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Parks says missionary
should replace him

By Robert Dilday and Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The next president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board should be a missionary, according to the man vacating the office.

Keith Parks, who will retire as FMB president in October, said a career in foreign missions -- and not short-term mission experience -- would be "a tremendous asset" for the new president, while a non-missionary president would receive less support for tough decisions from the FMB's 3,955 foreign missionaries.

However, only about half of the Foreign Mission Board's trustees agree with Parks about the need for a missionary president, according to the FMB's newly elected trustee chairman.

Parks, 64, announced in March he will retire earlier than planned because of "philosophical differences" with trustees. He said there had been a "drastic shift" in trustees' mission philosophy, with fundamental-conservative trustees now "expecting theological conformity from those who receive Southern Baptist money."

In a wide-ranging interview soon after his retirement announcement, Parks told the Religious Herald, newsjournal of Virginia Baptists, there are "many reasons" why the FMB president should have missionary experience.

"One, you're in a position to make much more knowledgeable decisions if you've had experience on the mission field yourself," he said. "Another is that missionaries are more likely to accept unpleasant decisions if they know you've been where they've been and you're making decisions out of a background similar to theirs."

Someone without missionary experience, Parks said, "is really going to struggle to make some decisions, and would make more wrong decisions than one might make otherwise. It will take him a lot longer to get a feel for what's going on."

Parks said he doesn't believe such experience can be obtained from brief missions trips abroad.

"I realize that some feel that those who have been on short-term preaching trips overseas have experience," he explained. "But it is so totally different it can be worse than not having any."

"Because the perspective of the short-termer is so different from the career missionary, who plugs it out year after year, I don't feel it (a short-term missions trip) equips someone to understand the missionary mindset or the basic principles of missiology."

Beyond that, he added, there is the question of the foreign missions call from God.

"I don't think the calling to be a foreign missionary is superior to any other calling," Parks explained. "But there is an intensity to that calling and a necessity of making some decisive breaks with the past that are not a part of a lot of other callings...."

"For someone who has never demonstrated that calling to missions to suddenly be called to head up this missionary organization will create in the minds of some of the missionaries and others a measure of uneasiness as to whether there is the same level of commitment to missions that sent them to the field."

Although FMB policy does not require the president to be a missionary, the current job description for the position calls for at least 20 years of relevant experience, including service as an FMB missionary and service in the Richmond-based administrative office.

The last three presidents -- Theron Rankin, Baker James Cauthen and Parks -- all were career missionaries. However, the six men who preceded them were not. The most recent non-missionary president was Charles Maddry, who served from 1933 to 1944.

When Parks was hired in 1980, he was chosen from among four finalists -- two were career missionaries and two were not.

New trustee chairman John Jackson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fairfield, Calif., said "probably half" of the current trustees think missionary experience is mandatory, while "another large bloc is looking for the man for his ability to lead and his missions heart."

The issue of missionary experience will be one matter to be settled early by the 15-member trustee committee that is seeking Parks' successor, Jackson told Associated Baptist Press April 8.

Few of the people mentioned as possible candidates for the job have been career missionaries, however. The name mentioned most often is John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston. Bisagno has not been a missionary, but he has preached evangelistic crusades overseas for the FMB more than 30 times and plans trips to Russia, Romania and India this summer.

Bisagno said he has "heard a couple rumors" that he might be considered but he said he has not been contacted by anyone at the FMB.

Asked if he would consider the position, Bisagno told Associated Baptist Press: "I think the presidency of the Foreign Mission Board is the single most strategic and important position that exists anywhere relative to world evangelism and missions. And I think any Southern Baptist would have to say he is open to prayerful consideration about that."

"I have great confidence the search committee will prayerfully seek and find God's man," he continued. "I think any search committee for any position -- denominational or for a church staff -- needs to be cautious about prior restrictions and guidelines. Rather, they should say, 'We want God's person. Period.'"

If the FMB favors a missionary or former missionary, the person mentioned most often for the post is Tom Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., and a past president of the SBC Pastors' Conference. Elliff was an FMB missionary in Africa.

Although early speculation about candidates has included a few current FMB administrators, several trustees have expressed their desire to look outside the agency for "new blood."

Parks did not discuss any of the potential candidates specifically.

Neither did he give any indication what his own future might hold beyond

the Foreign Mission Board, although he did say he will remain involved in missions.

Parks acknowledged he has received "a surprising number of offers" and said he is still mulling over long-term career options.

"I've tried to be as vague as possible with all of them, not because I've made a decision but because I haven't made a decision," he said. He did not identify the sources of the offers.

Parks also declined to comment on speculation that he may participate in the developing missions program of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or create a separate missionary-sending society on his own or with others.

Since he has "other engagements in the area," he will attend some sessions of the Fellowship's April 30-May 2 general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas, as a "private citizen" to get a "sense of the direction in which they are going."

Parks' demanding schedule is partly to blame for his still uncertain future, he said. "I've either got to do my job here or I've got to give it up and do something else," he said, noting he has not had time to reflect seriously on the future.

However, he's not likely to wait until his retirement is effective to make a decision, he said. "I'll have to give some thought to it prior to October."

Asked to assess the accomplishments of his 12-year tenure as president, Parks cited several developments that brought him satisfaction:

-- An intercessory prayer ministry was established for missions. "There are significant happenings around the world because of the involvement of the people in an informed prayer ministry," Parks said.

-- The FMB moved into global planning and strategies. "Previously, and understandably because of limitations and circumstances, we had worked mission by mission, area by area, then we added it up and said, 'This is our foreign mission program.'"

In 1987, he explained, the FMB began designing its strategies with the whole world in view, focusing on the best application of resources. "We're still learning how to do that," he said. "But the efforts to do that have been one of the most significant shifts in Southern Baptist foreign missions."

-- The FMB has developed a research arm that is "by far the most sophisticated missions data base in the world today," Parks said. "You can't go strategizing without adequate data."

-- The FMB has begun networking with other Christian groups committed to reaching the whole world with the gospel of Christ.

-- The non-residential missionary program was launched, giving Southern Baptist missionaries access to countries where missionaries are not allowed to live.

But there have been disappointments as well, Parks said. The greatest came at about the time he became president, when the Southern Baptist Convention "diverted its energies to spend time in political maneuvering" instead of pursuing Bold Mission Thrust, the denominationwide plan to preach the gospel to everyone in the world by the year 2000.

The diversion came, he said, "just at a time when potentially we as Southern Baptists had the commitment to missions, the personnel, the resources, the scope and size of our denomination, (and) we had evolved the plan most likely to succeed in reaching the world."

"Bold Mission Thrust has never received the kind of conventionwide affirmation from elected (SBC) leadership that would have been necessary for it to have taken off," he said. "It has not been the consuming passion of those who have been shaping the agenda and leading Southern Baptists over the past decade."

"Our failure to find a way to put aside our differences and rally around

"this concept of reaching the world is one of the great tragedies of this last decade."

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Paul Pressler nominated
to Foreign Mission Board

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- One of the most notable names in Baptist life has cropped up on a lengthy list of nominees to the boards of Southern Baptist Convention agencies.

Paul Pressler, an appeals-court judge and member of First Baptist Church of Houston, has been nominated to be a trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board.

Pressler is one of the two primary architects of the fundamental-conservative movement that has taken control of the SBC during the past decade.

His partner in that effort, Paige Patterson of Dallas, already serves as a Foreign Mission Board trustee. But Patterson will vacate his position on the board if his nomination as president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary is approved May 14.

Pressler, in addition to masterminding the political procedure for taking over convention leadership, served seven years on the SBC Executive Committee before rotating off last year.

Pressler and all other nominees for convention trusteeships will be presented for approval to messengers to the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis, Ind., June 9-11.

Pressler's pastor, John Bisagno, has been widely mentioned as a possible successor to FMB President Keith Parks, who will retire this fall.

But Pressler declined to talk about his new relationship to the Foreign Mission Board, instead referring such questions to Baptist Press, the SBC's official news service.

Pressler told Baptist Press he will not be involved in the selection process of a new FMB president. He said he will be in Romania this summer, participating in an evangelistic emphasis, and will be unable to attend the summer meeting of the board.

His work in Romania will be in conjunction with a mission trip sponsored by First Baptist Church of Houston. Bisagno is scheduled to preach the evangelistic crusade, he said.

Pressler has family connections to Eastern Europe and has traveled there previously.

Pressler's election to the Foreign Mission Board could have an impact on the board's news office, which has already come under fire from fundamental-conservative trustees.

During his tenure on the Executive Committee, Pressler was the leading critic of Baptist Press. The agency's director, Al Shackelford, and news editor, Dan Martin, were fired during Pressler's last year on the committee.

The Foreign Mission Board's communications system, which also serves as a bureau for Baptist Press, now is being reevaluated by a special committee of FMB trustees.

Pressler told Baptist Press he is looking forward to the opportunity to work on the board.

"I am grateful that what I can do is just be a part of a support team, using the knowledge that I have acquired through active involvement in world missions to assist our staff and missionaries in what I consider to be the greatest mission program in the world," he said.

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Supreme Court hears arguments
in crucial abortion case

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to clarify later this year whether or not abortion will remain a fundamental right that receives the highest degree of protection under law.

In an April 22 session, the high court heard oral arguments on the constitutionality of a restrictive Pennsylvania abortion law. A decision is expected this summer which abortion opponents hope will lead to the elimination of the constitutional right to an abortion.

Kathryn Kolbert, an attorney representing Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania, argued that if the Supreme Court abandons its heightened review in abortion cases, it will effectively overrule Roe vs. Wade, the 1973 landmark decision that recognized a woman's fundamental right to privacy in abortion decisions.

Ernest Preate, attorney general of Pennsylvania, told justices that even though he believes Roe should be overturned, the court need not revisit that decision to uphold the Pennsylvania statute.

The case reached the high court after the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld most parts of the Pennsylvania law, including requirements for parental notification, a 24-hour waiting period, and various reporting requirements imposed on abortion providers.

The appeals court struck down a requirement that in most cases married women must notify their husbands before having an abortion.

During oral arguments, justices gave little indication about how they may rule. But observers say the ruling itself may not be as significant as how the justices arrive at it.

The central issue is what standard the justices use to decide the case -- Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania vs. Casey -- said Kolbert, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union.

The "strict scrutiny" standard affords the highest constitutional protection to fundamental rights, a small group of rights that include the right to marry and procreate.

Even though Roe vs. Wade recognized abortion as a fundamental right, the 3rd Circuit Court said the high court established a new standard by departing from Roe's protections in 1989 and 1990 decisions. The 3rd Circuit said those decisions meant that states need show only a reasonable, rather than compelling, reason for regulating abortion unless the stipulations result in an undue burden on a woman's right to choose abortion.

Under the "strict scrutiny" standard, Kolbert said, all provisions in the Pennsylvania law are unconstitutional. Abandoning strict scrutiny amounts to abandoning Roe, she reiterated.

"Never before has this court bestowed and taken back a fundamental right," Kolbert said. She called on the court to reaffirm Roe.

If the court changes the standard of review, two options appear the most likely to replace it: an "undue burden" test or "rational basis" standard.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has offered the "undue burden" test that stipulates an abortion regulation cannot unduly burden a woman's right to choose. The less stringent "rational basis" test would allow an abortion regulation if it has a logical connection to a legitimate state interest.

Preate called on the justices to uphold all provisions of the Pennsylvania law by using the weaker protection applied in the 1989 Webster decision. U.S. Solicitor General Kenneth Starr echoed Preate's position, noting the administration supports the "rational basis" standard.

Justice David Souter, who has never ruled directly on an abortion case, asked Starr if a complete ban on abortions would be allowed under this

standard.

"I think it best not to answer these in the abstract," Starr responded.

When pressed by Souter, Starr appeared to concede that the standard would justify a complete ban on abortions except to save the life of the mother.

Preate urged the court to uphold the spousal notification requirement struck down by the lower court. Preate said this requirement provides exemptions and would apply to about 1 percent of the women.

However, Justice John Paul Stevens asked what state interest is served if the requirement affects practically no one.

O'Connor repeatedly asked what government interest was served by a statute that applied exclusively to married women.

"There are several interests," Preate said. "The interest, of course, in protecting the life of the unborn child."

O'Connor countered, "Well, then, why not require notice to all fathers? It's a curious sort of a provision, isn't it?"

O'Connor also noted that the provisions in the Pennsylvania law that compel speech -- such as spousal notification and the requirement that abortion providers supply specific information -- could raise First Amendment issues.

Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote the majority opinion in Roe, asked only one question, interrupting Preate to ask him if he even bothered to read Roe. Justice Clarence Thomas, who said during his confirmation hearings in October that he had never discussed abortion with another person, remained silent.

The court is expected to make its decision by late June or early July. In an election year, the court may decide not to overturn Roe overtly or resoundingly to reaffirm it. But activists on both sides of the issue see the handwriting on the wall -- abortion protections may be weakened further and eventually jettisoned.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission is among those who would like to see that happen. The CLC filed a friend-of-the-court brief, asking the high court to reverse Roe.

Abortion rights activists, bracing for defeat, say the battle will rage beyond the court to the legislature, on the streets of America and at the ballot box.

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Congressional report shows
new law needed, Thomas says

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A recent report from the Congressional Research Service makes a strong case for passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, according to Oliver Thomas, chairman of a coalition of 51 religious and civil-liberties groups supporting the proposed law.

The 32-page report reviews the impact of the Supreme Court's 1990 Employment Division vs. Smith decision, in which the court largely abandoned its view that the First Amendment's free-exercise clause requires the government to have a compelling reason before it can restrict religious practice.

The report by the research arm of the Library of Congress analyzes two legislative proposals that would reimpose the strict "compelling-interest" test.

Both proposals -- the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (H.R. 2797) and the Religious Freedom Act (H.R. 4040) -- would apply the compelling-interest requirement as a statutory standard. But the Religious Freedom Act would deny

compelling-interest protection for religiously based challenges in three areas -- challenges to the tax exemption of a church or other third party; to the use of government funds, including use by religious groups; and to abortion restrictions.

The three exemptions in H.R. 4040 mirror those proposed by the Office of General Counsel of the United States Catholic Conference.

The Congressional research report downplayed the legal significance of the exemptions, noting that claims in those areas "are not generally brought on free-exercise grounds" and that such claims could be successfully pursued on other grounds.

According to the report, judicial application of the Smith decision since 1990 has resulted in the denial of most free-exercise claims in state and federal courts. The report also concludes that Congress has the authority to restrict state, local and federal government from interfering with religious practice without a compelling reason.

Thomas, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the Congressional report "makes clear that we are in a free-exercise crisis, that Congress has the power to do something about it, and that RFRA is the proper vehicle."

"The report should resolve any lingering doubts about the need for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act," he said.

The Catholic Conference is the most influential U.S. religious body that has not joined the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion that is supporting passage of RFRA, Thomas said. He said lack of support from Catholic officials and opposition by the National Right to Life Committee have slowed progress on RFRA in the House and its introduction in the Senate.

Religious Freedom Restoration Act now has nearly 180 co-sponsors in the House, where a Judiciary Committee panel plans hearings beginning May 13. Thomas said coalition members remain hopeful Sens. Joseph Biden, D-Del., and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, soon will introduce the measure in the Senate.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Drummond to join
Samford faculty

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Lewis Drummond, who is retiring under pressure as president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been named to an endowed professorship of evangelism at Samford University's divinity school.

Even before Drummond announced in January he would leave Southeastern, he was mentioned as a likely candidate to be the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at Samford's Beeson Divinity School.

Drummond will be the first person to hold the endowed chair at Beeson. Before becoming Southeastern's president in 1988, Drummond held an endowed evangelism position at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that also bears the name of Southern Baptists' most famous evangelist.

A 1950 Samford graduate, Drummond will join the faculty of the Birmingham, Ala., school July 1.

Beeson dean Timothy George, a former colleague of Drummond at Southern, called his new faculty member "a world-class Christian and a pioneering scholar in the field of evangelism."

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Baptist leaders call
for end to 'Japan bashing'

By Paula Womack

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- Baptist leaders are speaking out against the current wave of "Japan bashing" in the United States, calling for an end to bigotry against Japanese, Japanese Americans and others of Asian descent.

"I am deeply disturbed by reported incidents of verbal and physical abuse aimed at Japan, at Japanese Americans and at many Asians who live in this country and around the world," said Daniel Weiss, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches.

"When persons are signaled out for abuse because of their race or religion or national background, Baptists must cry out," said Weiss, citing Jesus' "pointed warning" that "those who say they love God but hate their sisters and brothers are liars."

Lydia Barrow Hankins, a Southern Baptist missionary in Japan, said she is aware of the "misdirected hate" of "Japan bashing" in the United States.

"Whatever unfairness we perceive on the part of the Japanese government," she said, "we as individual Americans surely, before God, do not want to make ourselves judge and jury and hold every Asian accountable for the policies of a nation, no more than we would want to be held accountable for the economic policies of our nation."

"An Asian face...may belong to an American who is suffering under the same domestic policies as other Americans," Hankins warned.

Several economic and political factors have triggered the recent outbreak of bigotry and violence, including economic recession in the U.S., accusations of unfair trade restrictions by Japan, and the 50th anniversary last December of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.

And the highly publicized purchases of American companies and real estate by Japanese businesses have left many Americans with the perception that the Japanese are "taking over" the United States.

Sometimes those feelings have turned violent.

Two groups that monitor ethnically motivated hate crimes against Japanese Americans and others of Asian descent documented more than 20 incidents in California during January and February. Among those incidents cited by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center and the Japanese American Citizens League were:

-- Arsonists set the fuel pumps of an Asian-owned gas station in Los Angeles on fire Jan. 8.

-- A Chinese American family found swastikas painted on the walls of their vandalized Los Angeles home Jan. 19.

-- A six-foot cross was burned in front of an Asian-owned restaurant in Lakewood, Calif., Jan. 21.

-- Two Japanese exchange students in San Diego were severely beaten after a verbal confrontation with three teenagers Feb. 22.

A 233-page report released in March by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights confirmed the rise in such hate crimes and called hate-inspired violence against Asian Americans "a serious national problem."

The commission also linked "Japan bashing" to political posturing, such as a "buy American" amendment to the Los Angeles city charter scheduled for a vote in June.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, said the poor economic situation in the world has caused politicians and workers to look for a scapegoat.

"To many, Japan seems rich, brash, proud and arrogant," he said. "Therefore, restraining Japanese business and forcing her to play by our rules is the order of the day. The danger of such rhetoric is that it

*produces prejudice. Prejudice produces hate. And hate leads to war."

Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, agreed that anti-Japanese and anti-Asian sentiment is sowing the seeds of a violent conflict. "It gathers and amplifies the domestic political support for international aggression," he said.

David Nelson Duke, professor of religion at William Jewell College, said finding scapegoats for America's woes "is inconsistent with Christian attitudes and behavior."

"Scapegoating intends ill will, and whether it intends personal harm or not, it often leads to destructive behavior, ranging from personal insult to violence," said Duke an associate with the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Members of Evergreen Baptist Church in Rosemead, Calif., a church with a large Asian Pacific-American congregation in the Los Angeles area, have seen and felt the string of racism. The issue has been addressed by the church's human rights and legislation committee.

Such racism violates not only America's principles of equality and fairness, the committee said, "but it also violates the basic Christian belief of a basic human right against arbitrary discrimination."

Tai Shigaki, president of the Asian American Caucus of American Baptist Churches, said racism manifests itself as hatred, suspicion and paranoia.

"The need to 'draw in the wagons and close the circle' becomes very strong," she said. "Everything outside becomes an enemy and you don't distinguish the differences of people and circumstances. All you know is that what is outside is evil and working against you."

"As an Asian American, it suddenly dawns on me that although I assume I am within that circle I find myself being an outcast," she added.

Marilyn Chilcote is pastor of Dolores Street Baptist Church in San Francisco, a major center for Japanese trade and tourism. She said her church has begun to study international economic policies.

"Japan and its trade policies are being used as a scapegoat to draw attention from much more devastating economic policies, injustices and inequalities," she said. Responsibility for those deeper injustices, she added, "can only be laid upon U.S. policies, so deeply institutionalized and rationalized as to be practically invisible to us as casual observers."

"The church," Chilcote said, "may be the only institution in our country capable of challenging these evils -- and we will first have to admit our own complicity and deal with it by radically restructuring much of our life," she said.

"Hate is easy to generate and hard to dissipate," said Cecil Sherman, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. "Christians in America need to restrain the anti-Asian, and particularly anti-Japanese, language that is growing both in press and private comments. After all, 'Japan bashing' is mainly about money. Christians ought to be about something else."

Paul Nagano was one of 123,000 Japanese Americans interned in "relocation" camps at the outbreak of World War II. Now a retired Baptist pastor living in Seattle, Wash., Nagano said Americans should not bash the Japanese but befriend them.

"It is difficult for us as a nation to see the nation we defeated and then helped after World War II beating us at our own economic game," he said. "But the economic forces which are pressing the U.S. and Japan together are considerably stronger than the tensions which divide them."

"We need each other," he said.

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-- Paula Womack is news editor for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

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