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EDITOR'S NOTE: There will be no regular ABP issue for May 5. The first two stories in this issue have been updated from their initial release May 2.

CORRECTION: In the story "Fellowship assembly rejects..." (May 2), Tim Turnham of Silver Springs, Md., was incorrectly identified as being from Northboro, Mass.

Fellowship shows signs of permanence while grappling with group's identity

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship took on the look of permanence during its annual assembly April 30-May 2, even while participants continued to grapple with what the one-year-old organization is.

The Fellowship's three-day general assembly, held at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth, Texas, attracted an estimated 6,000 people to its largest session.

The one-year-old Fellowship is an outgrowth of the dissatisfaction moderate-conservatives have expressed over the current direction of the Southern Baptist Convention, which since 1979 has been controlled by fundamental-conservatives.

Gone, however, was the rhetoric of resentment that characterized the two previous Fellowship meetings. In its place was talk of the group's identity and future.

"I believe this is a permanent entity," said outgoing Fellowship moderator John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.

Hewett told a news conference May 1 the Fellowship is an "enduring" organization. "Whether it will take the shape Baptists usually call a

convention is yet to be revealed," said Hewett.

There were abundant signs that the organization plans to be around a while. Assembly participants adopted detailed plans for a global-missions program and installed former Texas pastor Cecil Sherman as the first coordinator for the Atlanta-based Fellowship.

Although there was no consensus about whether the Fellowship should leave the SBC, speakers and participants alike talked much about what the Fellowship should stand for and what it should become.

Bill Leonard, professor of religion at Samford University, described the Fellowship as "a people searching for a center."

"For the people who gathered here this week and for the people who did not, the old ways of being 'southern' Baptist are gone or going, and not even an angel from heaven can bring them back," he said in the closing sermon.

"Whatever our theology, we are living between the times," he said, "with one foot in the old SBC...and another foot thrashing around for some solid ground, some hope and vision for the future."

Leonard urged Fellowship participants to find their distinctive in believer's baptism, which can unite the community of believers in a common experience.

Other speakers urged Fellowship participants to unite around a banner of missions, which some Fellowship leaders hope will become a rallying cry to attract disgruntled Southern Baptists to the Fellowship.

To support the organization's recent decision to launch an aggressive missions program in Europe, Fellowship participants:

- adopted a statement to guide its global-missions program, approved an annual offering to fund missions, heard reports on mission projects already funded, and welcomed its first four "missioners" -- former Southern Baptist missionaries John David and Jo Ann Hopper of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, and Charles and Kathie Thomas of Romania.

- endorsed a five-point statement of principles for mission "partnership" -- drafted by European Baptists but rejected by the SBC Foreign Mission Board -- which is expected to open the door for the Fellowship to send missionaries to Europe at a time when Southern Baptist missionaries are increasingly unwelcome.

- heard a prediction that the Fellowship's three "giving plans" will attract contributions totaling \$6.6 million in 1992, of which \$5 million will be designated for traditional Southern Baptist Convention causes and \$1.5 million spent on Fellowship projects.

- endorsed a plan to spend \$2.5 million on global missions in 1993, with the European initiative claiming half the total and the other half divided among ministries targeting urban areas, "unreached" people groups, internationals in the United States and CBF administration.

- revised its "regular" or entry-level giving plan to fund not only the Southern Baptist causes included in the original but Fellowship projects as well. Beginning in 1993, 17.6 percent of funds routed through the regular will support CBF-funded ministries.

Fellowship leaders said such definitive actions don't necessarily indicate the Fellowship will become a new convention or denomination, however.

"For the time being, we're going to be a group within a convention," said Hardy Clemmons, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C. Clemmons was chosen moderator-elect of the Fellowship during the assembly and will succeed incoming moderator Patricia Ayres of Austin, Texas, next year.

Hewett said talk of the Fellowship becoming a denomination is

"inappropriate," since all Baptist groups are considered part of the Baptist denomination. "We are not going to be anything other than Baptist," he insisted.

Hewett said the Fellowship has no intention of recreating the structure and bureaucracy of the Southern Baptist denomination. He added the Fellowship will continue to allow participating churches to channel money to SBC causes "as long as churches continue to want to."

Churches or individuals that send money through the Fellowship can choose one of the organization's three funding plans, two of which send some money to SBC causes, or they can design their own customized funding plans.

Approximately 950 churches contribute to the Fellowship, according to the Fellowship's finance committee. About 350 churches have the CBF in their budgets, while another 600 send designated gifts from individual church members.

Hewett, who presided over the meeting, read a letter of greeting from the most famous Southern Baptist, evangelist Billy Graham during the assembly's opening session.

"It is my prayer that the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will make a significant contribution to renewal in the churches and a renewed emphasis on evangelism and foreign missions," Graham wrote.

"While situations and culture may change, the gospel...has not changed," the letter said in part. "The Bible is still the authoritative word of God. The Cross and the Resurrection are central in our message, and the need for repentance and faith is just the same in order to find heaven.

"May God bless your discussions this week."

Hewett later told reporters he asked Graham, a personal friend, to write the letter to affirm publicly "what he has said privately."

Organizers of the assembly expressed pleasure with the tone of the meeting, which included large- and small-group business sessions, several worship services, 25 training institutes, 75 topical workshops and 18 state or regional caucuses.

Workshops were held on such topics as mission opportunities, bio-ethics, evangelism and church growth, AIDS, women in ministry, conflict management and contemporary worship.

In a departure from business-as-usual for Baptist gatherings, participants were invited to attend small-group sessions to discuss specific matters of business and help draft recommendations that later were brought to the full assembly for discussion and approval.

Most organizers had counted on more people attending the first-ever Fellowship meeting west of the Mississippi River, however. Approximately 4,500 people registered for the assembly, while approximately 6,000 registered for the meeting last year in Atlanta. An offering of \$98,000 taken during this year's assembly fell short of meeting expenses.

Unlike annual sessions of the Southern Baptist Convention, participants are not required to register, and neither registration nor church endorsement is required to vote at Fellowship meetings.

Hewett acknowledged the Fellowship has a stronger following east of the Mississippi, particularly in the Southeast. "Baptists still have a problem with that river," he said.

He said the Fellowship "still has got a long way to go" to broaden its support in the Southwest, Hewett said.

Jimmy Allen of Fort Worth, co-chair of the Fellowship's global missions task force, said the mission-related actions taken at the assembly will serve as an encouragement to Texas Baptists. "A lot of Texas folks have been wanting to see if the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is...coming with that kind of priority," Allen said.

During a session focusing on missions, Fellowship participants greeted Keith Parks, retiring president of the Foreign Mission Board, with an extended standing ovation. Parks announced recently he will retire earlier than planned because of philosophical differences with trustees. Although Parks has been mentioned as a candidate to head up the Fellowship's missions effort, he said he was attending the assembly as a private citizen.

In other action:

-- Fellowship participants adopted a resolution confessing, repenting and rejecting the racism that has persisted in their parent denomination for almost 150 years. The resolution was narrowly adopted despite opposition from participants who said the Fellowship should avoid adopting any resolutions at all.

-- Participants broadened use of their "safety net" fund to include not only terminated denominational employees and seminary professors as before but missionaries as well. They declined to extend the financial aid to terminated pastors, however. The Fellowship's Coordinating Council voted to consider phasing out the "safety net" program, which has presented the organization with tax complications.

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Fellowship assembly rejects  
Baptist legacy of racism

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- As echoes of racial violence rebounded across the nation, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship confessed, repented and rejected the racism that has persisted in its parent denomination for almost 150 years.

Participants in the Fellowship's general assembly in Fort Worth set aside their previous agreement to avoid resolutions in order to repudiate racism in America. They did so on a split vote, but most of their debate hinged on whether they should deal with resolutions, not whether they agreed with the statement before them.

That statement claimed the not-guilty verdicts handed down to the Los Angeles police officers who beat Rodney King "have called into question the fundamental integrity of the American system of justice and provoked a wave of violence in cities across the nation."

The Southern Baptist Convention was created partly to protect slavery in the South, the statement said. "The sins...of slavery committed by our Southern Baptist ancestors remain spiritual blights on the relationship between African-Americans and Caucasian-Americans to the present generation."

Participants in the Fellowship meeting, "whose roots are in the Southern Baptist Convention, do publicly confess and repent of our historic complicity in condoning and perpetuating the sin of slavery before and during the Civil War and...apologize to all African-Americans for that sin," the statement added.

"We reject forthrightly the racism which has persisted throughout our history as Southern Baptists, even to this present day. Furthermore, we pledge our prayers and active efforts to work for the eradication of every vestige of racism in our nation and in our churches."

By their vote, participants also admitted the Fellowship is "too

white, too middle-class and too insulated from the seething racial problems confronting our society." They promised to pray for healing and offered themselves "as instruments of Christ's reconciling peace."

The statement passed by a slim margin after participants debated whether they should single out an issue for comment in a resolution.

Moderator John Hewett of Asheville, N.C., earlier said the Fellowship's administrative committee had decided two proposed resolutions -- one declaring sexual relations among homosexuals and the unmarried to be "sinful" and another urging use of recyclable products -- would be referred to the appropriate committees for review.

But Hewett ruled Tim Turnham of Silver Spring, Md., could offer the race statement for consideration.

Several participants argued against any resolutions. Only Charles Hurst of Tyler, Texas, spoke negatively to the substance of the measure. "I cannot apologize for the sins of my forebears," he said, only for not being more active in racial reconciliation today.

Walter Shurden of Macon, Ga., urged passage of the statement. It addressed "the most pressing issue before our nation," he said, calling the statement "an effort to say to our nation, and churches, and Baptists where this body stands on this issue."

Earlier in the assembly, Hewett lead participants in a prayer for the wave of violence that has swept America since the Los Angeles verdicts were announced.

After the meeting adjourned, new moderator Patricia Ayres of Austin, Texas, said, "The heart of that resolution is something we can't help but heartily endorse." The division of the vote reflected differences of opinion "over process, not substance," she said.

Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman of Atlanta concurred, even though he acknowledged "there is guilt in all of us."

"In my more honest moments, I find racism in myself," he admitted. "I purge it when I discover it, and then I think it's done, ... and then I have to do it all over again."

With the issue of racism so much on Americans' minds, he said, "it required us to respond."

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Fellowship looks to future  
not past for identity

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship peered ahead more than it looked back during its third annual meeting April 30-May 2.

"Presence and Promise" was the theme for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas. And, except for a few wistful glances, speakers kept their focus on the future.

Previous meetings had been different: In 1990, about 3,000 moderates gathered in Atlanta shortly after a crushing political defeat at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting, and their tone reflected their pain. Even last year -- when 6,000 of them went back to Atlanta and officially formed the Fellowship -- speakers often compared the group to the biblical Hebrews who fled Egyptian slavery and launched out into the wilderness.

But this year, themes of hope, commitment and an identity borne of

missions dominated sermons and speeches.

"My brothers and sisters, we've been writing the early chapters of our story," said Fellowship Moderator John Hewett. "We have given birth to something fresh and new. We know this: We are not yet where we ought to be, and we are not yet where we shall be. But thanks be to God, we are not where we used to be.

"We are learning to live in hope -- wild hope in the living God."

To live in hope "is to live by faith, trusting a gracious God to finish what was started," said Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C. "This hope is our watchword -- hope that what God started among us God will bring to completion."

Hewett cited a long list of initiatives he said indicate Cooperative Baptists have said "yes" to that hope: support for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington and the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland; support for the new Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va.; support for missionaries in Europe and mission projects from Idaho to India; support for Christian ethics and a free press.

"Wild hope tended from strength -- this is the distinguishing characteristic of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," Hewett insisted. "It is the powerful force which drew us here. It is the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. It is the launch of faith."

Tending that hope also calls for "clear, hard thinking," courage and recommitment to missions and evangelism, stressed Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman of Atlanta.

Clear thinking will be needed to separate hope from wishful thinking and threatening messages from reality, Sherman said. Courage will fuel commitment, and missions will enable the Fellowship to be an extension of God into the world, he added.

"We're going to design a mission system that you can throw your whole heart into," he promised. "The question is: Will you commit?"

That commitment demands an "ethic of cooperation," stressed incoming Moderator Patricia Ayres of Austin, Texas.

"Does not an ethic of cooperation provide the foundation for the atmosphere in which we work together, the pattern by which our various committees and groups will interrelate, the heart of our mission philosophy we have espoused and the standard of our relationship with other groups?" she asked.

"So let us be on with our task," Ayres urged. "To those who have never heard, we bring the transforming good news of Jesus Christ. With a hurting world we share the strong hope of the gospel: for the victims of tyranny and injustice, a God of justice, mercy and love; for those who suffer hunger, sickness or displacement, a Lord of compassion; for the lonely and fearful, a Comforter to strengthen and uphold. To those...who feel alienated and disenfranchised, we offer a joyful and enabling fellowship of cooperation."

Accomplishing that big task will not be easy, warned Phil Lineberger, pastor of First Baptist Church of Tyler, Texas.

"There has come a time in the lives of free and cooperative Baptists when we have begun to realize that if our lives are going to be lived redemptively, we must make personal, redemptive and caring commitments," he warned. "There are no shortcuts to anyplace worth going."

But, he stressed, "until we make a daring, courageous commitment to go into this world with redemption in faith and hope, we will not be able to understand what it was like to be born a child of God."

Fellowship speakers cite  
baptism as distinctive

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Baptism remains the sign of unity for Baptists, participants at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's general assembly were told.

"Baptism (is the) most unifying distinctive of the people called Baptists," said Bill Leonard, professor of church history at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. "Believers' baptism by immersion was the essence of historic Baptist identity.

"Baptism is an event and a theology which unites us with each other, as well as to Christ and his church. The very name 'Baptist' points to the centrality of faith and baptism in our...life."

"Though we Baptists have often said otherwise, our unity does not rise from our sense of mission, as strong as it may be," stressed Paul Duke, pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis. "On the contrary, unity is the gift that falls upon us.... Unity is grace, and it falls on us and covers us like the dew.

"This is what happened to us all in our baptism," Duke explained.

"What a sign of unity we got when the waters of baptism washed over us. Some of us were young, some of us old, some rural, some urban, some brown, some white, some male, some female. But didn't we all get wet?

"We Baptists did it the sloppy way, the whole way. We got sopping wet all over. It messed up our hair and soaked through our underwear.

"For all the happy differences and all the unhappy differences of our separate lives, we all were covered in the same water, drenched all over in the same watery sign of the same Christ, same blood, same death and resurrection, same big family of grace."

In today's "moments of uncertainty and transition," Baptists appropriately return to baptism for identity and unity, Leonard stressed.

"Baptism does not create salvation, it accompanies it," he said.

"Baptism...is an act of faith, a celebration of grace and an enactment of the word of God."

In addition, "to be baptized is to put on Christ," Leonard noted, quoting the Apostle Paul. "We not only believe in Jesus, but also identify with him and his way of living in the world.... We are the Christ-bearers of our world, carrying Christ with us out there, where he already is and where we belong."

Baptism also is a symbol of liberation in Christ, Leonard said. "It is the promise of freedom to all who believe.... This liberating gospel compels us to go out from here to confront issues of race and gender, worship and spirituality, witness and mission, sin and salvation -- scary stuff."

Ultimately, baptism tells Baptists who they really are, he added.

"There are difficult days ahead for all Southern Baptists, whatever their political, ideological, theological or regional differences," he noted. "But as we look past multiple identities to a new future of mission and ministry, we dare not fail to remember who we really are.

"For beyond all the qualifiers which identify the kind of Baptists we are or wish to be, we must never forget that the word 'baptist' itself is merely an adjective. In baptism, we are one people bound to all the church by such powerful images as body of Christ, communion of saints, family of faith, people of God.

"We are the community of the baptized."

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Fellowship welcomes first 'missioners,'  
lays groundwork for mission work

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship welcomed its first four mission personnel, all of whom will serve in Europe, and laid the groundwork for a greatly expanded missions program during the organization's general assembly April 30-May 2 in Fort Worth, Texas.

One evening session of the three-day meeting was billed as a "global missions celebration" and featured reports from the mission field -- both overseas and at home -- and sermons on the role mission will play in the new Fellowship.

All four of the new "missioners," as the Fellowship prefers to call them, are former Southern Baptist missionaries who resigned recently in protest of changes in the Foreign Mission Board's strategy for Europe -- changes they say depart from the FMB's historic mission principles.

-- John David Hopper will continue as president of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, but now under sponsorship of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and not the Foreign Mission Board. His wife, missionary Jo Ann Hopper, also works in the seminary's administration.

The Fellowship assumed their support May 1, making them the first mission personnel on the field.

-- Charles and Kathie Thomas, who last fall became Southern Baptists' first missionaries to Romania in half a century, will return to Europe, and perhaps to Romania, later this year under Fellowship sponsorship. They will go on the CBF payroll June 1.

-- A total of 20 "missioners" will be on the field by January 1993, Fellowship participants were told. Most are expected to be resigning FMB missionaries, such as John Deal, who will serve as field administrator for the European initiative.

In January the Fellowship's Coordinating Council voted to launch its own missions program in Europe, offering employment to some FMB missionaries who are expected to leave the Southern Baptist agency.

Foreign Mission Board trustees alienated some missionaries and national Baptists in Europe last October when they cut all FMB funding for the Ruschlikon seminary because of alleged liberalism. FMB President Keith Parks and other critics said trustees were requiring theological conformity in exchange for FMB money. But trustees said they were merely being accountable for FMB funds.

Thomas brought greetings from Baptists in Romania and France, the two countries where he spent most of his 17 years as an FMB missionary. He donned an Atlanta Braves baseball cap to make a point about the image of Americans and missionaries in Europe.

"Too many people go to Europe with their theological baseball cap on and say, 'We are the best. We are the biggest. You must do things our way.'" Trading the baseball cap for the traditional fur hat worn in Romania, Thomas said stateside Baptists who want to minister to people overseas must learn to respect them and their differences, "so that Jesus in me can become Jesus in them. This is the way that Southern Baptists have done missions in the past."

John David Hopper echoed Thomas' suggestion, saying Baptists must not let economic, racial, ethnic, nationalistic or spiritual barriers impede the gospel message.

Hopper announced to a news conference at the start of the Fellowship meeting that he and his wife are resigning as FMB missionaries because of the "creedal agenda" of FMB trustees and their restrictions on his ability to raise money for the Ruschlikon seminary.

As a result of the trustees' defunding of Ruschlikon, "we have watched the beginnings of dissension and division among Baptists in Europe," he told reporters.

Both Thomas and Hopper were welcomed with standing ovations. But Fellowship participants saved their warmest welcome for Keith Parks, who announced in April he will retire early as FMB president, also because of differences with trustees over missions philosophy.

Told that Parks was attending the missions celebration, Fellowship participants rose to their feet in an extended ovation for him and his wife, Helen Jean. Although Parks has been mentioned as a candidate to head up the Fellowship's missions effort, he said he was attending the assembly as a private citizen.

The FMB's top two administrators for Europe, who also resigned in protest, also were welcomed by Fellowship participants. Isam Ballenger, former vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, read scripture during the service. Keith Parker, former FMB area director for Europe, was introduced.

The Fellowship heard an offer of mission partnership from the American Baptist Churches. "We want to be cooperative Baptists too," ABC executive Daniel Weiss said at the missions celebration. "We eagerly welcome any efforts to that end."

Linda Bridges, assistant professor of New Testament at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.) preached one of the two sermons for the missions service. She said the Fellowship's identity is caught in the delicate balance between reverence for the past and revision for the future.

For Baptists, she said, the "essence of being is mission." A former missionary in Taiwan, she recounted Southern Baptists' proud tradition of missions -- "sacred stories of the past."

"It is a good story, one to be remembered and cherished," Bridges said. "But we cannot stop there. The Fellowship is "revising this special tradition" so that women, laypeople and small churches can have a part and so that new mission methods and objectives can be used -- "new ways of doing old things."

"The connecting link" in the delicate balance between reverence and revision is not "denominational structures or doctrinal purity," she said, but "a genuine concern for people."

"We continue the task of mission because we are committed to people," she said, "because we still believe...that the primary purpose of the gospel is to bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ."

During the three-day assembly, the Fellowship took several actions to undergird its mission work in Europe and around the world:

-- Participants endorsed a five-point statement of principles for mission "partnership" with European Baptists, which is expected to open the door for the Fellowship to send missionaries to Baptist unions in Europe. The "Dorfweil Statement" was drafted by the European Baptist Federation as a basis for mending the breach in the relationship between the EBF and the Foreign Mission Board in the wake of the defunding of Ruschlikon. But FMB trustees declined to act on the statement earlier this year.

-- The Fellowship adopted a statement of purpose and strategy to guide

all its mission work. "Our purpose," it says in part, "is to glorify God by bringing people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, sharing Christ's love and mercy, and carrying out the Great Commission through inclusive global mission in which all Baptists can participate."

The Fellowship plans to spend about \$1 million on global missions this year and \$2.5 million in 1993, with the European initiative claiming half the 1993 total. The other half will be divided among ministries targeting urban areas, "unreached" people groups, hunger and development, internationals in the United States, and CBF administration.

The need to raise money for the Fellowship's missions work was the focus of several assembly actions:

-- Participants approved an annual mission offering, which is expected to compete with established offerings already conducted by Southern Baptist agencies. The Fellowship's offering may begin as early as this year.

-- A plan to raise \$1.2 million in 1993 for the European initiative was outlined. Ten churches in ten states or regions will be asked to pledge \$1,000 per month.

-- The Fellowship also revised its "regular" or entry-level giving plan to include funding for not only Southern Baptist causes but Fellowship projects as well. Beginning in 1993, 17.6 percent of funds routed through the regular plan will support CBF-funded ministries.

Fellowship participants heard reports from mission projects already funded by the organization, including a church-starting project in Waterford, Ireland (\$10,000); development of a new congregation in a housing complex in Pittsford, N.Y. (\$15,220); ministries to internationals in Boise, Idaho, and Getzville, N.Y. (\$28,525); agricultural aid to Baptist farmers in Oravita, Romania (\$9,000); and support for ministerial students at a Bible institute in St. Petersburg, Russia (\$6,000).

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Southern Baptists continue support of BJC, Dunn says

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southern Baptists -- through individual, church, organizational and state convention contributions -- are giving more money to the Baptist Joint Committee than they did before the Southern Baptist Convention withdrew its financial support a year ago.

"That's the good side of coin," BJC Executive Director James Dunn said at a May 1 meeting of the Religious Liberty Council, a national organization formed three years ago primarily to support the Washington-based religious-liberty agency.

The bad side, Dunn told the 55 RLC members at the meeting, is the amount of staff time and resources spent in raising the money.

The agency's long-term financial status was addressed in a report by John Womble, BJC director of development and denominational relations who announced the launching of the first phase of a multiphase endowment campaign authorized by the BJC executive committee in March. The goal of the initial phase is \$1 million, Womble said.

Besides providing support for the Baptist Joint Committee, the RLC functions as a transitional vehicle to provide representation on the BJC for supportive state conventions and other Baptist organizations who have taken steps to replace the Southern Baptist Convention funds. The annual SBC allocation to the BJC had reached \$400,000, about half the agency's budget, before it was drastically reduced and then eliminated.

At its May 1 meeting the RLC elected three new representatives to the BJC. The new appointments bring to 11 the number of Religious Liberty Council members serving on the BJC. The RLC members include representatives of Baptist state conventions and other organizations, including the Alliance of Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, who provide financial support for the BJC.

Elected to a one-year term was Howard Cobble, pastor of Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., and a former chairman of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee. Cobble replaces Knoxville, Tenn., pastor Doug Watterson.

Elected to a two-year term was Jean Woodward, a member of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., and former president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. Woodward also served for five years as president of the Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia.

Elected to a three-year term was Phil Strickland, executive director of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and a member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas.

In a report on current church-state issues, BJC General Counsel Oliver S. Thomas told RLC members that the First Amendment's free exercise guarantees were virtually written out of the U.S. Constitution by a 1990 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. In *Employment Division vs. Smith*, the high court held that in most cases, government needs only a reasonable basis, not a compelling reason, to restrict the free exercise of religion.

"Every religious group in the United States will ultimately suffer because of the Smith decision," Thomas said. "We're in a free-exercise crisis."

Thomas also cited other church-state developments, including the Bush administration's proposal to require churches to report to the Internal Revenue Service contributors who give more than \$500 annually and a pending Supreme Court case in which justices are being asked to abandon the court's view of governmental neutrality toward religion.

"Chicken Little was wrong; the sky is not falling. But it is sagging," Thomas concluded.

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-- By Larry Chesser

House votes to overturn  
abortion-counseling ban

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives voted April 30 to overturn a ban on abortion counseling at federally funded family-planning clinics.

The ban was proposed by the Reagan administration in 1988 but its implementation was blocked by federal courts. In May 1991, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ban's constitutionality, but the controversy surrounding it continued.

The Bush administration and other ban supporters say that family planning should not involve discussion of abortion. Opponents, however, have labeled the ban a "gag rule" because they say it interferes with the doctor-patient relationship and infringes on free speech.

In the House debate, Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., called the abortion-counseling ban "bad medicine, bad law and bad precedent."

However, Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J., said the regulation is

"sound, balanced, humane and fully consistent with the original intent of the Title X program -- preventive family-planning services." Calling the bill "anti-child," Smith said the free-speech argument is an "affront to human dignity and the special preciousness of children."

Rep. Bill Emerson, R-Mo., echoed Smith's position. "The Congress and the American public do not equate elective abortion with birth control."

The House approved the bill (H.R. 3090) by a 268-150 vote. But the vote margin is shy of the two-thirds majority that would be needed to override a promised presidential veto. President George Bush has not had a single veto overridden.

The bill reauthorizes the federal family-planning program. Established in 1970, the Title X program serves about 4 million women every year and is the only federal program specifically for family planning.

Emerson submitted for the official record a letter from a number of organizations -- including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission -- that oppose H.R. 3090.

The letter, signed by CLC Executive Director Richard Land, told members of Congress that the organizations "will consider every vote in favor of H.R. 3090 a vote for abortion promotion in family-planning clinics funded with our members' tax dollars."

Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Wash., argued in favor of the bill "to retain the credibility of medical professionals and to provide patients with appropriate, complete and necessary medical care."

"The gag rule is nothing but voodoo medicine," said McDermott, one of two physicians in the House. "It is dishonest, it will not work and it is the wrong prescription for the country."

The U.S. Senate approved a similar measure (S. 323) in July, and a conference committee must iron out the differences between the two bills.

If legislative action fails to reverse the ban, it is scheduled to be implemented in May.

-- By Pam Parry

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