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South Carolina Baptists end  
Furman dispute peacefully

By Don Kirkland

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- South Carolina Baptists let Furman University go in peace.

Left with an alternative they found unacceptable -- a lawsuit against the university -- messengers to a special convention of the state's Baptists voted overwhelmingly May 15 to sever all legal and financial ties with their oldest institution.

The decision came 42 days after a special committee declared a lawsuit appeared to be the only way left to settle the 19-month crisis.

Instead, messengers meeting in sweltering heat at the state fairgrounds in Columbia took what convention president Eddie Greene called "the high road" and recognized Furman's independence without a fight.

Two buildings at the fairgrounds were packed by 4,858 messengers who provided this footnote to South Carolina Baptist history: it was the second largest convention ever.

It took four hours to settle on the specifics of the separation, but the fundamental deed was done quickly. After a hand vote left no doubt about the prevailing attitude, Greene announced, "All legal and financial ties between the South Carolina Baptist Convention and Furman University have been dissolved."

Messengers first had rescinded the action of their 1991 convention to pursue a declaratory legal judgment against Furman, and they dismissed the committee appointed to do it. Furman had touched off the controversy in 1990 when the school's trustee board announced that it, not the convention, would elect trustees.

But it was easier for messengers to sign the divorce papers than to divide the property. Money intended for Furman had been placed in escrow by

messengers in 1991, to stay there until the dispute was resolved.

Here is how messengers decided to spend the escrowed money:

-- The 1991 money, about \$1.6 million, will be used to set up a Richard Furman Scholarship Fund. Scholarships will go to Baptist students preparing for church-related vocations at South Carolina Baptist colleges or the six Southern Baptist seminaries. Furman students are not eligible for these scholarships, which will be available in the fall of 1993.

-- Of the 1992 money, \$30,000 will be used by the state convention to hire a full-time campus minister at Furman, \$25,000 for the South Carolina Baptist Historical Collection at Furman, and approximately \$450,000 for the Richard Furman Scholarship Fund.

-- The rest of the 1992 money budgeted for Furman but received after May 15 -- as much as \$1.1 million -- will be divided equally among three Baptist schools -- Anderson College, North Greenville College and Charleston Southern University.

The motion to set up the Furman scholarship fund was a substitute offered by Stephen Corts, pastor of Citadel Square Church in Charleston, S.C. The state convention's general board had recommended using that escrowed money for scholarships for Baptist students attending Furman.

Corts said his substitute, giving the scholarship to non-Furman students, "honors the purpose for which the funds were given -- and Richard Furman." The substitute passed 2,179 to 2,088.

The 1993 budget is expected to continue support of the campus ministry program and Baptist archives at Furman.

Although convention president Greene said the split with Furman "hurts," state leaders said the time had come.

Robert Shrum, president of the general board, told messengers they must decide "what to do when there are no other forks in the road."

"All the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put the relationship together again," Shrum said. "It is time for a different relationship with Furman to be born and the old one to die."

Shrum asked messengers to "resume the road that leads us toward our primary goal -- to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Greene, explaining why he called the special convention, said, "The cloud of controversy that overshadows our convention must be dispelled, no matter how difficult this day may be."

The convention president said there was no sweetness in the sorrow of parting. "We are a family, and an era is ending," he said. "But as your president, I want you to take the high road today -- for the future. If we do God's will, we all win."

At the end of the session, Greene announced a 12-member panel to study the convention's relationship with its remaining institutions.

The end of Furman's 166-year relationship with South Carolina Baptists did not come easily. A special committee headed by Robert Shrum had tried a compromise called the "Covenant." It would have loosened control of the Furman board while assuring the school would always be Baptist.

The convention said "no" to the covenant last November, voting narrowly to seek a declaratory judgment instead. And even the committee instructed to seek the court action took a stab at negotiating first. But it later declared it had reached an "impasse" and said litigation appeared necessary.

Momentum against legal action built, however, until February, when 34 pastors, later joined by 22 former state convention presidents, asked South

Carolina Baptists to sever Furman ties to stop damage to other programs.  
As spokesman for the pastors, Mike Hamlet of Spartanburg told messengers the convention was in a "mess." He urged attention back "to what South Carolina Baptists do best -- missions."

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Fellowship receipts up  
60 percent in April

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship received contributions of \$593,660 in April -- 60 percent more than the previous month and 72 percent more than April 1991.

According to figures released by the Atlanta-based organization, the April total is the second highest month on record, behind the \$732,445 received in January 1992.

Since Jan. 1, the Fellowship has received \$2,164,491. That is an increase of 65 percent over the \$1,309,724 received during the first four months of 1991.

Three months into the year, the Fellowship is on target to meet the 1992 projection of \$6.6 million established by its finance committee. Last year the Fellowship took in \$4.5 million.

About two thirds of the money collected by the Fellowship supports Southern Baptist agencies and institutions, while the remainder funds Fellowship-supported efforts, such as the organization's newly launched missions effort.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was established last year by Southern Baptist moderate-conservatives displeased with the current leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Fellowship's three giving plans allow churches and individuals to bypass traditional Southern Baptist funding channels, such as the Cooperative Program, and to withhold funds from SBC agencies of which they disapprove.

Approximately 950 Southern Baptist churches contribute to the Fellowship. About 350 of those churches have the Fellowship in their budgets, while another 600 churches send designated gifts from individual members.

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-- By Greg Warner

High court rejects challenge  
to unemployment exemption

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to hear a challenge to a New York labor law that exempts religious organizations from providing unemployment insurance for workers.

By refusing to review the case, the high court left standing lower court rulings that upheld the constitutionality of the exemption.

The exemption was challenged by Shirley Klein, a former English teacher

at Beth Jacob High School in Brooklyn, a school for Orthodox Jewish girls. Klein began receiving unemployment benefits after being terminated in 1987, but when the school objected, she was ruled ineligible and ordered to repay \$4,140 in benefits she had received.

The New York Court of Appeals, the state's highest court, rejected Klein's arguments that the exemption serves no secular purpose, favors religious schools over non-religious schools, and creates undue and excessive entanglement between church and state.

In upholding the statute, the appeals court noted that while one effect of the statute is to allow religious organizations the economic benefit of avoiding unemployment insurance payments, "such a benefit is incidental and does not deprive the exemption, as a whole, of its secular purpose and effect."

When enacted, the statute exempted a range of non-profit religious, charitable, scientific, literary and educational organizations, but many of these exemptions later were eliminated when the statute was amended to conform to federal tax law changes.

Noting that the exemption still applies to some non-religious employers, the appeals court said "it cannot be said that it is aimed exclusively or specifically at religious groups or organizations or that it impermissibly benefits religious organizations more."

The appeals court also said the exemption creates less entanglement between church and state than would be required if the exemption were not provided.

The appeals court also rejected Klein's arguments that the statute violated her equal-protection rights.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Parents urged to usurp  
TV's control of families

By Lacy Thompson

(ABP) While countless parents threaten to get rid of the family's television set, one Louisiana family did just that -- with a little help from nature.

When lightning knocked out the TV in the home of David and Cindy Nardini, they simply refused to fix the zapped set.

"We just decided to go without it," explained David Nardini, a member of Pineville Park Baptist Church in Pineville, La. "The kids were watching it too much. Cindy and I were watching it too much. It just censored too much family time. It was counter productive.

"Our oldest son (age 5) would sit in front of the television as long as it was on," Nardini continued. "He wouldn't pay any attention to what was going on around him. He wouldn't hear what we were saying to him.

"Frankly, we were just abusing it."

In the television-less months that followed, the Nardini family played more together, visited more together, read more. And Nardini said he found more time to spend on his spiritual life. "And television was no longer there

as an influence which most often leads you away from godly principles."

In spending more time with their two sons, David and Cindy Nardini found it easier to talk with and discipline the children. "It wasn't a change in the kids," David Nardini explained. "It simply was that we weren't preoccupied with something else. The kids weren't taking us away from something, from television. So we could give all our attention to them."

That approach -- countering TV's effects on children through human interaction -- is what media activist Sue Lockwood Summers recommends.

"Personal involvement is what kids are looking for, is what human beings are looking for," said Summers, who is a library media specialist for an elementary school in Littleton, Colo. "They may fill their time with hours of electronic media, but it will never be as significant as one human being offering time with a child."

The need to counteract the impact of television on the newest generation is painfully evident. Several recent studies indicate that unchecked and indiscriminate television viewing can promote a range of unhealthy behaviors and attitudes. (see related article)

Most parents know well the power of the tube. After all, how much of a child's conversation relates to television? How often is a child overheard singing a commercial or program theme? How many times is television in the middle of the struggle to get kids to bed or do chores?

Comments from many parents confirm what many specialists are saying: TV is out of control in the home.

-- "If my daughter gets up too late to watch television before she goes to school, she pitches a fit. I think she'd rather skip breakfast than morning cartoons. Well, I know she would."

-- "I try to get my son to read or even play a game sometimes, but he would rather watch television, even when there's nothing on he particularly wants to see."

-- "I wish I could find a way to blow the thing up."

Southern Baptists long ago recognized the power of television. At their national convention in 1977, they passed a resolution that warned, "If we do not control television, television will control us."

But awareness has not resulted in action, Summers and other experts say. A recent national survey of elementary students found a majority of them have no television viewing limits in the home.

"I think the television experience becomes such a hold on kids not because of kids but because of parents," said Summers, who teaches a graduate course for educators on how media affects children. She also is starting an organization and a book on the subject.

"Parents allow television to become a mainstay in kids' lives," said Summers, noting author Marie Winn first issued that assessment in her 1977 book, *The Plug-in Drug*. "They don't do it on purpose and they don't do it with any harmful reasoning. It just happens very quietly and very insidiously."

"And I think it's time parents took back the family time."

Doing that is not an easy task, Summers admitted. By the time the typical child heads off to kindergarten, he or she has watched up to 7,000 hours of television. But in a country that has more televisions than toilets, she said, Christians and their churches must try to win the family back.

Television can work against the very idea of family, she said, by fostering isolation over togetherness. Since most homes have more than one

set, TV viewing often is done alone.

When TV presents a child with an unfiltered view of the world, its values can undermine the family, Summers contended. Television bombards children with messages that often are in conflict with what parents want them to learn, she noted.

For instance, the commercial world of television is quick to promote a materialistic view of life that says happiness and success are found in things. "And that keeps us from understanding what true happiness and success are," Summers said. "That world view colors everything, including our Christianity."

Churches should get involved in helping families deal with TV's influence, Summers said. Church is a natural place to offer conferences and retreats on the use of television and on the role of parenting, she explained.

"Who controls the TV?" Summers asked a group of parents recently in Denver. "Who sets the standards in the home -- parents or the TV? Who raises the kids? Who gets to answer questions like: what is acceptable behavior? What's attractive? What's normal? What's funny? and What's a family all about? These are critical questions. If the church doesn't help parents, then who will?"

A bolt of lightning might help parents regain control of the family, as in the case of the Nardinis. But even that might not last.

After almost a year without television, the Nardini family returned to the electronic age recently. But they did so with a more critical eye, David Nardini said. "I think I learned a lesson. I'm better about it now."

"It's really easy to get back into it," Nardini warned. "You just turn it on and it's there."

But turn it off, Summers would say, and families find something else is there -- each other. That personal presence, she says, is the fundamental key to winning the television battle.

"I'm really not much of a doomsayer," she said. "I truly believe that one person still can have a tremendous influence on a child, even though that child is bombarded by thousands of hours of electronic media messages.

"I still think human beings respond to a personal touch and a personal involvement in their lives. That personal involvement is what kids are looking for, is what human beings are looking for. They may fill their time with hours of electronic media, but it will never be as significant as one human being offering time with a child.

"So we have to reset our priorities and ask why we had kids? Did we have a kid so that kid would be the first American to have 50,000 hours of television time in a lifetime? Probably not."

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Doctors say TV misuse  
can harm children

(ABP) Children watch too much television, and what they watch can be harmful. That's the conclusion reached by psychologists and pediatricians in separate studies on the effects and use of TV viewing.

A major report from the American Psychological Association cites the domineering and often disturbing impact television has on modern society. The five-year study, titled "Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society," was conducted by a team of nine psychologists.

Television inherently is neither good nor bad, the report said. It can have positive or negative effects on individuals, depending on what is viewed and how it is viewed.

For instance, it can teach children academic and social skills, the report noted. It can help adults gain knowledge. It can provide a sense of contact with a modern world.

On the other hand, it also can lead to antisocial behavior, stereotyping, poor grades, a loss of self-esteem, and a breakdown of healthy family interaction, the national report added.

Among the report's findings:

-- Pervasiveness. The average American child watches television three hours a day. Boys watch more than girls. Viewing most often begins in infancy, when parents use the television to quiet babies. Childhood viewing peaks at about four hours a day at age 12 and provides a backdrop for growing up.

-- Stereotyping. Television devalues and stereotypes social groups, such as women and minorities. Exposure to such messages increases stereotyped beliefs and attitudes.

-- Sex. Implied sexual activity on television most often occurs between unmarried couples with little emotional commitment to one another.

-- Violence. Prime-time television includes five-to-six acts of violence each hour. Saturday morning children's programs have up to 25 such acts per hour. The average child sees 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 assorted acts of violence by the time he or she leaves elementary school. Such exposure can cause aggressive behavior and foster the belief that aggression is the way to resolve conflicts.

-- Sexual violence. Watching sexually related violence leads to an increased acceptance of rape and other forms of sexual violence and can lead to antisocial values and behavior.

-- Reality. The average child is exposed to 20,000 commercials per year, and children under 7 have difficulty distinguishing commercials from programs.

The psychologists called for a national television policy to promote quality programming and protect persons from the harmful effects of television.

The psychologists' findings are echoed in another recent report from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Long-term television viewing is one cause for violent and aggressive behavior in children and is a significant contributor to childhood obesity, the report said.

The 13-year study noted Americans spend an average of seven years of their lives in front of the television, even though they view the activity as mindless, boring and addictive. In essence, watching television made the study participants feel worse instead of better and cut into meaningful family time.

The pediatricians urged parents to cut their children's television viewing time to one or two hours a day and to develop alternative family activities.

The key is the home, according to the report.

"We know from audience-rating surveys that television occupies a central place in the lives of many Americans," said John Murray, head of human development and family studies at Kansas State University and one of the drafters of the report. "The typical household has the TV set turned on for more than seven hours each day, and this figure has been steadily rising over the past decade."

Observers insist, however, the danger lies not in the television medium itself but in its misuse.

"What is most needed in addressing the role of television in American society," Murray added, "is an understanding of the ways to use TV sensibly and an appreciation of the subtle influences that this medium may have on our lives."

Yet most families have not acted. In a national survey of elementary school students, 58 percent said their parents set no limits on the amount of television they can view.

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-- By Lacy Thompson

Seeds of rebellion:  
How parents can reclaim  
their families from TV

(ABP) How can families gain control of the television and, in turn, perhaps the family? Specialists advocate several proactive measures:

The first step, experts say, is to evaluate the situation. Many families may not even be aware of the influence television has on them. Such families can keep a record of their television viewing for a week, or set up a temporary no-television period and monitor the effects.

Families should pay attention to the place of television in their lives. Where is the family set located? How central is it? How accessible? How often is it on when no one is watching? How often does it stay on during dinner? How often are other activities eliminated or restructured to make time for television viewing?

The second step is to set some rules and guidelines. The key in this area, specialists say, is for parents to realize they are more powerful than the television. Sources offer numerous ways to gain such control:

-- Be selective. Use a videocassette recorder to tape appropriate programs that then can be viewed at the parents' discretion.

According to the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, people should ask themselves questions about the programs they watch: Will watching this program represent responsible Christian stewardship for me? Will I be a better person for having watched this program? Is this a program that encourages morality or immorality?

-- Set up a weekly no-television night. "It may not even be a night to start," said media activist Sue Lockwood Summers of Littleton, Colo. "It may be a no-television hour. But it's something where the family says, 'We are an important entity and we care about each other.'"

-- Set daily limits on the amount of television family members can

watch. Most observers agree one-to-two hours a day is plenty for children. "There is no right that children have when they are born on this planet that says they are entitled to a certain amount of television," Summers insists.

-- Set viewing guidelines, such as no television until homework or chores are done, no television on school nights, no commercial television, or no isolated television viewing.

-- Monitor children's viewing to make sure what they are watching is appropriate and to be available to help them process what they are viewing. This is especially important in helping children understand the effect of commercials.

-- Promote alternate recreational, cultural and religious activities. Summers suggests using what she called an "imagination station," a box of non-television activities children can do while parents are busy with other activities, such as cooking dinner. In that way, television is not used as a baby sitter and family members can still have some interaction.

-- Set a good example. "It will be difficult to encourage children to accept responsible TV habits if parents set bad examples in their own viewing," Christian Life Commission materials note. "If TV plays a major role in the parents' lives, it will likely do the same in their children's lives."

Evelyn Kaye, author of "The Family Guide to Children's Television," says setting limits is appropriate: "Children learn there are rules about crossing the street, about brushing teeth, about not eating dangerous substances. And in the same way they can learn that television is one aspect of their lives which does not have to overwhelm all other activities."

Unless families take proactive measures, many more will find their family life dominated by the magic box that a Newsweek columnist once called the "stranger in the house."

"It's insidious," added media activist Summers. "It just kind of takes over the family without anybody really acknowledging its presence."

-- By Lacy Thompson

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of the Memorial Day holiday, no ABP issue is planned for Tuesday, May 26.

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