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SBC denounces homosexuality,  
embraces conservative agenda

By Greg Warner

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Southern Baptists denounced homosexuality in the strongest terms enroute to embracing a conservative social agenda during their annual meeting in Indianapolis June 9-11.

The welcoming remarks of Vice President Dan Quayle, who rallied Southern Baptist support for his campaign for "family values," set the conservative tone for the 135th yearly meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Messengers followed Quayle's lead by adopting conservative positions on homosexuality and a variety of other issues, from condom distribution to Freemasonry.

A total of 17,986 Southern Baptists registered as messengers for the Indianapolis meeting, which was quiet by recent standards. It was the farthest north that Southern Baptists have met since 1983 (Pittsburgh) and the smallest registration since 1984 (17,101).

Messengers confirmed not only the conservative social direction of the convention, but the conservative direction of its leadership. Houston pastor Edwin Young won easy election as SBC president, marking the 14th straight victory for the fundamental-conservative presidential candidate.

But the SBC's fundamental-conservative leaders failed to rein in one of their own -- Houston judge and SBC political strategist Paul Pressler -- whose nomination as a trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board was approved easily despite behind-the-scenes opposition from top leaders of the movement he founded.

That movement, which has controlled SBC affairs since 1979, was reprimanded by outgoing FMB President Keith Parks who, in his final address to Southern Baptists, claimed that the past 13 years have been marked by a lack of love, not evangelistic advance.

It was the issue of homosexuality, however, that occupied center stage this year.

Unlike other American denominations which have struggled for consensus on the homosexual issue, the Southern Baptist Convention -- by the vote of messengers in Indianapolis -- left no doubt that homosexual behavior and churches that condone it are unacceptable.

Messengers voted overwhelmingly June 9 to exclude any church that affirms homosexuality from participating in the SBC, marking the first time that a moral issue has been used to limit membership in the 147-year-old denomination.

And messengers went further by inserting anti-homosexuality language into the SBC constitution, which previously only looked at financial contributions to the SBC in determining church participation.

In the future, and if the constitutional amendment is ratified for a second time next year, no local church will be considered in "friendly cooperation" with the convention -- and therefore able to participate in SBC affairs -- if it acts "to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

The change was approved despite warnings it departs from the traditional relationship between the convention and its churches and that it opens the door for excluding congregations over a variety of moral issues.

The SBC action was directed at two North Carolina churches -- Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, which earlier this year blessed a marriage-like union between two homosexuals, and Olin T. Binkley Memorial Church in Chapel Hill, which licensed a homosexual divinity student to the gospel ministry.

Those actions "are contrary to the teachings of the Bible on human sexuality," the messengers said in a second motion in which they withdrew fellowship from the two churches.

SBC leaders disagreed on the significance of the action.

James Guenther, the SBC's attorney, said the action represents a "historic" change in ecclesiology for the denomination. "It is hard to overestimate the significance of this change," said Guenther of Nashville, Tenn.

But Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, said the change does not involve an "ecclesiological question" since the SBC has always had the power to discipline churches but hasn't used it. "If you had the power to do it, how does it change anything when you do it?" he asked.

Vice President Dan Quayle recruited SBC support for his own moral campaign against the nation's "cultural elite" during a welcoming address at the convention's opening session June 9.

In his address, which included references to his much-maligned "Murphy Brown" speech, Quayle said family values are basic to American society and essential to its survival. But they are also open to ridicule from the country's "cultural elite," he warned.

"Talk about right and wrong, and they'll try to mock us in newsrooms, sitcom studios and faculty lounges across America," Quayle said. "But in the heart of America, in the homes and workplaces and churches, the message is heard. A sense of moral decency runs deep in the American people.... And that's why I say this about the scorn of the media elite -- I wear their scorn as a badge of honor."

The vice president, who is President Bush's point man in the campaign for re-election, called for Southern Baptists to "speak up for the family, family values and the values and principles that make America great." He did not define those principles, but his speech cited faith, family, fidelity, freedom, modesty, integrity, honor, duty, goodness and love.

Quayle praised Southern Baptists for defending those values, saying they too "know what it's like to bear the brunt of ridicule" for unpopular positions.

In their own presidential election, Southern Baptists tapped Young,

pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston, maintaining fundamental-conservative dominance of the SBC's political process.

Young, who carried the endorsement of top fundamental-conservative leaders, defeated fellow fundamental-conservative Nelson Price and a non-aligned candidate, Jess Moody, on the first ballot with 62 percent. Moody, a pastor from suburban Los Angeles, got 21 percent and Price, an Atlanta-area pastor, collected 16 percent.

In other officer elections, two evangelists were elected as vice presidents -- Jay Strack of Dallas, first vice president by acclamation, and Joe Aulds of Ruston, La., second vice president in a runoff.

Lee Porter of Panama City, Fla., SBC registration secretary for 15 years, won re-election over Oklahoma pastor Bob Bender. Nashville businessman David Atchison was elected to a second term as recording secretary by acclamation.

Paul Pressler, the most powerful figure in the SBC's fundamental-conservative movement, turned back the most serious challenge to his leadership by easily winning election to a trustee post at the Foreign Mission Board.

Messengers defeated a substitute nominee by an estimated two-to-one margin, despite the fact most top leaders of the fundamental-conservative movement were opposed to Pressler's nomination. The election was described as a struggle for control of the movement's direction.

The alternate nomination did not come from fundamental-conservative leaders, however. Instead Cleeta John Rogers of Oklahoma City, Okla., nominated his brother, Eugene Rogers, a deacon in Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

Pressler described the victory as "overwhelming" and later complained that a Baptist Press news release downplayed the vote margin and cast him in a negative light. After Pressler threatened to fire the director of Baptist Press, a revised version of the story was later released.

The address by FMB President Keith Parks was one of the few disturbances in an otherwise tranquil annual SBC meeting. Parks warned that 13 years of denominational controversy have diverted Southern Baptists from their primary purpose of sharing the gospel. "Has the controversy accelerated our purpose of sharing the gospel with the world?" Parks asked. "I would have to answer 'no!'"

An estimated 200 people -- including former SBC president Adrian Rogers -- walked out in apparent protest during Parks' annual address, the last he will deliver after 13 years as FMB president. Parks will retire early this fall because of philosophical differences with FMB trustees over how to do missions work overseas.

Although the SBC was created for the purpose of missions, now many more people are present to elect an SBC president than to hear the annual missions reports, Parks told messengers in the largely empty Hoosier Dome. That suggests "current messengers do not consider missions as our primary purpose," he charged.

At a time of unprecedented responsiveness to the Christian message worldwide, Parks said, "we are killing our witness." "I tremble that we as Southern Baptists are so fragmented, so full of anger, so short on love, we may be passed while God finds someone else."

In other issues, messengers authorized a study of the "compatibility" of Masonic teachings "with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine." The proposal passed easily after messengers amended the original motion in order to instruct the HMB -- instead of a special SBC committee -- to conduct the study.

Neither the Home Mission Board president nor the man who introduced the original motion were pleased with the decision to ask the Home Mission Board to conduct the study. HMB President Larry Lewis said his agency will

draw ire regardless of its findings, and that will hurt HMB missions.

Larry Holly, the Texas physician who introduced the motion, said two previous requests for the HMB to study Freemasonry have produced unsatisfactory results.

In a 1985 study, the HMB's interfaith witness department concluded Freemasonry is not a religion or cult, and on that basis declined to critique it. Holly says Freemasonry is a secret, satanic, cultic order that teaches that other religions are as valid as Christianity.

Fred McPeake, a Masonic leader from Knoxville, Tenn., disagreed with Holly's assessment of Freemasonry. "It is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion, nor is it a false religion," said McPeake. "It is not in conflict with the Baptist faith."

Messengers later adopted a resolution containing thinly veiled criticism of Freemasonry. The resolution calls on Christians to avoid membership in any group "which conflicts with clear biblical teaching, including those teachings concerning the taking of oaths, the secrecy of activities, mystical knowledge or racial discrimination."

The convention passed a total of 15 resolutions, including one that cautions SBC agencies against participating in programs which "compromise support of the Cooperative Program" -- an apparent reference to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate-conservative organization that allows churches to bypass the Cooperative Program and other SBC funding channels.

Other resolutions positioned the SBC against condom distribution in schools, against letting homosexuals serve as Boy Scout leaders, against medical research involving fetuses from elective abortions, against euthanasia and assisted suicide, and against TV programs and ads that "glorify sexual promiscuity, violence and other forms of immorality."

In other resolutions, messengers voted for biblical language that refers to God in masculine terms, for the U.S. government to accommodate religious expression in public schools, for religious freedom for Middle East Christians, and for stepped-up evangelism in Eastern Europe.

The resolutions committee declined to act on dozens of other proposed resolutions, including ones denouncing the new Elvis Presley stamp and the use of sequined clothing in worship.

Messengers closed a chapter of Southern Baptist history by voting to end their 50-year-old relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. In contrast to previous decisions concerning the BJC, the vote drew no discussion and little opposition.

Messengers also overwhelmingly rejected a request from the Washington-based religious-liberty agency for binding arbitration to settle a dispute over who owns a \$300,000 capital-needs fund that has been in the name of the BJC for the past 28 years. The BJC may sue.

Among the many messages of the week was the last presidential address from Morris Chapman of Wichita Falls, Texas, who soon will move from the highest elected position in the SBC to the highest employed position -- president-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee.

In a reference to Southern Baptists displeased with the SBC's 13-year conservative trend, Chapman urged the others "not (to) be distracted" by those who would "hijack our heritage."

Calling the SBC a "denomination of destiny," Chapman said, "We will not...be deterred from the mission God has called us to accomplish for his own glory."

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-- This story includes information from Marv Knox, Trennis Henderson, Robert Dilday and Mark Wingfield.

Does SBC action on homosexuality  
portend scrutiny of local churches?

By Greg Warner

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Southern Baptists will have to "wait and see" if their decision to exclude churches that affirm homosexuality indicates their national convention now will exert more influence over local churches, according to church historian Bill Leonard.

"It depends on if this sets a precedent or is a one-time action," said Leonard, chairman of the religion department at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention voted overwhelmingly June 9 to amend their constitution to exclude any church that approves homosexuality from participating in the SBC.

The decision marks the first time that a moral issue has been used to limit membership in the 147-year-old denomination.

The constitution previously only looked at financial contributions to the SBC in determining church participation. If the amendment is ratified for a second time next year, no local church will be considered in "friendly cooperation" with the convention if it acts "to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

The SBC action was directed at two North Carolina churches, one which blessed a marriage-like union between two homosexuals and another which licensed a homosexual divinity student to the gospel ministry.

Leonard and other historians agree the SBC is well within its rights to determine what is tolerable within its fellowship and to expel churches that deviate from acceptable behavior and doctrine.

That power existed without the constitutional amendment, however. In fact, SBC messengers ousted the two churches before amending the constitution. If the amendment wasn't necessary, some historians ask, was it wise?

Some observers say the action departs from the traditional relationship between the convention and its churches and opens the door for excluding congregations over a variety of moral issues.

"It is hard to overestimate the significance of this change," said James Guenther, the SBC's attorney. Although the SBC has always had the power to exclude churches, he said, "the convention has never thought an issue was so important as to look to the faith and order of a church" to determine SBC participation.

Will the Southern Baptist Convention punctuate its recent decision with "an exclamation point," indicating homosexuality is a uniquely serious issue that warrants unprecedented action, Leonard asked, or "a comma," indicating more items will be added to the list of unacceptable church actions?

Neither Guenther nor Leonard would predict which it will be.

But Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, said it is "highly unlikely" the SBC will soon add other moral restrictions to the constitution, since it took the denomination almost 150 years to exercise its exclusionary power for the first time.

Although SBC messengers did not debate that question at length before approving the amendment, members of the SBC Executive Committee argued both sides a day earlier. Ray Fuller, chairman of the committee that brought the proposal, said the committee knew of "no other issues contrary to the Bible" that had surfaced in churches. But when they do surface, he said, "we will come back and address those issues as well."

Possible targets of future SBC action could be churches that favor abortion rights or women's ordination.

Guenther suggested expelling the two churches represents a "historic" change in Southern Baptist ecclesiology. But Land disagreed. "If (the SBC) had the power to do it, how does it change anything when you do it?" asked Land, a church historian.

Land, whose agency addresses moral issues such as homosexuality, said local Baptist associations historically have exercised discipline over churches. When the denomination does the same, it is a difference only of scale, he said.

In an interview from Berea, Ky., where he is teaching this summer, Leonard said the historic significance of the action depends on what happens next -- if it is a precedent or a one-time departure from the norm.

"We'll have to wait and see," said Leonard, former professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "If it does become a precedent, heaven only knows where we will go."

Predicting the direction the SBC will take is made more difficult by other changes in the denomination, Leonard said, changes caused by more than a decade of theological/political turmoil. "This simply adds another facet to an already unstable denomination."

Land said the SBC chose to use its power to expel for the first time because of the seriousness of the offense. "There have never been two Southern Baptist churches who have so directly challenged basic Southern Baptist belief," he said. "They are the ones who forced the decision on Southern Baptists."

"In my adult lifetime, there has not been any issue that has had the breadth of support as this issue," he said.

But Leonard added a caution. "Why (only) homosexuality?" he asked. "Which sins are important enough?"

Baptists could follow the direction of Roman Catholics, who classified sins according to seriousness, he warned. While Southern Baptists easily agreed to make homosexuality a test of fellowship, there might not be consensus on a host of other issues. "We all have our list," Leonard said.

"I understand the intensity of this," he said of the homosexuality debate. But, he added, "I think it is important to look beyond this specific issue and see a broader issue."

"The potential is that, instead of remaining a convention (operating) on a national level, we become a synod and look more like a connectional denomination, where rulings and precedents made on a national level are passed down on a local level."

Leonard defined a synod as a representative legislative body that sets dogma for a group of churches that are united around a common tradition. Under congregational rule, which is the Baptist tradition, policy is set in the local congregation.

A trend toward connectionalism, if it develops, would reverse the "bottom up" tradition of Baptist polity with a "top down" polity, in which the actions of the national body set the pattern for local churches.

If that happens, expect to hear a cry of "foul" from advocates of local-church autonomy.

So far at least, Southern Baptists have not crossed that line, said Land. Just as the two North Carolina churches were free to affirm homosexuality, so was the SBC free to withdraw fellowship from them, he said. "No one has tried to interfere with local-church polity."

Resolutions call for  
expanded religious freedom

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis June 9-11 adopted 15 resolutions which call for, among other things, expanded religious freedom in public classrooms and on foreign soil.

Another resolution offered thinly veiled criticism of Freemasonry, which will be the target of an upcoming study by the SBC Home Mission Board.

Resolutions are non-binding statements that reflect the opinion of a majority of messengers attending the annual convention. All 15 statements offered by the convention's resolutions committee passed with minimal discussion and little opposition.

A resolution on religion in public schools stopped short of calling for government-sponsored prayer, but it did note that some Supreme Court decisions "have been greatly misunderstood and grossly misapplied...to mean that the United States Constitution prohibits voluntary prayer and Bible reading in America's public schools."

The resolution commends the recent trend of the Supreme Court to move from a "strict separationist" doctrine to an "accommodationist" doctrine of religious liberty. A landmark case currently before the court could decide whether the courts will require government to remain strictly neutral in religious matters or whether government must "accommodate" the non-coercive religious activities of citizens.

The resolution also calls on the U.S. Congress to expand the Equal Access Act "to maximize the free-exercise rights of public school students."

"American students are denied basic civil rights," Albert Mohler, chairman of the resolutions committee, later told reporters.

"The resolution reflects that Southern Baptists have grown impatient with the outrageous encroachments on religious liberty suffered by America's public school students in the name of separation of church and state," said Mohler, editor of the Christian Index of Georgia.

Southern Baptists also registered their objection to restrictions on religious freedom abroad, particularly in the Middle East.

A resolution on religious freedom called on President Bush to influence Middle East nations and others "to provide genuine religious freedom" for Christians.

The resolution cites such restrictions on citizens of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt. Mohler told reporters "American lives were invested and lost" in the Persian Gulf War defending those countries, yet they deny religious freedom to their citizens and U.S. soldiers stationed on their soil.

A resolution on voluntary associations, directed in part at Freemasonry, called on Christians to avoid membership in any group "which conflicts with clear biblical teaching, including those teachings concerning the taking of oaths, the secrecy of activities, mystical knowledge or racial discrimination."

While the resolution does not mention Masons, messengers earlier adopted a motion to instruct their Home Mission Board to study Masonic teachings. For several years, Texas physician Larry Holly has led a persistent campaign to discredit Freemasonry, which Holly says is a secret, satanic, cultic order that teaches that other religions are as valid as Christianity.

While the resolution was sparked by the Freemasonry dispute, Mohler told reporters, it did not single out Masons in order to address "the broader moral issue" of involvement with any group "that doesn't measure up to biblical standards of holiness."

For example, Mohler said, the resolution's language against "racial

discrimination" is targeted at private clubs that exclude people of color.

The 15 resolutions were divided into two groups and adopted during two separate sessions of the convention. In both sessions, the resolutions were grouped into one motion for approval.

Mohler later was asked if such wholesale treatment of the statements minimized their importance. While he said he was troubled by the lack of time allotted to resolutions, Mohler said the messengers' willingness to adopt them all at once indicated the "strength of the consensus" on those issues.

Among the other resolutions:

-- On God the Father. The resolution notes that "God is a Spirit, beyond any human gender" but declares God "revealed himself to us as Father." It calls on "all Christians to remain faithful to biblical language concerning God, understanding that the revelation of God as Father is central and essential to Trinitarian faith."

-- On the Cooperative Program. The resolution states that "entities related to the convention have a binding responsibility" to support the denomination's unified budget and urges those entities and their employees "to maintain support of the Cooperative Program and avoid any conflict of interest, real or perceived, which would be occasioned by any participation with any organization, program or meeting which would compromise support of the Cooperative Program." The apparent target was the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate organization that allows churches to bypass the Cooperative Program.

-- On autonomy. The resolution affirms the autonomy of Baptist churches, associations and conventions but claims there is a "responsibility to maintain the integrity and scriptural discipline of every Baptist body in terms of faith, practice, membership and programs, thus protecting the witness and purity of the church and denomination."

-- On Boy Scouts. The resolution supports the Boy Scouts of America for refusing to allow homosexuals to serve as Scout leaders.

-- On condom distribution. The resolution condemns distribution of condoms in public schools and calls on schools to implement "abstinence-based educational programs" instead.

-- On fetal-tissue experiments. The resolution asks Congress to sustain the Bush administration's ban on research using fetal tissue from elective abortions, claiming such research is unethical and allows "aborted babies to be exploited for scientific and commercial purposes."

-- On TV morality. Without mentioning Vice President Dan Quayle or his criticism of the "Murphy Brown" sitcom, the resolution says TV viewers are "bombarded with themes, plots, images and advertisements which promote and glorify sexual promiscuity, violence and other forms of immorality." It calls on Christians to "express outrage" to television networks and others for this "misuse of the public airwaves and cable access."

-- On euthanasia and assisted suicide. The resolution speaks against euthanasia and assisted suicide and opposes efforts to designate food and water as "extraordinary treatment" that can be withheld upon request by a dying person.

-- On urban evangelism. The resolution notes the racial diversity of America's cities and the need for innovative strategies in evangelism and calls for greater inclusiveness of ethnic leadership in planning mission strategies.

-- On Eastern Europe. The resolution commends the Foreign Mission Board's "Green Alert" response to new opportunities in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism and encourages all Baptist churches to "marshall their resources and mobilize their members" to seize the opportunities quickly.

-- On the Lord's Day. Linking the "moral breakdown in our society" with disregard for the Sabbath, the resolution advocates "proper use of the Lord's Day to strengthen families and give proper recognition to God as Creator."

-- On appreciation. The resolution expresses appreciation to the host city, state convention and officers who worked in preparation for the SBC's annual meeting.

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-- By Mark Wingfield and Greg Warner

World population growth  
emerging as major problem

By Kathy Palen

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Experts agree: humankind is using resources and dumping waste at rates the earth cannot sustain.

During the recent Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, representatives from around the globe attempted to find ways their nations can work together to halt the growing assault on the environment.

But absent from the summit's myriad discussions and debates was the topic of population control. That absence came despite new forecasts of dramatic increases in the world's population.

Recently released figures from the United Nations Population Fund predict that the world's population, now at 5.4 billion, will surpass 11.6 billion by the year 2150. That figure reflects a significant increase from predictions made in 1980, when the agency projected population levels would stabilize at 10 billion people during the next century.

In light of such projections about population growth and the effects such growth will have on the earth, the topic is too controversial to be discussed at gatherings such as the Earth Summit. Why?

"The controversy comes first of all from those religions that believe we should simply allow nature to do what it will do," said Glen Stassen, professor of Christian ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "that we should get our ethics from nature rather than from a sense of responsibility for our role in the creation.

A second factor in the controversy, Stassen said, is the "polarized debate" over abortion. A "tragic spin-off" of that debate is fear that population control will lead to more abortions, he said.

"The U.S. government cut off its funding for population planning in other countries as part of its political response to a pretty extreme ideology," Stassen said.

While the abortion debate has overshadowed population concerns on a policy level, Stassen said the issue of population control is less controversial at the people level.

"The research is really clear that when contraceptives are made available with education, people in all kinds of countries will use them," he explained. "Furthermore, when basic economic needs are met, the people have fewer babies -- just as the United States made that transition when our economy started meeting our basic needs."

Robert Parham, director of the Nashville-based Baptist Center for Ethics, noted that population control also is a controversial topic in some Christian circles in the United States. Some Christians, he said, consider any population control as a mask for abortion, while others are angered by the use of federal funds for family planning.

"Despite the objections of some Christians, the issue of population growth must be put on the table for discussion," Parham said. "The world's population presently stands at 5.4 billion people, having more than doubled since 1900. It is expected to increase to 8.5 billion in the next 35 years."

Christians should be concerned not only about the rate of increase,

Parham said, but where it is; 90 percent of the anticipated growth is in developing countries.

"Most of the growth will take place in the impoverished world of the subcontinent of India, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, where a greater number of people now live in poverty, suffer from malnutrition, and lose children in the early years of life than did in the late 1960s."

Population growth in developing countries places increasing pressure on the already fragile environment, Parham said.

To illustrate, he cited the flooding in Bangladesh and the loss of cropland in Sahel that have resulted from deforestation that, in turn, has resulted from the demand for firewood among a growing population.

"Flooding and farming on marginal land adversely affect food production," he said. "Population growth, environmental deterioration and declining crop yields form a vicious cycle of harm."

"Christians must recognize that unless the rate of population growth slows, the quality of human life will deteriorate dramatically and the death rate will become even more cruel. We must develop an ethic which is pro-life for all of human life, as well as life's support system."

What are some ways to begin slowing the world's population growth?

Stassen gave three basic suggestions:

-- The United States should return to its policy of funding international efforts to do population control. "I think we should contact our representatives and senators and ask them to restore this funding," he said. "We should ask the same of the presidential candidates."

-- The United States should return to its policy of doing serious energy conservation. "Developing countries are pointing out that one American baby consumes 50 times what one Indian baby consumes and also pollutes 50 times as much," Stassen said. "So it's hypocritical for the U.S. to try to push them to control their population when we're not doing the energy conservation here at home."

-- The United States should help poor countries meet the basic needs of their people. "That's the key to persuading people to control the size of their families," he said. "If they know their babies aren't going to die, they won't have as many babies."

Another step, Stassen said, would be to move both extremes on the abortion debate toward a more middle solution in order to depolarize that issue.

And another major step "is to believe that we really can make major progress," he said.

"The evidence is clear. Many nations have made the transition from overpopulation to controlled population. Developing countries that start to meet the basic needs of their people and distribute contraceptives with information have regularly made big strides."

"Many people have been told there's nothing we can do about all kinds of problems that we have," Stassen said. "That discourages them, and it leads to inaction. On this problem, it's clear that we know how to do it and that it doesn't cost very much money."

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Crumpler: Cooperative missions  
'doesn't exist anymore'

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Cooperative missions, long the hallmark of the Southern Baptist Convention, "doesn't exist anymore" because of the heavy-handed missions strategy now employed by the SBC Foreign Mission Board, said

retired missions leader Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler.

Crumpler, former executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union, said SBC moderate-conservatives are being falsely accused of destroying the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget that funds mission work at home and abroad.

"We're not destroying it; it already has been destroyed," she said June 6 at the annual assembly of the Midwest chapter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national organization for Southern Baptists displeased with the SBC's current direction.

Giving to the Cooperative Program has stagnated in recent years, which fundamental-conservatives blame in part on the fact the alternate-funding plan of the Fellowship bypasses the Cooperative Program.

In a May 23 editorial in the Indiana Baptist titled "Pillaging a Denomination," editor Gary Ledbetter called the Fellowship's alternate funding "vandalism" and said the group is destroying the Cooperative Program. "They have siphoned off mission money and produced little or nothing of a missionary nature," Ledbetter wrote.

Noting the damage to the Cooperative Program was already done, Crumpler also denied Ledbetter's charges that the Fellowship is "deviating from traditional Southern Baptist beliefs that missionaries should concentrate on planting churches and winning souls."

Crumpler said the Fellowship, which appointed its first four missionaries in May, is doing what traditional Baptist missionaries have done since William Carey, Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong.

Now the wife of a Cincinnati, Ohio, pastor, Crumpler said the fact that 41 SBC missionaries resigned in May indicates the Foreign Mission Board has altered its historic approach to missions.

Arnold Peterson, one of those missionaries who resigned recently, told the Midwest Fellowship he left SBC mission work because "the fundamental-conservatives took over complete control of the Southern Baptist Convention and began drastic changes in the direction of the Foreign Mission Board."

Peterson, a missionary to South Korea for 18 years, is now pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Mt. Vernon, Ill. He said the FMB's new approach to missions is "bordering on paternalism."

Trustees of the FMB have repeatedly denied they have changed the principles by which the agency does foreign missions.

The Midwest meeting, held at an Indianapolis church three days before the start of the Southern Baptist Convention, drew 65 participants, twice as many as the group's last meeting. The regional group covers 10 states -- Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Forrest Cornelius, pastor of University Baptist Church in Iowa City, Iowa, was elected moderator at the group's meeting at the Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis June 6.

Cornelius, who was moderator-elect during the past term, succeeded moderator Dorothy Sample of Flint, Mich., former national president of Woman's Missionary Union.

Linda Bening, a businesswoman from Carbondale, Ill., was chosen moderator-elect and Viva Ames of Grand Rapids, Mich., was elected to replace Bening as recorder-treasurer.

A new office of communications coordinator was created. Merv Snider of Ohio was elected to the post, which was created by volunteer communicator John Taylor of Carbondale, former associate editor of the Illinois Baptist. Snider will set up a newsletter for the 10-state organization.

-- This article includes information from the Indianapolis Star.

### Supreme Court to rehear arguments in abortion case

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court announced June 8 it will postpone until its next term a decision on whether federal courts can use a 19th-century civil rights law to prohibit anti-abortion protesters from blocking access to abortion clinics.

While the high court offered no explanation for its decision to rehear *Bray vs. Alexandria Women's Health Clinic*, court observers said the move may signal a sharp split among the eight justices who heard arguments in the case Oct. 16. The court's ninth justice, Clarence Thomas, was awaiting Senate confirmation when the case was first heard but will be available to participate when it is reheard this fall.

In a ruling upheld by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, a federal district court granted a permanent injunction barring Operation Rescue's blockade of abortion clinics in the northern Virginia area.

The court held that Operation Rescue had violated an 1871 civil rights law by conspiring to deprive women seeking abortions and related medical and counseling services of the right to interstate travel.

Attorneys for Operation Rescue and the U.S. Justice Department argued before the Supreme Court that the lower courts had improperly used the 1871 law to bar blockades at the clinics.

The unusual but not unprecedented move of returning the Operation Rescue case to the calendar for reargument still leaves the high court with one controversial abortion case to resolve before it completes its 1991-92 term this summer.

In *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania vs. Casey*, justices are expected to clarify whether they consider abortion a fundamental constitutional right that can be restricted only for compelling reasons.

That case is being closely watched by observers on both sides of the emotionally volatile abortion issue to see whether the high court will further diminish or eliminate the abortion protections spelled out in the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision.

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-- By Larry Chesser

### Supreme Court won't review church-school labor ruling

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to review a lower court's ruling that federal labor laws may be applied to non-teaching employees of church-affiliated schools.

The case involved a directive from the National Labor Relations Board which ordered a Sonoma, Calif., school to bargain with a social-services union. The Supreme Court's June 15 order left standing a 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that affirmed the labor board's directive.

The National Labor Relations Board acted after a group of non-teaching employees at the school, including child-care workers, recreation assistants, cooks, cooks' helpers and maintenance workers, voted for union representation.

Officials at Hanna Boys Center, a Roman Catholic-operated residential

facility for troubled boys between the ages of 9 and 15, challenged the NLRB decision.

Hanna officials argued that a previous Supreme Court decision had excluded church-operated schools as entire units, not just teachers, from the scope of federal labor laws. The federal appeals court disagreed, stating that the exemption announced by the high court in NLRB vs. Catholic Bishop of Chicago in 1979 applied only to teachers.

School officials also contended that Hanna's child-care workers were similar to teachers, but the appeals court concluded that all employees in the group, "including the child-care workers, are secular employees with no teaching function."

The appeals court also held that the application of labor laws did not violate either the no-establishment clause or free-exercise clause of the First Amendment.

"Although Hanna as an institution is infused with an important religious component," the appeals court said, there is "substantial evidence" that the school's religious nature is fostered by other employees, not those who sought union representation.

The appeals court also concluded that enforcement of federal labor laws "will not interfere with the exercise of religious beliefs of anyone at Hanna."

Brent Walker, associate general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said it is not surprising that the high court declined the case and that the decision "as a whole" is not inconsistent with previous court rulings.

Walker nonetheless said he is "troubled" by the application of labor law provisions to child-care workers. "They apparently had some teaching duties and pastoral responsibilities," he said, "and this residential school seemed to be more pervasively sectarian than the 9th Circuit was willing to acknowledge."

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-- By Larry Chesser

Senate notes 25th anniversary  
of Jerusalem's reunification

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate approved a resolution June 10 noting the 25th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem and stressing that the city must remain undivided.

The resolution (S. Con. Res. 113) congratulated the people of Israel on the milestone and expressed the Senate's conviction that an undivided Jerusalem is essential for preserving the religious rights of every ethnic and religious group. It also called on the president and secretary of state "to issue an unequivocal statement in support of these principles."

The Jewish community was driven out of Jerusalem and denied access to holy sites in the area occupied by Jordan from 1948 to 1967. Jerusalem was reunited in 1967 during the Six Day War.

The Senate resolution notes that since Jerusalem had been reunited "persons of all religious faiths have been guaranteed full access to holy sites within the city." The resolution also asserts that Israel's concern that the United States might support a divided Jerusalem inhibits lasting peace in the region.

Sen. Daniel Moynihan, D-N.Y., said Israel's concern stems from U.S. support of two United Nations Security Council Resolutions that describe Jerusalem as "occupied Palestinian territory." Resolution 726 "strongly condemns" Israel, Moynihan added.

"We were far too passive in May 1948 when the Jordanian Arab Legion drove the once flourishing Jewish majority out of the Old City at gunpoint," Moynihan said. "We were too passive when Jerusalem was divided by barbed wire, mine fields and cinder-block walls."

Sen. Bob Packwood, R-Ore., said: "Supporting an undivided Jerusalem is smart, stable policy. For the past 25 years, observers of all religions have had free access to their places of worship. Arabs, Jews and Christians overlap each other in places of worship, commerce and rest."

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-- By Pam Parry

State Baptist papers could  
face steep rate increase

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- State Baptist newspapers could face a 50 percent increase in their postal rates if Congress fails to accept a proposal to delay the increase.

The House Subcommittee on Treasury, Postal Service and General Government approved an appropriations measure June 10 that would provide only \$200 million of the \$482 million needed for the non-profit mail subsidy, known as "revenue foregone." But the bill, approved in a closed meeting, includes a temporary shield from a non-profit postal hike in 1993.

Postal rates for non-profit mailers like Baptist state newspapers reflect only the cost of handling that class of mail. Revenue foregone reimburses the U.S. Postal Service for the overhead expenses.

Edward Roybal, D-Calif., chairman of the subcommittee, proposed that the Postal Service, rather than non-profit mailers, pick up the \$282 million difference in the amount needed and the amount appropriated.

Neal Denton, executive director of the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers, cautioned members of the non-profit community from taking solace from Roybal's proposal.

The shield is temporary -- only providing protection for one year -- and does not yet have the approval of the full Appropriations Committee, Denton said. He predicted the proposal would face opposition during the committee's consideration of the bill, scheduled for June 25.

Even if the proposal is approved, non-profit publications would be extremely vulnerable next year, he said. Denton said his alliance would prefer a permanent solution to the revenue-foregone problem, which has persisted in recent years.

In the last two years, President Bush has proposed budgets that would have severely cut revenue foregone, but Congress has taken steps to prevent rate increases for most non-profit mail. Bush's 1993 proposal for revenue foregone is \$88 million less than the subcommittee approved.

Offering his best guess, Denton said Roybal's proposal probably will survive the House committee, forcing the Senate to make the difficult decision. Therefore, the revenue foregone battle for non-profit mailers will be won or lost in the Senate, he added.

If Congress does not approve protection for non-profit mailers, the rate hike will go into effect Oct. 1.

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-- By Pam Parry

Faith is scary, not safe,  
Lutheran author says

By Lacy Thompson

ALEXANDRIA, La. (ABP) -- Faith is anything but safe, according to Lutheran minister and author Walter Wangerin.

In fact, Wangerin said, a relationship with God can be downright scary at times. That's because human beings tend to be afraid of what they cannot control, Wangerin explained in a recent interview with the Baptist Message of Louisiana.

People respond to this fear by trying to make faith into a noun -- something fixed -- so that "we can pick it up and hold it in our hand," Wangerin said.

But faith, the author said, involves launching into a relationship with God and giving up control at the same time.

"Whenever we stand before the God who made us and redeemed us, and whenever we leap into relationship with that God, there really is a sense of dying to ourselves," he said. "And that dying is literally the giving up of control."

It is in "uncontrolled" relationship with God that people find direction in life, Wangerin said.

Wangerin's readers often say his writings have helped them find direction. A Louisiana man, grieving over the death of his son, read an excerpt from Wangerin's "The Book of the Dun Cow" and was able to confront his bitterness toward God, the man's pastor reported.

The excerpt tells the story of Chauntecleer the rooster, who struggles with the death of his own sons. The same excerpt, printed in the Baptist Message, prompted a letter of thanks from one reader who was grieving over placing his wife of 46 years in a nursing home.

In addition to "Dun Cow," Wangerin, 48, has written "The Book of Sorrows" and "Ragman and Other Cries of Faith," all of which have received writing awards.

In his books, Wangerin often uses stories to describe the Christian faith. Most of those stories are drawn from the author's experiences. He has served as pastor of an inner-city Lutheran church in Indiana and currently teaches English at Valparaiso (Ind.) University.

Although his stories vary, Wangerin insists they all represent his attempt to tell one just story.

"The story I tell always regards our sin, which is breakdown, always regards the desire for the wholeness that sin has ruined, and always seeks...the intrusion of the deity into this world -- that we who had hurt God also might receive the love and blessing of God nevertheless."

Wangerin reminds people that the Bible teaches God can be found in the oddest places and the most unlikely people.

"Very often we don't see God in others because we choose to divide humans into those who are like us and those who are unlike us," he explained. "Generally, we think God is near us. Therefore, those like us are where we expect to see God. But my experience has been God usually bursts forth from where I didn't expect him, from those I would have severed myself from."

"Everything in some sense is touched by the glory of God," he said. "Every sorrow in some sense is a sorrow in which lurks the Christ. And so all of these things can become directives to our lives."

Ask Wangerin about the spiritual hunger found in the modern world, and he talks of how important it was for him as a child to see his parents smile and acknowledge what he had done, giving it value. That feeling is what people are looking for, he says.

"We're hungry for God to smile and say, 'This -- what you've done -- I

like that. And I like you.'"

In light of his emphasis on relationship with God, it is no surprise that Wangerin also stresses the importance of relationships between individuals. He speaks of the Old Testament concept of covenant, the idea of making and keeping promises with one another, and of forgiveness -- the idea that when the covenant promise is broken, Jesus provides the "miraculous ability" to heal a rift.

Unfortunately, he said, people want promises but don't want to make promises. "It makes us not too good at relationships. But we keep wanting to be good at it because when we fail, we hurt."

Wangerin emphasizes not only the Christian's relationships with God and others but with the world.

Christians should anticipate hatred from the world, he said. Hatred should come, however, not because Christians look at the world in arrogant judgment but simply because "if we are in God, the light in us will make other people upset."

When Christians "use God's law to accuse the world," he said, they deserve the animosity the world returns. "Then we're acting from a position of arrogance, superiority. And that's not Christlike."

In fact, to be a Christian in a modern world is to be a powerless servant, Wangerin said. He admitted he gets nervous when he sees Christians acquiring political power, even in an effort to bring about God's law in the world.

"Using the law as a ball bat" is the wrong way for Christians to advance the cause of God, Wangerin said. "I think the right (way) is the one Jesus pointed out for us -- humbling ourselves, even unto death, so that by sacrifice we bring Christ into the dark corners."

"If we're Christlike, we will not be powerful, not in this world."

"We think we ought to stand up for God, and (we) forget that God can do pretty good standing up for himself."

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