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Phone: (904) 396-0396   Fax: (904) 396-4441   CServe: 70420,73

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FMB Elects New Europe VP,  
Adopts Dorfweil Statement

By Orville Scott

EL PASO, Texas (ABP) -- Trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board unanimously elected Samuel M. James as regional vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa at its June meeting in El Paso.

The board also appointed 34 new missionaries, 32 of them at an appointment service during the annual meeting of the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas. The Hispanic Baptists, who were celebrating the 100th anniversary of the beginning of Baptist mission work in Texas' westernmost city, are part of the 2.5-million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas.

James, the board's area director for East Asia since 1985 has served with the board for 30 years. He succeeds Isam Ballenger who took early retirement last January in protest of Foreign Mission Board trustee's defunding international Baptist Theological Seminary, Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

In response to charges by Ballenger that FMB trustees have a "global agenda" to export the Southern Baptist controversy, trustees adopted a statement that "We have only one global agenda, and that is evangelism that results in churches."

They added, "We do not have a global agenda to export any perceived controversy to any Baptist body with which we partnership."

Also, they affirmed the right of all national Baptist bodies to work with other mission entities without jeopardizing their partnership with the Foreign Mission Board. That would include the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization formed by Baptists who oppose the control of SBC agencies by fundamental-conservatives.

The board expressed "deep appreciation for its long-time relationship with Woman's Missionary Union and for the enormous support this relationship has brought to the cause of foreign missions."

It asked its president, board chairman, recording secretary and human resources committee chairman to arrange a dialogue with their counterparts at WMU to discuss ways to strengthen the relationship and to discuss trustee's "concern that the support not be diluted by relationships between WMU and a non-Southern Baptist or quasi Southern Baptist mission agency." Trustees have expressed concern that WMU might form a relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In the wake of controversy concerning relationships with the European Baptist Federation, trustees unanimously approved principles of the Dorfweil Statement adopted last January by European Baptists meeting at Dorfweil, Germany.

The Dorfweil Statement specifies that partnerships between European Baptists and missionaries from other countries must be based upon mutual respect, spiritual freedom, moral integrity, reciprocal sharing and genuine consultation "in which the partners confer together and aim for mutual consent."

The Foreign Mission Board trustees declared: "This affirmation is not a new policy, but a new expression of principles we have historically supported, do now support and will continue to support.

"We earnestly desire mutual trust, happy cooperation and equal partnership in all our relationships with the European Baptist Federation and with other Baptist groups in Europe, and desire discussions with the European Baptist Federation to develop future partnership on that basis."

Trustees approved recommendations of the board's administrative committee for the October 30 retirement of Keith Parks, who has been president of the board for nearly 13 years and has served with the board for 38 years.

Parks had originally asked to served until 1995, but is retiring earlier because of philosophical differences with trustees.

Key financial aspects of the retirement package, which the administrative committee said were "at Dr. Park's own request consistent with his lifestyle of sacrificial service," include the 1990 Ford automobile provided for him by the board, benefits normally allotted to staff of the board at retirement and expenses for him and his wife to attend the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting and missions weeks at Ridgecrest and Glorieta (Baptist Conference Centers) for life, unless he becomes "employed by another missions sending agency."

The normal retirement package includes benefits accrued through contributions to the Southern Baptist annuity program, a one-time gift of \$3,800 (\$100 for each year of service), and routine medical and life insurance coverage.

Trustees also authorized the opening of foreign missions work in Aruba, an island which is part of the Netherlands Antilles off the northwest coast of Venezuela. It will be the 126th country in which Southern Baptists maintain missionaries.

Noting they are grieved by the perception that 1991 was less than a banner year for Southern Baptist foreign missions, the trustees cited a record \$81.4 million Lottie Moon Christmas offering during the year, plus record numbers of baptisms and new churches started.

They congratulated "all of our constituents, missionaries and staff for a job well done."

Supreme Court strikes  
St. Paul hate crimes law

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- In a unanimous decision June 22, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a St. Paul, Minn., statute that bars cross burning and other hate crimes.

While all nine justices concluded that the law violates the First Amendment's free speech guarantees, the unanimous result barely masked the sharp disagreement evident in the harsh criticism leveled by four justices at the rationale used by the majority to topple the 1987 measure.

Writing for the majority, Justice Antonin Scalia said the ordinance is unconstitutional because it discriminates on the basis of speech content and viewpoint.

Scalia said the law is discriminatory because while it barred the use of "fighting words" that insult or provoke violence" on the basis of race, color, creed, religion or gender," it permitted hostile expression in such areas as political affiliation, union membership or homosexuality.

"The First Amendment does not permit St. Paul to impose special prohibitions on speakers who express views on disfavored subjects," Scalia wrote in an opinion joined by Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Anthony Kennedy, David Souter and Clarence Thomas.

The key question, Scalia wrote, "is whether content discrimination is reasonably necessary to achieve St. Paul's compelling interest; it plainly is not. An ordinance not limited to the favored topics, for example, would have precisely the same beneficial effect.

"In fact, the only interest distinctively served by the content limitation is that of displaying the city council's special hostility towards the particular biases thus singled out."

Scalia concluded the while "burning a cross in someone's front yard is reprehensible, ... St. Paul has sufficient means at its disposal to prevent such behavior without adding the First Amendment to the fire."

In a concurring opinion joined by Justices Harry A. Blackmun and Sandra Day O'Connor and joined in part by Justice John Paul Stevens, Justice Byron R. White criticized the majority for protecting "Narrow categories of expression long held to be undeserving of First Amendment protection -- at least to the extent that lawmakers may not regulate some fighting words more strictly than others because of their content ... Should the government want to criminalize certain fighting words, the Court now requires it to criminalize all fighting words."

White and his colleagues who disagreed with the majority's rationale in deciding the case, would have struck down the St. Paul ordinance by holding that it "is fatally overbroad because it criminalizes not only unprotected expression but expression protected by the First Amendment."

White labeled the majority's opinion a "radical revision of First Amendment law."

"The decision is mischievous at best and will surely confuse the lower courts," he wrote. "I join the judgment, but not the folly of the opinion."

In a separate concurrence, Blackmun said he sees "No First Amendment values that are compromised by a law that prohibits hoodlums from driving minorities out of their homes by burning crosses on their lawns, but I see great harm in preventing the people of Saint Paul from specifically punishing the race-based fighting words that so prejudice their community."

Blackmun nonetheless agreed with White that the St. Paul ordinance went beyond fighting words to speech protected by the First Amendment.

In yet another concurring opinion, Stevens criticized the majority for giving fighting words, previously considered outside the scope of First Amendment protection, the same or higher protection than that afforded political or commercial speech.

"The Court today turns First Amendment law on its head: Communication that was once entirely unprotected (and that still can be wholly proscribed) is now entitled to greater protection than commercial speech -- and possibly greater protection than core political speech."

While the court's ruling is expected to have sweeping consequences in the free speech area, a Baptist church-state attorney said it is too early to predict precisely its effects, and whether it signals any possible change in how the court views other First Amendment protections.

J. Brent Walker, associate general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee, sees a stark contrast in the court's June 22 free speech decision and its 1990 decision sharply limiting free exercise rights.

"I find it strange that the court took a near absolutist position on the enforcement of the free speech clause while it is perfectly willing to write the free exercise clause out of the First Amendment altogether," Walker said, referring to the high court's 1990 opinion that significantly lowered the standard government must meet to restrict religious exercise.

"The common denominator is the majority's apparent willingness to depart from settled precedent in order to advance its novel constitutional philosophy," Walker said.

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-- by Larry Chesser

Religious freedom welcome  
in former Soviet republic

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Religious freedom apparently will play a part in the democratization of the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, according to an American journalist who recently returned from there.

Thomas Goltz, the first foreign correspondent to live in Baku, Azerbaijan, offered a first-hand account of Azerbaijan's democratic development at a June 22 briefing sponsored by the Helsinki Commission. (The Helsinki Commission, an independent agency created by Congress, monitors and encourages compliance with human rights accords).

Goltz said the "public face" of the government has been to welcome "informed religion" into Azerbaijan society because it provides a moral underpinning. Although the new country has a decidedly Muslim influence, the government appears to welcome other religions, he added.

Goltz covered the country's first democratic presidential election June 7, noting most interested observers agreed the election was largely free, fair and democratic.

Abulfaz Elchibey, chairman of the country's Popular Front, won the election, gaining approximately 60 percent of the vote, according to the Helsinki Commission.

Goltz said he was excited to see a democratic process proceed, but at the same time, he is pessimistic about how long it will last. He said the new government has several enemies, making Azerbaijan unstable.

Shireen Hunter, who works with the Center for Strategic and International Studies said she would not go as far as Goltz in saying Azerbaijan had undergone democratization. She said the country should be given credit for taking the preliminary step toward democratization, but it is not there yet.

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--By Pam Parry

Southern Baptists sharpen  
family values discussion

By Kathy Palen

(ABP) -- When people use the term family values, they often mean "squeaky-clean families that don't have problems," said a family therapist.

But such a model is impossible to live out, said Kay Shurden, a faculty member at Mercer University's School of Medicine.

The topic of the family has made headlines in recent weeks, sparked by Vice President Dan Quayle's attack on out-of-wedlock TV mom "Murphy Brown." His appeal to "enduring, basic moral values" in a speech to the Southern Baptist Convention June 9 rejuvenated the debate over who truly supports family values.

Unfortunately, say some Baptist ethicists, the idea of family often falls victim to oversimplification and idealism, particularly in an election year.

Doug Cole, executive director of the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, complained that the family often becomes a political football.

"I think one of the things that is going on in this country is that we find the definition of family slightly skewed," Cole said. Too often the family is described only in terms of "the age-old nuclear definition of 2.3 kids, a cat and a dog."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 26 percent of American households are composed of married couples with children. Single-parent families account for more than 14 percent of all households, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. Half of all marriages end in divorce.

While such statistics demonstrate that the shape of the American family is changing, they also are used to argue for a return to "traditional" family values.

But who defines what those values are?

Family specialists like Shurden and Cole argue that Christians need to take a more serious look at family values than that usually provided by politicians and the entertainment media.

In reality, Cole said, one can find family "any place that one finds the kind of small network of support where emotionality, intimacy, love and nurture can be experienced and which creates wholeness."

Shurden said family values essentially involve those things -- such as tolerance, love and generosity -- that a family teaches its members. The question about family values, she said, is: "What should be transmitted?"

The decision about what values a family will transmit is too important to be left to "movie makers, money grubbers and politicians who live in moral ghettos," said Robert Parham, director of the Nashville-based Baptist Center for Ethics, which will sponsor a national seminar on the family next February.

Ironically, Parham said, Quayle and Murphy Brown "share a common poverty of values."

"Behind their disagreement about parenthood is a fundamental commitment to individualism," Parham said. "Quayle preaches an ethic of individual rights: hard work, opportunity and personal responsibility. Brown exemplifies these values. Neither recognizes the value of community beyond the family unit, which is expressed in the old African proverb: 'It takes a whole village to raise a child.'"

Shurden said one important role for the family to play is to "launch" family members "into the world to do whatever it is that they want to do." Families prepare members for "launching" by providing love and nurture, which allows family members to believe in themselves.

But sometimes, she said, families hold onto members, particularly children, "to get them to fulfill their parents' desires instead of to live out of their own convictions. Families have a hard time letting people go."

Cole said Christians need to avoid the mistake of reducing the parenting experience down to "parenting by propositions," such as the proposition that "all families should have a mother and a father." The problem with such a proposition, he said, is that it is "simply not true."

"We're still dealing with a theoretical concept that was really popular and widely practiced in the '50s and probably the '60s," he said. "But since then, of course, we've had every kind of configuration possible."

Shurden, an associate of the Baptist Center for Ethics, agreed that any attempt to impose a '50s model of family values on a family of the '90s is dangerous.

Too often, she added, churches try "to put a guilt trip on families and say this is the way it should be, kind of like the Waltons. It's like there's a way that you should be in relationships with each other where you avoid all problems. I just don't think that's possible. I don't even think it's desired."

"I think one of the things we need to strive for in the '90s is for people to be able to be themselves and still be in their families, still keep their attachments. I think imposing a model on a Christian woman or a Christian man or a Christian family is absolutely trying to play God to them."

"We've already graduated two families," Fountain said. "Most of the time this can be accomplished within six months."

Congregations that are interested in strengthening families can take similar practical steps to do that, say family specialists.

Kay Shurden, a family therapist at Mercer University's School of Medicine, and Doug Cole, executive director of the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, suggested a number of things that local churches can do to assist families.

A congregation can:

-- Sponsor support groups for such target audiences as parents of teenage children, married couples, parents of young children and persons recovering from divorce. "They help people make changes," Shurden said, "and help people understand how...our losses and changes change our relationships."

-- Offer lessons on family life for the whole family through the Sunday school program.

-- Provide training sessions on such topics as parenting, family life and marriage. Cole said these sessions can be designed around what he calls the "brief continuing ed model."

-- Make resources related to the family available. These resources can include books, videotapes and other materials.

-- Sponsor a family life month during which members of the congregation or outside speakers discuss special topics of interest, such as how to deal with aging parents, children and grief, or the challenges of blended families.

-- Expose the congregation to different types of families as a way of broadening the definition of family, "so that when someone says the word 'family' we don't automatically think of a yuppie couple with three children," Shurden said.

-- Offer leadership training that teaches leaders and teachers to listen to the feelings that people express in discussion. "Ours is a curriculum-based approach," Cole said. "We teach material. If you can get away from a knowledge-oriented base into relating to the people who are actually in the room, then I think communication is much improved."

-- Enable church staff members to participate in skill-building workshops that will enhance their ability to work with families.

-- This article includes information from Mark Baggett of the Alabama Baptist.

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