
A S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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

July 7, 1992

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Sunday School Board forces 8 executives to retire
- * Religious-liberty bill introduced in Senate
- * Russian shares newfound faith despite hardships of life

Sunday School Board forces 8 executives to retire

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Seven veteran executives of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board have been forced to retire in a "reorganization" effort to make the massive publishing house more flexible and efficient, officers said.

Some employees called the retirements a long-awaited "purge" by fundamental-conservatives. But board President Jimmy Draper called it a painful but necessary adjustment to a changing marketplace.

"This is not a theological issue; some of the men are known to be conservative," Draper said July 1.

"There was no attempt to target anybody. We were top-heavy in management. It's an attempt to structure the board along business lines to make us a more flexible operation. It's a tough time. This is painful for everybody."

Forced to retire were Dessel Aderholt, 62, director of publishing analysis; Martin Bradley, 64, research department director; Andy Dodson, 53, distribution services director; Jimmy Edwards, 54, vice president for marketing; Johnny Godwin, 55, vice president for publishing; Bill Graham, 57, book store division director; and David Turner, 56, business planning director. Ken McAnear, 58, director of the Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in North Carolina, chose retirement although he was given a chance to remain in his job.

"We were told there would not be a place for us in the board after the restructuring but that there would be a severance package, and I feel they were fair to me," said Edwards, who worked there 23 years.

"I wish I could have completed my career at the board," Edwards said, "but the new president has the right to select his own people and fill leadership positions with people he's comfortable with."

Draper, a Texas pastor elected board president last year, is a former SBC president and a leading fundamental-conservative spokesman.

With 1,200 employees in Nashville, Tenn., the board is the world's largest producer and distributor of Sunday school literature and other religious supplies.

It serves most of the 38,000 churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, which has undergone a tumultuous, decade-long resurgence or takeover by the fundamental-conservative wing at the expense of the moderate-conservative establishment.

Since Draper went to the board, he has led a thorough restructuring and reassessment of middle and upper management.

He has used public speeches to address not a fundamental-conservative agenda but his desire to see the board become a "relevant, high-quality worldwide provider of Christian products and services."

Revenue at the board has been climbing each year -- last year it was \$196 million -- but church literature sales have been flat for a decade, with price increases explaining much of the annual revenue increase.

In a marketplace of fast-changing technology and consumer expectations, Draper said, the board must learn to read market trends more keenly and turn out new products more quickly.

The personnel shake-up has been the source of dread for many employees already anxious about the national economic slowdown and the denomination's tense internal politics.

It is not clear how many other forced terminations, if any, will follow, but Draper said there will be no layoffs.

Draper also announced nine people to direct divisions and departments in the new structure. Some of the positions vacated by the eight retiring executives will be phased out or restructured.

-30-

-- Ray Waddle is religion news editor of the Tennessean in Nashville.

Religious-liberty bill
introduced in Senate

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Legislation designed to restore a high standard of legal protection for religious practice was introduced July 2 in the U.S. Senate.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act (S. 2969) would restore the strict "compelling interest" standard the U.S. Supreme Court formerly required government to meet before restricting religious liberty.

That test permitted government to restrict the First Amendment's guarantee of religious exercise only if those restrictions were necessary to further a compelling governmental interest and if the least restrictive means of safeguarding that interest had been employed.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act already has been introduced in the House of Representatives and won approval of the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights June 24 (H.R. 2797).

The compelling-interest standard, articulated by the Supreme Court in 1963, virtually was abandoned in the court's decision in the case of Oregon Employment Division vs. Smith in 1990. Under the Smith decision, generally applicable laws and policies that burden religion don't need to be compelling but need only be reasonable.

"Religious liberty is damaged each day the Smith decision stands," said Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. "Since Smith, more than 50 cases have been decided against religious claimants, and harmful rulings are likely to continue."

Chief co-sponsors Kennedy and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, are joined by 18 bipartisan co-sponsors. A companion bill (H.R. 2797) has been approved by a House subcommittee and awaits action by the Judiciary Committee.

Kennedy said the Smith decision "was a rare, serious and unwarranted setback for the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of religion."

The bill simply would restore the compelling-interest standard, he said. "The act creates no new rights for any religious practice or for any

potential litigant," Kennedy added. "Not every free-exercise claim will prevail. It simply restores the long-established standard of review that had worked well for many years and that requires courts to weigh free-exercise claims against the compelling-state-interest standard."

Hatch said that a legislative response to Smith is important for the preservation of the full range of religious freedoms, particularly for minority religious beliefs and practices.

Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., a co-sponsor, added: "Freedom of religion is one of the many freedoms in this country that we often take for granted. One has only to look at the recent history of many nations to realize that no freedom should be taken for granted, especially not the freedom to worship.

"Religion inspires great passion, both in those who practice it, and in those who would limit its practice," Hatfield continued. "Our nation's very foundation was in part principled upon the desire to protect the individual ability to worship."

The Baptist Joint Committee and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission are members of a broad coalition of religious and civil-liberties groups that support RFRA.

"We are delighted that the bill is moving in the Senate and are pleased at the broad, bipartisan support it has among its co-sponsors," said Brent Walker, associate general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, which chairs the coalition.

"The coalition will call upon the Judiciary Committee and Senate leadership to expedite its passage," Walker said. "The restoration of religious liberty cannot await the next Congress."

A spokesman for the Christian Life Commission likewise welcomed the introduction of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act into the Senate, but cautioned against pushing for an early passage.

Although the bill is headed for apparent approval by the House and Senate, it has a better chance of becoming law if President Bush is not asked to sign it before the November presidential election, said Jim Smith, CLC director of governmental relations.

Forcing Bush to sign or veto the bill could "paint him into a corner that will make it hard for him to get out of if he is re-elected," warned Smith.

As yet the White House has not stated its position on the RFRA, Smith said. Opposition to the bill from some anti-abortion groups could prompt Bush to veto the measure rather than appear to endorse abortion prior to the election, Smith said.

Both the Christian Life Commission and Baptist Joint Committee have concluded the Religious Freedom Restoration Act does not advance abortion rights.

While Kennedy's sponsorship of the bill "may repel some" Southern Baptist support, Smith said, "To have a liberal Democrat like Ted Kennedy and a conservative Republican like Orrin Hatch will greatly enhance the chance of success over the long haul."

-30-

-- By Pam Parry and Greg Warner

Russian shares newfound faith
despite hardships of life

By Trennis Henderson

KHABAROVSK, Russia (ABP) -- To describe Lena Brest as an enthusiastic Christian is an understatement. Her personal commitment to Jesus Christ permeates her conversation and conduct.

"I am deeply convinced in my faith," she affirmed. "I am determined to share the gospel. It's like a contagious disease. Every moment I have the need to speak about God."

Since becoming a Christian last year, she added, "I consider myself a happy woman."

But life has not always been so good. For starters, Brest grew up in Russia, under the influence of decades of atheistic dogma.

"For all my life, I was seeking for God, but it was impossible to find a Bible and to read it," she said. "I believed deep in my heart that there must be a God, but my way to God was very difficult."

Even with the introduction of glasnost and perestroika, which has prompted increased religious freedom in recent years, Brest's search for happiness remained stymied. The rigors of maintaining a marriage and career and caring for three children in a country ravaged by poverty eventually took their toll. She became suicidal.

"Sometimes it is impossible to understand how you can go to shops and the shelves are empty," she remarked. "You Americans can't imagine it, but we face this problem every day."

"I love my country, but it's very difficult to live in this country and face such difficulties and shortages," she added. "If I continue speaking of it, I would cry."

Her problems were compounded by her belief that there was nowhere she could turn for help and encouragement. Even the local Baptist church in her hometown of Khabarovsk was seen as a place to fear and avoid.

"There are many prejudices against the Baptist church," she explained. "Many people consider it dangerous. There were many rumors about it, that they sacrifice their children and other terrible things."

Despite her trials, Brest eventually discovered the happiness and fulfillment she was seeking. She met an independent American missionary who moved to Khabarovsk last year to establish a church. Brest began attending a Bible study led by the missionary, whom she described as "a man who opened to me God."

"For the first time, I had the opportunity to read the Bible," she recalled. "So many things became clear to me, but still I was hesitating."

Brest faithfully attended the Bible study and soon accepted Jesus Christ as her personal savior and was baptized. About the same time, a member of Khabarovsk Baptist Church began inviting Brest to attend church with her.

"My first reaction was 'no.' I was afraid to go to this church," she said. "But still she insisted. Once I did attend, I found no discrepancy, no differences, between the Russian Baptist church and my faith."

Brest continues to attend the missionary's Bible studies and even serves as his assistant and interpreter. But she also has become an active member of Khabarovsk Baptist Church.

"I like to go to church because I need fellowship," she pointed out. "My soul is renewed when I sing songs and pray and listen to the sermons. Every time I have problems, I listen to answers to these exact problems as if the pastor were speaking to me personally."

Since becoming a Christian, her days of "blue spirits" and thoughts of suicide are in the past, she declared. "Now I have no such feelings because I have my best friend. It is Jesus. In any situation, I can rely on him and he really helps me very much."

Brest consistently shares her newfound faith with others.

"Wherever I go, I like to share the gospel," she said. "I feel it's my obligation now."

"Many people in our country have no hope," Brest acknowledged. "All their dreams were broken. They are frustrated. They don't see any possibility of any way out. For me, I have found this way out and I would like for more and more people to know about God."

"Every time I talk with people, I ask them, 'What may be your argument against God, against faith in general?' They may say, 'There is no God.'

"As a rule," she added, "people say they are so busy and don't have time to go to church."

Brest, an energetic 36-year-old language teacher, wife and mother, noted, "Many people are so surprised that a rather young woman is a Christian. Usually they think only old people go to church."

But she refuses to let atheism, apathy or age impede her bold witness for Christ.

"It's not people's fault but people's trouble that they don't know God, that they were brought up as atheists," she remarked. "Now we have neither communism nor socialism. Our only way out is through God."

Acknowledging the tremendous spiritual needs throughout post-communist Russia, Brest said, "It will take much time. For us as Christians there is much work.

"I think Matthew 9:37 is written just for our country," she added. "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."

If it is up to Lena Brest, however, there soon will be many more workers available. She is determined to help win her homeland to faith in Christ -- one person at a time.

-30-

***** END *****