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September 17, 1992

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Former FMB leaders in Europe  
see hope, caution in agreement

By Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The peace treaty between European Baptists and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board offers reasons for both hope and caution, according to two former FMB administrators in Europe.

Isam Ballenger and Keith Parker, the FMB's former top administrators for Europe who left their posts in a dispute with FMB trustees, described the proposed agreement as a step in the right direction. But Ballenger was skeptical that FMB trustees will uphold their end of the bargain.

Leaders of the European Baptist Federation and Foreign Mission Board approved a document Sept. 12 that tries to put behind them the yearlong dispute that threatens to keep any more FMB missionaries from entering Europe. The pact, dubbed the Hamburg Agreement, awaits ratification by both the EBF Council and FMB trustees.

The controversy in Europe erupted in October 1991 when FMB trustees defunded a European Baptist seminary they consider liberal. Ballenger and Parker announced in January they would take early retirement rather than continue to work for the trustees, whom they say want to impose a fundamentalist brand of theological orthodoxy on Baptists abroad. Trustees deny they have any such designs.

Parker, former FMB area director for Europe and now Europe missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said he is pleased with the Hamburg Agreement. "Anytime God grants some peace and unity within the family we rejoice," he said.

Ballenger said the truce was to be expected.

"I expected the Europeans to want to have good relations with the Foreign Mission Board, and I expected the board to want to improve things after the fiasco of last year," said Ballenger, former FMB regional vice president and now a professor at the Baptist Theological Seminary at

Richmond.

But, Ballenger added, FMB trustees may have trouble living up to the agreement, which calls for mutual respect and shared decision-making. "It's not natural for them," he said. "They may find that it is expedient for them to go along with it. But the agreement calls for consultation, and I'm afraid the trustees of the Foreign Mission Board do not know the meaning of consultation."

"Given the manner in which the fundamentalists have worked in our convention, it seems to me that it's going to be difficult for them to regard Baptists in other countries, with other theological statements and emphases, in an appropriate and proper way," Ballenger said.

"But hopefully, in the interest of missions and the missionary personnel in these countries, their manner of operating will be tempered and they will be forced -- and I think it will take some force -- to treat international Baptists in a more respectful way."

The FMB leaders who endorsed the Hamburg Agreement were still traveling in Europe and could not be reached for comment. However, trustee Steve Hardy of Burlington, N.C., rejected Ballenger's assessment.

"The trustees as a whole intend to abide by the (Hamburg) statement and very much desire to maintain relations with the Europeans," said Hardy, former chairman of the trustees' Europe committee. "I think it's a good statement."

Parker noted that in the Hamburg pact the FMB representatives agreed not to penalize the Europeans for working with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which recently established a missions partnership with the EBF. Such a "non-competitive approach" is necessary, he said, because of the "overwhelming task" of doing missions in Europe.

Parker predicted both European leaders and Fellowship "missioners" will "rejoice in the (Hamburg) statement and will pray not only for its formal ratification...but also for the actual application of the decisions in mission work on the field."

An important element of the EBF-FMB agreement, Parker said, is that it incorporates the five principles of the EBF's earlier Dorfweil Statement on partnership -- mutual respect, spiritual freedom, moral integrity, genuine consultation and reciprocal sharing.

"We pray that God will grant the realization of those principles among all Baptist groups working together in Europe," he said.

Ballenger predicted European Baptists "will be somewhat cautious" and will monitor further changes in the FMB and Southern Baptist Convention for indications of the future direction of missions. "My experience at the board is you could get one thing settled and a new group of trustees would come in and make changes," said Ballenger, a 27-year veteran of SBC missions.

As for the FMB's missionaries in Europe, Ballenger said, "they will hope but they will also wait and see."

"The missionaries will be encouraged because it is at least a step in the right direction for now," he said. "But the missionaries know what is happening here at home and they know how the trustees have been dealing."

Earlier this year, Ballenger visited many of the missionaries he used to supervise. He said he found many of them ready to leave the FMB to work for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which is starting its own missions partnership with European Baptists.

The truce between the Europeans and the FMB won't change the minds of those who are ready to leave, Ballenger predicted, but it may slow their departure. "It will make it easier for me to say to missionaries, 'Stay

with the Foreign Mission Board because that is where the financial strength is. As long as you can do your work in the country where you are serving...stay with it and make the trustees keep this agreement."

Earlier, before the agreement was unveiled, Ballenger told leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Sept. 11 that "a number of missionaries (in Europe) would like to be taken by this organization."

"The majority -- almost 100 percent of those appointed prior to 1988 or 1987 -- are very supportive of this organization, very supportive of what you are doing, and very hopeful for your success," he told the Fellowship's Coordinating Council. "I would venture to say 75 percent of the missionaries are intentionally dissatisfied with what is happening at the Foreign Mission Board and very hopeful, very interested in this organization, very open to this organization."

"The missionaries are not fooled by the words of the trustees," Ballenger said. "The missionaries are not dumb. They know better."

Trustees are telling European Baptists nothing has changed at the FMB, Ballenger said. The Europeans are "most gracious people," he said, and "want to believe the best."

"There probably is going to be some mending of the breach between European Baptists and the Foreign Mission Board, but I also expect the Europeans Baptists to be on guard."

Although many Southern Baptists feel the controversy over Europe and competition from the Fellowship will hurt financial support of the FMB, Ballenger said he "did not sense that the missionaries are anxious for their support."

"You do not threaten the salaries of missionaries," he told Fellowship leaders. "They will be paid. But it will be wonderful if you threaten the budget of the trustees." He said money spent on extra trustee meetings and trustee travel overseas "brings to my mind whether the support of missions lacks integrity."

He also questioned the lack of mission support coming from current convention leaders, particularly recent SBC presidents. "It will be good if the Foreign Mission Board experiences some decline in support, to put pressure on these people to support the work they control...."

"The Foreign Mission Board is an old ship and it has served us well," he said. "But it, like old ships, collects barnacles. And now we have an opportunity to start things over without the barnacles. There are a lot of things that need to be changed."

Later, in a question-and-answer session, Ballenger was asked what he would change about SBC missions.

Ballenger said "critical questions" must be asked about the FMB's heavy dependence on career missionaries and its generous financial support of missionary families. Compared to missionaries from other agencies, he said, FMB personnel are "the best provided for," but too often they are unwilling to work in the more challenging and less developed areas overseas.

Poverty must be addressed as a ministry commanded by Jesus and not simply as a means to win converts, he said. And mission and ministry must focus on America too, he added: "I feel like a traitor up here, but I feel like we are losing our homeland. I wonder how long we will have a central constituency in America that is a mission-sending constituency."

Alliance, Fellowship agree  
not to merge for now

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Alliance of Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the two most visible groups opposed to the conservative direction of the Southern Baptist Convention, apparently will work together but not merge their organizations, at least for now.

A dialogue group representing the two moderate Baptist organizations met Sept. 9 in Atlanta and issued a joint statement declaring: "We agree on the continued existence of each group at this time."

"We look with favor," the statement continued, "on every opportunity for cooperation," such as holding annual meetings at a common location and exploring common mission projects and mission offerings.

Finally, the dialogue group encouraged the Fellowship to "consult with and benefit from the experience of the Alliance" in relating to other Baptist bodies and the larger Christian church.

The results of the Sept. 9 dialogue were reported to the Fellowship's Coordinating Council three days later.

"We have met our friends and they are us," Layne Smith, a council member who participated in the dialogue, told his colleagues. He said the Fellowship and Alliance are "intertwined;" some members of each organization participate in the other.

Since the Fellowship was formed in 1990, there has been talk of a merger with the older Alliance. Discussions held in July 1991 charted a course for merger by the spring of 1993.

Since then, however, some members in both organizations have cooled to the idea.

"We're not saying we will never come together," Richard Groves, a member of the CBF's council and past president of the Alliance, told ABP. But that won't happen right away, said Groves, a pastor from Winston-Salem, N.C.

Although the Fellowship and Alliance have talked about merger, Groves said the issues that separate the two are not being discussed openly enough. "It could be it is simply not high on the list of priorities of some people," he said. "It also could be too sensitive an issue to discuss. All I hear is silence on the subject."

Most insiders cite several factors for the hesitation about merger, but the most prominent one is the attitude taken by the two groups toward the Southern Baptist Convention.

Many Alliance members say the Fellowship is moving too slowly toward forming its own convention, and indeed may not. Alliance executive Stan Hasteley told members in June that some Fellowship participants have concluded "that the better course for the Fellowship is to become a 'convention in exile.'"

Fellowship leaders, however, say a rush to form a new convention will shut the door on many churches and individuals who otherwise would support the Fellowship and its efforts.

Among other reasons for the hesitation are the different objectives of the two organizations.

The Fellowship is organized around a simple purpose statement which focuses on the need to "carry out the Great Commission under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in a fellowship where every Christian exercises God's calling and gifts."

The Alliance, meanwhile, finds its identity in its covenant, a broader statement of such principles as soul freedom, local church autonomy (including matters of ordination), cooperation with other believers, the servant role of leadership, and separation of church and state.

For its part, the Fellowship is drafting a new, broader purpose statement that incorporates some of those principles.

"The purpose of the Fellowship," the draft statement says, "is to bring together Baptists who desire to call out God's gifts in each person in order that the gospel of Jesus Christ will be spread throughout the world in glad obedience to the Great Commission. The Fellowship is committed to the preservation and propagation of individual and historic Baptist freedoms and distinctives, including the priesthood of the believer, the acceptance of the authority of the Bible without the aid of creeds, the autonomy of each church and separation of church and state."

Whether or not such changes will be enough to bridge the gap between the Alliance and Fellowship remains to be seen. In the meantime, occasional tensions between the two persist.

At the close of the Sept. 10-12 meeting of the Fellowship council, members were asked to act on their commitment to cooperation by agreeing to "explore the possibility" of a joint mission offering with the Alliance as early as 1994.

Some members said they were reluctant to hold the CBF missions committee to such a time frame. But one member voiced her concern that "Alliance issues are pushed aside" by the council.

The motion produced the closest vote yet on a council matter -- a 25-25 tie later broken by Moderator Patricia Ayres vote in favor of the recommendation.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series on disabled people and worship.

Access to worship:  
More than a ramp

By Shari Schubert

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- How can churches remove the barriers that keep people with disabilities from participating in worship and other church activities?

Although physical barriers, such as curbs or stairs that inhibit wheelchairs, are the most obvious targets, barriers come in other forms too. Communication barriers and attitude barriers can shut people out of worship just as readily as architectural barriers, say advocates for disabled people.

If churches are to provide a welcome to all, including those who have physical or mental disabilities, all three kinds of barriers must come down, according to communicators for the Washington-based National Organization on Disability.

Where such barriers exist, "the house of God is weakened for all,"

states an NOD guidebook for congregations of all faiths. "Every person is created by God, each is loved by God, and none should be diminished by another, even by unintentional actions or words," according to the guidebook, called That All May Worship.

Attitude is the "all-important, all-encompassing" factor, said Richard Presberry, director of allied services for the Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. If attitudes toward people with disabilities could be changed, he proposed, the other changes needed in society would come "naturally."

Attitudes toward disabilities often are communicated and conveyed to others in the language used to talk about disabilities. NOD's guidebook emphasizes the use of affirming, "people-first" language that focuses on the person as primary, and the disability as secondary. The phrase "person with a disability" would be preferred over "disabled person."

Among terms considered "no longer acceptable" by NOD are: crippled, crazy, retard, deaf and dumb, wheelchair-bound, homebound, shut-in, victim, invalid and any label beginning with the word "the," such as "the mentally retarded."

But some organizations of and for people with disabilities use "the..." phrases in their official names -- for instance, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

Carelessly used expressions such as, "If he can't see that, he must be blind," also can be hurtful to a disabled person or his friends and family members, even though the person who makes such a comment may have no intention of hurting or embarrassing anyone.

While the terms "disability" and "handicap" often are used interchangeably, NOD communicators make a distinction. They define "disability" as "a permanent physical, sensory or intellectual impairment that substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities." A "handicap," according to NOD, is "a barrier society places on the person with a disability."

Using that logic, one might say, "The stairs in that building will be a handicap for John, who uses a wheelchair," but not, "John is handicapped and can't use the stairs."

Ann Putnam, associate director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's church and community ministries department, pointed out that terminology preferences keep changing, and "it's difficult to please everyone." The "person with..." phrases can get "real awkward and wordy" in speaking and writing, she acknowledged.

She and other Southern Baptists who work in ministries to disabled people suggested that it may not be necessary to go to the extreme in using so-called politically correct terminology, but urged people to be sensitive to the feelings of others and the attitudes communicated in the words they use to talk about disabilities.

Body language also can communicate attitudes toward disabled individuals. Bill Mosby, a Southern Baptist chaplain at Fulton (Mo.) State Hospital, said people sometimes react to a mentally ill individual -- who may look "different" because of the effects of medication, or may dress differently from others -- by glancing at him and then looking away. A touch, a handshake or a hug may be withheld. "People just don't want to get close to them."

Why? One reason is that contact with a person who is mentally ill may cause a healthy individual to have to come to grips with the frightening reality that he too could be vulnerable to mental illness, Mosby pointed out.

Another reason people sometimes are uncomfortable around a disabled person is that they don't know very much about the disability and don't know how to help or relate to the person.

Some people are uncomfortable talking to a person about his disability, and adults often will try to discourage children -- who are naturally curious -- from asking questions, Presberry observed. That is unfortunate, he added, pointing out that talking with the person is one of the best ways to learn about the disability. Ask questions and allow children to ask questions, Presberry urged.

In the church, attitudes may be communicated in the ways a disabled person is allowed -- or not allowed -- to participate.

When churches emphasize members' abilities instead of their disabilities, and provide the assistance members need to use their abilities, they can find many different ways to involve disabled individuals in meaningful ministry.

A blind person, for instance, provided with transportation to church and study materials in Braille or on tape, may prove to be gifted in teaching Sunday school. In worship, a hymn or Scripture reading interpreted in sign language may be inspiring to deaf and hearing worshipers alike.

If architectural adaptations are made to allow access to the platform and choir area by wheelchair, individuals who use wheelchairs can more easily participate in worship leadership and music ministry.

Many worship leaders would not think to ask someone who is mentally retarded or mentally ill to read Scripture or provide special music, Mosby pointed out. But many of them are capable of doing so, and if they are, "I think they need to be asked," he said.

Mission Service Corps volunteer Gene Stevens, a member of Vandover Baptist Church in Fenton, Mo., who works as a consultant for ministries to blind individuals, said he feels there is a need for churches to "reach out to more visually handicapped people. They're not in church."

Charles Couey of Nashville, Tenn., president of the Southern Baptist Conference of the Blind, agreed that many blind individuals are not going to church. If they must depend on others for transportation, "that's one less place they have to get someone to take them," he pointed out.

Anders observed that churches in rural areas and smaller towns "tend to be caring" and usually do a good job of ministering individually to the disabled people in their congregations and communities. In urban areas, churches may need to make a more conscious effort to develop programs and ministries for people with special needs, he said.

"It's in the cities that they tend to get lost."

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'Bear Essentials' helps kids  
cope with parents' cancer

By Vicki Stamps

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- Teddy bears and balloons are not usually considered the latest technology in cancer treatment, but a support group for children at Missouri Baptist Medical Center in St. Louis ranks them near the top of the list.

The support group, Bear Essentials, is for children ages 4 to 8 who have a parent with cancer.

"We noticed a need for support...a need to help the children understand cancer, the treatment and the hospital," explained cancer program chaplain Seth Dyrness. "We wanted to take away some of the fear and make it less threatening."

The monthly meetings for the children begin with a friendship circle. Teddy bears are placed on chairs in the circle and the children may choose to sit with one. They then are led through activities and discussions designed to confront the fears associated with cancer.

The program has been met with approval from both children and parents. "For the first time since my diagnosis," one mother said, "I feel actively involved in doing something positive for my children relating specifically to my cancer."

Karen Greening, social service coordinator for the medical center, and Viki Longfield, who works in the educational department, lead the interdisciplinary team of Bear Essential facilitator in curriculum planning.

"The parents make tremendous contributions to the structure of this support group," Greening noted.

The suggestion for the group came from a parent concerned about the effects of her illness on her children. The idea spurred Greening and Longfield to begin research on both literature and resources available for children.

"We soon realized there was a dearth of literature about children with ill parents," Longfield said. "There is a lot written about the death of a parent and the grief process, but not about children coping with illness."

Bear Essentials is the first support group specifically for children under 9 years of age in the St. Louis area and also is considered a pioneer effort for the Midwest.

Parents play a key role in determining discussion topics used in the group. "We coordinated ideas with parents for themes," Greening explained. "We want to know what the children have on their minds."

An additional benefit of the coordination effort is that it gets the parents involved. "We have a support group for parents at the same time," Longfield explained. "Many parents wouldn't think of coming to a support group for themselves, but they will do anything for their kids."

From the time the children enter the circle for the first time, they are encouraged to share their feelings.

"The circle is an opportunity for us to introduce the evening's theme," Greening said. "It is also the beginning for the children to start talking with each other. These kids need to have a group of their own peers. They need to see others faced with this illness."

A facilitator reads a story based on the evening theme and the children then participate in a theme-related activity, such as music, a puppet show, a science experiment or a movie. After the group activity, the children divide into smaller groups and sit at a craft table with a facilitator.

The craft tables provide an even greater opportunity for the children to talk. "Kids express themselves through music and art," Greening said. "What they are thinking comes out to the facilitator as they are making their craft."

During a craft session, one of the children expressed a sense of loneliness when the parent entered the hospital. The comment prompted a future craft activity -- each child made a life-size silhouette of themselves on shelf paper for the parent to tape to the hospital wall during treatment. This enabled the children to be a part of the experience.

Becoming a part of the experience is prominent in the themes planned for each evening. A few of the themes include: Visiting the Hospital (including a tour of the cancer center), Friends, Feelings, Sharing, New Beginnings and Medical Equipment.

"We want to provide as much age-appropriate information as possible," said Greening. "When the children understand, it helps to normalize what is happening. We want our group to develop family and to provide a safe place for them to be with friends and talk."

Longfield said she believes some children need help in just realizing that what they are feeling is okay.

"Kids are egocentric," she said. "We need to address the kids who believe what is happening is their fault or those who are asking, 'What is going to happen to me?' Many times the care of these children is passed around while parents are busy with treatments. They need to know it is okay to be mad."

Another benefit for the children is the help the hospital can provide with grief.

"Death must be confronted," Greening pointed out. "Three parents died during the year and the children are invited back to the group to see their friends. They must have the reassurance that because the parent dies, the child does not die. We also provide transition from this support group into the group offering support for grief."

Bear Essentials recently celebrated its second birthday. Organizers, parents and children are convinced that its positive influence should continue.

Expressing her joy at the opportunity to work with families in the program, Longfield noted, "I've seen several of these kids grow with us during the past two years, and I know we are serving a purpose."

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-- Vicki Stamps is a correspondent for Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

U.S. Senate approves measure  
to overturn abortion 'gag rule'

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate approved Sept. 14 a measure that would overturn the Bush administration's ban on abortion counseling and referrals at federally funded family-planning clinics.

The ban was proposed by the Reagan administration in 1988 but its implementation was blocked by federal courts. In May 1991, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ban's constitutionality, but controversy has impeded its implementation, now scheduled for Sept. 23.

The Bush administration and ban supporters have said that family planning should not involve discussions about abortion and that the regulation prevents federal clinics from encouraging abortion.

Opponents, however, have said non-directive counseling does not encourage women to have abortions. They labeled the ban a "gag rule" because they said it interferes with the doctor-patient relationship.

Earlier this year, both chambers of Congress included language designed to overturn the ban in legislation reauthorizing the Title X family-planning program for five years. A conference committee ironed out

the differences in the two bills, and the recent Senate action approved the conference report (S. 323) by a voice vote.

The House of Representatives earlier approved the conference report by a 251-144 vote -- short of the two-thirds majority needed to override an expected veto.

Floor debate reflected election-year slogans as Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., characterized the measure as "anti-family legislation" and described bill opponents as "patriots."

Helms called the bill a "farce," "fraud" and "election-year high jinx" designed "to put the president of the United States on the spot."

Senate Democrats countered that the Republicans, not Democrats, had politicized the family-planning program, which existed 18 years before the ban.

"The gag rule does not reflect congressional intent," said Sen. George Mitchell, D-Maine and Senate majority leader. "It reflects Reagan-Bush political efforts to placate opponents of reproductive rights."

Mitchell said that "unless the gag rule is repealed there will be two standards of health care for American women," relegating poor women to the second-class.

Title X was instituted in 1970. About 4,000 clinics around the country provide medical and educational services to more than 5 million low-income women and teenagers each year.

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-- By Pam Parry

Catholic educators say survey shows growing support for 'parental choice'

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A recent nationwide survey apparently indicates a growing support for public funding of private schools. But a Baptist church-state specialist said the survey ignores reality, history and constitutionality.

A Gallup Poll, conducted for the National Catholic Education Association, indicated 70 percent of the 1,239 adults surveyed supported "parental choice," a plan to provide parents tax dollars to send their children to the public, private or religious schools of their choice.

Nearly 61 percent of Americans surveyed said they would be willing to shift tax money from public schools to choice programs. The poll also revealed that support for a national voucher program is strong among minorities, with African Americans and Hispanics representing the largest supportive subgroups in the survey.

The survey's findings, however, do not mesh with Americans' voting record on aid to religious schools. In 18 state referenda since 1966, voters rejected 17 parochial aid proposals.

Asked how poll figures squared with the voting record over a nearly 30-year period, George Gallup Jr. said the difference would be that local referenda would have cost figures attached to them.

The survey addressed the voucher issue generically without any cost factors, he said, adding that the poll shows "support for the concept" of choice. He emphasized 61 percent of those polled were willing to see current tax dollars go to choice programs, he added.

The Bush administration has proposed two choice plans. The first has been rejected by both chambers of Congress, and the second one is pending. The second proposal, "The G.I. Bill for Children," would provide \$1,000 scholarships for children of low- and middle-income families to attend the schools of their choice.

Gallup acknowledged that sometimes abstract ideas gain more polling support than specific proposals, but he said the main thing that the poll shows is a growing support for an idea that merits more attention and further survey research.

Catholic educators who joined Gallup in the Sept. 17 press conference said the poll also was designed to address directly the church-state or constitutional question surrounding public funding of religious schools.

Acknowledging a disagreement over the constitutionality of school choice, the question asked, "Suppose the Supreme Court rules that it is constitutional for state and federal governments to provide some public financial support for parents who choose religious-affiliated schools. Would you favor or oppose your state or federal government providing such support."

More than 64 percent of Americans surveyed indicated they would favor such a program under those conditions.

However, the Supreme Court consistently has ruled such a program unconstitutional.

Responding to the poll, James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said constitutional questions are resolved by the court not public opinion.

"The concept of church-state separation enshrined in the First Amendment has not been submitted to a popularity contest in a public referendum," Dunn said. "We hope that would never happen in this land."

Another survey question asked respondents if they had enough information about the different schools in their community to make the best choice for a child. Forty-six percent of the general population said they did not have enough information, while more than 60 percent of parents with children in school said they could make such a choice.

Frank Savage, executive director of the NCEA department of Chief Administrators' of Catholic Education, said: "The issue here is not about direct aid to private schools. It is not about dismantling public schools. The issue is educational reform through empowering parents with the right to choose."

Michael Guerra, executive director of the NCEA Secondary Schools Department, said the choice debate will be changed by the publication of this poll.

"All those who believe that educational choice is not the key to changing American education must now confront the reality of the American peoples' opinion," Guerra said.

Dunn disagreed.

"We still hold some truths to be self evident: that public money goes only for public purposes, that no one pays taxes to support religious institutions, that Americans have a common commitment to the common school," Dunn told Associated Baptist Press.

The survey results are based on telephone interviews with a national sample of 1,239 adults, including 492 Roman Catholics. The survey was conducted from July 3-30 and has a 3 percent margin of error.

Non-profit mailers may avoid  
immediate postal-rate hike

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Most non-profit mailers probably will not receive a postal-rate increase in fiscal year 1993, but they are extremely vulnerable, according to a spokesman for the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers.

The U.S. Senate approved Sept. 10 a stop-gap measure that would avert for one year a rate hike for non-profit mailers like state Baptist newspapers but would place the non-profit mail subsidy, known as revenue foregone, in a very tenuous position, said Brian Hummell, assistant director of the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers.

Revenue foregone reimburses the U.S. Postal Service for non-profit mailers' share of overhead expenses. Non-profit rates reflect only the cost of handling that class of mail.

The Senate approved 82-12 a spending bill (H.R. 5488) for the Postal Service that would provide only \$200 million of the \$482 million needed for revenue foregone to maintain current rates. The House of Representatives previously approved the same funding level.

The \$282 million shortfall would have triggered as much as a 50 percent rate hike for state Baptist newspapers, except that both chambers of Congress approved a proposal to shield non-profit mailers from a rate increase for 1993. The proposal stipulates that the Postal Service cannot increase rates for non-profit mailers in fiscal year 1993, which begins Oct. 1.

However, the rates would not be frozen for third-class publications that mail flats, non-letter-sized pieces that must be hand-sorted. Third-class flat rates are scheduled to increase approximately 1.9 cents per piece on Oct. 4.

The rate hike is the second phase of a two-year increase designed to cover a \$180 million shortfall from the previous year. Last year the rates on third-class flats increased by 2.2 cents per piece.

Most state Baptist newspapers are second-class, non-profit publications and will not be affected.

Hummell said the appropriations bill leaves non-profit mailers vulnerable for fiscal year 1994. He said the appropriations committee next year would look at the \$200 million as a starting point, and with economic constraints, Congress most likely would keep revenue foregone at that level or cut it.

The U.S. Postal Service has requested \$612.5 million for revenue foregone in fiscal year 1994. The \$412.5 million difference between current funding levels and next year's request probably will mean a huge rate increase unless a legislative solution is found, Hummell said.

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-- By Pam Parry

CBF year-to-date receipts  
nearing total for all 1991

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship received almost as much money in the first eight months of 1992 as in all of last year, according to Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman.

Contributions to the Fellowship in August totaled \$496,857, bringing the organization's year-to-date total to \$4,310,616, compared to \$4.5 million received in all of 1991. "Sometime in September we will pass that number," Sherman wrote in a memo to the Fellowship's Coordinating Council.

So far this year, contributions to the Fellowship have increased 63 percent over the same period in 1991. Sherman said the Fellowship is on target to reach its projection of \$6.4 million to \$6.6 million for the year.

The August total is a 29 percent increase over the same month last year but it was slightly less than July, when \$512,226 was received.

Sherman told members of the Coordinating Council he foresees the organization collecting as much as \$10 million in 1993.

He said the trend of contributors to target more and more of their money to support the Fellowship's own ministries continues.

Last year about three fourths of the money contributed through the Fellowship was designated for traditional Southern Baptist causes, such as state conventions and the agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. That portion has dropped to about 60 percent this year, he said.

In August 42 percent of Fellowship contributions were passed on to SBC causes. An additional 17 percent was designated for state-level Baptist causes.

Meanwhile, 33 percent of contributions were targeted for the Fellowship's own efforts, such as the organization's newly launched missions program. An additional 8 percent of August receipts went to organizations and agencies supported by the Fellowship.

Sherman said 680 churches have contributed funds to the Fellowship in 1992, up from 391 last year. That includes churches that contribute directly from their budget and an unspecified number of churches that send designated gifts from individual church members.

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

The Fellowship's three funding 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.

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-- By Greg Warner

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