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Executive Committee installs
Morris Chapman as president

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Ten. (ABP) -- The Executive Committee, the most powerful committee in the Southern Baptist Convention, turned over the reins of leadership to Morris Chapman Sept. 22, signaling that another chapter in the history of the 15 million-member denomination has begun.

In ceremonies that dominated the Executive Committee's three-day fall meeting, committee members installed Chapman as president and chief executive officer and also said goodbye to their retiring executive Harold Bennett.

Bennett led the Executive Committee during the SBC's most tumultuous time. He assumed leadership of the committee in 1979, the same year Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives won control of the SBC presidency. They have since gained control of most of the denomination's 21 agencies and steered the denomination on a decidedly conservative course.

Chapman's installation as the committee's fifth chief executive -- arguably the most influential post in the vast SBC bureaucracy -- is the most vivid demonstration yet of the transition taking place within the denomination.

Despite the tensions that marked much of Bennett's tenure, his departure was accompanied by words of praise and cooperation.

"I believe God will continue to bless Southern Baptists, and I want to be a part of that," Bennett said during his last report to the committee Sept. 23. Of Chapman, the former SBC president and Texas pastor who succeeds him, Bennett said, "I feel good about him."

Chapman praised Bennett for engineering a "smooth and enjoyable" transition of leadership.

Executive Committee members hosted a four-hour banquet for 500 people honoring Bennett Sept. 21, followed the next night by a smaller dinner, public inauguration and reception for Chapman. Committee staff members did not disclose the cost of the events.

The committee's business sessions were abbreviated because of the ceremonies for Bennett and Chapman. However, the committee found time to approve 55 mostly routine recommendations from its three subcommittees.

Only a recommendation to study the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship drew

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any debate, and it was the only recommendation defeated.

The committee turned down the unanimous request from its administrative subcommittee to study "the agenda, purpose and character" of the Fellowship and evaluate its effect on the Southern Baptist Convention. Although one committee member said the Fellowship is a "subversive group" which is siphoning SBC missions money and "proselytizing" SBC missionaries, others said they could do nothing about the Fellowship anyway and could better spend their time on SBC matters.

Also during the three-day meeting, Houston pastor and current SBC president Edwin Young briefed Executive Committee members on his plan for a national task force to examine nine facets of denominational life, from missions and theology to ethnic involvement and women's ministries.

Young and two former SBC presidents participated in Chapman's inauguration ceremony, held in the Sunday School Board's auditorium. Former SBC president Jimmy Draper, now president of the Sunday School Board, read Scripture.

Current president Young was asked to bring an "affirmation" of Chapman. "My life has been bound to Morris Chapman for many years," Young said, noting he and Chapman were "baptized two years apart in the same baptistry" at First Baptist Church of Laurel, Miss.

Young said SBC leadership opportunities have matured Chapman into a man "uniquely prepared" for the Executive Committee post. "I thank God that you brought him to our denomination at such a time as this," he told committee members.

Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn., and three-time SBC president, delivered the "challenge for the future." He said the importance of Chapman and his position cannot be overstated.

"I am convinced that as America goes, so goes the world. And I am convinced that as Christians go, so goes America. And as evangelicals go, so go Christians. As Southern Baptists go, so go evangelicals. As (SBC) leadership goes, so go Southern Baptists."

Rogers said he was "not altogether facetious" in suggesting "we may be looking at the most important man on earth."

Rogers urged Chapman to have a concern for the world that, like the Apostle Paul, is sincere, steadfast and sacrificial. "It is my prayer that you keep the same heart that you've had," he said of Chapman's sincerity. "I pray to God that you will never become a professional." Concerning steadfastness, Rogers said, "I pray that you will not equivocate, not compromise."

In his response, Chapman said that while he enjoyed the words of praise and encouragement, "I would be nothing without Jesus Christ." He pledged that both his work and the work of the Executive Committee will be rooted in a commitment to "present Jesus Christ to the lost world."

Chapman noted he is "accustomed to preaching much more about Christ than the Cooperative Program," the SBC's unified budget that supports its worldwide ministries. But, he said, the Cooperative Program "is still workable in our changing society."

"I am convinced what has worked will work," he said. While he said he may be convinced someday that the Cooperative Program is not the best plan for world evangelization, he will only make that concession "kicking and screaming," he said.

Chapman pledged to work in "mutual partnership" with SBC agencies and state Baptist conventions to make Baptist cooperation succeed.

He also pledged to conduct Executive Committee affairs with financial responsibility and openness, adding the committee's meetings will be open to the public except on rare occasions.

"Truth and trust are foundational to the integrity of the Executive Committee," he said.

Chapman promised that Baptist Press, the news service operated by the Executive Committee, will take a positive tone. Baptist Press "will report accurately, fairly and positively the good news about Jesus Christ and Southern Baptists...because there is a lot of good news."

In a business session the next day, the Executive Committee approved Chapman's request to study the feasibility of a national publication about the SBC published by the Executive Committee. Chapman said such a publication has been requested by "a number of persons" in order to better tell the SBC story.

In other business, the Executive Committee declined a request to charge the Woman's Missionary Union for use of meeting space during the annual Southern Baptist Convention each June.

The SBC has paid most of the rent for the annual WMU meeting and the SBC Pastors' Conference when the two pre-SBC meetings are held in the same facility as the SBC.

The Executive Committee decided to continue providing meeting space free to WMU after hearing that the SBC auxiliary has raised about \$1.7 billion for Southern Baptist missions in its 104-year history.

Committee members agreed instead to study the practice of subsidizing the Pastors' Conference after they were told the pastors' meeting has cost the SBC much more than WMU.

In the past five years, the SBC has absorbed \$169,945 in rent for the Pastors' Conference, while the pastors have paid \$74,875. During the same period, the SBC has absorbed \$20,000 in costs for WMU, which is almost all of the rent for the three years they have shared space with the SBC.

The request to charge WMU came from one of the Executive Committee's former employees, Tim Hedquist, former vice president for business and finance for the Executive Committee and now administrator at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

Hedquist, whose duties included arranging meeting space at the annual SBC, made the request in the form of a motion during the SBC in June. The motion was referred to the Executive Committee for action. No explanation was given for Hedquist's motion at the time.

WMU has been the target of some criticism in recent years from those who think its board of directors, now elected by state WMU groups, should be elected by the SBC. Some now are worried the WMU will begin promoting the missions program of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Executive Committee also declined to act on a complaint that the new baccalaureate degree program started by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary violates the seminary's program assignment from the SBC.

In July the presidents of 31 Baptist-affiliated colleges asked the seminary to abandon the new undergraduate program. But the Executive Committee declined to enter the debate, instead asking the six SBC seminaries to study the dispute and report back.

The Executive Committee also declined to place a limit of \$100,000 on salaries and a similar cap on severance packages for SBC agency employees, pledging instead to exercise "appropriate stewardship" in such matters. The requests came as motions referred from the 1992 SBC meeting.

Young, in his first address to the Executive Committee since being elected SBC president in June, said his task force is intended to help Southern Baptists "dream our dream again together."

He named two co-chairpersons to lead each of nine study groups. Their assignments cover home missions, foreign missions, the family, youth and children, women's ministries, ethnics, theology, cooperation with other

churches, and funding of SBC causes.

The nine members yet to be named to each study group will include representatives from the SBC agencies related to the various topics, Young said.

Young said the study should provide a fresh look at all the SBC does. "Forget about turf, forget about politics, forget about statements of purpose," he said, referring to the program statements that guide and limit the work of the SBC agencies.

The SBC will not fund the study, he said. Instead participants will pay their own expenses. At the conclusion of the studies, all 18 co-chairpersons will convene as a task force, to be headed by Draper, and draft recommendations.

The theological study group will not "reopen the debate about the Bible," Young said, since that already is settled. Instead it will seek a theological consensus around the framework of inerrancy. "Anybody that believes the Book, let's get on with the task."

One study group will be asked to find ways to encourage independent Baptist churches to join the SBC, Young said. "There are a lot of great independent churches that theologically are right with us," he explained. "Why could they not join us in a worldwide vision for Jesus Christ?"

He cited Northern Baptists and American Baptists as likely candidates. Asked if the appeal would go out to Jerry Falwell, the independent Baptist pastor who reportedly has shown some interest in the SBC, Young said, "Whoever."

The same study group will look for ways "to finish the healing process" within the SBC by seeking reconciliation with churches and individuals "who share a commitment to the absolute authority of the Scripture" and missions, Young said.

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Executive Committee rejects study
of CBF as pointless, distracting

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- If the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship poses a threat to the Southern Baptist Convention, it is best ignored, said members of the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 23.

The committee turned down a unanimous request from its administrative subcommittee to study "the agenda, purpose and character" of the Fellowship and evaluate its effect on the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Fellowship was formed in 1990 by Southern Baptist moderate-conservatives displeased with the current leadership of the SBC and its agencies. The Fellowship allows churches to fund selected SBC causes while bypassing the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget which is controlled by the Executive Committee. Other contributions fund the Fellowship's own programs and independent ministries.

The Executive Committee, during its three-day meeting in Nashville, Tenn., declined to examine the impact of the Fellowship after committee members said they could do nothing about it anyway and their time was better spent focused on SBC matters.

The study was requested by Bill Horton, a layman from Asheville, N.C., who told fellow committee members the Fellowship is a "subversive group" which is siphoning missions money from SBC causes and "proselytizing" SBC

missionaries.

"The Southern Baptist Convention has been viciously attacked and it is wounded and bleeding," charged Horton.

In North Carolina, he said, the Fellowship is causing "turmoil, disruption and chaos" among churches. In North Carolina, Texas and Virginia, the three states where the Fellowship has "attacked most zealously," contributions to the Cooperative Program have dropped \$2.3 million in the last 11 months, Horton said.

Other members of the committee, however, said such a study would be a pointless distraction and only lend credibility to the Fellowship.

"What can we do anyway?" asked James Morton of Grass Valley, Calif. A study "could continue some unnecessary tension," he said.

"Why don't we let those people go and do what they want to do?" asked Doug Westmoreland of Brentwood, Tenn. "Let's encourage our folks to make up whatever little deficit there is."

Morris Chapman, newly installed president of the Executive Committee, said he sympathizes with Horton's concern but doubts that the committee could conduct the study "objectively."

"Within our (Baptist) polity, there are those who have a right to exist who disagree with us," Chapman added.

Committee members spoke on both sides of the issue before the motion failed easily on a voice vote.

Afterward Chapman said he is confident SBC churches will be "discerning" in their own evaluation of the Fellowship. "I believe ultimately, when the day of decision arrives in these churches, the Southern Baptist Convention is going to be found healthy," he told committee members.

The Fellowship expects to receive about \$6.4 million in contributions this year. About 60 percent will be sent to traditional SBC agencies, while the rest will fund ministries operated or supported by the Fellowship. Earlier this year the Fellowship launched its own missions program, which now employs eight former SBC missionaries and plans to hire more.

In contrast, the Executive Committee oversees a Cooperative Program budget of \$140 million. However, the Cooperative Program faces a slight decrease for the second straight year, Executive Committee members were told.

Any financial impact from the Fellowship is "difficult to measure," Chapman later told Associated Baptist Press. "Whatever we are experiencing is temporary," he said, adding his confidence is in God to provide the resources the SBC needs.

Horton told ABP after the vote that his proposed study was not intended to keep Fellowship churches from participating in the SBC. But, he added, "I think those churches should decide where their loyalty lies."

Cecil Sherman, coordinator of the Fellowship, said Horton's accusations about the Fellowship are untrue. "Mr. Horton is either misinformed or malicious."

"We do not recruit missionaries," Sherman said. "The initiative is taken by the missionary. That's our policy."

"In contrast to some of the things that are happening in some of our (SBC) seminaries and to some of our (SBC) missionaries, there is no coercion or intimidation," he said.

Sherman's response came in a telephone interview from England, where he and other Fellowship leaders were meeting with the European Baptist Federation about sending more missionaries to Europe.

He also denied that the Fellowship is subversive. "We are open.... We do not conduct closed meetings. We are Baptists. We are above board. And we invite all who share our views to come join us."

Sherman said he would not be surprised to see an attempt to exclude

Fellowship churches from the SBC, but he said he hopes it is not successful. "We rejoice that we get to fund the Fellowship and fund the SBC," he said.

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Helms takes aim at United Way over stance on Boy Scouts

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., took aim at two United Way chapters that have cut or threatened to cut funding for the Boy Scouts because of its policy barring homosexuals and atheists.

Apparently Helms' efforts will yield nothing more than a roll call vote indicating where senators stand on the issue.

Helms offered an amendment to the appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (H.R. 5677). Helms said the amendment would prevent the use of tax dollars to help charitable organizations that want to compel the Boy Scouts of America to accept members and leaders who are homosexuals or atheists.

The amendment would require the Office of Personnel Management to drop from the federal government's annual employee charitable drive any charity that has withdrawn support for the Boy Scouts because of its admissions rules.

The Senate approved the amendment by voice vote, but a spokesman from Helms' office said the chances of the amendment surviving in a Senate-House conference committee and subsequently becoming law are "slim to none."

Because Helms expects the provision to be stripped from the HHS spending bill, he offered the same amendment to the Department of Defense Appropriations bill where he could get his colleagues on the record on this issue, the spokesman said.

The amendment to the DOD bill was rejected 49-49.

Helms noted that only two of the more than 2,100 chapters of the United Way would be affected -- chapters in San Francisco and Chicago that have cut or threatened to cut funding from the Boy Scouts because of its policy.

Helms said the Boy Scouts are under attack because of "their strict adherence to traditional values and belief in God." He likened the organization to the Catholic Church as "the latest bastion of ethical behavior in this country to come under attack from the rabidly militant and irrational homosexual lobby and those who wish to take God out of each and every public function in this nation.

"I am here tonight...to suggest that the American taxpayers have no interest, and the federal government has no business, supporting or assisting in the slightest degree any organization that uses its tax-deductible donations in efforts to blackmail the Boy Scouts of America."

Sen. Alan Cranston, D-Calif., disagreed. The San Francisco United Way, like other organizations, has a policy against making charitable contributions to groups that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, Cranston said.

"Because the senator from North Carolina disagrees with that decision made by a private charitable group, he wants to bar them from participation in the Federal Combined Campaign," Cranston said. "That is an outrageous interference with a private, non-profit group's right to decide to whom it will contribute its money.

"Where do we stop?," Cranston continued. "Shall we strip away rights of private groups whenever they adopt positions which conflict with the

right-wing agenda?"

In another matter, the Senate dropped a provision from the HHS bill that would have overturned the Bush administration's ban on abortion counseling and referrals at federally funded family-planning clinics.

Sen. Tom Harkin, chairman of the Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee, earlier had promised to keep the controversial provision. But when the Senate voted earlier on a family-planning reauthorization bill that would repeal the ban, an agreement was reached to drop the language from the HHS bill, Harkin said.

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-- By Pam Parry

Attorney-minister named
to head Americans United

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Veteran civil-liberties activist Barry Lynn has been named executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Lynn, 44, was nominated for the post in August by the Americans United board of trustees. His selection was ratified Sept. 22 by the 125-member National Advisory Council.

When he begins his new duties Oct. 5, Lynn will succeed Robert Maddox, a former Carter White House official who left Americans United in May to become pastor of Briggs Memorial Baptist Church in Bethesda, Md.

An ordained United Church of Christ minister, Lynn holds a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center and a theology degree from Boston University School of Theology.

He has served as legislative counsel for the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union and as legislative counsel for the United Church of Christ's Washington office.

Since 1991 he has served as co-host of "Battleline," a daily syndicated radio program that features debate on national issues, and as communications and health-policy consultant at Dartmouth Medical Center.

Lynn cited the challenge of heading the 50,000 member church-state organization "at this crucial time."

"The Supreme Court has nearly erased the free exercise of religion, the president has proposed a steady stream of government subsidies for religion, and Congress and the state legislatures are too often confused about fundamental First Amendment principles," he said.

Lynn's selection was welcomed by Foy Valentine, Americans United president and former head of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The cause of church-state separation is significantly strengthened by Barry Lynn's acceptance of the call to the helm of Americans United," Valentine said.

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-- By Larry Chesser

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