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

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Kentucky Baptists may make support of SBC optional
- * Loyalty low, skepticism high among 'Baby Bust' generation
- * Texas churches offer care, support for people with AIDS
- * Mid-America professor named Criswell College president
- * Florida child granted 'divorce' from parents
- * Correction

Kentucky Baptists may make support of SBC optional

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Kentucky Baptists will vote in November on a proposal that would allow churches to participate in their state convention whether or not those congregations contribute financially to the work of the national Southern Baptist Convention.

The proposal would change the way Kentucky Baptists define denominational cooperation.

In order to qualify for full representation in the annual Kentucky Baptist Convention, current guidelines require that a church contribute to the Cooperative Program, the unified budget that supports Baptist ministries on both the state and national levels.

In recent years, however, some Kentucky Baptists dissatisfied with the current leadership of the SBC and its national agencies have protested that policy, saying it forces them to fund national ministries they don't support.

The compromise proposal would put in place a two-pronged formula for representation that accounts for contributions to either the Cooperative Program or the state convention's budget alone.

The proposal was approved in mid-September by a study committee that has been examining the issue since 1990. It will be presented to the Kentucky Baptist Convention for a vote Nov. 10-11.

Under the present policy, a church that is in "friendly cooperation" with the Kentucky Baptist Convention and is a "bona fide contributor" to the state convention's work is granted one messenger to the annual state convention held each fall. One additional messenger (up to 10) is allowed for each 250 church members over 100 or for each \$250 contributed to the Cooperative Program.

Most of the money contributed to the Cooperative Program by Kentucky Baptist churches is funneled to the state convention budget for use in Kentucky (63 percent). The rest (37 percent) is forwarded to the national CP budget, which funds 20 SBC agencies.

Since only unrestricted, or "undesignated," contributions count as Cooperative Program gifts, disgruntled Kentucky churches have not been permitted to withhold the portion of their contributions earmarked for the national CP budget. However, the new proposal would grant equal participation

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on the state convention level to churches that support only Baptist work in Kentucky.

The proposal is expected to draw opposition from fundamental-conservatives, who now control the national CP budget and the SBC agencies.

Participation in the national Southern Baptist Convention held each June is open only to those churches that contribute to the Cooperative Program.

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-- By Greg Warner and Marv Knox

Loyalty low, skepticism high
among 'Baby Bust' generation

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- Tired of hearing about the Baby Boomers? Get ready for a new label to describe the second-largest generation in American history: the Baby Busters.

Boomers are the 79 million people born during America's "baby boom" between 1946 and 1964. Busters are the product of the subsequent "baby bust" years between 1965 and 1983, when Boomers themselves started having offspring.

Boomers represent 32 percent of the U.S. population; Busters represent 27 percent.

And while volumes have been written about Boomers' likes and dislikes, considerably less has been said about the attitudes and perceptions of Busters.

But a new study by the Barna Research Group shows there are significant differences between the two groups. The study is published in the book, "The Invisible Generation."

While Boomers were busy changing society, they left Busters to be the first generation raised from birth in the "new" society they created, the study notes.

Things have been changed for Busters rather than by them, the study says. As a result, Busters' perspectives are more likely to be shaped by their surroundings than to shape their surroundings.

Some specific findings of the Barna research include:

-- 38 percent of all adult Busters consider themselves "stressed out," nearly double the proportion of older adults who label themselves so.

-- Busters are more concerned with leisure time and friendships than Boomers, who place considerably more value on work and "getting ahead."

-- A majority of Busters claim to be patriotic, but the proportion is considerably lower than among any other generation.

-- Busters are more skeptical about institutions and traditions than Boomers, perhaps because they've seen too many scandals in government, sports, entertainment and religion.

-- Busters demonstrate even less institutional loyalty than Boomers. Only half the Busters who attend church said they attend the same church each time they go.

-- Busters are 30 percent less likely to attend church than older Americans and 50 percent less likely to attend religious education programs such as Sunday school.

"For the Builders -- the Boomers' parents -- the rallying points were surviving the Great Depression and World War II," noted George Barna, president of the Barna Research Group. "For the Boomers, it was rebellion against traditional ways of doing things, from traditional music and lifestyles to government and war.

"The Busters too want to rebel in some ways against the manner in which

their Boomer parents raised them. The problem is they don't know what to rebel to."

Music is a good example, Barna said. "Boomers rallied around rock as a unifying, socially rebellious force. Busters are doing this in small groups, around musical forms including various types of heavy metal, rap, hip-hop and punk, but the rebellion is often fragmented and lacking direction."

In short, Barna said, "Busters are very much a generation still in search of themselves."

-30-

-- By Marv Knox

Texas churches offer care,
support for people with AIDS

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Although they are more than 250 miles apart geographically and even farther apart politically, two Texas churches -- Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and First Baptist Church of Houston -- are walking the same path in ministering to persons with AIDS.

Broadway generally is identified with moderate-conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention, and Houston's First Church falls in the fundamental-conservative camp.

But the two disparate congregations both offer individual respite care for persons with AIDS or support groups for AIDS patients and their families.

In the last two years, "care teams" at Broadway Baptist Church have provided respite care for five persons with AIDS, working closely with the AIDS Interfaith Network of North Texas.

"Five doesn't sound like much, but it is when you have to watch them die," said Karen Gilbert, community minister at Broadway.

Care teams are volunteers who work with individual "clients" -- persons with AIDS. The volunteers may clean house, cook meals or provide transportation for their clients, in addition to providing companionship during often-lonely days.

Launching the care team ministry for persons with AIDS was a natural outgrowth of Broadway's ministry in its surrounding community, Gilbert explained.

"There are three gay bars and there's heavy intravenous drug use in the community around our church," she said. "I was seeing an increasing number of people who were HIV positive coming to our food pantry and other ministries."

Broadway sees its ministry as important not only to their clients, but also to the family members or companions who provide care for the persons with AIDS, Gilbert said. One former client's "significant other" joined Broadway's 15-person care team as a result of the ministry.

First Baptist of Houston began its AIDS care team about a year ago. It was an outgrowth of the groundbreaking work of South Main Baptist Church in Houston, which led the way for Southern Baptists in care for people with AIDS.

South Main launched its ministry in 1986. Volunteers from South Main formed one of the first care teams begun in cooperation with Houston's Foundation for Interfaith Research and Ministry (FIRM), founded by Southern Baptist Earl Shelp.

Care teams are linked with clients who request services or who are referred to FIRM by physicians, hospitals or home-based health-care services.

"We believe people with AIDS should not have to die alone and abandoned. Our care teams keep that promise to them," said Ron Sunderland of FIRM. In

six years, FIRM has provided respite care for about 1,000 persons with AIDS through the ministry of 1,300 volunteers from 65 congregations.

Lynn Guy, director of South Main's care team, said she inquired about starting the care team after learning about one young man in the church who was in the final stages of the disease. Although that particular man had less than one month to live, First Baptist began an ongoing ministry to others like him.

"This is where I feel God wants us to minister," Guy said. "If anybody should minister to persons with AIDS, it ought to be the body of Christ.

"We're not here to judge someone else's sin but to minister to them and show them the love of Christ."

FIRM provides training, orientation and a supportive network for volunteers. FIRM also offers guiding principles for the ministry, such as a strict "no proselyting" rule. "We consider that an abuse of the caring relationship," FIRM's Sunderland explained.

"However, over half of the clients ask the volunteers why they are involved," he added, "and then the care team members are free to say it is because they are living out their Christian faith.

"Many of the clients are anxious to discuss spiritual matters, but the conversation must be at the initiative of the client."

Often, persons with AIDS ask to accompany team members to worship services. Guy told of one client who asked to attend a revival at First Baptist Church to hear guest evangelist Jerry Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.

"We were afraid that might be a little too strong for him. We asked if he might rather go another time, but he insisted," she said.

The young man made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and was active in the ministries of the church until he was moved to a hospice, one month before his death. Six care team members were at his bedside when he died.

The care team at Houston's predominantly black Brentwood Baptist Church received a boost recently when pastor Joe Ratliff devoted the worship services to AIDS awareness.

Ratliff's sermon at each of the three Sunday morning services consisted of a dialogue with the widow of a Brentwood deacon who had died of AIDS. Fifty care team volunteers later signed up.

Brentwood also began a support group for persons with AIDS about one year ago. The group, which averages five to eight in attendance, meets twice a month at the church facility.

"There's been no resistance. Our people are very receptive and sensitive to them," said Donald Watkins, minister of Christian counseling at Brentwood.

"There's no reluctance on the part of the individuals with AIDS in coming to the church," he said. "A lot of them don't have many opportunities to get out of the house. They feel Brentwood is a safe place for them."

A second support group was begun for the families of people with AIDS. The two groups meet separately to maintain confidentiality and encourage openness. "Sometimes the individual with AIDS is afraid he will hurt someone he loves if he really says what's on his mind," Watkins said.

Volunteers often find themselves emotionally drained from working with terminally ill people, Watkins acknowledged. The grieving process that follows each death is painful. However, workers find spiritual succor within the larger fellowship of the church.

"Our church services are celebrative. We celebrate life, no matter how long or how short it is, recognizing it as a gift," he said.

Betty Arrell, a member of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, became involved in a support group for persons with AIDS through her work as a hospital volunteer and through the personal ordeal of seeing her cousin infected with the virus.

"It looks like quite a few of us within God's family will have to have

our lives touched by this before we become compassionate," she said.

Arrell served as facilitator for a small support group until one group member died and two others moved. "It is very frustrating to me that there is no Christian ministry that I'm aware of anywhere in our area meeting this need," she said.

Many churches are reluctant to open their doors to support groups for people with AIDS because of the association of AIDS with homosexuality and the fear that people with AIDS might join the church.

"Churches would rather that this thing would just go away, so they ignore it," she said. But churches are missing a great opportunity for ministry by failing to reach out, she said.

"I don't know of a better way to show someone Jesus," Arrell said, "than by being loving, non-judgmental and accepting, by taking them into our churches and into our lives, walking them out of the shadows and into the sunlight."

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Mid-America professor named
Criswell College president

DALLAS (ABP) -- Richard R. Melick Jr., professor and chairman of the New Testament and Greek departments of Mid-America Seminary in Memphis, Tenn., has been elected president of Criswell College.

Melick, 47, will succeed Paige Patterson, who recently became president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Since 1983 Melick has been on the faculty of Mid-America, an independent seminary with close ties to Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives. Melick previously was associated with Palm Beach Atlantic College in West Palm Beach, Fla., Miami Christian College and Columbia Bible College.

He is a graduate of Columbia Bible College, received a master of divinity degree at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a doctor of philosophy degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1979.

Melick served churches in Texas, Illinois and Georgia. He is a consulting editor for the New American Commentary, the inerrantist commentary published by Broadman Press.

Criswell College, which reports 300 students, is named for W. A. Criswell, the legendary pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, which founded the school in 1970.

Patterson, who planned and guided the rise to power of fundamental-conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention, became president of the college in 1975.

Criswell trustees reportedly fired Patterson over administrative issues in October 1991, then reinstated him at the urging of fundamental-conservative leaders. Patterson acknowledged "philosophical differences" with Criswell trustees but denied he was ever fired.

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Florida child granted
'divorce' from parents

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- Gregory Kingsley, the 12-year-old boy who sought a "divorce" from his parents, was given his wish Sept. 25 by a Florida judge and granted adoption by his foster parents.

The decision by Circuit Judge Thomas Kirk of Orlando was described as a landmark ruling for children's rights, giving children increased standing in the courts. Opponents, however, said it is a blow to the rights of parents and opens the door for legal abuses.

Kirk ruled that Rachel Kingsley, Gregory's 30-year-old mother, neglected and abandoned him and therefore was unfit as a parent. Gregory, who has spent most of his life in foster care, said in testimony he felt his mother had forgotten him.

The judge severed the mother's legal rights over the child and immediately approved Gregory's adoption by George and Lizabeth Russ, his foster parents for the past year.

Gregory's parents are divorced. His father, Ralph Kingsley, who lives in Missouri, previously consented to the adoption.

Both Gregory and his mother testified during the emotional two-day trial, which was carried on national television by CNN and featured on the cover of Newsweek magazine.

In testimony, Rachel Kingsley was portrayed as a neglectful and abusive mother who initiated little or no contact with Gregory during his time in foster homes.

In the last eight years, Gregory reportedly spent only two months under the care of his mother and then was returned to foster care at the insistence of his mother's female lover-roommate.

In her defense, Rachel Kingsley denied she neglected Gregory and said her efforts to take responsibility for the child had been frustrated by financial difficulties and the state's child-welfare system. Rachel Kingsley cares for Gregory's two younger brothers.

The case first made headlines in July when Judge Kirk ruled Gregory had a "fundamental right" to hire his own lawyer to represent him in the case. It was believed to be the first time a court had ruled a child had the same constitutional right to legal representation as an adult.

Kirk's ruling Sept. 25 is believed to be the first time parental rights have been severed at the request of a child. Courts have occasionally severed parental rights at the initiation of state authorities or foster parents.

The case has troubled some Baptist legal experts. Michael Whitehead, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said in July that Kirk's ruling granting Gregory legal standing runs counter to "the principle of the integrity and autonomy of the family."

But "children's rights are just as important as adults' rights," responded Charles Hodges, vice president of Florida Baptist Family Services, which provides residential and foster care for needy and neglected children. (see ABP story of July 21)

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-- By Greg Warner

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CORRECTION: In the Sept. 24 ABP story "Executive Committee installs Morris Chapman...", Tim Hedquist was incorrectly described as administrator of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn. Although he served at Bellevue, he has since moved to First Baptist Church of Dallas, where he is church administrator.

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