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FMB search narrowed to two men,
both with missionary experience

By Greg Warner and Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The search for a new president of the Foreign Mission Board has been narrowed to two men, both former missionaries.

The search committee is now poised to choose between Don Kammerdiener, FMB executive vice president, and Avery Willis, an administrator at the Sunday School Board, according to two members of the search committee.

One of the candidates is likely to become the next president of the Foreign Mission Board, succeeding 37-year missions veteran Keith Parks. Parks announced his early retirement in March, complaining the theological-political controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention has infiltrated the FMB's overseas work.

Although FMB trustees are scheduled to meet Oct. 12-14 in Richmond, Va., they are not expected to vote on a new president then. Committee members said no choice has been made between the two finalists. However, the committee will convene during the three-day trustee meeting -- Parks' last -- and may pick its nominee. Another committee meeting is scheduled for Oct. 30-31.

Several committee members declined to discuss their two top candidates. But two committee members confirmed the selection of Kammerdiener and Willis on the condition of anonymity. "That's where we are right now," said one.

Two other committee members -- John Greene of Lake Worth, Fla., and Terry Williams of Batesville, Miss., deferred to search chairman Joel Gregory of Dallas. "We decided early on that we'd let our chairman speak for us," explained Greene.

Gregory, who recently resigned as pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, was in seclusion and unavailable for comment.

Hoyt Savage of Las Vegas, Nev., also declined to identify the two finalists but he added: "We have interviewed two candidates.... Our choices are excellent choices. People will be pleased."

Although the search is focusing on Willis and Kammerdiener, the nine-member committee has not limited itself to those two and may eventually go another direction, committee sources said. "We are trying to keep an open heart," one member explained.

Avery Willis acknowledged he and the committee have held a "preliminary" interview but he said he had not talked further with committee members about their selection. Kammerdiener would not confirm that he had been interviewed for the post. "That's something the search committee needs to respond to," he said.

Over the years, both Kammerdiener, 56, and Willis, 58, have worked closely with Parks, who turns 65 Oct. 23 and will leave the FMB Oct. 31.

Willis and Parks served together as missionaries in Indonesia in the 1960s, and Parks later became area director supervising Willis and other missionaries in the region. After serving 14 years on the mission field, including six years as president of the Indonesian Baptist Theological Seminary (1972-78), Willis returned to the United States.

Willis is now director of the adult discipleship and family division of the Sunday School Board. He is credited with developing the popular MasterLife discipleship program, which he first used on the mission field.

Willis was one of six prayer leaders from SBC agencies who in 1989 urged Southern Baptists to conduct "solemn assemblies," protracted meetings for prayer and repentance. A common theme in Willis' solemn-assembly messages was that natural calamities, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, are God's "remedial discipline" to bring America to repentance.

A native of Arkansas, Willis holds a doctor of theology degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and has authored several books, including *The Biblical Basis for Missions* (1980).

Since 1980 Don Kammerdiener has served as a Richmond-based FMB administrator under Parks, first as area director for Middle America and the Caribbean, then as vice president for the Americas. He was named executive vice president in 1989, assuming responsibility for day-to-day operations at the FMB's Richmond headquarters. He will serve as interim president after Parks leaves Oct. 31.

Kammerdiener was appointed a missionary in 1962, serving first in Colombia. He was the field representative between the FMB and its missionaries in Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina from 1970 to 1980, when he joined the Richmond staff.

A native of Oklahoma, Kammerdiener holds a bachelor of divinity degree from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and has authored a Spanish-language book on church growth.

In narrowing the field from six candidates to two, search committee members passed over four prominent pastors with ties to Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives, who now control the FMB and the convention.

By choosing two men with overseas missionary experience, the committee satisfies what many Southern Baptists -- including most missionaries -- consider the primary qualification for Parks' successor.

Although Kammerdiener, a Parks appointee, is viewed as an FMB insider, he has not publicly criticized trustees as they have steered the FMB in a more conservative direction. Willis, whose conservative social views have won him favor from many fundamental-conservatives, would be seen as more of an outsider.

Willis told Associated Baptist Press both perspectives carry advantages. Although he's not a complete outsider because of his missionary experience, he said, he could offer "a fresh look at what we are doing."

Willis said he is in agreement with the trustees current bent and would

favor some more changes in the FMB. "I think that we need to find out where God is moving and get in step with him," he said. "That means we need to be very attentive to where he is working and go that direction."

Six candidates were on the committee's short list, including Kammerdiener and Willis. Associated Baptist Press has confirmed the other four were prominent megachurch pastors -- John Bisagno of First Baptist Church of Houston; Tom Elliff of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla.; Jim Henry of First Baptist Church of Orlando; and Adrian Rogers of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn.

Only Elliff has career missionary experience. Each of the four either removed himself from consideration or was moved to a lower level of consideration.

Savage denied a rumor that the job had been offered to Rogers and that Rogers declined. Rogers, a three time president of the Southern Baptist Convention, was never offered the job, said Savage, who was assigned to follow up on Rogers' recommendation.

Savage said the person who recommended Rogers was asked to provide a resume -- the same procedure used for every nominee. At that point, Savage said, Rogers wrote Gregory and asked that his name be removed from consideration. "That was the last time the name of Adrian Rogers came up," Savage said.

Savage also acknowledged that chairman Gregory was never a serious candidate for the post. "We considered him at one point, or wanted to," Savage said. "He categorically said that was out of the picture."

Those familiar with Kammerdiener and his work for the FMB say he is a strong leader driven by a deep commitment to mission principles.

Most expect Kammerdiener, if elected, to cooperate with the trustees' current conservative reforms. "He would go along with the basic direction of the trustees in order to maintain stability at the board," said one longtime friend of Kammerdiener.

"His missions calling is so strong that it will take more direct trustee action before he can see that basic missions principles are being threatened," the friend said.

Missionaries likely would view Kammerdiener as an acceptable choice for president because he has come up through the ranks, sources said. "He would have to prove to them that he is not politically oriented," one colleague added.

Willis' potential as FMB leader drew mixed reviews from associates.

"He's very talented and very gifted," said one who has known him for many years. "He has a clear understanding of church growth principles and would emphasize evangelism and church growth and discipleship. He would need to get someone who was a strong administrator and be willing to turn administration over to him."

A missionary who served with Willis in Indonesia questioned his qualifications as an administrator.

"His track record is one of emphasis on personal growth and MasterLife," the associate said. "His focus has been so much in that area that he has not demonstrated administrative skills and strength and experience."

"He's always been event oriented, moving from one spectacular to another," the colleague continued. "The people in Indonesia didn't see him as a steady, day-by-day guy but as one who moved from one crusade to some other big event somewhere. He made his mark by the dramatic and the high profile."

BJC delays action on lawsuit
while talks continue with SBC

By Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Representatives from the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist Joint Committee will try one more time to resolve their dispute over a \$300,000 capital-needs fund and keep the matter out of court.

The Baptist Joint Committee authorized its chairman and attorney to discuss the matter again with the SBC's attorney and chief executive. Although both sides emphasize there is no proposal on the table, both say they are willing to "open dialogue" again.

The \$300,000 fund has been a point of contention for more than a year. Both sides have suggested the BJC may take the issue to court, but the BJC has not said if it plans to file a lawsuit.

Some observers expected the BJC to decide to sue during its board meeting Oct. 5-6. Instead, BJC directors voted unanimously Oct. 5 to "empower our lawyer and chairman to enter into dialogue to resolve the dispute," reported James Dunn, BJC executive director.

That decision was reached by directors during a 45-minute closed-door session, during which they were briefed by BJC attorney Oliver Thomas. Thomas said later the meeting was closed because of the lawyer-client privilege and the sensitivity of the discussions.

"We are postponing any action on this lawsuit until this dialogue is completed," Thomas said.

"We want to go the second mile in trying to resolve this dispute in a Christian fashion," he added.

No date was announced for the talks with the SBC.

Morris Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, said he and SBC attorney James Guenther have agreed to meet with the BJC representatives. But Chapman said he has not been authorized to propose any settlement or compromise or to accept any offer from the BJC.

"Oliver Thomas has indicated the Baptist Joint Committee would likely proceed with a lawsuit but that they would prefer to talk with the representatives of the Executive Committee prior to filing a lawsuit," Chapman explained. "On that basis, we feel it would be not only appropriate but our Christian responsibility to listen to any proposal they might have."

"If such talks occur, they should in no way be characterized as negotiation," Chapman said. "They would be simply preliminary discussions."

The disputed money has been held for 25 years by the Southern Baptist Foundation in the name of the Baptist Joint Committee. It was allocated by the SBC in 1967 and 1968 to buy an office building for the Washington-based BJC, a religious-liberty agency representing 10 Baptist groups.

The funds were never spent, however, and the SBC has since cut off all new funding of the Baptist Joint Committee. Last September, the BJC requested all funds in the account to purchase a Capitol Hill building, but the foundation refused to release the money without an okay from the SBC Executive Committee. The committee refused.

Over the years, the BJC has been paid the interest on the account. Earlier this year, the foundation, acting on instructions of the Executive Committee, sent the BJC a check for \$81,036, the amount the account had appreciated over time.

In June the Southern Baptist Convention voted to redistribute the fund's \$300,000 corpus, but so far the money has not been put to another use.

"It is my interpretation," Chapman said, "that any decision which might

alter the previous action of the Southern Baptist Convention (to reallocate the money) would require approval of the Executive Committee and the Southern Baptist Convention. However, it's much too early for that to be a consideration."

"Our motivation would be to try to avoid a lawsuit," said Guenther, the SBC attorney.

"There are no discussions taking place at this point regarding anything that would be characterized as a settlement," Guenther added. "All either of us are saying is discussions may take place."

Dunn said the BJC authorized its executive committee to act on any proposal that results from the talks. However, the full board of directors "reserved for themselves the right to make a final decision about a lawsuit," Dunn added.

BJC chairman Tyrone Pitts, a representative of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, said the BJC directors are "open to dialogue." "We are hoping it will produce a resolution," he said.

Asked if he thought the BJC would take less than the full \$300,000 in order to keep the dispute out of court, Pitts said: "I am not going to speak to that. Our position is clear about that. We feel the money is ours."

Pitts said no deadline has been set to complete the dialogue.

No resolution is likely before March, when the BJC executive committee meets. The Executive Committee meets in February.

In other BJC business, the directors adopted a 1993 budget that is 3 percent smaller than in 1992. The anticipated drop reflects both the loss of SBC funding and tough economic times.

The directors also passed a resolution denouncing "the abuse of religion" in political campaigns. The statement is identical to one issued Aug. 28 by Dunn and other U.S. religious leaders after President George Bush told an evangelical audience that the Democrats had left God out of their party platform.

"Identifying the kingdom of God with any political party or candidate is presumptuous," the resolution said. "None has a monopoly on the truth. All are subject to the faults and frailties of the human condition."

The resolution urges political candidates to refrain from further attacks based on religion.

The BJC formed an ad hoc committee to study membership of its board and re-elected officers for a second term: Pitts as chairperson; Sarah Frances Anders, a representative of the Religious Liberty Council, first vice chairperson; Robert Ricker of the Baptist General Conference, second vice chairperson; Robert Tiller of the American Baptist Churches, secretary.

Dunn announced the BJC's Religious Liberty Conference will be held March 1-2 in Washington as a joint venture with the American Jewish Committee. The event, which is co-sponsored with the AJC every two years, will focus on the groups' shared values of religious liberty and church-state separation.

Plans were made to honor Rosemary Brevard, BJC research assistant, for 25 years of service to the agency. She plans to retire next May.

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New Supreme Court term, Congress
could impact religious liberty

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Decisions made by the U.S. Congress and Supreme Court in the next year could dramatically impact religious liberty, experts

told a gathering of Baptist journalists Oct. 4-5.

Three cases pending before the Supreme Court and one bill certain to be reintroduced in the next Congress were the focus of several speakers' comments during a briefing held for journalists by the Baptist Joint Committee.

The briefing featured dialogues with Doug Marlette, Pulitzer prize-winning editorial cartoonist for New York Newsday; Richard Carelli, veteran Supreme Court reporter for Associated Press; Forest Montgomery, attorney for the National Association of Evangelicals; Jody Powell, press secretary to former President Jimmy Carter; Edwin Newman, longtime newscaster for NBC television; and the Baptist Joint Committee's own staff.

The bill to be reintroduced in Congress is the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a measure drafted to restore the "compelling interest" test virtually abandoned by the Supreme Court in a 1990 decision.

That test permitted government to restrict religious practice only to further a compelling governmental interest, such as health or safety, and if the least restrictive means of safeguarding that interest had been used.

However, the court departed from that standard in deciding the 1990 case Oregon vs. Smith. The Smith decision said government needs only a rational basis to justify restricting religious practice unless the restriction singles out religion.

RFRA would restore the compelling-interest standard by legislative action, a step the NAE's Montgomery described as necessary but regrettable: "It is regrettable that we have to look to Congress for protection of our God-given rights."

Congress failed to approve RFRA this session, but both Montgomery and Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, agreed chances are favorable for passage in the next session.

That might not be necessary, however, if the Supreme Court reverses its position using a case accepted for review in this term, they added.

The Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye vs. Hialeah is one of three significant church-state cases already accepted by the court for consideration this term.

The case involves a church affiliated with the group known as Santaria, which uses animal sacrifice as a central part of its religious practice. The city of Hialeah, Fla., passed ordinances prohibiting animal sacrifice, apparently in an attempt to keep the church out of town.

The church sued, claiming the city ordinance violated adherents First Amendment rights to freely express their religious faith.

The case is particularly significant, Thomas and Montgomery said, because it is the first case the court has accepted since the Smith decision that concerns the First Amendment's clause on free exercise of religion.

The public outcry that has arisen since the Smith decision could prompt the court to restate its position through this case, Thomas, Montgomery and Carelli said.

In addition to prompting the drive for RFRA, the Smith decision has been criticized widely by religious-liberty and legal scholars.

However, the Lukumi case could prove a difficult one for restoring the compelling-interest standard because it has "some very noxious facts," Thomas said. "People don't see beyond the dead chickens and goats to see what's happening in this case."

What's happening is religious discrimination, he and the others explained. The city did not enact ordinances that prohibit all killing of animals but that prohibited only the actions of this one religious group, Thomas said.

"Our position is that the city of Hialeah cannot single out religion for this type of discrimination," Thomas said. "This case, if it goes the other

way, will be much worse than Smith.

"We have to go to bat for these people whose practices we may find offensive...but who have the right to practice their religion."

The court will have another opportunity to speak to the First Amendment's free-exercise clause and establishment clause in deciding *Zobrest vs. Catalina Foothills School District*.

The case involves a family's claim that government should provide a sign-language interpreter for a deaf child who attends a parochial school.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission filed a brief urging the court to accept this case and siding with the parents. The Baptist Joint Committee has declined to do so because it does not believe the free-exercise clause requires government to pay for people's religious choices.

The third case, *Lamb's Chapel vs. Center Moriches Union Free School District*, involves a dispute over whether a public school can prohibit religious groups from using its buildings during non-school hours if other groups are allowed to use the facilities.

Both the *Zobrest* and *Lamb's Chapel* cases open the door for the court to redefine both religion clauses of the First Amendment.

In addition to impacting the free-exercise clause, the *Zobrest* and *Lamb's Chapel* cases offer the court an opportunity to restate its position on establishment. The court was asked to reconsider that point, but declined to do so in ruling on *Lee vs. Weisman*, a graduation-prayer case, during the last term.

Both the Bush administration and several conservative religious groups have been pushing for a looser standard that would allow majority religions more benefits from government so long as they do not coerce participation. The Baptist Joint Committee, on the other hand, has said the court should retain its current standard, known as the Lemon test.

That test, formulated in 1971, requires government practices to have a secular purpose, neither advance nor inhibit religion, and avoid excessive entanglement between government and religion.

The editors' briefing also included dialogues about school choice proposals, another issue likely to surface in the next Congress.

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Religious Right hurts Christians,
not politicians, Jody Powell says

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Christians, not politicians, are the ones who have been hurt by the alliance of the Religious Right with the Republican Party, a former White House press secretary said.

Jody Powell, press secretary to President Jimmy Carter and a member of First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., addressed a group of Baptist editors Oct. 5 in Washington. The event was a briefing sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious-liberty coalition.

"Almost inevitably...when organized religion gets itself too close to the political process and to partisan politics, it is religion which suffers," Powell said. "There is a level of cynicism in politics that will tarnish and pull down something as important as our religious faith.

"It is almost always the politicians who use the preachers, not the other way around."

Powell said the Republican Party is "going to be alright" after its

alliance with conservative Christians has eroded. "The people who put that together from the political side and benefitted from it do not feel ticked off and discouraged. But many from the religious side do."

Powell said he sees the influence of the Religious Right declining and is saddened that many Christians are leaving the cause disenchanted with government.

The tragedy, Powell said, is that politicians took advantage of Christians in the same way they use other groups for their own gain. "On the political side, the people who were benefitting from that did not believe what they were saying."

That's not nearly so distressing when it happens to secular groups, Powell said, "but the church of Jesus Christ has got to be something different."

Powell said he has struggled for years to know where to draw the line between religious belief and the promotion of public policy.

As an example, he cited the Sunday school class Carter taught at First Baptist Church in Washington while president. Inevitably, visitors to that class included reporters who churned out stories about what Carter taught, as though he were the "national Sunday school teacher," Powell said.

That made Powell uncomfortable, he said, but it was a situation he had to learn to live with.

The intrusion of religious conviction into political decisions usually makes the process more difficult, he added.

Powell said he believes authentic religion should offer the political process an example of openness, dialogue and conflict resolution. Unfortunately, he added, "it has brought just the opposite and made politics meaner than it was."

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Supreme Court agrees to review
two church-state disputes

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Returning to the bench after its summer recess, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed Oct. 5 to review a New York school district's refusal to allow after-hours use of its facilities for religious purposes and an Arizona school district refusal to provide a state-paid sign interpreter for a deaf student attending a Catholic school.

In *Lamb's Chapel vs. Center Moriches Union Free School District* (91-2024), lower courts rejected arguments that a Suffolk County, N.Y., school district violated the First Amendment's free-speech and religion clauses, as well as the constitutional guarantee of equal protection.

Evangelical Christian Church and its pastor, John Steigerwald, filed suit against the district after it refused their request to use school facilities during non-school hours to show the James Dobson film series titled "Turn Your Hearts Toward Home."

The school district's policy allowed after-hours use of facilities for a variety of community purposes but followed a New York law in prohibiting use for religious purposes. The lower courts held that while the district had opened school facilities for various activities by citizens groups, it had created "limited forums" not open to religious uses by policy or practice.

The lower courts also evaluated the case in light of a 1990 Supreme Court decision affirming the Equal Access Act, which bars public secondary

schools from denying student religious groups the right to meet on school premises during non-instructional time. The district court noted that the plaintiffs were not a student group and that the district had not established a practice or policy of opening its doors to religious groups.

"This isn't technically an equal-access case," said Brent Walker, associate general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, "but the same principle is involved. The school district's policy and practice unfairly discriminate against religious speech."

Walker said the case could have serious consequences for churches throughout the country.

"There are thousands of Baptist churches that use school facilities for temporary quarters while sanctuaries and educational facilities are being constructed," he said. "An adverse ruling here could create a big problem."

In *Zobrest vs. Catalina Foothills School District* (92-94), lower courts ruled that neither the establishment clause nor the free-exercise clause was violated by an Arizona school district's failure to provide a state-paid sign language interpreter for a student at a Catholic high school.

The Education of the Handicapped Act authorizes federal funds for special services such as sign-language interpreters for deaf students. The school district would have provided an interpreter if the student attended public schools.

"I think the state could have provided the interpreter if it wanted to, but it didn't have to," Walker said.

He said providing a state-financed interpreter would not necessarily violate the establishment clause because the aid benefits the student, not the religious school. "But the failure to provide this aid doesn't violate the free-exercise clause," he added.

Should the Supreme Court declare otherwise, Walker said, "it would open the door to finding a free-exercise right to vouchers for parochial school tuition. That would be disastrous."

Several religious organizations -- including the Christian Legal Society, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the National Association of Evangelicals -- joined in a friend-of-the-court brief asking the high court to reverse the lower rulings on both establishment-clause and free-exercise grounds.

The BJC declined to participate in the brief because it disagrees with the contention that the free-exercise clause requires government to finance religious choices of parents, according to BJC General Counsel Oliver Thomas.

The *Lamb's Chapel* and *Zobrest* cases bring to three the number of church-state disputes the high court will hear this term. The court earlier agreed to decide the constitutionality of Hialeah, Fla., ordinances that prohibit animal sacrifice.

"The court's interpretation of the religion clauses remains in a state of flux," Thomas said. "These cases, coupled with the animal sacrifice case, should help clarify where the Rehnquist court is headed." William Rehnquist is chief justice of the Supreme Court.

In other action Oct. 5, the court vacated a lower court's decision upholding a regulation that prohibits election campaigning on Postal Service property. The regulation was challenged by a political candidate seeking to solicit signatures on a postal walkway.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said that the restriction is narrowly tailored and serves a significant government interest of helping the Postal Service avoid entanglement in partisan politics. The Supreme Court remanded the case, *Longo vs. Postal Service* (91-1988), to the appeals court for reconsideration in light of a 1992 decision by the high court upholding a Tennessee statute that forbids campaigning within 100 feet of polling

places.

Without comment, the high court left standing lower-court rulings in seven other cases:

-- In Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon vs. Oregon State Employment Division (91-1554), the Oregon Court of Appeals ruled that subjecting church schools to Oregon employment laws did not violate the separation of church and state as required by either the First Amendment or the Oregon constitution. Applying the laws did not create excessive government entanglement with religion, the Oregon court ruled.

-- In Society of Separationists Inc. vs. Herman (92-116), the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that an atheist who refused to take a juror's oath lacked standing to challenge the juror oath practice as a violation of the First Amendment's free-exercise clause.

-- In Robbins vs. Murphy (92-195), lower courts rejected a California man's efforts to intervene in a challenge to the display of a Latin cross at a municipal park in San Diego County. Ray Robbins, whose home had an unobstructed view of the 36-foot Mt. Helix cross, argued unsuccessfully that the removal of the cross would impair his view, diminish his property value and violate his free-exercise rights. Lower courts ruled that Robbins lacked sufficient property interest to intervene in the case.

The appeals court also held that the cross display, as well as two others, violated the "no preference" clause in the state constitution.

-- In New York State School Boards Association vs. Sobel (92- 348), the New York Court of Appeals upheld a state regulation requiring the inclusion of representatives of religious organizations on advisory councils in the public schools' development of AIDS education programs.

-- In Marks vs. Florida (91-1989), a Florida appeals court upheld the disorderly conduct conviction of a Loxahatchee, Fla., pastor and street preacher who had been charged in connection with protests outside an abortion clinic in West Palm Beach, Fla. Attorneys for John Wesley Marks argued unsuccessfully that his actions constituted protected free speech.

-- In Conference of African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church vs. Mother African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church (92-260), the Delaware Supreme Court dismissed an appeal by the conference after a trial court sided with the congregation in a dispute over church property. The top Delaware court said the trial court had not yet settled all matters, including any awarding of attorney fees, pending before it.

-- In United Missionary Aviation Inc. vs. Commissioner of Internal Revenue (91-1743), lower courts affirmed revocation of the tax-exempt status of United Missionary Aviation after finding substantial commercial purpose in its activities. In 1980, IRS revoked its tax-exempt status retroactive to Dec. 31, 1973, because it said the organization was "not operated exclusively for tax-exempt purposes."

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RFRA runs out of time
as Congress adjourns

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Religious Freedom Restoration Act eventually will be enacted but not in the 102nd Congress, predicted an attorney whose organization backed the bill.

Forest Montgomery, attorney for the National Association of Evangelicals, said religious freedom has lost in this session of Congress but

RFRA will be enacted "because it's right."

RFRA is a bill designed to restore a high level of protection for religious practice that virtually was abandoned by the U.S Supreme Court in its 1990 Oregon vs. Smith decision.

In the closing days of Congress, RFRA was approved by the House Judiciary Committee for floor consideration but was blocked in the Senate. During an Oct. 2 Senate Judiciary Committee meeting, Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., put RFRA on hold -- essentially killing the bill.

Simpson said: "If the free exercise of religion is indeed being limited, we must deal with that. But we have had only one hearing, and that hearing was held only two weeks before the Senate's scheduled adjournment.

"I believe we must be deliberate in our approach to this legislation, just as we must be very thoughtful and thorough in dealing with any constitutional issue -- particularly those issues involving the First Amendment."

Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee and chairman of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion, did not buy Simpson's explanation.

"Senator Simpson, like every other member of Congress, has had months, even years, to examine this legislation," Thomas said. "That he would block its passage in the waning hours of this session is unconscionable."

Thomas said RFRA got "caught in a last-minute traffic jam" that permitted a single senator to stop the bill. That situation was created by several factors that can be traced to aggressive opposition from the U.S. Catholic Conference and the National Right to Life Committee, Thomas said.

Those two RFRA opponents injected abortion politics into the legislative process, Thomas said, even though no woman in the history of the republic has ever made a successful claim to abortion based on the free exercise of religion.

The abortion issue was highly speculative and hypothetical, if not pure fantasy, Thomas said.

Mark Chopko, general counsel for the Catholic Conference who testified on the organization's behalf during congressional hearings, declined to be interviewed by Associated Baptist Press. The Catholic Conference has said that a legislative response to Smith should incorporate three exemptions, including one on abortion.

The coalition's 54 religious and civil-liberties organizations disagreed, saying that no claim should be singled out for preferential treatment.

In addition to RFRA, Congress grappled with several other bills before adjournment. The House of Representatives adjourned Oct. 6; the Senate was scheduled to finish its business a few days later.

Actions on other bills:

-- Taxes. A bill that would encourage charitable giving by changing tax laws governing non-profit institutions and their donors is pending in the Senate. The House approved Oct. 6 a conference report on H.R. 11 but a Republican filibuster postponed a Senate vote on the tax bill until Oct. 8.

One provision would make all gifts of appreciated property fully deductible on a permanent basis. Appreciated property includes real estate, stocks and tangible items such as collectibles whose value increased after being purchased.

Two other provisions would require more disclosure and substantiation of charitable contributions.

One specifies that a taxpayer cannot deduct any contribution of \$100 or more without receipts from the church or charity receiving the donation. A proposal introduced earlier by the Bush administration but later abandoned

would have required charities to report to the IRS all taxpayers who gave \$500 annually to the charity.

The other provision involves disclosure requirements related to "quid pro quo" contributions, payments made partly as a contribution and partly for goods and services provided by the church or charity.

Both disclosure provisions would result in churches dealing exclusively with the donor, not the government.

The Senate is scheduled to vote Oct. 8 on ending the filibuster, a tactic used to extend debate to the point no vote can be taken on a specific bill. If the bill receives Senate approval, President George Bush is expected to veto it.

-- Education. Plans to channel public funds to private and religious schools failed in the 102nd Congress.

Congress rejected efforts to include parochial aid in its major education reform package but then failed to enact the measure because of a filibuster.

-- Abortion. Congress has worked on several bills related to abortion that have not survived presidential vetoes. The Congress repeatedly tried to repeal the administration's ban on abortion counseling and referrals at federally funded family-planning clinics. The administration has vetoed all bills containing language to repeal the so-called "gag rule," and Congress has sustained each veto.

-- Nuclear testing. President Bush signed Oct. 2 a bill providing for the first time a nuclear test ban. The act requires a nine-month moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons and a complete end to all nuclear testing in the United States in 1996.

The historic test ban provision was included in the Energy and Water Appropriations bill for fiscal 1993.

-- Postal rates. President Bush signed Oct. 6 a bill appropriating funds for the U.S. Postal Service. Most non-profit mailers will not have a rate-increase for fiscal year 1993, but their reprieve may be temporary.

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Gregory's resignation
described as final

By Jim Jones

DALLAS (ABP) -- Joel Gregory will not reconsider his resignation as pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, church officials announced Oct. 6.

Gregory, who abruptly resigned as pastor after a leadership dispute with Senior Pastor W. A. Criswell, met with church leaders Oct. 6 and said his decision was final, according to a statement from the church.

"Dr. Gregory indicated that he considered his statement made to the church on Wednesday night, Sept. 30, to be firm," the statement said. "He did not ask that his resignation be reconsidered, nor did the deacon leadership ask Dr. Gregory to reconsider or return as pastor."

Deacon chairman Bo Sexton and vice chairman David Wicker met yesterday with Gregory and his wife, Linda, for the first time since Gregory's resignation, the statement released by church spokesman Ron Harris said.

"In the meeting, Mr. Sexton and Mr. Wicker expressed love for Dr. and Mrs. Gregory and their family, as did the Gregorys for the church family," the statement said. "The parties considered the meeting to be one of closure."

Gregory's resignation stunned the church, and 25 deacon leaders

initially rejected Gregory's resignation, leading to speculation that he might reconsider and return as pastor.

The speculation was reinforced Sunday when Criswell indicated he planned to curtail his preaching duties and devote full time to his role as chancellor of the church-sponsored Criswell College.

Gregory said in his resignation that he had high regard for Criswell, but that the 82-year-old senior pastor had been reluctant to give up leadership of the 29,000-member congregation, creating "intolerable" confusion over who was leading the church.

Neither Gregory nor the deacon leaders could be reached for comment Oct. 6.

Harris said the church will now begin the search process for a new pastor. The decision by Criswell to curtail his preaching duties apparently will stand, Harris said.

"Dr. Criswell will preach at his 48th anniversary service next Sunday (Oct. 11), but the church has scheduled other guest preachers through the rest of October," Harris said.

Criswell indicated he would move his office to Criswell College, a preacher-training institution. But he said he would be open to preaching if the church leadership requested it.

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-- Jim Jones is religion writer for the Fort-Worth Star-Telegram. This story is reprinted with permission.

Criswell offers to curtail preaching
but Gregory reportedly won't return

By Toby Druin and Greg Warner

DALLAS (ABP) -- Four days after one of its two pastors resigned, First Baptist Church of Dallas learned the other -- legendary pulpiter W. A. Criswell -- will curtail his pastoral responsibilities and become "just another member" of the church, Southern Baptists' largest.

Criswell, pastor of the 29,000-member congregation for 48 years, told the congregation Sunday, Oct. 4, he will begin devoting his time to his role as chancellor of the church-owned Criswell College. Whether or not the venerable preacher continues to fill the church's pulpit and bear the title of senior pastor will be left for church leaders to decide, he said.

The church's other pastor, Joel Gregory, who has shared Southern Baptists' most prominent pulpit with Criswell since January 1991, resigned abruptly Sept. 30 because of Criswell's reluctance to leave the pulpit after an agreed-to transition of "a very few months."

But Criswell's apparent change of heart is not expected to coax Gregory back.

A statement released by church leaders after an Oct. 6 meeting with Gregory said the resigned pastor considered his Sept. 30 resignation "to be firm."

"He did not ask that his resignation be reconsidered, nor did the deacon leadership ask Dr. Gregory to reconsider or return as pastor," the statement said. "The parties considered the (Oct. 6) meeting to be one of closure."

Earlier 25 church leaders, including deacon leaders and committee chairmen, voted unanimously Oct. 1 not to accept Gregory's resignation and to seek a meeting with the 44-year-old preacher.

Criswell's appearance before the congregation Oct. 4 left much ambiguity surrounding the future of First Baptist's pulpit. Rumors that Criswell resigned during the Sunday worship service were erroneous, deacon chairman Bo Sexton said later.

Criswell, 82, told the Dallas congregation Oct. 4 his new role at Criswell College is an "answered prayer for me." It apparently signals that Criswell has abandoned his desire -- reportedly shared with church leaders in recent days -- to remain in the pulpit of First Baptist until his 50th anniversary two years from now.

A subdued congregation packed the two Sunday morning worship services, which were supposed to commemorate his 48 years at First Baptist. The ceremonies were postponed for a week.

In a brief appearance at the close of both services, Criswell read from the book of Revelation, noting the author, the apostle John, wrote the book from the island of Patmos, where he had been exiled to die of loneliness.

Criswell noted that newly elected Criswell College president Richard Melick would be in place Jan. 1, and said he planned to be "at his side." "With you," he told the congregation, "I will be a fellow member of this great church."

"We need to be one in the faith and one in the Lord, never divided," he said.

Criswell told reporters after the service that he will preach during the Oct. 11 observance of his anniversary, but after that will be subject to the church leadership as to preaching responsibilities.

According to a First Baptist staff member who recently resigned, Criswell had been approached about using the Oct. 4 service to make a dramatic announcement that he would step aside and let Gregory seize the reins of leadership.

The former staff member said First Baptist is laboring under "an incredible financial strain" because of its indebtedness, and that financial concerns undoubtedly played a part in Gregory's surprise resignation.

"There is more here than meets the eye," the minister said. Morale among the ministerial staff has been "fairly intense and unsettling" for several months, the former staffer said. Gregory's unrealistic expectations of himself, the staff and the church had led to his frustration when substantial growth did not occur, the minister added.

Church Administrator Tim Hedquist, whom Gregory hired about a year ago, denied rumors the church's indebtedness was found to be worse than previously known. "Everything has been above the table," he said.

Gregory alluded to the church's financial struggles in an interview with the Standard.

Ambiguity over who was leading the church had prevented the congregation from facing up to its financial challenges, Gregory told the Standard Oct. 1. The purchase of a downtown office building and a new facility for Criswell College have put financial pressure on the church, he said.

"I need to be able to challenge the congregation...to growth," he told the Standard. "But I could tell there was ambiguity and tentativeness in the situation that just created a kind of malaise. And there was just no way to sustain that for two more years."

Church spokesman Ron Harris confirmed that the church's debt payments are affecting other parts of the budget. "I could see where that could be a concern" to Gregory, he said. But he said the debt service is "manageable."

"There is an indebtedness (and) there is a concern for having to deal with it," said Harris. "Something like that always puts a crunch on church programming."

Harris confirmed that the church's financial situation has come into

clearer focus since administrator Hedquist joined the staff, but he added: "There was not an overwhelming revelation that took people by surprise." Harris estimated the debt at \$8 million.

Gregory told the Standard his decision to resign had been "crystallizing" in his mind during the week before he offered it. But he added he had been discussing the situation with church leaders for several weeks and was getting "mixed signals."

Two church leaders told the Standard Oct. 4, however, that Gregory had been assured in discussions before his resignation that Criswell would quit preaching and move on to the college. They said they could not understand Gregory's action.

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-- This story includes information from Ken Camp of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Westminster Abbey hosts celebration
of missionary bicentennial

By Robert Dilday

LONDON (ABP) -- Amid the gothic splendors of Westminster Abbey, Baptists from around the world gathered Oct. 2 to celebrate 200 years of the modern missionary movement, begun with the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society of Great Britain on that day in 1792.

The hour-long "service of thanksgiving" featured readings by BMS administrators and missionaries, a sermon by Jamaican Baptist Horace Russell, music by a choir of Thai Baptists and a parade of national flags through the abbey's nave.

The Baptist Missionary Society was founded by 12 ministers, a deacon and a ministerial student in the back parlor of a devout Baptist laywoman in Kettering, England.

Primary catalyst in the effort was William Carey, a young Baptist pastor who became the society's first missionary, serving in India until his death in 1834.

Today the society, which is supported by the Baptist unions of Great Britain, Scotland and Wales, funds nearly 200 mission workers in 16 countries.

Russell, a professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, praised the BMS for its past contributions -- including a successful campaign to end slavery in the British Empire -- which he said show those around the world to whom it has ministered that they "are accepted as brothers and sisters" by the society.

"We today as free people salute the foundation of the BMS," said Russell, himself the descendant of slaves.

The irony of a Baptist service in the cathedral of a national church which once persecuted and even executed Baptists was not lost on the hundreds who attended.

But the steady growth of Baptist adherents in the United Kingdom is felt even in this bastion of Anglicanism. One of the abbey's stained glass windows memorializes John Bunyan, the 17th century author of "The Pilgrim's Progress," imprisoned for preaching Baptist doctrines. The window was installed early in this century.

Another prominent fixture in the abbey is a lectern of carved English

oak presented by the BMS in 1949 in memory of Carey.

"Every time the word of God is read in this abbey, it is read from this lectern," Michael Mayne, the church's dean, told participants.

Russell reminded the congregation that, as with the older brother in the biblical story of the prodigal son, it is easy for Christians to forget that God's forgiveness is open to everyone.

"God's table of fellowship to which all humankind is invited is also the table of forgiveness," he said. "It is not only God forgiving us but us forgiving each other...."

"It is a celebration of ourselves as sons and daughters of God."

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CORRECTION: In the Oct. 1 ABP story "FMB apology may have been key...", a deleted paragraph created a problem with attribution of the quotes that followed. Please substitute the 14th and 15th paragraphs with the following:

Reg Harvey, general secretary of Great Britain's Baptist Missionary Society, also expressed doubt that the Hamburg Agreement gets to the "root of the problem."

But "the masterly presentation (by Barber) does bring out very clearly the fact that there was genuine confession, repentance and forgiveness. That doesn't come across in the paper."

The council later agreed to Harvey's suggestion that Barber's introduction be included when the agreement is distributed to council members.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the only scheduled issue of ABP for this week. Other stories will be sent as necessary.

***** END *****