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Discrimination of rich vs. poor
is world's worst problem, Carter says

By Greg Warner

DeLAND, Fla. (ABP) -- The greatest challenge facing the modern world is discrimination based not on race or religion but poverty, said former President Jimmy Carter.

"The most serious example of discrimination is among rich people against poor people," Carter told an audience at Stetson University in DeLand, Fla., Oct. 26. "This is the greatest challenge of the future."

Carter said he has seen firsthand the effects of racial discrimination, which became "a blight on my own life" growing up in the South. And he has seen the price of religious discrimination, such as when he spent "26 days and nights" two years ago trying to negotiate an end to a religious-based civil war in Sudan.

But economic discrimination -- rich vs. poor -- is "the most insidious form of discrimination" and "the most troubling ethical problem" faced today, he said.

Carter defined the rich as people who have a home and at least a chance of getting medical care, an education, a good job, and a better life for their children, who live in a safe community and feel the justice system is on their side and that their decisions can make a difference, at least in their own lives.

Carter told his audience of 5,300 that most of them would be considered rich by his definition.

"But there are many people in this world who don't have any of those things," the Southern Baptist layman said. "They are the poor. And they are our neighbors."

"How we share with them is the challenge of Christian ethics in a secular world," said Carter.

That challenge was the topic of Carter's speech, which was sponsored by

Stetson's Institute for Christian Ethics as part of the James Stewart Lecture Series. The audience for the free speech filled the college's 5,000-seat arena and spilled over into an overflow room.

Voted out of the presidency in 1980, Carter said he now spends most of his time working to "alleviate suffering in the Third World" through the Carter Center at Emory University in Atlanta. The center works in conflict resolution, democratic reform and economic development in many nations, including 23 countries of Africa.

He also is known for his volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity and the Atlanta Project, which is exploring community-based solutions to problems in that city's poorest neighborhoods.

"He personifies the best of our Christian heritage and action," said Dixon Sutherland, director of the ethics institute at the Baptist-affiliated college, in introducing Carter.

Too often, Carter said in his speech, Christians isolate themselves from real people with real problems.

"How many of us really know a poor family as defined by me earlier? How many of us know one well enough to visit their home?"

Too many "self-congratulatory" Christians "live in a carefully structured, self-enclosed environment," he said. "We really deal with people just like us.... We profess to be Christian and practice Christian ethics in our lives (but) we rarely reach out to those who are different from us."

Christian ethics, Carter said, is simply living out the teachings of Jesus. "Christian ethics means we share what we learn from Christ in a way that is meaningful to others."

"The simplicity of it is very troubling," Carter conceded. While Christians might rather entrust Christian ethics to the world of theologians and academicians, "it falls on us individually."

"What does my life mean to anyone else?" he asked. "How much do I share my life with those in need? How much do I reach out beyond the boundaries of my church or my home or my safe community...?"

Carter said any definition of Christian ethics that does not include service to others is inadequate. "I don't know how to meld the preaching of God's Word to a life without an action component."

While many people seek personal greatness by acquiring money, possessions and fame, Carter said, "(the Apostle) Paul said the important things in life are the ones you cannot see...justice, peace, truth, service, compassion, love.

"Those are the measurements of a Christian life. That is what Christian ethics means."

But applying the teachings of Jesus does not mean sacrificing happiness, Carter added. "It opens up to us a way to expand our lives, to stretch our minds, to stretch our hearts and know more about God's world and know more about other people."

In an earlier question-and-answer session with about 600 Stetson students, Carter told them that young people can change the direction of their government by applying "a little of their superior savvy" to the political mix. He credited young people with leading the civil-rights movement, sparking the environmental cause and ending the Vietnam War.

On other topics:

-- Refugees. Carter said American attitudes toward refugees amount to racism. While Americans are open to immigrants from Europe, who are white, Haitians and other black-skinned refugees are unwelcome, he said. In the case of Haitians, "they are sent back primarily because they are black. I don't think that's right. Our country can absorb them."

-- Environment. During the 12 years the Republicans have controlled the White House, environmental issues have "taken a backseat," Carter said. America has already cut down 90 percent of its trees, he said, and the government is selling off the national forests "for less than it cost to build the roads to carry your and my lumber out."

-- War. "We are a warlike nation. The prime means by which a president can become popular is what? Go to war. In the last 10 years, there have been practically no wars between nations except those wars in which we've been involved." He criticized American military action in Lybia, Panama, Grenada, Nicaragua and Kuwait, as well as American complicity in Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

-- Homosexual rights. Carter said he is against discrimination based on sexual orientation. "I don't question the fact the Bible deplores homosexuality. It also deplores adultery." Since homosexuality is not mentioned in the Ten Commandments and adultery is, people who discriminate against gays but condone adultery are "on shaky theological ground."

-- Abortion. "I've never been able to accept the idea that Jesus would condone abortion," he said. Nevertheless, he supports constitutional protections for the right to choose an abortion, he said, rather than imposing his religious views on others. "I would do everything I could to reduce the need for abortion" through education and persuasion, he added.

-- School choice. Carter said he is opposed to using vouchers or other government funds to pay for private education. "This is a time when we should be strengthening public schools," he said.

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Religious Right may divide
Republican Party, Carter says

By Greg Warner

DeLand, Fla. (ABP) -- The influence of the Religious Right may be waning, but the movement may still be strong enough to split the Republican Party, said former President Jimmy Carter.

"The Religious Right probably has peaked and is going down, but they will capture at least half of the Republican Party," Carter told a group of students Oct. 26.

During a question-and-answer session at Stetson University in DeLand, Fla., Carter said Americans have grown skeptical of the Religious Right's "merging of religion and the state." While the movement's influence on American culture may be weakening, he said, its role in the Republican Party is growing.

"In the last eight or 10 years, there's been an increasing merger between the conservative element of the Republican Party and the conservative Religious Right," the Democrat said.

Carter's comments came in response to a reporter's question about the Christian Coalition, a conservative political organization led by televangelist Pat Robertson, a former Republican presidential candidate. The grass-roots organization is supporting many Republican candidates this year and has predicted it will soon control a working majority of the party.

"I would predict in the next few years within the Republican Party itself, particularly if (Democrat) Bill Clinton is elected president...that there is going to be a schism in the Republican Party between the moderate Republicans, who've had that political philosophy all their lives, on the one

hand, and arch conservatives or radical-right Republicans, dominated by the religious groups, who played such a great role in the Republican Convention this year," he said.

"It might be a very difficult thing for the Republicans to overcome in the future, to deal with a party divided between moderate Republicans on the one hand and the Religious Right and arch conservatives on the other," he told students at the Baptist-affiliated college.

Carter, a Southern Baptist, said the Religious Right was "a small group" in 1976 when he was running for president. "By 1980 the Religious Right had grown to be a powerful force in the country." The movement is credited with contributing to Ronald Reagan's win over Carter in 1980, when Carter lost his re-election bid.

Carter said the influence of the Religious Right presents problems not only in politics but in churches as well. The merger of conservative politics and religion, he said, has influenced his own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, which "almost invariably invites Reagan or Bush or Quayle" to speak to its annual meetings.

Carter, a member of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., described himself as "a very loyal Baptist" who still teaches Sunday school.

"I think we are a moderate church, but we don't want to withdraw from the Southern Baptist Convention," he said. "We are now trying to explore ways that we can participate in building homes and alleviating the suffering of the poor, which is condemned by many people in the Southern Baptist Convention as secular humanism, whatever that means."

"I think all of us are faced with a quandary, not only in politics."

Carter discounted rumors, reported by Newsweek magazine, that he would be offered the job of Secretary of State if Clinton is elected president. "I would not be willing to take a full-time job in Washington," he said in response to a student's question.

He said he would be willing to work with Clinton on an ad hoc basis to resolve problems in the Middle East, the former Soviet Union and elsewhere. "I would certainly take on that task," said Carter, who acknowledged earlier that he talks with Clinton frequently.

Carter currently works in Third World countries promoting international development, conflict resolution and democratic reform through the Carter Center at Emory University in Atlanta. He said the work of the center would be "much more effective" with Clinton in the White House.

Partly because of his work through the Carter Center and Habitat for Humanity, Carter enjoys more popularity now than when he left office. He said he is "gratified" to know he has a higher public approval rating than any other former president, including Reagan.

George Bush's re-election bid has been hurt by his "almost total negative campaigning," Carter said eight days before the election. "His running a negative campaign has not been attractive to the American people."

During arduous campaigns like his against Reagan in 1980, Carter said he could draw encouragement from "a belief I've done the best I can."

"I've never deplored the long campaign," he said. Not only does it give Americans a chance to see the candidates tested, he said, it forces the candidates "to learn more about Americans."

Pastors commend faith
of Bill Clinton, Al Gore

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Longtime Baptist pastors of Democratic candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore released a statement Oct. 29 decrying political attacks on the faith of these men as "unfounded and reprehensible."

They were joined by more than 40 people from 20 religious bodies who denounced abuse of religion in the campaign.

Jack Turner, pastor emeritus of Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Arlington, Va., and Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, offered personal insights into the faith of the presidential and vice presidential candidates at a press conference at First Baptist Church in Washington.

"Our experience with Bill Clinton and Al Gore over the years in worship, prayer, in public and private conversations confirms our pastoral convictions that these are men whose heads and hearts have been baptized by divine grace and mercy.... We believe their walk with God to be genuine and sincere.

"In a day when candidates are quick to use religion for political purposes, it is refreshing to observe those whose faith is authentic."

The pastors' statement, as well as one issued by other religious leaders, was responding to several attempts to paint the Clinton-Gore ticket as ungodly. Religious leaders speaking at the news conference distributed three such examples.

First, a brochure produced by Operation Rescue asserts "to vote for Bill Clinton is to sin against God." Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, wrote in an Oct. 12 letter that "Clinton has a deceptive veneer of Christianity" and called Clinton's reference to a "new covenant" a "pact with hell."

Second, a Christian Coalition letter and voter guide was distributed in 100,000 churches, suggesting specific biblical positions on public policy issues such as the economy.

Third, a Bush-Quayle campaign letter addressed to Catholics encouraged leaders to use their diocesan papers to support the Republican re-election bid. The letter also misrepresented a number of Clinton's positions, critics said. The letter asserted that Clinton would favor taxes levied on churches and a federal law that would compel Catholic hospitals to perform abortions. Clinton opposes both.

The religious leaders' statement expressed "outrage over the recent religiously based attacks on these candidates."

The mass mailings reflect "a spiritual arrogance and political extremism that has no place in our public discourse," the statement said. "Our nation is not a theocracy; nor do we boast a favored relationship with God. We have no Religion Czar or Grand Inquisitor. Ours is a place of liberty and justice for all -- where all faiths are welcomed, but none preferred."

The statement added that no individual should be identified as God's candidate.

"No candidate should be judged unfit for public office based upon religion. Personal piety and political competence are not the same. But, the charges against Gov. Clinton and Sen. Gore are the more outlandish because each is a person of faith.

"We call for an end to hate mongering and religious bigotry."

Eileen Lindner, associate for ecumenical relations for the National Council of Churches, said the NCC participated in the press conference not to defend Clinton, Gore or God but because "we are embarrassed" by the misuse of

religion in the campaign.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee and a statement co-signer, expressed concern about a "theocratic tendency" in the mailings that would invoke the name of God to further a political agenda.

Another letter signer, Al Gallmon, pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Washington, likened the recent tactics of "the God campaign" to those of the "Willie Horton campaign" in 1988 that fed into racial bigotry.

A reporter asked members of the panel why they were not concerned that Jesse Jackson referred to President George Bush as Herod or that Gov. Clinton made a biblical reference to the "new covenant."

Dunn responded that there was a difference between one person saying something and the mass distribution of millions of voter guides. Dunn said that he did not defend "all of the rhetoric on either side."

He added that the Operation Rescue assertion that a vote for Clinton is a sin against God "smells a lot like the Massachusetts Bay Colony where every sin was a crime."

Lindner said she thought that there was also a "normative" difference. She said that the mass mailings seemed to purport a normative Christian definition that excludes many Americans, making them second-class participants in democracy.

David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, said that Clinton's covenant language was an attempt to include all Americans.

Answering another question, Oliver Thomas, BJC general counsel, said that someone needs to respond to the misstatements of fact in the Bush-Quayle letter.

"I am offended and appalled that the president's re-election campaign would send out this kind of misleading information."

Religious leaders have been expressing concern about the misuse of religion in the campaign since August. In August, at least three separate statements were issued that called on both parties to refrain from using religion as a political weapon.

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-- By Pam Parry and Larry Chesser

Political alliances foreshadow 'eclipse'
of evangelical movement, Colson warns

By Daniel Cattau

DALLAS (ABP) -- Charles Colson, once the consummate White House insider and now a born-again Christian, looks at politics and the evangelical movement from the outside.

Evangelicals, who enjoyed a resurgence in the mid-1970s and 1980s, have lost influence by becoming identified too closely with a particular political group or agenda, he said. He described the situation as a tragedy.

"We've won the political battles but lost the cultural war," the former adviser to President Richard Nixon said in a Dallas interview recently. Colson was in Dallas to speak at Criswell College and Dallas Theological Seminary.

Referring to the distinct possibility that George Bush may lose to Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton in the Nov. 3 presidential election, Colson said,

"Ultimately, we're going to lose the political battle."

Colson even talks about the "coming eclipse of evangelicals" if they don't start getting their churches in order.

"If this were a business," he said, "you'd be contemplating Chapter 11," referring to bankruptcy.

A stolid Southern Baptist and evangelical, Colson has a reputation as an iconoclast in the ranks of the born-again. He is faithful to the cause yet critical of some of its tendencies toward scandal, internal bickering and self-righteousness.

With the election of Jimmy Carter as president, 1976 was declared the "year of the evangelical." Since then, the public's opinion of born-again Christians has dropped dramatically. Colson cited a Gallup Poll last year that showed 50 percent of those surveyed feared fundamentalists more than any other group in society.

In addition, he said, polls show that belief in the Bible as being literally true also has declined in the last 30 years.

"These are indications that we live in a post-Christian age," he said.

Colson, who spent seven months in prison for Watergate-related offenses, is the founder and chairman of the Washington-based Prison Fellowship. He was in Dallas to attend a fund-raiser for the international fellowship, which helps inmates get their lives in order and closer to Jesus.

Colson also gave the keynote address at a Dallas Theological Seminary pastors' conference and was promoting a new book titled *The Body* published by Word.

When asked whether he likens himself to any biblical figure, Colson mentioned several, including Jonah, God's sometime reluctant prophet.

"There are many times when I feel like I'm called to be a prophet, but I'd rather see the culture stew in its own juice," he said.

Colson, 61, reflected on where he was 20 years ago this month. He said he was thinking of ways -- quite literally -- to keep Nixon in the White House.

Now Colson's attention is focused on the problems the church creates for itself when it strays onto the secular path.

Many evangelical churches have bought into the church-growth movement but have diluted their product to appeal to Baby Boomers, he said. In the process, church growth was put ahead of spiritual growth with disastrous consequences.

"Do not let technique compromise truth," Colson said.

Colson, who once reportedly said he would walk over his grandmother to get Nixon re-elected, now talks tough to the church.

Invoking Martin Luther's Latin phrase *coram deo* -- the sense of fear and awe in the presence of God -- Colson said, "We need to recapture in the church a sense of awe and reverence, and the sense of the living God who is in our midst."

He added, "The trivializing of God is profanity."

The role of the church is not to win political battles or even make people happy, he said. "It's to make people holy."

For evangelicals, Colson wants them "to transfer their hope from the ballot box to the communion table."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a three-part series on pornography.

Videos, social changes make
pornography more prominent

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Donald Wildmon set a date to highlight the evils of pornography, and Madonna showed up a week early -- nude.

Just one week before the "Pornography Awareness Week" promoted by Wildmon's American Family Association, pop culture icon Madonna released her new book of sexually explicit photos, titled simply "Sex."

The book hit stores Oct. 21, generating fresh fodder for TV news shows and drawing blushes in people-on-the-street interviews.

Wildmon's Pornography Awareness Week was set to begin Oct. 26, and the release of Madonna's book became Exhibit A for impassioned sermons against pornography.

James Dobson used his Oct. 27 "Focus on the Family" radio broadcast to call for a boycott of Time Warner Inc., publisher of the book, and other companies involved in its production.

Madonna's exploits may be just the latest illustration for sermons against pornography. But they also highlight the concerns of an odd coalition of Americans that insist the fight against pornography isn't just about getting Playboy off the shelves of convenience stores anymore.

Changes in societal mores and the advent of new technology have combined to make pornography a more serious problem than ever before, according to some Christian activists, women's groups and law enforcement officers.

Sexually explicit materials depicting everything from the common to the absurd now are available in magazines, on videos, in books and through a variety of other forms.

This has led pornography's opponents to look beyond convenience stores and shops in the red-light district to neighborhood video stores and shopping-mall bookstores.

The photos of Madonna's nude stroll down a busy street and other more unusual exploits aren't stashed behind the counter at the Dairy Mart. They are for sale at national bookstore chains on Main Streets and in malls.

Fighting these large institutions presents a new challenge to Wildmon, Dobson and others like them.

Dobson's boycott of Time Warner and R.R. Donnelly & Sons Co., printers of the Madonna book, hits a major nerve in American business. Time Warner is one of the nation's largest media conglomerates, and Donnelly is the world's largest printing company, whose customers include the Southern Baptist Convention.

Wildmon currently is engaged in a boycott of the Kmart Corp., and already has run into obstacles with some major daily newspapers who don't want to run his paid anti-Kmart advertisements.

A news release from Wildmon's organization claimed 13 daily newspapers refused to run his ad calling on Kmart to stop selling pornography in their Waldenbooks stores.

"The newspapers banned the ad because they did not want to offend Kmart, one of their better customers," Wildmon charged. "They made an editorial decision to ban the ad based on economic considerations."

That's not the case, replied Stephen Bernard, vice president and

advertising director for the Louisville Courier-Journal, one of the 13 papers cited by Wildmon.

"We have not elected not to run it," he said. "We're surveying various newspapers across the country to see who's accepting it and who's not, in addition to reviewing our own standards of acceptance."

A decision about the ad was to be made the week of Oct. 26, he explained. The delay is due to the paper's need to verify claims made in the ad, he said. While Kmart is a good advertiser, he said, the decision about the AFA's ad will not be influenced by that.

Other newspapers cited by Wildmon include the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Chattanooga Times-Free Press, Memphis Commercial Appeal, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Cincinnati Enquirer, Indianapolis Star, Springfield News, Baton Rouge Advocate, Dallas Morning News, Phoenix Republic, Tucson Star and Detroit Free Press and News.

Ads such as the one under scrutiny are an important part of the anti-pornography arsenal. They form one element in a broad effort to inform the public.

"There is not a significant awareness of what pornography is and how available it is," noted Kent Ostrander, executive director of the Family Foundation, a Kentucky organization associated with Focus on the Family. "The problem is that so many Christians evaluate the problem on the basis of their experience with it. And since most of them have no experience with it, they don't think it's a problem.

"The normal Christian thinks that pornography, when we use the word, might be Playboy magazine, which might be characterized as airbrushed nudity," Ostrander said. But the bulk of pornography materials, he added, are much more raw and graphic than Playboy.

That also was the conclusion of the 1986 report of the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, an 11-member panel appointed by then-Attorney General Edwin Meese.

Among the two thick volumes of the commission's final report are claims that sexually explicit materials that do not degrade women or promote sexual violence are "quite small in terms of currently available materials."

In other words, they said, the copies of Playboy and Penthouse most commonly recognized by the average citizen are merely the tip of a much larger iceberg.

The advent of local video stores also has contributed to the influence pornography has on society, according to some critics. They see a direct connection between the rise of neighborhood video stores and the increasing incidence of rape in America.

Others downplay the relationship of pornography to crime.

"I'm not aware of any studies that show so-called soft porn, erotica, has had any direct effect on crime," said criminologist Pat Anderson, a Southern Baptist.

Anderson added, however, that soft porn might contribute to a cultural climate that encourages sex crimes by dehumanizing women and treating them as objects. He said such an influence might contribute to date rape, for instance, but likely has little to do with "the street-crime variety of rape," which is more violent than sexual.

"You can't rank all porn together," advised Anderson, who is head of the criminology department at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. "Child porno, sado-masochistic porn, bestiality -- it's hard for me to see how constant viewing of that subject matter can have anything other than a bad influence on a person's behavior."

But proving a cause-and-effect relationship between pornography and

crime is difficult, Anderson continued. "The problem with all that research is you can find some porno in the backgrounds of some sex offenders, but you can also find coffee."

One researcher who believes at least a link exists between the images people see repeatedly and their world views is Sut Jhally, a communications professor at the University of Massachusetts.

Jhally recently produced a video titled "Dream Worlds" which explores the influence of the MTV cable channel on attitudes toward women. Jhally views neither MTV nor pornography as a moral issue, but nonetheless sees a danger in their images.

"Images tell us a particular story about the way the world works," he said. "It's a story told not just once, but time and time again in most of our media."

"The question I would want to ask...is: 'What is the story that pornography tells us? What does it tell us about the world? And if you're exposed to that story over a long period of time, what kind of attitudes would this generate?'"

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Carnegie study shows parents oppose school 'choice' plans

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Most parents of public school students oppose school "choice" plans that would provide tax-funded vouchers to send children to the public, private or religious schools of their choice, according to a new study.

The survey, conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, found that fewer than 2 percent of parents choose to participate in school choice programs in the states that offer them.

The study showed that 70 percent of public school parents would not send their children to a different school -- public or private, either inside or outside their current district.

Of the parents surveyed, 62 percent opposed financial vouchers to enroll children in the public, private or religious schools of their choice.

School choice proposals have been the centerpiece of the Bush administration's education-reform package and a key element in President Bush's re-election effort. Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton favors allowing school choice within the public school system but opposes tax support for private and religious schools.

The Carnegie report acknowledged that the idea of having choices is generally appealing to Americans and that past opinion polls had reflected support for the notion that parents should be able to choose the schools their children attend. Those polls, the report says, did not reflect the trade-offs involved.

When the Wirthlin Group, the polling firm used for the Carnegie study, asked a general audience (not just parents) what is the best way to improve public education, 82 percent favored giving every school the resources needed to achieve excellence. Meanwhile, 15 percent would encourage competition through choice, leaving quality schools strengthened and weak schools facing the option of improving or closing.

Carnegie researchers studied the effects of school choice as it has been implemented in 13 states and scores of individual districts, concluding that

choice alone "will not result in widespread school improvement."

Participation in choice programs in states that offer them ranges from a high of 1.8 percent of the school population in Minnesota to a low of 0.1 percent in Massachusetts.

To date, only a districtwide choice program in Milwaukee allows parents to choose among public and private (but not religious) schools. During the most recently completed school year, only 632 students (0.65 percent) left public schools for private schools.

"Whatever else may be said of it, Milwaukee's plan has failed to demonstrate that vouchers can, in and of themselves, spark school improvement," the Carnegie report states. "A small number of students have been enabled to leave the city's public schools, and they feel pleased with the decision they have made.

"But no evidence can be found that participating students made significant academic advances or that either the public or private schools have been revitalized by the transfers."

The Carnegie study did not address constitutional questions arising from the channeling of public funds to religious schools, other than to acknowledge that many opponents of choice plans raise First Amendment objections. Instead, the study focused on what Americans as a whole and parents of public school children think of various choice programs and how they have worked.

The Carnegie study's findings regarding public support for school choice differ sharply from the results of a recently released Gallup Poll conducted for the National Catholic Education Association. That poll found that 70 percent of the 1,239 adults surveyed supported a voucher plan and that nearly 61 percent would be willing to shift tax money from public schools to the "choice" programs.

The Carnegie results are more in line with actual voter response to proposals to provide tax support for private and religious schools. Since 1966, voters in 18 states have considered various private and parochial school aid proposals and rejected all but one.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Gregory rules out taking
pastorate in Wichita Falls

By Daniel Cattau

WICHITA FALLS, Texas (ABP) -- Whatever Joel Gregory's future may be, it will not take place at First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls, Texas, Gregory said Oct. 25.

"I do not see myself as a candidate for this church," Gregory said after services Sunday at the church. Gregory abruptly resigned from the 28,000-member First Baptist Church in downtown Dallas Sept. 30.

Gregory said he has no immediate plans to become pastor of another church. His three-week preaching engagement at the 8,000-member Wichita Falls church spurred reports that he was a candidate to succeed Morris Chapman as pastor. Chapman left to become chief executive of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee this summer.

Gregory will conclude his three-week commitment in Wichita Falls Nov. 1.

"It's a great church with a wonderful heritage," said the 44-year-old

Southern Baptist minister. "But they are far into the process of seeking a pastor. The fact that I am a guest here has nothing to do with the process."

Harold Warren, chairman of the pastor search committee, said Oct. 22 that Gregory was "high on the list" of candidates for the job.

In a brief interview after the Oct. 25 service, Gregory declined to comment about the reasons for his resignation from First Baptist in Dallas, a position he had held for only 21 months. It seemed a foregone conclusion Sunday that he would not return to the Dallas church, Southern Baptists' largest.

"First Baptist has our prayers and best wishes as they seek their future pastor" was all he said about his former church.

Gregory was chosen to succeed W. A. Criswell, a renowned Southern Baptist leader, at the Dallas church two years ago. Criswell stayed on as senior pastor and chancellor of Criswell College.

Tensions intensified between the two pastors after Criswell recently hinted strongly that he had a desire to stay at the church for an additional two years, until his 50th anniversary as pastor.

Gregory's resignation has upset some members of First Baptist. But, he said in the interview, many members have also been "kind, supportive and encouraging."

Gregory said he plans to do more guest preaching across the country and will lecture next week at Trinity Evangelical Seminary in Deerfield, Ill. He also is working on a New Testament commentary for Broadman Press.

He heads the search committee charged with finding a new president for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

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-- Dan Cattau is religion editor of the Dallas Morning News. This story is reprinted with permission.

159 Sunday School Board workers
take advantage of early retirement

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- More than 150 employees have chosen to take early retirement at the Baptist Sunday School Board, the latest phase of a campaign to weed out a top-heavy bureaucracy, officers said.

A total of 159 out of 191 eligible employees, age 52 or older, agreed to early retirement rather than live with the uncertainty about whether some of their jobs would be phased out in the board's massive restructuring.

"There's some sadness, some gladness," Bob Churchwell, 58, an audiovisual production specialist and one of the new retirees, said Oct. 27.

"This is taking place mostly for downsizing reasons. But there's always a lot of anxiety about reorganizations. I've seen more concern and anxiety around this one than the others, and I've seen quite a few," said Churchwell, who has been a board employee 33 years.

Arriving on the job last year, new board president Jimmy Draper determined the enormous Sunday school publisher was in need of a managerial trim-down, having grown inflexible and too slow to adjust to changing market needs, he said.

"As Christians we should strive for excellence, and that means making

hard choices," Draper said earlier in October.

"Being Christian doesn't mean doing sloppy work. The Lord requires us to use our best business abilities to do his work. We don't want to be surprised by the 21st century."

The reorganization, including the forced retirements of seven veteran executives last summer, has hurt morale among many employees, Draper said.

One employee, refusing to speak on the record, called it an "un-Christian" act to create such job upheaval. But Draper said the board exists not for employees but for church customers and the mandate of spreading the gospel.

"Massive change can be unnerving," said Draper, a former Texas pastor and a leader in the fundamental-conservative movement in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"But there's a question of stewardship; we have to decide the best use of money, and that means some positions are deleted."

The SBC-owned board is the world's largest producer and distributor of Sunday school literature and other religious supplies.

It employs 1,200 people locally and had revenues last year of \$196 million.

Draper said the retirees have been given generous financial terms. Incentives included monthly benefits for early retirement that were based on projected Social Security benefits at age 62-65.

And some of the 32 employees who declined the retirement offer already have found spots in the new structure.

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-- Ray Waddle is religion news editor for the Tennessean in Nashville. This story is reprinted with permission.

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