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IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Baptists elected to White House with little help from brethren
- * Voters protect abortion rights, differ on gay-rights measures
- * Court invalidates abortion 'gag rule'
- * Baptists attorneys optimistic after animal-sacrifice arguments
- * Pornography hurts women, families, critics say
- * Black preaches for first time in service at SBC 'mother church'
- * Richmond Seminary receives \$24,000 from Asheville church

Baptists elected to White House
with little help from brethren

By Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- For the first time ever, Americans elected two Southern Baptists to the White House, but they apparently did it without much help from Southern Baptists themselves.

In fact, the winning all-Baptist ticket of Bill Clinton and Al Gore may be more indebted to Roman Catholics than Baptists for its success, according to exit polls and researchers.

"The fact they were Southerners made more of a difference than the fact that they were Southern Baptists," said James Guth, who teaches political science at Furman University, a Baptist school in Greenville, S.C.

The all-South ticket of an Arkansas governor and a Tennessee senator cut into the Republican lock on Southern voters to win the election, analysts say. But most evangelicals -- and presumably most Southern Baptists -- stayed with the Republican ticket, according to exit polls.

Both Clinton and Gore are members and regular attenders of Southern Baptist churches, which make up the country's largest Protestant denomination. But the pair is out of line with their denomination's leaders on several key issues, particularly abortion and gay rights.

"Southern Baptists still are more supportive of Bush than other religious groups," said Guth. While exit polls are not as definitive as the scholarly research that will follow, Guth said, "I will predict that Southern Baptists and other conservative Protestants were George Bush's best demographic."

By contrast Roman Catholics, most of whom voted for Bush-Quayle in 1988, swung in major numbers to Clinton-Gore in 1992. According to a New York Times study, more than half voted for the Democrats.

Clinton apparently fared better among Southern Baptists than Michael

Dukakis did in 1988, when 80 percent of Baptist ministers voted for Bush, Guth said, but "that was a foregone conclusion."

Guth said Southern Baptists apparently voted for president for the same reasons as other Americans, most notably the economy, and without regard to denominational label. "I don't think (being Southern Baptist) made much difference in the vote," he said.

Nancy Ammerman, a Baptist who teaches sociology at Emory University in Atlanta, agreed. "Baptists voted on the basis of economic considerations, just like the rest of the country did," she said.

That political reality brought a harsh rebuke from Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land, who said Baptists and other evangelicals who voted for Clinton "sacrificed their values" for the benefit of their pocketbooks.

Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission, said the effect of that choice, though not necessarily the intent, will be a significant increase "in the number of unborn babies that will die" when Clinton relaxes the abortion restrictions imposed by Reagan and Bush.

Before the election, one Catholic official, sensing the shift in his denomination from Bush to Clinton, predicted concern for the economy might overshadow traditional Catholic loyalty to the anti-abortion candidate. A swing to Clinton would "mark the triumph of pocketbook over principle" and could provide the deciding margin in a close election, wrote Russell Shaw, director of public information for the Knights of Columbus, in Religious News Service in late October.

Others objected to the values-vs.-pocketbook characterization.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington, said Clinton voters "did not abandon their values" but abandoned the "superficial" definition of values supplied by the Religious Right in favor of a broader definition.

Even some who picked Clinton for economic reasons sought not personal gain, Dunn said, but an economic policy that demonstrates mercy for the less fortunate. "The application of justice and mercy to economic reality is a moral exercise, and not one to be minimized or slighted," said Dunn, whose agency monitors religious-liberty issues.

Church historian Martin Marty also refused to fault Christians for voting economic concerns. "All of us can be people of integrity and have different parts of our lives take priority at times," said Marty, a professor at the University of Chicago.

He said religious leaders often overestimate the number of adherents who are "utterly dedicated" to certain social issues. This year the issue of economic survival simply overshadowed social concerns, even for voters deeply committed to the conservative agenda, he said.

Land, one of Clinton's Baptist critics, suggested the Baptist roots and rhetoric of Clinton and Gore may have made them more attractive to Baptist voters. But a more significant factor, he said, was apathy toward Bush among evangelicals, who never considered the incumbent president a true conservative.

"George Bush never had the heart of evangelicals because they never felt they were in his heart," said Land, former administrative assistant to Texas Republican governor Bill Clements.

Land cited an exit poll by Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network that showed 58 percent of evangelicals voted for Bush this year, a drop from 75 percent in 1988.

Despite the erosion of support among evangelicals, Land said they remain "virtually the only large voting bloc that voted as high as 58 percent" for Bush.

But the fact Reagan and Bush did not achieve the major aims of the Christian right -- on school prayer, abortion and other issues -- produced disillusionment in the camp this year, Land said, and that hurt Bush. "There were a lot of people who were involved in previous campaigns who were just voters in this campaign," he said.

While those issues may now slip to the sidelines, they won't be abandoned by the Christian right, Land said. Instead, evangelicals "may be reinvigorated" in the near future if they are angered by Clinton's policies on sensitive issues like abortion.

A Southern Baptist ethicist with a different reading on the election and the Christian right is Robert Parham, director of the moderate Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn.

In electing Clinton, Parham said, "the nation rejected the divisive, narrow agenda of the Religious Right, with its shrill cry for cultural cleansing." In its place, he said, America embraced Clinton's "ethical vision of a 'New Covenant,' where all Americans are individually responsible and the government is obligated to provide not a handout but a hand up."

Parham predicted Clinton and Gore will pursue an ethical agenda that is "broader and deeper" than legislation against abortion and attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts, two frequent targets of the Christian right.

The much-touted issue of family values, tailored by Republicans to reach evangelicals and other conservative voters, may have backfired, said Ammerman of Emory.

Exit polls showed only 14 percent of voters cited family values as a factor that influenced their presidential pick.

Among three groups in particular -- single adults, single parents and working women -- half voted for Clinton, while a third voted for Bush, according to the New York Times.

"The definition of family values that was given by Republicans has been defeated by a fairly clear majority," Ammerman said. "It seems to me that Clinton's vision of what a family is simply rang truer to a majority of the American population."

Historian Marty agreed. "The fact is the votes weren't there for that definition of family. That's not a repudiation of the family. But the voters didn't find their own families described" by the Republican rhetoric.

Although the Religious Right, which was credited with drafting much of the Republican platform, undoubtedly will bear some of the blame for Bush's defeat, several observers said post-mortems on the movement would be premature.

Furman researcher James Guth said the influence of the Religious Right is not on the wane but growing, quietly. "It's less visible but stronger," he said.

The Moral Majority and Jerry Falwell, who carried the banner of the Religious Right in the 1980s, "never did get organized," Guth said. But through the grass-roots efforts of groups like Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, the Religious Right is developing local organizations and better strategies, he said.

"They are no more popular than they have ever been," Guth said, "but that doesn't keep them from being part of a revived Republican coalition down the road."

Voters protect abortion rights,
differ on gay-rights measures

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Voters in Arizona and Maryland acted Nov. 3 to protect access to abortions, but voters in Colorado and Oregon split over what protection -- if any -- to offer homosexuals.

Those ballot proposals were among 231 decided by voters Nov. 3, when the desire of voters for change spilled over from the presidential election to a near-record number of local ballot issues.

Across the country, voters faced ballot proposals in 42 states and the District of Columbia -- 69 initiated by citizens and another 162 by their legislators -- according to the Free Congress Foundation, a conservative, non-profit organization.

The biggest push was for term limits for legislators, which won approval in 14 states. Other measures addressed social and moral issues, including abortion, homosexuality, assisted suicide, gambling and the death penalty. Baptists were involved in many of the referendums.

On abortion, voters in Arizona apparently defeated an initiative that would have banned abortion except to save the mother's life. Incomplete returns indicated that the measure would be defeated by 69 percent of the vote.

Marylanders, who turned out in droves, overwhelmingly affirmed an initiative barring state interference with abortion decisions (61 percent to 39 percent). Maryland joins Connecticut, Nevada and Washington state where citizens previously voted to guarantee access to abortions.

Abortion-rights advocates said this step is necessary if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns the 1973 Roe vs. Wade ruling that legalizes abortion. Anti-abortion forces said the Maryland law goes far beyond codifying Roe.

Homosexuality was a hot issue in Colorado and Oregon, where initiatives were designed to eliminate the rights of homosexuals.

Colorado voters approved a measure that allows discrimination of homosexuals. Under the measure, which was endorsed by the executive board of Colorado Baptists in September, local anti-bias laws cannot protect citizens on the basis of sexual orientation. That overrides gay-rights ordinances in Denver, Aspen and Boulder.

After the 54-36 percent vote, more than 200 homosexual activists disrupted a Nov. 4 Democratic victory party in Denver.

But in Oregon, a state constitutional amendment to officially declare homosexuality as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse" was defeated.

In Florida, Tampa residents repealed their gay-rights law.

California rejected the chance to become the first state to allow doctor-assisted suicide. Voters apparently defeated the right-to-die proposal by 54 percent, although results were incomplete.

In September California Baptists, through their executive board, urged defeat of the measure, which critics said would create "death clinics."

Gambling initiatives were on several state and city ballots. Among the statewide initiatives:

-- In Missouri, riverboat gambling was approved 62 percent to 38 percent, while an off-track betting measure was tied at 50 percent with 91 percent of the precincts reporting. Baptists were vocal against both plans.

-- Idaho voters approved a ban on casino gambling, 58 percent to 42 percent.

-- In Utah, parimutuel betting at horse tracks was defeated by 60

percent.

-- A non-binding referendum to allow casino gambling in the U.S. Virgin Islands also went down in defeat, 62 percent to 38 percent.

-- Seventy-one percent of Kentucky voters approved a measure to allow charitable gambling, such as bingo. Oklahomans approved a similar measure with 62 percent.

-- A state lottery seemed headed for victory in Georgia with 52 percent of the vote. But the aggressive opposition of Baptists in the state contributed to one of the narrowest lottery victories yet.

-- Nebraskans approved a state lottery by 62 percent.

-- Mississippi narrowly approved a measure to repeal a ban on lotteries.

-- An effort to repeal South Dakota's video lottery was rejected by 63 percent of the voters.

The death penalty was an explosive issue in the nation's capital. The District of Columbia soundly rejected a provision making first-degree murder a capital offense. The initiative, mandated by Congress, was defeated by a 2-to-1 ratio.

Congress attached a measure to a spending bill for the district that required the death penalty vote. Sen. Richard Shelby, D-Ala., brought the measure to Congress after one of his aides was shot to death near Capitol Hill in January.

Shelby said he offered his proposal on behalf of those who have been murdered in the district in 1992 -- nearly 400. Shelby's original amendment would have made first-degree murder a capital offense in the district without allowing residents to vote on the issue. A compromise was adopted that required district voters to decide.

But that compromise did not satisfy district leaders and residents who expressed outrage over congressional interference. The sentiment that Congress should not dictate referenda to the district may have been a major factor in the proposal's defeat. Some religious leaders in the community also launched a strong campaign against the proposal.

The death penalty also was an issue in two states. Arizona voters decided to replace the gas chamber with lethal injection as a more humane method of execution. New Jersey voters overwhelmingly approved the death penalty for crimes where death was not intentional.

Colorado voters grappled with parental choice, a plan to provide parents with vouchers to send their children to public, private or religious schools. Sixty-seven percent of Colorado voters rejected state vouchers for school choice.

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Court invalidates
abortion 'gag rule'

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A federal appeals court in the District of Columbia ruled invalid the Bush administration's implementation of a ban on abortion counseling and referrals at federally funded family-planning clinics.

The unanimous decision, handed down on election day Nov. 3, was the latest in a string of legal battles that erupted after the Department of Health and Human Services initiated the ban under the Reagan administration in 1988.

The regulation stipulated that a "Title X project may not provide

counseling concerning the use of abortion as a method of family planning or provide referral for abortion as a method of family planning."

Opponents have labeled the ban a "gag rule" because they say it violates the First Amendment's free-speech clause and the doctor-patient relationship. Legal battles over the regulation resulted in a 1991 Supreme Court decision upholding the ban's constitutionality.

In November 1991, President George Bush apparently tried to squelch widespread criticism that the regulation violated medical ethics by issuing a memorandum on how it should be implemented. The memo stated that the regulation should not prevent a woman from receiving complete medical information about her condition from a physician. Other health-care professionals, however, were banned from abortion counseling.

The United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia did not rule on the validity of the ban but on the procedures used to implement it.

At issue was whether or not the administration followed the notice-and-comment provisions of federal law in adopting the new directives. The notice-and-comment procedure includes holding public hearings and allowing time for public comment.

The appeals court upheld an earlier ruling that proper procedures were not used in adopting the new directives.

The administration has not indicated if it will appeal, but the question may be moot because President-elect Bill Clinton has voiced opposition to the ban.

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-- By Pam Parry

Baptists attorneys optimistic
after animal-sacrifice arguments

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Baptist church-state attorneys expressed generally optimistic assessments Nov. 4 after the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in a Florida animal-sacrifice case that likely will help clarify how far government may go in restricting religious practice.

The case gives the court its first opportunity to spell out the degree of religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment's free-exercise clause since its 1990 ruling that drastically reduced protection for religious practice.

At issue in the new case is the constitutionality of Hialeah, Fla., ordinances that ban animal sacrifice but not the killing of animals for a variety of other reasons.

The ordinances were challenged by practitioners of the Santeria religion, who number approximately 50,000 to 60,000 in South Florida. They argue that their religious practice of sacrificing chickens, pigeons, doves and other animals was singled out for discriminatory treatment.

In 1990, in the case of Employment Division vs. Smith, a narrow court majority held that in most cases, neutral and generally applicable laws do not require a compelling justification to restrict religious practice. Prior to the Smith decision, the court permitted restraints on religion only when the government employed the least restrictive means available to achieve a compelling governmental interest.

Under Smith, government is required to show a compelling reason only for laws and policies that single out religion for discriminatory treatment.

University of Texas law professor Douglas Laycock, attorney for the Santeria congregation, the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, described the ordinances as "open discrimination against a minority religion."

Hialeah officials counter that the ordinances are neutral and generally applicable laws aimed at preventing "indiscriminate slaughter" of animals. The city's attorney, Richard Garrett, said the prohibition of animal sacrifice achieves a legitimate governmental purpose.

After the oral arguments Nov. 4, three Baptist church-state attorneys agreed Laycock appeared to do a good job in convincing the Supreme Court justices that the Hialeah ordinances singled out a religious practice.

"The telling moment in the oral arguments was when Justice (Anthony) Kennedy asked the city's attorney if animal sacrifice would be permissible in a properly zoned, properly regulated slaughter house, thereby eliminating the city's concerns about disease control, sanitation and cruelty to animals," said Oliver Thomas, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee.

"When Mr. Garrett responded no, it was apparent that the city's real concern was the religious ritual itself, and not these other legitimate considerations."

Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel, said the oral argument "went extremely well."

"It's always hard to predict how the justices will vote, but I would not be surprised by a ruling in favor of the church -- maybe by as much as a 7-2 decision."

Michael Whitehead, attorney for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said Laycock "did an excellent job of responding to all the city's excuses and argument that the ordinances were neutral.

"It seems to me at the very least, Laycock convinced the court...the ordinances target religion," and would require the city to show a compelling justification.

During arguments, several justices questioned whether Hialeah officials had used the "least restrictive means" of achieving their purposes.

Thomas said another "critical point" in the hearing occurred when Justice Antonin Scalia suggested that because a fraternity might also engage in animal sacrifice the ordinances may be viewed as neutral, applying both to non-religious and religious conduct.

Laycock responded that if that's a valid argument, then the court really has repealed the free-exercise clause of the Constitution.

Laycock also suggested that under such logic, a ban on communion might be justified as generally applicable if a fraternity happened to engage in the practice.

Thomas, who joined Laycock in addressing reporters outside the court after the hearing, said he came away more confident that "the court would be able to get past the admittedly bizarre practice that's at issue in this case to the real principle that's at stake.

"Having said that, a win in this case is hardly a victory for religious liberty," he added. "It simply means that religion doesn't lose what little ground is left after the Smith decision."

Thomas said the Baptist Joint Committee and other mainline religious groups filed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the church because of what's at stake in the case.

"This is religious discrimination at its worst," he said. "If they can single out the Santeria religion...they can do it to anybody."

The brief filed by the religious groups asked the high court to reconsider its Smith decision altogether. While Thomas said some justices might like to reverse that decision, he is doubtful a majority is ready to do

so.

"But I think Smith is going to become a moot point by spring," he said. "I think with the support of the Clinton administration, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act could become law, conceivably before the Hialeah case is handed down."

The RFRA would restore the compelling-interest standard. The bill enjoys broad support among U.S. religious groups and lawmakers but failed to pass in the waning days of the 102nd Congress.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second article in a series on pornography.

Pornography hurts women,
families, critics say

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Pornography degrades women, destroys families and may encourage sexual crimes, critics claim.

"I do think pornography definitely is an influence in how men and women are together in their relationships," said Fred Hampton, a Baptist and clinical social worker in Kentucky who counsels sexual addicts. "I think pornography can often serve to polarize men and women in their relationships."

Others agree.

"It is a form of addiction that creates a high degree of alienation between husband and wife," said Larry Braidfoot, a Baptist political science professor.

"It creates a sense of fantasy, which detracts from normal, loving relationships," said Braidfoot, who worked on pornography issues while on staff at the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in the 1980s and testified before Congress several times on the topic.

Hampton is a counselor at the Family Care Center in Louisville, Ky., and devotes much of his practice to counseling individuals addicted to compulsive sexual behavior.

"I don't know that pornography is in and by itself necessarily addictive," admitted Hampton, who said he sees people from all socio-economic levels and backgrounds.

But the problems he sees in these lives are evidence pornography is at least a frequent contributor to family problems and sexual addiction, he said.

While not everyone who uses pornography develops sexual problems, the majority of people with sexual problems have been influenced by pornography, Hampton said.

Pornography often comes to dominate lives at the expense of the emotional and spiritual aspects of relationships, he explained. "When those other parts aren't nurtured, then that relationship suffers and family life is going to suffer. In many ways, pornography invites us to move away from what we have valued in terms of respect for one another."

Both Hampton and Braidfoot said pornography creates myths about women and sex.

"It reduces the role and status of women by minimizing their uniqueness

and individuality as humans and professionals by emphasizing only their sexual prowess and allure," said Braidfoot, academic dean at William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Miss.

"It can be a very selfish process in that it promotes being in relationship only for my gratification without much consideration for the other person," said Hampton. "It really is a very unrealistic portrayal of what it means to be in a loving, committed sexual relationship."

While that alone might be enough to concern most citizens, pornography can lead to even greater problems, other critics charge.

One of those concerned is Jim Devasher, a detective with the Kentucky State Police, based in Bowling Green, and a Christian radio personality. His primary work is investigating child-abuse cases, particularly child sex-abuse cases.

"Probably in 90 percent of all cases I work I find pornography present," he said. "A lot of times it is used as a stimulus before the abuse. Many times the perpetrators will show children videos of various sexual acts and try to arouse them. It's real common in abuse cases."

Researchers are not agreed on if a cause-and-effect relationship exists between pornography and sex crimes, but many experts contend there is some connection.

"The person who uses porn is not necessarily going to wind up involved in child sex abuse," Braidfoot said. But, he added, if the pornography depicts children, then the user has sought out "a harder and more selective kind of porn, and that kind of (abusive) behavior is more likely to result."

Braidfoot said he is convinced viewing pornography does have "an inhibition-lowering effect," particularly among teenagers, which can contribute to teenage sexual exploitation such as fondling and rape.

Concerns about the relationship between pornography and sex crimes were reinforced by the 1986 report of the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography.

The commission reported research showing a cause-and-effect relationship between hard-core pornography and sexual violence. "The research...shows a causal relationship between exposure to material of this type and aggressive behavior toward women," the panel wrote.

Even the materials that do not depict violence do present "degrading" views of women, sex and relationships, the commission said.

And that, in turn, affects society's perspective, they charged. "Substantial exposure to material of this variety is likely to increase the extent to which those exposed will view rape or other forms of sexual violence as less serious than they otherwise would have, will view the victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence as significantly more responsible and will view the offenders as significantly less responsible."

While conservative groups like James Dobson's Focus on the Family have widely promoted these findings, not everyone agrees.

In the book, "United States of America vs. Sex: How the Meese Commission Lied About Pornography," Philip Nobile and Eric Nadler charge the commission was stacked with conservatives who were hostile to pornographers.

This book disputes any claims of a link between pornography and violence, citing the report of a 1970 federal commission appointed to study the issue. That commission, appointed by President Lyndon Johnson, declined to report any verifiable link between pornography and sex crimes.

The Meese commission claims its different conclusion is the result of the spread of pornography into new forms and wider distribution from 1970 to 1986.

Dobson, host of the "Focus on the Family" radio program, served on the

Meese commission and since has written about that experience.

However, Dobson's role on the commission is ridiculed by Nobile and Nadler, who claim his views are not representative of most Americans.

Although the research methods and ideological bias of the Meese commission's report were questionable, Braidfoot said, it served to raise awareness of the porn problem. "In general, I found it helpful," he said.

All the attention to pornography in the 1980s failed to produce "an enduring sort of consensus" on the issue, however, Braidfoot said.

"I would not be surprised if we have a swing away from the (pornography) restrictions and heightened awareness we had in the late '80s," he said.

He said pornography has not been "a front-burner issue" for either political party since the early 1980s.

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-- Greg Warner of ABP contributed to this story.

Black preaches for first time
in service at SBC 'mother church'

AUGUSTA, Ga. (ABP) -- For the first time ever, an African-American preached during a worship service at First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., "mother church" of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Southern Baptist Convention was formed at the Augusta church in 1845 in part over a dispute with Baptists of the North over slavery.

"We all know why the Southern Baptist Convention was founded; we're not in denial," said Timothy Owings, pastor of the Augusta church, which hosted Philadelphia pastor William Augustus Jones in its famed pulpit Oct. 25.

Owings said Jones was invited in order to demonstrate the church's commitment to racial harmony. "We are working in our community on strengthening racial and ethnic relationships," Owings said.

Jones, rated one of the best preachers in America by Ebony magazine, is pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Philadelphia and former president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Although he is the first black to preach a regular service in the 175-year-old Augusta church, another African-American minister previously preached during a Wednesday night Bible study.

Owings said Jones was well received by the Sunday night audience, a mixture of blacks and whites who filled the sanctuary. He preached on Jesus' calming of the storm.

The idea to host Jones came out of a project called Augustans Together, which Owings said is seeking to bridge racial and ethnic barriers in the city.

The project was started by business people in the wake of the Los Angeles riots, which Owings said gave Augustans "a wake-up call" about race relations. "Some business people were concerned the same things could happen here," he said.

The non-sectarian group, composed of clergy, business leaders and educators, plans an awareness week in January, which will take the message into schools.

But Owings said the cause of racial harmony will require more than swapping preachers between black and white churches. As an example, he mentioned a project linking church members with urban youth.

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Richmond Seminary receives
\$24,000 from Asheville church

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond has received a \$24,000 gift and a promise of continuing support from First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.

The church had originally given \$20,000 to a proposed divinity school at Wake Forest University but voted recently to ask that their gift be returned because of the absence of visible progress toward that school's beginning, a statement from the church said.

"Our commitment to excellence in the education of Baptist ministers has not changed; we're just changing the place," said Pastor John Hewett.

"We have a great deal of confidence and trust in Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond to provide the kind of theological education we have historically supported," Hewett said.

In addition to the \$24,000, the church plans to send \$5,000 directly to BTSR in 1993 and support the school through contributions to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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