

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

Phone: (904) 396-0396 Fax: (904) 396-4441 CServe: 70420,73

January 12, 1993

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * WMU's blueprint for future opens door to Fellowship
- * Text of WMU documents
- * Clinton to worship at historic church enroute to inauguration
- * Supreme Court rejects church-state disputes

WMU's blueprint for future
opens door to Fellowship

By Greg Warner

TALLADEGA, Ala. (ABP) -- Woman's Missionary Union voted Jan. 10 to steer a new course for the 105-year-old Southern Baptist organization, and in the process opened the door to work with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Culminating a yearlong study by a special ad hoc committee, WMU adopted a "vision statement," eight "core values" and six far-reaching recommendations which leaders said will define the future of the mission-support organization.

The plan represents one of the most dramatic changes in the history of WMU, which until now has related almost exclusively to the Southern Baptist Convention's two official mission-sending agencies.

Under the new directives, WMU will support the missions programs of other Southern Baptist groups such as the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, forge relationships with evangelical missions organizations outside the SBC, become more involved in direct missions, and become active in social issues.

The plan, which was approved with only one negative vote by WMU's Executive Board in general session, is designed to let WMU serve all Southern Baptists involved in missions, leaders said.

Despite the historic scope of the proposal, WMU leaders said it is primarily an expansion of what the organization already is doing. They insisted WMU will not abandon any of its current activities. To emphasize that point, the board asked the 17-member ad hoc committee to supplement its recommendations with a preamble that affirms the SBC's missionaries and traditional channels of missions funding.

Still the plan is sure to draw fire from the SBC's fundamental-conservative leaders, who wanted WMU to disavow any connection with the rival Fellowship. The two-year-old Fellowship, formed by Southern Baptists displeased with the SBC's current direction, now operates its own missions program and recently hired former Foreign Mission Board President Keith Parks to lead it.

Because WMU is an SBC auxiliary with an autonomous board of directors, the historic proposal is not subject to SBC approval. But a group of top SBC leaders, which included SBC chief executive Morris Chapman, warned WMU Nov.

20 that the SBC might form its own women's organization if WMU supports the Fellowship.

Dellanna O'Brien, WMU executive director, said the ad hoc committee's work was not influenced by fear of reprisal, however, but by WMU's long-standing commitment to missions.

"We fear no one but God," O'Brien said to loud applause from board members. "We cannot be fearful. We have to be faithful and God will protect us."

Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said in a statement released to reporters that he is "saddened" by WMU's action, which he said apparently alters its auxiliary relationship to the SBC.

"If the WMU is, in fact, saying they no longer exist exclusively to support SBC programs, that is a choice made by them, not by the SBC. We have no choice but to relate to their choice. Apparently, they have chosen a course apart from the traditional auxiliary relationship which has served us well for 104 years."

This is not the first time Woman's Missionary Union has exerted its autonomy against the wishes of the Southern Baptist establishment. When the Birmingham-based organization was formed in 1888 as the SBC's first women's group, it was over the objections of the men.

This time WMU is challenging SBC officials who insist the Fellowship's practice of allowing churches to divert funds from traditional SBC channels is undermining Baptist cooperation.

In the preamble to its six recommendations, WMU affirms its support for the SBC's Cooperative Program budget and annual mission offerings but also affirms "the right of individuals, churches and state conventions to choose other plans for cooperative missions giving."

The recommendations say WMU will:

-- Recommit ourselves to missions, the reason we exist, and relate to others who share our commitment.

-- Provide prayer support and produce resources for Southern Baptist groups involved in missions, at their request.

-- Produce and market generic missions education resources for other evangelical groups.

-- Promote and facilitate effective volunteerism in response to missions needs.

-- Identify one social issue each year for specific intervention through national projects.

-- Accept contributions to be used for WMU and related missions needs.

Before acting on the recommendations, the Executive Board adopted the vision statement and core values, which board members said were foundational to everything else. The vision statement says: "Woman's Missionary Union exists to enable churches and believers to participate in introducing all persons in the world to Christ."

The core values affirm the priesthood of the believer, God's call to mission, prayer for missions, the giftedness of all women, the biblical mandate to respond to social and moral issues, the need to develop leaders, partnership with Christians around the world, and the need for diverse organizational models for missions. (see related story)

WMU's new openness may offer little immediate help to the Fellowship, however. O'Brien said the Fellowship is still too small to warrant production of tailored resource materials, so WMU's proposed generic resources will have to do for now. "We have to be realistic about where they are," O'Brien told reporters.

And the six recommendations would not allow WMU to raise money for the Fellowship or promote its new missions offering, she said. Although that could be reconsidered later, she said, too many WMU members object to the idea now to make it wise. "The offering is a very volatile issue."

Despite those limitations, Fellowship moderator Pat Ayres of Austin, Texas, called the WMU decision good news. "With their spirit of being open to finding ways to cooperate, we now can begin to talk specifically," she said.

Ayres confirmed that the Fellowship has not asked WMU to promote its offering. "We felt like they needed to open the door to work with us (first). And who knows how that will work?"

The WMU's offer of help to other Southern Baptist missions groups would include not only the Fellowship but other groups, as well as churches that support independent missionaries, board members were told. Those groups would themselves decide if they are Southern Baptist.

Marketing of generic materials outside the SBC already is done by some Southern Baptist agencies, particularly the Sunday School Board, leaders said.

The commitment to facilitate missions volunteers would expand WMU's current limited involvement in mission action. WMU would not employ or appoint missionaries, but instead link people and resources with missions needs around the world. The volunteers may or may not work through SBC mission agencies.

The commitment to social action is not new either, board members were told. Until the 1960s, WMU was active on such social issues as race, hunger and homelessness, O'Brien said. In reviving this emphasis, she said, WMU is responding to the changing needs of women.

"Today's woman wants to be involved in hands-on activities, activities where she can see that she makes a difference," O'Brien told reporters.

WMU will not solicit financial contributions but will accept them to support its expanded ministries or to make up for any loss in revenue, leaders said.

Some of those funds might be needed to pay the salaries of WMU workers now employed by the more conservative state conventions. Some of those positions may be eliminated in retaliation for WMU's openness to the Fellowship, board members said.

During the board's discussion of the committee's proposals, reporters were not allowed to quote statements made by board members. Otherwise, leaders said, the members -- who are state WMU presidents and executives -- would be reluctant to speak frankly.

O'Brien said WMU members resent the pressure placed on them to take sides in the SBC-Fellowship dispute, a pressure she said still could fragment WMU. "The lines drawn in our denomination are not ours," she said.

"We would hope we could be the one umbrella that could accept all groups," she told Associated Baptist Press.

Board members were told the proposal from the ad hoc committee was not designed as an endorsement of the Fellowship -- the group is not named in the documents -- nor as a slap at the Home and Foreign Mission boards.

Leaders of both those SBC agencies were due to speak later in the week to the Executive Board, which was meeting at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly near Talladega, Ala. Both agencies receive about half their funding from mission offerings promoted by WMU. In exchange WMU receives about 6 percent of its funding from the HMB and FMB to promote the offerings.

Although the two agencies could cut their funding of WMU, O'Brien said, "I don't know why they would want to do that. We're going to do exactly what we've always done for them."

O'Brien said she can't predict how SBC leaders will respond to WMU's new direction. How will WMU respond if the SBC forms a new women's organization? "We're going to keep doing what we've always been doing," O'Brien said.

SBC leaders "would be hard-pressed to justify" forming a new agency, "because we're not stopping anything we've done before," she said.

Even with the new direction, she said, WMU has not changed its assigned role as an auxiliary to the SBC.

"We are interpreting the (term) 'SBC' as Southern Baptist churches, not the agencies," O'Brien told reporters. "From that perspective, it is our responsibility to be auxiliary to Southern Baptist churches, and that's what we are going to do."

But Chapman in his statement suggested WMU may have overstepped the bounds of an auxiliary by assuming new duties for itself.

"When an organization gets a program of its own, it ceases to be an auxiliary.... When the leadership of the WMU says that they will 'promote and facilitate volunteerism,' does this mean they will support volunteers of the SBC Home and Foreign Mission boards? Or will they have their own mission program?"

-30-

.....

VISION STATEMENT

Woman's Missionary Union exists to enable churches and believers to participate in introducing all persons in the world to Christ. In fulfilling this mandate:

CORE VALUES

- We affirm and uphold the "priesthood of the believer," while accepting the responsibilities and privileges inherent therein.
- We acknowledge God's call to every believer to carry the good news of Jesus Christ to all the world.
- We embrace the privilege and responsibility of prayer for missionaries and missions needs.
- We recognize, emphasize and affirm the giftedness of women and girls in Christian endeavors.
- We acknowledge the biblical mandate to respond to social and moral issues with actions as modeled by Jesus Christ and with a message of his redemptive plan.
- We acknowledge and accept the responsibility for developing missions leaders.
- We covenant to partner with Christians around the world, as individually and corporately we multiply each other's efforts to lead a lost world to Christ.
- We pledge to provide diverse, flexible organizational models through which persons may participate in the global missions effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Honoring the perspective of history, recognizing the practicality of the present, and committing to the expansion of missions into the future, Woman's Missionary Union affirms the support of Southern Baptist global missions through prayer, the Cooperative Program, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions.

We also affirm the right of individuals, churches and state conventions to choose other plans for cooperative missions giving.

Further we affirm the missionaries and pledge to strengthen our support of them.

In response to change in our world and our desire to be a visionary force in global missions, we make the following recommendations:

- Recommit ourselves to missions, the reason we exist, and relate to others who share our commitment.
- Support Southern Baptist groups involved in missions through prayer and the production of resources, at their request.
- Provide prayer support and produce resources for Southern Baptist groups involved in missions, at their request.
- Produce and market generic missions education resources for other evangelical groups.
- Promote and facilitate effective volunteerism in response to missions needs.
- Identify one social issue each year for specific intervention through national projects.
- Accept contributions to be used for WMU and related missions needs.

-30-

Clinton to worship at historic church enroute to inauguration

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Culpeper Baptist Church in Culpeper, Va., has seen a lot in its 219 years but nothing like the excitement it expects Sunday, Jan. 17, when President-elect Bill Clinton, Vice President-elect Al Gore and hundreds of aides and reporters plan to visit the 11 a.m. service.

Clinton and Gore and their wives will worship at the church, about 70 miles from Washington, on their bus trip from Charlottesville, Va., to the capital for Jan. 20 inauguration ceremonies.

The trip is a re-creation of Thomas Jefferson's journey by horseback from Monticello, his home near Charlottesville, to Washington for his own inauguration in 1801.

"We really don't know what to expect," said Bert Browning, pastor of Culpeper Church. He said Clinton and Gore had asked the trip's organizers to find a Southern Baptist church in which to worship that Sunday. Culpeper, at about the journey's halfway point, fit the bill.

At the Secret Service's suggestion, the church has issued tickets to participants in an attempt to control crowds in the 1,000-seat sanctuary.

"Unfortunately, we can't seat everyone who wants to come," said Browning. Baptist representatives attending include James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia; and Fred Anderson, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

Among Virginia Baptists, Culpeper is something of a historical shrine. Between 1768 and 1778, 14 Virginia Baptists were imprisoned by British authorities in the Culpeper jail. Most were jailed for preaching without a license, but one layman was charged with "praying out loud."

While in prison, one minister, James Ireland, led a fellow prisoner to Christianity.

Although the jail was destroyed in the 19th century, its lock and key are still among the artifacts kept by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society. They are expected to be prominently displayed at the church the day of the president-elect's visit.

An early meeting house of the church stood on the site of the jail, but the 1,570-member congregation, organized in 1774, has since moved to more spacious facilities.

About 15 miles away, in Orange, is the site of a reputed meeting between

James Madison and influential Baptist pastor John Leland. Leland is said to have promised to back Virginia's ratification of the U.S. Constitution in return for a guarantee of religious liberty, later enshrined in the First Amendment.

Browning said he didn't know if organizers of Clinton's trip were aware of Culpeper's historical significance when they selected the church, but he's certain they do now.

"I've mentioned it to every official and reporter who has called," he said.

-30-

-- By Robert Dilday

Supreme Court rejects church-state disputes

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A pair of church-state disputes were among the well over 300 cases discarded Jan. 11 by the nation's top court.

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the criminal trespass conviction of a Minnesota man who argued that lower courts should have let him use the Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church to prove his right to be on church property. The high court also refused to revive a lawsuit challenging the use of the word "Sacramento" in the city seal of Sacramento, Calif.

The court's decision in the criminal trespass case left standing the Minnesota Supreme Court's ruling that the lower courts acted properly in not accepting the church code as evidence.

Harry Zimmer, a longtime member of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Columbia Heights, Minn., was convicted of criminal trespass after defying a letter from the church's pastor ordering him to stay away.

The letter from the Rev. Walter Sochacki accused Zimmer of intimidating and harassing members of the parish.

During his trial Zimmer sought to use the church code to show that the pastor did not have the authority to bar him from the church and that he could make a good-faith claim of a right to be on the premises.

Minnesota's top court upheld lower court decisions rejecting the use of the church code as evidence. While conceding that the code may have had some relevance to the case, the court said Zimmer's attempt to offer the lengthy code without an expert witness to interpret it would have been confusing to the jury.

James O'Leary repeatedly has challenged the use of the name "Sacramento" in the city seal, contending that the alleged religious significance of the name Sacramento somehow violates his constitutional rights.

Since 1989, a federal district court in California has considered O'Leary a "vexatious litigant" because his repeated efforts to relitigate faulty claims constitute "an abuse of judicial process."

In the July 1991 case appealed to the Supreme Court, O'Leary sought \$11 million in damages and an order barring Sacramento from using its city seal.

-30-

-- By Larry Chesser

***** END *****