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Elliff turns down offer
to become FMB president

By Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Oklahoma pastor Tom Elliff has declined the offer to become president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"After much, much prayer we -- my wife and I -- never arrived at a point of peace about accepting that position," said Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla. "It would be foolish for someone to walk into a position of that much importance ... without the absolute, bold certainty that he is the person God wants there."

The FMB search committee, in a statement released by its chairman Jan. 29, said it has ended talks with its leading candidate -- although it did not name Elliff -- and will continue its search.

"The committee recently narrowed its interest to a single candidate, only to find with prayer an apparent mutual and bilateral determination by the candidate and the committee that the will and timing of God rested in another direction," the statement said.

Search chairman Joel Gregory, the only committee member authorized to discuss the group's work, declined to comment beyond the statement. However, he did strongly deny the rumor that the committee -- made up of 15 FMB trustees -- would now disband.

"We intend to follow the prayerful and deliberate process already underway to find God's person for leadership," Gregory said in the statement, which was released from the FMB's Richmond, Va., headquarters.

One member of the committee, FMB trustee chairman John Jackson, said Jan. 11 that the committee settled on its nominee during a prayer retreat in

Colorado Springs, Colo., Jan. 7-9. Although the candidate was not identified, it was widely reported to be Elliff.

The 48-year-old pastor served as an FMB missionary for two years -- a qualification the committee said early on was important. He is the committee's only top candidate who has both missionary experience and a close identification with the movement to steer the Southern Baptist Convention in a more conservative direction -- a movement which former FMB president Keith Parks says is disrupting missions work overseas.

Parks retired last October, three years earlier than planned, in a dispute with trustees over the control and direction of the FMB, the largest missions agency of its kind in the world.

Elliff told Associated Baptist Press that he prayed diligently about the position, including at least one prolonged prayer session "from nine in the evening to noon next day." But he said he never was convinced that "God was initiating" the move.

"When 15 people call and say, 'We have reached a unanimous conclusion,' it looks like God's leadership," Elliff said.

"At one time I got about 20 seconds away from calling and accepting," he recalled. "I figured I would accept and get peace about it later on. Of course, I would not be accepting the position, just accepting the search committee's invitation to proceed further. But that would not have been honest."

Elliff said he told the committee his decision Jan. 27, apparently in a telephone conference call.

He told ABP his struggle to find God's leadership centered on his calling to be a pastor. "The big question for me was, 'Do you (God) want me to apply this pastoral-ministry approach within the Foreign Mission Board or remain here?'" he said, referring to his 18,000-member church in suburban Oklahoma City.

Elliff discounted rumors that family circumstances, such as the failing health of his wife's parents, influenced his decision not to return to missions work. "There is nothing more or less happening in our lives that doesn't happen to any missionary. ... Every missionary faces all kinds of exigencies."

Many of the FMB's 3,900 missionaries say overseas service is essential for the new president. But several former missionaries told ABP Elliff's short stint overseas would not be enough to convince missionaries and FMB employees that he was qualified to lead the agency.

Elliff left a successful pastorate in Tulsa, Okla., in 1981 to become a missionary to Zimbabwe. He and his wife and four children returned to the United States in 1983 so that his oldest child -- a daughter then 14 years old -- could receive treatment for injuries received in a 1982 automobile accident in Zimbabwe.

In his statement for the search committee, Gregory said the group will continue its work but will not have a nominee to recommend when FMB trustees meet Feb. 8-10.

Last October committee members said they had narrowed their search to two men, both with missionary experience -- FMB Interim President Don Kammerdiener and Sunday School Board administrator Avery Willis. But fundamental-conservatives complained neither had been involved in the 13-year struggle to win control of the SBC agencies.

The search committee apparently backed away from the two top candidates and renewed its search, settling on Elliff.

In addition to Elliff, three other prominent megachurch pastors were confirmed to be among the finalists for the post -- all with ties to the

SBC's fundamental-conservative movement -- John Bisagno of First Baptist Church of Houston; Jim Henry of First Baptist Church of Orlando; and Adrian Rogers of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn.

Gregory said the committee has considered 74 candidates and interviewed four.

Elliff had kind words for the search committee.

"I have come away from this process with unbelievable respect for this committee. These people are not going to be touched by a political agenda. They are not going to be manipulated by anybody but God. ... Southern Baptists ought to be proud of this group."

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FMB chairman compares
WMU action to adultery

By Greg Warner

FAIRFIELD, Calif. (ABP) -- The decision by Woman's Missionary Union to work with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is like committing adultery, according to John Jackson, trustee chairman of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"That's the way it's going to look to the trustees of the Foreign Mission Board," Jackson told Associated Baptist Press Jan. 26.

Those trustees have asked WMU leaders to attend the trustees' Feb. 8 meeting in Richmond, Va., to discuss the decision, Jackson said. The chairman added he is hopeful leaders of the two organizations can smooth over their differences at the meeting.

"I think there is still some room for understanding," said Jackson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fairfield, Calif. "We don't have a feud at this time."

Each year WMU raises about \$80 million for the Richmond-based Foreign Mission Board, which operates the Southern Baptist Convention's massive overseas missions program. The FMB's stateside counterpart, the Home Mission Board, receives about \$38 million in WMU-generated funds. Those contributions make up about half of the annual budget for each agency.

Since its founding 105 years ago as an auxiliary to the SBC, the Birmingham, Ala.-based Woman's Missionary Union has related almost exclusively to the two mission boards.

In a historic decision Jan. 10, however, WMU leaders voted to 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, and become more involved in volunteer missions and social action.

Although WMU can provide materials and prayer support to the Fellowship and other missionary-sending groups, WMU leaders said, the organization will not raise money for them. And WMU will continue to support the SBC's two official mission agencies as in the past.

Before the WMU plan was announced, Jackson told a Chattanooga, Tenn., newspaper that opening the door to the Fellowship -- a group of Southern Baptists opposed to the current conservative direction of the SBC -- would be tantamount to adultery.

"When they've done that, it will be similar to ... a woman having been married to a man for many, many years and all of a sudden she says, 'I have another man that I want to be married to as well. I know that we've had such

a good working relationship, but I know that you won't mind if I bring him into our bed," he told the Chattanooga News-Free Press.

"Their attitude is, 'Why can't we have both bedfellows. We don't see anything wrong with us going to bed with CBF as well as SBC.'"

Jackson was interviewed by the newspaper Jan. 10 while in Chattanooga to preach at First Baptist Church of Soddy-Daisy, where fellow trustee Bill Blanchard is pastor. Later in the day he and Blanchard left for the meeting of the WMU Executive Board in Talladega, Ala., where they learned of the WMU vote.

Contacted by ABP Jan. 26, Jackson defended his earlier remarks about adultery. The analogy is valid if "what appears to be so is so."

"They (WMU leaders) say they haven't changed anything," Jackson explained, "... but if they start dating someone else while they are married, then something has changed."

Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of WMU, called Jackson's use of the adultery analogy "unfortunate." "There are too many lost people in this world for us to spend our energies calling each other names when there is a Great Commission mandate yet to be fulfilled," she told ABP.

"If an analogy must be used, it would be more appropriate to use one of friendship," she added. "When I have friends who disagree, I don't take sides. I can be friends with both of them, even if they're not friends with each other."

O'Brien defended WMU's decision to work with other Baptist and evangelical groups. "The Foreign Mission Board realized this some time ago and began to develop relationships with other 'Great Commission' Christians," she explained.

"If the missions task is large enough for all Great Commission Christians, surely it is large enough for all Southern Baptists," she said. "WMU's commitment is to work with all Southern Baptists who have a heart for missions, in whatever way they choose to express that."

Jackson suggested leaders of the FMB and SBC may not view the WMU action as friendly. "I'm not certain WMU realized all the repercussions of this," he said.

Jackson would not say if he thinks SBC leaders should make good on their threat to start another women's organization to compete with WMU because of the action. But he said he has heard from many pastors who support the idea.

"Many pastors see WMU moving in a different direction," he said, noting many of those churches -- including his -- don't have WMU organizations. "Those pastors say, 'We want another organization.' I'm encouraging them to share their conviction with the (SBC) Executive Committee."

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Women gaining ground
in ministry roles

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- While Southern Baptists have been fighting over the inerrancy of Scripture the past 14 years, quietly Baptist women in ministry have been increasing their ranks, mirroring a national movement toward inclusiveness in other religious bodies.

"Most people I talk to, when they ask me about statistics, are shocked by the numbers I give them," explained Amanda Hiley, administrator for Southern Baptist Women in Ministry in Louisville, Ky., and pastor of

Bewleyville Baptist Church in Breckinridge County, Ky.

The bottom line: Currently about 900 women are ordained for professional ministry roles by Southern Baptist churches. That figure does not include unordained women serving on church staffs or women ordained as deacons.

Women still constitute a small percentage of approximately 90,000 Southern Baptist ministers listed in the 1992 edition of the SBC Annual, a list that includes both ordained and non-ordained ministers.

But the number of ordained women ministers is rising faster among Southern Baptists than any other American religious body, according to Sarah Frances Anders, chair of the department of sociology and social work at Louisiana College in Pineville, La.

Among the 10 largest U.S. bodies, Southern Baptists "have moved from seventh position to probably about fifth in total numbers, but our percentage rate of growth is highest," she explained. "Some others run as much as 5 percent to 10 percent in total numbers of ordained women. We're still in the 1 percent category."

The denomination's official publications do not report 900 ordained women in ministry. In fact, a newly published pamphlet from the Southern Baptist Historical Commission reports fewer than 300 Southern Baptist women were ordained as ministers by 1990.

But Hiley and Anders insist the higher figure is accurate.

"We have confirmed 883 ordained women," said Anders, who has been researching women's issues for several decades. "If we have 883 confirmed, I'm sure we have at least another 50."

Yet the increase of women in ministry roles has not been among the issues that have placed Southern Baptists in daily newspaper headlines in recent years.

The SBC in annual session has passed a few resolutions on women -- most notably a 1984 resolution which encouraged "the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination" because "man was first in creation and woman was first in the Edenic fall."

In recent years, other religious bodies have taken the spotlight in debating women's ordination. Most recently, it was the Roman Catholics in America and the Church of England.

By a margin of only two votes Nov. 11, the Church of England approved opening the priesthood to women. But by a much wider margin, U.S. Catholic bishops one week later rejected a pastoral letter on women that would have affirmed a male-only priesthood.

Both events made headlines worldwide.

The U.S. bishops' action marked the first time they ever have struck down a pastoral letter -- an official teaching document -- proposed by a committee for a final vote.

"This is a great chink in the armor," said Sister Maureen Fiedler, co-director of Catholics Speak Out, an organized effort to defeat the pastoral. "The walls of Jericho are beginning to crumble. We've circled the wall six and a half times, and there's only a little bit more to go."

Not all 110 bishops voting against the pastoral did so because they support women as priests, Fielder admitted, but the process of debating the pastoral brought the issue into a public forum never dreamed of before.

More significantly, the U.S. bishops acted directly against the wishes of Pope John Paul II, a conservative who reportedly exerted significant pressure to get the pastoral passed.

The success of Catholic women in opposing the pastoral brought encouragement to Southern Baptist women in ministry, Hiley said.

Yet the situation Baptist women face is in many ways different than that of Anglican and Catholic women, who are working with hierarchical church structures, she noted.

In a hierarchical church, one person or one board ultimately can make a decision to allow women in ministerial roles. But since Baptist churches are autonomous, the decision must be made on a case-by-case basis.

"By the nature of Baptist polity, we will never know when we have won the battle," Hiley explained. "There will never be a time when Baptist women stand outside a door and wait for some kind of mandate."

On the other hand, Baptist women already face greater opportunities than Catholic women, Fiedler countered: "You do in fact have women in ministry. Women in your denomination do function at the level we expect priests to function."

Ironically, the preoccupation with inerrancy in the SBC may have taken some of the heat off Baptist women seeking ordained ministry roles. Some observers have predicted the women's issue, if debated as fully as inerrancy, would be even more explosive.

"When you're talking about the women's issue ... it's bigger, it's more emotional, it's more intense, because you're talking about the humanity of more than half the people sitting in Southern Baptist churches," Hiley said.

"Inerrancy does not hit people in the gut like that does," she continued. "It may be one thing to have a theological argument upside down all day long. But it's another thing when your little girl comes home from camp and says, 'I think God is calling me to be a minister.'"

Yet resistance to women in ordained ministry roles remains strong among most Southern Baptist bodies. For example:

-- In Oklahoma, a presentation by the daughter of evangelist Billy Graham was cancelled from the state Baptist convention's January evangelism conference because some male pastors thought her presentation would be preaching -- a role they say God intended only for men.

-- In Pennsylvania last fall, some messengers to the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptist Convention walked out when Gaynor Yancey, a veteran female home missionary, gave the convention sermon.

-- In Kentucky, some trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary last spring tried to stop the election of six new faculty members -- all described as "conservative evangelical scholars" -- because the teachers affirmed the possibility of women serving as deacons and, in some cases, pastors.

The seminary incident prompted trustee chairman Wayne Allen, an opponent of women's ordination, to explain afterward: "Frankly, some of us were shocked that people with the same high view of Scripture we have hold these views. A long-held position among nearly all of us was challenged."

That incident is indicative of the deep division in the community of evangelical scholars, said John Newport, former provost and vice president for academic affairs at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I think the evangelical community is divided right down the middle on this," explained Newport, a widely respected evangelical scholar.

To illustrate, he pointed to the two inerrancy conferences sponsored by the six SBC seminaries in 1987 and 1988. The wide range of speakers assembled there were divided on the women's issue.

"These are all people committed to scriptural inerrancy," Newport noted, explaining he thinks that shows what a person believes about the women's issue is a matter of interpretation rather than of accepting inerrancy.

Theology aside, the true test of women serving in Southern Baptist churches will come as individual churches determine what is acceptable for their congregations. And those decisions often are influenced by pastors.

"As a classroom teacher, we get to see the pastors several years before the churches see them," said Leon McBeth, professor of church history at Southwestern Seminary, the SBC's largest. "I have noticed a remarkable openness on the part of students" to women in ministry roles.

"And that's here in a conservative area, in a conservative school," he added. "I would say that as we go into the 21st century, I expect more acceptance of women in ministry."

Hiley agrees, based on her experience as a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville: "In my generation -- I'm 23 -- I have male counterparts who are very serious about women having places (to serve), serious enough that it will cost them and they know it.

"Beginning with me and people younger, there are at least people who have grown up with ideas about women having places," she said. "But it's not going to happen in my lifetime.

"I don't believe in my lifetime Southern Baptist women will have achieved some base level of service in whatever roles God calls them to serve in. It's difficult to work in something that, at 23, I can say I don't believe will happen."

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SBC women in ministry
almost triple in 6 years

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The number of Southern Baptist women who are ordained has almost tripled since 1986, according to recent statistics.

The number of Southern Baptist women who are ordained has grown from 230 in 1986 to more than 900 today -- a 291 percent gain in six years -- according to a study by the Southern Baptist Women in Ministry.

The states in which Baptists have ordained the most women are Kentucky, North Carolina and Virginia, reported Sarah Frances Anders, chair of the department of sociology and social work at Louisiana College in Pineville, La.

Closing the gap are Georgia and South Carolina, said Anders, who has compiled extensive data on Southern Baptist women who are ordained and/or who have been engaged in ministry.

The 900 Southern Baptist women who have been ordained comprise only a tiny fraction of the total number of the denomination's ministers.

A survey of the 1992 edition of the South Baptist Convention Annual shows that about 90,000 Southern Baptists have been ordained or hold ministry positions in Baptist churches.

According to those numbers, ordained women comprise only 1 percent of the denomination's vocational ministry force. However, even more women are serving in church-staff roles without the benefit of ordination.

The three-fold increase in ordination has placed women in an array of ministries.

Chaplaincy has absorbed the largest block -- 202 -- of ordained women ministers in the denomination.

Eighteen women currently serve as pastors of Southern Baptist congregations. A total of 43 Southern Baptist women have been pastors.

Fifty-seven ordained women have been associate pastors.

Others minister in various capacities, such as missions, social work and

counseling.

In addition to their increase, women ministers also are more determined to train for ministry than their male counterparts, Anders said, noting they generally are better educated than male ministers.

Southern Baptists do not require seminary training or any particular level of education in order for ministers to serve churches. Some observers have speculated women must attain educational levels not expected of men in order to prove their worthiness for ministry.

And for most women ministers, their ministerial calling involves following God's leadership, Anders said.

"Most of these women feel ... ordination is not a biblical issue; it's an ecclesiastical issue," she explained. "It's a church problem, not a Bible problem.

"Many of them are not trying to prove anything. They simply are service-oriented. They feel like the best recognition of their position is ordination. ... Most of them are not bucking to be radical feminists."

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-- By Mark Wingfield and Marv Knox

Oklahoma leader apologizes
for canceling Graham's daughter

OKLAHOMA CITY (ABP) -- A Baptist leader in Oklahoma has apologized for removing Billy Graham's daughter from an evangelism conference program due to a male pastor's concern that her presentation might constitute unbiblical "preaching" by a woman.

Wayne Bristow, evangelism director for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, wrote a lengthy letter published in the Jan. 21 issue of the Baptist Messenger, the state convention's newspaper.

"In retrospect, I believe it was a mistake not to follow through with the invitation for Anne Graham Lotz to speak at the 1993 State Evangelism Conference," Bristow wrote.

Bristow canceled Lotz from the program after Wayne Keely, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Claremore, Okla., protested that Lotz's two presentations on the program would amount to preaching, a role he said is unbiblical for women.

The month before, Keely had publicly rebuked a woman speaking at the state's youth evangelism conference.

The desire to avoid such a confrontation is what motivated the decision to remove Lotz from her scheduled speaking engagement, Bristow said. "My intention was to avoid knowingly putting Mrs. Lotz in an embarrassing situation and opening the conference to a disruptive atmosphere."

In the letter, Bristow affirmed Lotz as "a godly woman, with great courage and confidence in the Lord." He also affirmed the role women have played throughout the history of Christianity as evangelists, prophets and teachers.

However, he said the Bible does not give a "pattern" or example of a woman in the role of a pastor. Further, Bristow noted, the Apostle Paul's writings are "in complete contrast to (a woman) who campaigns for ordination and a platform with an assertive spirit and out of human ambition."

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President moves to strike military's ban on gays

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton announced Jan. 29 he will issue an executive order by July 15 reversing the military's ban on homosexuals.

Clinton also said the government will stop legal action against known homosexual soldiers if that prosecution is based on sexual preference and not military conduct. And, he said, military recruiters will stop asking recruits about their sexual preference, which has been a means of keeping homosexuals out of military service.

The president's push to end discrimination of gays in the military got legal assistance Jan. 28 from a federal judge in California, who said the ban is unconstitutional. The ruling by U.S. District Judge Terry Hatter Jr. of Los Angeles applies only to the court's jurisdiction in California but may set the tone for other rulings.

Clinton has been working on a compromise with proponents of the ban, who include members of Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Earlier he held separate meetings with the joint chiefs and congressional Democratic leaders, who have urged him to delay action on the matter.

Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, urged the president to delay formal action until his committee could hold hearings on the issue in March. Nunn's speech on the Senate floor Jan. 27 prompted a meeting between Clinton and Democratic leaders of Congress.

Efforts to reverse the ban on homosexuals in the military has also drawn criticism from some religious leaders, including Southern Baptists.

Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, criticized Clinton, a Southern Baptist, for using "the power of his office to extol and defend such reprehensible, immoral behavior" as homosexuality.

"Our commander in chief is pursuing a policy which is dictated by the homosexual political lobby and is opposed by the overwhelming majority of military personnel," Land said in a prepared statement.

Land warned that after relaxing the ban on gays, Clinton might permit male and female soldiers to share sleeping quarters or require military chaplains to perform same-sex marriages.

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-- By Pam Parry and Greg Warner

Bills in new Congress raise old constitutional question

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Lawmakers who disagree with the U.S. Supreme Court's stance on prayer in public school offered their own remedies as the 103rd Congress convened recently.

Such measures have been introduced routinely for several years but have yielded little success, according to a Baptist church-state attorney.

Brent Walker, associate general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said such resolutions are unnecessary because schools cannot now abridge a student's right to pray in the classroom, lunch room or on the ball field. The 1962 Supreme Court decision barred only state-sponsored prayer, he said.

The measures, introduced in both houses of Congress, range from amendments that would alter the Constitution to resolutions that express the sense of Congress but carry no force of law.

At least four propose "voluntary school prayer." They were nearly identical, saying that the Constitution should allow school prayer as long as no one is forced to participate and the state does not prescribe the prayer's contents.

"It doesn't solve the constitutional problem to use labels like 'voluntary' or to bar the state from prescribing the text," Walker said. "There are many things schools could do short of prescribing the prayer that would be constitutionally offensive."

Rep. Bill Emerson, R-Mo., said he introduced a measure (H.J. Res. 27) because of last year's Supreme Court decision in a Rhode Island graduation prayer case, *Lee vs. Weisman*.

In the *Weisman* decision, a narrow court majority ruled that graduation prayer at a middle school ceremony was coercive and unconstitutional for three reasons: 1) school officials initiated the prayer, 2) those same officials picked the person to pray, and 3) the school instructed the rabbi how to pray.

"I am introducing a constitutional amendment to allow communities to decide for themselves whether or not they will offer a benediction at their public ceremonies and graduations and whether their children will be able to voluntarily pray in school," Emerson said. "Under this amendment, the rights of those who do not wish to participate in prayer remain fully protected."

Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., reintroduced a measure (S.J. Res. 9) that he first introduced in the 98th Congress and every one since then. Thurmond said his amendment would restore a right taken away by a court that has "too broadly interpreted the establishment clause of the First Amendment."

Two other measures (H. Con. Res. 11, H. Con. Res. 12), if approved, would express Congress' views that periods of silence be restored to public schools.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., also introduced two resolutions (S.J. Res. 3, S.J. Res. 16) that proposed an amendment to restore "the right of Americans to pray in public institutions, including public school graduation ceremonies and athletic events."

Walker defended the court's prayer decisions as correct and noted that others often have interpreted them too broadly. The court simply eliminated state-sponsored prayer, not private expressions of faith uttered voluntarily by students, he added.

James Dunn, BJC executive director, discounted the measures as politics as usual: "It's the annual orgy of playing politics with prayer."

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-- By Pam Parry

Retired Supreme Court
Justice Marshall dies

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, a giant among champions of civil rights in this century, died Jan. 24 of heart failure at the Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

Marshall, 84, retired in June 1991 after 24 years as a justice of the nation's high court. Appointed by President Lyndon Johnson, Marshall was the

first African American on the court. his replacement, Clarence Thomas, is the second.

Marshall, the great grandson of a slave and grandson of a Union soldier, first gained national prominence as a lawyer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As an advocate, Marshall won 29 of the 32 cases he argued before the Supreme Court, including the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education in which the court barred segregation in public schools.

The day after Marshall's death, Chief Justice William Rehnquist heralded Marshall as "the most influential civil rights lawyer of our century." In a statement read from the court's bench Jan. 25, Rehnquist said Marshall "designed and implemented the NAACP's legal strategy to eradicate racial discrimination in education, transportation, housing and the voting booth.

"Justice Marshall's contributions to constitutional law before his appointment to this court were singular," Rehnquist continued. "These contributions alone would entitle him to a prominent place in American history had he never served on this court. Building on those earlier accomplishments, he became an important voice in shaping the decisional law during his 24 years on the Supreme Court bench."

Brent Walker, associate general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, also praised Marshall's contributions. "Both as a lawyer and jurist, Thurgood Marshall was a tireless champion of the disenfranchised. His sympathy for minority rights impelled him to become a fierce defender of religious liberty, and his suspicion of governmental power bred an unswerving respect for the separation of church and state.

"His absence will be conspicuous."

Marshall's legacy was evident when nearly 20,000 people filed through the Great Hall of the Supreme Court Jan. 27 to view the coffin bearing his body. This was only the second time a justice's coffin has been on view at the court. The first was in 1974 when Chief Justice Earl Warren died.

That same day, Congress approved a bill (S. 202) that would name the new federal judiciary building in Washington for the late justice. The building, located three blocks north of the Supreme Court, opened in September and houses more than 2,000 judicial branch employees, including retired justices.

His funeral was set for Jan. 28 at the Washington National Cathedral. He was to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

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-- By Pam Parry

Coin to commemorate
Jefferson proposed

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A coin to commemorate Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, has been proposed in the U.S. Senate.

Sen. John Warner, R-Va., introduced a bill (S. 50) Jan. 21 that would require the secretary of the treasury to mint coins noting the 250th anniversary of Jefferson's birth, April 13, 1743. The coin's design would feature Jefferson's profile and a frontal view of his home, Monticello.

In the 102nd Congress, Warner introduced a measure, which then-President George Bush signed into law, to authorize a federal commission to help plan a Jefferson celebration. The new legislation would complement the commission's work, he said.

"It is important to realize the continued great popularity of Jefferson and Monticello not only in our country but throughout the world," Warner said.

In the past three years, 10 heads of state have visited Monticello, Warner said, adding that the president of Bulgaria called Jefferson "the father of the democratic movement."

No other American is more deserving of such an honor, Warner said.

Jefferson served as the third U.S. president, vice president to John Adams, the first secretary of state, commissioner to France, governor of Virginia and author of the preamble to the Virginia Constitution for Religious Freedom.

Proceeds from the coin's sale would be used to restore and preserve Jefferson's homes at Monticello and Poplar Forest, as well as for the International Center for Jefferson Studies. The center is designed as a hub of scholarship in areas of interest to Jefferson, including architecture, archaeology, horticulture, law and political philosophy.

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-- By Pam Parry

Study ranks Smyth & Helwys
youth materials highly

LOVELAND, Colo. (ABP) -- A study of youth Sunday school curriculum has ranked the materials published by Smyth & Helwys among the best in the country.

Smyth & Helwys' materials ranked fifth among 42 junior high curricula surveyed by Group Publishing of Loveland, Colo. Smyth & Helwys, based in Macon, Ga., was founded by moderate Southern Baptists two years ago.

Junior high materials from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board ranked 11th in the study, which was published in the February-March issue of Jr. High Ministry magazine, published by Group.

Leading the computer-assisted ranking was Group's own junior high materials, although the publishers said the use of an outside evaluator prevented bias.

The rest of the top five were, in order, David C. Cook, Priority One Publishing and College Press. Both denominational and non-denominational publishers were surveyed. Scripture Press, also popular among Southern Baptists, ranked 22nd for its junior high materials. Judson Press ranked 26th.

Richard Barnes, manager of youth Sunday school curriculum for the Sunday School Board, declined to comment on the board's ranking without first studying the results.

The curricula were evaluated on the basis of teacher materials, student materials, overall impression, theme, art and reader friendliness.

Evaluations of materials from the top seven publishers were printed in the magazine. Of Smyth & Helwys "Intersection" materials for junior high, the study said: "Pros -- Uses active learning. Interesting activities. Good connection of the Bible to daily life. Good use of small group interaction. Cons -- Too much lecture. Theme doesn't always seem applicable to junior highers. Format is cluttered and difficult to read."

Officials at Smyth & Helwys hope the good evaluation will help the company's Sunday school materials for youth and children catch on in

churches. Although sales of the publishers' adult materials are increasing, the newer curricula for youth and children are not selling as well.

Smyth & Helwys added the children and youth materials to its Formations curriculum series last September, giving the publisher a fully graded line of Sunday school curriculum.

Cecil Staton, Smyth & Helwys publisher, said sales of the adult materials jumped 42 percent last September. It is now used by at least some Sunday school classes in 950 churches in 41 states, he said.

Although primarily a book publisher, Smyth & Helwys is adding both vacation Bible school materials this year and an undated adult curriculum in the fall, Staton said.

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-- By Greg Warner

Interfaith delegation to Croatia
calls for U.S. to accept refugees

ZAGREB, Croatia (ABP) -- "It was like looking into the face of hell," said Baptist activist Ken Sehested in describing the situation in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Sehested, who is executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, was the only Baptist in a 10-person interfaith delegation that visited the war-torn region in December. The delegation included Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders from the United States.

The purpose of the visit was to "make a concrete, explicit statement that this war cannot be justified in the name of God," Sehested said. The war there pits predominantly Roman Catholic Croatians against predominantly Orthodox Christian Serbians, with Muslims squeezed in the middle, he said.

At the end of its Dec. 9-18 visit, the delegation approved a statement calling on the United States to increase immediately its quota of refugees from the former Yugoslavia and for "an immediate investigation into the growing body of evidence that large numbers of women and children are being subject to rape, torture and murder -- often as part of the systemic practice of ethnic cleansing."

The group participated in a special interfaith worship service calling for peace. Held in a Catholic church in Zagreb, it was organized by Father Mirko Mataoic, the Franciscan abbot for Croatia.

The delegation took with them a special message from former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, saying he was adding "my prayers to those that are being offered today in Croatia. ... We must have the courage to face the realities of human cruelty and dedicate our talents to active peacemaking, not simply the passive deploring of violence and abuse."

Visits were made to several camps for refugees, displaced persons and newly released prisoners of war in the vicinity of Zagreb. The delegation also met with a variety of governmental and religious leaders in the country, as well as officials of the United Nations and private relief agencies.

Sehested described Croatia as a country "choking with refugees." The stories of brutality the group heard at Spanko camp, located just outside Zagreb, "are almost beyond human comprehension," he said.

"Especially horrendous is the level of violence against women," said Sehested of Memphis, Tenn. "We heard multiple firsthand accounts of the use of 'rape camps' by Serbian forces as a systematic tactic of war, as part of

their strategy of 'ethnic cleansing.'

"This is more than the infamous 'comfort brothels' established by German Nazis and the Japanese in China during World War II," said Sehested. "This seems to be the deliberate attempt by Serbian forces in Bosnia to actually dominate by reproduction and repopulation."

Sehested was quick to point out that atrocities are not limited to the Serbian forces fighting in Bosnia. There are documented cases of brutality committed by Croats and Muslims as well.

"But I am convinced that Serbian desire for dominance in the region, fueled in significant measure by the memory of Nazi-controlled Croatian repression of Serbs during World War II, is the root cause of this vicious cycle of violence," he said.

Although Baptists in Croatia are few -- some 2,000 in number -- they are contributing to the relief of suffering, observers say.

The person who organized the delegation's itinerary was a Baptist, Boris Peterlin, assistant professor at the Institute for Linguistical Research. He also is director of Christian Information Service in Zagreb, an agency he began in February 1992 with ecumenical support in order to provide up-to-date and accurate information on the crisis in the region.

Sehested met with Branko Lovrec, president of the Baptist Union of Croatia and director of Christian Resource Center. Until the war, the center's principal task was that of publishing Christian literature. But since the start of the war, much of the center's efforts have gone toward humanitarian relief.

Because of unique relations with Muslim community groups in Bosnia, the center has been able to send 100 trucks filled with essential supplies into Bosnia. It also provides food and clothing for as many as 3,000 people a month in the Zagreb area and transports 20-50 tons of food per month to refugee centers on Croatia's eastern coast. All of this is done by a staff of eight and a host of volunteers.

Of the visit to Croatia, Sehested said: "My experience has consistently been that if you want to locate God's redemptive, hopeful movement, find the places where life is being ruined, robbed and wrecked. Look into the face of hell. There God has positioned the elect, the faithful, the ones who know and trust the gospel promise, the ones able to risk their security, even their lives, for the sake of their neighbors in need.

"I found a bunch of those folk in this journey."

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-- By Robert Armstrong

TV anchor suspended after comments
about media's anti-Christian 'bias'

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- A television anchorman has been suspended from his job after telling a group of conservative political activists that the news media are "liberal" and biased against Christians.

Lee Webb, news anchor for WTLV in Jacksonville, Fla., was suspended by the NBC affiliate for three days Jan. 27 for "violating company policy," News Director Kevin Brennan told the Florida Times-Union.

The station declined to comment on the incident or to confirm the reason for Webb's suspension. Webb likewise declined to comment. "They've asked me

not to talk about it," he told the newspaper.

Webb was a speaker for a Jan. 16 leadership training seminar sponsored by the Jacksonville chapter of the Christian Coalition, a national organization founded by TV evangelist Pat Robertson to mobilize Christians for political action on conservative causes.

The seminar attracted 100-plus people to Westside Baptist Church, where Webb, one of several speakers, offered advice on how the Christian Coalition could influence the news media.

Webb's comments were later reported in a cover story of Folio, a weekly lifestyle newspaper in Jacksonville.

In his address, Webb mentioned "the obvious bias that exists in the media against you as Christians." According to Folio, he showed a videotape of an NBC News story on the Religious Right which he said illustrated the bias. "We hear complaints every day that the news media is liberal. Yes, my friends, it is."

The TV station's action suspending Webb, though apparently legal, brought complaints from many Jacksonville residents. They said WTLV, while claiming freedom of speech for its broadcasts, was applying a different standard to its employees.

It was unclear Jan. 28 if any other action would be taken against Webb, who is a member of a non-denominational Christian church in Jacksonville.

The Christian Coalition claims 470,000 donors and activists involved in 721 chapters nationwide. The Jacksonville chapter is "the most successful Christian Coalition in the country," according to director Tom Scott.

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-- By Greg Warner

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