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Sweeping changes needed in SBC
to head off crisis, Elder says

By Toby Druin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Lloyd Elder, former president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, is asking Southern Baptists to start a "modern-day missionary movement" to rescue the Southern Baptist Convention.

The threat to the SBC, Elder said in a letter May 8, is seen in dangerous statistical trends that will force the SBC to layoff missionaries and close down agencies and institutions, possibly by the year 2000.

Neither the SBC's "controlling majority" nor the "voting minority" can rescue the SBC alone, Elder said. Instead, he called for a "mission-support coalition within the whole Baptist family to stop the critical trends and support missions as we know it."

Elder asks that grassroots Southern Baptists -- "not a new political party" -- mandate that the 14-year denominational controversy be stopped through sweeping constitutional and bylaw changes that "would involve the whole family in missionary governance, and call on our people to renew their zeal in missions support."

The proposals would force the SBC's ruling conservatives to share power with state conventions and dissident moderate Baptists.

Elder's proposals would have the president and the first vice president be elected for two years and alternate between laypersons and ordained ministers; involve state conventions in the nomination of half the persons to serve on SBC boards, commissions and committees; change how messengers qualify for the SBC annual meeting; increase the maximum number of messengers from a church from 10 to 20; and have the convention be held every two years and include simultaneous regional conventions through television hookups.

His proposals are outlined in a three-page cover letter and a 16-page research report entitled "Calling the Family Back Together" which was mailed

last week to 6,300 persons -- "representative missions leaders in the churches, associations, state conventions and SBC" and to state paper editors, Baptist Press, Associated Baptist Press, Baptists Today and secular religion editors and writers.

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, declined to discuss Elder's research and proposals. "I have no response," he told Associated Baptist Press.

Elder, who was forced to retire in August 1991 after seven years as president of the Sunday School Board, said he had paid the \$7,300 cost of research, editing, printing of 8,000 copies and distribution of the report. If others want to help with mass distribution, he said, copies can be obtained in lots of 25 for \$20.

The report and action plans grew out of his concern for the future of the denomination, he said in the cover letter.

"Months ago, I became concerned at the alarming decline in mission support in our Southern Baptist Convention, especially through the Cooperative Program," he wrote. His concern led to research that produced five research position papers totaling 65 pages which became the basis for his "report to the family."

His work does not relate to his former role as president of the Sunday School Board, he contends. In his retirement agreement, Elder became an advisor and consultant to the board at full salary (\$135,888) and benefits for a year, which ended April 1. After that he receives half salary and full benefits, plus an automobile.

Under the agreement, however, Elder risks losing all compensation if he makes any statement or takes any action "not in the best interest" of the Sunday School Board. But Elder said the report is not about him or the Sunday School Board.

Instead it has grown out of his 40 years of participation in the denomination, he said. He was a Texas Baptist pastor, associate to the executive director of the Texas convention and executive vice president of Southwestern Seminary before becoming president of the Sunday School Board. Since his retirement he has taught biblical studies and preaching at Belmont University in Nashville.

The 14-year-old SBC controversy has now consumed one tenth of the life of the convention, Elder wrote. "That's enough," he wrote. "Unless we make a move now, the crises continue to erupt, and the trends continue to develop."

Elder said he will attend the annual meeting of the SBC in Houston in June and hopes those to whom he has sent his report and others who will hear of its contents will act on it.

"Only a movement of grass-roots, mission-supporting Southern Baptist people and a miracle from the Lord will change the course of our denomination," he says. "Leadership from the state conventions could be absolutely essential, but a new political party would only further divide us."

In the past 14 years, while SBC conservatives have gained control of the denomination and its agencies through a series of narrow elections, the numerical growth and financial contributions of Southern Baptists have fallen off, according to statistics cited by Elder.

"Either the Southern Baptist Convention has become what the people want but are not willing to support financially, or, the Southern Baptist Convention can be changed by the people into what they do want and will, in fact, support."

Elder's report is in two parts. The first on "Critical Trends" analyzes what has happened in the denomination since 1980, the year following the beginning of the controversy, and projects trends through 2000.

The second part Elder calls "My SBC Vision for a Family in Crisis Toward 2000 A.D." and concludes with 20 "action plans."

His analyses include results of SBC presidential elections, trends in membership growth, total baptisms, church gifts to all causes, church budget gifts, mission gifts, Cooperative Program gifts and other areas.

One chart details the giving examples of churches of persons serving on the SBC Executive Committee and on the mission boards, the Sunday School Board, the WMU Executive Board, the Coordinating Council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and those who have served the last 14 years as SBC president.

Elder's research suggests leaders of the Fellowship are more supportive of the SBC Cooperative Program than are recent SBC presidents or members of the SBC Executive Committee, which controls the Cooperative Program budget.

The churches represented by the members of the CBF's coordinating council gave a higher percentage of church income to the Cooperative Program in 1991 (7.21 percent) than the churches represented by the members of the Executive Committee (6.84 percent) or the last seven SBC presidents (4.45 percent).

The CBF churches also gave more to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (1.98 percent) than did the churches of the Foreign Mission Board trustees (1.78 percent) and more to total missions (18.19 percent) than other leadership groups with the exception of the national WMU Executive Board (19.4 percent).

A summary of Elder's 20 proposed action plans:

- Reaffirm and reunite ourselves around missions.
- Recommit ourselves to the faithful and sacrificial support of our mission causes.
- Respect the autonomy of all Baptist bodies by consistently practicing the SBC Constitution's statement on authority.
- Continue to appoint one messenger for every mission-supporting, Southern Baptist church--regardless of size of mission gift or membership. Add a second messenger for each church of any size that gives at least two percent of its undesignated receipts through the Cooperative Program.
- Elect all other messengers, based on one additional messenger for each additional one percent of church budget gifts through the Cooperative Program.
- Increase the maximum number of messengers from each church to 20 messengers, or up to two percent of church membership.
- Require all messengers to the SBC to be at least 18 years old.
- Change business sessions from annual meetings to every other year.
- Establish a national network of 36 to 72 "regional voting conventions" for registered messengers to meet simultaneously with the national convention session.
- Provide for pre-registration, issuing as many as 200,000 to 300,000 Baptist voter registration cards.
- Select the SBC president, other SBC officers and all members of SBC boards, commissions and committees from churches that contribute through the Cooperative Program at least the convention-wide average percent of church budget gifts.
- Include members and churches of the family in participation and representation in Southern Baptist governance based on their support of Southern Baptist causes, not excluded because of their support of other mission causes.
- Require that the offices of SBC president and first vice president alternate between laypersons and ordained ministers and that they be elected for two-year terms.

-- Share the SBC president's appointment power to the Committee on Committees with the elective/nominating processes in the 34 eligible state conventions.

-- Authorize each of the 34 state conventions through their elective processes to appoint one of two nominees to serve on the Committee on Committees. The other 34 would be appointed by the SBC president.

-- Authorize the state conventions to nominate one of the two nominees to serve on the Committee on Nominations. The SBC Committee on Committees would nominate the other 34.

-- Authorize the state conventions to nominate the first eligible member to the SBC Executive Committee and each eligible third and fifth member. The Committee on Nominations would nominate the other members.

-- Authorize the state conventions to nominate the first eligible trustee and each additional third, fifth, etc. The Committee on Nominations would nominate the other trustees.

-- Authorize each state convention to nominate the first eligible state member to the governing bodies of the seminaries, commissions and foundation. The SBC Committee on Nominations would nominate all others.

-- Follow the SBC constitution and bylaw requirements for amendments to accomplish these proposed revisions for restoring the focus on missions, giving and governance.

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**SBC conflict, Masonic issue
cutting into seminary donations**

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- More than a decade of denominational conflict and "disruptive changes" at some Southern Baptist Convention institutions are making donors wary of investing their money in those institutions, according to the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

A case in point, says Russell Dilday: the current flap between Southern Baptists and the Masonic Lodge may have cost the Southwestern a major gift of between \$3 million and \$6 million.

Speaking to a group of Dallas pastors recently, Dilday said many donors or potential donors are asking how they can retrieve their money if Southwestern is "negatively affected" by "fundamentalists."

"I expressed concern to the men in Dallas and to other groups to whom I have spoken that raising money in the last five to seven years has become increasingly difficult because of denominational conflict or tension," Dilday said in a telephone interview with the Baptist Standard of Texas.

Fundamental-conservatives, who began to dominate the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979, have solidified their control of convention boards over the last few years, and administrative leadership of many institutions and agencies has been replaced.

Such "disruptive changes," Dilday said, "have resulted in great anxiety and frustration by donors who are asked to place their money in our institutions."

"Donors are asking ways they can take their money back if the institution is negatively affected by fundamentalists -- the term they use," said Dilday. "They ask if exclusions can be written into a trust agreement that lets them redirect the money if the president is fired."

The dispute over Masons has complicated one highly significant gift to the seminary, Dilday noted. He declined to give details but said the gift of between \$3 and \$6 million had been delayed and "possibly withdrawn" because of the Masonic conflict.

After a yearlong study of the secret order by the SBC Home Mission Board, the board concluded that, while some Masonic teachings are incompatible with Christianity, membership in Masonic Lodges should be left to individual Christians.

If that compromise recommendation is approved by the SBC this summer, Dilday said, he is hopeful the gift will be reinstated.

Other donors are placing restrictions on their gifts.

One major gift funding a chair of instruction at Southwestern was made with the stipulation that the professor holding the chair must be approved by both the president of Southwestern and the president of Baylor University.

"That is just an illustration of the frustration felt by the donors," Dilday said.

A couple of major foundations with whom seminary officials have talked recently have expressed reservations about the stability of the convention and have indicated that "until Baptists settle their disputes, we will not be favorable to proposals from your schools."

The hesitancy of donors, coupled with an overall decline in SBC seminary enrollment since 1985-86 and a resulting drop in fees collected, decline in Cooperative Program receipts and lower interest rates collected on endowment investments have led to tight financial problems for many of the seminaries, Dilday noted.

"However, in spite of all that, Southwestern continues to a kind of oasis of stability," he added. "Morale is high and the spirit is good. The board of trustees are supporting the administration in carrying out our goals, the faculty is staying in place and enrollment the last four semesters has either been level or turned up.

"All indications are that we are doing good work here. We are not gloating and don't presume about the future, but we would be insensitive not to be grateful for the way we are staying with it."

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Churches should teach dying,
staying well, speakers say

By Mark Wingfield

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- The church can play a role in health-care reform by teaching people how to die and how to experience wellness through spirituality, speakers said during a conference on "The Church's Challenge in Health."

The event, sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics, was held at Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., May 12-13. About 185 people registered for the conference, including Baptist physicians, nurses, hospital administrators, pastors and teachers.

The conference included a panel discussion about options in health-care reform. One of the issues that surfaced repeatedly on that panel and among other speakers was the enormous amount of money Americans spend fending off terminal illness and natural death due to old age.

For example, 80 percent of all money spent on health care in the United

States is expended in the last six months of a person's life, said Jerry Hickson, chief of general pediatrics at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tenn.

This expense could be reduced if the church would help people learn to deal with death, he said. Further, Christians could set an example for keeping families together and reduce costs through means such as respite care for the dying, Hickson suggested.

The rise of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, is one example of how health-care issues are complicated, said Marion Baur, dean of the nursing school at Samford University. She recalled how the resuscitation technique was developed for certain life-threatening cases where the patient otherwise had a good prognosis for living longer.

However, once the technique was known, "we ran through the hospital and thumped on anybody and everybody there," she explained.

And that was only the beginning of medical technology which has created multiple ethical dilemmas, Baur declared. "Technology has outpaced our wisdom, our morality, our Christianity and our laws."

The church should be concerned about helping sick people because Jesus was concerned about helping sick people during his earthly ministry, said David Sapp, pastor of Derbyshire Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

"Healing is a gift ... a gift born of the compassion and heart of God," he said.

However, health must not be made into a god, Sapp warned. "If we make health our god, hospitals our temples and doctors our priests, we follow a health that will ultimately fail."

All people eventually will die, he noted.

Healthy living requires living from the inside out rather than from the outside in, said Chuck Bugg, professor of preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

People who live from the outside in are shaped by circumstances, he said, while people who live from the inside out learn to change themselves when the circumstances of life cannot be changed.

The 21st century will bring greater emphasis on the role of spirituality in wellness, said Thomas Droege, associate director of the Interfaith Health Resource Center of the Carter Center in Atlanta.

"Faith has always been a factor in healing, whenever and wherever it occurs," he explained.

"Hope keeps people well and it facilitates healing Hope is an expression of faith. Keeping hope alive is what the church is about."

Bill O'Brien, director of the Global Center at Samford University in Birmingham, agreed with Droege's emphasis on spirituality. "The 21st century will be marked by things of spirituality," O'Brien predicted.

But in the last days of this century, health-care reform is urgently needed, said Emmett Johnson, president of Baptist Health Systems in Birmingham. "We're right at that last minute before we fall off the cliff," he asserted.

Health-care costs in America have increased at more than twice the rate of inflation in the last 40 years, Vanderbilt's Hickson reported. While general inflation has been 300 percent since 1950, health-care spending has increased 700 percent, he said.

The causes of medical inflation are many, Hickson said. He cited the self-interests, education and risks that impact physicians; costs of medical education; consumers' high expectations; the influence of the way health-care providers are paid; malpractice protection costs; and the increasing costs of hospitalization that have nothing to do with health care.

There are many forces pushing for more spending but few pushing for

conservation, Hickson charged. He said Americans have been overcome with the false security of use-now, pay-later medicine.

Achieving justice in health care will require Americans to face the issues of poverty and human depravation, said Wayne Flynt, distinguished professor at Auburn University.

"Perhaps absolute justice cannot be obtained in this world," he said. "Perhaps the poor we will always be with us. But approximate justice is obtainable."

The conditions related to health care in many of America's inner cities is worse than in Third World countries, Flynt and other speakers warned.

And while fortunate Americans worry about often-frivolous health-care issues, residents of the inner cities and the Third World worry about basic survival, said John Tarpley, a missionary surgeon for 15 years at the Baptist Hospital in Ogbomoso, Nigeria.

There still are areas of the world where childbirth often is fatal to women, he said. And the infant mortality rate in the first year of life is 10 times higher in some countries than in the United States.

Just as Jesus touched and healed lepers, the church must reach out to those stricken by lack of health resources, the missionary doctor said.

"Will we, the believers of the world, touch? Will we, the believers of the world, address the Third World challenges?"

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Churches should teach dying,
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Stop hating, start working
against AIDS, doctor urges

By Mark Wingfield

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Christians need to get over their homophobia and realize AIDS is a "national disaster" that threatens all people, a medical professor who works with AIDS patients told a group of Baptists.

"Throw your homophobic fears out the window. They don't count. That's not the issue," Michael Saag said during a conference on "The Church's Challenge in Health" sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics May 12-13 in Birmingham, Ala.

Saag is associate professor of medicine at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and director of the university's AIDS outpatient clinic.

AIDS is perceived as a homosexual issue only because it hit the gay community first, he explained. Had AIDS appeared in the 1940s, it might have hit servicemen the same way venereal disease did then, he added.

Calling AIDS "the VD of the 1980s and 1990s," Saag said AIDS is "no different than any other sexually transmitted disease." Saag himself has treated more than 15,000 AIDS patients.

Future AIDS cases will impact heterosexuals as much or more than homosexuals, Saag predicted. The number of Americans who already have died from AIDS equals three-and-a-half times the number of Americans who died in the Vietnam War, he said. And the number who will die of AIDS this year alone equals the U.S. casualties in Vietnam, he added.

"The epidemic is just beginning," Saag warned.

He showed statistical projections to buttress his point that the number of AIDS cases is multiplying exponentially every year and moving strongly into the heterosexual population.

Although most of the Americans who currently have full-blown AIDS were infected through homosexual encounters, many more of the people who currently carry the HIV virus that eventually leads to AIDS became infected through heterosexual sex, he explained.

And most AIDS victims are young people -- between 20 and 45 -- cut down in the prime of life, he added.

These statistics demand to grab the church's attention, Saag declared.

"For too long we as a society have turned our backs on this epidemic and pretended it didn't exist," he said, noting that in the future "it will affect you in ways you cannot imagine."

This denial has happened in large measure because AIDS has been linked with homosexuality, Saag said.

He showed a clipping from a secular newspaper with the headline, "Pastor pickets AIDS victims' funerals." A photo accompanying the article showed a man outside a funeral carrying a large sign proclaiming, "God Hates Fags."

"We are supposed to be a compassionate people," Saag lamented. "And

frankly, we are anything but compassionate. The compassion you preach about on Sunday morning, it's not out there."

America has "a crisis, an emergency of overwhelming proportions screaming at us and we've done virtually nothing but hating," he said.

Saag advocates teaching adults and children the facts about AIDS at home and in churches. Americans also need to be taught to take responsibility for their personal behavior, he said.

"The uninfected need a message to be responsible," Saag said. "The church is an excellent place to start, but the home is the best place to start."

Children and teens need to be taught that "the only safe sex is abstinence," the doctor declared.

However, he said teens who obviously won't be responsive to a plea for abstinence need to know they should find some protection through such means as condoms.

There is no data to support the claim that sex education promotes teens to engage in more sex, he charged.

However, he said children need to be taught that when they take on adult decisions, they face adult consequences.

Parents and churches must do all they can to fend off the spread of AIDS, he urged. "We are in a war, and we're losing badly."

"I am sick and tired of watching young people die. And I am sick and tired of watching us watch young people die and do nothing but hate."

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High court won't review
Bible distribution ruling

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Distribution of Bibles by Gideons to elementary school students during instructional time is not permissible under a federal appeals court ruling which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld May 17.

Without comment, the nation's highest court refused to disturb a ruling by the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that struck down a Rensselaer, Ind., school district's policy that for years had permitted the Bible distribution by Gideons International.

The appeals court's ruling reversed a federal district court's finding that the practice was no more offensive than allowing representatives of Little League baseball to discuss the sport in the classroom.

The school district argued that it had created a designated public forum by giving school officials the authority to allow distribution of literature by community members and that it could not discriminate against religion in such a forum.

In rejecting the school district's argument, the appeals court noted that the superintendent had excluded one publication and intended to exclude others found to be objectionable. The school district cannot exercise control over content while claiming to be tied to the requirements of content neutrality, the court said.

Two Baptist church-state attorneys warned that school officials and others should not read too much into the court's action.

"The decision should not be interpreted as prohibiting the distribution of religious literature by students," said Oliver Thomas, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee. "Such distribution, as long as it is not disruptive, is generally permissible, subject only to reasonable restrictions on the time and place of distribution."

Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel, said the decision does not mean that Gideons cannot distribute Bibles on the sidewalks adjacent to schools.

"The ruling only prohibits outside groups from having access to a captive audience of impressionable students," Walker said.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said the high court's action protects religious neutrality.

"I don't think the Religious Right attorneys who defended the school's policy would be as enthusiastic if the Unification Church tried to distribute the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Divine Principle to impressionable students," Lynn said.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Non-profit mailers
may face higher rates

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- State Baptist newspapers probably will face a small rate increase for each of the next six years, beginning in October. But the news could have been worse, according a major non-profit mail organization.

The House Post Office and Civil Service Committee approved, 17-5, a compromise measure that would phase in higher rates on non-profit mailers over a six-year period. The compromise, drafted by committee chairman William Clay, D-Mo., was drawn after the Clinton administration proposed 150 spending cuts that included funding for preferred postal rates.

The administration wants to save \$152 million over four years by reducing revenue-foregone appropriations to the U.S. Postal Service. Revenue foregone, which has been steadily reduced for the past several years, reimburses the Postal Service for the non-profit mailers' share of overhead expenses. Non-profit rates reflect only the cost of handling that class of mail.

While saving the government money, it would have resulted in a 35 percent rate hike Oct. 3 for non-profit mailers.

The Clay compromise would mean a 12 percent increase -- about 2 percent annually for six years -- for second-class non-profit publications. Third-class non-profit publications would face a 23 percent hike -- about 4 percent each year.

The measure also would:

-- repeal the surcharge on third-class flats or non-letter-sized material;

-- charge second-class non-profit publications the commercial rate if their advertising exceeds 10 percent; and

-- bar non-profit mailers that have certain commercial dimensions from using the preferred rate.

Non-profit mailers will continue to have lower rates, with commercial mailers picking up the tab formerly paid by taxpayers.

The Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers had hoped for a better result, but given the political reality, it can support this compromise, said Brian Hummell, assistant director of the group. The alliance is willing to go along with the measure as it is, he added, but if it is amended it could unravel the whole proposal.

"If this is the end product," Hummell said, "non-profits can live with it, but we are giving up quite (a lot)."

If the measure is approved by the House, it will go to the Senate for

action. Hummell expects the Senate to be a tougher battle ground for the proposal.

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-- By Pam Parry

Both religion clauses
essential, Dunn asserts

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Fidelity to both separation of church and state and the free exercise of religion will encounter opposition in today's pluralistic society, according to a Baptist church-state specialist.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, told participants at a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship breakout session that the First Amendment's guarantees of church-state separation and free-religious practice are not in competition with each other.

But supporting both, he said, will rub some people the wrong way.

Highlighting ways the BJC has worked to protect both principles, Dunn cited the agency's 1983 opposition to a proposed constitutional amendment to permit public school-sponsored religious exercises and its leading role the next year in the enactment of legislation protecting students' rights to meet before and after school for religious purposes.

Dunn said Baptists have always welcomed diversity and shunned conformity and creeds.

"We don't have a written creed," he said. "But there is an unwritten one, and you hear it prayed. You hear it taught in Sunday school classes. The wording varies but very little (among Baptist groups). ... It goes: 'Ain't nobody going to tell me what to believe.' "

In a report on church-state relations, BJC General Counsel Oliver Thomas told participants that the U.S. Supreme Court is moving away from protecting the constitutional rights of individuals.

Thomas cited a 1990 decision in which the high court abandoned its precedent of requiring government to show a compelling reason to restrict religious practice.

In that case, Thomas said, the court in effect said Americans' religious freedom will be accommodated if the legislature chooses. "But if they don't, the federal courts are no longer going to enforce free-exercise rights," Thomas said. "I call it the Pontius Pilate approach to decision making."

Thomas also pointed to a 1992 commencement-prayer decision in which justices came within one vote of abandoning the requirement of governmental neutrality toward religion. In a Rhode Island case, four justices wanted to permit government to sponsor religious exercises as long as no one is forced to participate.

"They do these things in the kinds of cases that would make you not notice them," Thomas said, noting that the court's decision to drop strong enforcement of religion rights came in a case involving the use of peyote in worship by Native Americans.

"It didn't pass the Bubba test because most Americans didn't care about Native Americans using peyote," he said.

The commencement-prayer decision has drawn strong reactions in some communities.

"Instead of having a fight over school prayer in your community, why not have a baccalaureate service?" Thomas suggested. "Baccalaureate services, if they are church-sponsored rather than school-sponsored, are perfectly

permissible."

Thomas told participants the BJC is involved in a controversial case involving animal sacrifice by practitioners of the Santeria religion.

The BJC has no position on animal sacrifice, he said, but is concerned about the authority of Hialeah, Fla., to single out only the killing of animals for religious purposes.

"If they can do that, they can tell Christian kids in public schools who want to distribute announcements for the youth revival, 'We're sorry, that's religious,'" he said. "And while other students can hand out their materials on the football game or the soccer club or the YMCA party on Saturday, you cannot hand yours out."

Thomas also briefed participants on lobby reform and gay-rights legislation.

Thomas criticized the lobby-disclosure legislation that recently passed the Senate because it exempts newspapers, but not churches.

"I think a free pulpit is as sacred as a free press," he said. "I think if a newspaper can editorialize about a piece of legislation that you ought to be able to preach for or against it without being treated like a professional lobbying organization."

Thomas warned that some information being circulated among churches concerning proposed gay-rights legislation is misleading.

"Congress is not about to force churches to employ, ordain or perform marriages of homosexuals," he said. "The Constitution forbids it."

Should a gay-rights measure begin to receive serious consideration in Congress, Thomas said, "we will not slumber or sleep until it exempts churches and religious organizations."

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-- By Larry Chesser

RLC elects six members
to terms on BJC board

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- The Religious Liberty Counsel elected six new board members to serve on the Baptist Joint Committee during its annual meeting May 14.

The RLC was formed as an advisory/support organization for the BJC. In recent years, the RLC served as a organizational vehicle to provide representation on the BJC for Baptists who channeled direct financial support to the BJC after the Southern Baptist Convention severed ties with the Washington, D.C.-based religious-liberty agency.

Elected to three-year terms on the BJC board were Cecil Sherman of Atlanta, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; and John Gilbert, pastor of First Baptist Church, Poplar Bluff, Mo.

Elected to two-year terms were Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Va.; and Marian Grant of Raleigh, N.C., recording secretary of the North Carolina Baptist Convention.

Elected to one-year terms were Bill Crosby, pastor of First Baptist Church, Erlanger, Ky.; and Ann Quattlebaum, a Greenville, S.C., counselor and social worker and president of the Alliance of Baptists.

The more than 80 RLC members attending the luncheon meeting were told by BJC General Counsel Oliver Thomas that the RLC's role is in transition. Thomas said a BJC subcommittee will recommend a bylaws change in October that would provide direct representation on the BJC for state conventions and

other associations of Baptists.

In a financial report, Development and Denominational Relations Associate Patrick Horn told the RLC the agency has met its budget to date this year, primarily because growth in CBF funding and an increase in foundation gifts have compensated for a shortfall in individual contributions.

RLC co-chairman Grady Cothen appealed to members to accept responsibility for increasing individual gifts.

"The best voice for religious liberty in America is hanging on by its fingernails," Cothen said.

Re-elected as co-chairmen of the RLC were Cothen, retired president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Abner McCall of Waco, Texas, president emeritus of Baylor University; and Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn, N.Y. Jerry Martin, pastor of Kensington Baptist Church, Kensington, Md., was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

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-- By Larry Chesser

ABP offers representation
to Virginia, Fellowship

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Associated Baptist Press will offer representation on its board of directors to several of its largest financial contributors, including Virginia Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The directors of ABP, meeting in Birmingham, Ala., May 12-14, also agreed to hire an associate executive editor and to consider starting a journalism awards program and an internship program for journalism students.

ABP is an independent news service founded in 1990 after the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, which operates the SBC's news service, fired both professional staff members in a dispute over editorial freedom.

ABP, which provides news and feature articles to more than 80 Baptist and secular publications, was established with a self-perpetuating board free from denominational control.

Expanding ABP's board of directors came at the request of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, which last November voted to pursue a "shared ministry" relationship with ABP and several other agencies it funds.

In 1992 Virginia Baptists contributed \$29,000 to ABP's \$194,000 budget. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization of moderate Baptists, contributed \$56,000.

The directors of ABP gave preliminary approval May 13 to a bylaw revision that would add up to three "appointed directors" to its 18-member board. Nominations for the openings, though submitted by outside persons or organizations, would be presented by ABP's chairman instead of the board's nominating committee.

The Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and perhaps others will be invited to make nominations.

The bylaw revision, along with others under study, will be presented for final approval through a mail ballot of the directors.

Board members said granting representation to the Fellowship and Virginia Baptists would not undermine ABP's independence, since only one position would be offered to each organization and since neither group has

tried to influence ABP's news operation.

Greg Warner, ABP executive editor, later spoke to the Fellowship's general assembly, which also met in Birmingham, and thanked the organization for its support. "Your commitment to press freedom, which has been transmitted to us with all goodwill and without interference, has helped us, and we are grateful," he said.

After approving a job description for an associate executive editor May 13, ABP's directors asked their executive committee to conduct the search and determine if and when it would be feasible to fill the position. The executive committee, meeting a day later, agreed to move ahead with the position and asked board chairman R. G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina, to appoint a search committee.

Other committees were asked to study the feasibility of a journalism awards program and internships for journalists in college and seminary. Thirteen Baptist colleges have expressed an interest in the internships, directors were told. Neither program is expected to start before 1994.

Directors agreed to give more attention to fund-raising. The executive committee will hold a monthly conference call to review progress in fund-raising.

One new director was elected to the board: Bob Stephenson, a layman from Norman, Okla.

Warner told directors that the first issue of ABP's monthly newsletter, approved at the directors' last meeting, was published in early May. The \$25-a-year newsletter, called Baptist Newswatch, is a digest of ABP stories and is targeted for Baptist laypeople.

Directors also previewed a five-minute videotape and a new brochure that will be used to promote the work of ABP.

-- By Greg Warner

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ADDITION: In the May 17 story "Carter embraces Fellowship....," please add the following after the 16th paragraph:

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn., was unavailable for comment. His associate, Bob Sorrells, did not respond to a request to discuss the incident.

And please make the same addition after the 19th paragraph in the May 17 story "Carter issues challenges...."

***** END *****