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Phone: (904) 262-6626 Fax: (904) 262-7745 CServe: 70420,73

June 8, 1993

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FMB nominee dogged  
by 'charismatic' label

By Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The man nominated to become the next president of the Foreign Mission Board almost lost his job two years ago because of his charismatic leanings.

Some colleagues say Jerry Rankin, a missionary administrator from Singapore, condoned or even practiced some of the so-called "charismatic gifts" -- speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, miraculous healings and other practices believed to demonstrate the Holy Spirit's power and presence.

While many Christians believe in and practice such spiritual gifts, most Southern Baptists oppose those practices as either unbiblical or divisive.

Rankin says he is not a charismatic and those who try to label him one misunderstand his beliefs or the nature of spiritual gifts.

But he acknowledges "praying in the Spirit" during private devotions and on one occasion interpreting a message spoken in tongues during a public worship service. And charismatic influences on his mission field, which some say Rankin condoned, are blamed for splitting churches in some countries.

The controversy over Rankin's beliefs produced a showdown two years ago among FMB administrators.

Rankin, area director for the FMB's 480 missionaries in Southern Asia and the Pacific, was questioned about his beliefs and practices in 1991 by his vice president, Bill Wakefield.

Wakefield, vice president for Asia and the Pacific, considered firing Rankin, according to several FMB administrators. "There's no question that Wakefield was after Jerry's scalp," said one FMB insider who asked not to

be identified.

The person who apparently intervened and saved Rankin's job is the man he is being hired to replace as president, Keith Parks.

Parks confirmed Rankin's tenure was in serious jeopardy. "But I felt he should have a chance to work through it rather than be fired," Parks recalled. "I still feel it was the right decision."

Instead of firing Rankin, a 23-year missions veteran, Wakefield issued a directive to missionaries in Asia in October 1991 stating the FMB would not allow missionaries to promote charismatic practices publicly. Although the FMB would not concern itself with the private spiritual practices of missionaries, Wakefield wrote, missionaries should avoid "identifying with the charismatic movement in general and the public practice of speaking in tongues in particular."

Wakefield, whom associates describe as a heavy-handed administrator, denies trying to fire Rankin. "If I had thought he should be fired, I know I had it within my power to do it," he said. "But we certainly had discussions about (spiritual gifts) and other matters I felt needed to be looked at."

Rankin likewise downplayed the episode. "Bill never was explicit (about firing) or implied that to me. Of course, Keith (Parks) may know something I don't."

Rankin and Wakefield agree their discussions focused on whether or not Rankin's emphasis on spiritual gifts was out of balance or interfering with his ability to supervise FMB work in the area.

Wakefield said he laid down guidelines for Rankin to follow in order to avoid "the perception" that he was encouraging charismatic practices. "Jerry found those to be too strict at the time," Wakefield recalled. "If anything had happened, it would have been Jerry looking at quitting."

Parks suggested the restrictions be revised, Wakefield said, and they were. Since then Rankin has operated "within the bounds that can be managed appropriately," Wakefield said.

Wakefield, considered the most conservative of the FMB vice presidents, issued a strong endorsement of Rankin after his nomination was announced. Yet earlier, when Wakefield learned the presidential search committee was considering Rankin, he told FMB staffers in Richmond that he would tell the committee about Rankin's charismatic leanings and that would nix the candidate's chances, FMB administrators said.

Wakefield denied ever trying to persuade the committee to drop Rankin from consideration. However, he said he told the committee about the confrontation over charismatic practices and other administrative dealings with Rankin. "They simply asked for information on Jerry," Wakefield said. "I shared with them in the fullest way this information."

In the end, however, after investigating Rankin's views and actions, the committee opted to nominate him anyway.

Joel Gregory of Dallas, chairman of the 15-member search committee, said a thorough investigation convinced committee members Rankin "does not practice, teach or advocate glossolalia and has held true to Baptist doctrine."

Trustees of the FMB will be asked to vote on Rankin's nomination June 14. Already the 51-year-old nominee has been endorsed by most of the SBC's conservative leaders, and his election seems all but assured. However, since the nominee must be approved by 75 percent of trustees, 21 of the 86

trustees could block the nomination.

It is unclear how much opposition Rankin's views are likely to generate among FMB trustees.

Paul Pressler of Houston, a leader among conservative trustees, denied knowledge of a rumored movement against the nominee. "There's always talk among trustees," he said. But Pressler said he has not decided how he will vote on Rankin's nomination. "I want to hear the man before I make up my mind," he said.

Gregory said the search committee will stand behind its unanimous choice despite criticism of Rankin's views on spiritual gifts.

"This entire thing is a tempest in a teacup, raised by people who either don't know the situation or are using it as a pretext because they wanted another candidate," Gregory said.

Rankin said he has no way of gauging trustee opposition but is trusting God for the outcome. "Just knowing the diversity among Baptists, I would imagine there is division among trustees on this matter."

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-- Robert O'Brien of the Foreign Mission Board contributed to this story.

Rankin's views on spiritual gifts  
demonstrate differences among Baptists

By Greg Warner

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- In one of the most unusual ironies in current Southern Baptist life, the man nominated to lead the denomination's 3,900 overseas missionaries holds views that would prevent him from serving the denomination as a stateside missionary.

Jerry Rankin, who will be presented for election as president of the Foreign Mission Board June 14, acknowledges "praying in the Spirit" during private devotions and on one occasion interpreting a message spoken in tongues during a public worship service.

That acknowledgement would automatically disqualify Rankin from consideration as even an entry-level missionary with the denomination's Home Mission Board. Trustees of the HMB, the Foreign Mission Board's stateside counterpart, passed a policy in 1987 that prohibits anyone who is "actively participating in or promoting glossolalia" from serving as a home missionary.

That irony demonstrates the division that exists among Southern Baptists over the issue of glossolalia, or tongues-speaking. While many Christians believe in and practice tongues and other controversial spiritual gifts, most Southern Baptists oppose those practices as either unbiblical or divisive.

Rankin, area director of the FMB's 480 missionaries in Southern Asia and the Pacific, is being nominated to become FMB president by a committee of conservative trustees who are theologically and politically in line with the HMB trustees who adopted the 1987 policy for home missionaries.

However, Joel Gregory of Dallas, chairman of the search committee

recommending Rankin, said a thorough investigation convinced committee members their nominee "does not practice, teach or advocate glossolalia and has held true to Baptist doctrine."

Rankin has said he believes all the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament are valid today, including tongues -- ecstatic, unintelligible "languages" considered by charismatics to be a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's presence in a person's life.

"From the standpoint of biblical authority, I don't think we can arbitrarily eliminate one or two (spiritual) gifts," he said. "That's an infringement on the sovereignty of God."

However, Rankin said he is not a charismatic, and those who try to label him one misunderstand his beliefs or the nature of spiritual gifts.

Rankin said his openness to spiritual gifts comes from his observations on the mission field. "From a missiological perspective, the abundance of God is moving in manifestations of power, particularly overseas and in Third World countries."

The charismatic movement presents a challenge to Baptists in many parts of the world, mission leaders agree. Charismatic churches are the largest and fastest-growing congregations in many countries in Asia.

Singapore, Rankin's base, is no exception. The culture in that tiny, independent island nation has provided fertile ground for charismatics, residents say.

"Singaporeans respond to glitter, noise, size, and they like to be entertained," explained missionary Fred Gibson, who was pastor of International Baptist Church in Singapore for six years.

The charismatic movement, rather than intimidating Rankin, has influenced him to seek an understanding of spiritual gifts and to pursue their legitimate use, colleagues say.

"He was not excessive," said Gibson, who now works with minorities and lepers in Singapore. "Most of the people here feel he didn't allow it to influence his relationship with his job and the mission."

Wakefield and other missionary colleagues say Rankin's openness in discussing spiritual gifts is disarming and has helped minimize conflicts. But it also contributed to the controversy that developed over his views.

Most of that controversy stems from an urban church growth conference that Rankin helped put together in Manila, the Philippines, in the spring of 1991 for Southern Baptist missionaries in Southern and Eastern Asia.

One of the speakers at the conference was Lawrence Kong, pastor of Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore, a large charismatic congregation which Rankin occasionally visited.

Kong was invited to describe the outreach strategies employed by his church, which attracts about 4,000 worshipers each week.

Missionary Les Hill, who was chairman of the planning committee for the conference, said he raised questions about Kong's charismatic practices but was assured Kong would only be advocating his church-growth methods.

"What I had been promised was not followed," said Hill, who was associate area director to Rankin at the time.

Instead, Kong's presentations reportedly included songs sung in tongues and encouragement to missionaries to seek charismatic gifts. "Lawrence came across very strong," said Hill. "He gave us 'freedom in the Spirit,' if you know what I mean."

Some missionaries objected and some refused to attend the sessions.

Participants said Rankin, as area director, responded to those protests by defending the conference's format, telling conferees they should be more open to what God is doing.

"Obviously, I was not heard for what I intended to say," Rankin explained June 3. "The perception was that I was in fact promoting" Kong's practices. Rankin said his criticism of missionaries concerned their "inability to hear what they could receive and filter out what they could not accept."

Rankin conceded Kong "did take advantage of the situation."

Some missionaries left the conference greatly disturbed, as did Baptist leaders from the various countries represented, said Hill, now president of the Baptist seminary in Baguio, the Philippines. Others, particularly some Philippine pastors, were excited by the emphasis on spiritual gifts and took the teachings back to their churches.

Some of those churches in the Philippines have split over the issue since the conference, Hill reported. "We're paying a big price for it," he said.

Rankin said some Baptists feel the conference contributed to division among the churches. But he added, "There already was disruption throughout our area."

Less than two months later, Rankin was preaching in a service at Queenstown Baptist Church in Singapore when a man in the congregation began to speak in tongues.

"I felt there was an awesome sense of the Lord's presence," Rankin recalled. "I'd never experienced something like that. What he was saying was very articulate to me in English. I felt uneasy. I wasn't going to respond. But then the pastor said, 'If this is a word from the Lord, there will be an interpretation.' There wasn't anything to do but be obedient to the Lord."

Rankin said he does not believe he has the spiritual gift of interpreting tongues on the basis of that one-time event. Neither does he believe he has the gift of tongues.

"In sensing the Lord's presence in my devotions, there have been times when I would acknowledge what I would describe as praying in the Spirit," he said. "But the Lord has never lead me to give public utterance. So whether I have the gift of tongues or not, I don't think I do."

"I don't in any sense consider myself charismatic," he said.

"It's unfortunate that Baptists don't have any other terms to use for someone who believes in and practices spiritual gifts than 'charismatic,'" he said.

"A charismatic advocates baptism of the Holy Spirit following salvation, accompanied by speaking in tongues, and believes that's normal for everyone and is a sign of having the Holy Spirit. I don't believe that. I don't believe it's scriptural. I've never believed it."

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-- Robert O'Brien of the Foreign Mission Board contributed to this story.

Supreme Court says discrimination  
against religion unconstitutional

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Policies governing after-hours use of school facilities cannot discriminate against religion, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court ruled June 7.

Justices said that a school district cannot bar the use of its facilities to address a topic from a religious standpoint when it permits that topic to be addressed from non-religious perspectives.

The high court struck down a New York school district's policy that permitted after-hours use of its facilities for a variety of purposes but prohibited religious uses:

Lamb's Chapel, an evangelical church in the Center Moriches community in Suffolk County, N.Y., challenged the policy after it was denied the use of school facilities to show the James Dobson film series, "Turn Your Heart Toward Home."

In siding with Lamb's Chapel, and its pastor, John Stiegerwald, the Supreme Court reversed lower-court rulings that upheld the district policy.

While school districts have broad discretion in controlling the use of facilities, including the control over subject matter, they cannot discriminate on the basis of viewpoint, the court said. The Center Moriches district policy did just that, the court said, by permitting the facilities to be used for presentation of all views about family issues except those from a religious perspective.

The court rejected Center Moriches' argument that the First Amendment's establishment clause required the district to ban the use of its facilities for religious purposes.

"The showing of this film would not have been during school hours, would not have been sponsored by the school, and would have been open to the public, not just to church members," wrote Justice Byron White, who is leaving the bench at the end of this term.

Under those circumstances, White wrote, there is "no realistic danger that the community would think that the district was endorsing religion or any particular creed, and any benefit to religion or to the church would have been no more than incidental."

While the court was unanimous in its judgment that Lamb's Chapel's speech is protected, not barred, by the First Amendment, justices disagreed about the rationale.

Three justices -- Anthony Kennedy, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas -- took exception to White's use of the Lemon test to decide whether allowing Lamb's Chapel to use the facility would violate the First Amendment's ban on governmental establishment of religion.

Formulated in the 1971 Lemon vs. Kurtzman decision, the Lemon test requires governmental actions to have a secular purpose, neither advance nor restrict religion and avoid excessive entanglement with religion.

White -- along with Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Associate Justices Sandra Day O'Connor, David Souter, John Paul Stevens and Harry Blackmun -- said none of the Lemon requirements would be violated by allowing Lamb's Chapel to use the school facilities.

Scalia, in a concurring opinion joined by Thomas, criticized the court for using Lemon.

"Like some ghoul in a late-night horror movie that repeatedly sits up in its grave and shuffles abroad, after being repeatedly killed and buried, Lemon stalks our establishment-clause jurisprudence once again, frightening the little children and school attorneys of Center Moriches Union Free School District," Scalia wrote.

In a separate concurring opinion, Kennedy called the reliance on Lemon "unsettling and unnecessary."

Religious and civil liberties were quick to praise the court's decision.

"Once again the Supreme Court has affirmed that the public square is not naked," said James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, which joined the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and other groups in backing Lamb's Chapel.

"Government neutrality is the standard," Dunn said. "We applaud and affirm this restatement of the high principle."

BJC Associate General Counsel Brent Walker said the decision "makes clear that religious speech is entitled to the same constitutional protection accorded other types of speech, so long as the state is not endorsing the religious message."

"We are pleased that the majority of six justices noted the continued viability of Lemon and the principle of neutrality it embodies," he added.

Christian Life Commission attorney Michael Whitehead noted that this is the third time the court has affirmed the principle of equal access for religious speech.

"We hope the First Amendment fundamentalists on the left, the 'strict separationist' crowd, is getting the hint," Whitehead said. "Equal access is the law. Equal treatment of religious speech is permitted by the establishment clause and commanded by the free-speech clause."

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said: "No longer may government officials discriminate against religious citizens who want to meet in public places. Religious viewpoints are now restored to equal protection under the law."

Jay Sekulow, attorney for Lamb's Chapel and chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, said the court is saying that "religious speech cannot be extricated from the public arena. Free speech is protected under the Constitution, and that includes religious free speech."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, called the decision a two-pronged victory for religious freedom.

"On its face the ruling is a significant victory for religious free speech," he said. "As an added bonus, the court was clear that if this activity had been sponsored by the school or had occurred during school hours, a forbidden line would have been crossed."

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-- By Larry Chesser

## Graduation prayer dispute rejected by Supreme Court

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- First Amendment specialists disagree over the impact of the U.S. Supreme Court's June 7 decision not to review a lower court's endorsement of student-led, student-initiated prayers at public school graduation ceremonies.

A year ago, the nation's high court struck down a Rhode Island school district's practice of providing clergy-led prayers at commencement programs. The court then instructed the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to reconsider a Texas school district's policy in light of its Rhode Island decision.

As it had earlier, the federal appeals court approved the Clear Creek Independent School District's policy. The Texas policy differed from the rejected Rhode Island policy, the appeals court said, because students voted to have prayer, a student led the prayer, and the prayers had to be non-sectarian and non-proselytizing.

This spring, school districts across the country were caught in a cross fire of competing legal advice. Some organizations, such as the American Center for Law and Justice, told districts that in light of the Texas case, student-initiated, student-led prayers are permissible. Others, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, answered that the Supreme Court had ruled in the Rhode Island case that any school-sponsored prayer violates the Constitution.

The court's refusal to hear the Texas case, called Jones vs. Clear Creek Independent School District, no doubt will add more heat and confusion to the debate over school prayer.

"Unfortunately, the court's refusal to hear the case will be portrayed by some as a suggestion that Jones was rightly decided," said Oliver Thomas, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee. "It wasn't."

Thomas noted that most of the hundreds of appeals filed each week at the court are rejected and that the court's refusal to hear a case does not necessarily mean the court agrees with the lower ruling.

At most, Thomas said, the appeals court's ruling is applicable in the 5th Circuit only, which encompasses Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

The American Center for Law and Justice took a different interpretation, saying the court's action "clears the way for students nationwide to pray and speak out about God during graduation ceremonies this month."

Jay Sekulow, ACLJ chief counsel, said the court's refusal to hear the Jones case "makes it clear that students do have the right to include prayer in their graduation ceremonies."

Thomas cautioned that religious Americans should not take too much comfort from a policy providing for non-sectarian prayers.

"What religious person could be satisfied with a court decision mandating 'non-sectarian' prayers?" Thomas asked. "That's like apple pie without the apples."

Sekulow's organization, founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, used the Jones decision this spring to urge school districts to permit student-initiated, student-led prayer at commencement programs.

However, rather than urging districts to follow the Texas district's

policy that requires non-sectarian prayers, Sekulow said the ACLJ urges districts to create a free-speech forum that would permit sectarian prayers as well as other speech.

Rather than becoming embroiled in legal battles over graduation program prayers, the BJC's Thomas said communities should look to a non-controversial solution.

"The best answer is still a church-sponsored baccalaureate service," he said. "Even the American Civil Liberties Union agrees that such an event is proper."

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-- By Larry Chesser

Leadership style spurs conflict  
between boomers, WWII generation

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- From the White House to the church house, a clash of leadership styles is sparking conflict between baby boomers and the World War II generation, according to careful observers of demographic trends.

Baby boomers -- broadly defined as people born between 1945 and 1964 -- want a "team ministry" style of leadership characterized by shared goal-setting, problem-solving and decision-making, according to Brian Saylor of the Church Growth Institute in Lynchburg, Va.

"People wanting to be part of the decision-making process -- that's very boomer," said Saylor, national seminar director for the institute.

But pastors of the World War II generation were taught by the military, the business world and the denominations they served to follow a highly structured, bureaucratic, hierarchal management style characterized by a clear chain of command -- a model rejected by baby boomers, said Carol Childress, director of the Leadership Network's Research and Information Center, Tyler, Texas.

Boomers are more concerned about relationships than institutions, are prone to devote themselves to local concerns rather than far-off denominational programs, and expect clear information and up-close examples of how their contributions are being used.

"It is clear that there is a new level of expectation about lay involvement among the younger generation," Childress said.

Generational differences were at the heart of a recent highly publicized rift at Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., according to some church insiders.

A number of Woodmont members -- particularly boomers -- said Pastor Bill Sherman, a longtime leader among Southern Baptist moderates, is aloof, domineering and consumed by denominational politics.

In his televised sermon on Feb. 28, Sherman publicly apologized for his perceived shortcomings and asked the congregation's forgiveness. Tensions continued to build, however, and the church squabble captured headlines in the local newspaper.

The congregation gave Sherman an overwhelming vote of confidence May

16, but not before a significant number of young families walked out of the service.

One member, who asked not to be identified, said attendance at Woodmont is in a "numerical free fall that is likely to continue." Several members and former church members agreed that the division primarily falls along generational lines.

"I see the newer generation wanting a collaborative form of church polity and an open pulpit which is not dominated by any particular personality on the ministerial staff," said Jeff Mobley, a Nashville attorney and former member of Woodmont.

Woodmont is not alone. Generational conflicts are surfacing in a growing number of Southern Baptist churches. The unusual aspect of the Woodmont situation was not that the rift arose, but that the division became public, according to observers of church conflicts.

In other congregations, the division between boomers and their elders has resulted in church splits, forced terminations or early retirements.

Norris Smith, a consultant in the church-staff support section of the Baptist Sunday School Board and a specialist in dealing with church conflict, said the "generational dynamic" undoubtedly is a prime element in a growing number of congregational disputes.

"You can even see it in the White House," Smith said, pointing to conflicts between President Bill Clinton's young staff and the older, entrenched leadership in Washington, D.C.

"It's hard for older people to turn loose of what they've built and adjust to another generation that doesn't have the same appreciation for the existing structures and for the way things have been done in the past," Smith said.

The older generation's loyalty to the church as an institution can clash with the boomer's desire to seek what they see as best for themselves and their families, he noted.

Ironically, the conflict between boomers wanting a role in church decision-making and pastors who are reluctant to relinquish control appears most pronounced in "moderate" churches that traditionally have denounced the autocratic pastoral style of "fundamentalist" congregations.

Conflicting expectations about pastoral authority are a key source of such conflicts, according to Paul Basden, a former pastor and now campus minister at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

"There are not many pastors -- myself included -- who can make a total break with the idea that the pastor has more than an equal voice in the church," said Basden.

In churches where members are continually reminded that "the ground at the foot of the cross is level," members may have difficulty reconciling egalitarian teaching with a practice in which the pastor and a hand-picked inner circle direct the church.

"This is not going to be the case in a church where there is a commonly accepted understanding about what pastoral authority means," Basden said. "There, world views are not colliding."

That's one reason, experts say, for the success of megachurches like Second Baptist of Houston, where current SBC president Ed Young is pastor.

In such churches, there is a shared understanding that the church hires a pastor because he is a strong leader with a vision from God who possesses determination to implement that vision, says John Vaughan,

director of the International Megachurch Research Center at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.

"The churches agree on the front end, 'This is how we do ministry here,'" Vaughan said.

Megachurch pastors function as executives who lead other leaders, not as managers who exercise hands-on control of operations, he said. "In growing churches, the people give up leadership, and the pastor gives up ministry," Vaughan said, echoing a theme of Young's.

Common expectations about leadership and common goals for ministry characterize successful churches, whether they are multi-staffed megachurches or rapidly growing new congregations, Vaughan said.

"Where the pastor leads as 'first among equals' in a lay-led church, that church potentially is headed for conflict," Vaughan said.

Not everyone agrees with Vaughan.

"The church of the 21st century will be a lay-led, lay-driven church," said Childress of the Leadership Network.

"The command style of leadership is waning," she explained. "The challenge is to move to more of what we call leadership by vision and values."

In the new model, the pastor articulates a compelling vision built around an overarching core value system that is clearly understood and endorsed by church members.

"That's the way you have to lead in times of great diversity when there are so many sides competing to be heard. And we believe that's what Jesus did," Childress said.

"It has to do with the empowerment of people and allowing them to develop to their fullest capabilities. The command style puts people into tightly drawn boxes. Leadership by vision and values frees people up to do ministry."

At Samford, Basden said he advises young ministers entering their first pastorate to sit down and discuss the matter of "vision" with lay leaders.

"I tell them, before they ever go to the church, to spend as much time as they possibly can getting to know the church -- its identity, vision, corporate culture and determinative values," Basden said. "Then I tell them to reveal something about themselves to the church -- their goals, their vision and their sense of what they are called to do best."

Church-growth specialist Lyle Schaller, retired from the Yokefellow Institute in Richmond, Ind., disputes the idea that baby boomers -- at least their largest sub-group, those born after 1956 -- really want a decision-making role. He points to the number of younger people who have left Southern Baptist churches to go to independent congregations with strong pastoral leaders.

"The critical issue for this group is not control. Their criterion is quality," Schaller said.

The real source of division in churches, Schaller maintains, is not generational but societal. Specifically, he sees society rejecting decisions made by far-off denominational executives and embracing local initiatives, even if those local ministries are carried out by churches "owned and operated by the staff."

Both young and old have things to learn that can prevent conflict, said Smith of the Sunday School Board.

"The younger generation needs a historical perspective to know why older members have done the work of the church in particular ways. There may be good reasons they don't know about," he said.

"At the same time, the older generation needs to turn over the reins of leadership and not be possessive. They need to learn that success in ministry is not the maintenance of an organizational structure.

"Success in ministry is seen in the lives of people as reflected in their relationship with the Lord and with other people."

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