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Mississippi College adds safeguards
in wake of embezzlement charges

CLINTON, Miss. (ABP) -- John Rogers donated chickens, a van and money to Mississippi College, where he serves as a trustee and where a student center bears his father's name.

Rogers, president of a Morton poultry company, hopes to assure supporters of the 167-year-old Baptist college that future donations will be in good hands. "Safeguards will be put in," he said Aug. 10 without elaborating.

Rogers and other college trustees met Aug. 12 to tighten procedures for donations amid accusations that former President Lewis Nobles embezzled about \$3 million in donations.

Nobles, 67, resigned Aug. 3 after 25 years as president when trustees began to investigate donations. Trustees allege Nobles diverted contributions for private use.

"I can assure you that anything coming in will go to the proper place," said Harry Vickery of Greenville, chairman of trustees.

Vickery was scheduled to meet Aug. 12 with leaders of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, which owns and operates the 4,000-student college.

Meanwhile, trustees are contacting key donors to address their concerns. Donors gave about \$2 million to the general fund last year. Records show the annual budget is more than \$22.7 million.

"This is very depressing," said Rogers, 64, a 1951 graduate. "It is hard to deny something is wrong. But it is difficult to accept."

His family's longtime support of Mississippi College is etched in stone on the Clinton campus. The college's B. C. Rogers Student Center is named for his father, who founded the Rogers Poultry Co. in 1931 and died in 1972.

Rory Lee, 44, a longtime college administrator, is serving as interim president until Nobles' successor is named. Nobles is moving out of the president's home, but no timetable for the move has been set, trustees said.

"This is a very unusual situation that occurred," Rogers said. "I think the college will remain very strong."

Vickery, trustee chairman, said it will be weeks before trustees can conclude their investigation of donations and investments that Nobles

handled.

No criminal charges have been filed against Nobles, but the FBI has begun looking into the dispute.

Nobles, who has been reluctant to discuss the allegations, defended himself in an Aug. 10 interview with the Baptist Record, newsjournal of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

"What has been put forth thus far is only allegations, and only one side of the controversy has been presented," he said. "In our jurisprudence system, a man is innocent until proven guilty.

"I'm not trying to be antagonistic but just to be patient until the full story is out," he said.

Former Mississippi College football coach John Williams, who resigned under pressure in 1991 because of questions about his divorce and remarriage, said Nobles was keen on playing the stock market.

"He was very, very much interested in stocks and the market," Williams said. "I'd read the sports page and he'd read the Wall Street Journal."

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-- By Andy Kanengiser of the Clarion-Ledger of Jackson. This story is reprinted with permission.

Ruth Ginsburg sworn in
as Supreme Court justice

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Taking oaths of office Aug. 10 at a private Supreme Court ceremony and at a public White House gathering, Ruth Bader Ginsburg became the second woman and 107th justice to serve on the nation's highest court.

Ginsburg, considered a moderate jurist on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia for the past 13 years, replaced retired justice Byron White.

Noting at the White House ceremony that "times are changing," Ginsburg praised President Clinton for nominating women for six of the 14 federal court positions he has filled.

Ginsburg, 60, predicted that during her lifetime, "there will be among federal judicial nominees ... as many sisters as brothers in the law. That prospect is indeed cause for hope and its realization will be cause for celebration."

A judicial system, she said, is enriched by "diversity of background and experience" and made poorer when "all of its members are cast from the same mold."

Clinton, the first Democratic president since Lyndon Johnson to nominate a justice to the Supreme Court, told the gathering that Ginsburg "defied labels like liberal and conservative, just as she did before the Senate, to earn a reputation for something else altogether -- excellence."

Her greatest challenge, Clinton says, lies ahead -- "a challenge to which she brings a powerful mind, a temperament for healing, a compassionate heart, a lifetime of experience."

Ginsburg's reputation on the federal appeals court bench as a thoughtful centrist helped pave the way for what Clinton described as the swiftest Senate confirmation of a Supreme Court nominee in nearly two decades. Ginsburg was confirmed Aug. 3 by a 96-3 vote after being nominated in mid-

June to replace White.

Despite her moderate credentials, Ginsburg is expected to be less conservative than her predecessor and a more consistent defender of church-state separation and religious liberty.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Charismatic Houston church
swims against SBC tide

By Mark Baggett

HOUSTON (ABP) -- "Our services use extensive praise music. There is clapping, dancing, victory shouts. At least one third of the service is given to hands-on ministry -- laying hands on the sick and anointing them with oil, and occasionally we have messages in tongues and interpretations."

No Southern Baptist would be surprised to find this description of a charismatic church in the rural South. But the speaker is pastor of a large Southern Baptist church in Houston and two-time president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

"Most Baptists would consider our church a charismatic church," said Wallace Henley, pastor of the Encourager Church in Houston, "but many charismatics would not."

Still, Henley and others in the SBC who believe in the gift of tongues have felt the resistance and rejection of mainline Southern Baptists, most of whom consider charismatic practices to be unbiblical or at least divisive.

Recently, during the annual SBC meeting in Houston, a controversy arose over the election of Jerry Rankin as Foreign Mission Board president and his alleged charismatic tendencies. Both Rankin and members of the FMB board of trustees who nominated Rankin emphatically denied that he was a charismatic.

But Henley called the debate a "semantic problem."

Nothing in the Baptist Faith and Message -- the most-used statement of Southern Baptist doctrine -- would exclude charismatic practices, Henley said, but "it has been an assumption."

"For a non-creedal denomination, we have a lot of creeds, and some of our creeds are assumptions," the pastor said.

"To say that Southern Baptists have never embraced it is to make a very general assumption of consensus," he said. "And we shouldn't build doctrine out of assumption and consensus."

It is difficult to determine how many Southern Baptist churches could be considered charismatic. C. P. Wagner, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, estimates there are 200 to 300 charismatic churches among the Southern Baptist Convention's 37,000 congregations.

Among all Baptist groups, however, 20 percent consider themselves charismatic or Pentecostal, according to "The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements." Two small Baptist denominations are devoted specifically to charismatic practices -- the Pentecostal Freewill Baptist Church and the Freewill Baptist Church of the Pentecostal Faith.

The Sunday School Board tracks worship practices among Southern Baptist churches but has no statistics on the number of charismatic SBC churches.

However, most observers agree charismatic practices and, more broadly, celebrative worship, are on the rise in the SBC.

Ron Pratt, a Sunday School Board consultant who works with ministers of

education, said celebrative worship -- which typically involves praise music, hand-raising and other demonstrative expressions but not necessarily speaking in tongues -- is appealing to people turned off by traditional hymn-oriented worship.

Pratt's own church -- First Baptist of Franklin, Tenn. -- incorporates some celebrative elements, Pratt said. Churches that have followed that trend "are appealing to a culture that is high-paced and visually oriented," Pratt said, "and that seems to be what has surfaced in churches that are trying to reach unchurched people."

Practices that could be characterized as charismatic differ widely, even among Baptists.

The Rankin controversy, for instance, had to do with what Rankin called his habit of "praying in the Spirit." Henley said he believes that every Christian filled with the Spirit of God has the capacity for what charismatics call a "prayer language," whether that person manifests the language publicly or not.

"He stops articulating English words and just groans," said Henley, citing Romans 8:26. "The difference in that and praying in tongues is giving that groaning an outward expression."

In a recent Encourager Church service, a man rose to speak in tongues, and others in the church offered interpretations of his speech, which Henley said in this case addressed a specific situation -- alcohol abuse.

"The interpretations unleashed a beautiful period of ministry in the body that addressed people's needs," said Henley.

When tongues are spoken in the service, the presbytery -- a group of 20 prayer leaders in the church, different from the six ruling elders and from the deacons -- are often called down to begin praying. So are other designated prayer ministers, all of whom would kneel at the 60-foot prayer rail at the front of the church.

In other services, the church will depart from the written order of worship and allow the six or eight praise leaders on the platform to direct.

"Last Sunday night," Henley said, "the whole service was the singing of old hymns. Over here, for example, someone would begin singing, 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' Sometimes, we let the Lord move us."

But Henley says the church departs from most charismatic churches in several respects.

Like charismatics, Encourager members believe there is a "second blessing," or a time after salvation when a believer receives the "baptism of the Spirit." But, Henley added, "we don't believe that everyone has to manifest tongues overtly."

The church also practices healing, Henley said, but "if a person is not immediately healed after a laying-on of hands, it is the sovereign will of God and not necessarily that the person is not ready to receive the Spirit because of some uncleanness."

Henley said one mistake of charismatics is forcing the same mold of expression on everyone. "My wife, for instance, worships God in quietness," he said. "Everybody has a different personality type, and God respects that type."

It was Henley's unique personality type that first led him on his odyssey to make peace between his interpretation of Scripture and Southern Baptist heritage and his growing desire to find a more demonstrative expression of worship.

After serving as an aide in the Nixon White House, Henley became pastor at Old Spanish Fort Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., where he began to wrestle with these issues.

"Several men had impacted me because they spoke of the Lord in a way that made me realize he was so real to them," he recalled. "It went beyond my cognitive belief. It was an experiential reality.

"People came and asked me to pray for healing and to anoint them with oil. I couldn't do that ... because my theological system wouldn't allow it. But James 5 gave a blunt command (for the elders of the church to pray for the sick and anoint them with oil) and I couldn't find anything scriptural to counter that blunt command."

This led to a re-examination of Scripture on the gift of tongues. He began trying to move his churches "to a fuller ministry." He now says he was impatient with those efforts. He has since apologized to members in those churches for "trying to bend the church in directions it didn't want to bend."

But even as he was serving his second term as president of the Alabama convention in 1984, he felt he was being led "to walk openly in what I had experienced back in 1974, what charismatics would call the baptism of the Spirit, and what Baptists would call 'filling'."

He was called to a pastorate in Houston, at what was then West Memorial Baptist Church. Soon he had instituted a New Testament eldership in the church -- six elders with oversight of the body. He led the church to move to a new site near Interstate 10 and change its name. Sunday attendance grew from 150 to 1,100.

To satisfy their sense of integrity, the elders drafted a letter to the local association outlining the changes made and explaining that the pastor and others spoke in tongues.

Rather than expelling the church, Henley said, the association responded, "We not only want you to remain, we need you."

Henley makes no apologies about the practices of the church, but he does reject the attitude that the gifts of tongues and Southern Baptist worship are incompatible.

In 1985, serving as one of seven state convention presidents who nominated Southern Baptists for the Peace Committee, he was told that Jack Taylor, a popular author and charismatic preacher, was an unacceptable choice.

"It is very important to realize that there are hundreds of Southern Baptist churches like ours," Henley said.

"I remember at my former churches people would tell me that this is not Southern Baptist. That really cut me to the quick. It hurt me because I had done a poor job in helping my people to realize that Southern Baptist tradition cannot be the Lord of Scripture."

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-- Greg Warner contributed to this article.

Views differ among Baptists
on validity, practice of tongues

By Mark Baggett

HOUSTON (ABP) -- "I cannot in conscience throw out any portion of the Bible, either on the basis of the ultra-dispensationalist theory or on the basis of higher criticism," said Jerry Rankin, new president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, in June as he faced a serious challenge to his

election.

Rankin had drawn criticism for his alleged belief in charismatic practices.

The Rankin nomination thrust the Southern Baptist Convention into an issue that Southern Baptists have never officially resolved in their confessions of faith: whether the gift of tongues is a valid spiritual expression.

Most Southern Baptists frown on the practice, which they believe is unbiblical or at least divisive. But others in the SBC, perhaps a growing number, are more open to charismatic practices.

The issue is far from settled. Much ambivalence remains, typified in part by Rankin's personal experience.

Rankin, a former missionary to Indonesia and director of FMB missionaries in Southern Asia and the Pacific, says he does not have the gift of tongues. But, he acknowledges, he occasionally "prays in the Spirit" during his private prayer life, and once offered the interpretation when a man spoke in tongues in a public worship service in Singapore.

Those who knew him on the mission field and those trustees who endorsed his nomination as FMB president maintain that Rankin is no charismatic.

But that presents a problem of definition. What is a charismatic? And what is tongues?

While there is no consensus among Baptists on the use of the gift, there is also no agreement on what tongues is.

Some of those who argue against the validity of tongues-speaking say the legitimate practice of the gift was limited to the early Christian centuries, when the Holy Spirit used the so-called "sign gifts" to validate the gospel message to a skeptical world.

But others, including Rankin, insist it is arbitrary and unwarranted to say any of the spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible have ceased. Many of those who acknowledge the legitimacy of tongues-speaking, however, are uncomfortable with its use in public worship. They prefer to believe the gift is used primarily as a "private prayer language," which is similar to Rankin's description of his own practice.

Yet another group of Baptists say tongues may still be a legitimate -- though rare -- spiritual gift, but it is not the same as the unintelligible speech usually associated with tongues-speaking today. One who holds such a view is Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"If and when the gift of tongues is given, it will be a re-enactment of Acts 2," Patterson said. "That is, the one given the gift will speak in a known language which he himself has never before officially studied for the purpose of communicating the gospel to those who otherwise might not be able to comprehend the language in which he would normally speak."

Few tongues-speakers would meet those criteria.

Missionaries report tongues-speaking and other "sign gifts" are often practiced by Christians in parts of the world where Christianity must compete with religions that rely heavily on demonstrations of spiritual power.

"In areas that are so devoid of the gospel, where spiritual warfare is present, there are debates in missiological circles over the validity of concrete expressions of the Spirit," said Bill O'Brien, a friend of Rankin's and a former missionary to Indonesia. "Jerry recognized that debate and was sensitive to those claims."

O'Brien, former FMB executive vice president, said FMB guidelines for appointment of missionaries have historically ruled out those who engage in open charismatic practices, partly because they produced "fractures of

fellowship" in some parts of the world.

But as for private practice of the gift, "it is such a subjective area that we did not think that was our concern." said O'Brien, now director of the Global Studies Institute at the Beeson School of Divinity at Samford University.

The dean of the Beeson School, Timothy George, said that most Southern Baptists would not accept speaking in tongues as a legitimate expression. But in frontier mission areas, such as the Far East, he said, the practice is more likely to occur.

"I've never experienced the gift of tongues," George said, "but I wouldn't question others' authenticity."

"The problem as I see it," said George, "is that the gift of tongues tends to become very divisive at the congregational level. It is a serious issue for the fellowship and for the unity of our mission."

Many pastors agree, although some believe the gift of tongues is still active. Typical is Bruce Calhoun, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Lacey's Spring, Ala.

"The problem with charismatic worship is that, when it is brought into an older, traditional church-worship setting, it creates a turmoil. It tends to be a very divisive. It tends to make some feel very spiritual and puffed up and then turn that on everyone else."

Calhoun and other pastors say the issue in Baptist churches is not so much the gift of tongues but demonstrative worship styles -- lifting hands, clapping, more expressive musical styles.

"You can't measure the barometer of my spiritual life by how loud I sing," said Calhoun. "Some say you must be lifting your hands. I say no, you don't necessarily have a spiritual problem if you don't lift your hands. Everyone worships in their own emotional way."

Calhoun said worship must be scriptural, which in part means that it is orderly, according to I Corinthians 14:26-40.

"Love is the guide," he says. "If the gift is causing division, then it is not from God."

Henry Johnson, pastor of Pathway Baptist Church near Dothan, said there is a place for demonstrative worship, but too often it is mistaken for charismatic practice.

"When someone raises their hands, claps their hands, keeps time with their music with the clapping of hands or tambourines, or something like that, that automatically puts everyone in the category of charismatic," Johnson said. "A great number of those instruments and those means are wonderful and tremendous ways in which to praise the Lord."

Although his church members do not speak in tongues during worship, Johnson said, if they did he would insist it be practiced "on a scriptural basis," following Paul's instructions for order in I Corinthians.

"Most of the tongues-speaking I know of being done is not in accordance with Scripture," he said. "Most of the practice of it is in total disregard to the Scripture."

"It should be done not as an outburst or an emotional thing, but totally as a result of God moving in the life of an individual. If it is a scriptural thing, then a person is not overwhelmed by an urgency to do so, but by a special message that is to be given."