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

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

August 24, 1993

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Florida pastor picked for prominent Dallas church
- * Parks cites different approaches, defends Fellowship
- * Kentucky conservatives hold 'invitation only' meeting
- * Church gets outside help as floodwaters take town
- * Flood leaves 2 churches with different results

Florida pastor picked
for prominent Dallas church

DALLAS (ABP) -- Florida pastor O.S. Hawkins will be offered the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Dallas, one of the country's most prominent pulpits.

Hawkins, a 46-year-old former Texan, has been pastor of the 10,000-member First Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale since 1978. He will be nominated to succeed legendary Dallas pastor W.A. Criswell Aug. 29, according to the chairman of the search committee.

Hawkins' election next Sunday by church members, considered to be a formality, may bring to an end three years of turmoil at the Southern Baptist Convention's largest and most influential church.

Joel Gregory was elected pastor in 1990 but resigned in September 1992, saying the 83-year-old Criswell was unwilling to relinquish leadership of the church as promised. At the time, Criswell continued to handle about half of the preaching duties at the church, where he has been pastor 49 years.

Almost a year later, Criswell, who carries the title of senior pastor, has since retired and preaches sparingly at the 28,000-member church. Gregory has not been hired for another pulpit.

Herschel Forester, chairman of the search committee at the Dallas church, told members about Hawkins' nomination during the morning worship service Aug. 22 after Hawkins' name appeared in news accounts over the weekend.

Likewise, Hawkins told his congregation Sunday, Aug. 22, that he is being recommended to the post. "I'm going to make the most monumental decision of my life in the next few days," Hawkins told parishioners. He said he is "not 100 percent sure" he will take the position.

Hawkins has long been mentioned as a candidate for the Dallas pastorate. Both Criswell and his wife, Betty, reportedly are strong supporters of the popular Florida preacher.

In 1988, even before Gregory's election, Hawkins reportedly was Criswell's favorite to become co-pastor of the church, with the expectation he would succeed Criswell when he retired. But the church did not fill the

position at the time.

Hawkins was again under consideration in 1990, when Criswell announced his intention to retire, but Gregory was the eventual choice of the search committee.

This time around, a search committee chose Hawkins from among four finalists. He will preach in three worship services Aug. 29 before the congregation votes that night.

If he moves to Dallas, Hawkins will return to familiar territory. He grew up in Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and later served as youth minister at the church. He is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

He also will be reunited with his longtime friend and colleague, Jack Graham, pastor of the 12,000-member Prestonwood Baptist Church, another of Dallas' prominent pulpits. The two were colleagues at Sagamore Hill and later, when Graham was pastor of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach, Fla., just north of Fort Lauderdale.

Both Graham and Hawkins are leaders in the fundamental-conservative movement that rose to power in the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s. Hawkins was president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in 1985.

Hawkins' church in Fort Lauderdale is one of the largest in Florida. It has distinguished itself in the community through its dramatic Christmas pageants and its annual Thanksgiving meal, during which the congregation feeds an estimated 10,000 homeless and needy people.

Before going to Fort Lauderdale, Hawkins was pastor of churches in Ada and Hobart, Okla. He and his wife, Susan, have two daughters.

-30-

-- By Greg Warner

Parks cites different approaches,
defends Fellowship against accusers

By Mark Wingfield

DANVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship ultimately has the same missions goal as the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board but will pursue a different way of accomplishing it, Keith Parks said Aug. 21 in Danville, Ky.

"The bottom line is we're all trying to spread the gospel, to bring people to know Jesus Christ," said Parks, former FMB president and current coordinator of the Fellowship's missions program. "The goal is the same. The way we go about it is different."

Parks was the featured guest at the summer meeting of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship, held at Lexington Avenue Baptist Church in Danville. The 250 people attending the one-day gathering represented the largest crowd ever to attend a Kentucky Fellowship meeting, said Carolyn Hale, the group's communications coordinator.

The Kentucky Fellowship is a state chapter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of moderates displeased with the Southern Baptist Convention's conservative leadership.

Parks left the FMB last year, citing "philosophical differences" with trustees. Their disagreement centered in part on support for the Baptist

Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland. The FMB cut funding for the school, which they accused of being liberal. The Fellowship later began supporting it.

Beyond Ruschlikon, Parks cited other differences between the FMB and the Fellowship:

-- Focus on unreached people groups. Aside from the Fellowship's 20-person mission force in Europe, which launched its new missions program, the Fellowship will concentrate on what missiologists call "World A," Parks said. World A is a region where about one-fourth of the world's population lives, predominantly people who never have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Only about 1 percent (3,000) of the world's missionaries work in World A, Parks said.

Despite some emphasis on World A, the FMB "is predominantly working in parts of the world that have the most missionaries, the most churches and the most money," he said.

-- Missionary assignments. The FMB assigns missionaries to nations, Parks explained. If a nation closes its doors to missionaries, FMB missionaries stop working with that people group until the country reopens, he said.

The Fellowship assigns missionaries to people groups, not nations, Parks said. This allows missionaries to work across geographic boundaries, both with nationals and expatriates, regardless of whether a country is open or closed.

For example, twice as many Albanians live outside Albania as live inside it, he said.

-- One mission board. While the FMB and its domestic counterpart, the Home Mission Board, separate missions inside and outside the United States, the Fellowship draws no such distinction, Parks said. "We're not dividing the world. We think that's long since passe to divide the world between home and foreign missions."

-- Missionary grouping. The FMB places missionaries near each other, so they can be organized into administrative groups known as missions. The Fellowship, though, "plans to scatter people and let them communicate electronically," Parks said.

-- No institutions. Institutions such as hospitals and seminaries have been a mainstay of FMB programs. But aside from its support for the Ruschlikon seminary, the Fellowship has no plans to start institutions, Parks said.

-- Divorcees and women. While the FMB opposes appointing divorced individuals as missionaries and won't appoint women to certain roles, the Fellowship won't be so restrictive, he said.

Women will be considered for more roles, and divorcees will be considered on a case-by-case basis, Parks said. "That doesn't mean everybody who's divorced is qualified to be a missionary, but it doesn't mean they automatically aren't qualified either."

Parks also defended the Fellowship against what he said are the four most-common accusations against it: that the Fellowship is theologically liberal, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, and doesn't believe in public prayer.

"All four are blatant lies," he declared.

Parks defended his theological orthodoxy. During his difficulties with FMB trustees, he recalled, he challenged them to cite any area where he was out of line theologically. "Not a one of them ever tried," he said. "They know, and I know, that there's no deviation in my teaching from sound biblical teaching."

Another common criticism of the Fellowship is that the new organization

is "tearing down the Cooperative Program," Parks said. The Cooperative Program is the SBC's unified missions-giving plan, which many moderate churches have at least partially bypassed to give to Fellowship causes.

To refute this argument, Parks cited a study, conducted by Lloyd Elder of Belmont University, on Cooperative Program giving in 1991. "The coordinating council members of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- their churches -- give a higher percentage to the Cooperative Program than any group among Southern Baptist leaders -- Executive Committee, Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board -- except Woman's Missionary Union's executive board."

Parks then referred to a "by invitation only" meeting of Kentucky Baptist conservatives held Aug. 19, called by its organizers a Cooperative Program Rally.

"I would guarantee you if we took an average of giving through the Cooperative Program of churches represented here and the churches represented there, the percentage given by your churches would be higher than the percentage given by theirs.

"They can talk CP all they want to, but until they start supporting CP, there's a lot of hypocrisy."

Parks said the Fellowship currently employs 22 missionaries and plans to approve six more in September. These will be the first "young, career missionaries" appointed by the Fellowship, he said.

-30-

Kentucky conservatives hold
'invitation only' meeting

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Conservative pastors held an "invitation only" rally in eastern Kentucky Aug. 19 to counter a perceived threat from the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship, which recently held a series of public meetings around the state.

A letter sent to select pastors to announce the conservative meeting also criticized the Kentucky Baptist Convention's executive director and the editor of the Western Recorder, the state Baptist newspaper, for belonging to churches that support the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The letter, written by pastor Mike Taylor of Prestonsburg, Ky., is the first identifiable sign that conservatives are preparing to turn out in force for the state convention's annual meeting.

"I would caution you that we do not want to give these (fliers) to anybody that we are not certain of where they stand," Taylor wrote in the letter. "This is not an open rally. This rally is by invitation only."

The Western Recorder obtained a copy of Taylor's letter from a pastor who received it in the mail.

The Cooperative Program Rally was held at First Baptist Church of Louisa, Ky. Rally speakers identified in the letter were Bill Hancock, pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, and Mike Routt, pastor of Eastern Gate Baptist Church in Shepherdsville.

Hancock, immediate past chairman of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said he had no knowledge of Taylor's letter.

Routt is one of two Kentuckians who attended a meeting in Memphis last August in which leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention's conservative

movement explained strategies for gaining control of state conventions. Routt did not respond to a telephone message left by the Recorder at his home.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is holding several regional rallies at which you and I are to believe nothing political is going on," Taylor wrote. "The reality is that we surprised them in Louisville and they are now preparing for Elizabethtown."

Taylor's reference to Louisville relates to last year's KBC annual meeting in which several initiatives supported by moderates were either defeated or passed narrowly. Moderates, who generally had been assumed to hold the advantage, also lost several key elections. This year's annual meeting is slated for Elizabethtown Nov. 16-17.

"We must increase our efforts," Taylor wrote, "to get as many messengers as possible, as the issue of contributing to the Fellowship through the KBC will certainly be brought up. If we lose the fight on this vital issue, we will lose the Kentucky Baptist Convention to the Fellowship."

Steve Hadden, moderator of the Kentucky Fellowship and pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Georgetown, said there's no way the Fellowship could take over the KBC even if it wanted to.

"We have 70 churches contributing to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship out of more than 2,000 Baptist churches in the state of Kentucky," he explained.

"The intent of the Fellowship is not to take over anything, and certainly not to take over the KBC. We want to support the KBC.

"It is our intent to prevent the sort of takeover that has occurred in the SBC and to resist fundamentalists who have a political agenda, who want to take over our agencies and institutions," Hadden said.

Taylor's letter criticized KBC Executive Director-Treasurer Bill Marshall and Western Recorder Editor Marv Knox for being "members of Fellowship churches."

"I don't know about you, brethren, but it really concerns me that they are paid by Cooperative Program monies to support the Fellowship in their editorials and Executive Committee decisions," Taylor wrote.

Marshall is a member of Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, and Knox is a member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville. Both churches channel some of their missions money through the Fellowship but continue to contribute to the KBC and the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget.

The reason for being selective in who was invited was to avoid having a "divisive" meeting, Taylor told the Western Recorder.

In contrast, the Fellowship meetings Taylor criticized were advertised publicly in advance and were open to all who wanted to attend, Hadden noted.

Some moderates have said they believe Kentucky is one of several states conservative forces intend to gain control of in the same way they captured the SBC.

T.C. Pinckney of Virginia, who in the last year has organized at least two national meetings for state-level conservative strategists, said the suggestion that Kentucky has been targeted for a takeover is "not true, and I think I would be knowledgeable about that."

Pinckney denied any national effort directed toward state conventions. "Nobody is directing what goes on in Virginia except Virginia. I'm confident that's true in every other state.

"If moderates in Kentucky feel their state has been targeted, it probably has been targeted by conservatives in Kentucky," he said.

Church gets outside help as floodwaters take town

By Bill Webb

HILLVIEW, Ill. (ABP) -- When the Air National Guard arrived at Hillview Baptist Church, Pastor Bill Smith at first thought the guardsmen were coming to make church members abandon their efforts to empty the church before Illinois River floodwaters invaded the building.

Instead, guardsman Ron Bracy explained, "We're here to move you out." Bracy is pastor of First Baptist Church in Central City, Ill.

News had come hours earlier on Sunday, Aug. 1, that the levee protecting the small Illinois town had broken and floodwaters were making their way across eight miles of lowland. Hillview Baptist, which had been aiding the efforts of those fighting the rising river, itself became a target of the floodwaters.

Bracy, nicknamed "Major Moses" by fellow guardsmen, offered his unit to help the pastor rescue his library and other materials from the church and remove appliances from the parsonage next door.

Bracy "was real insistent that those things had to get out," Pastor Smith recalled. "He was especially persistent about my library. He kept coming back and said, 'Pastor, you've got to get it all. You don't want to lose your library.'

"At one time during all the stress, he (Bracy) came up to me and said, 'I want you to know my church is praying for you right at this moment,'" Smith remembered, his eyes moistening.

Church members had been aware that the levy might break two weeks before it happened. The pastor and his wife, Donna, had almost completely emptied the parsonage. Appliances had been removed from the church kitchen, and the pulpit furniture, a piano and two organs had been taken from the sanctuary. Church records also had been removed.

Flood waters actually broke through two levees to reach the church property. Members and community volunteers had constructed a levee around the church and parsonage.

"I had thought all along that if the main levee broke and the river reached into our town, our levee would hold for several days," Smith said. That would allow a few days to remove office supplies and books, he thought.

But the effort was in vain. Within hours of the main levee's collapse, water was two-thirds of the way up the makeshift levee around the church. Donna Smith said. "It really came in fast after that," she said, and the church levy soon broke.

An estimated two-thirds of homes and public buildings in the town were flooded, some with water near the first-floor ceiling. Water rose to five or six feet on the first floor of the sanctuary.

The pastor, who has served the church for 33 years, believes at least half of his members' homes were affected. Some saw their farmland covered with water and their crops ruined.

"We look at our homes gone, and many people their income gone, and it hurts real bad," Smith told the Illinois Baptist.

"Right now, the prayers of people are sustaining us," Donna Smith said. "God's grace is sufficient."

Until the levee broke, Hillview Church operated as a food-distribution center for sandbaggers and other volunteers. Members received 500-600 meals a day prepared by Illinois and Kentucky disaster-relief units and delivered them to workers.

Until they can return to their own building, Hillview's members will meet in the facilities of Oak Grove Baptist Church, whose few remaining members voted to discontinue meeting and to invite Hillview's members to use the facility.

-30-

Flood leaves 2 churches with different results

VALMEYER, Ill. (ABP) -- The Illinois towns of Valmeyer and Prairie du Rocher are only about 20 miles apart, but their situations are vastly different -- one is flooded, the other is dry.

Water rose to the roof of First Baptist Church in Valmeyer after a Mississippi River levee broke. "There are houses in Valmeyer that are gone," said Pastor Wayne King.

But down river, at Prairie du Rocher, the levees have held. "The Lord's hand is on that levee," said Bob Orr, pastor of the Southern Baptist church there. He likens the town's good fortune to God's parting of the Red Sea for the Israelites. "This time he's using a levee to pile it up."

But as Orr rejoices in what has happened at Prairie du Rocher, he aches for those in other areas who have not been so fortunate. "Our town has been saved," he said. "I'm not sure why God chose to save ours when there is devastation in all directions."

Residents of Prairie du Rocher have been evacuated until the river drops to 40 feet, which should happen soon. But in Valmeyer, King speculated it might be Dec. 1 before residents could go back.

In the meantime, Baptist families have scattered. The Valmeyer congregation is meeting on Sunday afternoons in a church building in nearby Waterloo.

Prairie du Rocher members decided to cancel services and attend nearby churches until they are able to return to their town. Pastor Orr already is planning a celebration when they can return.

The future of Valmeyer is more uncertain, since the flood waters have not receded. But, Pastor King said, "God is looking down (and) sees the end result." King said he is trusting that "glorious opportunities" are still to come.

-30-

-- By Ferrell Foster

***** END *****