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Faith has role in politics,
Clinton tells religious group

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Challenging religious leaders to help him "recreate a common good in America," President Bill Clinton said that the political world is "entirely too secular" and that faith has a role in it.

Clinton made the remarks at an Aug. 30 interfaith prayer breakfast in the State Dining Room at the White House. The approximately 80 religious leaders represented virtually every mainline denomination and a variety of political ideologies.

Among the Baptists present were Cecil Sherman, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee. Not included were top leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, Clinton's own denomination.

Fresh from his vacation in Martha's Vineyard, Clinton said he wanted to make a "new beginning" by talking to religious leaders from all faiths and parts of the country as a rededication to the purposes for which they were called.

"Sometimes I think the environment in which we operate is entirely too secular," Clinton said. "That fact that we have freedom of religion doesn't mean we need to try to have freedom from religion.

"It doesn't mean that those of us who have faith shouldn't frankly admit that we are animated by that faith, that we try to live by it, and that it does affect what we feel, what we think, and what we do."

He acknowledged that "it's hard for me to take a totally secular approach to the fact that there are cities in this country where the average murderer is now under the age of 16."

"Now there may not be a religious answer to the policy question of whether it's a good thing that all these kids can get their hands on semi-automatic weapons," he continued. "But there certainly is something that is far more than secular about what is happening to a country where we are losing millions of our young people and where they shoot each other with

abandon"

Yet Clinton cautioned that religious Americans "who seek to know and do God's will" should approach the public arena with a certain amount of humility for two reasons: "One is, we might be wrong. After all, we're only human. The other is that the thing that has kept us together over time is that our Constitution and Bill of Rights gives us all the elbow room to seek to do God's will in our own life and that of our families and our communities. And that means that there will be inevitable conflicts"

He encouraged the religious leaders to find strength in their diversity and to find areas in which they could agree. One area of agreement, Clinton noted, was the need for the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The bill (S. 578, H.R. 1308) would restore a high level of protection for religious freedom that virtually was abandoned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1990. A broad-based coalition of 68 religious and civil-liberties groups backs the measure, which was approved by the House of Representatives but has not yet come to the Senate for action.

"This administration is committed to seeing it (RFRA) through successfully. And I think virtually every person of faith in this country without regard to their party or philosophy or convictions on other issues agrees with that. So we are hopeful that that will happen.

"But there must be other areas in which we can meet together and talk together and work together, and frankly, acknowledge our agreements and our disagreements. If people of faith treat issues about which they disagree as nothing more than a cause for a screaming match, then we also trivialize religion in our country."

Clinton said the country needs a new ethic of personal, family and community responsibility that "should unite people across the lines of different faiths and even different political philosophies."

Clinton asked the leaders to pray for him and his administration, inviting them to be part of an ongoing dialogue.

Among the Baptists invited were: Charles G. Adams, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, Detroit; Ray Bakke, Chicago; Willie Barrow, Operation PUSH, Chicago; John Binder, North American Baptist Conference, Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.; Amos Brown, San Francisco; Joan Campbell, New York,; Anthony Campollo, St. David's, Pa.; James M. Dunn, Baptist Joint Committee, Washington; Walter Fauntroy, Washington; Millard Fuller, Habitat for Humanity, Americus, Ga.; Ernest Gibson, First Rising Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.; Carolyn Hale, Georgetown, Ky.; Rex Horne, Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, Ark.; J.T. Jemison, Baton Rouge, La.; E. Edward Jones, Shreveport, La.; S.M. Lockridge, San Diego, Calif.; W. Franklyn Richardson, Grace Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, N.Y.; Cecil Sherman, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Atlanta; Gardner Taylor, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Oliver S. Thomas, Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion and Baptist Joint Committee, Washington; Daniel E. Weiss, American Baptist Churches in the USA, Valley Forge, Pa.

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Southern Baptists 'snubbed'
by White House breakfast

By Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- "Average, mainstream evangelicals" should feel snubbed because no Southern Baptist officials were invited to a prayer breakfast at the White House Aug. 30, said one Southern Baptist leader.

About 80 religious leaders from a variety of faiths participated in the

breakfast, during which Clinton encouraged people of faith to make their presence known in the public arena.

One presence not felt at the breakfast, however, was the Southern Baptist Convention, which is America's largest Protestant group and Clinton's own denomination.

Leaders of the SBC, many of whom have been openly critical of Clinton and his policies, were not invited. Also missing were other leaders of the religious right, which largely backed George Bush in last year's presidential election.

"Perhaps Bill Clinton will think better of snubbing evangelicals at election time," warned James Smith, Washington-based director of governmental relations for the Christian Life Commission, the SBC's moral-concerns agency.

In interviews with the Nashville Tennessean and Washington Times, Smith criticized Clinton for not inviting Richard Land, executive director of the CLC, and Robert Dugan, leader of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Land's name had been submitted for the invitation-only breakfast but was passed over, Smith said. Dugan was not invited, but the NAE's Washington lawyer, Forest Montgomery, did attend.

"They left out a huge swath of religious Americans when they cut us out of the meeting," Smith told the Times. "This is the price that you pay for standing up for biblical morality in this town. We're willing to pay that price."

Some religious and political leaders predicted the CLC would be shut out of White House sessions under Clinton after Land and some other SBC leaders were critical of Clinton during the presidential election last year.

And last June messengers to the annual Southern Baptist Convention approved a resolution distancing the convention from Clinton over abortion, homosexuality and other issues. Some messengers also tried unsuccessfully to get Clinton's home church -- Immanuel Baptist in Little Rock, Ark. -- expelled from the SBC for tolerating Clinton's membership.

Immanuel's pastor, Rex Horne, was among those Southern Baptists who attended the Aug. 30 breakfast. Also present were Cecil Sherman, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of Southern Baptists displeased with the current SBC leadership, and James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious-liberty lobby.

Dunn, one of several religious leaders the White House asked to suggest invitees, said the group included "a big selection of people from the left, middle and right." Dunn said no political litmus test was applied, noting the participants included abortion opponents as well as abortion-rights supporters.

The group included Jewish, Catholic and mainline Protestant leaders, as well as National Baptists and American Baptists.

The CLC's Smith described the group as "a roll call of the religious left with a few token evangelicals."

"This is the religious left reasserting itself," Smith said.

But one Baptist ethicist, who was not invited to the breakfast, warned that Christians on both sides of the political fence are vulnerable to the allure of political power represented by such White House meetings.

Robert Parham, executive director of Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., said there is "a growing conversation among Christian ethicists" about the danger of seeking political solutions to spiritual problems. Many ethicists believe "that the role of the church is to model a compelling lifestyle and speak the truth, not manage the government," Parham said.

"The religious right lost its moral credibility through overzealous

identification with the Reagan and Bush presidencies," Parham said. "I hope the religious left and center do not publicly sell their heritage for a bowl of breakfast pottage with the president."

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-- This story includes information from the Nashville Tennessean and Washington Times.

Sunday School Board cuts 45 jobs, rearranges corporate structure

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Sunday School Board, publishing house of the Southern Baptist Convention, will eliminate 45 more positions from its work force Oct. 1 in an effort to reduce corporate overhead.

The cuts will save the board an estimated \$2.4 million in its \$233 million budget next year, according to board President Jimmy Draper, who said the cuts are good stewardship of board resources.

Of the 45 positions eliminated, 16 are vacant. However, 29 employees will lose their jobs. Five have been given early retirement and so far four have been placed in other positions at the board. The rest will get help from the board in finding employment, and some will get severance pay.

The staff cuts follow a year of restructuring and down-sizing at the non-profit agency, which employs about 1,700 people in its Nashville, Tenn., headquarters, 63 bookstores and two conference centers.

The latest changes entail another realignment of the board's organizational structure, which was overhauled last year.

Corporate services, one of four major areas of the board's work, is eliminated in the new structure. Some duties and employees assigned to that area were eliminated, but others were given to the finance and administration area, which also was cut back.

The biggest losers were the marketing research department, which lost 12 employees and two vacant positions, and the public relations section, which lost five employees and five vacancies. Both were under corporate services, as were two other affected departments -- information systems and strategic planning.

Other cuts came from the facility management, human resources and production services departments, all under finance and administration.

Also eliminated is one of the board's four vice president positions. Mike Arrington, who has been vice president for corporate services, will become executive director for corporate affairs, supervising the two parts of his former area that remain -- communications and the conference centers.

Although Arrington "won't carry the 'vice president' title," Draper said, "I wouldn't call it a demotion."

"I really think he will be more valuable in his new position," Draper said. Arrington will report directly to Draper and concentrate on denominational relations, the president continued. "He will be an extension of myself."

The latest cuts are the result of a six-month corporate overhead study that targeted those areas of the board that produce little or no revenue -- corporate services and finance/administration. A second study of efficiency is underway in the revenue areas -- church growth/programs and trade/retail markets.

Charles Wilson, vice president for trade and retail markets, already has announced elimination of six employees and one vacant position in his area. Wilson said the jobs were pared by combining the two editorial departments for Broadman-Holman Publishing. Those seven were not counted in the 45 positions eliminated by Draper.

With the latest cuts and those still to come, board administrators hope to reduce overhead at the Sunday School Board by an estimated \$4.1 million a year. If successful, that would bring expenses below the projected revenues of \$233 million in 1993-94.

The cuts were necessary to bring board overhead down to an estimated 15 percent of budget, Wilson told trustees in August. Overhead costs were as high as 23 percent, Draper told trustees.

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-- By Greg Warner

Florida church member
sues pastor for records

By Debbie Salamone

SANFORD, Fla. (ABP) -- A founding member of a Baptist church near Orlando is suing the church in an attempt to learn if the pastor -- a national Southern Baptist leader -- has misused church money.

Ann Haynes is suing William Parker and First Baptist Church of Markham Woods in Seminole County Circuit Court. She is demanding to see records that may show whether Parker has wrongly usurped control of the 13-year-old Lake Mary church, altered church documents, taken interest-free loans from church money, and improperly included his home within the church's property tax exemption.

Parker, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention's powerful Executive Committee, denied all of the allegations Aug. 30. He said Haynes is no longer a church member. "She has no business with the church," Parker said. "The church is fine."

According to the lawsuit, Haynes was kicked out of the church Aug. 19, two days after she requested in writing to see the records.

In her suit, Haynes asks that she be reinstated as a church member and that Parker and the church be prohibited from expelling members without just cause. The lawsuit says other members who have disagreed with Parker or questioned his authority also have been stripped of membership.

Parker is one of four Florida representatives on the 80-member Executive Committee, which performs the work of the Southern Baptist Convention between annual sessions. He also is a trustee of the Florida Baptist Witness, the state Baptist newspaper.

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-- This story is used with permission of the Orlando Sentinel.

Carolina church expelled
because of female deacon

By Mark Bixler

WEST JEFFERSON, N.C. (ABP) -- A local Baptist association in North Carolina voted Aug. 21 to expel a church because it ordained a woman as deacon.

Conservative members of the Ashe Baptist Association, made up of about 50 churches in the mountains of western North Carolina, decided First Baptist Church of West Jefferson, N.C., violated biblical teachings by ordaining Theresa Early Curd as a deacon this winter.

Lloyd Day, pastor of two small churches near the Virginia border, said that women should not take leadership roles in the home or the church. "I think it's all right for a woman to pray and sing and testify, as long as it's not taking the leadership over the man," he said.

Day, who made the motion to kick the church out at the association's annual meeting, cited a Bible verse from I Timothy that says deacons "should be the husband of one wife" and should rule their children and their house well. "It'd be hard for a woman to be the husband of one wife," said Day, pastor at Sturgills Baptist Church and Tuckerdale Baptist Church, both in Ashe County.

He charged that the West Jefferson church, a moderate congregation with more than 250 members, erred when it ordained Curd. "I just stand for what the Bible teaches," Day said. "It's not a personal matter."

Curd, a mathematics professor at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., who has attended the West Jefferson church for about 13 years, said she was shocked to hear of the decision.

"We're sorry that the association could not respect our beliefs on this issue," she said. "They felt like we were sinning."

Curd said that members of her church have been supportive of her since the association excluded First Baptist. She plans to continue serving as a deacon, she said.

Though local Baptist associations have the power to expel member churches, they usually respect the autonomy of an individual church and rarely kick one out, said Roy Smith, the executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

"I don't know of any church in North Carolina that has been excluded because they had women deacons," he said.

The last time an association kicked out one of its member churches in a policy dispute was about 15 years ago, Smith said, when two organizations in the state expelled two churches in a dispute over the baptism ceremony.

Last year two North Carolina churches were expelled from the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention because of their positions on homosexuality.

Smith said Baptist churches across North Carolina have ordained women as deacons. Women serve as ministers of youth, music and education in numerous churches, and a handful of Baptist churches in the state have female pastors.

But Pastor Day said he thinks that trend should be reversed.

"It's just the order of the Lord for man to be the leader of family and church," he said. "It doesn't matter what I think or what anybody else thinks. It's the Bible that we base it on."

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-- This story is used with permission from the Winston-Salem (N.C.) Journal.

Doctrinal statement takes focus
of Southern Seminary convocation

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The 135-year-old doctrinal statement of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary took center stage during Aug. 31 convocation ceremonies marking the beginning of a new year and a new administration at the Louisville, Ky., school.

The Abstract of Principles, the seminary's doctrinal statement, was written by the school's founders in 1858.

Albert Mohler, who became the seminary's ninth president Aug. 1, signed his name to the original copy of the abstract during the convocation, then delivered a stern lecture on the importance of the document.

The original document has been signed by every tenured faculty member who has taught at the Louisville, Ky., school since its inception. All faculty are required to affirm the abstract before they are hired.

Addressing a nearly full house in Alumni Chapel, Mohler called the abstract a "sacred contract and confession" that is vital to the seminary's success.

He declared the necessity of such creeds to safeguard the integrity of the school's stance and to ensure those in the denomination that the seminary is trustworthy.

"Southern Seminary is a confessional institution," Mohler said. "... Teachers here should expose their students to the full array of modern variance of thought related to their courses of study. But these options are not value-neutral, and they must not be presented as such. The standard of conduct is found within the Abstract of Principles."

In his address, titled "Don't Just Do Something, Stand There!," Mohler admonished faculty, students and administrators to stand firmly behind the abstract. He quoted at length from portions of the document, outlining its general content.

Mohler also quoted extensively from the seminary's founders, particularly James Petrigu Boyce, the school's first president.

He noted Boyce had been a newspaper editor and was only 29 when he assumed leadership of the new school. Mohler came to the presidency from the editorship of Georgia Baptists' weekly newspaper and also is a young president at age 33.

Mohler also indirectly compared the beginning of his tenure with that of Boyce, whom he said "saw a crisis in Baptist doctrine approaching" and was determined to meet it head on.

"We have arrived at a critical moment in the Southern Baptist Convention," Mohler declared. "A denomination once marked by intense theological commitment and demonstrable theological consensus has seen that denominational unity lapse into a programmatic consciousness.

"We are in danger of losing our theological grammar but, much more dangerous by far, of losing our theological inheritance as well."

This is a crisis much more severe than the theological and political controversy that has racked the denomination for the last 14 years, he said. However, the controversy has been symptomatic of the deeper theological crisis, he added.

"We are in danger of becoming God's most unembarrassed pragmatists, much more enamored with statistics than in actual theological substance," Mohler warned.

The solution, he said, is "reformation and revival only the sovereign God of the universe can bring."

Mohler outlined four "operative convictions" from the abstract.

First, he said, is the conviction that "truth is always confronted with error, and the doctrinal repository of the church is ever in danger of compromise."

Doctrine is not a matter to be taken lightly, he said, but is of grave importance. "There is no theological indifference to be found here, no gospel minimalism, no lowest doctrinal denominator," he said of the abstract.

Second, Mohler cited the necessity of safeguarding the seminary against "theological atrophy or error."

Third is the conviction that the seminary has a responsibility "to protect the integrity of the gospel" and to ensure that its professors "give their unmixed and public attestation to the confession of faith," he said.

Fourth, Mohler said, is the conviction that those who teach ministry bear the greatest burden of accountability to the churches and denomination.

"Faculty at Southern Seminary will be held to a standard higher than that required of the churches, higher than that required of students, higher than that required of those who would teach at many sister institutions," he said.

Allowing even one person to teach students contrary to Southern Baptist beliefs could be devastating to the denomination, Mohler said.

"Scarcely a single heresy has ever blighted the church which has not owed its existence to one man of power and influence whose name has always been associated with its doctrine," Mohler quoted Boyce as saying.

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Hawkins unanimously called
to First Baptist of Dallas

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Obviously elated at putting one of their darker periods behind them, members of First Baptist Church of Dallas unanimously called O.S. Hawkins to be their new pastor Aug. 29.

The 46-year-old Hawkins, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., since 1978, said he would accept the invitation and will assume the responsibility Oct. 3.

Many Dallas church members shed tears after hearing Hawkins would become their new pastor. The church was stung last September when Joel Gregory abruptly resigned after less than two years as pastor. Gregory said W. A. Criswell, senior pastor of the church, was unwilling to surrender leadership of the church.

Criswell has expressed his desire to stay on until 1994, when he marks his 50th anniversary in the renowned pulpit.

Hawkins told reporters he has no problem with Criswell staying until that time and said the venerable 83-year-old pastor will be invited to preach from time to time.

Criswell was not present for Hawkins' three sermons to the church Aug. 29, but Hawkins said Criswell had told him that his being chosen by the search committee was "a miracle."

Hawkins met hundreds of his new church members at a reception at the church Saturday afternoon Aug. 28 and then preached to thousands more at both morning and the evening services Sunday. The vote on whether to call him as pastor came at the close of the standing-room-only Sunday evening service.

Hawkins, alluding to his love for baseball, remarked that the new major

league baseball stadiums in Baltimore, Md., and Arlington, Texas, have the appearance of those built in the 1920s and 1930s. They represent America's yearning for its roots, he said.

Applying that to the church, he said people have been saying for years that the church has to look and act like anything but a church to reach people. But the opposite is true, he said.

Hawkins is a native of nearby Fort Worth, Texas, where he attended and later became minister of youth at Sagamore Hill Baptist Church. He served churches in Hobart and Ada, Okla., before moving to Fort Lauderdale.

He is a graduate of Texas Christian University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, both in Fort Worth, and has a doctor of ministry degree from Luther Rice Seminary.

Hawkins' ministry at Fort Lauderdale has been distinguished by his mobilization of lay evangelists in his church and the church's ministry to the poor. He is a former president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference.

He is married to the former Susan Cavness of Austin, Texas. They have two daughters, Wendy and Holly.

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