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Baptists pray, discuss  
abortion with Clinton

By Ray Waddle

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Two top Southern Baptist leaders spent time with President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore Sept. 16, laying out their disagreements on abortion and gay rights, but the White House session produced no converts.

Morris Chapman of Nashville, Tenn., president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, and SBC president Ed Young of Houston talked with fellow Southern Baptists Clinton and Gore at the White House for 90 minutes -- three times longer than planned.

Clinton has made contact with dozens of religious leaders since taking office, but he had never met with leaders of the largest Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We talked of areas where we, as Southern Baptists, strongly disagree with the president and vice president," Young said afterward. "We are pro-life and deeply concerned about the gay agenda. The perception is the president has totally endorsed pro-choice and the homosexual lifestyle as a minority lifestyle."

Young and Chapman were accompanied by Clinton's Little Rock, Ark., pastor, Rex Horne, and Wendell Estep, pastor of First Baptist Church of Columbia, S.C.

They urged Clinton to appoint a born-again Christian to a significant staff position so the administration will look "more like America."

The six men prayed together, and Clinton laid out his views favoring the right of women to make choices about abortion, Young said.

"I came away with the strong impression to pray for them," said Chapman. "God has placed them in this unique position. They want to do their best, and they sincerely invite our prayers."

Some in the SBC thought Clinton snubbed the denomination earlier in September when no convention leader was invited to a White House interfaith

breakfast. But Clinton's Baptist defenders said the president received the first snub in June when Southern Baptist criticized Clinton's social agenda and did not invite him to their annual meeting.

Chapman said the Sept. 16 meeting was strictly a get-acquainted session that he hopes will lead to further private gatherings with the president.

Young and Chapman noted that Gore chastised the churches for their silence on environmental issues.

"He pointed out that 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,' the need to be a steward of this world and of this earth," Young said. "And then he talked about areas of ministry where the church needs to be involved. We've abdicated that to a great degree."

Horne described the session as "a frank, forthright but also friendly time of discussion."

"Values were talked about in a broad sense, as well as some specific ones, but not in an adversarial way, just among concerned Christians," the pastor said.

Like Chapman, Horne said he hopes the meeting "lays the groundwork for continued dialogue. And I think it did that."

"In order to do that, there has to come a desire to dialogue and not just do our speaking through the press and pulpits in such harsh rhetoric without getting behind the rhetoric to find out really what's true, and what we need to do, and how we can effect positive change in our country.

"And we were all agreed -- I think the president as well as those who were there -- that ultimately the only way that we can change our culture is from the inside out with change in the lives of individuals, who then change the country."

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-- Contributing to this story were Lacy Thompson of the Baptist Message of Louisiana and David Anderson of Religious News Service.

Committee action sets stage  
for battle on abortion funding

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Abortion-rights advocates won a battle as a Senate panel approved a measure that would allow public financing of abortions for poor women. But the war is far from over.

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a bill that would lift a nearly 20-year-old ban on Medicaid funding for poor women's abortions, setting the stage for a battle on the Senate floor. The bill, approved by voice vote, would appropriate funds for the Department of Health and Human Services (H.R. 2518).

When the measure came to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in June, members displayed unusual rancor during a highly charged debate, resulting in a modified version of the ban being upheld.

The Hyde amendment, named for Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., has banned federal funding for abortions except to save the life of the mother. The new House version adds exceptions in the cases of rape and incest.

A Senate subcommittee stripped the Hyde amendment from the Senate

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bill, and anti-abortion advocates did not try to reinstate it during committee consideration because they expect to fight the issue on the floor.

Observers predict a close vote that could come as early as next week. If the Senate approves the bill without amendment, a Senate-House conference committee would have to iron out the differences.

In related action, the House Judiciary Committee approved, 24-11, a bill designed to assure access to doctors and women seeking abortion services at health clinics. The bill (H.R. 796) was introduced as violence at clinics has escalated.

The bill would allow peaceful demonstrations but is designed to restrict violence.

A similar bill designed to combat escalating violence and vandalism at abortion-related clinics was approved, 13-4, by the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee in June.

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-- By Pam Parry

Fellowship appoints first  
new career missionaries

By Greg Warner

DECATUR, Ga. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship appointed its first new career missionaries Sept. 15 -- three couples who will serve in Miami, the Czech Republic and an undisclosed Asian country.

They are the Fellowship's first career missionaries who have not previously served as missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The six were appointed in a special service during the fall meeting of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council. Both the appointment service and the council meeting were held at First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., in suburban Atlanta.

The three young couples join 20 other Fellowship missionaries, all of whom serve in Europe. The Fellowship began appointing missionaries last year after denominational turmoil disrupted the SBC Foreign Mission Board.

Former FMB President Keith Parks subsequently left the FMB to become Fellowship missions coordinator.

One of the six missionaries appointed was Parks' son Stanley, who with his wife, Kay, will open mission work among an unreached people group in Asia. Neither the Muslim people group nor the country of residence was specified for safety reasons.

Neither was there any mention of Stanley Parks' relationship to Keith Parks. However, Stanley told of growing up in a missionary home in Indonesia and leaving at age five when his father joined the FMB home office staff.

Stanley Parks, 30, recalled seeing his mother, Helen Jean, weeping as they left, to which the five-year-old responded: "'Don't cry. Maybe God will call us back here.' Now 25 years later God has called us back to that same area."

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Commissioning Stanley Parks to Fellowship missions was not an entirely unique experience for Keith Parks, who earlier commissioned two other sons to service with the FMB. Kent Parks still serves as an FMB missionary in Indonesia.

Kay Parks, Stanley Parks' 30-year-old wife, renewed her childhood call to missions at age 19 -- before she met her future husband -- after hearing then FMB President Keith Parks preach. "It was my dream to go as a missionary under the leadership of Dr. Keith Parks. ... You can imagine how excited we were to hear God was calling Keith Parks" to work for the Fellowship.

Tracy Bengston, 30, who will help her husband, David, coordinate the Fellowship's hurricane-relief work in Miami, said she also felt called to missions after hearing Parks preach at an FMB appointment service. David Bengston, 30, is a mechanical engineer from Coral Gables, Fla. Tracy is from Charlotte, N.C.

The third couple, Allen and Verr Dean Williams, will go to the Czech Republic, where Allen will teach in a Czech Baptist seminary. Allen, 32, is from Jackson, Miss., and holds a doctor of philosophy degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Verr Dean, 33, said her commitment to missions was solidified last January as she taught a junior high class about missions. "I knew I could not teach them to be obedient to God if I was not obedient to God," recalled Verr Dean, from Crosbyton, Texas.

The next day, Keith Parks told members of the council the request for a teacher for the Czech seminary came from Czech Baptists, "who asked specifically for help from CBF rather than the Foreign Mission Board."

Parks said the Fellowship is attracting "the top echelon of missionary candidates." Of the six appointees, he said, "There are many others of that quality that we are dealing with."

"People ask me, 'Where are you finding these candidates?' We're not. They're finding us. They tell us, 'The way I'm looking at things right now, you're the only hope I have.'"

Parks said his seven-month tenure with the Fellowship has been characterized by surprising joys. "This is the most exciting time of my ministry," said Parks, who worked in FMB missions for 39 years.

Reporting on other mission efforts, Parks noted that former President Jimmy Carter recently visited Albania to encourage the government to allow religious freedom and mission work in the former atheist country. The trip was sparked by Carter's offer earlier this year to assist the Fellowship's mission effort.

The Fellowship sent a couple to Albania as short-term agricultural missionaries this summer. Unrest in a region of the country has delayed their work, Parks reported. However, he added, fledgling mission work in Albania recently produced a milestone: "the first Baptist to be baptized since (the Apostle) Paul was there."

"I forgot Paul was a Baptist," joked Hardy Clemons of Greenville, S.C., Fellowship moderator.

The Fellowship, which is cooperating with the European Baptist Federation on a lay-evangelism project in Siberia, is also working with the EBF to establish a program to train ministers in the region, Parks said. The program will use volunteer instructors on two-week teaching stints in Siberia, he said, and he asked for volunteers. "I'm serious about this," he added.

He also said the Fellowship is exploring the possibility of establishing a mission in Jordan to reach the Bedouins, a nomadic people who number 13 million but have no indigenous churches and no missionary witness.

The Fellowship also is planning to launch into urban missions and ministry to internationals, the council was told. "There are a number of exciting things that are not being done by other mission groups," said Jack Snell of Jacksonville, Fla., co-chair of the council's global missions ministry group.

The council voted to change the terminology used to refer to Fellowship missions workers -- from "missioners" to the traditional "missionary." Snell said the term "missioner" had some advantages, but it had caused "great confusion." He added: "'Missionary' is still a noble term in most parts of the world."

The Fellowship is producing study materials for churches that will describe the group's missions program and missionaries. The materials should be ready in October, Parks said.

Much of the business in the two-day council meeting focused on organizational details for the three-year-old Fellowship and the 83-member council.

A new budget structure will be put in place in 1995 for organizations that receive funds through the Fellowship. Each will be budgeted for a specific dollar amount, based on each organization's annual request to the council's finance committee, rather than a percentage of all Fellowship income.

The Fellowship now offers churches and individuals three funding plans, each with a different percentage-based distribution of funds for Fellowship-supported organizations. Most of those percentages were set three years ago.

The new arrangement will allow for a more equitable distribution of the Fellowship's fast-growing revenue, budget leaders said. "You do not want the program of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to be driven by the percentages in the budget, but the budget to be driven by the program," explained John Cothran of Greenville, S.C., co-chairman of the finance committee.

The council agreed to encourage state Fellowship chapters to pay the expenses of council members, most of whom pay their own way to council meetings. Council members who don't receive such help and don't have other resources can request assistance from the council itself, which will reimburse the airfare for members attending.

The council also revised personnel policies for the Fellowship staff.

The council heard reports from several ministry groups:

-- Theological education. The new Baptist theological school under study by moderates in Georgia should be funded by the Fellowship, said the theological education ministry group. For that purpose, the group asked that the Fellowship increase its allocation for theological education from 10 percent of the organization's budget to 15 percent.

The feasibility of starting a moderate seminary or divinity school to serve Georgia, South Carolina and east Tennessee is under study by two groups -- a grass-roots alliance of pastors and Mercer University of Macon, Ga.

Details have not been worked out, said Kandy Queen-Sutherland of

DeLand, Fla., co-chair of the theological education ministry group. But she added: "We have a group of people saying, 'We're going to do this.' They want to be CBF. ... They need to hear from us some kind of word of sympathy, and that's what this is about."

The committee also named council member James Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., as a non-voting trustee for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, which receives Fellowship support. The appointment will last one year, after which a full-fledged trustee likely will be named.

-- Christian Education. A new Fellowship staff position -- Christian education coordinator -- has been requested by the Christian education ministry group. The committee also is planning a consultation on Christian education for May 30-June 1, 1994, at the University of Richmond. The meeting, which will involve 30 to 40 educators from churches and academia, "will help pave new ground for new models in local church Christian education in the 21st century," the committee said.

-- Ethics and Public Policy. Plans for a 1994 consultation on AIDS, as well as initial work on a 1995 consultation on violence, were reported by the ethics and public policy ministry group. Expenditures of \$127,000 were approved for 1994, including \$45,000 for the Baptist Center for Ethics, \$9,400 for the Baptist Joint Committee, \$4,500 for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, \$4,500 for Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, and \$10,000 each for ethics chairs at Baylor University and the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

-- Laity. Plans were made for a laity luncheon on Friday, May 6, during the Fellowship's general assembly.

Council members were told the May 5-7 general assembly in Greensboro, N.C., may be the largest ever. Theme for the meeting will be "Pressing Toward the Mark."

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-- Photos of the newly appointed missionaries are available from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship office in Atlanta.

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