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Baptist leaders in South Carolina  
vote to sever ties with hospital

By Greg Warner

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- Leaders of the South Carolina Baptist Convention voted Oct. 11 to surrender control of their hospital system rather than challenge hospital trustees in court.

Those hospital trustees voted in August to empower themselves to elect their own successors, removing control of the hospital system from the Baptist convention, which has elected trustees since 1914.

Although convention officials originally called the hospital's action illegal and vowed to challenge it in court, they conceded such a legal battle would be poor stewardship and an unwanted distraction for the state's Baptists.

"We have decided that it is not in either of our best interests to further debate the rightness and wrongness of past events that have brought us to this juncture," said Clarence Freeman of Greenville, chairman of the convention's General Board. Instead, Freeman said, the hospital and convention agreed to pursue a solution that benefits the ministry and interests of both.

In return for their freedom, hospital trustees agreed to fund an array of medical, counseling and educational services for Baptist ministers in South Carolina. And the hospital agreed that a majority of its trustees will be South Carolina Baptists.

The agreement was approved by the General Board Oct. 11. It has already been endorsed by trustees of the South Carolina Baptist Hospital but must be approved by messengers to the South Carolina Baptist Convention in November before enactment.

Not all members of the General Board were thrilled with the compromise. Recalling Furman University's departure from the convention's fold last year, some worried the board's action would encourage other convention institutions to claim autonomy as well.

"Where are we going to draw the line? When are we going to say 'no'?" asked Boyd Broad of Charleston during debate. "It was Furman last year and Baptist Hospital this year. Where's it all going to end?"

The convention voted to sue Furman but later rescinded the vote and granted the school its autonomy.

South Carolina Baptist Hospital consists of the 542-bed Baptist Medical Center in Columbia as well as medical centers in Easley and the Harbison area. The hospital is valued at \$182 million, according to The State newspaper of Columbia.

Hospital trustees said the break with the convention was necessary to keep up with coming changes in the health-care system. Because the Baptist convention had to approve policy changes for the hospital at its annual meetings, it sometimes took one to two years before the hospital could implement new programs, officials complained.

The move will cost the hospital about \$800,000 the convention gives the hospital each year, but that accounts for only .02 percent of the hospital's annual receipts of \$320 million.

The Oct. 11 agreement was termed a "Commitment to Shared Ministry" by hospital and convention officials, who emphasized they still have much in common despite the differences over control of the hospital system.

As part of the agreement, the hospital will contribute \$3 million over a period of three years to a fund to assist Baptist ministers in the state. The money will pay for medical insurance for ministers, emergency medical care for ministers and assistance for terminated or pressured ministers. The hospital will consider continued funding for the program after the initial three years.

The hospital also will:

- offer pastoral counseling to all Baptists in the state,
- spend up to \$700,000 a year for medical care for South Carolina's needy,
- spend about \$1 million a year to continue the Baptist Benevolence Program, and
- continue other programs important to South Carolina Baptists, including clinical pastoral education, chaplaincy ministries and conferences for personal growth.

A joint statement released at an Oct. 11 news conference said negotiations between the hospital and convention reaffirmed "many mutual values shared between us." Both parties pledged to "strengthen the convention's influence in those areas where that influence is most valuable."

One area of agreement, the statement noted, is the hospital's abortion policy. Hospital trustees affirmed their policy, which dates to 1987, that prohibits abortion "except when medically necessary."

Many hospitals which bear the Baptist name were founded by various state Baptist conventions. Most, however, have since attained some degree of autonomy. The South Carolina convention is one of the few which has maintained control of the hospital it founded.

Stephen Cloud of West Columbia, president of the state convention, said the agreement will allow the convention to focus on spiritual needs instead of health care.

"Is this really the best time to be in the hospital business?" he asked board members.

-- This story includes information from The State newspaper and the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

Review board says Ed Young  
liable for all back taxes

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Convention president Ed Young will be required to pay 10 years of back taxes on his Houston home, not five years as requested by the prominent pastor.

A three-member appraisal review board ruled Nov. 7 that a new law which would have limited Young's liability to five years was not in effect when the dispute arose and therefore does not apply to Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston.

Young's attorney had argued the new law should govern the disputed taxes, which church officials say Young has agreed to pay. Young's tax bill has been estimated at \$60,000.

Young has not paid property taxes on the \$600,000 home since moving into it in 1979. The 5,000-square-foot house has been listed improperly as fully owned by the church and therefore tax exempt.

Church officials say the unpaid taxes are the result of a mixup, however, and there was no intent to avoid paying legitimate taxes.

The church, which bought the home when Young became pastor in 1979, has since been gradually transferring ownership of the property to Young as part of his housing allowance. He has been granted ownership to one-fifteenth of the property each year and now fully owns the house.

But Young's ownership has never appeared on property rolls, which until recently indicated the church owned the house. The discrepancy was first reported by the Houston Chronicle Sept. 1, the same day the new tax law took effect.

But tax officials say Young's case has been under investigation since early this year, after the home was profiled in a magazine article on houses of Houston's rich and famous.

"We're talking about whether the property owner can evade five years of back taxes," Sands Stiefer, chief of staff of the Harris County Appraisal District, told the review board Oct. 7. "They're trying to crawl through a loophole that really doesn't apply here," said Stiefer, who was quoted in the Houston Chronicle.

"We all know there's an error," said James Popp, an attorney representing Young at the hearing. "The question is how to fix it."

The review board agreed with appraisal officials, ruling Young will be liable for the entire amount.

Young was not present at the hearing and has declined comment on the dispute.

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-- This article includes information from the Houston Chronicle

Birmingham pastor named  
Southern's dean of students

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Doug Walker, 35, has been named dean of students and vice president for student services at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

A longtime friend of Southern's new president, Albert Mohler, Walker currently is pastor of Ruhama Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. At Southern he will be responsible for admissions, placement, vocational counseling,

student activities, health and recreation and pastoral care.

Walker, who holds a doctoral degree from Southern, was appointed to the post by Mohler, who announced the move to the seminary's trustees Oct. 12. Walker begins his duties Dec. 1.

He replaces Elisabeth Lambert, vice president for student services, who resigned last spring because of the change in administration. Walker's appointment leaves two deans positions unfilled.

In addition to his doctorate from Southern, Walker holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Alabama and a master of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Before becoming pastor of the Birmingham church, he was pastor of Mansfield Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ga., and Markland Baptist Church in Markland, Ind. He also served as associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Texas.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

National CP down  
for third year

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE (ABP) -- For the third consecutive year, gifts to the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program have dropped below the previous year's total.

The SBC Executive Committee closed its books on the 1992-93 fiscal year Sept. 30. Total Cooperative Program gifts for the period were \$136.5 million, a 1.2 percent decrease from the previous year's receipts of \$138.2 million.

The Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget, apparently grew each year since its beginning in 1925 until 1990, when it began a slide that has continued for three years.

Despite the third straight yearly drop, Executive Committee President Morris Chapman said he sees a "positive trend" because receipts for the past three months have been higher than the same months last year. That portends well for next year, he told Baptist Press.

The national Cooperative Program represents the contributions of local churches to fund the SBC's national agencies, such as the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board and six seminaries.

The SBC's budgeting process has been amended in recent years to require that the annual budget not exceed the actual receipts of the last complete fiscal year. However, declining contributions still have prevented the convention from meeting its budget goals.

As a result, 1992-93 giving fell 2.6 percent short of the SBC's \$140.2 million budget for the year.

While this year's decrease in gifts continues the three-year downward trend, it is not as large a decrease as occurred last year. Receipts in the 1991-92 fiscal year fell 1.4 percent from the previous year. Receipts in the 1990-91 fiscal year fell 0.36 percent from the previous year.

The downturn came on the heels of large annual increases during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. The average increase in the 1970s was nearly 9 percent, and the average increase during the 1980s was nearly 8 percent.

The average increase three years into the 1990s is no increase at all. Money available in the 1992-93 fiscal year was actually 3 percent less than money available in the last fiscal year of the 1980s.

In addition to undesignated Cooperative Program gifts in the 1992-93 fiscal year, the SBC Executive Committee received \$127.04 million in designated gifts for items such as the Lottie Moon offering for foreign missions, Annie Armstrong offering for home missions and world hunger. Designated gifts for the year were down 0.69 percent from the previous year.

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Many seek God  
without church

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- While three-fourths of Americans desire a close relationship with God, only half find the prospect of belonging to a local church desirable.

This is the finding of a nationwide poll by the Barna Research Group of Glendale, Calif.

"This gap is one of the expressions of the differentiation between private religion and social religion," explained pollster George Barna. "People's lack of involvement in and enthusiasm for the church coexists with a comparatively strong commitment to God."

People expressing the strongest difference in desire for God and desire for the church include:

-- The divorced, of whom 69 percent want to be close to God but only 28 percent want to be in a church.

-- Those whose beliefs do not classify them as "born-again," of whom 61 percent want to be close to God but only 34 percent want to be in a church.

-- The "unchurched," of whom 56 percent desire God but 19 percent desire the church.

-- Adults living in the Northeast, of whom 71 percent desire God but only 41 percent desire the church.

The poll found those who want to be part of a local church usually already are involved in one.

"The lines are pretty clearly drawn between those whose religious sentiment is expressed through a local church and those who keep it outside," Barna said. "And few people outside the church are clamoring to get in."

Churches that want to grow "should realize that most growth is going to have to come from the very people who do not see local church involvement as a very desirable thing," he said.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Faith is key factor in shaping  
moral views, researcher says

GLENDALE, Calif. (ABP) -- Strong religious belief may be the most significant factor in distinguishing the views of Americans on moral issues, according to George Barna, president of the Barna Research Group.

"Among the demographic groups we studied ... none were more different from each other than Christians and churched people on the one hand and non-Christians and unchurched people on the other," Barna said.

For instance, Americans whose beliefs classify them as "born-again" are significantly less likely than others to support gay marriages, divorce on

demand and euthanasia. "Born-again" Christians also are significantly more likely to support bans on explicit images in movies and magazines.

"On issues of personal liberty and privacy, religious beliefs and practices are clearly major influences," Barna said. "While the other demographic divisions are significant in many ways, faith may be the most significant of all."

The poll also found that different demographic groups can arrive at vastly different conclusions about the same questions related to privacy and personal freedom.

For example, women are more sympathetic than men to allowing homosexuals to marry each other. But women are less inclined to favor divorce on demand and more ready to prohibit movies and magazines from showing explicit images.

Married couples are more positive about legal euthanasia than singles but less positive than singles about legalizing homosexual marriages.

"Baby busters" (ages 18-28) are much more favorable toward homosexual marriages than senior adults. Meanwhile, Americans between the ages of 48 and 66 are nearly twice as likely as any other age group to say sexually explicit images should be outlawed.

College graduates are more hesitant to censor explicit images than are people with only high school experience.

Taking the nation as a whole, the poll found:

-- 58 percent favor allowing adults to die by taking lethal drugs if they choose to because of physical impairment or suffering.

-- 44 percent believe magazines and movies should be prohibited from portraying pornographic or sexually explicit images.

-- 42 percent favor a system of divorce on demand, where no court is involved but couples merely file notarized papers to end a marriage.

-- 29 percent favor legalizing marriage between adults of the same sex.

The data were drawn from telephone interviews with a representative sample of adults in July and August.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Mississippi Fellowship  
plans to open office

By Don McGregor

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (ABP) -- Plans for an office and a project for young people were unveiled at the fall meeting of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi.

Vice Moderator Charles Myers reported that the Mississippi body is looking to open an office to be staffed by a part-time secretary. Financing for such an office and its location are being worked out, he said.

Myers also noted that a project to involve about 150 young people will be a summertime endeavor of the Mississippi Fellowship. The project, to be under the direction of Scott Bebout, minister of youth at First Baptist Church, Meridian, will take the form either of a retreat or a missions trip.

The group, meeting at University Baptist Church of Hattiesburg, elected officers and heard two major addresses and a testimony by a newly appointed missionary.

The addresses were delivered by Paul Thibodeaux, former Foreign Mission Board fraternal representative to Eastern Europe and now a Fellowship missionary, and Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, former executive director of

the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union and now moderator-elect of the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The testimony was by Allen Williams, whose father, Glen Williams, is associational director of missions in Pike County, Miss. The younger Williams and his wife, Verr Dean, were recently appointed Fellowship missionaries to the Czech Republic, where he will teach theology.

Gene Triggs of Madison was re-elected moderator of the Mississippi Fellowship, and Myers of Jackson was re-elected vice moderator. Doug Haney, minister of music at First Baptist Church, Meridian, was named secretary; and Suzanne Boone of Jackson was elected treasurer.

Jane Allison of Hattiesburg was elected missions chairman, Linda Moore of Starkville was named communications chairman, and James and Joy Yates of Yazoo City were named to chair the membership committee.

Named as at-large members of the coordinating council were Jean Bogan of Long Beach, Jon Doler of Leland, and Greg Snowden of Meridian.

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