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Prague picked as new home for Ruschlikon seminary

By Greg Warner

DIDCOT, England (ABP) -- Prague, capital city of the Czech Republic, has been picked as the new site for European Baptists' international seminary.

The executive committee of the European Baptist Federation, meeting in Didcot, England, in late November, gave provisional approval for the Baptist Theological Seminary to move to Prague from its current site in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

The move is expected to help resolve the financial distress the seminary has suffered since 1991, when the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, which founded the school, withdrew all funding because of alleged liberalism. The seminary became a rallying cry for Southern Baptist moderates who accused the FMB of playing politics with the school.

The European Baptist Federation, which now owns the school, plans to sell or lease the Ruschlikon property to fund the move. The Swiss site, overlooking Lake Zurich, is valued at about \$12 million.

The seminary will have to build its facility in Prague. No date has been set for the move but it is expected to take a couple years to accomplish.

Leaving Ruschlikon is expected to solve at least two problems -- the high cost of doing business in Switzerland and the difficulty of getting visas for student families. Students, who come from 23 countries in Europe and beyond, frequently have to leave their families behind in order to study in Switzerland.

And the seminary can be operated in Prague for a fraction of the cost in Switzerland, where students now pay about \$10,000 a year to attend.

"The latest estimates are that we can cut expenses by two thirds," said David Rogers, seminary vice president for advancement.

John David Hopper, seminary president, was traveling and unavailable for comment.

Prague was chosen over Berlin as the new site in part because of its central location in the new undivided Europe.

"The center of gravity of European Baptists has moved to the east," observed Stanley Crabb, editor of the European Baptist Press Service, which is housed at the seminary.

Since the fall of communism, Baptists in the former Soviet bloc

countries have become more active in the EBF. The Czech Republic, with its Slavic culture and language, is likely to strengthen the seminary's ties with Baptists in the east.

Despite the emotional attachment to the Ruschlikon site, which has been home to the seminary since its founding 45 years ago, the move to Prague has been met with enthusiasm by the school's supporters, said Rogers.

"Once people have understood the strategic reasons for this, they have been excited about it," he reported. "Overriding is the fact there are so many educational needs in Eastern Europe."

The seminary always has been heavily dependent on financial support from the United States, and that likely won't change, Rogers said. But the move will prompt European Baptists to assume more responsibility for the school, he predicted.

"This is a chance for European Baptists to really build and establish this program as their own. ... This is truly their time to shine, and I think they will rise to the occasion."

To build the new facility, the seminary likely will encourage various national Baptist unions to donate building materials unique to their country to symbolize their cooperation in the project, Rogers said.

Seminary trustees and EBF leaders agreed to the move after an extensive study. The approval is provisional to allow time for consultation with the member unions of the EBF. Confirmation of the decision is expected by the EBF executive committee in May. Also by May the seminary may have selected a new name for the school.

With the move, the seminary will shift its focus from providing basic theological training -- which many national Baptist conventions now offer through their own seminaries -- to providing advanced theological training. To enroll, students generally would have to have completed their initial theological training elsewhere.

The seminary also will establish partnerships with the emerging theological schools in Eastern Europe and with the existing Baptist schools of Western Europe. Seminary courses will be redesigned to link with those of other European Baptist schools, particularly a six-school consortium in England.

While focusing on advanced studies, the seminary will maintain its emphasis on practical training of pastors and laypeople through lay academies, workshops, conferences and off-campus institutes.

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World leaders, specialists
seek action on global hunger

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The world needs a new generation of abolitionists willing to break the bondage of hunger, according to speakers at a conference on Overcoming Global Hunger Nov. 30-Dec. 1.

The World Bank-sponsored conference at American University in Washington drew international leaders and hunger experts. Among the participants were former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist; Boutros Boutros-Ghali, secretary-general of the United Nations; Rep. Tony Hall, D-Ohio; and Sir Ketumile Masire, president of the Republic of Botswana.

Carter, who has championed international human rights -- including the right to food -- challenged the crowd to do more than talk about hunger.

"My dream is that we will prepare specific ideas that can be tried in a

specific place, perhaps Ethiopia," Carter said.

He urged the representatives of various humanitarian groups to work together, noting that almost all the non-governmental agencies working against hunger "guard their turf." If these groups worked together as a team or task force, then inroads to eradicating hunger could be made, he noted.

He said such conferences usually result in the adoption of goals or perhaps a couple new agencies that fade into insignificance. Carter reminded the audience that at a similar conference in the 1970s, goals were adopted to eradicate hunger within the decade. If that had been accomplished, today they would be celebrating rather than re-examining the problem, he said.

Several factors have contributed to the lack of progress, he said. First, there is a reluctance to change basic policy even in the midst of failure. Second, hunger programs fail to be country-specific. Third, too many fragmented, uncoordinated efforts in a country can aggravate the problem.

Many hunger programs also fail to involve local people. People must be given the capacity to meet their own need rather than charity, he said.

The Carter Center, founded by the former president, works to help hungry people become self-reliant, emphasizing direct involvement of the poor.

Distribution, not food production, is the problem, Carter said, adding that protectionism, deforestation and overpopulation are contributing factors.

Boutros-Ghali echoed Carter: "The world now produces enough food to feed its population. The problem is not simply technical. It is a political and social problem. It is a problem of access to food supplies, of distribution and of entitlement.

"Above all, it is a problem of political will."

Hunger's existence violates the "most basic of human rights -- the right to survival," Boutros-Ghali said. "And it is our responsibility as an international community to guarantee that right."

The United Nations is central to this task because the solutions must be comprehensive, he said.

"Food security requires an across-the-board effort. Its political, social, economic and technological factors all must be involved and integrated. Above all, food security must be guided by a political consensus on the need for action, as well as its nature and scope."

Many speakers -- particularly representatives of the non-governmental agencies (NGOs) -- criticized the World Bank for policies they said lead to hunger.

Atherton Martin of the Development Institute said: "We simply refuse to accept hunger as a feature of life on earth. As NGOs we are convinced that an end to hunger is not only possible but imperative.

"If the horror of global hunger forces the bank to do one thing," he continued, "it should be to change the terms of engagement and to do all that is necessary to make it possible for local people, poor people, hungry people, to accept the bank as a partner in this quest to end hunger.

"The chance for a change begins and ends with the people on the ground, because very simply, nothing grows from the top down -- not trees, not economies and certainly not people."

David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, told Associated Baptist Press that World Bank leaders were receptive to the criticism offered at the conference. He said that there was a general agreement that the bank needs to move from top-down programs to bottom-up programs that are participatory.

"The basic problem is that the bank is run by the governments of the world, and very few governments are focused on what is good for poor people," Beckmann said. "The powers that press against the bank would not put poor people first."

Congressman Hall said that while the bank had been justifiably criticized it also deserves a lot of credit for holding a conference in which it opened itself up to such criticism.

Hall, whose 22-day hunger fast sparked the conference, told the group of experts that "we have a chance to make a major difference together."

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Religious freedom highlights
first session of Congress

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- On the heels of a highly charged anti-incumbent election year, lawmakers scrambled to bring about change during the first session of the 103rd Congress.

This year, when Congress welcomed the most diverse freshman class in its history, lawmakers set out immediately to change their own image. Several congressional-reform measures were introduced but none enacted.

Instead, Congress' session perhaps will be best remembered, at least by Baptists, for protecting religious liberty.

President Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act Nov. 16 after the measure languished three years in Congress. The law restores a high level of protection for religious practice.

In 1990 the U.S. Supreme Court virtually abandoned the time-honored test that required government to demonstrate a "compelling interest" before it could restrict religious practice.

The bill, supported by a 68-member coalition of religious and civil-liberties groups, was approved on a unanimous voice vote in the House of Representatives and on a 97-3 vote in the Senate.

In addition to RFRA, lawmakers introduced 6,128 measures, approving 747 of them. Among issues addressed:

-- Abortion. Both chambers explored various bills related to abortion, including the Freedom of Choice Act and the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

The Freedom of Choice Act is designed to provide legislative protection for a woman's right to privacy in abortion decisions.

Supporters say the bill would codify the 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision that the Supreme Court has begun to erode. Opponents counter that the bill goes beyond Roe and constitutes the most radical abortion-rights legislation ever considered.

Senate and House committees have cleared the measure for floor debate but neither chamber has acted on it.

Both chambers approved versions of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act but were unable to finish work on the bill before the adjournment.

The legislation is designed to curb escalating violence at abortion clinics by making such acts a federal crime. The bill would allow federal authorities to intervene and would provide fines and jail sentences for abortion protesters who intimidate or interfere with a woman trying to get an abortion. Penalties also would be imposed for destruction of clinic property.

A conference committee from both chambers of Congress will convene after the first of the year to try to reconcile the two versions of the bill.

Congress also rehashed the nearly two-decades-old debate over providing federal funds for abortions for poor women.

Pro-choice legislators failed to overturn the ban on federal funding but

succeeded in modifying it. The ban previously allowed federal funding if the mother's life was in danger. Now, as part of a spending bill, the ban also provides an exemption in the cases of rape or incest.

However, Congress approved a measure that would allow the District of Columbia to pay for abortions for poor women. For the first time in five years, Congress adopted a budget for the district without a ban on the use of local funds for abortions.

-- Crime and violence. Lawmakers tackled several provisions designed to reduce crime in the street, at home and on the airwaves.

President Clinton signed a bill Nov. 30 that creates a national five-day waiting period for handgun purchases. Both chambers approved the bill, named for former White House press secretary James Brady who was shot during a 1981 assassination attempt on President Reagan.

The waiting period allows law enforcement officials to run a criminal background check on would-be handgun buyers. The waiting-period requirement will go into effect in about three months.

Both bodies also approved different versions of an omnibus crime bill that will not be ready for presidential action until next session. The measure would authorize more than \$22 billion over five years for a variety of anti-crime initiatives, including an additional 100,000 police officers and more prisons.

Congress, led by Illinois senator Paul Simon, also warned television networks to clean up their act. Several measures were introduced in both chambers to regulate the industry, particularly its violent content. Simon, a Democrat, said he favored self-regulation but warned television executives at a conference that his colleagues and the public were growing weary waiting for the networks to act.

As a result, the networks instituted a labeling system that warns parents that certain violent programs might be harmful to their children.

-- Confirmations. The Senate confirmed 31,257 federal nominations of the 38,253 received. Among those were a new Supreme Court justice, ambassador to the Vatican and surgeon general.

The Senate overwhelmingly confirmed Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the Supreme Court. A pioneer for women's rights, Ginsburg garnered a 96-3 vote as she became the second woman and the 107th justice to sit on the high court.

The Senate also confirmed Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn as the next U.S. ambassador to the Vatican -- a position that Baptists have opposed on church-state grounds. Flynn is the third person to fill the post since Reagan appointed William Wilson in 1984.

The most controversial nomination was that of Joycelyn Elders as U.S. surgeon general. The Senate confirmed, 65-34, the former head of the Arkansas Department of Health under then-Gov. Clinton.

Elders, a pediatric endocrinologist and former pediatrics professor, was opposed by Religious Right groups despite near unanimous support from the medical community. The Religious Right said her views on sex education, abortion and teenage pregnancy would promote promiscuity.

She said that she wants to eradicate the need for abortion by curbing teen pregnancy. She said her health-care focus would be on prevention rather than just treatment.

-- Family. In February, Clinton signed the Family and Medical Leave Act that allows workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave annually for the birth or adoption of a child or the serious illness of an immediate family member. This measure was among the first approved by Congress.

-- Homosexual rights. Lawmakers grappled with several provisions designed to end discrimination against homosexuals, particularly in the military. As part of a defense-spending bill, Congress adopted Clinton's policy that sexual conduct, not sexual preference, would be the determining

factor for service in the military.

-- Charitable giving. Gifts to churches and other charitable organizations are expected to rise under the \$496 billion omnibus budget bill that barely cleared Congress. The controversial five-year budget plan contained several items that have a direct impact on churches and other charitable groups.

Donors are able to deduct the full market value of appreciated property given to non-profit organizations, which is expected to increase gifts to institutions dependent upon large gifts.

A provision reducing itemized deductions, including those for charitable contributions, for high income taxpayers was made permanent.

-- Non-profit postal rates. Most state Baptist newspapers felt a modest postal-rate increase in November because of a bill reforming how non-profit mail rates are calculated. A 12 percent increase for second-class non-profit publications will be phased in over a six-year period. Third-class non-profit publications face about a 20 percent increase over the same period.

Congress is scheduled to reconvene Jan. 25.

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Columbia medical center
links with Catholic hospital

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- Baptist Medical Center of Columbia, S.C., which recently severed its ties with the Southern Baptist churches in the state, has entered a joint venture with a Catholic hospital in Columbia.

Providence Hospital and Baptist Medical Center agreed to join forces to offer a preferred-provider organization, or PPO, to self-insured employers in the area.

The joint venture between two of Columbia's biggest hospitals is the type of move Baptist Medical Center officials said was difficult or impossible under the previous relationship with the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

The joint venture would have required approval of the convention, a process that sometimes took one or two years. Officials of the South Carolina Baptist Hospital, which operates the 542-bed medical center, said the recent break with the convention was necessary to keep up with fast-paced changes in the health-care industry.

Trustees of the hospital system voted in August to empower themselves to elect their own successors, removing control of the hospital system's three medical centers from the Baptist convention, which has elected trustees since 1914.

Although Baptist officials originally called the hospital's action illegal, they later decided not to fight the issue in court. In November the convention agreed to sever legal ties with the hospital system if the hospital agreed to fund an array of medical, counseling and educational services for Baptists in the state.

Providence Hospital is a non-profit Catholic hospital sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Augustine in Cleveland, Ohio.

Both hospitals will retain their separate identities. The joint venture will be conducted by a new board of directors.

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-- By Greg Warner

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