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Sherman to stay at CBF,
turns down Asheville church

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (ABP) -- Cecil Sherman, head of the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, has turned down an offer to leave the organization to become interim pastor of a North Carolina church.

Associated Baptist Press reported Jan. 11 that Sherman, 66, was considering the move to First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., where he previously served a 20-year pastorate.

In a statement faxed to ABP Jan. 13 just before he left on a trip to Europe, Sherman said he had decided to continue as coordinator of the CBF, a position he has held two years.

"I have come to the clear conviction that staying at the CBF is the right thing to do," Sherman said. "I have a commitment to what we're about and I have a commitment to the people we've brought here."

The Asheville congregation's deacons voted unanimously Jan. 10 to offer Sherman the interim post, said Charles Russell, deacon chairman. He said the deacons hoped Sherman's good reputation in the church would aid "a healing process" in the congregation.

Sherman was pastor at the church from 1964 to 1984. His successor, John Hewett, resigned suddenly last October for personal reasons. A second staff member since has been forced to resign, adding to the turmoil.

Sherman said Jan. 10 he would consider leaving the Fellowship because of the physical demands of travel on both him and his wife, Dot. However, in his Jan. 13 statement to ABP, he said, "CBF is steadier, CBF's future is brighter and my sense of calling to the Fellowship is stronger than it's ever been."

When Sherman become the Fellowship's first chief executive officer in March 1992, he said his age would probably limit his tenure to three or four years.

Sherman's decision to stay includes a commitment to reduce his travel schedule, according to Fellowship spokesman David Wilkinson.

The Fellowship was formed in 1991 by groups opposed to the new fundamental-conservative leadership in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Under Sherman's leadership, the number of churches contributing to the

Fellowship and the total annual income of the Atlanta-based organization has doubled. Contributions during 1993 were expected exceeded \$11 million from approximately 1,200 churches and an undetermined number of individuals.

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-- By Bob Allen and Greg Warner

Baptists Today faces
turmoil, transition

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Three staff members have resigned from the moderate newspaper Baptists Today in a conflict with editor Jack Harwell.

The newspaper's board of directors in December came one vote short of forcing Harwell to take a leave of absence to deal with stress produced by personal problems. Instead they agreed to pay for Harwell to get counseling.

The directors, meeting by conference call, also agreed to grant severance benefits to the three staffers -- Amy Greene, Michael Usey and Karen Cheponis -- who submitted a formal list of complaints against Harwell. As part of the severance agreements, the staffers were prohibited from talking about their complaints.

Harwell said the dispute concerned "long-standing philosophical differences as to the direction of the paper," which he has served as editor since 1988.

"I would say that pretty well sums it up," Greene told Associated Baptist Press. "It's the vision thing," she said, noting she was not free to discuss specific grievances.

"We understand that there has been some conflict," said director Jack Snell of Jacksonville, Fla., "but the trustees feel that Jack as editor has the responsibility of running the organization."

All three departing employees were part time. Harwell was the only full-time staffer.

Harwell, 61, accepted the offer of counseling because of "personal turmoil." Harwell, who has a son dying of AIDS, was divorced and remarried recently and has experienced other illness and death in his family. "We've been under a lot of family pressure for four years," he said.

While some on the board "felt I needed some time off," Harwell said, he disagreed. The motion to force him to take a two-month leave failed 5-6, he said.

Asked if the leave of absence was an attempt by some directors to ease him out of the editorship, Harwell said, "It's according to who you talk to."

The upheaval at Baptists Today threatens to overshadow changes at the newspaper that Harwell said are positive.

"Last year was the best year financially we've ever had," he said. "We have more regular (financial) contributors than ever." Subscriptions are up from 4,500 when he became editor five years ago to 16,000, he reported.

The newspaper, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year, moved out of its original office space at Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., Jan. 13 to space at a Decatur professional building. A board member donated use of the new space for 10 years.

And the publication has updated its production technology, purchasing a desktop publishing system to replace its typesetting equipment.

The three part-time staff members have been replaced by two new full-

time employees. Steve Wright was hired as associate editor, filling a position shared by Greene and Usey. And Karyn Reasoner was hired as office manager, replacing Karen Cheponis.

Wright, who operated his own Atlanta-based communications consulting company for the past six years, has worked for several Georgia newspapers. He once was a summer intern for the Christian Index, newsjournal of Georgia Baptists, when Harwell was editor.

All three outgoing staffers are seeking other employment. Greene plans to return to secular newspaper work. Usey, who finishes a doctoral degree soon, plans to enter the pastorate. Cheponis is seeking other employment in Atlanta.

Baptists Today, founded as SBC Today in 1983, became a voice for moderate and progressive Baptists who opposed the fundamental-conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s. It was founded by Walker Knight, who retired last year.

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Congressional vote expected on alcohol advertising

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Congress is expected to take its first-ever vote on an alcohol advertising bill early this year.

The Sensible Advertising and Family Education Act (S. 674), which requires rotating health and safety messages on broadcast and print alcohol advertisements, will go to the Senate Commerce Committee for a vote as early as late February.

The messages are similar to but more far-reaching than those already required to be placed on tobacco products and advertisements.

"This bill ensures that Americans, especially young people, will receive balanced information about the leading alcohol-related problems," said Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

"The primary source of information about alcohol comes from alcohol advertisements which promote drinking as risk-free activity that advances social acceptance, sexual attractiveness and athletic success," Parham said.

In 1992, one brewer alone spent more than \$315 million promoting alcohol consumption. The U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's communication budget, meanwhile, was \$12 million to spend, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer-advocacy group based in Washington, D.C.

The votes of 10 members of the Senate Commerce Committee are required to move the bill from committee to the Senate floor.

Four senators already are considered supporters of the bill, Parham said: Ernest Hollings, D-S.C., Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, John Rockefeller, D-W.Va., and Ted Stevens, R-Alaska.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest, a leading proponent of the bill, has identified eight senators as key votes to pass the bill out of committee: John Breaux, D-La., Bryon Dorgan, D-N.D., James Exon, D-Neb., Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, John Kerry, D-Maine, Trent Lott, R-Miss., Larry Pressler, R-S.D., and Charles Robb, D-Va.

Other members of the Senate Commerce Committee include Richard Bryan, D-Nev., Conrad Burns, R-Mont., John Danforth, R-Mo., Wendell Ford, D-Ky., Slade Gorton, R-Wash., Harlan Mathews, D-Tenn., and John McCain, R-Ariz.

Parham urged Southern Baptists to call and encourage their senators to

express support for the SAFE bill in January. "Now is the time for Southern Baptists to speak loudly for health and safety messages in alcohol advertising," he said.

The Baptist Center for Ethics is an independent Baptist think tank for social and ethical issues. It is based in Nashville, Tenn.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Women's auxiliary changes
group names, publications

TALLADEGA, Ala. (ABP) -- In an attempt to modernize the Woman's Missionary Union's adult organizations, the mission auxiliary's executive board has voted to drop its "Baptist Women" and "Baptist Young Women" designations for members.

In their place is "Women on Mission," a single organization that can be customized by Baptist churches to target various ages, tasks, interests and needs of women's groups.

The WMU executive board adopted the name change at its Jan. 8-13 meeting at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly near Talladega, Ala.

"The changes will allow women and girls to focus more on missions and less on organizational structure as we seek to be on mission for God in the world," said WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien.

The board also voted to discontinue two magazines -- its flagship Royal Service and Contempo. A new periodical named Mission Mosaic will succeed the two age-graded publications beginning in October 1995.

Royal Service is geared toward older women in WMU. It has been published 80 years. Contempo is the magazine for the current Baptist Young Women organization.

WMU will retain its age-level designations for girls. However, another new magazine, GA World, will target older members of Girls in Action, while an existing magazine, Discovery narrows its focus to GAs in grades 1-4.

The changes follow a revamping of the WMU's program design at last year's executive board meeting. They are designed to streamline WMU programs and make them more flexible, simpler and more relevant, O'Brien said.

The executive board selected the name Women on Mission for the new organization over "Women Aware," a name proposed following the WMU's annual meeting last June.

In other business, the board approved its first three national projects on social issues, another emphasis incorporated in last year's program revamping. The WMU will launch projects on hunger in 1994, AIDS in 1995 and child advocacy in 1996.

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Drop in SBC giving may lead
to 'minimal downsizing' at HMB

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A decline in giving to Southern Baptist Convention causes could lead to some "minimal downsizing" at the convention's Home Mission Board, the agency's president said.

HMB President Larry Lewis recently imposed a three-month hiring freeze

at the Atlanta-based board. He ordered an internal study of the organization and predicted some staff cuts might come as early as late this year.

Both of the board's two main sources of income declined in 1993. The largest, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, dropped \$1.3 million from a record \$37.6 million in 1992. Meanwhile, the HMB's share of the Cooperative Program, the SBC's central budget, came in \$676,000 below budget.

The decline in support will not affect mission work immediately, Lewis said, but he is concerned about the impact of potential budget shortfalls in 1994 and 1995. He called the hiring freeze and study "prudent management."

HMB spokesman Martin King said that, unlike some other SBC agencies, declining denominational support "really hasn't affected us." Now, he continued, "it looks like it is."

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-- By Bob Allen

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