

Associated Baptist Press

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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FMB trustees adopt strategy for Europe, appoint missionaries

By Pam Parry

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board adopted a strategy designed to accelerate missions in Eastern Europe, affirmed the SBC directive that agencies decline funds from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and appointed 35 missionaries at its Aug. 15-17 meeting in Alexandria, Va.

The proposal for Eastern Europe would earmark funds for the next three years to send missionaries and volunteers to meet "unprecedented requests from Eastern European countries." The strategy involves planting and building new churches, as well as a plethora of educational and training initiatives.

Among the projected results in Eastern Europe for the next three years are 1,800 preaching points, 420 missionaries deployed, 50,000 baptisms and 10,300 churches.

The trustees' emphasis on Eastern Europe was underscored by their four-fold approach to financing the effort.

They voted to allocate to Eastern Europe a portion of the 1995 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The 1995 offering goal is \$100 million, with approximately \$85 million budgeted for specific missions expenditures. They earmarked the first \$5 million received over the budgeted amount for Eastern Europe.

The trustees also voted to designate to Eastern Europe the first \$5 million the FMB receives in excess of Cooperative Program funds in 1995.

In observance of its 150th anniversary, the SBC has set \$150 million as the CP goal for 1995. The projected CP budget is \$136.5 million; any contributions over that amount will be divided among SBC agencies. The trustees earmarked the first \$5 million received from the overage for Eastern Europe.

The board, meeting at First Baptist Church in Alexandria, also approved two recommendations to accept funds from interested foundations and to place the needs of Eastern Europe on a strategic list promoted by the FMB development office.

In other action, the board:

- affirmed recent SBC action directing its agencies and institutions to decline CBF funds and commended its staff for prompt implementation of that action;
- appointed 35 new missionaries to serve in 10 countries, bringing the FMB missionary force to 4,027.
- affirmed the SBC resolution calling on agency trustees to be diligent, demonstrate servanthood and exercise wisdom in potentially divisive decisions;
- dialogued about various global missions strategies, including new vision and missions statements for the board.

During his board report and charge to the new missionaries, FMB President Jerry Rankin shared his vision for expanding global missions.

The FMB's vision and mission statements should be based on some "core values," he said. Such values would define the doctrinal parameters of the lordship of Christ, the centrality of the Bible, the lostness of man, the essential "saviorhood" of Jesus and the importance of prayer, he said.

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Flap over woman's ordination threatens BSU director's job

By Bob Allen

GALVESTON, Texas (ABP) -- A controversy over women's ordination has divided a Texas Baptist association and threatens the job of the campus minister at the center of the dispute.

The minister, 43-year-old, Raye Nell Dyer, by all accounts has been successful during a nine-year ministry as Baptist Student Union director at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. For several years, that included good relations with pastors and other leaders in Galveston Baptist Association.

That began to change in 1991 when Dyer asked her church, First Baptist Church of Galveston, to ordain her to the gospel ministry.

Since, she has survived one firing attempt and is now negotiating guidelines for reconciliation designed to salvage her ministry, but observers on both sides of the issue say it is uncertain it will be resolved peacefully.

"I'm still prayerful about reconciliation," Dyer said by telephone Aug. 18. She declined to be interviewed about her situation, saying she had been advised by supervisors not to talk to the press.

The Galveston congregation's deacons agreed in the summer of 1991 to recognize Dyer's calling and gifts but were uncomfortable with ordaining a woman, recommending instead a "partial ordination." Dyer appealed directly to the church, which voted narrowly to ordain her on Oct. 6, 1991.

After the vote, however, opponents threatened to delay the ordination, leading Dyer to postpone the service and later withdraw her request altogether.

But the rift continued, eventually spilling over into the association, which provides local oversight to the BSU director position funded by the Baptist General Convention of Texas. As the church conducted its own study of ordination, the association established a committee to investigate Dyer's theology and make recommendations regarding her future employment.

Dyer remained active in the church for several months, but received "harassing" phone calls and was "slandered" by individuals throughout the ordeal, she reported in a statement read at an associational meeting in July. Eventually she left the church, joining South Main Baptist Church in Houston, where she had been a member years earlier, in a neighboring association, under "watch care" or partial membership.

South Main offered to ordain Dyer, but church bylaws allowed ordination only of full members. The church voted to receive Dyer into membership and unanimously approved her ordination on Nov. 5, 1993.

Dyer's mother, who strongly supported the ordination, was in the last stages of cancer at the time. The church moved quickly, holding Dyer's ordination ceremony only nine days later. Two weeks after Dyer's ordination, her mother died.

Dyer's going outside the association further aggravated the situation in Galveston. In February, the association's BSU advisory committee wrote Jack Greever, the state BSU director in Dallas, recommending she be removed from her position at UTMB. After further consideration, the committee deferred to the association's full executive board, which met in a session called for the purpose of discussing the situation July 5.

With reporters from newspapers in Galveston and Houston present and with several of Dyer's supporters speaking in her favor, the executive board voted nearly unanimously to rescind the request that she be dismissed and to create guidelines for "reconciliation and healing" between Dyer and the association, composed of more than 40 churches in Galveston County.

Press reports termed the vote a breakthrough. Dyer told the Houston Chronicle that while she did not know what the guidelines would be, "I am more than willing to work toward reconciliation."

Galveston Association's director of missions, Grayson Glass, said Aug. 16 that a committee appointed to draft guidelines for reconciliation was asked to keep its recommendations confidential until they are presented to the executive board Aug. 29.

Friends of Dyer, however, say she was disappointed by a draft of the committee's work and unless the guidelines are renegotiated she probably will be unwilling to accept them.

Twenty-five campus ministers from 10 states attending Student Week at Ridgecrest, N.C., signed an Aug. 15 letter asking Greever to publicly support Dyer, voicing their "strong belief in her giftedness, call and effectiveness in campus ministry which led to her ordination" and asking him to "join with her in finding a place where her giftedness for campus ministry will be appreciated and expressed."

One of the signers, Bobby Waddail of Towson, Md., said Dyer's colleagues were shocked the dispute has gone this far. "She's not trying to be a pastor. It's hard to believe," he said.

Greever could not be reached for comment, but the Galveston director of missions said the campus ministers' initiative is unwelcome. Grayson Glass said associational leaders "are doing our best" to resolve the conflict. "We really don't think it's any of the 25 student workers' business," he said.

"We are working on some solutions," he said. "I don't think they ought to put Greever on the spot. Greever has worked with us very closely and worked with her. I felt like the initial meeting we had with her was a very good meeting."

Glass said women's ordination is a secondary issue in the dispute. "About half of our association believes it's alright for women to be ordained and about half of them don't," he said. "The whole problem developed, from our standpoint, (over) not whether she should be ordained or not but her pushing of this."

But Dyer told the association meeting in July she did not intend to be divisive. Ordination was important to her, she said, because "it is a logical step in my calling, ministry and vocational journey" and because "I felt God's leadership in it."

Dyer said she does not believe a transfer from the medical school is an option. "I still feel called here," she said. "This is a unique ministry and it really fits my gifts."

According to Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, more than 1,000 women have been ordained by churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Several of them are BSU directors and many serve as chaplains. Dyer says one part of her job is to function as a hospital chaplain at the school's medical center.

Bread for the World marks 20th anniversary

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Bread for the World, a Christian citizens' anti-hunger lobby group, recently noted its 20th anniversary during a Capitol Hill reception.

The organization began mobilizing Christians concerned about hunger in 1974 and now has 44,000 members.

Bread President David Beckmann said, "Bread for the World's 20-year witness against hunger has helped leverage billions of dollars for proven programs for hungry people. Our effective, faith-based advocacy for ending hunger is rooted in the Christian gospel."

Arthur Simon, founder and president emeritus of Bread, added, "If Bread for the World's past 20 years are any indication, we've witnessed just the prologue. This persistent, moral voice will continue to inform and sustain religious, political and social efforts in ending hunger."

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-- By Pam Parry

Smith helps youth find 'a place in this world'

By Melanie Childers

NASHVILLE (ABP) -- Singer/songwriter Michael W. Smith keys his music to promote young people's self-esteem.

A popular Christian musician with Baptist roots in a small town near the West Virginia-Kentucky border, Smith said one of the most important messages he wants teenagers to hear is that they're loved.

"A lot of kids feel like they don't have a place in the world," Smith explained during a telephone interview. He believes low self-esteem is the No. 1 problem among young people today.

With his family, Smith attended First Baptist Church of Kenova, W. Va., an American Baptist Church he joined at age 10 when he made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

"The church had a really great youth program," Smith explained. With a "hip" youth choir and a visionary youth director, he said, they developed an early version of what evolved into the contemporary Christian music genre.

"We were free to take our guitars and drums and blow it out every Sunday night. ... We were really ahead of our time in a lot of ways," he explained.

During the past decade, Smith has risen to the spotlight in gospel, Christian contemporary and adult contemporary music circles.

His two most recent gold albums, "Go West Young Man" and "Change Your World," featured songs that reached the top 10 on both Christian contemporary and secular contemporary charts.

Blurring the lines between the Christian and pop music worlds has extended Smith's impact to millions more people who never would listen to Christian radio stations, he said.

"It's unbelievable the effect this can have on people who won't have anything to do with Christianity," he explained.

But the labels that come from both sides limit him, he said. Smith doesn't want to be known just as a

gospel singer or just as a pop singer.

He would like to tell people, "Hey, I'm a pop singer, and my relationship with Jesus is the most important part of my life. That's who I am. Let me be who I am."

Smith credits belief in himself as one important factor contributing to his success. Consequently, self-esteem recurs as a prevalent theme in the messages he's sending to young people today through his music.

"At least one song on every album's going to be saying 'You know what? You're OK,'" he explained. "I feel like one of my gifts is the gift of encouragement. People feel that in my songs."

For example, songs such as "Picture Perfect," "Place in this World," "Out of this World" and "Emily" all promote a positive self-image.

Other songs accentuate high ethics, praise, love and authentic Christian living.

"Kentucky Rose," a song on Smith's most recent album, tells the fictional story of a dedicated preacher -- nicknamed Kentucky Rose -- who selflessly served a small congregation in a farming community.

Smith realizes his message of self-worth often collides with prevailing attitudes of a world that devalues people. It also counters the message of some Christians who promote Christianity as the key to a perfect, happy life.

"Everybody wants to say everything's OK and every day is going to be a great day," he explained. "It's just not that way. God is in control, but life is hard."

Personal experience has taught Smith about life's hardships.

"I went through a tough time from about 1975 to 1979," he explained. "I went through a drug phase, but I came out of it, by the grace of God."

Teenagers, especially, need a strong sense of their God-given worth to shore up against the storms of life, he said.

And judging from the response of his listeners, Smith has been successful at helping bolster people's self-worth and instill Christian qualities through his music.

"I get 300-500 letters a week from kids who say my music has changed their lives," he said.

Those letters remind Smith of his tremendous responsibility as a role model.

"It's honoring and humbling at the same time," he said. "It's a calling on my life, and I love being there and having that positive impact on kids. We could use some good role models these days.

"It's a wonderful feeling when you're connecting, when you're saying something positive," Smith continued. "You look out from the stage into a sea of hurting faces. Then you catch the look on someone's face. And you realize that you're giving them hope. That makes it all worthwhile."

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Pitcher relieved by news that his career is over

HAVANA, Ill. (ABP) -- When a professional baseball player gets the dreaded news he has been released by his team, his reaction is usually disappointment. Bill Sampen's reaction was different.

"I shot my arms up in the air and said, 'Yes!'" recalled Sampen, a Baptist from Havana, Ill., who got the news July 11.

Sampen, who has played for several teams in the major leagues, was released from his contract with the California Angels organization, which had assigned the pitcher to its Triple-A team in Vancouver, B.C.

Release usually means the end of a career. But that's alright with Sampen, who says his family is more important than the baseball career he spent much of his life working for.

"I just feel really sure that it's time to move on," Sampen said. "I'm to the point where I don't feel like I can be the husband and father that I want to be and still play."

Sampen and his wife, Amy, have a 1-year-old son and are expecting their second child. They recently moved back to Havana to prepare for the child's birth.

An outspoken witness for Christ, Sampen was "commissioned" in February by his church -- Mt. Zion Baptist in Kilbourne, Ill. -- for his ministry in baseball.

During nine years as a professional, Sampen played for the Montreal Expos, Kansas City Royals and California Angels.

After the birth of his first child last year, however, "instantly my desire [to play baseball] left me," Sampen said. He no longer could concentrate on the game, especially on road trips. "I hated being away from Amy and Isaac."

Sampen, who has spoken to many Baptist groups in Illinois, said baseball brought him many "blessings," including friendships, personal growth and financial rewards. "I'm sure I'll miss some things, but there's a lot I won't miss," he said.

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-- Ferrell Foster and Greg Warner

CORRECTION: In the Aug. 10 ABP story, "HMB follows SBC order despite impassioned plea," the name in the next-to-last paragraph should be Ernest Kelly, not Forrest.

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