

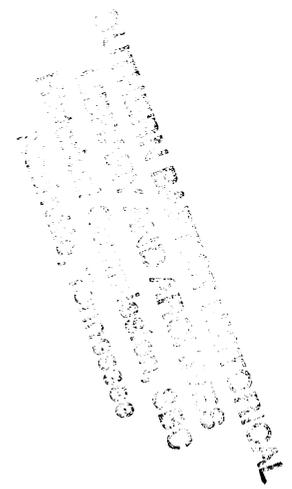
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Fellowship appoints missionaries, moves 1995 meeting to summer

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship appointed eight new missionaries, gave official recognition to 14 state-level affiliates, and moved its 1995 annual meeting from May in Austin, Texas, to July in Fort Worth.

Those were among actions taken during the Sept. 8-10 meeting of the Coordinating Council, the 78-member committee that administers much of the Fellowship's business. The council also heard from a committee trying to define the Fellowship's identity and future course. And the group began work on two new initiatives -- to increase the representation and participation of ethnic and racial groups and to help ministers and congregations in conflict.

The missionary appointments -- bringing the Fellowship's worldwide total to 52 -- were celebrated in a ceremony Sept. 8 at Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta, which hosted the council meeting. The four couples will serve in Atlanta, the Czech Republic, Eastern Europe and an undisclosed Asian country.

The council abandoned plans to conduct its 1995 general assembly in Austin because of logistical problems, including a shortage of nearby hotel rooms, limited parking, and higher costs for hotel rooms, facilities and travel. Most of those problems could be solved by a move to the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth, which hosted the assembly in 1992. The meeting is set for July 20-22.

The move also will give the Fellowship its first summer assembly, which organizers hope will attract more families with school-age children. About 6,000 people have attended the annual meeting, which until now has been held in the spring.

The council also adopted a statement of objectives for the annual meeting and guidelines for selection of future sites. Richmond, Va., was approved as the preferred site for the 1996 assembly, now scheduled for June 27-29. Plans to go to Orlando, Fla., in 1997, San Antonio, Texas, in 1998 and Louisville, Ky., in 1999 were suspended in deference to the new site guidelines.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, based in Atlanta, is an organization of Baptist moderates developing alternatives to the conservative-controlled Southern Baptist Convention. The Fellowship operates its own missions program and supports a variety of independent Baptist ministries.

At least 18 state and regional Fellowship "network groups" have sprung up in recent years, most working to promote the Fellowship's cause on the local level. Greg Hunt of Kansas City, Mo., the Fellowship's network coordinator, said some means of recognition from the national organization is necessary to solidify ties and "establish quality control for use of the CBF name."

The council adopted criteria for recognizing state groups and a process for handling requests for recognition. Care was taken in drafting the guidelines so that the freedom of state affiliates is not compromised, Hunt said.

The criteria is necessary not because CBF wants to control state groups but because those groups want recognition, said Fellowship moderator Carolyn Crumpler of Cincinnati. The process of recognition begins when a state group requests it.

To be recognized, a network group must declare an explicit relationship with the CBF, agree with CBF purposes, support the CBF cause, and avoid any activity that might jeopardize the Fellowship's non-profit status.

Fourteen groups already qualify: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, the Central region, Mississippi, Missouri, the Northeast region, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The council voted to extend formal recognition to them.

Four other groups are in various stages of development that likely will lead to recognition, Hunt said -- Texas, North Carolina, the Mid-Atlantic region and the West region. North Carolina met all requirements but not in time for review by the appropriate committee, Hunt said.

The council heard a preliminary report from a task force trying to write a vision and mission statement for the three-year-old organization. No action was taken on the statement, which will be revised and resubmitted at the council's February meeting.

"The mission of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," according to the draft document, "is to revitalize the Baptist vision by offering creative and innovative ways for Baptist individuals and churches to cooperate freely, faithfully and joyfully in sharing the gospel in their communities and throughout the world."

Rather than offering churches programs, products and services like a traditional denomination, the Fellowship should serve as a "resource center" for churches, suggested David Wilkinson, the Fellowship's communications coordinator. (See related story.)

Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman gave his own description of the Fellowship -- a three-pronged functional definition that he said harmonizes with the vision statement and gives shape to the group's budget and organizational structure.

Sherman said the Fellowship is three things: a missions-delivery system, a caretaker of Baptist principles, and a resource for congregational health and growth. "This is the first conceptual arrangement of this house that I have halfway liked," he said.

While global missions occupies most of the Fellowship's attention and budget, the organization also supports theological schools and other entities because of its commitment to Baptist principles, Sherman said.

But little has been done in the third area, help for churches. "We take from churches now but give very little back," he said.

As a resource center, Sherman said, the Fellowship should offer help in evangelism, leadership, Christian education, conflict management in churches, and pastoral care for hurting ministers. Many moderate churches need help in those areas, he said.

Sherman suggested the Fellowship should spend roughly 60 percent of its budget on missions, 20 percent on support for Baptist principles and 10 percent on church resources, with the remaining 10 percent going for general operations and the annual meeting.

Sherman said his concept for the structure of the Fellowship likely will require a reorganization of its Atlanta-based staff and the Coordinating Council's committees.

In view of that possibility, the Christian education ministry group delayed action on its plan to hire a Christian education coordinator for the national staff. Two other new staff positions are also under consideration -- coordinators for theological education and for ministry to ministers.

Also during its meeting, the council adopted a budget "target" for 1995-96 of \$9.15 million. That projection is less than the current \$12.5 million budget because the Fellowship will no longer fund Southern Baptist Convention agencies. At the June SBC meeting, messengers instructed SBC agencies not to accept church contributions that come through the Fellowship. While some churches are expected to send that money directly to the agencies, the Fellowship also expects to benefit from churches that stop funding the SBC.

Sherman reported the Fellowship is holding \$200,000 in church contributions earmarked for SBC agencies but now undeliverable because of the new SBC policy. Unless those churches give instructions on how to distribute the money, the Fellowship will apply the funds to its global missions program, Sherman said.

Keith Parks, global missions coordinator, said the Fellowship is "beginning to turn a corner" with the latest missionary appointments. Three of the newly appointed couples will be assigned to ethno-linguistic groups unreached by the gospel -- a priority in the Fellowship's missions program.

-- Craig and Meeryung Hall will work with an unreached people group in an undisclosed Asian country. Craig Hall, from Merritt Island, Fla., will serve as a strategic coordinator and consultant on theological education. A former church planter for the Home Mission Board and mission volunteer with the Foreign Mission Board, he now serves as a pastor in Purlmela, Texas. He is a graduate of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and is completing a doctorate at Baylor University. Meeryung Hall is a native of Seoul, South Korea, and has worked as a college music instructor, church pianist and mission volunteer in the Philippines.

-- Ralph and Tammy Stocks will be based in Europe, where he will serve as a strategic coordinator for mission work with the Gypsy people. A native of Hopkinsville, Ky., Tammy Stocks is a nurse and has served as a journeyman missionary with the FMB in Zimbabwe. Ralph Stocks, a native of Raleigh, N.C., worked as a high school teacher in North Carolina and was an FMB journeyman to Uruguay. The couple has two young children.

-- Clara and Donald McNeely, 18-year veteran FMB missionaries, will coordinate volunteers renovating the new site of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, the Czech Republic. Both are graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is from Ralls, Texas, and she is from San Antonio, Texas.

-- Kerry and Russell Brock of Louisville, Ky., will serve a two-year assignment with Quest, an interreligious ministry to the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Both are recent graduates of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

The Fellowship's global missions ministry group will assume leadership for the organization's new emphasis on starting new churches, reported Jack Snell of Jacksonville, Fla., chairman of the ministry group. A committee will bring a report in February, he said.

The goal for the Fellowship's 1994-95 global missions offering will be \$2.58 million, Snell announced.

The ministry group authorized funding for several mission projects, including a student ministry at California State University (\$10,000), scholarships for people from Muslim countries to attend a conference (\$12,800), and funding for the Passport youth camp to teach missions (\$10,000). "We are really concerned that young people are not buying into missions," Snell lamented.

The SBC Woman's Missionary Union is assisting the Fellowship in producing small cards similar to baseball trading cards to carry information about Fellowship missionaries, Snell reported.

Council members heard the first reports from two new groups. The committee on representation and

relationships is working to increase involvement of ethnic and racial groups in the Fellowship. And a group for ministry to ministers plans to establish a center for ministerial and congregational care as soon as possible.

The theological education ministry group reported \$83,000 was spent in the past year on scholarships to 64 students in 22 schools. Another \$34,000 funded the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.).

During the 1995 general assembly, the ethics and public policy ministry group will sponsor workshops on violence and on ministry to the emotionally and mentally ill, council members were told.

The council heard other reports from ministry groups on Christian education and equipping the laity.

Sherman said the Fellowship continues to grow, claiming support from 1,275 churches by the end of August. That's more than the 1,200 churches that supported the Fellowship all last year, he said. He estimated 500-600 of those churches have voted to send money to the Fellowship, while the rest represent designated gifts from individuals within churches.

The three-day council meeting was more quiet than in the past, which Sherman said was indicative of a new spirit among Fellowship leaders.

"For the first time, I can report to you a sizeable maturity and trust in the house," he said. "It is a thing that has brought me great encouragement. Sometimes it has been a long trip through deep mud; you don't go far and it's not much fun. But I'm beginning to see some bright spots. I'm beginning to see the designs of good judgment and the blessings of God."

While he took the coordinator's job reluctantly two years ago, Sherman said, "of late there has come to be some joy in this work, and I am very grateful."

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-- Photos of the Fellowship's new missionaries and the missionary appointment service are available from the Fellowship's Atlanta office.

Fellowship's leaders pursuing 'new model' to define its future

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, grappling with the group's identity and future Sept. 9, steered clear of any talk of forming a new denomination and focused instead on developing a loose-knit, user-friendly network of churches and individuals.

The Fellowship's Coordinating Council, its most powerful committee, heard a report from a task force trying to write a vision and mission statement for the three-year-old organization of Southern Baptist moderates. No action was taken on the statement, which will be revised and resubmitted at the council's February meeting.

But the draft document, and the discussion it generated during the council's Sept. 8-10 meeting, made several points clear: Fellowship leaders are not interested in forming a new denomination, at least not in the traditional sense, but are committed to finding a new model for how like-minded Baptist churches relate to each other.

John Tyler, chairman of the vision task force, told Associated Baptist Press the word "denomination" was not even considered when the group set out to define the Fellowship and its function. "We don't even think in those terms," said Tyler, a layman from Webster Groves, Mo.

Instead the Fellowship wants "to revitalize the Baptist vision," the document says, by redefining how Baptist churches cooperate to spread the gospel. Rather than being linked by formal ties of affiliation, participating churches

would look to the Fellowship to defend Baptist principles, provide resources for local church ministry and growth, and sponsor innovative and hands-on missions work.

While traditional denominations thrived by offering churches comprehensive programs and products, that top-down model no longer inspires loyalty among many churches, said David Wilkinson, the Fellowship's communications coordinator. To adapt, the Fellowship should become a "resource center" or clearinghouse of ideas that work on the local-church level, he suggested.

Since June, when the Southern Baptist Convention distanced itself from the rival Fellowship, there has been widespread speculation about what the Fellowship will become. Organized in 1991 as an alternative channel for missions contributions, it now employs its own missionaries and funds a variety of independent Baptist ministries.

While the Fellowship has taken on some characteristics of a denomination, there is little enthusiasm among its members for forming another denomination. Most still consider themselves Southern Baptists, despite efforts by SBC leaders to force the Fellowship out of the Southern Baptist fold.

In recent months, SBC leaders have stepped up their campaign to paint the Fellowship as liberal. But the vision statement as drafted will do little to dispute those charges. Absent from the document is any statement of the Fellowship's doctrinal beliefs. That is intentional, Tyler told council members.

"We were not going to make this in any sense a confession of faith," said Tyler. "We did not think the vision task force is the place for us to write confessional statements."

However, the council's administrative committee gave preliminary consideration Sept. 8 to a separate document that affirms basic Christian doctrine, including the Trinity, the Resurrection, salvation in Christ alone and biblical authority. So far the Fellowship has chosen not to adopt a confession of faith, the draft document says, because confessions have been misused as creeds "in the present climate of Southern Baptist life."

The document commends several historic confessions -- from the 1644 London Confession to the SBC's 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" statement -- but says doctrinal authority properly rests with local congregations and individuals, not national organizations. "We are not willing to trade a piece of our Baptist birthright to reassure you that CBF is not liberal," the statement concludes.

The statement is from a brochure, being prepared by the CBF staff, of answers to most-asked questions. It is still being revised.

Likewise, the vision statement will be reworked before it is voted on by the full coordinating council. Feedback from the most recent draft -- the fourth -- indicated more work needed to be done, Tyler told council members.

Tyler described the six-page vision and mission statement as an "internal document" designed to help Fellowship leaders give shape to the organization. "This document does not work for the Baptist in the pew," he said. "... Its value to tell people who we are is limited."

Council members asked for a simpler, more inspiring statement that will communicate the Fellowship's vision to the general public. Tyler agreed another version of the vision statement is needed to "capture the imagination" of Baptists in the pew.

"The mission of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," according to the draft document, "is to revitalize the Baptist vision by offering creative and innovative ways for Baptist individuals and churches to cooperate freely, faithfully and joyfully in sharing the gospel in their communities and throughout the world."

The mission statement includes seven core values that "define the personality of the Fellowship" and how it will function. Among the values embraced: inclusiveness, diversity, innovation, efficiency, a "dispersed" form of governance, and servanthood. "We exist primarily to serve local churches; local churches do not exist to serve the Fellowship," the document says.

Another core value: the Fellowship will work through "partnerships" with "independent producers of church resources" and avoid creating a bureaucratic structure and institutions. "We prefer partnerships, networks and alliances rather than internal agencies and institutions as the primary channels for development and delivery of resources to local churches," the document says.

To accomplish its mission, the document adds, the Fellowship will focus on six "major initiatives":

– "Revitalization of the Baptist vision," which is summarized as Bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom and religious freedom.

– A missions program that emphasizes both evangelism and ministry and which targets ethno-linguistic groups with little or no access to the Christian gospel.

– Partnerships with independent Baptist theological schools that demonstrate "reverence for biblical authority and respect for open inquiry and responsible scholarship."

-- A commitment to social justice which helps churches and individuals "explore the moral and ethical imperatives of the gospel."

-- Pooling of resources for effective ministry in diverse settings.

-- Sponsoring gatherings, such as the annual general assembly, for clergy and laity to find fellowship and encouragement.

Wilkinson told council members the Fellowship is "more than an effort to recover what we 'lost' in the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention and more than an exercise in 're-engineering the corporation' or 'reinventing the denomination.'"

"What may be happening is that we are on the verge of a significant paradigm shift for how a national religious organization relates to its constituencies," he said.

Many sociologists are convinced the traditional "program paradigm" for denominations and churches has run its course, Wilkinson said. Rather than offering churches programs, products and services, he suggested, the Fellowship might function as a "resource center" for churches.

The "resource paradigm," he said, focuses on "resources that empower churches to fulfill their mission in their contexts and empower persons to fulfill their calling under the Lordship of Christ."

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Clinton touts stronger families at meeting of National Baptists

By Bob Allen

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) – In a message sprinkled with references to Scripture, President Bill Clinton touted strengthening families as a national priority in a message to the nation's largest black Baptist denomination in New Orleans Sept. 9.

Speaking at a convention of the 8 million-member National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Clinton, a Southern Baptist, urged Americans to combat social ills through strong families which value children and instill in them a sense of hope for the future.

"I know that not everybody is going to be in a stable, traditional family like you see in one of those 1950 sitcoms, but we'd be better off if more people were," Clinton said.

Clinton, often the target of criticism from conservative religious leaders because of his pro-choice policies on abortion and advocacy of equal opportunities for homosexuals, decried high rates of both abortion and out-of-wedlock births in America.

Clinton noted 27 percent of all pregnancies end in abortion. "I don't care what your position is, whether you're pro-choice or anti-, that's too many," he said.

About 40 percent of American children are born into homes where their parents never married, Clinton said. "When the miracle of conception occurs, less than half of those miracles wind up being babies born into homes where there's a mother and a father and where the kid's got a better-than-even chance of having the life that most of us

have."

One in five white births is out of wedlock; for African-Americans the rate is one in two. But the white out-of-wedlock birth rate is growing faster than the African-American rate. "That is a disaster," Clinton said. "It is wrong, and someone has to say, again, it simply is not right."

"You shouldn't have a baby before you're ready and you shouldn't have a baby when you're not married. You just have to stop it. We've got to turn it around."

While a frank assessment of declining values is important in debate, Clinton warned against those who would lead the country into cynicism by harping on negatives.

"I note that there are many voices from all sectors preaching to us today about the decline in our values. In a way I welcome them all. And whether they are traditionally our allies or our adversaries, we should listen to the truth of their words; and if they are true, we should heed them," he said.

However, Clinton cautioned that Americans "should not let the voices of despair make our insecurities even deeper."

"There have always been problems in every society and there will be until the end of time. That is the lesson of Scripture. So for all the people who try to use the difficulties of the moment to dampen the energies of Americans, to defeat our spirits -- I say, that is wrong. The Scripture says, 'Let us not grow weary in well doing, for ... we shall reap if we do not lose heart.'"

The family-values debate needs to move beyond rhetoric, he said. "To all those who preach that we need to return to the values of our faith, I say, 'We do.' But the real issue is: what are we going to do about it?" Clinton said.

Clinton said he still believes government has a role to play in improving Americans' lives, but urged progress in efforts that go beyond government programs. He offered four proposals, each dealing with children. He urged "every American" to value children and work for stronger families, to create environments where children can "grow up without fear," to instill them with self-respect and hope for the future and to return "an ethic of service" in the nation.

"We are raising a whole generation of kids who aren't sure they're the most important person in the world to anybody," Clinton said.

Clinton quoted the King James version of II Timothy 1:5-6, where the Apostle Paul, who regards himself a "spiritual father" to Timothy, writes: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee ... I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee."

"I believe and you believe that every child has a gift of God within them," Clinton said. "When the gift dies, it is our sin as well as theirs and our loss as well as theirs."

"I don't think we ought to give up on families," Clinton said. He told of a Washington-area African-American pastor who led his church into rebuilding families. More than 40 percent of the church's membership is male. The pastor left a recent meeting of religious leaders at the White House to speak to 150 divorced and never-married couples about getting back together for the sake of their children and because "it is the right thing to do," Clinton said. "We need to do more of that," he added.

Clinton credited churches with being on the forefront of the type of volunteer activity he said he is advocating.

"A lot of you have run the day-care centers and run the recreation programs and run the prison ministries and counseled young people. You have done this, but America now knows that we must all do this."

Clinton spoke to the convention two years ago, when he was campaigning for president. Then, he said, "I wanted a chance to try to move this country forward again and try to pull our country together again."

"Today, having served now for not quite two years, I guess what I want to say to you is I think we're doing a pretty good job of moving forward, but not nearly a good enough job of coming together."

Clinton noted an improved U.S. economy and breakthroughs in foreign affairs, echoing the query of one columnist, "Why are people still mad at the president?"

Clinton said he learned one insight in a sermon he heard on vacation at a church in Red Bank, New Jersey,

where the minister described life as "not all work" but "also play and rest and worship."

"If you don't have faith, you won't have the rhythm right," said Clinton. "You will find yourselves working at play and playing at worship and you'll have it all messed up."

"That's kind of what's going on in our country today," Clinton said. "We still haven't quite got the rhythm right. So that even though we are facing a lot of our most profound problems, and even though we are clearly making progress in areas too long ignored ... we have to say: 'What is the real deal here? Why aren't we happier about it?' "

Clinton offered three reasons. One is "profound change" that is "unsettling" to the American people, he said. A second problem, he said, is "we live in a time which almost seems to glorify the negative." Third, he admitted, "we still have some problems that are real deep in this country, that all the progress we're making does not necessarily touch."

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New National Baptist Convention leader pledges increased social involvement

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) – An activist pastor elected to lead the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., vowed to lead the 8 million-member denomination into increased social involvement.

Henry Lyons, 52, pastor of Bethel Metropolitan Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, Fla., won a five-man race Sept. 8 for a five-year term as president of the convention, which claims to be the world's largest black organization. Lyons succeeds Louisiana pastor T. J. Jemison, who did not seek re-election after 12 years as president.

Lyons pledged to lead the convention to address economic and social problems and to be a force to be reckoned with in Washington. "America continues to look to this group for leadership ... and we've never offered them anything," Lyons said. "We want to turn that whole image around."

In 1961, the convention rejected efforts by Martin Luther King and other civil-rights leaders to steer the denomination into political activism. The leaders helped form the Progressive National Baptist Convention after their candidate for president lost a key vote.

Lyons, the third president in 42 years, prepares to lead the convention into the 21st century as it comes under growing pressure to address more aggressively the problems of AIDS, violence, poverty and the breakdown of family life.

"Our presence must be felt, must be made known and our counsel sought," Lyons said. "We've got to let it be known we will not be taken for granted."

Lyons said the convention will seek to work closely with the National Congressional Black Caucus, President Clinton and federal agencies to improve the quality of life in black communities.

Lyons received 3,545 votes to win the election. New York pastor Franklyn Richardson, the convention's long-time general secretary, finished second with 3,014. Philadelphia pastor William Shaw was third with 2,311, C. A. W. Clark of Dallas was fourth with 1,344 and a write-in candidate, Jasper Williams of Atlanta, drew 141 votes.

The race received intense interest because of criticism of Jemison for keeping the convention's budget secret and for connections to Mike Tyson, the boxer convicted of rape. Jemison was accused of offering hush money to the rape victim in the Tyson case. He denied the allegation, according to Associated Press.

Lyons said his plan for "total recovery" of the convention includes instituting a systematic giving plan and publishing regular financial statements.

Jemison, in his farewell address, noted the convention grew from 7.2 million to 8 million members under his leadership and built the denomination's first national headquarters in Nashville, Tenn.

"I move out without any regrets," Jemison said.

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Henry says Clinton is listening to Baptists

By Bob Allen

LEESBURG, Fla. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry said he believes the pleas of Southern Baptists and others have persuaded President Bill Clinton of the importance of promoting family values.

Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., told fellow members of the Florida Baptist Convention's State Board of Missions about his Sept. 8 meeting with Clinton. Henry was among 60 interfaith leaders attending a breakfast meeting with Clinton, followed by a smaller "pastoral meeting" with the president and his pastor, Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., and Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

In the meeting, Henry said, Clinton echoed themes about the importance of strong families, and complained his own record on family concerns goes under-reported. Clinton said he is advocating laws to encourage adoption and recognizes that tax codes penalize marriage, but neither concern has received much press attention.

"I heard him repeat what Dan Quayle had said," Henry said Sept. 9 at the State Board's meeting at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly near Leesburg. "My opinion is he's recognized what we have preached and taught, that that's the heart of it. That's what I think has really gripped his heart."

Henry said he found the president to be gregarious, intelligent and open to concerns expressed by Southern Baptists.

"He's very knowledgeable about the Southern Baptist Convention," Henry said. "He knows what we're doing. He keeps up with us." Henry said Clinton thanked him for a response he gave to a reporter's question following his election as SBC president in June, quoting "nearly verbatim what I said at the press conference."

Henry said he felt compassion and pastoral concern for Clinton's burden of governing a nation described by Clinton as "out of rhythm" and divided. Clinton confessed it is "very difficult" to be president under such circumstances, Henry said.

Henry said the president encourages those with whom he differs to be active in politics. "He said 'Pray for me because I need it and sometimes when I do the best I can it's not good enough,'" Henry reported.

Henry said he was also impressed by the amount of time the president gave to the religious leaders. The breakfast meeting lasted two-and-one-half hours, much longer than expected. After, when Henry, Blackaby and Horne, were led to the private meeting, they expected to be alone with Clinton no more than 30 minutes, but the president tarried for an hour.

While Henry said he believes some of Clinton's advisers give poor counsel, there are also committed Christians in the administration. "I also was impressed by some of the people around him. I want you to know in the White House there are some godly men and women I personally met and talked to and have a heart for Jesus Christ and are close to the president."

"We do have brothers and sisters in Christ who have his ear and who he cares about."

Southern Baptists should appreciate particularly Clinton's pastor, who speaks with the president weekly and has been able to influence policy decisions that help Baptists, Henry said.

"We should be thankful for Rex Horne, his pastor. Rex has the ears of the president," Henry said.

Henry said he believes Clinton received their concerns with openness.

"In the pastoral time we discussed several things," Henry said. "We shared our concerns that are about

abortion and homosexuality. He heard our hearts about that. We had a good discussion, a good give and take. He listened."

Henry said he assured Clinton Southern Baptists are praying for him. "He does care what we think," Henry said. "He is unashamed to be a Southern Baptist. He was deeply, deeply grateful about the promise" that Southern Baptists would be praying for him, Henry said.

The four closed their time with prayer and Clinton escorted them to the door and thanked them for coming, Henry said.

"We also shared some other things in a pastoral way that I feel like will bear fruit in the future."

"I went away much encouraged," he said. "I felt like I saw a little bit more of the man. Certainly it made me much more compassionate in my own prayer life for the president."

Henry said he came away believing that critics of Clinton's policies should avoid being too strident and be careful to focus their criticism on policies and not Clinton as a person.

"I think as long as we can do that we can make headway with each other," Henry said. "Without compromise, with conviction, with compassion and caring and listening to each other, I think we can move forward together in a lot of venues."

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Baptist state papers next battleground in SBC controversy, observers predict

By Anne Saker

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- Baptist state newspapers, which have documented 15 years of political and theological intrigue in the Southern Baptist Convention, may be the denomination's next battleground, observers say.

Late in August, Jack Brymer, editor of the newspaper for the Florida Baptist Convention, resigned after years of pressure from church people who did not like what he published in the Florida Baptist Witness. Brymer's departure poured gasoline on the flaming dispute among Baptists and yielded colorful analogies.

"It is a given in history, whether it's secular or religious: After the revolutionaries storm the palace, they head for the media centers," says R. G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder, the newspaper of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention.

"You had it with the communists in the '20s, with Adolf Hitler in the '30s, Red China in the '40s and with Castro's Cuba in the '50's. Ironically, you now have it with the Southern Baptist Convention."

The 15.4 million-member convention, the largest non-Catholic denomination in the United States, has been undergoing a "conservative resurgence" for nearly a generation. Baptists who declare the Bible without error say they have steered back the convention from a dangerous leftward drift. Other Baptists say the "resurgence" revolutionized the denomination's historically fierce devotion to individual church autonomy into a rigid top-down structure more like the Roman Catholic Church.

The conservative resurgence, which began in 1979, sought to impose certain rock-hard beliefs throughout the convention's power structure. Baptists who proclaimed the Bible inerrant were seated on denominational boards governing missions at home and overseas. The movement then surged through the six Baptist seminaries to purge them of "liberals."

With the convention apparatus and teaching institutions under the conservative wing, the next front may be the newspapers.

"It is absolutely self-defeating to pay the bill for your own bad PR," reasoned Paige Patterson, a chief force of the conservative resurgence and now president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. "Nobody else does it. Why should the Baptists?"

They don't have to, said Paul McMasters, executive director of the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center in Nashville, Tenn.

"Speaking from a strictly legal basis, they have every right to have any editor that they like," he said. "The Southern Baptist Convention is not a government institution, so censorship is not an issue here.

"But it is an issue of credibility, and it is an issue of irony. When those who would defend to the death the right to believe as they wish go to some length to thwart the right of somebody to print the news as he or she sees it, there is certainly some irony there."

Patterson said controlling the newspapers is in the best interest of all Baptists.

"General Motors doesn't employ its PR and press department to write bad stories about them. They know there will be enough bad stories about them in the general press. We don't have to hire folks to write ugly things about us."

"That's an awfully interesting parallel," McMasters said. "I would think that Baptist newspapers are producing something of a little higher caliber than a car coming off the assembly line. We are not talking about products here; we are talking about ideas, and in particular, religious ideas."

There are 37 state Baptist newspapers, published from Florida to Hawaii and Alaska. Most publish weekly and they range in size from the weekly Baptist Standard, with 235,000 Texas readers, to the monthly Dakota Connection with 1,700 readers in the Dakotas.

None of the papers is officially controlled by the national convention, as are none of the state conventions. Most papers are financed by the conventions and carry some advertising.

Editors are hired and fired mainly by boards of advisers with varying degrees of independence from the state convention. Thus, if the state convention is part of the conservative resurgence, so is the newspaper's board -- and usually, so is the newspaper.

"The tension is between those who see the Baptist newspapers only as house organs and those who see them as exchange journals of Baptist thought," said Puckett, who has endured plenty of his own struggles with those who dislike his tough line on the conservatives.

Gary Ledbetter executive editor of the Indiana Baptist, a paper which has endorsed the conservative resurgence, said he is "a little touchy" about the house organ term.

"The job of my paper, any Baptist paper, is to represent the state convention that they're in -- not necessarily to put a good face on it always," he said. Still, "we all have a publisher, and we all cross swords with our publisher at some peril."

Puckett said a tough shield for the Biblical Recorder is language in its charter that specifically provides for the editorial freedom of the editor.

"There are literally thousands of people who would go to the mat for the Biblical Recorder, not for R. G. Puckett, but for the Biblical Recorder's editorial freedom. I have never felt threatened," he said.

The war for the newspapers started slowly, mainly because conservatives could afford to take their time.

"They didn't need to take the newspapers over right away," said David Copeland, an associate professor of communications at Emory and Henry University in Emory, Va., who has studied the religious press. "Most of the state papers really didn't want to delve into this controversy, because they were servicing people of both persuasions."

"And when you get right down to it, when you talk about First Amendment freedoms, you're still talking about someone's job," he said.

In 1987, the editor of the Georgia Baptist paper, the Christian Index, was fired for being insufficiently in step with the new thought. In 1990, the two editors of the convention's news service, Baptist Press, were dismissed. An alternative news agency, Associated Baptist Press, formed immediately.

The chief complaint against Brymer was that he used too many Associated Baptist Press stories. Even after

he cut back on them this year, he said, pressure grew. At the end of a stormy board meeting Aug. 26, he quit.

Brymer said in an interview that the Associated Baptist Press issue was camouflage: People were unhappy because "I would not promote the conservative resurgence. But I didn't try to impugn it, either."

Time is working for the conservatives: Editors in Alabama and South Carolina are past retirement. Puckett is creeping up on it himself. Eventually, departures by aging editors will put nearly all the Baptist papers in conservative hands, says Patterson. As a result, he said, he sees no need to fire anyone outright.

"A Christian organization is under some obligation to operate with some reconciliation always in view," he said. "Sometimes, there comes a point where you have got to go separate ways, but you're always working for reconciliation. I think that's what the conservatives in Florida tried to do, but they had a hopeless feeling in their pit of their tummies."

McMasters said those who are wielding the new influences over Baptist newspapers need to exercise caution. "If the newspaper from the convention is perceived as merely an instrument of the powers that be, then it loses its value as an effective organ for information."

The dilemma is "an interesting confluence and conflict of two First Amendments rights: one being freedom of religion and the other being freedom of the press," McMasters said.

"As is usual in these kinds of conflicts, there are no early or easy answers."

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Significant minority of Christians reject some tenets of their faith

NEW YORK (ABP) -- A significant minority of American Christians do not hold to tenets of their faith such as the virgin birth, the devil or hell, according to a Harris Poll released Sept. 12.

The poll found that almost all American adults subscribe to basic religious beliefs including the existence of God (95 percent) and heaven (90 percent).

Four in five Americans describe themselves as Christians, the poll said. Almost all Christians say they believe in God (99 percent), heaven (96 percent) and the resurrection of Christ (96 percent).

However, those percentages drop off when they relate to other tenets, said Humphrey Taylor of Louis Harris and Associates in New York. Only 77 percent of Christians believe in hell, compared to 71 percent of all Americans. Among Christians, 78 percent profess belief in the devil, 85 percent in the virgin birth of Jesus, 87 percent in the miracles and 89 percent in the soul's survival after death.

More surprising, said Taylor, is that 49 percent of non-Christians accept Jesus' virgin birth and 52 percent believe Christ rose from the dead.

Belief in other supernatural phenomena is less widespread, the study found. Only 37 percent of Americans say they believe in astrology and 36 percent in ghosts. Among Christians, belief in astrology is 35 percent and in ghosts 36 percent.

Seventy-nine percent of adults describe themselves as Christians. But while the United States statistically is a Christian nation, it apparently is becoming less so, said Taylor.

Ninety percent of Americans over 50 say they are Christians, compared to only 59 percent of those age 18-24 and 70 percent of those 25-29. Taylor predicts that as large numbers of non-Christian immigrants continue to pour into the country, the percentage of Christian citizens will fall.

The poll of 1,249 adults was conducted by telephone in July. The sample's margin of error is 3 percent, Taylor said. Other possible sources of error in any poll or survey, however, such as question wording or interviewer bias, cannot be quantified, he added.

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-- By Bob Allen

Three-person race unfolding for Kentucky presidency

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- A three-way contest for the presidency of the Kentucky Baptist Convention was unfolding more than two months before the annual meeting at which a new president will be elected.

Three men who span the spectrum of political positions have emerged as likely candidates: Bill Hancock, pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville; Billy Compton, pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Vernon; and Bob DeFoor, pastor of Harrodsburg Baptist Church in Harrodsburg.

Hancock is closely aligned with the conservative movement that has gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the last 15 years. He was chairman of the SBC Foreign Mission Board's trustees in 1991 and 1992, the tumultuous years in which the FMB withdrew its support for Ruschlikon Seminary in Switzerland, one of several events that led Keith Parks to resign as FMB president.

DeFoor is closely aligned with the SBC's moderate wing and is a former board member of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship. He describes himself as "conservative biblically and moderate theologically." He says his candidacy will appeal to "people not interested in seeing Southern Baptist Convention politics imported into Kentucky Baptist life."

Compton presents himself as a centrist candidate. He has not been a public figure on either side of the SBC struggle. "I see myself in terms of our convention as balanced," he explained. "I have not identified with the Fellowship nor with the fundamentalists, but I have friends in both areas. I do have convictions that I think our convention ought to be more inclusive than either one of those groups."

All three candidates have deep Kentucky roots, and both Compton and Hancock are natives.

A new KBC president will be elected Nov. 15 during the KBC annual meeting in Frankfort.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Pensacola church helps refugees resettle into new life in Florida

By Barbara Denman

PENSACOLA, Fla. (ABP) -- For six years Giau Van Vuong was jailed in a communist North Vietnamese prison. His only crime was he served as a South Vietnamese military officer.

He and his family left Vietnam and arrived in Pensacola, Fla., Dec. 2, 1993. They carried no luggage except boxes of chemistry books for his eldest daughter. With three family members now working to help support her, she can enroll in the university to study for a master's degree, which, hopefully, will enable her to pursue a career in the

United States.

Currently Vuong works in a factory that makes specialty windows, cutting intricate shapes from glass and metal. His boss, Myles Fisher, a former Vietnam veteran, said he employs more than a dozen Vietnamese refugees because they are conscientious workers skilled at the exacting handwork required in the job.

Vietnamese workers "give 125 percent," said Fisher. "They are very competitive and very good with their hands, which increases productivity."

Vuong is but one among thousands in the current wave of Vietnamese refugees reaching the United States, former political prisoners who fought alongside and helped American military during the war. Their wartime involvement is now considered treason by the North Vietnamese.

They are the third wave of refugees to flee Vietnam in the aftermath of the war. The first wave of refugees left in the mid '70s after the fall of Saigon. Many left by boat and became known as the "boat people."

The next group of refugees were children of American servicemen who were allowed by the government to resettle in the States. The third are those like Vuong who became branded by the war.

Upon their arrival, the Vuong family was greeted by Hong Dang, minister to internationals at First Baptist Church of Pensacola. Through his contacts Dang found the family a place to live, jobs, furniture and clothing. He helped them apply for alien residency cards and Social Security numbers, get health examinations and enroll their children in school.

This is not the first time Dang, a refugee himself, has come to the rescue of refugees who resettle in Pensacola. He has sponsored nearly 10 families himself and has led fellow church members to sponsor others.

Often the families stay with Dang until a home can be found for them.

"But more than that we're helping meet their physical needs, we witness to them, share with them, and care for them," said Dang.

Many Southeast Asian refugees are drawn to Pensacola because of its similarities to their homeland. The warm climate allows them to wear the same type of clothes. The area's fishing industry offers a means of earning a living and a food that was a staple in the Vietnamese diet. And the friendliness of the community is a big plus, said Dang.

Dang said he has little problem finding the Vietnamese jobs because they are known for their diligence and hard work.

"They are hard workers, excellent workers," said Jeanne Danforth, personnel manager of the Thompson Farms in Pensacola. The produce company hires Vietnamese men and women to prepare salad vegetables for restaurants. "We're looking for two more Vietnamese to hire. We prefer to hire them because they're such good workers."

Their sense of responsibility can also be seen in the sacrifices they make for their families. Although he was trained as a video photographer, Sanh Truong works at the window manufacturer so that his children can continue with their education. "Young adults must now study," Truong said. "Older adults find jobs."

Older family members have more difficulties making adjustments to live in this strange land where language and customs are barriers. But they do so with the hope and promise that life will be better for their children. In that way, their reasons for coming to America are similar to the early Pilgrims' flight to the New World.

According to Dang, some of the Vietnamese refugees are new Christians and some are not Christian. Dozens of them have been won to Christ through Dang's ministry and witness.

A Buddhist who keeps an altar in his home for worship, Vuong expressed surprise that a church would "give me gifts and many things to use with my family. We are Buddhist, but they don't care about my religion."

Vuong's wife and daughters currently are attending the international Bible study at First Baptist. Dang sees their relationship as an inroad to bring the family to Christ.

The story of the Vuongs is being repeated over and over again in Florida. It is the story of modern refugees. Their nationalities, their reasons for leaving their homelands and their destinations change. But their reasons for coming to the United States are usually consistent -- to find a better life for themselves and their families.

According to Southern Baptist Home Mission Board officials, \$3,000 will help provide a new start in life for a refugee family. The money is expected to be used by sponsoring churches which encounter unanticipated expenses during the resettlement of a refugee family. These may include medical assistance, schooling for children, securing employment, providing housing and meeting other needs.

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