

# Associated Baptist Press

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## Mississippi College trustees back off secession vote

CLINTON, Miss. (ABP) -- Mississippi College trustees have reached a compromise with officials of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and agreed to reverse their Sept. 22 decision removing the school from state convention control.

Instead of implementing a change in the school's charter that would authorize the board of trustees to elect three-fourths of its own members and limit the state convention to choosing only the remaining fourth, officials agreed to a plan making trustee selection a mutual responsibility, Harry Vickery, chairman of the college's board of trustees, announced to faculty at the Clinton, Miss., school Oct. 14.

A resolution approved by both the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board and Mississippi College trustees will require agreement from both the trustee group and the convention's Committee on Nominations before a potential trustee's name goes before the Mississippi Baptist Convention for voting.

The plan signals a return to years of tradition when nominating committees invited institutional executives to submit names and attempted to honor those requests as a courtesy, observers say.

In recent years, however, the nomination process has become politicized as partisan conservatives viewed the election of trustees as a way to gain influence in first the Southern Baptist Convention and more recently Baptist state conventions.

That trend prompted Mississippi College trustees in September to unilaterally alter their charter in an effort to protect the school "from the politics of the convention," Vickery said.

The action unleashed a wave of criticism, including talk of a lawsuit and the withholding of the \$2 million funding the state convention provides the college each year.

Bill Causey, executive director of the state convention, engineered the three weeks of negotiations leading up to the settlement. Causey said establishing checks and balances was "the key" to the compromise. "The starting point of negotiations is that you're dealing with good people who have the larger view of the work of the Lord," Causey said.

Mississippi Baptist Convention President Rex Yancey termed the agreement "the best we could get and keep the school."

"If we had gone to court it would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and would have alienated all

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the lay businessmen who have poured money into the school and which could have alienated others. We could have lost the case, too. Even if we would have won, we would have lost. If we withheld the \$2 million (in Cooperative Program funding) Mississippi College becomes an elite Baptist school that's going to drift left. They always do," Yancey said.

In the event of an impasse with the nominating committee, the resolution would appear to allow the college to choose its own trustees.

The agreement also enlarges the Mississippi College trustee board to 24 members from the present 15. Up to a third will be in church-related vocations and -- for the first time -- alumni who live outside of Mississippi will be qualified to serve as trustees.

Mississippi College President Howell Todd, speaking to the faculty, called it "a refreshing new day, a new era of cooperation." Later, Todd offered his "utmost appreciation for the untiring efforts of Bill Causey, the Baptist leadership and Harry Vickery."

One participant in the compromise effort said, "The divorce is off."

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-- By Bob Allen and Tim Nicholas

## **Persistence of mass hunger a moral challenge, report says**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The earth's inhabitants possess the ability but lack the will to end massive hunger, according to the Bread for the World Institute's fifth annual report on global hunger, released Oct. 13 in Washington.

Despite overall improvement in world hunger, "there is still a wide gap between humanity's professed moral values and our collective action," the report says. "The persistence of mass hunger is, at its root, a moral and religious challenge."

The 1994 report identifies and focuses on the root causes of hunger: powerlessness, violence, poverty, environmental destruction and discrimination.

The report indicates:

- hunger has decreased globally while increasing in the United States;
- 20 percent of the people in the developing world are chronically undernourished;
- more than 1 billion people are too poor to afford an adequate diet;
- more than one-third of the world's people lack the vitamins and minerals they need to lead productive lives;
- one out of every five U.S. children lives in poverty; and
- an estimated 30 million Americans cannot afford to buy enough food to maintain good health.

The proportion of undernourished people across the globe dropped from 36 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1990. But in some areas hunger continued to grow: notably Africa, some countries that are struggling through the transition from communism and the United States.

In Africa, almost one-third of the children under age 5 are undernourished. In Bosnia, nearly 3 million people are at risk and dependent on United Nations rations. And between 1985 and 1990, the number of Americans who lacked sufficient food sources grew by 50 percent, from 20 million to 30 million -- including 12 million children, the report says.

However, significant gains in regions such as the Asian-Pacific have more than offset the worsening picture in other areas.

In the last 20 years, the undernourished proportion of the population in South and Southeast Asia has dropped from one-third to 24 percent in South Asia and 17 percent in Southeast Asia. In China, the rate improved even more dramatically, dropping from nearly 50 percent to 16 percent.

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-- By Pam Parry

## **Supreme Court leaves standing Randall Terry's contempt conviction**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for the jailing of Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry on a contempt-of-court conviction for showing a human fetus to Bill Clinton during the 1992 presidential campaign.

The court Sept. 17 left standing Terry's conviction and five-month jail sentence for disobeying a federal injunction barring Operation Rescue from "presenting or confronting" either Clinton, then governor of Arkansas, or his running mate, Sen. Al Gore, with any fetal remains.

The day after the injunction was issued, an anti-abortion demonstrator displayed a fetus to Clinton. Prosecutors said Terry was behind the act.

Terry sought to have his contempt conviction overturned, arguing it was improper for the same lawyers to handle the injunction, a civil matter, and prosecute the criminal contempt charge, citing a 1987 Supreme Court case that involved private lawyers handling both chores.

Without comment, the Supreme Court left standing a ruling by the 2nd U.S. Court of Appeals that the 1987 ruling "does not automatically" disqualify government attorneys from bringing both civil action and serving as special prosecutors in subsequent contempt proceedings but that in such cases "the court must examine the particular facts of the case to determine if reversible error has occurred." The court ruled further that no such error had occurred in Terry's case, *Terry v. U.S.*

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-- By Bob Allen

## **Forgotten heritage plagues SBC, Alliance of Baptists leader says**

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) -- A "forgetfulness" of their heritage, more than theological or doctrinal concerns, plagues Baptists today, the executive director of the Alliance of Baptists told a New Orleans congregation Oct. 16

The "genius" of Baptists, Stan Hastey told the congregation of New Orleans' historic St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church, was a radical call to discipleship, the priesthood of every believer, congregational autonomy and insistence on freedom of religion.

A hallmark of the Baptist tradition, is what "our Baptist ancestor Roger Williams of Rhode Island called ... 'soul liberty,'" Hastey said.

Williams was banished for refusing "to cease preaching what his persecutors considered theological trivia

-- matters such as spiritual conversion and believer's baptism," he said. The new congregation formed in Providence in 1636 "agreed to govern themselves by majority vote -- but only in civil matters. Matters of religion and conscience ... were to be left strictly to the individual," in the congregation that Baptists in America claim as the mother church to their denomination on this continent, Hasteley said.

More 350 years after "those humble yet glorious beginnings," Hasteley said, "what most plagues us Baptists today is not a loss of theological integrity or any diminution of our confidence in the authority of Holy Scripture, but our forgetfulness of who our ancestors were."

"We have forgotten that 'soul freedom' was the watchword of the Baptist movement in its beginnings and that our earliest ancestors were fierce dissenters against the very ideas -- theological and religious ideas -- that today are enforced upon so-called Baptists who have no idea under the sun what their heritage is or what their name means," Hasteley said.

Baptists have also forgotten "that we are Christians first and foremost; Baptists only secondarily," he said.

Many Baptists hold "the indefensible view" that only the Baptist expression of the Christian faith is truly valid. That view, with roots in 19th-century Landmarkism, Hasteley said, has contributed to a "peculiar form of denominational pride" taken to its extreme in the remarks of one leader that "the last hope, the fairest hope, the only hope for evangelizing this world on New Testament principles is the Southern Baptist people."

Baptists need to "eschew a narrow sectarianism within the larger Christian family," he said. The primary mission of Baptists is not to make new Baptists but to make new disciples, Hasteley said.

"We are Baptists," he said. And "when we've been at our Baptist best, we've made a difference in the world -- for Jesus' sake and to the glory of God."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following two stories accompany a conference wrapup story, "Culture barrier hinders gospel's growth, speakers say," in the Oct. 13 ABP

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## **Suburban church again adapts to changing Atlanta culture**

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- No one should have been surprised last year when Dunwoody Baptist Church adopted a radically different approach to worship in order to reach more people in its suburban Atlanta community. After all, says Pastor Jim Johnson, the church voted to disband in 1961 for the same reason.

Last year the church added a contemporary worship service to complement its traditional one. The early morning service uses a jazz band instead of a choir, upbeat choruses along with hymns, and drama instead of Bible readings. Johnson, preaching without a tie or coat, aims his message at the personal needs of Dunwoody's upscale residents.

The change came about, Johnson told a recent church-growth conference, when the church decided -- as it did once before in 1961 -- that reaching people with a gospel they can understand is more important than perpetuating one style of worship.

In 1961, Atlanta's urban sprawl was creeping closer and closer to Dunwoody, then a farming community north of the city. Realizing the community and church ultimately would be overtaken by the city, church members voted to disband their small rural congregation and sell the property so they could reconstitute as a mission of a larger, stronger, suburban church, Johnson said. The "new" church, geared for Atlanta's growing suburban population, prospered.

More than 30 years later, another cultural change is again prompting a shift in methodology. Despite the city's Bible Belt heritage, Atlanta's culture is becoming increasingly secular, Johnson said. People without church backgrounds have trouble relating to traditional worship styles. As a result, few churches are reaching unchurched non-Christians.

Johnson, who became pastor of the church in 1992, convinced Dunwoody's members that a more culturally relevant approach was needed if the church was to grow. The challenge, he said, was to lead the congregation to make the transition without compromising its basic nature or character.

The first step, he said, was "to reclaim the church's primary mission." Dunwoody members determined that their primary commitment, as demonstrated in 1961, is "to do whatever it takes to reach people for Christ," Johnson said.

The need for cultural relevance was a recurring theme in the two-day conference, which was held at the Dunwoody church and drew 285 registrants, mostly younger ministers. Johnson is an associate for the Baptist Center for Ethics, which sponsored the meeting.

The precedent of cultural relevance was set centuries ago, Johnson told participants, when the early church decided that non-Jewish converts did not have to adopt Jewish law and culture to become Christians. They concluded, Johnson said, "We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are coming to God" (Acts 15:19). That decision removed a key cultural barrier that limited the gospel.

Likewise, the duty of modern Christians is to remove cultural barriers that keep people from Christ, Johnson said. Those barriers can include worship style, hymnody, expectations of dress, even political party affiliation, he said.

But changing a church's approach to worship can be difficult and dangerous, Johnson said. Churches can split and pastors can lose their jobs over changes in worship. Rather than eliminate the traditional worship service, Dunwoody Baptist simply added the contemporary service to its schedule.

The contemporary service at Dunwoody proved so popular that a second one was added a year later. Now combined attendance in the two contemporary services averages 800 per week, while the traditional worship service draws about 550 people a week.

Dunwoody members demonstrated a contemporary service as part of the conference.

A lot of thought and planning goes into the contemporary service, Johnson said. A five-person worship team, including four staff members and a volunteer, plans the services. One staff member arranges much of the music played by the band.

But it's worth the work, Johnson reported. "Eighty percent of our new members come in through the contemporary service," he said. Baptisms have more than doubled in the first year, from 38 to 86, he said.

One key to making the transition, Johnson said, was convincing church members they could adapt the gospel message to culture without compromise.

"You have to discover what the church really values," Johnson said. If a church lacks a deep desire to make the gospel relevant, he advised, "Don't try it."

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## **Baptist worship styles vary but feelings strong, Basden says**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- There is no blueprint for worship in the New Testament, and neither is there one Baptist style of worship, said Paul Basden, pastor of Brookwood Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala.

As a result, opinions and styles differ widely, he said, even among Baptists, making worship one of four "volatile issues" dividing Baptist congregations today.

Basden, who spoke Oct. 11 to a conference on Church Growth With Biblical Integrity, taught classes on worship while serving as dean of the chapel at Samford University in Birmingham.

"People were made to worship," said Basden. It is "the primary corporate act a congregation does."

While the New Testament does not give a detailed description of appropriate worship, it gives clues to at least three "embryonic styles of worship" that surfaced in the early years of the Christian church, Basden said.

In the Jerusalem church, worship apparently centered around apostolic teaching, the Lord's Supper and prayer (Acts 2:42). Churches in Ephesus and Colossae focused on teaching and singing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16). And worship among the Christians in Corinth gave more attention to the "sign gifts" of tongues-speaking and healing (I Cor. 12-14).

Baptists likewise have a variety of worship styles, each with a different purpose and appeal, Basden said.

Baptists feel so strongly about worship style that they sometimes will split churches over worship differences, Basden said. Worship -- along with pastoral authority, the role of women, and the Southern Baptist theological/political controversy -- accounts for much of the division in Baptist congregations today, he said.

Basden described five styles of worship practiced among Baptists:

-- Liturgical. Mood: formal, solemn, majestic. Music: Pipe organ, traditional hymns, classical anthems. Purpose: "To lead the church to give corporate recognition to the transcendent glory of God." Favors reverence over relevance. It runs counter to the cultural obsession with entertainment. Biblical model: Isaiah 6.

-- Traditional. Mood: subdued, orderly, majestic, contemplative. Music: organ and piano, traditional and gospel hymns, traditional and contemporary anthems. Purpose: "To lead the congregation to praise and thank God for his goodness and to hear him speak through his Word." Geared for people from a religious culture and background, so it is very popular in the Bible Belt. Biblical model: Col. 3:16-17.

-- Revivalist. Mood: exuberant, celebrative, informal. Music: organ, piano and taped music, gospel hymns, contemporary Christian songs and anthems. Purpose: "To save the lost and encourage believers to witness." More evangelistic than worshipful. Biblical model: Acts 2-3.

-- Praise and worship. Mood: expressive, celebrative, contemporary, informal. Music: electronic organ, piano and taped music, praise choruses and contemporary Christian songs. Purpose: "To 'offer a sacrifice of praise' to the Lord in a spirit of joyful adoration." This is contemporary worship geared for believers. Biblical model: Psalm 150.

-- Seeker. Mood: celebrative, contemporary, informal. Music: piano, taped music, synthesizer and band, scriptural music and contemporary Christian music, little congregational singing. Purpose: "Present the gospel in clear terms and modern forms." An upbeat, non-threatening evangelistic service for non-Christians seeking God. Biblical model: Acts 17:16-34.

There are few "pure seeker services" in Southern Baptist churches, said Basden, who has been a member or minister in churches of almost every style. In fact, he said, most churches blend two styles, such as traditional with revivalist or seeker with praise and worship. But some styles don't blend, like liturgical and revivalist.

The "plumb line" by which every style is measured, Basden said, is "the gospel of Jesus Christ, not people's desires."

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-- By Greg Warner

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