

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Baylor regents deadlock over Corts' nomination**

By Greg Warner and Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- The governing board of Baylor University met to elect a new president Nov. 17-18 but adjourned without a decision.

Thomas Corts, 53-year-old president of Samford University, was nominated by a presidential search committee to take the helm of Baylor, the nation's largest Baptist college with 12,000 students. But the Baylor board of regents, after a protracted two-day meeting, apparently deadlocked over the nomination.

The regents left the Waco, Texas, campus after issuing a terse two-sentence announcement: "The Baylor University board of regents has adjourned its special two-day meeting after receiving a report from its presidential succession committee. There will be no news conference and no statement from the board or Baylor University."

Regents chairman Gale Galloway of Austin told Associated Baptist Press, "Dr. Corts was consulted and they mutually agreed that under the circumstances the best course of action would be to continue the matter."

Although the regents did not reach a decision, Galloway said, they adjourned their meeting "in a congenial environment."

It is unclear whether the regents ever voted on Corts. One regent said the nomination failed and the search committee resigned en masse. Another implied no vote was taken. A simple majority of the 38 regents was needed.

"The last thing they wanted was for it to come down to a split vote," said one regent who spoke on condition of anonymity. While Corts may not be out of the picture, the regent said, he may withdraw from consideration.

Corts could not be reached for comment. The Baylor regents are scheduled to meet again in January.

Corts, a popular and respected figure at Samford, is credited with making significant strides for the Birmingham, Ala., university during his 11 years as president. With 4,400 students, Samford is the fifth largest Baptist college in the country.

But Corts is neither a Baylor graduate nor Texas native -- factors some regents said were crucial. Others worried that Corts was too theologically conservative for the Baylor constituency.

As Corts' nomination became known in recent days, critics also uncovered complaints about his administrative style during nine years as president of Wingate College, a Baptist school in North Carolina. Some Baylor faculty expressed concern about his dismissal of several Wingate professors in the 1970s.

All those issues reportedly were debated by regents as they considered Corts' nomination behind closed doors in Waco. Corts met with the regents, as well as the faculty senate and representatives of the student congress.

A native of Terre Haute, Ind., Corts is a graduate of Georgetown (Ky.) College and holds master's and doctor's degrees from Indiana University.

He is the brother of John Corts, president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; Paul Corts, president of Palm Beach Atlantic College in West Palm Beach, Fla.; and Mark Corts, longtime pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C., and conservative Baptist leader.

Thomas Corts has not been a key figure in the theological-political controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. But he earned the respect of Alabama conservatives by assembling a conservative faculty for the Beeson School of Divinity at Samford.

Retiring Baylor President Herbert Reynolds, on the other hand, has been an important figure among Texas Baptist moderates, and Baylor has become the driving force in Texas Baptist life.

Last year Reynolds, 64, announced his intention to retire May 31, 1995. He has been president of Baylor since 1981.

In 1990 Baylor changed its charter to create a self-perpetuating board, abandoning the tradition of allowing the Baptist General Convention of Texas to elect the school's governing body.

In September of this year, under Corts' leadership, Samford likewise declared its autonomy from the Alabama Baptist State Convention, eliminating the convention's role in election of the university's trustees.

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## **GOP expected to push school prayer next year**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- With Republicans setting the agenda for the 104th Congress, the nation's long-running battle over school prayer may return to center stage next year.

Soon after Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress for the first time since the 1950s, Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., expected to be the next speaker of the House, called for a constitutional amendment to restore school-sponsored prayer to the classroom.

Gingrich, a Southern Baptist, said he wants a House vote on a school prayer amendment by July 4.

Asked about Gingrich's proposal during a Nov. 15 stop at Jakarta, Indonesia, President Clinton expressed an openness to discussing the issue with Republicans.

But White House officials said the president's history and views on voluntary school prayer suggest Clinton is more likely to support a neutral moment of silence statute.

Deputy White House Counsel Joel Klein noted that Clinton had authored a moment of silence measure as governor of Arkansas in 1985, and said that approach is more likely to be supported by the president.

"Based on past work and past comments, he (Clinton) does believe strongly in a moment of silence," Klein told Associated Baptist Press.

Klein said Clinton would be concerned about any prayer proposal that would create "undue coercion"

on students or violate the "appropriate separation of church and state."

In a moment of silence, Klein said, "a student can pray or think about whatever he or she wants to."

While lawmakers have sparred over lesser measures -- including resolutions expressing the sense of Congress and various funds cutoffs over school prayer -- only rarely since the landmark 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions barring school-sponsored prayer and religious exercises have proposals to amend the Constitution to permit school-sponsored prayer reached a floor vote.

The last House vote came in 1971 when a Republican Baptist congressman from Iowa led the battle to defeat a constitutional amendment. Fred Schwengel, who died last year, took the floor every day during a three-week period to argue against the measure. The amendment fell 28 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage, but Schwengel lost his seat in the next election.

In 1984, the Republican-controlled Senate held hearings and voted on President Ronald Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment to permit school-sponsored prayer, but that measure fell 11 votes short of the two-thirds necessary for passage. A 1966 Senate vote also failed.

Gingrich's call for a constitutional amendment on school prayer has drawn criticism from religious and civil liberties groups.

"Once again we see politicians playing politics with prayer," said James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious liberty agency that opposed previous school prayer amendments.

"It's absurd to think we need to amend the Constitution to allow 'voluntary' prayer," Dunn said.

"Kids can pray in school right now and not just before math tests," he said. "They can meet in the schoolhouse in groups before the school day for prayer and Bible study. And they do so legally and constitutionally."

While House Republican leaders have not settled on precise language for a constitutional amendment, attention is focused on a proposal by Rep. Ernest Jim Istook, R-Okla., that closely follows the Reagan-backed measure rejected by the Senate in 1984. Istook's amendment would state that the Constitution does not bar individual or group prayer in public schools, specify that no one could be required to participate in prayer and bar the government from composing school prayers.

In a Nov. 18 letter to President Clinton, the Baptist Joint Committee and other religious organizations stated their categorical opposition to the constitutional amendment on school prayer.

"At best, the amendment is unnecessary; at worst, it threatens everyone's religious freedom," the letter states.

The religious groups told Clinton there "is little doubt that the amendment's proponents want to return state-sponsored prayer to the classroom. They urged that prayer "be left to houses of worship, to families and to the students themselves."

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, meanwhile, "supports student-initiated, student-led prayer but opposes government-controlled prayer," said CLC General Counsel Michael Whitehead.

"However, government does not sponsor or control everything that government permits," he said. "We support the right of students to pray during the school day. The fact that students are permitted to pray does not mean it was a government-controlled or sponsored prayer."

"When tax-supported employees compose or lead prayers, that's government control. And we are opposed to that."

Whitehead said the Istook amendment "as written at this time" does not meet the CLC's concerns. But he said the CLC will be working with Istook to draft a school prayer amendment that does.

The CLC's executive director, Richard Land, previously has expressed support for the 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court prayer decisions.

## **Church-state conflicts reported in every state**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Residents in Plainfield, N.J., tried to shut down a Baptist church because they said it should not be in a residential area. In California, a Muslim inmate sued after being disciplined for praying aloud in a foreign language.

These two incidents are among 228 church-state conflicts reported across the nation during the past year, according to a report released Nov. 14 by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The Washington lobby group began tracking such instances six years ago. The report is not comprehensive but indicates the types of problems occurring in the states.

While the total incidents dropped from last year's total of 247, it is the second highest number of incidents since AU began tabulating the report in 1989. Conflicts were reported in every state and the District of Columbia. Multiple problems were reported in several states, with California topping the report at 18. Florida was second with 14. New York, New Jersey and Illinois each had 12, while Virginia followed with 11.

Religion in public schools posed an unusually high number of problems -- 100 incidents in 42 states. Fifty-one incidents concerning state endorsement of religion were reported in 29 states, the report said. Another 40 disputes over public funding of religious organizations occurred in 25 states, and 37 free exercise disputes were reported in 19 states.

Some examples include:

-- a student at a Tucson, Ariz., public high school won the right to form a Bible club after initially being denied permission by the principal;

-- Arkansas' lieutenant governor, in the governor's absence, issued a proclamation declaring "Christian Heritage Week";

-- council members in Wyoming, Del., voted to rescind a 1952 ordinance banning the religion of Wicca;

-- in the nation's capital a judge ruled that a Baptist minister could not sue a congregation for firing him, and a Presbyterian church won a legal battle to feed the homeless;

-- zoning officials in Palm Bay, Fla., tried to close a pagan-oriented church meeting in a house after neighbors complained;

-- the Maine Supreme Court ruled that a fundamentalist Christian could sue his former employer for failing to stop co-workers from harassing him because of his religious beliefs;

-- a federal appeals court in Michigan ruled that a Bloomingdale high school had to remove a picture of Jesus, which had hung in a hallway for 30 years.

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-- By Pam Parry

## **Kentucky Baptists steer course down middle of the road**

By Mark Wingfield

FRANKFORT, Ky. (ABP) -- Kentucky Baptists charted a middle course at their annual meeting Nov.

15-16, electing a centrist candidate in a three-way presidential race.

The 2,235 messengers to the Kentucky Baptist Convention in Frankfort applauded appeals for Christian unity but soundly defeated a proposal to form a special committee to promote harmony among people with diverse theological and political views.

Mt. Washington pastor Billy Compton was elected president in a runoff ballot with Louisville pastor Bill Hancock. Earlier balloting had eliminated a third candidate, Harrodsburg pastor Bob DeFoor.

All three candidates were announced prior to the annual meeting.

Compton staked out a middle-of-the-road course between DeFoor, a moderate, and Hancock, a conservative. DeFoor is a former board member for the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and has advocated keeping out of Kentucky the kind of conservative movement seen in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979. Hancock is a prominent conservative who served as chairman of the SBC Foreign Mission Board from 1990 to 1992, difficult years leading up to the resignation of former FMB President Keith Parks.

Hancock led a first ballot, receiving 39 percent of the vote compared to Compton's 31.3 percent and DeFoor's 29.7 percent. In a runoff, however, almost all of DeFoor's vote swung to Compton, who received 59.2 percent of the vote to 40.8 percent for Hancock.

Two moderate pastors had mailed a letter statewide prior to the convention endorsing DeFoor and associating Hancock with the conservative movement that has gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979. Their letter linked Hancock to a group of national conservative strategists who have met periodically to encourage conservative advances in the state conventions.

Hancock denied that link, although his candidacy was supported by the conservative wing of the convention.

The two vice presidential posts also went to unaligned candidates. M.A. Winchester, a medical doctor from Whitley City, Ky., was elected first vice president. Tyre Denney, pastor of Alton Baptist Church in Alton, Ky., was elected second vice president.

Just hours before the presidential election, outgoing President Bob Browning preached a sermon appealing for Christian unity in the convention. He spoke from John 17, which records Jesus' prayer that his followers would remain united.

It is unity -- "our ability to work toward accomplishing common goals in spite of our differences" -- which provides Christians with their greatest opportunity to witness to others, Browning said.

Despite political pulls from both the right and left in recent years that at times has threatened to divide Kentucky Baptists, messengers voted not to form a special committee to foster harmony.

"This is an attempt to reconcile our body. We need this," said Eugene Siler of Williamsburg, Ky., who made the motion to form a "harmony committee."

Quentin Lockwood, a retired missionary and pastor from Ashland; spoke against the motion, citing the "harmonious, beautiful" convention currently in session as evidence harmony already exists. Further, he cited the work of the SBC Peace Committee from the mid-1980s to say such committees seldom accomplish their goals.

Third, he said, "If we cannot heed the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, what makes us think we will pay any attention to what a committee brings before us?"

Messengers defeated the motion to create a harmony committee by a 2-1 margin.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Larry and Joyce Martin are returning to their home state of Kentucky, where he will be director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's missions division and she will be a staff writer with the Western Recorder.

Larry Martin has been vice president for ministry with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta since 1992. He was elected to his new post Nov. 14 by the Kentucky Baptist Convention's Executive Board and will begin work in Louisville Jan. 1.

Joyce Martin, former editor of The New England Baptist, was appointed to her new post by Recorder Editor Marv Knox and will begin work soon after the first of the year.

Before moving to Atlanta in 1992, the Martins served as home missionaries in Boston and Detroit.

From 1983 to 1992, Larry Martin was executive director of Greater Boston Baptist Association, where he gained acclaim for creative ministries and successful use of volunteer workers from around the nation.

From 1976 to 1983, he was director of missions with Greater Detroit Baptist Association. Before that he served four Kentucky Baptist churches as pastor.

He earned the bachelor of arts degree in history from Georgetown College in 1967, the master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1971 and the doctor of ministry degree from Southern in 1978.

In his new role with the KBC, Martin will oversee the convention's work in missions, evangelism, student ministry, Brotherhood and partnership missions.

In her new work with the Recorder, Joyce Martin, 47, will provide general news and feature coverage in addition to assisting with production and editing of several monthly newspapers the Recorder publishes in partnership with smaller state Baptist conventions.

She earned the bachelor of arts degree in history from Georgetown College in 1968 and the master of arts in Christian education degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1971.

She served as editor and associate editor of The New England Baptist from 1987 to 1992. While living in Boston, she also was an adjunct professor in Christian education at the Northeast Baptist School of Ministry and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

She previously served as minister of Christian education at churches in Massachusetts and Michigan. She served as a trustee of Southern Seminary from 1982 to 1983.

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--By Mark Wingfield

## **Texas pastor shot, killed while counseling**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- A 74-year-old Texas man is charged with killing a Baptist pastor shot while trying to offer marital counseling in a church member's home.

Marion Eugene Stevens, 68, longtime pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Monahans, Texas, was pronounced dead at the scene Nov. 15. He was killed by a shotgun blast to the head, according to Ward County authorities.

Carleton Russell Reed Sr. of Monahans was arrested, charged with murder and held in lieu of \$500,000

bond.

Dennis Ball, a deacon at Southside Baptist Church, told the Odessa American that Stevens had gone to counsel Reed and his wife, Virginia, for marital problems earlier in the morning of Nov. 15. Virginia Reed is a member of Stevens' church.

It was later in the day when Stevens returned to the Reeds' home to continue counseling the couple that the pastor was shot and killed, Ball told the newspaper.

Stevens was pastor of Southside Baptist Church for 24 years. A native of Hammond, Ind., he served as pastor of several churches in his home state, as well as in Illinois, Iowa, Utah and New Mexico.

He is survived by a wife, four daughters, 14 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

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