

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Lack of Texas, moderate ties undermines Corts' nomination**

By Greg Warner and Toby Druin

WACO, Texas (ABP) – Fear that Thomas Corts might lead Baylor University away from its Texas Baptist roots – and perhaps into the hands of fundamentalists – prompted Baylor regents not to elect Corts president of the country's largest Baptist university, several regents say.

"I have a real fear of a fundamentalist takeover," explained regent Nancy Thurmond of Fort Worth, Texas.

But the trustee chairman at Samford University, where Corts is currently president, said Corts' nomination at Baylor fell victim to "a backlash of denominational politics."

Baylor regents turned back the nomination of the 53-year-old Corts, who was the choice of the presidential search committee to lead the 12,000-student school in Waco, Texas. Three regents said the nomination failed 13-19 among those present for the Nov. 18 vote.

Regents chairman Gale Galloway of Austin, Texas, denied that a formal vote was taken. But in a follow-up letter to regents, he said the nomination failed by "the narrowest of margins," counting votes telephoned in from absent regents.

The regents were deeply divided over the nomination of Corts, the popular and respected president of Samford, a Baptist-affiliated school in Birmingham, Ala., since 1983. Although most praised Corts' credentials as a college president, many complained that he is not a Texas Baptist, not a Baylor graduate, and not clearly identified

with the moderate wing of the Southern Baptist Convention.

While moderate Baptists have lost control of the national denomination, they continue to hold sway in Texas. Baylor University, and particularly retiring President Herbert Reynolds, have led the charge against the influence of fundamental-conservatives on Baylor and Texas Baptist life.

Reynolds led Baylor to change its charter in 1990, loosening its ties to the Baptist General Convention of Texas to prevent what he called a "fundamentalist takeover." In September Corts likewise led Samford to eliminate the role of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in the election of trustees for the 4,400-student university.

But Corts also started an interdenominational divinity school at Samford with a conservative bent. And his brother, Mark, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., has been a key figure among Southern Baptist conservatives.

Those factors were more than Baylor regents could ignore, according to Thurmond and others.

"Dr. Corts is a very erudite person, a very substantial person," Thurmond told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. "But my conferences with people that I trust in the denomination who know his family caused some doubts."

Other regents echoed the concern about Corts' ties to fundamental-conservatives. Corts reportedly did little to allay those fears when he appeared before the regents Nov. 18. He told of hosting conservative Southern Baptist leaders at Samford but few moderates, the regents said.

Of equal concern, several regents said, was Corts' limited knowledge about Texas Baptists.

"Understanding Texas Baptists has a lot to do with whether a person can be a good president of Baylor University," Thurmond said.

One regent, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said board members "had grave concerns because they felt the need for someone who knew Texas and Texas Baptists."

Another said Corts' commitment to interdenominational work, symbolized by the establishment of Beeson Divinity School at Samford, was disconcerting.

"We made a promise to Texas Baptists to remain Baptist, and we want to keep it," the regent said. "That is really what the issue was all about. Beeson is interdenominational. Corts said that was fine, that he is a Christian first and wanted a Christian divinity school."

The Beeson school was established with a multimillion dollar gift on the condition that it not be a denominational school.

"I would hope that if that kind of money were offered to Baylor, we would say, 'We are sorry, but we want to be a Baptist school, a Baptist university,'" the regent said.

Chairman Galloway confirmed the regents were concerned about protecting Baylor's Baptist roots, although he said Corts was not directly criticized.

"Baylor University will retain its roots -- never doubt that," Galloway said. "Anybody who tries to do away with those roots will have to go through the board of regents and me personally."

Concern about Texas Baptist ties could lead the regents to choose Paul Powell of Dallas, president of the SBC Annuity Board, to succeed Reynolds. A former Texas Baptist pastor, Powell is a Baylor graduate and longtime Baylor trustee and regent.

The search committee reportedly was evenly divided between Powell and Corts before Powell withdrew his name from consideration in October. One Texas regent said Powell would better suit the regents' profile for a president.

Galloway discounted reports that the search committee resigned after the vote on Corts, but he said the committee's "fine work" likely is concluded. Its effort put the full board in position to make a decision, he said. "My recommendation, subject to the desires of the board, is that we operate as a committee of the whole" to continue the selection process, he said.

The full board is scheduled to meet again in January.

The regents now know "what it is we need to do and where we need to go, and we won't let it lie idle until

January," Galloway said.

Meanwhile, students at Samford are planning a "welcome back" party for Corts for Nov. 28, when he is due to return to the Birmingham campus.

Gerow Hodges, Samford trustee chairman, tried to put to rest any speculation that Corts would not return to Samford. Corts apparently tried to resign.

"He had earlier expressed his intent to resign if the Baylor situation worked out," Hodges said in a written statement, "but I did not officially recognize receipt of a letter of resignation, and I don't believe a resignation is effective until it is accepted. As far as we are concerned, Dr. Corts was and is president of Samford University, as before."

Hodges said the Baylor episode was "grossly unfair to a person of Dr. Corts' professional standing and character."

"I understand that Dr. Corts was asked to leave the door open to further consideration by Baylor," he continued. "It would not surprise me if the Baylor folks would come to their senses and make another try at him, but I believe it would be futile."

Corts could not be reached for comment.

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## **Defining relationships, officer races, racism, focus of state meetings**

By Bob Allen

(ABP) — Defining relationships in Southern Baptist life strained by 15 years of controversy captured the attention of several Baptist state conventions in fall meetings. Some states altered budgeting procedures to allow churches to minimize affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention, while others responded by bolstering traditional denominational ties.

With the SBC firmly under conservative control, the classic conservative/moderate confrontations are now filtering down to state convention presidential elections. And while conservatives made more gains than moderates, in many states races were run with less fanfare than in recent years.

Several states, meanwhile, signed on to an effort to put the SBC on record as repenting of racism during the convention's 150-year history.

Some highlights of state convention meetings, held mostly in October and November, include actions on:

- Cooperation/membership: A change in the way Texas Baptists count church gifts to the Cooperative Program promises to send "shock waves" through the SBC, observers say. At their annual meeting in Amarillo, Texas Baptists voted to count as Cooperative Program not only undesignated gifts to the unified budget which automatically funds the SBC, but also certain designated funds including gifts to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a rival missions agency to the SBC.

Supporters of the change, mostly moderates, said it will end a second-class stigma for churches which support the Texas convention but are no longer sympathetic to the conservative-dominated SBC. Conservative leaders predict it will hurt the state convention by prompting a backlash of churches sending missions gifts directly to the SBC, bypassing Texas altogether.

Virginia Baptists, meanwhile, which have offered churches giving options bypassing SBC causes for several years, took an additional step this year of basing membership solely on contributions to the state association.

Formerly, Virginia's constitution allowed churches to gain messengers based on all money that passed through

the state office, even if it was earmarked 100 percent for SBC causes. Now, only money that remains in Virginia will count toward qualifying churches for representation.

Proponents of the amendment said it is only fair that churches which pay the bills in Virginia ought to have the most say in decision-making. Conservatives complained the change would limit their influence in state affairs.

North Carolina Baptists changed their budget structure to allow churches to channel funds through their state convention to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Georgia Baptists accepted recommendations of a committee appointed in 1993 related to "harmony and cooperation with the work" of the state convention.

The committee report, approved without debate, said a church is in harmony with the Georgia convention if it is a member of a "cooperating association" or if it "makes current contributions to the causes of this convention."

The committee was created when messengers objected to convention presidents and nominating committees saying they would only appoint board or committee members whose churches give at least 7 percent of their budgets to the Cooperative Program.

Missouri Baptists defeated a proposal to permit only members of churches that support the Cooperative Program to be nominated to serve on state convention boards and commissions, but they approved a study on ways to increase the portion of CP sent to the SBC until the year 2000.

Maryland/Delaware Baptists rejected a motion to remove a constitutional reference tying Cooperative Program support to membership, after a convention leader reported that a policy had been adopted to ensure that churches will not be penalized for re-directing missions funds spent outside the two-state convention.

Other state conventions took opportunities to rally around the traditional Cooperative Program unified budgeting concept.

Arkansas Baptists adopted a resolution affirming the Cooperative Program as the "exclusive means to fund our missions endeavors," a reference criticizing the Texas action, according to a supporter.

Arkansas Baptists also increased slightly the SBC's share of Cooperative Program funds received from churches in the state, to 41.77 percent. Other states hiking the SBC percentage included Pennsylvania-South Jersey, West Virginia, the Dakotas, Iowa and Nevada.

Indiana Baptists also criticized the new Texas plan, adopting a motion instructing the state's executive board to "maintain our present policy regarding gifts to the cause of Christ as sent by our churches through the Cooperative Program."

Oklahoma Baptists adopted a statement pledging Cooperative Program support.

Another kind of membership issue arose for the second straight year in California, where an attempt was made to deny seating to a church with a woman pastor. After denying representation to San Francisco's 19th Avenue Baptist Church last year, this year's convention voted narrowly to seat the church's messengers.

California's Executive Board will study the question of women's ordination next year and consider a constitutional change requiring member churches to adhere to "biblical tenets."

– Relationships to institutions: While some state conventions debated how to relate to Baptist bodies beyond their borders, others struggled with internal relationships with institutions seeking to break free of state convention control.

Alabama Baptists declined to withhold funding from or seek legal action against Samford University, which voted in September to elect its own trustees. In the past the state convention has picked Samford trustees.

Alabama Baptists did, however, ask Samford trustees to reconsider their action and gave a special committee authority to continue discussions aimed at resolving the dispute.

Mississippi Baptists declined to alter the way they fund Mississippi College, which took efforts recently to distance the school from convention control, but they commissioned a study to ensure that other state institutions be prevented from taking similar action.

The college trustees voted in September to become a self-perpetuating board with only one-fourth of its

members elected by the convention. Later, they accepted a compromise allowing for joint approval of trustees by the college and the convention.

In South Carolina, where Furman University took similar action a few years ago, messengers approved constitutional changes clarifying the convention's relationship with its institutions. In the future, agencies may sever ties with the convention only by mutual consent, according to new legal ties approved Nov. 15-16 in Columbia.

– Presidential races: Conservatives made gains in state convention presidencies, viewed by observers as the next battleground in the Southern Baptist struggle between conservatives and moderates. State conventions in Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Maryland/Delaware and Illinois elected conservatives, while moderates prevailed in contested races in Virginia, Tennessee, New York and an unusual challenge to an incumbent in North Carolina.

Georgia Baptists continued a tradition of tight presidential races, electing a conservative candidate, John Yarbrough of Perry, over moderate Jim Ramsey of Albany, by 34 votes. Both men are pastors. Four vice president slots were divided evenly between conservative and moderate winners.

In other states, presidential races were lower key.

In Alabama, conservative candidate Fred Lackey won over former state convention executive Earl Potts. Two years ago, Lackey, pastor of First Baptist Church in Athens, lost in a hotly contested race to Dewey Corder of Trussville. This year's election, conducted in the shadow of an emotional debate over Samford University, drew less attention, however, and Lackey pledged to work with all Alabama Baptists.

In North Carolina, incumbent president Alfred Ayscue survived a challenge for a traditional second term. Mt. Airy pastor Ayscue, a moderate, won in a three-way race, garnering 2,208 votes against Durham attorney Ted Stone's 754 and Campbell University professor Lynn Buzzard's 675.

In Tennessee, a contested presidential race drew little interest, with only 815 of the total 1,359 messengers casting ballots. Moderate candidate Frank Hawkins, pastor of First Baptist Church of Kingsport, defeated Chattanooga pastor Don Long by 103 votes.

In Maryland/Delaware, conservative pastor Dallas Bumgarner of Glen Burnie garnered 53 percent of a vote against Wayne Kempson, a moderate from Waldorf, though observers said messengers appeared to show little concern about the candidates' politics.

In Illinois, a conservative pastor, Roger Ellsworth of Benton, was elected by acclamation after serving two years as a convention vice president.

Virginia Baptists elected a moderate, Woman's Missionary Union leader Margaret Wayland, over conservative candidate John Simms of Salem, by a wide margin.

New York Baptists elected a moderate who had not announced his candidacy prior to the convention, Bronx pastor Sam Simpson, over a conservative.

Missouri Baptists avoided a divisive election, choosing their next president, Raytown pastor Paul Brooks, by acclamation. Brooks is regarded as being aligned with neither moderate nor conservative groups.

Oklahoma Baptists picked their president from candidates divided not along moderate-conservative lines, but continued a practice established two years ago of a preferring small-town leader over a convention insider. This year Charles Graves, pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, defeated Nick Garland of Broken Arrow in a runoff election, 53 percent to 47 percent.

– Repentance for racism: Several states passed resolutions on racism, anticipating a statement expected to be proposed at next year's sesquicentennial meeting repenting of racism the SBC's past. Last summer, a group of urban directors of missions planned to introduce a resolution at a pre-SBC meeting but failed to show up during a scheduled business session to offer the motion.

This fall, state conventions including Georgia, California, Illinois, Maryland/Delaware, New York, New England, Pennsylvania/South Jersey and the District of Columbia adopted resolutions acknowledging the SBC's 1845 founding was in part to protect the institution of slavery.

– Other: The Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptist Convention voted to drop the word "Southern" from

the convention's name. The change was not a reaction, but an "enabling" action, supporters said.

Baptists in Kansas-Nebraska kicked off their 50th anniversary year.

Iowa Baptists began the process of becoming a state convention in 1995. Iowa Baptists formed their fellowship in 1965.

Maryland/Delaware Baptists approved ending legal ties with their retirement facility, the Baptist Home. The change is an effort to reduce ascending liability during an anticipated relocation of the home, which has lost money in recent years.

A New Mexico resolutions committee declined to report a resolution critical of the Baptist New Mexican's policy against promoting meetings of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The committee instead reaffirmed the commitment to providing access to "all relevant information" in convention communications.

Two state conventions – Ohio and Arizona – passed resolutions protesting the closing of Baptist Book Stores in their states.

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## **Church with woman pastor seated by California convention**

SAN DIEGO (ABP) – A San Francisco church which was denied representation at last year's meeting of the California Southern Baptist Convention because its pastor is a woman narrowly won its bid to send messengers to this year's session.

California Baptists meeting Nov. 15-16 in San Diego voted 357-340 against a motion to refuse to recognize messengers from 19th Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco. Last year, an effort to oust the church's messengers passed by nine votes.

Thousand Oaks pastor Ron Wilson issued this year's challenge, charging that the church, by calling Julie Pennington-Russell as its pastor, violated "holy Scripture and the Baptist Faith and Message."

A majority of messengers, however, sided with Seaside pastor Dan Coker, who said the issue facing the convention was not women in ministry, but "the autonomy of the local church in seeking God's person" to lead the congregation.

Baptist churches are self-governing and do not need denominational approval to call a pastor. However, voluntary associations of churches, including state conventions, have historically reserved the right to unseat messengers over aberrant doctrine.

Prior to the meeting, Pennington-Russell said she anticipated the challenge, but felt it was important to continue some healthy discussion started last year and "to have some things settled" about the church's future relationship to California Baptists.

The issue of women pastors does not appear to be settled for California Baptists, however. Convention messengers adopted a motion by Camarillo pastor Dan Nelson instructing the state's Executive Board to study the issue and report to next year's convention meeting in Modesto.

Nelson also made a motion that will be considered next year, to amend the convention's constitution to exclude from membership churches which "by faith and practice violate the biblical tenets" described in the Baptist Faith and Message. The Baptist Faith and Message, a statement of consensus beliefs approved by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963, does not address directly the ordination of women.

California Baptists also celebrated 10 years of leadership by C.B. Hogue, who retires as the state convention's executive director in February, and welcomed Hogue's successor, Fermin Whittaker, a former Californian who

currently works for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Messengers also voted to delete a \$200 budget item for Americans United for Separation of Church and State at the suggestion of Woodland pastor Carl Morgan, who said the religious liberty lobby had "continually butted heads" with the Christian Life Commission, the SBC's agency for moral, ethical and church-state concerns. Richard Land, CLC executive director, was a featured speaker at the convention.

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-- By Mark Wyatt and Bob Allen

## **Texas conservatives offer churches giving alternatives under 'new' CP**

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) – A conservative group formed to protest a change in the way Texas Baptists account missions gifts is asking that contributions to their organization be included in the state's new definition of its unified budget, the Cooperative Program.

In a letter addressed to "Southern Baptist" pastors and laypersons in Texas churches, Miles Seaborn, pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth, urged conservatives to send funds to the Texas Conservative Fellowship to underwrite costs of bulk mailings and speakers for meetings and rallies.

He noted that the Conservative Fellowship is asking to be – like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national moderate group – recognized as an entity able to receive designations through the Texas convention and have them counted as a Cooperative Program gifts in Texas.

Seaborn, who chairs the conservative group, wrote the Nov. 18 letter to respond to action by Texas Baptists allowing churches greater say in how their missions gifts are spent, suggesting how their churches might designate their missions gifts in 1995.

At their recent state convention meeting in Amarillo, Texas Baptists voted to expand their definition of the Cooperative Program. For the first time in Texas, gifts designated for use in Texas-only or for selected out-of-state ventures, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, will be counted as Cooperative Program dollars.

Traditionally, the Cooperative Program designation has been reserved for gifts given undesignated for a unified budget funding both the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Seaborn said he and two other pastors – O.S. Hawkins of First Baptist Church in Dallas and Claude Thomas of First Baptist Church of Euless – met with Texas Baptist Executive Director William Pinson and Treasurer Roger Hall to discuss guidelines and procedures for responding to the convention action.

Based on that conversation, Seaborn noted that churches may delete up to five line items from either the Baptist General Convention of Texas or the SBC budgets or can continue to support the unified budgets as they have in the past, according to the formula adopted by messengers to the convention in Amarillo – 64.5 percent for BGCT causes and 35.5 percent for SBC causes.

A church wanting to designate funds to maximize support for the SBC might ask the state to split its gifts evenly between the Texas and national conventions – or even give as little as 10 percent to Texas and 90 percent to the SBC – instead of the division formula approved by messengers in Amarillo, Seaborn suggested.

Seaborn announced a meeting of the Conservative Fellowship, scheduled Jan. 10 in Fort Worth, in conjunction with the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference

Responding to Seaborn's letter, Pinson acknowledged that "certainly Baptist churches are free to direct their giving according to the vote of their members," but that he hopes Texas Baptist churches "will not act to undermine efforts to reach the Texas mission field for the Lord Jesus Christ and to build here an even stronger base for Southern Baptist world mission causes."

Pinson pledged the state convention will "help churches as they consider financial support for state efforts in evangelism, missions, education and Christian benevolence."

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## **Florida Baptists hold placid meeting as Tropical Storm Gordon rages**

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (ABP) -- While Tropical Storm Gordon put a damper on attendance at the final session of the Florida Baptist State Convention, the annual meeting itself was notably calmer.

Gordon began pummeling Florida Tuesday night, Nov. 15, spawning tornadoes which destroyed 500 mobile homes along Florida's east coast and claiming at least three lives. By Wednesday morning, fewer than 300 messengers and visitors braved the 40-mph winds and torrential rains to attend the final session of the convention in Daytona Beach.

During the placid meeting Nov. 14-16, the 1,668 registered messengers replaced a controversial trustee of the convention's newspaper, agreed to accept churches outside Florida as members of the convention, and approved a \$24 million budget that reduces the amount of money going to the Southern Baptist Convention.

But messengers declined to act on a proposal to consolidate four annual missions offerings into two.

The semi-annual missions offerings were proposed by the State Board of Missions "in lieu of" the four now being promoted -- the Maguire State Missions Offering, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, and the World Hunger Offering.

Under the proposal, the State Board would set the statewide goal for the two offerings and determine how much money each of the four causes would receive, based on giving patterns for the past five years.

Critics worried the plan would separate the offerings from national promotional efforts. Currently, the home mission offering and the foreign mission offering are preceded by a nationwide week of prayer to heighten awareness.

The proposal was initially approved, but N.B. Langford, pastor of First Baptist Church of Panama City, immediately called for reconsideration.

Executive director John Sullivan assured messengers the weeks of prayer were not being abandoned. The proposal protects the autonomy of local churches, he said. "Every church will have its own decision to make," he said.

In proposing the plan in August, Sullivan said it would accommodate a trend among local churches that are combining the missions offerings into one or two annual emphases.

When discussion ended, messengers voted to send the proposal back to the State Board for further study.

William Parker was replaced as a commissioner of the Florida Baptist Witness, the convention's newsjournal, after the committee that nominated him withdrew his name.

Parker was eligible for a second three-year term on the Witness commission and was initially nominated for the post. But the Committee on Nominations, meeting during the convention, replaced him with Joe Boatwright, pastor of Aloma Baptist Church in Winter Park.

According to several committee members, Parker was replaced because his church, First Baptist of Markham Woods in Lake Mary, is not affiliated with a local Baptist association and its Cooperative Program giving for the past year did not meet the committee's standards. The church recently withdrew from one association and was declined membership in another.

Last January a Florida judge ordered Parker to open the financial records of his church to a former church member who alleges Parker mishandled funds and misused the church's tax-exempt status to evade real estate taxes on his house. No charges have been filed. Parker, a member of the powerful Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, was a frequent critic of Witness editor Jack Brymer, who resigned in August.

Steve Henderson, pastor of Scott Lake Church in Lakeland, tried to get Parker reinstated from the floor of the convention, but messengers upheld the committee's report.

A revision to the convention's constitution to permit churches outside Florida to affiliate with the state convention passed after some debate. The change will allow churches in Haiti and perhaps other nearby countries to affiliate with the convention, which has a high representation of ethnic congregations.

Tim Locher of Hollywood, a trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, expressed concern that allowing churches in other countries to affiliate with the Florida Baptist Convention would create a duplication of services with the Foreign Mission Board.

But Sullivan responded that any work with churches in foreign countries would be done in coordination with the FMB. Sullivan said the response from the Foreign Mission Board has been favorable.

Messengers also adopted a Cooperative Program basic budget of \$24 million -- \$421,351 less than 1994 -- with 41 percent earmarked for Southern Baptist Convention causes. The SBC portion is 1.2 percent less than in 1994. A proposal to further cut the SBC portion to 40 percent in 1996 passed without comment.

Messengers elected Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa, as president. Lee McGehee, chief of police in Ocala and a trustee of the SBC Christian Life Commission, was chosen first vice president and Luther Beauchamp, an attorney from Chiefland, was elected second vice president.

Messengers celebrated a successful campaign to defeat casino gambling in the state. Florida Baptists participated in a public relations campaign that helped convince voters to turn down a constitutional amendment authorizing casinos. The proposal lost by a 2-to-1 margin Nov. 8.

No resolutions were proposed by convention messengers, but five offered by the Committee on Resolutions were passed -- expressing appreciation for Brymer's 10 years of service, commending President Bill Clinton and others who worked for passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, supporting ministry to Cuban and Haitian refugees in detention camps, recognizing the centennial of the Florida Woman's Missionary Union, and thanking convention hosts and organizers.

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-- By Lindsay Bergstrom

## **Newspaper trustee bumped by Florida convention**

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist leader William Parker of Lake Mary, Fla., was replaced as a commissioner of the Florida Baptist Witness newspaper Nov. 15 because of complaints about his church's lack of involvement with Baptists in the state.

Parker, a member of the powerful Southern Baptist Executive Committee and a leader among conservative Baptists in Florida, was a frequent critic of Witness editor Jack Brymer, who resigned in August because of political

pressure from conservatives.

Parker was eligible for a second three-year term on the Witness commission and was initially nominated for the post. But the Committee on Nominations, meeting during the Nov. 14-16 Florida Baptist State Convention, replaced him with another nominee.

According to several committee members, Parker was replaced because his church, First Baptist of Markham Woods in Lake Mary, is not affiliated with a local Baptist association. The church recently withdrew from one association and was declined membership in another.

The church's contributions to the Cooperative Program, the denominational budget that funds state and national work, also did not meet the committee's standards, committee members said.

Although Parker's nomination was initially approved by the committee and included in its printed recommendations to the convention, the committee later substituted the name of Joe Boatwright, pastor of Aloma Baptist Church in Winter Park.

Steve Henderson of Lakeland, a trustee of the SBC Annuity Board, tried to get Parker's nomination reinstated from the floor of the convention, but messengers upheld the committee's report. Henderson said Parker was being treated unfairly because of legal trouble at the church.

Last January a Florida judge ordered Parker to open the financial records of his church to a former church member who alleges Parker mishandled funds and misused the church's tax-exempt status to evade real estate taxes on his house.

The member, Ann Haynes, was kicked out of the congregation first by the church's deacons and later by vote of the congregation. Prior to the congregation's decision, Parker denied her access to church records, telling her she was no longer a church member.

Haynes sued, claiming the deacon action to exclude her violated the church's articles of incorporation. Circuit Judge Newman Brock agreed. He ruled Jan. 18 that her initial request to view records should have been honored and ordered that all books and records be opened for her inspection within 10 days.

In the trial, Haynes said she believes the congregation never received a proper accounting for a \$416,334 bequest given to the church. She also alleges Parker deeded personal property into the church's name to obtain tax-exemption privileges and that he obtained interest-free loans from the church.

No charges have been filed against Parker.

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## **Leave prayer alone, religious coalition pleads**

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) — Prayer is a sacred act that should be left to houses of worship, families and individual believers — not the government — said an interfaith coalition in Washington Nov. 22.

The group, composed of Baptists, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, in a press conference on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court, asked lawmakers to refrain from amending the Constitution to allow state-sponsored prayer in public schools.

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

Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said such an amendment is unnecessary,

because students already have the right to pray in public schools. They can pray privately and even orally in a group as long as they don't disrupt the classroom, he said.

Walker, a Baptist minister, said he opposes a prayer amendment "precisely because we believe so fervently in prayer and don't want to see government meddling in it."

"When government tries to get into the religion business, it usually fouls things up," Walker said. He quoted John Leland, an 18th century Baptist preacher from Virginia, who observed: "The fondness of magistrates to foster religion has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did."

The proposed amendment, Walker said, "politicizes prayer, governmentalizes prayer, secularizes prayer and trivializes prayer."

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, appealed to Gingrich to refrain from tampering with the Bill of Rights for the first time in the nation's history.

"Today, I appeal to Newt Gingrich: this is a wrong-headed, misguided, divisive agenda," Saperstein said. "If forced to, the religious community will organize – as we have in the past – to defeat it. If you pursue this as a priority issue, you will have distracted this nation's attention from its real problems – crime, health care, political gridlock – to a divisive and doomed false panacea."

"Offer real solutions to real problems," he said, "and we will help you every way we can."

Saperstein said that a bipartisan, interfaith coalition mobilized to defeat two previous attempts to pass a school prayer amendment.

Robert Tiller, director of governmental relations for the American Baptist Churches, USA, said, "Because both prayer and personal conscience are central to our religious faith and practice, we oppose any effort of government to poke its nose into our prayers, especially our children's prayers, or to establish anything about prayer."

Responding to a question, Saperstein said the Clinton administration has indicated it will oppose a constitutional amendment but might support a statute for moment of silence in public schools.

Walker said he does not oppose moments of silence in the classroom, but that a moment-of-silence law is unnecessary because that right exists under the Constitution. Saperstein added that the problem with moment of silence laws is that once prayer becomes an organized activity some school officials may abuse their authority.

Fifteen religious groups, including the Baptist Joint Committee, expressed opposition to the constitutional amendment in a Nov. 18 letter to President Clinton.

Mark Pelavin of the American Jewish Congress, responding to another question, said that a fair reading of the recent election is that citizens want less government involvement in their lives. Pelavin said he is therefore surprised that House Republicans would conclude that Americans would desire more government intervention in their spiritual lives. The notion that voters want government to organize their prayers is a miscalculation, he added.

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## **Activist Larry Holly challenges abortion foes who preach violence**

By Steve Brunsman

BEAUMONT, Texas (ABP) – "Thou shalt not kill" is the one commandment most anti-abortionists revere most highly. But for Dr. Larry Holly, himself an anti-abortionist, far too many of his brethren are finding an escape clause in the commandment.

And that has become a problem for Holly, who has made it his mission to publicly debate and challenge anti-abortion leaders who contend the Bible allows violence against health workers – including the murder of

abortion doctors.

"I don't know anyone in this country who abhors abortion any more than I do. I do know this: Even if it was possible to stop all abortion by killing abortion providers, it would still be wrong and against God's Word," said Holly, 51, a Beaumont, Texas, physician and active Southern Baptist layman.

Holly's one-year-old crusade against pro-violence extremists has a goal.

Most Christian denominations, including those favoring a ban on legal abortion, have issued strong condemnations against violence. But Holly contends they fail to address the arguments and rhetoric of the pro-violence movement.

"The churches are singing to the choir. We've spoken to the people who are already convinced that violence is wrong," he said.

A CNN nationwide poll this year found that 3 percent of Americans -- possibly representing millions of people -- agreed that the use of force is legitimate to end abortion. A handful of anti-abortion leaders preach and teach violence, and some have small groups of followers.

The tenacious Holly, who made a name for himself among Baptists two years ago by leading a campaign against Freemasonry, has debated some of the nation's most famous anti-abortion militants during his latest crusade. He now is writing a book challenging the militants' beliefs and teachings.

"If they can't answer me, then they will have trouble with recruitments. Truth has a way of finding people," said Holly, a former trustee of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

In his latest campaign, Holly traded letters and telephone calls with Paul Hill in Pensacola, Fla., before Hill shot to death 69-year-old physician John Britton and 74-year-old escort James Barrett outside a Pensacola clinic.

Their long-distance contact was mostly formal. Hill circulated a petition on violence in the anti-abortion world, praising the "justice of taking all godly action necessary to defend innocent human life, including the use of force."

Holly tried to dissuade him.

"That was our entire conversation. I evaluated him as flippant. He didn't seem to understand the potential effect of his words or that he was talking about human life," Holly recalls.

A jury convicted Hill of murder in November, recommending a death sentence for the former minister.

Holly has also exchanged telephone calls and mail with two other men. One is David Trosch, a Roman Catholic priest and activist who was stripped of his ministry by the archbishop of Mobile, Ala.

The other is Michael Bray, a 42-year-old minister who served four years in federal prison during the mid-1980s for conspiracy bombings at seven clinics in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Holly publicly debated Bray recently in Maryland. Bray, who wrote the anti-abortion book "A Time to Kill," contends that use of force is allowed whenever an innocent life is at stake. Anti-abortion supporters contend that a fetus is an unborn child, often from the moment of conception.

Holly, in a detailed and disciplined rebuttal, contends that if abortion is legal, and no woman must submit to an abortion against her will, then violence has no moral standing in the anti-abortion movement.

Violence has never been the Bible's answer for sin, he said.

So far, Holly's call to stop the killing hasn't swayed Bray or Trosch.

"It all comes down to the law of the land for him (Holly)," Bray said in a telephone interview. "If civil authority says it is right or wrong, he abides by that."

Bray, who leads the 50-member Reformation Lutheran Church in Bowie, Md., an independent Lutheran congregation, said he has "no plans" to oppose abortion violently but doesn't oppose the use of force.

"It wouldn't be wrong; I couldn't condemn that. I don't do it, but it's not wrong," said Bray, the father of seven children. Bray counted eight children; his wife is pregnant.

Trosch, 58, a spokesman for Paul Hill during his trial, said that he would use force "if God gave me a clear-cut message." God hasn't spoken to him yet, he said.

Trosch described Holly as a Christian pacifist who interprets the Bible poorly. "He is closer to being a Quaker than a Baptist," Trosch said about an exchange of mail with Holly.

"I am not a pacifist," Holly said. "Force is never to be used to advance the kingdom of God or to propagate the gospel. If the government required that women have abortions, they and their families would have the right under God's law to say 'no.' That situation exists no place in the United States today."

Anti-abortion activists like Bray and Trosch contend that millions of deaths are the result of Christian toleration of legal abortion. Such views, according to Holly, fit into Christian Reconstructionism, which places Bible prohibitions and Old Testament teachings above U.S. civil law.

"Many of these people do believe in revolution. They want to take over the government," Holly said. "We don't have a right to force people to live by a law higher than the law of the land."

In Beaumont, where he led a Bible study on abortion with his teaching ministry, Mission and Ministry to Men Inc., Holly said that he's winning the subtle underground war in the anti-abortion movement.

Bible study member and church pianist Bobby Kinard agreed.

"We've got to take the emotion out of the debate and use logic. Follow Dr. Holly's logic and force doesn't make sense. But if you get me all emotional, I won't do it or can't do it myself, but I would say, 'Go, get 'em.'"

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## **Pastor celebrates Thanksgiving minus kidney, plus healthy daughter**

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Thanksgiving has always been special in the Knox family. This year, however, "Thank you, Lord," meant even more.

On Nov. 4, Oklahoma Baptist pastor Marvin Knox donated a kidney to his daughter, 36-year-old Martha Knox Scott, at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas. At 61, he is the oldest donor the hospital has ever worked with.

Knox has been pastor at First Baptist Church of Stratford, Okla., since April 1993. Prior to that he was pastor at Central Baptist Church of Marlow, Okla., for 12 years and of several churches in Texas.

Martha, who was born deaf, has experienced kidney problems since birth. She attended public schools before going on to the Jane Brooks School for the Deaf in Chickasha, Okla. For the last 16 years she has worked as a teacher's aide at the regional school for the deaf in Wichita Falls. She is a member of First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls.

Two years ago, after her kidney problems worsened, her urologist in Wichita Falls sent her to Parkland. In August 1993 she was placed on dialysis, and this April the decision was made that she would need a transplant.

Martha has two brothers. Marv is the editor of the Western Recorder, the Kentucky state Baptist paper; and Martin is pastor of First Baptist Church of Justin, Texas.

"We talked about all of us being potential donors," said Marvin Knox. But blood tests labeled him, his wife, Margaret, and son Martin as the most likely choices. Marvin took on the responsibility "because I'm bigger, meaner and uglier," he said.

During three days of testing in August he was told by one doctor that if he felt that he was under pressure to give up his kidney a medical reason could be found to relieve him of the responsibility.

"I told him not to look for it," said Marvin.

"In reality it seemed more logical for me to do it," he said, "and it was very reassuring to know that at 61 I am in good enough health to be able to do it."

"And he said he didn't feel he could walk around with two good kidneys when Martha had none," said Margaret.

Following the surgery, Marvin was out of the hospital in a few days, going back for checkups for about three weeks. He expected to be back in his pulpit in Stratford on Nov. 27.

Martha will have to be checked twice weekly for the next three months but hopes to soon return to work. The outlook, one doctor at Parkland told them, is for her new kidney to serve for 20 years.

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## **Journalists follow similar paths to Baptist beats in Washington**

By Tim Palmer

WASHINGTON (ABP) – How did a couple of former sportswriters from Missouri end up covering "the big game" in Washington, D.C.? For Tom Strode and Pam Parry, the path led through the University of Missouri at Columbia and through seminary to a Baptist public policy organization based in the nation's capital.

Strode, from Poplar Bluff, is director of media and news information for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and chief of the Washington bureau of Baptist Press. Parry, from Rolla, is information services associate for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs who contributes stories regularly to Associated Baptist Press. Instead of football, basketball and baseball, they now write about the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the United States government.

Strode finished his degree in journalism in 1974 and went to work covering high school and college athletics for the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock. The job was the fulfillment of a long-held career goal, but he was restless on a personal level.

Though he had grown up in Poplar Bluff's First Baptist Church and had attended church faithfully through college, he found himself wrestling with doubts about his salvation. Through First Baptist Church in Little Rock, he came in contact with "people who had something I didn't have."

In March 1975, Strode recalled, "I really placed my faith in Christ for the first time." Seven years later, he and his wife Linda left Little Rock for Memphis, Tenn., where Tom entered Mid-America Seminary. He thought he was leaving journalism, but his part-time job as a student turned out to be editing the newsletter at nearby Bellevue Baptist Church.

After completing his master of divinity degree, Strode remained on staff at Bellevue for five years. He continued to put out the newsletter and took on some pastoral duties as well.

Strode and his wife had been active in a statewide pro-family group in Arkansas, and he had been designated Bellevue's staff person for moral concerns. So when CLC executive director Richard Land contacted him in mid-1990 about the job in Washington, "We had really open hearts toward being involved with it."

He and Linda and their two children live in Fredericksburg, Va., and attend Spotswood Baptist Church there.

Parry felt a similar receptiveness to the idea of working for the Baptist Joint Committee – an organization she long had admired and respected. A 1985 MU journalism graduate – and like Strode a sportswriter on the Columbia Missourian – she followed a career track in Baptist publications.

After college, she worked for a year and a half as a news writer for Word & Way, the Missouri Baptist

paper, before enrolling in a master of religious education program at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City. She looks back on seminary as "probably the best two years of my life."

"I really think through seminary my faith became MY faith," she explained. Her training solidified what she believed as a Baptist, including the historic Baptist principles of religious liberty and separation of church and state.

Parry spent three years as associate editor of the Baptist True Union, newsjournal of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, before going to the BJC in 1991. She lives in Arlington, Va., and attends First Baptist Church in nearby Alexandria.

The two Missourians enjoy their jobs.

"Every job if you work at it long enough becomes routine," Parry said. "But this job's routine is incredible."

"Going home each night and seeing the same story I covered on CBS or CNN and seeing how they covered it -- that's always fun," she remarked. Parry was present for the confrontation between Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and the woman who had accused him of sexual harassment, Anita Hill --an experience Parry called "electrifying."

Though she regularly has contact with high-profile newsmakers, Parry professes not to be star-struck. "They're just people like you and me," she said. "They just have higher offices."

Larry Chesser, Parry's supervisor at the BJC, complimented her coverage of complex matters such as tax law changes affecting clergy and postal rates for non-profit mailers.

"Whatever the assignment ... Pam's skills as a seasoned journalist produce the reliable, timely and accurate reporting that Baptist readers demand and deserve," Chesser said.

Strode acknowledged that covering certain events in Washington can be exciting, but "some of the aura wears off of it after you've been here a little while."

As Washington bureau chief for Baptist Press -- "I usually qualify that by telling people I'm the whole bureau, too" -- he sees his role as keeping Baptists informed on critical issues of the day.

Strode pointed out that the CLC also is charged with communicating the positions of Baptists to the people who make public policy. As the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, he noted, Southern Baptists have an important role to play, especially among evangelicals.

"We really do want Southern Baptists to be the salt and light that Jesus talked about that Christians should be," he said. Part of his job is to refer news media requests for the Baptist position on different issues to the appropriate person.

Louis Moore, until recently director of media for the Christian Life Commission in Nashville, expressed admiration for Strode's work -- "He's one of the most dedicated people I have ever known" -- and for his Christian walk.

"He's a soul winner who shares his faith," said Moore, who has known Strode to witness to a taxi driver. Moore also described his colleague as a nice guy. "He lacks the arrogance a lot of folks in our profession have."

Both Strode and Parry write for and edit publications of their employers. Strode is editor of Salt, the CLC's Washington newsletter. Parry is associate editor of Report from the Capital, the BJC's newsletter.

Their ringside seats have helped shape the two Missourians' perspectives on Washington.

"I've come to a healthy appreciation of how hard our government works," Parry noted.

The nation's problems are too big for government to solve alone, she added. Churches need to do their part. "Government can pass a crime bill, but if we were preaching a message of love -- and reaching people -- that might do more."

Strode would like to see more activism among followers of Christ. "I think Christians need to be awakened to a deeper commitment to the Lord and to being his ambassadors in every part of the culture," he said.