

Associated Baptist Press

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In this issue:

- Two universities drop out of Southern Baptist group
- Pastor says he will turn over contested church records
- Churches getting smaller share of members' incomes, study says
- Baptist church secretaries earn average salaries, study says
- Infighting among Baptist hosts prompts relocation of WCC meeting
- Virginia church helps Estonian study at Richmond seminary

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Two universities drop out of Southern Baptist group

By Michael Clingenpeel

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Two Baptist universities -- one in Virginia and the other in North Carolina -- have severed formal ties with an association of Southern Baptist colleges.

The University of Richmond (Va.) and Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., have ceased to pay annual dues to the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, a voluntary association of Baptist universities and colleges which promotes the interests of higher education among Southern Baptists.

The action means the two schools no longer will participate in the meetings of the association, which include an annual gathering for the presidents and deans of member institutions and other meetings for admissions officers, fund-raising staff and other interest groups in education.

Also, neither school will be listed in a directory of Southern Baptist seminaries, colleges and schools circulated by the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention through its monthly publication, "The Southern Baptist Educator," and other promotional materials.

A recent packet promoting "Seminary, College and School Day" prepared by the Education Commission and sent to Baptist state papers, omits both.

David Burhans, chaplain at the University of Richmond, said the Virginia school has not been active in the association in recent years, prompting an "operational administrative-level decision" not to continue to pay membership dues. "We review our list of memberships all the time since they are constantly expanding and thought it was time to drop anywhere we were not active," he said.

University officials reportedly also have been uncomfortable in recent years when college guides have listed

Richmond as "a conservative Southern Baptist school."

"Richmond has never perceived itself as a Southern Baptist institution. It has gladly seen itself as a Virginia Baptist school," Burhans said. "The university's relationship has always been with Virginia Baptists, and that is a significant, historic and continuing relationship."

Officials at Wake Forest could not be reached for comment.

Richmond enrolls about 2,900 students, and is one of seven colleges and academies affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia. About 3,700 students attend Wake Forest, one of six colleges receiving support from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Stephen Carleton, executive director of the SBC Education Commission, said he phoned both presidents and they confirmed they knew about the decisions to drop out of the association. "I hate to see the fellowship, the association, lose anybody," Carleton said. "I don't think anybody takes any joy in that."

Carleton added he thought all other member schools had paid their dues for 1995. He said he did not know if the presidents from the two schools had conferred before taking the recent step.

Virginia Baptists' Executive Director Reginald McDonough said the action will not affect relationships between the university and Virginia Baptists.

The withdrawal of the schools reduces to 69 the number of institutions affiliated with the association.

-30-

Pastor says he will turn over contested church records

By Bob Allen

SANFORD, Fla. (ABP) -- After resisting a court order for more than a year, a Florida pastor and Southern Baptist Convention leader says he now is willing to turn over documents that include individual giving records to a former church clerk who accuses him of wrongdoing.

Bob Parker, pastor of First Baptist Church of Markham Woods in Lake Mary, Fla., issued a statement Jan. 12 announcing he plans to comply with a court order to make giving records available to Ann Haynes, a charter member who won access to the records in a 1993 lawsuit in a Seminole County court.

Parker, a member of the powerful SBC Executive Committee, said a \$10,000 fine assessed by a judge who has already found him and the church in contempt of court, coupled with a threat of further sanctions, prompted him to turn over the records.

In December, Circuit Judge O.H. Eaton ruled Parker and the church in contempt of court for failing to obey his Nov. 2 order demanding they open certain documents to Haynes and her agent, John King, a certified public accountant and former church member, including the giving records of individual members.

At another hearing Jan. 10, Eaton reportedly demanded the defendants pay the \$10,000 fine that had accrued since his contempt ruling and threatened to institute criminal proceedings unless they comply with his order by Jan. 13.

However, Haynes' attorney said in a Jan. 12 conference call with lawyers, Eaton said he did not intend to enforce the fine because of questions about its legality. The attorney, Tim Askew of Sanford, did not specify what those questions were.

Still, Askew said, the judge "made it clear he was expecting them to comply."

Askew said Jan. 13 he will reserve comment on Parker's promise until the records are turned over. "We just need to see if they're going to comply. They have told us many times they are going to comply and they haven't yet," he said.

While Parker said he now will follow the court order, he continued to protest the ruling, contending it "will have a chilling effect on future contributions to churches" because donors can no longer be sure their donations are confidential.

Haynes sued Parker and the church under a Florida law that requires non-profit corporations to disclose information to members who seek it for a "proper purpose."

Haynes says she wants to examine records to determine if Parker violated church documents to usurp control of the congregation, illegally transferred the ownership of his private residence to the church to avoid paying taxes, or kept jewelry or other items left to the church as part of a \$416,000 bequest.

Parker denies any wrongdoing and contends the lawsuit is part of an effort by a few disgruntled former church members to harass and discredit the pastor.

Parker and the Rutherford Institute, a religious-liberty watchdog group in Charlottesville, Va., contend that applying disclosure laws like the one in Florida to churches violates the First Amendment's free-exercise guarantees and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a 1993 federal law that permits limiting religious freedom only if there is a "compelling" state interest and only by the "least restrictive" means.

Giving to a church is a private act of worship, they argue, protected by religious-liberty statutes.

Askew said that while Judge Eaton did not consider RFRA in his ruling, he inadvertently met its standards. "There clearly is" a compelling interest in the case, Askew said. And Eaton's order -- that the giving records be opened only to Haynes and her agent and that they be required to maintain their confidentiality -- met the "least restrictive" standard, he said.

Askew said laws governing non-profit corporations do not infringe on a church's rights, in part because they are voluntary. While "there are many benefits" a church receives by incorporating, it is not required to do so, he said.

"If the church chooses to incorporate, then it is subjecting itself to the laws that govern incorporation," Askew said.

In addition to giving records, the defendants are ordered to turn over certain documents, including correspondence, checks, invoices related to the construction of Parker's home and inventories of any incidental items left to the church as part of a \$416,000 bequest from the Sarah Tatum estate.

Parker's statement and recent defense documents make no mention of materials other than giving records, but Askew said it is his understanding they also will be turned over to Haynes.

If so, it would end a 17-month legal battle that has cost the church more than \$13,000 in legal fees.

In August 1993, following a church split, Haynes requested in writing permission to inspect church records. Parker denied that request, informing her that a few days earlier the deacons had voted to remove her from membership.

She sued in Circuit Court in Seminole County. After a bench trial in December 1993, Judge Newman Brock ruled Haynes' excommunication violated due process outlined in the church's governing documents and ordered that the records be opened to her.

Last May, Florida's 5th District Court of Appeals denied a stay pending appeal of Brock's ruling. And the state's Supreme Court refused jurisdiction, leading the defendants to drop their plans for an appeal.

Later, they turned over some records to Haynes and her agent, but refused to include individual giving records, contending they are constitutionally protected. They also claimed that all other documents covered in the order either had been turned over, were missing or did not exist.

On Nov. 2, Eaton, who succeeded Brock in the Circuit Court, once again ordered Parker and the church to

turn over the records. A month later, when they had not obeyed his order, Eaton ruled them in civil contempt of court and assessed a \$500 a day fine beginning Dec. 19.

In a separate action filed in federal court, U.S. District Judge Patricia Fawsett, at a hearing Jan. 9 in Orlando, Fla., reportedly threw out an injunction sought by two members of the church who said having their contribution records made public violated their rights.

Parker, pastor of the church since 1983, described Haynes in his statement as a "former member" who was dismissed for poor attendance, un-Christian conduct and for refusing to work out conflicts within the church.

-30-

Churches getting smaller share of members' incomes, study says

By Mark Wingfield

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. (ABP) -- Church members are giving a decreasing percentage of their income to churches while going into debt to purchase more personal luxury items, according to an annual report on church contributions.

This trend may be caused in part by the failure of churches to communicate with members the needs of the churches and their mission agencies, according to researchers John and Sylvia Ronsvalle.

With assistance from the Lilly Endowment, the Ronsvalles are studying church member giving patterns in 29 U.S. denominations from 1968 to the present. They recently released their annual report on "The State of Church Giving" with new data through 1992.

With analysis of the 1992 data, total member contributions to church causes lost ground to inflation for the second year in a row -- the first back-to-back declines in the 25 years monitored in the study.

In addition, the percentage of members' income given to churches continued to drop, following a long-term pattern, the Ronsvalles said.

In 1968, church members gave an average of 3.14 percent of their income to churches. By 1992, the figure declined to 2.52 percent.

Hardest hit by the declining giving pattern are benevolent causes outside the local church, such as support for missionaries. When viewed in constant 1987 dollars, total support for causes outside the local church has decreased 1.8 percent in the past 25 years, compared to a 24 percent increase in support for local church needs.

Congregational funding for 600 Protestant missionary-sending agencies in the U.S. has remained flat since 1987, at about \$2 billion, the Ronsvalles said. In comparison, Americans spend \$4 billion annually on craft sales, \$32 billion on diet programs and \$40 billion on leisure travel.

Although the average U.S. household now contains fewer people than it did in 1968, it usually occupies more square feet of space today than in 1968, the Ronsvalles noted. "More comforts such as air conditioning and cable TV are taken for granted," they said.

Despite giving less of their income to churches, church members fare no better in managing their money. "Americans were buying on credit, paying more than an estimated \$30 billion in interest charges alone in 1991," they noted.

For this year's study, the Ronsvalles began looking at causes for the decline in church contributions. They

plan to release a final report on these causes later this year in a book to be titled "Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church."

Preliminary findings, they said, point to three key factors in the decline:

-- A "crisis of communication" in the church. "Local congregation members often express confusion about the purpose of denominational structures," they said. "Changes in attitudes and education efforts have decreased a commitment to international missions, long a source of funding for denominational structures."

-- The changing role of women. "When it was less common for women to work outside the home, women would spend time doing mission and stewardship education within the congregation," the Ronsvalles said. "Many congregations now are hiring people to do tasks which women used to fill as volunteers. Also, there is not a ready-made group to promote a broader vision within the church, as women's church groups find themselves in competition with women's careers."

-- Lack of instruction. "The church has not developed a positive agenda for the increasing affluence which became common among Americans since World War II," they said. "Rather, the church has often avoided the topic of money, leaving church members to form their attitudes toward accumulation and spending quite apart from the weekly religious services they attend."

The Ronsvalles' study group includes four Baptist denominations: the Southern Baptist Convention, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., General Association of General Baptists and the North American Baptist Conference.

Although the decline in giving is evident in all religious groups studied, it is more pronounced in mainline churches than in evangelical churches, they reported.

-30-

Baptist church secretaries earn average salaries, study says

LEE'S SUMMIT, Mo. (ABP) -- Baptists generally pay church secretaries in keeping with the national average for all church secretaries, while Mennonite churches pay considerably more and Christian churches pay considerably less.

These are among findings of an annual survey of church secretaries conducted by "Profile," a bimonthly newsletter for church secretaries. Results were published in the newsletter's September-October 1994 issue.

Baptist churches of all types pay full-time secretaries an average of \$8.92 per hour and part-time secretaries an average of \$7.76 per hour, according to Gayle Hilligoss, newsletter editor.

That compares to a national average in all churches of \$8.99 for full-time secretaries and \$7.76 for part-time secretaries.

The highest-paid secretaries work for Mennonite churches, which average paying \$10.50 per hour for full-time work and \$9.20 per hour for part-time work. Christian churches pay the lowest on average, with \$7.25 per hour for full-time work and \$6 per hour for part-time work.

The survey found secretarial pay generally increases as the size of the church increases. Full-time secretaries in churches with fewer than 300 members earn an average of \$8.45 per hour, while secretaries in churches with more than 1,000 members earn an average of \$9.74 per hour.

The survey could present a slightly skewed portrait of secretarial pay since only 24 percent of survey respondents work in churches with fewer than 300 members. Smaller churches compose the majority of U.S.

congregations, but also are less likely to employ full-time secretaries.

Among other findings:

-- 72 percent of full-time church secretaries are members of the churches where they work.

-- 98 percent of full-time secretaries are given paid vacation leave and 47 percent of full-time secretaries receive medical insurance. Only 7 percent of part-time secretaries receive medical insurance.

-- 91 percent of church secretaries work with computers, with 60 percent doing desktop publishing and 81 percent producing a newsletter.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Infighting among Baptist hosts prompts relocation of WCC meeting

GENEVA, Switzerland (ABP) -- A major meeting of the World Council of Churches that was to have been hosted by America's largest black Baptist convention will be moved because of internal strife plaguing the 8.2-million-member National Baptist Convention, USA.

The September meeting of the 158-member central committee, the World Council of Churches' governing body, will be held at the WCC's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, and not as planned in Nashville, Tenn., reported Ecumenical News International.

WCC officials cited "logistical and practical reasons" for moving the meeting.

The National Baptist convention is divided over a battle for leadership which included an unsuccessful court challenge to last fall's election of Henry J. Lyons as the convention's new president.

Lyons said he is in "complete agreement" with the decision to move the meeting, adding the convention "is not at this point ready to entertain such a prestigious body." He added the convention would be prepared to host another meeting of the central committee in 1997.

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-- By ABP staff

Virginia church helps Estonian study at Richmond seminary

By Chase Peoples

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- "We were totally speechless."

That was Tarmo Toom's first response to what he and his family found last fall when they arrived in Petersburg, Va., from the eastern European country of Estonia.

As they were ushered into their new home, the Tooms saw the duplex had been redecorated and fully furnished by members of West End Baptist Church in Petersburg, who even stocked the refrigerator with food.

It was a quite a welcome for the young man who had traveled halfway around the world to attend the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond nearby.

The Petersburg church decided to help the Toom family in response to a request from Glenn Hinson, a professor at BTSR and a former interim pastor at the church. Hinson met Toom while teaching at the European Baptist seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, where Toom was a student.

Like many students at the Ruschlikon seminary, Toom had found it impossible to take his family with him to Switzerland because of strict Swiss visa regulations. Rather than remain separated from his wife and three sons, the young man tried several times to transfer to other seminaries. But there was not enough financial aid to make it possible.

West End Baptist Church reunited the family, paying for their travel, living expenses and part of Toom's tuition at the three-year-old Richmond school.

Since moving to the United States, the Tooms have become a part of the Petersburg church, much to the delight of the congregation. "We have made no demands of the family, but we have been overjoyed at their involvement in the church," said Don Campbell, pastor of West End.

Tarmo, his wife, Merle, and sons Andreas, Erik and Ariel have been involved with various music ensembles and other activities, and Tarmo shares staff responsibilities as part of his course work at the seminary.

Toom will graduate from BTSR this spring and plans eventually to return to Estonia, one of the Baltic states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

Several years ago, Toom and several other young Estonian men recognized the need for theological education among Estonian ministers. They each agreed to study a certain theological discipline and return to help the small seminary already in Estonia.

"Right now," said Toom, "there are only three professors at the seminary and they are terribly overworked. We decided that we would return as faculty. We also felt strongly that Estonians should teach themselves instead of always being dependent upon visiting scholars."

Toom says the need for theological education in Estonia has grown since the fall of communism. "There was no education available to pastors during the 40 years of Soviet occupation, and without education your ideas can be easily challenged," he said. "With all of the new freedoms and ideas pouring into the country, Christians have an even greater need to be prepared for times their beliefs are challenged."

Toom is excited about the preparation he is receiving at BTSR to meet these goals. He says the openness of BTSR students to new ideas has enhanced his own learning. He said he also has enjoyed exposure to other denominations through the Richmond Theological Consortium, which allows students at BTSR to participate in the classes and programs of three other nearby theological schools.

In February, he will travel with a group of BTSR students in a seminary-required mission immersion trip to East St. Louis, Ill. "I look forward to seeing the other side of America besides the luxury I have seen this far," he said.

Most of all, Toom said, he is grateful to the church that made it possible for him to come here. "

The people at West End have been helpful in every possible way. I have felt extremely accepted at the seminary," he said. "I am happy here."

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-- Chase Peoples is a first-year student at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

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