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Sunday School Board back in black following \$8 million loss last year

By William H. Perkins Jr.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Baptist Sunday School Board finished the first quarter of the new fiscal year in the black after posting an \$8.2 million loss the previous year, trustees were told during their semi-annual meeting Feb. 6-7 in Nashville, Tenn.

Revenue for the first quarter was \$59,073,000 -- \$687,000 more than the amount budgeted. Expenses were more than \$2 million below budget, and funds provided from operations -- revenue after costs and expenses -- were \$1,575,000, compared with a budgeted negative amount of \$1,349,000.

Trustees expressed relief for the positive numbers and the management team now in place under board president Jimmy Draper, but the phrase, "One quarter does not a fiscal year make," was the oft-repeated caution voiced during the two-day meeting.

Trustees also changed from interim to permanent Draper's appointment of Ted Warren to the newly-created position of executive vice-president and chief operating officer.

Warren, who holds a master's degree with honors from Harvard Business School, has been serving for more than a year as chief financial officer and vice-president of the business services group at the board. He will continue those duties until a successor is chosen.

Vowing to stem the flow of red ink at the board, Warren said, "This is unacceptable. That's no way to run a business."

Charles Wilson, board vice-president for trade and retail markets, told trustees that the controversial Joshua volume of the New American Commentary series was not printed because it did not meet criteria as written and did not conform to the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy.

He said David Howard of Trinity Seminary has been chosen as the new author for the Joshua volume.

Wilson also reported that the "Christy" video series was ahead of sales estimates, while the "Secret Adventures" video series was below sales projections.

Gerald Shields, the board's director of information services, mapped out for trustees the new \$4.5 million VISTA business computer system that will consolidate 25 of the decades-old computer systems now struggling to

keep up with demand at the board.

Projected first-year savings alone from the computer changeover, which will occur during the next 18 months, are \$2.3 million, Shields said.

Trustee Timothy George, dean of the Beeson School of Divinity at Samford University in Alabama, debuted the first volume of the Library of Baptist Classics book collection that will revive sermons and writings of historical Southern Baptist leaders for a new generation of churchgoers.

"Pay Day Some Day" contains R.G. Lee's famous sermon, along with other material from Lee's ministry, George said.

Kirk Humphreys, a businessman from Oklahoma City, will continue as board chairman. Gary McManamy, pastor of Country Estates Baptist Church in Midwest City, Okla., was elected vice-chairman. Danny Strickland, pastor of Parkway Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., was elected recording secretary.

In other business, trustees:

-- Approved a revised 1994-95 operating budget of \$243,403,073 and a fixed asset budget of \$9,314,010.

-- OK'd a charter amendment to reduce the size of the board from 93 members to 58 members by the year 2000. The change must be approved by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee later this month and by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Atlanta in June 1995.

-- Voted to increase rates 4 percent at Ridgecrest and Glorieta Conference Centers beginning in October 1997 and begin a fund-raising campaign to pay for crucial repairs and improvements at the centers.

-- Dissolved the corporate affairs committee and folded its duties into the business and services group committee.

-- Rehired the Nashville office of Authur Andersen and Company as board auditor.

The next meeting of the full board is scheduled for Sept. 23-25 in Nashville.

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BWA protests 'persecution' of Baptists in Bulgaria

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An international Baptist organization is seeking intervention on behalf of Bulgarian Baptists, who may lose their land and partially constructed church buildings in Sofia, because the mayor "has come under pressure" to stop the Baptists.

The Baptist World Alliance has written the president of Bulgaria asking him to intervene in this latest "harassment of our Baptist believers and their building project in Sofia."

The Washington-based BWA has also alerted U.S. President Bill Clinton and Congressman Newt Gingrich, both Baptists, and Sen. Robert Dole, to this latest blow to religious freedom for Baptists in Bulgaria and asked them to "seriously plead for full religious freedom for all peoples" with Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev, expected in Washington the week of Feb. 13-17.

In a letter, BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz asked U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher to remind the Bulgarian government of its obligations under the United Nations charter and the Helsinki agreements to ensure religious freedom for all.

The latest issue at hand is a breach of contract between Bulgarian Baptists and the local government.

Even though the Union of Baptist Churches in Bulgaria has a contract agreement with the local municipality, Theo Angelov, president of Bulgarian Baptists, says the mayor now wants the project reviewed by the main municipality for "a new decision."

"I am almost positive that, under the existing conditions, they will withdraw the decision and take back the land," Angelov said. Bulgarian Baptists would lose their church, school and orphanage and would not begin to recover the money already spent.

Baptists around the world have prayed and hoped with Bulgarian Baptists for their first new buildings under freedom and many are giving financial support for the inexpensive pre-fabricated church buildings.

"This is a great disappointment to us and a great blow to religious freedom in Bulgaria," said Angelov. "Funds have been received from many organizations."

Lotz told the Bulgarian president of the dismay and concern of Baptists around the world, at this latest turn of events.

"The BWA is very concerned about the persecution of Baptists in Bulgaria, and more specifically, concerned about the harassment of our Baptist believers and their building project in Sofia," said Lotz.

"With the advent of new freedoms to Bulgaria after the peaceful revolution, we had thought Bulgaria would be a leader in supporting religious freedom for all denominations," Lotz said. "Unfortunately, this is not the case."

"We continue to be dismayed at the negative attacks upon Baptists in the media and the press," Lotz said. "There is a general hostility towards Baptists and other Protestant groups."

Lotz asked President Zhelev to intervene on the side of freedom for all religious groups.

"We continue to respect your efforts at restoring full freedom to the people of Bulgaria," Lotz said, "and trust that you will use your considerable powers to intervene on the side of freedom for all religious groups."

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Critics say Southwestern probation shows ATS bias against 'confessional' schools (revised)

By Bob Allen

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The two-year probation assessed Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary by a major accrediting agency has renewed criticism that the agency discriminates against conservative schools.

Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram that the Association of Theological Schools discriminates against seminaries that require professors to sign professions of faith. He charged ATS with disregard "for the freedom of a confessional people to be self-determining and faithful to their most cherished belief," the newspaper reported Feb. 4.

However, in the Jan. 27 letter to Southwestern announcing probation, the accrediting agency's associate director said the seminary's confessional nature had nothing to do with probation.

ATS, Southwestern's primary accrediting agency, imposed probation Jan. 6, saying trustees violated school procedures when they fired President Russell Dilday in March 1994 and have impeded academic freedom at the Fort Worth school. Conservative trustees fired Dilday charging he was too sympathetic to moderate Southern Baptists and had tried to block conservative reforms at the 3,117-student school, the largest of the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., issued a statement charging the ATS decision "appears to be rooted in a context of retribution, rather than in a redemptive and constructive intention."

Mohler also delivered a one-hour speech to the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents in early January in which he accused ATS of being insensitive to conservative schools that demand their professors adhere to doctrinal requirements.

Mohler said in an interview that a text of his speech was unavailable but that his remarks to the presidents' group focused on a "major divide among theological institutions" between schools that are "confessional and those that are non-confessional."

Mohler charged that ATS's "prevailing understanding of theological education," reflected in its committee appointments, literature and actions in recent years, "has been inclined toward the non-confessional model of theological education."

One example centers on "the nature of academic freedom in an academic environment," said Mohler.

"Non-confessional institutions may exhibit an understanding of academic freedom that is tied to the larger secular academy," he said, which is "an understanding of academic freedom which respects no confessional parameters."

"Confessional institutions, on the other hand, must understand academic freedom first in terms of fidelity to the confession and then in terms of the professor's legitimate freedom effectively to teach within those parameters," Mohler said. "Academic freedom in a confessional institution cannot mean freedom to violate the confessional parameters."

Mohler said he believes the accrediting agency's "explicit standards" for academic freedom "are met and exceeded by all six of the Southern Baptist seminaries," but that a problem lies "with the "interpretation and implementation" of those standards.

"I believe there is a proper role for accreditation and Southern Baptists must respect the need for a proper model of accreditation, even as Southern Baptists must demand that such a model respect our denominational convictions," Mohler said.

But most seminaries accredited by ATS are "confessional," and "the ATS standards support the confessional nature of these theological schools," said ATS Associate Director Daniel Aleshire in his Jan. 27 letter to Southwestern President Ken Hemphill.

"The confessional nature of Southwestern Seminary and the board's authority to terminate the president are not the reasons for the ATS action," Aleshire wrote in the letter, obtained by Associated Baptist Press.

Aleshire told Hemphill ATS's "central concern" is that the seminary's board of trustees "appears to be either unaware of or unresponsive to ATS understandings of appropriate governance of a theological school."

Over a period of "several years," trustees failed to implement their own procedures for presidential evaluation, Aleshire wrote, and decisions regarding the hiring or promotion of faculty "created the persistent perception that published criteria and the formally adopted confessional statement have not always been carefully followed."

The trustee violations constitute "a serious inadequacy" which probation is intended to correct, he said.

The president of a seminary which was approved for ATS candidacy status by the same committee that voted to place Southwestern on probation said it is "a gross error" to charge the accrediting agency with bias.

"The issue is not bias against Baptist beliefs, but the fidelity of our institutions to recognized standards of operating procedures," said Tom Graves, president at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. "You just don't fire your president without warning as you are changing the locks on his office door."

"Let's be honest," Graves said. "The issue here is not confessional theology. The issue is a recognized standard of proper conduct for boards (of trustees)."

Southwestern's probation has rekindled talk of a new accrediting agency, formed by the SBC seminaries and other evangelical schools as an alternative to ATS. Similar suggestions surfaced a few years ago when Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary was placed on probation because of trustees actions.

In his interview with ABP, however, Mohler stopped short of calling for a new accrediting agency. "It is my hope that we can work within the ATS toward a common understanding which respects the legitimate concerns of accrediting standards and the absolutely necessary role of confessional fidelity within Southern Baptist seminaries," Mohler said.

Graves said talk of forming an alternative accrediting agency is "frightful." "To become self-accrediting makes as much sense as auditing your own books," he said.

Neither Patterson nor Aleshire could be reached for further comment.

Southeastern's probation stemmed from the 1987 resignation of President Randall Lolley. Lolley quit, along with several other top administrators, after trustees instituted changes to ensure that only biblical inerrantists were added to the faculty.

In 1990, a motion was made at the SBC annual meeting to study the feasibility of establishing a denominational accrediting agency. The motion was referred to the SBC Education Commission, which recommended against forming any accrediting body that would "interfere with or attempt to substitute for the existing good relations with the regional accrediting associations."

Meanwhile, the SBC Executive Committee appointed its own task force to study accreditation of the convention's seminaries. Working with a similar group on the Education Commission, the task force recommended that trustees be better trained to understand accreditation issues and presented a resolution asking accrediting agencies to "strive for greater consistency" in evaluation of schools and to take care to avoid "the appearance of pressure designed to affect the theological posture of educational institutions."

Both the ATS and another regional agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, assessed probation against Southeastern Seminary. After two years, both agencies found sufficient improvement to restore the North Carolina school's full accreditation -- SACS in December 1993 and ATS in June 1994.

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