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Alliance of Baptists calls for dialogue with Jews

By Bob Allen

VIENNA, Va. (ABP) -- Renouncing "a past and present among Baptists that is complicit in perpetuating negative stereotypes and myths" about Jewish people, the Alliance of Baptists has adopted a statement urging Baptists to seek dialogue with Jews instead of conversion.

The statement, adopted March 4 at the Alliance's annual convocation in Vienna, Va., and recited the next day in a program at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., confesses "sins against the Jewish people," including "complicity," "silence," and "interpreting our sacred writings in such a way that we have created enemies of the Jewish people."

It also confesses "indifference and inaction to the horrors of the Holocaust" and expresses "hope for reconciliation between Christians and Jews."

The statement calls on all Baptists to:

-- affirm "the teaching of the Christian Scriptures that God has not rejected the community of Israel, God's covenant people,"

-- renounce interpretations of the Bible that "foster religious stereotyping and prejudice" against Jews,

-- seek "genuine dialogue with the broader Jewish community" that is "built on mutual respect and the integrity of each other's faith,"

-- oppose "all expressions of anti-Semitism," and

-- "[educate] ourselves and others on the history of Jewish-Christian relations from the first century to the present, so as to understand our present by learning from our past."

The statement, drafted by David Yeager, pastor of College Parkway Baptist Church in Arnold, Md., underwent considerable editorial revision by the Alliance's board of directors before being adopted without

opposition during the convocation's business session.

A "background" paragraph not included in the official statement, cited the "significant change" that occurred in Christian-Jewish relations following the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council in 1965. Past staff members of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department, influenced by the Vatican II document's call to dialogue, adopted "for a brief moment in time a different way to relate to the Jewish people and the Jewish faith."

"Regrettably, in recent years this effort at Jewish-Baptist dialogue has been reduced to a theology of conversion," the background paragraph continued.

The statement recalls the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps at the end of World War II, maintaining that the "madness, the hatred, the dehumanizing attitudes" which led to the Holocaust were not limited to Hitler's Germany but were "the culmination of centuries of Christian teaching and church-sanctioned action directed against the Jews simply because they were Jews."

Baptist Christians are "inheritors" and "transmitters" of a theology, the statement says, that has "taken the anti-Jewish polemic of the Christian Scripture out of its first century context and made it normative for Christian-Jewish relations."

The statement also criticizes Christian thought that "views the Jewish people and Jewish nationhood merely as pieces in an eschatological chess game," values "conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding and prejudice over knowledge," and "does not acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality and efficacy of the Jewish faith."

Yeager told Alliance members the statement "calls upon all Baptists to join with this group to affirm a more positive and uplifting attitude toward our Jewish sisters and brothers."

Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance, said the statement on Jewish-Christian relations embodies the organization's covenant principle of "steadfast support of religious freedom for all people."

In the convocation's closing ceremony at the Holocaust museum, Walter Harrelson, professor at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., said that while American seminaries have made strides in reinterpreting New Testament texts "that cause such pain to Jews and such embarrassment to Christians," fewer gains have been made regarding Christian reading of Old Testament passages.

Harrelson warned against a "flat and literalist" reading of Old Testament texts that presents Israel only as a sinful nation. Like the New Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures record both "human acts of faithfulness" and "human acts of infidelity," he said.

Without that corrective, Christians "can nod our heads and say, 'They were horrible; that's why God turned to us,'" Harrelson said.

Instead of "a story of failure," Christians should read the Old Testament as "story of God's promise on the way to fulfillment," Harrelson said.

Nancy Ammerman, associate professor of sociology of religion at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, described the experience of being asked to speak at the new Holocaust Museum: "This is a hard place to be. I've told some of you I think this is the hardest thing I've ever been asked to do."

"The most appropriate thing we can do in this place is simply to be silent," she said, and "to ask ourselves how could it happen? What went wrong? Could it happen again and what would I have done?"

"The longer we listen to that silence, the more surely we know that, yes, it could happen again; no, we are not innocent," she said.

Ammerman said to "break the cycle of dehumanization" evident in the Holocaust, humans must "recognize the mixture of good and evil in all of us."

Peggy Obrecht, the Holocaust museum's director of church relations, praised the Alliance for the statement. "We are so pleased that this statement would be handed out here in this museum," she said. "This museum is enhanced by your presence."

The statement was adopted at the ninth annual convocation of the Alliance, held March 3-5 at Vienna Baptist Church.

The Alliance was organized in 1986 as the Southern Baptist Alliance around principles progressive Southern

Baptists said were being eroded under conservative leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1992, the organization changed its name to Alliance of Baptists, symbolizing that the membership no longer wanted to be identified with the SBC.

With 121 member churches, the Alliance is dwarfed by the newer Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, another moderate splinter group with a more middle-of-the-road image than the more progressive Alliance. Last year, 1,377 churches contributed to the Fellowship.

"Great movements do not require great crowds or massive structures," Alliance president John Roberts said during an address. "Our size is an asset" allowing flexibility and "quick response to circumstances," he said.

In other business, Alliance members:

-- Re-elected President John Ewing Roberts, pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Baltimore, Md., to a second one-year term. Other officers elected were Joann Davis of Severna Park, Md., as vice president and Amy Greene of Decatur, Ga., as secretary.

-- Unanimously adopted a motion made from the floor by Joe Foster of Wake Forest, N.C., that the report of a task force on human sexuality be received "with gratitude" by the convocation for "reflection and deliberation" by members.

Foster, who described himself as a gay Christian, said the Alliance "gives us hope there are people for whom gay and lesbian Christians are people of worth."

Last fall, the Alliance's board of directors received a report of the task force on human sexuality and commended it as a study document but did not vote to endorse the statement.

The report does not advocate homosexuality as a lifestyle but encourages Alliance congregations to refrain from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Designed to promote dialogue, the report acknowledges that well-informed and well-intentioned Baptists can differ on biblical interpretation, but says churches should not take stands that discriminate or foster fear.

-- Asked their president to appoint a five-member task force to coordinate contact with the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba. A number of Alliance churches going to Cuba on missions trips have run into logistical and communication problems that establishing an official liaison committee might address, said Lee Gallman, pastor of Columbia Drive Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., who made the motion.

Members also adopted a resolution against the U.S. embargo against Cuba which, Gallman said, "continues to impoverish the Cuban people." "It's time to leave vengeance to God," he added.

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Assault rifle, gospel message prove useful for missionary to Kurds

By Greg Warner

WESTLAKE, Texas (ABP) -- Missionary Robert Anderson wears an AK-47 assault rifle over his shoulder. That might attract attention on most mission fields, but Anderson does it to blend in among the Kurds of northern Iraq.

For most male Kurds, a rifle or other weapon is standard attire, Anderson said. The Kurds live in a "combat zone," under constant threat from Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Anderson said.

The Kurds, numbering an estimated 20 million, are the largest ethnic group in the world with no country of their own. Kurdistan, their rugged, mountainous homeland, spans the borders of five countries -- Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran and the former Soviet republic of Armenia -- and has been the prize in a tug of war among nations that dates to 550 B.C. The history of the Kurds, known as the Medes in the Bible, is marred by oppression, most recently by Hussein after Iraq lost the Gulf War.

In this harsh setting, Robert and Roni Anderson are credited with gaining a foothold for the Christian gospel

in a predominantly Muslim region.

Robert Anderson first visited Kurdistan in 1992, drilling water wells as a mission volunteer for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. His crew was drilling next to an orphanage, he recalled. "Actually, it was a former prison where orphans of prisoners had taken up residence in the last place they had seen their parents alive," he said. "They were eating out of garbage cans."

He telephoned his wife in the United States. "He said, 'There are so many orphans over here who need some love,'" Roni recalled. "So I went over on the next plane. We were there a month and we knew that's where the Lord wants us."

For the past three years, the Andersons have been working as independent missionaries through their own relief organization, Concern for the Kurds. In February they were among 12 people appointed missionaries by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Andersons' work, centered in Dohuk in northern Iraq, includes water sanitation, food distribution, a feeding program for malnourished children, prenatal care, English classes, agricultural projects, medical clinics with volunteer doctors from the States, even computer training using equipment donated by IBM. They also distribute Bibles and train Kurdish Bible teachers for work in the villages.

Roni Anderson focuses her attention on the Kurdish women and children, she explained, because "men and women do not intermingle" in traditional Muslim culture.

Robert takes his message to the men, beginning with the head of each village. He typically presents the village leader with a Bible, identifies himself as a Christian, and explains that the relief work is a compassionate expression of the love of Christians for the Kurds.

Although most Muslims are highly resistant to the Christian gospel, the Kurds have proven somewhat more receptive, Anderson said, in part because Kurdish Muslims are less fanatical than their counterparts elsewhere in the Middle East.

Also some Kurds were Christians before the seventh-century Islamic conquests. Anderson points to the remains of a 2,000-year-old Christian church, which was once a Jewish synagogue, as a Kurdish link with their Christian past.

By most standard measurements, however, the work is slow. But at least one church has been started, and nine Kurds were baptized last summer, Anderson reported. "There have been many, many, many others who are believers but say 'I am afraid of Saddam,'" he added.

The Andersons' work meets more resistance from Iraq than from Kurdish Muslims, Anderson said. "Saddam is after anyone who is helping the Kurds," he said matter-of-factly.

The rifle Anderson carries is not just for show but for protection. He works under a threat of death.

In a Feb. 6 memo to non-government organizations working in the Dohuk region, the United Nations warned of televised reports that the Iraqi government has sent assassins into Kurdistan to kill relief workers helping the Kurds. A bounty of \$60,000 was offered for each assassination, the report said.

Keith Parks, CBF global missions coordinator, said he takes such threats seriously. "That's one reason why that part of the world is not reached. I don't fault people who don't feel comfortable running those risks."

As if flaunting Saddam Hussein is not enough, the Andersons have made themselves more tempting targets by preaching the gospel openly in a Muslim culture. Anderson takes those dangers in stride, however, quoting scripture verses about God's protection.

The Andersons and the Fellowship's global missions ministry group talked frankly about the dangers before appointing the couple.

"They are in risky circumstances," Parks said. "We know it and they know it. God has given Robert and Roni a peace of mind, and we just rejoice in that. We don't court martyrdom, but we believe we are responsible to take the gospel to everybody."

Many mission organizations instruct their personnel in the Middle East to be discreet or not to talk about Christ at all because of Muslim hostility.

But Anderson says he won't operate that way, and he has little patience with those who do. Of the estimated

50 Christian workers among the Kurds, Anderson said, there are only five missionaries who share the gospel openly.

Some missionaries work in cooperation with American relief and development agencies, such as USAID, serving as conduits for relief supplies and money. Those agencies, to protect their neutrality, restrict the religious activity of the missionaries, Anderson said.

That is an unacceptable compromise, he said. "Missionaries are being prostituted by foreign aid. They've married the government and divorced Jesus."

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has at least one representative in the region, a well-driller. FMB President Jerry Rankin said the agency would not accept restrictions on the ability of its personnel to witness. But he has reservations about Anderson's approach.

"He is taking a very high risk," Rankin said. "He certainly has a heart for the Kurds, [but] we have concerns about involving our missionaries in his type of work in direct evangelism. Our people are very much involved in sharing the gospel but not so overtly."

Several FMB trustees, impressed with the Andersons' work, encouraged the FMB to appoint the Andersons. But both Robert and Roni have been divorced, which automatically excludes them from FMB appointment. And the FMB grooms its own missionaries, nurturing them through a lengthy appointment process, and does not typically take on established missionaries that have made their own way.

"I am very impressed with Robert and Roni," said Rankin, who met with the Andersons for two hours last November. There's no question God has called them to work there and phenomenally blessed their ministry. I don't think there is any conflict with [FMB] strategy, nor does it demean the effectiveness of what our personnel are doing in a different way. But they would not be able to be appointed by the Foreign Mission Board."

Parks acknowledges the Andersons are "a bundle of paradoxes, but our [global missions] committee was just enamored with them. Our position is they are out doing something, and we want to help them do more." With Fellowship support, Parks said, the couple can focus on their work overseas rather than spending up to a third of their time in the States raising money.

Parks said the appointment of the Andersons, and several other non-traditional missionaries, in February demonstrates the versatility of the Fellowship's approach to global missions. Most of the 12 are laypeople, and only half have any seminary training -- a prerequisite for FMB career appointment. Several are divorced. Eleven already speak a second language. All 12 are already involved in missions, but only one couple was previously appointed by the FMB.

"I don't think I've ever appointed a group like that before with all that diversity," said Parks, Rankin's predecessor at the FMB for 13 years. Many could not be appointed by the Foreign Mission Board for a variety of reasons, he noted. "In every case, these people are out producing ... and we are willing to fill in the gaps in their backgrounds."

Because the Fellowship's missions program is still small -- 64 missionaries -- the organization can customize the training of new personnel, Parks said. For instance, some of the new appointees will receive theological training as part of their orientation rather than the traditional language schooling. Instead of developing a centralized orientation process, the Fellowship shops around for specialized third-party orientation programs.

"As small as we are, we are able to give personal evaluation and attention without having to run everybody through the same mold like I felt I had to at the Foreign Mission Board," Parks said.

Other CBF missionaries appointed Feb. 15 in Westlake, Texas:

-- Kelly and Susan Mulheren of Nashua, N.H., taught themselves Russian while working as volunteers with Russian Baptist immigrants in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. They will coordinate the Fellowship's mission strategy for reaching the Chechnyan people in the Caucasus region of Russia. Kelly, 39, is a computer software engineer from Marlinton, W.Va. Susan, 38, is a college professor from Richmond, Va.

-- Kirk and Suzanne Person have been assigned to work with Wycliffe Bible Translators to translate scripture into the languages of the Sino-Tibetan people. The couple met and married while both worked in a college in Lampang, Thailand. Kirk, 27, is from Loveland, Colo., and holds master's degrees in linguistics from Payap University in Thailand and in missiology from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Suzanne, 26, is

pursuing master's degrees in linguistics and missiology.

-- Jay and Anita Lynn were commissioned for a two-year assignment teaching English as a second language in Litomerice, the Czech Republic. Jay, 27, is from Richmond, Va. Anita, 25, is from Dover, Del. The Lynns are the first graduates of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond to be appointed missionaries.

-- Lonnie and Frances Turner, FMB missionaries to Zambia for 19 years, were appointed to work with the international diplomatic and business community in Brussels, Belgium. Both are 46 and from Harlan, Ky.

-- Mary Buzhardt, 37, will work with students and youth in Albania. A frequent foreign missions volunteer, Buzhardt has been minister of education at First Baptist Church of Walterboro, S.C., since 1986. She holds a master of divinity degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

-- Nomie Derani, a 43-year-old Lebanese native, will work with Arab immigrants in Dearborn, Mich., which has the highest concentration of Arabs of any U.S. city. She currently works as a volunteer in an Arab-American Friendship Center there. "We do whatever it takes to love them and meet their needs until they ask us why," she explained. Derani, whose mother was a ceremonial Koran reader in Lebanon, was led to Christ by Messianic Jews in Colorado.

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-- Photos of Robert Anderson available from Associated Baptist Press. Photos of other missionaries available from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

WMU members asked to study, pray about SBC restructure plan

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Members of Woman's Missionary Union have been urged to study, ask questions and to vote their conscience on a proposed restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention being presented at this summer's SBC annual meeting in Atlanta.

The plan reassigns some of WMU's traditional duties to other agencies.

A statement by WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien said the WMU will not issue a formal response to recommendations of a program and structure study committee calling for a streamlining of the denomination's organization because the WMU's executive board is not scheduled to meet until June 16-17, just prior to the SBC meeting scheduled June 20-22.

The blue-ribbon study committee has asked the trustees of SBC agencies to endorse the report before it is presented at this year's convention. The recommendations must be adopted at consecutive conventions before they take effect. Full implementation is scheduled in the year 2000.

O'Brien outlined answers to common questions about the proposal and urged women to "pray for leadership of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and understanding the report."

The proposal calls for a more centralized denominational structure. It would reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12. It also assigns tasks traditionally performed by WMU -- including promotion of two annual missions offerings and missions education -- to other agencies.

Members of the committee explaining the recommendations in February said they could not make mission assignments to WMU because of the organization's desire to remain an auxiliary to the SBC, free of the convention's control. However, the convention's two mission boards will be free to continue to work with WMU as in the past, the committee said.

O'Brien told reporters the study appears to strip WMU of its primary assignments of providing missions education and promotion of the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong missions offerings.

In her statement to WMU members, O'Brien discussed the legal question of "ownership" of the two offerings.

The SBC's legal counsel has said that since the SBC Foreign and Home Mission boards are sole recipients of the offerings, they own them, she said.

"Another argument could be made, however, that historical and emotional ownership belongs to WMU," O'Brien countered. For years, the offerings were for women only, and gifts from men were returned, she said. Eventually, WMU leadership "deemed it wise to make them church-wide offerings" and to allow the mission boards to determine allocations because they "knew where the most urgent needs existed."

"Did we give the offerings away?" O'Brien asked. "Perhaps so, in the interest of wider involvement and increased giving to missions. We have no regret for this."

The WMU has involved staffs of the mission boards and the Brotherhood Commission in promotion of the offerings in recent years, but "we have continued to be the primary agents in the work," she said. In addition to efforts by the WMU's national leadership, "untold hours and dollars are willingly spent" by state WMU offices to help promote the offerings, she said.

On the question of why WMU has chosen to remain an auxiliary rather than become an agency of the SBC, O'Brien said the WMU's independent status has allowed the organization "to be a helper to the convention and all its causes."

"WMU has shared in every large undertaking of Southern Baptists without losing the major emphasis on home or foreign missions," she said.

Also, unlike SBC agencies, the WMU membership chooses its own leadership, with state presidents comprising the national WMU executive board. "This means that women know WMU work on every level and are well able to represent the women in their state," O'Brien said.

WMU is also unique in that its members meet annually and that it raises its own operating budget through literature sales and does not receive money from the missions offerings or through the SBC's unified budget, the Cooperative Program, she said.

The restructure plan assigns "missions education" to the current SBC Brotherhood Commission. The Brotherhood Commission's president, however, has stated publicly "that he would hope that WMU would continue to be involved as it has been in the past with gender-specific missions education organizations," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said the WMU will move "full speed ahead" to implement its own organizational changes and publication of new magazines scheduled for this October. "We have been in the process of forming new options and entry points for all Southern Baptist women in the church for many months now," she said. "Excitement is growing. We have no intention of slowing it down."

"WMU has never feared change," O'Brien said. "Structures and formats may change, but the need for an organization that will sensitize Christians to the need of the world for Christ and that will provide them with models and opportunities for praying, going and giving to share the Good News will endure. We intend to continue to provide those for Southern Baptists."

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-- By Teresa Dickens and Bob Allen

**CLC trustees endorse name change,
add staff member, oppose Foster**

By Bob Allen

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- Trustees of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission endorsed changes proposed in a reorganization of the Southern Baptist Convention, hired a new media-relations director and voiced their opposition to the confirmation of Henry Foster as U.S. surgeon general March 2.

The commission's trustees held their semi-annual meeting in Raleigh, N.C., on the heels of a three-day ethics seminar in nearby Wake Forest.

Recommendations of a blue-ribbon program and structure committee, which would reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12, would call for a name change for the 48-year-old moral-concerns agency but leave its mission basically unchanged. CLC commissioners endorsed changing the agency's name to the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and replacing its current program statement with a new mission assignment drafted by the study committee.

The program and structure committee asked the boards of trustees of the various SBC agencies to endorse the recommendations so leaders may say the two-year study "has the support of the agencies" when it is presented for vote at this summer's annual convention in Atlanta, CLC Executive Director Richard Land explained.

While the restructure would not add any new assignments to the ethics agency, commissioners noted it would "do nothing but enhance" the CLC's work by giving the agency a higher profile in a streamlined denominational structure.

The recommendations, approved Feb. 21 by the SBC Executive Committee, must be adopted at consecutive SBC annual meetings before they take effect. The proposal calls for total implementation in the year 2000.

CLC commissioners also voted unanimously to elect 51-year-old Bill Merrell, director of missions for Comanche-Cotton Baptist Association in Lawton, Okla., as director of media and product development.

Merrell brings 28 years of experience as a pastor in Texas and Oklahoma to the post. He succeeds Louis Moore, who is now vice president for communications at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Land said the CLC's "needs have changed" since Moore was hired in 1988, leading him to nominate a person "who can give us more help with program areas" instead of a journalist.

Merrell will write news releases for Baptist Press and secular media and edit the CLC periodical "Light," along with other program duties to be assigned later, Land said. Merrell will begin work on or about May 1.

The commissioners adopted a motion by Jackie Kay, a pastor from Bartlett, Tenn., putting the full board on record as opposing the confirmation of President Clinton's nominee for the surgeon general post.

Earlier, the commission's executive committee voted unanimously to oppose Foster's confirmation, and CLC staff held a news conference announcing the agency's opposition.

While the executive committee is empowered to act on behalf of commissioners between meetings, Kay cautioned that when news reports say the CLC has made a statement, constituents "take that to mean the whole body has done that."

Land responded that he asked the executive committee to act instead of the whole board so he could schedule a press conference announcing opposition to Foster in Nashville while SBC officers were in town for a meeting. "We didn't think there was any doubt you'd be in favor of doing it," Land said.

James Smith, the CLC's director of government relations, described Foster as "a man who has made a profession, I would say, of the taking of unborn life," but told commissioners he should also be opposed because his touted pregnancy-prevention program distributes contraceptives to teenagers and for his ties to Planned Parenthood.

The commission also voted to give its 1995 John Leland Religious Liberty Award to Charles Lyons, pastor of Armitage Baptist Church in Chicago.

Commissioners honored Lyons for the church's strong pro-life stance and its publicized confrontations with gay-rights activists.

They also voted to publish a pamphlet written by board member Rob Showers, an attorney from Alexandria, Va., on ways to help churches avoid litigation and to direct staff to "review" its materials on pornography.

Commissioner Alma Ruth Morgan of Bartlesville, Okla., said a CLC brochure on pornography is out-of-date and asked the board to direct the staff to update it. Commissioners, however, said it would set a bad precedent for

trustees to commit budget dollars for specific projects without input from staff on how they fit into the "big picture" of the agency's work.

They also adopted a resolution honoring board member Vi Galyean of Christiansburg, Va., who is leaving the commission for health reasons. Galyean suffers from ALS, a degenerative muscle condition also known as "Lou Gehrig's Disease." She told commissioners there is no cure and her doctor told her she will die within one or two years but that she is "still praying for a miracle."

After a closed-door discussion, the board authorized the staff to resolve a dispute with the construction company that has been renovating the agency's Washington, D.C., office. The nature of the dispute with Scott-Long Construction Co. is not known. The staff also was authorized to enter an agreement with another construction company, C. H. Smith Services.

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CORRECTION: In the March 2 story "Oklahoma director of missions tapped for CLC media post," the name of Bill Merrell was misspelled. We apologize for the error.

Land, others sign clarification of evangelical/Catholic accord

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- Evangelicals who last year signed a controversial accord with Roman Catholics have issued a clarification designed to mute some of the criticism the document received.

Among those signing onto the clarification was Richard Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission, one of two Southern Baptist Convention agency heads to sign the original "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document last spring.

Both Land and the other SBC leader, Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board, have been criticized for signing the statement, which some say embraces false doctrine and undermines evangelism efforts by banning "sheep-stealing" from Catholic churches.

Land reported to CLC trustees March 2 that he recently signed a statement of "applicatory clarifications," drafted by three other signers of the evangelical/Catholic accord, intended to "prevent divisive misunderstandings of our beliefs and purposes."

The clarification was drafted in a Jan. 19 meeting of evangelical leaders, including signers and critics of the document.

According to a press release, the clarification was drafted at the request of Chuck Colson, chairman of Prison Fellowship. Two other signers of the document were involved in drafting the statement -- J.I. Packer and Bill Bright. Several evangelical leaders who did not sign the document were involved in drafting the clarification, including John Ankerberg, John MacArthur, R.C. Sproul and James Kennedy, the press release said.

The Protestant signers said their "para-church cooperation" with Catholics "in pursuit of agreed objectives does not imply acceptance of Roman Catholic doctrinal distinctives or endorsement of the Roman Catholic church system."

Some critics have said the document endorses a salvation by works, attained through the observance of Catholic sacraments. The signers, however, said, they understood the document's statement that Christians are "justified by grace through faith because of Christ" to mean "substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness of Christ, leading to full assurance of eternal salvation."

Other critics focused on language in the document calling Protestant and Catholic understandings different expressions of the same faith. The evangelicals' clarification reads: "While we view all who profess to be Christian -- Protestant and Catholic and Orthodox -- with charity and hope, our confidence that anyone is truly a brother or sister in Christ depends not only on the content of his or her confession but on our perceiving signs of regeneration in his or her life."

They acknowledged that they reject "proselytizing," defined in the evangelical/Catholic document as "sheep-stealing for denominational aggrandizement," but insisted that "evangelism and church planting are always legitimate, whatever forms of church life are present already."

Further theological discussions between evangelicals and Catholics, which were promised in the document, "should begin as soon as possible," they said.

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-- By Bob Allen

New book offers help for moral decision-making

By Mark Wingfield

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Two Christians walk down the street after dinner together when they are confronted by a man begging for money.

"Would you give me 50 cents?" asks the man, who carries a genuine look of poverty about him.

One of the Christians digs into his pocket and hands over two quarters. The other flatly declines the beggar's request.

Both are Christians, yet they made different decisions when confronted with a moral dilemma. Which person made the right decision?

This real-life situation is the beginning point for a new study book on moral decision-making written by Ray Higgins, former professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Becoming a Christian doesn't guarantee a person always will make good decisions in life. And there's no guarantee every Christian will make the same decision when confronted with similar situations, Higgins said in introducing his book Feb. 28 in Knoxville, Tenn.

Higgins spoke about his book, "Turn Right: A Christian's Guide for Making Better Decisions," during a conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics. The Nashville-based ethics agency published the book.

Churches ought to do more to teach guidelines for moral decision-making, said Higgins, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark. "We're trained for most things in life except marriage, parenting and moral decision-making."

The study book is designed for use in Sunday school classes, retreats, youth groups or special-interest seminars in churches. The content could be covered in four or five sessions, Higgins said.

In the book, Higgins addresses obstacles to decision-making, such as an unwillingness to ask for help or the fear of making an imperfect decision. He also discusses how to use the Bible in decision-making, how to ask the right questions to make better decisions and how to build a framework for moral decision-making.

The guide does not take a position on controversial moral issues such as abortion but does address those issues as examples of how decision-making guidelines could be applied.

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Churches urged to minister via divorce-recovery workshops

By Lonnie Wilkey

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Baptists have "crossed the barrier" about divorce, said Christian counselor James Hightower.

"We now see the divorced as people who can minister and who need ministry," said Hightower, minister of pastoral counseling and acting pastor at First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala.

Hightower led a conference on how churches can start divorce-recovery groups during a "Family Works" conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics Feb. 27-28 at First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tenn.

While acknowledging that many models for divorce recovery are available, Hightower described the program used at his Alabama church.

Hightower holds about three divorce-recovery workshops each year. They began as four-week sessions, but have increased to eight weeks. Each workshop is limited to 10 participants.

There is no problem in filling the workshops even though they are not advertised outside the church, Hightower said. Members and former participants refer friends and colleagues, he noted.

Divorce-recovery programs work best if led by two people, one male and one female, Hightower said, and credibility is highest if one of those leaders has experienced a divorce.

Before the group meets, Hightower personally interviews every participant. This helps him judge whether the person is ready for the group or would be better off getting individual counseling first.

Hightower said that in the first session, which is basically a get-acquainted time, he gives "permission" for people to say what they're really feeling. He also uses that time to stress punctuality and encourage attendance at all sessions.

As a resource, Hightower uses the book "Rebuilding When Your Relationship Ends" by Bruce Fisher. The book is published by Impact Publishers in California and is based on 19 steps or "building blocks," Hightower said. Among the building blocks which form the process of adjusting to the loss of a love are guilt/rejection, friendship, loneliness, adaptation, fear, denial, grief, anger, letting go, and finally freedom.

Basically, however, the group sessions revolve around the participants telling their stories, Hightower said. "I don't try to structure around topics. My goal is to let everyone in the room say something during the hour and 15 minutes we are there."

As the eight-week period draws to a close, Hightower said many participants say they would like to continue. Many people in the groups form friendships that continue after the sessions are over. Graduates of the program who feel they need additional help are referred to a Huntsville church of another denomination that has an ongoing divorce-recovery group.

Setting up the divorce-recovery groups has been helpful to First Baptist, Hightower said, noting he has been surprised by the results.

"It has been an amazingly effective way for people to come into the church. Our strongest singles leaders are people who were introduced to the church through divorce-recovery groups. I did not set it up that way," he said.

Hightower encouraged churches to consider beginning divorce-recovery groups, but issued a word of warning.

"It is hard work and it takes a lot out of you." The results, though, have been worth it, he affirmed.

END