Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

April 4, 1995

In this issue:

Carver students, alumni organize to save school

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Students from the Carver School of Church Social Work in Louisville, Ky., are continuing their protest outside the office of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler, and alumni of the Carver School are gearing up to fight for their alma mater.

Meanwhile, Carver School student representatives traveled to Birmingham, Ala., to meet with officials of Woman's Missionary Union, which birthed the Carver School in 1907.

Carver School students have held a sit-in outside Mohler's office since March 20, the day Mohler fired Diana Garland as dean of the school.

Earlier that day, Garland had told the school's 117 students she believed the school's future was "in serious jeopardy" due to Mohler's restrictions on faculty hiring and likely problems with accreditation.

On the first day of the sit-in, Mohler delivered pizza to the student protesters. But relations between the president and students reportedly weren't as friendly as the protests dragged on and students expanded their campaign to save the Carver School from closing.

Mohler requested a meeting with Carver School students April 3, but only five students attended because the meeting was called with only a few hours' notice. An open forum with the president has been scheduled for Wednesday, April 5.

The Organization of Student Social Workers has been carrying out an organized campaign to get their message out to seminary alumni, donors and trustees.

As part of this campaign, two Carver School students went to Birmingham March 27 and met with WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien and her associate, June Whitlow.

Rumors had circulated around Louisville that WMU still held title to the Carver Building on Southern Seminary's campus and might take it back if the Carver School closes. The Carver School of Church Social Work is an outgrowth of the Women's Training School started by WMU in 1907. Although the Carver Building now houses other seminary programs, it was originally built to house the Women's Training School.

Teresa Dickens, a WMU spokeswoman, said WMU attorneys had researched that claim and reported WMU maintains no real ownership of the building or the Carver School. "In 1957, WMU actually turned the school over to the Southern Baptist Convention," she said.

However, WMU did endow a professorship in the Carver School, and "we're still investigating whether we have any ties to it legally," Dickens said. "That issue has not been determined."

Dickens said WMU did not initiate the investigation but has attempted to respond to students who "came to us wanting us to help them."

Meanwhile, alumni of the Carver School held a series of organizational meetings last week and chartered a new organization temporarily called the Carver School Alumni Association.

Officers elected for the alumni association include Steve Williams, president; Larry Owens, vice president; Cindy Willis, treasurer; Breena Stevens, secretary; Tina Ward Pugh, public relations coordinator; and Cindy Ralston, membership coordinator. The current president of the Organization of Student Social Workers also will serve as a liaison to the alumni association.

In other developments related to the Carver School crisis in the last week:

-- David Dockery, seminary vice president for academic administration, met with Carver School students to hear their concerns.

-- The Organization of Student Social Workers began arranging peer support groups for all interested seminary students to help process grief and confusion about the turmoil on campus.

-30-

Uncertain future troubles Carver School's students

By Melanie Childers

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Michael and Wendy Bland lived with her parents for four months in order to save enough money to move to Louisville, Ky., and enroll in the Carver School of Church Social Work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Now they believe their dreams may die if the Carver School closes due to an impasse over faculty hiring and the firing of the school's dean.

The Blands are among 117 students facing the possibility that the Carver School -- the only seminary-based school of social work in the world -- may lose its accreditation and be forced to close.

Events of recent weeks, including the seminary president's firing of the school's dean, problems with hiring faculty members and almost certain accreditation problems, have jeopardized the future of the school.

Students -- many of whom have been participating in peaceful demonstrations on campus to voice their concern -- have found their own educational and career plans suddenly shrouded in uncertainty.

"I feel like it really throws a wrench in our plans," Michael Bland said. "Plans for the mission field, for children, for our whole life in general. I understand things can come up unexpectedly, like illnesses. But when you come here with the expectancy for education, you shouldn't have to wonder if the school of social work will be here.

"It feels like our place on campus and our hopes for ministry later are at a standstill," he said.

A trustee committee will be appointed in April to study the future of the Carver School. But their recommendation isn't scheduled to be heard until next October, well into the next academic year.

Carver students have said that's too long for them to remain in limbo.

"We're scared of what tomorrow's going to bring," said Jody Morrow, a social work student whose husband is enrolled in the seminary's master of divinity program. "Financially, we're very concerned. ... We've sacrificed a lot to get here.

In order to stay in school, Morrow said, she works three jobs in addition to her field placement service and her husband maintains a 40-hour-per-week job at Charter Hospital along with his own studies.

"And now we have a 16-month-old son," she added. "We can't just pack up and move somewhere else."

Because of the Carver School's unique position as the only one of its kind to combine theological training with an accredited social work degree, its closing would pose a difficult dilemma for students, she said.

"I came with the full intention of getting the church social work degree," Morrow said. "It was through the church that I saw the need for social work."

Changing to another degree program at Southern, or transferring to another seminary, is not an option for Morrow either, she said.

No other seminary offers an accredited MSW degree, without which she could not be hired by most Baptist children's homes, hospitals or weekday ministry centers, she said. "All of these require an accredited social work degree in order to get federal and state funding that helps supplement the lack of tithing by the churches," she explained. "They don't have the freedom to hire someone with a (master of divinity in) Christian social ministries degree."

Some seminary administrators have suggested the master of divinity in Christian social ministries as an alternative to the social work degree.

Geri Morgan, who enrolled in the Carver School in 1993, said she understands social work to be her Christian calling.

"I came here to help bridge the gap between the church and ministry to persons with AIDS. This was the degree that would put me in line to do that," she explained. "It's the only church social work program in the world. And I felt strongly the church needed to make more efforts in dealing with this problem."

If the Carver School should close, Bland said, "it will be a huge loss for Christian ministry as a whole -- not just Southern Baptists. If it's closed, people will see that as a failure.

"Even if it stays open, we will be concerned about what kind of school will be here," he continued. "And will it be a place where I want to continue my education?"

Morgan agreed changes at the school have caused her to rethink her decision to study at Southern Seminary.

"If they should close the Carver school, I would take that as a personal stab against women and minorities," she said. "I could not have a clear conscience and stay here and support what's going on -- financially or with my presence."

The Blands take personally President Mohler's statement that the philosophy of social work is "not congruent at all points" with the overall mission of the seminary.

"Being a social worker is a part of who we are," he said, adding that if social work doesn't fit with the seminary's mission, it's clear he no longer will be accepted there.

"I'm feeling anger that somebody else can tell me I'm not congruent with the Bible," said Ben Sandford, also a social work student. "Everything I've been taught (at Southern) is congruent with the Bible."

Ruth Souza sacrificed family relations and security to come to the Carver School from her home in Brazil. "My family is reduced to nobody. My home is reduced to a dorm room. And I gave up my job and career possibilities," she explained.

Souza came to the Carver School for the uniqueness of its program, but now she fears she won't be able to complete the degree she started.

"I could go to a secular school, but I came here for the theological education also. ... I want to learn social work from a Christian perspective," she said. "If I had wanted a secular perspective, I could have stayed in Brazil."

Souza recognizes the Carver School crisis was prompted by issues that do not concern Brazilians. But it could impact her ability to return to minister with Brazilians, she said.

"In Brazil, life is much more practical," she said. "People spend their time providing food and clothing for their families. They never have time for asking these kinds of questions like women in ministry."

Women in ministry is an issue in the crisis because Mohler has instituted a rigid litmus test on women's role in the church to which all prospective faculty members must adhere.

"I could be saying 'This is an American problem, not my problem, and when you solve your little fight here, then I'll solve mine.' But since I'm here and I believe God called me here, I'm willing to go through this and find a way that it can help me," she said.

Still, the Brazilian acknowledged the situation has caused her great sadness. "It's a deception that you come here with a dream and a goal, and you might not be able to achieve that goal because of things out of your control. You get frustrated."

-30-

First Baptist church formed in Albania

TIRANA, Albania (ABP) -- Forty-nine Christians in Albania have formed the first Baptist church of the modern era in that former atheistic country.

The Baptist Church of Tirana was founded Feb. 16, three years after the first Baptist workers arrived in the European country.

Baptist work in Albania began in 1992 after the fall of the communist government that had outlawed religion. Although in biblical times Albania was the site of some missionary activity by the Apostle Paul, its people are predominantly Muslim.

A mountainous country bordered by Greece and the former Yugoslavia, Albania is the size of Maryland with a population of almost 4 million. Annual per capita income is $820 in U.S. currency.

The first Baptist workers, medical doctors Chris and Mairi Burnett, were sent by the Baptist Missionary Society of England in 1992. They have since been joined by missionaries representing Italian Baptists, Canadian Baptists, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The work is coordinated by the European Baptist Federation. EBF funds purchased the property for the Baptist Center in downtown Tirana, which houses the congregation. The church has adopted the EBF's "Statement of Baptist Identity," which was presented to the EBF general secretary, Karl Heinz Walter, in a ceremony March 26.

The congregation offers Tirana's 260,000 people worship services, Bible studies, training and a benevolent ministry. The church has hired a pastor, Saverio Guarna of Italy, and opened a mission congregation in nearby Laprake.

"Very soon we will begin to offer training for about 20 lay preachers," Guarna told the European Baptist Press Service.

-30-

Modern immigration debate intersects missionary ideals

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

(ABP) -- Jesus commanded his disciples to "go and teach all nations," but what if the nations come to you instead?

More than 8 million immigrants from around the world have appeared on America's doorstep in the last decade. And, under current immigration laws, 1.1 million will continue to come knocking at the nation's door each year.

A growing chorus of Americans wants to shut that door, or at least be more selective about who walks through it. But Southern Baptist missiologists argue that Jesus' Great Commission requires Christians to roll out the welcome mat for immigrants.

Southern Baptists' entire theology of missions is on the line, says Justice Anderson, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"We have been hypocritical," Anderson said "We have been anxious to send missionaries to other countries, but not as willing to minister to the immigrants among us."

It is easy for Christians and churches to be caught up in a "web of anger" against immigrants that is sweeping the country, added Bill O'Brien, director of the Global Center at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. That is because the church is "a part of and not separate and isolated from our culture," he explained.

A resulting danger is that Baptists will simply reflect their culture and not challenge stereotypes that hinder ministry efforts, said Bill Fulkerson, assistant director of language church extension with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

For example, Fulkerson recounted a conversation he had with a woman after he spoke on immigration in her church. She told him what he had said was "well and good but I don't want 'them' to take my husband's job."

When Fulkerson asked her if her husband's job was in jeopardy, she said it wasn't. She said she meant American jobs were in jeopardy. When he asked what American jobs were threatened, she couldn't name any.

"She was repeating what she had heard," without checking the facts, he said.

Southern Baptists are frightened not only by economic issues of immigration, but also by the changing face of America's religious community, Fulkerson said. Increasing religious pluralism is especially threatening to Baptists who don't know much about their own faith, he said.

Anderson concurred: "We're afraid of upsetting the balance-of-religions basket."

If Southern Baptists are to be true to the call of the Great Commission, they must expand their missions vision to include people who are "geographically close but culturally distant," O'Brien said. "In the United States, Christianity is being put to the test."

Whether Southern Baptists approve of immigrants coming to America or not, they must live out the gospel in such a way as to attract immigrants to Christ, Fulkerson agreed.

"Many immigrants come with many misconceptions about America and about Christians. They have heard that America is a 'Christian' nation, yet when they arrive they see the breakdown in morals and in family life," he said. They wonder why they should align themselves with what appears to be a "failed religion."

Wherever Southern Baptists stand on immigration policy, churches should take initiative to minister to immigrants, the three scholars suggest, by:

-- Getting the facts. "Immigration issues are laden with emotion," O'Brien said. "Do your homework. Dispel myths. Defuse deception. Correct false information."

-- Determining to be "light and not heat," O'Brien said. Even if an individual or a church is involved only distantly in the immigration issue, they can have an influence on governmental and denominational immigration policies.

-- Creating links to the larger world. With more transnational business and educational opportunities and with tourism as the world's No. 1 business, "there will be an endless flow of immigrants" in the future, O'Brien said. "The issue is not going to go away."

-- Getting to know immigrants personally. "Suspicion creates invisible barriers," O'Brien said. "Personal contacts allay fears," Anderson added.

-- Treating immigrant employees fairly. Christian employers must ask themselves if they are exploiting immigrants, O'Brien said.

-- Analyzing existing church programs and ministries to determine if there are places available for immigrants to plug in, if a church has immigrants in its community, O'Brien said.

-30-

Baptists' immigration debate dates back to Annie Armstrong

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

(ABP) -- Immigration: mission or menace?

When this question arose during the first great epoch of immigration at the turn of the century, Baptists participated fully in the dialogue, according to Baptist historian Leon McBeth.

Between 1880 and 1900 about 20 million immigrants arrived in the United States. Because most points of entry were in the northeast, Northern Baptists led the way in ministry, McBeth wrote in his 1987 history, "The Baptist Heritage."

Since most of the immigrants came from non-evangelical backgrounds, they were resistant to conversion and assimilation into prevailing American life.

Some Baptists were among those who called for a limit to immigration and who blamed immigrants for the social unrest and violent labor disputes of the late 19th century. Epithets such as "European refuse," "Sabbath-breakers," "beer-guzzling" people, "infidels, Catholics, Formalists and all other classes of gospel-haters" labeled the newcomers.

The Home Mission Society of the Northern Baptist Convention warned in 1900 that unless converted and assimilated, the new immigrants would radically change the soul of America.

But, no matter what Baptists thought of immigration policies, they made valiant efforts to convert the newcomers, McBeth said.

Baptists assisted in funding ethnic pastors and starting ethnic churches. They provided literature in various languages, but at times debated whether such ministries should be conducted in English or the immigrant tongues. They provided training for ethnic pastors, mostly by forming "language departments" in existing seminaries.

At their peak, Northern Baptists sponsored work in at least 25 languages. By 1939 more than 1,000 churches related to the NBC as an outgrowth of ministry to immigrants.

It was a woman who first helped Southern Baptists to institutionalize ministry to immigrants, according to Woman's Missionary Union historian Catherine Allen. And it was a border-state city that became her laboratory.

The woman was Annie Armstrong. The city was Baltimore.

"Men and means were not forthcoming fast enough for the great work of foreign missions, so God turned the stream this way and sent great masses of the unevangelized to come in contact with Christian civilizations," Armstrong wrote in 1898.

"Is not God sending this message to us -- 'Here are these people; I have taken them from the crowded countries where they were living, and sent them to you that you may mass your forces and lend a hand to them,' " she continued.

Armstrong mobilized the women of Baltimore to minister through what the women called "Christian Americanization" to the German, Irish, Russian and black immigrants flooding into the port.

Soon classes and clubs for the poor, the black and the foreign-born sprang up all over the city.

The Southern Baptist Convention felt the influence of those Baltimore women, since many of them also sat on the national WMU executive committee. They carried their concerns with them to that assignment as they organized subcommittees on work with Chinese, German, blacks, Italians and children, according to Armstrong's biographer, Bobbie Sorrill Patterson.

And as a direct result of Armstrong's efforts, the Home Mission Board appointed Marie Buhlmaier as a home missionary to work with German immigrants -- many of whom were Jewish -- in Baltimore in 1893.

"As far as I have been able to ascertain, she was the first missionary appointed by Southern Baptists to work with immigrants," Allen said.

The work grew to the point that Armstrong successfully lobbied the board a second time to appoint additional missionaries to work among immigrants.

By 1910, leaflets were available from WMU in German, Italian and Spanish.

By 1916, when the immigrant population had grown to 4 million in SBC territory, ministry had begun with Germans in Baltimore, Mexicans in Texas, Cubans in Florida and Chinese in Georgia.

But it was not without opposition. Because some Southern Baptists feared the social gospel espoused by Walter Rauschenbusch, the 1900 home mission report at the SBC annual meeting noted that "personal service of this character is not popular, but we trust the time is coming, when for Jesus' sake, many other Baptist women besides these now laboring in Baltimore and other sections will be willing to overcome all prejudice and minister to the lowliest in our midst."

-30-

SBC would be in decline if not for ethnic growth

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Without the increase in ethnic congregations over the last decade and a half, the Southern Baptist Convention would be a declining denomination.

"The SBC would show a negative 3 percent growth rate in number of congregations," said Bill Fulkerson, assistant director of language church extension at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

By the mid-1980s, the SBC's ethnic-minority membership was growing at the fastest rate of any American denomination, according to a United Methodist survey. Southern Baptists led U.S. denominations in establishing new ethnic-minority congregations during the 1975-1984 period, the survey also showed.

The trend has continued so that today Southern Baptists across the nation worship in 101 languages and dialects in more than 8,000 non-Anglo language and cultural churches with more than 500,000 members.

Hispanic congregations comprise the single largest SBC language-culture group with 3,487 churches and

missions with more than 236,000 members.

Asian, Caribbean, European and Middle Eastern congregations are among Southern Baptists' fastest-growing.

The second-largest Southern Baptist Sunday school in California is at First Chinese Baptist Church in Los Angeles. Two of the three largest Southern Baptist churches in New England are Haitian. New York's largest Southern Baptist church is the French Speaking Baptist (Haitian) Church in Brooklyn.

More than 40 ethnic Baptist fellowships meet during the SBC annual meeting. And in 1994, an African American and an Asian American were elected SBC vice presidents.

-30-

-- By Joyce Martin

Immigrants caught in Americans' 'web of anger'

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

(ABP) -- Immigration has been identified as the most important trend shaping the future of the United States, just at a time many Americans believe immigrants are wearing out their welcome.

More than 8.7 million people from all over the world poured into the United States during the 1980s -- more than since the great immigration decade of 1900-1910.

But 61 percent of Americans see that level of immigration as bad for the country, according to a 1993 New York Times/CBS News poll. In 1986, when the same question was asked, 46 percent favored a decrease in immigration. In 1965, only 33 percent favored a decrease.

Historically, every wave of immigration has presented challenges and has had its backlash. However, several new factors have been added this time around, according to three Southern Baptists who are knowledgeable on immigration issues.

"We are in a general retrenchment period in our country," said Justice Anderson, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"There is a revival of isolationism. Many people just don't want to deal with the complex problems of living in the world arena," Anderson said.

"We seem to be sending a strong message that democracy and security and freedom are only for us and not for the rest of the world," added Bill Fulkerson, director of the Home Mission Board's refugee resettlement office.

Bill O'Brien, director of the Global Center at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., said he senses "a lot of frustration about the social and economic problems in the United States."

Immigrants are getting caught in a "web of anger" as the American-born increasingly blame foreigners for any problem which seems too overwhelming to solve, O'Brien said. A whole body of myths and false information has developed as immigrants have become "easy targets to beat up on," he said.

Further, this wave of immigrants has been primarily Asian and Hispanic and not European, Fulkerson said. "They are more easily singled out."

In addition, Fulkerson said, four events of the last few years have fueled the fire:

-- The bombing of the World Trade Center and the arrest of Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman in New York City in 1993. "People tend to link immigrants, especially Arabs, with terrorism," he said.

-- The grounding of the Golden Venture, an alien-smuggling ship filled with nearly 300 Chinese immigrants, in June 1993.

-- The large number of Cuban and Haitian boat people who have come to Florida in recent years.

-- The continuing flow of Hispanics across the border from Mexico.

"It has become easy to lump all immigrants -- legal and undocumented -- in one group. It is easy to associate anyone who looks non-Anglo as an illegal," Fulkerson said.

Like many national trends, this anti-immigration backlash began and has been most intense in California. Last November, Californians passed Proposition 187, which would prohibit undocumented immigrants from receiving education, social services and non-emergency medical care, and would require public officials to report anyone they suspect of being illegal.

Although Proposition 187 is now tied up in the courts, it has sparked a national debate. Seven states currently are considering similar measures, and leaders in Congress are considering a plan that would deny welfare benefits to most legal immigrants as well.

"Interestingly, several of the seven states historically have been receptive to immigrants," Fulkerson said.

At the core of the anti-immigration mood is a re-emerging racism, Fulkerson, Anderson and O'Brien said.

"As a nation we haven't dealt with black-white racist attitudes, so our prejudices are emerging in new forms," Fulkerson said.

He fears the anti-immigration spirit is "starting out the same way as the anti-Jewish movement began in Nazi Germany. "Blame for economic conditions, racial pride with certain groups being considered 'less than desirable, less than American' and the move to stop all immigration" have a familiar ring, he said.

Today, more than 200 years after the first immigrants came to her shores, America faces the crisis of a "still-emerging nationhood with a puzzle of cultural diversities," Oscar Romo said in the book "American Mosaic: Ethnic Church Planting in America."

The migration which began with the Conquistadors was followed by the Pilgrims, then by Latin Americans, and now by those from the Pacific Rim nations, said Romo, who recently retired after leading Southern Baptists' language missions work for 30 years.

"It would be well for us, as we continue to move through the 1990s, to remember once again that the United States is a nation of immigrants, a tapestry of cultures and traditions and languages," Romo said. "Americans must respect this heritage and build on it."

-30-

END