

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Foreign Mission Board pulls out of joint Albanian partnership**

TIRANA, Albania (ABP) -- After three years of close cooperation among Baptist mission groups in Albania, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has withdrawn from a joint mission committee and will operate independently in the former communist country.

Dan Panter, FMB associate area director for East Europe, announced the change during the March 23-26 meeting of the Albania Committee, a joint planning group sponsored by the European Baptist Federation. Panter told the committee the decision was part of an administrative restructuring of the FMB's work.

But Roger Briggs, the Foreign Mission Board's associate area director for Europe, told Associated Baptist Press the FMB wants to be "more aggressive in evangelism" than he felt other EBF team members want to be. For instance, FMB missionaries want to be involved in "direct witnessing" and hold invitations following worship services. The EBF is not eager to do that, he said.

However, Briggs downplayed any "rift in relationship" with the EBF team. "We're still friends," he said. He added the four Baptist churches in Albania would not be forced to choose between competing groups for ministry assistance. "We're all together on that," he said.

The Albania Committee is composed of representatives of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Baptist Missionary Society of England, Canadian Baptist Ministries, Italian Baptist Union and Swedish Baptist Missionary Society. All five groups have mission personnel working in the once-atheistic country.

The committee expressed gratitude for the help of the Virginia-based FMB and appreciation for FMB missionaries Gale and Leslie Hartley, who remain in the country.

## Group says laws not fuzzy on religion in schools

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has declared public schools religion-free zones in such a murky manner that officials cannot possibly discern what is and is not legally permissible. Right?

Not according to 35 religious and civil-liberties groups that are immersed in constitutional law on a daily basis. The groups released a consensus statement April 13 on what the law says about religion in public schools -- even though they do not all agree with its application.

The statement is designed "as an aid to parents, educators and students" who may not understand this largely unknown area of constitutional law, they said. Signers include the National Association of Evangelicals, Christian Legal Society and Baptist Joint Committee.

The statement grew out of the 68-member Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion that backed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. It addresses 18 areas of student activity from prayer and distribution of literature to religious holidays.

Public school prayer -- among the most contentious issues captivating American lawmakers -- was the centerpiece of the statement.

Students have the right to pray individually or in groups or to discuss their religious views if they are not disruptive, the statement says. Students enjoy the right to read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals and discuss religion with willing listeners subject to the same rules of order as apply to other speech, it continues.

School officials may not allow organized prayer at graduation ceremonies, but churches and students may organize a baccalaureate ceremony, the groups note. The courts have conflicted on the issue of student-initiated prayer at graduation.

"Until the issue is authoritatively resolved, schools should ask their lawyers what rules apply in their area," the document advises.

Teachers and school officials may not encourage or solicit religious or anti-religious activity, but they may teach about religion.

Students may express religious beliefs in homework assignments, but some problems arise with oral presentations because the classroom is not a voluntary environment.

Religious or anti-religious remarks made in ordinary class discussion should not be discouraged. For example, if in a sex education class a student says God forbids abortion, a teacher should not squelch that remark. But if a student chooses to conduct a religious service for an oral presentation, the school should not allow itself to be used as a church.

Teachers also may rule out of order remarks that are not relevant to the class discussion. For example, a student cannot interject belief in creationism during a discussion of Hamlet's sanity.

Students also may distribute religious materials subject to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions imposed on distribution of all non-school literature.

The statement also says:

- Participation in rallies, such as "See you at the pole" events, is permissible.
- Religious persuasion, not harassment, is constitutionally protected.
- Student religious clubs have the same rights as other non-curricular groups to meet before and after school.
- Public schools may teach about religious holidays but may not observe them as religious events.
- Schools have discretion to excuse students from lessons that are objectionable to their religious beliefs.

-- Schools may teach civic virtues, such as honesty, citizenship, courage, respectfulness, but may not advance them as religious tenets.

-- Religious messages on T-shirts may not be singled out for suppression.

-- Schools may dismiss students to off-premises religious instruction.

The groups said the statement will be distributed widely throughout their various networks.

U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley lauded the joint statement as "one more sign that groups which have historically held different perspectives on issues involving religion and public education are working hard to bring a new spirit and a tone of goodwill to this often highly charged dialogue."

"Americans need to know that their public schools are open to constitutionally protected religious expression," Riley added.

Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, which helped draft the document, said that, despite pervasive misconceptions, God has not been expelled from the nation's classrooms and student prayer is not illegal. In fact, he said, "God has a perfect attendance record."

"Religion has not been taken out of the public schools, nor could it ever be," said Walker, an ordained minister and member of the Supreme Court bar. "It is only state-sponsored religious speech and devotional exercises that have been removed."

Most of the groups signing the document oppose a constitutional prayer amendment. But others like the National Association of Evangelicals and the Christian Legal Society that support such a measure also signed.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which did not sign the document, insists a constitutional amendment is needed to guarantee religious liberty in schools and elsewhere.

Michael Whitehead, general counsel for the Christian Life Commission told Baptist Press April 12 there is "virtual unanimity" among conservative religious-liberty groups that a constitutional amendment is needed. "We remain committed that a constitutional amendment is the surest way to achieve the objective of expansive protection for prayer and religious speech by students and others in public places," Whitehead said.

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-- By Pam Parry

## **Mohler chides faculty for supporting Garland**

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The faculty of the Carver School of Church Social Work has been reprimanded by President Al Mohler for expressing opposition to his firing of Carver School Dean Diana Garland.

Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote a letter to the social-work faculty April 4 in response to a resolution they passed March 23.

The Carver faculty's resolution stated support for Garland's work as dean and for the public statements she made March 20 which prompted her firing. Garland was fired as dean after she told social-work students the Carver School's future is in "serious jeopardy" due to Mohler's restrictions on faculty hiring.

"Your resolution brings great grief to me as president of this institution, for by it you have set yourselves against this administration, the board of trustees and the legitimate concern of the Southern Baptist Convention and its churches," Mohler wrote.

The letter is similar in tone and content to a longer one Mohler distributed to seminary students April 5. In that letter, he laid the blame for the seminary's current crisis at the feet of Garland and Carver School students and said students should have no influence over how the seminary is run.

The "outrage" expressed in the faculty resolution should be directed "at yourselves," Mohler wrote the faculty, "for you have sought to make this a public issue and to force the question of the Carver School's future upon this institution and the denomination."

"You cannot serve the cause of the Carver School by attempting to bring public pressure against the administration and the board of trustees," he continued. "You have served the cause of your school badly by your resolution, and I am deeply disappointed to have received this document by your action. More than this, I am grieved by the spirit and attitude of your resolution."

A particular spark in the Carver School crisis was Mohler's rejection of a faculty candidate approved by Carver School faculty and students and other seminary administrators. Mohler rejected David Sherwood's nomination because the professor, though conservative theologically, indicated it might be possible for God to call a woman to be a pastor.

In addition to asking adherence to the seminary's doctrinal statement, Mohler has begun requiring prospective faculty members to line up with his views on four other areas: women in ministry, abortion, homosexuality and the exclusive nature of the Christian gospel.

The Carver faculty's resolution said that by instituting such "arbitrarily determined absolutes" outside the seminary's governing documents, Mohler had "thwarted" the dean's ability to lead the school.

In his reply, Mohler defended his hiring standards as "hardly arbitrary." As he has stated before, Mohler said his own views on women in ministry "represent the legitimate and unapologetic concerns of Southern Baptists."

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## **Richmond seminary voices 'sadness' over firing at Southern**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Students, faculty and staff at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond sent an open letter of support to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the wake of the firing of Dr. Diana Garland from her post as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work at the Louisville, Ky., seminary.

"We ... wish to express our sadness at the firing ... and our regret over the resulting turmoil at your seminary," the letter states. "Along with you, we grow weary of political agendas which hinder the work of theological education, which is to equip God-called men and women for ministry."

Garland was fired by Southern President Albert Mohler for telling students that hiring restrictions imposed by Mohler have placed the future of the one-of-a-kind social-work school "in serious jeopardy." Those restrictions -- which require all professors to oppose female pastors, as well as abortion, homosexuality and universalism -- make it impossible to hire qualified faculty, Garland said.

Garland's firing has sparked protests from Southern students and others. Joining the chorus April 12 were 83 students, faculty and staff of the Richmond seminary, a small independent school founded by the Alliance of Baptists. Southern is the Southern Baptist Convention's oldest and second-largest seminary.

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-- ABP staff

## **SBC must go back 300 years to 'return to roots,' pastor says**

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Yes, Baptists need to return to their roots, but those roots go deeper than the 19th-century founders of the Southern Baptist Convention, a Kentucky pastor proclaimed.

To be true to their tradition, today's Baptists must return to the faith and practice of their early forebears -- English Separatists, Anabaptists and Mennonites -- who preceded the SBC by more than 200 years, said Jim Holladay, pastor of Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

Holladay gave the keynote address, "A Call for Baptist Renewal," at the Clarence Jordan Award banquet, sponsored by Long Run Baptist Association in Louisville.

The annual award honors the memory of Jordan, former superintendent of missions for the association, who later founded the interracial Koinonia Farm near Americus, Ga., and led in the civil-rights movement.

Holladay noted some Southern Baptists have called for the convention to return to its roots. However, he contended, those Baptists point specifically to a few individuals who helped start the convention in 1845 and who were influenced by John Calvin, a 16th-century Swiss theologian most closely affiliated with Presbyterian and Reformed denominations.

"Our roots are in the Radical Reformation in England and Europe," Holladay said, stressing Baptists aren't natural heirs of Calvin.

The first Baptist preachers, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, were English Separatists, who believed that even the reforms of the Puritans did not go far enough, he reported. When Smyth and Helwys immigrated to Holland to escape persecution in England, they encountered their theological kin, the Mennonites and Anabaptists, who contended the reforms of Calvin and Martin Luther also "did not go far enough in restoring authentic Christian faith and practice."

These forces shaped key elements of the Baptist faith and tradition, Holladay insisted. They include:

-- "An emphasis on the immediacy of our relationship with God -- that each person can experience God directly through the presence of God's Spirit," he said. "From this, Baptists developed a doctrine of soul competency."

-- "An emphasis on Christianity as a life of discipleship," he added. "The key question ... was not, 'How can I get saved?' but, 'How should a Christian live?' The key desire was to become a follower of Jesus Christ through active love of one's neighbor. This life would call for continual internal renewal and suffering."

-- "A distinct teaching on the corporate nature of Christian living," he said. "They recognized the mutual neediness and interdependence of all persons [and] union with Christ is found in community."

Summing up the early elements that shaped Baptist life, Holladay stressed, "Baptist life springs from the desire to move beyond mere external reform to internal/communal reform, which results in changed people [living] in changed communities, working to liberate persons from the bondage of sin and its effects."

Clarence Jordan, "a true Baptist life," lived out that desire for liberating people from the bondage of sin, Holladay said.

Jordan "was deeply devoted to and rooted in Scripture," he said. Jordan also believed that the call to be a Christian was a call to discipleship, that the church should reform both itself and society, and that Christians should be willing to suffer in order to reconcile people to the love of God.

The 1995 Clarence Jordan Award committee gave the award to Bill Kaufman of Louisville, a retired pastor, home missionary and director of the Kentucky Baptist Brotherhood department, because they believe he embodies those traits, said committee chairman Claude Witt.

"We believe he most strongly represents what Clarence Jordan was all about," said Witt, executive director of the Temperance League of Kentucky. "Clarence Jordan was a people person, and certainly Bill Kaufman was a people-person kind of pastor and denominational leader."

In making their unanimous selection, committee members particularly noted Kaufman's commitment to ministry in Louisville's inner city, Witt reported.

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## **Hispanic leaders commend reversal by Lewis, Land**

McALLEN, Texas (ABP) -- Texas Baptist Hispanic leaders have commended the two Southern Baptist Convention agency heads who recently removed their signatures from the controversial "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document.

On April 6, Larry Lewis, president of the SBC Home Mission Board, and Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, announced that they were withdrawing their signatures from the document.

They were among the 40 original signers of the accord, drafted one year ago to highlight social issues of common concern for Catholics and conservative Protestants.

On April 12, officers of the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas and presidents of the state's 30 Hispanic fellowships issued a statement commending Lewis and Land for withdrawing their names from the "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document.

The Hispanic leaders acknowledged that the original intent of the accord may have been "noble." However, the endorsement of it by Lewis and Land had created "an unnecessary disturbance" in Hispanic Baptists' work and witness, "as evidenced by their withdrawal from the document," according to the officers.

"Perhaps we could say that it is a lesson well learned," the statement said. "We applaud their courage to make necessary changes and we look forward to working together to reach Hispanics and others for Christ."

Roland Lopez of McAllen, president of the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas, said he received a letter from Lewis dated April 6 confirming the removal of his and Land's signatures from the Evangelical/Catholic document and asking Lopez to communicate that action to Hispanic Texas Baptists.

In mid-March, officers of the Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas and presidents of the regional Hispanic Texas Baptist fellowships had released a statement distancing themselves from the Evangelical/Catholic document and urging Lewis to rescind his endorsement of it. They claimed the document had been used by Roman Catholic priests to hinder the Baptist witness to Hispanics.

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-- By Ken Camp

## **RTVC trustees voice concerns about plan to merge, move agency**

By Toby Druin

IRVING, Texas (ABP) -- Trustees of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission flirted April 11 with asking that the commission remain a separate agency rather than be merged with the Home Mission Board and Brotherhood Commission as proposed in the denomination's restructure plan.

But when the rhetoric had cooled, the trustees settled for a watered-down resolution to be sent to the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, along with a list of "serious concerns" which they said need to be resolved before the matter is voted on in June.

Among the concerns, which they said have not been answered to date: Why the need for relocation and why Atlanta? How much will the move cost and how much will it save? How many trustees from each of the current three boards who will serve on the new board? Is there a proper understanding of the uniqueness of the ministry of the RTVC?

The restructure plan, called "Covenant for a New Century," will be considered by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta June 20-22. The plan would reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12. The RTVC would be one of the casualties, apparently losing its identity in a merger with the Home Mission Board and Brotherhood Commission into a new North American Mission Board. The RTVC, which was moved from Atlanta to Fort Worth, Texas, in 1955, would move back to Atlanta.

Also during their spring meeting near the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, RTVC trustees considered a motion asking for a study of the current effectiveness of the RTVC and the effect of the proposed merger, with the results to be given to SBC messengers. The motion was referred to the RTVC executive committee.

The RTVC trustees were to be briefed Monday evening, April 10, by a member of the Program and Structures Study Committee, which drafted the proposed restructuring, and by two members of the SBC Executive Committee, which approved it and will recommend it to the SBC annual meeting.

The two Executive Committee members, Richard Cagle of Alabama and James Merritt of Georgia, were at the briefing. But Rex Terry, a study committee member from Arkansas, was unable to attend because of bad weather. Because of Terry's absence, one trustee told the Baptist Standard, many of the trustees' questions went unanswered, and many of the answers given by the SBC Executive Committee members were qualified by "I think."

The SBC Executive Committee has asked all trustees of all agencies to endorse the restructure plan.

Instead, when the RTVC trustees convened in their plenary session Tuesday morning, April 11, Jerry Holbert, trustee from Springfield, Mo., presented a statement asking the trustees to go on record saying they could not at present accept the merger and calling on the SBC Executive Committee to amend the study to retain the RTVC as a "separate communications agency" of the SBC.

Holbert said the statement was intended to give the Executive Committee an indication of where the trustees stand on the merger question and was not meant to reflect on the position of RTVC President Jack Johnson, who in comments following announcement of the proposal had indicated general approval. Holbert said he felt the proposed statement reflected the position of those who had asked questions the previous evening.

But while none of the trustees reportedly voiced approval of the restructuring during the previous evening, several spoke against Holbert's proposal.

D.J. Benson of Mississippi said he felt Holbert's statement was premature and would best be considered after the SBC meeting in June. Ernie Helton of Ohio questioned if any downsizing would actually occur. And Garland Morrison of Indiana questioned if a proposed resolution already drafted by the RTVC executive committee didn't address the question in better form.

Morrison tried unsuccessfully to call the trustees into executive session. Richard McCartney, retired executive vice president of the RTVC now serving as consultant to Johnson, spoke against going into executive session, saying Baptist business is done best in the open and reporters should hear the opinions expressed rather than get them second-hand after the meeting.

Speaking in favor of Holbert's proposal were Toni Clevenger from Florida, Jack Marcom of the Washington, D.C., and Lori Davis of Texas. Clevenger at one point called for a vote on the proposal but agreed, at the urging chairman Dallas Bumgarner of Maryland, to allow more time for discussion.

Benson again questioned the statement, saying it sounded like an ultimatum. He was joined by Helen George of North Carolina, who said she felt it was premature and that the trustees' "mode is to be one of cooperation" and of "subjection." She also noted Johnson's statement of approval of the restructuring.

Clevenger, urging a vote on the Holbert statement, said to do less than make a statement would be to "devalue" the history of the commission.

Johnson, asked to express his opinion, said he felt the resolution already drafted by the RTVC executive committee "pretty much says what you want to say."

"My opinion is that you want to make a statement that you are seriously concerned," Johnson said. "I just have to say I would choose the document of the (RTVC) executive committee."

The commission followed with adoption of a substitute motion approving the statement of their executive committee largely unchanged. The substitute, offered by Wyman Copass of Kentucky, commends the study committee for its time and effort in drafting the restructuring proposal, affirms the trustees' responsibility to implement the actions of the SBC if the proposal is approved, but states that the RTVC trustees have "serious concerns, which are [to be] attached to the resolution and which need to be resolved prior to the Southern Baptist Convention's consideration of the Executive Committee's recommendations."

McCartney said the list of concerns will be synthesized from the Monday evening discussion and included with the resolution.

In other business, the trustees approved a series of resolutions, including one guaranteeing a \$950,000 loan by FamilyNet for the purchase of equipment to uplink and downlink satellite signals.

Copass was elected chairman of the commission, succeeding Bumgarner. Others elected were first vice chairman Omer Ray Finch Jr. of Oklahoma, second vice chairman Billy Thomas of Louisiana, and secretary Nancy Berlin of Colorado.