

Associated Baptist Press

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

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is four parts of a five-part series on the proposed plan to restructure the Southern Baptist Convention. Another ABP release is scheduled for Friday. It likely will include part five of the series, as well as a story on various efforts to bring a racial-reconciliation resolution to the June SBC meeting and other stories.

PART ONE:

Debate continues as vote on new SBC structure nears

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- What's the bottom line on the ambitious plan to restructure the Southern Baptist Convention?

Is it a long-overdue streamlining of the denomination or simply a mopping-up exercise for the conservative takeover?

A significant change in the way Baptists do their work or just window dressing?

Cheaper, more efficient decision-making or a centralization of power in the hands of a few?

A sharper focus on the primary tasks of missions and evangelism or dangerous tinkering with structures and relationships that have served Southern Baptists well?

Southern Baptists soon will be asked to make up their minds about the massive restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention. The restructure plan will be recommended to messengers at the SBC's annual meeting, scheduled June 20-22 in Atlanta.

The restructure plan, unveiled in February, is the most-discussed item of business going into this year's convention.

The plan was proposed after an 18-month study by a seven-member Program and Structure Study Committee. It was approved in February by the Executive Committee, which will bring it as a recommendation to the SBC Tuesday, June 20. If approved at two consecutive annual meetings, the new structure would be in place by 2000, according to a time line proposed by the study committee.

While parts of the plan have drawn criticism, no organized opposition has developed. And SBC officials say they will discourage any amendments to the plan. That suggests Southern Baptists likely will leave their Atlanta meeting -- which will mark the convention's 150th anniversary -- with a blueprint for a dramatically different future.

The biggest overhaul in the convention's century-and-a-half history, and the first major study since 1959, the restructuring proposal would reduce the number of SBC agencies and institutions from 19 to 12. Proponents say it will propel the denomination into the 21st century with a leaner organization and sharper focus on missions.

SBC president Jim Henry encouraged Southern Baptists to adopt the changes so the denomination might remain "on the cutting edge of innovation."

"If we don't, we will fossilize and become a denominational dinosaur in the sands of time," Henry said.

Mark Brister, chairman of the restructuring committee, drew an analogy from a Popular Science article on the sinking of the Titanic. The luxury liner sank after striking an iceberg in 1912 because metal plates designed to make it unsinkable shattered instead of bent, said Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La. Still, the ship could have survived hitting an iceberg straight-on, but a last-ditch attempt to swerve caused the hull to be ripped open, he continued.

"Inflexibility and dodging real issues can be costly," Brister said. "We are convinced that if we confront the issues head on and remain open and flexible, our greatest days as a denomination lie in the journey ahead."

The centerpiece of the plan is a first-ever, overarching mission statement for the convention's work, which puts the emphasis on ministry, not bureaucracy.

"The Southern Baptist Convention exists to facilitate, extend and enlarge the Great Commission ministries of Southern Baptist churches, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, upon the authority of Holy Scripture and by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit."

The proposal replaces old "program statements," which define the parameters of work for the various SBC agencies, with "ministry assignments" aimed at serving the needs of local churches. "The goal is the fulfillment of ministry -- not the accomplishment of mere programs," the report says.

Even critics acknowledge there is much to be commended in the effort to get Baptists beyond business-as-usual in an era of corporate downsizing and waning denominational loyalty. Hardly anyone, apparently, opposes it outright.

Several Baptist leaders, however, have said they have questions about the proposal.

Study committee members respond that some concerns -- such as a continuing role in the SBC for Woman's Missionary Union -- are unfounded. Other questions, they admit -- such as cost -- are unknown.

Among the most significant -- and most hotly debated -- elements of the plan are these:

Home missions

The new North American Mission Board would combine the resources of three existing entities -- the Home Mission Board, the Brotherhood Commission and the Radio and Television Commission.

Borrowing communications skills from the RTVC and mission education/enlistment from the Brotherhood, the North American Mission Board would focus on "reaching the United States and Canada for Christ, using every appropriate means of evangelization and church planting."

The new board would be located in Atlanta. Current Brotherhood Commission offices in Memphis, Tenn., and RTVC offices in Fort Worth, Texas, would be eliminated.

The new structure emphasizes starting churches in areas where Southern Baptists are new or numerically weak. "We are convinced that a greater percentage of total North American mission funds must be directed to pioneer mission areas and the major metropolitan areas of the United States and Canada," the committee wrote. Established Baptist state conventions will be encouraged to assume the costs for their own evangelism and missions programs.

Benefits of the new structure for mission in North America, the committee wrote, include "a clearer definition of the relationships" between the national board and state conventions and "a comprehensive front-line communications strategy" made possible by the consolidation. Growth of established churches is assigned the Baptist Sunday School Board, leaving the North American Mission Board free to "focus on church planting and the growth of new congregations.

Finally, the consolidation reduces the number of trustees by about one half, "saving expenses and streamlining governance," the report says.

Unanswered questions include the cost of moving the Radio and Television Commission's expensive studios to another state and how to shoehorn additional personnel into a new HMB headquarters building designed for the HMB's 350 employees. Brotherhood currently employs about 80 people and the RTVC has slightly over 100 employees. Architects of the proposal are counting on saving money by eliminating duplication of services.

A second question related to the building concerns its ability to accommodate the RTVC's broadcast studios. The HMB's new studio in Atlanta is only about half the size of the larger of two RTVC studios, although it probably could be expanded some, Lewis said.

If the RTVC were relocated from Fort Worth, "we would either have to build new studios ... or be greatly hampered," said Jack Johnson, president of the RTVC.

Funding of state missions

Another issue is how the proposal affects cooperative work between the North American board and Baptist state conventions. The plan calls for a concentration of missions dollars in states where Southern Baptists comprise less than 10 percent of the total population. The other, more established state conventions would be expected to assume funding for their own mission efforts, which have been funded jointly with the Home Mission Board.

The Missouri Baptist Convention, for example, stands to lose more than \$500,000 a year in Home Mission Board funding. "To stop that in midstream, unilaterally -- half a million dollars -- would be a disaster for our budget," noted Paul Brooks, president of the state convention.

Most of those established conventions contribute more money to SBC home missions than they receive in subsidies from the HMB. Many admit they would be tempted to reduce the stream of dollars that leave the state and steer the money to their own missions efforts. That in turn could hamper the new mission board's work in less established states.

But committee members point out a 1959 study recommended that state conventions work toward assuming more responsibility for their own missions work. And no one is suggesting the cuts take place overnight, they add.

Foreign missions

The Foreign Mission Board would be renamed "International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The proposed name change has received broad acceptance. FMB president Jerry Rankin and others have said the term "foreign" has a patronizing connotation when relating to other nationalities.

The committee also proposes taking responsibility for mission work in Canada away from the international board and transferring it to the Home Mission Board, which would then be renamed the "North American Mission Board."

Currently, the Home and Foreign Mission boards share responsibilities in Canada. The Atlanta-based HMB commits about \$800,000 a year for church planting and general evangelism in Canada, said Marty King, the board's public relations director.

The Richmond, Va.-based Foreign Mission Board, meanwhile, has 29 missionaries assigned to Canada. They do primarily student work and theological education. The FMB supports the Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta, with about \$100,000 a year. It also provides faculty members as appointees of the board.

Richard Blackaby, president of the Canadian seminary, said the restructure raises some uncertainty about the future. "When all of your faculty are (FMB) foreign missionaries and you receive a lot of help in various ways from that board, to think about (the FMB) having nothing to do with Canada whatsoever is unsettling for all my Foreign Mission Board faculty, to say the least."

Missionaries in Canada would be given a choice between staying in Canada as missionaries of the revamped Home Mission Board or accepting a new assignment from the International Mission Board somewhere else in the world, said Avery Willis, FMB executive vice president.

Woman's Missionary Union

Changes proposed for Woman's Missionary Union have been the most criticized of the restructure committee's plans.

The committee recommends the two mission boards "assume primary responsibility for promoting their own mission offerings," the Lottie Moon foreign mission offering and the Annie Armstrong offering for home missions.

Traditionally, Woman's Missionary Union, an SBC auxiliary, has claimed the lead role in promoting the annual offerings, which provide about half of the support the mission boards receive.

And the restructure gives the WMU's traditional missions-education assignment to the North American Mission Board and the task of providing women's ministries, also previously carried by WMU, to the Sunday School Board.

In a barrage of letters, grass-roots WMU members and supporters charged the snub of WMU demeans the 107-year-old auxiliary's contribution to missions.

But the restructuring committee gave ministry assignments only to denominational agencies governed by trustees elected by the convention. "Thus, the Woman's Missionary Union, governed by directors elected by state WMU organizations, is not assigned a ministry statement," the committee wrote.

In April, WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien asked the committee to amend the report by adding WMU's ministry statement. But the committee unanimously refused.

WMU leaders have not campaigned against the plan but encouraged members of the organization to study the proposal, ask questions and vote their consciences.

Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin said the committee's plan "implies no change whatsoever" in the way the FMB works with WMU, since the FMB intends to continue to seek help from WMU in promotion of its mission offering.

At first reading, O'Brien told the restructure committee in February the report appeared to "strip us of all of our work." While she later modified that view, she still insists the changes are major.

Church services

The SBC's new structure expands the work of the Sunday School Board, the convention's 104-year-old publishing arm and the world's largest religious publisher and church-services organization.

In addition to the various publishing, training and services currently offered, the Nashville, Tenn.,-based Sunday School Board would take on new assignments for ministries to men and women, stewardship education and capital fund-raising.

"We identify the need for a comprehensive strategy of ministry to men and women as one of the priority issues for the denomination's future," the report says. The new assignment would blend with current Sunday School Board responsibilities of family ministry and discipleship development, the committee added.

The study committee also recommends that the Sunday School Board assume responsibility for stewardship education, an emphasis promoted since 1960 by the Stewardship Commission.

Elimination of agencies

Five Nashville-based denominational agencies would be eliminated: the Stewardship Commission, Education Commission, Historical Commission, the Southern Baptist Foundation and the Commission on the American Baptist Theological Seminary.

The committee wrote: "The proliferation of separate commissions was characteristic of an era of organizational expansion, when separate entities were considered necessary for each distinctive purpose. We believe this impulse should not frame our current denominational strategy or structure."

The Stewardship Commission, established in 1960, offers programs aimed at encouraging individual Baptists to donate more money and other resources to churches and the denomination. The stewardship-education assignment would be transferred to the Sunday School Board. The Stewardship Commission also is assigned promotion of the Cooperative Program, the convention's unified budget. That responsibility would be reassigned to the Executive Committee, the standing committee that collects, records and disburses Cooperative Program funds.

Stewardship Commission trustees and staff voiced concern about eliminating the agency, citing its good track record in promoting denominational support with very limited budget. With Baptists giving less of their money to churches than in the past and churches keeping a greater share for their own ministries, giving less attention to stewardship would be disastrous, they warn.

Members of the restructure committee offer assurance that emphasis on stewardship and Cooperative Program promotion are not being downplayed but merely transferred.

The Southern Baptist Foundation, established in 1947, manages assets invested to benefit denominational causes. In the restructured SBC, responsibility for managing that \$167 million would be given to the Executive Committee.

Critics of the change wonder if the professional expertise needed for financial management can be provided by the Executive Committee. Also, the Executive Committee has been at the center of many of the theological-political controversies of the last decade, causing some to question whether that volatile reputation might cause donors to be concerned over the integrity of invested funds.

In March the Association of Baptist Foundations protested the change. The association's members -- 32 state Baptist foundations -- are the SBC Foundation's largest investors.

But members of the restructuring committee said the foundation's work could continue undisturbed, either as a subsidiary of the Executive Committee or under the supervision of an Executive Committee subcommittee.

Centralization

A tangential concern raised by some observers, as the Executive Committee takes on more responsibility, is centralization of power.

The Executive Committee "was never intended to become a super committee with hierarchal authority, but that is what it has become," Slayden Yarbrough, a professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, wrote in the university's newspaper.

"Using its power of allocation and appropriation of funds, it has placed great pressure upon agencies to conform to its political agenda. In so doing, it has violated the bylaws of the SBC constitution ... that "The Executive Committee shall not have authority to control or direct the several boards, agencies and institutions of the Convention. That is the responsibility of trustees elected by the convention and accountable directly to the convention," he wrote.

Executive Committee President Morris Chapman said he did not understand why anyone should be concerned about a perceived increase in the power of the Executive Committee. "Southern Baptists have always been careful not to empower any one entity with authority over other entities. The Executive Committee understands that it exists to serve our churches across the country and to be a facilitator among the SBC entities. Nothing in the report gives any added power or leverage," Chapman said.

Baptist history

Some Southern Baptists also are protesting the dissolution of the Historical Commission, which since 1951 has operated the denomination's historical library and archives and produced resources to educate churches about Baptist history and heritage.

Under the restructuring plan, management of the library and archives would be transferred to the six seminaries of the SBC and the production of educational materials reassigned to the Sunday School Board.

Leaders of the various state historical societies around the SBC lined up to protest the abolishment of the commission. State historical groups in Missouri and Virginia also opposed the proposal. And Historical Commission trustees stated in May they "are not in agreement" with the recommendation to dissolve the agency.

The Southern Baptist Historical Society, an auxiliary to the Historical Commission, said it will continue to function even if the commission is eliminated.

The historical groups worried mainly that Baptist heritage will not get adequate attention divided among six seminaries spread across the nation. Some critics added the change could allow a political agenda to enter into Southern Baptists' preservation of history. They fear revisionism of Baptist heritage will glorify the SBC's ideological shift during the 1980s.

The process

Other criticism of the restructuring proposal centers on the process the committee used. The study began after a motion at the Southern Baptist Convention was referred to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee appointed the committee, which consisted of both members and non-members of the committee.

While the structure committee interviewed agency heads in its hundreds of hours of study, they were not consulted in the final stages of planning. Most denominational executives learned of the fate of their agencies only hours before the report was made public.

Some denominational insiders believe the committee could have used more input.

"I was on the Home Mission Board six years before being elected chairman and I have learned more this year than in the other six combined," observed Bob Curtis. "There is no way the committee could embrace that level of understanding for all the SBC agencies."

More openness in the process and more input by trustees would have been helpful, Curtis said. "In a year-and-a-half's time (the time the committee has been working) that could have been done. It would have alleviated a lot of questions." he said.

But members of the committee have been reluctant to consider amending their report, turning down several requests to amend and delay the restructuring plan. Executive Committee chairman Fred Wolfe said there is no plan to amend the report before it is presented to messengers next month.

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-- With Shari Schubert, Brian Smith, Tim Palmer and Bob Terry

PART TWO:

New structure headed for vote without financial details

By Shari Schubert

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The most massive reorganization ever of the Southern Baptist Convention will come to a vote next month without a price tag.

Southern Baptists will be asked to exchange their current denomination structure -- 19 agencies and institutions spending \$631 million a year -- for a streamlined 12-agency structure that will cost ... well, no one knows.

The reorganization is proposed by a seven-member Program and Structure Study Committee, which says the plan will make the Southern Baptist denominational machine run smoother and cheaper. Money will be saved by reducing the number of agency trustees and eliminating duplicated support services. The end result, the committee says, will be a denomination better poised to meet the demands of world evangelization.

But some observers are asking why the Program and Structure Study Committee did not include any estimates of expected savings or anticipated costs.

"It is simply impossible to give an exact dollar figure," said committee chairman Mark Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La. "We do know that substantial savings will come."

That assumption has been questioned by several affected agencies.

Trustees of the Brotherhood Commission, which is eliminated in the plan, noted that claims of "improved fiscal efficiency and more effective performance are not substantiated by any data included in the report."

The Brotherhood trustees asked for further study, "to include impact statements and standard business case documentation."

Brister maintains that doing a cost study was not the committee's responsibility.

Asked if any estimates had been made of costs or savings related to the committee proposal, Brister responded: "To do a study of the depth that you are talking about would have required an outside consultant and cost Southern Baptists hundreds of thousands of dollars. We (the committee members) completely volunteered our time."

"Our purpose was to look at structure," Brister said. "We did. Cost savings was not the goal, but it (is) one of the many wonderful results. Our goal was to affirm who we are as Southern Baptists, and make sure that our denomination fulfills the mission."

Morris Chapman, chief executive of the SBC, affirmed the Program and Structure Study Committee's stance. "The committee members wisely did not allow themselves to be distracted by considering literally hundreds of secondary issues which were beyond the committee's assignment," he said.

The Program and Structure Study Committee anticipates that a significant amount of money can be saved by reducing the cost of travel, meals and lodging for trustees attending meetings. If the Committee's recommendations are adopted, the number of trustees serving SBC agencies would be reduced from 917 to 621.

The frequency of trustee meetings and the amount spent on each meeting varies from agency to agency. The Home Mission Board has three meetings per year of its full 90-member board, spending about \$45,000 per meeting.

The Radio and Television Commission spends \$12,000-to-\$15,000 for each meeting of its 30-member board, noted retired RTVC executive vice president Richard McCartney. It also meets three times a year.

If a similar expenditure of \$1,500 per year per trustee were typical for other SBC agencies, elimination of 296 trustee positions conceivably could save well over \$400,000 a year.

The Program and Structure Study Committee also anticipates that money can be saved by downsizing and -- with the proposed North American Mission Board -- by consolidating services that currently are handled separately for different agencies.

The committee proposal does not specify what jobs would be eliminated. That is an "implementation matter" that would have to be determined by the trustees of the agencies involved, Brister said.

This being the case, it is virtually impossible to estimate how much money might be saved by downsizing. McCartney speculated that merging the RTVC, the Brotherhood Commission and the Home Mission Board into the proposed North American Mission Board, based in Atlanta, might save hundreds of thousands of dollars in personnel costs.

But how much will it cost to implement the Program and Structure Study Committee plan?

McCartney, who continues to work for the RTVC in a part-time consulting role, said moving the commission's television studios from Fort Worth, Texas, to Atlanta could cost several million dollars.

"I'm sure the (committee) was suggesting a move to Atlanta because the Home Mission Board is constructing a new office building there and they thought this would be a handy way to make use of it," he said. "But there is not adequate space in it for television production studios" on the scale needed by the RTVC to continue its present scope of work."

If the operation is moved to Atlanta, McCartney said, "we're looking there at several million dollars worth of building (costs), probably considerably more than our present facility would get in a sale, simply because not too many people are looking for television production houses, and Fort Worth is now in a fairly depressed building market."

The Brotherhood Commission's present building in Memphis, Tenn., is thought to be worth about \$1.25 million. Prior to the release of the restructure report, Brotherhood officials had been working toward the possible sale of that building and construction of a new headquarters in Memphis at an estimated cost of about \$3.75 million. That proposal was put on hold, pending the outcome of the vote on the committee's recommendations.

Other potential costs include:

-- Relocating employees. According to the American Movers Conference, the average employer-paid move costs \$4,379 to \$2,632 for actual transportation of goods and the remainder for other services such as packing and storage. Those figures are based on an average distance of 1,062 miles. For comparison, the distance from Memphis to Atlanta is about 375 miles. From Fort Worth to Atlanta is about 750 miles.

-- Severance benefits for employees whose jobs are eliminated. Stewardship Commission president Ronald Chandler said trustees of that agency already have approved an incentive package for employees who "stay to the end," hoping to stave off an early exodus of staff whose jobs stand to be eliminated.

-- Cost of employee time spent planning and implementing the restructuring.

-- Cost of in-house or contract labor to merge various services. According to one estimate, setting up computer systems and merging accounting and other data bases for an agency the size of the proposed North American Mission Board easily could take a several-person team a year to complete.

-- Legal costs. Attorneys for the SBC Executive Committee are confident that the Program and Structure Study Committee's proposal is legally feasible, but a considerable amount of paperwork would be necessary. Articles of merger, articles of incorporation and bylaws would be needed for the new North American Mission Board. Articles of merger also would be needed to pull the Southern Baptist Foundation into the Executive Committee.

Nashville attorney James Guenther, the SBC's lawyer, said it has not yet been decided whether to handle the elimination of some of the smaller agencies, such as the Stewardship and Education commissions, with articles of dissolution or with articles of merger to make them a part of the larger agencies that would be assuming some of their responsibilities.

Guenther said he could not estimate the cost for preparing the documents.

Many of the costs cited above are one-time costs. Anticipated savings presumably would be ongoing. But no documentation is available to show how long it would take for ongoing savings to recover front-end costs.

Lee Beaver, a retired St. Louis businessman and former Missouri Baptist Convention president, said that ideally, a for-profit company considering a merger or reorganization would want to recover its costs in two years, although three-to-five years would not be unheard of.

To further complicate the matter, it is not known what kind of long-term impact the proposed SBC reorganization might have on giving patterns.

And there are questions to be answered regarding how the new structure would deal with certain financial obligations of the agencies targeted for dissolution. For example:

-- Debt. The RTVC still owes nearly \$3 million on a \$10 million loan it obtained in 1986. "Our facility is the collateral on that note," McCartney noted. "When the decision is made, we'll have to sit down with our bankers and say, 'How can we deal with what we owe you?' ... They don't want our collateral. They want their money. They're not going to want to say, 'Yeah, we'll take your building and you can go when you want to go.'"

-- Retirement liability. Some agencies pay premiums for Medicare supplement and life insurance benefits for their retirees through an arrangement with the SBC Annuity Board. The current premium rate for the benefit is \$133 a month. If the SBC dissolves agencies like the Historical Commission, which soon will have three retirees receiving the benefits, it is unclear who will be responsible for those payments.

When will the questions be answered? It appears unlikely that many answers will be forthcoming before SBC messengers are asked to vote on the committee proposal in June.

"If the convention endorses it," said committee member Ronnie Floyd of Springdale, Ark., "... basically things can begin to happen about answering those kinds of questions, and those are great questions."

PART THREE:

**Home Mission Board
braces for merger**

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The day he learned of the proposed restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention, Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis immediately thought about the new \$20 million office building his agency was constructing in suburban Atlanta.

Lewis asked his staff: How could a building designed to accommodate 350 HMB employees be modified to house the new North American Mission Board, to be created by merging the HMB and two other agencies?

That question still looms as HMB staffers prepare to move into the 184,000-square-foot facility June 9.

And it is symbolic of a larger question Lewis and other SBC executives have been asking ever since the restructuring plan was unveiled in February: Is it wise -- or even possible -- for the HMB, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission to be rolled into one agency based in Atlanta?

The SBC's Program and Structure Study Committee believes the merger is both possible and wise. Creating the new North American Mission Board is one of the centerpieces of their sweeping proposal, which will be presented for a vote June 20 by messengers to the annual Southern Baptist Convention. The plan must be approved again next year.

The merger would bring all the SBC's domestic missions efforts under one roof. Benefits are suggested to include greater coordination and cooperation and a reduction in expenses through fewer trustees and consolidation of overlapping support functions.

"The assignment of this new agency is reaching North America for Christ, using every appropriate means of evangelization and church planting," the committee report explains. "By bringing the assignment and resources of the current Radio and Television Commission into this structure, the new board will include as a strategic focus the use of communication technologies in the evangelization of North America. The current Brotherhood Commission will bring to this new board the focus upon the mobilization of volunteers for mission, disaster ministries and missions education."

Although executives of the three current agencies had been interviewed by the study committee, they were not involved in formulating the study committee's recommendation. And from the moment they heard the final proposal, all three raised questions about how such a merger could be done.

While the three agency heads -- Larry Lewis of the HMB, James Williams of the Brotherhood Commission and Jack Johnson of the RTVC -- have said they're willing to make the merger work if Southern Baptists vote for it, trustees of the three agencies have expressed concern about the plan more openly.

Trustees of both the Brotherhood Commission and RTVC stopped just short of outright opposition to the plan in their spring meetings.

Questions raised about the merger go beyond traditional attempts to defend agency turf, although trustees of the various agencies admit their role is to represent their agencies.

"Our concern is for the Radio and Television Commission," explained Wyman Copass, pastor of Yellow Creek Baptist Church in Owensboro, Ky., and chairman-elect of RTVC trustees. "We just want to be sure that our investment as Southern Baptists is handled in the best way possible."

Copass sees many potential benefits to the merger, but he still struggles with some unanswered questions, he said.

"First and foremost, is this going to enable us to do a better job of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ?" he asked. "Is it going to give us a better position to do that? In the long run, is it going to give us more finances to do that?"

Details to answer such questions are scarce at this point. Members of the Program and Structure Study Committee admit their work was driven by mission statements and ministry assignments rather than financial analyses. But the net result of the restructuring should be greater efficiency and cost-savings for the SBC, they said.

However, the HMB's Lewis noted "very little has been done" in the way of impact studies.

"People constantly ask me the simple question, 'Can we absorb the staff of these other two agencies into our building?'" he said. "The only answer I can give is, 'I don't know,' since nobody has yet told me how many people would be involved, and nobody has really done the study to see if our studio facilities are in fact adequate to accommodate 12 hours of programming every day through a network such as ACTS."

ACTS is one of two small Christian TV networks operated by the Radio and Television Commission.

For the short term, both agency heads and the study committee agree working out the physical merger of the three agencies will take extraordinary efforts.

But in the long term, the inconvenience would pay off in greater ministry and efficiency into the next century, the study committee contends.

Nevertheless, logistical questions are dominating the discussion as messengers prepare to debate the restructuring proposal at the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta June 20-22 and -- ironically -- attend dedication ceremonies for the HMB's new office building the same week.

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PART FOUR:

Merger raises questions of facilities, staff, money

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (ABP) -- So far the proposed merger of the Home Mission Board with two other Southern Baptist agencies has produced more questions than answers. Among the most-asked questions are these:

-- What size staff will the new mission board have?

No one knows for sure. The Program and Structure Study Committee, which devised the merger, has said this would be a decision for the trustees of the new agency, the North American Mission Board, to make. Obviously, some overlapping positions in service areas such as accounting, public relations and secretarial staff would allow for reductions.

Currently, the Home Mission Board employs about 350 people in Atlanta, plus more than 5,000 missionaries who live around the United States and its territories. The Brotherhood Commission has 80 employees at its Memphis, Tenn., headquarters, and the Radio and Television Commission has 100 in its Fort Worth, Texas, facility.

The new 75-member trustee board would be constituted in June 1997, and its first task would be to hire a president. Other staffing decisions presumably would flow from that.

-- How many employees of the Brotherhood Commission and RTVC would move to Atlanta?

Both James Williams of the Brotherhood Commission and Jack Johnson of the RTVC have expressed concerns at this point. While no clear prediction can be made, both men say they expect to lose a significant number of staff members in the move.

Johnson speculates only 30 percent to 40 percent of the RTVC staff would be willing to relocate to Atlanta. The rest are talented communications professionals with marketable skills who probably would not have difficulty finding other jobs in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, he said.

-- Would the new HMB building be adequate to house the North American Mission Board?

Although currently configured to accommodate 350 employees, the new HMB building could be reconfigured for up to 500 employees, Lewis said. That would require putting offices in ground-floor space intended for use as a warehouse.

Reconfiguring office space is one thing; reworking television studios is another. RTVC officials say their biggest concerns are about losing their two recently renovated studios in Fort Worth with no guarantee of what facilities can be built in Atlanta.

Moving a studio isn't as simple as moving an office. Johnson pointed out, for example, that 40-foot-high ceilings are required to accommodate television lighting. A couple of years ago, when rewiring was done for the RTVC's control room, seven miles of cable were installed.

The one studio in the new HMB building is about half the size of the larger of the RTVC's two studios. And it was designed for industrial-level video production, not commercial broadcast production.

Johnson said "everybody understands" the Atlanta studio is inadequate for RTVC use.

"I don't believe there's any thought at all to force us into those facilities," he said. But deciding what to do -- building additional studios or leasing space or renovating the HMB studio -- would be a decision for the new agency's trustees.

-- How long would it take to make the logistical changes necessary for the merger?

The Program and Structure Study Committee's report calls for trustee boards of the three current agencies to be merged in 1997 and for the complete restructuring to be executed by the year 2000. RTVC and Brotherhood officials have suggested it would take that long or longer.

-- Would it be possible for the North American Mission Board to have offices in more than one location? For example, could the radio and television facilities remain in Fort Worth?

Both Johnson and Williams have floated this idea, and some of their trustees favor it as well. The idea would be to link the three units of the new North American Mission Board electronically.

Asked if the Program and Structure Study Committee was open to this possibility, chairman Mark Brister replied simply, "No."

Committee member Ronnie Floyd of Arkansas said leaving the RTVC in Fort Worth is not an option. "If we're going to have an entity called the North American Mission Board, we do not want them spread out in three parts of the country."

-- Would the RTVC and Brotherhood Commission gain resources through the merger with the much-larger HMB?

Trustees and staff from both the Brotherhood Commission and RTVC have hinted at this idea. Committee member Floyd mentioned it as well in responding to a question about how the RTVC will pay for moving its facilities.

"Because the finances of the present Home Mission Board are much greater than the finances of the RTVC, that is going to get them into a source, a pool, of financial strength that they've never known," Floyd said. He noted the RTVC would become "one of the major players in that source."

However, HMB President Lewis warned that that financial pool may not be as deep as it appears. The vision of extra money to spend is a "deception," Lewis said.

The HMB has been "in a cutback mode about as long as I've been in this office," he said. "Our income has been pretty flat, with only small increases relevant to inflationary increases. We've had to reduce budgets and even eliminate positions."

Lewis also expressed concern that the RTVC would "bring more liabilities than assets" to the marriage. He said he believes RTVC assets, even if the agency's Fort Worth facility were sold, probably would not cover RTVC's current indebtedness of more than \$3 million.

-- Would the proposed structure of the North American Mission Board give appropriate balance between the various agendas it carries?

Trustees of both the Brotherhood Commission and RTVC have expressed concern that their entities would have less representation on the merged trustee board and therefore could get the short end of the resource stick.

Williams also has said repeatedly that he fears the "entrepreneurial" spirit of the Brotherhood Commission will be squashed under the larger bureaucracy of the new agency.

For example, the Brotherhood's disaster-relief ministry requires decisions to be made quickly, he explained. The flexibility of the Brotherhood's small organization has allowed the agency to gain a reputation for getting to disaster sites "a step before the military," he said.

On the other hand, even the largest partner coming into the merger faces the potential of de-emphasis, said Bob Curtis, chairman of HMB trustees.

The proposed structure places all of the HMB's current divisions and departments in one new division on the same level with "technology and communications" and "missions education and volunteers" divisions. Yet some current HMB departments include more personnel than the entire staff of the RTVC and Brotherhood Commission combined.

HMB sections of evangelism, ministry and church extension will be pushed farther down the organizational structure, he said.

-- How much momentum for ministry would be lost in the next few years as energies are devoted to making the merger work?

All parties involved agree it will be a monumental task to merge the three agencies into one new entity. But no one can predict how much of a drain or boost to ministry that will be during transition.

Trustee chairman Curtis said he fears the HMB's growing work in enlisting volunteers, starting churches and increasing SBC baptisms could suffer in the short term.

"I hate to see all of that hurt by the turmoil of change and transition," he said. "What kind of opportunities will we lose as the year 2000 A.D. approaches because we are in the midst of restructuring?"

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-- With Brian Smith and Shari Schubert

N.C. leaders request delay of SBC restructuring

By Todd Deaton

CARY, N. C. (ABP) -- Four officers of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina have issued a formal request that consideration of the Southern Baptist Convention's restructuring proposal be postponed for at least one year to provide more time for discussion and resolution of "uncertainties that exist" in the report.

The statement -- released May 25 by Alfred Ayscue, president; Kathryn Hamrick, first vice president; Jack Glasgow Jr., second vice president; and Marian Grant, recording secretary -- urged SBC leaders to use their influence to delay consideration of the report.

The request was addressed to Mark Brister, chairman of the SBC Program and Structure Study Committee, Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, and Jim Henry, SBC president. Brister was not immediately available for a response. Executive Committee officials declined to comment until they received the letter.

Citing "reactions from some agencies, an auxiliary and individual Baptists alarmed at the far reaching consequences" of the report, the North Carolina officers stated, "While there may be merit in some of the substantive changes which are set forth, there remain questions that should be resolved prior to presentation to the convention for approval."

"We make this request for delay as officers of one of the largest, strongest and most supportive old-line state conventions," the four said, noting the strategic role which North Carolina has played in the Southern Baptist Convention from its inception.

If the report of the Program and Structure Study Committee -- adopted by the SBC Executive Committee in February -- is approved at the next two annual SBC meetings, the denomination's 19 agencies will be reduced to 12. Eliminated in the plan are the Education Commission, Stewardship Commission, Historical Commission, the Southern Baptist Foundation and the Commission on the American Baptist Theological Seminary. Three agencies -- the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission -- would be merged into a new North American Mission Board.

But the primary concern identified by the North Carolina officers is the Woman's Missionary Union's relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The proposal reassigns WMU's mission-education tasks to the Brotherhood Commission. WMU's role in women's ministries would be given to the SBC Sunday School Board. And the WMU's responsibilities in Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong offering promotion would be given to the renamed home and foreign mission agencies.

"For 107 years the WMU has made contributions of inestimable worth to SBC life," the statement observed. "People do not understand how this auxiliary to the convention can be held in such low regard as to be effectively shunned in the report."

The officers noted that Brister's committee has denied the WMU's request to give the organization a role in the new SBC structure.

Noting that WMU Executive Director Dellana O'Brien has exhibited "patience and Christian restraint under pressures that threaten the very survival of the WMU," the officers added, "We find it difficult to understand how the Brister Committee could so quickly and easily dismiss her efforts to amend the committee's report to give the WMU its time-honored role as an auxiliary in SBC life. Baptists in North Carolina are waiting for an answer to this strange rejection."

Other concerns raised in the statement:

-- The Home Mission Board's new Atlanta facility will be "ill suited" to accommodate the Radio and Television's elaborate communications equipment, the officers said,

-- The reassignment of the Historical Commission's archival duties to the Southern Baptist seminaries is unworkable, the officers said. "Responsible historical research and assembly are not effectively carried out in such a fragmented fashion."

Requesting more time for North Carolina and other state conventions to study the full implications of the restructuring, the officers noted, "Our state convention would not consider a report of this magnitude for only 45 minutes as the SBC Executive Committee did in February, when amendments were not permitted."

"Those restrictions are questionable and create a lack of confidence in leadership," the statement concluded. "It is our fervent hope that such restrictions will not be imposed in Atlanta," site of the June SBC meeting.

Arkansas association leaders adopt motion opposing CBF

PINE BLUFF, Ark. -- A Baptist association in Arkansas said May 9 the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is not welcome among its churches.

"We will not endorse, encourage or support any CBF activity in Harmony Baptist Association," members of the association's executive board said. There are 39 churches in the association.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a national organization of churches and individuals established in 1990 by moderate Southern Baptists displeased with the current conservative direction of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Eddie Harrison Jr., pastor of Dollarway Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, Ark., introduced the motion, which reaffirmed commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention and its unified budget, the Cooperative Program.

Describing himself as "a very strong Southern Baptist, a very strong conservative," Harrison said: "What prompted this for me is the actions of the CBF. Since the CBF is so well-organized, I see them as a different denomination. I don't see them as Southern Baptists any longer."

"It's an issue that just keeps coming up," Harrison added. "My purpose is a preventive measure as an association. We're trying to head off a problem before we have it."

National CBF leaders insist the organization is not a separate denomination.

"We are committed not to become a denomination," Bill Bruster, CBF's western coordinator, said during the third annual assembly of the Arkansas CBF, which drew approximately 160 participants to Little Rock in April. "We were formed Baptist, we remain Baptist, and I hope we never form a new denomination."

Dianne Swaim, moderator of Arkansas CBF, noted that the association's action "saddens me but does not surprise me. We don't ask them to endorse, encourage or support the CBF as an association but we would ask that they not actively discourage support among individual church members."

"I respect their freedom to take this action," Swaim said. She added, however, that CBF supporters "are Baptists and we're not at war."

Acknowledging that the association's executive board "can't speak for all the churches or individual churches," Harmony Director of Missions Ed Smith said the action "is just strictly the board doing it."

The motion's author agreed. "It doesn't say a local church or an individual can't support CBF," Harrison said. "But as an association we've got to let folks know where we stand."

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-- By Trennis Henderson

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