

Associated Baptist Press

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FMB drops trademark application for Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Administrators at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board have dropped an effort to trademark the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.

"The relationship between the WMU and the FMB is far more valuable than control of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering trademark," said Don Kammerdiener, FMB executive vice president, in a joint press statement released by both organizations.

The decision was communicated to national leaders of the Woman's Missionary Union at a June 5 meeting in Birmingham, Ala., by Kammerdiener and David Button, FMB vice president for public relations and development. The trademark application had drawn opposition from WMU leaders and others.

Kammerdiener said the decision was made the previous week in a telephone conversation with FMB President Jerry Rankin, who is visiting missionaries in Asia.

WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien, one of four WMU leaders at the Birmingham meeting, welcomed the FMB move.

"This decision has helped to affirm the historic role of the WMU in its support for the offering," O'Brien said in the statement. "This has been an emotional issue for our membership. I believe the decision will help put this issue behind us and contribute to a closer relationship between these two missions partners."

The trademark disagreement arose May 13 when the Virginia WMU's executive board said they had learned the FMB had applied 10 months earlier for a trademark on the Lottie Moon offering. National WMU leaders said

they were "surprised and disappointed" to learn of the action.

In the joint statement, Kammerdiener said that the board would not block any attempt by WMU to secure a trademark on its own. But he suggested "that it may be in the interest of both parties to drop the matter altogether."

"We're grateful for the freedom that the FMB has given WMU to apply for a trademark for the LMCO, but we have no immediate plans for doing so," O'Brien responded. "For one thing, we haven't had time to consider pros and cons of such an action. And we certainly would not act without a directive from our executive board."

In the Birmingham meeting, WMU and FMB leaders also agreed that Southern Baptist churches are free to contribute to any causes, but that "all monies contributed to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering should rightfully go to the support of missionaries appointed by the Foreign Mission Board."

The offering raises nearly half of the FMB's annual budget.

FMB leaders said they initiated the trademark application "after concerns arose regarding unauthorized use and distribution" of the offering named for famed 19th century missionary Lottie Moon. Some churches have reportedly raised funds in the offering's name and then sent some of the receipts to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or to independent non-SBC missionaries.

The trademark disagreement occurred at a time some Southern Baptists feel SBC leaders are attempting to minimize WMU's role as the denomination goes through a restructuring process. Rankin has insisted, however, that nothing will change in the historic partnership between the women's auxiliary and the Foreign Mission Board.

The Birmingham participants agreed to continue their dialogue. And they announced that WMU's New Hope publishing arm will publish a new biography of Lottie Moon, written by Rankin. O'Brien will write the foreword for the book.

Kammerdiener also invited WMU leaders to meet with the FMB trustees during their October meeting in Richmond.

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-- By Teresa Dickens and Robert O'Brien

Baptist Standard to announce Toby Druin as new editor

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Baptist Standard, the largest Baptist newspaper, is expected to name longtime managing editor Toby Druin as editor.

The directors of the Texas Baptist newspaper met June 6 and reportedly approved Druin, the nominee of the editor search committee. He will succeed Presnall Wood, who announced last year he will retire at the end of 1995 at age 63. Wood's 17-year tenure is the longest of any editor of the Standard, which was established in 1888.

Druin, 60, joined the Standard staff in 1976. Previously he was associate editor of Biblical Recorder in Raleigh, N.C., and earlier news director at Baylor University. He also worked at Texas newspapers in Amarillo, Borger, Wichita Falls and Plainview and as a music director in Baptist churches.

A native of Amarillo, he is married to the former Larra Rodgers. They have three daughters. Druin is a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where he earned a bachelor's degree, majoring in journalism and religion.

With a weekly circulation of 260,000, the Standard is the largest of the 39 Baptist state papers. The second largest, the Alabama Baptist, named a new editor May 26 -- Bob Terry of Missouri.

Druin is current president of the Southern Baptist Press Association, the organization of state Baptist newspaper editors. He is believed to be the first associate editor to hold that position.

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-- By Bob Allen

Baptist Peace Fellowship revises statement on gays

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Directors of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America have revised a controversial statement they adopted in February declaring the organization a "welcoming place" for gays and lesbians.

Meeting in New York City May 19-20, the board of directors unanimously adopted a "Statement on Justice and Sexual Orientation," which supersedes the "Statement on Gay and Lesbian Justice" they adopted in February.

Ken Sehested, the peace fellowship's executive director, said the statement is a "refinement" of the previous pronouncement, not a reversal.

"The heart of our conviction -- that sexual orientation is irrelevant to Christian discipleship -- remains unchanged," Sehested said, "but there was a widespread feeling that the earlier document did not communicate what we intended."

The February statement prompted the national ministry arm of the American Baptist Churches in the USA to cut off ties with the Baptist Peace Fellowship until its "stated aims, goals and resolutions are consistent with American Baptist policies."

Sehested said American Baptist leaders took offense not primarily with the statement's affirmation of gay and lesbian orientation, but with a sentence pledging to oppose denominational resolutions which attack homosexuals.

The revised statement still welcomes persons into the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America regardless of sexual orientation and terms inclusion of gays and lesbians an issue of justice.

The statement goes on to acknowledge that sexual orientation is "a matter of significant conflict within the church and the larger culture."

"In welcoming gay and lesbian people into our movement, we do not intend to break relationship with those who disagree with our position, but rather seek to deepen dialogue," the statement says.

The statement says the Baptist Peace Fellowship board worked through two years of dialogue on the issue "to reach agreement among ourselves." The process was "a productive one, enabling us to practice the disciplines of reconciliation, which include listening to and respecting those with whom we disagree, while resisting the temptation to intimidate or coerce."

The statement pledges to work for "full civil and human rights within the larger culture" and "full participation within the body of Christ" for those "excluded because of their sexual orientation." It encourages churches to engage in "open and vigorous dialogue" on the subject based both on the study of Scripture and the testimonies of gay and lesbian Christians. It also opposes "any action, statement or policy leading to discrimination or violence against people based on sexual orientation."

In a commentary in Baptist Peacemaker, Sehested observed that homosexuality is dividing not only Baptists but "virtually every mainline Protestant body along with the Roman Catholic Church." In the public arena, meanwhile, "the 'gay agenda' has replaced the 'communist threat' as the battering ram of reactionary politics," he said.

He said the Baptist Peace Fellowship chose to address the issue because it is "simply the right thing to do," because the presence of gays already in the organization creates "a ready-made opportunity to practice our calling as reconcilers within our own household," and out of concern for "genuine fidelity to Scripture."

Sehested noted that the Bible mentions homosexual behavior in seven texts. In each, he outlined contextual issues that argue against reading the Scripture as banning homosexuality outright. For instance, Sodom and Gomorrah's sin was more rape and homosexuality, he said, and the cities are later condemned by the prophets only for pride and oppression of the poor.

In addition, he cited "a major issue of consistency" for Christians who insist on stringent opposition to homosexuals based on a literal interpretation of the Bible. Those same Christians, he said, ignore similar injunctions, such as the Old Testament's prohibition against eating pork and the New Testament's commandments for women to cover their heads and not to speak in church.

In other business, the directors of the Baptist Peace Fellowship announced the creation of the Gavel Peace Fund. The fund will provide grants for Baptist peacemakers engaged in mediation to end civil wars and other violent and non-violent conflicts around the world.

The first grant of \$800 was given to the Saboi Jum, general secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention in Myanmar. Since 1989, Jum has headed a mediation effort to end a 40-year-long civil war in the nation formerly known as Burma.

A \$24,000 bequest from the estate of Victor Gavel inaugurated the fund. Gavel and his wife, Eileen, were founders of the American Baptist Peace Fellowship and initiators of the Edwin T. Dahlberg Peace Award for the American Baptist Churches.

The Fellowship is seeking founders gifts of \$25,000 or more for the Gavel Fund, as well as smaller donations of any size, said Jim Lowder, chair of the group's Development and Finance Committee.

Professor's link to abortion research sparks protest from Baylor group

By Toby Druin

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Robert Sloan, in his first day as president of Baylor University, faced one of the most contentious issues among Baptists -- abortion.

Sloan said June 1 he shares the concern of a group of Baylor alumni "for human life and the tragedy called abortion," but disputed some of their abortion-related charges concerning Baylor College of Medicine.

A group of 17 Baylor alumni -- including retired football star Mike Singletary, a seminary professor and the college roommate of Sloan's wife -- wrote Sloan in late May asking that when he became president of Baylor on June 1 he discontinue Baylor's appointment of 11 people to the medical school board of trustees and end its use of the Baylor name. But Sloan said the relationship between the two institutions will continue.

Baptist ties with the medical school in Houston were severed in 1968. But the school has retained the Baylor name and 11 of its 44 trustees are elected by the Baylor University board of regents.

The 17 alumni asked that those ties cease along with use of the Baylor name because, they charged, the medical school had "entered an alliance with Planned Parenthood of Houston to serve as a testing center for the controversial 'abortion pill' RU-486."

They asked Sloan to "distance the name of Baylor from this chemical weapon against the unborn."

Both Sloan and Claire Bassett, director of communications for the medical school in Houston, said the school has no contract with Planned Parenthood, that the contract is between Planned Parenthood and an individual faculty member, Alfred Poindexter. Bassett said that all testing takes place at the Planned Parenthood offices, not at the medical school, and that the school receives none of the research funds.

"It is simply an individual faculty member taking part in a research project," Bassett told the Baptist Standard. The testing was begun in October 1994.

Sloan said he welcomed the input from the alumni group.

"I would like to extend my hand to them in appreciation for their concern over life," he said. "I share deeply their concern for human life and the tragedy called abortion. I would be happy to sit down with and relate to them personally. I don't want an adversarial relationship. We can work together."

Sloan said, however, that he could not revoke the use of the name "Baylor." "We cannot do that, and we don't want to even if we could," he said.

"And regarding the election of trustees, we elect one-fourth of them, but that is a matter of their charter."

He said that the university regents probably could refuse to elect the 11 medical school trustees, "but we want to continue our close ties with that great institution. We share a concern for strong Christian values as those values permeate medicine and higher education, and we think that together we can have an influence for good."

Thomas Goodman, pastor of First Church, Eastland, Texas, and spokesman for the alumni group, responding to Sloan, said they would stand by the concerns they raised. "However, we are glad that Dr. Sloan declared his pro-life convictions in his statement," Goodman said in a fax message to the Standard, newsjournal of Texas Baptists.

"Since Baylor University appoints a fourth of the medical school trustees, and since the Baylor University president is customarily one of these trustees, we are confident that Dr. Sloan will bring his pro-life convictions to bear upon the trustee meetings he attends."

In addition to Goodman, the group includes Singletary, former star for the Chicago Bears; Linda Ferguson of Eastland, former Baylor roommate of Sue Sloan; and Charles Kelley, evangelism professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Other members are Richard Neill, Fort Worth; Neal Jeffrey, Dallas; William Streich, Wichita Falls; Thomas Northen III, Richmond, Va.; Guy Holloway, Richmond, Va.; Clint Ferguson, Eastland; Kirby Hill, Baton Rouge, La.; Erica Toles, Fort Worth; Diane Goodman, Eastland; Thomas Goodman, Eastland; Cecil Taylor, Satsuma, Ala.; Gay Holloway, Richmond, Va.; Brian Nystrom, Fort Worth; and Kara Toles Cobb, Fort Worth.

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Smyth & Helwys dedicates building, announces price rollbacks

MACON, Ga. (ABP) -- Smyth & Helwys Publishing reached a new milestone with dedication of a new 20,000 square-foot office building May 25.

The new building, located just off I-475 west of Macon, Ga., is the first permanent headquarters for the four-year-old publishing firm, which formerly had offices on the campus of Mercer University.

Cecil Staton, president and publisher, told about 125 employees and guests at a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house that the event symbolized another milestone for the organization dedicated to producing Christian education materials "nurtured by faith and informed by scholarship."

The building includes offices for Smyth & Helwys' 27 employees and for Mercer University Press, a publisher of academic books formed in 1979, plus a 12,000-square-foot warehouse. The building, completed and occupied last fall, is valued at about \$1.1 million, said Ron Jackson, a member of the company's board of directors.

In other news, Smyth & Helwys recently announced record earnings and a 10 percent rollback in prices for children's and preschool curriculum.

"We are committed to the goal of providing our resources at the lowest cost possible," Staton said. "We are beginning our fall price cuts with preschool and children's 'Formations.'"

Smyth & Helwys posted record sales during the first quarter of 1995. That came on the heels of a record year in 1994, with sales totaling about \$2.2 million, 21 percent higher than the previous year, according to the news release.

Sales have leveled off in some children's literature, but boosting sales "is not a driving force" in the decision to reduce prices, insisted Ben McDade, marketing vice president. The children's curriculum is reusable, so churches that bought it in the past are not reordering this year. Sales of dated leaflet pieces, meanwhile, continue to grow, he said.

Smyth & Helwys "has been committed from day one to a full line of curriculum," McDade said. Children's literature "is a hard sell for all publishers," he said. While it "has never been a money maker, it's a line we're committed to," he said.

A news release said the publisher is also lowering costs for its weekly fax support services, which supplement Bible study curriculum.

Founded in December 1990, Smyth & Helwys was formed as an independent, moderate alternative to the Sunday School Board, publishing house of the Southern Baptist Convention. The company is named to honor John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, founders of the modern Baptist movement in England during the 17th century.

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-- By Bob Allen

Clergy could provide better moral leadership, poll says

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- Americans say religious leaders could do a better job of providing the nation with moral leadership, according to a recent Gallup Poll.

About one person in three (36 percent) believes religious leaders or churches have been doing a good job of raising the moral and ethical standards of the nation, according to a survey by the George H. Gallup International Institute. Half the populace think they have been doing just a fair job and 12 percent say their performance has been poor.

Americans, however, feel strongly the clergy has the potential to improve the nation's moral climate. Two of three say religious leaders could have a great deal of influence on raising moral and ethical standards. Another 27 percent say they could have some influence and only 4 percent believe their potential impact is negligible.

There was a time when members of the clergy were the most respected members of their community, but factors such as the televangelist scandals, political forays by some visible clergy and moral lapses by others have tarnished the image of people of the cloth, observed pollsters George Gallup and Robert Bezilla.

Currently, a slim majority rates the honesty and ethical standards of clergy as "very high" (14 percent) or "high" (40 percent). One person in three ranks them as only average and one in 10 (9 percent) terms them very low.

Before 1988 the clergy ranked first in comparison to other professions. That year they fell into second behind pharmacists. They remain there, just slightly ahead of dentists, college teachers and engineers in the public's esteem. At the bottom of the list are senators, congressmen, insurance agents and car salesmen.

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national sample of 1,007 adults conducted in September 1994. The margin of error is plus-or-minus 3 percent.

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-- ABP staff

Pope calls for Christian unity, but affirms papal primacy

VATICAN CITY (ABP) -- Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical letter May 30 committing the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenism -- the search for unity between Christian churches.

The pope described "great joy" at renewed relationships between Catholic and non-Catholics around the world and urged all Christians to support activities undertaken to promote unity, according to Ecumenical News International.

At the same time, the pontiff defended what he said is his leading role among Christians as the successor to Saint Peter. His position as the Bishop of Rome, he said, makes the pope "the first servant of unity" of the church.

The role of the papacy has been central to controversy among Christian faiths, including the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

A substantial portion of the encyclical is devoted to pursuing unity with Orthodox churches of the East. The pope said the process of resuming contacts with those churches "has been slow and arduous" but "has led to the gradual discovery of brotherhood."

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-- ABP staff

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