

# Associated Baptist Press

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## Radio-TV Commission meeting called to ponder future of ACTS network

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Directors of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission have been summoned to a special meeting Aug. 11, possibly to consider ending a channel-sharing arrangement that has kept ACTS, Southern Baptists' cable TV network, on the air since 1992.

Jack Johnson, president of the Fort Worth, Texas,-based Radio-TV Commission, called for the meeting, he said, for directors to consider the commission's contract with VISN, an interfaith cable network which shares the Faith and Values television channel with ACTS, the Southern Baptist Convention's network.

The agreement between ACTS and the New York-based VISN Group, Inc., was set to expire June 30, but was extended twice until Aug. 15, Johnson said. The commission's next regularly scheduled meeting is not until September.

Johnson said he announced the meeting because agency bylaws require trustees to be notified 10 days prior to a called meeting. Should a new agreement be reached before then, the meeting will be called off.

However, he added he doubts such an agreement will be reached, unless there is "significant movement" in negotiations with VISN.

VISN recently announced changes that would significantly reduce the quantity of religious programming on Faith and Values and is offering ACTS a reduced role in the partnership, Johnson said.

"The whole environment of the channel is changing," Johnson said. "We have no position in management. We must ask ourselves if we want to be a part of it."

That question could have major implications for the future of ACTS, which was launched in 1984.

The two networks began sharing a channel in October 1992, after ACTS lost its own satellite transponder. Under the partnership, ACTS was given eight hours a day programming, continued to maintain a separate corporate identity and agreed to a prohibition against fund-raising, proselytizing and maligning of other faiths.

The move was expected to save money for both networks and to increase the size of the ACTS audience. Before the partnership, ACTS lost money and was available in about 8 million households. Through the Faith and Values channel, ACTS is now accessible to almost 1,400 cable systems and some 23 million homes.

The financial aspect of the partnership also "has worked well," Johnson said, freeing up resources to allow the commission to develop FamilyNet, a broadcast service targeted to independent television stations.

Finding a transponder for direct transmission of ACTS is no longer an option, because none is available, Johnson said.

"Our options are to shut down the network or find a compatible programmer," Johnson said.

If no agreement can be reached with VISN to continue ACTS programming, the commission would have to find another "compatible" cable network -- not necessarily a religious network but one that fosters religious values -- on which to share time, Johnson said.

If no agreement can be reached and no additional channel is available, another option is for the commission to close down ACTS and put all of its programming into FamilyNet, which is available to more than 30 million homes.

Another option would be to close down ACTS temporarily until another transponder or cable channel becomes available.

Also clouding the future is the recently adopted restructuring of the SBC, which rolls the Radio-TV Commission and two other agencies into a new North American Mission Board. It is possible the new mission board, which will not be incorporated until necessary bylaw changes are ratified next year, may not want to continue in the cable television business.

Johnson said the Radio-TV Commission will continue to negotiate in good faith with VISN.

"We are going to do everything we can to make it compatible, but if we can't feel we can function (there) we will have to do something else," Johnson said.

"We are looking at some drastic changes," he said. "But we are crunching the numbers, working diligently, trying to run this operation like a business. We will see what we can negotiate."

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

## **Lawsuit challenging gift annuities jeopardizes charities, experts say**

By Toby Druin

WICHITA FALLS, Texas (ABP) -- A federal lawsuit challenging the right of charities to issue gift annuities could become a class action, a move that could have billion-dollar ramifications for charitable organizations from Baptist churches to the Boy Scouts.

Attorneys for a woman filing the suit have petitioned a federal court to add 29 new defendants to the case, including the Baptist Foundation of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention.

A hearing on the case is scheduled Aug. 28 in the U.S. District Court in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Attorneys will ask U.S. District Judge Joe Kendall to certify their suit as a class action, including both every donor who has given charitable gift annuities and every charity that has issued an annuity or acts as a trustee for a charitable trust. That would include thousands of churches, hospitals, arts organizations and universities throughout

the country.

"Every charity in the country is in jeopardy because of the implications of this lawsuit," said Tal Roberts, executive vice president of the Baptist Foundation of Texas.

"This could cripple charities precisely at the time when the federal government is looking to charities to take on more of our needs," said Roberts, who also chairs the American Council on Gift Annuities, a voluntary organization of 1,500 charities that publishes actuarial tables for reference by charities. The council is also named as a defendant in the suit.

A charitable gift annuity is an arrangement allowing a donor to give a sum of money to a charity and receive an income in return, usually at a reduced tax rate and until death.

Gift annuities have been in use for more than 150 years. They were first used by the American Bible Society and since have been commonly implemented by churches, universities, hospitals and various non-profit, charitable organizations such as the Boys Scouts and the Salvation Army.

However, the grand-niece of a 90-year-old North Texas woman who donated her estate to a Lutheran foundation is challenging the practice. After Louise Peter entered into the gift annuity, Dorothy Ozee of Wichita Falls filed suit in federal court to try to stop it.

Ozee's attorneys argue that the charitable gift annuity is a "commercial" arrangement that should come under state banking and insurance laws.

The suit alleges that the distribution of actuarial tables by the American Council on Gift Annuities violates antitrust law. The practice of charities using the same tables to calculate life-long payments constitutes price-fixing, the suit argues. It also alleges that commingling of more than one charity's trust funds in a pooled investment fund violates the Investment Company Act of 1940 and other securities laws.

Judge Kendall agreed in a preliminary ruling that the Lutheran Foundation violated the Texas Insurance Code by issuing charitable gift annuities without being licensed as an insurance company.

However, since that time, the Texas Legislature has unanimously approved and Gov. George W. Bush has signed a law protecting charities' rights to use charitable trusts. Similar legislation (S.978) has been introduced in Congress by Texas Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison.

Introducing her bill, Sen. Hutchison said that in entering into a gift annuity, a donor is interested primarily in trying to help the charity, not in getting the best possible return on the investment.

If the lawsuit in Wichita Falls is successful, she noted, it could "financially disable thousands of charities, including hospitals, relief organizations, arts groups, museums, universities and every religious denomination in the country."

"One of the plaintiff's lawyers in this case has boasted that this is a 'billion-dollar lawsuit' because it will extract huge sums of money from our nation's noblest institutions -- and earn him a big contingency fee," she said.

"Charities are not harming anyone," she said. "The only harm being done is by this lawsuit to America's charities. We must act now to protect charitable giving from harm, and to protect our laws from being misapplied."

If successful, the class action lawsuit could require the rescission of countless charitable trusts, the return of all charitable gift annuities and could make the charities liable for damages.

Every dollar lost by charities due to an unfavorable ruling would translate into "a child unvaccinated, a baby unfed, a sick person with no medical care, a Boy Scout troop that will cease to exist, a house for a poor family that will not be built and a scholarship that will not be granted," Hutchison said.

## Confronting racism requires individual action, King says

By Sarah Zimmerman

BUENOS AIRES (ABP) -- Confronting racism must be each Christian's individual obligation, Bernice King, daughter of slain civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, said Aug. 2.

Jesus set the example for confronting racism personally, King said during a Baptist World Congress workshop in Buenos Aires.

Referring to Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, King said, "Jesus did not send anybody else to handle his personal responsibility. He did not call together a commission to study the problem. He opened the dialogue himself."

"That one encounter made all the difference because it was personal," said King, associate minister of the Greater Rising Star Baptist Church in Atlanta.

"You cannot do everything, but you can do something," she encouraged the group of Baptists. "And what you can do you ought to do, and what you ought to do, by God's grace, you must do."

Differences between people are inevitable, but they should not be used to justify ethnic cleansing, excessive police force or exploitation, King said.

"We will speak different languages, we will be born into different races, we will be raised in different cultural backgrounds. But we can change the way we react. We need a major overhaul in our attitude toward our differences .... It is not the differences we are against but the divisiveness."

To change attitudes, King said, "we must put aside our personal hang-ups and embrace the example Jesus set .... Jesus was courageous, bold and daring. He challenged the legal, social and economic systems of his time, even when it was unpopular to do so."

After the workshop, King was asked for reaction to a resolution Southern Baptists passed in June, which voiced repentance and asked for forgiveness for the slavery in their history and pledged to work toward racial reconciliation.

King said the resolution "was a good first step," but the true test of Southern Baptists' commitment to ending racism will be in their actions and attitudes.

King and other workshop speakers stressed that a relationship with Christ is necessary for racial reconciliation.

Terry Rae, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, said he visited government officials in 1985 to ask for apartheid laws to be abolished.

"When we left, we felt we had been laughed at and that we had no hope. Now we praise God for what he has done," Rae said, then added: "The laws are gone, but it will take the mighty power of God to take racism out of the hearts of people."

Desmond Hoffmeister, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa, said that in 1990 -- the year of the last the Baptist World Congress -- "I was a second-class citizen in the country of my birth. I was a victim of a brutal system of racism."

Five years later, he said, he is "recognized as a human being in the land of my birth. I give glory to Jesus Christ."

Despite legal changes in South Africa, much needs to be done to heal the country divided by violence, poverty and prejudice, the Baptist leaders said.

"Unfortunately, as Baptists we are still divided," Hoffmeister said. South Africa's Baptist Convention is a predominantly black group and the Baptist Union is predominantly white. "Pray for us that the political divisions might be overcome," Hoffmeister said.

"We meet regularly to try to build a future together," Rae said. "We have a way to go, but with the power

of God, we will walk together. We will show the world how races can stand together as one."

Racism is a worldwide problem, said Denton Lotz, Baptist World Alliance general secretary.

"In the United States there are more Baptists than any other country, and more people of race in Baptist churches than any other (denomination) in America," Lotz said. "Yet racism is a curse and a tyranny over our country."

The Baptist World Alliance declared racism a sin in its Harare Declaration in 1993, but Lotz said taking action is more important than making a statement.

According to the declaration, racism is evident when people:

-- assert that by heredity and by nature they are superior to the rest of humanity.

-- oppress others through economic and political means to find security and self-acceptance, privilege and power.

-- project onto others their anger, hostility, hatred and failures in order to rationalize feelings of superiority.

The declaration calls for Baptists to "respond to God's intention of wholeness for all, seeking to bring people together, as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, whatever may be their ethnic identity.

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## **Evangelism grows churches, BWA nominee emphasizes**

By Trennis Henderson

BUENOS AIRES (ABP) -- "The church must evangelize or it will die," declared international evangelist Nilson Fanini. "We need the power of God."

Fanini, who will be nominated Aug. 5 as Baptist World Alliance president, is pastor of First Baptist Church in Niteroi, Brazil. His congregation, which has grown from 400 to 7,000 members during his 32-year pastorate, also has started 42 other churches and supports 53 missionaries.

Leading a BWA workshop on "The Dynamics of Evangelism and Church Planting in Latin America," Fanini emphasized that "the first step is to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit." The two-hour seminar was among 56 elective workshops offered to BWA participants this week in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Comparing the ministry of the first-century church to congregations today, Fanini asked: "How did the early church grow so much? It didn't have anything. Today we have everything but we do so little."

Insisting that "the most important thing is to build a church," he noted, "Jesus said, 'I will build my church.' Was Jesus wrong? Has he changed his mind? I think not."

In addition to sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leadership, Fanini said, other keys to successful church planting include prayer, demographic analysis, personal witnessing, discipleship and effective use of such resources as Sunday school, buses and media.

Explaining that property and facilities are secondary considerations, Fanini added, "The building doesn't make the church. The church builds the temple. I believe we need to start with the church. That's a very important principle."

"I used to think God was American because they had all the money," he said. "But I discovered God also is Brazilian and Argentine. I also discovered God doesn't work with money. He works with faith."

Fanini said prayer is essential to combat the power of Satan. "The idea is that the city is in the hands of the enemy and Satan has kidnapped the city from us with drugs, prostitution, homosexuality, violence. If the city is kidnapped and in the hands of the demons, a great movement of prayer is very important."

He said the Lord taught him early in his ministry that "I used my tongue too much and forgot about my

knees."

"The church is a mirror of the heart of the pastor," Fanini said. "If the heart of the pastor is on fire, the church will be on fire. We as pastors need to ask God to help us be true to Him and to be examples to the sheep."

Describing the worldwide population of 40 million Baptist believers as "the largest army in the world," Fanini emphasized the importance of each Christian "speaking about Jesus everywhere."

Urging pastors to equip their members for such ministry, he added, "We need to teach and disciple our brothers and sisters in the church ... . The pastor should shake the trees and the fruit will fall. That's how church planting begins."

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## **Baptists from former Soviet Union see opportunities, challenges**

BUENOS AIRES (ABP) -- Baptists in the former Soviet Union are enthusiastically winning friends and neighbors to Christ, but they face growing resistance from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Urie Apatov, executive secretary of the Euro-Asiatic Federation of Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and editor of its publication Christian Word, came to the Baptist World Congress with a delegation of 20 persons from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kurgikistan, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Middle Asia.

"We have a great opportunity now," Apatov declared. "After communism, the souls of many were empty. Those souls can be and are being led to Christ.

"My greatest joy is to anticipate the gospel being freely distributed in my country and everybody being able to buy Bibles in every bookstore," he said. "We did not even dream about this possibility 10 years ago."

There are more than 250,000 Baptists in more than 3,500 churches in the area of the Euro-Asiatic federation.

"As an example of what is happening in our area," Apatov said Aug. 2, "last year Armenian Baptists baptized about 250 persons. With about 800 members before those additions, that is a growth rate in one year of approximately one convert for every three believers."

Methods that are used to lead people to Christ include church preaching, evangelistic crusades and the use of music in preaching the gospel.

Local pastors and Christians from different countries have helped conduct evangelistic crusades in clubs, theaters and stadiums.

"Billy Graham's style of preaching makes gospel words glow," Apatov remarked.

Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus Baptist churches are very musically inclined, he noted. "Music is the main means of brotherhood. We have very good musicians and choirs. That is a very useful way of sharing the gospel. Every Baptist home seems to have a piano and children learn Christian music in the home."

But Baptists in the federation face varying problems.

In the south, great economic difficulties hamper growth in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan due to civil wars being fought there.

Some nations are Muslim and opposition to Christianity is strong.

In many of these nations the Russian populace is departing, making it important for local Baptists to assume responsibility for their own church life.

The government no longer allows Baptists as many opportunities as they enjoyed for a few years after the demise of communism. In many areas today the Russian Orthodox Church will gather signatures asking the government to deny building permits for Baptist church structures.

"We are grateful for the help we have received. We need further help to preach the gospel, but it is more

beneficial when that help comes to us in unity," Apatov said. He declined, however, to describe the specific problems or dissensions.

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-- By Jack Hillhouse

## **Reunion, evangelism highlight World Meeting of Baptist Women**

BUENOS AIRES (ABP) --Celebration was the dominant mood of the World Meeting of Baptist Women July 28-Aug. 1 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The leadership conference, sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance Women's Department, drew 390 delegates from 90 countries and geographic regions. Approximately 40 guests also attended the meeting.

In a business session, Mercy Jeyaraja Rao of India was elected as president and Irene Haase of Germany as secretary-treasurer, both for five-year terms.

In keeping with its theme, "In Christ We Celebrate Life," the meeting's 10 sessions celebrated -- through worship, testimonies, Bible study and prayer -- the relationship women have with Christ and each other.

The climax of the women's season of celebration occurred on Monday afternoon and evening when some 3,000 guests joined the delegates for the World Reunion of Baptist Women at Buenos Aires' Grand Rex Theater.

The reunion featured a pageant of colorful, spectacular folklore from around the world. Along with cultural presentations by delegates from the BWA Women's Department's six continental regions, other guest performers included musicians, singers and dancers from Argentina and Brazil; a Christian troupe of Indonesian dancers; an 11-member women's choir from Korea; and a quartet of musicians and singers from Moldova.

Between the sessions of the reunion, Argentine Baptist women led the delegates in an evangelistic rally at Buenos Aires' famous landmark, the Obelisk. The rally included special music by the Korean Women's Choir and a message by Gloria Humeniuk, a women's leader and pastor's wife from Balua Polauca, Argentina.

During earlier sessions of the meeting, the delegates heard highlights of work being done by women around the world.

One of the more stirring moments came with the introduction of delegates from 17 new women's organizations formed since the Women's Department's meeting in 1990. Organizations and countries represented by the new groups are Belarus, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Central Asia Republics, Croatia, Estonia, Euro-Asiatic Evangelical Christians-Baptists Women's Department, Fiji, Latvia, Pakistan, Philippine Southern Baptist Women's Assembly, Moldova, Nepal, Russia, Ukraine, Vietnam and Georgia.

Among other highlights of the meeting were two Bible study periods led by William Hull, provost at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Baptists have lowered the barrier between men and women in the church, Hull said in his first session, but they have not yet leveled it to the ground. The cross is a place of equal standing before God for men and women, he added.

Baptists should celebrate progress in which women take certain leadership roles and make "independent religious decisions." At the same time, he said Christians must admit that they have not yet fully utilized the spiritual gifts of women.

"Our concern here is not so much with the legal rights of women in the world as with their spiritual responsibilities in the church," Hull said.

Hull said Jesus is the model for how women should be recognized in the church.

"The emphasis of Jesus on faith instead of circumcision as the basis of one's standing before God had the

effect of placing men and women on equal religious footing. For faith, unlike circumcision, is, by its very nature, no respecter of gender," Hull said.

"The deepest tragedy of building back the barriers that Christ died to tear down is that it condemns the church to a futile effort of trying to fulfill its mission by utilizing only half of its available resources."

In other actions, the delegates:

-- welcomed Willene Pierce as the new executive director of the BWA Women's Department. Pierce assumed the position Feb. 22 after serving 13 years with the Woman's Missionary Union of Maryland/Delaware.

-- recognized Beth MacClaren upon her retirement as executive director of the Women's Department. She held the position for seven years.

-- recognized outgoing President Catherine Allen of Birmingham, Ala., and secretary-treasure Aduke Akinola of Ibadan, Nigeria. Both had served since 1990.

-- approved four routine bylaw changes designed to enhance participation.

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-- By Teresa Dickens with Pam Parry and Brenda Sanders.

## **Nicaraguan Baptist balances ministry and motherhood**

BUENOS AIRES (ABP) -- Nicaragua has a woman president -- so do Nicaraguan Baptists.

Carmen Pena is president of the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention and is representing her country at the Aug. 1-6 Baptist World Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"We have a place in the kingdom of God just as men do," Pena says.

Pena is married to a Nicaraguan Christian businessman and is the mother of two. Nevertheless she finds ways to balance her home responsibilities and her work as convention president.

"My husband stands behind me totally," she says. "And I try to help my children to see that their mother has to pay a price to have this ministry. So they too have to pay a price" in sharing her with Nicaraguan Baptists.

Pena has led Nicaraguan Baptists since January 1993. Part of her assignment is to visit the country's 87 churches and 120 mission points. She has had regional meetings in the seven areas of the country. As she travels throughout her country, visiting churches, speaking and praying for the people, she feels that the Lord has used her.

Pena, a graduate of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Managua, works with the seminary's program of theological education by extension. She oversees three extension centers with 50 students enrolled. The extension centers prepare leaders in rural areas. Some of the leaders come from remote areas, traveling to the extension center meetings two days a month.

Pena says she is overcoming the ideas women themselves have about the kind of ministry they can have. "Some think we are weak, we can't travel much, and that we have been created to always stay in the home and the kitchen."

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-- By Betty Poor

## **Croatian Protestants protest proposed pact with Vatican**

GENEVA (ABP) -- Protestant churches and organizations in Croatia are protesting a proposed law which they claim is undemocratic and will discriminate against the country's smaller religious denominations.

The churches have complained that the new law, combined with a special agreement to be signed between the Vatican and the Croatian government, gives the Roman Catholic Church a privileged position at odds with Croatia's constitution which forbids discrimination on the basis of religion, reports Ecumenical News International.

One church leader said the Roman Catholic Church was becoming a "State church." According to press reports, the new agreement with the Vatican will make Roman Catholic religious education compulsory in state-run schools, and a "Catholic military vicariate" will be established within the Croatian army.

Stanko Jambrek, a pastor and secretary of the Protestant Evangelical Council, said that the new law, which is yet to be passed by Croatia's parliament, could bring about "religious cleansing" of the republic.

According to another press report, the proposed law stipulates that only religious denominations with at least 30,000 to 50,000 members will be recognized by the state.

A Croatian journalist has already predicted that the law will turn almost 30 religious denominations into "mostly outlawed sects".

According to Seventh-day Adventists in Croatia, "with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, the Islamic community and maybe the Serbian Orthodox Church, there are no other religious denominations in Croatia with the membership that may come close to the 'democratically' chosen number of at least 30,000".

Independent figures show that approximately 76 percent of Croatia's population of 5 million are Roman Catholics, about 11 percent are Serbian Orthodox and 1.2 per cent are Muslim. Along with small Protestant organizations, Croatia has a small minority of Jews.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Jimmy Carter appeals on behalf of Belgian Baptists**

BRUSSELS, Belgium (ABP) -- Former President Jimmy Carter, who is an active Baptist, has written to the outgoing Belgian minister of justice, Melchior Wathelet, to complain about the country's religious discrimination against Baptists and other Protestants.

According to the Baptist Union of Belgium, the government in Brussels turned down a request by newly formed Federation of Evangelical Churches in Belgium for official recognition as a church. Wathelet refused the request, telling the group it would have to operate through the United Protestant Church which had already been granted recognition.

"However, for reasons which do not concern the state, this is not possible for us," said Samuel Verhaeghe, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Belgium. He said there are doctrinal and historical differences between the two organizations.

"Belgium must be the only country in Western Europe which still defines Baptists as cults," Verhaeghe told Ecumenical News International. "We want to change that for all evangelicals, and not just for the Baptists."

Wathelet, who still holds an important role in the Belgian Government, has recently been replaced as minister of justice by Stefaan De Clercke. Verhaeghe said he hoped De Clercke would reconsider the Federation of Evangelical Churches' request.

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-- By ABP staff

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**CORRECTION:** In the Aug. 1 ABP story, "WMU distributing materials for AIDS education program," please replace the 12th paragraph with the following:

One of the source materials offered by the women's group's AIDS program is a video, "Echoes from the Valley," produced by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, which tells the story of the Allen family and includes videos of physicians and others talking about the disease. It also features information on services provided to AIDS patients by Broadway Baptist Church of Fort Worth and First Baptist Church of Arlington.

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