

Associated Baptist Press

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Turmoil at FBC Atlanta prompts called meeting

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Members of First Baptist Church of Atlanta will hold an emergency meeting Aug. 13, apparently prompted by Pastor Charles Stanley's pending divorce and the abrupt resignation of his son as pastor of the 14,000-member church's satellite congregation.

Andy Stanley announced his resignation as associate pastor of First Baptist in a worship service Aug. 6 but without citing a reason, according to spokesman Jim Daley.

The same day, eight leaders of the church submitted a letter to Charles Stanley calling for an Aug. 13 meeting of the church's membership to discuss, among other things, the biblical qualifications for a pastor.

Since Stanley and his wife, Anna, have been unable to reconcile their marriage, some members of the church and its staff consider him to be unqualified for pastoral ministry, which they -- and Stanley -- say the Bible limits to men with intact first marriages. Some members said they expect the church conference to ask Stanley to resign or take a leave of absence.

Daley, director of marketing and communications for In Touch Ministries, Stanley's farflung TV ministry, confirmed a meeting will be held Sunday night "to discuss several business items" following the church's 6:30 p.m. worship service.

Daley would not discuss the agenda for the meeting. Asked if Stanley's role as pastor will be discussed, he said, "That will be decided in the meeting."

Stanley insists he is still seeking "reconciliation" with Anna, his wife of 40 years.

Anna Stanley first filed for divorce in June 1993. She later sought a legal separation instead but refiled for formal divorce in March of this year, saying attempts at reconciliation had failed. In her complaint, in which she asks for a jury trial, she is seeking alimony, division of the couple's assets and possession of their north Atlanta home.

Stanley, 62, whose TV ministry has made him one of the best known pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention, served as SBC president in 1984 and 1985.

First Baptist, one of the SBC's largest congregations, negotiated the sale of its downtown property in 1988

as part of a plan to move to a suburb in north Atlanta. New property was purchased later that year and a satellite congregation established, with Andy Stanley as pastor. Plans to reunite the two congregations were delayed, however, when sale of the downtown property fell through.

It is unclear whether Andy Stanley's resignation was in response to the turmoil surrounding his father, the divorce or some other reason. According to church staff members, Andy Stanley resigned to his father Wednesday, Aug. 2, and was unaware of plans for the called church conference.

Three days earlier, longtime church administrator Nolen Rollins resigned. In a letter to friends, Rollins later said, "I have become increasingly less able to give full support without compromising my personal integrity." He would not elaborate in a telephone interview Aug. 11.

Other details of the resignations, as well as the called church meeting, were sketchy and the Stanleys could not be reached for comment.

Daley, when asked what authority permitted the eight church members to call a church conference, said, "That's apparently how our constitution is worded."

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Clinton announces limits designed to curb teen smoking

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Clinton, in an effort to curb teen smoking, has placed strict limits on the sale and advertising of cigarettes.

Clinton announced at a news conference Aug. 10 in Washington that he has taken executive action to authorize the Food and Drug Administration to institute a series of steps designed to stop sales and marketing of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco to children.

The steps include requiring young people to prove their age with an ID card to buy cigarettes and banning sales of cigarettes in vending machines. They prohibit tobacco advertising on billboards near schools and playgrounds and ban the use of advertising images like "Joe Camel" to entice children to smoke.

The president's ban also prohibits free samples, giveaways and other marketing gimmicks aimed at young people, including sponsorship of sporting events. It also requires tobacco companies to fund and implement an annual \$150 million educational campaign aimed at stopping young people from smoking.

Tobacco companies said the limits are illegal and immediately filed suit to have them blocked.

But Clinton said the problem of teenage smoking is too serious to leave up to a voluntary approach. "Nobody much likes government regulation and I would prefer it if we could have done this some other way," he said. "The only other way I can think of is if Congress were to write these restrictions into law. They could do that, and if they do, this rule could become unnecessary."

Clinton cited strides made in making teenagers aware of the dangers of drug use in the 1960s and 1970s and of drunk driving in the 1980s. "It is time to take a third step to free our teenagers from addiction and dependency," he said.

While sale of tobacco to minors is already illegal, Clinton quoted statistics that show smoking is on the rise among young people. Smoking among eighth-graders has increased a third during the last four years and 25 percent among 10th graders. One out of five high school seniors is a daily smoker. Few people begin smoking after their teenage years, Clinton said.

Clinton said he did not propose an outright ban on tobacco because tens of millions of adults smoke legally and trying to take away that right "would be as ineffective as Prohibition was."

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'Jane Roe' professes Christianity, changes views on abortion

DALLAS (ABP) -- "Jane Roe," the woman whose test case led to the landmark Supreme Court ruling legalizing most abortions in America, has become a born-again Christian and changed her position on abortion.

Norma McCorvey, known as Jane Roe in the 1973 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision ruling early-term abortions a matter of private conscience, was baptized Aug. 8 by fundamentalist pastor Phillip "Flip" Benham, president of the national anti-abortion group Operation Rescue.

"I'm pro-life, I think I've always been pro-life, I just didn't know it," McCorvey told Dallas radio station WBAP.

"I think abortion's wrong. I think what I did with Roe vs. Wade was wrong. I just have to be pro-life," she said on "ABC World News Tonight."

McCorvey recently quit her job as marketing director at a Dallas abortion clinic, where she worked across the street from Operation Rescue's national headquarters.

"Jesus Christ has reached through the abortion mill wall and touched the heart of Norma McCorvey," Benham, an ordained Free Will Methodist minister, told USA Today.

Pro-life advocates predicted McCorvey's conversion would have far-reaching influence in the abortion debate, while abortion-rights advocates downplayed its significance.

"Norma McCorvey has exercised her right to decide this personal issue and we respect that," said Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion Rights Action League. "But the Roe decision isn't about any individual woman. It's about the decision of all women to make the choice free of government intervention."

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-- By ABP staff

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is a condensed rewrite combining two stories that ran in yesterday's ABP.

Clinton outlines 'family values' agenda at joint Baptist meeting

By Bob Allen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist who has at times received scorn from his own Baptist family, got a hero's welcome at a gathering of other Baptists -- both black and white -- Aug. 9.

Clinton addressed a historic joint session of the predominantly African American Progressive National Baptist Convention and the mostly white Alliance of Baptists in Charlotte, N.C.

Clinton called on Americans to reject the politics of polarization and embrace the "family values" of hard work and commitment to others.

"Whether we like it or not, we are all in this together," Clinton said. "Whether we like it or not we are an American family and we behave like a good family or a bad family or a little bit of both, but we are a family. We have got to get together."

In his first address to the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Clinton received a strong endorsement from platform speakers and a capacity crowd at the Charlotte Convention Center because of his support for the poor

and minorities.

Renowned African American preacher Gardner Taylor introduced Clinton to the crowd. "We are Christian people and we know Christians, no matter what label they might bear," Taylor said. "And we know imposters when they bear the name of Christian and bring disgrace on the name of Christ by their lack of compassion and concern for people in this land."

"We are thankful we have a president who is a committed Christian," Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., said.

"We know his compassion and we are committed to his purpose," Taylor said. "Liberty and freedom and democracy can no longer claim primary position in two branches of our government. We have only the executive branch where compassion for people ... and religious liberty still exist and we must keep it so."

Clinton told the crowd, "there's been a lot of talk for 15 or 20 years about family values," but that discussion is often limited to concerns like violence and sex in the media, while ignoring other social and economic issues that are also important to building strong families.

"Isn't raising a family fundamentally about the obligations we owe to other people in the family?" Clinton said. "Isn't it fundamentally about the responsibility we have to fulfill those obligations and then to behave in such a way that we can make the most of our lives?"

"If we're going to talk about the family values of America, shouldn't we talk about it like that?"

The president outlined his list of "family values" that he said government can help promote:

-- Reducing the nation's debt, but without placing undue burden on programs that help children and the aged.

-- Helping working families, including reforming health care and raising the minimum wage. "My idea of the 21st century is not a hard-work, low-wage, dead-end society. Let's raise the minimum wage. ... That's our obligation to people who are out there doing that kind of work the rest of us don't want to do. That's part of our family obligations."

-- Education. Clinton said he has proposed a G.I. Bill for America's workers that would provide a voucher up to \$2,500 a year to any unemployed person to be used for up to two years for education and training at a community college.

-- Protecting the environment. "I don't understand this new obsession in Washington with ripping out all the protections for the environment and for the public health and safety, for clean food, clean water, clean air."

Clinton also cited four imminent threats to children in society: violence, teen pregnancy, smoking and drugs.

"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven,' " Clinton said.

"When they come, what do you do? Luke 11: 'If a child asks for bread would you give him a stone? If he asks for a fish would you give him a serpent? If he asks for an egg would you give him a scorpion?' That's what the kids of this country are being given, a whole lot of them."

He called on churches to intervene in a gang culture which overwhelmingly believes it is proper to shoot someone for showing disrespect.

"Somebody has got to say, 'I don't care what they call you, it is better to live to be 70 years old and have children and grandchildren and have a useful full life. What difference does it make what they call you?' Somebody has to be there to do that, and we've all got to do that together."

He urged changing laws to encourage unwed teenage mothers to remain at home rather than drop out of school and go on welfare and holding fathers more accountable for children born out of wedlock.

He also called for continuing and strengthening drug-prevention programs in schools.

Clinton also introduced the issue of teenage smoking, acknowledging he was speaking in an area of country where tobacco is an important financial crop. Still, he said, Americans should not ignore evidence that smoking poses a serious health risk to the nation's young people.

"If you wanted to do something to reduce the cost of health care, help over the long run to balance the budget and increase the health care of America, having no teenagers smoke would be the cheapest, easiest, quickest thing you could ever do to change the whole dynamic of health care in America."

The PNBC, established in 1961 by founders of the civil rights movement, is regarded as the most liberal of the black Baptist groups in America. The Alliance of Baptists, founded in 1986, is considered the more progressive of two main splinter groups to emerge since a conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years.

Clinton's warm reception at the meeting contrasted with that in his own denomination, the conservative and predominantly white SBC, which has never invited him to speak. The SBC recently adopted a resolution opposing Clinton's surgeon general nominee, Henry Foster, another speaker at the PNBC meeting.

In 1993, there was an unsuccessful attempt at the SBC to refuse seating to messengers from Clinton's home church, Immanuel Baptist Church of Little Rock, Ark., because of Clinton's pro-choice position on abortion and his "don't ask, don't tell" policy toward gays in the military.

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CORRECTION: In the Aug. 10 ABP story, "Clinton receives warm welcome at joint meeting of Baptists," please correct the year reference in ninth paragraph so the paragraph reads as follows:

In 1993, a Florida pastor tried unsuccessfully to remove Clinton's home church, Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., from membership in the SBC because of the president's pro-choice position on abortion and his "don't ask, don't tell" policy toward gays in the military.

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