

Associated Baptist Press

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New requirements for SBC chaplains may force denomination question on CBF

By Bob Allen

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Chaplains Commission is tightening doctrinal requirements for new chaplains, making it tougher for moderate Baptists to serve as chaplains and pastoral counselors in hospitals, the military and businesses.

The change could potentially nudge the breakaway Cooperative Baptist Fellowship toward declaring itself a separate Baptist convention, though a Fellowship spokesman said chaplaincy is only one of several issues framing a study of whether the moderate organization should formally split with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Chaplains Commission, a subsidiary of the SBC Home Mission Board, is the body that endorses Southern Baptist chaplains. Chaplains are paid by the agencies and companies they serve and receive no funds from the SBC. But hiring agencies typically require chaplains to be certified by the faith group they represent.

Southern Baptists number 2,343 chaplains, including some whose sympathies lie with the Fellowship, which was formed in 1991 by moderates opposing conservative reforms in the SBC.

At the Fellowship's recent general assembly in Fort Worth, Texas, a motion came to the floor asking the organization to vote next year to establish a new national Baptist convention. Bill Montgomery, a retired Air Force chaplain from San Antonio, Texas, said he made the motion so the Fellowship could endorse chaplains who might otherwise be turned down by the Southern Baptist Chaplains Commission.

Montgomery's motion was ruled out of order. But the Fellowship's moderator, Pat Anderson of Lakeland, Fla., said he will appoint a five-person task group to study the pros and cons of establishing a new denomination.

The chairman of a separate Fellowship committee already studying chaplaincy, however, said in July it would be unnecessary to start a convention just to endorse chaplains, because HMB officials had "bent over backward" to ensure that moderate Southern Baptists continue to be certified, regardless of their support for the Fellowship.

But just over two weeks later, at an Aug. 8-9 meeting at the HMB's new headquarters in Alpharetta, Ga., the Chaplains Commission voted to add questions to a form sent to new applicants to ensure that new chaplains hold conservative views.

The revised belief statement for chaplaincy candidates will add specific questions about authority and inspiration of the Bible. Chaplains will be asked if they believe the Bible is historically accurate and if the miracles described in Scripture actually occurred. They will also be asked to explain their understanding of a section of the Baptist Faith and Message, a confessional statement adopted by the SBC in 1963, which describes the Bible as "truth without any mixture of error."

The Chaplains Commission also voted to add to informational materials mailed to first-time chaplain applicants a copy of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, a document written by evangelical scholars in 1978.

Current SBC leaders view the Bible as inerrant, meaning that it is historically accurate and to be taken literally. Many moderates, meanwhile, revere the Bible's authority but are more open to various interpretations.

The intent behind the Chaplains Commission's action apparently was not to force the denominational issue on the Fellowship, but it could provide a test case should a candidate denied SBC endorsement for doctrinal reasons turn to the Fellowship for certification.

Ron Gaynor, chairman of the Chaplain's Commission, said the timing of the HMB action, on the heels of the Fellowship's discussion on whether to form a convention, was coincidental. He said the recommendation came from a member of the commission, but the Fellowship was not mentioned in the discussion.

"I did not get the impression it was directed at anyone. It was not an effort to be exclusionary," said Gaynor, a pastor from Tucker, Ga.

Gaynor said the commission decided to add the questions to make the questionnaire used by chaplain applicants more consistent with the one used by prospective missionaries seeking appointment by the HMB.

Huey Perry, director of the HMB's chaplaincy division, said participation in the Fellowship is not an issue for endorsement of chaplains. The commission is charged with endorsing chaplains and pastoral counselors who are members of cooperating Southern Baptist churches. "That is the litmus test," he said.

Ed Beddingfield, chair of the Fellowship committee studying chaplaincy issues, said he is willing to take HMB leaders at their word.

"I would not impose any interpretation on the motives of the Chaplains Commission," said Beddingfield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Sylva, N.C. "Without speaking to the members of the Chaplains Commission, I would not want to assume they made these changes based on the Fellowship's action in Fort Worth."

Regardless of the intent, however, the commission's new rules will "certainly have an effect on the outcome of our study," Beddingfield predicted. "We will certainly have to take the Home Mission Board's actions into account as we study the issue of whether the CBF should look into endorsing chaplains," he said.

Though the chaplaincy study is still in a preliminary stage, it appears it might be possible for the Fellowship to find a way to endorse chaplains short of forming a new convention, Beddingfield said.

The need for agencies to have chaplains accountable to their denomination can be accommodated easily in faith groups with an established hierarchy. With denominational groups like Baptists, however, which exercise little or no authority over local churches, endorsement by a centralized agency raises polity issues, Beddingfield said.

"Some Baptists feel that having endorsements at all by the denomination is meddling in a polity that is not ours," he said.

Beddingfield said there appears to be precedent for chaplain-hiring agencies to make allowances for a faith group's polity.

"There may be the possibility of other options besides declaring oneself to be a denomination," he said. "What we want to find out is if those possibilities exist and how they are implemented in other denominations and how they are interpreted by the using agencies."

While the desire to endorse chaplains will be one of several issues to be weighed by the task force considering forming a new convention, the denomination question is only a secondary concern to the chaplaincy study group, Beddingfield said.

One concern that led to the study was the possibility that the SBC might no longer endorse chaplains sympathetic to the Fellowship, he said. But most of the impetus came from current chaplains who say that out of

personal conviction they no longer want to represent the SBC.

The HMB's Huey Perry downplayed the impact of the Chaplains Commission's new policy, which he said is not particularly onerous and will not apply to current chaplains. "I think initially that our people who are endorsed will have some concerns that this is going to be a re-examination of them theologically," Perry said.

Chaplains are endorsed for a specific position, which means generally they must obtain an "update endorsement" from the HMB in order to change jobs, Perry said. However, staff of the HMB's chaplaincy division is authorized by policy to issue update endorsements and merely report them to the Chaplain's Commission, he said. Only first-time endorsements require approval by board members.

"We have a lot more update endorsements than we do first-time," Perry said. Of 118 chaplains endorsed at the group's last meeting, only 35 were first-time candidates. The rest had received a previous endorsement, he said.

Perry said the chaplaincy division staff "will have to work really hard at alleviating the concerns" of current chaplains. "I think the biggest thing we have to deal with is the perception," he said.

Those assurances did little to allay the fears of Al Hall, a hospital chaplain in St. Petersburg, Fla., who as a theological moderate admitted "I was a little anxious" at his own recent re-endorsement.

"At least among us who are on the field, we are not that certain" that the new restrictions won't be applied to current chaplains, Hall said.

Jerry Martin, a retired military chaplain in Kensington, Md., predicted the change "will create an uncomfortable environment for new chaplains who might find it more desirable to look for endorsement from some other agency."

Martin, pastor of Kensington Baptist Church in suburban Washington, D.C., said he agreed to write a statement of his beliefs when he was endorsed by the SBC in 1965 but would have objected to being prompted for particular responses on specific topics.

Martin wondered if the more stringent doctrinal requirements might open the door for excluding chaplain candidates based on other theological views, such as the ordination of women.

While the Home Mission Board decided several years ago not to appoint ordained women as missionaries, the issue "has not been a problem" for chaplains, Martin added. "I think (the new policy) is only going to create problems," he said.

Perry admitted that some first-time applicants for endorsement may be concerned about the new language. But he predicted that when most receive the materials they will conclude the HMB is "really just asking them to be more specific about what Baptists have believed and do believe" regarding the nature of the Bible.

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Christians should seek to influence government, not control it, Dunn says

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- People with religious values should seek to influence government, but not control it, a Baptist church-state specialist told a national cable-television audience Aug. 23.

A deep commitment to separation of church and state does not translate into separation of politics from religion, said James Dunn.

"There's an appropriate mix," said Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious-liberty watchdog group in Washington.

Dunn appeared with a Presbyterian minister on "The Washington Journal," a morning C-SPAN program that assesses the day's news.

Churches should not try to dominate the political process but to speak to it, Dunn said. "Influence, yes. Control, never."

Elenora Giddings Ivory, director of the Washington office of the Presbyterian Church/USA, said churches often are forced into involvement in church-state issues when their ministries are endangered.

She pointed to a Presbyterian church in the District of Columbia that was moving and its new neighbors did not want the church to continue to feed the homeless. The local zoning board denied the church the right to continue. The church eventually won the battle to resume the program.

"Churches used to be considered good neighbors," she said. "Once our churches begin to realize that they are in danger of losing the ability to feed the hungry and clothe the (needy), then they do become involved in church-state issues."

Among other topics discussed was school choice -- a plan that would provide parents with public tax dollars to send their children to the public, private or religious school of their choice.

"I am fed up to here with public-school bashing when the vast majority of our schools are doing a great job," Dunn said.

The nation would benefit if Americans spent as much energy on improving public schools as they spent criticizing them, he said.

The Baptist Joint Committee opposes the spending of public money for private purposes.

"The notion you can take the public trust and pervert the common school and use it to advance religious or political causes is just bizarre," Dunn said.

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Black, white pastors take 'gamble' on relationship

By Ken Camp

PORT ARTHUR, Texas (ABP) -- Reaching outside comfort zones of race and culture can be a gamble. And two Southeast Texas Baptist preachers -- one black, one white -- can't help but smile when they consider the irony of that.

After all, opposition to gambling brought them together. Now, they just hope others in racially divided Port Arthur will take the same gamble that they have.

Randy Vaughn, pastor of the predominantly African-American Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church, and Rick Erwin, pastor of Procter Baptist Church, a mostly white congregation, joined forces about three years ago when gambling promoters tried to bring casinos to their economically depressed area.

Though their stand was unpopular, they succeeded in keeping casino riverboats from docking at Port Arthur's "Pleasure Island." And they struck up a friendship that has endured.

"Our relationship is rooted in mutual respect," Erwin said. "We have committed to be friends first. We can disagree. We may put each other on the spot sometimes. But we're friends, and that comes first."

The relationship took nurturing. Vaughn is a community-oriented social activist who serves as executive vice president of the Texas State Missionary Baptist Convention and whose church is affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Erwin is a Southern Baptist whose ministry involvement is limited mainly to his local parish and likes to work on antique motorcycles and hunt rattlesnakes on a West Texas ranch.

"We wanted common ground, and we found it," Erwin said.

The pair found that they shared a common commitment to Christ and concern for their city. And in Erwin, Vaughn discovered someone who understood his passion for racial justice in a way few white Southern Baptists could.

"As we began to talk and open up to one another, Rick was able to share things about his own background, particularly concerning his father, that helped to shape his life," Vaughn said.

Erwin has clear childhood memories of when his father began implementing court-ordered integration at

the Louisiana high school where he was principal. The Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on his family's front lawn.

"That will make an impression on a 12-year-old that won't go away," Erwin said.

Vaughn and Erwin made a commitment to lead their churches to develop relationships with each other. The pastors began occasional pulpit exchanges, their congregations started worshipping together once a year and they worked together on a vacation Bible school.

But Vaughn does not dwell on what has been done. He focuses on what could be done as black and white Christians begin working together in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

"There are more opportunities before us than what is behind us," he said. "The issues are real. Racism is real here in Port Arthur."

Segments of Southeast Texas' Golden Triangle area have long been known for racial intolerance. In Port Arthur, racial tensions reached a high point recently when the city council fired the black city manager.

But there are signs of hope. One avenue of cooperation is the Organization of Christians Assisting People, started 10 years ago by Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church. The ministry provides remedial education and tutorial opportunities for children and youth, adult day care for the aged and disabled, substance-abuse counseling, transportation and housing assistance.

The non-profit organization holds open two positions on its board of directors for representatives from Golden Triangle Baptist Association.

And the association has worked recently with several predominantly black congregations in nearby Beaumont in inner-city youth revivals and other events, according to Dion Ainsworth, associate director of missions.

Block parties sponsored by Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Beaumont with help from the association drew more than 300 young people and resulted in at least 40 professions of faith.

The key to such cooperative efforts is granting all parties an equal voice in the planning process -- particularly the churches that remain in the communities where ministries take place, Vaughn emphasized.

One dream in which Vaughn hopes to involve churches and community leaders is a human development project. Believing that the city's greatest resource is its people, he wants to see city government join hands with churches to train future leaders in understanding cultural diversity, resolving conflict and setting goals.

"I'm optimistic. Oh my, I've got to be optimistic," he said. "If it weren't for undying hope and the love of God, I wouldn't be able to keep going."

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-- Photo available by request

40 percent of food-stamp mothers never married, according to study

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- About 40 percent of the mothers receiving food stamps have never been married, according to a Census Bureau study released Aug. 23.

About 5.3 million mothers received food stamps during three months in 1993. Of those, 2.1 million had never married, the study reported.

The Census Bureau study, titled, "Mothers Who Receive Food Stamps -- Fertility and Socioeconomic Characteristics," revealed that women on food stamps tend to have more children and begin child-bearing at ages younger than the national norm.

The average age of mothers receiving food stamps during the study period was 30, compared to an average age of 34 for mothers not in the program. Food-stamp mothers averaged 2.6 children, compared to 2.1

children for mothers not on food stamps. The average age for a first birth was 20 for mothers receiving food stamps, compared to 23 for others.

Most (78 percent) of food stamp mothers were jobless, according to the study. Four-in-10 lacked a high-school diploma, and two-thirds lived in families with monthly incomes of less than \$1,000.

More whites (3.2 million) received food stamps than blacks (1.9 million) or Hispanics (1.1 million), but higher percentages of minorities received public assistance. About one-in-three African American mothers of childbearing age received food stamps, compared to one-in-nine white mothers. One-in-four Hispanic mothers received food stamps, compared to one-in-seven non-Hispanic mothers.

About 13 percent of the nation's 4.2 million foreign-born mothers were on food stamps, and about three-quarters of all foreign-born mothers on food stamps were not U.S. citizens, the study said.

Data for the study was collected in the Survey of Income and Program Participation between June and September 1993.

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Dan Martin hospitalized in Vernon, Texas

VERNON, Texas (ABP) -- Dan Martin, longtime Baptist journalist, was hospitalized Aug. 17 in Vernon, Texas, with acute pancreatitis and other health problems.

A series of tests and other medical procedures at Wilbarger General Hospital indicated Martin has a stomach mass, he said, but surgery was delayed pending further tests.

Martin has been working as a reporter for the Vernon Daily Record since May, when he was laid off as executive director of Texans Against Gambling. The anti-gambling agency cited lack of financial support for the organization in letting Martin go.

Martin, 56, previously was news editor for Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's news service, for 10 years before being fired -- along with Baptist Press director Alvin Shackelford -- by the SBC Executive Committee in July 1990. After his dismissal, Martin was interim director of Associated Baptist Press for several months.

A native of Wichita Falls, Texas, Martin spent 17 years with daily newspapers in Colorado and Texas before entering denominational journalism, working for the SBC Home Mission Board and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Dan Martin and his wife, Colleen, have limited health insurance. Colleen has been unemployed since moving to Vernon, and Dan has not been with the Vernon newspaper long enough to build up any sick leave. Many of his friends and former colleagues have contacted the Baptist Standard of Texas wishing to help with medical expenses. The Standard is serving as a channel for getting contributions to the Martins. Gifts to the Martins through the Standard will not be tax deductible, however. The address is Baptist Standard, P.O. Box 660267, Dallas, TX 75266-0267.

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