

Associated Baptist Press

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October 26, 1995

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Campbell University to begin new divinity school in 1997

CARY, N.C. (ABP) -- Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C., will open a divinity school in 1997, joining a growing number of moderate Baptist schools offering ministers alternative training to conservative seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Campbell President Norman Wiggins announced plans for the school at a ceremony Oct. 25 at offices of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in Cary.

The charter class will enroll in August 1997, Wiggins said, though some courses will begin next fall. Campbell hopes enrollment will reach 125 by the time the first class graduates, in 2000.

Campbell is the third North Carolina Baptist school to announce new ministerial training programs in recent years. Gardner-Webb University's master of divinity program is in its third year, with 102 ministerial students currently on the campus in Boiling Springs. Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem has been raising money for a divinity school and is expected to announce an opening date soon.

One of the six SBC seminaries is also located in North Carolina. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest once was regarded the most progressive seminary. However, after moderate President Randall Lolley resigned in 1987 and was eventually replaced by conservative leader Paige Patterson, the seminary led the way in what leaders call a "conservative resurgence" at SBC schools.

Other moderate Baptist schools formed in response to changes in denominational seminaries include Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Va., and Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. A new Mercer University theology school is scheduled to open in Atlanta this fall.

Wiggins said Campbell's divinity school "will be rooted in the noble tradition of North Carolina Baptists and will be faithful to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of the Bible, the priesthood of believers and the autonomy of the local church."

Campbell now offers graduate studies in law, education, business and pharmacy. With creation of a divinity school, "Campbell is part of the emerging pattern among Baptists in the establishment of theological schools as part of the university setting," said Glen Holt, who chairs a committee studying theological education needs in North Carolina.

Roy Smith, executive director of the North Carolina convention, termed the establishment of the school "a vitally important event in North Carolina Baptist life."

Alfred Ayscue, state convention president, called it "good news that the overwhelming majority of North Carolina Baptists will greet with enthusiasm and gratitude."

Start-up costs for the school will be about \$200,000, said Provost Jerry Wallace. When the first class graduates, the budget will be about \$1 million, he said.

Campbell trustees voted Sept. 22 to establish the school, based on a feasibility study first commissioned in 1969, Wiggins said.

Overall enrollment is down in SBC seminaries, which are run by conservatives who gained control of the nation's largest Protestant body during the 1980s. Among factors affecting seminary enrollment is the proliferation of new schools in moderate states in response to the SBC's conservative movement.

But Southeastern Seminary President Paige Patterson said he expects the moderate schools to end up competing more with each other for students and money than with SBC seminaries.

"But everybody's got a right to do what they want to do," Patterson said. "That's part of what it means to be in a free society and a free church. I wouldn't trade it for all the money in the world."

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-- By Bob Allen, with R.G. Puckett and Anne Saker

Vocal Freemasonry opponent disfellowshipped by church

By Bob Allen

BEAUMONT, Texas (ABP) -- Larry Holly, a conservative layman whose relentless opposition to Freemasonry led to a study of the lodge by the Southern Baptist Convention, has been kicked out of his church in Beaumont, Texas, after raising the issue there.

Holly, a physician, also leads Mission and Ministry to Men, a ministry he describes as offering materials to encourage evangelism and discipleship. In that role Holly maintains a lengthy electronic-mail list by which he regularly offers both devotional thoughts and commentary on current events.

In a note dated Oct. 26, Holly reported he had been asked to leave the membership of Calvary Baptist Church in Beaumont.

In an earlier note, dated Oct. 16, he described challenging members of the church to confront the issue of Freemasonry in their congregation.

Holly said he told church members he had not spoken about the issue before because he feared becoming a source of conflict in the church. He said a sense of spiritual renewal in his life, however, prompted him to speak out.

At the church's evening service Oct. 15, following a series of revival meetings, a young man asked for prayer for his "indifference and coldness toward God," Holly wrote. The pastor asked if anyone else wished to speak, Holly said, and after a few minutes he went forward.

Holly said he confessed that as the young man's mentor and teacher, he was "largely responsible" for his spiritual emptiness.

He continued: "Pastor, I need to ask your forgiveness because I have not been faithful to you. For the past six years, I have feared becoming the source of conflict in this church. But from this day forth I am going to be a man of God. If that splits the church, then so be it. If the church wants to vote me out, then so be it."

Holly said he went on to say: "Pastor, you and I know that one of the things blocking revival in our church has not been dealt with. And until it is, we can play games all day, but we will not see revival. I am not going to live in fear any longer. That thing is Freemasonry."

Holly said he had "no intention of pursuing the question of Freemasonry any further" in the church, but added, "I do believe that we have the opportunity to have liberty, freedom and revival."

Later that week, the church's deacons reportedly called a meeting and voted to ask Holly to leave for creating strife in the congregation.

Holly declined to be interviewed about the dispute. John Powers, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, did not return a reporter's phone call.

Holly wrote that he recently experienced a feeling of spiritual renewal after a long period of emptiness. Among "a number of changes" he is making in his life, Holly is going to refrain from writing for his informal electronic mail and fax network so as "not to be distracted from hearing from the Lord," he said.

In his Oct. 26 note, Holly said he does not know where he will attend church, but noted that "no other Southern Baptist church in our community would receive us as members," because of his reputation as a Masonry opponent.

Holly's assertion that Freemasonry is inconsistent with Christianity led to a 1992-93 study by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department. Since the report, which left membership in the Masonic Lodge a matter of personal conscience, Holly has sought unsuccessfully to have the document recalled, alleging that it is biased and tacitly endorses Masonry.

Holly has been vocal on other issues as well.

As a trustee of the Baptist Sunday School Board for several years, Holly was a leader among a conservative faction that alleged the agency favored moderates in the SBC, eventually forcing President Lloyd Elder to take early retirement in 1991.

Conservatives who now lead the SBC have not been spared Holly's criticism, either.

Holly was also a leading critic of the 1994 "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document, linking conservative Protestants and Catholics together on a number of social issues. Under pressure, two SBC agency heads who had supported the document -- Richard Land of the Christian Life Commission and Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board -- eventually had their signatures removed.

He also recently wrote a book condemning violent protest of abortion, in which he also argues against the non-violent "civil disobedience" approach advocated by pro-life groups like Operation Rescue.

Keith Parks' son resigns as SBC foreign missionary

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Three years after his father retired as president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to head missions work at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Kent Parks is also resigning as a Southern Baptist missionary to seek appointment with the moderate organization's alternative missions program.

Kent Parks and his wife, Erika, have resigned from the Foreign Mission Board effective Nov. 30, citing philosophical differences with the agency's conservative leaders.

They expect to be hired as Fellowship missionaries at an appointment service Dec. 1, after which they will return to Asia to work with an unreached people group.

The Parkses, Southern Baptist Convention missionaries for eight years, said they are unable to give the "unquestioning loyalty" for current SBC leaders that FMB administrators demand.

"While we are totally committed to world evangelization, we find we cannot speak with the support and loyalty for these leaders that is expected of us," the Parkses wrote in their resignation letter.

The couple accused conservative SBC leaders, who gained control from moderates in a long political struggle during the 1980s, of "intimidation and slander" against opponents and said missionaries are increasingly restricted from speaking out against trustees.

They said it is inconsistent for the FMB to claim it wants to work with all "Great Commission Christians" while refusing to cooperate with the Fellowship, which leaders say competes with SBC mission efforts.

They also criticized the SBC for taking primary responsibility for promoting missions offerings and education away from Woman's Missionary Union, its 107-year-old auxiliary. While the WMU will continue to support missions, the change demotes the organization from a "CEO" to a "secretary" role, they said.

The couple also said they do not use the word "inerrant" to describe Scripture, a litmus test for hiring at SBC agencies controlled by conservatives, but "do not feel we should be considered suspect because we have an even higher view of the complete authenticity and truth of each verse of God's Holy Written Word."

The Parkses said they know of "many" other missionaries who have resigned for similar reasons but "have chosen not to go public" with their complaints. "We feel a responsibility," the couple said, to "share our perceptions" with supporters and friends.

A spokesman for the Foreign Mission Board declined to respond to charges in the Parkses' resignation letter.

"We do not routinely comment on personnel matters," said David Button, vice president for public relations and development.

One brother of Kent Parks, Stan, already serves as a Fellowship missionary in Asia. Another brother, Randall, also resigned as an SBC missionary and works in Egypt with the Agency for International Development.

Keith Parks, a 38-year Foreign Mission Board employee, retired as president of the FMB in October 1991 in a dispute with trustees. Two months later, at age 65, he took over as missions coordinator for the Fellowship, a year-old organization with 14 missionaries and a \$2.5 million budget.

With a new crop of appointees this December, the Fellowship will surpass the 100-missionary mark for the first time. The Atlanta-based organization has a current budget of \$13 million. The largest portion of that, \$9 million, is set aside for global missions.

The Foreign Mission Board, based in Richmond, Va., employs 4,077 missionaries with an annual budget of \$189 million.

Many people who give money to the Fellowship would not otherwise be supporting missions at all, Kent and Erika Parks observed in their resignation letter. Rather than competing with SBC missions, the Fellowship "is adding a resource to the overall world mission endeavor which might otherwise be lost," they said.

"Is not our greatest concern to the overall mission effort and not just the FMB contribution to it?" they asked.

Senate committee explores religious equality proposal

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A proposed religious equality amendment to the Constitution that advocates say is needed to clear up the issue of religious expression in public schools would have the opposite effect, a top Justice Department official told senators Oct. 25.

Debate over the amendment would only further complicate the difficult issue of religion in the public sphere, Assistant Attorney General Walter Dellinger told the Senate Judiciary Committee in its second hearing on the issue in a week.

Dellinger said the Clinton administration is working to reduce polarization on the issue by helping school districts to understand what types of religious expression are already permitted by the Constitution.

"In a country as diverse as ours, we must take care that well-intended discussion about the role of religion in public life -- and especially in public schools -- does not have the effect of heightening religious tensions and undermining our sense of shared community," he said.

"Before the country embarks on what has the potential to be a very divisive debate on this subject, it is important that we share a common understanding of the kind and amount of religious activity that already is permissible in the public schools," he continued.

A supporter of the amendment, meanwhile, said it is needed to reverse "a state of religious apartheid" that exists in America.

Louis Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, said that for more than 50 years "public manifestations of Christianity ... have been continuously and systematically separated from American society."

Sheldon said groups pushing for the amendment are concerned about hostility toward religion and not -- as critics allege -- pursuing a hidden agenda to reinstate prayer led by school officials. He labeled that charge a "straw man."

Cathleen Cleaver, director of legal studies of the Family Research Council, admitted the amendment is a "radical procedure" but argued it is needed to correct court rulings limiting religious expression.

The two religion clauses in the First Amendment, Cleaver said, were designed to complement one another but erroneous rulings by courts have instead placed them in conflict. The proposed amendment is "restorative, not creative," she said.

Another witness, Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said the doctrine of church-state separation implied in the First Amendment serves both secular and sacred aims.

"When we tie the church and state together, the church tends to use civil power to enforce its brand of religion and the state palms off the name of God to support its stripe of politics," Walker said. "But when we separate the two, religion tends to flourish, and the state is relieved of the daunting task of making decisions about religion -- something it does poorly."

Though some Christians support the proposed amendment because it would open the door for government funding of religion, Walker said churches are better off without tax money.

"When religion bellies up to the public trough, it becomes lazy and dependent. How can religion raise a prophetic fist against government when it has its other hand opened for a handout?" he asked.

Kevin Hasson, president and general counsel of The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, said new laws are needed but not a constitutional amendment. He said the threat to religious liberty is not one of "conspiracy but bureaucracy."

"The law as it is actually experienced by American citizens is mediated by an assortment of zoning commissioners, park rangers, school administrators and the like," Hasson said. Civil servants have budgets to defend

and bureaucratic tranquility to maintain and generally feel the safest course is to exclude religious expression, he said.

"This bureaucratic allergy to trouble is, I believe, the thread that ties together most of the various horror stories we have all heard," Hasson added.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, and committee chairman, said he is reluctant to amend the Constitution but that both sides had valid arguments.

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6,000 respond to preaching in northeast Indian crusade

MEGHALAYA, India (ABP) -- More than 6,000 people in northeast India responded to invitations to accept Jesus Christ in a series of meetings led by Brazilian pastor Nilson Fanini, the Baptist World Alliance reports.

Fanini, one of the most prominent church figures in Brazil who was recently elected president of the BWA, preached to about 25,000 people nightly in a series of evangelistic crusades Oct. 18-22 in Meghalaya.

More than 750 people came forward each night, mostly of the Garo ethnic group which lives in the region, said Tony Cupit, director of evangelism for the BWA. He estimated two-thirds of the decisions were first-time commitments to Jesus Christ.

"There was a mighty outpouring of God's spirit on the Garo people," Cupit said.

The evangelistic meetings were part of a conference on reaching unevangelized people living in "World A," the segment of the world least influenced by Christianity.

The Baptist World Alliance organized the meetings along with the Garo Baptist Convention, an organization formed in 1875 by Baptists originally evangelized by American Baptist missionaries. The convention numbers 1,471 churches with 148,652 baptized members.

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-- By Wendy Ryan

Texas social service agency begins international ministries

DALLAS (ABP) -- Buckner Baptist Benevolences, a Christian social service agency in Texas, is now offering international adoptions and other ministries in three Eastern European nations, officials have announced.

Thanks to networking with social workers in Russia, Poland and Romania, Buckner will for the first time begin offering international services, announced Kenneth Hall, president of the Dallas-based agency.

Among services planned are international adoption of special-needs children, joint exchanges of social workers, medical care for children in orphanages and providing supplies ranging from medicine to computers and toys.

Buckner recently finalized its first international adoption when a couple from Houston returned to the United States with a 5-year-old girl from an orphanage in St. Petersburg, Russia.

In February, one social worker from Oradea, Romania, and another from St. Petersburg will come to Dallas to train with Buckner's staff for three months. The purpose of the staff exchange is "to assist the people in those countries in developing a comprehensive social work program," said Mike Douris, director of Buckner Children and Family Services, Inc., for East Texas.

Hall said officials in the three nations initiated inquiries based on Buckner's reputation as "a quality social service agency."

Hall said Buckner will soon begin seeking volunteers to travel to St. Petersburg and Oradea to work with orphanages. Officials in those cities expressed a special need for ophthalmologists, said Hall, who recently concluded a two-week trip to the three Eastern European countries.

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-- By ABP staff, with Scott Collins and Russell Rankin

CORRECTION: The fourth paragraph in the Oct. 13 ABP story, "Fall enrollment declines at Southwestern Seminary," contains an error. Enrollment at off-campus centers is 404, up 15 percent over last year. ABP reported a wrong number. New students in off-campus centers number 104, compared to 50 last fall. ABP regrets the error.

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