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Dockery elected president of Union University

By Mark Wingfield

JACKSON, Tenn. (ABP) -- Seminary administrator David Dockery was unanimously elected president of Union University Dec. 8, succeeding Hyran Barefoot, who will retire May 31.

Dockery, 43, currently is vice president for academic administration and dean of the theology school at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

University trustees and faculty praised Dockery as a good fit for the 2,000-student Baptist school located in West Tennessee.

However, faculty and staff at Southern Seminary quietly lamented Dockery's impending departure from the seminary, where he has been considered a cohesive force between faculty and administration during three years of tumultuous transition.

By order of trustees, faculty and staff are not allowed to speak publicly in any way that could be deemed negative toward the seminary. However, faculty sources who spoke on condition of anonymity used words such as "chaos" to describe the perceived impact of Dockery's departure on seminary faculty and staff.

Dockery reportedly has been a buffer between President Albert Mohler and the faculty, who have been at odds with each other from the start of Mohler's tenure in 1993. That situation has deteriorated further due to Mohler's firing of Diana Garland as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work and a subsequent investigation by three accrediting agencies into changes in faculty hiring policies.

In a speech to Union's trustees immediately after his election, Dockery praised the university for moving to the forefront of Christian colleges in recent years. "It will be a privilege to serve alongside a faculty of this quality, to work with this very capable trustee board and to get to know the outstanding students and alumni of this

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institution," he said.

Dockery's selection drew praise from the university's trustee chairman, current president and a faculty spokeswoman.

"The search committee and board of trustees see Dr. David Dockery as a man of true conviction and vision who already possesses a firm understanding of Christian higher education, a man we believe will capably lead Union University into the next century," said John Drinnon, a Memphis, Tenn., layman who chairs the trustee board.

"I support the board's decision wholeheartedly and look forward to working with Dr. Dockery in my new position of chancellor," said Hyran Barefoot, retiring president.

"Dr. David Dockery possesses the desired presidential qualities as described by the search committee, faculty and staff of our university," said Carla Sanderson, dean of the university's nursing school and a faculty representative on the search committee.

In Louisville, Mohler commended Dockery to Union's trustees, faculty and staff, saying Dockery has made a "stellar" contribution to the seminary. "He has provided leadership for this faculty, guidance for students, and he has served as a model of the Christian scholar."

Although no specific plans were announced by either institution, Dockery apparently will continue to serve the seminary through the spring semester. Mohler said he intends to name Dockery's successor before the spring trustee meeting, which is April 15-17.

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Six faculty members leaving Southern Seminary

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE (ABP) -- Six faculty members have announced resignations from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary this fall, with some departures effective this month and others to be effective in the spring.

The six are:

-- David Dockery, vice president for academic administration and professor of theology, who will become president of Union University in Jackson, Tenn., in May.

-- Janet Spressart, acting dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work, who will become associate professor of social work at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, N.Y., after this academic year.

-- David D'Amico, professor of evangelism, who has been appointed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to serve as a missionary to the diplomatic community in New York City, effective soon after the first of the year.

-- John Hendrix, professor of Christian education, who has been called as pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Clinton, Miss., effective Jan. 1.

-- Mary Alice Seals, assistant professor of church music, who will become associate professor of church music and assistant to the dean at Gardner-Webb University's divinity school, effective in January.

-- Rebecca Russell, assistant professor of church music, who resigned at the beginning of this academic year and now is teaching at the University of Kentucky.

Spressart's resignation could have the most immediate impact on students, since she is one of only two full-time faculty members remaining in the Carver School. Seminary trustees have voted to discontinue the master of social work degree program, which is the primary degree offered in the Carver School.

The seminary's administration has been seeking to transfer that degree program to another Baptist institution, but no deal has yet been struck. After this spring, 24 students will remain in the Carver School lacking only one year of study to complete their degrees.

A primary concern of these remaining students is whether the master of social work degree program will retain its accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education.

Spresart said her resignation will not be the sole determining factor in that accrediting decision, but could be one factor. "It's going to be a total picture. They will be looking at an array of things: How many students will be here? Who is on board to provide leadership? What kind of educational plan is available for the students?"

Nevertheless, Spresart said she announced her decision to leave the seminary well in advance "so the students would have one more piece of information in their course of making decisions."

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Christmas traditions not always based on facts

By Bob Allen

(ABP) -- Christmas is Jesus' birthday. Any child in Sunday school knows that, which is unfortunate, because it almost certainly is wrong.

The modern celebration of Christmas combines a number of traditions so ancient that their origins have become lost to all but historians and trivia buffs. Following is all you ever wanted to know (or perhaps not) about the celebration of Christmas.

Followers of Jesus celebrated his death and resurrection early in church history, but Jesus' nativity was not celebrated until 300 years later. While Dec. 25 eventually came to be associated as Jesus' birthday, no evidence remains about the exact date of Christ's birth.

Luke's gospel tells of angels announcing Jesus' birth to shepherds in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Winter in Judea was wet and chilly. It is unlikely that shepherds would spend the night in their fields in December. More likely, scholars say, Jesus was born in the spring lambing season, when nights were balmy and shepherds would need to be awake to tend their ewes.

Early Christians were more likely to celebrate the day of a person's death than the birth. Very early in the history of the church, Christians held an annual festival commemorating the death of Jesus, as well as honoring many of the martyrs on the day of their death.

Before the fourth century, churches in Egypt, Asia Minor and Antioch observed Epiphany, the manifestation of God to the world, celebrating Christ's baptism, birth and the visit by the Magi described in the Gospel of Matthew.

Early in the fourth century, Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ. At the time, the church was embroiled in a controversy over the nature of Christ -- whether he was truly God or a created being. It is likely an emphasis on the doctrine of the incarnation, the idea that "the Word was made flesh," in John 1:14, was a factor in the spread of the celebration of Christmas.

The term Christmas, a contraction of "Christ's mass," did not come into use until the Middle Ages. Another term used to describe the event, Nativity, is from the Latin word for "birth."

Christmas appeared at first to have been observed at different times during the year. There is some evidence that the earliest Christmas festival was held in May.

In the fourth century, Pope Julius I designated Dec. 25 as Christmas, probably to coincide with pagan celebrations of the winter solstice, which many ancient religions observed as signaling the return or rebirth of the sun. The Roman Feast of the Invincible Sun was celebrated across the Roman Empire. Rather than trying to eradicate pagan holidays, church leaders sought to replace them with Christian observances.

Another tradition says Jesus died on the same date as he was conceived, March 25, placing his birth nine

months later on Dec. 25.

When the Julian calendar, established by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C., was replaced by the Gregorian calendar, ordered by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, 11 days were dropped. Some Christian sects refused to accept the redating and continued to celebrate Christmas on the old Dec. 25, which is Jan. 7 on the new calendar. Protestants were also slow to accept the Gregorian calendar, which became official in 1752.

The Christian calendar purports to date history from the year of Jesus' birth, but it is based on a miscalculation. The census by Quirinius cited in Luke 2:2 was dated by the Jewish historian Josephus in 6-7 B.C.

Herod the Great, mentioned in Matthew's gospel as the jealous king that tried to murder the Christ child, died in 4 B.C., according to Roman histories. Scholars pinpoint the year of Jesus' birth as sometime between 4 B.C. and 1 B.C.

Christmas became a public holiday by order of the Roman emperor Justinian in the sixth century. St. Francis of Assisi introduced devotion to the Christmas crib, or manger, in the 13th century.

Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, expressed devotion to Christmas in sermons. English Puritans, however, tried to do away with the holiday in the 17th century. It was revived with the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, but as a more secular holiday than it had been before.

Some pre-Christian traditions became associated with Christmas and continue today. For example, in the first millennium in what is now Scotland, Druids celebrated the winter solstice by a festival honoring their sun god. Called, "Yule," the celebration included dragging a huge log into an opening and starting a bonfire. The Druids would dance around the yule log in a noisy celebration designed to wake the sleeping sun.

The Druids also hung mistletoe in hopes it would bring peace and good fortune. Use of plants like holly comes from an ancient belief that such plants blossomed at Christmas.

The Christmas tree is a fairly recent addition, developing in the early 17th century in Strasbourg, France, and spreading through Germany and into northern Europe. The evergreen tree trimmed with lights and other decorations was derived from the so-called paradise tree, symbolizing Eden, in German mystery plays.

The use of candles on Christmas trees developed from the belief that candles appeared miraculously on the trees at Christmas.

The Christmas tree was introduced in England in 1841 by Prince Albert, consort of Queen Victoria. From there it accompanied immigrants to the United States.

The figure of Santa Claus, which arguably overshadows Jesus in secular celebrations of Christmas, stems from a historical character from the fourth century, Saint Nicholas.

The patron saint of Russia, Saint Nicholas lived in Asia Minor, now Turkey. He also came to be viewed as the patron saint of children, scholars, virgins, sailors and merchants. In the Middle Ages, thieves also viewed him as their patron saint as well.

The Saint Nicholas legend tells of surreptitious gifts to three daughters of a poor man, who, unable to give them dowries, was about to abandon them to a life of sin. From that story grew the custom of secret giving on the eve of St. Nicholas Day, Dec. 6. Because of the proximity of dates, Christmas and St. Nicholas Day became merged in many countries.

Colonial settlers on Manhattan Island introduced the name Santa Claus, a corruption of the Dutch "Sinterklaas," a modification of "Sint Nikolaas."

The Twelve Days of Christmas, popularized in the carol, refers to the 12 days between Christmas and Epiphany, Jan. 6. Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God, represented in the adoration of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus and the miracle of turning water to wine at Cana.

Use of the abbreviation "Xmas," often criticized as an attempt to secularize or remove Christ from Christmas, actually has Christian roots. "X" is a Greek letter transliterated into English as "ch." It is the first letter in the biblical word "Christos," which is translated as "Christ."

Professor urges Christians to 'lay claim' to Internet

By Bob Allen

MUSKEGON, Mich. (ABP) -- A professor at a religious college is urging Christians to view the Internet as a new mission field.

Bad publicity about so-called "cyber smut" and the attempted luring of children on-line has caused many Christians to be suspicious of the Internet, says author Quentin Schultze in a new book, "Internet for Christians," by Gospel Films, Inc., in Muskegon, Mich.

However, there are many Christian ministries with sites on the Internet, which Schultze says he hopes will entice believers to "be salt and light in the new medium."

At one time, Christians looked suspiciously on the motion picture industry, for many good reasons, noted Schultze, a communications professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. In hindsight, however, "the decision to forsake Hollywood merely led to a forsaken Hollywood," he writes.

Schultze urges churches not to repeat that error. "There comes a time when the church of Jesus Christ has to be bold enough to lay claim to a new medium," he contends.

The Internet is a worldwide network of computers that grows by hundreds of thousands of users every month. It includes both electronic mail, by which computers can communicate from almost anywhere in the world, and the World Wide Web, a vast network of information on almost any topic imaginable.

"Computer-to-computer communication is the next major wave of media technologies," Schultze says. "The technological waves began with simple human speech, continued with writing and eventually printing and exploded with electronic media, from the telegraph and telephone to broadcasting and satellites."

Learning to master the technology needed to communicate by computer can be intimidating, particularly for older folks, Schultze says.

All that is needed to get on the Internet is an adequate computer and a telephone modem, Schultze says. Internet providers, which can be national or local, generally supply necessary software, he explains.

Schultze's book offers tips on how to "surf" the Internet, or find information, and highlights current services of interest to Christian users.

Schultze said Christians should seek to develop Internet sites that "truly serve people." Most churches should not rush onto the Internet "unless it enhances their ministry," he added.

He does recommend, however, if churches have enough members on-line, using electronic mail for prayer chains, church news for former members who have moved away, reminders for those who have been asked to perform special tasks and for feedback and discussion about sermons.

The Internet holds particular potential for youth ministry, he said, because most youths are computer literate and many are already on-line.

The primary uses for pastors are for continuing theological education and communication with fellow pastors. Rural pastors or pastors who lead the only congregation of their tradition in town "can use the Net to develop orbits of friends and associates virtually free of cost," he said.

Benefits for missionaries are obvious, he said, including faster and more frequent transmission of prayer requests from the field, more contact with loved ones back home and quicker response to requests for emergency funding. Less obvious is the possibility that easy and frequent communication between missionaries in similar cultures can enhance their work, he said.

Use of the Internet by missionaries has its own problems, however, such as security of messages -- governments may monitor electronic transmissions -- as well as lack of access and prohibitive costs in remote areas.

Denominations as yet have not found ways to use the Internet very well, Schultze said. By its egalitarian nature, the technology may in fact undermine denominational loyalty by giving a cheap and visible platform for

gadflies, he said.

He suggested that "perhaps the most fruitful direction" for denominations on the Internet is for seminaries to use the technology in addition to or in place of continuing education courses.

"The gap between seminaries and the pastors, let alone between the seminaries and the laity, is often far too wide in many denominations," he wrote.

"Could not seminaries offer via the Internet credit and non-credit distance education courses for the laity and for pastors who are unable to get time off from their positions to attend seminary?" he asked.

"I can hear the complaints from the theological gurus at the big-name schools: 'Further erosion of standards and watering down of real theological education,'" Schultze wrote. However, he countered, "It all depends on how it's done."

"Distance education can be just as rigorous as on-campus education," he said. Creative use of technology could even enhance learning, he added. "Just because a student sits in a classroom does not mean that real learning is taking place. In fact, it has become increasingly clear that some seminary degrees are granted in some situations merely as rewards for residency!"

Concerns about so called "cyber-porn," or indecent material, that targets children are real and require diligent monitoring by parents, he said, but those types of messages are rare. Another family concern is that the computer, like television, might be addictive for some young people.

For those reasons, some parents decline to bring a computer into their home, Schultze said.

However, Schultze cited "a spiritual drawback" to having a computer-free home. "The more monastic approach to the new media ignores a major parental responsibility to teach children about the real world," he said. "Christian parents are responsible for teaching discernment, which cannot be developed adequately without real interaction with the world outside of the home."

Schultze edits a free "Internet for Christians" newsletter, published twice a week, available by both electronic mail and on the Internet's World Wide Web.

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: Internet users may access "Internet for Christians" newsletter at the address: <http://www.gospelcom.net/ifc>. To subscribe to the electronic mail version, computer users may address a message to: ifc-request@gospelcom.net. The message should include only the word SUBSCRIBE followed by the subscriber's e-mail address.

Associated Baptist Press is now available on the Internet. The home page address is <http://www.helwyscom/abphome.htm>.

Religious leaders arrested while demonstrating in U.S. Capitol

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- U.S. Capitol Police arrested 55 religious leaders Dec. 7 in the Capitol Rotunda as they prayed for the president and Congress to refrain budget bills they claim would punish the poor.

Police said the religious leaders were charged with "demonstrating within a Capitol building," a misdemeanor. The religious leaders were expected to be released on their own recognizance and could face a maximum fine of \$500 or six months in jail or both.

The demonstrators in the Capitol chanted, "Woe to the legislators of infamous laws, to those who issue tyrannical decrees, who refuse justice to the unfortunate, who cheat the poor among my people of their rights, who

make widows their prey and rob the orphan," a quotation of Isaiah 10:1-2.

The religious leaders also prayed and sang "Jesus Loves the Little Children" as they were arrested one by one and cuffed by police using plastic "flex-cuffs."

The group included Catholic priests, Protestant pastors and inner-city church workers. Jim Wallis, editor of Sojourners magazine, helped organize the gathering along with Tony Campolo, president of Evangelical Association for Promotion of Education.

Before he was arrested, Campolo said Jesus came to rescue the perishing and care for the dying. Alleging that "the church has forgotten the poor," Campolo said he came to speak to fellow Christians more than to the politicians.

He told Associated Baptist Press that other evangelical voices had been usurped by the "far religious right" because "we have been too busy spending money on soup kitchens and the poor rather than setting up television and radio networks."

The group of religious leaders said in a statement that they were not defending the systems that have failed to transform poverty and "sometimes further entrenched it." But the poor must not be punished for the systems' failures, they maintained.

They said the Bible insists "that the best test of a nation's righteousness is how it treats its poorest and most vulnerable in its midst."

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Parents' guide on religion in public school released

By Pam Parry

ARLINGTON, Va. (ABP) -- Transforming shouting matches into dialogue is an aim of a new parents' guide on religion in public schools released Dec. 7 at the Freedom Forum in Arlington, Va.

The guide, produced by The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University and the National PTA, describes for parents what religious practices are allowed in public schools. The guide will be sent to more than 30,000 local PTA presidents, according to Joan Dykstra, national PTA president.

The 16-page guide gives legal answers to 15 of the most pressing questions parents face related to religion in schools, ranging from graduation prayer to religious holidays.

"This guide is long overdue and another important step in the continuing effort of many groups in our nation to find common ground in the effort to protect religious liberty," said Education Secretary Richard Riley.

The new publication will complement the Clinton administration's guidelines on religion in the school sent to every school district this year, Riley said. The administration guidelines were designed to help school administrators understand what religious expression the law permits in public school.

Both documents "can go a long way to clearing up much of the confusion that has led some parents to believe that religion has no place in our public schools," Riley said.

Dykstra said she hoped the new document will open dialogue between parents and school officials.

"Parents must accept the responsibility for nurturing their children's spirituality and for being involved in the decisions about how religious issues are handled in school," she said. "The emphasis in the guide is on tolerance, respect and individual freedom -- the basis on which decisions about school programs should be made."

Charles Haynes, scholar-in-residence at the Nashville, Tenn.,-based First Amendment Center, said regional workshops around the country will follow the distribution of the guide. Haynes said the primary goal of the project is to inform and involve parents in policy discussions with the local schools.

Oliver Thomas, a Baptist attorney and consultant for the First Amendment Center, said that the guide "is as good as it gets" from a legal standpoint.

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Romanian Baptist leader killed in car wreck

BUCHAREST, Romania (ABP) -- Romanian Baptists are mourning the tragic loss of a young leader killed Nov. 30 in a car wreck.

Ioan Campean, 42, had been president of the Bucharest Association of Baptist churches since 1990. The Association is the regional grouping of about 25 churches in the Bucharest area.

Campean was killed instantly in a head-on collision near Bucharest after an oncoming car suddenly swerved into his lane. It took rescue workers more than two hours to free his body.

Campean is survived by a wife and three children. The oldest son is a student in the Bucharest Baptist Theological Seminary. The youngest is 14.

In addition to his leadership responsibilities in the Bucharest Association, Campean was pastor of the 1,400-member Ploiesti Baptist Church.

More than 1,500 people attended a Dec. 3 funeral service.

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-- By ABP staff

Missouri Fellowship elects coordinator

COLUMBIA, Mo. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri elected its first full-time coordinator Dec. 2.

Harold Phillips, minister of education at Second Baptist Church in Liberty, Mo., was elected by the state Fellowship's coordinating council. He will take over the job Jan. 1.

Phillips has been at the Liberty church since 1987. Before that, he was on the staff of Deer Park Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

Phillips is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Missouri became the second state Fellowship group to hire a full-time coordinator. Oklahoma was the first. Several state groups employ part-time staff.

Greg Hunt, pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., who chaired the coordinator search committee, termed the hiring "a decisive turning point in the life of the organization."

Eighteen autonomous state and regional groups relate to the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization of Southern Baptist moderates.

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-- By ABP staff

CORRECTION: Please correct an error in the 21st paragraph of the Dec. 5 ABP story "Fellowship sends 100th missionary in Alabama appointment service." The corrected paragraph should read as follows:

-- Jonathan and Tina Bailey, who will work with an unreached people group in Asia. He is a native of Greenville, S.C., and a 1995 graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas. She was born in Savannah, Ga., and is a 1994 graduate of Southwestern Seminary who works on campus as an audio-visual assistant and graphic artist.

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