

Associated Baptist Press

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FBC Atlanta to vote on Reighard to lead satellite congregation

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Members of First Baptist Church of Atlanta will be asked Jan. 7 to elect Ike Reighard as senior associate pastor for the 14,000-member congregation, putting the 45-year-old Reighard in line to succeed Charles Stanley as pastor of one of Southern Baptists' largest and most influential churches.

Reighard, currently pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in nearby Fayetteville, Ga., will assume pastoral duties for the downtown church's north Atlanta satellite congregation. But Reighard and Stanley, 62, will trade pulpits about once a month in an attempt to reunify the troubled congregations.

Stanley, who became pastor in 1972 after serving as associate, has been under pressure to resign for several months because of his pending divorce from his wife of 40 years, Anna. The church voted Oct. 1 to keep Stanley as pastor, but he has said he will resign if the divorce becomes final.

As associate pastor, Reighard succeeds Andy Stanley, Charles' son, who resigned as pastor of the satellite congregation last August, saying his father's pending divorce disqualifies him as pastor.

Many conservatives -- including Charles Stanley -- say the Bible limits the pastorate to men with intact first marriages. The elder Stanley is contesting the divorce and says he is seeking reconciliation. But Anna Stanley says the marriage cannot be salvaged. The couple has been separated since 1992.

Reighard, pastor of the Fayetteville church for 20 years, was nominated for the associate's post at First Baptist by a seven-man committee that has been running the church since Stanley relinquished administrative duties last August. Stanley announced Reighard's selection to the congregation Dec. 31.

Although no vote by the congregation is required by bylaws, "This was just a move we felt was necessary," explained Boyd Wages, church administrator.

Wages acknowledged Reighard likely will be the front-runner to succeed Stanley, whose "In Touch"

television ministry has made him one of the country's best known preachers. "I think he would have the inside track," Wages said. "But there is no guarantee that anything like that would take place. It would be up to the church."

Reighard agreed there is "a lot of speculation" that he will succeed Stanley. But he added, "I sure hope Dr. Stanley stays and works through his marital situation. I think that's what would be the best thing for God's kingdom and the church."

"I'm coming with the intention of being a helper to Dr. Stanley," he said. "My prayer is that Dr. Stanley is going to be there for a long time to come. He casts a long shadow. I just cast a wide one. He's America's preacher, and he's going through an extraordinarily difficult time."

Reighard serves on a four-man committee named by First Baptist to recommend a church policy on divorce in the ministry. The committee has yet to bring its report, despite a long-past deadline. But Reighard said he has made up his mind about the issue.

"I see absolutely not one thing that disqualifies Charles Stanley from being pastor of that church," he said. "If I did, I wouldn't go." Reighard said the committee's study uncovered no "surprises" about the Stanleys' marriage and "nothing that hinted of immorality." He called the split a "heartbreaking situation" caused in part by the stress of the pastorate and Stanley's devotion to his calling and church.

Reighard, a graduate of Mercer University and Luther Rice Seminary, said he was first contacted about the associate's position in early August, soon after Andy Stanley's resignation. If elected in the Sunday night church business session, he is expected to begin his duties Feb. 11.

Wages said Reighard's election is expected to bring stability to First Baptist, which has lost several key staff members in recent months, and to prepare the way for the downtown church to complete a long-planned move and merger with the satellite congregation in north Atlanta.

Since Andy Stanley's resignation, attendance at the satellite site has dropped from about 4,000 a week to 2,200. Weekly attendance at the downtown facility is about 3,800.

In 1988 the church bought a former Avon cosmetics distribution center in suburban Dunwoody and started a new congregation in the site's 375,000-square-foot building, with Andy Stanley preaching. The move of the downtown congregation was delayed, however, when the sale of its \$28 million facility fell through.

Since then, members say, the two congregations have grown apart, with the satellite congregation adopting a contemporary worship style and the downtown congregation maintaining a more traditional approach. Many members doubted that the merger could be completed, Wages said. And there was discussion about the two groups parting ways.

But Andy Stanley's resignation and the potential hiring of Reighard have revived plans to move and reunite the two congregations.

Reighard said his approach is "more in the middle," somewhat contemporary but not far removed from the downtown congregation. "Some people may not like going back the other direction, [but] it's more a fine tuning than a pruning job," he said.

"It's a blend that will allow us to bring the two congregations together," Wages predicted. Differences in worship style and philosophy factored into the rift between Charles and Andy Stanley, he added.

The downtown congregation is ready to move north as soon as a new buyer is found for its property, Wages said. A new worship center is planned.

After the merger and move is complete, Reighard said, both he and Stanley will continue to preach, and both contemporary and traditional services will be held.

Andy Stanley, meanwhile, has announced plans to begin a new church in north Atlanta, but no start date has been set.

Reighard, a native of North Carolina, grew up in downtown Atlanta, about five miles from First Baptist's downtown facility. "I used to ride my bike on the church parking lot until the security guard chased me off," he recalled. As a young man, he worked at the Avon distribution center that later became the church's satellite site.

Reighard's decision to leave New Hope Baptist -- his first pastorate -- was "enormously difficult," he said.

"In early December, I spent three days in the house I was born in in rural Appalachian North Carolina, just praying and fasting, with nothing but a Bible and sleeping bag. I just never realized it would be that tough."

He said he is content as pastor of New Hope, a suburban church 25 miles south of downtown Atlanta, and never seriously contemplated a move until contacted by First Baptist.

A prominent leader in the conservative movement of the Southern Baptist Convention, Reighard served as president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in 1994. He is a trustee of the SBC Home Mission Board in Atlanta and served two terms as president of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1988-90).

The Stanleys' divorce trial, originally set for last November, has been postponed, probably until April.

Meanwhile, Wages said, the church committee drafting a divorce policy likely will complete its work soon -- but long past its November deadline.

Dennis Mock, a church staff member and the original chairman of the committee, issued a draft policy even before the committee met that argued marital separation should be treated the same as divorce and disqualify a person from the pastorate. But Mock resigned from the committee and staff.

Based on statements from committee members, Wages said, he expects the committee now will recommend a policy that will allow Stanley to remain as pastor.

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Midwestern faculty member takes job at Central Seminary

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- Archeologist and biblical backgrounds teacher Larry McKinney has left the faculty of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to work at the nearby Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

McKinney, assistant professor of biblical backgrounds, has taught at Midwestern, a Southern Baptist seminary in Kansas City, Mo., since 1981. He started Jan. 2 as regional director of development and institutional research at Central Seminary, an American Baptist school that is also supported by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

McKinney is the sixth faculty or staff member to come to Central from Midwestern in the last two years, since trustees set out to turn the Southern Baptist seminary more conservative. Trustees elected a conservative, Mark Coppenger, as the school's president last spring, replacing long-time president Milton Ferguson, a moderate.

Meanwhile, Central Seminary has set out to recruit students from moderate Southern Baptist churches which oppose conservative reforms at Midwestern.

Last year, Central Seminary trustees voiced "full support" for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an Atlanta-based operation offering alternatives to SBC programs, and adopted a policy offering discounted tuition to students from Fellowship-friendly churches.

They also added several faculty and staff members who worked formerly at Southern Baptist schools. New Testament professor David May, preaching professor Mike Graves, and academic dean James Hines all taught at Midwestern before joining Central's faculty.

George Townsend, Central's business vice president, also came over from Midwestern, as did Brenda Sanders, director of communications.

Another Southern Baptist, Molly Marshall, joined Central's faculty after resigning under fire at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Gayla Sherman, vice president for development and public relations, also once worked on the development staff at Southern Seminary.

At Midwestern, McKinney has been curator of the Morton Collection of Biblical Artifacts and coordinator

of the "January in Jerusalem" annual travel study program. In addition to fund-raising in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas and seeking grants from foundations and corporations, McKinney's job at Central will include planning and conducting an annual overseas study tour for seminary alumni and friends.

McKinney, 46, said he left Midwestern because he did not expect to be granted tenure there. Trustees blocked a recommendation to grant tenure to McKinney and Hines in October 1994, saying they did not know enough about the two teachers to vote on tenure.

Originally it was announced that the two would be presented for tenure last spring, but Hines left the school and Ferguson decided not to proceed with recommending McKinney.

Trustees extended his teaching contract, which was due to expire last July, until July 1996, McKinney said. "I was advised by the board of trustees I needed to be looking for something," he said.

McKinney said did not discuss the possibility of remaining at Midwestern with either Coppenger or the new faculty dean, Lamar Cooper. "I had made a decision I would not wish to pursue that," he said, because of a new questionnaire being used in the faculty interview process.

The questionnaire, approved by trustees in October, asks prospective faculty members their views on issues such as biblical inerrancy, abortion, homosexuality and whether women should be ordained as pastors.

"My objection was I saw it as creedal in nature," McKinney said. "My response was 'I am a Baptist in Christ' is my creed."

Coppenger described McKinney as "a gracious and talented scholar and teacher."

"I am confident Central will be pleased with his service," Coppenger said in a statement prepared in response to a reporter's inquiry.

Coppenger defended the faculty questionnaire, saying it "reflects the fact that Midwestern Seminary is gladly responsive to the concerns of the Southern Baptist Convention" and places the seminary "squarely at the heart of convention commitments."

McKinney said there are no immediate plans for him to teach classes at Central, but he is already a member of the adjunctive faculty and he and the dean have discussed the prospect of "down the road possibly shifting the focus back to the classroom."

"Right now we're looking at needs of the seminary and we are all kind of general practitioners around here," he said.

A native of Tulsa, Okla., McKinney is a graduate of both Central and Midwestern seminaries. He received the master of divinity degree from Midwestern in 1981 and the master of arts in religious studies from Central in 1985. His bachelor's degree is from Texas Tech University. He also did doctoral studies at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

In addition to his work as a scholar, McKinney has worked in public relations, graphic arts and advertising. He is a five-time winner of the "Addy Award," presented by the American Advertising Foundation's southwestern district.

His wife, Janet, is currently a student at Central Seminary. They are members of Englewood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., which licensed him to the ministry in 1986.

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Parry resigns BJC position; Byrd named as replacement

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Pam Parry has resigned as associate director of communications at the Baptist Joint Committee to become an editor for the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging in Washington.

Kenneth Byrd, a 1995 graduate of Samford University, Birmingham, Ala., and fall-semester intern at the BJC, has been selected to succeed Parry.

In her new position, Parry will edit publications for AAHSA, an organization representing 5,000 not-for-profit nursing homes, senior housing facilities, continuing-care retirement communities, assisted-living facilities and community-service organizations for the elderly.

At the BJC, Parry has covered Congress as a correspondent for Baptist News Service and Associated Baptist Press and been associate editor of Report from the Capital, the agency's biweekly newsletter.

Before joining the BJC staff in 1991, Parry was associate editor of the Baptist True Union, news journal of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, and a news writer at Word & Way, news journal of the Missouri Baptist Convention. She is a graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Byrd's responsibilities at the BJC also will include providing news coverage of Congress for BNS and ABP and serving as associate editor of Report from the Capitol.

In 1994 Byrd served a three-month internship at United Press International in London, England.

"Pam Parry served the Baptist Joint Committee with distinction," said BJC Communications Director Larry Chesser. "She served Baptist readers by regularly providing first-rate coverage of Congress that reflected the highest journalistic standards."

"At the same time, we are excited about Kenny Byrd joining our staff," he added. "Kenny's outstanding performance during his internship here made him a consensus choice among our staff to fill this position."

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Religious equality amendment introduced in Senate by Hatch

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The drive to add a Religious Equality Amendment to the U.S. Constitution moved a step forward Dec. 22 when Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch introduced a measure he said would restore religious liberty to "its intended and proper place in American society."

Hatch's Senate amendment is identical to one proposed Nov. 15 in the House of Representatives by Judiciary Chairman Henry Hyde, R-Ill.

The Hyde-Hatch proposal would bar government at any level from denying benefits to or discriminating against individuals or groups on account of religious expression, belief or identity.

In offering the measure in the Senate, Hatch said it is intended to rescue the First Amendment's guarantee of the free exercise of religion "from a misguided Supreme Court jurisprudence and the hostility that jurisprudence has spawned among local, state and federal governments."

The Utah Republican said he did not "take lightly" the prospect of amending the Constitution but concluded after lengthy study such a step was necessary.

Hatch said statutory measures, including the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that he co-sponsored, are not wholly adequate to safeguard religious liberties.

The Hyde-Hatch proposal has the support of a number of religious organizations, including the National Association of Evangelicals and the Christian Legal Society. Other groups, including the Concerned Women for America, are supporting a Religious Liberties Amendment sponsored by Rep. Ernest Istook. That proposal would permit public school-sponsored religious exercises as long as they are student-initiated.

Both proposals are drawing stiff opposition, however, from a coalition of other mainline Protestant and Jewish groups.

"The proposed amendments would be better named 'religious-subsidy amendments,'" said Brent Walker, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee.

Walker said the Hyde-Hatch proposal would open the door to direct government funding of religious activities and make the First Amendment's prohibition against establishment of religion virtually meaningless.

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Clinton signs lobby reform measure

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A church-state specialist hailed language that exempts churches from a major lobby-reform bill.

President Clinton signed the bill Dec. 19. It provides the most extensive overhaul of federal lobbying laws in five decades.

The law broadens the definition of lobbying and will require more people to register as lobbyists. Unlike the old law, which applied only to contacts with members of Congress, the new bill also covers lobbying efforts directed at other elected officials.

Churches and other religious organizations are exempted from the bill. Without that exemption, the law could have restricted churches from speaking out on social issues, said constitutional lawyer Brent Walker.

"We applaud President Clinton and the Congress for making these needed reforms in a way that protects the rights of organizations to engage in religiously motivated speech," said Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington.

"Religious people should not have to go hat in hand to Caesar for permission to utter a prophetic critique of government," Walker said.

The law exempts "churches, their integrated auxiliaries, and conventions and associations of churches" from the lobbying reforms.

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-- By Pam Parry

Max Lennon named Mars Hill president

MARS HILL, N.C. (ABP) -- Former Clemson University president Max Lennon has been named president of Mars Hill College, a Baptist school in Mars Hill, N.C.

Lennon, 55, is currently president and chief executive officer of Eastern Foods, Inc., in Atlanta. He will succeed Fred Bentley as Mars Hill president beginning March 1. Bentley, president for 30 years, will become president emeritus and plans to do fund-raising for the college through June 1997.

The school's board of trustees elected Lennon to the post in December. Bentley called Lennon "the right man to take the college into the 21st century." Lennon "brings vision, experience and new energy to Mars Hill College," Bentley said.

With 1,300 students, Mars Hill is one of seven colleges and universities related to the 1.2 million-member Baptist Convention of North Carolina.

Lennon is a 1960 Mars Hill graduate. He also holds a bachelor's and a doctor's degree from North Carolina State University. He taught agriculture at Texas Tech University and University of Missouri, was executive dean at Ohio State University and from 1986 to 1994 was president of Clemson University.

He is a member of First Baptist Church in Peachtree City, Ga., where he teaches Sunday school and is a member of the strategic planning committee.

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-- By ABP staff

Samford president picked to lead accrediting agency

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Samford University President Thomas Corts has been elected president of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, a regional accrediting organization representing more than 12,000 public and private schools.

Corts was chosen to lead SACS during the organization's annual meeting in Atlanta Dec. 10-13.

The organization is one of six regional accrediting agencies in the U.S. It covers 11 southern states from Virginia to Texas and schools in Latin America.

Corts is the first president of Samford, a Baptist school in Birmingham, Ala., to be elected president of SACS. He previously was chairman of the SACS Commission on Colleges, the body that deals directly with university and college accreditation.

Membership in SACS is voluntary and open to elementary, middle and secondary schools and degree-granting colleges and universities. SACS grants accreditation based on evaluation by peers about whether an education program meets standards set by educators from other schools.

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-- By ABP staff

SBC racism apology ranked No. 4 in RNA poll

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Southern Baptist Convention resolution apologizing to African-Americans for past acts of racism was fourth in a ranking of the top stories of 1995 by religion newswriters.

The annual poll by the Religion Newswriters Association surveyed religion writers at major metropolitan newspapers.

The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a religious zealot who said God told him to pull the trigger topped the ranking of news stories about religion.

Second was the Million Man March, summoned by Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. In the RNA poll, the event was paired with another trend, continued growth of Promise Keepers, a predominantly white and conservative Christian organization, which attracted about 850,000 men in rallies nationwide.

The RNA poll ranked Pope John Paul's latest statement that women cannot be priests as the No. 3 story of 1995. The statement stopped just short of a claim of papal infallibility and is declared definitive by the

Vatican's highest panel on doctrine.

• The RNA poll placed at No. 4 the statement by the SBC, the nation's largest non-Catholic faith group, acknowledging the role of racism in the convention's history. The SBC was formed in 1845 in a split over slavery. The resolution, adopted on the eve of the SBC's 150th anniversary celebration, also acknowledged the convention's failure to embrace the civil rights movement and integration.

Other events topping the RNA poll were:

5. The choosing of Franklin Graham to succeed his father as head of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

6. A five-day visit to the U.S. by Pope John Paul II, during which he called on Americans to defend life "from conception to death," to care for the poor and to strengthen their families and marriages.

7. Political gains by the Christian Coalition, including its "Contract with the American Family."

8. A peace agreement signed by leaders of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, enforced by NATO troops including 20,000 from the U.S.

9. The filing of two civil suits by the Episcopal Church, efforts to recover \$2.2 million embezzled by treasurer Ellen Cooke.

10. An encyclical by the pople to urge leaders of Orthodox and other churches to help him re-think the meaning of the papacy and another statement in which he preached against abortion and a "culture of death" in the modern world.

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-- By ABP staff

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