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Accrediting agency denies extension for Carver School

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The Council on Social Work Education has denied a request to extend accreditation of the Carver School of Church Social Work through December 1997 so that all students remaining in the school may graduate.

However, the accrediting agency has agreed to continue accreditation through June 1997, if Southern Baptist Theological Seminary can meet basic accreditation standards. That would allow most, but not all of the 25 students remaining in the Carver School's master-of-social-work program after this May to graduate.

Even seminary administrators -- who reported the CSWE action Feb. 26 as a positive reply -- admit meeting those basic accreditation standards will be a monumental challenge.

Seminary trustees voted last fall to discontinue the Carver School's program at Southern Seminary at the conclusion of the current academic year in May. That decision was made after Diana Garland, then dean of the Carver School, reached an impasse with seminary President Albert Mohler last March over faculty hiring policies and subsequently was fired as dean.

The seminary in Louisville, Ky., now intends to continue operating the Carver School through May 1997, since an earlier plan to transfer the social-work program to another institution beginning in the fall of 1996 has not worked out as planned, Mohler said.

Mohler said the seminary is continuing negotiations with Campbellsville College, a small Kentucky Baptist college that wants to acquire the Carver School. But since accreditation of an existing program is not transferrable, Campbellsville could not receive the current students in mid-program, he said.

So if Southern Seminary cannot maintain CSWE accreditation beyond this spring, the 25 remaining students may have no way to complete their degrees with the accreditation necessary to be hired in most social work jobs.

That has prompted talk among the remaining students of filing a class-action lawsuit against the seminary for breach of contract. However, such a lawsuit does not appear imminent as long as the accreditation question remains unsettled.

"We want to try to work with the administration as much as possible," explained Carver School student Sonny Hatfield, who was reticent to talk about the possibility of legal action. "We have talked to an attorney and are ready to file a class-action lawsuit if there is a breach of contract."

Even though the seminary does have the opportunity to keep most of the remaining Carver School students on track toward graduation, students aren't sure that's a safe bet, Hatfield said.

"The students are fearing this is another smoke-and-mirrors act by the administration," he explained.

Hatfield said in a meeting with Carver School students Feb. 26 Mohler and other administrators outlined four options for students: to transfer to the seminary's master-of-divinity/church-social-ministry track, to transfer to a Christian-education degree, to transfer into another accredited master-of-social-work program or to "grin and bear it and do what we need to do to graduate by May 1997."

"The only option ... is to just load up and try to get through it," Hatfield said. In his case, that will mean taking 18 hours of course work and doing a 20-hour-per-week field placement.

"CSWE placed the burden on the administration, but my feeling is they put the discomfort on the student," he said.

The burden on the seminary to maintain accreditation for even one last year as the social work program is closed will be immense. But exactly what will be required of the seminary to meet accreditation standards during this "phase-out" period is unclear.

Mohler would not elaborate on this point during a news conference held on campus Feb. 26. However, Janet Spressart, acting dean of the Carver School, said a few basics are known for sure.

First, a new dean must be hired. Spressart previously announced her resignation from the faculty to be effective in June. She is moving to teach at another school. The only remaining full-time faculty member in the Carver School after May will be Garland, and she has requested a sabbatical leave for the fall semester.

Whoever comes to head the program for this one-year stint must hold a master-of-social-work degree and a doctor of philosophy in social work or a related field, according to CSWE standards. This person also must have adequate field experience in social work.

The seminary also must enlist adequate faculty to teach a wide range of classes, conduct a certified field-placement program and offer student advisement, Spressart said.

Accomplishing this goal will be "tremendously rigorous work," Spressart said. That assessment was confirmed by some seminary administrators and others familiar with the process.

Nonetheless, Mohler appeared undaunted by the challenge.

"Our first concern is for the interests of our students who will continue into the program for the next academic year," he said. "This administration is committed to marshal the resources and attention of this institution to enable students on-track for graduation in May 1997 to complete their program and receive an accredited master-of-social-work degree ... insofar as we are able to make this possible."

The search for a new dean already has begun and is the first priority, Mohler said.

Even though not all students remaining in the Carver School will be able to complete their degrees at Southern Seminary, "we are confident that we can assist all students toward the fulfillment of their academic goals," Mohler said.

SBC foreign missionaries report record year for new churches

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist foreign missionaries reported a record 2,612 new churches in 1995, according to reports by the Richmond, Va.,-based Foreign Mission Board.

Overseas church starts were up 21 percent over 1994, bringing to 39,073 the total number of "partner" churches which relate to missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Baptisms, meanwhile, dropped 5 percent, to 287,806, following a 15 percent gain last year. Officials estimated total professions of faith in Jesus Christ at 1 million, however, the equivalent of a "Pentecost harvest" every four days.

Of the 2,612 new churches, 367 were reported among people groups once considered inaccessible to traditional mission work, the Foreign Mission Board claimed. Southern Baptists began mission work with 41 new people groups in 1995, "many of them" among the 2,466 cultures targeted by mission strategists as "World A," the least-evangelized part of the world, according to a Feb. 28 news release.

The record number of new churches and continuing high baptisms "reflect the work of the Holy Spirit through the witness of missionaries, volunteers and national co-workers," said Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board.

Overseas partners reported an average of one baptism for every 14 members, compared to a 40-to-1 baptism-to-member ratio in American churches.

The churches also reported gains in discipleship training, Bible teaching ministries and the number of missionaries appointed by overseas affiliates.

Total membership of affiliate churches exceeded 4 million for the first time, reaching 4.11 million, officials reported.

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-- By ABP staff

America headed for anarchy or revival, Barna warns

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Evangelical Christian researcher George Barna says America faces one of two outcomes in the next five to 10 years: moral anarchy or spiritual revival.

And despite talk of revival in some evangelical circles, Barna adds he isn't optimistic.

"If I were a betting person, I would bet on the fact we are going to see massive moral anarchy take over our country," he said in a daylong seminary on "What Effective Churches Have Discovered" Feb. 19 in Nashville, Tenn.

Current talk about revival sweeping America has no statistical basis, Barna said.

True revival would result in significantly more people professing faith in Jesus Christ, and that is not happening, he explained.

Despite the growth of some churches, there has been no overall increase in the number of people becoming Christians, he said. Barna said his research shows that 70 percent to 80 percent of church growth in America is "transfer" growth, meaning the movement of Christians from one church to another.

The Christian church in America has been unable to stop a massive moral and ethical decline, Barna said. As evidence, he cited statistics such as:

-- A majority of people who marry this year will have cohabited with someone before getting married, even though individuals who cohabit are significantly more likely to end marriages in divorce than individuals who never live with a mate outside of marriage.

-- One-third of Americans believe it is acceptable for two people to have an affair with each other, as long as both of them want the affair to happen.

-- 50 percent of people getting married this year believe their marriage will end in divorce.

-- 71 percent of American adults believe there is no such thing as absolute truth, a view shared by 64 percent of born-again Christians and 40 percent of evangelical Christians.

-- 96 percent of American adults believe in God, but 45 percent believe Jesus committed sins while on earth.

-- A majority of Americans believe salvation may be found in either of two ways: through relation with Jesus Christ or through good works.

-- Americans aren't keeping the 10 Commandments because they don't know them; 58 percent of American adults cannot name half the commandments.

The future of the American church is bleak unless three "big issues" can be addressed, Barna said.

First, the church must help laity embrace a biblical worldview that affects their daily living, he said. "Christians don't understand the fundamentals of the faith. Christianity is so shallow there's not depth to build on."

Second, the church needs true leaders, Barna said. Most pastors are not gifted with the leadership skills necessary for directing the work of a local congregation, he said. "We do not have people with strong, visionary leadership."

One solution is to help more pastors develop leadership skills, but another is to rethink the way church leadership is structured, he said.

Third, Christians must be willing to embrace new models for the local church, Barna suggested. "We are following a model developed 500 years ago in an agrarian, rural culture. ... This model was great for that context, but not for today."

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Old is new in good evangelism, Barna says

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Noted Christian researcher George Barna set out to write a book on new methods of evangelism a few years ago but found none.

The best methods of evangelism already are known and have been used in various forms throughout the history of the Christian church, he said during a seminar on "What Effective Churches Have Learned" Feb. 19 in Nashville, Tenn.

"What we need is not new models," he explained. "What we need is new hearts."

He quoted the writer of Ecclesiastes to say there is nothing new under the sun. "The seeker service is nothing more than Jesus sitting on a hillside with 3,000 of his closest friends," preaching in a style they could understand, Barna said.

While there are many obstacles to evangelism, the greatest problem of the modern church may be the separation of evangelism from discipleship, he suggested.

"Most Protestant churches are focused on getting decisions. But that's just one step in the process," he said.

His company, Barna Research Group, has discovered that a majority of people who make decisions to become Christians have dropped out of church participation within six to eight weeks.

This is a travesty for which leaders of the modern church will face God's judgment, Barna said. "We lose them not temporarily but eternally. They think they got it already. We've given them the false impression that they've got it together spiritually."

True commitment to Christ will result in conversions, not just decisions, Barna said. And that requires a process most churches don't follow through with.

In the seminar, Barna outlined 12 characteristics of effective evangelistic churches:

-- They have an evangelistic culture driven by the pastor. "You will not have a church with an evangelistic culture if you just hope it will happen."

-- Their philosophy of ministry has evangelism at its core. "Everything they do has an evangelistic flavor to it." Yet he noted these churches are not driven by numbers. They see success as being faithful to share the gospel, not in the number of decisions recorded.

-- Both their mission and vision of ministry emphasize evangelism.

-- Their weekend services are highly evangelistic.

-- They use evangelistic events frequently and strategically. Effective churches plan several evangelistic events each year and use a variety of events, he said. Moreover, they develop evangelistic events based on the needs of their communities and target each event to a specific audience.

-- They borrow their best ideas from other churches. Effective churches take ideas used successfully in other churches and adapt those ideas to their own context.

-- They spend money on outreach. Most churches spend most of their money on buildings and programs for adults, Barna noted. Yet effective evangelism focuses on relationships, events, children and youth.

-- They are innovative, risk-taking, aggressive and restless.

-- They provide good evangelism training. Effective churches offer evangelism training throughout the year and teach courses at different levels, he said.

-- Their congregations are networked with non-Christians. Most Christians don't have relationships with non-Christians, which leads to "hit-and-run" evangelism, Barna said. Yet effective churches encourage their members to develop relationships with non-Christians.

-- They set significant evangelism goals and are held accountable to them.

-- They cooperate with other churches for God's purposes.

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Warning to would-be evangelists:

Watch your language

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- If you want to talk to non-Christians about finding new life in Jesus Christ, don't tell them they need to have a broken heart, George Barna suggests.

"Most people today go to great lengths to avoid having their hearts broken," Barna said, emphasizing the trauma of modern relationships.

Although the broken heart language may have meaning to some Christians, it only confuses non-Christians, Barna said during a Feb. 19 seminar on "What Effective Churches Have Discovered."

Talk about broken hearts is only one example of bad language Christians use that thwarts evangelism and confuses non-Christians, Barna said. Other examples of confusing language include:

-- "Covered by the blood of the Lamb."

-- "Slain in the Spirit."

-- "Christian walk."

-- "I've been convicted."

-- "Sweet fellowship."

-- "Get into the word."

-- "God is moving."

-- "Prayer warrior."

-- "The lost."

Words and phrases such as these communicate, but they communicate the wrong message, Barna said. "They say you don't know the lingo, you don't know the holy handshake."

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Barna: Church's priority should be reaching youth

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Effective youth ministry is essential for the future of the church, and the single greatest thing churches can do to help youth is ensure that their parents don't get divorced, according to researcher George Barna.

While many churches place only secondary emphasis on youth ministry, it should be one of the top priorities of every church, Barna said in a seminar on "What Effective Churches Have Discovered" Feb. 19 in Nashville, Tenn.

A holistic approach to youth ministry will provide resources for strengthening the marriages of parents of teenagers, Barna said. Like it or not, divorce takes a long-term toll on teenagers emotionally, socially and spiritually, he said, citing a long list of research findings.

"Do whatever you can to solidify the marriages of parents," he pleaded with pastors and youth ministers attending the conference.

In the most impassioned presentation of his daylong seminar, Barna urged pastors to become the champions for youth ministry in their churches.

Today's youth are the future of the nation and church, he noted. Thus, they have the potential to redefine culture more than any other group.

Additionally, the 22 million teenagers in America today are more responsive to the Christian gospel than any other segment of the population, Barna said. They also make the best evangelists to bring their parents to faith in Christ, he added.

Yet today's youth live in a difficult world that causes them to feel stressed-out, skeptical and self-reliant, Barna reported.

Because of cultural shifts, the current crop of teenagers is the first group of American teens not using Christianity as the starting point in their religious deliberations, he said.

The top six issues on the minds of today's teens are academics, relationships, emotional pressures, physical security, family finances and substance abuse, Barna said.

A recent Barna survey of what teenagers desire for the future found good health at the top of the list, followed by good friends, a comfortable lifestyle and a clear life purpose.

Most surprising, though, 80 percent of teens surveyed said finding one spouse for life is something they "must have" for the future. This is the first time this item has appeared on a list of teenagers' must-have issues, Barna said. He suggested it is a backlash from teenagers who have experienced the trauma of broken homes.

Today's teenagers are looking for emotional ties and bonds to their parents, Barna said. Yet the best most parents offer is limited periods of close physical proximity -- watching TV together, eating dinner together, going to a movie together -- that does not create a bond, he added.

While teens view the church as being good at issues such as helping people become more caring or teaching right from wrong, they view churches as being worst at helping them relate to their parents, Barna said.

He outlined a number of character traits of modern youth and concluded that what many teens need is not what the church is offering. Effective churches offer practical applications of the spiritual truths they teach.

"The church pushes reflection more than application," he said. "But teens want application more than reflection."

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Miami churches reel from events after Cuba downs unarmed planes

By Barbara Denman

MIAMI (ABP) -- The shooting down of two civilian aircraft by Cuban fighter jets over the Caribbean and the subsequent disclosure of the defection of an alleged Cuban-American spy have rocked two Miami Baptist churches.

"One's a hero. One's a turncoat," said Ray Carvajal, language missions director for the Miami Baptist Association.

Members of Estrella de Belen Iglesia are mourning the loss of church member Pablo Morales, 26, a Cuban-American who belonged to the Miami-based group Brothers to the Rescue.

Morales, Armando Alejandro Jr., Mario de la Pena and Carlos Costa -- all members of the anti-Castro group -- are missing and presumed dead after two planes they were flying were shot down Feb. 24 by Cuban MiG-29 fighters. Cuba claims the planes were in Cuban airspace. The Clinton administration says the planes were near, but not in, Cuban airspace.

"We don't understand why this happened," said Pastor Javier Sotolongo of Estrella de Belen Iglesia. "We know there is a purpose in this. We just don't know what it is."

Meanwhile, members of University Baptist Church in Coral Gables are even more perplexed about the role that Juan Pablo Roque played in the attack on the unarmed aircraft. Roque mysteriously disappeared from Miami the day before the planes were shot down.

Three days later, Roque appeared on Cuban television saying he had infiltrated Brothers to the Rescue. He claimed the group, best known for mercy flights to rescue Cubans fleeing on rafts, was involved with U.S. government agencies in attempts to overthrow the Castro government.

Members of University Baptist Church had befriended Roque, who had been involved in the church's English classes and Spanish-Bible-study groups. His wife of 11 months, Ana, and her children from a previous marriage are members of the church.

Roque defected to the United States from Cuba four years ago, telling members of the church that as a trained diver, he swam through the mined waters off the coast of Havana to seek exile in Guatanomo Bay.

"We have a lot of mixed feelings," said Gaby Viggiani, assistant director of the Spanish Bible study. "There are some that are angry, some are disbelieving, but the church is praying for Ana in our 24-hour prayer ministry to show our support." In a television interview, Ana Roque said she believes her husband was coerced to return to Cuba, where his children from a previous marriage live.

During a recent banquet sponsored by the church, Roque indicated he had accepted Christ as his savior, Viggiani reported. "There was an honesty in him, something very genuine, yet he always seemed a little hesitant." When he returned to Cuba last week, Roque took his nicest clothes, a picture of his American family and two Bibles the church had given him.

"It's hard when you think you know what people are like and find out they're not that," Viggiani said. "It's not up to us to point fingers but see what the Lord wants to do with all this. He turns negative things into positives for his glory."

The Bible-study group plans to provide child care and meals for Ana Roque and children during the next week.

Members of Estrella de Belen Iglesia are also involved in a prayer watch for the loved ones of the attack victims. "Pablo was somebody special," said Pastor Sotolongo. "He always had a laugh on his face. He was full of love. He would wake up early in the morning to pray and read his Bible."

In 1992, Morales left Cuba on a raft and was rescued at sea by the Brothers to the Rescue 15 days before Hurricane Andrew struck Miami. "The reason he was flying (when he was shot down) was because he was looking for rafters like he was," said Sotolongo. "That was the main purpose of the trip."

Morales had strong evangelical influences in his life, but was not a Christian when he arrived in Miami, said the pastor. "He was saved in the U.S. and on April 10, 1994 was baptized by me."

Sotolongo said the young man was engaged to a woman in the church and worked for her family's frozen food business. Many of her family members attend the Hispanic church. A memorial service two days after Morales was shot down filled the church with mourners.

"He was a pastor's dream. He grew in the Lord, witnessed, tithed to the church and gave offerings to missionaries," Sotolongo said.

The pastor said he has contacted Morales' family in Havana. "It's very painful for them. His mother is devastated and his sister can't understand why he was killed. They cannot hold a memorial service. They cannot even talk about him. In Cuba, they are calling him a terrorist. Please pray for his family."

When Morales left Cuba on a raft, he brought with him a copy of a New Testament with a personal inscription and reference of John 14: 2. That Bible remained in Morales' car until it was given to Sotolongo a few days ago. "That passage says in my father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." Sotolongo said. "The Lord was preparing him for this."

Carvajal said this tragic story clearly shows how Miami churches are "busy in the outreach of those who come as refugees. Thousands of others have been reached through our Baptist churches here." he said.

"One's a hero. One's a turncoat. All you can do is open your hearts, and open your arms."

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CORRECTION: In the Feb. 21 story "Reccord says restructuring offers SBC 'divine moment,'" please replace the 14th paragraph (fourth from the bottom) with the following:

David Hankins, the Executive Committee official directing the implementation, told Associated Baptist Press the memo was prompted by concern over severance agreements. The implementation task force "will take a comprehensive look" at severance issues, he said, and make sure all affected employees are cared for.

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