

# Associated Baptist Press

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## In this issue:

- Anna Stanley drops divorce lawsuit
- National Council of Churches decries church fire-bombings
- British Baptist leader opposes national lottery
- American Baptist official leaving Washington office

## **Anna Stanley drops divorce lawsuit**

By Gayle White

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Apparently ending three years of nervous speculation about the fate of one of the nation's most famous pastors, Anna Stanley quietly dismissed her divorce suit against Charles Stanley March 14.

In a letter to be read March 17 to the congregation of Stanley's church, First Baptist of Atlanta, Anna Stanley says she and her husband are "not living together at this time" but are "working toward that end."

The Stanleys have been married for 40 years and have two grown children. Stanley, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, is one of the country's best-known television pastors.

"I'm thrilled it happened," said the couple's son, Andy Stanley, pastor of North Point Community Church, a new congregation being organized in north Atlanta. "I think it's an authentic move toward reconciliation."

In a telephone interview March 14, Charles Stanley said: "Naturally, I'm pleased and grateful to God for answered prayer. I'm grateful for all the people who have been praying for us for these almost three years. Especially, I am grateful to my church for their patience and support and unwavering love for me through this difficult time."

In her letter, Anna Stanley also thanked the church and viewers of her husband's nationwide television ministry, In Touch.

"We all feel that the progress made in the past several weeks is due in great part to your prayers," she wrote.

Her lawyer, David Ross, said his client is "hopeful about the future. She and Charles have come to the understanding outlined in her letter, and she dismissed the suit in light of that understanding."

Anna Stanley first filed for divorce in 1993, saying she and her husband had been separated for a year.

The filing set off debate within Stanley's 13,000-member church, the state's largest Baptist congregation, which historically had not allowed divorced men to serve as pastors or deacons.

Stanley had said that if a divorce were granted, he would resign immediately.

Church members informed of Anna Stanley's decision to drop the suit rejoiced Thursday.

"Praise the Lord! That's exciting news," said Richard Taylor, a deacon at First Baptist.

Nancy Schaefer, a member of First Baptist and a former vice president of the Georgia Baptist Convention, also called the dismissal an answered prayer.

"Many members have struggled with this," she said. "Some have gone on to other places. Some are spiritually sore. Maybe this is a sign that healing is on its way."

Former deacon Tim Turner, who resigned from office in October because of concerns about Stanley's continued leadership, said: "My prayer and hope has always been for total restoration of the marriage. Hopefully, this is a sign that it's headed in that direction."

-30-

-- Gayle White is religion writer for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

## **National Council of Churches decries church fire-bombings**

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Church leaders have issued a call to government agencies to "investigate aggressively" a series of fire-bomb attacks on black churches in the South.

Leaders of the National Council of Churches held a news conference March 6 in Knoxville, Tenn., to decry the racially motivated attacks.

More than 25 African-American churches have been bombed in southern states in recent months, more than half of them since December.

During one recent incident -- the Jan. 8 fire-bombing of a church in Knoxville -- the words "Kill the niggers" and "White is Right" were sprayed on the church building, reported Ecumenical News International.

"Our country is in denial about racism, but in fact the climate has really spawned these outrageous events," said Robert Polk, general secretary for national ministries at the National Council of Churches.

Law enforcement officials have "refused to aggressively pursue" investigation of the bombings and have "not provided protection" to pastors who have received death threats, charged Mac Charles Jones, a pastor from Kansas City, Mo., and the NCC's associate for racial justice.

Instead of pursuing suspects in the bombings, the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and local officials "are interviewing the members of the local church as if they were under suspicion and responsible," Jones said.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **British Baptist leader opposes national lottery**

LONDON (ABP) -- A Baptist leader is protesting suggestions by British Prime Minister John Major that churches should support a national lottery in order to maintain old church buildings.

Major told the Sunday Telegraph in January that churches were "mistaken" to oppose the lottery.

"There are many beautiful churches ... where the cost of preserving them ... is very great," the prime minister said. "They would be helped by the lottery ... I would like to see the churches taking advantage of this." He advised churches to apply for grants from the National Lottery, which gives a percentage of its profits to British charities.

David Coffey, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, an opponent of the lottery since its inception in 1994, wrote a letter to national media criticizing Major's suggestion and a comment on BBC radio by government minister Virginia Bottomley, who described the lottery as "great fun."

Coffey asked Bottomley to "ponder the warning of Jesus" against basing one's life on an abundance of possessions. He said gambling addictions have increased since the lottery began and lottery spending has "exacerbated" debt problems for families.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

### **American Baptist official leaving Washington office**

VALLEY FORGE, Pa. (ABP) -- The head of American Baptists' Washington-based public-policy arm has resigned effective March 31.

Robert Tiller, director of the American Baptist National Ministries' Office of Governmental Relations since 1979, plans to "pursue other professional endeavors," according to American Baptist News Service in Valley Forge, Pa.

As director of governmental relations, Tiller has been responsible for communicating policy positions of the 1.5 million-member American Baptist Churches in the USA to Congress and the president.

Tiller also edited a quarterly newsletter, "The Advocate."

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-- By ABP staff

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