

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Hastey asks convocation to recommit to Alliance**

By Bob Allen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- Alliance of Baptists head Stan Hastey called members to "a renewed commitment to this movement," at the moderate Baptist group's 10th annual convocation. He asked members to increase financial support for the Alliance and to begin a "process of revisioning of who we are and what our future role might be" in Baptist life.

Also at the March 14-16 convocation in Charlotte, N.C., the Alliance elected Nancy Hastings Sehested, a minister from Lake Junaluska, N.C., as the organization's president. She succeeds outgoing president John Roberts of Baltimore, who served two years.

Howard Roberts, a minister from Auburn, Ala., was chosen as vice president. Amy Greene, a journalist from Atlanta, was elected to a second one-year term as secretary.

The Alliance formed in 1987 to defend historic principles perceived at risk during a decade-long takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention by conservatives. Over time, and particularly since the formation of the larger and more centrist Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1991, the Alliance has carved a niche by addressing issues "risky enough to limit our growth potential," Hastey said.

Hastey, executive director of the Alliance since 1989, described two transition moments for the organization. One was the decision four years ago to change the group's original name -- from the Southern Baptist Alliance -- symbolizing that "some of us no longer consider ourselves part of the convention which at one time we had thought so indispensable to our particular expression of Christian faith." The other was when the Fellowship backed off from a proposed merger of the two groups over fear that the Alliance's progressive agenda "would retard the growth of the larger movement."

Hastey said the Alliance is still needed as a voice for progressive Baptists. Last summer's decision by the Fellowship to defund the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America over homosexuality was "perhaps the clearest demonstration of the wisdom not to merge," Hastey said.

The CBF's Coordinating Council revoked funding after directors of the Baptist Peace Fellowship declared their organization a "welcoming place" for gays and lesbians. The Alliance's own task force on human sexuality had previously adopted a similar stance, Hastey said.

"The need for the Alliance is not only as great today as it was when we were founded, but the Alliance will continue to be needed for the indefinite future," Hastey said.

However, he warned that the group's future might be jeopardized by flat financial support.

"If we really believe the Alliance is needed for the indefinite future, we've got to begin demonstrating it by providing the necessary support to ensure our continuation," Hastey said.

He urged members to recruit individuals to join the Alliance, noting that individual membership has fallen off from a high of 3,000 in 1989 to about 1,200. He also asked them to "make an annual pledge to the Alliance" over and above membership dues.

The number of churches belonging to the Alliance has "remained remarkably stable" at about 125, Hastey said, but most of those congregations offer only token financial support.

The Alliance is also working on beginning a foundation to ensure long-term financial stability, he said.

Much of the Alliance's work is focused on 15 ecumenical "partnerships" with other progressive Baptists, Hastey said. "No other group of Baptists whose geographical base is in the South has sought the breadth and depth in such relationships as has the Alliance," he said.

One of those partner groups is the Fraternity of Cuban Baptist Churches, a group of 17 constituted congregations which formed seven years ago over theological differences with other Cuban Baptists, including the ordination of women.

The Alliance has worked with Cuban Baptists by matching up sister-church relationships for missions work and through "a public witness before our own government to normalize relations with Cuba," Hastey said.

At the convocation, the Alliance adopted a statement "lament(ing) the tragic deterioration in relations between the United States and Cuba in recent days," affirming "solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Fraternity of Cuban Baptist Churches" and pledging anew "to persuade our government to lift the economic embargo against Cuba and pursue a path leading to normalization of relations between our two countries."

The Alliance is also expanding a new partnership in Zimbabwe, Hastey said. The Alliance has given money to the Baptist Theological Seminary in Zimbabwe the last two years after the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board gradually phased out funding for the school.

Hastey also announced that the predominantly white Alliance plans to produce curriculum on racism in cooperation with the Progressive National Baptist Convention, an African-American organization. The materials are due in early 1997, he said.

Outgoing Alliance president John Roberts said many of his non-Baptist friends assume moderate Baptists are demoralized after losing control of the SBC, but that is not the case.

"This is a great time to be a Baptist," said Roberts, pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Baltimore. "It's a fresh time. We're getting to try again. We're getting to start from scratch. It's hard work ... but it's the best time ever to be a Baptist in my life."

He said the Alliance is on a "journey in a post-denominational world." He urged Alliance members to reclaim the word "liberal," a good word that has been used to vilify.

"The best heritage of Baptists is indeed theologically conservative, but until this century the great Baptist leaders were described as liberal in spirit," Roberts said. Baptist founders were dissenters who rebelled against the status quo, Roberts noted. "Baptists were born in liberalism, sustained and nurtured by liberal ministries. ... If liberalism does indeed send people to hell, then hell must be filled with the giants of Christian history."

In the annual "covenant address," retired missionary and educator Anne Thomas Neil recalled a struggle in the Alliance's early days over the role of women in the organization.

A vocal lobby for women in ministry caused a backlash of "silent hostility" and a feeling that "women are wanting to take over the Alliance," she said. Neil recalled being asked many times in not-so-friendly tones, "Just what is it you women want?"

"I am glad to say I have not heard this question in an Alliance setting for a very long time, and I don't ever expect to hear it again," she said.

The convocation's theme was "Listening to the Spirit" and featured sessions on spirituality and social action led by Glenn Hinson, professor of spirituality at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.); Marjorie Thompson, an author from Nashville, Tenn.; Jim Wallis, editor of Sojourners Magazine, and Mary Cosby, co-founder of Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C.

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-- Photos available by request

### **Virginia Baptists approve new policy on designated gifts**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The Baptist General Association of Virginia will let churches to channel contributions to tax-exempt Christian organizations not in the state association's budget, including a breakaway conservative group that complains the BGAV is too liberal.

The Virginia Baptist executive committee approved the new policy unanimously March 12.

The change was made after several Virginia Baptists asked the BGAV's treasurer's office to forward money to other organizations, including Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, a group dissatisfied with what they call the liberal direction of the BGAV.

The previous policy allowed BGAV treasurer Nathaniel Kellum to forward funds only to organizations listed in the state budget.

Rather than endorsing a list of approved recipients, the new policy allows Kellum to forward money to any organization which "has been granted 501(c)3 status by the Internal Revenue Service along with a tax exempt number," and has "a stated Christian mission that is compatible with the mission of the General Association."

The new policy is "a convenience to the churches," Kellum said. Money designated to other organizations will not count in a formula making churches eligible for messengers at the BGAV annual meeting. Messengers are granted on the basis of dollars the church gives to the Virginia portion of the BGAV budget.

"This is an open policy that seeks to serve the churches," said Reginald McDonough, executive director for Virginia Baptists. "It is to facilitate their wishes and is in keeping with Virginia Baptist character of openness."

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-- By Michael Clingenpeel

## High court agrees to review abortion clinic buffer zone

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The United States Supreme Court has agreed to clarify how far courts and communities may go in curbing protests at health clinics that perform abortions.

The high court announced March 18 that it will review a court-imposed "floating" 15-foot buffer zone at clinics in western New York.

The buffer zone requires abortion demonstrators to keep 15 feet away from clinics and from people entering or leaving clinics. However, it permits two "sidewalk counselors" to engage in "non-threatening conversation" with people approaching or leaving the facility but requires the "counselors" to stop conversations if the targeted person indicates the counseling is unwanted.

Abortion opponents say the buffer zone and the "cease and desist" requirement violate their free speech rights.

A three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in a split decision, agreed with the demonstrators. But the full 2nd Circuit, in a 13-2 decision, upheld the restrictions.

In rejecting the demonstrators' arguments, the appeals court cited a 1994 Supreme Court decision in *Madsen v. Women's Health Center* that upheld a 36-foot buffer zone around a Florida clinic.

The appeals court concluded that New York restrictions are content-neutral and are thus permissible if they "burden no more speech than necessary to serve a significant government interest."

In this case, the restrictions further the government's interest in medical safety, public safety and access to abortions, the appeals court said.

The appeals court noted that the clinic buffer zone approved by the Supreme Court in *Madsen* was both more and less restrictive than the restrictions ordered by the court in New York.

The Florida buffer zone was less restrictive in that it did not "float" to protect people approaching or leaving the clinic, the appeals court noted. But it was more restrictive in that it extended more than twice the distance of the 15-foot zone here and was absolute, permitting no "sidewalk counselors" to penetrate it unless invited.

"We conclude that the 15-foot buffer zone burdens no more speech than necessary to accomplish the governmental interests at stake in this case," the appeals court said.

The appeals court also distinguished between the "cease and desist" order in New York and a similar provision the Supreme Court struck down in the 1994 Florida case.

In *Madsen*, the Supreme Court invalidated a provision ordering demonstrators not to approach any person within 300 feet of a clinic unless they are invited to do so.

The "cease and desist" order in New York, the appeals court reasoned, "is far more solicitous of the demonstrators' interest in approaching their target audience face-to-face and delivering their message. They may approach without being invited and need not retreat unless expressly rejected by a counselee, and then only to a distance of 15 feet."

In asking the high court to reverse the full appeals court, attorneys for the abortion opponents said the ruling undermines the First Amendment.

If the appeals court majority "is correct, then their new constitutional right 'not to be hassled in public' will swiftly encroach upon union picketlines, gay rights activists and all other anti-establishment protesters who 'hassle' the American people by challenging the status quo," the appeal stated.

## **High court nixes invalidation of Arkansas abortion provision**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Lower federal courts went too far when they voided a 1985 Arkansas constitutional provision that bars public financing of abortions except to save the life of the mother, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a five-page unsigned opinion March 18.

Amendment 68, added to the Arkansas Constitution in 1985, declares that it is state policy "to protect the life of every unborn child from conception until birth, to the extent permitted by the Federal Constitution." It prohibits public funding of abortions except those performed to save the life of the mother.

Two lower federal courts invalidated the amendment, holding that the 1994 Hyde Amendment requires states that participate in the joint federal-state Medicaid program to finance abortions in pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, as well as those performed to save the life of the mother.

The Supreme Court agreed with the lower courts that the Hyde Amendment requires Medicaid funding of abortions in cases of rape and incest. But the high court reversed the blanket invalidation of Amendment 68, noting that the amendment could properly restrict funding of abortions in a state-funded program outside of Medicaid.

In addition, the court noted that the Hyde Amendment is not permanent legislation. While the 1994 version of the amendment requires funding of abortions in the cases of rape and incest, previous versions limited funding to abortions necessary to save the life of the mother. Named for its sponsor, Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., the Hyde Amendment is routinely attached to federal health-care appropriations bills.

Several times this term, the Supreme Court has refused to let states enforce policies that were more restrictive than the Hyde Amendment's requirement to fund abortions resulting from rape and incest.

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-- By Larry Chesser

## **African-American church groups form partnership with lender**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Two African-American Baptist conventions have formed a partnership with a major federal mortgage supplier to provide loans for home buyers in low-income communities.

The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. (Freddie Mac) announced the partnership with Minority Enterprise Financial Acquisition Corp. March 13. MEFAC is an organization owned and operated by the National Baptist Convention of America Inc. and the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. The group claims 12.7 million members.

MEFAC, created in 1993, focuses the resources of its members toward the economic development of communities served by its local churches.

E. Edward Jones, president of the National Baptist Convention of America, said when low-income families can afford to buy their own home, "their self-esteem shoots up."

Jones said when homes can be bought and a community's infrastructure can be rebuilt, there will be a rapid decline in crime and violence.

Freddie Mac is also joining with HomeFree, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that educates and prepares potential home owners through a network of churches and religious groups.

Marcia Griffin, president and founder of HomeFree, said basic information about getting loans is the greatest obstacle. "There are single women and families who can afford to buy a home, but are scared to death of rip-offs and scams and being sold a house they cannot afford," Griffin said.

"Our job is to turn renters into home owners," Griffin said. She added that she wanted to "inspire a sense of hope that home ownership is available to them."

Freddie Mac, along with HomeFree and MEFAC, hopes to help as many as 12,000 families become home owners by the end of 1997 and another 138,000 families by the end of the decade.

As part of the alliance initiatives, several partnerships will be formed. PHH Mortgage Services, one of the nation's largest mortgage bankers, will partner with MEFAC to form and run a national mortgage operation.

Hyman Jarrett, president and chief executive officer of MEFAC, said PHH will help set up its mortgage organization. "Our goal is to one day become a mini-Freddie Mac," Jarrett said.

In addition, Chevy Chase Bank and Mortgage Guarantee Insurance Corp. will be partners with HomeFree.

MEFAC will work closely with the recently formed Revelation Corp., which consists of five black religious organizations. Revelation will encourage members to buy certain products at discounts and its members will in turn receive a portion of the rebates back to increase their buying power.

Revelation will help give MEFAC "seed money" for the costs of major building projects like shopping malls, according to Jarrett.

Jarrett said a major reason for the partnership with Freddie Mac and PHH is to "learn to do business the way corporate America does so that we can use these dollars to funnel back into our communities. This will enable our dollars to be turned over more than once."

MEFAC will refer home buyers to banks like Chevy Chase to get a loan. Freddie Mac will buy the mortgage and sell it on Wall Street. The profits will go back into funds to provide more loans.

Although Congress chartered Freddie Mac, it does not receive federal funds and it pays taxes. The Department of Housing and Urban Development does impose some regulations on Freddie Mac, however.

In 1996, Freddie Mac must make sure 40 percent of its mortgages are for low-income individuals whose income is only 80 percent of the nation's median income. The group must also set aside 21 percent of its mortgages for inner-city buyers.

The alliance with MEFAC will help Freddie Mac meet these goals, according to a spokeswoman.

"We have accepted the challenge to lift our people off government welfare," Jarrett said. "Housing is the first step."

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## **Retired Wake Forest president James Ralph Scales dead at 76**

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- Retired Wake Forest University President James Ralph Scales died March 12 at North Carolina Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem, N.C. He was 76.

Scales was president of the university from 1967 to 1983, a period which saw Wake Forest grow from a small Baptist school to a university with a national academic reputation.

The son of a Baptist minister, Scales was a native of Oklahoma. He was a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University with a master's and doctor's degree from the University of Oklahoma. A lifelong Baptist, he was a member of Wake Forest Baptist Church.

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## **Hardin-Simmons names prof for theology school**

ABILENE, Texas (ABP) -- Robert Ellis of Fort Worth, Texas, has been named professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology.

Ellis, 40, is currently associate professor of Old Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons and was an instructor at the Baptist school in Abilene, Texas, before joining Southwestern's faculty in 1986.

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-- By Bob Allen

## **American Baptists losing head of peace office**

VALLEY FORGE, Pa. (ABP) -- The director of American Baptists' peace-and-social-justice arm has announced he will resign June 15.

Daniel Buttry, director of the Peace Program and Neighborhood Action Program for American Baptist National Ministries, will move to Hamtramck, Mich., according to American Baptist News Service. There, he will join his wife, Sharon, a recent seminary graduate who is taking a job as executive director of Friendship House, a ministry center related to National Ministries.

Buttry is the second American Baptist official to announce his resignation in recent days.

News of Buttry's resignation came on the heels of an announcement by Robert Tiller, head of the ABC's Washington-based public-policy arm, that he is stepping down March 31.

Buttry said his experience as director of the peace program "has been very satisfying" and that he has "a lot of possibilities, a few offers and lots of question marks" for work in the Detroit area.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Seminary professor named to head European Baptist group**

WIESBADEN, Germany (ABP) -- A Southern Baptist seminary professor has been chosen to lead the European Baptist Convention.

James Heflin, professor of preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, since 1985, was elected general secretary of the European convention Feb. 15. He succeeds John Merritt, a Southern Baptist missionary who is retiring after 24 years in the post.

The European Baptist Convention is an association of about 60 English-speaking churches in major cities across Europe.

Heflin will be the first non-missionary ever to hold the post. The European convention will provide his entire compensation package. Previous general secretaries were appointed missionaries whose salaries were paid by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

The Foreign Mission Board is expected to continue a fraternal relationship with the European Baptist Convention, according to European Baptist Press Service.

Heflin lived in England during a sabbatical leave from Southwestern Seminary in 1991. While there, he taught and preached in churches in England, France, Germany and Norway that belong to the European convention.

Last fall, he spent another sabbatical as interim pastor of International Baptist Church in Berlin, Germany.

Heflin termed the decision to accept the position "very difficult."

"We want to become not only Americans living in Europe, but Baptists in Europe working to win the world for Christ," he said.

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**END**