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Media, evangelism largest units in new mission board structure

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Workers in media and evangelism will comprise more than half the headquarters staff of the North American Mission Board, according to information released by the task force overseeing creation of the new Southern Baptist Convention agency.

The agency is to be created in June through a merger of the SBC Home Mission Board, Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission. Its 350 employees will be 165 fewer than the total number of staff positions at the three existing agencies. Savings from the merger have been projected at \$9 million a year.

No information has yet been released about the impact of restructuring on field missionaries. However, pieces of information are being released about what shape NAMB's headquarters staff in Atlanta will take.

Of the three primary thrusts of the existing HMB, evangelism gains in staff support in the new structure, while church planting and ministry are redefined with less direct staff support. The media work of the RTVC and the missions education work of the Brotherhood Commission, meanwhile, combine to create the largest single unit of the new agency's structure.

Due to adoption of a matrix structure in which all positions are said to interact to achieve the agency's overall goals, several specialized emphases in the current HMB structure will not carry the high profile they have in the past.

Specialized efforts to start and strengthen congregations among African-Americans and dozens of language groups, as well as a broad approach to Christian ministry, will assume smaller and lower-profile positions in the new structure.

In the current HMB structure, the church-planting unit is the largest of three major areas of missions work in terms of personnel and budget and the second-largest in staff among five organizational sections, with 84 positions.

In the new NAMB structure, a church-planting group is one of five "work groups" but will include only 26 positions. Although details have not been released, up to 24 church-loans positions housed in the current church-planting unit could be accounted for elsewhere in the new structure, creating a more likely downsizing of employees directly responsible for church planting from 60 to 26.

Two specialized areas of church planting that carry division status in the current HMB structure -- work among black churches and language churches -- will be reduced to an unspecified number of consultant positions in the new structure. The new structure includes no specific department or division with overall responsibility for language missions or African-American work.

"Ethnicity concerns" will be addressed in the new congregation-implementation unit of the church-planting group, HMB employees were told in a Feb. 3 staff meeting. The new congregation-implementation unit will house an unknown number of consultants.

David Hankins, a vice president with the SBC Executive Committee and liaison to the implementation task force, confirmed that language specialists will be among the church-planting consultants, but he could not say how many and exactly what types they would be. He said, for example, there might be an African-American consultant, a Korean consultant, a Hispanic consultant and other consultants who are generalists.

Despite the apparent downsizing, Hankins said the new structure will not reduce the SBC's emphasis on church starting among African-Americans and language groups. Because of the matrix structure being used in the new organization, "every position in one sense will support church starting," he said.

That sentiment was echoed by Rudy Hernandez, a Hispanic evangelist from Grand Prairie, Texas, who serves on the 10-member task force creating the new organization.

"We don't have (language missions) as a division per se, but it will be prominent in the mission work of the board," Hernandez said. "Definitely, ethnic missions will play a significant role in the new North American Mission Board."

Others familiar with the HMB's longstanding emphasis on language missions and work with African-American churches are privately expressing concern about the new structure. However, since the task force overseeing the restructuring meets behind closed doors and has released only selected information about the new structure, these individuals are not yet ready to speak on the record about their concerns.

In recent years, ethnic and African-American congregations nationwide have accounted for a major portion of the SBC's numerical growth. Language and black church starts combined have accounted for 50 percent to 60 percent of all new church starts in the SBC, according to HMB statistics.

Ministry, which currently is one of the HMB's five sections of work, will become a lesser unit under one of five "work groups" in the new structure. Ministry evangelism will be one component within the evangelization group.

Currently, the HMB ministry section includes chaplaincy, church-and-community ministries, special ministries, Mission Service Corps, student missions, alternatives-to-abortion ministries and volunteer projects.

Although specific information has not been released about what areas of work will remain, HMB employees were told in the Feb. 3 staff meeting that the ministry evangelism unit would include four areas: chaplaincy ministries, special ministries, immigrant ministries and Baptist-center ministries.

The entire evangelization work group, of which ministry evangelism will be one part, will have 56 positions. The HMB's current ministry section includes 54 positions. The HMB's current evangelism section has 43 positions.

In the matrix established for NAMB's structure, the evangelization group and church-planting group serve as the two primary missions units and are supported by three other work groups: media and missions, strategic planning and mobilization, and business services.

The largest of the five work groups in terms of headquarters personnel will be media and missions education, with 122 positions. The largest unit within this work group will be media technology, which will be housed at least temporarily in the currently facilities of the Radio & Television Commission in Fort Worth, Texas.

Other units in the media-and-missions-education group and their sub-units reportedly will include public relations (promotion, news and information); publishing (editorial and photography); missions education (children, youth, adults, missions opportunities/events, missions development, publications); and media strategy.

The second-largest work group, with 86 positions, will be business services: finance and accounting; human resources; information services; church loans; and marketing.

The third-largest work group, with 56 positions, will be evangelization: direct evangelism (interfaith witness, evangelism events, soul-winning); campus evangelism; church evangelism (family, spiritual renewal, multi-cultural); ministry evangelism (chaplaincy, special ministries, immigrants, Baptist centers).

The strategic-planning-and-mobilization group will include 44 positions in four units: associational planning (town and country, metropolitan); strategic-focus cities; strategic planning, coordination and research; and volunteer mobilization (adults, youth).

The church-planting group will include 26 positions in three units: leadership enlistment and training; strategy-resource development; new-congregation implementation.

In addition to the five work groups, an executive group will account for an additional 16 positions, including the agency's president, possibly an executive vice president, vice presidents of each work group and related support staff.

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-- Marv Knox contributed to this story.

Trend spotter: Churches face 10-year window of opportunity

By David Winfrey

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Christian churches have a 10-year window of opportunity to reach baby boomers and a broader culture that's giving the church a second look, according to one of marketing's leading futurists.

Faith Popcorn told Leadership Journal, a quarterly publication for pastors, that people are giving churches another chance out of desperation.

"I think there's a universal consciousness that the planet is in trouble ecologically -- which I think is spiritual," said Popcorn, a leading adviser to Fortune 500 companies and author of "The Popcorn Report" and "Clicking," both on trends.

"I do think people are really looking again for a more gentle spirituality and more understanding," she added.

Popcorn told the journal's writers she is "100 percent Jewish," and doesn't "believe in Jesus Christ the way Christians do." Nevertheless, Popcorn said the church can be important to baby boomers who are looking for a second chance as they age.

"If you're going to have a successful religious organization, this would be the next 10 years to do it," she said. "If in the church it became OK to be more aware of what was going on with your consumer -- your parishioner, whatever you call them -- you would have an ongoing institution that would be healthy and vital and connected."

Among her other observations that relate to the church:

-- People are seeking a community, not just a church. Popcorn said people are finding community either in mega-churches ("It's like a village") or in small congregations. She compared it to retailing, where superstores and specialty boutiques are popular at the same time. "The middle will probably fall out. The extremes will grow."

-- In the area of charitable contributions, Popcorn said donor control will affect giving in the next decade. "People want to see what happens to their money."

-- Two trends might discourage volunteerism: "cocooning," in which people retreat from the world, and "99 lives," a sense of busyness.

However, "people have time to do whatever they want to do," countered Popcorn.

She suggested churches associate volunteer work with two other trends: "clanning," in which volunteer work is done as a team or club, and "egonomics."

"Helping somebody through a difficult time, for example, is rewarding," she said, adding people today feel more out of control of their lives. "When you're able to control even a little, like when you help out a friend, you feel extremely good."

-- Popcorn said virtual reality is one part of the trend of fantasy adventure that worries her.

"The downside is if virtual reality becomes more manageable than life," she said. "Ralph Nader once said early on that if we watch more than three or four hours of television a week, we'll not be paying attention to our environment, our cities, our government. Our average viewership is 36 hours a week, and he was right."

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Clinton sticks with Isaiah theme in remarks at prayer breakfast

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Addressing the annual National Prayer Breakfast, President Clinton called on Americans to be "repairers of the breach" by working for the poor and ridding politics of its "toxic atmosphere of cynicism."

Repeating a theme from his recent Inaugural and State of the Union addresses, Clinton cited Isaiah 58:12 as a reminder "that we should all be repairers of the breach."

Clinton identified three groups -- America's poor, troubled people around the world, and U.S. politicians -- as people in the "breach" in need of prayer and support.

He urged listeners to help repair the breach by providing jobs for as many as 4 million adults who will lose benefits under welfare-reform legislation enacted last year. The welfare-reform package cuts off benefits for able-bodied adults after two years.

"So the people who are in the breach are the people that we say have to go to work, who want to go to work, who can't go to work," Clinton said, calling on private employers, churches and community nonprofit groups to hire them.

"If you don't, this whole thing will be a fraud, and we will not have repaired the breach," he said.

Clinton said the United States should also reach out to people around the world who are in trouble.

"We can get a long way with having the finest defense in the world, but we also have to help people become what they can be," he said.

"We're not talking about spending a lot of money here," he said. "It's only one percent of our budget."

As for politicians in the breach, Clinton said the nation's capital "is gripped with people who are self-righteous, sanctimonious and hypocritical."

"All of us are that way sometimes," he said. "I plead guilty from time to time."

Clinton said too much effort is spent by politicians "trying to get even."

"Pray for the people in public office that we can rid ourselves of this toxic atmosphere of cynicism and embrace with joy and gratitude the phenomenal opportunity and responsibility before us," he said.

"Do not forget people in the rest of the world who depend upon the United States for more than exhortation, and most of all, remember that in every scripture of every faith, there are hundreds and hundreds of admonitions not to forget those among us who are poor. They are no longer entitled to a handout, but they surely deserve and we are ordered to give them a hand up."

Also addressing the nearly 4,000 public officials and other leaders attending the breakfast here were Vice President Al Gore and Baltimore neurosurgeon Ben Carson.

Gore also called for reconciliation, pointing to efforts to rebuild churches burned in recent years.

"These houses of worship have been lifted back up and the breath of the Spirit has been breathed into them,"

he said. "May the same thing happen to our hurting nation."

Carson, director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University, lamented the fact that more young black males are in jail than in college and that some respond by saying "I'm not a black male, so it doesn't affect me, it's not my problem."

"I beg to differ with you," Carson said. "Because all of our ancestors came to this country in different boats, but we're all in the same boat now and if part of the boat sinks, eventually the rest of it goes down, too."

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Welfare, education, stronger communities top nation's agenda

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Clinton outlined education, community revitalization, welfare reform and a balanced budget as national priorities in his State of the Union address Feb. 4.

"We face no imminent threat, but we do have an enemy," Clinton told a joint session of both houses of Congress. "The enemy of our time is inaction."

He said the country is ready for action. "We must be shapers of events, not observers. For if we do not act, the moment will pass," he said.

Clinton discussed top items on his agenda for his second term, including a balanced budget, welfare for the poor and improving the nation's education system.

Highlighting what may preview an early dispute between the Democratic president and the Republican-controlled Congress, Clinton opposed the idea of a constitutional amendment to balance the budget.

"We do not need a constitutional amendment," he said. "We need action." Clinton told Congress it would be unwise to adopt an amendment that could cripple the country in a time of crisis, when balancing the budget only requires "your vote and my signature."

Both parties have said they are committed to working toward a balanced budget by 2002.

In a GOP response to the president's message, however, Rep. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., maintained a constitutional amendment is needed to balance the budget.

"The Balanced Budget Amendment will force the government to change its ways, permanently," Watts said. "No longer will a president or a Congress be able to spend money we don't have."

Both Clinton and Watts called on communities to help implement new welfare policies that turn many former federal programs over to the states. Their remarks highlighted a growing debate in the religious community over the proper role of religious organizations in aiding government welfare programs.

While Clinton called on religious groups to hire people off welfare, Watts extended a plea to involve religious groups in providing welfare services.

Clinton said there is a moral obligation to make sure that people who must work, can work. "I challenge every religious congregation, every community nonprofit and every business to hire someone off welfare," he said.

Clinton also addressed employers who criticized the old welfare system. "You cannot blame that old system any more. We have torn it down. Now do your part. Give someone on welfare the chance to go to work."

Clinton continued his call for the new welfare policies to restore basic health and disability benefits to legal immigrants who "work hard, pay taxes and obey the law."

Watts pushed for "American Community Renewal Act" legislation that would provide vouchers for faith-based drug programs, money for low-income students to attend private or parochial schools and create tax incentives to invest and live in low-income areas. Two similar proposals were introduced in the last Congress.

Watts said the legislation would "help rebuild low-income communities through their own moral renewal and by giving them economic opportunity." The proposal "recognizes that faith-based institutions contribute to the healing of our nation's problems," he added.

A group of Republican House and Senate leaders have recently formed a group called the "Renewal Alliance" to promote proposals that empower charities, families, churches and community organizations to participate in solving human problems.

"The strength of America is not in Washington. The strength of America is at home, in lives well lived in the land of faith and family," Watts said. "Government can't ease all pain," he added.

Clinton said his top priority is to ensure that Americans have the best education in the world.

His proposed budget, he said, will include \$51 billion next year to create a "national crusade" for raising educational standards, establish nationally accepted credentials for excellence in teaching, build an "army" of volunteer tutors to assure every child can read by the third grade, set aside money to finance school construction and repair, give tax credits for college tuition, increase Pell Grants scholarships and outline a goal of connecting every classroom and library to the Internet by 2000.

Clinton also renewed his call to provide more Americans with health care. "No child should be without a doctor just because a parent is without a job," he said.

Opposing efforts to cut back on support for the arts and humanities, Clinton said "the enduring worth of our nation lies in our shared values and our soaring spirit."

He also urged the nation to embrace cultural diversity.

"My fellow Americans, we must never, ever believe that our diversity is a weakness -- it is our greatest strength," he said. "We may not share a common past, but surely we share a common future."

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