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Bob Reccord probable pick for mission board president

By Bob Allen

NORFOLK, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia pastor Bob Reccord, who for the past 18 months has led the effort to reorganize the Southern Baptist Convention, has resigned that post and is expected to be nominated as the first president of the North American Mission Board, the centerpiece agency in the restructuring plan.

Reccord, 45, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., has chaired the 10-member task force appointed in September 1995 to implement the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring plan adopted at consecutive SBC annual meetings in 1995 and 1996.

The reorganization reduces the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12. The new North American Mission Board will replace three current Southern Baptist agencies: the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission.

In a written statement, Reccord told Baptist Press, the SBC news agency, that he was stepping down as chair of the implementation task force because the group seeking the mission board's president had asked him to "move forward to another stage of the selection process."

Reccord said he was one of several men interviewed for the position last year but, since the discussions "were merely introductory" he felt no need to resign from the implementation team.

"I now feel, however, that it is appropriate for me to do so since the [search committee members] have asked me to move forward to another stage of the selection process. Though no prior requirement or agreement exists regarding such a step, I believe it to be the high road of integrity to ensure procedural propriety," Reccord said. "I would hasten to add that this step in no way presumes upon the process or my involvement in it."

Bill Hogue, chairman of the 13-member search committee, emphasized no final decision has been made. He told Baptist Press any candidate has to pass a three-step screening process: psychological testing, management assessment and physical testing.

Sources close to the search process told Associated Baptist Press that Reccord has yet to pass the physical examination. He underwent back surgery March 3 and was unavailable for comment.

Associated Baptist Press attempted Feb. 27 to confirm a report that Reccord planned to resign from the implementation team. Reccord did not return a reporter's phone call. David Hankins, the SBC Executive Committee's vice president for convention policy, told ABP he was unaware of any plans by Reccord to step down.

Reccord has been the leading candidate for NAMB president since December, when California pastor Rick Warren, the search committee's first choice, withdrew from consideration. Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, Calif., the SBC's fastest-growing church, was interviewed twice and was reported to be the unanimous first choice of the committee.

Hogue told state-convention executives in February that Warren withdrew prior to the last stage of the selection process.

Once a nominee is selected, the candidate will be presented to the NAMB's 86-member trustee board for election. That process is expected to be completed at the board's organizational meeting at the end of the 1997 SBC annual meeting in June.

The new mission board, which also comes on line in June, will be based north of Atlanta in Alpharetta, Ga., in current Home Mission Board headquarters. For now, television production facilities will remain open at the Radio and Television Commission in Fort Worth, Texas. Brotherhood Commission offices in Memphis, Tenn., are for sale.

The new agency, which oversees nearly 5,000 missionaries across the United States and in Canada, will employ about 350 workers. The three agencies being merged currently have about 500 combined employees. Officials predict severance benefits for workers laid off by the merger will cost \$2.5 million. Savings from the merger have been projected at \$9 million a year.

The new mission board will have a budget of more than \$70 million. That includes more than \$33 million proposed from the SBC Cooperative Program budget and an estimated \$40 million from an annual missions offering.

Reccord, pastor of the Norfolk congregation since 1992, was ordained to the ministry in 1973 at Calvary Baptist Church in Evansville, Ind.

He is a 1972 graduate of Indiana University who earned the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Earlier in his career, he was pastor of Bell Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon, Fla., and co-pastor at Carmel Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.

Earlier, as a bivocational pastor in Warren, Mich., Reccord was vice president of sales and marketing for Chemecto, Inc.

He worked for Evangelism Explosion International as director of leadership training for the United States. He also has worked as director of witness training for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

A member of the SBC Executive Committee since 1994, Reccord has been a speaker at the SBC pastors' conference and at Sunday School Week at Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly. He has served twice on the SBC resolutions committee, in 1993 and 1995; on the SBC Committee on Committees in 1994; and on a stewardship and missions giving study group appointed by SBC president Ed Young in 1993. He is currently serving a 1995-2000 term on the Baptist World Alliance's Evangelism and Education Committee.

He married Cheryl Ann Burger in 1972. They have three children: Christy Joy, 20; Bryan Christopher, 17; and Ashley Nicole, 13.

Reccord, whose doctoral thesis was on metropolitan church growth, has hinted at priorities he might bring to the North American Mission Board.

In an interview last August, Reccord told a Baptist Press writer the new mission board should target resources at major metropolitan areas.

"This doesn't mean neglecting the small towns and rural areas, but when you can penetrate major cities in a systematic way, you impact the nation," he said. "I think it's important to target specific areas, then to concentrate your resources on that area.

"I would like to see the North American Mission Board target regions of America, then pour our resources into those areas in an all-out campaign to win people to Christ. In a sense it would be like an invasion. We could

soften the target area by use of media prior to the actual campaign. And, obviously, we would use media extensively throughout the campaign. Of course, I'm talking about creative, attention-getting electronic and print messages coordinated to both mobilize evangelicals and reach the lost."

"There would be a massive prayer effort and, at the proper time, preaching by several of our greatest preachers simultaneously throughout the targeted region. But use of media would definitely pave the way for all of this."

The interview with C.C. Risenhoover of the SBC Radio and Television Commission, focused on use of mass media in the North American Mission Board. He said the new agency should "develop a platform for media that we haven't had before" and that using the mass media will be critical for communicating with the "boomer" and "buster" generations that have grown up watching television.

He also said the new mission agency would work closely with Baptist state conventions, associations and local churches and would "link arms with other evangelical groups."

Reccord said his previous stint with the Home Mission board "opened my eyes to the field white unto harvest and put a fire in my heart."

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Brotherhood Commission head to stay on as consultant after merger

By Russ Dilday

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- Trustees of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission have approved an agreement allowing President James Williams to continue employment after the agency closes in June.

The "contract of agreement" between Williams and the Brotherhood Commission must be approved by trustees of the commission's successor agency, North American Mission Board.

The agreement, approved by trustees in an executive session, permits Williams, 62, to continue employment as both a consultant with NAMB and to assume the duties of executive director of the Baptist Medical- Dental Fellowship "until his planned normal retirement date, Nov. 1, 1999."

The Feb. 28-March 1 meeting at the Brotherhood Commission's headquarters in Memphis, Tenn., was the final meeting of the full board of trustees for the 90-year-old agency.

The commission will be dissolved June 19 when it is merged with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Radio and Television Commission to form the North American Mission Board. The merger is part of a downsizing of the Southern Baptist Convention adopted two years ago.

Following an executive session of the trustee board, Williams read a statement by the commission's executive committee that trustee chairman Donley Brown of Missouri said was unanimously approved "with tears of joy."

The statement contained the terms of a "contract of agreement" between Williams and the Brotherhood Commission "and/or its successor agency, the NAMB."

Williams will succeed current medical-dental fellowship executive Henry Love, who has served 18 years as the leader of the 1,700-member, Memphis-based group that provides volunteer services for Southern Baptist missions-sending agencies.

The board also noted in the agreement that "Williams anticipates opportunity to use his broad knowledge and experience of Southern Baptist life in supporting the NAMB mission, giving special attention to the assignment given to NAMB in missions education and involvement."

Following the announcement, Williams acknowledged that the agreement will be contingent on the approval of NAMB trustees. "As the agreement points out, I would be serving at the wishes of the NAMB," he said.

Williams, in his presidential address, noted "tangible evidence of a new interest in missions education among our Southern Baptist people" that will carry over into work of the North American Mission Board. "We move into the NAMB not from a position of weakness but from a position of strength, not as a dying organization, but one that is alive and dynamic," he said.

During a financial report, Jack Childs, vice president for business services, told trustees that after financial losses for two reporting periods, "it looks like the Brotherhood Commission will take an indebtedness of \$200,000 to \$250,000 into the NAMB."

Childs explained in a later interview that the commission owes money to both a printing company and local bank.

"With our normal cash flow, we had projected...that we would just about take care of all of that indebtedness before we went through the fiscal year," he said, "but, due to the fact that we've had some early severance, we're having to take that money out of our cash flow and we have some expenses related to transition."

Childs said another financial burden is a "retention bonus" trustees approved in 1995 "to pay the staff that would stay through the end an amount of 25 percent of their annual salary."

"We're not budgeted for that and, frankly, we don't have the money to take care of that," he said. "It has got to come from the sale of this building."

The commission's entire indebtedness, he noted, can be offset by the sale of the commission's 40,000-square-foot physical plant, with an asking price of \$1.4 million. "If we sell this building, we should be able to pay our debts and the retention bonus."

The move into the NAMB also was the focus of a Logistics and Transition Team panel, who discussed their roles in the transition to the new agency and answered questions from trustees. Much of the their report and many of the questions from the board focused on personnel issues.

"Will Brotherhood Commission personnel have an opportunity to serve in the NAMB and when might they know?" asked Williams, part of the panel. "It's a question you have asked me 100 times and a question that the staff has asked me at least a thousand times."

"Most certainly," answered panel member and executive vice president Mike Day. "But there will be some employees of the Brotherhood Commission who will not have that opportunity. When will they know? 'Soon' is the answer of choice these days.

"I know this sounds empty to you as trustees, but you don't have any idea how empty it sounds to those who ask every day," Day remarked. "We're hoping within the next two to three weeks we will know something."

He added that employees will not officially be offered a job with the NAMB until the board has taken its hiring action on June 19. The current Brotherhood staff numbers 53 employees.

"I have a concern about the staff -- the uncertainty of a job and where will it be," added Brown. "Many of them have families and own homes here. So, if they are offered jobs at the NAMB, its going to be upsetting their family routine.

Trustees also honored Brotherhood staff with a banquet at First Baptist Church in Memphis and approved a resolution stating their "heartfelt appreciation for the staff and volunteers, past and present and...commit to continuing prayerful support of the Brotherhood Commission staff and those individuals who continue the legacy of the ideals of the Brotherhood Commission with men and boys in missions."

Disaster-relief workers respond after killer tornadoes hit Arkansas

By Trennis Henderson and Russ Dilday

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. (ABP) -- Hours after killer tornadoes ripped through several counties in Arkansas, Baptist disaster-relief efforts were in full operation in Arkadelphia and Little Rock. The March 1 storms killed at least 24 people, injured more than 300 and damaged or destroyed more than 800 houses and businesses.

"This was 31 years of our life just blown up before us," Karen Kirkpatrick said early Sunday morning as she sifted through debris from the previous afternoon's tornado that devastated much of downtown Arkadelphia.

Standing amid the rubble of what had been her family's business, she added, "We're not the only ones suffering. At least we've got our lives and our health. We have so much to be thankful for. ... Everyone has banded together and we're united -- just pray for us."

Two blocks away at First Baptist Church of Arkadelphia, the Arkansas Baptist Men's feeding unit was busy preparing meals for storm victims and relief workers. More than 20 disaster-relief volunteers manned the unit, preparing more than 1,000 meals for distribution Sunday afternoon. Disaster relief coordinator Ronnie O'Neal said he expected the number of meals being served to double during the next several days.

While First Baptist Church and nearby Ouachita Baptist University escaped any serious damage during the storm, the offices of Red River Baptist Association suffered extensive damage.

"We don't know what we're going to do with our offices, but the ministry goes on," noted Maurice Hitt, Red River Association director of missions. "The indications are the building has shifted on its foundation. It may be structurally beyond repair."

Refusing to let the property damage sidetrack ministry efforts, Hitt emphasized, "That building is nothing but a tool. It is not our ministry. I can see interruptions but I do not see the ministry being damaged." He added that he already has received an offer of a office building for the association to use.

As church members, Boy Scouts and other volunteers joined disaster-relief workers at First Baptist Church, pastor Kevin Lee noted that a disaster-relief training conference had been held at the church only three weeks before.

Affirming that disaster-relief efforts "make all the difference in the world," Lee added, "The visible reminder that there are people who care helps reach these folks who are in absolute despair."

In addition to feeding efforts, the church has offered its facilities for use by the state convention's disaster-relief child-care unit. Across town at Park Hill Baptist Church, Red Cross volunteers set up a shelter that housed 14 people the night of the storm.

"It's great that the churches open their facilities to the Red Cross for shelters," said Red Cross worker Fred Fox of Hot Springs. "People are devastated when their homes are destroyed. They are physically drained and need someplace to rest and sleep."

"We always thought we were immune," noted First Baptist Church member Otis Turner, an Arkadelphia attorney whose title office was destroyed. Despite the widespread devastation, "it could have been so much more terrible," he added. "Just clean up and start over -- that's all you can do."

While feeding efforts were under way in Arkadelphia, three clean-up teams of Arkansas Baptist Men were mobilized early Sunday morning in areas of south Pulaski County and north Saline County. The work crews helped families remove debris from their yards and roofs -- or what was left of their homes.

Sixteen men from Sherwood, Jacksonville and Little Rock helped with the efforts with chain saws, a front-end loader and bare hands. An additional 10 men were expected to join the teams Monday.

They concentrated their work in an area where a tornado injured 20, destroyed approximately 60 homes and damaged scores of other residences. When they arrived at the affected area, many team members were left speechless by the sight of leveled homes and flattened groves of trees.

The storm hit close to home for many of the crew members. Hunter Douglas, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, watched the twister cut a path less than a mile from his home. Later that evening, he helped a local woman break through debris to reach her mother in a destroyed home -- to find her safe in her bedroom.

The team was aided in cleanup efforts by a new weapon -- a computer map system used by Douglas at his home-turned-command center that allowed coordinators to make assignments street by street.

Crew member Ken Scott, a member of First Baptist Church in Gravel Ridge and a veteran of clean-up efforts last year in Van Buren, said the Baptist Men's crews "are going to stay as long as it takes" to clean up. Surveying the damage surrounding him, he added, "We may be back for several days."

Looking at the small team of volunteers, Scott said, "If more men knew the feeling you get from helping others, we'd have the field full of people out here. I feel like I was led to do it, and it's a good feeling to help people when they are absolutely helpless."

"Disaster-relief is the best-kept secret in the whole (Southern Baptist) convention," agreed team coordinator Warren Burlison, a member of Highland Heights Baptist Church in Benton. "In fact, we cleaned up a yard for a couple (members of a Southern Baptist church) and they had no idea we had anything like this. The next thing they asked is, 'How do we sign up?'"

"Our greatest resources is our volunteers," O'Neal emphasized. "We're reaching out with the love of God to hurting people and showing them that, through our Baptist Men, that God loves them."

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Members of Congress say TV rating system needs improvement

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Appearing before a Senate committee, members of Congress and community leaders urged the television industry to scrap its new age-based ratings system for a new system that rates programs based on content such as violence and sex.

At a Feb. 27 Senate Commerce Committee hearing, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., called the present ratings system, which took effect early this year, "vague and vexing."

"A television rating system that does not give parents information on sex, violence and language is no ratings system at all," said Sen. Dan Coats, R-Ind.

Other witnesses and committee members praised the industry for setting up voluntary standards.

In written statements for the committee, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., admitted the rating system is not perfect but urged lawmakers to give it time to work. "Fortunately for all of us, it was not for me or any other government official to devise it. Moreover, it is only 58 days old and is still being refined."

"Now it is time for governmental restraint," Leahy said, "not governmental restraint of programming but of our own tendencies to want to intervene."

Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, spearheaded the development of the industry's rating system. He said the system is based on the rating system used for motion pictures, which has received high parental approval.

It is significant, Valenti said, that television executives worked together to create a system. "Please understand these are disparate groups, mutually antagonistic, hotly competitive, yet they have put aside their marketplace conflicts to bind together in an alliance with parents," Valenti said.

Valenti told reporters that a content-based approach would not improve on the age-based system. If a program were rated for violence, for example, a viewer would not be able based on a "V" rating to differentiate between the types of violence in "Tom and Jerry," in "The Terminator" or in "Schindler's List."

The television industry moved to create a ratings system after a provision in last year's sweeping telecommunications reform package called for a "v-chip" device to be installed in new television sets and required an advisory committee to recommend a television-rating system.

According to a spokeswoman for Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the Federal Communications Commission will have final say on the rating system used for the v-chip.

The television industry voluntarily decided to set up a system, hoping to prevent having government ratings imposed on them. The new age-based ratings took effect Jan. 1. According to a pamphlet distributed by TV Parental Guidelines Inc., the six categories are:

-- TV Y to indicate the program is designed to be appropriate for all children, including children from ages 2-6;

-- TV Y7 to indicate that the program is designed for children age 7 and above. The program is more appropriate for children who have acquired the ability to distinguish between make-believe and reality;

-- TV G to indicate programs for the general audience. Most parents would find this program suitable for all ages. Most parents may let younger children watch this program unattended;

-- TV PG to indicate programs for which parental guidance is suggested, which may contain some material that some parents would find unsuitable for younger children. Many parents may want to watch this with their younger children;

-- TV 14 to indicate programs that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age. Parents are strongly urged to not allow children under 14 to watch the programs unattended; and

-- TV M to indicate programs for mature audiences only. This type of program is specifically designed to be viewed by adults and therefore may be unsuitable for children under 17.

Many groups have criticized the age-based rating system.

At the hearing, Traditional Values Coalition Executive Director Andrea Sheldon said that the television industry "speaks out of both sides its mouth when it comes to avoiding responsibility for its programming or taking credit for what it has done to and for our society."

She said a content-based system would give a description of the subject matter, type of language, sex and the amount of violence a specific show contains. Sheldon said studies show that the escalation of television violence, profanity and sexual content is damaging the country's children and culture.

"It is apparent that the television industry is more concerned about its own financial gain than the concerns expressed by the American parents."

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., said, "We don't need to injure our children while we entertain our adults."