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New name proposed for SBC publishing arm

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Trustees and staff of the Baptist Sunday School Board are asking the Southern Baptist Convention to change the name of its 106-year-old publishing arm.

Trustees of the Nashville, Tenn.,-based publisher voted Sept. 16 to rename the agency LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention. To take effect, the proposal must come before the SBC Executive Committee in February and gain final approval by convention messengers next June.

Jimmy Draper, Sunday School Board president, told Baptist editors Sept. 22 that administrators have long acknowledged a need for a new name more descriptive of the agency's far-flung services.

When established in 1891, the board's sole assignment was to produce literature for Sunday school, Draper said at a press briefing. Today, it provides resources and services for various church programs, operates two conference centers and a nationwide chain of bookstores, and publishes books, Bibles and church supplies through its Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Draper said the new name also would more strongly support a previously approved vision statement to "assist local churches and believers to evangelize the world to Christ, develop believers, and grow churches by being the best worldwide provider of relevant, high-value, high-quality Christian products and services."

"There's been some discussion we've been trying to distance ourselves from Southern Baptists; that's not the case," Draper said. He noted that inclusion of the words "of the Southern Baptist Convention" is consistent with titles of other SBC agencies.

Trustees also voted to make the Southern Baptist Convention the sole member of the corporation, Draper added, "removing any doubt about who owns the Sunday School Board."

The recommendation has been in the works more than two years, Draper said. A 19-member employee task force considered 400 names before settling on the recommendation, which the board's executive management group approved unanimously July 1.

Some long-standing SBC agencies were renamed in a recent denominational restructuring. The study committee proposing the reorganization gave the Sunday School Board new assignments but did not suggest a name change.

Draper said the term "LifeWay" is an allusion to John 14:6 describing Jesus as "the way, and the truth and the life."

A new logo contains two dominant elements. The cross, universal symbol of the Christian faith, is surrounded by shaded curves which represent the way to God through Christ, the Holy Spirit's work in the world and the agency's commitment to meet changing needs, Draper said.

Draper said no decision has been made about how the change would affect the 70 Baptist Book Stores nationwide, but he predicted they too would gradually take new names.

Implementing the change would cost \$450,000 over three years, Draper said. That does not include costs for changing Baptist Book Store signs, which run \$8,000 apiece.

Revenues for this year are projected to reach \$281 million, Draper said.

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ABP directors launch plans for magazine, development officer

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- Associated Baptist Press, an independent national news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., has launched plans aimed at beginning a monthly magazine.

In a related move, ABP directors approved a two-year fund-raising goal that includes hiring of a development officer to underwrite costs for the magazine and other operations.

Meeting Sept. 18-20 in Memphis, Tenn., the news service's board of directors voted unanimously to develop a prototype of the proposed magazine by April. They also asked staff to prepare a mission statement, marketing plan, budget and staffing plan for the magazine. The directors approved spending of up to \$20,000 from reserve funds to develop the project.

Established as a news cooperative of Baptist state newspapers in 1990, ABP provides news stories to 33 Baptist papers and 73 metropolitan newspapers and national magazines. Stories from ABP are also distributed on the World Wide Web.

Greg Warner, ABP's executive editor, told directors the magazine venture must not jeopardize the agency's primary task of providing a news service for Baptist and secular publications and must not weaken ABP's long-term financial health.

However, Warner said, establishing a magazine could help ABP reach new readers, build awareness of the organization, and provide a new source of revenue.

"The rules are changing," Warner added later. "Communicating with Baptist people is not as simple as it once was in the old denominational model. We have to create new ways of getting the news out which are more responsive to readers' lifestyles and needs."

He said a new magazine would likely be both a print and electronic publication, in order to reach younger Baptists who are not reading traditional Baptist media.

The board action stops short of officially launching the publication, however, pending an analysis of subscription and advertising potential.

In a marketing survey presented to the board, 31 percent of Baptist respondents said they would be interested in subscribing to a new Christian publication if it addressed topics of interest to them. The survey was conducted by Southern Research Group of Jackson, Miss.

Warner said the survey indicated Baptists are faithful readers of a number of publications -- including state Baptist newspapers and various Christian magazines -- but many Baptists can't identify one publication that represents their point of view.

"We think the market is ripe for a news and feature magazine that speaks to real-life issues from a sensible Christian perspective," he said.

Warner estimated ABP would need to raise \$100,000 in the next few months to cover start-up costs of a magazine.

To address the long-term financial health of ABP, directors set a goal of raising another \$200,000 over the next two years to initiate a development program. The plan, which includes immediately hiring a development officer to lead the agency's fund-raising efforts, was bolstered by a \$100,000 pledge by one board member -- the largest gift by an individual in ABP's history.

In other business at their semi-annual board meeting, ABP directors approved a 1998 basic budget totaling \$340,000, an increase of 15 percent over projected income in 1997. The budget anticipates \$34,000 in contributions from churches, \$83,000 from three Baptist state conventions, \$35,000 from individuals, and \$150,000 from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The 1998 budget includes a 4 percent raise for ABP's three employees.

The news service also presented its 1997 Religious Freedom Award to author and social activist Will Campbell.

"I have received some awards in my life but I have learned one thing -- until one is honored by his people, he is not honored at all," said Campbell, who was ordained a Baptist minister 56 years ago at age 17. "For whatever reason, most of the awards I have been given have not been from my people, and you are my people," he said.

The award honors individuals in journalism and other fields for significant contributions to enhancing religious freedom. Campbell, of Mt. Juliet, Tenn., is the Religious Freedom Award's fourth recipient. He is author of such books as "Brother to a Dragonfly" and "Forty Acres and a Goat."

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Alliance of Baptists drafts new mission statement

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) --Directors of the Alliance of Baptists have proposed a new mission statement linking the group with concern for the poor and oppressed, ecumenical relations and the environment.

Meeting Sept. 18-20 in Washington, the group's board of directors also voted to launch a monthly publication and a partnership with Baptists in Zimbabwe.

If approved at the group's 1998 convocation, scheduled March 12-14 in Washington, the mission statement will replace an original purpose statement in the Alliance constitution.

The Alliance was organized in 1986 around a covenant defending principles that were perceived under attack at the time during a conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention. As that controversy ran its course, and as another moderate group emerged -- the larger and more centrist Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- Alliance members began to identify less and less with the SBC struggle. Eventually, a "visioning" committee was asked to redefine the group for the present and future.

The committee drafted the proposed mission statement. It says that to "keep faith" with its founding covenant statement, the Alliance will:

- Make the worship of God primary in all gatherings,
- Foster relationships within the Alliance and with other people of faith,
- Create places of refuge and renewal for those who are wounded or ignored by the church.
- Side with those who are poor.
- Pursue justice for those who are oppressed.

- Care for the earth.
- Work for peace.
- Honor wisdom and life-long learning.
- Hold one another accountable for equity, collegiality and diversity.

Alliance President Nancy Hastings Sehested said the committee agonized over finding succinct language that adequately described the Alliance's purpose.

"We as the visioning committee see the Alliance as part of reimagining the church," she told directors. "We long so much for new wineskins to hold our imaginations and hopes. And we have been creating those wineskins in the Alliance of Baptists."

During lengthy discussion on the mission statement, Sehested was asked to explain what the committee meant by the phrase "side with those who are poor."

"We wanted to be specific that our task as faithful followers is to continue the work of Jesus, who spent his life with those who were the pushed down and pushed aside, who didn't have economic securities," she responded.

"That is a phrase that can go in many directions. We thought of ministries of compassion. But we also wanted to say for us to be faithful we must find our lives with the lives of people who are disadvantaged economically. It will have expression in many, many ways. But we must make our lives part of their lives."

Pointing to the life of Mother Teresa, one Alliance director confessed he was not yet ready to become poor himself but that he would like to "side" with those who are poor.

"This is a real wrestling with us in some hard ways," Sehested acknowledged. "How do we become charitable? It has more to do with the heart of our own idolatries."

Stan Haste, Alliance executive director, distinguished between the covenant and the mission statement by calling them statements of "being" and "doing," respectively.

The board also approved a monthly Alliance newsletter, beginning in January. As part of the recommendation, the Alliance will discontinue publishing the "Alliance Edition" of Baptists Today, an independent newspaper. The board hired its secretary, Sue Harper Poss, a communications consultant from Greenville, S.C., to produce the newsletter on a contract basis.

The board also approved a formal relationship with the Baptist convention of Zimbabwe. Steve Henderson, chairperson of the missions committee, cautioned directors that the partnership would not be official until Zimbabwe Baptists vote on the initiative in November.

Henderson said the missions committee was recommending the partnership despite some concerns.

"It embodies in a very definite way some of the core principles in our mission statement," said Henderson of Austin, Texas. But it also defies common sense in terms of a financially viable project, he added.

"Right now we can't afford to do it," he said. We need volunteers. There are concerns about doing this. We have limited resources of time, money and staff."

In the end, the missions committee and board decided it was a risk worth taking.

Other board actions included:

- Approval of a 1998 budget of \$231,132.
- Declining a request to underwrite the service of a couple denied missionary appointment by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The board directed Haste to express in a letter its profound regret that the Alliance is not able to take on the full financial support of missionaries.

- Receiving a report on 15 Puerto Rican political prisoners who are incarcerated in U.S. federal prisons. They were convicted of conspiring to use force to gain political independence for Puerto Rico. The report encouraged individual Alliance members to express concern by writing their representatives in Congress and President Clinton.

The Alliance sent a letter of concern Sept. 17 to President Clinton. Signed by Haste and Sehested, the letter asked the president to research these cases and inform the Alliance about these prisoners' legal status.

- Approving the formation of a new committee on peace and justice.
- Hearing about deepening dialogue with the United Church of Christ.

The directors also approved a motion from the missions committee that the promotional costs of the annual missions offering be absorbed into the Alliance budget, so that the organization could assure its donors that every dollar collected for missions goes to the field. They set a 1998 missions offering goal of \$75,000 -- the same as 1997.

On the recommendation of 17-year-old Rachel Tanner of Baltimore, the directors voted to include a program for middle-school and high-school age youth as part of its 1998 convocation. The board set aside \$500 over and above the approved budget to underwrite it if necessary.

"In order the shape the future of the Alliance, the future leaders of the Alliance must be educated now," said Tanner, a member of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Towson, Md. "It's essential to include youth as part of the Alliance."

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Pastor sentenced for homeless shelter, but judge says penalty already paid

By David Finnigan

FULLERTON, Calif., (ABP) -- Pastor Wiley Drake, the Disney provocateur and convicted homeless activist, was sentenced to 1,500 hours of community service Sept. 19 on four misdemeanor building-code violations for housing homeless people at his First Southern Baptist Church in Buena Park, Calif.

Once the sentence was imposed, however, Drake learned he had already paid his debt to society -- partly through the very illegal activity that landed him before a judge.

Buena Park city officials say Drake is running a homeless shelter and must follow laws applicable to such work. Drake's defense always has been that he has never run a shelter, but is pastor of a church which simply helps homeless people, therefore making him not bound by city laws about shelters.

"Our goal always has been to minister to people as a church," he said.

Drake was convicted July 28 by a jury in Orange County (Calif.) Municipal Court and sentenced Sept. 19 by Judge Gregg Prickett, who also presided at the trial. Drake's sentence called for community service but no jail time or fines. Prickett then gave the 53-year-old preacher credit for all 1,500 hours, reasoning that Drake already had done the community service through his church activities -- including caring for the homeless.

"The very court that allowed a jury to judge my activity as wrong told me I had already served my 1,500 hours [partly through that activity]," Drake told Associated Baptist Press after the sentencing.

Drake's church operates Here's Hope Social Ministry Center, giving food to poor neighbors and letting up to 75 people a night sleep inside a makeshift church shelter or in parked campers. It's that makeshift quality of Drake's homeless work that got him in trouble. Drake also is known for his failed resolution last year at the Southern Baptist Convention calling for a Disney boycott, although a similar one passed at this year's convention in Dallas.

Though Drake walked out of court free and clear, his First Southern Baptist Church was put on three years probation. It was convicted alongside Drake of four separate counts of the same building violations. Church officials will be back in court Nov. 14 for a progress report on building improvements and getting the campers out of the church parking lot.

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