

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Associated Baptist Press directors move forward with new magazine**

By Bob Allen

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Directors of Associated Baptist Press voted April 3 to proceed with the launch of a new Christian magazine this summer, pending achievement of a fund-raising goal.

Last fall ABP's board of directors asked Executive Editor Greg Warner to develop a prototype and strategic plan for a news-and-feature magazine to be published by the news service based in Jacksonville, Fla. At their spring semi-annual meeting, April 2-4 in Waco, Texas, the directors approved and directed implementation of the plan, which calls for a first issue in July.

Funding for the magazine will come from subscriptions, advertising and contributions. A business plan estimates the magazine will lose \$300,000 during its first 30 months, then begin to break even. In approving the plan, directors asked that \$200,000 of that anticipated deficit be raised before the magazine is launched. Warner reported that \$100,000 has already been pledged or contributed and expressed confidence that the fund-raising goal will be reached.

The magazine's mission will be to "engage Christians in dialogue with their world and empower them to integrate faith and life." It will be a full-color consumer magazine geared toward lay people ages 25 to 50.

"The way we as Baptists traditionally have done communications was effective in its day, but it is not proving effective in reaching the next generation of Baptists," Warner said. "This magazine is our attempt to rethink that strategy. We must account for the historic spiritual shifts taking place in our culture, and we must communicate in a way that is relevant to the experience of young-adult Christians."

The magazine will emphasize "applied faith" and will "be pervasively Baptist but not explicitly Baptist, highlighting Baptist principles but not promoting specific Baptist organizations or causes," according to the strategic plan.

It will "be unapologetically Christian but honest and objective in addressing the issues," the strategic plan said. "We will seek the sensible center, avoiding narrow agendas on either end of the theological spectrum."

The magazine will premier in July 1998 as a 32-page bimonthly and will be accompanied by an Internet site. A production schedule calls for 10 issues in 1999 and, when advertising and subscriber support allows, increasing to 40-to-48 pages a month.

Staff will conduct focus groups to test the prototype and two proposed titles for the magazine -- "CruX" and "FaithWorks."

The magazine will be staffed separately from ABP's 8-year-old news service, which last year published 609 stories distributed to 242 outlets, including 32 Baptist papers, other religious publications, religion writers at 61 daily newspapers, news services and electronic media, as well as agencies, churches and individuals.

"Baptist state papers continue to do an excellent job of reaching a loyal Baptist audience with timely news of Baptist ministries, and Associated Baptist Press will continue to assist Baptist state papers in their mission," said ABP board chairman Michael Clingenpeel.

"But there is a need for a publication informed by Baptist values that addresses a younger audience, whose world view transcends traditional Baptist institutions," noted Clingenpeel, editor of the Religious Herald newspaper in Richmond, Va.

The ABP board established a new five-member committee to oversee the magazine -- Dan Lattimore, chairman of the journalism department at University of Memphis; Marv Knox, associate editor of the Baptist Standard newspaper in Dallas, Texas; Philip Poole, executive assistant to the president at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.; Ed Vick, an engineer and president of Kimley-Horn and Associates in Raleigh, N.C.; and Rebecca Wiggs, an attorney in Jackson, Miss.

The committee was authorized to name an editorial advisory board to provide consultation about content to the magazine staff.

In other business, Warner reported that ABP had contracted with Cargill Associates in Fort Worth, Texas, to assist in beginning a development program, including help in hiring a permanent development officer as early as June or July. In the meantime, ABP directors authorized the board chairman and executive editor to hire an interim development director to raise funds for ABP on a contract basis.

Directors also pledged to contact selected churches for participation in ABP's "Local Partners" program, in which a local congregation underwrites the cost of sending ABP news releases to its city's local newspaper.

Warner also reported to directors that ABP won an appeal of penalties assessed by the Internal Revenue Service against the news service for failure to timely file tax forms 990 for the years 1991-93. Upon appeal, the IRS has refunded \$15,941 in penalties and interest.

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## **First McCall awards presented to Roberta Torn, James Dunn**

By Larry Chesser

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- The first Abner V. McCall awards for humanitarianism and religious liberty were presented March 20 to a Baptist volunteer who pioneered support efforts for cancer patients in Houston and to the head of a six-decade-old religious liberty agency in the nation's capital.

The awards are named after the 10th president of Baylor University, who died in 1995.

Roberta Keys Torn, who has visited cancer patients at M.D. Anderson Hospital an average of three days a week for more than 24 years, is the first recipient of the McCall Humanitarianism Award, which recognizes Baylor University graduates "who, with compassion and concern, have exhibited a Christian response to those situations and persons around them in ways exemplified by the life of Abner V. McCall."

The first McCall Religious Liberty Award was presented to James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee and former director of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The award "recognizes individuals, who by their lives and actions, have exemplified the courage and dedication of Abner V. McCall to the belief in and commitment to religious liberty."

At M.D. Anderson, Torn started and led volunteer groups called Adopt-A-Friend and Friends-N-Deed. She also started a program called Sojourn House, which provides low-cost housing to M.D. Anderson outpatients.

Working with cancer patients and their families "has been a program that is so rewarding," Torn said. "It has been my life."

At 82, she still can't get away from it. "I cannot not go to M.D. Anderson," she said. "I've tried, but I cannot do anything else when I think I need to be there."

Dunn said the honor is magnified by the linkage with McCall. He said the two shared a common vision and passion for religious liberty.

"We did and I do despise ritual religion, compelled Christianity and culture-bound churches," Dunn said. "I despise denominational cupidity and inconsistent and contradictory claims for soul freedom by a people that are quick to kick out or ostracize those who are honest about not agreeing with the majority."

Dunn said it was McCall, more than anyone else, who doggedly insisted that the Baptist Joint Committee form the Religious Liberty Council. Now the individual membership arm of the BJC, the RLC was initially formed to provide financial support for the agency after the loss of funding from the Southern Baptist Convention.

Dunn also cited ties to J.M. Dawson, the first executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, who brought McCall into his home while he attended Baylor.

"Abner McCall and J.M. Dawson were always in hot water for defending the freedom of someone to exercise their Baptistness, for local churches' freedom to make their own decisions, for democracy and for noncreedalism," Dunn said. "My only real lament here tonight is that while they were always in hot water, always being despised and condemned and attacked by somebody, ... it seems I'm more likely to be in tepid water, not having quite the opportunity to strike a blow for real religious freedom because I believe with all my heart -- as they taught me to believe and modeled believing -- that when anyone's religious liberty is denied, everyone's religious liberty is endangered."

Introducing Dunn, Oliver Thomas, special council for religious and civil liberties at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., noted that the spunky Texan has been called many things.

"But I have a name for James Dunn -- Baptist," Thomas said. "No one embodies the word quite like James."

When future Baptists "call the roll of the champions of religious liberty -- Williams, Backus, Leland, Truett, Dawson and McCall -- the name Dunn will ring out, and well it should," said Thomas, who served eight years as general counsel at the BJC.

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## **Highly effective churches impact lives, Barna claims**

By Marv Knox

MESQUITE, Texas (ABP) -- "Highly effective" churches have the power to transform lives and communities, religious researcher George Barna is telling church leaders across the country.

Unfortunately, only 10 percent to 15 percent of the 320,000 Protestant churches in America are highly effective, he lamented.

Barna focuses on habits of highly effective churches in his "Inward, Outward and Upward: Ministry That Transforms Lives" seminar, which he is conducting nationwide this spring. He recently launched the tour with presentations in the Houston and Dallas areas.

To be highly effective, churches must intentionally implement a set of habits -- repeated behaviors -- which produce life-transforming ministry, he said.

Barna cited a definition of "highly effective" used by author and lecturer Stephen Covey -- "the systematic and intentional application of great and complementary habits."

"The development of those habits makes you highly effective because it means you have achieved complete maturity," Barna said.

The effectiveness of a church's ministry should be rated according to the "six pillars of ministry" -- Christian education, evangelism, stewardship, worship, relationship-building and community service, he noted.

His organization, Barna Research Group, studied a cross-section of effective U.S. churches, he said. Their "created habits" are biblically consistent, consistent with their own philosophy of ministry, fully integrated into the life of the church, and "firm but flexible" in the way they are implemented, he said.

From his analysis of those congregations, Barna highlighted nine habits of highly effective churches. Highly effective churches:

-- Exhibit strategic leadership.

"Leadership is not a pillar of the church, but you cannot be effective without leadership," Barna said. Despite what many people might expect, "the vast majority of senior pastors are not leaders," he reported. "They are called to ministry but not to leadership."

Still, in highly effective churches, the senior pastor is a leader, or the senior pastor facilitates leadership on the part of others, he said. For example, 8 percent to 12 percent of the membership of highly effective churches are leaders, compared to 4 percent of typical churches, Barna noted.

These churches identify and develop leaders, he said. "They don't accept the 'any warm body will do' philosophy" for staffing programs and ministries, he said. Rather, they seek out people whose skills and interests qualify them as leadership candidates, and then provide them with training to be effective.

-- Organize for effectiveness.

"The church must have a leader supported by a team of people who have complementary gifts," Barna said. Effective churches build their structures around such a team approach to ministry, he explained.

"Everyone in the church is expected to be involved in ministry, right from Day 1," he added. "The key is expectation -- everyone is expected to be involved."

Weak, ineffective churches lack that expectation and are passive, Barna reported. Passivity, he said, is "what Satan has done to the church in America."

-- Build upon relationships.

"The church operates on the basis of a hierarchy of relational priorities," Barna insisted. Jesus is the first relationship priority for each member, followed by family, church and community.

"These churches teach their people how to prioritize time for relationships," he said. "The goal of the church's internal relationships is spiritual renewal," which reflects the central focus on Jesus.

A consequence of strong relationships is minimal membership turnover, he said.

Members "keep coming back because that is where they develop their greatest fellowships in the world," he pointed out. "Twenty percent of Americans move in a given year, most within one to 25 miles. But members of effective churches will commute rather than move their membership."

Another benefit of relationships is strong community outreach. "The church grows numerically through word-of-mouth," he said. "People visit when they are invited by someone from that church."

-- Invest in genuine worship.

"Genuine worship is a non-negotiable endeavor," Barna insisted. "It calls into question everything we do. But worship is not attending an event; it is a state of mind and spirit. For God to be honored, our goal is to get people to obsess on God, not money, fame or security."

Effective churches evaluate worship by "determining if the people met God," he added. "Did they experience God's presence?"

-- Engage in strategic evangelism.

"Highly effective churches focus on conversions, not (numbers of) decisions," Barna explained. "Last year, of all the people who made first-time decisions for Christ, the majority were not associated with the church in eight weeks.

"Why? Because the typical church focuses on evangelism but not discipleship, which the Bible doesn't separate. Evangelism without discipleship is just salesmanship."

-- Implement systematic theological education.

"They provide their people with a basic but comprehensive foundation of Christian theology," Barna said. "They help people understand how it all fits together."

This kind of teaching contrasts with the norm, he said, noting "less than 10 percent of Christians have a biblical world view."

"Christians don't act like Christians because they don't think like Christians. Christians don't think like Christians because they don't understand their faith."

-- Focus on holistic stewardship.

"Stewardship is integrated into all of their teaching," he explained. "Stewardship is the management of everything that is God's -- money, time, relationships, space and material goods."

Motivation for supporting the highly effective churches develops because people understand the church's cause and the impact it can have on the community and the world, he said.

-- Serve the community.

"The church's leaders model a lifestyle of servanthood" that teaches the members to care about the community and to expand their "comfort zones" in order to serve less-fortunate people, Barna said.

Highly effective churches also "diligently foster cross-ministry cooperation," and work with other churches in the community, he noted.

-- Equip families to minister to themselves.

"The role of the church is to equip families, not to satisfy all of their ministry needs," Barna stressed. "They equip families for multiple purposes -- individual growth, family growth as a unit and external service.

Barna offered encouragement for churches that would like to be highly effective.

"There is hope," he said. "God is for us. Some churches -- tens of thousands of churches -- are being effective. (And) people are very open about what they need and experience."

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## **'Classic paradox' shapes church**

MESQUITE, Texas (ABP) -- The American church context is a "classic paradox," George Barna declared. He cited four contradictory themes that encounter the U.S. church:

-- Americans are exhibiting the highest interest in religion and spiritual development in 50 years. But "Christianity is unappealing because Christians behave no differently than anyone else -- their faith does not impact their lives."

Recent research shows Christians' world views and decision-making factors are not significantly different from non-Christians'.

Based on Christians' behavior, non-Christians "have no reason to be drawn to Christianity," he insisted.

-- Christian churches come into contact with more than 100 million adults and more than 30 million children each month. However, "most of them are involved in a religious ritual and have little connection with Christ," Barna said.

His surveys indicate "one-half of attenders of Protestant churches are not Christians," he said.

-- Most Christians and churches think evangelism is important. Unfortunately, "few people are accepting Christ as their Savior," he added.

A significant factor in American Christians' anemic evangelistic output is the fact "few Christians have relationships with non-believers" that can make a difference in the non-Christians' lives.

-- Thousands of churches are being started, and Christianity is more accessible to people. Still, "few churches are led by leaders, and most non-churched people are not seeking a church to attend," Barna warned.

"The 'auto-pilot church' -- doing religious activity without intentional, strategic purpose -- simply doesn't work," he said.

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--By Marv Knox

## **Here's how to form healthy church habits**

MESQUITE, Texas (ABP) -- Habits are "repeated behaviors" that become automatic, George Barna observed.

He suggested eight keys for developing good habits in churches:

- Compare God's vision to your practice.
- Identify a desirable alternative behavior to achieve.
- Make the creation of better habits a part of your agenda.
- Create a "piecemeal strategy" for developing a new habit.
- Establish an achievable goal and impose a reasonable time frame.
- Prepare for anguish and turmoil attributable to change.
- Develop and use a reliable support system for encouragement and accountability.
- Learn to enjoy the journey as well as the outcomes.

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