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## **Carson-Newman considers plan to elect its own trustees**

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. (ABP) -- Carson-Newman College is expected to vote April 17 on a proposal to elect its own trustees, changing the way the school relates to the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Trustees of the four-year college in Jefferson City, Tenn., were summoned to a special meeting to vote on the proposal. Trustees were sent a copy of the plan prior to the meeting, but it was not made available to reporters.

In recent years, many historically Baptist colleges have severed formal ties with their sponsoring state conventions, usually to prevent conservative Baptists from changing the theological direction of the colleges.

The Carson-Newman proposal, however, is expected to retain some relationship with the Tennessee convention. Charles Ambrose, vice president for advancement at Carson-Newman, said the school and state convention want to work together to bring about the best solution possible.

The convention committee that relates to the state's three Baptist-affiliated colleges met April 15 to discuss Carson-Newman's action but is not expected to respond until after the vote.

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-- ABP staff

## **Appeals court says RFRA applies to federal law**

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. -- Affirming that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act applies to federal law, a U.S. appeals court ruled April 13 that bankruptcy trustees may not dip into church coffers to recover tithes given by debtors.

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Congress lacked the authority to impose on states and localities the 1993 law that bolstered protections for religious practice. However, since then, attorneys for religious groups and the Clinton administration have argued that RFRA still applies to the federal government.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with RFRA supporters, ruling that "RFRA is an appropriate means by Congress to modify the United States bankruptcy laws."

In a 2-1 decision, the court ruled that "while Congress cannot, through ordinary legislation, amend the Court's authoritative interpretation of the Constitution, congressional disapproval of a Supreme Court decision does not impair the power of Congress to legislate a different result, as long as Congress had that power in the first place."

In 1992, Bruce and Nancy Young, active members of the Crystal Evangelical Free Church, filed for bankruptcy. During the year preceding the filing, the Youngs had given \$13,450 in tithes to the Minnesota church.

Lower courts held that the tithes were subject to bankruptcy confiscation because the contributions were made to the church in exchange for "less than reasonable equivalent value."

In 1996, the appeals court overturned the lower courts and ruled that RFRA protected the Minnesota church from being forced to turn over the tithes. But the Supreme Court vacated that ruling and ordered the appeals court to reconsider the case in light of its ruling against RFRA.

Handing a victory to religious groups and the Clinton administration, the appeals court reaffirmed its earlier decision and declared RFRA constitutional when applied to federal activities.

The court said that the Supreme Court did not address whether the Congress could constitutionally impose RFRA on federal law and declared that those portions of the law were "severable" from the portions declared unconstitutional.

"Whenever an act of Congress contains objectionable provisions separable from those found to be constitutional, it is the duty of this court to so declare, and to maintain the act in so far as it is valid," the appeals court said.

The court said there is "nothing in RFRA's text or legislative history to suggest that Congress would have declined to protect religious liberties from federal interference merely because it was unable to protect those liberties from state interference."

The court also dismissed a challenge that RFRA violates the establishment clause. It said that the purpose of RFRA was to "protect one of the most treasured birthrights of every American -- the right to observe one's faith, free from government interference."

The court also said there was not excessive entanglement between church and state. "Indeed, RFRA was designed to prevent such an entanglement by limiting the impact that neutral laws have on religion."

Religious leaders applauded the ruling but said legislation is still needed to protect churches from bankruptcy trustees and creditors.

Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said that "it is a major victory for a federal court to rule that RFRA requires the federal government to give heightened protection to religion -- not just under the bankruptcy laws, but throughout the 200-volume U.S. Code and the extensive federal bureaucracy."

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said that churches "have regained a shield against creditors, but haven't won the war."

He said that pending congressional legislation to protect tithes and charitable donations is still needed because the appeals court could be overturned. He also said the ruling applies RFRA to bankruptcy cases but does not decide nationwide whether the church or the creditors will always win.

"What the court has told the Congress is that it can legislate to protect the church offering plate without fear of being struck down again," McFarland said. "But we still need congressional action to tell bankruptcy trustees to get their hands out of the offering plate."

Phil Strickland, director of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, agreed with McFarland's assessments. He said the ruling would boost the efforts of Cedar Bayou Baptist Church in Baytown, Texas, in its battle to keep \$27,700 in tithes given by a deacon.

"One practical and immediate implication is the protection of church tithes. In Texas, this applies directly to the Cedar Bayou case and will give us a distinct boost in the outcome of that case. At another level, it encourages a pursuit of state RFRAs," he said. "We are encouraging all states to establish RFRA protections which are vital to the religious community."

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-- By Kenny Byrd

## **Ten Commandments resolution approved in Senate after changes**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate approved a measure supporting the public display of the Ten Commandments in government offices and courthouses after language was added to clarify that displays should not violate the establishment clause.

The nonbinding resolution, which expresses the "sense of the Senate," passed April 2 on a voice vote. A similar resolution was approved last year by the House. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., sponsored the resolution as part of the Senate budget resolution, which sets forth the federal budget over the next five years.

The Senate resolution states that "the public display, including display in the Supreme Court, the Capitol building, the White House, and other government offices and courthouses across the nation, of the Ten Commandments should be permitted, as long as it is consistent with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution."

The language requiring consistency with the establishment clause was added by Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J.

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, called the measure "shameless political posturing."

"I have a commandment for the Senate," Lynn said. "Thou shalt not play politics with religion. ... Since the days of Moses, the Ten Commandments seem to have done quite well without the help of the U.S. Senate."

The House and Senate measures were motivated by controversies over an Alabama judge who hangs the Ten Commandments in the courtroom where he presides and begins court proceedings with vocal Protestant prayers.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed suit against Etowah County (Ala.) Circuit Court Judge Roy Moore to cease his practices, but a court ruled that the ACLU lacked standing to sue.

Alabama Gov. Fob James filed a suit seeking a declaratory judgment supporting Moore. In early 1997, James told a group of Baptists that he would call in state troopers and the National Guard if necessary to prevent removal of the Ten Commandments from the courtroom.

Montgomery County (Ala.) Circuit Judge Charles Price ruled that Moore should cease opening court sessions with prayers. He also ruled that unless the display was part of a larger display of historical items, Moore should remove the Ten Commandments replica.

However, the ruling was invalidated when the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that James lacked ground to seek the declaratory judgment, returning the situation to the status previous to the lawsuits.

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-- By Kenny Byrd

## Missouri pastor, layman on AIDS-prevention crusade

By Rob Marus

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Pastor Eric Williams and layman Torean Walker both have come face to face with the AIDS epidemic in the African-American community, and they have some sobering words about what they have seen.

They also have hope.

"When the disease was first discovered, it was uncovered in the white, gay male community," said Williams, a black Southern Baptist pastor. "Ever since then, it has been perceived as a homosexual disease. But ever since then, we have seen that the [HIV infection] rates for adolescents and women of color are really skyrocketing."

Walker agreed. "You know, AIDS and HIV is an epidemic inside of an epidemic -- it happens in waves, it happens in cycles," Walker said. "And the next cycle is definitely going to hit the black community."

Figures from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta show that, in the United States, infection rates for the virus that causes AIDS are decreasing in the self-identified gay, white male population. But rates among all categories of African-Americans are increasing rapidly.

And these are just the reported figures, which Walker and other AIDS specialists believe reflect only a fraction of the actual infection rate in many black communities because many people in these communities who should be tested don't even realize they are at risk.

Based on the reported figures alone, an African-American dies of AIDS every 30 minutes on average. And that grim statistic will get worse before it gets better, Walker noted.

"Now we have a whole generation of people who were infected [in the late '80s], and it's coming around to the time when they should start getting ill," Walker said. "Because they haven't been tested, they haven't had any early intervention or treatment."

Williams and Walker both have a passion for confronting the anticipated holocaust because they are affected personally by AIDS.

Walker contracted HIV 13 years ago. He recently was diagnosed with AIDS, although he is currently in good health.

Williams, pastor of Calvary Temple Baptist Church, an historically black Southern Baptist congregation in Kansas City, Mo., first was confronted with the issue five years ago. He was asked by a local funeral home to officiate at the funeral of a young black man who had died of AIDS. The man's own pastor had refused to conduct the service, Williams said.

Williams said he felt God ignite a fire within him to bring more compassion to the way black churches deal with people living with AIDS and HIV. "When I brought the idea to our congregation, the majority of them were very, very supportive of starting ministries and doing outreach."

But the response was not so positive when he began preaching his message to fellow black pastors. "When I first started this effort, people questioned my sexuality, people questioned my beliefs about homosexuality. ... I became known as 'the AIDS man.' I'd go into a ministerial gathering and have a seat, and sometimes when I sat down people would go to another table."

Walker, the layman, is HIV program coordinator and outreach specialist for Kansas Multicultural Alcohol and Drug Treatment. He and Williams have become two of the most visible leaders in educating the Kansas City African-American community and particularly faith communities about the ever-more-real dangers of AIDS and HIV.

Recently, the two led the Kansas City area's Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS. The emphasis is based on an event begun several years ago by Harlem churches concerned with the lack of attention paid to AIDS in the black community. Since then, it has been replicated in other cities across the country.

Williams and Walker said the AIDS epidemic is worsening among African-Americans mainly because of the twin evils that continue to plague that community -- racism and poverty. Not only do fewer at-risk blacks get tested for HIV than their white counterparts, but those who test positive often have less access to proper medical care than most whites.

Both leaders say the black church will be the key to AIDS prevention and education efforts, much as it was the key to the civil-rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. But fear and ignorance continue to plague the church, they said.

Williams recalled one of his initial training sessions with pastors four years ago. One pastor in the back of the room made repeated jokes about homosexuals during the session, Williams said. "His wife was in the front, and after a while she started crying, and got up and walked out."

"A few months later, he told me, 'Pastor Williams, I wanted to thank you for sending your people around. We just found out that for months my brother has been HIV-positive, and my wife has been taking care of him.'"

One of the problems in black churches is a difficulty in talking about sexuality in a church setting. "But, if you talk about AIDS, you have to talk about sex," Williams said. "That's a difficult subject to talk about on Sunday morning and in a Wednesday evening Bible study. But when we start seeing empty pews because of deaths that are associated with this, when we start seeing escalated health-care costs, when we start seeing families who are broken up by this disease, then it's time to start talking about sex."

Williams and the members of Calvary Temple are not afraid to discuss delicate subjects when they are doing their AIDS training sessions in a church setting. "There's not safe-sex education," he said. "We tell people that condoms are not 100 percent effective. The only sure way of avoiding the disease is to avoid sexual contact of any kind, with anybody that you don't know is not infected. So we use the abstinence approach."

But unlike many Christian pastors, Williams doesn't expect people to ignore other prevention methods. "It never fails that we get other questions," Williams said. "And every one of our trainers is equipped with information about condoms and other devices that people can use to become a little safer than they are."

AIDS still is associated with homosexuality in the African-American community, Williams said, and homosexuality is a subject even more taboo in the average black church than the average white church. Williams is still uncomfortable with the topic.

Since many of the people he now works with are gay, he said, he has had to retrain himself to avoid homophobic attitudes and comments, though he remains personally opposed to homosexuality.

"I can't answer the question whether I think AIDS is a judgment from God," Williams said. "All I know is that, if it is, he doesn't need me to be an assistant judge. What he needs me to do is to share his love with as many people as I come in contact with."

His friend Walker has a slightly different perspective. He is gay.

"I think a problem ministers have is that they can't get past the [sexual] orientation piece of it," the layman said. "This is a health issue. This is a health epidemic. It's not about that person."

Walker, who attends a National Baptist church in Kansas City, said he experienced some rejection in his congregation when the news of his sexual orientation and HIV-positive status came out. Mothers would stop allowing their children to hug him at church. Some of his friends became aloof. But he does not blame them.

"I said, 'That's OK,' because I knew they had to come up to the level of understanding that I had."

"If we are to be truly Christ-like, well, you know, Christ dealt with a whole lot of kinds of folk. And he never kicked any of them to the curb, and he never did not have a compassionate response," Walker said.

"We have to get to that same space. How to do that, I don't know. But the bottom line is this: If we can't do that, and this epidemic does hit us [as hard] as it is projected to hit us, then the blood of the people is going to be on the hands of our ministers and churches."

Pastor Williams feels an equal urgency for the cause of educating the black community, not only in prevention but in compassionate care of people living with AIDS.

"We're big on missions, especially Southern Baptists," he said. "And I see this as a mission -- a mission project that can reach people in your own community, in your own walk of life, and share the love of Christ with them in what is going to be the most delicate part of their life."

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## **Lack of leadership impacts U.S. churches, Barna says**

By Marv Knox

MESQUITE, Texas (ABP) -- The bad news: Many American churches suffer from a woeful lack of leadership, religion researcher George Barna claims.

The good news: Leadership can be cultivated.

That's the message Barna is telling church leaders this spring through a seminar called "Inward, Outward and Upward: Ministry That Transforms Lives."

"People need to be led," insisted Barna, who recently launched a nationwide tour for the new seminar.

His organization, Barna Research Group, studied a cross-section of effective churches and polled Americans to examine the status of U.S. church life. "More than four out of five people are followers, although up to 60 percent of people describe themselves as leaders," he reported.

"Most people hate the responsibilities of leadership," he explained, noting they don't like the burdens of criticism, loneliness and pressure that accompany leadership.

But people need leaders, because "left to their own devices, people make wrong decisions," he said. "A leader has the vision to make right decisions."

Unfortunately, most churches have too few leaders, Barna contended.

"Most churches have about 4 percent of adults in leadership," he described. "But effective churches have 8 percent to 12 percent of adults in leadership."

"A church cannot be understaffed in leadership and make progress."

Barna defined a Christian leader as "someone who is called by God to lead, leads with and through Christlike character, and demonstrates the functional competencies that permit leadership to take place."

"A Christian leader leads people by motivating, mobilizing, resourcing and directing them to fulfill a vision from God that they jointly share."

Leadership takes place on at least three levels, he said.

"Micro-level" leadership influences small groups, like a youth group, a ball team or a Bible study class.

"Most leadership is micro-level," Barna said. "Therefore, the church primarily is shaped by the cumulative effect of micro leadership."

"Mezzo-level" leadership provides modest leadership, such as that of a pastor of a small church or a church Sunday school director.

"Many clergy and lay leaders operate at the mezzo-level," Barna said. "Inability to grow beyond mezzo-level leadership will halt a church's growth."

"Macro-level" leadership is extensive and affects many people. Such leadership includes pastors of dynamic megachurches.

"These are the global agenda-setters," Barna said.

Although most churches are not likely to exert macro leadership, churches can take effective steps to identify and cultivate their leaders, he added.

Churches should look for three primary traits in its leaders, Barna noted. They are:

-- Calling.

Leaders should have the spiritual gift of leadership, Barna said. He cited the 12th chapter of the book of Romans, which affirms the traits of exhortation, generosity, aid, mercy and cheerfulness.

Leaders also should be called by God to lead, he added, noting such a call usually is confirmed by the personal conviction of the individual and the affirmation of others who see leadership qualities in the person.

-- Character.

"Character determines how a person responds to pressure," Barna suggested.

He noted a variety of positive character traits -- optimism, integrity, servant mentality, influence, intelligence, self-confidence but not arrogance, high standards, diligence, humility, willingness to take risks, interpersonal skills, respect and discipline.

-- Competency.

Experience and results build competency, Barna said.

Christian leaders can articulate God's vision for themselves and others, develop other leaders, strategize, motivate others, mobilize people for ministry and resolve conflict, he said.

They're also effective at identifying and acquiring resources, reinforcing commitment and success, objectively evaluating the ministry, shaping "corporate culture," modeling Christian character and commitment, and attracting and maintaining a team of leaders and workers.

Churches need to develop a process for "building champions," or developing leaders, Barna urged.

"Subject every [leadership] candidate to a thorough assessment," he advised. Before assigning a person to leadership, look at personality, gifts, leadership aptitude and spiritual commitment.

"Assess their heart," he said.

Each leader also should be provided a customized development plan, he added.

For example, baby busters tend to learn best if they are coached through a relational learning process, while baby boomers tend to learn best through experience and respond best to goals.

Regardless of age and background, leaders should be led and trained by a mentor, someone who already has experienced leadership, he said.

Leaders, especially new ones, should be given "ample, regular access to the 'directing leader,'" the church leader who is best at describing the congregation's "big picture" vision, Barna said.

"This tends to maintain motivation and creates a deeper sense of trust," he explained.

Churches additionally should provide their leaders with "formal classroom-style instruction on leadership," he noted. "This is not just theology and doctrine. You need to go beyond that point" to help them understand the challenges of leadership itself, he said.

Leadership education also should include peer interaction with other leaders in the church as well as aggressive exposure to a range of leadership resources, such as books, videos, tapes and conferences.

Barna reinforced the necessity of providing intercessory prayer support for all church leaders.

"These are the people on the front lines of [spiritual] battle," he stressed.

Developing leaders should be given "progressive leadership experiences," Barna said. Their responsibilities should be increased incrementally, so that they are not given more than they can bear.

Finally, all leaders should be engaged in a "reasonable accountability process," Barna said. "Don't evaluate competency so much as ensure that character is in place," he explained. "Help leaders learn from their mistakes."

"Raise up heroic leaders," Barna urged churches. "It will revolutionize your ministry."

**Leaders vs. teachers:  
two separate paths**

MESQUITE, Texas (ABP) -- Leaders and teachers possess quite different skills and interests, religion researcher George Barna reports. While churches need leaders in order to thrive, many churches are "led" by teachers, he said.

Here are differences between leaders and teachers as Barna described them:

Characteristic	Leader	Teacher
Influences through	Vision, character	Ideas, words
Provides followers	Direction, motivation	Intellectual challenge
Seeks	Corporate transformation	Individual growth
Loves to	Strategize	Study
Needs	Committed zealots	Teachable audience
Has courage to	Make unpopular decisions	Teach the truth
Motivates followers to	Action	Reflection
Deals with conflict by	Resolving it	Stirring it

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