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Dobson's conservative politics likely will be welcome at SBC, observers say

By Mark Wingfield

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- No elected officials are scheduled to address this year's annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, but messengers nonetheless will hear from one of the most potent political power brokers in America today.

He recently has been on the cover of U.S. News and World Report, has been the focus of articles in the New York Times and Washington Post and has struck terror in the hearts of Republican leaders on Capitol Hill.

He is James Dobson, an otherwise mild-mannered psychologist with a national radio and television audience totaling 28 million people weekly.

Since 1977, Dobson has been gaining reputation among evangelical Christians nationwide as an authority on family issues. He left his job at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles that year to begin a radio program called "Focus on the Family."

That one program today has multiplied into a worldwide ministry with a \$113 million annual budget and the No. 1 program on Christian radio.

Dobson has written dozens of books, the most popular of which have sold 16 million copies. He created a video series on parenting that has been viewed by 70 million people. "Focus on the Family" now includes the daily

radio broadcast and several shorter spin-offs, including "Family News In Focus" and "James Dobson Family Commentary." He writes a syndicated advice column that appears in secular and religious newspapers alike. His organization produces a variety of special-interest magazines for adults, teachers, attorneys, teens and children.

Dobson's influence and family message should resonate well with Southern Baptists, said Rick Ferguson, chairman of the SBC's committee on order of business and a Colorado pastor.

"He is so well-known and has such a strong ministry with regard to families, giving biblical foundations for family life," Ferguson explained. "In today's world there's a desperate need for ministry to families."

This will be an important message for Southern Baptists to proclaim in Salt Lake City, headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he added. "Mormons are typically known for having a strong emphasis on family. Not that we're competing with Mormons, but while we're there we'll be letting the Mormons know we have a strong interest in families."

But the family emphasis may not be the most notable thing about Dobson's address at the SBC's closing session June 11. According to early hints, the message may pack a political punch.

In a February speech in Arizona to 300 members of the Council for National Policy, Dobson vented his frustration that the Republican-led Congress has continued to "betray" conservative Christian voters. He threatened to abandon the Republican Party and "do everything I can to take as many people with me as possible."

Dobson's speech was reported by the New York Times, which obtained a tape recording of the closed-door session attended by political and religious leaders including Pat Robertson, Rep. Dick Armey of Texas, Oliver North and Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina.

In that speech, Dobson said he planned to sound the same overtly political warning in his speech to the SBC this summer.

A spokesman for Focus on the Family said he could not confirm on the record what Dobson's topic would be when he addresses the SBC, but he did acknowledge Dobson's February statement as reported by the New York Times.

Ferguson, the chairman of the SBC's committee on order of business, said the invitation to Dobson was issued long before Dobson became involved in his latest round of political posturing.

"I don't know what he has on his heart to say to Southern Baptists," Ferguson explained. But he acknowledged that if Dobson does delve into political issues of interest to conservative Christians, it would be well-received.

"Dobson is recognized today as a strong voice for morality and biblical morals," he said. "He's calling our nation back to moral sanity. He's probably one of the most influential voices to that effect in America today."

Added Bill Merrell, director of communications for the SBC Executive Committee: "I think Southern Baptists are by and large very amenable to the socially conservative sections of the Republican Party platform, which Dobson has recently supported publicly and vocally."

By his own admission, Dobson's focus has in recent years expanded from how to help families internally to advocating changes that impact families externally. That means going head-to-head with government and with societal forces he perceives to be anti-family.

Focus on the Family, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., has its own public-policy arm, a separate though loosely connected organization called the Family Research Council. This Washington-based advocacy group, headed by former Reagan administration official Gary Bauer, promotes conservative issues such as tax relief for parents, school prayer, anti-abortion initiatives and anti-homosexuality initiatives.

Some of the followers of Dobson's more generic family advice have frowned upon his recent foray into politics, urging him to stick with his original mission. But Dobson has replied that his original mission of strengthening families cannot be accomplished without attacking related political and social issues.

In a 1995 letter to Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, Dobson asserted: "My concerns, and the concerns of millions of evangelical Christians, are not political in nature. They are profoundly moral and ethical, and we are determined to defend them with our very lives if necessary."

Armed with his millions of loyal listeners and a mailing list coveted by campaign managers, Dobson today has moved into the role of kingmaker in some political circles.

In Kentucky, Dobson's influence is being wielded in the current race to fill the U.S. House seat being vacated by Rep. Jim Bunning. Dobson has thrown his endorsement behind state Sen. Gex Williams, whom the Washington Post recently described as running the "moral wing of the Kentucky Republican Party."

Though Williams' opponent in the May 26 Republican primary has the backing of Republican Party officials, Williams has the corner on the Religious Right endorsements, and his campaign strategist is none other than Ralph Reed, former head of the Christian Coalition.

This Kentucky race is typical of others nationwide in which Dobson and other Religious Right figures are asserting increasing influence this year. Dobson also has thrown his support behind Robert Dornan, the flamboyant former California representative who narrowly lost his seat in the last election and whom Time magazine recently dubbed "the loudest, loosest cannon in all the right wing." Dornan is attempting to regain the seat he lost.

What's different this year is that Dobson's endorsement takes more work to get. Dobson has made known his displeasure with Republicans who came into office with the support of religious conservatives but have not fulfilled the agenda of religious conservatives.

In a Feb. 26 letter to all Republican legislators on Capitol Hill, Dobson outlined his conditions for continuing to support the Republican Party.

"Our great frustration with Republican leadership ... is not the failure to pass pro-family legislation in every instance. It is the failure to try," he wrote.

Dobson demanded action on specific issues including override of the presidential veto of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act, defeat of any pro-gay agenda in legislation, defunding of Planned Parenthood, defunding of condom-distribution programs, passage of legislation requiring parental consent for abortions performed on minors, defunding the National Endowment for the Arts and enacting an outright ban on human cloning.

This spring, Dobson held a series of meetings with Republican officials on Capitol Hill in which he elaborated on his agenda. He publicly threatened to start supporting independent candidates rather than non-performing Republican candidates, even if that means a split vote putting a Democrat in office.

Joining Dobson in some of these Capitol Hill sessions has been Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

"The go-along, get-along strategy is dead," Land told the New York Times in March. "No more engagement. We want a wedding ring, we want a ceremony, we want a consummation of the marriage."

Dobson's recent threat to take nationwide his campaign for holding Republicans accountable for fulfilling promises to the Religious Right has produced some immediate results. Gingrich, for one, emerged from a May meeting with Dobson proclaiming anew the importance of Dobson's agenda and pledging to work on it.

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Texas Baptist paper editor announces retirement plans

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Toby Druin, editor of the Baptist Standard since Jan. 1, 1996, has announced his retirement as the Texas newspaper's 12th editor, effective Dec. 31.

"Three years ago, the directors of the Baptist Standard gave me the highest honor in Baptist journalism when they elected me editor of this paper," Druin said.

"I told them at the time of my election that I would serve until I was 65. I am ending that commitment 10 months short," said Druin, who will be 64 Oct. 20.

"I feel absolutely no pressure to make this decision," he noted. "I have never felt anything but total support from the board of directors.

"As I have prayed about it over the last few weeks, I simply feel that it is best for me and my wife, Larra, and the future of the Baptist Standard."

Druin said he wants to be free to spend more time with his family and to be involved in volunteer church-building projects. He said he would also like to work part time after his retirement to expand the Standard's regional edition concept.

A regional edition for readers in Houston and Southeast Texas is among several innovations the Standard has launched under Druin's tenure.

The Houston/Southeast Texas edition is a monthly insert of news and information about and for Baptists in eight associations in that part of the state. It is designed to offer increased coverage on a closer-to-home basis and to strengthen the paper's circulation. Druin envisions several regional editions across the state.

Druin also led the Standard to publish an electronic edition, available internationally on the World Wide Web. The complete paper is reproduced each week on the Standard's website: www.baptiststandard.com.

The Standard also completely redesigned its printed edition three months after Druin became editor. The paper switched from a magazine format to a tabloid. The change enabled the newspaper to increase the amount of news it publishes each week for about the same cost as the old magazine format.

On the business side of the paper's operation, Druin oversaw the implementation of new business and circulation computer equipment and software, as well as the transfer of mailing operations to the paper's printer, Dallas Offset. All these moves, along with related reduction of the size of the paper's staff, resulted in budget savings for the paper.

The Standard's board of directors, which met May 19, accepted Druin's retirement announcement with appreciation.

"We affirm our editor, Toby Druin, in this decision, because we know he has made it thoughtfully and prayerfully," said board Chairman Danny Andrews, editor of the Plainview Daily Herald.

"Toby has given 22 years of devoted service to the Standard and has done an outstanding job as editor the past two and one-half years," Andrews said. "We wish him well as he completes his tenure and in all his future endeavors.

"The board will now turn its attention to naming a successor to Toby. We plan to meet soon to discuss that issue."

When Druin retires Dec. 31, he will have completed 43 years as a professional journalist, 34 years in denominational journalism and more than two decades with the Standard, including 19 years as associate editor.

He began his career in 1956 and was a staff member and editor for eight years on Texas daily newspapers in Amarillo, Borger, Wichita Falls, Plainview and Waco.

He worked in the public relations department at Baylor University, 1964-66; as associate editor of the North Carolina Biblical Recorder, 1966-73; as editor of news services for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, 1973-76; and as associate editor of the Baptist Standard, 1976-95.

He was president of the Association of State Baptist Papers in 1995-96 and was the first associate editor to hold that post.

The Druins have three adult daughters and six grandchildren.

They are members of First Baptist Church in Duncanville, Texas, where he is a deacon. He has been bivocational and interim music minister at numerous Baptist churches.

Former missionary, professor among new CBF chaplains

By Robert O'Brien

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A former missions administrator and a veteran seminary professor were among five persons endorsed as chaplains and counselors May 18 by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Keith Parker, a retired missionary and now a pastoral counselor in North Carolina, and Andrew Lester, a professor and pastoral counselor in Texas, were among the second group to be endorsed by the Atlanta-based Fellowship's seven-month-old council on endorsement.

The five new endorsements double the Fellowship's total chaplaincy force to 10. The first five endorsements were announced in February. The council on endorsement was established last fall after the CBF declared itself an endorsing body for chaplains, pastoral counselors and other ministers in specialized settings.

Parker, a North Carolina native, spent 24 years as a missionary professor, counselor and administrator for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) before taking early retirement in 1992 to become a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary.

Parker, area director for Europe when he left the IMB, was appointed as a CBF missionary and directed the beginning phases of CBF missions in Europe. He returned to North Carolina in 1993 to establish a pastoral counseling practice with offices in Brevard and Hendersonville.

Lester, a native of Coral Gables, Fla., was a professor of psychology of religion at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., for 14 years before resigning in 1991 to become professor of pastoral theology and pastoral counseling at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

Others endorsees included Linda Serino, staff chaplain since 1990 at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn., and a member of the Tennessee CBF Coordinating Council; Brenda Lee, director of pastoral care since 1995 at Shore Memorial Hospital in Nassawadox on Virginia's Eastern Shore; and Greg Slate, a clinical pastoral education resident since 1997 at Baptist Health Systems in San Antonio, Texas.

Endorsement by a denomination or other endorsing body is necessary for people seeking employment as chaplains or pastoral counselors in the military, hospitals and business settings. The Fellowship voted last summer to begin offering endorsements for moderate Baptists who do not desire endorsement by the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Pioneer Fellowship missionaries Jan and Kevin Rutledge resign

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Pioneer Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionaries Jan and Kevin Rutledge are resigning, officials of the Atlanta-based Fellowship have announced.

The Rutledges, who have served in the Czech Republic since 1993, resigned effective Aug. 1. In their resignation letter, they said they would seek "other opportunities" for missions and would continue to support the Fellowship "in every way we can."

The North Carolina couple have been in the United States since December because of visa difficulties and family health problems. They and their three young daughters live in Greensboro, N.C.

The Rutledges were among 20 Southern Baptist missionaries who left the SBC's Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) to jump start the Fellowship's fledgling missions team in January 1993.

After moving from Poland, the Rutledges opened CBF work in the Czech Republic, teaching English and later working in cooperation with the Czech Baptist Union to begin a new congregation in Prague.

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-- By ABP staff

Community renewal bill reintroduced; sponsors remove voucher provision

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- House lawmakers have introduced a bill designed to revitalize low-income communities through tax breaks and business incentives. It would also allow communities to fund faith-based drug rehabilitation programs.

Sponsors of the American Community Renewal Act introduced similar legislation in the 104th Congress. That measure failed to gain momentum, partly because it included a controversial education-voucher plan.

Sponsors of the renewal bill introduced May 14 said the voucher initiative was removed this year to make the bill less controversial.

However, the bill includes another provision expected to raise similar concerns about the separation of church and state. The bill would allow up to 100 communities to give public grants and vouchers for drug-addiction treatment that could be used at faith-based facilities which view evangelism as part of their treatment.

Sponsors of the plan say it would allow government to support programs that have a better track record of solving drug addiction problems. Leaders of religious programs stood with sponsors of the bill outside the Capitol to announce its introduction. "The best players can't play," said one leader on the current situation.

Rep. James Talent, R-Mo., said the voucher provision would be permissible because a recipient would get to choose where it is used. "If that's unconstitutional then putting your Social Security check in the collection plate is unconstitutional," he said.

But critics of the bill argue that government funding of religion, even in the form of a voucher, may create an excessive entanglement between church and state.

Melissa Rogers, assistant general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee, said the proposal is a "far cry from an individual choosing to drop a Social Security check in the collection plate."

"This is funneling tax money to churches and other thoroughly religious groups," she said. "This is not some random act."

Rogers added, "From the church's perspective, it is different to receive somebody's Social Security check in the collection plate than to receive government grants or vouchers that would come with government strings and regulations."

According to sponsors of the bill, faith-based groups could not require a beneficiary to participate in a service or program that is religious in nature.

Bill sponsors also released a General Accounting Office report of the top 25 counties with the most people living in poverty. Los Angeles, Philadelphia and New York were in the top 10. Also listed among the 25 was Dade (Fla.), Shelby (Tenn.), Fulton (Ga.) and six Texas counties -- Harris, Bexar, El Paso, Hidalgo, Dallas and Cameron.

In up to 100 designated renewal communities, the bill would:

-- Establish a capital-gains-tax rate of zero for the sale of any qualified zone stock, business property or partnership interest located within the qualified zone.

-- Give a wage credit to businesses located in the zones for hiring low-income employees who remain employed for a year. The credit would increase for companies who employ a worker for two and three years. An existing law cuts off the credit in low-income communities after six months of employment. The sponsors said businesses have been firing people after six months and hiring new employees in order to receive the credit.

-- Create a Family Development Account designed to encourage low-income families to save a portion of their income or their earned-income tax credit.

-- Create other benefits for housing and building-renovation projects.

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Clinton vetoes

D.C. voucher bill

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- As expected, President Clinton has vetoed a bill that would have funded tuition vouchers to help a limited number of low-income students attend private and parochial schools in the District of Columbia.

The measure would have provided "opportunity scholarships" of up to \$3,200 for 2,000 low-income D.C. students. It was approved by the House of Representatives April 30 on a 214-206 vote, far short of the two-thirds majority needed to override a veto. It passed the Senate last year on a voice vote.

"This bill would create a program of federally funded vouchers that would divert critical federal resources to private schools instead of investing in public schools," Clinton said in his veto message.

Clinton urged Congress to enact legislation "to reduce class size, modernize our schools, end social promotions, raise academic standards for all students, and hold school systems, schools, and staff accountable for results."

House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, and a voucher proponent, criticized the veto.

"It says a lot about the character of our president that he would stand in the schoolhouse door and deny D.C.'s most vulnerable children the opportunity for a decent education," Armey said.

In contrast, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., said the veto showed Clinton's commitment to public education.

"We want to help the children of the District of Columbia get a good education," Kennedy said. "But this voucher provision is the wrong way to do it. By vetoing this bill, the president has said 'no' to using public funds to help a few students instead of helping all students."

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Christian educators group loses challenge to workshop expulsion

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP)-- The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear a claim by a conservative Christian educators group that its First Amendment and equal-protection rights were violated when its exhibit was removed from a workshop sponsored by a state-supported educational cooperative.

Two lower courts earlier dismissed a lawsuit filed by the Arkansas Christian Educators Association and its president, James Parsons. The Supreme Court, without comment, refused to review the case.

Parsons and his organization filed the complaint after his exhibit was removed from a workshop sponsored by the Ozarks Unlimited Resources Cooperative in August 1995. The cooperative comprises 21 school districts in a seven-county area in northwest Arkansas.

Parsons had received permission to set up his display at the workshop. Following complaints from participants that religion should not be a part of the workshop and over Parson's literature opposing "outcome-based" education standards which were required by state law, the cooperative's director had the booth removed from the exhibit area.

In a decision later upheld by the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, federal District Judge Franklin Waters ruled the cooperative was immune from damages claimed in the lawsuit because it is an "arm of the state."

Waters also ruled that removing the exhibit did not violate Parsons' free-speech rights because the cooperative workshop was not a public forum.

"The workshop was designed solely for training and discussion of topics related to implementing state-mandated educational standards," Waters wrote. "It was not a forum for individuals or organizations to express their views or beliefs."

Seeking to appeal ACEA's case to the Supreme Court, Rutherford Institute attorneys argued that the cooperative, which receives private as well as public funding, is not an arm of the state and is not entitled to immunity from such lawsuits.

In addition to the immunity issue, ACEA attorneys asked the high court to decide whether their clients' rights to free speech, free exercise of religion and equal protection under the law were violated by the cooperative's action.

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Florida governor vetoes 'Choose Life' license tag

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (ABP) -- Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles has vetoed a controversial "Choose Life" license tag approved earlier by the state legislature.

Supporters argued the license plate was intended to promote adoption, but opponents termed it a political message against abortion.

"Simply because a particular political message is able to garner a majority of votes in the Florida Legislature does not mean that an official state of Florida license plate is the proper forum on this -- or any other -- political issue," Chiles said in his veto message.

Chiles also vetoed a \$50 tax rebate to homeowners, saying it would discriminate against renters.

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-- By ABP staff

Sociologists say polls unreliable in measuring church attendance

By Mark Wingfield

CHICAGO (ABP) -- Asking Americans whether they attended church last Sunday is not a reliable way to gauge actual church attendance, argue sociologists Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler.

Asking that question is similar to asking Americans how often they have sex or if they voted in the last election, the researchers suggest.

Responses to those questions may reflect what an individual thinks is appropriate rather than what he or she does in actual practice, they said.

Hadaway and Marler turned the heads of the religious polling world in 1993 when they said the oft-cited figure that 40 percent of Americans attend church every week is vastly overstated.

For decades, the Gallup Poll and other surveys have reported American church attendance holding relatively steady, at about 40 percent of the population. Hadaway and Marler report they became increasingly suspicious because if the polls were correct, churches should be growing at the same rate as the U.S. population but are not.

So along with another colleague they undertook an exhaustive survey of Ashtabula County, Ohio, counting people at every church in the county and comparing the numbers to simultaneous polling data on how many people in the county said they attended church that week.

Instead of 40 percent of Protestants attending church as they reported to pollsters, only 20 percent actually were counted in attendance. And instead of 50 percent of Catholics attending as they reported to pollsters, only 28 percent actually were counted in attendance.

Pastors were not surprised by the findings. But pollsters whose data were called into question were not happy.

Five years after their initial study, Hadaway and Marler are offering new insight into the controversial issue. They co-authored an article in the May 6 issue of the Christian Century in which they explain possible reasons for differences in polling data.

Hadaway is a former researcher for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and Home Mission Board who currently works for the United Church of Christ's Board for Homeland Ministries. Marler is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who teaches at Samford University.

Their mission in 1993 was not to prove that the Gallup Poll data was "wrong," they assert. And even now, they believe the Gallup figures accurately reflect answers to the question Gallup pollsters ask.

The problem is the Gallup question and others like it are prone to divergent interpretation by well-meaning respondents, Hadaway and Marler contend.

"Researchers who study how people answer survey questions have long known that responses to behavioral questions represent more or less than 'just the facts.' When asked how many times they ate out last week, how frequently they have sex and whether or not they voted in the last election, most people report what they usually do, what they would like to do or what they think someone like them ought to do."

So the traditional Gallup question -- "Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days?" -- evokes responses based not so much on fact as on emotion, tradition and desired perception, Hadaway and Marler argue.

"Active church members who did not happen to attend church last Saturday or Sunday are expected to say no in response to Gallup's question. But this creates problems for people who see themselves as committed church members and weekly attenders. Many have an internal rule that says, 'I am a person who attends church every week.' Saying, 'No, I did not attend church' violates that internal rule and identifies them symbolically as non-churchgoers."

Also, inquiries among people who answered yes to the church-attendance question when they actually had not attended church the previous week found that people's perceptions of their involvement in church may be based on marginal relations to a church.

"Follow-up questions about what people meant by 'attending church' revealed that a few were counting things other than attending worship, such as going to weddings, funerals, committee meetings, Sunday school and choir practice," Hadaway and Marler write. "One individual in Ashtabula County even said his attendance consisted of mowing the church lawn on the previous Saturday."

But these cases account for only about 2 percent of all people polled. What about the rest of the gap?

The answer may lie in what people perceive their relationship to the church to be, and that relationship may be based in the distant past.

"First, a 'churched' identity, once established, seems remarkably resilient and long-lasting," they report. "Second, whereas 'churched' behavior might be important for establishing such an identity, continued frequent attendance does not seem necessary for people to maintain it."

To illustrate, they cite the case of a Connecticut woman named Carol who is "typical of many people who continue to see themselves as 'regular' churchgoers despite increasingly irregular attendance."

Carol was raised in the church, went to church events weekly through her teens, but dropped out during college and the early years of child-rearing. Later she and her husband returned to a different church "for the sake of the children."

Now her family attends only at Easter and Christmas, but she goes by herself occasionally. And she donates services for special church events. She doesn't know the current minister or many active church members, yet she considers herself a part of the church. And if a pollster asked whether she attended church last week, she said she might reasonably answer yes, even if she didn't actually attend that week.

"Church attendance is increasingly a private matter, and it is correspondingly easier for each of us to maintain an idealized image of ourselves as regular attenders when in fact we may only manage to attend church two or three times a month at the most," Hadaway and Marler write. "As long as the proportion of Americans who see themselves as regular, fairly active churchgoers is stable, the proportion of Americans who say they attend church each week will remain about the same-regardless of the actual level of attendance."

Change in the polling disparity will occur only when Americans believe it is less important for them to perceive themselves as regular churchgoers, they argue. And this change may be on the way, with lower levels of childhood involvement in church producing adults with lesser self-imposed expectations about the importance of church attendance.

The researchers conclude: "The challenge for American churches is to help reconnect the doing and the saying, before all is said and done."

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Study says conservatives want pastors to be authoritative, but not strict

By Mark Wingfield

MUNCIE, Ind. (ABP) -- Conservative churches grow faster than less-conservative churches not because they enforce a strict code of conduct, but because their pastors are more certain of what they believe, a new study contends.

Joseph Tamney and Stephen Johnson of Ball State University reported findings of their study on the popularity of strict churches in the spring issue of the "Review of Religious Research."

The researchers set out to examine an earlier hypothesis put forth by Dean Kelley in his 1977 book "Why Conservative Churches Are Growing." Kelley argued that strictness, or making behavioral demands on members, results in church growth and is a key behind the success of more conservative churches.

"Kelley's model of an ideal serious church combined uncritical obedience, intolerance, isolation from competing groups and demanding rules that result in a distinctive lifestyle," the authors said.

What the new study found in an extensive random-sample survey of residents of Muncie, Ind., is "starkly different," except for a common desire for pastoral authoritativeness, they said.

Tamney and Johnson found that modern Americans favor authoritative preachers but not churches with strict separatist rules of conduct.

"Contrary to what Kelley seemed to assume, people liked what we have called open churches [ones in which the services are joyful, the pastor encourages contact with people having different religious views and charitable activities are important]," the authors said. "Our data suggest that few American people today equate religious seriousness with strictness in the sense of separatism, intolerance of dissent or demanding membership criteria."

Removing all other considerations such as church identification, the study found that Americans on the whole are looking for churches that have pastors who are certain about what they preach, offer joyous worship services and programs for the needy.

The Ball State University researchers' work was based on interviews with a randomly selected group of 576 people in Muncie, Ind., in 1994.

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Pastors say they're overworked but blame themselves, study says

CAROL STREAM, Ill. (ABP) -- Congregational expectations placed on pastors may be rising, but that isn't the reason most pastors say they're burning the candle at both ends.

In a new nationwide survey of 600 pastors conducted by Leadership magazine, nearly half said they believe they're working too hard.

But when asked why they're working too hard, the pastors didn't blame congregation members. Instead, the pastors pointed the finger at themselves.

Only 7 percent of pastors in the survey said unrealistic expectations from their church's governing board drives their hard work.

The most oft-cited answers were "I expect too much of myself" (68 percent) and "I love what I do so much I don't always know when to stop" (51 percent).

However, the article in Leadership's spring issue which reports on results of the survey quotes an Indiana pastor who said pastors may underestimate the pressure they feel from a congregation.

"You can say all the pressure comes from yourself," said Peter Strubhar of First Missionary Church in Berne, Ind. "But the expectations of what a few people think pastoral ministry ought to be are never-ending. From time to time I think, 'If I'd do this one thing, it would make the critics happy for a while.' That soon becomes my expectation."

The Leadership article lists five "surprises" found in the research, with the source of pastoral workloads being No. 1.

Other surprises cited include:

-- When estimates of time spent in ministry were double-checked against actual time logs, researchers found that pastors accurately estimate the number of hours they spend in ministry each week. However, the pastors misjudged their actual hours in two key areas: they underestimated the amount of time spent on administration and overestimated the amount of time spent in prayer.

-- Despite perceptions to the contrary, there's not much difference in the way large-church pastors spend their time compared to pastors who have no other support staff. Regardless of church size or staff size, pastors reported spending about 11 hours each week in sermon preparation.

"The only real difference in the way solo pastors and pastors with staff spend their time is this: Senior pastors spend two more hours per week leading meetings and services, while solo pastors spend an extra hour each week in pastoral care," the article reports. "Pastoring is pastoring, and the way time is spent shifts little based on church size."

-- Most pastors have had little or no training in time management and are having to learn to "work smarter" by trial and error.

-- Despite the intense demands on pastors, most report they are happy in their work and find it fulfilling. More than 80 percent said they are happy with their workload, and 91 percent said they are satisfied with the kind of work they do.

The most-satisfied pastors, however, share several common traits, the study found: they limit their work to 45-50 hours per week, have learned to live with unfinished business, use all their annual vacation and consistently take one full day off per week.

Leadership is a quarterly journal for church leaders published by Christianity Today Inc., in Carol Stream, Ill.

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Missouri church grows by cutting its rolls

By Rob Marus

UNION, Mo. (ABP) -- A Missouri Baptist pastor discovered less can be more by leading his church to purge its inflated membership rolls and at the same time experience renewed vitality and growth.

Kenneth Parker, pastor of First Baptist Church in Union, Mo., since 1995, said he was always bothered by the way many Southern Baptist churches leave inactive and non-resident members on their rolls. The issue came to a head when he was embarrassed in a newspaper interview because the congregation's attendance was so out of proportion with its membership.

"The local newspaper interviewed me and asked me about how many members we had," he said. "I said, 'Around 1,200,' but I quickly added, 'But that's not an accurate measurement of who we are as a church.' I felt silly, and it really seemed a compromise in integrity to even state that we had around 1,200 members. We didn't even have 275 in worship on most Sunday mornings."

Parker came up with a plan to remove names of members who had joined other churches or moved but also to "find out who really wanted to remain an active part of the church membership."

He had read about a California church which uses a "membership covenant" to outline expectations of church members. A committee at Parker's church decided to mail the covenant to members with a form letter asking them to sign the statement if they wanted to retain membership.

Parker said most church members approved of the change, but some thought it went against tradition or was an effort to transplant California-style ideas into the Midwest.

The church voted overwhelmingly to adopt the membership covenant and also started a new-member education class to promote involvement in church life.

After the plan was implemented in 1997, the church's total membership dropped from more than 1,200 to 333 but since has climbed above 350.

Average Sunday morning worship attendance grew from 230 in 1995 to 330 for the last quarter of 1997. Average Sunday school attendance increased from 167 to 191 over the same period. The church baptized 28 people last year.

"I realize people can manipulate statistics to prove whatever their point is, but these are actual numbers, not 'ministerially speaking,'" Parker said. "It's obvious to see that the majority of our members do in fact attend at least morning worship service, and that is very gratifying to me."

Church growth expert John Vaughan, director of the Center for the Study of Growing Churches and publisher of Church Growth Today newsletter, said Parker's church was typical of many county seat-type First Baptist churches.

When people move to a small town, they may not be able to find a church of their denomination, so they join the largest church in town, Vaughan said. When they move to a larger city, they rejoin a church affiliated with their denomination, which may or may not bother to inform the small-town church.

"A lot of people are functionally holding membership in two churches," Vaughan said.

"Usually, an SBC church will write to another SBC church and tell them" when a person moves his or her membership from a church, Vaughan said. But if it is a church of a different denomination, the small-town Baptist church might never be notified that the people who moved are no longer members. Thus, they stay on the roll as "non-resident" members.

Churches of other denominations often aren't as reluctant to purge membership rolls, Vaughan pointed out. "There are congregations that will make contact with you if you are absent for 30 days, and then in 60 days you will get a letter, and after 90 days you will be removed from the membership rolls."

In many Southern Baptist churches, meanwhile, it often takes an obituary announcement to remove even a member who has not attended in many years.

"I don't think that is a put-down to Baptists," said Vaughan, a member of First Baptist Church in Bolivar, Mo. "I think we feel a sense of accountability to anyone who's on our roll."

Parker said he would advise other pastors to count the cost before proceeding with such a change, but he is glad he did.

"I can say with integrity and no added explanation that I pastor a church with a membership of 351. Who knows? They might all show up this Sunday!"

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