

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Texas church calls state's first female Baptist pastor**

By Marv Knox

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Calvary Baptist Church in Waco has broken the gender barrier among Texas Baptist clergy by electing Julie Pennington-Russell as its pastor.

Pennington-Russell, 37, is believed to be the first female senior pastor of a church affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Pennington-Russell has been pastor of Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco since 1993 and was the church's associate pastor from 1984 to 1993. She will begin her tenure at Calvary Church in early August.

Women ministers are a distinct minority among Southern Baptist clergy, and female pastors are even rarer.

Slightly more than 90 women have been ordained as senior pastors or co-pastors of Southern Baptist churches, reported Sarah Frances Anders, an emeritus professor at Louisiana College, who has kept tabs on women in ministry for about 40 years.

About 75 women now serve Southern Baptist churches as pastors, Anders said. Around 30 states have at least one female Southern Baptist pastor, and most of them are in the East.

About 1,300 Southern Baptist women have been ordained, she added. But many of them have found places of service in denominations, such as the United Methodist Church, that are more open to their ministry.

Some Baptists say the Bible forbids women to serve as pastors. Others say those apparent prohibitions refer to specific situations in the early church; they cite other passages that, they believe, affirm all God-called people in ministry.

Pennington-Russell said she hopes the issue of her gender will fade into the background quickly, noting her gender "has been a non-issue for a long time" with the San Francisco church.

"I look forward to getting down to work with Calvary," she said. "I just want to focus on being a good pastor."

Pennington-Russell has been impressed by the church's commitment to remain in its transitional neighborhood, she said. "They have chosen to stay and do ministry to the people around them," she explained. "Calvary wants to be a place where all manner of people will feel welcome, regardless of race or economic status. They want to be home for all who follow Christ, and for me that strikes a chord."

The church voted 190-73 to call Pennington-Russell as pastor after committing almost a week to a series of get-acquainted meetings.

"I'm very pleased that the church voted overwhelmingly" to call the new pastor, said Tom Purdy, chairman of the church's pastor-search committee. "In most cases, it would be considered a landslide."

Pennington-Russell and Purdy acknowledged some church members expressed reservations about electing a woman pastor, but they cited a positive spirit among the congregation. "We had an amazing spiritual renewal last week," Purdy said.

"We take the Bible very seriously as the word of God," Purdy noted. "The amazing thing about our church is the openness to do God's will. We believe women and men are equal in the sight of God and feel that calling Julie Pennington-Russell as our pastor is totally in line with Scripture."

The church ordained its first women deacons in 1990 and called and ordained Fran Porter as minister to senior adults in 1995.

During the lengthy discussions with Pennington-Russell, "people with different views showed love and respect and the outstanding loving desire to ... serve God together," Purdy said.

Calvary is "a mainstream traditional Texas Baptist church," he added. "Our ad in the phone book shows that we are affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention, [and] we are a Texas Baptist church."

The church allows its members individually to decide how the portion of their gifts that goes outside of Texas is channeled, he reported. About 85 percent of out-of-state contributions go to the Fellowship, and 15 percent are sent to the SBC.

Although Southern Baptists do not agree on the role of women in ministry, neither the Southern Baptist Convention nor its affiliated state conventions have withdrawn fellowship from churches over the issue. However, some area associations of churches have removed churches for calling a woman as pastor.

Paul Stripling, director of missions for Waco Baptist Association, expressed hope the association will move forward positively.

"There already is a strong sense of unity and unanimity in Waco Baptist Association, and I hope it always will prevail," Stripling said. "I feel the best about our association that I have felt in the 16 years I have been director of missions. Our hope would be that each of us would respect and honor the autonomy of each local church and our congregational form of government."

Stripling pledged to work with Pennington-Russell "as I do with other pastors of our 102 churches."

Pennington-Russell is a graduate of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and the University of Central Florida.

She has been an associate Baptist campus minister at San Francisco State University and a supervisor of field education at Golden Gate Seminary.

She is a member of the board of the Baptist Joint Committee and has served on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's coordinating council.

Her husband, Tim Pennington-Russell, develops Internet websites for various companies. They have two children, Taylor, 7, and Lucy, 3.

## **Marv Knox elected Baptist Standard editor**

DALLAS (ABP) -- Marv Knox, associate editor of Baptist Standard since December 1995, will become the newspaper's next editor when current editor Toby Druin retires Dec. 31.

The paper's board of directors tapped Knox, 41, to become the 13th editor of Texas Baptists' weekly news journal in a meeting June 1.

"The board's unanimous choice of Marv Knox as editor-elect of the Standard confirms our feelings when he joined the paper almost three years ago that he very well could be at the helm upon the retirement of Toby Druin," said board Chairman Danny Andrews of Plainview.

"We have every confidence in Marv's leadership of the Standard as we approach the great challenges of the 21st century," he said.

Druin praised Knox's election as his successor.

"I couldn't be more pleased with the action of our directors," said Druin, who announced to the board May 19 that he will close out a 22-year career with the Standard -- the last three as editor -- at the end of this year.

Knox accepted the decision of the board with acknowledgment of the work of the editors who have served before him and a pledge to be faithful to their heritage.

"The opportunity to walk in the path worn smooth by a succession of saintly Standard editors is both humbling and an honor of the highest magnitude," Knox said.

Knox came to the Standard from the editorship of the Kentucky Western Recorder, where he served 1990-95. Previously he was an editor of Baptist Press in Nashville, Tenn.; associate editor of the Baptist Message newspaper in Louisiana; director of news and information at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; and assistant news director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. He is licensed to preach, but has not been ordained.

He has written extensively on the relationship of church and state, Baptist history and Christian ethics. He has written or co-written five books, and his writing and editing have been honored with awards from the Religious Public Relations Council and the Baptist Public Relations Association.

Knox is president of the Association of State Baptist Papers and is a member of the board of directors of Associated Baptist Press.

He is a Fort Worth native who was raised in a pastor's home, primarily in Perryton, Texas, in the state's Panhandle. His father, E. Marvin Knox, is pastor of First Baptist Church in Stratford, Okla. His mother, Margaret, is a public-school teacher. His brother, Martin, is mission pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Green Bay, Wis., and his sister, Martha, is a teacher's assistant in Wichita Falls.

Knox is married to Joanna Jarchow Knox. They have two daughters, Lindsay, 14, and Molly, 11. They are members of First Baptist Church of Lewisville, Texas, where Joanna is financial secretary and works in children's and youth ministry. He is a deacon, teaches an adult couples' Sunday School class, chairs the denominational-relations committee and is a member of the missions committee.

Both Knox and his wife are graduates of Hardin-Simmons University. In 1996 he was named a distinguished alumnus of the university's Logsdon School of Theology. He earned a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary in 1984.

## **Seminary professor resigns abruptly**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond's first professor of Christian education resigned abruptly May 27.

Bill Rogers, who came to the Virginia seminary in 1995, volunteered his resignation "because he found himself outside the ethical expectations of the seminary," said Beth McMahon, the school's director of public relations.

Faculty Dean Thomas Halbrooks said the impact of losing the only full-time Christian education professor would be "minimal" on students at the 9-year-old school. The 1997-98 school year just ended, and a replacement has been found for a doctor-of-ministry seminar Rogers was scheduled to teach this summer, Halbrooks said. He said the school will likely initiate a faculty search this fall and use adjunct faculty next year.

Before coming to Richmond, Rogers was a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and dean of the seminary's School of Christian Education.

Rogers, 59, said he has no plans for the immediate future.

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-- By Bob Allen

## **South African Baptists propose new convention**

By Ashlee Ross

COLESBERG, South Africa (ABP) -- Black and white Baptist leaders in South Africa have endorsed the concept of an integrated Baptist convention, signaling a significant break with the nation's apartheid past.

At a May 14-15 meeting in Colesberg, delegates from the Baptist Union of South Africa and the Baptist Convention of South Africa signed a resolution urging their respective executives "to implement our obedience to God in the speediest possible way."

The new body would reflect the demographics of South Africa, reported Desmond Hoffmeister, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa.

Racial differences were behind a 1987 split in which the Baptist Convention of South Africa pulled out of the Baptist Union of South Africa. While both groups are interracial, leadership of the convention is primarily black and the union's leaders are mostly white.

Prior to endorsing the resolution, the 180 delegates held an open forum during which "an honest time of sharing deep hurts, anger and bitterness took place," Hoffmeister reported in a letter to constituents. "God clearly moved in our midst as brothers and sisters forgave each other and were reconciled to one another," he continued.

Hoffmeister said a "synergy" for a reunion has been developing among African, Colored and Indian Baptist groups in South Africa. He said delegates representing the nation's white Baptist faction responded positively to the initiative but did "express concern at bringing the broader white constituency on board."

Despite those reservations, "it is safe to say South Africa will never be the same," Hoffmeister said. "If the resolution adopted at Colesberg becomes a reality, the new Baptist movement will be a formidable force both nationally and internationally."

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, said the Colesberg accord represents a powerful stand against racial discrimination. "The Baptist World Alliance has been calling for reconciliation on a number of our visits," he said.

Wendy Ryan, director of communications for the BWA, said the move will allow South Africans "to go back to the kind of fellowship they once enjoyed."

In his letter, Hoffmeister expressed thanks to the McLean, Va.,-based BWA for its support of the effort. He also credited American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., the European Baptist Mission, the Baptist Missionary Society and the Baptist Union of Great Britain for various means of support.

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-- Ashlee Ross is an intern at Associated Baptist Press.

## **Lotteries hook problem gamblers, debt consultant tells Texas group**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Lotteries hook potential problem gamblers into a financially destructive lifestyle, a consumer-debt-management specialist told the governing board of a Texas anti-gambling coalition.

"If alcohol is the drug of entry for addiction, the lottery is the activity of entry" for problem gamblers, said Bettye Banks, vice president of the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Greater Dallas.

Banks told the Texans Against Gambling board of directors June 2 that among adults counseled by her organization, most with gambling problems started by playing the lottery.

"It's the foot in the door," she said. "It's the hook. Eventually, it's the needle in the arm."

Some people, particularly those in low socio-economic groups, believe their only hope for riches is to win a lawsuit or a lottery, Banks said. She described instances of patients with diabetes who spent so much on the lottery that they lacked the money to buy insulin.

The one good thing about the lottery is it requires the consumer to pay cash, Banks said. That is not the case in casinos where credit cards are welcomed.

"There the gambler has the price of the bet plus interest at 19.9 percent," she said. "The highest debt load I've ever seen that was based on gambling cost the individual his marriage and his wife her business. He took an American Express card to Las Vegas and had run up \$87,000 in gambling debts."

While the lottery is the gateway to compulsive, obsessive or addictive gambling for many adults, sports betting pools are the entry points for most high school-aged youth, Banks said.

"Pools are attractive because everybody's doing it, and kids are so peer-driven," she said.

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## House bill raises church-state concerns

By Rob Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A U.S. House bill to allow government funding of "faith-based" drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs has religious-liberty watchdog groups concerned.

Missouri Republican James Talent is a sponsor of the American Community Renewal Act, which aims to help poverty-stricken communities. The bill, introduced in the House of Representatives May 14, is co-sponsored by Reps. J.C. Watts (R-Okla.) and Danny Davis (D-Ill.).

Most of the bill's provisions are designed to stimulate economic development. But it contains a clause that would allow states to provide public grants and vouchers for drug treatment.

Individuals could use the vouchers for treatment at "faith-based" facilities and organizations -- including those that emphasize evangelism and proselytism in their programs.

A similar bill failed last year, partially because it contained a controversial section providing education vouchers that parents could use in private and parochial schools. The new bill omits that section.

Talent said the bill "puts the government on the side of economic growth and moral renewal" in rehabilitating poor areas. "It's part of an overall movement of faith back into the center stage of our communities in appropriate ways, and I think that's a good thing."

Several church-state separationist organizations, including the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, oppose Talent's bill.

"The principle that public funding must be restricted to public institutions and public purposes is deeply ensconced in American life," said James Dunn, BJC executive director.

Dunn said the Talent bill would open the door to excessive entanglement between church and state. "The section, for instance, on treatment of substance abuse would allow houses of worship to administer treatment in the name of the U.S. government while still requiring participants to attend worship. That should offend even religious people, because worship done under the compulsion of law is not true worship."

Several other religious groups -- including the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the American Jewish Congress -- have stated their opposition to the bill on church-state grounds.

Talent contends their argument is inconsistent. "If you say that you can't give someone a voucher to go to a faith-based rehabilitation program, why can a veteran take his disability benefit check and put it in the offering plate?"

Dunn said the BJC does not oppose government funding for non-sectarian services provided by faith groups. He gave the example of Catholic Charities in its social ministries.

"We have no fuss with that and we never have, because there is a difference between providing government support for them and providing government support for 'pervasively sectarian' organizations."

Dunn said case law has established the difference between "pervasively sectarian" and "religiously affiliated" programs. Programs that involve proselytism have been considered pervasively sectarian and thus ineligible for government funding. Dunn said Talent's bill would open the door to government money for sectarian programs and organizations -- including local congregations.

Talent said applying such a test amounts to the "excessive government entanglement in religion" that separationists fear. "Then you have the government deciding how much religion is too much. There's a point at which that begins to look like hostility toward religion."

The bill's opponents also fear eventual government regulation of organizations and churches that take public money. Rudy Pulido, pastor of Southwest Baptist Church in St. Louis and president of the St. Louis chapter of AU, said, "Most Americans would want accountability as to how their taxpayer funds are used, and that would ultimately mean that the churches would have to open their books to the government."

"It just amazes me how Talent can't see these basic threats," Pulido added. "But I certainly don't want the wool to be pulled over the eyes of a lot of good Christians out there."

Talent said the bill has a safeguard. Government support would come in the form of vouchers given directly to a person who would have a choice between non-religious and sectarian treatment programs. By giving a choice, "you break the link by which the government would be involved."

BJC general counsel Brent Walker cited a time-tested principle of American jurisprudence in response: "What you can't do directly, you can't do indirectly," he said. "And the government would be funding these organizations indirectly."

Talent said opponents of his bill are using weak constitutional arguments to mask an anti-religious prejudice.

"I think it would be healthy for those people who really don't want faith to be back in the center stage of these communities to get that out into the open, rather than hide behind constitutional concerns that I don't think are valid in this instance," he said. "The truth is, they just don't want churches and temples to be more heavily involved in the life of the community. We certainly should not have government programs that stretch to exclude them."

Talent said desperate times call for desperate measures. "There are millions of people living in these neighborhoods who are mired in despair, and we have to help them. I'm at the point where I'm willing to try almost anything that will work."

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## **National truck-stop chaplains' meeting offers perspective on unique ministry**

By Debbie Sanders

STRAFFORD, Mo. (ABP) -- Play the stereotype game. Assume the driver of the 18-wheeler that just roared past is munching on a Moon Pie, jammin' down to a Garth Brooks song blaring from the tape deck, and cursing at every little old lady who dares to drive 55 mph in the passing lane.

Better slam on the brakes. If Truckers' Christian Chapel Ministries and similar groups have anything to do with it, that mental picture is as wrong as running a red light.

Through efforts of a growing ministry, that trucker may instead be listening to a taped sermon, he may be praying, he may even be asking God to save him, all in the cab of his huge rig as it rolls down the Interstate.

Toward that end, the Missouri Baptist Convention, Truckers' Christian Chapel Ministries and First Baptist Church of Strafford, Mo., sponsored the first truck stop ministry chaplaincy training May 22-23, in the Strafford church.

This national conference drew about 50 chaplains and others interested in this ministry. They came from 12 states, including West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Arizona and Missouri.

The truck-stop ministry program basically revolves around the philosophy of ministering to people where they are. Keith Jackson, industrial chaplain for the Joplin, Mo.,-based Sitton Truck Line, said the call to be a truck stop chaplain is unique.

"Truck stop chaplains are volunteers who emphasize ministry and evangelism," he said. "Not everyone can do that, holding worship services and being able to minister in Christ's name."

In order to reach truck drivers, the volunteer chaplains first must receive permission from truck-stop administrators to conduct a regular worship service. Services can take place in offices, conference rooms, even mobile homes brought onto the property for that purpose.

Although each truck stop chaplain might set up the worship service in a different way, there is one constant -- presenting the gospel. And because many truck stop chaplains are former truck drivers themselves, and not many

of them have formal training, this seminar sought to address that need.

"A lot of us don't feel qualified," said Glenn Cope, a former truck driver turned chaplain for Truckers' Christian Chapel Ministries of Ohio. "This conference is long overdue. Although there are more than 90 chaplains across the nation, some of the areas feel isolated. This conference brings reality to what we do. We can network and direct someone with troubles to another chaplain down the road."

Jackson presented ministry sessions that discussed healthy and unhealthy ways of coping with crisis, stages of grief, death and dying, religious resources in pastoral care, suicide and notification of family in a trauma situation.

Neely Lewis, director of evangelism for Truckers' Christian Chapel Ministry in Mesa, Ariz., led sessions dealing with personal evangelism inside the truck stop, and discipleship training for employees of the truck stop.

Another time called "mission fair" let the chaplains from across the nation share pictures, bulletins and handout materials they have used successfully in their own ministries.

One of the convention's organizers, Frank Stark, started a truck-stop ministry back in 1971 in Strafford, as an outgrowth of a come-as-you-are service begun by a group of youth in the church. Stark, former pastor of the Strafford congregation, is an associate with the Missouri Baptist Convention missions department. He also operates an auto-racing ministry and is a field specialist with the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board.

Stark said more than 2,000 professions of faith nationwide can be linked to truck-stop ministry, and he stressed the importance of the ministry's affiliation with a local church.

"This is the first meeting of its kind that we know of," he said. "A lot of the fellows serving as chaplains are former truck drivers, and they have found there is more to being a chaplain than they thought. The response to this convention has been fantastic. Many have asked if we are going to do this again next year."

With 7.8 million drivers on the road, there certainly appears to be a need for truck-stop chaplains, who may be called on to provide counseling, referrals and even financial help.

Cope remarked: "This ministry touches a nation. A trucker's schedule is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and his problems don't fit into regular hours."

Because all drivers can't be reached through Sunday morning worship services, Truckers' Christian Chapel Ministries provides audiotapes which truckers can listen to at any time while they are traveling. "Good News for the Professional Driver" is one of these tapes, and it starts with a friendly greeting.

"Hello, driver. I just want to thank you for lettin' me ride along with you for a little while..."

What follows is a 20-minute sermon based on the 23rd Psalm. The message speaks to the listener in a folksy, easily understood, non-threatening manner, often using modern-day examples.

At the end, the plan of salvation is presented, and the driver is encouraged to pray, right where he or she is.

The same group also distributes a truck-stop ministries directory which includes chaplain locations nationwide, and a three-tape set that gives instruction about baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church, prayer, eternal security, evangelism and stewardship. A variety of printed materials supports the tape set.

Former truck drivers such as Cope, a 32-year veteran who has watched men accept Christ in laundry rooms and seen families touched through tragedies, see this as an important ministry.

"The need is there," he said. "If you look at the drivers' lifestyle, the loneliness, marital problems, guilt from being away from home, there are any number of reasons there needs to be someone there for them. Even if they did have a home church, they wouldn't be there."

One of the most positive aspects of the program is that touching the life of one driver can have a compound effect. Cope has found that drivers can take the message they have been given, and share it with the world.

"Drivers need to talk to someone who is concerned with them," he said. "The ones who are Christians need to be fed, encouraged, strengthened. Then they become missionaries and witnesses who carry the gospel with them wherever they go."

## Recent Baptist college graduate builds homes, hope with Habitat

By Shonda Maupin

AMERICUS, Ga. (ABP) -- Joy Roethlisberger turned an internship into a job working with both national leaders and people in need.

Roethlisberger, a 1997 graduate of Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., is the special assistant to Millard Fuller, the founder and president of Habitat for Humanity International, based in Americus, Ga. It is the largest house-building organization and second-largest charitable organization in the United States.

"It's a step in fulfilling my dreams," said Roethlisberger, who grew up Baptist in the tiny northeast Missouri town of Clarksville. "I was a dreamer, and I had great aspirations. I worked hard, and I love meeting people. I think that's the key. It's not luck -- I've been blessed. God has paved the way for me."

And Roethlisberger's job is to pave the way for Millard Fuller.

"I travel in front of our president and do advance work for his speaking engagements," she said.

Advance work includes speaking to the media, preparing the president's itinerary and occasionally helping to build houses.

Since starting the job last June, Roethlisberger has been to Kentucky, Texas, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, England and Northern Ireland.

"Typically, I'm here about 40 percent of the time," she said. "Usually, I travel 60 to 70 percent."

One example of Habitat's international work is its recent building project in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Roethlisberger said Habitat's history as a nonpolitical organization enabled the organization to bridge the gap between Catholics and Protestants involved with the Belfast project.

For example, she said the Belfast Habitat for Humanity chapter has been able to avoid paying paramilitary groups for safety assurances, both in Catholic and in Protestant areas.

She noted a particular conversation there with a Catholic woman. "The lady said, 'Religion is such a divided issue here that I've actually kept count of the number of Protestants I've ever spoken with. You're the fifth one,'" Roethlisberger recalled.

"That's how tense it is in Belfast. That's just unbelievable. And she's not the only one; a number of people would tell you that."

Roethlisberger is back in the U.S. now after working in London for several weeks. This summer's travels include the 1998 Jimmy Carter Work Project in Houston, where a team of volunteers will build 100 houses in five days.

"Habitat for Humanity is helping so many people all over the world in all walks of life, and I feel privileged to be a small part of that effort," she said.

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-- This story previously appeared in Omnibus, the student newspaper at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo. Stacey Hamby of the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way contributed information.

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