

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **SBC approves family statement, elects Patterson as president**

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention adopted an amendment on family to its official doctrinal statement and elected conservative leader Paige Patterson as SBC president June 9.

The family amendment, drafted by a committee, upholds lifelong marriage as a biblical model and rejects the legitimacy of homosexual unions. It also urges wives to submit to their husband's authority and holds couples responsible for their children "from the moment of conception."

A proposed amendment that would have removed language about female submission was defeated.

Patterson, an architect of the conservative movement which captured control of the nation's largest non-Catholic faith group during the 1980s, was elected the convention's president by acclamation. He is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

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-- By Bob Allen

## **Elliff calls Southern Baptists to continue course correction**

By Bob Allen

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention has successfully restored theological integrity and stood firm for biblical values in recent years but must continue to "chart our course by the unchanging Christ" if it is to avoid future denominational decline, SBC president Tom Elliff declared June 9.

In the president's address at the SBC's June 9-11 annual meeting in Salt Lake City, Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., said Southern Baptists should thank God for "raising up among us voices of warning" against cultural change, popular thoughts and theological trends that "all work against the course God has established for us."

While some labeled mobilization by conservatives into SBC leadership during the 1980s as a "mutinous takeover by a few malcontents," it was in reality "a God-ordained 'take-back' so that the course would once again be established on the inerrant and infallible word of the living God," Elliff said.

Southern Baptists also have stood firm against cultural forces which "under the guise of openness and tolerance" sought to undermine traditional definitions of family, marriage and devalue the unborn and the aged, Elliff said.

"Many Christian denominations in our nation, having long ago decided that they couldn't decide what they believe about the Bible, have nothing to say to the nation at this crucial hour, but Southern Baptists have repeatedly refused to be intimidated by any entity, especially those that run contrary to the Bible's definition of what real family, real marriage, is," Elliff said.

Similarly, the convention has refused "to be muzzled by misinterpretation of the First Amendment when our nation needs to hear the voice of God once again," he continued.

Despite those accomplishments, Southern Baptists must continue to vigilantly guard the denomination's course, Elliff said. "The only hope for us is to continue to chart our course," he said. "Jesus must be to us what the pole star is to the ocean navigator, that fixed point of reference by which all we do is judged."

In order to do that, Southern Baptists must emphasize "the beauty of holiness" by not compromising biblical standards in an attempt to become "culturally relevant" and by expecting pastors and other spiritual leaders to lead lives consistent with Bible values.

"Secret sin in pulpit and pew" has sometimes reduced churches to "making casual suggestions to a sin-sick society instead of thundering 'thus says the Lord,'" Elliff said. "It has to be casual, because it is only the righteous who are as bold as a lion."

The convention also must become "mobilized for a bountiful harvest" by practicing evangelism and missions, Elliff said.

"I think all our missionaries ought to have to raise their own support," Elliff said, pausing for a moment "to let that sink in."

"I don't think they ought to have to raise their financial support," he continued, "but what if all our missionaries had to raise their prayer support?" He suggested requiring missionary candidates to recruit at least 10 people to pray for them an hour each week and for them to recruit 100 people for a similar commitment by the time they are sent out.

Five thousand missionaries would generate half a million hours of prayer each week. "Now, that's passionate praying!" he exclaimed.

Elliff also urged Baptists to "personalize" the "blessed hope" of eternal life and the recognition of a "reckoning" at Judgment Day.

Christians will be judged not as to whether they go to heaven or hell, but with how they were stewards of God's gift, Elliff said. "Every conscious minute of your life you are sending ahead either treasure or trash," he said.

## **Kentucky volunteer beats odds to bring witness to Utah**

By Mark Wingfield and Bob Allen

ODGEN, Utah (ABP) -- Debbie Hansford almost never made it from Kentucky to be a volunteer missionary in Southern Baptists' evangelistic blitz in Utah.

But because she made it against the odds, she believes God had a good purpose for the work her group from First Baptist Church of Whitley City was to do in Ogden, Utah.

"I can't wait to see what God's going to do," she said Saturday, June 6, while making preparations for a neighborhood block party at Immanuel Bilingual Baptist Church in Ogden.

The group was among some 2,200 volunteers to blanket Salt Lake City and surrounding communities for the "Crossover '98," an annual evangelism blitz held in conjunction with the June 9-11 Southern Baptist Convention.

More than 760 Utah residents prayed to receive Christ during the event, North American Mission Board official John Yarborough said during the opening session of the convention June 9. Reports were still being collected.

Encounters between Southern Baptists and Mormons were described as friendly and cordial on the home turf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but few of the converts appeared to be active Mormons. Most people making professions of faith did not have a religious affiliation, officials said.

Witnessing venues included Salt Lake City's Delta Center, as basketball fans gathered for a June 5 NBA playoff game between the Utah Jazz and Chicago Bulls. "We couldn't let this opportunity pass without reaching out," said Tim Knopps, evangelism consultant for the North American Mission Board. Volunteers passed out New Testaments and a gospel tract bearing a photo and of the late Pete Maravich, who was a star for the Jazz in the 1970s, and a story of his life, including his commitment to Jesus Christ.

Other outreach activities included block parties, door-to-door evangelism, inner-city evangelism teams, prayer walks, direct mail and a phone bank set up in Woodstock, Ga., to handle responses to television spots and newspaper advertising in the Salt Lake City area, said Yarborough, vice president for evangelization at the Alpharetta, Ga.,-based NAMB.

The group of eight volunteers from Whitley City was organized by layperson Ruth Ann Sandige. The Kentucky church already had a long-term relationship with the Utah church dating back to the Kentucky Baptist Convention's partnership with Baptists in Utah and Idaho.

Hansford had been to Ogden before and didn't want to go back on this trip. In fact, she had convinced herself she couldn't afford it.

But when Sandige called to invite her to help with the evangelistic effort preceding the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Salt Lake City, Hansford began to mull it over.

She didn't sleep that night, troubled by the sense that God was telling her to go. Finally, she remembered a promotion the Kroger store chain recently had done whereby customers could turn in grocery receipts for airline ticket discounts.

"God showed me every little thing" about how it could work out to make the trip, she said.

The next morning, she gathered up her receipts and headed to Kroger, only to learn the special promotion had ended. But the store had some of the discount coupons remaining and agreed to give her one anyway.

She was on her way, until two days prior to her scheduled departure she had a freak automobile accident on I-75 in which her car crossed a median from the northbound to the southbound lane and was totaled. She emerged with only a small bruise.

One of the first people on the scene of the accident asked her, "Can you walk out of this?"

She replied, "Yes, I'm going to Utah."

She and other Kentucky volunteers worked alongside volunteers from Arizona and Texas as well as a corps of college students recruited from across the nation.

They formed evangelistic teams which blitzed the neighborhoods around the church, making door-to-door contacts and presenting the gospel anytime someone would listen. Several people prayed to trust Christ as Savior during this effort. Some left the doorsteps where they had prayed and came straight to the block party.

Church members also had invited friends and prospects to the block party. Throughout the afternoon, volunteers spread into the crowd, talking one-on-one with those who would listen to a gospel presentation. Special events also were offered for children.

Pastor Juan Acosta said the block party, made possible by help received from the volunteers, was a pivotal part of his strategy for increasing local awareness of the small church. Acosta came to the church only one year ago, with help from the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board and Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

The block party was "the first real move toward evangelism outside the church walls," Acosta said. "We're using this to reintroduce the church to the community."

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-- North American Mission Board writer James Dotson contributed information included in this report.

## **WMU kicks off 2-year anti-violence emphasis**

By Bob Allen

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- A 110-year-old Southern Baptist women's group best known for missions support and education is turning its attention to reducing violence and promoting peace, both in the United States and abroad.

Woman's Missionary Union kicked off a two-year WMU emphasis entitled "Project HELP: Violence" at the auxiliary's annual meeting, held June 7-8. The theme of the meeting, held in conjunction with the June 9-11 Southern Baptist Convention in Salt Lake City, was "Peace Builders."

"We're called to be instruments of [God's] peace in a broken world," said WMU president Wanda Lee.

The program is designed to educate and involve Christians in reducing violence and promoting peace, according to a printed handout. It will focus on causes and consequences of violence in American communities and reduce violence through one-time, short-term and ongoing ministries.

It also will include an international project in Bosnia, to be conducted in partnership with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

"Someone has said our world is addicted to war," Dellanna O'Brien, WMU executive director, said in her annual report. About 100 million people have been killed in some 250 civil and international wars this century, and at any given time between 10 and 40 wars are in progress, she said.

O'Brien described the United States, meanwhile, as "the most violent nation in the world," boasting a homicide rate for men age 15-24 that is nine times higher than the second-highest nation and the world's largest prison population.

Violence has even infiltrated two places always regarded as "safe havens," she pointed out, churches and schools.

O'Brien said building peace will require "intentionality" and "risk taking" by WMU members. She also said it will take a "commitment of time," noting the organization's track record of rising above the prolonged infighting between conservatives and moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1980s.

"We, as members of WMU, long ago decided to keep our eyes focused on the cause which brought us together in the first place -- missions," O'Brien said. "We chose not to become embroiled in the controversy -- to

take a stand but not a side -- in an attempt to bring us together around God's great love for the nations and his desire to keep us on target."

As a result, she added, "countless numbers of Southern Baptists have kept the faith." She read from a recent commendation letter in which a pastor said WMU's concern, compassion and work for missions "has made the greatest difference for good in our denomination."

"Be encouraged. WMU is still the leading light for world missions education and creative mission ministry," O'Brien said.

The peacemaking emphasis fulfills a portion of WMU's mission statement challenging "Christian believers to understand and be radically involved in the mission of God," O'Brien said.

O'Brien said WMU has previously demonstrated that commitment by reaching out to AIDS patients and their families "when associations with them were less than popular," by including women from different cultures in the organization, by serving the poor and through volunteer mission trips.

"It is only as we embrace the needy, the suffering, the lost of the world with the love of the heavenly Father that we can be peacemakers," O'Brien said. "May it be so."

O'Brien offered a resolution, which met unanimous approval, calling on WMU to "commit ourselves to a full range of peace-building efforts."

Participants in the meeting also re-elected by acclamation their two national officers: president Wanda Lee of Columbus, Ga., and recording secretary Janet Hoffman of Bernice, La.

In a business session prior to the annual meeting, the WMU executive board increased the basic goal for the 1999 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions \$3 million to \$45 million and approved a challenge goal of \$50 million for the offering. The board also set a goal of \$115 million for the 1999 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions. For the year 2000 Annie Armstrong offering, the board established a basic goal of \$47 million and challenge goal of \$55 million.

A total of 1,190 women registered at the meeting, more than twice the attendance of last year's meeting in Dallas.

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-- Mark Kelly of the SBC International Mission Board contributed information to this story.

## **Campolo challenges WMU to make sacrifices for peace**

By Bob Allen

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- To become agents for peace, Christians must turn inward, asking God to cleanse them and thus transform the way they view their enemies, author Tony Campolo told Woman's Missionary Union members as the Southern Baptist Convention's auxiliary kicked off a two-year emphasis on violence.

Campolo, a professor of sociology at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa., said the first step in becoming a peacemaker is to begin to listen to God in prayer, rather than just reciting requests. Intimacy with God follows, which changes the way a Christian views the world, the poor and enemies, said Campolo, a popular speaker and author well known for his advocacy of radical Christianity and biting humor.

Campolo said Southern Baptists are good at talking to God, but they seldom take the time to wait in silence for God to speak. He urged WMU members to devote each day "five minutes of stillness where you empty yourself of everything" to let Jesus "fill you up with his Spirit."

He said Baptists also like to pray for forgiveness of sins, but that doesn't solve the problem of sin which makes people prone to violence.

"We need more than forgiveness," Campolo said. "We need cleansing."

"The reason we need to be cleansed is because that which makes for war is in us. There is hostility, there is meanness. There is all kind of selfishness and greed within us. The peace of God begins when he cleanses us."

Through an intimate relationship with God, "he changes your perception of the world around you," Campolo said, so that other people become "sacramental" -- that is, the presence of Christ becomes real as the Christian ministers to the poor and to enemies.

"One cannot be hostile to a person who is a sacramental presence of Jesus," Campolo said. He related an embarrassing encounter which "turned to reverence" as he embraced a street person who had offered him a drink of coffee because it tasted unusually good that morning and "when God gives you something good, you ought to share it."

"Of course, that not only goes for bums, it goes for nature itself," he continued. "That is why every Christian should be an environmentalist. When we talk about violence, we are talking about violence against all of God's creation."

"We also have to be at peace with our enemies," noting that many American Christians see no contradiction with wanting Rwanda and Bosnia to live in peace while glorifying American wars.

"If we want them to renounce war, then we have to renounce war, and we are not ready to do that," he said.

Campolo chided Southern Baptists for their public dispute about the authority of Scripture. "After you suckers prove the Bible is inerrant, you're not about to do what it tells you anyway," he bellowed. "It's about time you recognize this Bible says love your enemies. You suckers can't believe in capital punishment, either, because if you read the Bible it says 'blessed are the merciful.'"

But Campolo said he has been criticized most in the past for his views about money. "I find it hard to believe a person who is a Christian can go out and buy a BMW," he said, noting that many Southern Baptists have adopted the craze of wearing bracelets and T-shirts labeled WWJD for "what would Jesus do?"

"If Jesus was going to buy a car in a world where there is massive starvation, can you imagine him spending 60,000 bucks for a BMW or \$50,000 for a Mercedes?" he asked.

Campolo said he takes literally Jesus' words to the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, while most American Christians water the message down. "Did Jesus say what he meant? Did he mean what he said?"

"Hey, Campolo!" he shouted. "You're making it difficult for rich people to get into heaven. Hey, that's not my line. Someone else said that."

"How radical is this gospel? Does it mean we're ready to give up killing? When are we going to reject the insanity of all this? When are we going to be the peacemakers that the Beatitudes call us to be?" he asked.

Campolo said peacemaking must extend to "even people that the church gives a hard time to," such as homosexuals. "You don't have to approve of somebody to love him. If you did, Jesus would never have loved you."

"Peace is seeing other people as sacramental, even your enemies, and thus being rendered incapable of hurting them," Campolo said. "Peace is living in harmony with the world Christ created. Peace is being cleansed of the hostility and the darkness of our souls."

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## **Imitating culture has formed 'haze' over church, speaker says**

By Mark Wingfield

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- Attempting to be too much like the secular culture has left the American church lost in a haze without direction, Ronnie Floyd told the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference June 8.

"There is a strange haze over the church of Jesus Christ in America today," said Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church of Springdale, Ark. "The haze is so thick at times that it is difficult to see what is really going on around us."

Pastors "have the challenge of navigating the church through this strange haze," which Floyd said comes from "the fires of our culture, the power Satan is ushering all through our culture."

Rather than seeking to get closer to the culture, the church must separate itself from the culture in order to see more clearly, he said. "The closer we get to the culture, the more we lose our visibility."

The challenge is to be close enough to the culture to make a difference but far away enough not to be affected by it, Floyd declared.

He compared the challenge of the modern church to the situation faced by the early church at Corinth. That church, which became ensnared in controversy, scandal and trouble, attempted to have a "user-friendly" message, Floyd noted.

That's just like the modern church, he added. "We are so interested in being cute and being relevant to the culture that we now have lost our edge on it."

Being user-friendly is not consistent with the nature of the gospel, Floyd said.

"Let's set the record straight: There's nothing friendly about the cross," he said. "The cross of Jesus Christ is not a user-friendly message. It is an offensive message. If one is not offended by it, one cannot be saved by it. If you do not stumble at the cross, then you will stumble into hell."

Instead, Floyd called pastors to live and work "above the cultural edge" by "living dead," serving Christ, preaching the word of God and selling out to God's control.

Another preacher in the Monday afternoon session compared the American church to ancient Rome, where tolerance was a supreme virtue and people were ridiculed for not going along with the evils of the culture.

In facing such a challenge again, Christians must not be ashamed of the gospel, said Mike Hamlet, pastor of North Spartanburg First Baptist Church in Spartanburg, N.C.

Hamlet spoke about three characteristics of those who are unashamed of the gospel: They have been changed by the power of Jesus Christ, commissioned by God and have a sense of courage.

Also during the Monday afternoon session, three Pastors' Conference officers were elected by acclamation. The new president is Hamlet, who spoke immediately prior to the election. He was nominated by Ed Young, former Southern Baptist Convention president and pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston.

Other officers are Tom Atwood, vice president, pastor of First Baptist Church of Oxford, Miss., and Paul Purvis, secretary, pastor of First Baptist Church of Conyers, Ga.

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## **Put poor on political map, eligible leaders urge**

By Marie Biggs

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- U.S. lawmakers should be more responsive to the needs of low-income Americans, religious leaders said at a Capitol Hill gathering.

The religious leaders gathered June 1 in a U.S. House of Representatives office building to hold the first "preach-in for the poor." The event was hosted by Rep. Tony Hall, D-Ohio, and was sponsored by Call to Renewal, a progressive evangelical group created to provide an alternative voice to the Religious Right.

"The most important thing in Congress is to work for the poor people," Hall said.

Jim Wallis, editor of Sojourners magazine and convener of Call to Renewal, said, "It is important that we remember that morality is also about how we treat the poor, which Jesus said was the true test of faith."

Wallis said it is part of the Great Commission to care for the poor and that he disagrees with the government "dumping" the poor out on the streets before they can support themselves.

"We need to put the poor people back on the map of politics [because] they have become missing persons," Wallis said.

A Call to Renewal press release cited Business Week Associate Editor Aaron Bernstein's observation that, "a year after Congress passed its overhaul of the nation's welfare system, there's increasing evidence that millions of single mothers and immigrant families are being driven further into poverty."

The press release summarized reports from across the nation detailing the impact of welfare reform on the impoverished within the last year. According to the release, some of the effects include:

-- Second Harvest, the nation's largest network of food banks, reported a 10 percent to 35 percent increase in demand for food assistance among its 11,240 agencies.

-- The International Union of Gospel Missions reported that 20 percent of those checking into rescue missions have become homeless because of the loss of government benefits in the past year.

-- The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported a 12 percent increase in demand for space at homeless shelters. At the preach-in event, James Forbes, senior minister of Riverside Church in New York, said the faith community needs to help those in need.

"We need to deliver them by caring, by offering not a hand out but a helping hand," Forbes said.

Forbes urged people of faith to speak out against poverty and to stand up for what is right. He suggested that affluent Americans need to show the poor that they count.

Wallace Charles Smith, senior minister of Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., said Jesus was an outcast in his time in the same way that the poor are outcasts today.

"God can take those whom the world denies and put them on a street called Straight," Smith said.

Nancy Sehested, pastor of Sweet Fellowship Baptist Church in Clyde, N.C., compared the plight of the impoverished to that of the Biblical character Naomi. According to the story, after losing several family members, Naomi had changed her name to Mara -- meaning bitter.

"The poor are bitter with disappointment," Sehested said, adding "there are things that you and I can do."

Sociologist Tony Campolo of Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa., told preach-in participants that Jesus said to not worry about those that hurt the body but those that hurt the soul.

"These that walk away from the poor are in serious trouble because God is on the side of the poor," Campolo said.

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## **Tithe protection bill passes Congress, heads to president**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives has passed a bill designed to protect tithes and other charitable donations from bankruptcy laws which have been used to confiscate donations given by bankrupt donors.

The House amended the bill June 4 to conform to a Senate version which passed in May. President Clinton is expected to sign the bill.

The Religious Liberty and Charitable Donation Protection Act would bar bankruptcy courts from confiscating contributions to religious organizations and other charities to pay creditors. It would protect tithes and other contributions of up to 15 percent of the debtor's annual income.

The measure would also permit debtors in Chapter 13 bankruptcy to tithe during their repayment period.

The bill is sponsored by Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and Rep. Ron Packard, R-Calif.

Current federal bankruptcy laws have been interpreted to allow the confiscation of funds given during the year before a donor declared bankruptcy. Some state fraudulent transfer laws have allowed creditors to recover funds donated over several years. The bill would bar creditors from recovering charitable gifts under state laws.

Before the House approved its version of the bill by a voice vote, Packard said: "A person often in times of financial and other problems turns to God and their church for strength and for blessings. To close those windows of heaven and prevent God from pouring out a blessing at the very time that bankrupt families need his blessings would be unconscionable."

Packard added: "I do not believe that a church or a charity that receives a tithe or a donation ought to have to check the financial background of the donor before they donate. They certainly should not be penalized for receiving a donation from anybody, but that is exactly what current law requires."

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