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## **Passport/Disney partnership offers a different kind of camp**

By Ashlee Ross

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- "They send you through the building in the dark. I've heard that this window comes flying at you. Then, they drop you three times and take your picture."

This isn't your typical church-camp experience.

These teenagers are attending Passport, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-affiliated camp with a missions focus. And they're waiting in line for the Tower of Terror at Walt Disney World's MGM Studios.

For the first time in its six-year history, Passport held two weeks of its summer camps at Disney World in Orlando, Fla. While campers obviously aren't observing the Southern Baptist Convention's boycott of Disney theme parks, products and subsidiaries, this goes beyond denominational politics and is not a statement on the boycott in any way, camp coordinators say.

"It wasn't in reaction to anything," said Colleen Burroughs, Passport's vice president. "Both Passports that we've started, the regular camp and this one, have been an effort to create something new as opposed to what's already in existence."

In fact, Passport leaders began discussing the possibility of working with Disney's Youth Educational Series to provide a full experience for the campers even before the nation's largest Protestant faith group urged church members to refrain from patronizing Disney last summer.

"The fact that Disney would even let us partner with them in a program in a million-dollar facility was kind of overwhelming," Burroughs said. "We basically took about half of their program and put in what we wanted to about Christian education."

The first day of camp focused on American history and freedom. The camp met at the Hall of Presidents, and YES facilitators discussed the importance of freedom. Adding a religious spin to the lesson, Passport leaders discussed the importance of religious freedom and the spiritual freedom experienced by Christians.

"Our take was the Bill of Rights, the separation of church and state, religious freedom and what the founding fathers had to say about that. That's obviously an important Baptist distinctive," said David Burroughs, Passport's president.

The second day of camp focused on multi-cultural education, and the camp met in the China and Morocco sections of EPCOT. Campers met with cultural representatives from each country who discussed the nation's history and religion.

"We talked about Buddhism and what it's like to be a missionary in a Buddhist country or Islamic country," Colleen Burroughs said.

On the last full day of camp, the focus was the environment and God's command to care for the world. Campers spent the morning at the Living Seas and the Land centers at EPCOT. YES facilitators discussed each person's responsibility to care for the environment, and Passport counselors discussed what the Bible teaches about God's creation.

The only comments on the Southern Baptist Disney boycott -- which protests company policies that some critics say promote homosexuality and immorality -- came from the campers.

"I think it's kind of hypocritical almost, because it seems to be such a big news issue and then they're very welcoming to us," said Ellen Alford, a high-school junior from River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. "They've been very nice. We get into the parks before everyone else. They've been very accommodating. They've made special arrangements for us."

Chester Phelps, a youth minister at River Road Baptist Church, said he was asked to participate in Passport at Disney World the same day the Southern Baptist Convention voted to boycott Disney.

"There was no way that their program, Youth Educational Series, and Passport together could be a bad program," Phelps said. "It hasn't been. It's been a wonderful program for our young people."

Camp director Rob Fox said the Disney environment offers hands-on opportunities and gives campers a lot of information at once. He said this helps keep the campers' attention, especially in their information-driven world.

"The way they see the world is so much different than the way I saw the world when I was growing up," Fox said. "They're exposed to so much more. It just seems like information abounds."

Another difference in Passport and other camps is women's active leadership roles. In addition to being Passport's vice president, Colleen Burroughs also served as the camp pastor.

Anna Katherine Ellerman, a camp counselor, will enter Duke Divinity School in the fall. She plans to work as a hospital chaplain and later to earn a Ph.D. in religious studies. She said Colleen's leadership was an example for her and a non-issue with the kids.

"Her messages are so very powerful and so very full of the Holy Spirit that gender doesn't even become an issue anymore. She's extremely gifted," Ellerman said.

Although it's not a big deal for most campers, using women in Passport's leadership roles is an intentional effort to challenge stereotypes such as women cannot serve as pastors.

"We are very intentional about it," David Burroughs said. "These kids see it in the summer for a couple of years and they get used to the idea. Ten years from now, when they're on a pastor-search committee and a female's resume comes across the desk, they won't automatically throw it in the trash can."

In addition to being led by a woman, Passport's worship service differs from some other camps in that it avoids pressuring youths to accept Christ or enter full-time Christian service. Leaders offer a low-pressure invitation by urging students with questions to talk to their youth ministers.

"It is definitely a part of camp that you have an invitation to come to know Christ. That's always a part of camp," Colleen Burroughs said. "But we realize that a lot of the kids who come to camp year after year are already Christians, so they need a little bit more challenge in discipleship training to grow some. It's not just about rededicating your life every year."

In the past, Passport has been held at Stetson University in DeLand, Fla. The regular camp focuses on missions and includes a week-long project, such as building a home with Habitat for Humanity. The typical Passport camp focuses on mission action while the Disney camp emphasizes mission education.

"Our effort is not to directly compete with what's already there and to create another cookie-cutter of a camp," Colleen Burroughs said. "It just seemed like a unique opportunity."

David Mears, pastor of Corinth Baptist Church in Vance, S.C., brought nine people to Passport the second year the camp was in operation. Last year, Mears brought 45 campers and chaperons.

"It has been a high point in the Christian education of our youth," Mears said. "It isn't the week of camp. It spreads out over the months of the year."

Mears said the size of the youth group has tripled, and unchurched kids have stayed in the youth group after going to Passport.

"We see the kids who have gone to Passport bringing new kids to church," Mears said.

Each summer, Passport takes up an offering for a CBF missions need that will not be met by another source. In the two weeks of camp at Disney World, students raised more than \$2,860 for CBF's mission efforts at a Bedouin camp in Jordan.

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## **Senate committee considers religious-liberty protection bill**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An official of the Mormon church told U.S. Senators at a hearing June 23 that a new law bolstering religious liberty is needed to protect minority faiths.

"The Bill of Rights protects principles, not constituencies," said Elder Dallin Oaks, member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Oaks testified at a Senate hearing on the Religious Liberty Protection Act.

RLPA would restore special protections for religion stripped in a 1990 Supreme Court ruling. It is similar to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which Congress approved but the Supreme Court struck down last year.

Under the law, governments could not pass generally applied laws which happen to burden religion unless they use the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling interest such as health or safety. It is sponsored by Sens. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah and Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Reps. Charles Canady, R-Fla., and Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y.

Oaks told the Senate Judiciary Committee that worshipers who need the protections in the proposed law "are the beleaguered minorities, not the influential constituent elements of the majority."

Hatch, who is also a Mormon, said "hostility to religious freedom comes more subtly from the blind, bureaucratic behemoth of the regulatory state."

"As it imposes its arbitrary rules into every corner of our lives, it seems unable to somehow to cope with the infinite variety of religious experiences in America," said Hatch, the committee chairman.

Hatch said Mormons, for example, "are no longer driven from state to state, and their extermination is no longer an explicit state policy, but they are still told they cannot build their temples in certain towns."

Oaks said Mormons tried to build a temple in Forest Hills, Tenn., but found there were no sites available with the appropriate zoning designation for a church structure. The church finally selected a site that stood adjacent to three other church buildings of different denominations, and petitioned the city to build a church that was "well within the specification of other churches."

"Despite these facts the city rejected the church's petition for a zoning change and made it clear that it would not approve any site or temple within the city because the city leaders believed that another church building would detract from the city's aesthetics and would lead to increased traffic," he said.

The new law was drafted after the Supreme Court struck down RFRA, saying Congress exceeded its constitutional authority in imposing the law on the states. The new law would be enforced mainly through Congress' spending powers.

A broad coalition of religious and civil-liberties groups in the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion helped draft the legislation. Supporting the bill are groups including the American Jewish Committee, Baptist Joint Committee, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Christian Legal Society, National Association of Evangelicals and National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

In a press release distributed at the hearing, Kennedy said: "Like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, our new bill does not dictate a particular outcome. In some cases plaintiffs will win, in others, they will lose. In many cases, a lawsuit will never be filed, and the Religious Liberty Protection Act will simply serve as a guidepost for negotiations between individuals and their local and state representatives."

Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said the "vast majority of Americans are correct in their intuitive sense that religious liberty has lost significant ground in recent years and that the courts in general, and the Supreme Court in particular, no longer share most Americans' conviction that religious liberty should be cherished and protected to the greatest practical extent."

Land said the *Boerne vs. Flores* decision, in which RFRA was ruled unconstitutional, is "the worst religious-liberty decision in my lifetime."

Elliot Minberg, vice president and legal director for People For the American Way, said government should be neutral in its policies toward religion.

"Sometimes ... true neutrality means that religion must be treated a little differently," he said. He said a policy applied to religion in the same way it is applied to secular activities can sometimes hinder the free exercise of religion.

Minberg discussed how religious clubs gathering under the Equal Access Act are treated differently to assure the First Amendment's establishment clause is not violated. "Even though a paid public-school teacher could be asked to guide and participate substantively in the activities of a chess club, the act specifically provides that teachers or other school employees can be present at a religious club meeting 'only in a nonparticipatory capacity.'"

Similarly, Minberg added, religion is sometimes treated differently out of concern for the First Amendment's free-exercise clause. At least prior to the high court's 1990 *Employment Division vs. Smith* decision, he noted, "a town could decide to prohibit the consumption of alcohol, but would need to prove a compelling interest in order to apply that prohibition to a church that used wine in conjunction with Communion." The *Smith* decision spawned the creation of RFRA.

A second panel consisted of several lawyers who addressed a recent House hearing on RLPA.

Marci Hamilton, professor of law at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University, criticized the fact that a broad coalition of religious groups had joined together to pass the bill.

In her written statement, Hamilton, who argued against RFRA's constitutionality before the Supreme Court, said that "for those who take comfort from the fact that RLPA is supported by a wide cross-section of religions, I leave you with the words of Framer Rufus King, one of the youngest members of the Constitutional Convention but a Harvard graduate who was highly respected on structural issues: 'If the clergy combine, they will have their influence on government.'"

It is unclear whether Congress will have time to vote on RLPA before the session ends.

## **Education savings bill clears Congress; Clinton veto expected**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate gave final congressional approval to a bill that would provide tax breaks for parents who send children to private and religious schools, but the measure is expected to be vetoed by President Clinton.

The education savings accounts were included in part of a larger package of education reforms.

The 59-36 Senate vote on June 23 and a 225-197 vote earlier in the House of Representative were both short of the two-thirds majority necessary to override a presidential veto.

The measure cleared the Senate on a largely party-line vote with two Republicans opposing it and eight Democrats supporting it.

The proposal, sponsored by Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., would allow families to invest up to \$2,000 per year, per child, in tax-advantaged education IRAs. The accounts would earn tax-free interest and withdrawals could be used to pay education expenses from kindergarten through college at public, private and religious schools.

Current law provides a \$500 per year savings account that can be used only for higher education.

During the Senate debate, Coverdell said the bill would benefit 14 million families representing more than 20 million children, about half the school population.

Backers estimate the proposal would provide about \$1.5 billion in tax breaks and lead to \$12 billion in savings earmarked for education.

"It is a plus," Coverdell said. "We are causing billions of new dollars to come of the aid of educators and education."

Opponents charged that the bill would largely benefit the well-off.

"Treasury Department analyses conclude that 70 percent of the tax benefits from this provision would go to the top 20 percent of all income earners," said Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y.

"This bill will not result in greater opportunity for middle- and lower-income families to send children to private schools, as supporters contend," Moynihan said. "Instead, it will merely provide new tax breaks to families already able to afford private schools for their children."

Clinton recently informed House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., that he would veto the education bill if it contained the education savings accounts because they are "bad education policy and bad tax policy."

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## **High court sidesteps dispute over choir's religious music**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court declined June 26 to hear a former Utah high school student's claim that her First Amendment rights were violated by the alleged promotion of religion by her music teacher.

Left standing were two lower court decisions dismissing Rachel Bauchman's federal complaint against choir teacher Richard Torgerson and other officials at West High School in Salt Lake City.

During the 1994-95 school year, Bauchman, then a sophomore, auditioned and was admitted to Torgerson's choir class. At the end of the school year she filed a lawsuit charging that her First Amendment rights were violated by Torgerson's selection of Christian music for the choir to perform and the scheduling of performances at religious settings such as churches.

Bauchman also alleged that after she and her parents expressed opposition to Torgerson's selection of songs and performance sites, the choir director criticized her in front of classmates and called attention before the class to the fact that she is a Jew.

After a federal district court dismissed her claim, Bauchman appealed to the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, where a three-judge panel voted 2-1 to uphold the dismissal. The full court declined to review the panel's ruling.

The appeals court panel said it could identify "a number of plausible secular purposes for the defendants' conduct," noting that a "significant percentage of serious choral music is based on religious themes or text." Also, the court said performances may have been scheduled at churches not for religious reasons but because such facilities are "acoustically superior to high school auditoriums or gymnasiums."

The appeals court said the choir activities did not have a primary effect of endorsing religion. A reasonable observer, the court said, would not see the inclusion of religious songs, along with a variety of secular songs, as advancement of religion.

The appeals court also rejected the Jewish student's claim that being required to practice and perform Christian devotional music violated her free-exercise rights.

"The fact that Ms. Bauchman had a choice whether or not to sing songs she believed infringed upon her exercise of religious freedom, with no adverse impact on her academic record, negates the element of coercion and therefore defeats her free exercise claim," the court said.

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## **Study gives insight to religious, political behavior**

By Marv Knox

OXNARD, Calif. (ABP) -- Most Americans believe these are the "good old days," according to a new survey by the Barna Research Group, an observer of U.S. religious trends.

"Most Americans possess a positive view of life at the end of the 20th century," reported George Barna, the firm's president and founder.

"Three out of four (75 percent) say they are either completely or mostly satisfied with their life these days," Barna said. "A similar portion (76 percent) are 'excited about the future.'"

Two-thirds of Americans told researchers they are comfortable financially. Meanwhile, only about one-third indicated they feel "stressed out," and a similar number said they are "searching for meaning in life."

"One of the reasons underlying people's sense of security is their religious faith," Barna said. "Overall, seven out of 10 Americans describe themselves as religious, and nearly two-thirds say they are 'a committed Christian.'"

Several other indicators revealed faith is vital to most Americans, he added.

For example, 83 percent said "religious faith is very important" to them.

This feeling pervades even the "least overtly religious segments of the population," Barna said. He cited agreement with this statement among vast majorities of men (77 percent), residents of the Northeast (77 percent), single adults (79 percent), Baby Busters (81 percent) and liberals (74 percent).

Research shows Christianity is holding its own, even in a day of religious pluralism, he said.

"Despite all of the talk about the encroachment of non-Christian faiths in America, the reality is that more than four out of five people still view themselves as Christian," he said. "The real transformations relate to what people believe the content of the Christian faith to be and how dedicated they are to living out the precepts of Christianity.

"The fact that so many people behave in ways that contradict the principles of the faith they claim to possess may be attributed to spiritual ignorance as much as to cultural seduction."

The new research reveals "people view life in very different ways," Barna said. He cited several demographic factors that help determine Americans' outlook:

-- Gender.

"Women emerged as much more likely than men to describe themselves as religious (76 percent versus 64 percent), as Christian (86/77) and as a committed Christian (69/53)," he said.

"Men were more than twice as likely as women to declare that they are atheist, agnostic or have no religious faith (15 percent versus 6 percent)."

-- Financial status.

Increase in income reduces Americans' religious ties, the survey showed.

"Upscale individuals also tend to be more satisfied with life, more excited about the future and more apt to believe they are seen as leaders and are more likely to acknowledge living in financial comfort," Barna explained. "The affluent are less likely to ... be searching for meaning in life."

-- Ethnicity.

White adults are the Americans who are most likely to feel satisfied with their life, to say they are financially comfortable and to describe themselves as Christian, research discovered.

Conversely, non-whites are almost twice as prone to search for life's meaning and to feel stressed out.

-- Age.

Baby Busters--Americans from 18 to 32--are the least likely to say they are religious (62 percent), Christian (72 percent) or committed Christians (46 percent).

Baby Boomers--age 33 to 51--are the ones most likely to define themselves as leaders (69 percent) and financially comfortable (68 percent).

Older Americans--age 52 and up--are the most religious, most pervasively Christian, the most satisfied with their lives and the most likely to be conservative.

-- Location.

People who live in the Northeast are the least likely to be politically conservative. They paired with residents of the West to be the Americans least likely to be religious and Christian.

Residents in the South and Midwest hold similar views and are more likely than people elsewhere to describe themselves as religious, Christian and committed Christians.

-- Marriage.

Married people are more likely than singles to define themselves as religious, Christian, committed Christians, conservative, financially comfortable, leaders and satisfied with life, the survey showed.

Singles are more inclined to search for meaning and to be politically liberal.

-- Parenthood.

Adults with children under age 18 who live at home are more likely than empty-nest parents to admit they are searching for meaning, stressed and also excited about the future. They also are only half as likely as empty-nesters to say they are liberal.

## **North Korea famine worsening, says pastor just back from visit**

By Orville Scott and Robert O'Brien

HOUSTON (ABP) -- The plight of famine victims has worsened since he was first in North Korea last November, said Yoo Jong Yoon, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's Asian network.

Yoon, in Houston for CBF's general assembly, June 25-27, returned to the United States May 23 after arranging for delivery of 240 tons of corn purchased with funds contributed through the Atlanta-based Fellowship.

Yoon, a Dallas pastor, purchased the corn for starving North Koreans with \$41,000 of CBF funds. He also used \$10,000, donated by the Korean American Sharing Movement of Dallas, to buy 5,000 pairs of shoes for distribution in schools and orphanages. CBF has sent another \$47,000 for North Korean famine victims through the Baptist World Alliance.

Additional contributions of about \$25,000 to North Korea hunger relief have increased CBF's total to about \$113,000, CBF staffer Tom Prevost told the Fellowship's global-missions ministries group, meeting in Houston, June 25.

The group voted to distribute the additional funds through the BWA and the Asian Network.

North Korea, which still considers the United States an enemy 40 years after the Korean War, has been beset in recent years by a series of natural disasters and economic hardship. Ironically, the famine opened the road to the peace table.

That word came from John LaNoue of Dallas, who spent 85 days in Korea last fall, monitoring food shipments by non-governmental humanitarian organizations, including 130 tons supplied by Texas Baptists. He traveled to Korea under the auspices of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board and Amigos Internacionales, a non-profit relief and development organization based in Waco, Texas.

LaNoue, of the Texas Baptist Men's organization, was told at a debriefing with a U.S. congressional committee that the humanitarian relief was instrumental in bringing North Korea to a peace summit in Geneva.

Yoon, pastor of Glory Baptist Church in Dallas, has maintained close communication with Paul Montacute, who directs Baptist World Aid, relief arm of the BWA.

BWAid thus far has used about \$6,000 of the \$47,000 previously allotted by CBF to support grain shipments to North Korea through the Canadian Food Grains Bank by Canadian Baptists, Montacute said. The remainder paid for large quantities of food, medicine and seed.

Montacute said BWAid sought "to multiply the value of the dollars received by working to find donated goods to ship."

For example, he said, BWAid paid \$15,676 to ship a container of donated medicine "with a wholesale value exceeding \$690,000." Through mid June, the BWA has also paid another \$13,293 to buy and ship 45,000 pounds of food to North Korea, \$24,000 to buy corn seed in China, and about \$2,000 for on-site food distribution costs, according to Lee Hickman in the BWAid office in McLean, Va.

"People are hungrier and more malnourished than when we were there last fall," said Yoon, who has traveled twice to North Korea since his first visit last November.

Korean Texas Baptists, he said, have donated \$20,000 for North Korean famine relief through the Baptist General Convention of Texas and are looking for additional ways to become involved in physical and spiritual ministries.

"Our purpose is to deliver relief aid and open opportunities for the spread of the gospel," Yoon said.

After his most recent trip, Yoon reported that adults are allowed only a handful of corn per day -- "and corn is all they have."

"There's no sugar; no oil. Corn alone cannot provide enough nutrients," he said.

"May, June and July are critical months. There's a possibility they may have some harvest in July, but they badly need fertilizer. An official in North Korea's Compatriot Department told me, 'If you can find fertilizer, we will send a ship to get it. With fertilizer, farmers can produce five to six times as much food.'"

In Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, Yoon visited the nursery area of a hospital where officials told him newborns are much smaller than they were a few years ago, and many die from malnutrition within a few days after they are born.

When he asked why critically ill infants weren't put into incubators, the administrator explained that only two of the hospital's incubators are operable.

"Could you send us 10 incubators, even second-hand ones?" the official asked.

Yoon observed malnourished workers lying beneath the trees, obviously lacking the energy to do their jobs.

And he recalled an even more pitiful sight at one of the country's eight government orphanages that has nearly tripled its population.

Many children lay motionless on mattresses on the floor -- their skinny limbs and swollen stomachs graphic evidence of famine, he said.

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## **Fellowship endorses first military chaplains**

By Robert O'Brien

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Capt. James Harwood, assigned to the U.S. Navy Chief of Chaplains Office in Washington, D.C., has become the first military chaplain endorsed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Endorsement of Harwood and four other chaplain applicants increased CBF's total to 15, CBF staffer Gary Baldridge told the Fellowship's global-missions ministries group meeting preceding the group's 1998 General Assembly in Houston.

Besides Harwood, a 25-year Navy veteran, other military chaplains endorsed were Navy Cmdr. James Pope, an 18-year veteran based in Point Mugu, Calif.; Navy Lt. Cmdr. Thomas McGathy, a 14-year veteran based in San Diego, Calif.; and Eric Smith, a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Council on Endorsement also approved Robert Randolph, chaplain at the Juvenile Evaluation Center of the North Carolina Division of Youth Services, Swannanoa, N.C. He is a native of Asheville, N.C.

Military applicants became officially eligible for CBF endorsement after the Armed Forces Chaplains Board voted June 3 that the Fellowship meets U.S. Defense Department criteria as "an ecclesiastical endorsing agent to nominate clergy for the military chaplaincy." The applications of the four military chaplains are in process with their respective branches of the service to change their endorsing agent to CBF.

The Fellowship, a group for moderate Southern Baptists, voted last year to begin endorsing chaplains, counselors and ministers in other specialized settings to provide an alternative to Southern Baptist Convention endorsement. CBF's Council on Endorsement, established last November, had endorsed 10 chaplains and counselors, mainly in the health-care field, before the latest group was announced in Houston.

Harwood, a Virginia resident and Oklahoma native, directs plans, programs and professional development on the staff of the Navy Chief of Chaplains in Washington.

Pope, a native of Clinton, N.C., and former Southern Baptist home missionary, is currently command chaplain at the Naval Air Weapons Station in Point Mugu. He is on the Navy's list for promotion to captain and possible transfer.

McGathy, a native of Opp, Ala., was recently transferred to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego after a tour of duty in Los Angeles with the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service programming religious broadcasts for overseas military personnel.

Smith, a native of Florida who grew up in Mississippi, currently works in Fort Worth as a case manager for Tarrant County mental health and retardation services and as a bivocational chaplain at a nursing home.

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## **Baptist Women in Ministry meet, worship in Houston**

By Ashlee Ross

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Baptist Women in Ministry approved a budget and elected new board members in an annual meeting during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's General Assembly.

The group approved a 1998-1999 budget of \$55,750, up more than \$11,000 over the current fiscal year.

Prior to a lunch and business session June 25, Baptist Women in Ministry held a worship service at Willow Meadows Baptist Church in Houston titled "And the Spirit will Dance."

Dawn Darwin Weaks, associate pastor at Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas, preached to the group about empowering other women to participate in ministry.

"No, others do not always include us," she said. She cited Bible passages Gen. 1:27, Joel 2:28 and Gal. 3:28 to defend her decision to enter the ministry.

"I used them to argue my call all the way through college," Weaks said.

Worshippers also watched an interpretive dance performed to the hymn "O Happy Day" and tied ribbons around their wrists symbolizing the blood of a woman who had gone before them to help pave the way for women in ministry.

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## **South Carolina student addresses BJC body**

By Ashlee Ross

HOUSTON (ABP) -- The Baptist Joint Committee's Religious Liberty Council held its annual luncheon June 26 during the meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Houston.

The group's guest speaker was Sterling Dowling, an 18-year-old South Carolina student. When a school board member asked Dowling if he would support "honoring God by posting the Ten Commandments in your school," Dowling said he "would not go for it."

Dowling answered the board member, "Individual liberty, sir, individual liberty."

Dowling spoke to the council on the importance of individual liberty and its roots in America's founding.

"I challenge you to maintain your strong beliefs" and "to speak your mind," Dowling said.

BJC General Counsel Brent Walker gave a congressional update on the Istook amendment, the Religious Liberty Protection Act and the Freedom from Religious Persecution Bill.

Melissa Rogers, associate general counsel, urged RLC members to recruit others and to write letters to the editor praising the defeat of the Istook amendment.

Bill Lawson, pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, also spoke about the importance of preserving religious liberty.

The Religious Liberty Council is a member body of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee formed after the Southern Baptist Convention severed ties with the BJC in 1991. It is comprised of moderate Southern Baptists who continue to support the 62-year-old religious-liberty agency.

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## **New Age beliefs challenged by seminary professor in new book**

By Cindy Kerr

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Whether crystals or karma, reincarnation or Ramtha, channeling or Gaia, self spirituality or positive thinking, New Age elements are being mixed in any combination and served up on a plate to millions worldwide, says a Baptist seminary professor in his new book.

Yet while many point fingers at New Age influence in today's society, few meet it head-on with substantial proof that the movement contradicts what the Bible teaches, says John Newport, in his recent book, "The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview: Conflict and Dialogue."

"This work is unique because it not only teaches what New Agers believe," said Newport, distinguished professor emeritus of philosophy of religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. "It gives the biblical approach and provides Bible teaching that answers New Age teaching."

The book, with its systematic look at the multi-faceted New Age movement, includes chapters addressing the New Age and ecology, health, business, education, science, the arts, history and the occult. It also counters criticism often used by New Agers against Christianity.

Newport first noticed emerging interest in the New Age in the early 1970s when, as a guest professor at Rice University, he was asked to teach a course devoted to comparing the New Age and biblical world views. But his interest began much earlier. During post-graduate studies, Newport encountered Karl Barth at the University at Basel, Switzerland, and Emil Brunner at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. From them, Newport gained an interest in Christian apologetics.

"If this is the contemporary alternative and challenge to the biblical worldview, we as Christians need first to understand the New Age movement, its views and its criticism of the biblical worldview," said Newport. "Then we must be prepared to meet this challenge with a fresh witness of the Christian gospel."

New Agers seemingly have the upper hand on some issues, such as health and ecology, that Christians often wrongfully neglect, according to Newport.

"The Bible teaches a marvelous balance of the physical and spiritual, the total person of which is made in God's image," he said. "The body is not evil; it is the temple of the Holy Spirit and yet a majority of Christians are overweight."

"Romans 8 teaches that God created the world not as our mother, a New Age identification, but as our dwelling place that will be redeemed," continued Newport. "As New Agers often protest, Christians are involved in all humanity's rape of creation. In light of Romans 8, Christians must recognize nature as part of God's redemptive plan, and thus extend social action and proclamation in that direction under correct spiritual and theological principles."

While Christianity may identify with some New Age teachings that contain elements of often overlooked truth, two things make Christianity unique, Newport says: creation is in God's image and the cross is a testimony of sacrificial love.

"In my book I make a case for the fact that while Christianity is a religion always in renewal, it stands on basic principles found in the Bible, not on those we tend to create ourselves," Newport said.

"I'm calling for a constant re-study of the Bible in order to be sure we have its total teaching, since often we twist it into our own private purposes. Remember that once we justified slavery from [misuse of] the Bible. The truth of Scripture not only stands in conflict to the New Age; it also opens up opportunities for dialogue. If we believe and take seriously what the New Age is teaching us -- that all people have religious interest -- there is a new urgency for evangelism and missions. People seem incurably religious, and we must meet them not with cold, hard religion, a New Age critique of Christianity, but with a sense of community," he added.

Thirty-five evangelical churches in the San Francisco Bay area recently sponsored a lay-led seminar based on the contents of the book.

"The success of that seminar," Newport said, "revealed how dialogue can open an avenue to a fresh understanding and appreciation of the biblical worldview.

"God plows up the soil at different times," Newport said. "The New Age is another indication that God is plowing up our nation and world as humanity hungers for meaning and purpose."

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