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## **Dunn announces transition at Baptist Joint Committee**

By Larry Chesser and Kenny Byrd

GREEN LAKE, Wis. (ABP) -- James Dunn has announced he will step aside from his role as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee by Sept. 1, 1999, when he will become a visiting professor of Christianity and Public Policy at the Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Dunn, who has headed the BJC since January 1981, told the agency's directors he would stay on after that date on a part-time basis. He pledged to continue to serve the religious-liberty agency "in a different role as long as my health, my successor and our mutual understanding of the Lord's leading allow me to do so."

During their annual meeting, Oct. 5-6 in Green Lake, Wis., the BJC directors accepted Dunn's proposal. They named an 11-member search committee and a five-person committee to determine the title, compensation and related details of Dunn's reduced role.

Dunn, who will be 67 by next September, said the transition "will represent a change in pace, not a change in place."

Dunn and the BJC directors discussed his future part-time role with the agency in the areas of speaking, writing and development. Details of Dunn's new role are expected to be presented to the BJC's executive committee in March.

BJC chairman Aidsand Wright-Riggins said Dunn "has been the most dynamic personality for religious liberty in the United States over the past 18 years. The vacuum created by his announcement is a very huge space -- largely due to his perspective, his political savvy, his persistence."

While Dunn is stepping out of the executive director's role, "our hope and full expectation is that he will step into new areas of responsibility that will help us to build on the legacy that he's created," said Wright-Riggins, director of National Ministries for American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal said Dunn "was and is a Baptist statesman, a prophetic voice and a caring person. Only time will tell and the historical record will show his impact of Baptist life at a tumultuous and transitional time. I'm grateful to be called his friend."

After his announcement, other board members called Dunn the "quintessential freedom fighter," a "mighty champion for human rights" and an "authentic and refreshing leader."

Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, told Dunn she had identified him with the issue of religious liberty since she was 20 years old.

"For me, religious liberty and the separation of church and state have had a face and it's always been your face," she said.

At Wake Forest, Dunn will teach an elective course titled "Christianity and Public Policy," according to Bill Leonard, dean of the divinity school.

"James Dunn is recognized inside and outside the Baptist community as one of the foremost analysts of church-state issues in the United States," Leonard said.

"In his work at the Baptist Joint Committee, James has faithfully articulated Baptist ways of responding to matters of religious liberty, justice and hope."

Dunn will be part of a five-person faculty when the divinity school opens next fall. He will be joined by renowned Hebrew scholar Phyllis Trible; theologian Frank Tupper, a former colleague of Leonard's at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; and church history and spirituality expert Father Samuel Weber, a Roman Catholic priest and Benedictine monk.

Leonard said the school will open with 35 students from a variety of denominational traditions and is expected to grow to 135-150 students within three years.

Dunn's tenure at the Baptist Joint Committee coincided with more than a decade of unrest that left conservatives in power in the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the founding bodies of the BJC. As the SBC moved away from its strong commitment to the separation of church and state, Dunn and the BJC became frequent targets of the new SBC leadership. The BJC's refusal to back new SBC positions on issues such as school prayer was among disputes that led to that denomination severing ties with the agency in 1991.

Since then, however, Southern Baptist support for the BJC has actually grown because of gifts from individuals, churches, state conventions and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Legislative milestones during Dunn's leadership of the BJC have included:

-- Enactment of the Equal Access Act of 1984, a measure protecting the rights of secondary-school students to meet for religious purposes during noninstructional time.

-- Enactment of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, a law later partially invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court that made it more difficult for government to restrict religious practice.

-- Defeat of proposed constitutional amendments designed to permit government-sponsored prayer and religious expression in public schools in the Senate in 1983 and in the House of Representatives in 1998.

-- Defeat of various initiatives to provide tax support for religious schools.

Perhaps the most notable legislative setback during this period was the establishment in 1984 of formal diplomatic ties between the United States and the Vatican, despite strong opposition from the BJC.

Named to an 11-member committee to complete the search for a new executive director were Aidsand Wright-Riggins; Daniel Weiss, general secretary, ABC/USA; Elaine Smith, a Washington, D.C. attorney; Daniel Vestal; Marion Grant from Raleigh, N.C.; Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia; Patricia Ayres of Austin, Texas; Phil Strickland, director of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; Robert Ricker, president of the Baptist General Conference; Marvin Griffin, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; and a representative to be named later from the North American Baptist Conference.

## Historic North Carolina church ceases to 'identify' with SBC

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- Following a three-month study, members of the historic First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., have voted overwhelmingly to end the congregation's 153-year relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Members of the church, which was established in 1812, voted 264-23 at a business meeting Sept. 23 in favor of a "resolution of identity" saying, "regretfully, we no longer identify our church with the Southern Baptist Convention."

Though the moderate church has a long history of disagreement with conservative leaders of the SBC, the final straw leading to the break was a denominational statement this June calling for wives to submit to their husbands. Another factor was the attendance at this year's convention by independent Baptist leader Jerry Falwell as a voting messenger, according to a report in the Sept. 25 Biblical Recorder newspaper.

But the Raleigh News and Observer reported that church members described the vote as a general rejection of "authoritarian trends" that have emerged in the SBC since conservatives seized power two decades ago.

The church has not sent messengers to the SBC annual meeting since 1991 and no longer contributes to the national convention's unified budget. The congregation has continued to collect annual offerings for the support of Southern Baptist home and foreign missions, however.

The vote does not affect the church's relationship with Raleigh Baptist Association and the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. The resolution strongly affirmed ties with both groups.

"What this is really about is our identity," Mary Jon Roach, chairwoman of the church's denominational-relations committee told the News and Observer. "It's a matter of us saying to people around us: We don't approve of what the SBC is doing."

The church approved two amendments to the resolution, avoiding the word "disassociate" and removing language describing the SBC's "authoritarian leadership, its biblical literalism, its theological fundamentalism, and its departure from historical Baptist traditions."

The resolution noted that women have been serving as deacons at First Baptist Church since 1874, and that the church has been ordaining women to the ministry since 1982.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a leader in the SBC's conservative arm, said First Church and others that are leaving the convention "represent a liberal direction that has been running against Southern Baptist conviction for the latter half of this century."

Mohler predicted that only a few churches would follow First Baptist's lead. "The vast majority of Southern Baptist churches have made their convictions absolutely clear," he said.

Members of the 1,350-member church affirmed their pastor, Daniel Day, with a standing ovation for his leadership in the issue.

## **Southern Baptist leader accused of misconduct**

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The chairman of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's board of trustees has been suspended as pastor of his church, pending an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct.

According to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Ollin Collins, pastor of Harvest Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, is being sued by two female church members who claim they had sexual relationships with him during counseling sessions.

Church officials declined comment, and Collins reportedly could not be reached, having started a 60-day sabbatical in Hawaii.

Church leaders said in a Sunday-night worship service that both the congregation and Collins would be sued. In a letter sent Oct. 5, church leaders said Collins had been suspended "immediately and indefinitely with full pay and benefits pending further investigations."

Two women, 32-year-old Kimberlee Brokaw and 37-year-old Lucy Thompson, claimed they had sexual affairs with Collins that began after they had gone to their pastor for counseling for personal problems.

The women's attorney, John Holland, accused Collins of abusing his power and the counseling relationship.

Collins, a prominent pastor in the Fort Worth area, was a member of the Southwestern Seminary board of trustees that fired seminary President Russell Dilday in 1994. Collins later met with local pastors to defend the action and was acting chairman of the search committee which recommended Dilday's replacement, current President Ken Hemphill.

Collins was elected chairman of the seminary's 40-member trustee board in March.

Harvest Baptist Church, which Collins started 20 years ago, has a \$5.8 million auditorium which seats 3,150. The church also has a school for kindergarten through grade 12, a day-care center and a family life center. Collins has said the church has visions of "becoming one of the few megachurches in the whole state of Texas."

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-- By ABP staff

## **'Wounded Heroes' find 'safe place' at retreat**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Sitting in a semi-circle, about 60 couples -- all Baptist ministers and wives -- talked about grief and guilt, depression and anger, broken vows and shattered dreams.

They described domestic violence, physical intimidation, addiction to prescription drugs and suicide attempts.

They spoke from personal experience.

"There's something freeing about going through what you think is the worst thing in the world," the wife of one minister said. "It takes the fear out of a lot of other stuff."

There's also something freeing about being in a "safe place," where a preacher can be brutally honest with himself, his spouse and his peers, according to participants at a recent "Wounded Heroes ... Wounded Brothers" retreat.

"This has been a real oasis in the desert for me," said one participant at the Christian psychotherapy retreat, held Sept. 21-27 at the Cooper Aerobic Center in Dallas.

Wounded Heroes was founded by evangelist Freddie Gage of Euless, Texas, who discovered the need for such a ministry the hard way. Twenty years ago, the revivalist once described by W.A. Criswell as "a bouncing ball of fire" burned out. After preaching more than 1,000 revivals and speaking in at least 3,000 school assemblies, Gage suffered anxiety attacks and clinical depression.

"I have spent time in a psychiatric hospital. I am on medication today," Gage told participants at the Dallas retreat. He also described his feelings of betrayal when the confidentiality he had been promised was violated within 24 hours after his release.

After leaving the hospital, Gage went on to conduct more than 300 evangelistic crusades. Longing to help other Christian workers, he became affiliated with Rapha, a Christian mental-health service, for 10 years. Wounded Heroes grew out of a continuing need that Gage saw for Southern Baptist ministers and their spouses to have a unique and confidential setting where they could receive professional help.

Wounded Heroes offers a week of intensive, interactive group therapy at no charge to those who qualify for the service.

Wounded Heroes is not sponsored by any Southern Baptist agency, but it has been strongly supported by Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, and O.S. Hawkins, president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board. It also has been endorsed by Bob Reccord, president of the North American Mission Board, and Jerry Rankin, president of the International Mission Board.

Dick Maples, coordinator of minister/church relations for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, serves on the Wounded Heroes board of directors, and his office has provided some financial support for the retreats.

At the recent Wounded Heroes retreat in Dallas, counselors and psychotherapists led participants through a variety of activities including role-playing, games and group discussions.

During one session, participants sat in two concentric circles, with women seated in the inner circle and each woman's husband seated behind her so she would not see his face as she spoke. While the women discussed personal, intimate issues, their husbands were required to listen without speaking.

In another exercise, participants were asked to select a rock that represented the burden they were bearing. They were instructed to carry that rock with them everywhere for the duration of the retreat.

One couple chose a very small stone that they kept out of sight, because they had been hiding their burden from everyone. A minister chose a jagged, broken rock, because he had been through a divorce and his family was torn apart. Another minister explained that he selected the ugliest rock he could find, because the burden he carried was so ugly.

At the end of the retreat, participants were invited to choose what they would do with their rocks and their burdens -- lay them down, cast them away or carry them home. While many were anxious to leave the rocks behind, at least one person planned to take the rock home as a reminder of lessons learned.

"I don't ever want to be far away from failure and forgiveness," he said.

Another participant echoed the same sentiment, reflecting, "You don't appreciate God's grace until you come to the point where that is all you have. Then you find out that's all you really need."

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