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The Stacks

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story updates and replaces the Oct. 6 ABP story

"Southern Baptist leader accused of misconduct"

Seminary trustee chairman resigns amid charges of sexual misconduct

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

Chairman Ollin Collins resigned Oct. 7 from the seminary's board of trustees, a day after the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported his suspension as pastor of Harvest Baptist Church in Watauga, Texas.

According to the paper, Collins 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 has served as an at-large member on the seminary's 40-member board of trustees since 1990. He was elected chairman in March.

He was a member of the board when it 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.

The trustee vice chairman, retired Fort Worth pastor Miles Seaborn, will function as chairman of the board until a new chairman is elected next spring.

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."

By ABP staff

High court leaves ruling on federal applicability of RFRA untouched

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A 1993 federal religious-liberty law, which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1997 cannot be enforced upon the states, can still apply at the federal level, according to a federal appeals court ruling left standing by the high court Oct. 5.

The high court refused to review the lower-court decision that in effect leaves the Religious Freedom Restoration Act binding in federal cases in Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota—states within the jurisdiction of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

RFRA bolsters protections for religious practice by placing a heavy burden of proof on the government before it can interfere with religious practices. In 1997, the high court ruled that Congress lacked the authority to impose RFRA on states and localities. Since then, attorneys for religious groups and the Clinton administration have argued that RFRA still applies to the federal government.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with RFRA supporters when it ruled April 13 that bankruptcy trustees may not dip into church coffers to recover tithes given by donors who later declare bankruptcy.

In 1992, Bruce and Nancy Young, members of the Crystal

Evangelical Free Church, filed for bankruptcy. During the year preceding the filing, the Youngs had given \$13,450 in tithes to the Minnesota church.

Lower courts held that the tithes were subject to federal bankruptcy laws and ruled against the church.

In 1996, the appeals court, citing RFRA, ruled that the Minnesota church could not be forced to turn over the tithes. But the appeals court was ordered to reconsider that decision in light of the Supreme Court's subsequent decision striking down parts of the religious-liberty statute.

The appeals court reaffirmed its earlier decision and in the process ruled that RFRA still applies to the federal government and its laws. In a 2-1 decision, the court ruled that nothing in RFRA's text or legislative history suggests that "Congress would have declined to protect religious liberties from federal interference merely because it was unable to protect those liberties from state interference."

Religious leaders said the high court's refusal to hear the case signals that RFRA protects religious practices from federal laws that substantially burden religious exercise without a compelling reason to do so.

"The court's order is not an outright affirmation of the 8th Circuit's ruling, but it's the next best thing," said Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee. "When given the chance to further limit the reach of RFRA, the court declined the invitation. The appeals court's ruling will be persuasive authority throughout the United States."

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said the high court's action, coupled with recently enacted legislation to protect tithes from bankruptcy proceedings, leaves the door closed nationwide on virtually all creditor suits to recover church offerings, absent proof of fraud.

"Not only was this case the 'Battle of Stalingrad' for invading bankruptcy trustees, but it also clarified that RFRA still protects us against any federal law that substantially and unjustifiably burdens religious exercise," McFarland said. "Paying debts is important, but keeping the government's hand out of the offering plate is even more important," he added.

Bulgarian Baptist pastor named head of European Baptist Federation

KIEV, Ukraine (ABP) -- Bulgarian Baptist leader Theodor Angelov has been elected next general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, replacing current leader Karl Heinz Walter, who retires next fall.

Angelov was elected by the EBF council at a Sept. 23-26 meeting in Kiev, Ukraine. He will be the federation's eighth general secretary and the first from Eastern Europe.

"God has led us to this moment in history and to this person," said David Coffey, EBF president and chairman of a general-secretary search committee.

Details about Angelov's starting date and where his offices will be located will be worked out with the EBF executive committee.

Angelov is currently president of the Baptist Union of Bulgaria and pastor of Sofia Baptist Church.

Angelov was born in 1939 in Lom, Bulgaria, the son of a Baptist pastor who served for more than 50 years, eight of them in prison. He professed faith in Christ at the age of 15 and was baptized a year later. He began preaching at 17.

His educational background includes an engineering degree from the Chemical-Technological University in Sofia in 1969 and a Ph.D. in 1980. He has had more than 65 articles published in the field of biochemistry.

In 1991 he was elected president of the Baptist Union of Bulgaria in the first conference they had been allowed to have since 1946. He was ordained and has served as pastor of Sofia Baptist Church since 1992. In 1993, he was elected vice president of the European Baptist Federation and he served as EBF president, 1995-97.

He and his wife, Anni, were married in 1962; she died in 1997. He has two sons and two grandchildren.

European Baptist Press Service

Albania Baptists planning to form union of churches

KIEV, Ukraine (ABP) -- Baptist work in Albania has grown to the point that several churches are planning to form a Baptist union in the country, according to a report at a European Baptist Federation council meeting, Sept. 23-26 in Kiev, Ukraine.

A delegation from Albania attended the meeting, including Alfred "Freddy" Golloshi, co-pastor of Freedom Baptist Church in Tirana; Jonathan Steeper, director of the Baptist Centre in Tirana; Saverio Guarna, pastor of Way of Hope Baptist Church in Tirana and Adnan Pula, elder of the Way of Hope church.

Baptist work in Albania began in the early 1990s as a cooperative missions effort under oversight of the European Baptist Federation. That arrangement ended with the recent formation of a new oversight committee, International Baptist Cooperation in Albania.

Despite the upheavals of civil unrest, armed gangs, and the more

recent influx of refugees from Kosovo into Albania, Baptist work has continued and grown. It received associate member status in the European Baptist Federation last year.

In September 1998, representatives from four congregations met to discuss the formation of a Baptist union. They formulated an initial covenant that has been taken back to the churches for ratification. The church representatives plan to meet later in October to pursue forming a union, according to Jonathan Steeper.

The EBF council voted to accept the union as a provisional member with the understanding that the union's status be reviewed in three years. If its formation has been completed and is functioning, its EBF membership will be confirmed in the year 2001.

By Martha Skelton

Leadership transition, strategic plan primary work of BJC directors

Larry Chesser

GREEN LAKE, Wis. (ABP) -- The Baptist Joint Committee focused on the future during its annual meeting Oct. 5-6 by adopting a strategic planning statement, approving a record budget for 1999 and naming an 11-member search committee to seek a new executive director for the 62-year-old religious liberty agency.

James Dunn, who has headed the agency since January 1981, asked BJC directors to allow him to step aside from his duties as executive director by Sept. 1, 1999, and assume part-time duties in such areas as speaking, writing and fund-raising. In approving the request, the directors named a five-member committee to work with Dunn in finalizing the details of his future role at the BJC.

In September, Dunn will also become visiting professor of Christianity and Public Policy at Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C.

The strategic plan, approved by the directors as a working document, states that the agency's mission is "to defend and extend God-given religious liberty for all, bringing a uniquely Baptist witness to the principle that religion must be freely exercised, neither advanced nor inhibited by government."

The statement also emphasizes that "freedom of choice in religion is essential, and that separation of church and state is indispensable to ensuring religious liberty."

The plan was developed by a task force led by Dwight Jessup, a BJC director and vice president for academic affairs and dean at Taylor University in Upland, Ind. The task force was assisted by consultants Tom and Sue Bennett of Tulsa, Okla.

Among the plan's identified priorities for 1999 are the transition to a new leadership for the agency, increasing annual operating revenues

to better fund the agency's mission, entering into the Internet world on a continuously improving basis and developing strategies for appealing to the younger generation and for growing the Religious Liberty Council, the individual membership arm of the BJC.

Longer-range priorities include securing \$10 million in endowment for the agency, the development of policies that increase racial diversity in BJC activities and the development of educational and resources for schools, churches and other groups.

Also discussed was the desirability of developing a more active role for directors. BJC Chairman Aidsand Wright-Riggins, executive director of National Ministries, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., plans to ask directors to serve on subcommittees in part to effect the implementation of the strategic plan.

Directors approved a budget of \$878,000 for 1999, which represents a 3 percent increase over the \$849,551 budget for 1998.

Named to the committee to work out the details of Dunn's future role at the BJC are Kevin Butler, editor of the Sabbath Recorder, monthly magazine of the General Conference of Seventh Day Baptists; Elaine Smith, an attorney at the U.S. Treasury Department and past president of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia; Suzii Paynter, an educational consultant from Austin, Texas, and Lynn Bergfalk, senior minister of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

The BJC directors also approved a statement calling on states to pass state Religious Freedom Restoration Acts modeled after the federal law that was partially invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1997.

The high court ruled that Congress lacked the authority to require states to enforce RFRA's high standard of protection for religious exercise. That decision left religious liberty advocates turning to states to enact their own laws to protect religious practice from burdens imposed by governmental actions.

"State RFRAs are needed because individuals are often substantially burdened by laws that do not explicitly target religion," the statement declares.

Neutral, broadly applied government policies such as zoning laws "exact a painful price from people of faith," the statement added. "Without state RFRAs, most of these people are and will continue to be forced to choose between breaking the law and keeping their faith."

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