

Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

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Former Southern Seminary president gives \$250,000 to Richmond school

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Duke McCall, who for 30 years was president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., has given \$250,000 to a Virginia seminary that he says now better matches his moderate theological views.

The gift from McCall's family foundation will endow a faculty position at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, one of a number of new schools formed in recent years in response to a takeover of Southern Baptist Convention seminaries, including Southern, by conservatives.

The Louisville Courier-Journal reported the gift Oct. 23.

McCall, 84, told the newspaper that he has accepted a sense of "exile" from the seminary and the Southern Baptist denominational structure to which he devoted most of his career.

"There's no big deal; there's no big crisis or conflict," he said. "It's just that we're heading on different paths, and we get further apart the longer we go."

Albert Mohler, Southern Seminary's current president who has steered the formerly moderate school to a more conservative stance since taking the helm in 1993, declined to comment on McCall's gift, according to the Courier-Journal.

McCall was president of Southern Seminary from 1951 to 1982. Prior to that, he was president of another Southern Baptist seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and was executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee.

Herb Hollinger, director of the SBC's official news service, Baptist Press, said McCall "definitely has had a contribution" to Southern Baptist work but in recent years has aligned himself with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group which sponsors missionaries and raises money for moderate causes. "And we understand and wish them all well," Hollinger said.

In an interview, McCall told the Courier-Journal the Duke K. McCall Foundation agreed to the donation because "I believe in what they are doing" at Richmond and because of his personal bond with the seminary's president, Tom Graves.

Graves, 51, grew up in the Southern Seminary community, the son of longtime professor Allen Graves, who was dean of Southern's School of Religious Education under McCall. Tom Graves, who attended Southern Seminary

as a student during McCall's presidency, said he considers him a mentor and hopes "what Duke McCall lived for can live on" at Richmond Seminary.

Several former faculty members and graduates of Southern Seminary teach at the Richmond school, including Glenn Hinson, a longtime church-history professor at Southern.

Other professors have left Southern Seminary during recent years to teach at other new moderate Baptist seminaries and divinity schools including Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Texas, Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Georgia, and the new Wake Forest University Divinity School in North Carolina.

"There's nothing that Dr. McCall stands for that Southern Seminary would be comfortable with any more," said Ken Chafin, a retired faculty member and former pastor of Louisville's Walnut Street Baptist Church.

Chafin said McCall's giving money to Richmond "basically says that when he looks at what he wants for the future, he's investing ... someplace else rather than the place where he planted his life. That's about as strong a statement as you can make."

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-- By Bob Allen

South Carolina Baptist paper moving to bi-weekly schedule

GREENVILLE, S.C. (ABP) -- South Carolina's 129-year-old newspaper, The Baptist Courier, will reduce its frequency from weekly to every other week starting next year, the paper reported Oct. 15.

Directors of the Greenville-based paper adopted the change based in part on a recommendation by a consultant that publishing larger issues on a less frequent basis would serve readers better by allowing "more diversity in content," according to an article written by Editor Don Kirkland.

Beginning Jan. 7, the paper will print a 32-page issue every other week. The typical paper now is 16 or 24 pages and is published weekly except for seven skip weeks in May, June, July, August and December.

The action came on the heels of an announced 13 percent increase in costs to mail the magazine-size newsprint publication in 1999. It now costs nearly as much to mail the paper as to produce it, the article said.

Like most Baptist state newspapers, the Courier has lost subscribers in recent years. Its current circulation is more than 98,000. A decade ago, circulation was reported to be 122,000.

"We are doing great compared to other states and according to our readers," said Jim Goodroe, chair of a trustee panel which has been studying the paper's effectiveness. "However, only two of every five South Carolina Baptist homes receive the Courier, and we are read by few lay people under 50 years old."

Goodroe said moving to a bi-weekly publication will allow staff the time and space to produce "life-related articles" to help the newspaper appeal to a "new generation of readers."

"The Courier's readers will be informed in coming weeks about new features to be added to the magazine in January," Kirkland wrote. "The Courier's main mission of telling the story of what South Carolina Baptists are accomplishing for the kingdom in this state and around the world will not change but will be enhanced by the 'new' Courier."

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-- By ABP staff

Don't distribute Christian Coalition voter guides, religious leaders say

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A group of religious leaders from various faiths is calling on churches to refrain from distributing Christian Coalition voter guides or other materials they charge are manipulative, partisan and threaten tax-exemption.

Leaders of The Interfaith Alliance, a group created to counter the Religious Right, held a press conference Oct. 21 to denounce attempts to use churches to support or oppose candidates for public office. The group called on churches to participate in its Oct. 23-25 "Call to a Faithful Decision Weekend."

The group encourages people of faith to get involved in politics but opposes the distribution of what it considers biased voter guides in churches.

"The voter guides of the Religious Right have far more to do with voter indoctrination and partisan persuasion than with voter education," said Welton Gaddy, executive director of The Interfaith Alliance. The press conference was attended by members of the Jewish, Protestant and Muslim communities.

As part of the emphasis, the alliance provided materials, including sample sermons, to help churches participate in the weekend. State offices of the group sent letters to churches criticizing the distribution of Christian Coalition material. "They may ask to place these voter guides in your church," one letter stated. "For ethical and legal reasons, we respectfully urge you to decline this request."

Randy Tate, executive director of the Christian Coalition, announced several months ago that the coalition plans to distribute 45 million voter guides throughout the country. The guides will be given to churches to distribute on the Sunday before the Nov. 3 elections.

The Coalition, founded by Pat Robertson, has been sued by the Federal Election Commission for alleged election violations but denies the charges. In a separate matter, the Internal Revenue Service has yet to grant the organization its request for tax-exempt status. The request has been pending for more than nine years. The coalition is allowed to act as a tax-exempt group while the matter is pending with the IRS.

Gaddy said: "Should religion and politics mix? Yes! Not only should religion and politics mix, for the integrity of religion and the good of the nation, religion and politics must mix. The crucial question is 'How?'"

He said the timing of the distribution of the coalition voter guides just before the election "intentionally deflects scrutiny and prevents candidates from responding to inaccuracies and issue distortion in the materials."

"In the name of Christianity, faith and family, and even freedom, the Christian Coalition manipulates, if not deceives, religious people," Gaddy said. "That is not the right way to mix religion and politics."

"Their strategy represents political manipulation that is bad for religion and government," Gaddy said. "Instead of providing descriptive information, the voter guides produced by the Religious Right over-simplify public policy questions."

Rabbi Jack Moline said he told members of his congregation in a newsletter to vote in the upcoming elections. "Voting may not seem as heroic as sheltering a refugee or taking up arms to resist tyranny, but it actually is of greater importance. ... Your mundane vote may make your act of heroism blessedly unnecessary."

Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance of Baptists, said that "the accusation often leveled by Christian Coalition leaders that our objective is to silence them is patently false." He added: "What all true Baptists decry is the abuse of the political system for narrowly sectarian and clearly partisan ends. Despite all their denials, what the leaders of the Christian Coalition are doing amounts to a crude manipulation of vulnerable voters to such ends."

Arnie Owens, spokesman for the Christian Coalition, dismissed the interfaith group's actions as just "another left-wing attack on the distribution of voter guides in an attempt to silence the pro-family movement."

"They are engaging in a misrepresentation of the truth," Owens said.

Owens said the coalition's voter guides are nonpartisan. He said the timing of their release is coordinated to make the guides more effective. He also said certain issues are selected for inclusion in the guides in some areas of the country but not in others in an attempt to "present issues where there are differences between specific candidates."

Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice, also contended the Christian Coalition voter guides are nonpartisan. "They clearly fall within the IRS mandate," he added.

Other groups have previously criticized the Christian Coalition voter guides and warned churches that distributing the guides may jeopardize their tax status.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State recently distributed a memorandum warning that churches can lose their federal tax exemption if they distribute partisan voter guides. The memo, signed by attorneys Milton Cerny and Albert Lauber Jr, stated that the IRS "will examine all aspects of voter guides for signs of bias, including the array of questions presented, the size of type used for different candidates and the photographs of candidates themselves."

"It is essential that churches consult their legal advisers and carefully review any voter guide before agreeing to distribute it," they said.

The Texas Faith Network also sent letters to Texas religious leaders warning against the use of the guides. "These guides focus on issues far afield from core issues of faith. ... We want to be clear: religious leaders and their congregations can and should be involved in issues of public policy and work to do God's will. We are not attempting to silence the views of the Christian Coalition. However religious leaders violate a sacred trust when they endorse candidates from the pulpit or allow the distribution of partisan political literature."

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Survey shows support for vouchers declining

By Jim Bennett

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Support among Americans for school vouchers has declined during the past year, according to a survey by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

The survey found that support for school vouchers among black respondents had fallen from 57.3 percent to 48.1 percent, and among white respondents from 47 percent to 41.3 percent.

Although support for vouchers dropped, blacks who support vouchers still outnumber opponents. According to the survey, vouchers are opposed by 39.8 percent of black respondents, 50.2 percent of whites and 50.2 percent of the general population.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is an organization working to improve the socio-economic status of African Americans and other disadvantaged groups.

David Bositis, senior political analyst for the center, said the survey showed a significant correlation between dissatisfaction with public schools and support for vouchers.

The survey found that black supporters of vouchers were mainly baby boomers and those living in the Northeast and Midwest, while opposition was highest among younger blacks (ages 18-25). The strongest opposition

to vouchers among the general population was registered by senior citizens and college graduates. The strongest support for vouchers was among those in the general population who earn less than \$15,000 per year and those earning more than \$75,000.

Numerous congressional attempts to enact vouchers have been stymied by opposition from the Clinton administration, school boards and teacher unions. Vouchers are also opposed by religious groups such as the Baptist Joint Committee, who argue their use in sectarian schools violates the separation of church and state.

The survey of 1,606 adults was conducted Sept. 5-27, 1998. The survey has a 3.5 percentage point margin of error.

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-- Jim Bennett is an intern for Baptist News Service, a division of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

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