

Nashville, Tennessee

Associated Baptist Press

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

October 29, 1998

(98-83)

In this issue:

- Southern Baptists of Texas to launch new convention
- Calvin Miller named professor at Samford divinity school
- Religious-persecution bill signed; president criticizes some provisions
- Baptists discuss worship in first international conference
- 82-year-old Texas Baptist missions volunteer honored
- Olympics outreach ministry going for more than gold
- Organization uses fishing to bond fathers, children

Southern Baptists of Texas to launch new convention

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Southern Baptists of Texas aren't going away mad; they're just going away, according to leaders of the new group splitting from the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention will launch officially Nov. 10 in Houston. Its constitutional convention will be held the second day of the 2.5-million-member BGCT's annual meeting, which convenes across town.

"We are not starting this thing in anger," Southern Baptists of Texas President Miles Seaborn said.

"We haven't committed ourselves out of bitterness, but out of the conviction that we have to be true to God about our hearts, our money and our energy."

Southern Baptists of Texas has been started by some Texas Baptists who have supported the so-called "conservative resurgence" in the Southern Baptist Convention over the past two decades.

They accuse the Baptist General Convention of Texas of pulling away from the Southern Baptist Convention. They cite two main examples.

First, in 1994, the BGCT redefined its Cooperative Program unified budget formula to include Baptist causes beyond the traditional state convention/SBC allocations. Southern Baptists of Texas particularly loathe the inclusion of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group based in Atlanta, as part of the BGCT giving plan.

Second, messengers to the BGCT annual meeting last year overwhelmingly approved an Effectiveness/Efficiency Committee report calling on the state convention to increase its ministry in efforts typically reserved for the SBC. Examples include publication of supplemental church literature, stepped-up involvement in missions and increased provision of theological education.

Within hours after they lost the Effectiveness/Efficiency votes, Southern Baptists of Texas leaders talked about a split from the state convention.

The need for a separate convention in Texas became more apparent in January, after a two-day meeting between BGCT and Southern Baptists of Texas leaders, reported Ronnie Yarber, Southern Baptists of Texas' administrative director and staff member at Meadow Creek Community Church in Mesquite.

"We agreed there were things we could not agree on," Yarber said of that meeting.

He cited "the nature of Scripture and the inerrancy of the Bible, how we view and therefore how we approach the issue of homosexuality [although the BGCT since has removed a congregation for ordaining a homosexual deacon,] the ordination of women to pastoral roles of our churches, abortion and support for the Baptist Joint Committee," a Washington-based religious-liberty organization.

"It became obvious they were going one way and we ought to go another," added Seaborn, retired pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth. "They said they would not change their actions, and we said we would not change our convictions. ...

"Almost every major decision made [by the BGCT] in the past four or five years has moved us away from the SBC," he said. "We believe the SBC is on the right track."

Meanwhile, leaders of a Texas moderate group denied they are trying to "pull the Baptist General Convention of Texas out of the Southern Baptist Convention."

That's the most recent charge by critics of Texas Baptists Committed, an organization of so-called moderates who have resisted SBC-style domination of the Texas convention by conservatives.

"Our agenda is not to take the BGCT out of the SBC," said David Currie, the group's coordinator.

Currie and other leaders said the moderate group wants to give Texas Baptists choices about which groups they cooperate with. "We're not trying to pull off a schism," said Jerold McBride, Baptists Committed co-chair. "We're wanting to cooperate as we used to. What we resist is coercion."

-30-

Calvin Miller named professor at Samford divinity school

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Christian author Calvin Miller, who since 1991 has taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been named professor of preaching and pastoral ministry at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School.

Miller, 62, has written more than 40 books and numerous articles on religion and preaching. He was pastor of Westside Baptist Church in Omaha, Neb., 25 years before becoming professor of communication and ministry studies and writer in residence at the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

He will join the faculty at Samford Jan. 1, according to officials at the university.

The Beeson Divinity School was established in 1988 by a bequest from the estate of philanthropist Ralph Waldo Beeson. Beeson, an insurance executive, left more than \$20 million in his will to begin a non-sectarian, evangelical divinity school at the Baptist university in Birmingham, Ala.

Timothy George, dean of the divinity school, said Miller "brings to Beeson proven experience as a pastor as well as unique gifts as a poet, artist, evangelist, novelist and master communicator of God's good news."

A native of Oklahoma, Miller is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University with the master-of-divinity and doctor-of-ministry degrees from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

Religious-persecution bill signed; president criticizes some provisions

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton signed a measure Oct. 27 designed to curb religious persecution abroad after backers agreed to give the president broad flexibility in imposing penalties on countries that permit oppressive actions against religious minorities.

The International Religious Freedom Act won overwhelming support from both houses of Congress after lawmakers made several revisions to an earlier House bill that would have imposed automatic sanctions with limited ability for the president to waive sanctions.

"When we promote religious freedom we also promote freedom of expression, conscience and association and other human rights," Clinton said in a statement released after he signed the bill.

Under the measure, a new 10-member commission will be appointed within 120 days. The commission will issue a country-by-country report on religious persecution abroad and will recommend penalties that could be imposed by the president on countries engaging in or permitting religious persecution.

In a statement released by the White House, the president announced that he would appoint Robert Seiple, special representative of the secretary of state for international religious freedom, to serve as ambassador of the new commission. The new law specifies that the ambassador will be a nonvoting member of the commission. The president, speaker of the House, and president pro tempore of the Senate will each appoint three members to fill the remaining nine slots.

Under the law, the president is required to choose from a list of penalties provided in the bill or impose "commensurate actions" against offending countries. Economic penalties will be required only if the country is considered to be an egregious violator of religious freedom.

The president could waive the use of any penalty for national security reasons or if the waiver would further the purpose of the bill. The president could also decline to impose penalties if the persecution in the country ceases. Even broader provisions are in place for the president to delay the implementation of penalties. Penalties range from a "private demarche," or diplomatic maneuver, to more serious economic and travel sanctions.

While signing the bill, Clinton criticized some provisions. He charged that some economic penalties could result in reprisals against minority religions. He also said the legislation's requirement that the president undertake negotiations with foreign government and report on those negotiations to Congress may "infringe on the authority vested by the Constitution solely with the president."

"I shall treat the language of this provision as precatory and construe the provision in light of my constitutional responsibilities to conduct foreign affairs, including, where appropriate, the protection of diplomatic communications," he said.

An aide to Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., sponsor of the final version of the bill, complained the president is getting "awfully ticky-tacky" in his criticism. Steve Moffitt, legislative assistant to Nickles, said negotiating with other countries is something the president "should want to do as opposed to sitting back in the White House and issuing edicts."

Moffitt denied the bill's requirement for negotiations unconstitutionally intervenes into presidential authority over foreign policy. "The Congress tells the president what to do all the time," he said.

Clinton commended Congress for "incorporating flexibility in the several provisions concerning the imposition of economic measures. Although I am concerned that such measures could result in even greater pressures -- and possibly reprisals -- against minority religious communities that the bill is intended to help."

Clinton said the final bill "provides additional flexibility by allowing the president to waive the imposition of economic measures if violations cease, if a waiver would further the purpose of the act, or if required by important national interests."

Another provision in the law calls on the secretary of state to "permit, on terms no less favorable than that accorded other nongovernmental activities unrelated to the conduct of the diplomatic mission, access to the premises of any United States diplomatic mission or consular post by any United States citizen seeking to conduct an activity for religious purposes."

Moffitt said the equal-access provision does not require the United States "to do anything extraordinary." It is needed, he said, in about a half-dozen countries where it is illegal to practice any other religion but Islam. In Nepal, he said, Hinduism is the only acceptable religion.

Clinton said he has asked the State Department to prepare guidance to clarify the scope and the proper implementation of the equal-access provision.

"State Department policy already allows U.S. government mission employees access to U.S. facilities for religious services in environments where such services are not available locally," he said. "The extension of this practice to U.S. citizens who generally enjoy no privileges and immunities in the host state has the potential to create conflicts with host country laws and to impair the ability of U.S. missions to function effectively. Care also must be taken to ensure that this provision is implemented consistent with the First Amendment."

In addition to the commission and an ambassador, the law recommends but does not require the creation of a special adviser on religious persecution in the National Security Council at the White House. The measure also contains provisions to promote religious freedom through further training of U.S. foreign service personnel and religious freedom awards and performance pay for meritorious foreign-service officers.

-30-

Baptists discuss worship in first international conference

By Martha Skelton

BERLIN (ABP) -- How Baptists worship and the reasons why were central themes of the first international Baptists in Worship Conference, held Oct. 15-18 at Schoeneberg Baptist Church in Berlin.

It was sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance with the cooperation of the European Baptist Federation and German Baptists. Tony Cupit, director of study and research at the McLean, Va.,-based BWA, led the conference. More than 600 people from 58 countries and all six continents participated.

Various ideas about worship were both affirmed and challenged through music, prayers, Bible exposition, sermons, dance, mime and drama from different perspectives.

Several speakers said worship is central to the Christian experience and a foretaste of heaven. "Of all our acts on earth, the only one to go on to heaven is worship," said Chris Ellis of the United Kingdom.

Foundational papers on a theology of worship were presented by Karl Heinz Walter of Germany, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation -- with a response by Thorwald Lorenzen of Australia -- and Noel Vose of Australia.

The conference also explored cultural expressions of Baptist worship.

For example, in the Caribbean, worship and church life have followed three strains, according to Ken Cadette of Trinidad. First, he said, was a period of "theological imposition" during colonization. Next came a period of "theological invitation" when churches copied the traditions of Europe. Finally, there was "theological indigenization," or taking the truth of the gospel and expressing faith in a relevant way in the people's own culture.

"The gospel is truth, not a tool of exploitation," Cadette said. "Our challenge is to keep the intellectual truth of the gospel, to make cultural elements our own, appealing to the Caribbean man."

In North America, there is good news and bad news about worship, said Paul Basden, pastor of Brookwood Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. The good news, he said, is churches are rethinking their traditional 11 a.m. Sunday worship services. The bad news is the resulting differences are sometimes divisive.

"The reality is the New Testament does not endorse one form of worship," he told the group. Whatever the worship "style," Christians should above all avoid division and view diversity as God's gift -- as Pentecost, not Babel, he said.

Other speakers discussed worship amid suffering, war and persecution.

"When you go through suffering, you find blessing, inner peace, joy," said Simon Sirkar of Bangladesh. "In Bangladesh, through confiscation of property, the striking of human rights and privileges, isolation from our society, friends, loved ones, [suffering was] a tool of deeper fellowship with God," explained Sirkar, a pastor near Dhaka. He quoted a believer in Pakistan who said, "I would rather travel with God in the night than alone in the day."

Suffering in the Ukraine began even before the Communist era, pastor Gregory Komendant pointed out. During the most repressive times in the 1930s, with churches closed and buildings destroyed and laws against more than 10 people coming together, they still worshipped. "Worship had a special taste," he said. "To be faithful [might lead] to death."

Asked what she would say to the affluent West, Lebanon's Mona Khauli responded: "It is not enough to observe suffering on TV and turn it off." She suggested sharing in the suffering of others through partnerships and linking families and churches through letters and visits.

Several speakers charged Baptists are often weak in their understanding and observances of the ordinances, sometimes adding a baptismal observance or the Lord's Supper onto the beginning or end of a regular service.

In contrast, Douglas Waruta, chairman of the department of religious studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, described a baptismal service in Africa: The candidates stand on the far shore of a river, the pastor midstream and the church members on the near shore singing and worshipping. As individuals are baptized, they walk to the "believers side" and are embraced into the fellowship. This is an example of making an ordinance a central and symbolic expression of worship, he said.

Young people need to be woven into the worship of churches, not sidelined or put on hold with a "wait-your-turn" attitude, said Emmett Dunn, director of BWA's Youth Department.

Simon Hall, a young pastor from Leeds, England, cited passion for God that results when young people are mobilized in missions projects. Youth need certain things from the church, he said: holistic spirituality that relates faith to all aspects of life, a theology of culture and acceptance as part of the family.

One youth from Brazil said his dream is for the church to accept differences and live together; encouraging, not condemning each other; acting, not only talking.

"Young people really think we can change the world through Jesus," he said. "We want what is true and biblical."

A young woman from Norway expressed her commitment to Christ and added her dream -- churches that "focus on the contents and not on all the packing paper."

-30-

-- Martha Skelton writes for the European Baptist Press Service.

82-year-old Texas Baptist missions volunteer honored

By Orville Scott

DALLAS (ABP) -- Eighty-two-year-old Sue Low, who helped lead 646 inmates to Christ in the Dallas County Jail the past four years, has been named Mission Service Corps Volunteer of the Year by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Low, a member of First Oak Cliff Baptist Church of Dallas, celebrated her 82nd birthday in the Dallas County jail. She led four men to Christ the day before her birthday and held a Bible study for 28 inmates the day after.

During the past 12 years, she and her husband, Asa, who died in 1996, led 1,200 people to Christ in their jail ministry.

"It's a lot of hard work, and some have told me it's too dangerous for me," Low said, "but I've never done anything that brought me such joy."

"When I was 20 years old, God called me into special service," she said. While she earned a college degree in music, she said, "I kept believing that God had something else he wanted me to do."

Now, for the first time in her life, she said, "I know what God called me to do."

Low is one of more than 2,450 Mission Service Corps volunteers involved in Christian missions across the United States, said Sam Pearis, Texas director of the program.

Among the treasured mementos of Low's ministry is a letter from 23-year-old Tammy, whom she led to believe in Christ in the jail.

"When we talked, she was scared and had cried for two days over the death of her boyfriend," Low said. "I shared the plan of salvation with her and she became a Christian."

Tammy was sentenced to prison but is out now and working. While in prison she wrote Low: "My boyfriend died because of his drug involvement. That could have been me. I would have died and gone to hell without knowing about God's love if you had not shared the plan of salvation."

In sharing her Christian testimony with church and women's groups, Low tells them: "I am not doing anything you cannot do. Every town and city has a jail with people who need to hear about God's love."

"We need Christian men and women who know how to present the plan of salvation, who love people and who are willing to give of their time, efforts and money," she said.

-30-

Olympics outreach ministry going for more than gold

By Marv Knox

HURST, Texas (ABP) -- When Olympic athletes go for gold, Sam Mings aims for glory -- not for himself nor for his country but for Jesus Christ.

Mings heads Lay Witnesses for Christ International, a ministry he founded two decades ago. His goal is to lead athletes to faith in Christ and to help them use their visibility to share the Christian message with admiring fans.

Friends called him "Miler Mings" when he ran track in suburban Fort Worth, Texas, in the 1950s. But now he's running a marathon -- trying to recruit 2,500-3,500 Baptists to participate in Reach-Out 2000, a ministry to the Summer Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, Sept. 15-Oct. 1, 2000.

"We have a chance to touch the world and to evangelize Australia," declared Mings, a member of North Richland Hills Baptist Church and a mile-a-minute talker who waves his arms in excitement as he describes the opportunities associated with his evangelistic mission.

"We need God to touch the hearts of athletes and fans from around the world and also to touch the hearts of Australians," he said. "Australia is a non-Christian nation. Less than 4 percent of Australians are Christians.

"But Australians love sports. Forty percent of Australians worship sports."

That's an attitude Mings has seen countless times as he's traveled the globe providing ministry at sporting venues.

Lay Witnesses for Christ has provided ministry at four Olympics -- Los Angeles, Seoul, Barcelona and Atlanta -- as well as numerous track-and-field championships and other sports events.

The organization works in two primary spheres: One set of ministries serves the athletes, seeking to lead them to Christ and encouraging Christian athletes to live out their faith. The other capitalizes on sports fervor, showcasing the testimonies of Christian athletes who tell adoring fans their relationships with Christ are more valuable than gold medals.

Lay Witnesses for Christ has attracted a pantheon of Olympic stars. Foremost is Carl Lewis, the sprinter/long-jumper who dominated the Summer Olympics for years.

Mings also has worked with track stars such as world-record setters Leroy Burrell and Florence Griffith Joyner, swimmers such as Olympic gold medalist Josh Davis and thousands more athletes in various sports.

During the Olympics, Mings' organization has produced local "More Than Gold" rallies and televised "Evening with the Olympians" media galas, which have been broadcast around the world.

"We think 'multiplication,'" Mings said of the media-saturated ministries connected with the Olympics. "These athletes are covered by the media from around the world. If we can encourage an athlete to say, 'I'm running for the Lord,' stop to pray on the track after a race or wear a Christian T-shirt, that message will be shown around the world.

"God has given these athletes a platform to speak his name. That's why an athlete like Carl Lewis, the Olympian of the century, has had the opportunity to share Christ with more people than Billy Graham has -- because the media clamors after him and wants to hear what he has to say."

Mings will work with Lewis and other world-class athletes in Sydney during Reach-Out 2000, but he's recruiting an army of Baptist volunteers to fill out the rest of the ministry.

"We need people uniquely gifted in any way," he said. "We can use mimes, puppeteers and singers, as well as people to share their faith one-on-one, distribute literature and work with athletes. We need doctors and nurses and people with the gift for hospitality, who can make athletes feel welcome."

Some volunteers will go door-to-door with Christian athletes, telling Australians about Jesus. Others will minister to non-Christian athletes.

Christian athletes also will lead clinics and demonstrations, visit hospitals and "draw crowds" for volunteers who share their faith, he added.

Beyond skills, "we need people who are prayed up and ready to make a difference" in people's lives, he stressed. The ministry needs volunteers of all ages, as well as ethnic diversity. A large contingent of volunteers is expected to comprise what Mings calls the "God Squad," senior citizens who travel around the world and pitch in wherever they're needed.

Participation will cost about \$2,500, Mings reported. That amount includes airfare, two meals per day, housing and uniform shirts.

Because of the cost, he urged churches and other groups to consider sponsoring volunteers who can join the ministry.

-30-

Organization uses fishing to bond fathers, children

By Tim Palmer

KIMBERLING CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Jesus told his first two disciples, both fishermen, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Missouri Baptist layman Larry Sifford has picked up on that idea, using fishing to strengthen families and lead people to faith in Christ.

Motivated by guilt that he was not spending enough time with his two sons, Sifford, a member of First Baptist Church in Kimberling City, Mo., started the organization Like Father, Like Son in 1993.

At first, it was an awareness program urging fathers to spend more time with their children, using a video series and a workbook.

But the organization soon discovered that men needed more than general encouragement. They needed something specific, that they could put on their calendars.

A former marine dealer and resort operator, Sifford hit on fishing.

Five years later, Like Father, Like Son is growing rapidly. Recently at Missouri's Table Rock Lake, 114 father-son, father-daughter and grandparent-grandchild teams competed in the season-ending LFLS regional tournament.

They qualified by fishing in at least three of a half-dozen state tournaments conducted in Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Illinois and Kansas during the year. The only age requirement is that participants must be at least 7 years old, which makes for a wide range of competitors.

"We've got 70-year-old dads fishing with 40-year-old sons," Sifford noted.

Four of the teams went home with new, fully equipped fishing boats. All of them went home with memories of hours spent together on the water. And 15 participants went home having made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

The Bible commands parents to write God's law on their children's hearts, Sifford said.

"When do fathers have time in today's world to do that?" he asked. Spending up to eight hours together in a fishing boat allows plenty of time.

Sifford's concept has caught on in a big way, spreading to 10 states and spawning a magazine with a circulation of 80,000. In March 1999, the first LFLS Grand National Championships will take place in Cypress Gardens, Fla.

Besides strengthening families, LFLS is designed to win people to the Lord. It is not overtly evangelistic but takes a subtle, "lifestyle evangelism" approach, he said. For example, alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

"You've got to understand the mentality of the fisherman," Sifford said. "Fishermen are known as the world's biggest liars. In order for a fisherman to believe another fisherman, he's got to build trust and credibility with his peers."

One way Sifford attempts to gain fishermen's trust is through an honest and well-run contest. He advertises to fishermen that they can compete in tournaments and win prizes. Then he delivers on his promise, with the help of corporate sponsors.

This way, when he shares the gospel with them, they are ready to listen, he said. And they are inclined to believe that what he tells them is true.

The regional tourney includes a "fathering seminar," which fisherman must attend to pick up tickets for a drawing for a \$20,000 bass boat which takes place the next day. Once there, they hear the gospel.

The two-day regional tournament is the only LFLS event in which participants fish on Sunday. A brief devotional service precedes the second-day launch.

Ryan Sifford, 18, is Larry and Judy Sifford's younger son. Ryan said he appreciates the time his dad has spent fishing with him. He learned technique, but that was not the only benefit. "Just the quality time is something that you can't ever replace."

The grins of the youngsters as their catches were weighed for the tournament confirmed that they all felt like winners.