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Missouri university administrator tapped by Associated Baptist Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Veteran Baptist public-relations specialist Philip Poole will join the staff of Associated Baptist Press Jan. 1 as executive director.

Poole, who has been executive assistant to the president and director of public relations at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., since 1994, has for the past two years served on the board of directors for ABP, an independent national news service based in Jacksonville, Fla.

As executive director, Poole, 44, will function as chief operating officer for ABP, with key responsibilities in administration, development, public relations, marketing, operations, information systems, budgeting and personnel. He will report to Greg Warner, executive editor.

Warner will continue to serve as the agency's chief executive but also will become editor of FaithWorks, ABP's new Christian-lifestyle magazine which made its debut this summer.

"Passing most of my administrative duties on to Philip will allow me to focus on FaithWorks and make sure the vision for the magazine is carried out," Warner said. "I like this arrangement because it plays to everyone's strengths. I can concentrate on journalism and Philip can apply his considerable talents in administration and public relations to build an even stronger base for ABP."

"I have known Philip for 20 years and have always been impressed with his professionalism and Christian commitment," Warner added. "In these last two years, we have also discovered Philip has an abiding commitment to the mission and future of ABP. We are fortunate to have him."

Poole said ABP "plays a vital role in religious communications today."

"ABP's growing international reputation as a fair and accurate news service reflects my own personal conviction about religious journalism," Poole said. "That made it very easy to accept the opportunity to become part of the ABP leadership team."

One key area of responsibility for Poole will be to develop the non-profit agency's fund-raising program, Warner said. Poole will share that responsibility with a full-time development officer to be hired next year.

ABP directors unanimously elected Poole to the new position of executive director Nov. 12. They also approved new or revised job descriptions for the executive editor and the yet-to-be-named executive director of

development. Naming Warner editor of FaithWorks will delay the need to hire additional editorial staff for the magazine until later in 1999, directors were told.

The changes are part of a plan approved by ABP directors in September to double the agency's staff from three to six during 1999. The expansion is aimed to meet the increased demands of the magazine and for fund-raising, while maintaining the twice-weekly ABP news service established in 1990.

Before going to Southwest Baptist University, Poole was director of public relations for the Missouri Baptist Convention for six years. He was a public relations specialist for the Baptist Sunday School Board from 1984 to 1988.

Before that, he worked four years as director of communications at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and an adjunct instructor in communications at the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. While at Southwestern, Poole hired Warner, then a seminary student, as a news writer.

"Philip gave me my first job in Christian journalism," Warner noted. "Despite that lapse of judgment, for which I am ever grateful, he has proven himself to be a first-rate administrator with a rare combination of talents that will be most valuable to ABP."

Poole said he has "the highest regard" for other members of ABP's staff and board of directors, which also aided his decision.

"I continue to be amazed at how God's divine direction has been evident in my life through the years," Poole said, "and this certainly is no exception."

A native of Sherman, Texas, Poole is a graduate of Baylor University, where he received a BA in journalism in 1977. He received a master's in journalism from the University of North Texas in Denton in 1984. He has been accredited by the Public Relations Society of America since 1987.

He has contributed to several professional and denominational journals and has been a reporter and editor at various regional and national conventions and meetings.

Poole is a member of the Public Relations Society of America and was president of the mid-Missouri chapter in 1993. He is also a member and former president of the Baptist Communicators Association.

He is active in civic organizations, including his current role as president-elect of the Bolivar area chamber of commerce. He has served on local committees for United Way of America in three cities.

He is married to Shellyn Gresham Poole, who is director of student activities at Southwest Baptist University. They have two daughters, Melissa, 14, and Caroline, 13. The Pooles are members of First Baptist Church in Bolivar.

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-- By Bob Allen

Baptist church damaged in Indonesian rioting

McLEAN, Va. (ABP) -- A Baptist church was among 13 congregations damaged or destroyed by recent riots in Indonesia, according to a report from the Baptist World Alliance.

Baptist leaders from Indonesia passed on reports to the McLean, Va.,-based BWA that rioters threw stones and damaged windows at the Baptist Church in Grogol. The mob also set fire to a car belonging to the church and beat up a church guard in the Nov. 22 rioting, according to the report.

The leaders also described frightening encounters as rioters twice approached Calvary Baptist Church in Jakarta and the offices of the Union of Indonesian Baptist Churches.

According to the leaders, the mob approached the church in downtown Jakarta and said they came to burn it to avenge the death of two Muslim leaders who had died that day. Earlier that afternoon, the rioters had damaged a Pentecostal church nearby and burned two church cars.

Guards, neighbors and church leaders persuaded the would-be attackers to leave. They returned later that evening, but were dispersed by military personnel who by that time were guarding the church and nearby Baptist union offices.

"It was just like war," one leader said. "We did not dare stay inside our homes. We turned off all the lights in the homes and went outside and it was pitch dark. We also took down all of the signs that identified the church, school and office buildings."

"Please pray for us," said the Indonesian leaders, "we do not know what will happen to our country."

Another source said that, unlike last year's uprising which led to the fall of President Suharto, the rioters are being led not by students but by "the average person in the street," who has been hit the hardest by the downturn in Indonesia's economic fortunes. Many business owners are Christians, who are generally wealthier ethnic Chinese, sparking hostility from the predominantly Muslim Indonesians.

"Tragic and false rumors have caused hysterical re-actions among uninformed youth," commented Denton Lotz, general secretary of the BWA. "Let us pray for our Baptist brothers and sisters who is patience and love seek full religious freedom."

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-- By ABP staff

Alabama Baptists elect leader, debate resolutions at convention

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- A close presidential race, improved relations with one of its universities and debate over resolutions highlighted this year's Alabama Baptist State Convention.

The meeting was held Nov. 17-18 at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

In a tight race for the Alabama convention presidency, Birmingham pastor Buddy Gray edged Muscle Shoals pastor Tom Whatley by 11 votes, 509-498.

While both men described themselves as nonaligned, Gray, pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church, was backed by conservatives, while moderates supported Whatley, pastor of Woodward Avenue Baptist Church.

Prior to the convention, Southern Baptist Conservatives of Alabama circulated a letter endorsing Gray for president. Asked about the letter, Gray said he is not a member of the group and did not solicit an endorsement. In fact, he continued, "They asked me if they could and I said, 'No,'" Gray describe himself as "a conservative pastor."

"I believe in the fundamentals," he said, "but I'm not mad about it."

Saying he and Whatley are long-time friends, Gray, 41, reacted to the close vote by commenting, "There's not 10 cents worth of difference between me and Tom."

Following three years of tense relations with the University of Mobile, a state-convention audit committee gave the school an "excellent report" at this year's annual meeting.

At previous conventions, the committee had voiced several concerns related to management of the university's Latin American branch, including a report last year that the school had ignored a 1994 agreement to stop sending money to the Nicaragua campus and to pay back \$2.3 million it invested there without convention approval.

Last year, the university's president resigned under pressure. Since taking over in February, the school's new president, Mark Foley, "has taken significant action" to restore relations with the state convention, said Steve Richardson, audit committee chairman. In an interview, Richardson cited as improvements the school's "orderly withdrawal from Nicaragua" and the raising of \$500,000 by the school's trustees..

"UM is financially stable and operating in the black," Richardson said. And "student enrollment is going up again."

Messengers to the convention debated before adopting resolutions on civic responsibilities of Christians and support for seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

A resolution urging Alabama Baptists to vote in elections and inform themselves about candidates turned controversial when James Walters, a messenger from First Baptist Church in Mobile, proposed an amendment discouraging churches from jeopardizing their tax-exempt status through endorsing candidates or using voter guides. Following heated debate, a second amendment removing the reference to voter guides passed by a ballot vote of 472-376.

The statement on seminaries affirmed the six SBC schools and all schools that "teach the Bible as our ultimate guide in faith and practice." Messengers speaking in favor of the resolution lauded the move toward conservative biblical scholarship including the teaching of "inerrancy." Opponents asked if it was intended as a nonendorsement of non-SBC divinity schools, such as Birmingham-based Samford University's Beeson Divinity School. After the resolution committee's chairwoman said the resolution did not serve to discredit any other schools, the statement passed by a show of hands.

Another resolutions passed by the convention opposed a state lottery. The committee recommended no action on one submitted resolution which would have called for a response to Baptist churches and entities who have dropped Baptist from their names.

Alabama Baptists headed off a potential debate over whether or not to endorse the Southern Baptist Convention's recent statement on the family by adopting earlier in the convention two statements on sexual morality and family concerns proposed as part of the report by the convention's state board of missions. The Alabama family statement sounded themes similar to the SBC's pro-family stance but avoided a controversial clause in the SBC statement urging wives to submit to their husbands.

Next year's convention is scheduled Nov. 16-17 at Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile.

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-- By Bob Allen and Jennifer Davis Rash

BCE launches site on the World Wide Web

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Baptist Center for Ethics has launched a site on the World Wide Web, officials at the Nashville, Tenn.-based agency have announced.

The site contains moral reflection on current events, detailed information about resources, recommended books, family-centered articles and links to other organizations. It can be accessed at www.baptists4ethics.com

"We believe this website will be another way for BCE to advance its mission of providing proactive, positive and practical resources to the Christian community," said Robert Parham, executive director.

Founded in 1991, the Baptist Center for Ethics' resources on moral and family-life topics have been used by nearly 1,200 congregations in 40 states. BCE also provides commentary on contemporary ethical issues to both denominational and secular media outlets and has been featured in interviews by major daily newspapers and broadcast networks.

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-- By ABP staff

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