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EDITOR'S NOTE: Beginning with this issue, we are using a new word processing program to produce ABP. We will continue to send e-mail messages in a "text-only" format, so we don't anticipate any problems. If you have trouble receiving or reading this file, however, please call ABP at 1-800-340-6626.

National WMU leader announces retirement

By Teresa Dickens and Bob Allen

TALLADEGA, Ala. (ABP) -- Dellanna O'Brien has announced plans to retire Sept. 1, 1999, after 10 years as executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention auxiliary, Woman's Missionary Union. O'Brien, 65, announced plans Jan. 12 at a meeting of the WMU executive board in Talladega, Ala. O'Brien said a mild stroke she suffered in September was not a factor in her decision to retire, which she has been discussing with WMU president Wanda Lee for about a year.

"WMU has faced some of its hardest days this decade," acknowledged O'Brien, who has sought to redefine the organization in light of declining participation by younger women and faced conflict over the auxiliary's refusal to align with the conservative faction now in control of the 16 million-member SBC.

But she also pointed to accomplishments in the million-member WMU the last 10 years. She cited record totals for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, started by WMU in 1888 and 1895, respectively, to support Southern Baptist missions.

She also noted the organization's more recent involvement in projects related to hunger, AIDS and child advocacy; the partnership with Habitat for Humanity to build eight houses; and the development of Christian Women's Job Corps, a job training program which seeks to help women in poverty to gain self-sufficiency.

"God has both revealed his will to us and enabled us to be on mission for him," O'Brien said. "He has protected us in the midst of criticism and directed us in times of confusion. Never have we been so aware of his guidance and love."

"It has been my high honor to serve as your executive director this decade," O'Brien continued. "Never have I worked harder and never have I been so happy in my assignment."

Prior to her service with WMU, O'Brien was an educator and served as a Southern Baptist missionary with her husband, Bill, and family in Indonesia. Following their missionary service, the family lived in Richmond, Va., where Bill served as an administrator with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. He now teaches missions and directs the global center at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., the city where WMU's national headquarters are also located.

Lee appointed a search committee to find O'Brien's successor in the closing session of the board meeting, Jan. 13. Members of the committee are Ann Coffman, board member from Florida, who will chair the group; Rebecca Williams, board member from Mississippi; Kathy Sheldon, board member from Pennsylvania-South Jersey; Madonna Havner, board member from Wyoming; and Judith Edwards, WMU executive director for New Mexico.

Lee said the women were chosen to represent both a broad geographical area and various walks of life. The committee includes women who are married to pastors, former home and international missionaries and some with previous experience on state search committees for an executive director.

Lee said the committee will have its first meeting in February. She said there is a clearly defined process for selecting a new national director, and it will be announced in the coming weeks.

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God wants 'visionaries' to end racism, Lotz says

By Wendy Ryan

ATLANTA (ABP) -- "What God wants is more visionaries, more prophets and more dreamers to work for racial justice," said Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, the worldwide organization of Baptists.

Lotz spoke to the delegates at an International Summit of Baptists against Racism, held Jan. 8-11 in Atlanta. The meeting was sponsored by a special BWA commission on racism that Lotz formed in 1992 out of concern over escalation of racial tensions in North America and the tide of the racial and ethnic conflict now sweeping many parts of the world.

Delegates from 30 countries met at Ebenezer and Wheat Street Baptist churches, sites pivotal to the fight for civil rights in the United States, as well as other locations in Atlanta. One session was held at the Carter Center, where former President Jimmy Carter addressed delegates. Another was at Morehouse College, alma mater of Martin Luther King Jr., where his widow, Coretta Scott King, spoke.

In the summit's closing session, Lotz urged delegates to open themselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit and to work for change around the world.

"What God needs now is men and women who are open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives," Lotz said, "men and women ready to go to the halls of injustice and say, 'Enough! Enough! God says it is enough!'"

Lotz described Martin Luther King Jr. as a dreamer whose work has changed people around the world.

"We honor tonight especially the dreams of one man who was cradled in this church," Lotz said from the pulpit of Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the slain civil-rights leader once co-pastored alongside his father. "To a certain extent this church can rightly be called the birthplace of the civil rights movement, not only for black

Americans in the United States but for the poor and marginalized worldwide," Lotz continued.

Lotz said there are Martin Luther King houses in Germany, Italy, Hungary and Russia, "because in their persecution they recognized the prophetic ministry of God in Dr. King's life."

"It was Martin Luther King's dream that captured the world and continued the prophetic ministry of Jesus" Lotz said. It was the Holy Spirit working in his life that gave him a dream of equality and justice for all."

"I still have a dream," Lotz said, echoing a phrase from King's most famous speech. But he warned that the world has not dealt kindly with dreamers, and Baptists who fight for racial justice and an end to ethnic and tribal conflict might well suffer for their convictions.

"We honor our martyrs, but we kill our prophets, and this is true in Anabaptist and Baptist history," Lotz said.

He cited the examples of Balthasar Hubmaier, a German reformer who was burned at the stake in Vienna; Conrad Grebel, a Mennonite leader who was drowned in Lake Zurich; Roger Williams, who founded the first Baptist church in America after being banned from the Massachusetts Bay colony; John Bunyan, who wrote the devotional classic *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison; Sam Sharpe, who was hanged in Jamaica after proclaiming, 'I would rather die on yonder gallows a free man than live in slavery; Adoniram Judson, the first American Baptist missionary, who was imprisoned in Burma; and Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights leader who was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn.

"All of these men and women were dreamers of whom the world was not worthy," Lotz said, "but all made profound changes in the way we view the world. They understood that Jesus had come not to talk about life but to change life."

Lotz also warned against false dreamers and dreams, like Hitler, a racist who enraged a whole people to commit the Holocaust and H. F. Verwoerd, who instituted apartheid in South Africa.

In the United States, Lotz said, the church is shamed by false dreamers in the Ku Klux Klan who spew racism with Christian words. In the Balkans there is ethnic conflict with dictators encouraging the people in genocide.

"Part of the prophetic responsibility of the church is to warn people against these false dreams and against these false shepherds," Lotz said.

"Jesus wants true dreamers," Lotz said, "and he promised he would send the Holy Spirit in order to make new dreamers."

"Indeed Jesus Christ is God's dreamer become reality for all humanity," Lotz said. "In Jesus Christ we see and touch and feel the power and justice of God.

"Let us go from Atlanta and proclaim to our churches and the world: 'I have a dream that one day men and women in Kosovo, Albania, will live in peace, that the Armenians and Azerbaijanians will love one another, that Hutus and Tutsis will sit down at the same table and break bread together, that in North East India Kuki and Naga tribes will live in peace, that the Aboriginal in Australia will be fully integrated into the life of the community, and the inner cities in the U.S.A. will be highways of peaceful integration and love.'"

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Religious-liberty activists weigh congressional proposals

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) - Education-voucher proposals appear to be a sure battle in the 106th Congress. Beyond that, religious leaders are looking to religious-liberty issues from the last Congress to predict what might be next in an unsure atmosphere in Washington.

Issues that came up in the previous Congress and may confront the 106th Congress as well include attempts to:

- pass legislation to make it harder for government to interfere with religious practices;
- amend the religion clauses of the U.S. Constitution, a top priority among members of the Religious Right;

and

-- pass a measure that would strip federal courts of jurisdiction in cases involving the hanging of the Ten Commandments in public places.

The Religious Liberty Protection Act was introduced in response to a 1997 Supreme Court decision that ruled Congress lacked the authority to impose a similar law on the states.

Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said RLPA "will be difficult to move in its most robust form." Political defections on both extremes and a rancorous impeachment process make bipartisan approval unlikely, Walker said. He said religious-liberty advocates would likely focus on getting legislation passed in as many states as possible.

Oliver "Buzz" Thomas, special counsel at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said a religious coalition seeking a law to strengthen religious liberty will look to break barriers that thwarted momentum behind RLPA last Congress.

"A lot of what happens this year in religious liberty is going to happen at the state level," Thomas said, adding that division among RLPA supporters could lead to attempts at passing state versions of the legislation. He listed New York, New Jersey, Texas and California as target states.

Thomas said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, a sponsor of RLPA, "is prepared to go forward with the original version of the bill, including the commerce provisions that were stripped on the House side, if Democrats who may be worried about civil-rights threats can come on board."

Some lawmakers and even some members of the religion coalition have raised concerns that RLPA could allow religious beliefs to be used to violate civil rights, but most supporters of the bill say that fear is unwarranted. Another split last year led to the removal of a major portion of the bill when some of the coalition's most conservative members, including the Home School Legal Defense Association, opposed the bill's attempt to protect religion through Congress' commerce powers.

"I hope that a top priority will be given to a vigorous, comprehensive RLPA," said Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom. "It will be a gut check on principle for conservatives and civil rights activists alike."

McFarland said that even though it might hurt RLPA's chances of passing, lawmakers might consider stripping the popular land-use provision from the bill and passing it in a separate piece of legislation. The land-use provision would strengthen religious groups in their bids to fight local zoning laws during church construction or renovation.

Another religious liberty issue in Congress surfaced last year when the Religious Freedom Amendment failed to receive the two-thirds vote necessary for passage in the U.S. House of Representatives. The amendment would have opened the door for some forms of government-sponsored prayer and tax-financed religious education and activities. An aide to Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., sponsor of the constitutional amendment, told Associated Baptist Press that no decision has been made on whether to introduce the measure in the 106th Congress.

Thomas said Istook may introduce a version of the amendment "but it's hard to get momentum for something like that in an off-election year."

"A lot of support for the Istook amendment came from politicians who wanted to go back to their district and say 'Hey, look I voted for this,'" Thomas explained.

Walker predicted there would be no "major activity on the constitutional amendment, although I'm sure several will be filed, particularly in the House of Representatives."

Although the Istook received the support of many conservative Christian groups, other conservatives opposed the measure, acknowledging that it may have gone too far toward government establishment of religion.

McFarland, whose agency refused to support the Istook measure, included it in a list of four proposals that "could be real unfortunate clutter in the area of social legislation in the 106th Congress." McFarland said other "clutter" could include two pieces of legislation sought by gay-rights supporters and some religious groups, including the National Council of Churches.

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act would protect homosexuals against employment discrimination. It includes a broad exemption that allows religious groups to refuse to employ gays and lesbians.

Another bill criticized as "clutter" by McFarland is hate-crimes legislation designed to curb violent crimes against homosexuals and by making homophobia and sexism equal to racism in dealing with violent crimes. McFarland said he opposes "violence in any form, but my love for the First Amendment is too great" to allow religious beliefs to possibly be used as evidence of other crimes.

The National Council of Churches supports ENDA.

McFarland, Thomas and Walker criticized an anticipated attempt in the House to open the door for states to hang the Ten Commandments in public places. The proposal was introduced in the previous Congress by Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala. The issue surfaced in Alabama where Etowah County Circuit Court Judge Roy Moore fought court rulings ordering him to halt his practices of opening court sessions with prayer and displaying a replica of the Ten Commandments on the wall.

Laura Woolfrey, a spokeswoman for Aderholt, said "we are absolutely going to reintroduce the bill" in the 106th Congress. The measure would allow states to make their own decision about the public display, without intervention from federal courts.

Walker said the proposal "aims to strip the federal courts of power to enforce the U.S. Constitution as it applies to the Ten Commandments."

Will Dodson, governmental affairs director of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said the ERLC has no position on the Aderholt proposal and did not take a position on the measure last year.

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Battles over education vouchers expected on Capitol Hill, in states

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- It may be a while before lawmakers send much of a signal about how religious-liberty issues will fare in the 106th Congress.

Oliver "Buzz" Thomas, special counsel at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said congressional action on religious-liberty issues would depend "on how quickly the Senate can dispose of the impeachment trial."

Many religious leaders expect that popular church-state issues will resurface in some form, with plans to use public funds for religious schools, or vouchers, high on the agenda.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said education vouchers likely will form a major battle between "compassionate conservatism and logical liberalism" this Congress.

"Conservatives worth their salt do not want government regulating religion, presuming to force guidelines on faith-based institutions," Dunn said. "Any liberal worthy of the name demands that public funds are dedicated to public purposes," he added. "Yet some misinformed, misled, short-sighted political animals, both inside and out of the church, keep screaming for voucher schemes for parochial schools."

Several conservative religious leaders and groups support the idea of vouchers, including the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which filed a brief in support of a Milwaukee voucher initiative that was upheld by the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case on appeal last year.

Will Dodson, governmental affairs director for the ERLC, said this Congress "will probably try to avoid controversy on issues such as vouchers. It will be slow to act." But he predicted that eventually lawmakers "will target an area, like the District of Columbia, as a trial for vouchers."

He said the time has come to experiment with vouchers. "There are some forms of vouchers that are unconstitutional, but vouchers, if drafted properly, are neutral toward religion," he said.

Dodson said the ERLC supports allowing churches to be eligible for government funds to provide social services through programs such as charitable choice, "but that does not mean it is wise for churches to take those funds."

"Generally, it is not," he advised. "Churches have to weigh what they give up and what they get before deciding."

Steven McFarland, director of Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said "choice will be important" in the 106th Congress. "There is a growing consensus that non-governmental programs can do school and social services better. Why not give them a try?" He said vouchers and charitable-choice initiatives that provide government funds for faith-based social service programs "will be a rallying cry for many conservatives."

Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said the proponents of education vouchers and charitable choice "are targeting the African-American and Hispanic communities to garner support for these schemes."

"Attempts to convert these constituencies make it even more imperative that we stand firm in our opposition to those perverse plans to subsidize religion and in favor of the separation of church and state," Walker said.

Walker noted that following the Supreme Court's refusal to review the Milwaukee voucher plan, voucher battles might increase at the state level, as several consider their own proposals.

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Justices decline dispute over sentence altered because judge read Bible verses

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court declined Jan. 11 to disturb a lower court's decision freeing a convicted sex offender because the trial judge quoted Bible verses before pronouncing his sentence.

Arron Pattno was sentenced to 20 months to five years in prison after being convicted of sexual assault for having sexual contact with a 13-year-old boy. Before pronouncing the sentence, the judge read Bible verses denouncing homosexuality.

The Nebraska Supreme Court said that a reasonable person "could have questioned the judge's impartiality" after hearing him cite Scripture.

Pattno pleaded guilty to abusing the youth he met through an Internet chat room in 1996. He later challenged his sentence as excessive, arguing the judge showed bias against Pattno because of his sexual orientation.

The state Supreme Court sided with Pattno.

"Because the trial judge interjected his own religious views immediately prior to sentencing, a reasonable person could conclude that the sentence was based upon personal bias or prejudice of the judge," Nebraska's top court said.

The Nebraska court also noted that Pattno's crime was sexual contact with a minor, not sexual contact with another male.

The court said the scripture read by the judge was not relevant to the crime to which Pattno pleaded guilty, "and it should not have been considered by the judge in determining an appropriate sentence."

The state Supreme Court also said the judge's use of the Bible violated the separation of church and state.

"Allowing a court to recite scripture, and thereby proclaim its interpretation of that scripture, implies that the court is advancing its own religious views from the bench," the Nebraska Supreme Court said.

After Pattno's sentence was vacated, he was resentenced to four years' probation by another judge.

In asking the nation's high court to reverse the decision, Nebraska Attorney General Don Stenberg argued that the Nebraska ruling could "lead to an extensive inquiry into the religious beliefs and practices of each judge in Nebraska."

Stenberg noted that the Nebraska Supreme Court acknowledged that the evidence supported the sentence and that the sentence was below the maximum allowable for that class of felony.

"This militates against any inference that the judge had some religiously based bias against Pattno which resulted in the imposition of a questionable prison term," Stenberg argued.

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High court rejects challenge to military homosexual policy

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused Jan. 11 to review lower court decisions upholding the "don't ask, don't tell" policy governing gays in the military.

The policy was challenged in separate actions by officers in the U.S. Navy and the Army National Guard who were discharged after acknowledging their homosexual orientation to their commanding officers.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the challenge, ruling the policy regulates conduct, not speech, and relates to the government's interest in maintaining discipline in the military.

The 9th Circuit became the fourth federal appeals court to uphold the "don't ask, don't tell" policy which took effect in 1993. So far, the Supreme Court has refused to hear repeated requests to invalidate it.

Under the policy, the military no longer asks recruits about their sexual orientation, but homosexual conduct continues to be grounds for dismissal. The policy presumes that service members who acknowledge they are homosexuals engage in gay sex. But military personnel may challenge that presumption by showing that they do not, and are unlikely to, commit homosexual acts.

Richard Watson, a Navy lieutenant, was discharged in 1995 after acknowledging his homosexual orientation while serving in Bremerton, Wash. Andrew Holmes, a first lieutenant in the U.S. and California Army National Guard, was discharged in 1994.

Both men filed actions in federal district courts. The appeals court consolidated their cases.

In March 1996 a federal district court in Washington rejected Watson's claim that the policy violated his due process and First Amendment rights, but that same month, a district court in San Francisco ordered Holmes reinstated.

In rejecting claims by Watson and Holmes, the appeals court said the policy is "rationally related to the military's interest in preventing homosexual conduct."

While the "assumption that declared homosexuals will engage in homosexual conduct is imperfect, it is sufficiently rational to survive scrutiny," the appeals court said.

The appeals court also rejected arguments that the policy violates free speech protected by the First Amendment, because it takes effect only when a service member says he or she is gay.

"Because Watson and Holmes were discharged for their conduct and not for speech, the First Amendment is not implicated," the appeals court said.

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Supreme Court rejects dispute over ads linking abortion, cancer

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused Jan. 11 to hear claims by Philadelphia-area transit officials that their removal of station advertisements linking abortion and breast cancer did not violate the Constitution.

The high court left intact a ruling by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority violated the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech by removing the advertising posters of Christ's Bride Ministries, a nonprofit organization based in Merrifield, Va.

In early 1996, CBM contracted with transit officials to place posters bearing the message "women who choose abortion suffer more and deadlier breast cancer" in subway and train stations. The ministry paid more than \$3,000 monthly to display posters in 25 rail stations.

SEPTA immediately received complaints about the posters and removed them after receiving copy of a letter from a federal health official questioning the accuracy of the ads' claim.

In a letter to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Philip Lee, assistant secretary of health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said the ad was "unfortunately misleading, unduly alarming" and "does not accurately reflect the weight of the scientific literature."

CBM filed suit after the ads were removed. At first, a federal district court rejected the ministry's claim, ruling that Philadelphia transit officials maintained control over the advertising space and that Lee's letter was a "reasonable" basis for removing the posters.

The federal appeals court disagreed, however. It ruled that transit officials had created a "designated public forum," and that "content-based restrictions on speech that come within the forum must pass strict scrutiny to comport with the First Amendment."

In this case, the appeals court said, "We conclude that CBM's First Amendment rights were violated when SEPTA removed CBM's ads."

In another abortion-related case, the high court refused to reinstate a challenge to the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act by an anti-abortion group called Lambs of Christ.

The federal law bars the use of force or threats to intimidate persons entering or leaving clinics that perform abortions.

In this dispute, 11 members of the group were arrested after blocking entrances to a Planned Parenthood clinic in Rochester, N.Y., in December 1996.

The defendants were convicted and ordered to pay more than \$1,100 in property damage. They received sentences ranging from time served plus supervised release to four months imprisonment.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the group's claim that the federal law is unconstitutional. "FACE is a valid exercise of Congress' power under the Commerce Clause," the appeals court said.

The appeals court also rejected arguments that FACE discriminated against speech on the basis of content or viewpoint.

"Both by its language and its application, FACE seeks to govern all people who obstruct the provision of reproductive health services," the appeals court said. "And it does so regardless of whether the obstruction is or is not motivated by opposition to abortion."

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High Court sidesteps challenges to New York porn shop restrictions

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP)-- In a pair of cases challenging a city ordinance that forbids adult businesses from operating near churches and residential areas, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review lower court rulings upholding the law.

Left intact Jan. 11 were lower court rulings that the New York City statute does not violate the First Amendment's right to free speech.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a state trial court decision that the ordinance "was not an attempt to regulate speech but rather was motivated by concerns other than those related to speech." The particular concern addressed by the statute, the court continued, was "a reasonable belief that adult establishments produce undesirable secondary effects such as neighborhood deterioration, crime and decreased property values."

In October 1995 the city enacted an ordinance that forced the relocation and disbursement of adult or sexually oriented businesses located within 500 feet of any school, day-care center, house of worship or one another. The businesses were also limited to non-residential districts.

Nearly 85 percent of the estimated 177 adult businesses could have been forced to relocate, close or change the nature of their business. To date, nearly 50 establishments have closed or altered the nature of their business.

In February 1996, more than 100 adult video stores, theaters and other similar institutions challenged the zoning law in a case filed in the New York Supreme Court. The suit alleged that the ordinance violated both the state and federal constitutions. At the same time, a similar suit was filed by four patrons of the establishments. The cases were informally consolidated in the state court system.

Since the case involved First Amendment claims, the case was moved to a federal court. But the federal court allowed the case to return to state courts to resolve state issues. The federal court retained its jurisdiction over the federal claims, however.

The state courts, including the New York State Court of Appeals, rejected challenges to the laws restricting the adult establishments. The state trial court concluded that the zoning law "does not violate plaintiffs' rights of freedom of expression guaranteed under the State Constitution, and is, therefore, constitutional."

The state courts also rejected petitioners' claims that the city had not met its burden of demonstrating ample alternative locations for adult businesses under that law.

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