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Texas Baptists may cut funds to SBC agencies, Dilday says

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- When Texas Baptists meet this fall, they likely will consider reducing funding for selected Southern Baptist Convention entities, the president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas told an Abilene newspaper.

Some seminaries could risk losing \$3 million from Texas Baptists because of theological differences, according to a Jan. 19 story in the Abilene Reporter-News based on an interview with Russell Dilday, president of the 2.5 million-member BGCT.

After the story appeared and was picked up by the Associated Press, Dilday discussed his comments further in an interview with the Baptist Standard Jan. 22.

Dilday told the Texas Baptist newspaper he did not mean to imply he was advocating such changes. Rather, he answered candidly when a reporter asked him what he believes is likely to happen next November, he said.

"It is inevitable that in El Paso there will be some votes on the way Texas Baptists share resources," Dilday said. He suggested such recommendations could come from the convention floor if not put forward by a BGCT committee.

Dilday said there are not yet any formal proposals to defund SBC agencies before the state's administrative committee, executive board, or a special committee studying implementation of an "Effectiveness/Efficiency" report adopted by the convention in 1997.

But he said he has heard strong sentiment expressed for decreasing funding for certain SBC causes that are now included in Texas Baptists' unified budget. He said sentiment runs strongest against four particular entities: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.; and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, Tenn.

The Abilene newspaper said Dilday did not expect Texas Baptists to defund Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, even though it is moving in a fundamentalist direction. Dilday was president of the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, 15 years before being fired in 1994 over differences with the school's conservative trustees.

The Texas convention already offers churches latitude in what organizations receive money they give for ministries outside the state. Most churches use a plan that calls for 33 cents of every dollar given to the BGCT to be forwarded to the SBC Executive Committee for distribution to national agencies through a unified budget called the Cooperative Program.

In addition to the traditional state/SBC split, since 1994, Texas churches may choose to direct that a portion of their gifts be forwarded instead to another world missions organization, such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or the Baptist World Alliance. Churches may also "negative designate" up to five state or national entities they do not wish to support. Monies given through any of the plans are credited as Cooperative Program gifts, and therefore count in a formula used to determine how many messengers a church may send to the annual state convention.

Any new changes in Texas giving options would have to "allow churches to divide funds between the BGCT and SBC with more selectivity," Dilday said

Although not cited by Dilday, that might mean creating additional tailored giving plans from which churches could choose the mix of Texas and worldwide causes they prefer. Baptist conventions in Virginia and North Carolina currently offer such plans.

Another possibility would be for the BGCT to adopt a list of preferred "partners" in worldwide ministry which could include, for example, the SBC International Mission Board and Southwestern Seminary but no other SBC entities. Whatever is proposed, Dilday said he hopes all Texas Baptist churches will be given room to make "reasoned and informed decisions" about their giving.

"I want our convention in its decisions to follow an often-overlooked Baptist ideal that those who have the majority ought to give great consideration to the minority," he said. Just because those who dislike the conservative direction the SBC has taken in recent years may constitute a voting majority in Texas, those of other convictions should not be shut out, he said.

If a proposal for further funding changes comes to the floor in El Paso, it likely will be adopted, Dilday predicted, provided it still allows room for a variety of options.

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said Dilday's comments represent "a serious and unnecessary departure from the proven method of the Cooperative Program."

"It is disappointing in a day when state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention are strengthening their partnership that Dr. Dilday would suggest an approach which erodes the relationship between the BGCT and the Southern Baptist Convention," Chapman said in a written statement.

David Currie, executive director of the moderate group Texas Baptists Committed, said he favors the type of changes Dilday has predicted but hopes they will originate within BGCT committees rather than from the convention floor.

Since conservatives gained control of the SBC, the six SBC seminaries have become "fundamentalist institutions that don't share our vision and values," Currie said. Thus it is "fair for questions to be asked" about how those schools are funded, he added.

Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler called Dilday's remarks "a case of posturing in an attempt to dissuade Texas Baptists from their historic and longstanding partnership with the Southern Baptist Convention."

"I am convinced that the vast majority of faithful Texas Baptists cherish and will continue to support the historic partnership we share," Mohler said, according to Baptist Press.

Last year, the BGCT forwarded \$22.66 million in Cooperative Program gifts to the SBC Executive Committee, in addition to more than \$20 million given to the SBC's two mission boards through special offerings. Those were the largest contributions from any state.

According to the SBC's distribution formula last year, the undesignated SBC Cooperative Program gifts of Texas Baptists provided \$11.33 million to the International Mission Board, \$5.16 million to the North American Mission Board, \$1.38 million to Southwestern Seminary, \$92,434 to Southern Seminary, \$788,568 to Southeastern Seminary, \$401,082 to Midwestern Seminary and \$337,634 to the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

Baptists respond quickly to needs of tornado victims

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- Everyone talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it, an old saying goes. But that doesn't account for Southern Baptists, who, as usual, were at the forefront of disaster-relief ministries in the wake of recent tornadoes in Tennessee and Arkansas.

A storm system of 20 to 30 tornadoes ripped through Arkansas Jan. 21, killing at least six people and injuring dozens of others. Approximately 200 homes were destroyed as the storm traveled northeast through the state's center.

The grounds of the governor's mansion was among areas damaged in Little Rock. "Your first reaction is that you are stunned," noted Gov. Mike Huckabee. He said the mansion's manicured lawn went from a "picture-perfect garden" to devastation that "looks like a bomb hit it."

Calling the close call "a little unsettling," Huckabee, a former Baptist pastor, reflected: "It reminds you that it doesn't matter whether you are the governor or you are a guy living in a mobile home park in a remote part of Arkansas, tornadoes don't play favorites. We ought to all realize that we are here by the grace of God."

Reflecting on the devastation and loss of life across the state, Huckabee remarked: "I can offer no explanation as to why some are taken and some are left. Those are questions we won't know in this life. But what we can say is those folks don't have to go through their tragedy without feeling the prayers, the concern and the sympathy of their neighbors and friends in Arkansas."

In addition to damage in Little Rock and North Little Rock, the most extensive destruction centered in Beebe and Newark, communities located northeast of the capital city. Initial reports indicated that First Baptist Church of Beebe, was among facilities heavily damaged.

Red Cross officials requested Arkansas Baptist disaster-relief teams to provide emergency food service in both Beebe and Newark, said Dan Clevenger, the state convention's disaster-relief coordinator. He said a relief unit from Forrest City would set up at a Methodist church in Newark and a team from Arkadelphia had been assigned to Beebe. He added that several chainsaw crews also were on standby to do clean-up work.

Noting that each of the disaster relief units is equipped to feed up to 3,000 people per meal, Clevenger explained, "It's ministry to help people in need in a time of crisis.

"We always combine ministry and evangelism -- they're never separate," he added. "We'll go to share our faith by establishing relationships in a time of crisis. We'll be expressing love to people, helping them and caring for them. People respond to that."

In Clarksville, Tenn., Concord Baptist Association's disaster-relief feeding unit volunteers and members of Hilldale Baptist Church had provided 1,450 meals for tornado victims as of Monday, Jan. 25.

A tornado roared through the downtown area of Clarksville early Jan. 22. It destroyed 148 and damaged 562 businesses and homes.

"They're not kidding when they say it looks like a bomb went off in downtown Clarksville," said Don Davis, a member of Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville who arrived early to assess damage. He said the disaster affected more businesses than homes.

Several hundred members from Hilldale Baptist Church served in the disaster-relief efforts said Verlon Moore, the church's pastor. Some even slept at the church on Monday night so they could begin work early Monday morning.

Tim Bearden, disaster-relief director for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, praised Hilldale's members. "The church and its members are truly a lighthouse for the Kingdom of God," Bearden said.

Between 50 and 75 tornadoes were counted across Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas during the day Jan. 25. They were followed by severe thunderstorms, which resulted in flash flooding across the three states.

Meanwhile, other Tennessee residents continued to recover from a tornado which hit their community a week earlier.

A Tennessee Baptist disaster-relief feeding unit began providing meals in Jackson, Tenn., Jan. 20. "We're trying to meet the immediate needs and help out where we are needed," said Conroy Ryan, associate director of missions for Madison-Chester Baptist Association.

"They're just like a bunch of angels. That's the only way to describe it," said Gary Holbert, a resident of the severely damaged Charles Latham area after the Red Cross truck arrived with a meal prepared by the Baptist volunteers.

Ryan said dozens of Baptist churches from across Tennessee had volunteered including 16 teams from outside the area.

With Madison County schools closed for the week, 70 youth and adults from West Jackson Baptist Church delivered food and drinks to the disaster areas.

The church also opened its doors as a free daycare for school-age children, said Connie Stricklin, emergency childcare coordinator for the state convention. She noted it was available not only for tornado victims, but also for volunteers who came to help.

"It's gotten busier every day," said Teresa Kee, a volunteer at East Union Baptist Church, which served as a citywide shelter for those who lost their homes.

"We've just been amazed at people who have brought stuff," she added. East Union served 400 hot meals and more than 1,000 sack lunches to storm victims and volunteers. The church also received eight Sunday school rooms full of clothing for storm victims.

Volunteer Amanda Mayo said the packages were given to victims as they came to the church and also were delivered to storm victims across the county.

"It's wonderful to see the community pulling together like this," one volunteer said. "It restores your faith."

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-- By ABP staff, with reporting by Trennis Henderson, Marcia Knox, Connie Davis, Andrea Aldridge and Lonnie Wilkey.

Former seminary professor to lead Kentucky theology school

CAMPBELLSVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Former seminary professor and hospital chaplain Walter Jackson has been named dean of Campbellsville University's new school of theology.

Jackson, former senior professor of pastoral care at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and associate director of the St. Matthews Pastoral Counseling Center in Louisville, Ky., will design curriculum, hire faculty and recruit students for the theology school, said Campbellsville President Kenneth Winters.

Trustees of the Kentucky Baptist liberal-arts university voted last October to establish a school of theology. The school will offer both undergraduate and master's-level training for ministers, officials announced last fall. "The establishment of the school of theology at Campbellsville will enable this Christian university to reach out to our church and educational constituencies in an even greater way," Winters said.

Winters said the school would not be positioned with any particular faction in the Southern Baptist Convention. It is not expected to compete for students with Southern Seminary in Louisville. "It is our contention that there is a solid group of men and women who feel God's call for them to enter the ministry and who wish to do their undergraduate and graduate experience on a Christian university campus," Winters said.

Jackson was professor of ministry at Southern Seminary from 1982 to 1996 and also served as associate dean and acting dean of the school of theology. He worked 19 years as a hospital chaplain in Kentucky and Oklahoma, where he also developed two clinical-pastoral-education programs and two pastoral-counseling centers.

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-- By ABP staff

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story updates and replaces the Jan. 21 ABP story "Baptist agency's firing of gay worker sparks talk of anti-discrimination law."

Proposed gay-rights law to exclude all religious groups

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- An ad-hoc committee of Louisville's board of aldermen voted Jan. 19 to change the religious-exemption amendment for a proposed measure to bar job discrimination against gays and lesbians.

The measure, expected to pass Jan. 26, would no longer apply the law to religious-based schools or charities that receive a majority of funding from public sources.

That provision was viewed by Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children as a direct response to the organization's firing of a lesbian supervisor, which re-energized the move to pass what supporters of gay rights are calling the "Fairness Ordinance."

More than half of KBHC's annual revenues come from state reimbursements for services the agency supplies to families and abused and neglected children.

The ad-hoc committee of aldermen voted 5-2 to recommend passage of the measure to ban job discrimination against homosexuals, according to the Louisville Courier-Journal newspaper.

Meanwhile, opponents expressed disappointment that no public hearings would be held in connection with the measure. Aldermanic President Steve Magre, who was expected to vote for the employment ordinance, told the Courier-Journal that no amount of public testimony would change any alderman's mind.

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-- By David Winfrey

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