

Nashville, Tennessee

# Associated Baptist Press

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

February 4, 1999

(99-11)

## In this issue:

- Greensboro congregation latest in string of North Carolina churches to leave SBC
- Fellowship projects growth in missionary appointments
- State RFRA conference examines zoning laws' impact on churches
- Experts urge churches to give community a sign
- Sign messages get Texas church noticed
- Pointers for effective use of church signs

## **Greensboro congregation latest in string of North Carolina churches to leave SBC**

GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP) -- Greensboro's College Park Baptist Church has become the latest in a string of North Carolina congregations to break ties with the Southern Baptist Convention over disagreement with the national convention's conservative leaders.

The Greensboro congregation voted 105-12 during a Jan. 10 business meeting to end the church's relationship with the 16-million-member national organization. Pastor Michael Usey told the Greensboro News and Record the convention's conservative positions were "casting a bad shadow on the church."

In October, Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham took similar action, voting to sever ties and delete references to the Southern Baptist Convention from church documents.

"Out of our Baptist heritage and its basis in the authority of Scripture, we recognize that Watts Street Baptist Church does not ascribe to many of the principles espoused by current Southern Baptist Convention leadership," said a statement issued by the church's pastor, Mel Williams.

In September, Raleigh's 186-year-old First Baptist Church passed a resolution stating it would no longer identify itself as a Southern Baptist congregation. The move followed a study of recent convention actions including last summer's adoption of an amendment to the "Baptist Faith and Message" which calls on women to "graciously submit" to their husbands.

Wedgewood Baptist Church in Charlotte voted to cut ties with the SBC in late June, citing the convention's increasingly fundamentalist and sectarian bent. "The amendment to the 'Baptist Faith and Message' was the final straw," said Pastor Chris Ayers. "We have been upset with the SBC for a long time, going back to what Bailey Smith said about God not hearing the prayers of Jews (in 1980), and then the evangelism of Jews (in 1996)."

According to a Jan. 30 report in the Baptist newspaper Biblical Recorder, all of the churches, plus three other moderate congregations in the state which have left the SBC over the last five years, continue to maintain ties with the 1.2 million-member Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Herb Hollinger, an SBC spokesperson, told the Greensboro News and Record the denomination regrets the churches' decision but "understands the world is a diverse place" and respects the autonomy of the local church.

-30-

-- By ABP staff. Adapted from a report by Suzy Barile in the Biblical Recorder.

## **Fellowship projects growth in missionary appointments**

By Robert O'Brien

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Reflecting optimism about financial growth, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's global missions office has ended a two-year slowdown on the appointment of missionaries.

Leaders of the Atlanta-based group say they plan to appoint at least four missionaries in February and at least eight in June.

"We have specialized needs in missions overseas and in the U.S. and want to match up people with those needs," said Keith Parks, global missions coordinator.

CBF leaders expect to reach a \$5 million goal for the 1998-99 Global Missions Offering, setting the stage for growth in the group's missionary force.

Financial Coordinator Gary Skeen said the offering had surpassed \$1.3 million as of Dec. 31, 1998 -- or 17 percent ahead of the same point last fiscal year.

The Fellowship ended 1998 with 126 career and short-term missionaries -- down from its peak of 151 in June of 1997.

The Fellowship's missionary force grew rapidly before an unexpected plateau in giving, combined with large numbers of new missionaries, forced the organization to cut back on missionary appointments. Since, the 8-year-old missions operation has for the first time begun to feel the effects of attrition, as missionaries have resigned or retired, said Gary Baldrige, associate global-missions coordinator. Now, Fellowship leaders are once again actively recruiting new missionaries.

"Our log jam is clearing and we can look ahead once again to encouraging qualified candidates to look ahead with us to 2000 and beyond," Baldrige said.

Overall gifts to the Fellowship between July and December were up 13 percent, officials said. Total contributions approached \$6.6 million, including designated gifts that are forwarded to state and regional CBF organizations, CBF partner organizations and some state conventions.

Undesignated contributions to CBF ministries were described as "basically even" with the previous year.

The number of churches contributing to the Fellowship, meanwhile, grew to 1,478. Of the 138 new contributing churches, 83 were from Texas, where CBF held rallies last spring followed by its General Assembly in Houston in June.

Texas led the nation in the number of contributing churches, with 322. Georgia, however, with 137 churches, gave the most money, \$917,000. Other leading states were North Carolina, where 237 churches gave \$766,000; Alabama, where 41 churches contributed \$379,000; and Virginia, with 250 churches and gifts totaling \$376,000.

-30-

-- Sarah Zimmerman and Bob Allen contributed to this story.

## State RFRA conference examines zoning laws' impact on churches

By Ashlee Ross

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Raising money to construct a church may be easier than finding a place to build it, said a law professor at a Jan. 28 conference on restoring religious freedom in the states.

Douglas Laycock, a professor at the University of Texas Law School, discussed the impact of zoning laws on churches at the Restoring Religious Freedom in the States Conference at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington.

The conference, sponsored by the Council on Religious Freedom, addressed the recent push to pass state versions of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a 1993 federal law that bolstered protection for religious liberty.

The Supreme Court declared RFRA unconstitutional as applied to the states in June 1997. Many religious-liberty organizations have since sought to enact "mini-RFRAs" on a state-by-state basis.

In addition, members on the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion support the Religious Liberty Protection Act, a federal bill that would bar state and local governments from unnecessarily interfering with religious practices.

Laycock, who defended RFRA before the Supreme Court, said passing state RFRAs is difficult because of, among other things, the impact such laws have on zoning for churches.

He said residents sometimes do not want churches in their community for reasons ranging from hostility toward a certain religion to increased traffic.

While older denominations may have had churches in a neighborhood for decades, Laycock said, newer religions and churches sometimes cannot get in because zoning laws make it harder now to build a church.

"It functions as a grandfather clause," Laycock said. Zoning laws usually affect "non-denominational, new, unfamiliar churches," he said.

Laycock said cities are more likely to give special-use permits to banquet halls, fraternal organizations, funeral homes, libraries and museums than to churches.

While existing laws allow a church to buy several houses in a residential neighborhood and tear them down to build a church, churches often find a Catch 22 in trying to find a suitable location, he said.

Neighborhoods try to keep churches out because churches generate traffic on Sunday, he said, while business districts want to keep churches out because churches generate traffic only on Sunday.

"Certainly there are legitimate reasons why neighborhoods need to have a say" in where churches are built, he said. However, people often oppose churches in their neighborhood because of prejudice against the church's denomination or religion, he added.

Laycock pointed to a Gallup Poll in which 30 percent of respondents said they do not want religious fundamentalists in their neighborhood, and 62 percent said they do not want a minority sect or cult in their neighborhood.

Perhaps because they are unfamiliar to many people, most zoning cases involve small religions and small churches, he said.

"There is no majority religion in the United States, and adherents of different faiths are distributed quite evenly across the nation," Laycock said. "Every faith is a small faith somewhere."

Laycock said small churches are "overwhelmingly overrepresented" in church zoning cases. He said denominations that comprise nine percent of the population total more than 50 percent of such litigation.

Laycock said state RFRAs should be worded carefully. Municipal and zoning officials will oppose state RFRAs if the laws mean neighborhoods can no longer keep churches out, he warned.

Another trouble spot for zoning, Laycock said, is that some churches provide special services, such as daycare, which neighbors may not understand.

"They understand sermons and hymns and prayers," he said. "Everything else may require a special permit."

30-

## **Experts urge churches to give community a sign**

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Does your church have anything to say?

Most people's first opinion about that question may be formed more by what's said on a church's sign than in its pulpit, according to a number of church-communication experts.

While most churches have outdoor signs with changeable message boards, few churches use those signs effectively, the communicators said.

Yet the first impression people often have of a church is from its sign, said Mike Townsend, sales director for J.M. Stewart Corp. The Sarasota, Fla., -based manufacturer of church signs works with LifeWay Christian Resources to serve Southern Baptist congregations.

Research by the Church Growth Institute found 10 percent of people who join a church attended there the first time as a direct result of the church sign, Townsend said.

"Stop and think about what the average sign in front of a church is," Townsend said. "They're not all that attractive. If churches would just give due diligence to their signs, they would increase the number of people who come in."

One of the worst things a church can put on its sign is weekly sermon titles, Townsend and other experts said. That usually is done more for the pastor's ego than to catch the attention of passersby, they said.

Asked about the effectiveness of posting sermon titles, veteran church communication consultant Floyd Craig groaned. "You've got to be really good to put a sermon title up there," he said. "If a sermon title is appealing to the audience rather than to just the preacher, then it might be worth putting on there."

A more effective alternative might be a money-back guarantee, Craig said, only partly tongue in cheek. "Guaranteed: Sermons 15 minutes. That would get attention."

While most pastors would be unwilling to make that particular offer, Craig's suggestion illustrates the type of creative thinking behind effective church signs, the experts agreed.

Dan Pryor, a Dallas communication and leadership consultant, said churches should approach their sign decisions first by asking a basic question: "Who are you trying to communicate to?"

Using an outdoor sign for messages that are relevant only to those inside the fold is not only ineffective but may actually repel visitors, he and the others suggested.

"We have found the best way to use a marquee sign is to view the sign as the communication that exists between the church and the people who drive by, the people we call the drive-by congregation," Townsend said.

Thus, clever sayings, Scriptures quotations, uplifting thoughts and timely announcements are appropriate. Craig suggested this example: "Children hugged here."

"Think about what would cause people to smile," he said. "Do that over a long period of time, and people will begin to have a good impression."

Church signs have the potential to subtly influence thousands of people who pass by some churches each day, Craig said. He described the impact one well-used church sign has made in his own life as he passes it every day on his way to and from work. The sign is changed about twice a week and always carries an uplifting message.

"Without exception, they put up statements that make me say, 'Oh, that's good. That's a nice thought.' One of these weeks, I'm going to stop by there on a Wednesday night when they're having prayer meeting and thank somebody. They always have a spiritual word, and I need something in the morning that will help me."

If churches will meet the needs of passersby in such simple ways, those strangers will be more inclined to have a positive impression of the church as a place to find help, Craig added.

Providing information that is helpful to those driving by is the key to any success in signage, said Phil Hester, a former Houston advertising executive who 10 years ago moved to San Diego to become a pastor and start an innovative church.

To illustrate, he recalled an account from his advertising days. A Texas-based stock market investment firm wanted to build an image through billboards. Hester's agency recommended producing electronic billboards with a running Dow Jones average.

The campaign was a huge success and firmly associated in the public's mind the name of the investment firm with helpful information about the stock market, Hester said.

"I've thought about this many times in terms of churches," he added. "Signs, unless they are speaking to a need in the community, become like trees, invisible. They're there, but you don't see them or read them. You just drive by them."

Hester's church, Northstar Community Church in San Diego, doesn't have a sign, because it doesn't own a permanent building. If he had a sign, he would "try to have messages that related specifically to issues relevant to my community."

For example, he said, people would be interested to know what ministries a church offers, such as Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, youth programs, clothes closets, divorce-recovery groups or Boy Scout troops.

And, Hester said, since technology has made electronic signs more affordable today, he would put up a sign with running messages, maybe the time and temperature as well.

When concocting clever messages, churches walk a fine line between being prophetic and being offensive, said Townsend, the sign salesman. "You don't want to shy away from what you stand for, but you certainly want to be prudent."

To illustrate, Townsend draws upon Jesus' declaration that he would make his disciples "fishers" of men. "The sign is a hook, and you want to put an attractive bait on there."

That means churches also must be honest in what they advertise on their signs, added Monty Carter, a South Carolina pastor who previously worked in marketing and evangelism.

"Better to go without, or just cover the basics, than to run the risk of making a false identity statement about the church," he warned.

If a church wants to advertise itself as a friendly place, it better be friendly to those who visit, Pryor added. "You've got to live up to your promises."

-30-

## **Sign messages get Texas church noticed**

By Mark Wingfield

DESOTO, Texas (ABP) -- When an unfamiliar woman dropped off her children at the nursery of Southwest Baptist Church in Desoto, Texas, on a recent Sunday morning, the nursery worker asked her how she heard about the church.

"It was your sign," the woman said, somewhat sheepishly.

She explained that the messages on the church's outdoor sign had intrigued her so much that for several weeks she made a point to drive by and read the sign.

Ultimately, that caused her to visit the church, the first time she had been to any church in a long time.

Her story is not surprising to Pastor Brian Waite. The marquee-type sign has become the church's trademark in the community, he said.

On response cards included in each Sunday's bulletin, worshipers are asked to indicate what brought them to Southwest. "You'd be amazed at how many times people put down the sign," he said.

It's not by accident that the church's sign is generating so much interest. Waite and other church leaders intentionally focus on using the sign effectively. A creative team holds regular brainstorming sessions to think up the catchy phrases to be displayed.

"We want to make people stop and look," Waite said. "We're trying to get away from the cutesy-type things to something that's going to attract a non-Christian or non-churched type person."

Here are some of Southwest's recent offerings:

- Our Sundays are better than Baskin-Robbins.
- Free faith-lifts on Sunday morning.
- Open Sunday.
- Early-bird special (advertising early service).
- Come learn to live without fear.
- You're the reason we're here.
- We're pro-Jesus.
- Our sermons are fat-free.

-30-

## **Pointers for effective use of church signs**

What to say: Make the message relevant to the needs of people who drive by the church.

How much to say: Most outdoor signs must be read in five seconds. That means 10 words or less. Avoid lengthy lists and schedules.

When to change: Outdoor signs should be changed at least once a week. Twice a week is better. For example, it may be easiest to change the message on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Who changes it?: "The best person to change the sign is a newly saved person," suggested Mike Townsend of J.M. Stewart Corp. "They may not be equipped yet to teach or do a lot of the things in the spotlight, but they do have a lot of commitment to the Lord and enthusiasm."

Sources for sayings: The daily devotional guide "Our Daily Bread" has pithy statements at the bottom of each page. Books include "More Bulletin Borders" a collection of sayings that make people think or laugh; "Quotable Quotations" by Lloyd Cory; "14,000 Quips and Quotes" by E.C. McKenzie; "Book of Great Thoughts and Funny Sayings" by Bob Phillips. Speedbumps, a newsletter produced by Dan Pryor, is another source.

A new outdoor sign costs \$3,000-\$6,000 for an average church. "If you use it right, it will pay for itself in a short period of time," Townsend said. (ABP)

-30-

-- By Mark Wingfield

---

END