



Nashville, Tennessee  
**Associated  
Baptist Press**

Editor: **Greg Warner**  
Associate Editor: **Bob Allen**

Phone: (904) 262-8584  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

March 23, 1999

(99-23)

- Virginia CBF requests rebate from national office
- Smyth and Helwys launching second adult Sunday-school line
- Baptist-affiliated university bans discrimination against gays

### **Virginia CBF requests rebate from national office**

By Bob Allen

VINTON, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia's Cooperative Baptist Fellowship chapter has made an unprecedented request that national CBF rebate a portion of funds it receives from Virginia churches to bolster the organization's work in the state.

Most state and regional Fellowship groups receive money from local churches. They keep part of it and forward the rest to national CBF offices in Atlanta.

In Virginia, however, most churches that support the moderate Baptist organization do so through a giving-plan option administered by the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

At their annual meeting, held March 19-20 at Vinton Baptist Church near Roanoke, Virginia CBF leaders said they do not wish to set up a pass-through funding method that would compete with the state association. However, they said their group needs more money to hire staff to promote the Fellowship's missions and ministries in the state.

"We are not growing in Virginia, and we will not grow with volunteers," said Richard Clore, pastor of Hulls Memorial Baptist Church in Fredericksburg.

The Virginia Fellowship approved a 1999-2000 budget that adds two part-time field representatives and a full-time office manager to devote attention to tasks like helping moderate pastors find churches. To fund the new positions, the state group is asking the national CBF to return 15 percent of the undesignated money it receives from Virginia to the state group.

Last year, Virginia churches gave more than \$701,000 to the Fellowship. Fifteen percent of that total would equal about \$105,000.

Should the request be granted, it would be the first time for the national organization to channel funds to a state group, said Gary Skeen, the national CBF's coordinator of finance and administration.

National Fellowship leaders discouraged the Virginia CBF from making the request this year, saying it would have the effect of amending a budget approved at the national group's general assembly last summer.

Traditionally, the Fellowship has looked to local churches, not state organizations, to determine how funds are distributed, Skeen said. "While we have encouraged state and regional groups, we want to feel close to the local church."

State and national leaders worked out a compromise asking that Virginia leaders write individual congregations informing them of the change.

A majority at the Virginia CBF meeting rejected the compromise, however, saying it would undermine the state group's authority. During debate, one participant compared it to a church taking a vote at a business meeting and then polling other church members who were not present to ask them if it was OK.

"We need to establish this meeting as the forum at which CBF of Virginia makes decisions," said Gary Dalton, pastor of Belmont Baptist Church in Charlottesville and chairman of the state CBF's finance committee.

While the number of churches contributing to the Fellowship nationwide continues to grow, more money is going into building state and regional organizations, while funding for national and international efforts remains flat.

Building infrastructure in the state will help the national organization over the long haul, supporters of the budget said. "We do need to promote CBF, and it will help at the national level," Clore said.

But one participant in the discussion said the state group should view itself as nothing more than an information arm of the national organization. "I believe the adoption of this budget will set up a separate state organization that is not needed," said David Upshaw, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Farmville.

In other business, the Virginia Fellowship elected Bruce Hunter, pastor of Beaver Dam Baptist Church in Troy, as its moderator-elect. Kitty Johnson, a member of Monument Heights Baptist Church in Richmond, will lead the state organization during the next year. She succeeds Mark Olson, pastor of Thalia Lynn Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, this year's moderator.

Bill Leonard, dean of Wake Forest University's divinity school, was the keynote speaker at the two-day meeting, preaching at two worship services.

-30-

## **Smyth and Helwys launching second adult Sunday-school line**

By Bob Allen

MACON, Ga. (ABP) -- Curriculum-and-book publisher Smyth and Helwys has announced plans to launch a new line of adult Sunday-school materials following the Uniform Series study plan used by various denominations.

The announcement came on the heels of a decision by the Southern Baptist Convention's LifeWay Christian Resources to end its long-time involvement in the Committee on the Uniform Series, which coordinates lessons used in 40 denominations.

Cecil Staton, president and publisher of Smyth and Helwys, said the Macon, Ga., -based company has had requests to add a second line of curriculum for several years. "We believe that now is the time to reach out to those churches and to meet that significant need," Staton said.

In announcing the new line of materials, Smyth and Helwys officials did not mention a recent decision by LifeWay Christian Resources to discontinue a line of lessons that follows the Uniform Series.

Trustees of Southern Baptists' official publishing house approved a strategy Feb. 9 that includes the launch of new "flagship" Bible-study curriculum and discontinuing three lines beginning next year. One of the three, the Family Bible Series, follows the Uniform Series, which has been in use for more than 100 years.

About 100,000 adults in 2,000 churches use Smyth and Helwys' Formations lesson series, which debuted in 1991, according to a press release. The company began offering age-graded resources for youth and children in 1992.

While describing the Formations line as “enormously successful,” Staton said Smyth and Helwys recognized early on “that one line of resources could not meet the needs of all adults.”

“Smyth and Helwys Publishing is excited to bring our love for the Bible and excellence in publishing to those Sunday school classes that prefer the Uniform Series,” Staton said.

Smyth and Helwys officials said the new line would be launched in January. Information about the new line will be mailed to churches early this summer, they said.

Curriculum Coordinator Tom Harrington has been named editor of the Smyth and Helwys Uniform Series Bible Study, and Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, has been enlisted to write commentary for the series, according to the announcement.

The lessons will use the New International Version translation of the Bible.

Formed in 1990, Smyth and Helwys is a privately owned publishing firm popular among moderate Baptists who view it as an alternative to the conservative-controlled LifeWay Christian Resources, previously called the Baptist Sunday School Board.

-30-

## **Baptist-affiliated university bans discrimination against gays**

By Robert Dilday and Michael Clingenpeel

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The University of Richmond has added sexual orientation to its non-discrimination policy, a move some say puts it at odds with the Baptist General Association of Virginia, which founded the school 169 years ago.

The rewritten policy, approved by trustees during a regular meeting March 5, prohibits discrimination of gays and lesbians in recruiting and promotion of students, faculty and staff.

University officials said the decision merely puts into writing a long-standing practice, although the previous non-discrimination policy prohibited bias only on the basis of gender, race and religion.

“This policy bespeaks our current practice,” said William Cooper, university president. “We do not and will not discriminate against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation.”

John Pagan, dean of UR’s law school, said the decision “brings us into the mainstream of American higher education.” The policy change is significant, he said, because “it guarantees that all students, faculty and staff will be treated fairly based on their talents and their achievements and that their private lives will play no role in the way the university treats them.”

“It also helps the University of Richmond compete with the nation’s best schools for the most talented students and professors,” Pagan said.

But the policy may be incompatible with a position on homosexuality taken by the BGAV, which still maintains ties to the university.

At last year’s annual BGAV meeting, messengers “commended” to churches a statement “that homosexual behavior is sinful and unacceptable to Christians.” While condemning homosexuality, the statement called for “Christ-like compassion for homosexual persons” and offered guidelines for ministry to gays.

Three years ago several churches separated from the BGAV to form a new state convention, which now numbers about 150 congregations. One reason cited by the new Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia was their claim that the BGAV’s stance on homosexuality was too weak. The SBCV continues to make the charge in attracting churches to its fold.

Since 1969, when the university accepted a \$50 million gift contingent on loosening its ties to Virginia Baptists, the BGAV's influence at the school has diminished. Today the group allocates about \$230,000 annually, primarily for scholarships for Baptist students. The state Baptist group also nominates four of the university's 40 trustees.

A negotiated "partnership agreement" that spells out the relationship includes the university's earlier non-discrimination clause. It is unclear if the change will require the agreement to be renegotiated.

Other Baptist links to the school are a chaplain and associate chaplain, both of whom are Baptists, and the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, which maintains its headquarters and library on campus.

Virginia Baptist leaders expressed regret at the university's decision.

"This action is very disappointing," said Reginald McDonough, executive director of the BGAV. "In this day of relative values, it is important for institutions that are educating the future leaders of our churches and communities to advocate and model the highest standards of Judeo-Christian morality."

McDonough said Virginia Baptists "certainly want to support a continuing Christian witness and ministry on the UR campus as we do on all the college campuses in Virginia." He added that the BGAV's support for the school, however, "may need to be changed to reflect current realities."

The four trustees nominated by the BGAV also issued statements following the decision. Two of them -- Earlene Jessee, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia, and Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waynesboro, Va., and a former BGAV president -- said they voted against the new policy. Another former BGAV president -- Clint Hopkins, retired pastor of Churchland Baptist Church in Chesapeake, Va. -- said he voted for it. Walter Harrow, a layman from Deltaville, Va., and also a former BGAV president, did not divulge his vote.

"Since I did not serve on the subcommittee which studied the discrimination clause, I feel others can better explain the reasoning process which brought this action to the full board," said Jessee. "I voted against the decision and am concerned about the far-reaching consequences it may have for the relationship between the BGAV and the University of Richmond."

Wilson said he regretted the action and noted he "would have preferred that the board maintain the policy that had been in place for many years." However, he added, "Since our only current financial connection with the university is to provide partial funding for the Baptist Scholars Program, it is not surprising that our influence has declined accordingly."

Hopkins said: "Jesus never made sexual habits an issue with his followers. We want to be as much like Jesus as possible, so it is not proper for us to give too much attention to sex in deciding who is in and out of the Kingdom."

Harrow said he was "concerned about how Virginia Baptists may view this [action]."

The Southern Baptist Convention has strongly condemned homosexuality. It excludes from membership any churches which "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

The University of Richmond has no ties to the SBC. In 1995 it withdrew from the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, a voluntary association of administrators from Baptist universities and colleges that promotes higher education among Southern Baptists.

-30-

END

---