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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

- Texas Baptist leaders propose new giving option for churches
- State paper editor resigns unexpectedly
- Clinton makes final appointments to religious-persecution commission

**Texas Baptist leaders propose  
new giving option for churches**

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptists would have another choice for how their missions gifts are spent -- one that shifts more funds to ministries within the state and away from national agencies that are unpopular with moderates -- under a plan proposed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas' administrative committee.

The proposed fifth option for giving through Texas Baptists' unified budget would enable churches to channel about 73 percent of their Cooperative Program gifts to ministries of the 2.7-million-member state convention. The remainder would be allocated to the Southern Baptist Convention's International and North American mission boards, two SBC entities located in Texas -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and Annuity Board in Dallas, -- and the Baptist World Alliance, a global network of Baptists based in McLean, Va.

The new option would exclude funding for the remaining traditional SBC recipients of the Cooperative Program -- five seminaries, the Executive Committee and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Still, the proposal is expected to have less impact on those entities than some SBC leaders had feared, since it is being offered only as an additional giving option and not the "default" budget plan.

The BGCT executive board is scheduled to consider the plan, recommended initially by a special funding committee, May 18 in Dallas.

The Texas convention is among several state groups in recent years to start offering giving options in response to controversy between moderates and conservatives in the nation's largest non-Catholic faith group.

For about seven decades, Texas Baptists had only one ministry-support option for funds distributed beyond the local church. Cooperative Program contributions sent to the state convention were divided, with a larger share staying in Texas to support BGCT causes and the rest forwarded for distribution to the various efforts of the national convention.

In 1994, the BGCT voted to broaden the Cooperative Program, offering churches more say in how their mission gifts are spent.

One current option allows churches to earmark funds solely for Texas Baptist ministries. Another follows the traditional pattern established in 1925, with Texas keeping 67 percent of these receipts and the SBC getting 33 percent. The third is similar to the 67/33 split, except that churches may exclude up to five BGCT or SBC entities. The fourth enables churches to set their own percentage of how funds are divided between the BGCT and SBC and also include other Texas ministries and up to six other "worldwide" ministries.

Leaders said several factors contributed to the proposal for yet another option.

First, the implementation of 19 recommendations of a state convention "Effectiveness/Efficiency" committee in 1997 created a wave of new Texas Baptist ministry projects, said Leroy Fenton, chairman of an E/E funding committee that proposed the new giving plan. Some of those projects are not adequately funded by existing giving plans, added Fenton, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waxahachie.

Second, some Texas Baptists have expressed disapproval of the recent direction of some SBC organizations, Fenton said.

Examples cited during deliberations included the increasing influence of Calvinism at Southern and Midwestern Baptist theological seminaries, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's close identification with the Religious Right and a feeling by many Texas Baptists they are ostracized from meaningful participation in the SBC, members said.

Third, formation of a competing Baptist convention in the state, Southern Baptists of Texas, has created "concern on our part regarding the impact that will have long-term," Fenton said. "The political climate has changed somewhat, and some funds are being diverted from (BGCT) causes."

In light of these factors, a possible change in the BGCT Cooperative Program has been rumored for several months.

Those rumors surfaced statewide in January, when Texas convention president Russell Dilday said in a newspaper interview he expected motions for change to be presented to messengers to the 1999 BGCT annual session next November in El Paso.

While some accused Dilday of promoting the issue, he said his comments were nothing more than his prediction of what he believed to be a likely scenario.

The actual proposal for a new giving option, however, does not require a vote of the convention in order to be implemented, said Roger Hall, the convention's treasurer and chief financial officer.

The 1994 action that expanded the Cooperative Program's giving options from one to four also authorized the executive board to continue to present a broader range of options to churches, he explained.

Bill Pinson, the state convention's executive director, said the new plan would merely simplify a process that is already available to Texas Baptist churches. "This can be done with the present form and is being done," Pinson said. "This simply makes the process simpler."

The change does not go as far as some predicted. A scenario spread by rumor had the BGCT adopting a "default" Cooperative Program option that would cut the SBC out entirely and place an added burden on churches wanting to support the national convention.

But the actual proposal does not assign default status to any plan, leaders said.

The new option "will not be imposed on any church," Dilday said. "Each church chooses its channel of giving. No one channel is forced on any church."

"This approach affirms the continuing relationship between the BGCT and the Southern Baptist Convention by providing a channel of choice for churches that desire to support BGCT and SBC missions causes through Cooperative Program giving," Dilday said.

## State paper editor resigns unexpectedly

By Bob Allen

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (ABP) -- Baptist journalist Ferrell Foster has announced his resignation from the Illinois Baptist, news journal of the Illinois Baptist State Association, where he has worked 12 years, the last three as editor.

Foster, 43, said there were "many factors" in his decision to step down effective May 31, "but ultimately I just believed it was what God wanted me to do." He declined to elaborate on the factors prompting his decision.

Foster said he was not asked or pressured to resign, but he accepted a severance package offered to employees affected by a recent restructuring of the state convention. The deadline for accepting the severance offer of two-months' salary was the end of April.

Bob Wiley, Illinois Baptists' executive director, said he hates to see Foster leave. "I think Ferrell is an excellent editor," Wiley said. "He's a fine journalist. He's given Illinois Baptists years of good work. He's contributed well out of his giftedness to Illinois Baptists."

Wiley said he would function as interim editor of the 9,500-circulation paper that is published every other week until Foster's replacement is named. Tim Ellsworth, the Illinois Baptist's former associate editor who was reassigned as director of communications in the recent restructuring, will return to the paper in a managing-editor role during the interim, Wiley said.

Foster is the third program-staff member, along with three secretaries, to resign or retire since implementation of the new staff structure Jan. 1.

Asked if the number of recent resignations indicated poor morale or lack of support for the new structure, Wiley responded, "I don't know of that at all." He said the severance offer was an incentive in some of the cases and that he knew of only one resignation in which job dissatisfaction was a major factor, a secretary who took what she considered to be a better job.

Foster joined the state convention staff April 1, 1987, as associate editor of the Illinois Baptist. He served as acting editor of the paper for seven months in 1996 following the departure of former editor Bill Webb. He officially became editor in October 1996.

A native of Dallas, Foster earned a bachelor's degree from East Texas State University and a master-of-divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to coming to Illinois, Foster was director of public relations for New Orleans Seminary and was managing editor of the Marshall News Messenger in Marshall, Texas.

He and his wife, Trese, have five children -- Tiffany, 17; Tabitha, 15; Landon, 11; Meredith, 4; and Cameron, 1. The Fosters are members of Cross Point Community Church in Springfield.

Foster said his future plans are unclear. "I will be considering any and all possibilities and believe God will make it clear what I am to do in order to provide for my family. I would appreciate the prayers of Illinois Baptists for my family and me during this time of transition."

In his editorial for the current issue, Foster announced his decision to leave and offered the following words of explanation: "As best my wife and I can understand the will of God, we felt he wanted us to take this step of faith. We sensed that God would not show us the next path he had for us until we had said goodbye to the old one. We heard no voices from above, and I would never say, "God told us" to do this or that ... but we feel this is his will for us, and it is consistent with Scripture.

## **Clinton makes final appointments to religious-persecution commission**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Clinton announced appointees to fill three remaining seats on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom May 5.

Clinton named Muslim leader Laila Al-Marayati of Los Angeles, Baha'i spokesman Firuz Kazemzadeh of Alta Loma, Calif., and Washington State Supreme Court Justice Charles Smith of Seattle, a Baptist, to the posts.

The nine-member commission was established under last year's International Religious Freedom Act. Members of the commission will evaluate religious persecution abroad annually and will recommend penalties against countries that permit persecution.

In a related action, Robert Seiple was sworn in May 5 as ambassador-at-large of international religious freedom at a State Department ceremony. In that role, he will act as a nonvoting, 10th member of the commission and will also head the Office on International Religious Freedom at the State Department.

Seiple said the newly established commission will have "a voice that can be strong and unhindered and truth that does not have to be cleared."

"At the end of the day there is really only one constituency that we serve," Seiple said, "and that's a constituency composed of folks on this day who are being marginalized, discriminated against, persecuted because of their faith or their beliefs. They will not be forgotten."

Smith was originally appointed to the Washington State Supreme Court in 1988 and was elected to six-year terms in 1990 and 1996. He served from 1965 to 1985 on the General Board of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and was the denomination's president from 1975 to 1977.

Smith said in an interview he is "honored to be asked by the president to serve on this significant commission" and "especially honored that I can represent the Protestant faiths given my background as an American Baptist."

Smith was also a member of the Baptist Joint Committee in the 1970s and again during the 1980s. The BJC is a Washington, D.C.-based religious-liberty organization that serves 13 national and state Baptist bodies.

Al-Marayati was a founding member and past president of the Muslim Women's League, an organization that focuses on the dissemination of accurate information about Islam and Muslims, particularly regarding women. She also served as a member of the U.S. State Department's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad established in 1996.

Kazemzadeh is secretary for external affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. He is professor emeritus of history at Yale University and is the principal spokesman of the American Baha'i community, testifying frequently before the House and Senate committees about the plight of Baha'is abroad.

The law requires that five of the nine voting members of the commission be appointed by the president's party and the remaining four by the other party.

Republican congressional leaders previously appointed former U.S. Sen. Bill Armstrong of Colorado; John Bolton, former assistant secretary of state; Nina Shea, director of Freedom House's Program of Religious Freedom; and Elliot Abrams, former assistant secretary of state.

However, a spokeswoman for Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., said Armstrong declined to be on the commission. In his place, Republican congressional leaders have selected Michael Young, dean at George Washington University Law School, she said.

Democratic congressional leaders selected Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of Newark, N.J., and Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Saperstein said the commission will convene as soon as possible, probably within two weeks. "We have some pressing decisions to make because we're already past some of the deadlines as to how to use our time most effectively."

-30-

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