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Editor: Bob Allen  
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626  
Fax: 904.262.7745  
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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### Texas moderates propose 'non-geographic' association

By Marv Knox

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Texans affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship have voted to form an association of churches that would extend beyond the borders of the Lone Star State.

The Baptist Association of the Southwest would relate to the Baptist General Convention of Texas. But it could also include churches in at least three border states -- Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma -- according to a report presented by a special committee created to study the endeavor.

If it develops as planned, the Baptist Association of the Southwest would become the 115th association affiliated with the BGCT. The concept was approved without dissent June 24 by Texans attending the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's General Assembly in Birmingham, Ala.

Traditional Southern Baptist associations are comprised of churches of similar faith and practice within a defined geographic territory, such as a county or region within a state. They cooperate to provide ministries, do mission work and share fellowship. While they work closely with state conventions, they are autonomous from them and are supported separately by member churches.

The same would be true for the proposed new association, except its borders would encompass a wider area to include several states, said George Mason, chairman of the study committee and pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas.

The new concept is needed, Mason said, because moderate churches say they are being ostracized in some associations. For out-of-state churches those feelings of frustration extend to their state convention, as well.

"Our state convention is in a positive relationship with our churches. We want to continue our relationship," Mason said. "But for (moderate) churches in Oklahoma and Louisiana -- their state conventions aren't as open as ours is in looking for options for relationships."

Mason said his local association discontinued support for a congregation being sponsored by Wilshire after the mission church called a woman as pastor.

Susan McMillan of First Heritage Baptist Church in Houston said her church's access to funds from the state convention was hindered by policies of the association.

"It is unwritten but traditional BGCT policy for money for church starts to follow associational approval," Mason said. "This is delegating the autonomy of the state convention to the association."

A regional association could solve such problems, Mason said.

Churches would not necessarily be forced to choose between affiliating with the new association or their old one, Mason noted. Churches could be dually aligned with their local association and with the Baptist Association of the Southwest.

Planners intend for the new association to be strongly supportive of the BGCT, Mason stressed.

He said this contrasts with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, a conservative group that set up a competing state convention last fall. "We want to maintain our strong, constructive relationships with the BGCT," he added.

The proposal tries to strike a fine balance for participating churches, Mason said. "What would be the best configuration to strengthen our [national] ties with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship ... and also be constructive in relationship to the BGCT?" he asked. "We don't want just another organization floating out there, competing with our state convention. But we want to be connected in a cooperative way."

The proposal for a new association also is not connected to Baylor University Chancellor Herbert Reynolds' call for a Baptist Convention of the Americas, Mason said. Last fall, Reynolds challenged Texas Baptists to form the nucleus of a convention spanning North and South America as an alternative to the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention.

"This new association does not have any direct relation to what he talked about," Mason said. "There may be some confluence of agreement, but our proposal reflects the day and time in which we live. This is an age of communication and travel, in which the spread of relationships is not bound by state lines. So, it's coincidental but not surprising that what we propose lines up with Dr. Reynolds' idea. But this is not a step toward that kind of convention."

This new association would be appreciated by moderate Baptists in states bordering Texas, said Bob Stephenson, a lay member of First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla.

"We're a very strong church, but we have no place to go," Stephenson said of his congregation, which is strongly moderate and therefore out-of-step with the conservative Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

The Norman church has started eight mission congregations and gives \$500,000 a year to missions, Stephenson said, noting, "We'd be an asset to you."

Six or seven "good, strong moderate churches" in Oklahoma would be immediate candidates for membership in the new association, Stephenson predicted.

The BGCT constitution does not prevent non-geographic associations or affiliation with out-of-state churches, reported Ed Schmeltekopf, the convention's associate executive director.

There is historical precedent for the practice, Schmeltekopf added. German immigrants had their own association within the state from the 1890s until after World War II.

For about 30 years up to 1985, Baptists in Minnesota-Wisconsin were also affiliated with the BGCT, Schmeltekopf added. Every year, they faithfully sent messengers to Texas for the annual convention meeting.

Some Baptists from just across the state line have also been seated as messengers to the annual session in the past, he said.

The BGCT constitution does not address state residency in its policies regarding the seating of messengers from affiliated churches, he pointed out. However, the constitution does require that members of BGCT institutional boards "shall be active members of cooperating Baptist churches in the state of Texas."

A committee with members from Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas will work on preparing the foundation of the new association, Mason announced. And its "constituting convocation" will be held March 31-April 1, 2000, in Dallas.

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## **Southwestern theology dean dies after long bout with cancer**

By Matt Sanders

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- The theology dean at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary died July 2 after a four-and-a-half year battle with cancer.

Funeral services for 60-year-old Tommy Lea were held July 6 at Travis Avenue Baptist Church near the seminary campus in Fort Worth, Texas.

Lea, a professor of New Testament at the seminary since 1979, was named dean of the school of theology in 1995.

Seminary President Kenneth Hemphill said the seminary lost not only a dean, but also a colleague and friend. Hemphill said Lea "led with vision and compassion" and "had the unique ability to stand with clear conviction and yet build consensus among the faculty."

In public statements since 1996, Lea made it clear that his illness had not shaken his faith in God.

"I have renewed the conviction that God is sovereignly in charge, even in my sickness," Lea said. "He has not left me. He is concerned about my spiritual good."

Lea also said people's prayers had given him strength, health, stamina and endurance.

In a 1998 article, Lea wrote that illnesses like cancer are opportunities to know God more deeply. Although Lea wrote he would "be pleased" if God chose to heal him in this life, he added that he knew "complete healing comes in the life beyond."

Prior to coming to the seminary, Lea served as pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., and Liberty Baptist Church in Appomattox, Va. He also served as assistant pastor of Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas.

Lea was born Sept. 20, 1938, in Houston, Miss. He earned a degree in electrical engineering from Mississippi State University in 1960. During his senior year at MSU, Lea was called to preach. That year he also married his high school sweetheart. He attended Southwestern earning a master of divinity in 1964 and a doctor of theology in 1967.

He was the author of numerous articles that appeared in theological journals. He also wrote commentaries on First Corinthians, First and Second Peter, Jude, and First and Second Timothy. He and other faculty members have used his book, "The New Testament: Its Background and Message," in introductory New Testament courses at Southwestern.

Lea is survived by his wife, Beverly; three children, Lisa Rutledge of Arlington, Texas, Marcie Funk, a missionary in Africa; and Clifton Thomas of Edmond, Okla.; and five grandchildren.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Donations can be made to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Tommy Lea's memory.

## **Expert on Russian, Eastern Christians named head of Beeson Global Center**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- A scholar who specializes in the study of evangelical Christians in Russia and Eastern Europe has been named director of the Global Center at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School.

Mark Elliott, who since 1986 has been professor of history and director of the Institute for East-West Christian Studies at Wheaton College, was named to the post effective July 1, announced Timothy George, dean of the Beeson School.

Elliott, a lifelong Methodist, will succeed William O'Brien, who is retiring. O'Brien, a former missionary and administrator at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, became first director of the Global Center when it opened in 1992.

The Global Center, located on Samford's campus in Birmingham, Ala., promotes Christian outreach across cultures by collecting and disseminating information about churches and ministries worldwide. It provides hands-on, interactive learning through displays, computers and other technology.

Elliott is founding director of Wheaton's Institute for East-West Christian Studies and edits its quarterly publication. George said Elliott's knowledge of Christianity in Eastern Europe would enhance the Global Center's mission.

Elliott is a graduate of Asbury College with a master's and doctorate from the University of Kentucky. He has written numerous articles, books and reviews.

Beeson is a non-sectarian, evangelical divinity school established by an endowed gift at the Baptist-affiliated Samford in 1988.

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-- By ABP staff

## **American Baptist scholar named Baylor department chair**

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- A former American Baptist historian who now teaches in Canada has been named chairman of Baylor University's religion department.

William Brackney, principal and professor of historical theology at McMaster Divinity School in Hamilton, Ontario, will assume the post vacated a year ago, Baylor President Robert Sloan announced July 1. Brackney will succeed Glenn Hilburn, who returned to teaching after 15 years as chairman of the department.

Brackney moved to Canada 10 years ago after serving as vice president and dean of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in St. Davids, Pa. He previously taught at Colgate Rochester Divinity School and other schools. He was executive director of the American Baptist Historical Society from 1978 to 1986 and was archivist for American Baptist Churches, USA, six years.

He has written 15 books and is currently editor of a series on human rights and world religions.

"Dr. Brackney brings outstanding credentials to Baylor, both as an administrator and as a teacher at the undergraduate and graduate levels," said Wallace Daniel, dean of Baylor's College of Arts and Sciences.

Brackney said his decade of service in Canada has been rewarding, but he and his family look forward to returning to the United States. He described Baylor, a Baptist-affiliated school in Waco, Texas, as "an outstanding world-class university, excellently poised for the 21st century."

Brackney will join the Baylor faculty in January. Until then, religion professors Naymond Keathley and William Bellinger will serve as co-convenors of the department, officials said.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Teenagers fill Alamodome for youth evangelism event**

By Ken Camp

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- While revelers filled the streets of San Antonio to celebrate the Spurs' win over the New York Knicks in the NBA championship, thousands of Baptist teenagers filled the city's Alamodome to celebrate Christ's victory over sin.

"A Cross To Bridge the Great Divide" was the theme of the 1999 Texas Youth Evangelism Conference, held June 25-26. More than 15,000 young people came for the high-energy, high-volume event, which featured the commissioning of seven student-led "Shine Out Revival" teams.

"The only way we can cross the great divide is by the blood of Jesus Christ," said Christian recording artist Geoff Moore. "No matter what you've done, no matter what's been done to you, God loves you."

Other professional Christian musicians featured at the conference were Rebecca St. James, Nikki Leonti, Avalon and FFH. A dozen student bands of varied musical styles also performed before their peers.

Youth communicator Dave Edwards of Oklahoma City urged the teenagers to let God do what only he can do -- cleanse, change and complete a dirty, broken and incomplete person.

"Sin is the condition inside you that makes you do stupid things on the weekend," Edwards explained. "But whatever you've done, God can make it right."

When Edwards invited the teen-agers to make public commitments to God, young people responded in overwhelming numbers. More than 1,400 decisions for Christ were recorded, including 136 professions of faith and 141 who committed their lives to vocational Christian service.

Later, Edwards asked the young people, "What happens when the goosebumps are gone?"

He encouraged the teens to move away from being "event-centered Christians" and to grow into mature believers. He challenged them to "step into the ring" of a Christian lifestyle characterized by God's presence and biblical principles.

Bill Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, led a prayer of dedication during a commissioning service at the conference for Shine Out Revival teams.

The student-led teams, each made up of a preacher, worship leader and children's leader, are serving nine weeks this summer around the state.

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## **Speaker offers common-sense reasons for sexual abstinence**

By Ken Camp

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- Abstaining from premarital sex is not only biblical, it also makes good sense, claims a worker at a non-profit educational organization that promotes sexual abstinence.

Even if teenagers don't heed the Bible's command to remain sexually pure, the risks of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and emotional scars should be compelling enough reasons to delay sex, says Eric Tooley, program director of Aim For Success, Inc.

"Abstinence means freedom from the problems associated with teen pregnancy and STDs, freedom to aim for success in life," Tooley told youth ministers at a seminar held in conjunction with the Texas Baptist Youth Evangelism Conference.

Tooley, a former youth minister, said an average of 2,739 teenage girls get pregnant and 8,219 teens contract a sexually transmitted disease each day in the United States. About one in four sexually active teens gets an STD, and chlamydia is now four times more widespread than chicken pox, he said.

Youth ministers can encourage sexual abstinence by urging teens to delay dating, enforcing boundaries and being responsible adults.

"Don't say to youth, 'I just want to be your friend.' Teenagers have friends. They need adults who act like adults," Tooley said.

When a teenage girl faces a crisis pregnancy, a youth minister should not try to solve her problems, push her toward a solution or encourage her to make any hasty decisions.

Instead, Tooley offered three suggestions:

-- Love her unconditionally.

-- Encourage her to go to her parents. "Go with her if you need to, but get the parents involved as quickly as possible."

-- Direct her to a crisis pregnancy center, pregnancy resource center or similar program offering abortion alternatives.

For teens who are not sexually active, Tooley recommended that youth ministers tell them they are not alone. Both independent research by government agencies and surveys by Aim For Success reveal that the majority of teenagers have not had sex.

"That's not the message most teenagers get," he said. "They think everybody's doing it, except them."

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## **Churches should show love to at-risk kids, gang expert says**

By Ken Camp

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- Churches need to provide 9-to-5 programs for youth -- 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., if that's when teens are on the streets, said Nathan Anguiano, director of a gang-intervention program based in Fort Worth, Texas.

If churches don't show love to at-risk youth, troubled teenagers will seek acceptance from gangs, Anguiano told youth ministers during a seminar on "How to Deal with Teen Violence." The seminar was held in conjunction with the Texas Baptist Youth Evangelism Conference.

"We need to go where the kids are," he said. For Anguiano, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, that means spending five nights a week at a recreation center in south Fort Worth, supervising about 40 teens and running midnight basketball games. He directs "Comin' Up," a gang-intervention program coordinated by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Fort Worth.

Anguiano's work is more than fun and games, however. It includes breaking up fights, sitting by the hospital bedsides of wounded gang members and attending "one too many funerals" as a result of gang violence.

But it also includes involving at-risk young people in meaningful service. Last year, Anguiano took 11 gang members to Del Rio to help flood victims clean their homes and reclaim their belongings -- a ministry project initiated by Hispanic Texas Baptists.

Anguiano came to the social-service agency after serving as youth pastor. In both his ministry and at his part-time job as a school bus driver, he came into contact with gang members and young people who were being drawn into gangs.

He relates to at-risk youth from his own experience. He was a "preacher's kid," the son of a Baptist pastor in south Texas. He never participated in a gang, but he went through his own rebellious stage, locking a junior high school teacher in the janitor's closet and spending far too much time hanging out on the streets and fighting.

While he works for a secular agency now, Anguiano said churches can do something that is impossible for any other people-helping organization. Churches can reach young people with the life-changing love of Jesus Christ.

"Who better to make a difference in their lives than us?" he asked ministers.

Churches that want to minister effectively to at-risk youth, need at least seven things Anguiano said. They are:

- A passion for reaching all youth, including "the unreachable, the unteachable and the unloved."
  - The support of church leaders who demonstrate a caring attitude and a willingness to receive inner-city youth into their fellowship.
  - The willingness to build relationships with all teenagers by being available at all times and meeting their needs for "a listening ear, a caring voice and an outstretched hand."
  - Patience and an ability to help young people turn their mistakes into learning experiences.
  - The ability to implement programs that meet the varied needs of at-risk young people. "Our youth need more than just the weekly Bible study. They need someone to come in and help them get on their feet."
  - A love that will not give up on young people and a genuine enthusiasm for ministry among them.
- "At-risk youth can tell when you don't care," Anguiano said.

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