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August 24, 1999

(99-69)

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**Called trustee meeting
scheduled Sept. 13-14**

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary will have a called meeting Sept. 13-14 to discuss leadership of the seminary's president.

Carl Weiser, chairman of the seminary's board of trustees, said Aug. 24 that leaders were not yet ready to state why the meeting was being convened. "We will be determining the [official] purpose of the meeting in the days ahead," said Weiser, pastor of Hyland Heights Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va.

Sixteen trustees reportedly requested a called meeting of the full board to discuss leadership issues raised by the trustees' executive committee.

Mark Coppenger, 51, who has been president of the Southern Baptist seminary in Kansas City, Mo., four years, confessed "misappropriation of anger" at a called meeting of the executive committee July 30. That meeting followed a two-month investigation by trustee leaders into complaints that Coppenger had misdirected his anger toward seminary employees.

At the July meeting, held in executive session, Coppenger confessed to having a problem with controlling his anger and agreed to specific recommendations by the executive committee for "steps to repentance and restoration," according to statements released after the meeting.

In a press conference after that meeting, trustee chairman Carl Weiser told reporters the full board would be briefed on the process, also in executive session, at the next scheduled trustee meeting, Oct. 18-19.

Seminary bylaws, however, permit as few as 10 trustees to request a called meeting. Sixteen trustees reportedly signed a petition requesting a called meeting.

The July 30 executive-committee meeting focused on anger, but some trustees reportedly have also raised other concerns about spending and enrollment.

Investors in Arizona Baptist Foundation wait to learn when they can get funds

By Bob Allen

PHOENIX, Ariz. (ABP) -- Investors in the troubled Baptist Foundation of Arizona must wait until October to learn when they can get some or all of their money back, according to an Aug. 21 letter.

The letter from an executive oversight committee set up to handle the crisis keeps a promise to stay in touch with investors in light of the Arizona Corporation Commission's finding that the Foundation was violating state securities law.

"We know you'd like us to tell you when you can get some or all of your funds, and we'd like to be able to answer that today but hope you understand that we don't have quite enough information to be that specific yet," the letter said.

"What we can say, however, is that by sometime in October we hope to be in a position to begin communicating a plan to deal fairly with investors."

The Arizona Corporation Commission, the state agency which oversees public utilities and securities, issued an order Aug. 10 requiring the Foundation and two subsidiary corporations to "cease and desist" from offering or selling investment products in violation of the Arizona Securities Act.

Foundation trustees had already taken that action voluntarily July 22, when they also placed a temporary freeze on the withdrawal of invested funds, continuing to pay only interest and distribution of Individual Retirement Accounts.

According to a yearlong investigation by the commission and the Arizona Attorney General's Office, the Foundation and two subsidiaries -- Arizona Southern Baptist New Church Ventures, Inc., and Christian Financial Partners, Inc. -- did not disclose their "true financial condition" to the investing public. The commission concluded the three corporations "offered and sold securities within or from Arizona through material misrepresentations and omissions of material fact."

According to Religion News Service, a spokesman for the Arizona Corporation Commission said investigators believe Foundation officers created transactions that were a Ponzi scheme, in which new investors are brought in to pay off old ones. "It appears that way to us," said Mark Sendrow, director of the commission's securities division.

Foundation leaders "don't know yet" how the crisis happened, according to their Aug. 21 letter -- "not in enough detail to reach definitive conclusions."

"We do not want to point fingers at any individuals or organizations until all the facts are known," the letter continued. "We truly meant it when we said in our last letter that the board was shocked after learning the extent of the state's concerns."

Trustees of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona consented to the state's cease-and-desist order without admitting or denying the commission's findings. "BFA will continue to cooperate fully with the state agencies," said the letter to investors.

Foundation leaders said they had heard from thousands of investors in the two weeks since their first letter, and most are willing to give them time to work on a solution. They encouraged investors to remain patient and discouraged them from suing to retrieve their funds.

"We respect everyone's right to pursue legal options, but please understand that the cost of legal defense can impact the availability of funds intended for payments to investors," the committee wrote.

"We're continuing to exert every effort to avoid possibilities such as bankruptcy or receivership to give us time to work out a positive solution to BFA's current problems."

President Bill Crofts, General Counsel Tom Grabinski and Controller Don Deardoff are on administrative leave after voluntarily removing themselves from their duties July 22. Their relationships with the agency "are being evaluated at this time and decisions will be reached soon," according to the Aug. 21 investors' letter.

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Two Kentucky school districts vote to post Ten Commandments

By Trennis Henderson

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- It's back-to-school time in Kentucky. In addition to reading, writing and arithmetic, students in several schools are being exposed to another topic this year -- the Ten Commandments.

Nearly two decades ago, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Kentucky law that required schools to post the Ten Commandments. Despite that ruling, two school districts in the state have voted to permit volunteers to purchase and post copies of the biblical commands in school classrooms.

The Jackson County school board and superintendent recently decided to allow volunteers to post the Ten Commandments in every classroom in the county's five schools. That was followed by Harlan County's school board voting unanimously to allow copies of the document to be placed in each classroom.

The recent actions come as legislative efforts are underway on both the state and national levels to authorize schools to post the Ten Commandments.

The U.S. House of Representatives voted in June to permit states to post the Ten Commandments in government-owned buildings. The amendment to the Consequences for Juvenile Offenders Act awaits action by the U.S. Senate.

"Our nation was founded on Judeo-Christian principles," said Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala., the sponsor of the amendment. While "simply posting the Ten Commandments will not change the moral character of our nation overnight," he added, "It is one step that states can take to promote morality and work toward an end of children killing children."

On the state level, Rep. Sheldon Baugh of Russellville has pre-filed a bill in the Kentucky General Assembly that would allow schools to decide whether to post the Ten Commandments.

In the meantime, supporters and opponents of the school district actions are evaluating the next step in the process, which may include legal challenges.

At least half a dozen other school districts in the state are seeking information about the legal impact of posting the Ten Commandments, according to Brad Hughes, director of communication services for Kentucky School Boards Association.

"Our position is that the standing ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court would not allow the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools," he explained. "We don't see anything in the court's standing opinion that would make it acceptable regardless of who paid for the project."

While he believes many school officials in the state personally would favor posting the Ten Commandments in schools, Hughes said: "For many of our members, it is not simply a moral question or a legal question but an ethical question. They know they can't just willy-nilly go out and put themselves in a position of legal liability."

"Once you start, you must treat everybody equally," he added, including allowing teachings from other religions to be posted.

In Jackson County, however, spokesman Lonzo Moore said the school board's decision was a response to community action calling for the Ten Commandments to be posted.

Emphasizing that school officials "are not trying to push the religious aspect on anyone," he added, "I think it's a good thing. The Ten Commandments are a good set of rules to live by."

Moore said the only negative reaction he has heard was a media report of an individual who has threatened to file suit against the school district if the documents are not removed within 30 days.

Beyond that, he added, "the only personal comments I have received have been positive."

Claude Witt, executive director of the Temperance League of Kentucky, said his organization will support Baugh's legislative effort to allow school districts to make their own decisions on the issue.

"People are searching for anything they can do to help our children in schools," Witt said. Posting the Ten Commandments where students "occasionally see it can't be bad," he said.

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New Age and occult are attractive to spiritual searchers, experts warn

By Pat Cole

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- While neither occultism nor New Age beliefs are well-defined movements, they hold a definite attraction for some people's misplaced religious longings, according to two informed observers of cults.

The shift from the modern era and its focus on reason to the postmodern era and its emphasis on experience has provided fertile soil for New Ageism, Don Metcalf said in a recent interview.

In modernity, God was "left out of the picture," Metcalf said. "People are searching spiritually. ... Unfortunately they are searching in the wrong places."

Metcalf, a member of Parkwood Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., has studied the New Age movement extensively and has taken courses offered by the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board and other organizations.

Last week, he spoke on cults at conferences sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention in Pikeville and Winchester.

Mark Terry, a speaker at the Winchester conference, said in an interview that hopeless people who believe there's no reality beyond this life are drawn to the occult.

"They believe they can indulge their passions by participating in Satanism, and they believe they can achieve spiritual power by worshipping power and participating in Satanism," said Terry, a missions and evangelism professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Both occultism and New Ageism are "umbrella terms" that include various religious expressions, Metcalf and Terry said.

New Age adherents "pick up beliefs here and there," Metcalf said. "They have no strong foundation on what they believe." The movement borrows many concepts from Eastern religions, he added.

Monism, a belief in the unity of everything, and pantheism, a belief that God is in everything, are pervasive in New Age thought, he said.

Those subscribing to the New Age movement seek self-realization and search for the divine within themselves, he said.

"It is a very self-centered belief system," Metcalf observed. "You choose what [you believe] is good for you."

While Terry speaks mostly about Satanism, occultism also encompasses witchcraft, sorcery, demonology and fortune telling, he said.

Terry classifies Satanism in three categories:

-- The Church of Satan. It's typically pointed more toward hedonism than Satan worship per se. The church is registered with the IRS and is the most public and best-organized expression of Satanism.

-- Cultic Satanism. News reports of Satanist involvement in animal sacrifice and criminal activities usually come from this group. Their rituals are well hidden from public view.

-- Recreational Satanism. This term describes people "who dabble in it" occasionally, Terry said. Seances and Ouija boards are popular among this group.

For Christians, evangelistic efforts for followers of the occult or the New Age movement are challenging, Terry and Metcalf said.

In approaching someone involved in New Ageism, Metcalf recommended Christians build relationships and engage in dialogue about their beliefs. "They are open to talking about Jesus, but it is a different Jesus," he said.

In New Age thought Jesus is simply one of many who have reached a state of enlightenment, he added.

They believe Jesus is divine, but they also maintain that divinity lives in everything, Metcalf noted.

"You must have a good ear to listen," he explained. "If they believe you are unconcerned about what they believe, you are going nowhere."

Terry said dialogue is virtually impossible with a cultic Satanist, however. Only one who wants out of the movement would dare talk about converting to Christianity, he said.

In that case, he speculated a Satan follower would have to relocate for reasons of personal safety.

A Church of Satan member would be "less hard core" and more open to a conversation about faith, he said.

At seminars, Terry warns parents, grandparents and youth leaders that Satanism preys on young people.

"If a young person begins to make a radical change in lifestyle, dress all in black, display satanic symbols on clothing or their body, become withdrawn, forsake friends for new friends and activities, those are danger signs," he said.

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World's Christian population near 2 billion, researchers say

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The number of Christian people in the world will pass the 2 billion mark in the year 2000, say religious statisticians David Barrett and Todd Johnson, based in Richmond, Va.

Christians already number 1.99 billion, meaning that one third of the world's 6 billion people are Christians, Barrett and Johnson said. The Christian designation is applied to Roman Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, Anglicans, Charismatics and Pentecostals.

Muslims are the second-largest world religion, with 1.19 million adherents, followed by Hindus, 774 million; non-religious, 768 million; Buddhists, 359 million; tribal religions, 252 million; atheists, 151 million; new religions, 101 million; Sikhs, 22.7 million; and Jews, 14.2 million.

Europe is the continent with the largest number of church members: 536 million. Latin America is second with 463 million followed by Africa, 333 million; Asia, 295 million, North America, 224 million and Oceania, 20 million.

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-- European Baptist Press Service

European Baptists challenged by needs in post-war Yugoslavia

By Martha Skelton

HAMBURG, Germany (ABP) -- Winter is coming. Homes, crops and businesses are destroyed. Many people have no jobs, no income. Power and water are sporadic. People on different sides of the ethnic divide excuse or overlook what has been done in their name by their "side" while distrusting and blaming the others.

The struggle for peace in post-war Yugoslavia -- Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo -- is on with ripple effects still being felt in Albania and Macedonia.

European Baptists through the European Baptist Federation and Baptist World Aid are being challenged to respond in a focused effort to multiple needs -- both urgent and long-term, practical and spiritual. During the Baptist World Alliance council meeting in Germany recently, representatives from different parts of the Balkans met with officials to establish the scope of the needs and what role Baptists can play in meeting them.

Kosovar refugees returning to their homes in some cases have brought with them the new faith they found while living in Macedonia or Albania. They need discipleship and churches where they can worship and share the gospel. Many also returned to destroyed homes, farms and businesses. Tents from the refugee camps have been set up in many villages, and people are being urged to try and winter-proof one room of their home to get by until spring when more extensive rebuilding can be done.

Bekim Beka, who fled to Albania as a refugee and helped lead the Baptist refugee ministry in Tirana, is now back in Kosovo setting up "Love in Action," a Baptist humanitarian-aid organization similar to the one that operated in Albania. The Pristina-based ministry will need an estimated \$150,000 to give emergency food, blankets, mattresses and reconstruction materials to approximately 5,000 people for three months.

Beka also reported that the Baptist church buildings in Pec -- left behind when the mostly Serb congregation fled after Serb forces withdrew from Kosovo -- are safe. A Baptist caretaker family has moved into the buildings. This church and its pastor, Simo Ralevic, had an active ministry including literature distribution. Church members who fled are now living in northern Serbia.

Beka said it is urgent not only to meet physical needs but also to spread the gospel and start churches in all regions of Kosovo.

American missionary Gary Opfer, speaking on behalf of the Baptist Foundation of Tirana, reported on efforts to establish continuing help with refugees returning to Kosovo. The refugees were asking Baptists in Albania to help them with the needs they would have after returning home. Some of the refugees are also new believers needing spiritual encouragement, and the aid effort was intended in part to spread the gospel among

those it helped. "We see hearts softened, open to Jesus Christ," said Opfer.

As of late July, Opfer estimated there would be 10,200 refugees in 1,700 families. He estimated it would cost \$25 to feed a family for a month. Volunteers from the various missionary organizations working in the Balkans are needed for food distribution, warehouse operations and removing rubble, he said.

Volunteers should come only on request, said European Baptist Federation General Secretary Karl Heinz Walter. "We don't need to overcrowd these areas with little infrastructure left," he said. Beka agreed. "For the expense of sending one volunteer from the USA, we could pay at least two local workers," he added.

Zeljko Mraz, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Croatia, reported on refugee work being done by the Baptist church in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Pastor Tomislav Dobutovi and his small congregation have worked with Croatian Baptist Aid and in cooperation with humanitarian organization "My Neighbor" to give what food and other help they could to the thousands of Kosovar refugees and others coming to Sarajevo. Refugees from Kosovo, Serbia and from earlier conflicts in the region are living crammed into houses with other families or in refugee camps in Sarajevo and other towns.

In addition to food, clothes and other obvious needs, people in northern Serbia will need firewood for the winter, reported Branka Srnec, director of the Baptist aid ministry "Tabita" in Novi Sad. Because the NATO bombing destroyed so many power plants, an effort is on to provide people with woodburning stoves and wood to get through the winter. If they don't buy firewood soon, they will have to pay the inflated prices that are expected as cold weather sets in.

The ministry, which has been working in the city of 180,000 since 1991, helped refugees that fled Croatia and Bosnia in earlier ethnic conflict. It now also tries to help destitute Baptist church members. "Before the war, Christians were helping the refugees. Now Christians in the churches are on the same level as the refugees," she said.

Despite many negatives in Novi Sad there are positive elements as well, Srnec said. Christians prayed at coordinated times in their homes when they could not gather for security reasons. There were 24-hour prayer chains.

One night when the bombing was terrible in Novi Sad, Srnec stood on the balcony of her apartment and watched the terrible fires burning into the sky. "I thought of Matthew 24 -- heaven and earth gone in a fire. I could understand such a picture. We (mankind) did it, making such things. One man can push a button. But God has everything in his hands. I prayed for the city, country and went to bed. There was no fear. Sadness, not anger. I was sure we are in (God's) hand."

Avram Dega of the Union of Baptist Churches in Serbia, said 2,000 church members there face a crisis with no support now available for the old and poor among their members or for pastors, who have not received their salaries and pensions. "The eyes of the people are on us (the union leadership); our eyes are on you," he told BWA and EBF leaders.

"It is time to show the solidarity of the world Baptist family with the small Baptist family in Serbia."

Dega said the union's social fund once helped support 40 ministers' widows and retirees. Now church members have nothing to give and pensioners have no income.

The union was planning to add three new pastors for a total of 10 but cannot pay them, Dega said.

Cedo Ralevic of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Yugoslavia, which is also working in Montenegro, reported on increased interest in the gospel in the period before the bombing came to Serbia. The union, which reported 13 churches and 568 members in 1998, also faces the struggles to help people hurt by the bombing campaign. They have a humanitarian organization, "Love Your Neighbor," that has been active in past crises as well. They want to continue a project of helping believers start small businesses so they can be self-supporting.

Sandor Szenczy, director of Hungarian Baptist Aid, reported on efforts during the bombing campaign. From Hungary, HBAid was the only Baptist entity able to send in relief supplies to Novi Sad. They also

brought Serbian children to camps in Hungary for a respite during the nightly bombings. Szency made a visit to Kosovo recently with BWAid Director Paul Montacute to continue survey work for aid efforts. HBAid is providing two workers to assist "Love in Action" in Pristina.

The European Baptist Federation through its Baptist Response-Europe program is committed to working with BWAid to support relief efforts in Serbia and Kosovo, said EBF General Secretary Karl Heinz Walter. And it is supporting the efforts by Bekim Beka in Pristina to organize a Baptist presence in the country and encourage church-planting efforts.

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