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Nominee for Texas executive

withdraws candidacy for post

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Phil Lineberger has withdrawn his nomination to become the next executive director of the 2.7 million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Lineberger, pastor of Williams Trace Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Texas, had been the first choice of a committee seeking a successor to Bill Pinson, who retires next January.

The search committee announced Lineberger's nomination Aug. 30 and scheduled a called meeting of the state executive board to vote on his election Sept. 14. That meeting has been cancelled, however, in light of a letter to the search committee in which Lineberger withdrew his candidacy.

"My mother, a lifelong Baptist who died this year, would have been thrilled to know that one of her children had been considered worthy to lead the great Texas Baptist convention," Lineberger wrote.

"However, after agreeing to be nominated, I could get no peace from God about serving in this high position. My wife, my three daughters and their families spent a week in intensive prayer, but we could not get confirmation in our spirits that God was calling us to this work.

"Therefore, I respectfully request that I be allowed to withdraw from consideration for the position of executive director."

Lineberger affirmed and expressed gratitude for the committee.

"I really appreciate the confidence the committee had in me," he said in an interview. "It's a tremendous honor to come from where I came as a kid -- walking to church and catching a bus -- and then to be asked to coordinate the work of the entire convention was something I never dreamed of."

"But my family couldn't get any peace about it," he said. "We felt that evidently God did not intend for us to take this position."

The search committee will continue its work as before, reported its chairman, Bill Brian, an attorney and member of First Baptist Church in Amarillo.

"We're mindful of Dr. Pinson's announced retirement date and also of the desirability of the candidate being able to spend some time with Dr. Pinson before he leaves," Brian said. "Beyond that, we will work diligently, but otherwise we don't feel we're working under time constraints."

When Brian announced Lineberger's nomination, he said the search committee had interviewed four candidates.

After Lineberger's withdrawal, however, Brian said any statement regarding the status of the remaining three candidates or any others would be premature.

The committee will get back to its work and proceed from there, he said.

"We are confident of the Lord's leading in this dynamic process to the one he has chosen," Brian said.

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Flap over committee appointee divides North Carolina factions

By Bob Allen

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- North Carolina Baptist leaders are wondering if a flap within a powerful appointment committee could derail a proposed plan to share leadership between moderates and conservatives in the 1.2 million-member state convention.

A 15-member Committee on Committees recently rejected an important committee nomination because the individual being considered belongs to a church that does not support the Southern Baptist Convention.

Allan Blume, the committee's conservative chairman, declined to name the candidate but told a Greensboro newspaper he doesn't believe such people should be allowed to lead.

Blume told the Greensboro News and Record that such an appointment would violate the state convention's constitution. An article added in 1946 describes one purpose of the state convention as "to cooperate with the work of the Southern Baptist Convention."

That has only recently created a rub for moderate and progressive congregations that have grown at odds with conservative leadership of the SBC. About a dozen North Carolina churches have formally cut ties with the national convention, most of them since last year, when the SBC adopted a family statement declaring that wives should submit to their husbands.

The Committee on Committees action raises questions about the status of those churches in the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

"I think that is a minority group that we do not need to elevate or encourage," Blume told the Greensboro paper. "I have an integrity issue with them staying in the state (convention) without supporting the work of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"They need to withdraw from the North Carolina convention if they cannot support the Southern Baptist Convention," Blume said.

That view prompted the pastor of one moderate church to question whether it would continue to support programs of the state convention if denied fair and full representation.

"The precedent that is established is that anyone who is not contributing to the Southern Baptist Convention will not be considered for positions of authority," said Jim Somerville, pastor of Wingate Baptist Church. "Little by little, the voice of Wingate Baptist Church would be chiseled away so that there's no representation on the state level."

"We don't want to be a part if we don't have a voice," he said.

Others have wondered if the decision could affect only churches that have taken formal action to cut SBC ties or might also include about 90 congregations that give to the state convention unified budget through a "Plan C," which forwards no funds to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Michael Cummings, president of the state convention, said he believes what happened in the August Committee on Committee's meeting is "opinion, not policy" and that he is a conservative who is "uncomfortable with excluding anyone" from participation.

Cummings, director of missions for Burnt Swamp Association in Lumberton, said he still supports a shared-leadership plan being proposed at the state convention this fall that would rotate the convention's presidency between moderate and conservative candidates.

The plan, proposed by a bipartisan study committee, must be approved by a two-thirds majority. Cummings said he realizes that some moderates do not believe conservatives can be trusted.

"The action (by the Committee on Committee) might have given the impression that conservatives are not serious about balanced leadership, but that's a false impression," Cummings said.

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-- Information for this story was compiled from the Greensboro News and Record and by the staff of the Biblical Recorder.

Jewish leader protests booklet calling for conversion of Jews

By Bob Allen

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- A call for Southern Baptists to pray that Jews might accept Jesus during Judaism's High Holy Days isn't kosher, according to the head of the Anti-Defamation League.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the world's leading organization against anti-Semitism, called the initiative "offensive and disrespectful" to Jews.

Foxman responded to distribution by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention of a prayer booklet encouraging Baptists to focus their prayers on converting Jews to Christ between Rosh Hashana -- the Jewish New Year, Sept. 11 -- and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Sept. 20.

The 10-day period, called collectively the Days of Awe, is Judaism's holiest season. It's the time when traditional Jews believe God seals their fate for the coming year. It's the perfect time for evangelical Christians to pray that observant Jews will come to view Jesus as their Messiah, said Randy Sprinkle, director of the International Mission Board's prayer strategy office.

"God calls on his children to reflect his deep heart love for his chosen people, the Jews," Sprinkle said.

The booklet offers tips on how Southern Baptists might evangelize Jewish acquaintances while they are sensitized to matters of faith. "Pray each day for Jewish individuals you know by name," it suggests. "Build authentic friendships with Jewish people. Love them as you would an unsaved relative."

On day one of the Jewish New Year, it explains, Jews blow the shofar, or ram's horn, as a reminder of Abraham's call to sacrifice his son, Isaac. "Ask God to reveal the truth of his own Fatherly sacrifice," the booklet suggests.

In a letter to SBC president Paige Patterson, Foxman said his organization is "shocked and deeply offended by the call for members of the Southern Baptist Convention to pray that Jews will convert to Christianity during the High Holy Days."

"It is pure arrogance for any one religion to assume that they hold 'the truth,' especially on the eve of the holiest days for the Jewish faith," Foxman continued. He called timing of the prayer guide "offensive and disrespectful" and "totally contrary to the spirit of dialogue that was supposedly emerging between Jews and evangelical Christians."

It's not the first squabble between Jewish leaders and Southern Baptists. SBC president Bailey Smith grabbed headlines in 1980 when he remarked, "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew."

In 1996, the convention adopted a resolution calling on the denomination to "direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jews." That same year, the North American Mission Board appointed a home missionary to coordinate outreach among Jews.

While some Jewish leaders view such actions as hostile and intolerant, Sprinkle said they are motivated by love.

"Intercessory prayer is an act of love," he said. "Christian intercessors are people of love. They love the Jewish people, even scattered across the earth as they are, because God first loved the Jewish people."

While other Christian denominations have agreed not to target Jews for evangelism, Southern Baptists have little choice, said Don Kammerdiener, executive vice president of the International Mission Board.

"Many Jewish leaders reject such efforts as being wrongheaded, arrogant or even contributing to the spiritual and cultural equivalent of the holocaust," Kammerdiener said. "But the Bible is clear regarding the necessity of sharing the gospel with Jews."

"Jesus and the apostles were Jews. Jesus stated clearly that his followers were to begin their witness to him in Jerusalem, the heartland of the Jews. Jesus is the Messiah promised to the Jews, the Savior of all who believe in him. He is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant promises," Kammerdiener said.

The Bible is also explicit in Romans 1:16 that Jews are included in the gospel invitation, Kammerdiener said. "Obedient Christians have no choice except to invite Jews and all other peoples to come to faith in Christ."

The International Mission Board earlier published a similar guide to help Christians pray for Muslims during their annual holy days of Ramadan, and other guides are planned focusing on prayer for Hindus and Buddhists, Sprinkle said.

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ABP's board of directors hires development officer

By Bob Allen

NEW YORK (ABP) -- A church educator from North Carolina has been named the first development director of Associated Baptist Press, a national, independent news service based in Jacksonville, Fla.

Directors of the news service meeting Sept. 2-4 in New York City unanimously elected Charles Qualls of Greensboro, N.C., ending a yearlong search for a development officer.

"This is an exciting day for ABP," said Jimmy Nickell, a retired business executive from Overland Park, Kan., and chairman of the board's development committee.

Qualls, 34, has been associate pastor for Christian education at First Baptist Church in Greensboro, N.C., since 1995. Earlier, he held a similar position three years at First Baptist Church in Milledgeville, Ga. While attending seminary, he was an intern in the Family Ministry Department of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

"I love my congregation but love Baptist life and what Associated Baptist Press has been doing for the last several years," Qualls said. His new job, he said, "feels like the opportunity to be a part of something that is just starting to hit stride."

In his report to ABP directors, Executive Editor Greg Warner said the agency "has begun the transition from a quasi-denominational wire service to a post-denominational information provider."

With ABP's Web site receiving more than 100,000 hits a month and its year-old Christian lifestyle magazine FaithWorks targeting a postmodern audience, the agency has moved beyond existing solely as a news provider for Baptist and daily newspapers, Warner said. That expansion has also changed how the organization receives its funds. A few years ago ABP relied on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship for nearly half of its funding. Today, contributions from the Atlanta-based Fellowship provide about 20 percent of the ABP budget.

"Changes in Baptist life now dictate that we can no longer rely on centralized funding for the growth of this organization," Warner said. "Nor can we rely on a new generation of Baptists to take up the mantle of charitable giving once this generation has passed." He said the addition of a development officer would allow ABP to expand ongoing efforts to increase its number and types of donors.

Qualls is a native of Roswell, Ga., and a 1987 graduate of West Georgia College in Carrollton. He received a master of divinity degree in family ministry and Christian education from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1992.

He is co-author of Lessons from the Cloth, a book published this year by Smyth and Helwys Publishing and of The Sunday School of the Future, another book due out this fall.

He is married to Elizabeth Boynton Qualls of Manchester, Ga. She is also on the staff at First Baptist Church in Greensboro as church librarian. She has one master's degree from Southern Seminary and is working on a master's in library science in North Carolina.

Qualls plans to work from Greensboro initially with a view toward moving to the news service's Florida headquarters in two or three years. He begins work Oct. 1.

Also at the New York meeting, ABP directors presented the 1999 Religious Freedom Award to James Dunn, who retired in September after 18 years as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington.

Established in 1994, the award honors individuals whose achievements advance the principles and practice of religious freedom.

Joining his longtime friend at a Sept. 2 banquet at the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center was broadcast journalist Bill Moyers, who introduced Dunn and offered reflections on his career.

"Bill Moyers and James Dunn are both longtime freedom fighters," Warner said.

In other business at the fall meeting, ABP directors approved revisions scaling down the current-year budget from \$806,323 to \$662,547. The cuts were necessary mainly due to slower-than-anticipated growth in circulation of FaithWorks, which now has more than 3,600 subscribers. Current projections are for it to reach a viability goal of a total 5,000 bulk and individual subscriptions by the end of next year.

Expenditures reduced in the revisions include budgeted funds for a development director and editorial assistant that have not been spent and a \$46,000 cut in monies previously earmarked for magazine marketing.

A budget for the 2000 calendar year, also approved by ABP directors, anticipates spending of \$779,883, nearly 18 percent more than projected income in 1999. Included in that figure is a fund-raising goal of \$120,000 from individuals specifically for FaithWorks.

The budget includes a 2.5 percent raise for current staff. A personnel subcommittee reported it would undertake a study of ABP's overall salary structure.

ABP's news service produced 317 stories during the first six months of 1999, according to an editorial report, up 12 percent over last year. Total reprints in Baptist papers also increased, from 917 to 976 between January and the end of June.

In other business, the board voted to dissolve its strategy committee, delegating strategic planning to the executive committee, in anticipation of forming a specific committee to oversee the news operation next spring.

ABP's next two board meetings are scheduled April 13-15, 2000, in Louisville, Ky., and Sept. 21-23, 2000, in Dallas.

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ABP presents Religious Freedom Award to James Dunn in New York ceremony

By Bob Allen

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Recognizing a career of advocacy for religious liberty and the separation of church and state, the independent news service Associated Baptist Press presented James Dunn with its sixth Religious Freedom Award Sept. 2.

Dunn, 67, retired Sept. 1 after 18 years as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious-liberty watchdog consortium based in the nation's capital. He recently joined the faculty of the new Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C., as visiting professor of Christianity and public policy and continues to serve as a part-time consultant for the BJC.

Directors of the national news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., have given the award each year since 1994 to an individual whose achievements advance the principles and practice of religious freedom.

"This is a journalistic organization giving an award for religious freedom, but we think that makes sense," said Greg Warner, executive editor of Associated Baptist Press.

Also on the program, broadcast journalist Bill Moyers introduced Dunn and offered his reflections on his longtime friend's career.

"Bill Moyers and James Dunn are both longtime freedom fighters," Warner said.

At a ceremony at the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center in New York City, Dunn accepted a numbered print of a Maxwell Mays landscape of colonial Providence, R.I., site of the first Baptist church on American soil, and a plaque recognizing his selection.

"I have had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time," Dunn said. "Time for the Baptist word came due and it was simply my job to say it, and to say it when not many others were."

Dunn credited a long list of mentors and friends including Moyers, whom he termed "the prophetic voice of the last quarter of the 20th century."

"So when Bill, my friend, indicates that he thinks the stuff I'm doing is OK, that gives me more than a smattering of confidence," he added.

In his introduction, Moyers described Dunn as "one of my closest friends; a brother."

Moyers began by praising Dunn's wife of 41 years. "Patience is Marilyn's pen name in the story she and James have co-authored," Moyers said, adding that those close to the couple "know the story would have been different without Marilyn."

He also observed, "The story would have been different if James had learned a long time ago to keep his mouth shut," alluding to Dunn's knack for quotable witticisms that at times have landed him in controversy.

"You can't understand James unless you understand he's not just a Baptist, he's a Texas Baptist," Moyers said.

"Having been raised a Baptist, he comes from a long line of troublemakers," Moyers said, citing a "dissident spirit" that characterized "non-conformist" groups throughout church history.

"Among the non-conformists were Baptists," Moyers said. "Baptists were not very popular, and the last thing you would want was for your daughter to marry one."

In the final analysis, however, Moyers said it may be that Baptists' greatest contribution to American life is their insistence on religious freedom for all. If that is so, he continued, "Baptists like James Dunn put us and kept us on the right side of history."

"People ask me what kind of Baptist I am, and I say a James Dunn Baptist," Moyers said.

Moyers said it is fitting that a news organization like ABP should honor a religious-liberty champion like Dunn.

"If religious liberty rises from the ground of a free conscience, so does a free press," Moyers said. "People will make the right decision if they are informed and free."

Dunn quipped that he was "not trying to avoid responsibility for my doings" by mentioning so many other individuals but noted: "When the books are closed, if we've done any good, you and those I've mentioned deserve the credit and the blame. We're in it together and we still face serious challenges."

Dunn criticized moves by Democrats, including Vice President Al Gore, to support "charitable-choice" measures to provide public funds to religious organizations. "To funnel tax dollars directly into 'faith-based' programs effectively neuters their first name: 'faith,'" he said.

He also decried education vouchers, a top priority of Republicans in Congress, as "a marriage made in hell" between "a Roman Catholic Church desperate to save its schools" and "fundamentalist Christians seeking public money for their segregation academies."

He chided preachers for "following the flavor of the year in righteous outrage" in condemning homosexuality. Dunn said serious scholars suggest that violence, idolatry, prostitution and pederasty cloud Bible passages commonly cited against homosexuality. "But there are clear teachings, not in question, condemning adultery, divorce, greed and mistreatment of the poor," Dunn said. "They are strangely slighted by church leaders who skew the scriptures for their own agenda."

Charles Overby, chairman and chief executive officer of The Freedom Forum, said ABP's Religious Freedom Award resonates with the international foundation's mission of promoting a free press, free speech and free spirit for all people.

"I do not believe the First Amendment as we know it will exist at the end of the 21st century," said Overby, a Baptist layman who was founding chairman of ABP's board of directors but is no longer on the board.

Overby described America as a "poll-driven culture" where public policies are "more and more majority-opinion oriented."

"I think the First Amendment is in for a tough time," he said.

Prior to assuming his role at the BJC in 1981, Dunn served 12 years as director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission in Dallas. He also has been a pastor and campus minister. He is a graduate of Texas Wesleyan College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, both in his native Fort Worth, Texas.

Previous Religious Freedom Award recipients are Southern Baptist journalists Jack Brymer of Birmingham, Ala., and Walker Knight of Atlanta; author and civil-rights activist Will Campbell; New York Times journalist Gustav Niebuhr and the religion-reporting staff of the Dallas Morning News.

In addition to honoring Dunn, ABP also presented its Founders Award for significant professional or financial contributions to Virginia Boyd Connally. A retired physician from Abilene, Texas, she has been a strong contributor to ABP and gave one of the first gifts for FaithWorks, a Christian lifestyle magazine started by the news service last year.

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