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**SBC president responds to complaints
about prayer guide targeting Jews**

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention's president offered no apologies for a recent pamphlet urging prayer for evangelization of Jews but said it was not intended to be offensive.

Paige Patterson told the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 20 he has responded to a letter from Anti-Defamation League head Abraham Foxman complaining that a prayer guide produced by the International Mission Board offended Jewish people.

"I think I can speak on behalf of all Southern Baptists, even though the first thing any president learns is you don't do that," Patterson said he told Foxman. ... "We are never happy when we offend anybody. It seems contrary to the spirit of Christ to offend anybody."

The pamphlet urged Southern Baptists to pray that Jewish people might accept Christ during Judaism's High Holy Days. Foxman's letter said it was arrogant and insensitive to target Jews for evangelism during their faith's holiest season. Patterson, however, said the New Testament commands Christians to share the gospel.

"We have sort of a problem. One Jew has said to us, 'You cannot witness and you cannot pray for the salvation of Jews.' Another Jew has said to us, 'You must share my message with everyone in the world and you must pray for the conversion of my people, the Jewish nation,'" Patterson said.

"We are torn between the advice of two Jews," he quipped. "We are going to follow the example and advice of the one who died for us."

"I hope and trust he will understand that," Patterson said.

Patterson said he assured the Jewish leader that Southern Baptists would stand by Jewish people to defend religious liberty.

"We do not believe in coercion, we do not believe in deception in evangelism, but we do believe in witnessing to everybody," said Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Prefacing his remarks, Patterson, who as SBC president serves ex officio as a member of the Executive Committee, made a motion asking the group to send a message of encouragement to Wedgwood Baptist Church and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. The motion passed unanimously.

"There is no question we have been through some very tough days," Patterson said, citing both the Fort Worth shootings and the recent firing of a seminary president in Kansas City, Mo.

"I don't do well when I'm walking through the valley," Patterson confessed. But, he added, "It is in the sorrowful, valley experience that the clear superiority of the claims of Christ becomes apparent."

"Did you see (Wedgwood pastor) Al Meredith and did you see (Southern Seminary president) Al Mohler and did you see (Southwestern Seminary president) Ken Hemphill on television ... with opportunities uninterrupted to proclaim the cause of Christ?" Patterson said.

"Let's cry together and let's hurt together and let's sorrow together over all the things that come along," Patterson said. While he believes such experiences "will multiply" for Christians, he said, "In those exigencies of life that utterly disrupt everybody else, it is in our weakness that [God's] strength is made perfect."

Hemphill was scheduled to bring a routine report from Southwestern Seminary at the Sept. 20-21 Executive Committee meeting in Nashville, Tenn., but remained in Fort Worth to minister to victims and their families.

"As you know, three Southwestern students have joined the ranks of the martyrs, and my place is here with the family," Hemphill wrote in a letter read to the Executive Committee by Annuity Board President O.S. Hawkins.

Seven people died in the Sept. 15 shooting spree at a youth rally when an assailant opened fire and then took his own life.

"Our friends and colleagues have joined a long list of Christian martyrs who have paid the ultimate price," Hemphill said.

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Arlington pastor nominated to lead Texas Baptist group

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Charles Wade, the immediate past president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, has been nominated to be the next executive director of the state convention.

Wade, 58, will be presented to the BGCT Executive Board at its regular fall meeting, Sept. 28 in Dallas. If elected, he will succeed Bill Pinson, who retires Jan. 31.

"I'm really humbled by the invitation to do this," said Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, since 1976.

Wade was nominated after Phil Lineberger, another Texas pastor, was announced as the choice but then withdrew.

An 18-member search committee recommended Wade from a field of more than 30 candidates, reported chairman Bill Brian, an attorney and member of First Baptist Church in Amarillo. The committee met in Dallas Sept. 14 and voted overwhelmingly to nominate Wade, he added.

"Dr. Wade brings an extraordinary blend of experience, people skills and vision that equip him for the task," Brian said, noting the committee had met with the nominee for more than six hours during three interviews.

Brian said Wade "told the committee he would lead Texas Baptists to 'dream a bigger dream,' noting success depends on the vitality of the vision and the blessings of God."

Brian cited a litany of qualities that impressed the search committee and led to Wade's nomination.

"Dr. Wade said that the question for our state convention is, 'How can the BGCT empower the churches?'" Brian recalled, affirming Wade's success at the congregation he has led for more than two decades. First Baptist Church in Arlington is "the flagship of mission efforts in Texas by a local congregation," he said.

"Mission Arlington (an outreach ministry pioneered by First Baptist Church) has flourished in meeting the spiritual and human needs of thousands in the Arlington area," he added.

Wade will encourage the convention to see every church as "a distribution point for the love of Jesus," Brian predicted.

He described Wade as "a servant leader who, when he was president of the convention, led all facets of the convention with dignity, fairness and in a spirit of openness."

"He sees himself as a consensus builder, noting that people come first and strategy second in fulfilling the mission of the convention," Brian said.

In late August, Wade was one of two finalists for the nomination to be the executive director. The committee initially chose Lineberger, pastor of Williams Trace Baptist Church in Sugar Land, Texas, but Lineberger withdrew soon afterward.

Noting the committee previously had affirmed both finalists, Brian noted, "The committee and Dr. Wade both believe that Dr. Wade's sense of call in the matter was confirmed by this chain of events."

Lineberger praised the committee's selection. Wade "will make a great executive director," he predicted. "I'm pleased that the committee selected him."

First Baptist Church in Arlington has 5,956 resident members and averages almost 1,800 people in Sunday school. Last year, the church gave \$227,294 to the Cooperative Program unified budget and a total of \$338,772 to missions.

Mission Arlington supports weekly Bible studies in more than 200 locations with more than 3,000 people in attendance. It also provides clothing, food, rent and utility assistance, medical and dental care, childcare, adult day care, development of employment opportunities, transportation and counseling services. More than 400 volunteers participate in the ministry every day.

He is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and earned master's and doctor's degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Wade was president of the BGCT from 1995 to 1997. He is a member of the executive committee of Texas Baptists Committed and served on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Coordinating Council.

Wade and his wife, Rosemary, have one son, Mark; three daughters, Roshelle, Karee and Mary Robin; and seven grandchildren.

Wedgwood victims remembered in community-wide service

By Dan Martin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Standing in broiling sun in the Texas Christian University football stadium, Don Browning led 15,000 mourners in the first song his now-slain daughter ever sang.

"When my daughter was six years old, and in the first grade, she sang her first solo, 'This Little Light of Mine,'" Browning said. He then led the crowd in singing a Negro-spiritual version of the popular children's song.

Browning, who lives in Phoenix, spoke at a Sept. 19 service for victims who were killed or wounded when a suicidal gunman burst into Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, Sept. 15. His daughter, Sydney Browning, 36, was children's choir director at the church when she was killed.

In another emotional moment at the community-wide service, Al Meredith, pastor of Wedgwood Baptist Church, declared, "I want the violence and terror to stop." He asked participants to raise their hand if they wanted it to stop as well.

He then asked them to raise their other hand and to say, "Hallelujah," which he said translated means, "Praise the Lord." After repeating the word several times, he asked them to sing it and led in several repetitions of the chorus, "Alleluia."

Meredith recalled that at 6 p.m. Sunday, Jewish people worldwide entered into their highest holy day, Yom Kippur, and urged participants to similarly fast, pray, repent and seek God so that violence and terror might stop.

He said he has been amazed at the aftermath of the tragedy. "We are just ordinary people, but we have an extraordinary God," he said.

Ken Hemphill, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where two of the slain and two of the wounded were students and one was a recent graduate, said, "The world has looked on with amazement that we have handled our grief with victory."

"But our pain is real, and we do grieve. But we do not grieve as those without hope," he said, quoting the apostle Paul. Christians know that Christ has defeated death, Hemphill said. "We live in the light of the promises of God."

The ecumenical service was organized by community leaders including Mayor Kenneth Barr and Michael Dean, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

Dean and Barr praised fire, police, medical technicians and hundreds of others who took part in the relief effort following the attack, including schools, churches, individuals, groups, businesses and others.

Also present at the event -- although not on the stage -- was Texas Gov. George W. Bush and his wife, Laura.

Dean said Bush was asked repeatedly to speak at the memorial service, but the governor, who is running for president of the United States, declined.

Dean said Bush told him the event was a religious and not a political event. One news outlet quoted Bush as saying he felt it would be inappropriate for him to speak, so he and his wife sat in the stands, three rows back from the field.

Patti Cornelius, a senior at Southwest High School, which is only a few miles from the church, slowly read the names of those killed in the attack. As she read each name, another student rang a large hand bell.

Two students from Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., which was devastated April 19 when two teenage gunmen killed several students and teachers, came to offer help.

"We didn't come with answers," said Craig Nason. "We know what you are going through. ... We came with prayer, love and support. We want to help you carry the burden any way we can." Nason and Ashley Steele then went into the congregation to pray and minister with their Texas peers.

Christian recording artist Stephen Curtis Chapman sang three songs, including one he wrote for the funeral of a girl slain at Paducah, Ky., in another act of random violence two years ago. Chapman said he came because he wanted to help those grieving and hurting however he could.

Participants sweltered in 95-degree heat. A few fainted.

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Evangelicals map spiritual forces as precursor to revival in Houston

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Some people gauge the spiritual condition of a city by how many people attend church. George Otis Jr. asks how many people don't go to church and why.

A self-described "investigative researcher," Otis stands at the forefront of an emerging movement among evangelical Christians that seeks to map the world's cultural terrain as a precursor to spiritual revival.

Not only can individuals and churches be transformed by God's power, he contends, but so can entire communities and cities. He says he has found evidence of community transformations in places like Cali, Colombia; Kiambu, Kenya; Almolongo, Guatemala; and Hemet, Calif.

His research is documented in a video and two books published by the ministry he heads, the Sentinel Group.

Very few of the newly discovered "transformed" cities are found in the industrialized West, Otis said during a September conference in Houston. But he believes a broad area stretching from Houston to Oklahoma City could be on the brink of such a revival.

"This is a real hot spot," he said. "This is where I think something's going to happen."

So does Jim Herrington. He believes it so much that last November he resigned his position as director of missions for Houston's Union Baptist Association to launch a new interdenominational effort called Mission Houston.

Mission Houston's goal is to facilitate the kind of community transformation Otis says is happening in other places around the world. It seeks to draw together pastors and lay leaders from a wide range of evangelical churches in focused prayer and preparation.

"Houston is pregnant," Herrington told the 200 people gathered at the conference on community transformation. "We're praying this pregnancy will go full term."

One sign of Houston's expectant state is a growing focus on united prayer, Herrington said. Through Mission Houston, seven full-time "catalysts" are working in individual sections of metropolitan Houston to facilitate pastors' prayer meetings.

"Pastors are being very responsive to pray," he said. "Pastors' prayer gatherings are being held all across the city."

Not only are pastors praying, but a growing movement of lay intercessors is emerging in Houston as well.

On Aug. 26, 500 people from various churches across Houston gathered for united prayer on behalf of community transformation.

"God is speaking," said Mary Ann Bridgwater, a community leader and lay leader in First Baptist Church of Houston who helped organize the prayer vigil.

Like several others, she has been praying for community transformation in Houston for years. It all began in 1991, when she determined to pray regularly for every pastor in Union Baptist Association. She quickly realized she couldn't limit her prayers only to Baptist pastors, so began to pray specifically for all pastors.

"God at that time gave me a heart for the city," she explained.

Like Otis and Herrington, Bridgwater believes Houston's emerging prayer movement could be the front line of a future spiritual renewal in the city. United prayer meetings will be held every two weeks this fall.

While many are praying, a few others are beginning the detailed task of what is called "spiritual mapping" in order to provide intercessors more specific data to bring before God in prayer.

Spiritual mapping is a new concept that involves interviews, historical research and block-by-block observation to discern what events in the past or present may be blocking revival in a community. In other cities where spiritual mapping has been done, Christians have discovered influences like the occult, cults and ancient tribal religions that they believe continue to hold sway over their communities.

When these specific issues -- along with more common problems such as drug abuse, gangs, domestic violence and civic corruption -- have been targeted in focused prayer, Otis said, transformation has resulted.

"No generation and no community has ever popped out of a vacuum," Otis said. "A road has been paved before we came on the scene. Unless that road is changed, we will follow that road."

Overcoming these barriers allows people praying to "see a community the way it actually is rather than the way it appears to be," added Bob Beckett, pastor of the Dwelling Place Church in Hemet, Calif., and a speaker at the Houston conference.

"Our worldview does not end at the boundaries of the material world," Otis said. "There are realities that cannot be measured with tools you can pick up in university laboratories."

However, spiritual mapping follows essentially the same concept as cultural geography, which is taught in many universities today, Otis said. It is an attempt to "trace disease back to its source."

"We look at our community today, and it is polluted," he said. "We've got to work our way back to the fountain."

Spiritual mapping is just getting underway in parts of Houston, specifically in the city's Montrose section and in the suburban area of Clear Lake. Texas Baptists are involved in these efforts, along with representatives of Mission Houston and other evangelical churches.

Mission Houston plans to facilitate spiritual mapping in other sections of the city as well, channeling all information to intercessory prayer teams for intensive, focused prayer.

Through those well-researched prayers, Herrington and Otis anticipate an extraordinary transformation that everyone around will attribute to God.

"When the kingdom of God comes into a community, it arrives like a river of molten lava," Otis said. "It burns through the church and breaks through the walls. It transforms everything."

Alliance of Baptists endorses ties with NCC, pension board of ABC

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Alliance of Baptists directors have endorsed affiliations with the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and with the pension board of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

The affiliations require final action by the NCC and the General Board of American Baptist Churches.

The NCC's General Council is scheduled to vote on the Alliance's membership during the group's 50th anniversary meeting scheduled Nov. 9-12 in Cleveland.

Five Baptist bodies are among the 35 Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican communions in the NCC -- American Baptist Churches, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention U.S.A., National Missionary Baptist Convention and Progressive National Baptist Convention.

The NCC's Membership and Ecclesial Relations Committee approved the Alliance's application for membership Sept. 13, said Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance.

Mark Caldwell, pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., and chair of the Alliance's Ecumenical Development Committee, said the group's interest in joining the NCC is consistent with its past ecumenical pursuits.

"From our beginning in 1987, the Alliance of Baptists has embraced broad ecumenical interests," Caldwell said. "While a part of the larger Baptist tradition within Christianity, the Alliance has valued other denominational and spiritual traditions."

In the past, the Alliance has developed partnerships with American Baptist Churches, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the United Church of Christ, the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba and the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe.

The Alliance directors unanimously endorsed the possibility of participating in the ABC's Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board pension plan.

A final vote by the ABC General Board during its November meeting could clear the way for the Alliance and other groups to participate in the plan. The ABC board earlier approved the first of a two-stage vote on opening the retirement plan to "affiliated" groups.

In addition to the Alliance, other groups looking at participating in the plan include the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, according to Richard Huber, associate executive director of the pension board.

Once approved, pastors and other staff members of churches in affiliated groups could be covered by the plan. The plan has already been open to the national staff of the Alliance and CBF.

Huber told Alliance directors that the M&M Benefit Board has one of the best track records among denominational pension boards.

Citing advantages of opening the plan to "affiliated" groups, Huber said the move would increase membership, leading to increased economies of scale, a broader risk pool and an enlarged asset pool that would provide more investment options.

Alliance directors approved a statement "gratefully endors[ing] the offer of the M&M Benefit Board of American Baptist Churches to participate in its retirement/death benefit plan as an affiliated group and heartily commends the plan to congregations affiliated with the Alliance."

In other action, the Alliance approved a \$245,681 budget for the year 2000, a 4.3 percent increase over the previous year's budget. The new budget allocates \$20,400 for administration expenses, \$155,881 for personnel expenses and \$69,400 in program expenses.

Alliance directors also approved a mission-offering goal of \$85,250 for 2000. Topping a list of 20 proposed mission disbursements are \$20,000 for the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba; \$10,000 each for the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe and Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe; and \$7,500 for the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

Hastey told directors that the group's work with Cuban Baptists will be facilitated by its receipt of a license to travel to Cuba and a second license to send money to Cuba.

The licenses were granted by the Treasury Department's Bureau of Foreign Assets Control. Hastey said the travel license is open-ended for two years and is renewable.

Since 1991, the Alliance has sponsored dozens of trips to Cuba.

In other actions, Alliance president Welton Gaddy, pastor of Northminster Church in Monroe, La., and executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, told the board he will appoint a Committee on Ordination to assist congregations in ordination procedures.

Hastey said one of the ways the committee would assist local congregations is to serve, when requested, as an "association of churches" for Alliance churches not affiliated with a local association.

Alliance directors also approved a motion to endorse a boycott of Mount Olive Pickle Co. in North Carolina over the firm's resistance to better wages for farm workers.

Directors also approved a motion by Richard Cook of Baltimore asking Hastey to write a letter of condolence to members of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, following a Sept. 15 shooting spree at a youth rally that left seven people plus the gunman dead.

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