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**Executive Committee debates,
but declines to study, 'ecumenism'**

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A referred motion from last summer's Southern Baptist Convention divided the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 20-21 in Nashville, Tenn.

After debate, the 81-member committee voted by a wide margin not to call for a study of whether mission gifts are being used for ecumenical efforts that might compromise Southern Baptist beliefs.

In other matters referred by the convention, the Executive Committee also declined to recommend other proposed studies of charismatic influences in Southern Baptist churches, of ways to make the SBC Annuity Board more effective and of whether to rename its unified budget, the Cooperative Program.

Louisiana pastor Jerry Moser made a motion at the June 15-16 convention in Atlanta that was referred to the Executive Committee. It asked the Executive Committee to study the use of Cooperative Program funds with groups or individuals "whose professed beliefs are in conflict with or could risk the possible compromise of the historic distinctives of the unique witness of Southern Baptists."

The Executive Committee declined to recommend a study but offered a gentle reminder encouraging denominational entities to "maintain the historic position of Southern Baptists" as they cooperate with other groups in "appropriate" evangelistic or moral-advocacy efforts.

The Executive Committee then approved a separate motion affirming the North American Mission Board's participation in Mission America 2000, a coalition of Christian leaders that is seeking to share the gospel with every person in America by the end of next year.

Asked to give an example of the kinds of affiliation he believes ought to be studied, Moser cited NAMB involvement in Mission America. A work group also interviewed NAMB President Robert Reccord before concluding a formal study is unwarranted, reported Bruce Martin, pastor of Village Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C.

Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Sun Baptist Church in Youngstown, Ohio, and a former SBC vice president, said he was concerned the discussion might cause people to become suspicious of the Mission America movement, which he supports.

"Our Northern cities are not going to be evangelized by Southern Baptists," Frost said, but Southern Baptists can help other Christians witness by supporting Mission America. He said he has been involved in the effort. "I've not compromised anything," Frost said, "but have been working in our community with United Methodists, Presbyterians and others."

Jerry Spencer, pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Dothan, Ala., said the effort is no different from a local church taking part in a Billy Graham crusade. "We cooperate with other people we may not agree with theologically," he said. "I've been doing that 25 years, and I don't think it's a real issue."

Mission America 2000 is a coalition of more than 360 national Christian leaders who represent 70 denominations, more than 200 parachurch groups and 57 ministry networks, according to the organization's Web site.

The North American Mission Board's main financial involvement in the effort is through a retirement package approved in 1996 by trustees of a predecessor agency, the Home Mission Board. The agreement secunds services of former HMB President Larry Lewis to head up Mission America's "Celebrate Jesus 2000" prayer-and-witnessing emphasis through next year.

During discussion, Executive Committee members said they have confidence that NAMB leaders would not participate in Mission America if they thought it might compromise the gospel but acknowledged they did not know enough about the coalition to say if they would be comfortable with every group involved.

"We don't even know who's in Mission America," said Clark Stewart, pastor of Harmony Baptist Church in Crystal Springs, Miss., adding he could not support Frost's motion.

"We have spent 20 years dealing with doctrine," said John Click, a retired pastor from Goddard, Kan. He said he is suspicious of any involvement with parachurch groups, which he said resort to "dumbing down doctrine and blurring doctrinal distinctives" in order to gain wider appeal.

"When the media get hold of this and we find ourselves lumped with people who doctrinally are far from where we are in many respects, the public at large is not going to be able to make these distinctions," Click said.

Moser, pastor of Bayou DuLarge Baptist Church in Theriot, La., has been a frequent critic of Southern Baptist conversations with other faith groups. In 1995, he confronted then-HMB head Larry Lewis at an associational meeting for endorsing an "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" statement drafted by religious leaders.

After the incident, the church sponsoring Moser's mission fired him for insubordination. Moser's congregation kept him as pastor but lost use of its building, owned by the mother church, over the dispute.

Lewis and another SBC agency head, Richard Land of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, eventually withdrew their signatures from the document, saying critics misunderstood its purpose.

Moser, however, maintains the two men should publicly repent of ever attaching their names to the document, which he said hurt his ability to evangelize in Louisiana's predominantly Catholic bayou country. He maintains a Web site monitoring developments concerning the ECT statement and other involvement by Southern Baptists that he regards ecumenical in nature.

Moser said he was "pleased" the Executive Committee discussed his motion, but he believes further study is needed. "This issue is not over Mission America," Moser said. "This issue is over ecumenism."

Moser said he worries that linking with "sacramentalist" groups such as Episcopalians or Roman Catholics in evangelistic efforts dilutes Southern Baptists' proclamation that salvation is attained through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He said those churches embrace "another gospel," which says that grace can be received through sacraments.

"Some of these groups ... are more liberal than anybody we got rid of or fired," he said.

Moser said, however, that he would have preferred the Executive Committee do its own research rather than respond to his. He said he could have given other examples of ecumenism involving other SBC entities but was asked for only one.

The Executive Committee responded to another referred motion by declining to recommend a committee to study ways to make the Annuity Board more effective. Annuity Board trustees could conduct such a study if needed, the committee said.

Another referred motion asked for a study committee to clarify the missions focus of the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget. Citing previous decisions not to change the program's name and ongoing discussions about how to make the Cooperative Program more effective, the Executive Committee reported that a special committee is unnecessary.

Another referral requested a study of the impact and influence of Southern Baptist churches involved in "unbiblical" worship practices. Citing local-church autonomy, the committee declined to recommend such a study.

After the vote, Gerald Harris, pastor of Eastside Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., said the Georgia Baptist Convention conducted a similar study last year that found some churches were involved in unorthodox practices like being slain in the spirit and laughing uncontrollably.

"This is a great concern for us in Georgia," Harris said. "It seems like it is drawing churches away from our convention. It is causing a great deal of disruption in our associations. It seems like somewhere this ought to be addressed."

He suggested that a committee appointed recently to review the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement deal with charismatic issues in a statement on the Holy Spirit.

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SBC budget receipts on rise, but fund raising a mixed bag

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Funding for Southern Baptist Convention ministries through the Cooperative Program unified budget continues to set new records, but specific fund-raising campaigns at SBC agencies and institutions are meeting with mixed results.

Gifts to the national Cooperative Program this fiscal year should exceed the budget by about \$12 million, Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said Sept. 20. This would be the sixth consecutive year for record giving to SBC causes.

Final figures will be released after the fiscal year ends Sept. 30, but Chapman told Executive Committee members enough overage already has been received to ensure the SBC will pay off its remaining \$3.5 million in capital needs to agencies.

Due to a budgeting change enacted this year, however, SBC entities will no longer be able to draw on Cooperative Program surpluses for building projects. Once current capital-needs allocations are fulfilled, any

overage in Cooperative Program giving will be divided among all SBC agencies and institutions according to the same formula used to distribute the normal budget.

That means the convention's mission boards, seminaries and other entities will need to rely even more on their own fund-raising efforts for capital needs. The SBC constitution forbids agencies from soliciting funds from Baptist churches but allows fund-raising, with Executive Committee approval, from individual donors and foundations. Entities are also required to report annually to the Executive Committee on fund-raising activities. This year's fund-raising reports were among material reviewed by the Executive Committee Sept. 20-21 in Nashville, Tenn.

"The Lord has been mighty good to Southern Baptists," Chapman said in his report to the Executive Committee.

This increase in Cooperative Program funding must continue and accelerate, said Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC's International Mission Board. Rankin told Executive Committee members his agency is appointing record numbers of missionaries and anticipates increasing numbers of applicants in the years ahead.

Without significant increases in missions funding, the IMB might have to turn away some of those who believe God has called them to career missionary service, Rankin warned.

"That would be absolutely tragic, because what is happening today in the accelerating harvest is not a result of our missions strategies and record numbers of missionaries," he explained. "God is at work, and he is calling us in faithfulness and obedience to join him in what he is doing."

The increasing number of missionary appointments also presents another financial dilemma for IMB leaders. The Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Md. -- where most missionary appointees go for intensive training before shipping out to their fields of service -- needs to be doubled in size, Rankin said.

IMB leaders asked the Executive Committee for permission to embark on a \$23 million fund-raising campaign for this purpose. According to documents filed with the Executive Committee, the IMB intends to spend less than \$100,000 to raise the \$23 million.

That could be a challenge, if the recent experience of other SBC agencies and institutions is any indicator.

Among reports on special fund-raising activities filed with the Executive Committee during the meeting, only Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth showed evidence of a high return on money spent in fund raising. As of July 31, Southwestern reported raising \$13.43 million toward its \$100 million goal in the "Touch the World ... Impact Eternity" campaign. This was accomplished at a cost of \$3.26 million, the report said. The campaign has completed its third of 10 years.

A recently ended campaign by LifeWay Christian Resources to fund improvements at Ridgecrest and Glorieta conference centers was less successful. The \$20 million "Renewing the Place of Renewal" campaign raised \$3.49 million, according to the Executive Committee report. This was done at an expense of \$1.11 million.

The SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission has spent \$96,285 to raise \$139,201 toward a \$250,000 goal to provide support for the agency's new daily radio program, according to its report filed with the Executive Committee.

At Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, \$90,189 was spent in the past 17 months to raise \$26,325, according to documents filed with the Executive Committee. This was part of the seminary's \$12 million "First Step Toward Tomorrow" capital campaign, which is still in its early stages.

On a related front, two agencies asked the Executive Committee's permission to borrow funds for special projects.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary received permission to borrow \$3.67 million for construction and renovation of student housing. This was Southeastern's fifth request for authorization to

borrow funds for student housing since June 1997. Total borrowing authorized by the Executive Committee for the seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., now stands at \$12.27 million.

Documents filed with the Executive Committee indicate payments on these loans are to be made from funds received in rent.

LifeWay Christian Resources also asked the Executive Committee for authorization to borrow \$7.9 million to complete implementation of a master facilities plan. The five-year loan will be repaid with funds from operations and reserve fund earnings, according to documents filed with the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee granted permission for this loan as well.

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Study of 'Baptist Faith and Message' scheduled to get underway this fall

By Trennis Henderson

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- What does the future hold for Southern Baptists' historic "Baptist Faith and Message" document? The answer to that question will unfold in the coming months as a blue-ribbon committee appointed by Southern Baptist Convention President Paige Patterson goes about its work.

The committee, authorized in June by SBC messengers, was assigned the task of reviewing the doctrinal statement "with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando."

The statement, originally adopted in 1925, was revised in 1963, reducing the number of articles from 25 to 17. The only change to the 1963 statement came last year when SBC messengers adopted an amendment on the family. While not an official creed, most Southern Baptists regard the "Baptist Faith and Message" as a general statement of basic Baptist beliefs.

Patterson announced appointment of the study committee in August, naming three-time SBC president Adrian Rogers to head the 15-member committee.

The committee includes two former SBC presidents, two seminary presidents, the head of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission and the wife of the SBC Annuity Board president. It also includes the individual who made the motion to study the document.

The make-up of the committee is significantly different from one appointed by SBC President Herschel Hobbs in 1962. Hobbs named the sitting presidents of each state convention to the committee, which presented its report in 1963.

"What we had then was a serious group of leaders who were all the presidents of the state conventions," recalled Wayne Ward, an adviser to the 1963 committee. Ward, a retired professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said Hobbs viewed that appointment process as the best way to "have a representative committee."

"You didn't have a hand-picked committee like this one is," Ward added.

Despite that fact, others say the current committee is equally representative of Southern Baptists today. "I think you see a very good representation of current Southern Baptist leaders and pastors and others," said committee member Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "I believe the vast mainstream multitude of Southern Baptists will be very pleased with any recommendations which may come from this committee."

When he announced the committee appointments, Patterson said he did "not anticipate even beginning to approximate a rewrite" of the faith statement.

"Most folks feel, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it,'" Patterson said.

While describing the "Baptist Faith and Message" as an "undeniably fabulous statement," he added that the committee will be "free to proceed with whatever recommendations they wish to make."

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., said he hopes the document will be given a thorough study and that it either be "left exactly as it is, which would be wonderful if we agree to that premise" or that it be "clarified and strengthened."

While Rogers said he is "happy with it the way it is," he added, "I don't think there is anything that can't be improved with study."

In a series of articles written in 1993 for the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the "Baptist Faith and Message," Hobbs, who is now deceased, emphasized the statement is not creedal. "Southern Baptists have always been a non-creedal people," he wrote.

Citing the importance of the statement's preamble, Hobbs added: "If we ignore the preamble, we do not need to get a creed. We will already have one." He said the 1963 statement, drawing from the earlier 1925 version, declares that "the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists [are] the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments."

"Confessions [of faith] are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience," Hobbs said.

The 1963 preamble says the committee closely followed the 1925 statement. "In no case has it sought to delete from or add to the basic contents of the 1925 statement."

The preamble adds, however, "This generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us."

Such a time has come again, Mohler said. The pattern of addressing the statement in 1925, 1963 and 1999 "demonstrates that for every generation there is an opportunity and a responsibility to revisit the confession of faith and make sure that it does express those truths definitely held among us, those doctrines most precious to us," he said.

The most dramatic denominational change since the last revision is the SBC's conservative shift during the past two decades.

"Without doubt, the conservative recovery of the Southern Baptist Convention has prompted some questions," Mohler said, "but I would remind us that during the controversy, it was the conservatives who pressed for the 'Baptist Faith and Message' to be understood as a parameter document of belief for those who teach." He said the call to study the document "does not come out of conservative dissatisfaction" with the current statement.

T.C. Pinckney, a conservative Baptist leader from Virginia who made the motion calling for the study, said he "would anticipate a relatively small number of word changes that, from my standpoint, would tighten up the 'Baptist Faith and Message' where it needs it."

As an example, he cited the document's first article, which says the Bible "is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man."

"To me, that's somewhat loose wording and is open to a variety of interpretations, some of which would be unfortunate," said Pinckney, editor of Virginia's conservative Baptist Banner newspaper. "I would think a better wording might be, 'The Bible is God's written revelation of Himself to man.' The words 'the record' are open to a variety of interpretations that can be used to substantiate the view that the Bible is not infallible."

Concerning the issue of Scripture, Pinckney added, "In accord with the conservative resurgence of the last 20 years ... the words infallible and inerrant should be included" in the statement.

Rogers said he expects the committee's work to be done "inside the cradle of respect that we have for an inerrant Bible."

"I don't think it is necessary to include the word inerrancy in the statement," he added, "but in fairness, I would not rule it out."

Mohler said he believes "it is reasonable to expect that in 1999 we should ask some questions about whether or not we learned anything in the last 20 years which should be reflected in our confession of faith."

While he believes the wording of the 1963 statement already affirms inerrancy, Mohler said one question that does remain is: "Could it be said more clearly?"

Another potential issue awaiting the committee is the current denominational debate over Calvinism. Mohler, a high-profile Calvinist in Baptist life, appears to represent a minority view on the 15-member committee.

Mohler insists, however, that he "is not pressing a Calvinist agenda" and will not do so during committee proceedings.

"My agenda is biblical truth," he said. "I don't think when you look at the committee that you've got either a Calvinist or an anti-Calvinist agenda. There is no personal agenda behind this."

As the committee begins meeting this fall, Rogers said he hopes it will not be necessary to have "more than two, and at the most, three meetings."

"I am not coming to chair the committee to superimpose my ideas," he added. "I am sure we will have a consensus and I will be happy with that consensus."

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-- With additional reporting by Michael Clingenpeel and Lonnie Wilkey

Violence, fervency spark thoughts of martyrdom among some teens

By Todd Svano and Greg Warner

MADISON, Wis. (ABP) -- Tina Leonard sat quietly while her English literature classmates talked about the teenagers killed a day earlier in a Fort Worth church. In her heart, she guarded the secret she had carried for months.

"God has laid it on my heart that I am going to be martyred," she later confided to a few close friends.

Tina, 16, thought it would sound crazy to her friends. She was surprised to find them unfazed by the idea. "When I told one of my friends, he said, 'That's awesome. I wish that could happen to me.'"

"If you ask many teens, a bunch would say they'd be willing to die for God," says Tina's best friend, Joanna Dobbe, 15, also of Madison, Wis. "Personally, I would like to be a martyr. You would be blessed, because Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'"

Such thoughts shock parents and even some psychologists. But others say the popularity of martyrdom may be on the rise among Christian teens fervent about their faith and sober to the reality of violence today.

The school shooting last April in Littleton, Colo., was a defining moment for Christian teens, say Tina Leonard and other youth.

In the wake of the Columbine tragedy and the earlier shooting of students in a prayer group in Heath High School in Paducah, Ky., some Christian teens are asking themselves tough questions like "What if it were me?" Some teens are finding the possibility of dying for Christ plausible and even attractive.

Such thoughts are fueled, some observers say, by the media attention given to the rash of youth violence and the hero treatment afforded its victims.

The now-famous words that reportedly cost Columbine student Cassie Bernall her life -- "Yes, I do believe in God." -- have shown up on T-shirts and coffee mugs. A book about the murdered teen, written by her mother, quotes a note found in Cassie's room: "I will die for my God. I will die for my faith."

The Christian music industry has taken note of Columbine, which already is cited as a defining event of the millennial generation. Singer-producer Phil Driscoll has started a record label to highlight young talent energized by the Columbine shooting. DC Talk has published a book about Christian martyrs that is targeted to teens. Stephen Curtis Chapman, a graduate of Heath High in Paducah, has made teen violence a personal cause.

Meanwhile, the 13 wooden crosses erected near Columbine High School, which became a popular memorial after the massacre, are on tour across the country. Youth rallies in Atlanta, Nashville, Jackson, Tenn., and elsewhere have attracted up to 14,000 people anxious to glimpse a tangible symbol of an incomprehensible tragedy.

"They're a symbol of courage and boldness," 17-year-old Maris Wainwright of Nashville told the *Tennessean*.

Wainwright cried when she was chosen to carry the cross of Rachel Scott, a Christian student who, like Cassie Bernall, was reportedly killed after testifying to her faith. "It was the most incredible honor, knowing she had the ultimate courage, knowing what she died for."

Dave McPherson, Cassie Bernall's youth pastor in Littleton, said the surge of teen enthusiasm around Cassie's death is genuine. "They are challenged by her, but they are not worshiping her," he told Religion News Service. "But she's causing them to live closer to what they believe."

Such enthusiasm doesn't usually lead to thoughts of martyrdom. Psychologists and youth workers say that's rare. But to some teens who see a violent world at odds with faith, it makes sense.

"Sacrificing yourself for the glory of God is a very, very mesmerizing and very attractive thing, especially when life on earth ... is not giving one much positive feedback," said Herman Feifel, a Los Angeles psychologist who specializes in thanatology -- the study of death, dying and bereavement.

Some teen talk about martyrdom might be bravado, Feifel suggested. "Because their own sense of identity and security is not well developed, they are at risk [to such thoughts]," said Feifel, an emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Southern California. "Most, if they manage to survive, manage to grow out of it."

It's normal for children and adolescents who hear about tragedies like the shooting in Fort Worth's Wedgwood Baptist Church to imagine something similar happening to them, said Gerald Hickson, vice chair of the department of pediatrics at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital in Nashville.

"It's not unusual for children to mentally place themselves in that situation somehow," said Hickson. "It's one of the ways we process such an event. ... You are not going to have a church-going child who won't ask, 'Might this happen to me?'"

However, Hickson said, it's unusual for adolescents to view the possibility of a martyr's death as attractive. "That's not something I find often."

Joy McInvale was part of a team of counselors called to the Fort Worth church after the shooting. A counselor in private practice in nearby Bedford, McInvale said teenagers today feel more vulnerable to violence.

“Every type of trauma changes our perception of the world,” she said. Violence like what occurred in Fort Worth “causes teens to believe they could be victims. ... And when it happens in your hometown, your backyard, it is more than a possibility. It is a reality.”

“I’ve had dozens of students say to me, ‘If it could happen at Wedgwood Baptist Church, it could at my church.’”

Fifteen youth from Ken Caryl Baptist Church in Littleton, Colo., were attending Columbine High School -- about a mile away -- at the time of that massacre last April. “After Columbine, they didn’t feel safe at their *school*,” said Steve Lee, the youth minister, “but after Fort Worth, they don’t feel safe in their *church*.”

For Tina Leonard and her Wisconsin classmates, the Fort Worth shooting was more shocking than Columbine because of where it happened. “This week’s shooting hit closest to home, because we realized it could happen even in our own church youth group,” she said.

Psychologists agree most youth feel more vulnerable in today’s world, which in turn can prompt fears of a violent death and even thoughts of martyrdom. Other factors could contribute as well -- a widespread fatalism about the future, a drive to be noticed, a focus on end-time scenarios that foresee widespread mayhem, and a desire for authenticity which, among Christian youth, makes martyrdom the ultimate testimony.

Charles Ewing of New York, a forensic psychologist who specializes in youth violence, says he hears more fatalism from teenagers today.

“They feel they really don’t have any control over what’s going to happen to them,” he said. “The more random acts of violence we have in society, the more we are giving them the message that it is out of their hands.”

Whereas teenagers traditionally think of themselves as immortal and think little about death, Ewing said, the highly publicized school and church shootings may be changing that. And without the benefit of experience or maturity, teens come to view life as more dangerous than it is, he said.

“Although we live in a violent time in society, it is nowhere near as violent as we believe it is,” he said. Ewing, who often consults school officials on violence issues, said the chance of being killed at school (about one in a million) is less than the chance of being struck by lightning (about one in 600,000). Yet teen fears are based on perceptions, he said, even if they are unrealistic.

Separating reality from fiction is becoming increasingly difficult for teenagers who have grown up with highly publicized tragedies and ever-present media violence.

For one surreal moment, the intrusion of the gunman at Wedgwood Baptist in Fort Worth actually drew laughter and applause from the 200 youth present. Some believed the gunman’s derogatory words about Christianity were part of a skit.

Persecution of Christians, and the targeting of Christians for violence, is getting a lot of attention in evangelical circles of late.

But parents and ministers need to be careful not to exaggerate the prospects of persecution, said John Thielepape, pastor of Meadow Lane Baptist in Arlington, Texas, which sent 20 youth to the tragic prayer rally in Fort Worth.

“We’re not teaching them to pursue persecution,” he said. “We want to emphasize the faithfulness. If they’re faithful, persecution may come ... [but] it’s more likely that someone is going to challenge them verbally than to shoot them.”

Tina Leonard’s car bears the license plate “IB4GSUS.” She says she tries to live up to that motto.

In a culture in which authentic faith is often trivialized by cheap grace and a consumer Christianity, many youth who are fervent about their faith are serious about making a difference. To some, martyrs like

Cassie Bernall are the ultimate heroes. And they are enamored by the "effect" dying for one's faith can have on survivors and others.

Tina's friend Joanna was upset when Tina told her she expects to die as a martyr. But later Joanna became convinced -- through a vision, she says -- that she will be with Tina when she dies and later will testify to others about Tina's faith and death.

Joanna Dobbe shared her vision with her father, Madison pastor Keith Dobbe. When he later told a reporter about it, Dobbe sobbed -- not because of his daughter's possible death, he said, but because of her faith.

"Their faith just amazes me," Dobbe said, burying his face in his hands. "It puts my mediocre life with God to shame."

Other adults are skeptical of the courage, or bravado, voiced by teens who identify with martyrdom. But Baptist sociologist Tony Campolo says the older generation has misjudged the appetite and courage of today's youth. "What we have not understood is that young people are hungry to do something heroic for others," he said in an interview before the Fort Worth shooting.

While Campolo does not endorse or encourage martyrdom, he does say teenagers are capable of greater sacrifice than adults expect of them.

Kyle Merten, 16, of Milwaukee, Wis., says he would be willing to die for his faith. But he also sees the talk of martyrdom as overblown. He knows violence is real; four years ago his school principal was shot and killed. "There are some kids that really are questionable that you think could do that. So I do worry about it. But I try not to think about it and get that bad vibe in my head."

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-- Todd Svano is a free-lance writer in Middleton, Wis. Greg Warner is executive editor of Associated Baptist Press.

Georgia Baptist leaders recommend church's ouster

By John Pierce

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., could become the first church removed from fellowship by the Georgia Baptist Convention under a new constitutional provision banning churches that affirm homosexuals.

The state convention's executive committee voted Sept. 14 to recommend expulsion of the 86-year-old congregation long known for extensive social ministries in a racially and economically diverse community.

It would mark the first time for the Georgia convention to remove a church over homosexuality, though the Southern Baptist Convention took such action against two North Carolina churches in 1992.

The Georgia convention voted last fall to change its constitution's definition of a "cooperating" church to bar congregations that knowingly take action "to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

The Oakhurst congregation amended its church covenant in 1997 to "reject any status in this fellowship" over sexual orientation.

Gerald Harris, president of the state convention, said he admired the church's ministries but its position on homosexuality is "clearly outside the parameters established by our convention."

Executive Director Robert White said most Georgia Baptists would disagree with the church's position. "We cannot accept homosexuality as normative," he said.

Oakhurst pastor Lanny Peters said he was not surprised by the recommendation but is disappointed to see the church's long relationship with the state convention come to an end. "We have been a Georgia Baptist Convention church since 1913," he said.

Peters said his church members "are not as one" on the issue of homosexuality but that the congregation would be in disagreement with the position adopted by the convention.

"We believe homosexuality is an orientation more than a lifestyle," he said.

A second congregation under investigation by Georgia Baptist leaders, Virginia-Highland Baptist Church in Atlanta, has not yet responded to a written inquiry about its stance on the issue, White said.

If messengers to the Nov. 15-16 annual meeting approve the recommendation, Oakhurst would become the first congregation removed from fellowship of the state convention in its 177-year history.

Charles Walker of Jasper, who has written extensively on Baptists in Georgia, said he has found no record of the state convention ever excluding a church. However, he recalled occasions when Baptist associations made similar decisions based on issues such as the "Free Will controversy" in the 1830s.

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Arizona Baptist Foundation lays off employees, faces suits

PHOENIX (ABP) -- The Baptist Foundation of Arizona has laid off 72 of its 133 employees in an effort to cut overhead at the troubled agency.

"We deeply regret the need to let good people go but know it is important to retain no more staff than necessary to operate the organization during this time of transition," trustee chairman Berry Norwood wrote in an investor letter dated Sept. 13.

Trustees of the Arizona Foundation froze assets in July in light of findings by the Arizona Corporation Commission that the agency misled investors about its true financial condition.

The board fired three top administrators Aug. 26. They had been on administrative leave since voluntarily stepping down from their duties at a Foundation board meeting July 22.

In other recent developments, two lawsuits were filed against the Foundation. A class-action suit was filed Aug. 27 in Maricopa County Superior Court. A Phoenix-area pastor sued separately Aug. 30, according to news reports.

The class-action suit, filed by investor Franklin Kestner Sr., accused Foundation officials of bilking investors for personal gain.

The other suit was filed by Richard Kimsey, pastor of Desert Valley Baptist Church in New River, Ariz., and his wife, Ann. It accuses the Foundation of "a Ponzi scheme in which the mountain of debt could be sustained only by selling new notes and persuading investors to roll old notes into new investment."

Kimsey, who recently moved to the state, reportedly sold his home in Georgia for \$100,000 and invested the proceeds in the Foundation July 15.

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-- By ABP staff

Gardner-Webb receives largest gift in history

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. (ABP) -- Gardner-Webb University, a Baptist-affiliated private school in Boiling Springs, N.C., has announced a \$5.4 million gift, largest in the school's history.

The gift from the estate of Winifred and David Lindsay, longtime supporters of the school, will be used for endowment to provide student scholarships and for capital needs, officials said.

A gift of this magnitude can transform a school the size of the 1,500-student Gardner-Webb, said Drew Van Horn, vice president for university relations.

"We now join the ranks of many prestigious colleges whose largest gifts are very similar in size to Mrs. Lindsay's," he said. "When you can mention your college among the likes of Davidson, Wake Forest and Furman, it means greatly enhanced credibility for your university."

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-- By ABP staff

Observers await final piece of report on religious freedom

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An 1,100-page U.S. State Department report details religious persecution worldwide but still awaits designation by the Clinton administration of countries of "particular concern" in violating religious freedom.

A listing of those countries was supposed to coincide with the Sept. 9 release of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, mandated by a law approved last year.

"Since this is the first time we've done this, we want to do it right," explained a State Department official who said the secretary of state was expected to make the designations on behalf of the president soon.

Leaders of a new U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom applauded the detailed report, calling it an "extraordinary shift" in American foreign-policy making.

"For the first time in American history, every American embassy in the world has focused significantly on our first freedom," said Steve McFarland, executive director of the 10-member commission.

Still, McFarland said identifying countries of particular concern remains important, because that designation could open the door for sanctions by the United States. Options in the law range from minor to severe penalties, but the president also has broad authority under the law to refrain from imposing penalties at all.

"All eyes are looking at whether China is on the list," McFarland said, describing the nation as a clear "violinator of religious freedom."

According to the report's executive summary, the Chinese government's "intolerance of unregistered religious activity has led in some areas to persecution of persons on the basis of their religious practice through harassment, prolonged detention, and incarceration in prison or 'reform through labor' camps, and police closure of places of worship and other holy places."

It also cited "credible reports" of incidents of abuse or torture of Buddhist monks and nuns. And groups such as Protestants and Roman Catholics who do not belong to "official" churches are persecuted, it said.

The State Department report notes a resurgence in religious activity in China since the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese government reports between 10 million and 15 million registered Protestants. According to foreign experts, perhaps 30 million persons worship in churches independent of government control, although the report says that some estimates claim 80 million.

In one of many issues addressed in the China section, the report notes that "foreigners are not permitted to conduct missionary activities, but foreign Christians currently are teaching on college campuses with minimum interference from authorities as long as their proselytizing is low key."

Robert Seiple, U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom issues, said the unprecedented report will provide a "comprehensive record" of the status of religious freedom, and it will "help alleviate suffering, recalling to persecutors and persecuted alike that they are not, and will not, be forgotten."

He told reporters at a press conference, however, the International Religious Freedom Act "was never conceived primarily to be a sanctions act. Sanctions are a last resort."

The report's executive summary said: "The vast majority of the world's governments have committed themselves to respect religious freedom. Indeed, most have accepted one or more of the international instruments that explicitly protect that right."

But "there remains in some countries a substantial difference between promise and practice. Much of the world's population lives in countries in which the right to religious freedom is restricted or prohibited. This gap between word and deed has several causes," the summary stated.

"Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes remain determined to control religious belief and practice," the summary said. "The result -- inevitably -- is persecution. Other regimes are hostile to minority or unapproved religions. Some tolerate, and thereby encourage, persecution or discrimination."

Some governments have adopted discriminatory policies that give preferences to favored religions, the report said.

And in detailing the U.S. response to religious freedom issues, the summary said: "The promotion of religious freedom involves far more than public airing of violations. The most productive work often is done behind the scenes, for a very simple reason: no government or nation is likely to respond with alacrity when publicly rebuked."

Work to promote religious freedom "usually is done out of the limelight, often without acknowledgment, occasionally without knowing its result. But the work must and does take place," the report stated.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The full report and its summary can be seen or downloaded through the Internet at www.state.gov.

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South Carolina Baptist church welcomes women to pulpit

By Robert O'Brien

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (ABP) -- Lynn Hyder stepped from the pulpit and took a quick look around in mock relief.

"The walls of the sanctuary are still standing," she joked to Randy Wright, pastor of Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C.

The comment to Wright, though light-hearted, communicated the struggle of women in ministry to find acceptance in Baptist pulpits -- especially in the Deep South.

Fernwood's walls also stood as Tiffany Greer Hamilton and LeJeanna Raymond took their turn with Hyder in the pulpit earlier this year in three days of Lenten services at the church.

Indeed, no lightning flashed from above in disapproval of three women seminary students preaching in a Baptist pulpit on successive days. But hope flashed in the hearts of the three young South Carolinians because of the chance to preach in their home state.

"Preaching at Fernwood gave me hope there's a place for women in ministry in the South -- and that I could come back home," said Hamilton, a graduate of Clemson University. She returned to Clemson, S.C., to become minister of education and youth at First Baptist Church after earning a master-of-divinity degree in Richmond, Va., this year.

"I saw the young women grow in their confidence as preachers after the Fernwood experience," said Charles Bugg, professor of preaching at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. He arranged with Wright for the three students to preach at Fernwood to demonstrate their skill.

Looking back on their experience, the three women say they got a tremendous boost from hearing lay people -- even some who had never heard a woman preach -- tell them they had spoken profound words that had an impact on their lives.

"That did more to affirm them in ministry than all the words I could say in a semester," said Bugg, who encourages young women to take their place in ministry alongside their male counterparts.

Bugg, who directs the seminary's Center for Preaching and Worship, sees the Fernwood experience as a model for other churches to follow for both female and male preaching students.

The model worked at Fernwood, where the women's preaching earned an invitation for the seminary to send students of both sexes to preach annually, said Bugg, a former pastor in Florida and North Carolina.

"It's affirming to hear God speak through whomever God chooses," Wright said. "I heard people going away saying, 'Golly, seminarians are preaching well!' -- not, 'Golly, women are preaching well!' That's refreshing, and it speaks well for the students and their seminary."

Hamilton, Raymond and Hyder all stand firm in their conviction that God has called them to ministry. But they also believe that preaching should spring from love and God's word, not from anger, bitterness or a political agenda.

They said they understand and empathize with the pain many women feel in struggling to respond to God's call.

"It's frustrating to feel that people won't give you the opportunity to use your gifts from God because you're not a male," admits Raymond, who is from Orangeburg, S.C. She earned her seminary degree in 1998 and is associate pastor for youth at Lamberth Memorial Baptist Church in Roxboro, N.C., where her husband, Jeff, is pastor.

"But if you come to the pulpit with anger or a feminist agenda, you damage the cause of women in ministry," she said.

Hamilton added that women shouldn't change denominations just because being a Baptist woman in ministry is difficult. "Some people have encouraged me to leave Baptists, and I've had opportunities," she said. "But you don't leave something just because it's difficult. I'm happy with being a Baptist and with Baptist tenets."

Hyder, a Charleston native in her final year at the Richmond seminary, said the first time she preached at a Baptist church in Virginia, her parents came up from Beaufort, S.C., to hear her. Her 70-year-old father had adopted a wait-and-see attitude about her career choice, and she was anxious to see how he would react.

"You preached from the word," he told her, "and that's all I can ask of anyone -- man or woman."

Hamilton grew up hearing her beloved grandfather, the late Dan Greer, preach at Washington Avenue Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C. She can only speculate about how he would have felt about his granddaughter following in his footsteps.

Her father believes that once the controversial issue of women preachers became personal with someone he loved, Dan Greer would have gravitated to her support like the rest of the family has done.

Family members say Hamilton preaches like her grandfather, a respected pastor and former president of South Carolina Baptists. She has all his sermons, uses many of his Scripture references, and preaches in the same story-telling style.

"My family now sees it as a great spiritual heritage -- Papa and me," Hamilton said.

Hamilton's grandmother was quietly reflective after hearing her granddaughter preach. "I didn't know a woman could do that," she said.

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