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October 21, 1999

(99-86)

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EDITOR'S NOTE: ABP is working on several other stories that we anticipate issuing tomorrow.

**New IMB prayer guide
puts spotlight on Hindus**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- A month after its controversial booklet urging evangelizing of Jews during their High Holy Days, the Southern Baptist International Mission Board has issued a similar prayer guide targeting Hindus.

A new initiative asks Southern Baptists to pray the world's 900 million Hindus might be delivered from spiritual "darkness" during Divali, their annual Festival of Lights, according to a press release from the Richmond, Va.,-based mission board.

The 12-day Southern Baptist prayer emphasis kicks off Nov. 3, when Hindus worldwide begin to celebrate Divali, one of the religion's most widely celebrated festivals. According to the press release, the festival features the lighting of small lamps.

"As Divali begins, we want to invite Southern Baptists to pray that the world's Hindus might be convicted of sin and see Jesus is the Light of the world," said Randy Sprinkle, the IMB's director of prayer strategy.

Jewish leaders protested a similar prayer guide in September focusing on conversion of Jews between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Judaism's holiest season, calling it arrogant and offensive. Southern Baptist leaders defended the booklet, saying Christians are commanded to witness to people of all faiths.

The IMB earlier produced a prayer book coinciding with a Muslim holiday and a fourth prayer guide focusing on Buddhism is planned.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To order the Hindu prayer guide, titled "Divali: Festival of Lights," e-mail the International Mission Board Resource Center at resource.center@imb.org or call 1-800-866-3621.

Churches claim victory in Alabama lottery defeat

By Jennifer Davis Rash

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP) -- Alabama's churches are receiving credit for the rejection of a statewide lottery by voters Oct. 12.

"The reason we won is the churches," said Jim Cooper of Citizens Against Legalized Lottery.

The measure failed 46 percent to 54 percent, following an unprecedented campaign by religious leaders. Early on, polls indicated that 60 percent of Alabama citizens supported a lottery to raise funds for education.

Observers believe last-minute television advertising and efforts by churches prompted a record voter turnout and made the difference in the outcome.

"It was truly a David and Goliath scenario," said Lt. Gov. Steve Windom, a lottery opponent and member of First Baptist Church in Tillman's Corner, Ala. Lottery supporters outspent foes four to one but still lost by more than 100,000 votes, Windom said.

Lottery opponents said they hope their victory will encourage church leaders in South Carolina. Voters in that state face a ballot on a state lottery in October 2000.

Dan Ireland, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program, noted that Alabama was the first state to vote on a lottery since a report in June by a national commission urged states to put a moratorium on the expansion of gambling.

The National Gambling Impact Study Commission, created by Congress and approved by President Clinton in 1996, raised concerns about legalized gambling's economic and social impact on communities.

Gov. Don Siegelman had supported the call for a lottery by portraying it as the only hope to improve education in Alabama. After its defeat, however, he vowed to find another way to better schools.

Supporters said the lottery would raise \$150 million a year for college scholarships, prekindergarten classes and school technology. Opponents countered by saying it would wind up costing Alabama money by hurting the economy in other areas.

"The vote ... was not against scholarships, prekindergarten and technology," Windom said. "It was against financing it with gambling dollars."

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Baptists may alter relationship with University of Richmond

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia Baptists will change their 169-year-old relationship with the University of Richmond if a proposal is approved in November.

Under the plan, adopted by the Virginia Baptist Mission Board Oct. 13, the Baptist General Association of Virginia will no longer nominate trustees for the university and will phase out financial contributions to the school.

Instead the BGAV will fund a new Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies, to be housed on the university's campus and directed by Fred Anderson, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

University trustees adopted the proposal Oct. 1. The Historical Society's executive committee OK'd it on Sept. 30. It would be implemented if also adopted by the BGAV at its annual meeting in Richmond, Nov. 9-10.

The proposal would effectively end governing and financial ties between the university and Virginia Baptists, who founded the school in 1830. Those ties were strained last March, when the school added language on sexual orientation to its non-discrimination policy.

Some viewed the university's action to prohibit discrimination against gays and lesbians in student, faculty and staff recruitment and promotion as being at odds with the state convention's position on homosexuality. The BGAV endorsed a report in 1998 "affirming the biblical teaching that homosexual behavior is sinful and unacceptable to Christians" while calling for compassionate ministry to gays. The state association adopted a similar statement in 1993.

Responding to the university's new non-discrimination policy, Virginia Baptist Mission Board's executive committee in April named a seven-person task force to examine BGAV-UR ties. Recommendations from the panel were approved Sept. 14 by the executive committee, which presented them Oct. 13 to the Mission Board.

In 1969, the historically Baptist university accepted a \$50 million gift made with the stipulation that it loosen its relationship with Virginia Baptists. Currently the BGAV nominates four persons to the university's self-perpetuating, 40-member board. Virginia Baptists also give the university about \$230,000 a year, mostly for the Virginia Baptist Scholars Program, which assists students from churches affiliated with the BGAV.

Under the proposal, the BGAV would lose its four trustees, but those now serving will complete their terms. About half the board's current members are Baptists.

Baptists' contributions to the university would be phased out over four years, allowing students in the scholars program to finish their education. As those funds are freed, they would be transferred to the budget of the Center for Baptist Heritage and Studies.

The BGAV also would continue to pay a Baptist campus minister at Richmond, as it does for a variety of schools around the state.

According to the proposal, the new center would "champion Baptist distinctives and Baptist heritage; ... provide educational opportunities related to Baptist distinctives, history and heritage; ... make available Baptist records and historic materials; and ... serve as a research center for undergraduates, scholars and local church historians."

The center is scheduled to begin operations next year, after a charter is obtained from the State Corporation Commission. It would be governed by a 13-member board of directors nominated by the BGAV, the university and the Virginia Baptist Historical Society. The Historical Society would continue as a membership-based organization that collects and preserves historical records.

"I am excited about the establishment of the center," said Reginald McDonough, BGAV executive director. "Baptists need a place to preserve our roots and a place to dialogue about the future of Baptist life and work. I envision the center being a think tank for the greater Baptist family."

McDonough acknowledged that some Virginia Baptists would have preferred the center to be located elsewhere. "But what better place to have a Baptist and Christian witness than on the campus of a world-class university?" he asked. "In this location we will have an opportunity to raise the Baptist flag before thousands of the future leaders of our nation and world."

University President William Cooper said in a statement: "We are deeply grateful for the often sacrificial support by Baptists throughout the university's history. We welcome the opportunity to partner with our state's Baptist churches to create this new educational venture."

"The center will celebrate and preserve Baptist history while expanding research opportunities and programs to serve the needs and interests of Baptists today," Cooper said.

Anderson said the proposal "represents a magnificent opportunity to provide a wider knowledge of Baptist history and to promote a better understanding of Baptist distinctives and principles. It builds upon the foundation laid by the founders and supporters of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society and enlarges the mission of sharing Baptist heritage."

"If the proposal is adopted by the BGAV, I will look forward to developing the new work of the center while continuing the unique ministry of the Society," Anderson said.

Although the Mission Board approved the proposal with only one member voicing opposition, discussion prior to the vote reflected varied responses.

"Do the other Virginia Baptist schools state in their documents that they will not admit a non-heterosexual as a student?" asked Paul Rowles, pastor of Bowling Green Baptist Church in Bowling Green, Va. "If not, why is UR being singled out? Will we embark on a purge of the other schools?"

But William Payne of Alexandria, Va., maintained the proposal does not go far enough in addressing homosexuality. "The issue is, where do we stand on homosexuality?" he said. "If we don't take a stronger position we will lose more churches [from the BGAV]. ... Virginia Baptists appear to be halting between two opinions." Payne, a member of First Baptist Church in Alexandria, said the board should consider asking the BGAV-nominated trustees at UR to resign and to relocate the Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waynesboro, Va., said the proposal pleased him. "If we just pulled the plug [on the BGAV-UR relationship] we would have come across as other Baptist groups have in their relations to institutions. This shows there doesn't have to be a win-lose situation," said Wilson, a trustee of the university.

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Wedgwood officials dispute some facts in spurious e-mail

By George Henson

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- While members of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, rejoice that more people didn't die in the Sept. 15 shooting rampage and report people are coming to faith as a result, not everything being reported about the tragedy is true.

One e-mail making the rounds, purporting to be written by a Wedgwood member, makes this claim that God miraculously intervened to save lives. "To enter the church, the gunman walked past our children's playground, which should have been full of kids, but for some reason every single children's and preschool class was running late. No one had made it to the playground yet."

Church leaders said in a written statement that description was only partly true.

"The gunman entered through the south foyer doors," the church response explains. "This door is not by the playground. One can see the playground if they were at just the right angle, but the gunman was very intent on getting inside the building. It is true that the children were not outside because of delays."

The e-mail also says the bottom fell off the pipe bomb thrown by Larry Gene Ashbrook, causing it not

to detonate. The bomb actually did explode, the church response states, but it exploded upward and not outward, with the shrapnel landing in the balcony.

And contrary to the e-mail, some kids did see wounded victims before they fled the building. Several teens mentioned seeing the body of Sydney Browning, director of the church's children's choir.

On the other hand, the e-mail does contain some information that is accurate and which church officials say is very uplifting:

-- A United Methodist church in Fort Worth sent 15 people to Wedgwood the Sunday after the shooting to cover the church's childcare needs, so that no adults would have to miss the service.

-- A church in Tulsa, Okla., drove more than five hours so they could march around the Wedgwood Church and pray during its services that Sunday.

-- A youth wounded while shielding a friend has scoliosis. The curvature in her spine may have caused the bullet to miss major organs as it passed through her body.

-- A number of teenagers have professed faith in Christ at schools throughout Tarrant County since the shooting.

-- Wedgwood has received strong support from Christians around the world. As of Oct. 6, the church had received more than 13,000 e-mails, 20,000 cards and letters, hundreds of posters and banners and \$100,000 in donations. Those e-mails, cards, letters, posters and banners now line the hallways of the church.

There is even more going on at Wedgwood that the e-mail doesn't report, church officials say.

"There is a deep sense that we have to wait on God right now," said Chris Shirley, minister of education and single adults. "None of us are absolutely sure where God is leading us right now, but we do know we want him to be the one leading us."

"What has emerged from the tragic shooting in our church on Sept. 15 is a clear message of hope and faith in our God, even in the darkest hours," said Wedgwood Pastor Al Meredith. "I have called our people to 40 days of concerted prayer for spiritual awakening in our nation, Sept. 28-Nov. 7. I invite others to join us."

The tragedy has also energized the prayer lives of many members at First Baptist Church of White Settlement, Texas, said Jim Gatliff, pastor of the suburban Fort Worth church. One of the Wedgwood victims was from his church's youth group, and another member of the White Settlement youth group was seriously wounded.

"Probably the biggest difference I have seen is in prayer," Gatliff said. "We have Christians all over this city who are praying for revival."

Some see signs that such a revival already has begun. Forty-two students at a school near Wedgwood recently professed faith in Christ, and Gatliff said more than 100 have become Christians through the rallies and the funeral of Joey Ennis in White Settlement.

Follow-up on some of the decisions may be difficult, however, Gatliff said, because many of the decisions were made at events where people didn't fill out commitment cards. "We're just having to trust the Lord in that," he said.

He went on to say, however, that many of those making commitments already are beginning to attend area churches.

Shirley said there also has been a rise in the overall commitment level among Wedgwood members who made decisions for Christ before the shooting.

"The No. 1 thing I've noticed is a renewed commitment to the body of Christ," he said. "We are seeing people back in church that we haven't seen for a very long time."

Christians also are demonstrating a greater commitment to each other, he added.

"We linger longer with one another. Worship services end, but the people don't leave. They stay and talk with one another. I hear a lot more people telling one another, 'I love you.' I see a lot more people hugging."

Shirley admits not all Wedgwood members are coping well.

"There are some people who are still deeply hurting, people who when they come here, they don't feel absolutely secure. Everyone is going to take their own time to get through this in their own way," he said.

That is also true among the church's youth, Shirley reported. "There has been a resurgence in our youth and in their participation, but there are also some among that group who are still hurting."

Wedgwood reports a lot of new faces in its worship services, but church leaders are encouraging those who are merely wishing to change churches to reconsider.

"When people call and say, 'I've been going to Such-and-Such Church, but now I feel like I need to come to Wedgwood,' we discourage that. We tell them they should reconsider and that church membership should really be a matter of prayer," Shirley said.

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Southwestern trustees approve overhaul of seminary curriculum

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees affirmed the school's "Theological Education for the 21st Century" master plan during their fall meeting, Oct. 18-20 in Fort Worth, Texas.

A core curriculum focusing on basic ministry skills provides the backbone of the plan, President Ken Hemphill told trustees.

"We asked, 'What does every church have a right to expect from Southwestern?'" Hemphill said. The answer is a broad-based set of skills that will be presented to all students in all three of the seminary's schools -- church music, educational ministries and theology.

The 21st century plan will be implemented in the fall of 2000, reported Daryl Eldridge, dean of the School of Educational Ministries and chairman of the committee that developed the master plan.

The core curriculum will be taught in five courses, Eldridge said. The courses will be:

-- "Spiritual Formation," a two-semester course for first-year students in which eight students will meet with one faculty member weekly to focus on personal faith development.

-- "How to Study the Bible," which is designed to move the students beyond devotional reading to sound, systematic biblical interpretation.

-- "How to Share the Faith," an emphasis on evangelism and missions.

-- "Worship," a class that will bring theology, education and music students together to look at how Christians worship and praise God.

-- "Leadership in Ministry," a study of conflict resolution, relationship building and teamwork.

In addition, the 21st century plan involves "a complete overhaul of the curriculum," Eldridge noted, explaining the seminary will switch from 2- and 4-hour courses to 3-hour courses as the norm.

A key benefit of that change will be flexibility for students, he said, explaining the changes will facilitate a new course schedule. Students will be able to earn degrees by attending on Monday and Friday only; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday only; and evenings only. The seminary also hopes to introduce a Saturday schedule, he added.

Southwestern also is adding Internet courses and hopes to move to teaching 33 percent of its courses on the World Wide Web.

The 21st century plan also will involve new programs, Eldridge said. He cited plans for teaching ministry-based evangelism in the inner city, a women's-ministry program, a master's degree in Christian counseling and more student options.

Faculty and administrators currently are working on implementing the changes so they can be functional in less than a year. The new catalog should be available in the spring.

In other business, trustees:

-- Elected two new faculty members, approved faculty rank for two administrators and promoted two faculty.

Mark Edward Taylor of Fort Worth was elected assistant professor of New Testament. He currently is a guest instructor of New Testament and is completing a doctor of philosophy degree at the seminary. He has been a pastor, youth minister and interim pastor of churches in Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama.

Taylor is a graduate of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary and Mississippi State University. He and his wife, Ann, have two daughters.

Malcolm B. Yarnell III was elected assistant professor of theology. He is completing a doctor's degree from Oxford University in England and is a tutor at Regent's Park College at Oxford. He has been pastor of churches in North Carolina and Louisiana, a church planter in Texas and a banker.

Yarnell is a graduate of Duke University, Southwestern Seminary and Louisiana State University. He and his wife, Karen Annette, have two sons.

Michael Pullin, archivist and special collections librarian, and Bill Vinson, director of undergraduate and lay theological studies, were granted faculty status.

Gerald Aultman was promoted from associate professor of music theory to professor of music theory. C.L. Bass was promoted from professor of music theory and composition to distinguished professor of music theory and composition.

-- Approved the seminary's L.R. Scarborough Award for institutional advancement to Jimmy and Carol Ann Draper of Nashville, Tenn., and Warren and Wanda Hultgren of Tulsa, Okla.

Draper is president of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention and formerly was longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless. Hultgren is the retired pastor of First Baptist Church in Tulsa.

The award recognizes pastors, missionaries and denominational leaders who direct significant sums of financial support to the seminary. The Drapers and Hultgrens were honored at a luncheon on the seminary campus during the trustees' meeting.

-- Heard a report that the seminary received about \$6.1 million in cash gifts during the latest fiscal year, which ended in July. That marked the second consecutive year such gifts to the seminary eclipsed \$6 million, reported Jack Terry, the seminary's vice president for institutional advancement.

-- Learned the seminary enrolled 3,213 students this fall, with 2,720 on the Fort Worth campus and 493 at several off-campus locations, such as centers in Houston, Little Rock, Oklahoma City and San Antonio.

The enrollment total is "slightly down" by less than 100 students compared to last year, noted Lawrence Klempnauer, vice president for student services. That partly is attributable to an early start for public schools in Fort Worth this fall, which caused some students with families to delay their move to seminary. Student applications are significantly ahead of applications received by this date last year, he said.

Southwestern students' average age is 32, he said. They come from 41 states and 42 foreign countries and include 202 international students, up from 181 last year.

Conference calls Christians to care for the environment

By Mark Wingfield

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Please don't call them nature worshippers.

They are environmentalists, to be sure, but unlike some who claim that title, they care for Creation because they believe in God.

"If we take the Bible seriously, we will be environmentalists," explained Tony Campolo, a popular speaker and author who teaches at Eastern College in St. David, Pa.

Campolo joined a group of like-minded activists for an Oct. 10-11 conference on environmentalism from a Christian perspective held at Baylor University. The conference, titled "Caring for Creation -- Christian Stewardship of the Environment," was co-sponsored by Baylor's environmental studies department and the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission.

Linking environmental concerns to the biblical mandate and attempting to broaden environmental sensitivity beyond the agenda of secular organizations were recurring themes of the conference. Clergy, educators, laity and students attended sessions with crowd sizes ranging from 50 to 200.

Larry Lehr, who teaches in Baylor's environmental studies department, complained that "a forceful and dynamic statement" about the environment is lacking from the pulpits of many denominations. It appears to be easier for the church to talk about abortion, homosexuality and corporal punishment than to talk about God's creation, he said.

Even more harmful, other speakers added, is that some Christians preach that humans should dominate creation rather than care for it.

This stems from different interpretations of Gen. 1:28. In the King James Version, God tells Adam and Eve to, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Christians have often taken this passage to mean humans may use creation in any way they need. Biblical environmentalists, meanwhile, believe God commands Christians to be caretakers and stewards rather than rulers of the earth.

"Our theological heritage often has been harmful to the way we view ecology," said James Nash, a United Methodist minister who teaches at Boston University's School of Theology.

"The anti-environmental position must not stand unchallenged," Nash said. "The fact is, we are involved in a great ethical, theological and social struggle. ... Unfortunately, we can't make our case by appealing to our shared Christian theologies."

Nash disputes a common view taught among Christians that the world was created exclusively to benefit humans, Nash said. He called that position "theologically arrogant" and said it has led Christians to create "a God conformed to our own image."

Nash said Christians are rather called to "reflect the true divine image."

"We must understand dominion in the true biblical sense, not as a right to plunder," he said.

Campolo observed an irony in that the very Christians who most often decry the influence of secular "humanism" in culture are themselves humanistic when it comes to the environment.

"We have this idea that God created the planet just for us," Campolo said. "If that's not humanism, I don't know what is. The heavens were created to declare the glory of God."

Campolo cited Psalm 148 as affirming the idea that all things were created for the purpose of praising God. He drew an illustration from research by scientists on "songs" that are sung by whales.

"If there weren't any human beings on earth, there would still be a place for whales," Campolo said. "They are not here just to provide blubber but to sing hymns to God."

Several speakers pointed to important distinctions between a Christian and secular perspective on environmentalism.

"We worship God as creator, not creation itself," said Terri Morgan, special projects coordinator for the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Dan McGee, professor of ethics in Baylor's religion department, said stewardship is the best model to view the relationship between humans and creation. "The essence of being a good steward is not privilege but responsibility," he said.

Another speaker said Baptists especially ought to champion the environment because of their belief in priesthood of the believer.

This doctrine is "vital to understanding care for creation," said Stan LaQuire, director of continuing education for Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and past director of the Evangelical Environmental Network.

If Christians stand as priests before God, others who look at Christians ought to be able to see in them what God is like, LaQuire said. Christians, he said, must "demonstrate to the rest of the world the joy God has in his creation."

Morgan concluded with a similar point: "If we claim to know and love the creator, we must live out our faith in a way that demonstrates respect for creation."

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Speakers offer suggestions about ways to help environment

By Mark Wingfield

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Be focused. Pick a problem. Start with it.

This simple formula is an easy way for Christians and churches to get involved in environmental concerns, said David Smith, president of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.

"We need advocates. A group like this is very powerful in the effect you can bring," Smith told participants in a conference on caring for creation as Christian stewardship at Baylor University.

In addition to academic papers, speakers offered practical advice for Christians wanting to put their concern for the earth into practice.

Evangelical author and speaker Tony Campolo described his own work with World Vision and Compassion International and said sponsoring a child in a Third World country is a simple way to make a lifelong difference in another person's life.

For about \$25 a month, sponsors help feed, educate, clothe and love a child, he explained. Such a goal is not beyond the reach of anyone attending the conference, he said, challenging especially the students in the audience, whom he suggested spend an equivalent amount each month on soft drinks.

Campolo said he is affiliated with another organization that is buying up large portions of the rain forest in Belize to save it from development. The world's rain forests are being leveled at a rate of a football field every minute, he said.

An individual can buy an acre of rain forest for \$50, Campolo said.

Campolo also suggested efforts to help create sustainable jobs in the Third World. "If we're going to end poverty in the Third World, we've got to create jobs," he said.

Reducing poverty helps the environment, he said, because it reduces overpopulation. Birth rates are highest among impoverished and uneducated populations, he explained.

Campolo said creating jobs in the Third World around the business of recycling would do double good. He cited an illustration of helping workers in one poor country manufacture sandals out of used tires.

Other practical suggestions for action included:

-- Become an advocate for a particular environmental cause. For example, the rate of deaths caused by asthma is rising in the United States, with polluted air cited as a major contributor, according to Smith.

-- Find out what's causing pollution and other environmental hazards at home or around the world. "Seventy-one percent of emissions come from four or five main industries," said Larry Lehr, a professor at Baylor. "These are the result of our consumptive patterns."

-- Change your own habits to reduce consumption and waste by recycling, conserving energy and water, driving more fuel-efficient vehicles and using mass transit when available.

-- Plant trees.

-- Encourage environmentalism as a missionary focus, taking trips to help poor people develop sustainable food supplies. "Environmentalism has become a form of missionary work," Campolo suggested.

-- Plan an evangelistic Bible study group around themes of creation, drawing from accounts such as the Genesis creation story, God's covenant with Noah and New Testament teachings on stewardship.

-- Begin a creation club for kids.

-- Create bulletin boards at your church teaching about care for creation from a biblical perspective.

-- Hold a congregational forum on lifestyle issues such as over-consumption, simple living and frugality.

-- Hold an outdoor worship service.

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