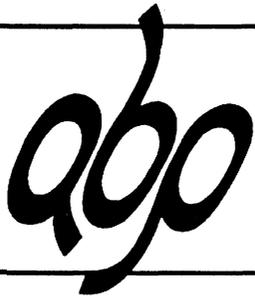


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**WMU announces downsizing
of 39 workers at headquarters**

By Mark Wingfield

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Woman's Missionary Union will eliminate one-fourth of the staff positions at its national headquarters in Birmingham, Ala., in an effort to "stabilize expenses," the agency's leaders announced Nov. 2.

The downsizing will not affect any program personnel, said Teresa Dickens, a spokeswoman for the 111-year-old auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Positions to be eliminated fall primarily in the areas of customer service, order entry and information technology, Dickens said. The majority of the affected workers are hourly employees rather than salaried employees, she added.

A press release announced the impending elimination of 39 jobs at WMU, which has a current work force of 150.

Most of the functions currently performed by these employees will be outsourced to third-party vendors, Dickens said.

The first and most pivotal of several third-party contracts has been signed with Media Services Inc. of Birmingham, which will provide technical and personnel support for meeting WMU's customer service requests.

WMU customers should experience no difference in the way they order materials, Dickens said, explaining that all changes will happen behind the scenes. "Media Services will have 10 customer service representatives" assigned to WMU customers, she said. "When they answer the phone, they will still say 'Woman's Missionary Union.'"

Negotiations are underway with other vendors to outsource additional internal operations such as information technology, travel planning and food services.

All the changes are projected to be in place by March 31, and all existing employees may keep their jobs at least through the end of January, Dickens said.

"The challenge of staying current in technology has been consuming more and more of our fiscal budget for several years," said Wanda Lee, national WMU president. "In an effort to stabilize these expenses, the WMU executive board previously discussed and affirmed the possibility of contracting with outside vendors to assume these responsibilities."

"The goal of the board was to free up more of WMU's revenue to support the central purpose of WMU, which is to provide the best possible missions-education resources for churches," she said.

"While this is a reasonable decision from a business standpoint, it is a heart-wrenching situation from a personal angle," Lee said. "All the employees at national WMU are loyal, dedicated workers. They see their jobs as a ministry and thereby are not just working, but fulfilling a spiritual commitment."

Lee said laid-off employees would receive a "generous" severance package and out-placement assistance.

WMU leaders did not announce how much the changes would save. The effect on the bottom line probably will not be immediate but should become apparent in future years, Dickens said, noting a major reason for the change was the perpetual expense of upgrading equipment.

WMU derives the bulk of its operating income from the sale of age-graded periodicals and other missions-education literature. Circulation of these periodicals has declined over the last decade, some by more than 50 percent.

According to data reported in SBC Annuals, Accent, the magazine for teenage girls in the Acteens missions education program, had an average circulation of 46,084 in all its editions last year, compared to an average of 105,423 a decade earlier. The circulation of Missions Mosaic (previously Royal Service and Contempo), the magazine for adult Women on Mission members, has dropped from 378,308 to 250,818 in 10 years.

National WMU does not receive any allocation from the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program or from the two Southern Baptist annual missions offerings it promotes -- the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. WMU receives a combined total of about \$500,000 annually from the SBC's International Mission Board and North American Mission Board, Dickens said.

The changes come at a time when WMU is awaiting election of a new executive director. Dellanna O'Brien retired from that post this fall, and a search committee has yet to name her successor.

However, the process leading to the staff reduction started well before O'Brien retired, Dickens said. Over the past year, WMU leaders have engaged two separate consultants to analyze the agency's operation, and both independently made similar recommendations, she said.

The news release was timed by finalizing negotiations with Media Services, she said.

Having this difficult transition completed before a new executive director comes on board will be "very good" for that person, Dickens predicted. "It will be a tighter ship, and she will not have to make those decisions."

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New Mexico Baptists to consider doctrinal test for membership

LAS CRUCES, N.M. (ABP) -- The Baptist Convention of New Mexico has directed its executive board to study language requiring that local churches must affirm the recently amended "Baptist Faith and Message" in order to be in good standing.

That came after the state convention approved new articles of incorporation and bylaws that no longer mandate a church be part of a local association in order to be recognized by the state group.

Former convention president Dean Mathis, pastor of Taylor Memorial Baptist Church in Hobbs, N.M., said the change would weaken the role of associations, which in the past have enforced doctrinal integrity of churches, thus sparing the state convention from debating theology.

Mathis proposed an amendment to the new articles of incorporation and bylaws -- which govern the state convention, a children's home, a foundation and two camps -- to require that messengers to the annual meeting be "from Baptist churches which have been received into and are cooperating with one of the Baptist associations in New Mexico."

Messengers at the Oct. 26-27 state convention at First Baptist Church in Las Cruces rejected Mathis' amendment 172-90, however, and then voted overwhelmingly to adopt new governing documents proposed by a study committee named last year.

Mack McCarthick, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Lovington, made a motion that a credentials committee use the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" as criteria to decide whether to seat messengers to the state convention. The motion passed 190-61.

McCarthick returned later in the meeting with another recommendation, that the executive board study amending the just-approved articles and bylaws to specify that future credentials committees also use the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement as a guide.

But Amy Mathis, a messenger of Sandia Baptist Church in Albuquerque, said some New Mexico Baptists disagree with an amendment to the doctrinal statement voted by the Southern Baptist Convention last year. A new article on the family, the first amendment to the "Baptist Faith and Message" since 1963, declares that wives should submit to their husbands. Mathis warned that churches that disagree with that position would be in danger of being ruled out of fellowship by the state convention.

In other business, the convention passed a resolution urging churches to pray and fast for 80 days for revival. Another resolution denounced a call by New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson to legalize drugs, calling it a "destructive and immoral position."

A third resolution took exception to a recent move by a state university to drop religion courses from its general curriculum. The resolution encourages Eastern New Mexico University in Portales "to keep, and expand where possible, the number of religious courses ... as an option for students who wish to take such courses."

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-- By Bob Allen and John Loudat

SBC has become 'virtual arm' of Religious Right, critic says

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention has turned its back on church-state separation to become a "virtual arm of the Religious Right," the head of Americans United for Separation of Church and State charged at a banquet Oct. 31.

AU Executive Director Barry Lynn mentioned the SBC in opening remarks during an awards banquet at the organization's annual meeting.

The church-state organization presented Madison-Jefferson awards to Calvin Didier, retired pastor of House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, Minn., and to James Dunn, recently retired executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

Church-state separation "is the single grandest idea we've had since the American Revolution," Lynn said. "And the terrible irony is that some of the institutions which struggled to create it and preserve the idea of religious liberty have now turned their back on its powerful message."

"As we honor James Dunn," Lynn said, "we -- whether we're Baptists or Presbyterians or Humanists -- look in horror at the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention, which has become a virtual arm of the Religious Right."

"They are now thought of as the people who are trying to convert Hindus and boycott Walt Disney," Lynn said, "not the powerful voice which demanded pulpit freedom and church autonomy and knew that the best way to guarantee it was for it to shun the resources any government would offer it."

SBC president Paige Patterson did not immediately return a reporter's phone call inviting him to respond to Lynn's comments.

Lynn also criticized congressional proposals to post the Ten Commandments in government-owned buildings and a resolution calling the nation to prayer.

While some people may actually believe that posting the Ten Commandments at Columbine High School might have prevented the shooting rampage there, Lynn said, "They are truly mistaking magic for morality and faith for a rabbit's foot."

Betty Evans Boone, vice president of Americans United's board of trustees, presented the religious-liberty award to Dunn, who led the Baptist Joint Committee 18 years before becoming president of the Baptist Joint Committee Endowment. She described Dunn as "a case study in perseverance."

Dunn accepted the award and noted that it was the BJC's first executive director, J. M. Dawson, who helped create Americans United and ran the organization in its first years.

"Authentic Baptists believe that separation of church and state is always best for the state and best for the church," Dunn said. "The best thing government can do for religion is leave it alone."

Dunn said supporters of church-state separation face "real struggles," including proposals to fund religious education through vouchers. "The American people have been snookered about vouchers," Dunn said.

Receiving a third award -- the Religious Liberty Award -- was Michigan high school student Micah White.

During the 1998-99 school year, White petitioned officials at his high school in Grand Blanc, Mich., to form an atheist club. But White ran into opposition despite the fact that the school had allowed other clubs for students to express religious beliefs.

With the assistance of Americans United and the 1984 Equal Access Act, White was able to establish the club.

Clubs such as these, White said, "accomplish an important goal -- they ensure schools are not dominated by one religion, and in turn they protect the religious liberty of all students."

Deborah "Arnie" Arneson, outspoken New Hampshire radio commentator, provided the keynote address.

Arneson said she recently saw a news piece on immigrants who had just become new American citizens. A refugee from Kosovo was asked what he would like to see different about democracy in America. Arneson said the man responded: "I am very frightened by all the religion I am hearing coming out of some of the political candidates. ... It did damage and destruction in my country. You can't do it in this country."

Arneson said faith and politics are not separate, but church and state are. "We have never used religion in politics in a positive way," she said.

Rogers named general counsel at Baptist Joint Committee

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A legal expert on church-state affairs has been named general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Melissa Rogers, who has worked five years at the BJC as associate general counsel, succeeds Brent Walker as general counsel. Walker recently became executive director of the religious-liberty agency in Washington, succeeding James Dunn, who retired.

"Melissa Rogers is the perfect person for this job," Walker said. "She's a brilliant lawyer who cares deeply about religious liberty. She works tirelessly and is admired by friend and foe alike."

Rogers is a 1991 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Law where she was a member of the National Moot Court Team, a legal writing instructor and an associate editor of the Comparative Labor Law Journal. She is a 1988 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

Before joining the BJC staff in 1994, Rogers specialized in telecommunications law with the Washington law firm of Dow, Lohnes and Albertson. She is a member of the Maryland, D.C. and U.S. Supreme Court bars.

Rogers said she would "work diligently to uphold a level of excellence in legal representation" in her new job.

"As a lawyer, it is a fascinating experience to work at the intersection of church and state," she said. "As a Baptist, it is a true privilege to serve a group that has such a historic and continuing commitment to religious liberty and church-state separation."

June McEwen, chairwoman of the Baptist Joint Committee, called Rogers "an outstanding attorney" who "has an unusual amount of the abilities needed to do the job well."

"I think it's a cause for celebration for the Baptist Joint Committee that she has accepted the position," added McEwen, a retired educator and author from Chattanooga, Tenn.

Daniel Vestal, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and a member of the Baptist Joint Committee, said: "Melissa Rogers is highly qualified with rich experience and a great commitment to religious liberty. The BJC is fortunate to have her fill this role."

At the BJC, Rogers speaks and writes frequently about church-state issues, including topics such as charitable choice and the Religious Liberty Protection Act. She has made guest appearances on Court TV, CNN, "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly" on PBS, C-SPAN and numerous radio programs.

A native of New Orleans, Rogers and her husband, Stan Fendley, live in Alexandria, Va., and are members of Ravensworth Baptist Church in Annandale, Va. They have two sons, Adam, 3, and Carter, 10 months.

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Judge Roy Moore invited to lead pilgrimage up biblical Mt. Sinai

By Mark Wingfield

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- Judge Roy Moore has been invited to lead a group of Christian pilgrims up Mount Sinai next year in a re-enactment of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments.

Moore is the circuit judge who was at the center of controversy earlier this year because he posted the

Ten Commandments in his Alabama courtroom. At least two lawsuits were filed over his posting of the Commandments, sparking a national debate about the separation of church and state.

The April trek up Jebal Musa, the site traditionally associated with Moses' reception of the Ten Commandments as described in the Old Testament, is being planned by Ed McAteer of Memphis, Tenn. McAteer, a retired marketing executive, is an activist for conservative political causes and Christian support for the nation of Israel.

The planned climb will be in conjunction with McAteer's 19th annual International Christian Prayer Breakfast to honor Israel and pray for the "peace of Jerusalem," a biblical reference. The prayer breakfast will be the focal point of a nine-day Holy Land tour.

After the prayer meeting at the Ramada Renaissance Hotel in Jerusalem in the morning April 2, participants will journey to Egypt for a memorial service that night at the foot of the traditional Mount Sinai, McAteer said.

Scholars argue about the actual location of the mountain known in Bible times as Sinai, but the most commonly visited site is in Egypt and called Jebal Musa.

Judge Moore and Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee have been invited as keynote speakers for both the Sinai service and a journey up the mountain the next morning.

McAteer said he hopes the pilgrims will complete their climb up more than 300 roughly hewn steps to the mountaintop before daybreak, where they will hold another service, read the Commandments and pray. Judge Moore, he said, has been asked to speak on the importance of the Ten Commandments while at the summit.

The pilgrims then will descend the mountain carrying stone tablets engraved with the Commandments. Tablets will be prepared in 38 languages, McAteer said, and available for purchase for \$95.

"As we come down, the people will have the tables of stone in their hands," he explained. "This will be a repeat of what Moses did. ... This will be the first time in 3,400 years -- as far as we know -- that this has happened."

McAteer said he could think of no one more fitting to speak at the event than Moore, because the Alabama judge has become "better identified with the Ten Commandments than any man in America."

The pilgrimage for evangelical Christians will follow by one week a planned visit to Israel by Pope John Paul II. The papal visit is one of many special events planned in the Holy Land during the millennial year.

McAteer said he expects 1,200 people to attend the prayer breakfast, with an unknown number making the journey to Sinai. The Sinai trip is being offered as an add-on to the regular tour.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information about the trip and prayer breakfast, call Abraham Dori at (612) 928-8518.

Meeting Billy Graham like reaching World Series, Brock says

By Tim Palmer

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- Baseball Hall-of-Famer Lou Brock met Billy Graham for the first time when they shared the stage during the 80-year-old evangelist's Oct. 14-17 Greater St. Louis Crusade. Beforehand, the retired St. Louis Cardinal outfielder said he felt the same excitement he had as a player "trying to reach the World Series or steal a base."

A six-time all star, Brock set records for single-season and career stolen bases during 18 years in the major leagues. He amassed more than 3,000 career hits and helped his team win two World Series and three National League pennants. He retired in 1979 and reached baseball's Hall of Fame in 1985.

Addressing 40,000 people at the Friday session of a four-day crusade at the TWA Dome in downtown St. Louis, the 60-year-old Brock told of a time in his life when he was successful in the world's eyes but couldn't shake loneliness. "I never seemed to get it right."

He said he found himself wondering: who can save me from myself? "And the answer became Jesus Christ."

Brock said God led him to the Bible verse Galatians 1:15. Having gained assurance that he has a purpose on earth, Brock said he is working to become a better disciple of Jesus Christ. "I am not there, but I'm striving to be a member of God's Hall of Fame."

St. Louis Rams quarterback Kurt Warner made a surprise appearance at the same session. In an interview with emcee Cliff Barrows, Warner recalled that in his youth, he always kept his life on one side and his Lord on the other. Then, four years ago, "I was born again."

"Right at that moment, those two entities came together," Warner said. "I realized the reason I am here is to praise and worship the Man above." His football success, he continued, gives him a platform to glorify and praise God. "There's just one little secret to all my success -- and that secret is Jesus Christ."

"I'm not a football player," Warner said. "That's what I do. All I am is a man who lives for Jesus Christ."

Graham's self-effacing style surfaced when he acknowledged the guests. "My goodness, I never dreamed I'd meet these men, even, and here I am on the same platform with them."

Preaching from Luke 19, Graham used the familiar story of Zacchaeus to remind his listeners that Jesus is still "passing by."

Zacchaeus was an important and wealthy man, Graham noted, but he was a lonely man who wanted to see Jesus. "I've met some of the wealthiest people in the world," the evangelist said. "They may be famous; they may be wealthy; but they're lonely."

Graham noted that 16 of Christ's 18 parables in the Bible dealt with money. "That's how important it is to God what you do with your material possessions," he said. Today as in Zacchaeus' day, he continued, obstacles block people's view of Jesus. "You promote your own eternal death by being absorbed with the world around you."

When Jesus called up to Zacchaeus, Graham said, he told him to make haste.

"I'm going to ask you tonight to make haste and come to Jesus," Graham said. "Jesus is still passing through St. Louis. He wants to have dinner with you."

More than 200,000 attended the Greater St. Louis Billy Graham Crusade. More than 12,800 reported making a profession of faith.

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