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IN THIS ISSUE:

- Texas Baptists affirm SBC statement sans controversial article on the family
- Northeastern ministry school closing doors after 11 years
- Researchers cite obesity as growing health threat
- Supreme Court justices hear dispute over use of student fees
- More and more young singles bypassing churches, experts say

**Texas Baptists affirm SBC statement
sans controversial article on the family**

By Mark Wingfield

EL PASO, Texas (ABP) -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas voted Nov. 9 to make the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" the "unifying statement of our common faith and practice."

The action, approved overwhelmingly, distances Texas Baptists from a controversial family amendment added in 1998 to the Southern Baptist Convention's official doctrinal statement as well as possible wholesale revisions due to be considered by the SBC when it meets next June.

In other action, messengers moved a step closer to opening membership in the state group to churches from outside Texas and paved the way for studies that could lead to additional changes in missions funding.

This year's Texas convention appears to widen a rift between leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention and its largest affiliated state group. While conservatives gained control of the national convention during the 1980s, moderates hang on in Texas.

The Texans say Southern Baptists, not they, have moved from long-held views.

The affirmation of the 1963 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" is a "statement that as Texas Baptists we haven't changed," said David Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, a moderate organization.

The media had a field day two summers ago when the SBC amended the "Baptist Faith and Message" for the first time in 35 years. A new section on the family says, among other things, that wives should submit to their husbands. Texas Baptists passed a non-binding resolution opposing the amendment last fall.

This June Southern Baptists established a committee to review the entire "Baptist Faith and Message." The committee, chaired by Adrian Rogers of Memphis, Tenn., is expected to recommend additional changes in the statement when the SBC meets next year in Orlando, Fla.

Bob Newell, a messenger of Memorial Drive Baptist Church in Houston, made the motion for the state convention to affirm the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" and to distribute the statement to every BGCT-related church.

Paul Taylor of First Baptist Church in Mauriceville attempted to amend Newell's motion to also include the 1998 family amendment. "I believe it is a scriptural amendment," Taylor said. "I believe the BGCT should also follow the Scriptures." Newell responded that he opposed the family article on scriptural grounds. "Scripture speaks of mutual submission, and the addition to the 'Baptist Faith and Message' does not," he said.

Messengers voted down Taylor's amendment by an overwhelming majority on a show-of-ballots vote. Without further debate, messengers then approved the original motion to embrace the 1963 statement.

SBC leaders immediately criticized the action.

"I am grateful the BGCT leadership has made crystal clear for the sake of Texas Baptist churches where they stand on family and church issues," said SBC President Paige Patterson. "Now it is up to the churches to decide with whom they agree -- with a liberal, culturally acceptable view of family and church or with a Christ-honoring, Bible-believing perspective," added Patterson, a native Texan who now is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest N.C.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., called the BGCT's action "an intentional rejection of a clear teaching of the Bible."

"This is another lamentable sign of the determination of some Texas Baptist leaders to alienate Texas Baptists" from the SBC, he said.

Mohler, in his statement faxed from Louisville to El Paso, accused newly elected BGCT president Clyde Glazener of "denominational grandstanding" for describing the SBC statement as "Neanderthal" in an interview with the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

Richard Land, a former Texan who now heads the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, Tenn., also weighed in with a statement defending the family amendment, which he helped write.

"Let it be clearly understood that Dr. Glazener and those who support him in the intent of the BGCT's motion have a disagreement with the Apostle Paul, not merely with the Southern Baptist Convention," Land said. "As for me and my house, we are going to stick with the Apostle Paul."

Asked by reporters about Land's statement, Glazener said he didn't want to get into a confrontation with Land. However, he said not all Baptists agree with Land's interpretation of the New Testament.

"The finest Greek scholar Southern Baptists have ever produced, A.T. Robertson, ... believed the early church had women deacons," Glazener said. "He's probably as sharp as Richard."

Meanwhile, Texas Baptists moved toward opening their state convention to churches from other states with approval of the first of two required readings of a proposed constitutional amendment.

The amendment, suggested by Phil Lineberger of Williams Trace Baptist Church in Sugar Land, would change wording in a section that describes how governing boards of BGCT agencies and institutions are elected.

The constitution currently requires trustees to be "active members of cooperating Baptist churches in the state of Texas." Lineberger's amendment would change the phrase to "active members of cooperating Baptist General Convention of Texas churches."

"There are churches outside the borders of Texas that share in our vision and the kinds of ministries we're involved in," Lineberger told messengers. "Some of them want to be actively supporting of the BGCT. These churches should have full rights and privileges in the BGCT."

The motion was approved with little opposition. Constitutional amendments require approvals by two-thirds of messengers at two consecutive annual sessions. Lineberger's amendment must be considered a second time when the state convention convenes next year in Corpus Christi.

While the proposal drew little discussion, it could have far-reaching implications.

Many Baptist state conventions have fallen in line with the conservative stance of the SBC. Moderates, left in the cold in their home states, might feel more at home with Texas Baptists. That is the impetus behind

formation of a recently announced Baptist Association of the Southwest, which is expected to include churches from Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana.

Others have suggested a larger role for Texas in an age of changing denominational identities. At a 1998 meeting of Texas Baptists Committed in Houston, Baylor University chancellor Herb Reynolds proposed creation of a Baptist Convention of the Americas that would span from North America to South America.

Technically, nothing in the current constitution prohibits a church from outside Texas from joining the BGCT. Lineberger's proposed amendment would remove the only impediment to non-Texas churches being eligible for leadership.

Texas Baptists also will undertake intensive studies in the coming year that could affect how they relate to national denominational entities such as mission boards and seminaries.

One motion approved by messengers called for a committee to study the "financial resources, theological positions and mission strategy and philosophy" of the SBC International Mission Board and North American Mission Board as well as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national moderate group. Another established a committee to study the "financial resources, theological positions and philosophies of Southern Baptist and BGCT-supported seminaries."

Both committees are to be appointed by the BGCT president and newly elected chair of the BGCT Executive Board. Both committees are to report their findings to the Executive Board.

Another motion asked convention leaders to work "to develop a simplified budget system that is not as confusing as having five budget options while protecting the right of any church to give as they so choose."

The various giving plans were developed primarily for moderates who did not want to support the traditional Cooperative Program unified budget that divides funds between the state convention and the SBC.

The study could result in major changes to the "default" giving plan, which is still used by a majority of Texas churches and sends millions of dollars each year to the SBC. Some moderates have contended that money would be better spent on theological schools and other entities in Texas.

The maker of the motion, however, said his intent is just to simplify the process for directing funds to the state convention.

"The purpose of this amendment is that I am basically the assistant treasurer of The Woods Baptist Church," said Jim Kolb of Tyler. "Between myself and the pastor, we could not figure out how to fill out the form" churches send along with the contributions to the BGCT.

He asked convention leaders to "study how we can revise this form so an average person can fill it out."

-30-

Northeastern ministry school closing doors after 11 years

WHITE MARSH, Md. (ABP) -- The Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry, a regional consortium for using theological education as a mission strategy for Southern Baptists, is disbanding, trustees announced Nov. 5.

The partnership, involving the area's four state and regional Baptist conventions, the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, did not achieve goals quickly enough to become viable, said Ina York, chairwoman of the school's board of trustees.

"Many significant accomplishments have been counted, but the board concluded that a nontraditional institution does not seem feasible at this time," she said.

Trustees announced the decision to close the school, effective next June, in a press release.

York cited finances and the challenge of coordinating training over an 11-state area as factors in the decision. Despite a major gift, sacrificial support by several churches and ongoing funding by NAMB, the founding "state conventions did not fully embrace the NeBSM vision," she said.

York said disbanding the organization would allow the participating state conventions to take a more individualized approach to contextual theological education.

The school, which opened in 1989, has allowed 52 ministers to earn seminary degrees from Southern Seminary without relocating to the campus in Louisville, Ky. Graduates include a seminary professor, a state convention leader and two denominational employees.

The approach not only offered flexible training for bivocational ministers and lay people but proposed a solution to a common problem in areas where Southern Baptists are not well established -- prospective ministers leave for seminary and don't return.

Currently, 264 students are registered in various programs, including 190 in master's-level training in centers through a partnership with Southern Seminary. The school offered courses and seminars for 57 learners not pursuing a degree this fall and for 17 young leaders through the school's Quest program.

Current partners in the consortium are the Baptist conventions of New England, New York, Pennsylvania-South Jersey and Maryland-Delaware. It also includes Southern Seminary, NAMB, Southern Baptist Seminary Extension and Georgetown College in Kentucky.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

Researchers cite obesity as growing health threat

By Sarah Griffith

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Obesity is a rapidly growing health threat for millions of Americans, according to research published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Oct. 27 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"Overweight and physical inactivity account for more than 300,000 premature deaths each year in the U.S., second only to tobacco-related deaths," said CDC Director Jeffrey Koplan. "Obesity is an epidemic and should be taken as seriously as any infectious-disease epidemic."

Obesity -- weighing more than 30 percent above ideal body weight -- increased in the general population from 12 percent in 1991 to 17.9 percent in 1998.

Highest increases occurred among young people (18-to 29-year-olds), those with some college education, and Hispanics. Regionally, the largest increase occurred in the South by 67 percent and in Georgia by 101 percent.

"These data show that obesity increased in every state, in both sexes, and across all age groups, races, educational levels, and smoking statuses," the article reported. "Rarely do chronic conditions such as obesity spread with the speed and dispersion characteristic of a communicable-disease epidemic."

Physical inactivity -- a major contributor to obesity -- "has not changed substantially between 1991 and 1998," the study said. Researchers called on people and organizations of public standing to help abate the problem.

"To control the obesity epidemic, a wide range of population groups, including physicians and other health-care professionals, public-health professionals, legislators, communities, work sites, and organizations, must become engaged in working toward a solution," the article said.

The CDC recommended that:

- Health-care providers counsel their obese patients.
- Workplaces offer healthy choices in their cafeterias and provide opportunities for employees to be physically active on site.
- Schools offer more physical education that stresses lifelong physical activity.
- Urban policymakers provide more sidewalks, bike paths and other alternatives to cars.
- Parents reduce their children's television and computer time and encourage outdoor play.

"In general," Koplan said, "restoring physical activity to our daily routines is critical."

A Baptist ethicist called on churches to "recover the historic church's moral teaching about the vices of gluttony and sloth, two of the seven deadly sins."

Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., also suggested that churches "model good nutrition through their meals" and "plan events that include physical activities" as ways to fight obesity.

Other factors contributing to obesity, Koplan said, include:

- The public being exposed to more high-calorie foods.
- The growth of the fast-food industry.
- Increased availability and marketing of snack foods.
- Increased time for socializing, and the custom of socializing with food and drink.
- Convenience is becoming a characteristic of American living and another major contributor to obesity, he said. It has "a devastating toll on every segment of society, particularly on children."

Sixty percent of overweight 5- to 10-year-old children have at least one factor increasing their risk for heart disease, such as elevated blood pressure or insulin levels, Koplan said.

-30-

Supreme Court justices hear dispute over use of student fees

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in a First Amendment dispute that arose after students at a public university objected to fees they pay in addition to tuition being used to fund student groups with which they disagree.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison asked the high court Nov. 9 to overturn a lower court's ruling favoring conservative Christian students who objected to the use of their mandatory fees for groups such as environmental and gay-rights organizations.

The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that using mandatory activity fees to fund such groups burdened the free-speech rights of students who object. University officials argued that pooling funds for various student groups promotes free speech by encouraging a forum for all kinds of ideas.

Arguing the students' case, attorney Jordan Lorence contended that "students have a right not to speak." Otherwise, he said, African-American students could be forced to fund the KKK.

Some justices questioned whether there is a difference between using tuition money and student fees to fund unpopular speech. They asked, for example, if students could object to part of their tuition being used to pay teachers with whom they disagree.

Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy said student groups provide a forum for diverse viewpoints, which universities have long accommodated.

After the hearing, parties from both sides continued their arguments at press conferences on the steps of the Supreme Court.

Standing alongside students who objected to the university's funding policy, Lorence told reporters, "We're not asking to censor any groups or any speech on campus." He added that they were "simply asking that these groups be funded by volunteers."

But the president of the university said student fees are intended "to provide a forum for all kinds of ideas." She said students do not have the opportunity to opt-out of mandatory fees for the same reason she is not allowed to opt-out of paying taxes because she dislikes government programs.

Students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison must pay mandatory student fees or they cannot receive their grades or graduate. During the 1995-96 academic year, students paid \$166 in fees each semester.

While the university controls the distribution of a certain portion of the fees to student organizations, representatives of the student body have virtually complete authority over distributing the "allocable" portion of the fees.

The students sued the university's board of regents during the 1995-96 academic year. They claimed the fee policy violated their rights of free speech and association.

The students presented evidence of 18 organizations that both receive student fees and engage in political and ideological activities, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Campus Center, Campus Women's Center, Madison AIDS Support Network, Students of National Organization for Women and others.

Susan Ullman, an assistant Wisconsin attorney general who argued the university's case before high court, told justices that any group meeting certain criteria and providing a service to the university is eligible to receive funding.

But at least one justice seemed skeptical of Ullman's claim that an environmental-protection group made eligible to receive university funding as the result of a student referendum provided any "service."

Associate Justice Antonin Scalia observed that by the university's definition, "any speech" could be called a service.

A decision in the dispute, Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System vs. Southworth, is expected before next summer.

-30-

More and more young singles bypassing churches, experts say

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Strike one: they're young.

Strike two: they're single.

Strike three: they're college-educated.

Three strikes and today's young professionals are out -- out of church, that is.

Research by pollster George Barna indicates the young, single and well-educated are the least-likely adults to attend church.

Who can blame them? Churches cater to couples starting families, because that's when many young adults return to church. Many people, however, are putting off marriage until well into their 30s, if they marry at all.

More couples are also postponing childbearing or choosing to be childless. As a result, churches waiting for the stork's visit to begin ministering to young adults are less apt to connect with 20-somethings.

Stereotypes are another hindrance. Some churches view single adults as lonely people needing a life. They create ministries for misfits, and consequently attract a disproportionate number of personality-challenged people who perpetuate the negative stereotype.

Churches often perpetuate stereotypes from television, which present single adults as either sex-crazed party animals or the weird neighbor next door, says Alan Corry, single-adult ministry specialist for Lifeway Christian Resources in Nashville, Tenn.

Even the innocuous Andy Griffith Show cast single-adult characters in a negative light. Andy had been married and was widowed, so though single he was fairly normal. But consider Barney and Goober. Who wants to grow up to be like them?

Meanwhile, more and more are opting for a single lifestyle. Today 43.6 percent of American adults are unmarried, up from 35.7 percent in 1970, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Yet the single-adult population in most churches has not changed in those 30 years.

Many single adults who are establishing their careers and enjoying their independence would rather read the Sunday newspaper at home than attend a church they think values only families. And they would much rather sleep in than get up early for a Bible class that resembles a special-needs group more than an adult discussion.

Tiffany Schmieder of Atlanta said she turned to the church initially to meet people with similar values when she graduated from college and moved to Atlanta. But church is not simply a social connection for her. She's committed enough to her spiritual growth that she gets up at 5 a.m. on Thursdays to be part of a women's Bible study.

Yet Schmieder, 24, isn't surprised to hear Barna's research indicating most of her peers are unchurched. "They're not thinking about their own mortality," she says.

Priority Associates, a Campus Crusade program focusing on young professionals, has ministries stretching from New York City to Austin, Texas, with the goal of presenting Christ and developing spiritual leaders in the marketplace.

Business people spend most of their waking hours at work or with work-related activities, leaders acknowledge, but many professionals desire more than career success. Priority Associates offers life-skill seminars on subjects such as establishing balance in life, staying focused, and finding direction for living.

While many people find such guidance at churches, young single adults are more likely to look elsewhere, experts say.

One obstacle is that many view their parents' religion as ineffective, says Corry. They see Christian parents divorcing at the same rate as non-Christians. They've watched their parents work long hours to provide children with material possessions but flunk on emotional provision.

Meanwhile, as upwardly mobile adults, they are moving from an egocentric stage of life to a search for something meaningful. But many are finding it in places other than the institutional church.

Hands on Atlanta is one such place. The 10-year-old organization recruits and places volunteers in area agencies and projects. It has a mailing list of 20,000 families and singles, most between the ages of 20 and 45. Each receives a monthly calendar describing current volunteer projects. The group is not faith-based, but many volunteers are religious about their involvement.

"They're mostly young professionals who are really busy, but they really do want to contribute to their community," says Terri Heyns, recruitment supervisor. "They don't want their time wasted. They feel their volunteering matters."

Like Schmieder, who turned to church to find friends with similar values, many single adults participate in Hands on Atlanta to meet people who share their volunteer spirit, Heyns says.

A few churches are tapping into that desire to make a difference by incorporating mission opportunities into their single-adult programs.

"Young adults are suspicious of church. They see it as a cloistered environment that only looks at itself, and they don't want to be part of that," says Mace Hall, single-adult minister at Peachtree Road United Methodist Church in Atlanta.

More than half of the 1,500 people who worship at Hall's church are singles age 25-35. At least 300 single adults are involved in the church ministries.

The church follows the Hands on Atlanta philosophy with a Christian spin. "We're not a dating service or just a place for social interaction," Hall says. "Our strength is rooted in ministering to the congregation, community and the world. We are to be Christ in and for this world."

Every year the church's singles build a Habitat for Humanity home. And 250 single members participate in an annual one-day community service marathon. They coordinate volleyball tournaments to raise money for a children's hospital and charge a \$10 admission to their Halloween party to donate to a local food pantry.

Including single adults on committees and in leadership positions helps them feel included in the congregation, but they'll run screaming in the opposite direction if the group is only a rubber-stamping body or if their input is not taken seriously.

Janet Gresham, 38, of Edmond, Okla., remembers volunteering to teach youth in Sunday school when she was in her late 20s. The church leadership hesitated, telling her they really wanted a couple because so many students came from divorced families and needed a positive role model. Gresham was allowed to teach, but only because the church couldn't find a couple who would take the job.

Now she wishes she had told the church leaders that maybe the youth needed a role model of a happy single so they wouldn't be in a such a rush to get married and perhaps make some of their parents' mistakes.

Gresham grew up attending church with her family, so church was also where she turned after college to "meet and socialize with people. I was turned off by the bar scene."

When she moved to a different state and left that circle of friends, however, she dropped out of church for four years. "It was too easy to just sleep in." Now she's involved in First Presbyterian Church of Edmond. Though the church doesn't have a single-adult ministry, she enjoys her involvement on the mission committee -- and she teaches an adult Sunday-school class.

Churches can capitalize on single adults' desire to be part of a healthy community by offering study courses in relationships, both in platonic friendships and dating relations, says Albert Hsu, author of *Singles at the Crossroads*.

"Many of today's young single adults lacked good role models for relationships due to brokenness and dysfunction in our families of origin," Hsu writes. "We have insecurities; we have trouble being vulnerable. We are shy. ... Relational skills, like everything else in life, require training."

In April and May, six churches in North Atlanta sponsored an eight-week series on relationships. The congregations enlisted a Christian comedian to lead the series and secured a sports bar as the host facility. The setting drew people who would not darken the door of a church. The event was advertised as being sponsored by a coalition of churches, so there was no hidden agenda. Admission was a \$5 cover charge, which gave it more perceived value than a free event.

By the end of the series, 500 people had participated, including 120 who checked a box on a survey to say they would like to know how to have a personal relationship with God.

"It's still amazing to me that people would come to a sports bar, pay \$3 to \$5 to park and \$5 to eat, then come in and sit down so we could tell them Jesus loves them," says Linda Pirkle, minister of education and single adults at Wieuca Road Baptist Church, one of the sponsoring congregations.

"People are looking for something that is very real, and that's what Jesus offers."

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