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**Associated  
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Editor: Bob Allen  
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626  
Fax: 904.262.7745  
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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**CBF council proposed budget  
that implements strategic plan**

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will launch new initiatives in leadership training, starting churches and missions partnerships next year, according to a proposed budget based on a new set of organizational priorities also being proposed at a national gathering this summer.

In addition to adopting the \$16.9 million budget in a meeting March 30-31 in Atlanta, the Fellowship's Coordinating Council took steps to establish a retirement program for churches, elected a staff member for chaplaincy and pastoral-care ministries and voted to apply for membership in the Baptist World Alliance.

The proposed spending plan is the first step in implementing a still-developing strategic plan for the 9-year-old moderate group. The budget is based on four strategic initiatives and 14 priority areas adopted by the council in February. The entire plan -- which includes a restructuring of the organization's Atlanta staff -- awaits approval by the CBF General Assembly June 29-July 1 in Orlando, Fla.

A second phase of long-range planning to reorganize the Coordinating Council and resolve issues including how the Fellowship relates to state and regional networks is planned for next year.

The process is aimed at moving the Southern Baptist Convention splinter group, which formed to protest conservative leadership of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, into its second generation.

The 1,500-church Fellowship, which has appointed 125 missionaries and endorsed about 70 chaplains and pastoral counselors, voted in 1996 not to become a separate convention.

However, a now-deceased Fellowship supporter who unsuccessfully advocated that step would be pleased with the organization's progress, his long-time pastor said.

Bill Montgomery, a retired military chaplain from Austin, Texas, wanted the CBF to declare itself a denomination separate from the SBC for two reasons, recalled Guy Sayles, who now is pastor of Kirkwood

Baptist Church in St. Louis. Montgomery wanted the Fellowship to be able to appoint chaplains and to have a benefits board, Sayles said.

"He's dead now. I hope he can rest easy," Sayles quipped.

The Fellowship's growing chaplaincy program prompted in part the hiring of a new associate coordinator. Milton Womack, a 60-year-old psychologist and former missionary from Houston, will work as associate coordinator for pastoral care and chaplaincy in the Global Missions Ministry Group. Womack has been working as a consultant in developing and improving pastoral care for CBF missionaries on the field, said Gary Baldrige, co-coordinator of the ministry group.

The Global Missions group also recently named Phil Hester, a 59-year-old pastor in San Diego, as the first associate coordinator for new church starts. Next year's proposed budget earmarks \$187,000 for developing new initiatives in church planting.

Tamara Tillman, a 5-year missionary in the Middle East, will join the Atlanta staff July 1 as associate coordinator for missions education, Baldrige said.

The Coordinating Council authorized officers in 1998 to adopt and implement a retirement-benefits plan for ministers and employees of "member churches and other affiliated organizations."

Two years later, the council now is authorizing an expenditure of up to \$175,000 for start-up costs for a CBF Benefits Board within the next year, even if it means taking money from reserves. Funds from any budget surplus at the end of the current year could be used to cover part of the cost.

"This is something we've been talking about a long time," CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal said. "I think we're real close."

Gary Skeen, the Fellowship's coordinator of finance and administration, has been named president of the new board. Skeen said it is uncertain if the benefits board will work alone or in partnership with the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Council member Raymond Bailey of Waco, Texas, predicted it "will soon be an absolute imperative that we have our own benefits board."

While the Fellowship has been contributing to the Baptist World Alliance on an annual basis, it has not until now sought membership in the worldwide organization with offices in McLean, Va.

"Though we may not be a convention or denomination by the definition of Baptist World Alliance, we feel like we qualify to be a member of the world Baptist family," Vestal said. "The Baptist World Alliance is the only organized expression of that."

Randy Hyde, pastor of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., commented that it "would be a courageous act" for the BWA to grant membership to CBF. The Southern Baptist Convention, which opposes the moderate-led Fellowship, currently provides \$425,000 a year to the BWA, while the Fellowship has earmarked \$20,000 to BWA in the 2000-2001 budget.

While some BWA leaders oppose CBF membership in the group "for obvious reasons," said CBF global missions co-coordinator Gary Baldrige, other leaders of national Baptist organizations around the world believe the Fellowship should be part of the worldwide Baptist fellowship.

The \$16.9 million 2000-2001 budget includes new dollars for new programs to resource local churches, while providing status-quo funding for 20 autonomous CBF "partners" -- including seminaries and divinity schools, ethics agencies, press services and an independent moderate-Baptist newspaper -- that receive part of their funding from the Atlanta-based Fellowship.

The Coordinating Council previously authorized staff leadership to draft a budget proposal. That is a departure from the normal budgeting process, in which ministry groups of the Coordinating Council make recommendations to a finance committee, which recommends a final budget to the full council.

"This is a transition budget," said moderator-elect Donna Forrester of Greenville, S.C., presiding in the

absence of current moderator Sarah Frances Anders of Pineville, La. "This process is about as messy as it is going to get -- I hope."

The budget projects a 7 percent increase in undesignated gifts and 5 percent in an annual offering for global missions.

It includes \$1.18 million for 11 seminaries and theology schools that receive part of their operating support from the CBF. The schools, along with other "partners," are budgeted to receive the same dollars next year as in the current budget. That is because new dollars were needed for priorities identified in the strategic plan, Vestal said.

"We did not decrease any partner organization, but we did not increase any partner organization," Vestal said. "It was simply a matter of priorities of our strategic plan."

"I want to say how much we value these partners," Vestal said.

The budget might place a pinch on some of the organizations that partner with CBF, but most are established enough that they do not rely solely on CBF for support, one official said.

Responding to a question about the budget might hurt partners and state and regional networks, Bill Bruster, CBF networking coordinator, said he did not think it would force any organization out of existence. "They won't be able to do as much as in the past," he acknowledged. "It will hamper some of them."

Greg Warner, executive editor of Associated Baptist Press, said denial of a requested \$60,000 funding increase might hinder the news service's ability to cover church-state issues in Washington, D.C.

Baptist News Service, a division of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs that has functioned as a Washington desk for ABP, recently lost credentials permitting access to press galleries. A committee of journalists revoked the credentials because the BJC is involved in lobbying, creating a potential conflict of interest. As an independent, subscription-based news service, ABP would likely qualify for credentials. The two agencies have jointly proposed phasing Baptist News Service into a bureau of ABP, contingent on funding.

"We had planned to do it by April," said Warner, whose agency still stands to receive \$142,431 in operating funds in next year's CBF budget. "We can't do it that quickly without CBF money."

Come fall, Warner said, the BJC has indicated that it will cease its news operation and shift resources to direct public relations that the agency has in the past refrained from in order to retain its press credentials.

"All we're trying to do is provide the Baptist voice in Washington," Warner said.

The Coordinating Council debated but did not act on a motion by David Burroughs of Louisville, Ky., to add \$60,000 in funding to ABP to next year's budget, referring the matter back to the staff leadership team that recommended the budget for more discussion but with no specific instructions.

A new CBF staff structure that is also part of the strategic plan will emphasize collaboration and decrease competition among ministry groups, Vestal said. Funding for several projects in the proposed budget is divided across more than one ministry group. That "forces us to work in a more cooperative structure," Vestal said.

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## **Southern Seminary announces plan to close campus child-care center**

By Trennis Henderson

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary officials have announced plans to shut down the school's Child Development Center effective July 31.

The announcement came in an April 4 letter distributed to parents of children enrolled at the child-care

center on Southern's Louisville, Ky., campus. The news prompted sharp outcries from some parents and staff members, who voiced concern about the seminary's motivation for the action.

The child-care center, founded in 1971, currently serves 69 children, including 60 from the seminary community. The center is located in a two-story building that formerly housed the seminary's school of church music. The facility reportedly needs more than \$1 million in renovations to remain open.

Calling the action "a painful decision," seminary President Albert Mohler said: "It was just a business decision. We could not come up with a business plan with adequate income for the center. We're in a competitive market like everyone else."

Mohler said the center's 18 employees "will be able to apply for other positions on campus, but there is no certainty of employment" after July 31.

The decision to close the center was made by the seminary's 10-member executive cabinet, which includes Mohler, four vice presidents and five deans. Their decision followed a study on renovation costs by the trustees' real estate committee.

In the letter to parents, Dennis Williams wrote, "If the seminary did the renovation, the cost to the parents to use the center for their children would be prohibitive."

Williams, dean of Southern's School of Christian Education and Leadership, added that the administrative decision was made "after careful thought and evaluation of the possible options."

Responding in an April 5 letter to Mohler, Mim Dunlap called Williams' claims "ludicrous."

Dunlap, whose children have attended the child-care center the past two years, said she was insulted that Williams "would presume to know my or any other seminary family's financial situation."

She said closing the center will force seminary families to use private, non-Christian day care centers, "spending the same 'cost prohibitive' dollars somewhere else."

Dunlap's letter also questioned recent cost increases for rent, tuition and other seminary-related expenses "if a seminary family's finances are such a grave concern."

Dunlap noted that the center's closing comes just a year after seminary officials unveiled a 10-year, \$70 million campus master plan. "I can't help but wonder how another \$1 million would be that difficult to raise," she said.

Emphasizing the decision came after several months of review, Mohler said the child-care center's future remained unresolved amid last year's long-range plans.

While parents' child-care needs "are very real," he added, "We cannot offer a service that does not meet the standards we expect from ourselves."

Mohler said the child-care center is an auxiliary service designed to pay its own way. "It has not broken even for the last several years," he said, explaining the center's budget "has been somewhat subsidized."

He said the seminary's auxiliary services, such as on-campus food service, "are not core programs, but services we try to provide. We are committed to our auxiliaries standing on their own financially" rather than affecting the seminary's operational budget.

Child Development Center employee Karen Eley told the Louisville Courier-Journal she is concerned that seminary officials "are not thinking about the children."

"We are concerned for these students," Mohler responded. Countering claims that the decision was based on a belief by seminary officials that mothers should stay home with their children, he added, "We are not philosophically opposed" to providing child care on campus.

"Should we be able to do this in the future, we would gladly support it," Mohler said, although "there is no suitable location presently on campus." He said administrators have considered building a new child care facility and remain open to that option if funds are available to build, staff and operate "the kind of facility and program we desire."

Meanwhile, Mohler said administrators hope to provide partnerships with other area child-care providers for the benefit of seminary families.

The five other Southern Baptist Convention seminaries -- Golden Gate in Mill Valley, Calif.; Midwestern in Kansas City, Mo.; New Orleans; Southeastern in Wake Forest, N.C.; and Southwestern in Fort Worth, Texas -- all have an on-campus child-development center.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

### **First woman ordained by Mexican Baptist church**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- Rebeca Montemayor Lopez is reportedly the first woman to be ordained to the ministry by a Baptist church in Mexico.

A six-member delegation of Baptist women from the United States attended the historic ordination council and ceremony at Shalom Baptist Community in Mexico City March 24-25.

The delegation was sponsored by the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. The team included women representing the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Baptist Women in Ministry and American Baptist Women's Ministries. Ordained Baptist women from Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Cuba also attended.

The step is likely to spark controversy, according to the leader of the U.S. delegation.

"This church has taken a courageous and risky step which will open doors for Baptist women but which will also serve to separate them from others who do not support the ordination of women," said LeDayne McLeese Polaski, an ordained woman who works as managing director of the Charlotte, N.C.,-based Baptist Peace Fellowship.

"It was therefore important for us to be here to affirm our deep support of women in ministry and to affirm this congregation for taking this historic action," she said.

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-- By ABP staff

### **Association considering ouster of two pro-homosexual churches**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A motion to oust two churches with pro-homosexual views has been referred to a committee of the Atlanta Baptist Association.

Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., and Virginia-Highland Baptist Church in Atlanta were voted out of the Georgia Baptist Convention last fall over the same issue.

That action did not affect the congregation's membership status in their local association, which in Southern Baptist polity is self-governing. However, Tim Clark, pastor of Pine Lake Baptist Church in Atlanta, made a motion to dismiss the two churches at an associational meeting March 20. The motion was referred to

a membership team without discussion.

Both churches include homosexuals in all areas of congregational life and have written statements saying they don't discriminate against gays. Messengers at the Georgia Baptist Convention last fall found them in violation of new constitutional language denying membership to churches that act to "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

The Southern Baptist Convention has a similar provision, but neither church has been involved in the national body for a number of years.

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-- By ABP staff

### **Christian Index cutting back from weekly publication**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Southern Baptists' oldest denominational newspaper, Georgia's Christian Index, has announced it will cut back from a weekly schedule to every other week later this year.

The paper has been published weekly since its founding by missions leader Luther Rice in 1822. The paper, originally named the Columbian Star, was at first based in Washington, D.C., and intended for a national audience. It was renamed The Christian Index after Jesse Mercer bought the paper and moved it to Georgia in the 1830s. Mercer donated it to the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1841.

Current editor William Neal said rising costs to mail the paper and other issues prompted the change. The paper, which is non-profit, has lost money the last two years, Neal said in a March 23 editorial.

"We prefer cutting back on the frequency of the paper rather than raising subscription rates," Neal wrote. "Our ultimate goal is to increase circulation, and raising our rates would work against that goal."

Neal said the paper would become more feature-oriented, and the Christian Index's Web site will become the main source of breaking news.

Baptists no longer rely only on their denominational paper for church news, Neal said. Television stations and daily newspapers cover major stories more quickly, and news services used by editors are available to anyone on the Internet.

"The Index as a printed piece simply cannot compete when it comes to late-breaking, hard-news coverage," Neal wrote. He said the paper would concentrate instead on "offering our readers what they cannot get from other sources."

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-- By ABP staff

### **Bible available in 21 new languages**

(ABP) -- The Bible was made available in an additional 21 languages for the first time last year, according to the 1999 Scripture Language Report of the United Bible Societies.

The Bible in complete form or portions is now available in 2,233 of the 6,500 world languages. The new Scriptures were produced in languages of Africa and Asia.

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-- European Baptist Press Service

## **Memorial service honors scholar, leader**

SOFIA, Bulgaria (ABP) -- European Baptists remembered Baptist scholar and denominational leader George Beasley-Murray at a memorial service March 3.

Beasley-Murray, 83, died in late February after suffering a major stroke.

A London Times obituary described Beasley-Murray as "one of the most prolific biblical scholars of the 20th century" who "sought to bridge the gulf between the believer and the scholar" in the decades following World War II.

He was principal of Spurgeon's College in England from 1958 to 1973. He also taught at Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He was president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1968-69. He was the author of many books, including the 1962 "Baptism in the New Testament," which is used widely in Baptist seminaries.

David Coffey, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, studied under Beasley-Murray at Spurgeon's. "He left an abiding influence on my life, not least by offering a sound model for a pastor-preacher called to do the work of an evangelist," Coffey recalled. "He was among that select company of Baptists who served the world church, and the Baptist Union was proud to have him as their distinguished representative on so many occasions in both academic and ecumenical gatherings."

Beasley-Murray and his wife, Ruth, had been married for 58 years. In addition to his widow he is survived by four children and nine grandchildren.

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-- European Baptist Press Service

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