



Nashville, Tennessee
**Associated
Baptist Press**

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

July 19, 2000

(00-62)

IN THIS ISSUE:

New Mexico leaders propose new criteria for membership

Fellowship reselling acreage to Mercer for \$1.75 million

Bill to ease zoning restrictions on churches introduced in Congress

First head of religious-freedom office leaving U.S. State Department post

Ministers' kids offered pointers for 'survival'

Veteran pastor offers advice for balancing duty, demands

**New Mexico leaders propose
new criteria for membership**

By John Loudat

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (ABP) -- Baptist leaders in New Mexico are recommending that Southern Baptists' official faith statement not be applied as a test of fellowship in the state convention.

A credentials study committee was named in January to study a proposed change to Baptist Convention of New Mexico bylaws allowing only churches that affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" to seat messengers at the state annual meeting.

Instead, the study committee, in recommendations approved Oct. 23-25 by the state convention's executive board, would define eligible churches as those that give at least \$250 to the Cooperative Program unified budget and whose faith and practice do not "conflict with Scripture."

"Everything in the 'Baptist Faith and Message' is in Scripture, but not everything in Scripture is in the 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" said Joe Bunce, president of the state convention.

The convention in session would be final judge of whether a church qualifies to be represented at the annual meeting.

The committee report notes that the preamble to the "Baptist Faith and Message" denies "the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches."

The SBC uses the "Baptist Faith and Message" as a guide for employment of denominational workers but does not require churches to endorse it to be in good standing with the national body.

Bunce, pastor of First Baptist Church in Bloomfield, said the statements from the "Baptist Faith and Message" preamble and the SBC constitution were the committee's main rationale for the proposal.

John Hinze, chairman of the study committee, said members also studied bylaws of several other state conventions.

Bunce said the proposed change would apply three-fold criteria -- "financial support, belief and practice" -- to determine whether a church is "sympathetic with the convention's purpose and work."

Albuquerque pastor Bernie Moraga raised a concern that some churches might not be able to afford to give \$250 a year to the Cooperative Program.

Hinze said that four churches that seated messengers at last year's BCNM annual meeting "didn't give a dime" to the convention's work.

"This says if you're going to drink the milk and enjoy the butter, you're going to have to help feed the cow," Bunce said.

-30-

--Bob Allen contributed to this story

Fellowship reselling acreage to Mercer for \$1.75 million

By Bob Allen

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is reselling seven acres of Atlanta property it bought five years ago from Mercer University, turning a \$500,000 profit.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship purchased the property adjacent to Mercer's satellite Atlanta campus for \$1.25 million. The Fellowship, which leases office space from Mercer, bought the property both for an investment and to help the Macon-based Mercer raise money for its new McAfee School of Theology, located in Atlanta.

While CBF leaders said at the time it was possible the land could be used to build permanent offices for the Fellowship, the group has no plans for building anytime soon, said David Wilkinson, the organization's communications coordinator.

Wilkinson said the Fellowship recently extended its lease agreement with Mercer and CBF leaders are "very pleased" with the arrangement.

Wilkinson said Mercer officials approached the Fellowship about buying the land back.

The Fellowship's Coordinating Council approved the \$1.75 million sale at a June 26 meeting in Orlando, Fla., just prior to the group's annual General Assembly. The university will pay for the land over time, at 7.75 percent interest.

The money will remain in the Fellowship's reserve funds, which total about \$4 million.

CBF finance committee chairman David Currie said overall giving to the Fellowship was up about 6.4 percent with a month to go in the fiscal year. A total of 1,784 churches have given to the CBF so far this year, nine more than the entire year in 1998-99.

"Everything is continuing to slowly and progressively go up," Currie said, noting that he expects a surge in first-time givers in the wake of negative publicity from the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting two weeks earlier, also in Orlando.

-30-

Bill to ease zoning restrictions on churches introduced in Congress

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Local governments' ability to restrict houses of worship through zoning regulations would be limited in a bill just introduced in Congress.

The "Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act" would also give people in prisons, hospitals and groups homes greater protection for religious exercise.

The measure was introduced July 13 in the House of Representatives by Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., and co-sponsored by Reps. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., and Chet Edwards, D-Texas and in the Senate by Sens. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, and Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., is also a co-sponsor.

Supporters hope the bill will move quickly through both houses, which are nearing a month-long recess and then have only a few weeks remaining before the 106th Congress ends its term. Observers believe it would pass if voted on this term.

It is backed by a coalition of both conservative and liberal groups that have worked together on previous efforts to bolster religious liberty.

While the law would not make churches immune from zoning regulations, it would require zoning officials to treat religious and secular institutions equally.

Melissa Rogers, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said communities have used zoning laws to restrict the size of churches and hours they are allowed to operate as well as to exclude minority faiths. Ironically, she noted, authorities have often treated non-religious entities better than churches.

"A home Bible study or prayer gathering should be treated with at least as much dignity as a Tupperware party or a backyard barbecue," Rogers said.

The Washington-based BJC is chairing a coalition of 60 diverse organizations urging Congress to support the bill.

The coalition first came together to help pass a 1993 law that restored religious liberties stripped in a Supreme Court ruling. After the high court ruled parts of that law unconstitutional, the coalition fell apart over another broad religious-liberty protection bill that passed only in the House.

The new law brings the diverse groups back together by focusing on two areas where the majority of conflicts between religion and government arise -- zoning laws and the religious rights of those in institutions such as prisons.

Sponsors of the bill described instances of city officials seeking to limit the number of worshippers at churches and pressuring houses of worship to shut down soup kitchens.

They also told of Jewish prisoners being denied unleavened bread during Passover when Jewish organizations offered to provide it at no cost.

Religious liberty is "at the heart of the American experience," Canady said, adding the measure would protect people of faith "from the overreaching power of government."

The measure would require that religious groups demonstrate "a substantial burden on sincere religious exercise," and would still allow governments to prevail if they can show that burden is "an unavoidable result of a compelling governmental objective."

Kennedy said the measure would protect people of faith from "unnecessary government interference" without undermining other civil rights.

The broad coalition includes groups ranging from the American Civil Liberties Union to the Family Research Council and from the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Shannon Royce, legislative counsel for the Southern Baptist Convention's moral-concerns and religious-liberty voice, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said the measure covers only a portion of religious-liberty cases. She said the ERLC would work in future congresses to secure "a full and complete protection of religious liberty for all Americans and not just many Americans."

Royce said the Southern Baptist group works in coalitions that include a broad array of organizations "because that's how things happen in Washington, D.C." She disputed the notion that working with groups like the ACLU implies endorsement of those groups. "Simply working with one group on one issue does not mean that we agree with everything they believe in," Royce said. "There are issues where we very much disagree with the ACLU," she added.

In a press release, ACLU legislative representative Terri Schroeder said: "The balance between the needs of religion and the larger community's concerns has been off kilter for far too long. This bill will restore the equilibrium."

Carl Esbeck, executive director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, also voiced support for the measure. He called the coming together of groups that usually disagree "rare and fairly remarkable."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, voiced support for the legislation. However, Lynn said, "We would never support the use of this bill to trump nondiscriminatory zoning decisions by local authorities." He said the purpose of the bill is not to allow a church that "wants to build a steeple that's 500 feet tall" to get around restrictions related to the safety of a structure.

Other groups supporting the bill include People for the American Way, National Association of Evangelicals, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Prison Fellowship, American Jewish Congress and the U.S. Catholic Conference.

But opposing the measure was the lawyer who argued against the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act before the Supreme Court. The court went on to strike down the act's application to the states in 1997.

Marci Hamilton, professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University in New York, told Associated Baptist Press that the new measure would be unconstitutional because it grants a privilege for religion.

"There are religious groups and individuals that are burdened by land-use laws, but so is everybody else," Hamilton said. She said religious beliefs are currently protected and the bill would "result in a net decrease in peaceful co-existence."

-30-

First head of religious-freedom office leaving U.S. State Department post

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The first head of a government office established two years ago to monitor religious persecution overseas is leaving the post, saying he has met his goal of weaving religious freedom "into the fabric" of U.S. foreign policy.

Robert Seiple, head of the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department, is resigning to begin a think tank at Eastern College in Philadelphia.

"I think I did what I came here to do," Seiple, who was appointed to the post by President Clinton in September 1998, told Associated Baptist Press.

Seiple, a past president of World Vision International, said he put "the railroad tracks in place" for the new federal office but that he now can be more effective in promoting religious freedom in an independent commission.

He said it is unlikely that his presidential-appointed replacement would be named until after the 2000 elections.

Seiple will move to Eastern College, an American Baptist-related school where he once served as president. He described the new Institute for Global Engagement as a "think tank with legs," that will focus on the "whys" of religious persecution and pre-emptive ways to curb conflicts.

Seiple said the institute would function in different ways than the "established bureaucracy" of a federal agency. "There will be times that an independent commission will be able to say things that a State Department office will not be able to respond to," he said.

The State Department religious-freedom office was created under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. As head of the office, Seiple has also served ex-officio as ambassador-at-large of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. The commission, also established under the law, monitors violations of religious freedom abroad and makes policy recommendations to the president, secretary of state, and Congress.

September will mark major mandates under the act. The State Department will be required to list "countries of particular concern" in religious-freedom violations. With the commission looking over the administration's shoulder, the president will have to decide what, if any, actions should be taken against those countries.

Elliot Abrams, chairman of the independent commission, expressed regret at Seiple's resignation announcement. "Ambassador Seiple was the first Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom," Abrams said in a written statement. "He started from scratch and built the position into a serious and influential one by force of personality, personal integrity, and a passionate commitment to religious freedom."

"Despite Ambassador Seiple's departure, the work of his fine staff and of the Commission in advancing the cause of religious freedom overseas will go on," Abrams said.

-30-

Ministers' kids offered pointers for 'survival'

By Mark Wingfield

GLORIETA, N.M. (ABP) -- True confessions: Have you ever gone swimming in the church baptistry?

It's not a question most church members would ask, but it proved a good ice breaker for several dozen children of ministers attending a special session offered for them during the Texas Baptist Family Reunion.

More than one minister's kid admitted to having taken a few laps in the baptismal pool -- and some said they even brought along a friend.

While having a parent in high places can provide certain perks for ministers' kids, participants said they also face unique challenges.

One 13-year-old clergy offspring said she has moved seven times; another 12-year-old said he had moved six times.

So is being a minister's kid a blessing or a curse?

It all depends on how you choose to look at it, suggested Stephen and Marcie Hatfield, who led the session. He is pastor of First Baptist Church in Lewisville, Texas, and the son of a longtime minister and denominational worker. She is a pastor's wife and mother of five.

"None of your friends had any choice about the families they were born into either," Stephen Hatfield reminded the group. "Being a preacher's kid can be a blessing. It depends on how you handle it."

The Hatfields offered the group a Top Ten list of ways to survive life as a minister's kid, a few of them light-hearted:

-- Attend church. "You might as well make the best of it and get something out of it," he suggested.

And the minister's child can be a profound role model for others, his wife added. "You can make a lot of difference in your youth group."

-- Talk to old people. "People want to know you," she said. "They want to know the staff kids."

That has advantages, she said, because of the relationships that are built and the life lessons that can be learned.

-- Don't tell folks your dad "owns the church."

-- Be yourself. This item generated much discussion from the group, with several teens expressing frustration that they don't believe they can be themselves without endangering the parent's employment.

"Everybody's always watching you when you're a minister's kid," one teen reported.

"My parents make choices for me because of how it would look to the church," another said.

"I have a fear of what adults in the church would think" if I was truly myself, another offered.

-- Clarify how much of your life is OK to become sermon illustrations. "If it's something that bothers you, you owe it to yourself to talk to your dad about it," Stephen Hatfield cautioned.

Many of the teens, however, said they enjoyed the attention of having their exploits used as a sermon illustration. One participant said she actually suggests family stories to her father for him to consider in sermon preparation.

-- Learn camouflage techniques so your dad can't spot you in a crowd.

-- Understand that your parents' vocation is a calling. "There was a time when I was a kid when I wished my dad didn't do what he did," Hatfield admitted, adding that he finally realize his father was in the ministry not for personal gain or to persecute the children but to answer a strongly felt call from God.

-- Don't expect to be Mary or Joseph in every Christmas play.

-- Realize God wants personal time with you. "God wants you to love him, regardless of whether you're a minister's kid or not," Stephen Hatfield said. "That's going to help you survive life."

-30-

Veteran pastor offers advice for balancing duty, demands

By Mark Wingfield

GLORIETA, N.M. (ABP) -- Ministers may be expected to do everything well but in reality should discover and focus on a few strengths, a veteran pastor advised.

Dennis Hochgraber, pastor of Shiloh Terrace Baptist Church in Dallas, led a session for clergy during the recent Texas Baptist Family Reunion at Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico. Based on his 25 years of experience as a pastor, he urged ministers to focus on their areas of giftedness while surrounding themselves with others with different gifts.

Hochgraber urged ministers to serve God faithfully through the church but not to "sell yourself out to the church." Left unchecked, he warned, churches can continually make more demands until the minister burns out.

Hochgraber offered five tips for faithfully balancing the demands of ministry:

-- Recognize there is a difference between being successful and being faithful. Faithfulness is not related to church size or other traditional standards used to measure a minister's effectiveness. Rather, faithfulness is a measure of being true to one's calling from God regardless of location or circumstances.

-- Recognize you have but one life to live. "The trap in ministry is to try to live several lives," he explained. "You don't do anything well because you try to do everything."

-- Do not waste your life. Ministers must "continually come before the Lord" for personal renewal in order to have the spiritual energy to minister to others, he said. "We get empty and have to be filled."

-- Understand the stages of life. God doesn't always reveal his entire plan for a person's life at once, and ministers especially must recognize that living in God's will creates different demands and opportunities throughout life, Hochgraber said. "Like climbing Mount Baldy, the experience is in getting there."

-- Seek to glorify God in your life and ministry. "The reason the church is here is to bring glory to God," he asserted.

Ministers who don't pay attention to these matters may find themselves like the person described in the Song of Songs who took care of his extended family's vineyards but neglected his own, Hochgraber said. "This is a powerful warning."

-30-

END
