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**CBF leader disputes meeting
coverage by Baptist Press**

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship "has never issued any statement, taken any action or spent a single dollar that was intended in any way to condone, endorse or promote the gay-lesbian lifestyle," Coordinator Daniel Vestal said in a statement released July 26.

He was responding to what he described as "inflammatory" reporting about the Atlanta-based Fellowship in Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention news service. Reports filed by a free-lance writer from the CBF's recent General Assembly in Orlando, Fla., characterized the moderate group as funding and supporting homosexual activism.

The Baptist Press reports, which have been widely circulated on the Internet and appeared in several Baptist papers, accuse the Fellowship of advancing pro-homosexual causes by funding the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and Baptist Women in Ministry. One story described a pro-gay piece of literature found at the Peace Fellowship's booth during the June General Assembly and attributed pro-gay quotes to one individual affiliated with Women in Ministry.

"The so-called news stories produced by Baptist Press about the 2000 General Assembly ought to be an embarrassment to any self-respecting news organization," Vestal said. "I call upon the leaders of the SBC to put an end to the mean-spirited assault on fellow believers who are part of the Fellowship. There ought always to be room for disagreement among Christians, but our commitment to honesty, integrity and fairness ought to reflect the spirit of Christ."

Vestal said he cannot speak for either the Charlotte, N.C.,-based Baptist Peace Fellowship or Women in Ministry, which has offices in Kansas City, Kan., but he does want to "set the record straight" on the Fellowship's position.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has never issued any statement, taken any action, or spent a single dollar that was intended in any way to condone, endorse or promote the gay-lesbian lifestyle," Vestal said. "In fact, both retired Coordinator Cecil Sherman and I have made unequivocal public statements expressing our personal views on the subject of homosexual behavior."

Vestal quoted a past comment of his that appears in a CBF brochure. "I believe the practice of homosexuality violates the teaching of Scripture," Vestal said. "But I will not throw stones at those who live a homosexual lifestyle -- or any other lifestyle I believe to be outside the will of God. As a follower of Jesus, I should offer them my love and friendship. I should do this in a spirit of humility that grows from my own need for forgiveness and grace."

Further, Vestal added, the Fellowship's relationship with the Baptist Peace Fellowship and Baptist Women in Ministry "has nothing whatsoever to do with the issue of homosexuality. To suggest otherwise is untrue."

Vestal said the Baptist Press report that CBF has renewed funding for the Baptist Peace Fellowship is inaccurate.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship does not contribute to the operating budget of the Baptist Peace Fellowship," Vestal said. "In fact, five years ago CBF's Coordinating Council chose to discontinue a modest allocation to the Peace Fellowship's operating budget after concluding that some of the (agency's) statements and actions constituted an advocacy for the gay-lesbian lifestyle."

The CBF budget for 2000-2001 does include one line item of \$9,900 for a designated contract with the Baptist Peace Fellowship to develop three specific projects, Vestal said. "These projects ... have nothing to do with the issue of homosexuality. Rather, they focus on developing congregational resources dealing with issues of church conflict and reconciliation, restorative justice and biblical teachings about peace, justice and reconciliation."

The CBF budget also allocates \$30,000 to Baptist Women in Ministry, which is one of CBF's partner organizations. This funding "has nothing to do with the issue of homosexuality," Vestal asserted.

"The Baptist Press story attributes some comments on homosexuality to a board member and past president of Baptist Women in Ministry," he noted. "If she was quoted directly, I personally disagree with some of her statements. But her comments on that issue have nothing to do with the nature of our cooperative work with Baptist Women in Ministry."

Although the Baptist Press stories focused heavily on the Baptist Peace Fellowship and Baptist Women in Ministry, these organizations were only two of 93 exhibitors at the CBF general assembly, Vestal said.

"CBF has not attempted to screen and approve each of the thousands of resources on display at the resource fair. Instead, all Resource Fair vendors are asked to exhibit in ways that support and complement the mission statement of CBF and the purpose and objectives of the general assembly," he said. "If any of the materials displayed at the resource fair are determined to be in conflict with CBF's mission and core values, then future participation by that vendor will be re-evaluated."

Vestal accused Baptist Press of continuing a pattern of guilt-by-association reporting used by other critics of CBF. Using the same kind of logic, the SBC itself could be characterized as supporting homosexuality, he said.

"The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest contributor to the Baptist World Alliance," he said by way of example. "The BWA has cooperated closely in recent years with the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America to help mediate hostilities among warring factions of the Naga people in northeast India who are predominantly Baptist. Using the same kind of connect-the-dots logic that Baptist Press and other opponents of the Fellowship have consistently employed, one could argue that the SBC is condoning or supporting a 'pro-homosexual organization' through its ongoing support of the BWA."

"Now, one could defend such a conclusion as based on fact," he said. "But it is unfair, and it is certainly not the whole truth. Indeed, this perpetual 'look-who's-keeping-company-with-whom' finger pointing is enough to make the Pharisees proud."

Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship, also criticized a story based partly on an interview with him.

"The character of that story reminds me of another story I heard many years ago," Sehested wrote in an open letter to Baptist Press July 7. "It was issued by Tass, the official news agency of the former Soviet Union, regarding a professional auto racing event held in Europe.

"The story reported that the car sponsored by East Germany (then a Soviet ally) finished third, while the American car in the race finished next-to-last.

"In truth, only three cars were in the race."

"Needless to say, I failed to recognize much truth in your story," Sehested said.

Will Hall, an Executive Committee vice president in charge of Baptist Press, said he would issue a response to Vestal's statement July 27.

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Study examines salaries of Southern Baptist ministers

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. (ABP) -- The average full-time Southern Baptist pastor earns \$39,187 a year in salary and housing allowance, plus benefits and expenses equaling a total compensation package of \$51,589.

That's according to a biennial survey of churches in 18 Baptist state conventions including old line states like Georgia and Alabama, smaller conventions like New England and Hawaii and others in between.

The average pastor's salary increased \$3,141 since the last survey, or 8 percent over two years.

The best-paid pastors were in Georgia, where the average salary and housing totaled \$43,560, and the lowest-paid were in Iowa, where the typical Southern Baptist pastor earned \$29,814.

The survey also looked at annual compensation for other church employees.

"Bivocational" pastors, preachers who also hold jobs outside the church, were paid an average of \$12,046 in salary and housing. Full-time ministers serving in roles other than pastor averaged \$38,879. Part-time staff in those roles averaged \$9,712. Full-time church secretaries earned on average \$19,724, while part-time were paid \$9,090.

Average compensation for full-time church custodians was \$19,895 and for part-time \$6,384.

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-- By ABP staff

House lawmakers encourage public postings of 'In God We Trust' motto

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- "In God We Trust," the national motto of the United States, should be posted in public buildings, according to a nonbinding measure approved by House lawmakers.

The measure merely reflects the "sense of Congress" and carries no legislative weight.

Rep. Bob Schaffer, R-Colo., referred to "moral destruction and decay" in the country, saying, "It is fitting that we look to our national motto."

Rep. Ronnie Shows, R-Miss., a Baptist, said, "The values we teach at home and church are universal and should not be left outside the schoolhouse door or outside where we work and play every day."

But Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., opposed the measure, pointing to his Virginia roots. "The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was the basis for the First Amendment," he said.

Scott said the measure would invite lawsuits against states and localities that may be unfamiliar with the complicated issue of what kinds of government endorsement of religion are allowed by the Constitution.

Referring specifically to the "In God We Trust" motto, Schaffer said, "I concede that there may be some who do not, but as a nation, as a whole, this is not a controversial statement of any kind."

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Controversial Falwell statements cut by SBC agency radio show

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- After receiving warnings from a church-state watchdog group, the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission aired a radio interview with televangelist Jerry Falwell but edited out controversial portions that called for the defeat of presidential candidate Al Gore.

The July 25 airing of the Falwell interview on the ERLC's "For Faith and Family" radio show followed heated letters between the ERLC's executive director Richard Land and Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

While Lynn is trying to claim credit for the edited comments, Land issued a press release saying Lynn had no impact on the decision.

"I'm delighted that Richard Land chose not to put the SBC's tax exemption in jeopardy," Lynn stated. "Had he ignored our advice, the ERLC would likely have faced penalties from the IRS. The agency's leaders contacted their lawyers, considered the consequences of ignoring federal tax law and decided to play by the rules."

But Dwayne Hastings, a spokesman for the Nashville, Tenn.,-based ERLC, told Associated Baptist Press that Lynn had nothing to do with the decision. Hastings said the partisan nature of Falwell's comments was one of many considerations for editing, including time constraints for the radio show. But those issues would have been considered with or without Lynn's letter, Hastings said.

During a lengthy interview taped during the SBC annual convention, Falwell said: Ronald Reagan would not have been president unless Bible-believing Christians in 1979 and 1980 by the millions said, 'We've had enough,' and threw Jimmy Carter out and put Ronald Reagan in, to put it bluntly. If we don't do the same thing Nov. 7 with Mr. Gore ... and get somebody in there to rebuild the moral values and fabric of this nation, we're going to be in the same mess or worse than we were in 1980."

Lynn immediately wrote Land, urging him "to refrain" from airing the interview, citing limits on political activity for tax-exempt religious organization in the IRS code.

After Land defended the interview and accused AU of censorship, Lynn told a reporter that if Land removed partisan quotes in editing, it would be because of Lynn's letter. "There's just no other reason for him to do so," Lynn said.

Baptist Press, the SBC's press arm, however, quoted Land's response as, "It is simply laughable for Barry Lynn to postulate that his rumblings either delayed or prompted us to consider canning the Falwell interview."

Land said the Falwell interview "was edited according to our normal editing standards as every other program. This program went through the normal editorial process that saw 44 minutes of tape trimmed to a length suitable for airing."

However, Hastings confirmed that not every program is cleared through the American Center for Law and Justice, Pat Robertson's legal organization. The ERLC sought the help of the ACLJ's Jay Sekulow after receiving the warning from Lynn against airing the partisan statements in the interview.

Land said the ACLJ reviewed the entire tape of the Falwell interview. "Although the ACLJ's attorneys found Dr. Falwell's comments to be 'permissible,' as they were identified as 'strictly personal and not representative' of the ERLC or the SBC, in the editing process for this interview as in every other occasion we steer far clear of the line," Land said.

"At the time we did the interview, we had already decided there were things Dr. Falwell said that did not fall within our program format," he added.

Land said he would not air anything that would jeopardize the ERLC's tax status.

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'Above the rim' basketball paves way for gospel in Lebanon

By Shawn Hendricks

BEIRUT, Lebanon (ABP) -- In the sweltering heat of Beirut, Lebanon, Rob Kinnard knew how to draw a crowd. His fancy basketball moves and exclamations of "Oh, baby" as he finished each trick amazed the dozens of Lebanese children looking on. Soon he had them chanting "Oh, baby," too.

Kinnard was one of eight Sports Crusaders volunteers from Missouri who conducted basketball clinics July 3-6 while presenting the gospel and promoting Celebrate Jesus -- Lebanon 2000, a Christ-centered, revival-type celebration held near Beirut.

"The basketball opened the door to sharing Christ," said Kinnard, a 39-year-old human-resources representative for a trucking company in Excelsior Springs, Mo. "I believe the kids saw the love of God through our enthusiasm."

Sports Crusaders is an evangelistic program supported by the Missouri Baptist Convention. It was the first time Sports Crusaders had traveled to the Middle East nation.

Charbel Daou, a Beirut resident who helped coordinate the clinics, said the team couldn't have come at a better time.

"It used to not be this way a few years ago, but basketball is now the No. 1 sport here in Lebanon," Daou said. "Sports Crusaders is doing a lot of good things here. This group is bringing together people who normally wouldn't hear the gospel."

Each morning, team members climbed into a small bus to travel to different areas of Beirut. One clinic took place near an old church that had been bombed during the 1980s by Israeli forces. Another was conducted in a schoolyard surrounded by run-down apartments with freshly washed clothes hanging off the balconies.

Children of all skill levels, wearing basketball jerseys and T-shirts with their favorite NBA players and logos, flocked to the courts. Many of the courts were cramped between buildings and busy streets. The smell of sweat and car exhaust hung in the air.

Players found little shade on the hot asphalt of the basketball courts.

Many wore hats to protect themselves from the sun. Empty water bottles littered the ground. One of

the clinics was cut short because of the rising afternoon temperature.

Each of the two daily clinics consisted of a stretching session, then passing and shooting drills, followed by a light scrimmage between the children.

Several competitive coed scrimmages also were organized during the week, giving the Lebanese an opportunity to compete against American basketball players.

"It's an opportunity to show Christ on the court," said Julie Clover, a junior at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau. "We still want to win, but we're not competitive to the point we have to." During halftime, team members shared their testimonies. Several Lebanese youngsters made professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

The trip had a profound impact on the Americans as well.

"It's nothing we can really understand," team leader Tim Scifres, a schoolteacher in Sikeston, said. "Realizing we could share the gospel with those kids simply because we could play basketball was amazing to me.

"(In Lebanon), there is such a deep chasm between Catholics, Muslims and evangelical Christians. Believers there have to be so committed to what they believe. "This experience has not only encouraged me to witness overseas, but also to witness to the guy next door."

Kelly Spicer, a junior at Hannibal-LaGrange College, shared about the religious struggles many of the Lebanese children face daily.

"There was a girl who was a believer, but she went to an all-Muslim school. She wasn't allowed to even say Jesus' name."

Spicer said she admires the Lebanese "believers" for their strong Christian faith and convictions. "It made me wonder if people can tell I'm a Christian by looking at my life." Once Spicer graduates from college, she plans to pursue full-time overseas mission work. Scifres plans to continue working with sports evangelism in the United States.

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--EDITOR'S NOTE: Basketball in Lebanon photos are available to editors from Word and Way.

Popular quartet singer Ernie Haase goes solo

By Stacey Hamby

BOLIVAR, Mo. (ABP) -- He is one of gospel music's most beloved artists. He has been Tenor of the Year four consecutive years at the Singing News Fan Awards. His television appearances include NBC's "Today Show" and "Prime Time Country." He has sung at Billy Graham crusades and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Now, after 10 years with one of gospel music's legendary groups, Ernie Haase has launched a solo career.

Haase moved into the hearts of fans as tenor for the Cathedrals. But his life might have taken a far different turn, if not for the encouragement of one Southwest Baptist University professor.

Haase was studying music at the private school in Bolivar, Mo., in the mid-1980s when the opportunity of a lifetime arose. "I knew that I wanted to be a gospel music artist," Haase recalled. "I told my voice teacher, Dr. Ted Harris, this very thing when I auditioned for him.

"Later, I had a choice to make -- stay in school or follow my dream. Dr. Harris is the only one who told me to go for it. He said if it did not work, I could always come back.

"Well, that was 15 years ago, and I still have not been back."

Harris, retired associate professor of voice, said he doesn't regret advising Haase to pursue his dream.

"It wasn't difficult to see he had greatness in that voice," Harris said.

"The first two or three notes I heard him sing, I thought, 'Wow, this voice is going to do something someday.'"

Haase first sang professionally with a group called Redeemed, headed by singer/songwriter Squire Parsons, before joining the Cathedrals in 1990.

"My 10 years with the Cathedrals were the best years of my life," Haase said. "The Lord gave me a wonderful opportunity to serve with veterans who knew how to follow the Lord's leading with class and dignity.

"They also taught me how to handle decisions in a musical market without using Madison Avenue thinking. They always sought the Lord and his promptings. I will carry this with me the rest of my career."

Haase's solo career includes appearances in churches and concert halls.

"One thing I learned from George Younce (former Cathedrals bass) and Glen Payne (the late lead singer for the Cathedrals) was never to try to open a door that is shut in your face," Haase said. "Follow the Lord's leading by going through the door that is before you. That is what I did with the solo decision.

"As the Cathedrals slowed down these last five years, I started getting invites from all different churches and concert promoters. So, I just walked through the open doors."

The open door to his solo career has led to his first post-Cathedrals recording, "Never Alone." Daywind Records vice president Norman Holland said: "Ernie Haase is a complete artist, successfully combining creativity, professionalism and ministry? 'Never Alone' effectively showcases the artist Ernie has become." His first CD, "What a Difference a Day Makes," was released during his Cathedrals days.

In addition to his solo career, Haase is joining a quartet comprising Jake Hess, George Younce and Wesley Pritchard to produce a new CD and schedule some concert dates.

Haase's concert plans also include some duet appearances with his father-in-law, George Younce. Ernie has been married to Younce's daughter, Lisa, for nine years.

"Lisa and I have no children, although she feels like she is still trying to raise me to full maturity," he said, laughing. "So I have no children, and Lisa has one child -- me!" Children are at the heart of a new ministry to which Haase is dedicating time. Along with four churches, Haase is hosting a basketball camp this summer for young people in grades 4-12. Former NBA all-star Mark Price is conducting the camp.

"His name is bringing in kids who know nothing about me and my music or about Christianity," Haase said. "We will present a world class camp with the simple gospel. I thank my Lord that after traveling all over this country ministering in song, that I will get to minister in my own backyard." Haase knows children can understand the gospel. "I was 5 years old when I came to know the Lord," he said. "It was simple and non-eventful. I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart, and He did."

While life is looking good for Ernie Haase, he doesn't forget his roots in Indiana or his time in Missouri at SBU.

"My SBU days opened my eyes to other people and their life experiences. I started writing songs when I attended SBU. I really believe the Lord sent me there to open up my way of thinking on how ministry and people connect."

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--EDITOR'S NOTE: CD cover of "Never Alone" and a promo pic of Ernie Haase are available to editors from Word and Way.

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