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**Texas megachurch dually aligns,
threatens to pull out of state group (revised)**

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story clarifies a final sentence that raised questions when the story originally appeared in ABP Aug. 10.

PLANO, Texas (ABP) -- A suburban Dallas megachurch has threatened to leave the Baptist General Convention of Texas unless the state group declares full support for the Southern Baptist Convention.

Members of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, voted July 23 to dually align with the new Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, a conservative group that supports SBC leadership but is at odds with moderate leaders of the 2.7 million-member BGCT.

A study committee identified eight "grave concerns" about the state convention, including a move last year to reject a family amendment to the SBC's "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement. Unless the state convention reverses that stand and affirms long-term support for all SBC ministries, the resolution said the church would likely drop its affiliation with the BGCT outright.

With more than 14,000 members, Prestonwood is among the largest SBC churches but is not currently a strong financial supporter of the BGCT. The state convention stands to lose about \$6,000 a year should the church sever ties, according to the Baptist Standard.

In addition, seven Prestonwood members serve as trustees of BGCT agencies. Should the church break ties with the state group, those trustees would be allowed to finish their current terms but could not be re-elected. Members of the church would be ineligible for future trustee elections.

NIV tops pastors' poll of favorite Bible version

PHOENIX (ABP) -- The New International Version emerged as the most popular Bible translation in a nationwide poll of Protestant ministers.

In a poll of more than 500 pastors of Protestant churches, 34 percent said they are most likely to rely on the NIV in their work. The traditional King James Version was favored by 24 percent of the pastors, followed by the New Revised Standard Version (17 percent), the New King James Version (10 percent) and the New American Standard (9 percent).

Other versions, including the New Living Translation, The Message, the Living Bible, the Contemporary English Version and the Amplified Bible, were each named by less than 2 percent of the pastors.

The survey, conducted by Ellison Research, a marketing-research company based in Phoenix, only asked pastors what version of the Bible they use for most of their work. It didn't ask them what is the "official" Bible of their church or denomination, what translations they own or what version they recommend to parishioners.

The type of Bible used varied by denomination. Pastors in mainline denominations favored the New Revised Version. Evangelicals favored the NIV, while Pentecostal and charismatic churches tended to prefer the King James Version.

A pastor's personal political stance also emerged as a factor in choice of a Bible translation. Among self-described political liberals, 71 percent preferred the New Revised Standard Version for their work. The NIV was top choice among political moderates, at 43 percent. Conservatives split equally between the NIV and King James, with 35 percent each.

A surprising find, said researcher Ron Sellers, is that the pastor's age has little to do with selection of a Bible translation. The average age of pastors who favor the King James Bible is 51, compared to 50 for those who prefer the NIV and 48 for each the New Revised Standard, New King James and New American Standard versions.

"The research exploded the myth held in some circles that older pastors cling to the traditional King James, while younger ministers prefer more contemporary versions," said Sellers, president of Ellison Research. "Just under half of the ministers who prefer the NIV are 50 years or older, and almost half of the pastors who rely on the King James are under the age of 50. Their preference has far more to do with theology, worldview and denominational background than with age."

The survey, funded and conducted independently by Ellison Research, included 518 working pastors in a variety of Protestant denominations in all 50 states. The margin of error was listed at 4.3 percent.

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-- By ABP staff

CBF preparing to launch benefits board for ministers

By John Pierce

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a 10-year-old moderate organization that already offers alternative missions, education and other church programs to disenfranchised Southern Baptists, is about to launch into a new area -- ministerial retirement.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship voted two years ago to develop plans for a benefits board to provide retirement and other employee services to related churches and organizations. As part of the budget approved at this summer's General Assembly, CBF allocated \$175,000 from reserve funds for administrative start-up costs of the new venture.

The Church Benefits Board, Inc., is scheduled to incorporate in September and begin receiving retirement contributions Oct. 1. It will be "a separate organization with a self-perpetuating board," said Gary Skeen, CBF coordinator of finance and administration since 1994. Skeen has laid the groundwork for the board, which will operate in partnership with The Ministers and Missionaries Benefits Board of the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

"By partnering with ABC we can bring to the table a fully mature benefits program that (otherwise) would have taken many years to develop," said Skeen, who is expected to be named president of a seven or eight-member governing board that will be comprised of persons with expertise in financial services.

As result of a ruling from the Internal Revenue Service, received by American Baptists in July, what is popularly called the "M&M Board" is now able to partner with other Baptist groups to provide employee services. According to a press release, the Alliance of Baptists was first to endorse the partnership, followed by CBF and The Progressive National Baptist Convention.

"We are pleased that (these three Baptist groups) have chosen MMBB as their provider of benefits and services," said Sumner Grant, the agency's executive director. "Their decision helps us fulfill our plan of increasing our asset base, lowering management fees, and creating a higher return for our members."

Skeen said early inquiries from CBF-related churches often involve transferring retirement funds from the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, where many ministers have invested for years. Skeen said the Annuity Board does a good job with investments, and he is not interested in creating fear about those funds. However, a simple process will be set up to handle transfers, he added.

"Once you join this program, then it's just a matter of filing the appropriate transfer of funds," said Skeen, adding that the transaction will be at no cost. He warned, however, that any decision relative to rollover or investment options should be done in consultation with a financial planner or investment options.

It's particularly important that ordained ministers keep at least some retirement funds in "a church plan" in order to gain tax benefits from a housing allowance, Skeen said. Both the Annuity Board and the new CBF Church Benefits Board qualify as "church plans."

Skeen said comparing the new CBF board with the Dallas-based Annuity Board is like "apples and oranges." The Southern Baptist program is much larger, even when compared to the entire M&M Board's 10,000 participants, 90 employees and \$2.5 billion in managed funds. The structure and administrative fees are also quite different, he said.

"They (Annuity Board) have about 12 investment choices, and we'll have eight various options," Skeen said. "And we'll charge (an administration fee of) 1 percent of annual contributions." The Annuity Board bases its fees on earnings, he said.

The basic plan to be offered by the CBF-related Church Benefits Board will be based on contributions of 10 percent of an employee's annual compensation. Seven percent will go into retirement, 1 percent will cover administrative fees and the remaining 2 percent will provide for disability and group term-life insurance, Skeen said. Medical coverage is also available but is subject to state and regional regulations, he added.

"It has become very difficult to operate a national medical insurance plan," said Skeen.

Professor stresses importance of fostering positive childhood

By Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Childhood experiences do not predetermine adult behavior, but they have a strong impact -- either for good or ill -- on what adults will become, says a Baptist university professor.

"Positive childhood experiences lead to solid character formation, psychological well-being and healthy relationships," said Gaynor Yancey, assistant professor in Baylor University's School of Social Work.

"A dysfunctional beginning can unleash an abundance of personal demons that haunt an individual for a lifetime," Yancey continued in remarks at a recent training conference sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union of Texas. "For better or worse, the child lives on in the adult."

Yancey said parents can help create positive childhood experiences by modeling and teaching conflict resolution and by fostering open communication.

Conflict management involves recognizing the source of a problem, getting the facts, defining the conflict, gathering ideas and discussing options that will lead to solutions, and then preparing a plan for implementation, Yancey explained.

Effective communication depends on a willingness to recognize the uniqueness of each family member, lower defenses, take the time to genuinely listen and take responsibility for individual thoughts, feelings and behaviors, she said.

As children learn to communicate with other family members, she continued, parents should also teach them the importance of communicating with God.

"Part of godly leadership is how you help your family start the day," Yancey said. "A spiritual quiet time is important, because God desires fellowship with me, Jesus deserves my attention, and it's necessary for a vital and growing relationship with Christ."

Healthy families learn both to pray together and serve together, Yancey said. A healthy Christian family is missions-minded and not just inwardly focused.

"A healthy family moves outside and outward to share the gospel," she said.

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Both women's ministries, WMU have place in church, speaker says

By Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Women's ministries that are focused on spiritual growth and service-oriented groups like Woman's Missionary Union both contribute to a church's health, according to a Texas WMU consultant.

Terri Dowell Ussery of Georgetown, Texas, compared the two emphases to breathing, which involves both inhaling and exhaling.

"But you can't inhale all the time, and you can't exhale all the time," Ussery said at a summer leadership training conference in Waco, Texas. "There is a rhythm that has to work together to help us be complete."

Ussery said women need both the spiritual nurturing that many find in women's ministries and the opportunities for service provided through WMU. She illustrated with a reference to the biblical sisters Mary and Martha, who were friends of Jesus.

"Martha is a big time doer," Ussery said, adding, "If you want the job done at church, WMU will do it."

Mary, meanwhile, "sits at the feet of Jesus, learning who he is and who she is in him," Ussery continued. "It's the difference between doing and being."

Instead of viewing women's ministries as competitive with WMU, Ussery challenged missions activists to view the Bible studies and fellowships as "preparing women's hearts to be ready to 'do.'"

Women's ministries provide effective entry points for women who are new believers or who come from another denomination, she said.

Rather than viewing the need-based women's programs as "self-centered," WMU workers should recognize that "these ministries are meeting a need for women where they are," she said.

"They may not be ready to begin ministry," she said. "Women's ministries can be base-level spiritual preparation to minister. Then WMU takes a disciplined woman and gives her an outlet for ministry."

As an established, structured organization with participants that may be more mature believers than those in loosely organized women's ministries, Ussery challenged WMU leaders to assume the role of "the big sister."

WMU can share helpful resources and introduce missions concepts into women's ministries, she said.

"Infuse every area of the church with missions awareness, missions involvement and missions education. Think outside the box. It doesn't have to be a Women on Missions group to be missions," she said.

Ussery encouraged WMU members to practice servant leadership and develop mentoring relationships with younger believers in women's ministries. "Younger women don't want your criticism," she said. "They don't even want suggestions. They want you to love them."

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Christian Women's Job Corps helps women build future

By Ken Camp

KERRVILLE, Texas (ABP) -- Some are unemployed single mothers with small children. Some are underemployed grandmothers. But all are women working toward a better life.

"We're seeing God's handprints all over this program," said Patty Crick, project director for the Christian Women's Job Corps in Kerrville, Texas.

Christian Women's Job Corps is a ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention auxiliary Woman's Missionary Union. The program helps low-income women learn life and job skills in a Christian context.

"They're learning self-sufficiency one step at a time," Crick said. Eight women, ages 21 to 60, graduated from Kerrville's first Christian Women's Job Corps class in May. Two earned high-school equivalency diplomas.

The Kerrville Christian Women's Job Corps is one of 14 such programs in Texas alone. It offers a full-scale daytime program. It meets five days a week in the storefront facility of New Hope Baptist Fellowship, where Crick's husband is pastor.

Each day begins with breakfast and a morning Bible study. The daily curriculum includes computer instruction, communications, money matters, family and childcare, health and nutrition.

To help working women stuck in low-paying jobs, the ministry also offers night classes in computer skills and a Bible study.

"There is so much healing going on through the Bible studies," Crick said. "That's where the transformation takes place inwardly. The skills they learn help them deal with outward circumstances, but the real change takes place in the heart.

"Their outward circumstances may be one crisis after another, but God's word becomes ingrained in their hearts."

By the end of the semester, all eight members of the first Kerrville graduating class had started attending church. Half participated in a women's Bible study.

Graduates of the weekday program receive letters of reference and a certificate of completion from Christian Women's Job Corps. Night class students receive a certificate of merit from the Christian Women's Job Corps technology program.

Just prior to graduation, participants in Christian Women's Job Corps are treated to a "pamper me" day at a beauty salon. They also take a field trip to several San Antonio thrift stores. Participants are given \$25, along with helpful hints about how to put together a wardrobe suitable for job interviews.

Twenty-three volunteers worked as teachers or mentors with the Kerrville program during the spring semester. Other volunteers from Baptist churches in the area prepared and served home-cooked noon meals.

The nutritious meals are served family style, allowing students to refine social graces as they eat alongside the volunteers. Meals are never served on paper plates, and participants wash their own dishes, underscoring the idea of self-reliance and individual responsibility.

"We always set an open space at the table for anyone who walks in the door," Crick said.

Women come to Christian Women's Job Corps from a variety of backgrounds. Some have been victims of spousal abuse. Some have husbands who are in prison. Some are unmarried.

"They come here looking, searching for something," said Crick, who relates to them from her own experience growing up in a dysfunctional home with a suicidal, alcoholic mother.

"When they come here and I sit down across the table from them, I'm able to look them in the eye and say, 'I understand.'"

Jean, a 60-year-old May graduate of Christian Women's Job Corps, had worked for years as a licensed vocational nurse. That career ended when an injury left her unable to do heavy lifting.

When she came to Christian Women's Job Corps, Jean had been living in a trailer home for three months without a refrigerator, hot water or electricity. The ministry helped her secure a refrigerator and got her utilities restored.

After graduating from the program, Jean got a job as the nurse at a Christian camp.

"Christian Women's Job Corps turned her life around," Crick said. "She went from completely hopeless to having hope."

Another May graduate left Christian Women's Job Corps with a clear sense of direction. "I'm going to get a bookkeeping job until I can go to school and get an accounting degree and become a CPA," said Robin. "That's been my plan since I was in the ninth grade."

Somewhere along the line, however, Robin lost sight of that plan. She is the mother a 2-year-old, and her husband is serving a prison term in California.

But Christian Women's Job Corps has helped Robin get her dream back on track. After graduation, she went to work as bookkeeper and secretary for a construction company.

After the first semester, Crick realized that one of the great needs of unemployed young women was quality childcare. Christian Women's Job Corps started a childcare program for women in the program during the summer semester, using the preschool facility of a neighboring church. A job corps graduate was hired as day care director.

The summer program drew 10 women for the evening computer program and eight for the weekday program. They ranged in age from 21 to 65 years old.

While Christian Women's Job Corps is sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union and supported by Texas Baptists, the Kerrville program draws volunteers from various denominations. Partners in Ministry, an organization headed by Bill Blackburn, former pastor of Kerrville's Trinity Baptist Church, helped the program secure computer equipment.

"It's just wonderful to see the churches coming together, being Jesus in the flesh," Crick said. "That's what it's all about."

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