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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story replaces and clarifies an earlier version that ran under a different headline in Tuesday's issue. It was posted yesterday on the Internet and sent early to e-mail subscribers.

**CBF seeking to communicate
contrast to SBC, leader says**

By Brenda Sanders

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- While Cooperative Baptist Fellowship leader Daniel Vestal has resisted calling the movement a "denomination," the moderate group must build an identity that more clearly distinguishes it from the Southern Baptist Convention, he said Aug. 29.

From its beginning, people have asked if CBF is a denomination, Vestal said at a "Baptist dialogue" panel discussion during a daylong centennial celebration at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

"I have resisted that title," Vestal said. "I have said we are 'denomination-like' in that we provide services that an organized structure, which we have traditionally called a convention or a denomination, have provided."

Now, however, Vestal said he senses "a great yearning" among Fellowship supporters "for us to define ourselves and to separate more clearly from the Southern Baptist Convention."

"I'm not afraid of using the 'D-word,' but I guess I'm more comfortable in saying we are a fellowship that functions like a denomination," Vestal said. "I guess I have bought into the reality that we are living in a post-denominational world."

"Yet, in the life of CBF, there is this great yearning out there for a more clearly defined organizational structure that differentiates us from SBC -- even from (American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.) or other Baptist

organizations," he said. "And I think CBF is going to have to deal with that this year. I don't think it's something that we can avoid."

Seminary student Bud Adams asked Vestal and fellow panelist, American Baptist Churches president Trinette McCray, to explain a relationship between CBF and ABC that he described as "two people who are dancing together but not holding hands."

McCray, a campus minister and director of multi-cultural relations for Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, responded first. "I think that the world has enough confusion in and of itself and that the church need not add to that confusion, which would make it even more difficult for us to reach that world with the gospel," she said. "I think that the 'dance' that we may be engaged in with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship might be that grace-hand of God that is keeping us from adding to that world of confusion."

"Where we can find that both of our purposes for mission and ministry are advanced by working together, we are finding ways that we are able to do that," she continued. "Because we have some differences, it doesn't have to keep us from working together on those things we hold in common."

Vestal agreed: "I've discovered that between moderate Southern Baptists -- which has been the lion's share of the CBF's constituency -- and American Baptists there's an awful lot of affinity. There's a tremendous amount of identity, such as commitment to theological education, to racial inclusivity, to gender balance, to the local church."

"Those of us in leadership feel a tremendous amount of affection for ABC and we want very much to find ways to explore relationships, partnering and cooperation," Vestal said.

One tangible way that CBF and ABC are working together, he pointed out, is through the CBF's recent endorsement of retirement-benefit plans for ministers and employees of churches with the American Baptist Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board. In addition, through partnering for some church starts; joint conferences at the American Baptist Assembly in Green Lake, Wis.; and mutual support for Central Seminary, he said: "There are some very practical, structural, tangible ways that partnering has started. My hope is that we deepen that and find ways to explore that."

When asked what each organization could learn from the other, McCray responded, "We might learn courage from CBF -- what it means to see the need, to seize the moment, to find perhaps that time that God decided, either through controversy or otherwise, to cut into our affairs and have the courage to strike out onto a new path."

American Baptists are "rooted in our years, in our longevity," she said. "Sometimes, that can become a hindrance to the new directions and progress that God wants to make for God's world."

"From CBF we can see that when you walk out into deep waters, it's good to walk out," she emphasized, "when you just have a vision and hope that there is something in that next place that you see the hand of God directing you to."

Vestal noted: "What energizes me personally and causes me some degree of envy with the ABC is the diversity they have -- it's black, brown white; it's male, female; it's laity, clergy -- in a much more distinct way."

"At CBF gatherings, it's pretty much all white folks," he said. "I do think we are breaking through in clergy-laity and male-female in terms of leadership, but we have so much to learn in CBF about reflecting the richness of the Body of Christ."

David May, associate professor of New Testament at Central Seminary, asked: "What is a concern, problem or weakness unique to ABC and CBF, and what is one that you think you have in common?"

Vestal responded: "For CBF, I think we try to do too many things. Our expectations exceed our resources and ability to perform. When moderate Southern Baptists get together, we will address every human problem in the world, all the theological issues, all the human concerns -- then we leave convinced that we're going to meet them all tomorrow, and we can't do that."

He continued: "We don't think strategically. We don't budget strategically. We don't plan strategically. We think we can do everything.

"And I don't think we can. We have to be realistic about what we can and can't do. That's hard to do, because if you choose to do one thing, it means you can't do something else."

Considering a shared challenge of the two Baptist groups, Vestal said, "To be honest, as I look at ABC, I guess I don't see ABC churches and folks being really aggressively evangelistic. They don't win a lot of people to Jesus.

"However, having said that, I don't see most moderate Southern Baptist churches being aggressively evangelistic," he continued. "We're not really passionate about the gospel changing people's lives. We're ... more oriented to political correctness and relevancy.

"To be candid, I see that as a problem that both ABC and moderate Southern Baptists share."

McCray said she would rather answer the question, "What hurts my heart the most?" about American Baptists. "That would be the fragmentation that is occurring within our denomination. There are areas where we are deciding to 'move the house,' but in doing so, we are moving it off the foundations."

Both Vestal and McCray said they are open to exploring further options for intentional partnering together and with other Baptist groups, as well.

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Historic D.C. church to install new pastor

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C., has scheduled a ceremonial installation of a new pastor Sept. 17.

James Somerville, who for the last nine years has been pastor of Wingate Baptist Church in Wingate, N.C., assumed the prestigious pastorate in the nation's capital in July.

Founded in 1802, the church is located a few blocks from the White House. Presidents Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter were active members of the congregation.

Daniel Vestal, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, is scheduled to participate with others in the 2 p.m. service that is open to the public. Officials from a variety of Baptist and ecumenical organizations, as well as government leaders, are expected to attend.

Somerville was born in 1959 in Selma, Ala. He studied at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire before attending Georgetown College in Kentucky. He earned both the master-of-divinity and doctor-of-philosophy degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He is married to the former Christine Treadwell. They have two daughters, Eleanor and Catherine, who are enrolled in D.C. public schools.

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-- By ABP staff

Vatican terms RCC the only 'true' church

(ABP) -- The Vatican issued a declaration Sept. 5 describing the Roman Catholic Church as the only "true" church and other faiths, like Baptists, as "deficient."

The 36-page "Declaration Dominus Iesus" ("On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church") expressed "sincere respect" for other religions but attacked "religious relativism which leads to the belief that one religion is as good as another."

While the various religious traditions "contain and offer religious elements which come from God," the declaration says, they cannot be regarded as complete or "salvific" ways to eternal life.

The Catholic Church "is the universal sacrament of salvation," the statement says. Christian groups that reject papal authority and the sacraments "are not Churches in the proper sense," the statement says. People baptized in those communions are nevertheless "incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church."

The statement, issued at a Vatican news conference by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, drew criticism in some circles.

Jerry Rankin, president of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, issued a statement saying in part, "Salvation comes by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and Christ alone -- not through any institutional church body, be it Baptist, Catholic or otherwise."

Another prominent Baptist, however, who has been criticized for taking part in ecumenical efforts with Roman Catholics, said he welcomes the Vatican document as demonstrating that groups can work together without compromising core convictions.

"We certainly do not agree on the role of the papacy, and this remains a barrier to full Christian unity," said Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University. "But evangelicals believe that God is able to work in, with and under faulty structures to bring lost men and women into a personal, saving relationship with Jesus Christ."

"While only God can read anyone's heart, I dare to say that there are countless Roman Catholics who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, just as there are no doubt many Southern Baptists who have been duly dunked but are still spiritually dead."

"There is no place for either Catholic-baiting or Baptist-bashing among true believers in Jesus," George said.

Some have criticized George and other Southern Baptist leaders for participating in a controversial "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" dialogue a few years back. More recently, criticism has turned to joint evangelistic work with other groups, such as the Mission 2000 umbrella organization targeting American cities.

The SBC Executive Committee is scheduled to consider Sept. 18-19 a motion referred by the Southern Baptist Convention to study the use of denominational funds in joint efforts with groups "whose beliefs conflict with the witness of Southern Baptists."

In March, Southern Baptist seminary president Albert Mohler said on CNN's "Larry King Live," that the Roman Catholic Church "is a false church and teaches a false gospel" and that "the pope himself holds a false and unbiblical office."

Voucher support declines, says annual Gallup poll

By Jeff Huett

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Support for school vouchers is waning, with a majority of Americans now opposing the use of public funds to pay tuition at private schools, according to a recent survey.

Americans believe the biggest problem facing the nation's public schools is inadequate funding, according to poll results released Aug. 21. Phi Delta Kappa, a professional education organization, conducted the survey in conjunction with the Gallup Organization, a polling firm based in Princeton, N.J.

Fifty-two percent of those surveyed said they oppose "allowing parents to send their children to a private, or church-related school with the government paying all or part of the tuition." Meanwhile, 45 percent favor school vouchers, according to the survey. Those figures are reversed from last year's survey, in which 51 percent supported and 47 percent opposed vouchers.

More than three-fourths (76 percent) said if private or church-related schools accept funds from the government, they should be accountable to the state in the same way as public schools.

Most respondents remain in favor of reforming the existing school system rather than creating an alternative system. However, the percentage in favor of reforming public schools slipped from 71 percent in 1999 to 59 percent this year.

However, when asked to choose between "improving and strengthening the existing public schools or providing vouchers for parents to use in selecting and paying for private and/or church-related schools," 75 percent of respondents said they would rather improve public schools.

"The respondents to both questions this year make it clear that a majority of the public expects improvement in student achievement to come through the public schools," Lowell Rose and Alec Gallup wrote in a summary of the 32nd annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll.

In a question new to this year's poll, respondents indicated that parents have a greater effect than schools, teachers or students themselves on student achievement. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated parents had the greatest responsibility, with teachers drawing 26 percent of the responses.

"These findings may go a long way toward explaining why the public does not seem inclined to blame the public schools when students have difficulty achieving satisfactory levels of learning," the pollsters wrote in summary.

In another line of questioning unique to this year's survey, randomly selected Americans were asked about school improvement and the political parties. When faced with the question, "Which of the political parties is more interested in improving public education in this country -- the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?" 41 percent of respondents answered the Democrats, compared to 29 percent for the Republicans.

If compelled to vote "solely on a desire to strengthen public schools," however, respondents were split between presidential candidates George W. Bush and Al Gore. Bush garnered 38 percent of responses, compared to Gore's 37 percent.

When asked if "knowing that a candidate for national office supports vouchers for parents to use to pay for private schools" would make them more or less likely to vote for a candidate, 44 percent of respondents said it would make them less likely to vote for the candidate. Forty-one percent indicated it would make them more likely to vote for the candidate.

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-- Jeff Huett in working as an intern at the Baptist Joint Committee.

Baylor student to compete in 'Jeopardy' college tourney

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- A student at Baptist-affiliated Baylor University in Waco, Texas, has been picked for an upcoming college championship on the popular television show "Jeopardy."

Rob Schickler, a senior from Arlington, Va., will be among 15 college students scheduled to compete at a two-week tournament to be taped Sept. 15-16 in Seattle. It is scheduled for broadcast nationally beginning Nov. 8.

Schickler, who has a double major in business and journalism, tried out for the show during a stop in Austin. He received a phone call in August telling him he had been selected.

Schickler, who will compete against students from schools including Harvard, Dartmouth and Vanderbilt, could win up to \$50,000 and a new car, along with a chance to advance to the show's "tournament of champions."

"It will be a great experience," said Schickler, who has been brushing up on his Shakespeare and other literature, geography and history. "I've been a big fan of the show and watched the high school and college tournaments. Hopefully, I'll do well, not only for myself but for Baylor."

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-- By Baylor News Service

Baptist woman reports on 10-months in Kosovo

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- For Debbie Rouse, a short-term mission trip to Albania last summer turned into a 10-month stint in war-torn Kosovo. She helped relocate refugees, distribute food, teach English to children using the Bible and to comfort women who lost sons and husbands in the war.

"God burdened my heart last year for the women and children of Kosovo," said Rouse, a member of Midway Road Baptist Church in Dallas, who worked as a volunteer with Texas Baptist Men from last October through mid-August.

When refugees returned to their bombed out homes in Kosovo, Rouse relocated with them to the Baptist Center in Peje, operated by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.

She worked with Baptists from Texas, Tennessee and Georgia and joined with the European Baptist Convention and others in providing food, clothing, shelter, wood-burning stoves and more than 38,000 blankets to help the Kosovars through a bitterly cold winter. Texas Baptist Men sent several teams to rebuild or put roofs back on houses.

Baptists were not alone in offering relief to the Kosovars, Rouse noted. Other non-governmental organizations also provided emergency humanitarian aid.

"The people in Kosovo said, 'The difference in what the Baptists did is that they came and listened to us,'" Rouse said. "That's what they needed more than anything. They needed to tell their story."

For more than 10 months, she listened. As she earned their respect and friendship, she in turn shared with them the story of Jesus.

"The women would bring out pictures of the sons and husbands they had lost. We just loved on them and cried together," she said.

In addition to helping missionaries with food distribution, Rouse assembled and distributed gift bags especially for women. Along with lotions and feminine-hygiene items, each kit included a Bible and Christian literature.

Rouse remembered one woman who told her: "I have the Koran in my living room, but I keep the Bible in my bedroom. I read it at night when I cannot sleep, and that is often. It gives me so much comfort."

In the past year, a small but strong Christian community has begun to grow in Peje, Rouse noted.

One member of that community is Esat, a former Olympic athlete who worked alongside Texas Baptist Men in Albania providing refugee relief but was resolute in maintaining his identity as a Muslim.

Though his wife is still a follower of Islam, Esat is now a leader of the church at Peje. When Baptist volunteers put a new roof on his bombed out home, he in turn gave the house to the church so that volunteer teams would have lodging.

Rouse shared a prayer list from a recent service at the Baptist Center in Peje in which Esat's request was "that we can have more believers from my town (and) that they will see the light."

Another church member's request was "that my husband will find a job and I can build my house, because I am living in a basement."

As the rebuilding effort continued over the past year, later Baptist volunteers also helped Rouse lead a vacation Bible school and built an outdoor basketball court for the local elementary school.

On the first day of vacation Bible school, 42 children ages six to 12 attended. By Friday morning, 120 children were present, and a total of 140 different children attended at some point during the five-day Bible school.

During the Cedar of Lebanon prayer retreat on Labor Day weekend, an annual spiritual renewal event sponsored by Texas Baptist Men at Mt. Lebanon Baptist Encampment, Rouse displayed paintings that the children completed in vacation Bible school.

The joyful, sunny pictures painted in bright primary colors were in stark contrast to some of the dark and somber pictures that the children had drawn a few months earlier, she noted.

Rouse showed a photo of one 6-year-old, Saida Skenderi, who wrote the following note: "I like to go to school and to play with my friends. I want to thank the people who gave me books, crayons and the rest things (provided by Samaritan's Purse). I love all people and children of the world. I would like to have happy childhood. I want to learn to speak English. I believe in God and I love Jesus."

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