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**SBC seminary presidents
decry Texas funding proposal**

By Bob Allen and Ferrell Foster

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (ABP) -- The presidents of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries swiftly condemned a Texas Baptist proposal to dramatically reduce funding to their schools.

The proposal, which would base funding to SBC seminaries on the number of Texas students they enroll, would mean "the effective end" of the 75-year-old Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified funding plan, the council of seminary presidents said in a statement issued Sept. 11.

The Texas funding proposal is still being finalized, but its basic framework became public at a meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas administrative committee Sept. 8. If approved, it would cut Texas funding of SBC seminaries from about \$5.3 million to a maximum of \$1 million a year and redirect funds to three schools owned by the BGCT.

Of the six SBC schools, only Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, enrolls large numbers of Texas students, meaning the other five would be for all practical purposes defunded. Even Southwestern would lose, however, receiving \$875,000 next year compared to the \$1.5 million Texas Baptists now provide the school.

In a 900-word statement, the seminary presidents used strong terms to denounce the Texas proposal. Calling it "a repudiation of the Cooperative Program," they said the plan's "underlying motive is hostility" and that its effect would be to harm students.

"The Cooperative Program is an agreement between the SBC and the state conventions," the presidents said. "No state convention has the right to redefine this agreement unilaterally. The proposed BGCT action is a dagger thrust at the heart of the Cooperative Program. This is a sad day for all Southern Baptists, and a great tragedy for the BGCT."

The seminary presidents claimed that a Texas committee making the proposal "did not conduct a serious study of our seminaries" and that its findings "lack merit and misrepresent our schools."

"Evidently, the BGCT leadership is completely uninterested in and uncommitted to the support of theological education for anyone other than Texans and BGCT Texans at that," the presidents said. "Their Great Commission horizon apparently ends at the Texas border."

Defending the proposal against critics, however, BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade said it is designed to "fund fully the Texas Baptist seminaries who will honor historic Baptist principles as they prepare young men and women" for ministry.

"These men and women will be ambassadors of Christ not only in Texas but around the world," Wade said. "Our vision is nothing less than the Great Commission -- from Texas to the world."

Wade noted that the Texas convention has continued to support the national Cooperative Program generously through two decades when the broad base of Texas Baptist leadership was excluded from decision-making in the SBC.

"The proposals of the seminary study committee come only after years of SBC unwillingness to hear the concerns of many Texas Baptists regarding the actions of seminary trustees and administrations," Wade said.

Mike Chancellor, vice chairman of the committee, said part of cooperation involves participation in decision making. "The Cooperative Program is about sending dollars, but it's also about stewardship in the spending of the dollars," he said.

Bob Campbell, chairman of the study committee, said the six SBC seminaries "have broken faith with a large portion of Southern Baptists."

The Houston pastor said current SBC leaders have "narrowed their trustee boards to reflect only one viewpoint" and therefore do not reflect the diversity of Texas Baptists.

Campbell said the same is true of the schools' faculties. "They're hiring only one kind of faculty, ... only those faculty who agree with their narrow theological interpretation of Scripture and are politically correct within the conservative resurgence."

Campbell said the committee was not driven by anger but by "legitimate concern" regarding theological, philosophical and financial changes at the seminaries.

Other critics weighing in on the Texas study-committee proposal included Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. In a statement posted on the seminary's Web site, Mohler decried the plan as a "cold and calculated move designed to sever the historic ties between the Baptists of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention."

"The defunding of the seminaries is a radical proposal with a transparent political agenda," Mohler continued. "The BGCT study committee declined the opportunity to conduct a genuine study of our institutions. Had they done so, they would have been forced to affirm the integrity and quality of our work and programs."

Morris Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, urged Southern Baptists in Texas to attend the state convention this fall and vote against the proposal.

"Tragically, anti-SBC leaders in the BGCT are now prepared to make the kind of recommendations that have the potential to cause hard feelings among Southern Baptists in Texas and split churches all across the state of Texas," Chapman told Baptist Press.

In their joint statement, the seminary presidents said the plan could backfire on Texas Baptist leaders if local churches apply similar logic.

"The BGCT claims that needs at home require that fewer dollars be sent on to national and international causes," the presidents said. "Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument will spell the end of the BGCT. Why should local churches not keep the money even closer to home? The BGCT leaders' hostility to the SBC is leading them to take actions injurious to their own cause and to the cause of the gospel."

Campbell, the study-committee chairman, countered critics of the plan. "We're not repudiating the Cooperative Program," he said. "Just as the SBC has made changes in the Cooperative Program, we also feel the need to make changes."

Campbell said Texas Baptists for years have had a "cooperative spirit, funding more than just Texans." But he said the quality of education at the six SBC schools is not at the same level it has been in the past.

"It is extremely difficult to continue to fund the seminaries with the radical changes they have made," Campbell said. "However, we do not want to abandon our sons and daughters who have gone to these schools in good faith. Although our loyalty to these institutions has changed, our love and concern for the students has not changed."

The SBC seminary presidents, however, said they believe most Southern Baptists would support changes made at their schools.

"We are proud of our seminaries, proud of our students, proud of our faculties, and proud to serve Southern Baptists," they said in their statement. "Something far more important than money is at stake in this proposal. Our convictions are not up for sale. Faithfulness to the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention; faithfulness to the Bible as 'truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter;' and faithfulness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ are far more important than finances."

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CBF offers disaster relief to Indian flood victims

ATLANTA (ABP) -- In response to recent flooding in south central India that left 62 Banjara Gypsy (Romany) families homeless, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has allocated \$5,000 toward emergency relief and established a fund for additional contributions from individuals and churches.

Destructive floods swept through northern India over the past two months, followed by four days of torrential rains that caused flooding in southern India as well. The floods left thousands of residents homeless in Hyderabad, capital of the state of Andra Pradesh.

Approximately 100,000 Gypsies live in the capital and its twin city -- Secunderabad -- hometown of CBF missionaries Sam and Latha Bandela, who serve as international coordinators for unreached people groups in North India.

The CBF global-missions allocation will provide immediate relief for those families displaced from a Banjara slum in Secunderabad. "They are people who were living on government lands as squatters right on the side of a sewage canal," explained CBF missionary James Francovich. "With the high waters, all their huts were washed away." The funds will help rebuild huts and provide clothes, food and cooking utensils.

CBF missionaries James and Robbi Francovich, who serve as strategy coordinators in Secunderabad among the Banjara Gypsies, have worked for more than two years with the families recently affected by the flood.

Currently on home assignment in Texas, the Francoviches are scheduled to return to India in December. They plan to use any additional funds raised to work with the Indian government and Banjara community for long-term improvements for the slum area which could be subject to future flooding because of its location. The couple asks that people pray specifically for those in the flood area and for all Gypsy people.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To contribute to the relief efforts, make checks payable to CBF, marked "India Flood Relief," and mail to: CBF, P.O. Box 101699, Atlanta, GA 30392.

-- By CBF communications staff

International seminary publishing new journal

(ABP) -- An international Baptist seminary in the Czech Republic is introducing a new journal on Baptists in Europe.

The "Journal of European Baptist Studies" will be published by the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, an institution owned by the European Baptist Federation. It will be printed three times a year and available for purchase by subscription or individual copy, according to a press release.

"In the past 10 years there have been massive changes in Europe," said Ian Randall, the seminary's academic dean who edited the first issue. "This journal will have as one of its concerns a European-wide dialogue between Baptists and others which will engage the different traditions from which we draw -- Eastern, Central, Southern and Western European."

IBTS Rector Keith Jones predicted the journal, which is in English, would "make a significant contribution to the developing of the thinking and action of European Baptists."

Articles in the premiere issue include "Rethinking Baptist Ecclesiology," written by Jones; "Hungarian Baptist Beginnings" by Istvan Gergely, an official in the Convention of Hungarian Baptist Churches in Romania; and "East and West: A Theological Conversation" by Parush Parushev, a Bulgarian who works at IBTS as director of applied theology.

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-- By ABP staff

EDITOR'S NOTE: Subscriptions will be \$10 a year in Europe and the Middle East and \$15 in the United States. Individual copies will be mailed for \$6. The journal will be sold at the seminary's bookstore in Prague. Subscription forms are available by e-mail from Denise@ibts.cz

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