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**Midwestern trustees reject
merger/relocation suggestion**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have reaffirmed Kansas City, Mo., as their ministry base, rebuffing rumors that the school might relocate to another state.

A trustee campus planning and building committee drafted a resolution Oct. 7 affirming the 43-year-old seminary's vision to impact the Midwest and Great Plains region.

The statement, which was approved by the trustees' executive committee, is scheduled for presentation to the full board at a regular meeting Oct. 16-17.

Committee chairman Reagan Bradford of Edmund, Okla., said the resolution was partly in response to rumors that Midwestern might merge with another Southern Baptist seminary and relocate outside of the Kansas City area. Colorado Springs, Denver and Las Vegas were mentioned as possible sites.

While some individuals have talked about a number of possibilities, Bradford said: "This was the first time our trustees have talked about this idea. We felt the need to speak quickly and clearly that we believe God has placed this seminary in Kansas City by choice, not by chance. Our passion for prairie fire in the Midwest/Great Plains has not gone out. We have no intention of changing that."

Board chairman Carl Weiser of Lynchburg, Va., said, trustees are "considering a number of new possibilities," including building a new campus in Kansas City. Weiser said the merger and relocation idea is one of many suggestions that trustees have received. "After thinking about it, we do not see the possibility of a merger or relocation for all the reasons set out in the resolution," Weiser said.

The resolution reads in part:

"Having prayerfully considered the suggestion that MBTS merge with another seminary and relocate the main campus outside the Midwest, the executive committee of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary respectfully rejects the suggested merger and relocation as being neither desirable nor feasible. The board of Midwestern Seminary is fully devoted to the vision and mission of theological education in the Midwest, based in Kansas City, as assigned by the Southern Baptist Convention. We believe this is God's will for MBTS.

"The board of Midwestern Seminary is enthusiastic about the accomplishments of our faculty and students in advancing our mission to the Heartland from the Kansas City campus. Midwestern's current student growth, faculty strength and financial health are positive indicators that provide every reason for thanksgiving and no reason for worry about the future of theological education in Kansas City. We are always willing to consider new opportunities, strategies or partnerships with other SBC agencies, wherever the Lord leads. We believe the Lord wants Midwestern to maintain her focus on the Midwest/Great Plains region of the United States while also maintaining a heart for the world."

The resolution directs the campus planning and building committee "to continue to study and pursue opportunities for real-estate development and construction of facilities in Kansas City, which will enhance our growth and our mission accomplishment in the Midwest and around the world."

The resolution says the decision not to seek a merger does not imply "disapproval of any sister seminary."

"We welcome every opportunity for new partnerships and cooperation that will help each seminary to accomplish its unique mission," the resolution says.

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-- From Word and Way

Old O'Hair/FCC hoax finds new life on Internet

By Sarah Griffith

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A decades-old hoax about a well-known atheist seeking a ban on religious broadcasting has caught up with the information age.

The urban legend about religion and the FCC has circulated through the mail and word of mouth since 1975. It re-emerged recently as an e-mail hoax focusing on the CBS program "Touched by an Angel."

"CBS will be forced to discontinue 'Touched By an Angel' for using the word GOD in every program," reads the e-mail hoax. "[The] petition, number 2493, would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, on the airwaves of America."

The hoax asserts self-proclaimed atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair and her organization have received "287,000 signatures" with a petition that will "ultimately" ban religious programming.

"Sunday worship services being broadcast on the radio or by television will be stopped," reads the e-mail. "This group is also campaigning to remove all Christmas programs and Christmas carols from public schools! You as a Christian can help!"

O'Hair has been missing and presumed dead since 1995, according to About.com's "Urban Legends" Web page.

The petition, "routinely assigned the number RM-2493," was in fact not filed by O'Hair but by Jeremy D. Lansman and Lorenzo W. Milam in 1974, according to the FCC.

RM-2493 asked the FCC to explore operating practices of religious stations. It also asked that no new requests for licenses be granted to religious stations until after the completion of the FCC inquiry.

The Lansman-Milam petition was denied on Aug. 1, 1975, according to the FCC.

Because of millions of inquiries inspired by the hoax during two decades of circulation, the FCC has published information about laws regarding religious broadcasting in newspapers, religious publications, TV Guide and Time magazine.

"There is no federal law or regulation that gives the FCC the authority to prohibit radio and television stations from presenting religious programs," according to the FCC "Consumer Facts" Web page. "Broadcasters, not the FCC nor any other governmental agency, have the responsibility for selecting the programming that is aired by their stations."

Such hoaxes cause unnecessary traffic for organizations like the FCC, wrote David Emery in an article for About.com.

"E-mail hoaxes have become so prevalent that they're regarded in some quarters as a threat to network integrity comparable to that of actual computer viruses," wrote Emery. "The threat posed to individual users is less dramatic, but in these days of ever-increasing spam people are getting fed up with the amount of garbage clogging their inboxes."

The hoaxes survive because of "new and inexperienced users unfamiliar with Netiquette and unaware of how rampant misinformation is on the Internet," wrote Emery.

He suggested that computer users become familiar with anti-hoax resources and have "cut-and-paste templates" ready to send in answer to e-mail hoaxes.

"There are few solutions at this point beyond redoubling our efforts to expand awareness and change people's habits," Emery wrote.

Cliff Vaughn, project coordinator for the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., also suggested thinking twice before forwarding e-mail.

"Don't assume your friends always pass along legitimate stories," Vaughn said. "While no deception may be intended, all of us, at some point, probably contribute to the vast wasteland of misinformation. Before asking friends to attach their names and pass e-letters on, take some time to investigate."

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Baptist layman ministers amid western wildfires

By Shawn Hendricks

POPLAR BLUFF, Mo. (ABP) -- Breathing smoke, walking for miles on blistered feet in the August heat, sleeping under the stars. These are just a few of the memories Bud Fritz has of traveling out West to help firefighters in a summer when some of the worst recorded forest fires burned. And fighting fires wasn't even why Fritz wanted to go.

For Fritz, a member of First Baptist Church in Poplar Bluff, Mo., traveling deep into the hills around Scipio, Utah, and Salmon, Idaho, was all about forming relationships and ministering to his fire team from Mingo Job Corps in Puxico, Mo. As a 14-year Job Corps educator, Fritz has had many opportunities to share his Christian faith with young people, most from difficult backgrounds.

The fire team's responsibility was to go into areas that had burned, clean them up and put out any small fires still burning. Fritz talked to team members while waiting for firefighters to clear an area.

On most days, the team awoke at 5:30 a.m. and returned around 10 p.m. Many firefighters carried 65-pound packs during long hikes through the wilderness. "There are going to be times when you want to quit," Fritz said.

Being away from his wife, Gayla, and two children made the trip even harder. Fritz said prayer support from his church meant a lot.

Bill Vail, pastor of First Baptist Church, Poplar Bluff, said church members were naturally concerned about Fritz's safety. "Anybody would be concerned when someone goes to fight a fire, but we felt like he was in God's hands," Vail said. "He does a great job with the kids he works with at Mingo."

Since returning, Fritz said, several fire team members have gone to church with him. "They've been coming pretty regularly. I hope they continue to come."

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Songwriters often hidden talent in Christian music industry

By Stacey Hamby

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Songwriters put the pen to the lyrics that people love. But with their names only in small print on the inside of CD covers, songwriters often take a back seat to the groups and soloists who make their songs popular. Even in the music industry, it takes years to become a sought-after songwriter.

Dove Award-winning songwriter Joel Lindsey said that few people focus on writing Christian songs as their sole career. Like him, most have other jobs or ministries, often within the music industry. Lindsey is manager for recording artist Janet Paschal.

Because of the high volume of songs and the limited number of cuts on albums, competition can be stiff and even discouraging for new songwriters.

"I was told there is so much competition out there," recalled Margene Betts about her start in songwriting five years ago. "But I could feel the call on my life to write songs. It's a ministry, like preaching or singing is."

Betts, a member of Calvary Baptist Church in Blue Springs, Mo., has had several Southern gospel groups record her songs, including The Ruppes, who did "Mine Eyes Have Seen His Glory." But she said it's not easy to get a song recorded.

"I find out when they're recording and try to determine if my songs match their music style -- traditional, country, progressive, contemporary," she said. "I ask them to listen to a demo tape, and I give them my lyrics to look over.

"And I pray about it every step of the way."

Hundreds of songwriters take Betts' approach of presenting songs to groups for consideration. Then they wait.

Some writers, however, sign with publishers to write exclusively for them. Then publishers market the songs.

Others belong to groups that record their songs. That's an advantage, said Rodney Griffin of the gospel group Greater Vision. He was voted Songwriter of the Year at the 2000 Singing News Fan Awards during the recent National Quartet Convention in Louisville, Ky.

"There are so many tremendously gifted songwriters who are here this week who will never be known because they don't sing in a group, or their songs don't get recorded," he said.

"By winning this award, it doesn't mean my songs are any better than anyone else's; it just means mine are more exposed. Others with the same opportunity will get the same result."

Griffin's song, "Just One More Soul," recorded by Greater Vision, was named Song of the Year at the fan awards.

Writing songs takes time and patience. Great songs don't often happen as a sudden revelation in the middle of the night.

"That's a common idea -- that we just wake up in the night and write a whole song," said Lindsey, who has written such popular songs as "He Made a Change" recorded by The Cathedrals and "Shall We Gather at the River" recorded by Point of Grace. "But usually if that happens, we wake up with an idea for a song."

Then comes the hard work. Penning just the right lyrics. Then "pitching" your own work to artists, or waiting while your publisher markets your song.

Griffin advised aspiring songwriters that the only way to sharpen their craft is by getting advice from veteran songwriters. Griffin said he looks up to Lindsey, with whom he has co-written songs.

"That's the only way to reach the next level," Griffin said. "It will not happen by itself any more than a board can become a birdhouse on its own."

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-- Color photos available by request from Word and Way.

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