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**Associated
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Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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**CBF council adopts value statement
'welcoming but not affirming' of gays**

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has adopted a stance against homosexuality described by leaders as "welcoming but not affirming" of gays.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship's governing board, the Coordinating Council, voted Oct. 13 to adopt a "statement of organizational value" about groups or causes it will fund.

The statement, which came to the full council as a recommendation of a smaller advisory council, describes faithfulness in marriage and celibacy by singles as "the foundation of a Christian sexual ethic."

"Because of this organizational value, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship does not allow for the expenditure of funds for organizations that condone, advocate or affirm homosexual practice," it says.

The statement further prohibits the "purposeful" hiring of gays as CBF staff or missionaries.

The Coordinating Council approved the recommendation by a 35-23 margin, but council leaders added quickly that they doubt the vote was a referendum on homosexuality.

CBF moderator-elect Jim Baucom said the approved statement "probably represents the vast majority of people in this room." While a few members obviously voted against the statement out of conviction, he said, several others told him they agreed with its sentiment personally but "cannot make a statement that would exclude people from the pews of my church."

The Fellowship, a moderate group spun off from a long controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention, is often targeted by SBC critics for associating with individuals and groups on record as affirming gays. While CBF leaders have said publicly they believe homosexuality is immoral, the organization itself had never before made a statement on the issue.

It did, however, once before cut off program support for a partner organization, the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, for condoning homosexuality. The Fellowship continues to cooperate with the Peace Fellowship, however, on projects of mutual benefit.

Describing events that led to the new proposal, CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal said a pastor phoned him just before the last General Assembly to say he planned to make a motion to defund the new divinity school at Wake Forest University over the school's open-admissions policy toward gays.

Following a lengthy meeting with Fellowship leaders, the pastor agreed not to spark a controversy at the gathering, which was focused on strategic planning and the future, if CBF leaders would promise to deal with the concern this year.

Even apart from that episode, Vestal said he has "given an inordinate amount of time" to the issue of homosexuality in his three years on the job. He said Fellowship leaders have received more than 200 e-mails, letters and phone calls on the subject since last summer's General Assembly alone.

While the Fellowship has purposely avoided taking positions on controversial issues through a policy of not allowing resolutions at the General Assembly, Vestal and other leaders said the organization can no longer dodge a controversy that is dividing many denominations.

"It [is] time for CBF to address this issue as an organization," Vestal said. "We are being defined by our enemies on the right and our friends on the left. I feel it is time for our organization ... to do some self-definition and not depend on others to define us."

Vestal said the questions of gay ordination and same-sex unions are settled in all but a handful of Fellowship-friendly churches. Very few, he said, would ordain a gay person or bless a same-sex union.

"We have reached a consensus in our congregations about this, but we have not reached a consensus as an organization," Vestal said.

While rejecting homosexual practice, the new CBF statement acknowledges "the love and grace of God for all people, both those who live by this understanding of the biblical standard and those who do not."

Vestal described the Fellowship's position on homosexuality as "welcoming but not affirming," borrowing a phrase from the title of a book by theologian Stanley Grenz.

"We treasure the freedom of individual conscience and the autonomy of the local church," the statement says, "and we also believe that congregational leaders should be persons of moral integrity whose lives exemplify the highest standards of Christian conduct and character."

Vestal said the statement would not be used to tell any church, individual or other organization what to believe. "I have no interest whatever in excluding or demeaning or minimizing any in this Fellowship who share a different perspective than this document," he said.

He also said the value statement would not affect current employees, describing the organization's hiring practice as "don't ask, don't tell."

If any sentiment was unanimous among council members, it was that they would have preferred not to deal with the divisive issue.

"I do not want, one, for us to fragment over this," Vestal said. "Two, I don't want anyone to leave over this. I think the difference between us and other bodies is we can and should have differences among us and still be committed to Christ and our common cause."

Still, speakers expressed sharp differences in a civil, three-hour discussion of the issue.

"I don't think we should limit the Spirit of God in the way that it moves," said Dixie Lee Petrey, a council member from Knoxville, Tenn. "Do we really want to sit here and say God's Spirit cannot call a homosexual to follow God's call?"

Bob Setzer, pastor of First Baptist Church in Macon, Ga., responded: "I don't know that I want to have an extended debate on homosexuality. ... This issue goes to what CBF will fund, not what local churches and CBF people will believe."

"The issue to me is are we going to allow CBF to become an advocacy group around this issue or is it going to be a broad organization built around a common mission?" Setzer added.

"We're not saying that God cannot call a homosexual, even a practicing homosexual," he said. "We're saying CBF does not want to fund that person's education."

Raymond Bailey, pastor of Seventh and James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, said the Fellowship is unwise to depart from its tradition of declining to take positions on controversial issues.

"If we deal with this issue in this way, next year it's going to be abortion," Bailey said. "The year after that it's going to be a balanced budget. ... What will it be next?"

Bailey said it is easy to "pick out sins" of others, but "unless we're willing to deal with adultery, smoking, excessive drinking, the alcohol industry, we're opening a Pandora's box."

New council member Stacey Simpson, pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Edison, Ga., described two years ago attempting to persuade the CBF General Assembly to adopt a resolution opposing the Southern Baptist Convention on its support for wifely submission. She said she and others were told the Fellowship does not make statements about beliefs, particularly in reaction to other groups, because votes on controversial issues produce "winners and losers."

"I didn't like that very much at the time, but I see the wisdom of it now, because I am going to be one of the losers," said Simpson. "I don't know what has changed in the last two years."

Harold Phillips, coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri, however, said the statement would be helpful for people like the St. Louis pastor who was interested in and supportive of the Fellowship until he learned it had not taken any position on homosexuality.

His perception, Phillips said, was "CBF can't make up its mind about this."

Baucom, pastor of Rivermont Avenue Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., said the Fellowship is "not going to have the luxury" of avoiding the issue. Baucom said it is a sign the organization is maturing.

"Adults have to speak about some things that children don't," he said. "We're becoming an adult and we're going to have to define ourselves on this issue as representatives of the people who sent us here."

Council member Steve Harris, an attorney from Liberty, Mo., and an African-American, reminded the council that Southern Baptists once similarly justified slavery by appealing to Scripture. He also asked the many in the room who were disenfranchised by conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention to recall how it made them feel.

"Remember from whence we came, and do not do that to anyone else," he pleaded.

Both Simpson and Harris said they wondered if the issue is important now only because individuals capable of giving the CBF money think it so. Harris said about 40 CBF "young leaders" he polled by e-mail were unanimously opposed to the policy.

"While it may be true that we will lose some churches and money if we don't accept this statement, know that if we do we will lose some of CBF's future," Harris said.

David Currie of San Angelo, Texas, coordinator of Texas Baptists Committed, countered that rejecting the value statement would not be "saving the future but shutting it down" by positioning the Fellowship "left of center."

Council members rejected a portion of the original recommendation that would have ended direct financial support of theology schools that affirm homosexuality. In the case of theology schools that are bound by university-wide policies that prohibit discrimination of gays in admissions, the proposal would have blocked direct funding of those schools but allowed their students to receive CBF scholarships.

The proposal was defeated pending study of its impact on various schools.

Vestal said four of the Fellowship's 11 partner schools have open admission for gays: Wake Forest Divinity School and Baptist "houses" of study at Duke, Emory and Texas Christian universities. Of the four, Wake Forest and TCU already use CBF funds only for scholarships. Only two, houses of study at Emory's Candler School of Theology and Duke, receive program support.

Candler official David Key said the defeated motion would have defunded the Baptist house of studies there.

The way scholarship funds are administered at Emory would prevent shifting funds from other accounts to offset the loss, Key said. Also, because of university policies, the program would be unable to accept scholarships that are "negatively designated" to exclude gays, which the CBF policy attempts to do. Further, he said, Emory matches dollar-for-dollar scholarships that are donated by CBF. Those funds would also be lost.

The council also voted down a motion to create an ad hoc committee to study funding of theology schools, referring the task to staff and a finance committee as part of next year's budget process.

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Carter expresses 'troubled heart' over Baptist power shift

By John Pierce

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- Southern Baptists' most famous Sunday-school teacher says his small church is "deeply troubled" and "in a quandary" over recent developments in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Speaking Oct. 15 at a building dedication at Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Ga., former president Jimmy Carter compared the fast-growing metropolitan church to his home congregation, Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., which has one staff member, the pastor, who also leads the music.

Carter said his church has about 80 resident members yet draws hundreds of visitors when he teaches Sunday school, "more than two out of three Sundays."

He described Maranatha as "a traditional church" that emphasizes historic Baptist principles.

"We're in a quandary over what to do," Carter said of the power shift in Southern Baptist life. "We've observed what's happened in the last 20 years with deeply troubled hearts."

Though Maranatha has historically given 10 percent of its offerings to Southern Baptist causes, Carter said, "We now give half of that to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," a moderate group based in Atlanta.

"Our church permits women deacons as does yours," Carter told the Johns Creek congregation and guests that overflowed a new 1,200-seat, \$13 million worship and family life center. He pointed out that the apostle Paul mentions many responsible women in his biblical writings, including Priscilla, "who corrected Paul."

Carter also expressed disagreement with current Southern Baptist leaders on the role of women in marital relationships. "They quote accurately a very small portion of Scripture" but stop short of a broader interpretation of Scripture on the subject, he said. "There has been a division driven among Baptists."

Among the concerns Carter addressed was the recent narrowing of the "Baptist Faith and Message" and its use as a creed. "One of the most profound changes is that Christ is no longer looked up to as the interpreter of Scripture," he said in reference to the removal of a portion from the 1963 faith statement when revised this summer.

An emphasis on pastoral authority and the weakening of support for the separation of church and state are also troubling, Carter said. "It grieves me to know that Jerry Falwell is now the pre-eminent spokesperson for the Southern Baptist Convention."

Carter, a long-time reader of The Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' newspaper, said he was also concerned to learn recently of restrictions placed on the editor regarding news coverage. "At home we believe in a free religious press," he said.

Carter told listeners that more important than power struggles, new buildings and accumulating wealth is learning to "be like Jesus" by investing their lives in things unseen. "One of the great things in God's kingdom is you don't have to be strong, rich or well educated to be ... superlatively successful," he said.

The 76-year-old Carter said it was the first time in more than 10 years that he and his wife, Rosalynn, had missed being at their home church in order to participate in the service of another congregation. Carter said he accepted the invitation out of their friendship with Deen Day Smith, whose family foundation has long supported Baptist mission causes.

Smith, a member at Johns Creek, introduced Carter as "a man of peace," "a Christian statesman" and "one of the most recognizable intellectuals to ever hold office in the White House." She commended the Carters for exemplifying a Christian marriage.

Following the service Pastor Bill Self said he was impressed by Carter's "profound spirituality" and welcomed him to speak freely from the pulpit. "We believe in the priesthood of the believer," Self said, adding, "and I agree with what he said."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story updates and replaces an earlier story in ABP Oct. 12.

Jury sides with former coach in suit against Baptist school

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- A jury has agreed with a former coach that a Baptist-affiliated university did not renew her contract because she sued the school, claiming sex discrimination and that men and women's teams were treated unequally.

While a district judge has dismissed Anne Julian's claims of sex discrimination at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., a federal court in Kansas City said her dismissal was in retaliation for filing suit.

Julian, a 1990 graduate of the school, was hired in 1996 to coach volleyball and softball. She filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Division in 1997, claiming she was paid less and given fewer resources than male coaches.

In 1998 she also filed suit for sex discrimination. She left the school after the university chose not to renew her contract in May 1999.

U.S. District Judge Fernando Gaitan dismissed Julian's claims of discrimination, breach of contract and hostile work environment.

The school's lawyer told the Kansas City Star that Julian was dismissed because she mistreated players and acted unprofessionally by discussing her lawsuit with students.

The jury awarded Julian \$1,800 in lost wages and \$75,000 for emotional anguish.

University officials released a statement saying they "strongly" disagree with verdict and plan to appeal.

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-- By ABP staff

Patterson says funding cut won't hurt SBC seminaries

By Jimmy Allen

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- The potential cut in funding by Texas Baptists to the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries shouldn't hurt the SBC, according to Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

"Very possibly, the Southern Baptist Convention may be better off," Patterson told seminary trustees at their Oct. 9 meeting. "I firmly believe the people most hurt will be those in the BGCT (Baptist General Convention of Texas) itself."

Patterson's remarks came during his semi-annual report to the trustees. Minutes earlier he had described Southeastern's expected loss of \$875,000 annually from the BGCT as a "terrible hit" and "tragic."

The BGCT executive committee is recommending that funding to the seminaries, as well as the SBC Executive Committee and Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, be reduced by \$5.3 million. A final decision will be made Oct. 30-31 during the BGCT's annual convention in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Funding to individual seminaries would be determined by the number of Texas students that attend, if the proposal is approved. Thirty-five students from Texas attend SEBTS, but not all of them are from churches that support the BGCT.

Patterson introduced the topic to trustees by talking about the committee of Texas Baptists that visited the campus. During a three-and-one-half-hour meeting that Patterson and trustee chairman Dwight Smith both described as intense, the committee members used 80 percent of the time to complain about what they disliked about the SBC, according to Patterson. "Most of that was me," he said.

Of the reported 20 percent of discussion about Southeastern, most of what they said was wrong, Patterson said. For example, one professor's Baptist background was questioned, but the committee was told the professor had come to the seminary from a Southern Baptist church.

"Essentially, they lost every issue they put on the table," Patterson said.

In a telephone interview, Bob Campbell, who chaired the seminary study committee for Texas Baptists, disagreed with Patterson's assessment.

"It was a very cordial meeting," Campbell said. "We did not agree. We agreed on how polite it was. ... We did ask hard questions."

The purpose of the meeting was informational, he said. "We didn't feel triumphant. We came there for information. ... It wasn't a win-loss kind of thing."

One of the questions was about \$8,000 given to every student in the college program as detailed in the school's catalogue, according to Campbell. At first, Southeastern's officials denied that information was in the catalogue until they saw it for themselves, he said. "They said, 'That's a mistake.' Does that sound like a lot of backing down?"

As far as the professors without a Baptist education, Patterson told the Texas group that some had married Baptists, some had joined Baptist churches and some had been raised participating in Royal Ambassador programs, according to Campbell. "They did not say that about every professor," Campbell said.

Campbell also disagreed with Patterson's report of the time allotted to the issue of Southeastern. Instead of 20 percent of the discussion, the seminary was the focus of 60-70 percent of the dialogue, according to Campbell. About 30 percent was about the "Baptist Faith and Message," the board of trustees not representing the broad spectrum of Baptists and trustees' interference with school operations.

After Patterson told trustees how much funding Southeastern would lose, he said the process with Texas had been healthy because it made the seminary officials examine themselves one more time to make

sure their aim is to please God. Patterson then noted \$875,000 isn't enough to buy him, and said he would stand with Jesus and the Bible at all costs.

"All we need to do is please God," he said. "I'm determined to please God."

He then informed the trustees of a letter notifying him of Cooperative Program receipts totaling \$18.7 million more than budgeted. The result for Southeastern is a windfall of \$691,338, an announcement generating applause by the 26 trustees attending.

Patterson said many Texas churches are writing and saying not to worry about the BGCT because some are going to join the relatively new Southern Baptist of Texas Convention and others will send money directly to the SBC.

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Texas proposal affecting Southern's campus plan

By David Winfrey

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will postpone a \$5.7 million construction-and-renovation project for conference facilities in light of an expected cut in income from Texas Baptists.

Southern officials broke ground in April for the Rice/Judson Conference Center, a component of the seminary's \$70 million campus master plan adopted by trustees last year.

President Albert Mohler told trustees the postponement was necessary in order to focus resources on personnel and programming in light of the Baptist General Convention of Texas' proposal to cut funds to the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries as well as the SBC Executive Committee and Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

"The issue is not the construction costs per se, but the fact that that much-needed facility brings on in its first months a considerable operating cost that will have to be extended out into the future," Mohler said.

Other aspects of the master plan are continuing, he added, including the construction of new residence halls.

In his report to the trustees, Mohler criticized the Texas plan while predicting that Texas Baptists ultimately will support Southern and the other seminaries.

"I believe what Texas Baptists are doing is basically a revolt against the Cooperative Program," he said.

Trustees responded at the end of their two-day meeting, Oct. 9-10, with a resolution backing Southern Seminary and calling on Baptist churches to continue financially supporting the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

The Texas plan calls for reducing the money the BGCT sends annually to the six Southern Baptist seminaries from \$5.3 million to a maximum of \$1 million.

Future funds would go to seminaries based on the number of Texas students enrolled. The surplus funds would support three Texas schools: Truett Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene and Hispanic Baptist Theological School in San Antonio.

"They're going to take the money that had gone to the six Southern Baptist seminaries and they're going to invest it in two Texas Baptist schools -- what they call seminaries -- and also to the Hispanic school there," Mohler said of the plan.

Members of the 16-member Texas committee studying Southern Baptist theological education cited several concerns about all six seminaries, including:

- A high rate of turnover in faculty at some seminaries.
- A high percentage of faculty from non-Southern Baptist backgrounds in some seminaries.
- A lack of diversity on the seminary trustee boards.
- A lack of diversity in chapel speakers.
- Trustees creating political litmus tests for faculty hiring.

"The direct accusation made against us by the BGCT committee and the leaders who adopted this is that we are too serious when it comes to our confession of faith, that we are too defined when it comes to what we believe and what we expect of those who will teach, that we are out of step and out of date when it comes to those convictions we believe are rooted in Scripture," Mohler said of the report.

The trustees' resolution states "we believe that the direction (of Southern Seminary) is soundly biblical and in line with historic Southern Baptist theology and practice."

It also urges Texas Baptists "to continue supporting our SBC seminaries and the Cooperative Program for the glory of God."

Bill Haynes, pastor of Sweetwater Baptist Church in Longwood, Fla., proposed the resolution. After the meeting he said he doesn't hold "feelings of grandeur that it can change the world, but I think it can make people stop and think."

Mohler predicted that messengers to the BGCT annual meeting later this month will adopt the changes and that they will have a significant short-term impact. A withdrawal of \$1 million represents about 6 percent of Southern's operating budget, he said.

But Mohler further predicted that individual Texas churches would step up to support all six seminaries. "I'm confident that where the Lord gives the vision, the Lord will provide the resources," he said.

"I believe as the dust settles and as the issues are clarified, Texas Baptists want to stand with the gospel. They want to stand with the truth," he added. "I believe not only will we receive their students, but we will receive their financial support."

On campus for the school's Heritage Week, SBC president James Merritt agreed.

"Southern Baptists will rise to the occasion if that's what it calls for," he said, pledging his support to lessen the impact of any shortfall. "I will do everything in my power and I will use all of my influence to make sure that if indeed this shortfall does occur, that the seminary will not suffer in the least."

Also during the fall meeting, trustees:

- Passed a resolution endorsing the revised "Baptist Faith and Message."
- Learned of a new Christian ministry track for the seminary's master of divinity program. Danny Akin, vice president for academic administration, said the degree was a response to requests for a more flexible M.Div. program that permitted students not seeking to be pastors to take more electives.
- Approved the hiring of Ruth Wong as temporary non-Baptist personnel for the seminary's school of church music and worship. Wong previously was interim director of music ministries at Foothills Presbyterian Church in San Jose, Calif.

American Baptist Churches urge voter participation

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The governmental-relations office of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. is urging its church leaders to encourage members to participate in the upcoming national elections.

ABC's National Ministries Office of Governmental Relations has created a Bible study and special materials to "guide churches in their nonpartisan role."

"As Christians our faith values should inform our choices of candidates for public office," said Curtis Ramsey-Lucas, director of legislative advocacy for 1.5 million-member denomination with headquarters in Valley Forge, Pa.

In a press release announcing the Election 2000 resources, Ramsey-Lucas said, "As individuals and as congregations we can help develop informed public opinion in our communities on important issues -- and then challenge candidates on the issues."

American Baptists have produced a three-session Bible study titled "Does the Bible Tell Me How to Vote?" and a series of questions for candidates on issues of concern.

Also included in the materials is a resource packet outlining the "dos and don'ts" of church participation in elections. It also details ideas for how to conduct a candidate forum in a church.

"Just how our faith commitments will determine the outcome of Election 2000 is beyond our understanding, but history teaches that we will have an influence if we get involved," Ramsey-Lucas stated.

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: Resources are available from American Baptist Churches by calling 1-800-ABC-3USA, extension 2464.

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