



# Associated Baptist Press

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## More than one in four workers at state convention take severance

By Shawn Hendricks and Bill Webb

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- At the first of next year, the Missouri Baptist Convention will experience what is believed to be the largest staff turnover in its history. A total of 28 employees will leave their positions after accepting a severance option expected to cost the convention nearly \$770,000.

The state convention currently has 101 staff positions. Deadline to accept the severance package was Dec. 8. The large response to the severance offer is expected to be felt across the organization.

"To my knowledge, there has never been this much turnover at one time in the history of the MBC," said Jim Hill, the state convention's executive director. "We have a lot more staff leaving than I had anticipated."

The state convention offered an across-the-board severance package to employees in anticipation of a major staff restructuring slated next year.

Hill said employees taking the offer cited several reasons, but more than half indicated political conflict between moderates and conservatives was a contributing factor. Conservatives won officer elections for the third year in a row this fall and now control the process for nominating convention committees and boards of trustees.

Other reasons included difficulty with transition in the New Directions restructuring plan and desire to take early retirement or move toward a new career or ministry opportunity.

Hill said the amount of experience leaving the Jefferson City offices adds up to 417 years. "That's a loss, because there is so much history," he said.

Hill said that although he did not expect so many people to accept a severance deal, offering it was the right thing to do.

Some areas of the day-to-day operation of the convention staff will be affected, Hill acknowledged. "Any time there are this many vacancies in an operation, there will be a lull in the work. There will be a period when we won't be able to do an event, or there will be something we can't staff, or a request we can't respond to."

Hill said he hoped to fill many of the vacancies by Feb. 1. "I think our organization will experience some grief over this -- there is always a grieving process," Hill said. "And that is healthy and natural. I think so far, they have been handling it well and are looking to the future. We're going to survive it."

The state convention's executive board met Dec. 11-12 and approved a plan for funding severance payouts ranging from two months salary to 12 months of salary and benefits, depending on tenure.

Nine of the 28 staff vacancies won't be refilled.

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## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **William Jewell professor succumbs**

LIBERTY, Mo. -- William Jewell College religion professor David Nelson Duke died Dec. 18 at his home in Liberty, Mo. Duke, 50, suffered from cancer.

He joined the faculty at the Baptist-affiliated school in 1980. He was a graduate of Samford University, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Emory University.

Survivors include his widow, Marcia, and two children. (ABP)

### **Longtime state paper staffer retiring**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- Assistant to the editor Mary Dee Enloe is retiring Dec. 31 after 28 years with the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way. In all she worked 41 years in offices of the Missouri Baptist Convention, 35 years as a full-time employee.

Editor Bill Webb said there was a time when Enloe was on a first-name basis with most of the pastors across the state and that she "probably still is the best-known member of the Word and Way staff." (ABP)

### **Deaf churches join forces for crusade**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- More than 50 persons made spiritual decisions, including a dozen first-time confessions of faith, in a week-long evangelistic crusade targeting deaf persons in central Florida.

Florida Baptist Convention deaf-ministries consultant Don Otwell said the multi-church event, which was several months in preparation, will have lasting benefits. "One of the best things about the crusade was that we had 15 deaf churches from Orlando to Clearwater working together in unity to reach others for Christ," he said. (ABP)

### **Book about SBC debate wins award**

CARBONDALE, Ill. -- A book investigating persuasive strategies and rhetoric used in a conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention has been named the Religious Communication Association's book of the year.

"In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention," was written by Baptist scholars Carl Kell and Raymond Camp and published by Southern Illinois University Press. Kell teaches at Western Kentucky University and Camp at North Carolina State. (ABP)

## Artist sheds light on 'darkness of the soul'

By Stacey Hamby

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- There were some days when she didn't even want to get out of bed. She read Scripture, but she had trouble believing it. She cried out, but she got no answer. The depression enveloped her like a "darkness of the soul."

But if Christian musician Lynda Randle of Kansas City, Mo., hadn't gone through two years struggling with depression, she might not have the depths of compassion she has for other people today. Part of her ministry now is through the songs on her latest contemporary Christian CD, "Soul Shower."

"'Soul Shower' was born in the dark; it was born out of my bowels," Randle said. "It's hard to see in the darkness. The storm was so bad, I didn't know if I was ever going to get out of it."

That storm included the death of her father, a sister, a brother, two uncles and her best friend, all within two years. The loss of her father to cancer in 1998 hit her particularly hard.

"When I was a kid, I used to lie on his chest to hear his heartbeat," she recalled. "I could tell him anything. In December 1997, Dad went in for tests. He told me, 'Chubs' -- he always called me that -- 'I've got stomach cancer.' In one month, he was gone."

The following months were some of the hardest of Randle's life, she said. "At one point, for about a week, I felt detached, like the world was moving around me. I had to pick someone up at the airport, and I remember thinking I didn't even want to go, because I was so scared. The fear of loss was so strong, I was afraid to be gone from my kids and afraid for my husband traveling."

Then one day last spring, she woke up and felt different. "After the intense prayers of God's people, the light came back on," she explained.

Reflecting on what the experience taught her, she said: "I learned that God uses pain to give us wings of flight. Satan can take that grief -- which is very natural -- and turn it into something bad, but God can use it for good."

Randle is riding high now with not only "Soul Shower" but also the release of her gospel music CD, "Timeless." Randle recorded "Timeless" in response to the demand of fans who heard her sing during Gaither Homecoming concerts.

But she is the first to admit that singing doesn't come naturally to her. "Growing up I sang in the choir -- that was a given in our culture -- whether you could sing or not." She grew up as one of seven children in Washington, D.C. Her brother is Michael Tait of Christian rock group dc Talk. "I enjoy singing, but it's an effort for me to vocalize," she said. "But God called me to do it."

In high school, she ended up in a music class because another class she wanted was full. She started singing in contests and winning.

She went on to Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., and sang on Jerry Falwell's television program. Invitations to sing in churches started coming in, and her career was on its way.

Today, she regularly tours the United States, singing her own blend of contemporary and gospel music and working to help bring about racial reconciliation. Randle home schools her daughter, Patience, 9. She and her husband, Michael, also have another daughter, Joy, 3.

Michael is a youth minister and speaker who also has worked with the National Center for Fathers, based in Shawnee, Kan. They are members of Christian Fellowship Baptist Church in Kansas City.

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