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**Midwestern Seminary trustees
elect president unanimously**

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees have unanimously chosen Phil Roberts, a conservative academician who specializes in missions and evangelism strategies, as fourth president of the Southern Baptist Convention seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

His election at a called trustee meeting Jan. 8-9 concludes an almost 16-month search for a new leader following the forced termination of former President Mark Coppenger over conflict with faculty and administrative staff that trustees concluded diminished his ability to lead.

Roberts, who comes to the post from a vice presidency at the SBC North American Mission Board, told trustees he has been a friend of Coppenger's for many years and "was saddened by the events that led to his departure" but honored to succeed him.

"I believe seminaries are the lifeblood of the denomination," he said. "We value those who are bivocational and lay pastors, but in the final analysis, those who take seriously theological education and commit themselves to it are the ones that rise to the surface in leadership."

Roberts said he first met with the search committee nearly a year ago and then again in October. He and his wife prayed about accepting the position over Thanksgiving and agreed to allow his nomination. "We have increasingly felt step-by-step that this is indeed God's will for us," he told trustees.

Board chairman Carl Weiser, pastor of Hyland Heights Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., also served on a seven-member search committee that unanimously recommended Roberts. Weiser commented that in addition to qualifications for the post: "The one thing on my heart and the search committee's was that we find God's man. We wanted to find the heart of God in the matter more than anything else."

Roberts, 50, will begin the job, which pays \$124,000 a year plus benefits, in mid-February.

Speaking with reporters after his election, Roberts described theological education as "an extension of the Great Commission," referring to Jesus' words quoted in the closing verses of Matthew commanding Christians to preach the gospel to all people, baptize believers and teach followers to obey his commands.

The president-elect said he would continue the seminary's traditional emphasis on classical theological education that includes biblical languages, theology and church history, while also involving students in hands-on evangelism and missions experience.

He said he plans to teach courses, as he has in the past as a visiting professor at Midwestern, but not this semester. "I think it's very important for the president to be in touch with the lives of the students," he said.

Roberts said he is impressed and looks forward to working with the seminary's faculty.

Like his predecessor and a majority of trustees, Roberts holds conservative theological views but hinted that he might be more flexible than Coppenger, who drew criticism for strident attacks on women's ordination and ardent support for Calvinism, a theological view that emphasizes God's sovereignty over man's free will. He also clashed with subordinates. After receiving repeated complaints about angry confrontations, seminary trustees voted to fire Coppenger in September 1999. He now works as a church planter in Illinois.

In response to a reporter's question, Roberts said he agrees with the "Baptist Faith and Message" article on Election, which he said is definitely not an "Arminian" position. [Arminianism is the school of thought opposing Calvinism. It is named after a theologian during the Reformation who debated John Calvin.] However, Roberts added he doesn't "have any particular theological agenda" beyond the "Baptist Faith and Message."

He also said he agrees with the "Baptist Faith and Message" view that only males are qualified to serve as pastors in a local church, calling it "the clear teaching of Scripture" and a doctrine shared by most mainstream Christians throughout history.

"I don't think that we have to shut down discussion on it," Roberts said, however, contrasting with an oft-repeated quotation from a Coppenger chapel sermon that labeled women preachers "a raging heresy."

Asked how his administration would handle a student application from a woman who felt strongly that she was called to preach, Roberts speculated that the seminary might "encourage her in her education, but not to be pastor."

Roberts was born in Danville, Ky., but grew up in Ohio. His father, the late Ray Roberts, was a church planter and the first executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Georgetown College in 1972. He graduated from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with the master of divinity degree in 1976. After additional study at Oxford University in England, he received his Ph.D. from the Free University of Amsterdam in 1989.

Since June 1999, Roberts has been vice president for strategic-focus cities for the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga. He directed the Interfaith Witness department at the NAMB-precursor Home Mission Board from 1994 until 1999.

Before that, he was professor of missions and evangelism at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., 1989-1994. He was also dean of the theology faculty at the Institute of Biblical Studies in Oradea, Romania. He was pastor of International Baptist Church in Brussels, Belgium, 1985-1989, and worked as an adjunct professor of evangelism at Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven, Belgium.

He was assistant professor of evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1982 to 1985 and pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Wiesbaden, Germany, 1975-1978.

He is the author of numerous articles, and books including "Mormonism Unmasked," published by Broadman and Holman in 1998, and "The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism," by Harvest House, which he co-authored, also in 1998.

He married the former Anna Fierenczuk in 1980 in Warsaw, Poland. They have a daughter, Naomi, 18, a freshman at Georgia Tech University, and a son, Mark, 14, who is in eighth grade.

Also at the meeting, held mostly in executive session, Weiser named a committee to evaluate remodeling needs at the seminary-provided president's home.

Trustees also thanked Interim President Michael Whitehead with a two-week vacation and monetary gift. Weiser described Whitehead as "a man of integrity and a godly man."

Whitehead, an attorney who came to work as the seminary's business vice president six years ago, recalled how his legal background has helped the school as it waded through matters involving personnel and property use.

"God every now and then raises up a lawyer," Whitehead said. "There's occasionally a need for a lawyer, but not forever."

"The gifts I had at the time were what the seminary needed at the time," Whitehead continued. "That's the way a sovereign God works."

Founded in 1957, Midwestern is one of six seminaries owned and operated by the Southern Baptist Convention. It enrolled 293 students in pre-baccalaureate, basic and advanced degrees in 1998-1999, according to the 2000 SBC Book of Reports.

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Clinton delivers Sunday sermon, pastor counseling to continue

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist, delivered the sermon Jan. 8 at Foundry United Methodist Church -- the church he and his family have visited regularly during their eight years in the White House.

His roughly 15-minute Sunday sermon was titled "Reflections and Anticipations," and focused on his appreciation to a church that has welcomed him "in the storm and sunshine."

According to a White House transcript of the sermon, Clinton told the congregation that "You cannot imagine the peace, the comfort, the strength I have drawn from my Sundays here."

Philip Wogaman, pastor of Foundry, told Associated Baptist Press that several months ago he had invited Clinton to deliver a sermon to the congregation before his presidency finished.

Wogaman also confirmed to ABP that he and two other ministers -- who have been counseling the president on issues surrounding his admitted misconduct with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky -- will continue to meet regularly with Clinton even after he leaves the White House. Wogaman said that Clinton has faithfully kept the commitment to meet with the ministers and "has said the sessions will continue to be helpful."

In his sermon, Clinton thanked Wogaman for being one of three ministers who "have shared the burden of meeting with me on a weekly basis."

Wogaman said it was not a rejection in any way of Clinton's Southern Baptist roots to make the Methodist church his home. Among other things, it was the desire to be at a place he could attend with the first lady, who is Methodist, and because of proximity to the White House, Wogaman noted.

Wogaman said there are many "fine Southern Baptist churches and pastors who are not in harmony with the right-wing agenda of its leadership." Wogaman said he honors the heritage of Southern Baptists exemplified by former SBC president and former congressman, the late Brooks Hays. "Foundry is very close to being like the best of the Southern Baptist tradition -- the similarities are more obvious than the differences would be," he said.

Speaking of Clinton, Wogaman added: "In my mind --- with the exception of his lapse -- he exemplified the best of the Baptist tradition, too. He's a good man. When all the smoke clears ... he's going to go down as one of the really good American presidents ... and he's not through with his life yet."

Wogaman said that during the worship service, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, now a U.S. Senator, delivered the New Testament (I Thessalonians) reading to the church, while daughter Chelsea Clinton delivered readings from the Old Testament (Isaiah 42). He said Clinton's sermon picked up on the Scripture reading about thankfulness and gratitude.

Clinton thanked the church for prayers and for being a home to him and his family. He thanked the church for its social mission -- especially outreach to the homeless -- and supporting peace worldwide.

He thanked the congregation for being a "true community church, welcoming Christians from all races and nations, with all kinds of abilities and disabilities, some seen and some not."

"I thank you especially for the kindness and courage of Foundry's welcome to gay and lesbian Christians, people who should not feel outside the family of God," Clinton said.

Clinton also discussed his future. "I look forward to finding out whether John Quincy Adams was right when he said there is nothing so pathetic as an ex-president. Or whether, instead of his words, the life of John Quincy Adams and the life of Jimmy Carter prove exactly the reverse."

He quipped, "I anticipate my Christian bearing will be tested by a return to commercial air travel where I will reap the rewards of not having succeeded in one of the things I tried to do, which was to end all those backlogs."

He also said that for the first time in his life as he embarks on earning a sizeable income, "that Christ admonished us that our lives will be judged by how we do unto the least of our neighbors."

Working for peace around the world will also be a part of his future, Clinton said, as he tries to find ways "to get people to move beyond tolerance to celebration of those differences. ... I've kind of grown impatient with the word 'tolerance,' because tolerance implies that someone who's better than someone else is decent enough to put up with them. And I think we need to move beyond that."

Concluding his sermon, Clinton thanked the congregation for the constant reminder that "though we have all fallen short of glory, we are all redeemed by faith in a loving God."

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Nonprofit mailers: Enough is enough with postal rate hikes

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Citing the financial burden that will be placed on the nation's churches, charities, hospitals and educators, the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers has issued a statement saying "enough is enough" after the Jan. 7 U.S. postage increases.

"The increase in postal rates will drain valuable and necessary resources from America's churches and charities at a time when the Bush administration looks to the nonprofit community to provide the nation with more programs and services," said a statement from the organization released Jan. 5.

The alliance is a national association of nonprofit organizations that use mail to raise funds, solicit members and disseminate information. Baptist members include The Alabama Baptist newspaper and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

"Didn't we just do this?" asked Neal Denton, executive director of the alliance. "After imposing double-digit hikes in January 1999, some community-based churches and charities face 18 percent rate hikes again."

Denton called for creation of a high-level Capitol Hill-White House task force to "set the course for the national mail delivery network in America." He added, "And it should be done before the Postal Service Board of Governors sign, stamp and deliver any more rate hikes to the American public."

Denton told Associated Baptist Press postal increases hit mailers differently depending on how much a nonprofit group automates, pre-sorts and otherwise prepares its mail in advance. However, on average, the increases are: Nonprofit Periodicals, 7.2 percent; Nonprofit Standard, 4.8 percent; and Nonprofit Enhanced Carrier Route, 18.3 percent.

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Bill introduced would bolster religious institutions' ability to secure loans

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- One of a plethora of bills introduced in the opening days of Congress would seek to bolster the ability of religious institutions to secure the necessary capital resources to carry out their work.

The Faith-Based Lending Protection Act, introduced Jan. 3, would amend the Federal Credit Union Act, according to a statement made by its sponsor, by Rep. Edward Royce, R-Calif.

Royce said the measure would exempt from lending caps imposed on credit unions by federal law loans to nonprofit religious organizations.

"Each year credit unions loan millions of dollars to nonprofit religious organizations, many located in minority and/or lower income communities," said Royce in the Congressional Record.

Without legislative action, he said, "these religious institutions will find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to secure the necessary funds under favorable terms to allow them to continue their work."

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-- By Kenny Byrd

Clinton announces \$300 million to promote nutrition in poor nations

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton announced Dec. 28 that the United States will commit \$300 million in resources to support a pilot program to promote better nutrition and school enrollment for needy children in countries with low incomes.

Global Food for Education Initiative program grants will allow approximately 9 million children to receive a regular meal or a take-home ration at school, says a White House fact sheet.

The food will be distributed through the United Nations' World Food Program and private voluntary organizations, including Catholic Relief Services and CARE, and in all, the grants will support 49 projects in 38 countries.

The program has received strong support from two proponents of an international school lunch program -- Ambassador George McGovern and former Senator Bob Dole.

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-- By Kenny Byrd

Opponents of Mormon temple construction lose appeal bid to U.S. Supreme Court

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused Jan. 8 to hear the appeal of opponents to the recent construction of a Mormon temple near Boston.

Left untouched was a ruling by the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which upheld a 1950 Massachusetts law that says zoning ordinances cannot ban the construction of buildings for religious use but may set requirements on size, height, parking and open space on a lot.

The law was challenged in 1998 after a Mormon church started construction of a 69,000-square-foot structure in Belmont, a suburb of Boston. Opponents said the law violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution.

But a federal judge said the law does not create favoritism toward religion. It rather represents "a secular judgment that religious institutions ... are compatible with every other type of land use and thus will not detract from the quality of life in any neighborhood."

Still pending is a separate lawsuit over the height of the temple's planned 139-foot steeple.

Filing a friend-of-the-court brief with the 1st Circuit in support of the Mormon construction were some religious organizations, including American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts; American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; Baptist General Conference; and Baptist Joint Committee.

The religious groups' 30-page brief said the Massachusetts law, called the Dover Amendment, "is entirely consistent with America's deep tradition of respect for the free exercise of religion."

"Striking it down will likely lead to increased religious discrimination of the sort that has plagued other jurisdictions and which gave rise to the Dover Amendment in the first place," the brief continued.

Left solely to political processes, the brief went on to say, minority faith groups would be at a disadvantage in trying to build in communities where they are unwanted.

Asking the U.S. Supreme Court to review the ruling was attorney Marci Hamilton, who in 1997 successfully argued before the high court against the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. After the Supreme Court struck down parts of RFRA, religious groups banded together to steer the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act through Congress.

The measure, signed into law by President Bill Clinton, would in part address the often-burdensome local zoning regulations that face church constructions and renovations.

That law was not an issue in the Mormon temple dispute in Boston, but Hamilton has told Associated Baptist Press that opponents of the new land-use bill are looking for an appropriate test case to challenge the law.

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Southern, northern state conventions partnering in 'Impact Northeast' effort

By Ferrell Foster

DALLAS (ABP) -- Tall buildings glisten like jewels along the coastline, while lush hills and mountains stretch inland for hundreds of miles. It is the northeastern portion of the United States, and it is home to millions of unchurched people and relatively few Baptists.

Baptists in the South have cast their eyes in that direction by entering a multi-state partnership that is seeking to bring more spiritual light into the region.

"Impact Northeast" has united six "support conventions" in the South -- Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia -- with five "impact conventions" in the Northeast -- the District of Columbia, Maryland/Delaware, New England, New York and Pennsylvania/South Jersey. Together, they are making a concerted effort to expand the Baptist witness in the Northeast.

"The Northeast U.S.A. is so critical for the evangelization of America because easily over one quarter of our population lives there and vast portions of those people don't know Christ," said Don Sewell, director of Texas Partnerships for the Baptist General Convention of Texas in Dallas.

Only 1 percent of the population in the Northeast is Baptist, said Charles Barnes, coordinator of Impact Northeast in Annapolis, Md. "We still have not impacted the tremendous population centers of America," said Barnes, who recently retired as executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

Barnes was talking, of course, about New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Washington and the many other cities of the region.

Those cities and the countryside that surrounds them make up "the most unchurched 25 percent of the American population" said Steve Seaberry, equipping coordinator for Texas Partnerships.

Individual state conventions in the South and Northeast have formed partnerships in the past, Sewell said. They provided the "seedbeds" of concern that led to Impact Northeast, "the brainchild" of four state executives: Bill Pinson of Texas, Reggie McDonough of Virginia, Bill Causey of Mississippi and Ken Lyle of New England. [Pinson and Lyle have since retired.]

The 11-convention partnership started in 2000 but has been slow to gather steam. It lasts through 2007.

Impact Northeast is a "very expansive and ambitious partnership," Sewell said. "This partnership is a new paradigm. Formerly a partnership simply was between two Baptist conventions or unions. Impact Northeast draws from the very best resources of all these conventions to address church growth and leadership needs in any of those five impact conventions."

"While it's true," Seaberry said, "that the six southern conventions have more just in raw numbers, ... that's not to imply there's a void in the Northeast conventions. We're looking at this as an equal partnership drawing on the joint resources."

But, of course, most of the human and financial resources rest with the southern conventions, and Texas is the biggest of those.

"I personally think that we as Texas Baptists have no excuse but to exhibit a compassion to our countrymen at this juncture in American history," Sewell said. "We are indebted as Texas Baptists to the Christian heritage which we historically derived from the Northeast part of the U.S.A. in the 1700s."

"They shared the time-honored truths of freedom of religion and soul competency which are the bedrock of our faith," Sewell said. "Now we have the strategic opportunity to reintroduce the spirit of Christianity to many in the Northeast who have lost the vision of our religious forefathers."

Sewell envisions short-term volunteers from the South assisting in one or two week ventures in "virtually all areas" of Christian growth and leadership. "We need teachers, choirs, preachers, youth leaders, construction workers, prayer and witness advocates, and people just to go alongside our Baptist friends in the Northeast to encourage them and be their support."

David Waltz, executive director of Pennsylvania/South Jersey Baptist Convention, said there is excitement among Baptists in the Northeast just knowing that there are people in the South who care. "It's sometimes overwhelming to see the great need" in the region, and it can be discouraging.

"We need lots more churches," Waltz said. "There are entire counties with no Southern Baptist work" in Pennsylvania/South Jersey, including one such county with a population of 100,000 people.

"We have the strategies in place," Waltz said. "We just need the resources, the people."

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Baptists ministering in Northeast find similarities in diverse settings

By Ferrell Foster

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (ABP) -- Baptists in the Northeast will quickly tell a Baptist from the South that things are different in that part of the world -- not necessarily better or worse, just different.

The Northeast itself has differences from region to region as one travels southward from New England to New York, then to Pennsylvania and Maryland; while Washington, D.C., has its own culture. But still there are similarities.

"It's not a foreign land," but it is a different culture, said David Lee, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

There are "not many Baptists," said Tom Schenk, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church, near Pittsburgh. That can make ministry difficult. "People don't have an evangelical mindset. They're not used to Baptists being so strongly oriented to reaching out to people."

As a result, many Baptists throughout the Northeast talk about the importance of "relational evangelism," building enduring friendships as a means to conversion.

"It's very relational here," said Tommy Kennedy, pastor of Cross Point Fellowship in Harrisburg, Pa. "People want to get to know you."

"Impressing people with your genuineness and love is a powerful tool anywhere but especially up here," said Karl Novak, pastor of Cicero Baptist Church in New York.

Christians have to "show them the difference Christ makes" in their lives, Schenk said. People simply are not used to the concept of "making a decision for Christ."

Just being a Baptist can cause problems in reaching out to the unchurched. "The name Baptist itself is looked down on here," said Kirk Strawbridge, a semester missionary at the University of Pittsburgh.

People "think of Baptists as being very judgmental and straight-laced," trying to tell others what's wrong with them, Novak said. The people "tend to be skeptical," but it's not impossible to go door-to-door.

Carl Anderson, director of missions for Keystone Baptist Association in south central Pennsylvania, agreed. People in the South think there is little receptivity to the gospel in the North; but, he said, "I've yet to have a door slammed in my face."

People in the Northeast do have a reputation for not being as friendly as those from the South. Sometimes they can be "a little bit less than polite," Novak said.

Rob Karl, a church planter in south central Pennsylvania, said the people are "not as friendly" as in his home state of Virginia, but they're "not mean."

Lisa Hoffman, a semester missionary from Kentucky working in Boston, had a different perspective. It may be cold outside during the winter, but "it's not a cold place as far as people go," she said.

As for Baptist life itself, common themes surface in talking to ministers -- great need for both prayer and financial resources.

"The price of housing is ridiculous," said Michael Dean, international-ministries coordinator for Greater Boston Baptist Association. A safe, three-bedroom house will cost \$300,000 in the Boston area.

Those prices affect ministers' personal living conditions, as well as church structures. "Southern Baptists don't have property," Dean said. "They have churches that are meeting in places that are unbelievable."

The same situation exists in all of the large cities, where real estate prices make buying land or buildings for churches difficult.

"Land is almost all gone," Charles Barnes, coordinator of Impact Northeast, said regarding the Baltimore-Washington area. "And it is very, very expensive."

David Lee, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, said a way is needed to connect, on one end, "people with a missions heart" who have been blessed with resources to those needs on the other end in the Northeast.

While much of the Northeast is largely secular today, it is not a region without its own Baptist and Christian heritage. The first Baptist church in the continent was started in Rhode Island some 350 years ago, and the Great Awakening of the 18th century centered in that part of the country.

Many in New England are probably not aware of their Christian history, Dean said.

Despite inherent difficulties, Hoffman called Boston "really a perfect ministry area." It can be "intimidating, but invigorating; international, but local at the same time."

Baptists from the South who minister in the Northeast for short or long spans will have to cross cultural boundaries, said Robert Cochran of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. "They will discover that God crosses with them."

"Church might look a little different," said Dean. But he encouraged Baptists in the South to "look behind that" and "you might see a spiritual vitality that is there." That's because, "Jesus Christ is here."

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