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**CBF elects woman  
to No. 2 position**

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship elected a woman to its No. 2 staff position Feb. 22.

Reba Sloan Cobb of Louisville, Ky., will serve as the organization's chief operating officer in a newly created position titled resource center coordinator.

Cobb, 57, was elected without opposition by the CBF's Coordinating Council on the recommendation of a seven-member search committee. Since 1998 she has been executive director of the Louisville-based Kentuckiana Interfaith Community, an agency representing Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim organizations.

A longtime volunteer leader in CBF, Cobb now will coordinate the work of the CBF's 48 staff members, most based in Atlanta. She also will implement the organization's strategic plans, cultivate its partnerships with related organizations and manage its infrastructure, support systems, finances, administration, human resources and information technology.

The new position will allow Coordinator Daniel Vestal, as chief executive officer, to focus primarily on external relations. These include cultivating CBF's partnerships with churches, directing fund raising and leading the Coordinating Council.

"I have known Reba for 10 years," Vestal said. "I personally am looking forward to working with her. I feel the touch of providence in her selection."

Cobb explained why she took the job: "I love a challenge, and we have a challenge before us. ... This (administration) is what I love to do. ... I felt the call of God. ... (And) I have a passion for CBF."

Cobb will begin her duties March 15 and move to Atlanta by May 1. Her salary is within the CBF-prescribed range for the position -- \$110,000 to \$120,000.

Cobb is a widow. Her husband, Dwight, died in 1995. She has two grown sons and one grandchild.

A 30-year resident of Louisville, she previously was president of the Center for Women and Families in Louisville (1992-98). She also has worked in politics -- as an unsuccessful candidate for the Kentucky House of Representatives, assistant to the state Attorney General, and manager of a successful campaign for that office.

An ordained minister, Cobb was youth minister for Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville. She was co-founder and coordinator of the Center for Women in Ministry and a board member of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry. She was a trustee of Georgetown College and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

She has been involved with CBF since its inception. She was a member of the original Coordinating Council, program chair for the CBF's annual meeting in 1997 and a leader in the founding of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship.

Cobb, who grew up on a farm in Alabama, holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University (1965) and a master of arts degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1967).

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## **Annuity Board won't serve churches that sever SBC ties**

By Tony Cartledge

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- A running joke among Baptist ministers during two decades of denominational infighting has been, "If the Southern Baptist Convention splits, I'm going with the Annuity Board." For some, it's no longer a laughing matter.

The Dallas-based SBC agency has announced that staff members from churches that publicly sever ties with the SBC are no longer eligible to participate in Annuity Board retirement or insurance programs. The board will continue to manage asset accumulations and distributions for past participants, officials said, but will not accept additional contributions or make insurance programs available.

State convention officials have been asked to implement the policy and notify the Annuity Board when a church announces its withdrawal from the SBC.

The Church Annuity Plan is based on contractual agreements between the Annuity Board and the state conventions or multi-state associations affiliated with the SBC. The plan calls for the state conventions to determine which churches qualify for participation.

As amended and restated in 1995, the plan defines an eligible church as " ... any Southern Baptist church as determined by the state convention as well as an association of Southern Baptist churches or other Southern Baptist organizations that the state convention determines should be treated as a church for purposes of participation in this plan."

The same section goes on to state that " ... an organization shall cease to be a [qualifying] church when the Annuity Board receives notice from the state convention that the organization is no longer a Southern Baptist church."

Annuity Board President O. S. Hawkins recently wrote to executive directors of the state conventions, reminding them of the provision. The Annuity Board must act within the limits of its charter, Hawkins said, which calls for it to serve churches only within the bounds of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We expect you to notify us of churches in your state that no longer consider themselves to be a part of the Southern Baptist Convention," Hawkins said in his letter to Jim Royston, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Royston, however, told the Biblical Recorder newspaper that the state convention's policy allows any church contributing a minimum amount to its unified budget to qualify for participation. "The contract is between the state convention and the Annuity Board," he said. "If a church continues to support the state convention, we don't plan to declare it ineligible."

Curtis Sharp, executive officer for denominational and public-relations services with the Annuity Board, told a recent gathering of state executive directors and editors that the Annuity Board has no desire to force churches out of its programs. "We want to keep them in," he said. "The worst thing for us is to erode our asset base -- the more assets we have, the lower our fees -- but we must maintain the charter."

Sharp said the Annuity Board is encouraging all SBC churches to remain affiliated with the convention so they will not face any loss of benefits.

Annuitants who are members of non-SBC churches will not be affected, Sharp said, because their benefits are based on past service.

The Annuity Board cannot cease serving a church unless the state convention instructs it to do so, said Sharp, because the Church Annuity Plan is based on a contract between the Annuity Board and the state conventions.

The Annuity Board will not rely solely on the state conventions, however. Sharp said that when board officials learn of churches that have voted to withdraw from the SBC, they will contact the churches individually, advise them that the Annuity Board will serve only SBC churches, and encourage them to rethink their decision to sever ties.

Those churches, however, won't entirely be left out in the cold. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a 10-year-old moderate organization that offers alternative missions, education and other church programs to disenfranchised Southern Baptists, launched a new benefits board Oct. 1.

Gary Skeen, president of the CBF Church Benefits Board, Inc., said he is already in conversation with a number of churches that have recently severed SBC ties. He said about 30 churches have enrolled so far in medical, retirement or life-and-disability programs offered by the new organization.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

## **Baptist retirement facility closing doors in Maryland**

BALTIMORE (ABP) -- The Baptist Home of Maryland/Delaware is closing its doors after 85 years of retirement ministry, citing financial problems.

The home borrowed \$2 million last year to build a new facility near Laurel, Md., to replace Rainbow Hall, a mansion near Baltimore built by Gen. Douglas MacArthur in 1917 and purchased by Baptist Home in 1963. Baptist Home trustees cited costs with maintaining an aging facility as the primary reason for relocating.

Maryland's Department of Aging recently canceled the construction project, however, saying the agency failed to find enough people to fill what would have been a 249-person facility called the Trellises. According to news reports, the home was unable to repay the entire loan and would turn over its property to Allfirst Bank, which is owed more than \$1 million.

The Baptist Home's 43 residents will have to be relocated. Formerly an agency of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, the now-freestanding organization remains responsible for residents who paid fees for lifetime care.

According to a report in the Baltimore Sun, preservationists are worried that the historic mansion, where then-Brig. Gen. Douglas MacArthur lived in the 1920s following a three-year posting in the Philippines, would have to be demolished. Baptist Home added a wing to the original mansion in 1969. The property has been assessed at \$2 million.

The Baptist Home was founded in 1915 by Willoughby McCormick of the McCormick Spice Company to help widows of Baptist ministers and poor women. In recent years, the agency has offered assisted-living and nursing-home facilities.

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-- By ABP staff

## **BJC announces staff additions**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Baptist Joint Committee has announced the recent addition of two members to its professional staff.

Hollyn Hollman has been named general counsel at the Washington-based religious-liberty advocacy group. She succeeds Melissa Rogers, who left the BJC post in November to become executive director of The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

A litigation associate at the Washington, D.C., office of McGuireWoods, Hollman will join the BJC staff effective March 5.

BJC Executive Director Brent Walker welcomed Hollman's decision to accept the general counsel's post. "I'm excited about Holly's joining the BJC family," Walker said. "She is a first-rate lawyer and a gifted leader who will be a strong and effective voice for religious liberty. Melissa left big shoes to fill, and I am confident Holly can fill them."

Hollman is a 1995 graduate of the University of Tennessee College of Law, where she served on the National Moot Court Team, wrote for the Tennessee Law Review and received the Vinson and Elkins Award for Excellence in Brief Writing. During 1994-95, she was a visiting student at Stanford University School of Law in Stanford, Calif.

Hollman is a 1989 cum laude graduate of Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., with a B.A. in politics.

From 1995-1999, she was a litigation associate in the labor and employment law section of Waller Lansden Dortch and Davis in Nashville, Tenn. In addition to representing employers in federal and state court, Hollman served as Equal Employment Opportunity officer for the Tennessee Titans of the National Football League. She also served on the firm's hiring committee.

Last year, Hollman joined McGuireWoods. In addition to representing employers in court, Hollman advised management clients and conducted training workshops on employment law.

Hollman served as an intern and a legal assistant at the BJC during 1991-1992. While a law student, she served as a clinic intern at the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund in Berkeley, Calif.

Hollman is a member of the District of Columbia and Tennessee bars and the American Bar Association.

Oliver Thomas, general counsel at the BJC when Hollman served as a legal assistant, praised her selection.

"For starters, Holly understands Baptists," Thomas said. "Her parents have been stalwarts in their local

church, and Holly did her first stint at the BJC as a college intern. Add to that history a keen intellect, winsome personality and experience in two prestigious law firms, and you have the recipe for the kind of general counsel who may become the BJC's best ever."

Hollman is married to Jay Smith, a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University.

In related news, Jeff Huett, a native of Alabama and a journalism graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, was named associate director of communications at the BJC in January.

Huett served as editor in chief of The Baylor Lariat, the university's 7,500-circulation newspaper. Previously, he completed internships with Associated Baptist Press in Jacksonville, Fla., and on the communications staff at Buckner Baptist Benevolences in Dallas, Texas.

Huett, named "Outstanding Senior Journalism Graduate" at Baylor, succeeds Kenny Byrd, who left the BJC staff in April 2000 to become the first Washington bureau chief of Associated Baptist Press.

In addition to serving as associate editor of Report from the Capital, Huett will handle staff liaison responsibilities for the Religious Liberty Council, the individual membership arm of the BJC.

"Jeff's outstanding record as a student journalist at Baylor and as a BJC intern indicate that he will be a tremendous asset to our communications efforts," said Larry Chesser, BJC communications director.

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## **White House faith-based office opens, Church of Scientology seeking funds**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The White House Office on Faith Based and Community Initiatives is now open for business, but the prospect of minority faith groups receiving federal funds is already creating unlikely critics of so-called "charitable choice" plans.

The office opened Feb. 20 and White House officials said a flood of calls poured in. The office is charged with reviewing spending policies and building support for legislation to enact President Bush's recently announced faith-based initiative. But news reports have indicated that many are calling believing that the office already has money to distribute, which it does not.

But if spending bills are passed to expand "charitable choice" measures that allow thoroughly religious organizations to receive tax dollars without having to create nonprofit organizations separate and independent from the church, many are beginning to line up for the funds.

One group is the Church of Scientology, which plans to seek government support for its drug and literacy programs. A Scientology official told Associated Baptist Press that the programs were separate organizations from the church.

In an interview with the New York Times during the campaign, Bush had said, "I have a problem with the teachings of Scientology being viewed on the same par as Judaism or Christianity. But I am interested in results. I am not focused on the process."

Also, The New York Times recently reported that Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church plans to seek aid for its abstinence programs in school.

These reports have led to criticism of the Bush plan from one of the president's key supporters during the election.

Pat Robertson, president of the Christian Coalition, made comments critical of the Bush initiative recently on his "700 Club" television program.

"I really don't know what to do," said Robertson, according to a transcript of the program provided by a church-state watchdog organization. "But this thing could be a real Pandora's box. And what seems to be such a great initiative can rise up to bite the organizations as well as the federal government. And I'm a little concerned about it, frankly."

Robertson said he hated to find himself "on the side of the Anti-Defamation League," whose leadership recently met with the head of the new White House office, John DiIulio, seeking promises that no funds would be given to the Nation of Islam. The ADL says the Nation of Islam spread anti-Semitic sentiments, and news reports said they were assured by DiIulio that the Bush administration would not fund them.

On his television program, Robertson said money flowing to such organizations could be a real problem. "I mean, the Moonies have been prescribed, if I can use that, for brainwashing techniques, sleep deprivation and all the rest of it that goes along with their unusual proselytizing. The Hare Krishnas much the same thing."

"And it seems appalling to me that we're going to go for somebody like that, or the Church of Scientology, which was involved in an incredible campaign against the IRS," Robertson added. "I mean, they were accused of all sorts of underhanded tactics. And in Germany, because of Scientology, there's been a crackdown, essentially, on many evangelical groups that were triggered by the revulsion against some of their beliefs and practices."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said Robertson's comments mean Bush's plan "is in enormous political trouble."

"As more and more people look at the details of the Bush plan, I think you'll see a lot more criticism similar to Robertson's," Lynn said. "Whether you're on the left, right or center, Bush's plan is disastrous public policy."

A spokesman from the White House faith-based office did not respond to an interview request in time to comment for this story.

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## **Baptist leaders issue joint statement criticizing church-state partnership plan**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Baptist leaders have issued a statement urging the rejection of President George W. Bush's plan "to shift tax dollars to houses of worship to subsidize social ministries."

The 14 signers -- brought together by the Baptist Joint Committee, a church-state separation advocacy group -- included moderate Baptist leaders, past Southern Baptist officials and a past president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

"President Bush is trying to do the right thing," the statement acknowledges. "All of us should applaud his recognition of religion's vital and helpful role in addressing pressing social problems. But when it comes to his call for 'charitable choice,' we must say no."

"We oppose charitable choice not because we want to discourage the delivery of faith-based services, but precisely because of our religious convictions and desire to maintain religious freedom."

The group stated that the announced initiatives "are made worse" by the creation of an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, "designed to facilitate the dumping of billions of dollars on churches and other pervasively religious ministries."

"For Baptists and all lovers of freedom, alarm bells go off when government creates an office in charge of religion," the Baptist leaders said. "Even the hint of a religious affairs office makes us nervous.

"It is one thing for the White House to set up a liaison office to ensure that religious groups are apprised of events that affect them and to make sure that religious voices are heard. It is quite another to set up a high level agency to take the active lead in spearheading and shaping policy that could harm religion.

"We all want to do what is right, but in the right way."

Signing the statement were Jimmy Allen, past president of the Southern Baptist Convention; Patricia Ayres, a member of First Baptist Church in Austin, Texas; Grady Cothen, past president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; James Dunn, visiting professor at Wake Forest Divinity School and president of the BJC Endowment; Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance of Baptists; Bill Leonard, dean of the Wake Forest Divinity School; Robert Maddox, pastor of Briggs Memorial Baptist Church in Bethesda, Md; William and Dellanna O'Brien, co-directors of BellMitra Associates; Keith Parks, retired global missions coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; R.G. Puckett, editor emeritus of the state Baptist newspaper of North Carolina, the Biblical Recorder; Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y.; Foy Valentine, former director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission; and Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

The BJC is often criticized by its conservative Baptist counterparts for supporting a strict wall of separation between church and state. But current Southern Baptist Convention officials have also raised constitutional concerns about the Bush plan in press releases.

Southern Baptist North American Mission Board President Robert Reccord expressed gratitude for a president "who sees value in faith-based ministry" and optimism about proposals "to end the federal government's discrimination against faith-based organizations." But he added, "Faith-based ministries need to proceed with caution."

"There can be a tendency over time for the government to attempt to control that which it subsidizes," Reccord said. "Great wisdom will be required on this journey."

Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission head Richard Land said he believes the proposal can be set up in a constitutional manner but listed "ground rules" that must be met. Land said:

- There must be a viable secular alternative.
- No religious group should be restricted or discriminated against in the distribution of funds.
- Government aid must go only for the nonreligious aspects of the program.
- It should "voucherize" the intended beneficiaries of the funds, empowering individuals to determine which provider to choose.

Land said if the government attempts to censor the religious message of a group, then that ministry "should never, under any circumstances, accept the money."

Groups with religious ties have long received government funding, but to avoid constitutional problems, they have set up separate nonprofit organizations. To receive money these programs have had to adhere to anti-discrimination laws that govern hiring and have had to avoid proselytizing.

Under Bush's plan, religious groups could compete for government funding without establishing separate organizations and without altering the religious nature of their services. Whether churches would still be allowed to only hire people of their faith while taking government money is heavily debated and would likely be decided in the courts.

## **Bush answers church-state questions at first press conference**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- In his first official press conference as president, George W. Bush responded Feb. 22 to a question about his support for the separation of church and state.

"I strongly respect the separation of church and state," Bush said in response to a heated question from veteran White House reporter Helen Thomas. Thomas now sometimes writes opinion pieces, including a recent one criticizing Bush's faith-based initiative.

Thomas asked the president: "Why do you refuse to respect the wall between the church and state? And you know that the mixing of religion and government for centuries has led to slaughter. I mean, the very fact that our country has stood in good stead by having the separation -- why do you break it down?"

Bush responded, "Helen, I strongly respect the separation of church and state," as Thomas interjected, "Well, you wouldn't have a religious office in the White House if you did."

Bush replied: "I didn't get to finish my answer, in all due respect. I believe that so long as there's a secular alternative available, we ought to allow individuals who are helping to be able to choose a program that may be run by a faith-based program -- or will be run by a faith-based program."

"I understand full well that some of the most compassionate missions of help and aid come out of faith-based programs," he added. "And I strongly support the faith-based initiative that we're proposing, because I don't believe it violates the line between the separation of church and state, and I believe it's going to make America a better place."

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## **Lawmakers seek reversal of Bush abortion policy**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Bipartisan legislation has been introduced in an attempt to reverse an executive order by President Bush that prohibits U.S. foreign aid to family planning organizations involved in abortion.

Bush signed the order on Jan. 22, reversing Clinton administration's position on the issue. Bush's order bars any foreign aid to groups that provide abortion services, counseling or referrals.

In effect, the Bush policy reinstates the Mexico City Policy of former Republican administrations.

But Senate lawmakers have introduced legislation to reverse the order. It has the backing of Sens. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif, Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, and others.

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- By Kenny Byrd

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