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Group takes steps to form new metro Atlanta association

ATLANTA (ABP) -- About 50 Atlanta Baptists met Feb. 22 to take initial steps to form a new Baptist association in protest of a January vote by Atlanta Baptist Association to retain two churches friendly to gays.

The individuals came from about 18 different churches, according to a report in The Christian Index. They passed a resolution announcing their intent to form a new association. Since most of those present had not been elected to represent their church officially, a future meeting will be scheduled after congregations have voted whether to join the new association.

They elected Tim Clark, pastor of Pine Lake Baptist Church, as moderator pro-tem. Volunteers formed an executive planning committee for the new group, tentatively called the Metro Atlanta Baptist Association. The committee will draft bylaws to be adopted at the next meeting. After that, charter churches will be admitted and officers elected.

Rehoboth Baptist Church in Tucker, Ga., which has already severed ties with Atlanta Baptist Association, offered to be host for the next meeting.

The move comes in response to a controversial vote by the 153-church Atlanta Baptist Association against removing two churches known for accepting homosexuals as church members and leaders. The congregations, Virginia-Highland Baptist Church in Atlanta and Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., earlier were voted out of the Georgia Baptist Convention over the issue.

After the Atlanta Association vote, leaders of both the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board announced plans to stop funding missionary positions in Atlanta Association unless the association changes its stand.

Some Atlanta Baptists are pursuing that end. Sam Boyd, pastor of Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Atlanta, has given notice that he plans to propose an amendment to the association's bylaw on membership at an upcoming meeting scheduled March 12. Boyd's amendment would specify "an affiliated church does not include a church which knowingly takes, or has taken, any action to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior."

Others at the Feb. 22 meeting, however, said they weren't optimistic that the motion, which requires a two-thirds majority, would pass. Several appeared already committed to the idea of starting something new.

Georgia Baptist Convention Executive Director Robert White attended as an observer, along with other state leaders. Asked to speak, White said he was grieved by the issue. "The convention will relate to churches and associations that are biblically sound," White said. "If Atlanta Association says 'we erred' and they correct that decision, that will put us in a position of working with the association."

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-- By ABP staff

Speaker calls for facing church conflict

By Ken Walker

CAVE CITY, Ky. (ABP) -- Church leaders can steer congregations in a healthy direction by honestly facing conflict instead of running from it or turning a dispute into a personal battle, according to a former pastor and noted conference leader.

Too many church members treat the biblical mandate of reconciliation as an opportunity to argue their case, said Ken Schmitt, keynote speaker at a recent deacon-pastor-spouse retreat sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Schmitt said many people misunderstand Jesus' three-step process on resolving conflicts recorded in Matthew 18:15-17. The passage calls for private reproof, then intervention by a small group and as a last resort taking the matter before the whole congregation.

"We see this as one-two-three strikes and you're out," Schmitt said. Instead, he added, "We are to work toward reconciliation for the common good."

The retreat was titled "Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior." That is the name of a book by Arthur Paul Boers, published by the Alban Institute.

Although this was the first time he led a seminar based on the material, the St. Louis- based speaker has done extensive studies in "systems" theory.

He described this philosophy as thinking about the world and each person's part in it as a whole. When people appreciate how all members contribute to the congregation, they develop respect for others, even those that irritate them, he said.

"Systems thinking changes our focus from the speck in our brother's eye to the beam in our own," he said. "The most significant thing we can do to change behavior is to deal with the beam in our eye."

Too often, members focus on the problems they think others pose, said Schmitt, an assistant director in charge of pastoral care for Wycliffe Bible translators.

That creates the potential for intense battles, he said. To illustrate, he referred to a past lawsuit in Knoxville, Tenn., where he was pastor of a non-denominational church from 1977 to 1991.

A woman sued for \$20,000 for injuries she received during a contentious business meeting, when she fell over a pew and banged her hand. In addition to her alleged attacker, she named the church as a defendant for allowing the incident to occur.

Schmitt said the episode was an extreme example of a common ailment in churches, where people avoid confronting others until simmering problems explode.

"Avoidance isn't love," he said. "We want to avoid discomfort. It isn't dealing out of love. We aren't really turning the other cheek."

"We need to learn a new vision of dealing with problems," he added. "The problem is change is challenging. It hurts."

One solution is to develop what he called Christian assertiveness. This calls for working on the system that leads to problems instead of fretting over them, he said.

Healing the system often eliminates the problem and helps members develop respect for others' role. Then, instead of dismissing difficult people we can appreciate how they challenge us and contribute to our spiritual growth, Schmitt said.

Changing a system is also more valuable than concentrating on symptoms, he said.

He told an amusing story about a high school where girls were kissing bathroom mirrors to leave lipstick marks, despite threats of suspension and other punishment.

A cleaning lady solved the problem. She walked into the bathroom while females were putting on lipstick, dipped a sponge in a toilet and wiped the mirrors.

Likewise, churches often attack symptoms, Schmidt said. One example that arose during small-group workshops after each main session was the problem of low enrollment in adult education.

Instead of blaming teacher quality, grumbling about lack of commitment, or trying to simply boost enrollment, a systems approach asked what can be done to deal with the situation.

Among suggestions that emerged in one group were varying class times, scheduling special-interest sessions, polling members about their needs, improving nursery care to attract more young adults, and improving teacher training.

The same theory applies when churches are upset with their pastor. Workshop leader David Stancil said congregations need to face what they are doing wrong instead of blaming everything on their leader.

Now an associate pastor at a church in Louisville, Stancil was a layman and deacon chairman about 10 years ago amid squabbling and division.

"I got up and said, 'The last four pastors have left without our blessing and they were good people,'" he recalled. "'The problem is not the pastor, the problem is us.' It took us about a year and a half to work through that."

Noting that the virus of gossip won't spread without leaders' participation, he said if deacons and spouses behave in healthy ways it will dramatically improve congregational health.

If a member is upset about the pastor, deacons should ask if the individual has gone to the pastor, or offer to go along, or ask if he or she can discuss the situation with the pastor, Stancil said.

If the complainer refuses, the deacon should point out that person is acting unbiblically and will be held accountable.

"If people know the rules, the system becomes healthy," he said. "The goal is not to win, it's reconciliation."

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Father-daughter dance bolsters abstinence effort

By Shawn Hendricks

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. (ABP) -- On Feb. 9, several couples entered a multipurpose building in St. Joseph, Mo., wearing corsages and formal wear. Moments later, the building was alive with laughter, singing, dancing and the Village People song, "YMCA." No, this wasn't a wedding reception, homecoming party or winter formal. It was a father-and-daughter dance sponsored by First Baptist Church of Savannah, Mo.

Fifteen couples attended the church's first dance. The event was part of the youth group's True Love Waits sexual-abstinence emphasis.

Youth minister Dyann Duncan said she wanted the event to be more than just a dance.

"It's a good opportunity for fathers and daughters to spend time together," she pointed out. "With school activities and jobs, a lot of our fathers don't get to spend much time with their daughters. I wanted the fathers to wonder, 'How well do I know my daughter?'"

Duncan said she was a little concerned that parents or others in the church might disapprove of a church-sponsored dance. Those concerns were soon put to rest.

"Everyone was so supportive," she said. "The parents were like, 'Oh that is wonderful; you have to do this again.'" Duncan said she hoped the event taught fathers that they need to be complimentary of their daughters, and to treat them as they would want young men to treat them.

"Girls need to be hearing compliments from their fathers, or they will go to someone who will compliment them," Duncan noted. "Statistics show that girls who don't have a good relationship with their dads are more likely to have premarital sex."

Before the dance, all of the fathers were given a list of things to do for that night. The list included washing their vehicles and taking their daughters out to dinner at a nice restaurant.

"I wanted them to treat their daughters like they would want them to be treated on a normal date," Duncan said. "A lot of dads did above and beyond what we asked them to do. At the end of the night, a lot of the girls were like, 'I didn't know my Dad could be so much fun.'"

Keri Weber, 16, was a little skeptical about going to a dance with her father. "It felt kind of weird at first," she said. "I am not used to that kind of special treatment, like having the door opened for me."

Keri ended up having a wonderful evening with her father. "I liked being able to go to the dance and have fun with my dad," she said. "I usually am not able to spend a lot of time with him because I am so busy with school and work."

Her father, Gary, who cleaned out his pickup truck especially for the evening, had a good time, too. "It's something pretty special you can do with your daughter," he said. "I thought it was a real good experience. It grew us together a little bit." The following Sunday during the church service, 18 youths vowed to stay sexually pure until they are married.

Duncan observed: "I think the kids are ready for something like this. They are wanting to get real with God. Youth ministry is about more than summer camp and having a lock-in once in a while." With all of the support Duncan received for the dance, she plans to hold a similar event next year.

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Woman reaches out to Vietnamese community

By Shawn Hendricks

FESTUS, Mo. (ABP) -- When Betty Hayes walks into the foyer of Faith Baptist Church in Festus, Mo., one can't help but notice her.

With Vietnamese children flocking around her like chicks following their mother hen, the longtime church member makes her way through the building. Everything around her whirls at a rapid pace. Looking a little exhausted at first, Hayes quickly perks up when asked about her Vietnamese friends.

For the past 20 years, relationships between Hayes and a local Vietnamese community have matured slowly but steadily into a full-fledged ministry of the church. Within the last two years, the church has begun holding Vietnamese worship services in the fellowship hall.

Hayes, a single woman in her 60s, is quick to point out the support the ministry receives from fellow members of the congregation. But there is no doubt that she is the ringleader.

Whether giving rides to church for Vietnamese children or serving as a go-between for Vietnamese adults who speak little English and their doctors, Hayes keeps quite busy. And she does it all without speaking a word of Vietnamese.

"The children speak English, so that helps," she said.

It all began in 1981 when Hayes agreed to take in an 8-year-old Vietnamese girl named Mia, who needed a place to live. She lived with Hayes through college.

Betty said it was an opportunity she couldn't pass up. "When the Lord puts something in front of us, we need to respond then, and he will multiply it," she said. "When we respond to physical and emotional needs of people, then the Lord will open up doors for us."

Hayes, who also has two grown adopted children, has housed a half-dozen Vietnamese children through the years. Mia, who is in her 30s, now lives in Oklahoma. Currently, Hayes has legal custody of Bethany, a 9-year-old Vietnamese girl, and she takes care of a 15-year-old boy named David Nguyen.

"I didn't go out looking," she said. "The Lord just brought them here."

Though Hayes believes the Lord's work is being done through the ministry, she said the cultural differences make it difficult for her and others to share their faith. Because most Vietnamese have been raised in the Buddhist culture, making a profession of faith in Christ is not easy for them.

"It's not like witnessing to anyone else," she said. "They are open to all types of beliefs, but it's difficult to break through that wall."

Hayes said there are some, like Mia, who never did make a profession of faith. She still talks regularly to Mia. "I keep praying for her, but it can be heartbreaking."

For a long time, Vietnamese people would come to church with Hayes every Sunday despite their inability to understand the sermon. Mark McGee, who assists with the ministry, said, "For so many years, they would come just out of respect for Betty. The core of the ministry is relationships, along with a trust in Betty."

Just within the last two years, the church has begun to see more cultural barriers broken down through the Vietnamese services Hayes and others helped start.

Every other Sunday, the church holds a service specifically for the Vietnamese in the fellowship hall. Ban Le, pastor of Emmanuel Vietnamese Baptist Church in St. Louis, leads the service.

On other Sundays, Vietnamese members attend the regular worship service and use headphones to listen to tapes of Ban Le's sermon.

Through the years, 11 Vietnamese people have made professions of faith.

Hayes said the last two years of ministry have played a key role in most of those decisions.

"There were times that I wanted to witness to them, and I couldn't do it because of the language barrier," she said. "It takes time."

Mike Goodwin, who has been pastor of the church for 29 years, said the Vietnamese have always been welcomed warmly into the congregation.

"They are just part of the body," he said. "We can't speak much, but we have a good time. It's been a neat thing how they have been received." Goodwin is grateful for the help Hayes has provided. "She's got a heart for missions -- period," he said.

"She's one of the most marvelous ministers I've ever known, and she does it in a natural way. She's the picture of sacrificial ministry."

Hayes' daughter, Debbie, said her mother's ministry is evident when you walk into her home and see the photos of her Vietnamese friends.

"She's running out of wall," Debbie pointed out.

Though there doesn't seem to be much room left, she said, her mother always finds a place to put them.

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News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Baptist communicator joins NCC staff

NEW YORK -- Veteran Southern Baptist communicator Pat Pattillo has been elected to a senior-staff position at the New York-based National Council of Churches.

Pattillo, who now lives in Birmingham, Ala., has been named the NCC's associate general secretary for communications, effective April 16. He will oversee the communications program of the nation's leading ecumenical organization and its international ministry, Church World Service.

Pattillo worked 21 years at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., including 14 years as vice president of development and public relations, and eight years at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. Since 1996, he has been North American representative for Hong Kong Baptist University.

"It will be a privilege to join with this unique cooperative organization as it pursues a broad range of Christian ministries rooted in biblical faith and focused on the most challenging human needs," Pattillo said.

Pattillo's wife, Zelma Mullins Pattillo, is an ordained Southern Baptist minister and a board certified chaplain. She is coordinator of spiritual care for Unity Hospice, a joint program of the Baptist and Catholic health systems in the Birmingham area. They are parents of two adult children. (ABP)

Psychologist joins Beeson faculty

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -- A practicing counselor and African Methodist Episcopal minister from Baltimore has been named associate professor of divinity at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala.

Patricia Outlaw will teach in areas of pastoral counseling and spiritual formation, along with proving assessment services to Beeson students, officials announced March 1.

Outlaw holds bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology from Towson State University, a Ph.D. in human development from the University of Maryland and a master's degree in theology from St. Mary's Seminary and University. She is completing a doctor of ministry degree at Beeson.

Since 1979 she has headed a private counseling practice, Outlaw and Associates, in Baltimore.

Beeson Dean Timothy George said Outlaw would "bring a strong counseling dimension to Beeson's curriculum of training faithful ministers of the gospel." (ABP)

Bank closing costs church \$50,000

METROPOLIS, Ill. -- A small-town Illinois church lost nearly \$50,000 when its bank shut down before Christmas, in the heart of the church's collection of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions.

First Baptist Church of Metropolis, Ill., learned a hard lesson when the National State Bank of Metropolis, which had been doing business for more than a century and survived the Great Depression, closed its doors Dec. 14. The church had several accounts totaling nearly \$150,000. The FDIC insures deposits up to \$100,000, meaning the congregation lost more than \$49,000 in excess of that limit.

"It couldn't have come at a worse time for us," said Pastor Louis Brinker, noting that the church was just about to buy 48 acres of land for a new building. He said, however, that church members had responded well to make up for the loss.

Brinker said he hopes the experience will be a lesson to other churches to make sure they are covered in case their banks go belly up. The Metropolis bank was the seventh FDIC-insured institution to fail in 2000. (ABP)

Oklahoma Baptists speak out against lottery

OKLAHOMA CITY -- Opposition by Oklahoma Baptists and other church groups is being credited with stopping a lottery proposal in the state Senate.

After vocal opposition, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted 17-13 to kill a proposal for a statewide referendum on a lottery.

"Thank you Oklahoma Baptists for your immediate response to our request for phone calls and letters to our governmental officials in regard to the lottery," Oklahoma Baptist Convention Executive Director Anthony Jordan said in the weekly newsjournal Baptist Messenger.

Jordan said those calls and letters made a difference. "As I met with legislative leaders and heard reports from the governor's office, our effort was a major factor in stopping the extension of gambling through the lottery," he said. (ABP)

Mississippi College president retiring

CLINTON, Miss. -- Mississippi College President Howell Todd announced Feb. 5 that he will retire after seven years at the Baptist-affiliated school in Clinton.

Todd, 57, said he wants to spend more time with his family and get involved in volunteer projects.

He is credited with restoring the college's image after its former president, Lewis Nobles, admitted to embezzling millions of dollars donated to the school. He also changed the face of the campus, initiating major construction and renovation projects after a fund-raising drive that raised nearly \$100 million.

He said he would step down within the next 12 months, after a successor is named. (ABP)

Minister seeking used laptop computers

GENTRY, Mo. -- A Baptist ministry described as "connecting the dots" between those who have quality items to give away and those who need them is, along with similar organizations, hoping to launch a national drive for old laptop computers.

Darrell Treat, a bivocational pastor in Gentry, Mo., said organizations including he and his wife, Deb's, Fish and Loaves ministry have sent thousands of desktop computers into mostly foreign countries to missionaries, schools, hospitals and others. Because of new taxes and costs of shipping, that is being hindered, he said.

To get around the problem, Treat said the organizations are working together to start a national drive for old laptop computers. "We hope to get large and small businesses, as well as churches and individuals, to donate old machines for God's work," he said. All donations will be 100-percent tax deductible, he said.

Treat can be reached via e-mail at fishandloaves@juno.com or through Gentry Baptist Church, P.O. Box 160, Gentry, Mo., 64453-0160. (ABP)

Baptist Center for Ethics launching youth resource

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- The Baptist Center for Ethics has announced plans to launch an electronic newsletter for individuals working with youth.

Y! will debut at the end of March, said Robert Parham, executive director of the independent ethics agency in Nashville, Tenn. It is aimed at helping youth ministers, parents and other youth workers better understand teens often described as Generation Y, those born roughly between 1980 and 2000.

Parham said the newsletter would be mailed initially to subscribers of bcE*byte, the organization's e-newsletter that goes to church leaders. (ABP)

Hardin-Simmons VP takes post at Belmont

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Baptist-affiliated Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., has named Dan McAlexander as provost, effective April 2.

McAlexander currently serves as associate vice president for planning and dean of graduate studies and special programs at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas.

As provost, he will serve as Belmont's chief academic and operating officer, reporting directly to the president and serving in his absence. (ABP)

Longtime Southwestern prof R. Othal Feather dies

FORT WORTH, Texas -- R. Othal Feather, who taught education administration 28 years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, died March 25 in the Indian Territory of Southwestern Oklahoma. He was 97.

He also served as a minister of education with churches in Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Texas. He was an Army chaplain during World War II and served on special assignments by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in the Middle East, Japan, Hong Kong, Africa and South America. He was a frequent writer in professional journals in areas of outreach, education and personal evangelism. He authored two books. (ABP)

CBF funding behind last year

ATLANTA -- Mid-year contributions to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship were down 4 percent from last year, according to officials of the Atlanta-based CBF.

Contributions for the first half of the 2000-2001 fiscal year exceeded \$6.2 million, behind last year's pace. Receipts for the CBF's Global Missions Offering were virtually even with totals last year.

Nancy Duncan, the Fellowship's chief financial officer, said most of the decline is in designated giving, which is down more than 19 percent from last year. A special emphasis on relief ministries to Kosovo last year pushed designated contributions to record highs. (ABP)

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