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**Baptist agencies differ
on disclosure of salaries**

By Laurie Lattimore

MACON, Ga. (ABP) -- About half of Baptist organizations contacted by the independent newspaper Baptists Today would disclose salary information for their top executive. Three Southern Baptist Convention entities said policies allowed them to release only salary ranges.

The American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. has a policy of keeping salaries secret, said Wendy Rothenberger, associate director of human resource development and the legal department for the denomination based in Valley Forge, Pa.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Coordinator Daniel Vestal, meanwhile, willingly reported his \$142,041 compensation package that includes salary and housing allowance. David Wilkinson, communications coordinator for the Atlanta-based Fellowship, said he talked to Vestal when the former pastor was hired about whether he preferred to keep his salary a secret.

"He said all his life he had had no problem being open about his salary, so he didn't plan to have a problem now," Wilkinson said.

While acknowledging the tension between privacy concerns and accountability to people in the pew who pay denominational salaries through their tithes and offerings, other Baptist leaders were more discrete in discussing their compensation.

Morris Chapman, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, allowed his office to release a salary structure showing the range for his position between \$133,428 and \$191,280.

Claude Thomas, pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas, and current SBC Executive Committee chair, initially refused to share any information or discuss the matter with Baptists Today. After discovering the release of the salary structure, however, Thomas told the paper that Executive Committee guidelines allow the disclosure of salary ranges, but he refused to give an opinion on the issue of whether such compensation should be public information.

Thomas also said Chapman was not allowed according to convention directives to speak his views on the matter either.

"I am informed that the Executive Committee staff has provided information requested about salaries in keeping with the policy authorized by the Southern Baptist Convention," Thomas said. "As chairman of the Executive Committee, which employs Dr. Chapman, I have asked him not to answer additional questions. For him to do so would require him to go outside the directives approved by the convention."

Neither Chapman nor Thomas would confirm or deny speculation that Chapman receives an income bonus based on performance of the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified giving plan. Herb Hollinger, who retired last June from the SBC Executive Committee where he led the denominational news service, Baptist Press, noted rumors about such a bonus but said he was unable to confirm it during his tenure at the Executive Committee.

"I've always been in favor of releasing salaries of all SBC leaders, but you and I both know that is not going to happen," Hollinger said, noting he got "in all kinds of trouble" years ago for printing his own salary as editor of the Baptist newspaper in California.

Hollinger lamented that his desire for disclosure is unfortunately not the desire of many Southern Baptists. "Apparently there is still a huge trust factor," he said. "Southern Baptists have always had a blind trust of their leaders."

Both SBC mission boards provided salary information when requested. The International Mission Board, which relies on CP funds and mission offerings for its \$254 million budget, readily offered full disclosure of exact salary information.

IMB President Jerry Rankin is paid \$124,378 in salary and housing allowance, reported David Steverson, interim vice president for finance. He also noted that Rankin drives a 1997 Buick LeSabre provided by IMB and received a \$350 Christmas bonus like every other employee last year.

"We're not afraid to disclose information," Steverson said of the mission board. "It's just not what we're all about."

At the North American Mission Board, spokesman Martin King said the salary range for Robert Reccord is \$140,000 to \$195,000 -- information that was published when the president was hired to head up the newly created domestic missions organization in 1997.

"I think there is a waving between privacy and accountability," said King, when asked whether such information should be available to the average Baptist. "What people make in this culture is very private, yet we want to be accountable to those who pay for it."

King suggested that one danger in releasing salaries is that the average Southern Baptist might not understand why some people and some positions make certain salaries. "That is why we elect trustees. I don't think people are clamoring for this information. In a public company, how many people really reveal the top salaries to stockholders?"

Perhaps surprising to some, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention gave salary information for its chief executive, even though the revenue-producing agency receives no Cooperative Program funding.

James Draper, who has led LifeWay Christian Resources for 10 years, has a salary range between \$229,872 and \$344,808 according to Charles Willis, senior media-relations manager. Willis noted that LifeWay -- formerly the Baptist Sunday School Board -- has a \$419 million budget, more than 5,000 employees and has never taken CP funds since it sells materials and resources to churches.

"We're a pretty huge operation," he said. "It would be pretty unfair to take CP money and then turn around and charge churches for materials."

However, both the Southern Baptist Annuity Board and Woman's Missionary Union, an auxiliary to the SBC, refused to give any information regarding the salaries of their executives. Neither receives CP funding for its operational budgets.

"There is accountability because everybody wants to know their money is being spent well," said Teresa Dickens, communications specialist for WMU. "But then again there is an element of privacy. For [WMU Executive Director Wanda Lee] it is a privacy issue." In addition, Dickens noted, "We don't give money to CP and we don't get money from CP, so we're not obligated to tell."

An Associated Baptist Press story in 1997 indicated former WMU Executive Director Dellana O'Brien's salary as approximately \$80,000. Dickens said Lee's undisclosed salary is below that amount.

Trustees of the Annuity Board have a policy against the release of any salary information. However, trustee chairman George Tous Van Nijkerk said the compensation for current president O.S. Hawkins, who came to the position from the pastorate of Dallas' First Baptist Church, was determined by an outside consulting firm that considered the local employment markets plus practices in similar industries.

Tous Van Nijkerk would neither confirm nor deny speculations about salaries, but noted that Hawkins "is a happy man" and makes "nowhere near what he could be making" in a financial institution in the corporate world. However, Tous Van Nijkerk said that Hawkins, a pastor with no formal financial training, has focused his efforts on the Adopt-An-Annuitant program that helps retired pastors who did not plan for retirement.

The trustee chairman also confirmed that Hawkins gets a performance bonus based on a criteria set by trustees. He noted that the current financial market is not necessarily the barometer for performance.

"The bonus is set by trustees from an established criteria based on expectations of the trustees, such as making a difference in the lives of its annuitants," Tous Van Nijkerk said.

Presidents Albert Mohler of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Kenneth Hemphill of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, declined to provide any information on compensation. New Orleans Seminary did not return numerous phone calls regarding the salary of President Charles Kelley.

On the other hand, officials at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., readily provided information on their leader, former SBC President Paige Patterson, whose salary is between \$90,000 and \$110,000 and lives in the president's home on campus. He also got a \$125 bonus at Christmas this year along with all seminary employees.

When Phil Roberts was hired in February as the new president of Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., his salary was reported to be \$124,000. William Crews, president of Golden Gate Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., reported his salary range at \$83,850 to \$105,350. Like most presidents, he also lives in a house provided by the seminary.

Crews said he didn't mind giving out his salary information, but he doesn't imagine that many other Southern Baptists care what any of the executives make. "I'm not curious," Crews said. "From my experience as a pastor, I never cared about what SBC leaders were making."

Two newer seminaries that receive funding from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship were asked about compensation for their leaders. At Truett Seminary, a part of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, university spokesman Larry Brumley said the seminary does not release any salary information to the public.

However, the IRS requires all colleges and universities to report the salaries of the top five paid staff members, Brumley explained. Although the figures are a year behind, the Chronicle of Higher Education reports all the salaries in its December issue every year.

Paul Powell, former president of the SBC Annuity Board, was named dean of the George W. Truett Seminary in February.

Unlike Truett, the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond is autonomous rather than a graduate program of a larger university. Tom Graves, president of BTRS for the past 10 years, said his salary is \$80,948 for a school with a \$2.1 million budget.

"I think any persons paid from gifts from a congregation need to be very open about salaries and about budgets of their school," said Graves. Though he doesn't field many calls about his salary, he believes many Baptists are interested in what their leaders are being paid. "I've got to believe many are interested, and any employee of a non-profit that works off the gifts of others should be very open about salary."

At least one pastor whose church has long supported Southern Baptist mission causes agrees heartily.

"That money comes from Baptist people, so Baptist people ought to know," said Perry Sanders, 72, long-time pastor of the First Baptist Church in Lafayette, La. His congregation continues giving 15.5 percent of its offerings to the Cooperative Program, the missions and evangelization funding mechanism of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, an SBC agency dependent on the gifts of cooperating churches, said a business and financial plan giving broad ranges without providing specific salary details is a good approach.

"We believe it is important to balance cooperating Southern Baptists' right to know with the legitimate privacy concerns of their denominational servants," said Land.

Bobby Reed of the ERLC released a statement showing the "average salary of the top five employees" at the SBC agency is \$78,406 with benefits averaging \$32,146. He said that limited information is consistent with the convention's policies on revealing salary ranges of its employees.

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Pastors of former SBC churches meet

RALEIGH (ABP) -- "If we aren't Southern Baptist, then who are we?" This and other questions sparked lively discussion at a first-ever national meeting of representatives from churches that have taken official action to leave the Southern Baptist Convention.

The meeting, held March 26-27 in Raleigh, N.C., drew 29 people from six states, representing 22 churches. The meeting was organized by Bill Bruster, networking coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but the churches represented included some, like Raleigh's Millbrook Baptist Church, that do not support CBF. Millbrook left the SBC in 1996 and is aligned with the Alliance of Baptists.

About one third of all churches that have chosen to opt out of the SBC are found in North Carolina, which has nearly triple the number of any other state. A list compiled by Bruster contained 73 churches in all, including 25 from North Carolina. Nine churches were listed from Texas, eight from Virginia, and seven each from Kentucky and Missouri.

The list reflected the difficulty of defining what it means "to leave the SBC." Two of the North Carolina churches on the list have distanced themselves from the SBC by withdrawing funds but have not voted to officially sever ties. Two other churches in North Carolina that have taken such votes, meanwhile, were not on the list. Many other churches across the theological spectrum are functionally inactive in the SBC but have not taken official action to withdraw.

The meeting was billed as a gathering for pastors, but some laypersons also attended. The gathering had no set agenda other than fellowship and an open discussion of common concerns, according to Dan Day, pastor of First Baptist in Raleigh, which opted out of the SBC in 1998.

Retirement issues topped a list of concerns, in part because the SBC Annuity Board announced in February that it would no longer serve churches that separate from the convention. Gary Skeen, president of CBF's new church benefits board, described a partnership CBF has developed with American Baptists to provide annuity and health-insurance benefits for churches seeking or needing alternative programs. Other options known to participants were also discussed.

How churches that have left the SBC expect to relate to other Baptist denominations or organizations in the future was another topic for discussion. Bruster told the group that CBF was not a denomination and does not intend to become one but was focusing on its primary purpose as a missions-delivery system.

Several participants talked about the issues of self-definition and communication. "If we're not Southern Baptist, then who are we, and how do we let others know?"

Other topics ranged from an exploration of resources for literature and missions projects to a roundtable on re-energizing plateaued churches to spark new growth.

Mack Thompson, of Ridge Road Baptist Church in Raleigh, said the meeting was a very positive experience. "There is a major shift from the denomination to the local church when it comes to 'doing church,'" he said. "More churches are choosing not to just plug into the denominational program as we used to do but are taking more responsibility for determining who we are and what we do. I see this as a healthy thing." Ridge Road voted last summer to leave the SBC.

The discussion of common concerns was particularly helpful, said Marion Lark, pastor of First Baptist Church in Henderson, N.C., which voted in January to part company with the SBC. "For us, the decision was a matter of identity and integrity," Lark said.

First Baptist Church of Wilmington is one of the most recent North Carolina churches to separate from the SBC, having given the proposal overwhelming approval in February. Pastor Mike Queen attended the meeting and stressed that the church holds no ill will or rancor toward the SBC.

"The vote was just a reflection of who we are," he said. "We are not supportive of the stance currently taken by the SBC. When people ask me who we are, I tell them our primary identity is that we are North Carolina Baptists."

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-- By Biblical Recorder staff

Miss Lizzie still teaching Sunday school after 80 years

By Lonnie Wilkey

HUMBOLDT, Tenn. (ABP) -- Around First Baptist Church in Humboldt, Tenn., she's known simply as "Miss Lizzie."

Feb. 25, one day after her 94th birthday, members of the west Tennessee congregation honored Lizzie Chatham with a plaque recognizing her for 80 years as a Sunday school teacher.

"Miss Lizzie keeps me busy," Pastor Ed North says of the matriarch and church icon. "She always keeps me informed about what is going on in our church," he said. "She is a blessing."

Chatham became a member of First Baptist in 1927, two days after she married Russell Chatham.

She's been active ever since. "I don't know what it is (like) not doing something in the church," she admitted.

However, there are two things Chatham won't do. "I don't preach and I don't sing," she said.

Teaching Sunday school has been her specialty since she taught her first class at age 14 while a member of First Baptist Church in nearby Alamo, Tenn., where she had been baptized two years earlier.

She has taught all ages through the years. Currently she teaches a class of senior women, several of whom are also in their 90s.

Chatham said she enjoys every part of teaching, from preparing her lesson to keeping in touch with class members, and praying for her class as well as her pastor, church staff, and other church members.

She admitted she now spends more time preparing her lesson each week than she used to.

"I used to not have to do that much studying, but my computer (mind) doesn't work like it used to," she laughed.

In addition to her study at home, Chatham attends teacher training every Wednesday evening and also conducts a Bible study in her home on Mondays.

She estimated she has taught thousands of lessons over the 80-year span. And, she has missed very few Sundays over that time. In December, after spraining an ankle, she came to church and taught for two Sundays in a wheelchair.

Minister of Education Terry Sampson describes her as a faithful church member. "She is here every time the doors are open unless she's sick," he said, adding that she not only attends the teacher training sessions, she contributes to them.

Many of the people she taught decades ago are still active in the church. Four boys she taught as 5 and 6 year-olds are now men in their 70s.

When asked which age was the easiest to teach, Chatham didn't hesitate: "5-6-year-olds are the easiest," she affirmed. With a wry grin, she added, "They look at you and accept what you say. Other age groups like to question."

She said the Lord has been important to her, and she has tried to share Christ throughout her life. "There is no greater joy than doing the Lord's work," she affirmed.

Chatham has no idea of how many people she has helped lead to Christ. She views her role as a "seed planter."

"You never know when you're planting seeds when and if someone will accept Christ," she said. One person she did help lead to Christ was a son-in-law, a Muslim, who later led his mother and father to the Lord.

Chatham is proud of her entire family. She has two daughters and a son. Another son and her husband are deceased. Two of her five grandchildren are Baptist ministers. She also is quick to tell about her 16 great grandchildren.

What's more, her family is proud of her. "My children and others call me an encourager," she said proudly. She takes that role seriously by praying for others and sending birthday and get-well cards when needed.

Chatham said she has no plans to quit teaching Sunday school.

"The Lord called me to be a teacher and when he gets through with me, he'll stop me," she said with conviction.

"I don't think I have a say in it."

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Minister urges caution in spreading urban legends

By Mark Wingfield

OKLAHOMA CITY (ABP) -- Christians who pass along false stories and urban legends via e-mail compromise their witness for Christ, claims an Oklahoma minister who has written a book on the problem.

"If we're known for fabricating stories, for passing fearful stories around, we're going to lose our right to be heard in the public arena," said John Williams. "We're going to be looked upon as fools for Christ."

In fact, "Fools for Christ" was the working title of his book, recently published by Broadman & Holman under the title "The Cost of Deception: The Seduction of Modern Myths and Urban Legends."

The church, Williams says, is the representation of truth on earth. As witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ, he says believers should not let themselves become known for spreading falsehood.

"Christians must guard themselves from the distrust and suspicion that can destroy community," he writes in the book's first chapter.

The danger, he writes, is illustrated by a famous Mark Twain quote: "A lie can travel halfway around the world before the facts have even put their boots on." The phenomenon of urban legends is nothing new, Williams acknowledges, although it has been given new impetus by the speed of the Internet.

"There is a lot of hokey that has been given validity by the replication and forwarding of urban legends and e-mail myths," he writes. "Perhaps you've recently signed a petition to stop an atheist's efforts to ban shows like 'Touched by an Angel.' Most of us have been told about the computer in Belgium called The Beast that has a record of every living human being.

"Even our pulpits are not immune from perpetuating urban legends. Have you ever heard during a wedding ceremony that as a result of the creation of the first woman, all men have one less rib than women? Ask any doctor; men have the same number of ribs as women. These myths still persist today, despite the fact they are not true."

All urban legends have several things in common, Williams explains.

"They are fun or shocking to tell, entertaining to hear and simply not true. Except in a few cases, it is usually impossible to determine the origin of Internet legends; they reappear every few months or years in slightly different versions, travel through cyberspace and then disappear."

Two things got Williams pondering why Christians are so gullible to spread urban legends.

First, he was amazed at the number of Christians who became prophets of doom as the year 2000 approached. He listened to those who were predicting the collapse of governments, the failure of banks, wars and all manner of dire consequences from the so-called "Y2K problem."

Williams, a former pastor and radio personality who now leads Oklahoma Concert of Prayer, went to the Bible to look for answers. "I just didn't see a scenario like Y2K coming," he said.

"In the aftermath of the Y2K washout, the most important question we must ask ourselves is this: How could so many people, who were so earnest in their convictions, be so wrong?" he writes in the book's introduction. "Similarly, why has the American church been so brazen in predicting the date of the Rapture, the return of Christ and naming the Antichrist, only to be proven wrong again and again? What is it that causes us to be so easily deceived?"

The second thing that prompted him to write the book was being inundated with one of the most unstoppable urban legends to afflict the modern church. On a single day in 1998, he received e-mails from five people urging him to sign a petition to keep Madalyn Murray O'Hair from putting an end to all religious broadcasting.

The appeal is bogus, but it has been circulating among Christians for 30 years.

In his book, Williams devotes an entire chapter to debunking what he calls "the petition that won't go away." Also in the book, Williams tackles stories about angel sightings, an alleged well drilled into hell from Russia, NASA's alleged proof of Joshua's missing day, alleged appearances by various corporate executives on television talk shows where they are purported to have made alarming comments about Satanism or racism, warnings about HIV-infected needles left in theater seats, predictions of who is the Antichrist and various other end-times prophecies.

All the urban legends he explains have been thoroughly researched, with information drawn from multiple sources.

The response, he said, has been positive.

"The key to it is everyone can relate to one of these stories. Even if they don't get e-mail messages, they've heard these stories," he said.

And most people relate to the book because they have been guilty of passing on at least one of the urban legends, he said. "When you tell those stories, 95 percent will say, 'Oh, I got that and I sent it to my friends.'"

Pastors especially must be discerning about passing along bogus stories as sermon illustrations, Williams warned. "What would happen after a period of time if people find out these are not true? It would cause people not to trust their pastors."

The best advice for all people hearing or reading sensational stories is to "trust but verify," Williams said. "Believe the best about everybody, but also verify."

"That really would help put to rest a lot of these stories a lot quicker."

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