



# Associated Baptist Press

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### Student mission trip opens eyes to poverty

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Begging for money on a snowy day, digging through garbage for aluminum cans and looking for a warm place to sleep were just some of the experiences facing Texas students who recently traveled to the nation's capital to learn about social justice.

The week-long mission trip -- "Doing Biblical Justice in the 21st Century -- was sponsored in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and tackled issues such as poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, advocacy and Africa.

"This is the way CBF has always envisioned working in partnership with churches and other groups," said Lonnie Turner, CBF representative in Washington and an organizer of the mission trip. Turner and Ben Bryant, a CBF analyst for justice and reconciliation issues, hope to make the program an annual event through partnerships with universities and churches.

About 20 Baylor University students from Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, took part in the March event. Among other hands-on experiences, the group participated in a poverty-simulation activity that offered a brief taste of homelessness.

They were asked to give up most of their possessions and sleep on a cold, hard floor in the basement of Calvary Baptist Church, just blocks away from the U.S. Capitol.

Sabrina Neff later said her first thought was, "Wait, let's talk about this."

They were divided into small groups and had to make tough decisions, like what four items to keep with them, and whether to spend a small amount of allotted money on a meal or not. After a night in the church basement, the students spent about five hours outside in the cold and snow with hardly any possessions.

A "poverty-simulation scavenger hunt" sheet provided a list of chores to do. "Borrow a quarter from someone you don't know." "Collect 100 aluminum cans." "Spend 45 minutes consecutively of your time without talking to each other."

In a discussion following the activity, all agreed that it fell far short of what homeless people face daily, but yet the experience proved insightful.

"People really wouldn't look us in the eye," said Leslie Fontaine, a senior at Baylor majoring in Child and Family Studies. "It was hard to be vulnerable enough to say, 'I don't have anything.'"

Jonathan Greer, a music major, said: "I think I always thought of homelessness as being a financial state, but there's so much more involved with the physical and psychological state. I mean, in just one day, I was so exhausted."

Amy Castello, minister of congregational life at Seventh & James, helped organize the week and participated in the activities. She shared her experience of not being able to find a place to sleep. At one point, she was even asked to leave a museum by security guards before finally sitting on a toilet seat to rest. "Where can they sleep?" Castello asked of the homeless.

The simulation program was run by CityGate, a ministry affiliated with Calvary Baptist Church and led by its former pastor, Lynn Bergfalk.

Paget Rhee, a CityGate staffer, led the group in a discussion after the simulation experience. She said the homeless in D.C. do not collect cans for money -- that would be impractical. They do it to fill their day with purpose. "How many days can you go without purpose before you have no self-esteem left?" she asked.

The poverty-simulation experience was just one day for the group. Sterling Severns, associate pastor for youth and adults at First Baptist Church in Washington, led the group in various worship services, including one where students washed each other's feet.

A discussion on challenges and opportunities in Africa was led by Salih Booker, director of the African Fund American Committee on Africa. David Smock, director of the Initiative on Religion and Peacemaking at the U.S. Institute of Peace, spoke about the conflicts in Africa and how religion should and could play a positive rather than a negative role. Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance of Baptists, also addressed the group.

"Because of CBF's emphasis on biblical justice and mercy," Turner said, "it's important to sensitize and introduce students to justice issues in America and internationally that we ought to be concerned about."

Turner, who works along with his wife, Fran, in the nation's capital, also expects to develop a CBF intern program to work on public policy. "Charity is a personal attribute," Turner said, "but justice is a matter of public policy."

The group also discussed the proper relationship between government and religion in addressing issues of poverty with a panel made up of U.S. congressional staffers, a Baptist Joint Committee representative and a homeless man.

Mandy Tyler, assistant to the general counsel at the BJC, told the students that religious programs for the poor should avoid the temptation to take tax dollars for their work to ensure a "prophetic" voice. Tyler distinguished between the actions of Martin Luther King's "prophetic voice" during the civil rights struggles and Pope Pius XII's silence during the Holocaust. "King stood outside of the government's power," she said, "while Pius was firmly under the government's control."

Tyler said there are ways church and state can cooperate to combat poverty but asked, "When the sanctuary becomes just another government office, won't the religious person become more like Pope Pius than Martin Luther King?"

Advocacy for social justice issues was also a central focus of the mission trip. Elizabeth McMeekin, program director at Jubilee Ministries affiliated with Church of the Savior, organized hands-on work for the students at local organizations, such as the National Association of People With AIDS, where students stuffed envelopes, wrote a press release and learned about how to influence public policy.

But it was the interaction with individuals that seemed to have the greatest impact on the students.

During a meal program for the homeless, the Texas students spoke openly with individuals who face daily what the students briefly faced. Rachel Barkley, a sophomore at Baylor studying social work, spoke with a homeless man, who identified himself as Frasure.

Frasure told Barkley that "only the strong survive," and "it's a jungle out there." He spoke of determination to survive and said "experience" is the best teacher.

"What hurts you the most?" Barkley asked him. Frasure thought and said, "When people ignore me ... when I need them the most." Barkley cried and asked if she could pray for him as he got up to return to the street. "You already have," Frasure replied. "You talked to me."

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## **Texas journalist to receive Religious Freedom Award**

JACKSON, Miss. (ABP) -- Retired Fort Worth Star-Telegram religion editor Jim Jones has been named 2001 recipient of the Associated Baptist Press Religious Freedom Award.

The award, which honors individuals whose achievements advance the principles and practice of religious freedom, particularly in the field of journalism, will be presented this fall.

ABP directors selected Jones for the award during a March 29-31 meeting in Jackson, Miss. They also voted to present the organization's Founders Award, which honors significant financial support or other contributions to the Jacksonville, Fla.,-based news organization, to Patricia Ayres of Austin, Texas.

In a report to directors, News Service Editor Bob Allen said ABP produced more stores in 2000 than in 1999 but usage in Baptist papers was down 5 percent. He said the decline resulted primarily from policy changes at two papers discouraging the use of ABP news.

Executive Editor Greg Warner reported that circulation of FaithWorks magazine was 4,852 at the end of February. Warner, who also serves as editor of ABP's Christian lifestyle magazine launched in 1998, said he expects circulation to reach the 5,000 milestone in March or April and could reach 8,000 by the end of the year. He said the magazine would likely need to be subsidized by contributions until circulation reaches 10,000.

He said "key leaders in the emerging church -- across the spectrum and not just Baptists -- are finding FaithWorks and consider it a leader in this field."

Executive Director Philip Poole reminded directors that the organization borrowed money last year to expand the staff. He said \$16,000 is left in an interest-free \$100,000 line of credit and no funds from the loan were used during the last six months of 2000 or so far this year.

Directors also heard reports on preliminary work leading up to ABP's first capital campaign.

In his executive editor's report, Warner said: "Summary version -- Number one, we're working very hard. Number two -- we're in need of money. That's the constant factor governing our life right now."

Warner said he sees both promise and challenge in how related but independent organizations in moderate Baptist life must function in the future.

"There are tremendous opportunities out there for an organization like ours that is fast on its feet and able to adapt to new realities," Warner said.

"There are many Baptist organizations and other denominational organizations that are struggling to find out how they are going to function."

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-- By ABP staff

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

### **Virginia exec to retire**

RICHMOND, Va. -- Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board for 15 years, announced April 3 that he will retire at the end of next February.

"I have chosen the February 2002 date because I prayerfully believe this to be the best time for me to step aside," McDonough said in a statement. "There is no question in my mind God called me to these positions almost 15 years ago."

Before coming to Virginia, McDonough was associate executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee. (ABP)

### **Seminary honors conservative leader**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -- Paige Patterson, co-founder of what has been termed the "conservative resurgence" in the Southern Baptist Convention, has received Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's coveted E.Y. Mullins Award for distinguished service to the denomination.

The award, the seminary's highest and the equivalent of an honorary doctorate, honors Patterson's "remarkable legacy of leadership," according to Baptist Press.

Patterson, now president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and the convention's immediate past president, played a key role in the late 1970s in a grassroots effort to replace moderates then in leadership of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

"When the history of the Southern Baptist Convention -- and beyond that the history of Christianity in America in the last half century is written -- if justice is done, Dr. Paige Patterson will be recognized as one of those who most sacrificially, most faithfully, and by God's grace most effectively offered leadership when there was so little leadership in the land," Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler said in presenting the award April 3. (ABP)

### **Church severs ties with SBC, state convention**

ST. LOUIS -- A St. Louis church has voted to sever ties with both the Southern Baptist and Missouri Baptist conventions, citing differences with leadership of both organizations.

Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis voted March 14 for a resolution severing ties with the state and national conventions. The statement says in part that "elected and employed leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention and, of late, the elected leaders of the Missouri Baptist Convention, to which we have had long and cherished ties, have guided those groups away from our understanding of the Baptist way of being Christian."

Conservatives have controlled the Southern Baptist Convention for years but only recently solidified leadership in Missouri. While there has been a recent rash of moderate churches leaving the SBC in protest, Kirkwood is thought to be the first church to disassociate with the Missouri Baptist Convention over the same issues.

The resolution reaffirms the church's relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and its Missouri chapter, the Alliance of Baptists and educational and benevolent institutions in Missouri. (ABP)

### **First female Texas Baptist camp manager begins job**

BROWNWOOD, Texas -- Rhonda O'Banion made history just by reporting for work on April 2 at Heart of Texas Encampment, becoming the first woman to manage a Texas Baptist camp.

"While there are a number of private camps directed by women, this is a first for us," said Red Colquitt, camp consultant with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. "It's a new era in Texas Baptist life."

The camp's board of directors voted March 29 to hire O'Banion as encampment administrator. Ten associations of churches in Central Texas support the camp and are represented on its governing board.

"I appreciate the overwhelming support I have received from the board of trustees," O'Banion said. "They know me, and I believe they felt comfortable with me."

O'Banion, 36, has been associated with the camp for more than 10 years. She first served as a summer worker, retreat hostess and coordinator while she was a student at Howard Payne University.

O'Banion said she is willing to represent the camp in pulpits across the state with the caveat, "I'm not a preacher, and I have no aspirations of becoming one." (ABP)

### **Church's baptism policy scrutinized by association**

ELKIN, N.C. -- A Baptist church's decision to accept members who have been baptized in other denominations is landing it in hot water with its association.

First Baptist Church of Elkin, N.C., voted last April to change membership requirements to allow Christians who have been baptized in another denomination's tradition to join their church. "We're not going to make the ritual of baptism a preliminary of being a member of the church," Pastor William Johnson was quoted as saying in the Baptist newspaper Biblical Recorder.

Elkin Baptist Association responded by forming a steering committee to study whether churches with open-baptism policies should be excluded from the association. The steering committee reported March 13 it had reached an impasse and brought no recommendations at the association's meeting in April.

Director of Missions Johnny Enloe said no action was taken at the April meeting. "We just discussed it," Enloe said. "I think that's all we need to say." (ABP)

### **Virginia CBF hires first coordinator**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. -- Eight years after forming, a Virginia chapter of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has hired a paid leader.

Richard Clore was installed March 17 as first coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Virginia during the group's annual meeting, held at University Baptist Church in Charlottesville.

Clore, former pastor of Hull's Memorial Baptist Church in Fredericksburg, will seek to recruit churches for the organization that offers alternatives to denominational programs of the Southern Baptist Convention. (ABP)

### **Virginia Alliance council calls for halt to death penalty**

RICHMOND, Va. -- The council of Virginia's Alliance of Baptists chapter has joined a growing number of religious and civic organizations in the state calling for a moratorium on executions.

The statement, adopted in February, amplifies a similar statement passed at last year's national Alliance convocation in Austin, Texas.

Virginia ranks second behind Texas in the number of executions since the U.S. Supreme Court's reinstatement of the death penalty in 1976. If measured per capita, Virginia leads the nation in executions.

"We felt it was important to speak out against the Virginia execution system," said Link Elmore of Richmond, a council member who helped draft the statement. "It's an issue that directly reflects our faith that we serve a God of grace, not retribution." (ABP)

### **Truett names assistant dean**

WACO, Texas -- Rene Maciel, director of student services at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary for two years, has been named assistant dean for administration and academic services.

In his new role, Maciel will be responsible for day-to-day operations at the seminary, including some functions previously performed by the seminary's former assistant, Michael Morgan, who resigned in March to become development director for the Baptist Standard newspaper.

Before coming to Baylor in 1999, Maciel was administrator at the New Mexico Baptist Children's Home in Portales, N.M. (ABP)

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