



Associated Baptist Press

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Nashville, Tennessee

JUL 23 2001

July 19, 2001

(01-57)

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Woman's ordination sparks conflict in Florida Baptist association

By Christopher Hedglin

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- The ordination of a woman minister at a church in Gainesville, Fla., has sparked a dispute that may force the congregation out of the Santa Fe River Baptist Association.

In addition, Lynn Williams' dismissal from two consultant positions she held with the Florida Baptist Convention has raised questions about whether ordination was connected to her loss of work with the state.

Williams, minister of education and students at Parkview Baptist Church, was ordained Jan. 7. In response, three churches alleged that the Gainesville congregation is out of fellowship with the association and called for its removal.

The churches, First Baptist Church of Archer, Santa Fe Baptist Church of Alachua, and Parker Road Baptist Church of Gainesville, say Williams' ordination goes against the new "Baptist Faith and Message" statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention last year.

The faith statement reads in part, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." While members of the committee drafting the new language said it was intended to address only women as senior pastors, some are reading it as applying to all ordained ministers.

Wayne Harvey, the association's director of missions, stated that the association had "not established any statement of faith," which includes never having endorsed the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message." But Parkview's opponents claim that a section in the association's bylaws automatically puts the congregation out of fellowship.

The section states, "The association reserves the right to withdraw membership from any church found to be out of fellowship with the association, the Florida Baptist Convention, or the Southern Baptist

Convention in their doctrine, principles, practices, policies, and programs, and deny voting privileges and seats to messengers from such churches."

Critics say that Parkview's ordination of Williams goes against the policies of the SBC and thus violates the association's bylaws.

"I'm not against any individual," said Gordon Keller, the pastor of Parker Road Baptist Church, "but I feel and I believe that the Bible is clear that women are not to be ordained. That's why I have taken the stand that I have."

Harvey said a credentials committee is expected to report at the association's annual meeting in October. He said the committee might recommend no action or could come out either for or against the church.

"I really don't know how it's going to go," Harvey said. "It's still up in the air."

Harvey said any decision on Parkview's future with the association is being held until the annual meeting so that the issue can be considered by the largest group of people possible.

The prospect of being removed from the association isn't the only problem Williams has encountered. She said her ordination has forced her to step down or be removed from a number of leadership positions that she held prior to this year.

Earlier this year, Williams voluntarily decided that at the end of this term she would step down as the association's Sunday-school director. In addition she resigned from the association's strategic-planning team.

She said those were concessions to the church's opponents in an effort to keep the peace within the association.

"I had hoped that by removing myself from leadership positions that those churches would back off and drop the whole issue," Williams said.

In addition to these voluntary resignations, Williams said she believes she has been denied leadership opportunities on a state level due to her ordination.

Williams said she was told that she would no longer be used as a FAITH consultant for the Florida Baptist Convention or as a state Sunday-school consultant. She said she was told that she would no longer be used in these roles at the request of John Sullivan, the executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention.

Asked about a connection between her ordination at Parkview and her removal from her leadership positions, Williams responded, "It is a direct result of my being ordained."

When asked about these allegations, Barbara Denman, a spokesperson for the state convention, said: "Lynn Williams served as an independent contract worker with the Florida Baptist Convention and concluded her commitment. The convention utilizes a number of contract workers throughout the state and contract workers are evaluated periodically on their ability, effectiveness, relational skills and presentation skills. Just because we are not using her now may not mean we will not use her in the future, but as a contract worker, we have no legal obligation to her."

Despite the controversy that her ordination has caused, Williams says that her church has continued to stand behind her. "This church has been wonderful," she said. "They have been absolutely and totally supportive of me."

Though few Southern Baptist churches have women pastors, new language specifying that males only qualify for the post was among the most controversial of wholesale changes made to the "Baptist Faith and Message" in 2000. Opponents to the article said it is up to each individual church, and not the denomination, to determine its own leaders. Some expressed fear that narrower theology in the document's latest rewrite could be used as a creed to coerce beliefs on churches and individuals, instead of a voluntary confession of faith.

Other associations have disciplined churches over women's ordination in the past, however, even before revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message." While local churches are autonomous in Southern Baptist

life, so are associations and state and national conventions, meaning they also are free to determine their own criteria for membership.

But some observers expect such disputes to increase as state and regional bodies discuss the new faith statement.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

EBF president wants no part of proposed new 'alliance'

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- The president of the European Baptist Federation says the organization has no interest in being part of a new "alliance" suggested recently by former President Jimmy Carter.

Carter, who renounced ties with the Southern Baptist Convention last year, recently called on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and other "traditional" Baptists to combine efforts for missions, education and other causes.

In an interview in Atlanta, Carter told a pool of reporters he had already met with moderates on the losing end of a two-decade struggle for control of the SBC. He said he now wants to expand the dialogue to include other Baptist groups in the United States and Europe, naming specifically the European Baptist Federation.

Ole Joergensen, president of the EBF, responded to a news report of the interview that 51 European Baptist unions and conventions are satisfied to be affiliated as the EBF and with other Baptists through the Baptist World Alliance.

He said the EBF has no interest in being part of or forming a new alliance, because it might be perceived as taking sides in controversy between Baptists in the U.S.

"We understand the necessity for the different Southern Baptists to find a clarification in the long, ongoing division," Joergensen wrote in an e-mail to Associated Baptist Press. However, he said, "We have not had and we do not have any intention to take part in any dialogue about forming a new alliance apart from EBF and BWA."

Carter said he hoped Baptists from the U.S. and Europe would discuss his proposal at an August meeting in Europe. He did not elaborate on what particular meeting he had in mind.

Joergensen said the EBF has invited missionary agencies from Europe and North America, including some Baptist state conventions that have established partnerships with some union or convention in Europe, to a "consultation for networking in partnership in Europe" in August.

"Its purpose is to discuss ways we can be better stewards to serve the Great Commission," he said. "It has nothing to do with forming any new alliance."

Joergensen said, if necessary, he would consider canceling the meeting because of "misinformation" reported in the media.

He said a report of Carter's comments "more than indicates that EBF is part of efforts to form a 'new alliance of Baptists in the United States and Europe' as EBF is the only European body mentioned in the article."

"I will as strong as it is possible bring my denial that the EBF has any intention to be part of forming a new alliance," he said.

Carter said he has met privately with leaders of the CBF, Baptist General Convention of Texas, Baptist General Association of Virginia and Baptists Committed about possible joint efforts. He said no merger is being considered but suggested a model of "partnership" to enhance missions.

He said he hoped that over the next 15 to 20 years, the effort would expand to include other conventions in America, such as American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., and predominantly African-American groups, as well as in Europe.

"If there are other Baptists who don't respond and don't want to cooperate, who cares? Forget them and move on as Christians and as Baptists, just following Jesus," Carter said in veiled reference to the SBC during a speech to the CBF June 29.

Carter said "traditional" Baptists could unite around a broad statement of shared beliefs. Those include local-church autonomy, the separation of church and state, equality of men and women, respect for all persons, rejection of creedalism and belief in the authority and inspiration of Scripture as interpreted by the teachings and example of Jesus.

Carter, a lifelong Southern Baptist who first declared his allegiance to the CBF in 1993, said those values are no longer shared by fundamentalist leaders of the SBC.

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Alabama Baptists sow 'Seeds of Hope'

By Jim Newton

MARION, Ala. (ABP) -- More than 125 volunteers from five Alabama Baptist churches were busy this summer "Sowing Seeds of Hope" in Perry County by rebuilding 11 dilapidated houses and building good relationships.

"Sowing Seeds of Hope" is a faith-based community development initiative described as a partnership between the people of Perry County and the Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Although the five-day emphasis in June was by far the biggest volunteer project attempted by Sowing Seeds of Hope, this is not a volunteer project, said Mart Gray, co-coordinator of Sowing Seeds of Hope and coordinator of Alabama CBF.

"This is a movement in the hearts of the people to bring about change in the life of the community by working together in a new and exciting way," Gray said.

Barbara and Gary Baldrige, national CBF co-coordinators for global missions, described Sowing Seeds of Hope as "an excellent model" that other CBF state and regional fellowships could follow in developing their own faith-based initiatives with a holistic approach to transform communities and share God's love in word and deed.

Although Sowing Seeds of Hope is not primarily about short-term volunteer involvement, Gray said the attitudes and actions of the volunteers brought credibility to the movement and gave the initiative a higher visibility in the community.

About 105 volunteers helped paint, re-roof and repair 11 houses in Uniontown, a small town about 25 miles west of Selma.

Another 20 volunteers, including those from the local community, took part in a literacy project that included giving free books to elementary-school students and building bookcases for homeroom libraries in two Perry County elementary schools.

The volunteers gave away about 250 new books and 1,000 used books to 250 children in Uniontown and Marion.

"It was so exciting to see the faces of these children when they received their free books and to know they would ask their parents to read a book to them at home that night," said Mark Wilson, a graduate student at Auburn University who is working as a summer literacy intern for Sowing Seeds of Hope with a grant financed by CBF.

The biggest volunteer project involved remodeling and rebuilding 11 dilapidated houses in Uniontown, most of them owned by families who could not afford to repair them. Alabama CBF raised about \$18,000 to pay for building materials bought locally to help the Perry County economy.

Volunteer crews from five Alabama Baptist churches put new roofs on three houses, replaced a lot of rotten wood and windows, and scraped and painted all 11 of the houses, said Rowe Smith, a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville.

Dean Johnson, minister of education and youth at Pintlala Baptist Church near Montgomery, said the "overwhelming needs" of the people in Uniontown had a tremendous impact on the lives of the youth from his church involved as volunteers. "We've been sowing seeds of hope not only in the lives of the people here, but also in the lives of our own youth," he said with tears in his eyes.

"I never dreamed this was possible," said homeowner Clara Carmichael. "I would never have been able to do this without their help."

Mayor Ed Daniel, who co-chairs Sowing Seeds of Hope with Gray, expressed appreciation to Alabama CBF for making a 25-year commitment to help coordinate the efforts of existing agencies, both government and non-government.

"I've been involved in a lot of different organizations, but Sowing Seeds of Hope is different," the mayor said. "It is a faith-based initiative that has tried to involve everyone in the community."

The main thing that Sowing Seeds of Hope has done is to bring people together and give them a vision for the future, said Minnie Curry, a leader in the Marion community. In the past, she said, leadership of the various organizations and factions had not come together, but Sowing Seeds of Hope came to Perry County without any political, financial or personal agenda and got people to work together.

The last night of the volunteer project, about 125 people evenly divided between Uniontown residents and volunteers met at First Missionary Baptist Church to celebrate what was accomplished. "Words cannot express how deeply we appreciate what you have done," said Anthony Trimble, pastor of the church established in 1867 after the Civil War.

At the conclusion of the celebration, the 125 volunteers and Uniontown residents joined upraised hands and sang, "What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms."

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Hispanic Baptist leader defends 'criterion' phrase

ABILENE, Texas (ABP) -- The president of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas lauded Texas Baptists for affirming a reference to Jesus omitted in a revision of the "Baptist Faith and Message."

The Baptist General Convention of Texas twice affirmed the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message," most recently in 1999, which included the statement, "The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ."

The newest version of the document, adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000, dropped the sentence. Defenders of the change said it had been abused in efforts to undermine biblical authority.

"Not only is Jesus the criterion of biblical interpretation, he is the only criterion for interpreting the Bible," Antonio Estrada said in his presidential message at the 91st annual meeting of Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, held June 25-27 in Abilene. "He is the rock, the foundation, the cornerstone on which our faith and practice as Texas Baptists is founded."

Estrada said Hispanic Texas Baptists and other churches related to the BGCT share a common calling and mission, as well as a common understanding about the supremacy of Jesus.

"The Hispanic Baptist Convention is united to the BGCT in brotherhood until Jesus comes for us," he said.

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-- By ABP staff

After losses, sisters focus on ministry

By Shawn Hendricks

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Blessings sometimes come in ways people least expect them. Just ask Heather (Wall) Brill, 24, and her sister, Holly (Wall) Nesbitt, 26.

The two sisters, members of Memorial Church in Jefferson City, Mo., have come through a turbulent year of tragedy and blessings. They recently talked about losing their husbands in a canoe accident last August in Vermont, moving home to nearby Holts Summit with their mother and forming a music group with sister Heidi.

"If I had a big plan, this wouldn't be it," Heather said. "I never thought about living here. But now that I'm here, I feel a peace about it. This is where I am supposed to be."

These words don't come easily for a woman who lost her father to health problems months before losing her husband, James, and brother-in-law, Scott Nesbitt. She had planned to move to Texas that fall so James could attend seminary.

Holly also was settled in, helping her husband to start a Christian youth camp in Vermont.

"My relationship with God has strengthened so much," Holly said. "It's so much deeper." After the accident, Heather, Holly and Holly's 3-year-old daughter, Emma, returned to Missouri. They lived with their mother and three siblings until November.

Last fall, Heather entered Holly and their younger sister Heidi, 21, and herself in a music talent contest conducted by Christian radio station KCVO. They were among the winners, and the three have been singing together ever since under the name, The Walls.

They recently completed their first demo CD, which features three songs with lyrics written by Heather and Holly. The trio has a backup band made up of church members Aaron Snell, Jordan Nelson, Greg Nelson, Rowe Arends and Jeremy Duren.

In June, the group played at the Crossover Christian Music Festival in Camdenton, Mo.

Both Heather and Holly believe their music has helped them cope with their losses.

"I just know that how we dealt with the tragedy was clinging to God," Holly said. "We don't know how much time we have. You realize how precious life is. After (the accident) happened, we said from now on it is going to be nothing but ministry." Holly acknowledged many difficult times. She remembers when she wouldn't open her Bible and would cry uncontrollably.

"I prayed all the time, but I had to take baby steps, maybe just reading a chapter a day," she said. "I was starting over. Now it is so different." Now living comfortably in a house next to their mother, Heather and Holly are moving forward with their lives. Holly is the worship leader for Memorial Church and Heather freelances as a graphic designer.

"The Lord has brought wonderful people into our lives," Holly said. "I'm so grateful and so blessed. You do sometimes feel guilty for how great things are. It's been God. The Lord is meeting the needs." Ken Lumley, pastor of Memorial Church, has counseled with Holly and Heather since they began attending the church.

"This band that they have been doing has been real helpful to them," he said. "It lets them reunite around a good common cause. We don't always know how they are feeling, but we have tried to communicate that we are more concerned about them than the gifts they bring." Despite the tough times, Heather said she doesn't feel sorry for herself.

"Even though I've been through this horrible pain, I'm so grateful and so blessed," she said. "It's funny how the Lord moves. It's not about us.

Everyone has a sad story."

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: For booking information, contact The Walls at 573-896-8325.

Mormon faith appealing but deceptive, Baptists say

By Shawn Hendricks

SALT LAKE CITY (ABP) -- Three years after the Southern Baptist Convention met in Salt Lake City, the eyes of the world focus on the Utah city as it prepares to host the Winter Olympics in seven months. As they did in 1998, Baptists and Mormons both see the event as an opportunity for evangelism in the hometown of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

With strong family values, an emphasis on Jesus Christ and a massive public-relations campaign, Mormons appear to have a lot to offer. Continuing dramatic growth -- there are about 5 million Mormons in the United States and 11 million worldwide -- bears out the appeal of their message.

Mormons contend their doctrine is Christian and a restoration of the original church established by Jesus Christ. Baptist leaders, however, warn of deception and a doctrine that is lacking.

On any Sunday, visitors to a Mormon ward, or what is referred to as a meetinghouse, likely will find plenty of families and friendly people to greet them.

"Mormons are very good at appealing to (Christians)," confirmed Phil Roberts, president of Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. For five years, he led the North American Mission Board's interfaith-evangelism department, and he appeared in the NAMB video "The Mormon Puzzle." Their main targets, Roberts said, are those who already are members of Christian denominations, particularly Baptists.

Roberts said a Mormon typically seeks to connect with a prospect through a shared familiarity with Jesus Christ.

"They will go up to Christian people and ask, 'Do you love Jesus; do you want to know more about Jesus?' They will claim to have another testament of Jesus Christ."

Another reason for the Mormons' success is that most Baptists and other evangelicals lack knowledge of their own theology, said Keith Markham.

Markham is pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church in the Salt Lake City suburb of Layton, Utah. He worked closely with Southern Baptists' Crossover Salt Lake City evangelism effort in 1998.

He has mixed feelings about the results.

"The very positive thing that happened with the convention is that Baptists in Utah got recognition and acceptability that we have never had." Without that recognition, Baptists wouldn't be able to conduct the ministry efforts they are planning for the Olympics in the city's Temple Square, Markham said.

Part of the problem with such efforts, however, is that many people who participate lack knowledge of the Mormon culture, Markham said.

"It's totally different," he explained. "Witnessing to a Mormon has to be done through relationships. You don't reach Mormons through knocking on their doors and confronting them. You reach Mormons through relationship building.

"To go knock on their door, you are wasting your time because they are trained to relate to your questions." Mormons often use the same words Baptists do and claim Jesus as the cornerstone of their faith, Markham said, but to Mormons, the words have a different meaning.

"Their Jesus who they believe in is not the Jesus who died on the cross and is the Savior of the world," he explained. "Their Jesus that they believe in is a man that was born of a God and a physical relationship with a woman. They see him as a big-brother helper that has power, that can encourage them and help them."

Grace is another word Mormons use frequently, Markham said.

"They believe in grace, but it is just the opposite of what we do. We believe in grace, salvation by grace and grace alone, and then we work out of gratitude for what God has done.

"They believe in works, period. And then if they have not done enough, they hope that God will step in and his grace will stand in."

One area where Baptists could learn a few things from Mormons, Markham said, is discipleship.

"We have a number of Southern Baptists that are Southern Baptist by name, and yes, have probably been saved, but don't understand what they believe," he said.

"We have made church members and not disciples in the last 40 years. So we have a lot of people that are church members and don't know why.

"When you get that, it is easy for somebody to come by with a golden philosophy and say, 'Hey, you've got this revelation, but there is a later revelation.' If you don't know what you believe, it's easy to follow."

James Walker is a former fourth-generation Mormon. He is president of Watchman Fellowship, a ministry based in Arlington, Texas, that educates people on faiths they consider cults and New Age movements.

Walker has traveled around the United States educating Baptists about the Mormon faith.

"Well, part of it is an ounce of prevention," he said. "It's a lot easier to do a little education now."

Baptists must improve their witnessing skills if they are to reach Mormons, Walker said. "I want us to do a better job. We consider this a mission field on our doorstep."

More teens adopting vegetarian diets

By Jodi Mathews

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Chelsea Clinton is one, and so is Geoffrey Giuliano, who plays Ronald McDonald on television. As a matter of fact, they are a growing population and may be represented in youth groups all across America. What are they?

Vegetarians.

No, it isn't some crazy cult infiltrating America's youth. Vegetarians choose not to eat meat, poultry or fish for health reasons, because they support animal rights or because meat just plain grosses them out.

According to a 2000 Roper poll conducted by Vegetarian Resource Group, a little over 2 percent of American teens are vegetarians. That is almost double the number of vegetarian teens found in 1995. Generally girls are more likely to avoid meat at a young age. Eleven percent of 13- to 17-year-old girls said they did not eat meat, according to the poll, compared to about 5 percent of boys in this age group.

A 2000 National Zogby Poll reported that there are about 4.8 million vegetarian adults in the United States. That's roughly 2.5 percent of the U.S. population and a 1.5- percent increase from last year.

How are churches and Christian youth organizations handling this growing number of vegetarian youth?

Scott Hantman with Young Life in Colorado Springs, Co., told Y!, an online weekly newsletter published by the Baptist Center for Ethics, that Young Life makes every effort to provide vegetarian alternatives at their camps and organization gatherings.

"We try to make it so the vegetarian kids don't feel left out or separated from the rest of the group," Hantman said. Youth leaders are encouraged to call in advance to inform camp staff of special needs or requests their youth may have.

On the other side of the United States, camp leaders are dealing with the issue of vegetarian youth as well.

"The kids are really grateful when we provide them with the option of eating vegetarian," said Howell Williams, assistant director for Passport Camp in Wingate, N.C. "The number of vegetarians at camps varies from week to week."

Williams said one week they may see 20 vegetarians and the next week there might not be any. And the youth aren't the only vegetarians at camp, she said. More and more chaperones are moving towards the vegetarian lifestyle.

In West Virginia, the vegetarian issue has not warranted many changes, said Rob Ely, director of camping and youth for the West Virginia Baptist Convention, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.

"We have long been ordering things like cheese pizzas and salads for our events," Ely said. Although there may only be four or five vegetarians out of 600 youth at a state event, Ely said the young people really want the option to eat something without meat.

At West Virginia camps, Ely said the vegetarians are few and far between. And when they do go to camp, they often bring their own veggie burgers and meat alternatives.

Why are so many youth being drawn to this lifestyle?

For Derek Hogue, a high-school senior at Richland Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., it started when he was 13 as a way to oppose animal cruelty.

"My parents thought it was a phase," he said of his foray into vegetarianism. "Back then it was because of animal rights, but after not eating meat for a while I couldn't go back. I became enlightened about other reasons to be vegetarian."

Hogue said outbreaks of beef diseases in Europe and other health issues related to meat consumption added to his reasons for remaining a vegetarian.

"Now, I am a vegetarian because of animal rights and health reasons," he said. His Christian faith has nothing to do with his choice to abandon meat, he said.

"The Bible doesn't condemn people for eating meat, or for not eating meat," he said. "I just choose not to."

Derek's reason for "going veg" is common among youth. All 11 youth interviewed for famousveggie.com said they decided to go veg for animal-rights reasons. Some teens mentioned seeing videos about slaughterhouse practices and reading about the cruel treatment of industrial farm animals.

Youth may get turned on to the veggie way by horrifying pictures and commentary about the slaughter of animals, but as they mature in their beliefs many add health reasons to their no-meat way of life.

Don Vigus, youth minister at First Baptist Church in Wilmington, N.C., asked his youth at their last gathering how many were vegetarians. Of the 45 to 50 youth present, there were no vegetarians. However, several of the teens said that if they did go vegetarian it would be because of animal rights.

A few summers ago, Vigus said a female youth worker who was a vegetarian inspired many of the young girls to go the veggie route. But after she left, so did the vegetarian tendencies for those young girls.

"In our group, [vegetarianism] does not represent a growing number of youth," Vigus said. "But, I think that the youth really admire the self-discipline aspect of vegetarianism."

With the number of vegetarians increasing, if this "fringe" group hasn't hit your youth groups yet, it will.

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: Jodi Mathews is communications director for the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn. To subscribe to Y!, send full name and e-mail address to acacia@baptists4ethics.com, with the subject line "SUBSCRIBE Y!"

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Flood-relief effort enters 'recovery' phase

HOUSTON -- Work by Baptists to aid victims of Tropical Storm Allison is expected to go on for 18 months.

Baptist leaders in Texas say the crisis is over for most of 20,000 Houston-area residents who had homes damaged by massive floods in June. Now Texas Baptist Men is gearing up a second "recovery" phase to help people rebuild.

Leaders hope 2,500 Baptist groups across the state will "adopt" churches and households for prayer, office help and construction. (ABP)

Texas Baptists tap leader for work with African Americans

MANSFIELD, Texas -- Mansfield, Texas, pastor Michael Evans has been named director of African-American ministries for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The state convention counts about 696 affiliated churches with a predominantly black membership. That figure is larger than many Southern Baptist state conventions.

Evans has been pastor of the 500-member Bethlehem Baptist Church for 10 years. He is a former chaplain and a graduate of Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. He has done post-graduate study at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. (ABP)

Texas WMU sets endowment goal

DALLAS -- Woman's Missionary Union of Texas will seek to raise \$12.5 million in endowment funds by 2005, the missions auxiliary's 125th anniversary.

The "Touch Tomorrow Today" campaign, done in cooperation with WMU's national organization, will provide funds for both organizations. Neither receives funding through the Cooperative Program unified budget that supports simultaneously ministries of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and Southern Baptist Convention. (ABP)

Billy Graham preaches to 190,000 in Louisville

LOUISIVLLE, Ky. -- Famed evangelist Billy Graham preached to a combined crowd of 190,000 over four days at a recent crusade in Louisville, Ky.

About 10,000 people responded to the 82-year-old Graham's invitation to accept Jesus.

"People are searching for something that can only be found in God," Graham said. While culture has changed dramatically in today's world, he added, "God hasn't changed."

The event, the first full-blown Graham crusade in Louisville in 45 years, is one of two planned this year. The other is scheduled in October in Fresno, Calif. (ABP)

Alleged con artist poses as missionary

HARRODSBURG, Ky. -- The son of a Ugandan Baptist minister faces felony charges for allegedly conning churches in Kentucky out of thousands of dollars and donated clothing.

Daniel Lubowa, who used an alias of Mark Phelps and allegedly represented himself in several churches as a missionary seeking aid for needy people in Uganda and Sudan, was arrested June 9 on charges of theft by deception.

Lubowa reportedly told churches he was raising money to start churches, but investigators say it was a scam that has been going on for several years and in at least seven states. (ABP)

Bibles on way to earthquake victims

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. -- The International Bible Society has rushed nearly 20,000 Bibles and religious tracts to Peru, ravaged by a 7.9-magnitude earthquake June 23.

"People are very open to the gospel message during times of crisis," said Luciano Jaramillo, executive director for Latin America.

The organization is working with pastors and ministry partners to ship and distribute Scriptures from Colorado Springs, Colo., and Ecuador to hard-hit areas of Peru. (ABP)

Truett seminary adds three to faculty

WACO, Texas -- Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary is adding three faculty members this summer.

Bert Dominy, who taught theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for three decades, comes to the school as professor of theology.

Ronald Cook, pastor of First Baptist Church in Brownwood, Texas, becomes associate professor of Christian scriptures and will direct the seminary's doctor-of-ministry program.

Michael Stroope, director of the All Peoples missions organization in Dublin, Texas, fills a newly created position as associate professor of missions. (ABP)

Popular Bible teacher dies

IRVING, Texas -- Southern Baptist Bible teacher Ron Dunn died June 29 in Irving, Texas, after a long illness. He was 64.

Dunn, president of Lifestyle Ministries in Irvin, Texas, spoke at conferences and churches. He mailed about 2,000 Bible-study cassettes a month to pastors, missionaries, students and church members around the world.

Dunn was pastor of MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church in Irving nine years before beginning his wider ministry in 1975. (ABP)

Soulforce plans protest at Lutheran meeting

INDIANAPOLIS -- Soulforce, a gay-rights group that organized a protest at the recent Southern Baptist Convention, says it will also be present when Lutherans gather in Indianapolis next month.

A press release said the group will gather at the Aug. 10-13 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to protest "unfair and discriminatory" church policies against homosexuals.

Current policy requires gay or lesbian individuals to vow celibacy before being ordained as an ECLA minister.

Thirty-four Soulforce demonstrators were arrested June 13 during a protest of the SBC's anti-gay position in New Orleans. Organizers for the Indianapolis protest said civil disobedience could take place there as well. (ABP)

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