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**NAMB employees leave  
over new faith statement**

By Steve DeVane

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- Three North American Mission Board employees have reportedly left the agency in Alpharetta, Ga., over a requirement that workers affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

NAMB spokesman Martin King said Gerry Hutchinson, Donoso Escobar and George Pickle "have left the board because they said they could not do their ministries in accordance with" the official faith statement of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Hutchinson was head of church-and-community-ministries evangelism for NAMB. Escobar was an associate in that department. Pickle was a chaplaincy evangelism associate.

Hutchinson resigned effective July 31. Escobar and Pickle took early retirement.

King said NAMB's professional and management employees, which make up about half the agency's 425 workers, were given a copy of the newly revised faith statement to review in late May or early June. The employees were then given a two-part document, he said.

The first part contained a statement that the employee had read and agreed with the "Baptist Faith and Message." If the employee said "No," to this, he or she had to explain why.

The employees were then asked to sign the second part of the document promising to carry out their responsibilities "in accordance with and not contrary to" the current edition of the faith statement.

King said it was possible for employees to say "No" on the first part, as long as their differences with the statement were minor, and they signed the second part.

Hutchinson, Escobar and Pickle would not sign the second part, King said.

"They said they couldn't work according to the guidelines of the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

The "Baptist Faith and Message," first approved in 1925 and revised in 1963, underwent a second major revision last year. While the statement is non-binding on local churches, agencies of the convention use it as a guide for hiring.

Some of the current document's 18 articles are controversial. Some Baptists criticize removal of a phrase from the previous version describing Jesus as the criterion for interpreting the Bible as diminishing the Lordship of Christ. And while few Southern Baptists have women pastors, some differ with an added pronouncement that the Scripture limits the office of pastor to men, saying it is up to the local church to choose its own leaders and not the denomination.

King said NAMB sees the "Baptist Faith and Message" as guidance for SBC agencies.

"That's different from a creed which is forced on a local church, an association or a state convention," he said. "A local church is autonomous from the Southern Baptist Convention, but the agencies are not. They are owned by the Southern Baptist Convention."

Hutchinson said he told his supervisors he objects to three parts of the revised "Baptist Faith and Message:"

-- The removal of the statement that says Jesus is the criterion by which Scripture should be interpreted.

-- The inclusion of what Hutchinson called "one-way submission," in the amendment on the family that calls for wives to submit graciously to their husbands. "I favor mutual submission as referenced in Ephesians 5:21," he said.

-- The prohibition against women pastors in the paragraph on the church.

Hutchinson said that after he discussed the issue with his superiors they "agreed to disagree" and he chose to resign.

"I could not look myself in the face in the morning if I signed the 'Baptist Faith and Message' just to keep a job," he said.

Hutchinson said he had affirmed the 1963 version of the statement five times during his 20 years with NAMB, the last being in 1994.

"With the changes that occurred in 1998 and 2000, I could no longer do that," he said.

The family amendment was added in 1998. The statement underwent a complete rewrite in 2000.

Hutchinson said he is leaving on good terms, noting that NAMB plans to honor the three employees at a reception.

"I felt very good about the way we concluded my service at the board," he said. "I have no ax to grind in wanting to be judgmental or vengeful toward the agency." Hutchinson said he prefers to remember his good experiences with NAMB and its predecessor, the Home Mission Board.

"I feel deeply about my sentiments," he said. "I was willing to pay whatever price necessary."

He said he is exploring his career options and hopes to return to his native state of North Carolina.

Pickle could not be reached for comment.

Escobar said that he decided to take early retirement effective Aug. 1, but he wouldn't say if he left rather than sign the "Baptist Faith and Message."

"I wish I could discuss that with you, but part of my agreement allowing me to take early retirement was that I was not going to discuss publicly the reasons [for it,]" Escobar said. "Under contract, I'm not at liberty to discuss it."

King said he did not know the specific conditions of the retirement agreements. "I know often when someone leaves the board or other types of employment, it's not unusual to have an agreement that we won't speak critically of one another," he said.

King called the three men "good employees, brothers in Christ."

"It's sad for us that they've left, but they're the ones that made the determination that they couldn't conduct their ministries in accordance with guidelines set down by the owners of the agency, the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

King said the three were given severance packages that are "fair" and additional assistance to help their transitions to other ministries.

NAMB missionaries are asked to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" during the application process, King said.

"We have not gone back to the mission force of 5,000 and asked them to reaffirm the current 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" he said.

## **IMB trustee resigns after being convicted of fraud**

DALLAS (ABP) -- A former high-profile conservative in the Southern Baptist Convention has resigned as a trustee of the International Mission Board after going to prison for a fraud conviction in what prosecutors describe as a multi-million-dollar investment scam.

Russell Kaemmerling was elected as an IMB trustee last year. But two weeks before his election to the national leadership post, a federal warrant had been issued for his arrest on 19 counts of fraud, according to a copyrighted article by Texas Baptist Standard.

Kaemmerling is a brother-in-law of Paige Patterson, who was in his final year as SBC president when Kaemmerling was nominated and elected to the leadership post. Like Patterson, Kaemmerling is a veteran of the so-called "conservative resurgence" within the SBC.

Patterson also had at least an indirect role in the appointment. The SBC president names a committee on committees, which assembles a committee on nominations for the following year. That group works during the year to compile a list of nominees for the hundreds of trustees elected to governing boards of the SBC and its agencies.

According to the Standard article, Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., was traveling and could not be reached for comment.

The SBC's trustee-nomination process was key to allowing conservatives to methodically gain control of the nation's largest Protestant denomination by hand picking like-minded nominees to replace moderates who held the majority of those posts at the start of the 1980s.

While the denominational controversy has waned in the last decade, nomination committees continue to take a rigid stand on doctrinal purity and loyalty to the conservative movement. Recent criteria include acceptance of narrower theology codified in the latest version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement and exclusion of churches that support the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate splinter group that the SBC's ruling party regards a competitor.

Amid such scrutiny of lesser-known nominees, however, SBC officials claim Kaemmerling's then-mounting legal troubles -- including two civil cases he had already lost with judgments totaling nearly \$3 million -- went unnoticed. Kaemmerling said only his immediate family and close friends knew the nature of the allegations against him until recently.

Kaemmerling, who maintains his innocence, has begun serving a prison sentence in Texas. He said he didn't tell others about allegations against him because he never took them seriously. He says he still expects to be exonerated on appeal.

Among revelations in the Baptist Standard report, written by Managing Editor Mark Wingfield:

On the same day Kaemmerling was elected an IMB trustee and led a benediction prayer from the platform of the SBC annual meeting in Orlando, Fla., a grand-jury indictment naming him was unsealed in U.S. District Court across the state in Pensacola. The indictment portrayed Kaemmerling as the leader of a seven-man scheme to defraud investors of millions of dollars and eventually led to his conviction on 19 counts of fraud.

Kaemmerling's legal troubles, however, began well before his recommendation by the SBC committee on nominations. He and others related to the criminal case had judgments rendered against them in civil courts in 1997 and 1999. The plaintiffs in those cases also figured prominently in the criminal trial.

In the 1999 civil case, a year before his nomination as an IMB trustee, a default judgment of more than \$1.8 million in actual and punitive damages was handed down against Kaemmerling. Two years earlier, Kaemmerling and two of the same co-defendants had been found liable in a civil case brought by investor Serge Chernay. That case resulted in a \$1 million judgment against Kaemmerling.

Kaemmerling's criminal conviction is on appeal. The civil cases were not appealed.

According to one Pensacola prosecutor, the federal criminal charges were drawn up on only eight cases in which investors allegedly lost a total of \$6 million. The total amount believed to have been lost through two separate investment schemes allegedly exceeds \$15 million, said Benjamin Beard, lead prosecutor in the 12-day trial.

While taking a back seat in recent years, Kaemmerling was a key player in the early days of the fundamentalist movement within the SBC.

From 1980 to 1985, he was editor of the Southern Baptist Advocate, an independent magazine used to advance the fundamentalist agenda and criticize the then-moderate leadership of the SBC and professors in SBC seminaries.

Kaemmerling dropped to a lower profile in 1986, after he was relieved of duties at the Advocate for what he described as "personal reasons." He had remained mostly out of sight on the national scene until his nomination to the IMB and his appearance on the SBC program three months before he was to face a jury in federal court.

Kaemmerling's wife is a sister to Patterson's wife. She also is a sister to Chuck Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

In correspondence with the Baptist Standard, Kaemmerling insisted none of his extended family "had any knowledge at all of the entire situation until just prior to the sentencing hearing in late November 2000."

Beyond his wife and children and a couple of close friends, "no one was aware, especially not Chuck Kelley or Paige Patterson," Kaemmerling said.

David Fannin, pastor of Nassau Baptist Church in Houston, was chairman of the SBC committee on nominations last year.

Fannin said he was unaware of Kaemmerling's legal situation prior to his nomination and election. "If we had known that, it would not have gone anywhere," he said.

Kaemmerling continued to serve as an IMB trustee until after he entered a federal penitentiary in Beaumont, Texas, the last week of May.

IMB spokeswoman Wendy Norvelle said Kaemmerling sent in a letter of resignation from the board dated June 4. IMB administrators were unaware of his predicament until he was incarcerated, she said.

Kaemmerling said he sees himself as a victim of a government conspiracy. He referred to a book titled "The Tyranny of Good Intentions," which he said "demonstrates how the federal government is abusing power, manufacturing evidence and prosecuting non-criminal activity as if it were criminal to gain convictions."

Kaemmerling said evidence that would have cleared him wasn't allowed at his trial and insists his appeal will clear his name.

"I will state plainly that I have never taken any money illegally," he said. "The business transactions we brokered were legitimate and real with positive results both possible and intended."

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-- By ABP staff

-- EDITOR'S NOTE: The full copyrighted story as it appeared in the Baptist Standard was included in ABP Friday, Aug. 3.

## **Bible Belt states leading nation in executions of mentally retarded**

By Jared Porter

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Bible-Belt states have been more likely to execute mentally retarded defendants than other states, according to data compiled by the publication Mental Retardation and the Death Penalty Information Center.

Thirty-two of the 35 mentally retarded defendants given the death penalty between 1984 and 2000 were executed in southern states, statistics show.

"The fact that so many of the executions of the mentally retarded have occurred in southern states suggests a blood lust in widespread pockets of the Bible Belt," said Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn.

Some southern states are beginning to ban capital punishment for mentally retarded defendants after following through with executions in such cases. Still, legislation in more than half of southern states currently allows the death penalty for the mentally retarded.

The North Carolina General Assembly just passed a bill banning the execution of mentally retarded offenders. Gov. Mike Easley was expected to sign the bill into law, making North Carolina the 18th state to adopt such a policy, according to the Charlotte Observer.

The bill defined a mentally retarded defendant as anyone with an IQ of 70 or lower before the age of 18 while exhibiting "significant limitations in adaptive functioning."

The Council of Christian Life and Public Affairs of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina supports the ban and believes "executing mentally retarded people is morally and ethically wrong," said Doug Cole, executive director of the council.

In Texas, however, Gov. Rick Perry recently vetoed a similar bill.

"Texas' criminal-justice system already has numerous safeguards to ensure that defendants who have sub-average intellectual capacity and who also have significant impairments in adaptive functioning ... are not executed," Perry wrote in his veto proclamation.

The Death Penalty Information Center reported six executions of mentally retarded defendants in Texas since 1990. Perry denied mentally retarded defendants had been executed in his state because each "knew what they were doing was wrong," the New York Times reported.

However, according to the Times, the test of whether a defendant knows right from wrong is used in cases of insanity, not mental retardation; most mentally retarded people are not insane and know right from wrong.

Perry added that signing the bill into law would undermine the jury system by giving judges the power to overturn a jury's determination of whether a defendant was mentally retarded.

Susan Paynter, director of citizenship education for the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said her organization supported the ban as well as another bill vetoed by Perry. The other bill would have required giving juries the option of life without parole as a sentencing option.

The bill would have benefited anyone convicted in a capital case, including mentally retarded defendants, Paynter said.

The idea behind the bills, she said, is to provide a "safety net at the sentencing stage" so judges and juries have another option besides putting someone to death or letting a defendant go free.

Another cause for concern, Paynter said, is whether the mentally retarded receive "adequate and fair judicial and legal representation." The Texas criminal-justice system, she said, operates on the assumption that all citizens receive competent and adequate counsel.

However, "there are many Texans who feel like the criminal-justice system doesn't always provide the best counsel for our very vulnerable citizens (the poor and the mentally retarded)," Paynter said. This concern prompted many Texans to want the safety net in sentencing the bills would provide.

In July, Missouri became the 16th state to ban the death penalty for mentally retarded defendants, Associated Press reported.

Georgia banned capital punishment for the mentally retarded in 1988.

Other southern states that prohibit the execution of the mentally retarded include Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky and Tennessee. Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma and North Carolina (pending) still have the death penalty for the mentally retarded.

Southern states lead in total executions since 1976, accounting for 86 percent of state executions as of July 2001, according to the Death Penalty Information Center.

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-- Jared Porter is a reporting intern at the Baptist Center for Ethics. This story is reprinted, with permission, from the BCE's electronic newsletter, bcE\*byte.

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