



Associated Baptist Press

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Supreme Court accepts school-voucher case

By Bob Allen

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court said Sept. 25 it will decide whether giving taxpayer money to parents to send their children to religious schools is constitutional.

The case, involving a Cleveland voucher program, is likely to result in a landmark decision regarding the future of educational "choice" programs.

"This is probably the most important church-state case in the last half-century," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

It pits those pushing for vouchers as a way to help children in failing public schools but cannot afford tuition at private schools against those who say using tax dollars for religious education violates the separation of church and state.

Cleveland's voucher program, established in 1995, allows up to \$2,250 for public school students to attend private, religious or suburban public schools.

There are 56 private schools currently in the program; 46 of them are religious in nature.

A state judge upheld the program in 1996. A state appeals court reversed that decision and struck the law down in 1997. The Ohio Supreme Court also struck it down on a technicality but declared the program does not violate church-state separation provisions in the state constitution.

After changes by state legislators, the law was up and running again.

In a new lawsuit in federal court, a judge held last December that the program favors religion and thus violates the Constitution. The U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that ruling by a 2-1 vote.

The court said allowing the diversion of government funds to religious institutions would be "intension" with precedents of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The state of Ohio, backed by several pro-voucher groups, appealed to the nation's high court. Earlier this year, the Bush administration filed a legal brief asking the court to hear the case, arguing that vouchers are constitutional.

Americans United has opposed the Ohio voucher program from the start. "The court must not allow tax dollars to be diverted from public schools to religious schools, and thus force all taxpayers to finance religion," Lynn said.

But Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said he sees the court's review as "an opportunity to jettison damaging previous court doctrine and to affirm religious freedom."

"In this case, the lower courts have ruled that poor parents -- in a school district where the public schools have seriously failed to educate -- could not get vouchers from the state to educate their children in alternatives to those dismal public schools," Land said, according to Baptist Press. "In doing so, the chief reason the courts have cited is that the parents decided in most cases to use their vouchers at religiously affiliated schools. This is pure, unadulterated anti-religious bigotry."

Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, disagreed with Land, however, contending the "fundamental principle" that tax dollars should not be used to finance the teaching of religion "cannot be skirted by passing vouchers through the pockets of parents."

"Time and time again voters have said no to voucher proposals," Walker said. "Now it is time for the Supreme Court to declare them to be unconstitutional, too."

The case, *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, will likely be heard early next year with a ruling expected by summer.

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Nothing prepared chaplains for ministry at ground zero

By Ken Camp

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Three long-time Baptist chaplains responding to terrorist attacks in New York City said nothing they had experienced over the years prepared them for what they saw at "ground zero" of the World Trade Center collapse.

Hugh Atwell of Fort Worth, Texas, wrote in an e-mail message after his first day at the scene that his experience in Vietnam, more than 33 years of police work, the Oklahoma City bombing and shootings at Wedgwood Baptist Church "did not prepare me for the horror" of this disaster.

Atwell said he found police officers, firefighters and recovery workers physically and emotionally "spent" but open to discussing spiritual matters.

"When you approach them, they all have a story to tell, and I have had no one refuse prayer," Atwell wrote. "They are encouraged when told of the prayer support from across the nation."

Atwell served in New York City with Milfred Minatrea, director of missional church strategy with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and Michael Haynes of Temple, Texas.

Haynes, a member of Temple's Immanuel Baptist Church, is director of the Faith-Based Counselor Training Institute, the training arm for Texas Baptist Men's Victim Relief Ministry. Although his ministry is devoted largely to preparing other chaplains and grief counselors for crisis situations, he said no preparation was adequate for the enormity of the crisis in New York City.

First seeing the smoldering rubble where the World Trade Center towers once stood "was just beyond my comprehension," he said.

The chaplains arrived in New York five days after terrorists crashed two hijacked jetliners into the World Trade Center. During their time in the city, the focus of workers at "ground zero" shifted from rescue to recovery.

Minatrea vividly recalled when recovery workers discovered the remains of one firefighter. He was identified as being from the same station as one of the crews working in the recovery operation.

Members of the crew tenderly placed their fallen colleague's body in a basket, draped a flag over it, then hooked the basket to a crane that lifted it out of the rubble and lowered it slowly to the earth.

"For about 10 minutes, everything came to an absolute stop," Minatrea said. "In a totally impromptu ceremony, all of the workers removed hats and helmets, and they stood in solemn silence."

Most of the recovered remains from the disaster site were taken to a temporary holding area and then a temporary on-site morgue in a golf cart-style ambulance before being transported to the county morgue. But in this instance, the firefighters refused the cart.

"His brothers from the station physically carried his remains all the way, as other firefighters spontaneously filed in behind them in a parade. It was nothing planned. It was a spontaneous, compassionate memorial," Minatrea recalled.

"Out of that experience," he said, "I had the opportunity to visit with any number of rescue and recovery workers, because when something like that occurs, they are re-traumatized."

Haynes described one Canadian firefighter who broke down, weeping uncontrollably in his arms. "Sometimes, all you could do was just hug them," Haynes said. "It was a ministry of presence, more than anything."

Many of the recovery workers are Catholics, and the Baptist chaplains got used to being addressed as "father." Workers sometimes asked for prayer. Often they just needed to talk.

"Father, God is real! I know it now," a New Jersey trooper told Minatrea. The trooper, who patrols the Hudson River by boat, recounted his story of Sept. 11.

After the terrorist attacks, he responded by boarding his vessel and heading for lower Manhattan. The captain of the 40-foot craft managed to weave his way into the bay between yachts, barges and docked boats.

They disembarked and started to work just before the first tower collapsed. The already smoke-filled air became black with dust.

"Father, if you were to put your head in a black trash bag, that's what it was like," the trooper told Minatrea. "You couldn't see your hand in front of your face."

Rescuers struggled to help more than 100 wounded onto the trooper's vessel and lashed themselves to the outside railing. Then the captain, working from memory and reversing the process, retraced his route through the crowded bay.

"We made our way through that absolute darkness and never scraped a boat," the trooper said, noting he believed it was beyond human capability.

Once the crew docked across the river, the trooper called his wife. He explained that he had been part of the rescue operation at the World Trade Center complex, and he was unhurt. He told her to hug their kids and tell them he loved them. Then he added, "Today, I found out God is real."

Texas board tables 'inerrancy' amendment to confession

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Is the Bible "inerrant," literally true in all areas, or "trustworthy" in matters of faith and practice, even if understood figuratively in places?

That question, which fueled a decade-long controversy that eventually split the Southern Baptist Convention, reared its head at a Sept. 25 meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board.

Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, recommended that the board place on the agenda for the state convention an "addendum" to the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message," the state convention's official faith statement. The proposed addition stated: "We believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and the inerrancy of the original manuscripts."

McKissic, whose church recently aligned with the rival Southern Baptists of Texas Convention in addition to the BGCT, said the amendment would unify Texas Baptists and build bridges to the Southern Baptist Convention, which tightened the faith statement's doctrines in 1998 and again in 2000.

Wesley Shotwell of Ash Creek Baptist Church of Azle, countered that inerrancy is a theologically "slippery" and divisive word that even the SBC avoided in revising the "Baptist Faith and Message."

Shotwell offered a substitute motion that the executive board "reaffirms the historic commitment to our belief in the absolute and complete trustworthiness of the Bible," and a 1999 vote endorsing the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message."

The board voted to table both motions in order to "pray and seek God's face" while asking the BGCT's executive director, Charles Wade, for guidance in defining Texas Baptists' commitment to the Bible.

In other business, the executive board voted to recommend to the state convention a 2002 budget of \$47.5 million, about 9 percent smaller than this year's spending plan.

Stephen Hatfield, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lewisville and chairman of the BGCT administrative committee, characterized the budget recommendation as a realistic goal in a time of economic instability and a changing denominational landscape.

"This is a trim budget," he said, but added that it still will allow the BGCT to cover priority needs.

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Seminary feeling effects of faculty departures

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Faculty losses are being felt at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of theology, the division that teaches core requirements for future pastors and other church leaders attending the school in Fort Worth, Texas.

President Ken Hemphill has described the seminary as being in a "time of transition," caused in part by a number of professors reaching natural retirement age.

"When I came to Southwestern a little more than seven years ago, Dr. John Newport, special adviser to the president, informed me that nearly half our faculty would reach retirement age during my first 10 years of service," Hemphill wrote in the fall issue of Southwestern News, the seminary's alumni magazine. "His calculations are proving to be pretty accurate."

Sources interviewed by the Texas newspaper Baptist Standard, however, also cited other factors linked to controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention, chiefly resignations and forced terminations resulting from tightening doctrinal requirements for teachers.

One of three longtime professors retiring this year said he moved up his retirement date rather than sign recent revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement.

Another longtime professor retired from Southwestern but continues to teach at another school, Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.

In all, nine of last year's 41 elected faculty in the school of theology are gone this fall. Most took other jobs. Two were forced to resign for refusing to endorse changes made to the "Baptist Faith and Message" last year.

Just one replacement was in place before the start of school this fall. Another long-time professor and administrator, Bill Tolar, had planned to retire this summer but changed his mind after he became the last elected faculty member teaching in the biblical backgrounds department.

A smaller faculty means not only heavier class loads for returning professors but raises accreditation issues. The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada requires "at least two faculty specialists in each field in which doctoral students may specialize" for an accredited doctor-of-philosophy degree.

Southwestern is down to one elected faculty member each in departments of biblical backgrounds, Christian ethics and pastoral ministry.

Theology Dean David Crutchley said he hopes to add one faculty member this fall, but he acknowledged it will take some time to rebuild from recent attrition. "We've lost some key faculty," Crutchley said. Crutchley said he is not "rushing to the cliff" but is "looking very carefully for faculty who fit the criteria we need."

"This is a very significant time in the history of the seminary," he said.

The losses come on the heels of another major transition. Since trustees fired the seminary's former president, Russell Dilday, in 1994, 33 of the 48 elected theology faculty at the time have gone. That is double the turnover rate of the previous eight years.

At least eight departures were connected to theological concerns, including policies requiring faculty to twice ratify changes to the SBC's official faith statement, the "Baptist Faith and Message."

While older professors had earlier pledged to teach in accordance with a version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted in 1963, some objected to a family amendment added in 1998 admonishing wives to "submit graciously" to their husbands. A comprehensive rewrite of the faith statement in 2000 removed a phrase in the 1963 edition making Jesus Christ the criterion for interpreting the Bible, viewed by some as a serious omission.

Crutchley said he does not know how many faculty members have left due to changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" in 1998 and 2000. "One cannot determine the motivation for faculty movement," he said.

But he acknowledged those changes were a factor for some. He declined to discuss specifics, citing the confidential nature of personnel matters.

Altering employment requirements for faculty already in place, however, brought attention from the Texas Faculty Association, which notified Hemphill in October 1998 the seminary was "not acting in good faith" with tenured faculty.

Hemphill said at the time the seminary had no choice, because it was required to follow directives of the SBC.

A bylaw eventually approved by the seminary's trustees reads: "Predicated upon the authority, inspiration, inerrancy and the infallibility of the Bible, the statement of faith, also referred to otherwise as the articles of faith, of the seminary shall be the 'Baptist Faith and Message' currently adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, as may be amended from time to time by the convention."

Two professors left after the first round of changes in the faith statement in 1998. Some faculty at the time reportedly signed the "Baptist Faith and Message" but added notation of disagreement at certain points. Trustees later ruled that affirmation of the document must be made without notation or disclaimer.

Crutchley declined to speak to the matter of faculty notations in the past but confirmed there are "no written notations on the 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message' documents as they stand today."

The current requirement that faculty affirm the current "Baptist Faith and Message" affects not only full-time faculty but also dozens of adjunct professors both in Fort Worth and at off-campus centers in Houston; Little Rock, Ark.; Lubbock; Oklahoma City; San Antonio; Shawnee, Okla.; and Tulsa, Okla.

For the first time, the seminary this fall is enforcing strict affirmation of the confession for adjunct faculty, too.

That has caused some Texas Baptist pastors, among others, to discontinue their roles as adjunct faculty for Southwestern.

Figures about turnover in adjunct faculty are not yet available, but Crutchley confirmed the trend. "We have lost a number of adjuncts," he said.

Meanwhile, Crutchley said he is pleased with the qualifications and commitment of those professors he has recommended for election within the past year -- Siegfried Schatzmann in New Testament, Paul Wolfe in New Testament and Larry Ashlock in pastoral ministry.

In his back-to-school address to the faculty, Hemphill portrayed faculty changes in a positive light. "The churches are changing and in transition," he said. "The seminary cannot stay static but must stay a step ahead."

Hemphill said this as an opportunity to build a faculty for the new era.

"I want a faculty that is conservative, compassionate and courageous," he said. "They've got to be genuine and relational. We've got to have faculty who believe the 'Baptist Faith and Message' 2000."

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Not all 'retirements' devoid of controversy

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Three longtime faculty members did retire from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of theology this year, although not all those could be described as normal retirements.

Harold Freeman, professor of preaching since 1974, said he retired earlier than planned because he refused to sign the amended "Baptist Faith and Message."

Bert Dominy, professor of theology since 1968, technically retired from Southwestern's faculty but actually moved to a new post on the faculty of Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.

Overall, the School of Theology lost nine of its 41 elected faculty members this fall. Two retired outright, two moved to faculty positions at Baylor, one became an administrator at another SBC seminary, one moved to the foreign mission field, one took a church position and two others were forced to resign because they would not sign the revised "Baptist Faith and Message."

Only one of these faculty members was replaced before the start of the fall term. In addition, Bill Tolar, former vice president for academic affairs, had announced his retirement from teaching this summer but later cancelled those plans after Tommy Brisco resigned to teach at Baylor. Had Tolar not postponed his retirement, the seminary would have had no elected faculty remaining in the biblical backgrounds department.

Of 33 faculty departures since 1994, less than half could be classified as retirements at a normal retirement age. The 33 departures include at least eight whose leaving was in some way related to the seminary's new political and theological context, concerns about the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" or the use of the confession of faith as a creed.

Those eight are Rick Johnson, Dan Kent, Alan Brehm, Jeff Pool, Keith Putt, former President Russell Dilday, Freeman and Doug Dickens.

Sources close to the seminary faculty have suggested privately that changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" or other political pressures were a factor in other departures, but those former faculty members have been unwilling to comment publicly.

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News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Missouri journalist named ABP bureau chief

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- Rob Marus of Jefferson City, Mo., has been named chief of Associated Baptist Press' news bureau in Washington, D.C.

Marus, 26, coordinator for Mainstream Missouri Baptists since 1999, succeeds Kenny Byrd, the first chief of the 2-year-old bureau, who resigned to attend law school.

Marus, a native of Arkansas and graduate of Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn., worked two years at Word and Way, the official news journal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Bob Allen, editor of the independent, national news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., described Marus as "a capable and dedicated journalist who will serve ABP's readers well in this vital role." (ABP)

Bush to nominate ambassador for religious freedom

WASHINGTON -- President Bush announced Sept. 26 plans to nominate John V. Hanford III to be ambassador at large for international religious freedom. He has worked as a congressional fellow in international religious freedom in Sen. Richard Lugar's office since 1987.

In his new position, which has been vacant since Robert Seiple resigned a year ago, Hanford will serve as a non-voting member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

At a Sept. 20-21 meeting, the panel established by a federal law in 1998 elected George Washington University law school dean Michael Young as chairman through May 2002.

The commission monitors religious freedom worldwide and provides independent advice to Congress and the president on relating to foreign governments that discriminate against their citizens based on religion.

Southern Baptist Convention official Richard Land, a new member of the commission, told Baptist Press that attending his first meeting, held in Washington, was a "tremendous experience." (ABP)

Oklahoma church severs SBC ties

OKLAHOMA CITY -- Oklahoma City's historic First Baptist Church, founded the year of the Oklahoma land run of 1889, has ended its 87-year affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The church voted 300-69 Sept. 23 to sever ties with the SBC, citing disagreement with "dogma" that a resolution says the national convention is trying to impose on separate and independent congregations.

The church, one of the first in the state to ordain women as deacons, cited specifically new tenets in the SBC's "Baptist Faith and Message" limiting the pastorate to men and calling on wives to submit to their husbands.

"Considering the desperate need for qualified ministers capable of taking the gospel to a broken and needy world, we believe excluding women from the role of pastor inhibits the time-honored Baptist mission of taking the message of Christ to the world," according to a report by a study committee.

The action leaves intact the church's affiliation with the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. (ABP)

CBF Foundation head stepping down

ATLANTA -- The first president of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Foundation, an organization to build endowment for the Atlanta-based CBF, has resigned effective Oct. 15.

According to a press release, Ruben Swint, who has held the post for nearly six years, moved to part-time status in January to begin a consulting business. He now plans to expand his work with churches and non-profit organizations by joining the Genesis Group, a consulting firm.

Swint attributed the move to "a growing sense of call to this specialized vocation on behalf of congregations."

CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal praised Swint for "significant contributions to Baptist churches and individuals who are part of the Fellowship movement."

Foundation trustees plan to name an interim president. (ABP)

CBF giving up, but number of churches down

ATLANTA -- Giving to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship reached a record \$16.8 million in 2000-2001, officials of the Atlanta-based organization announced.

The number of contributing churches, however, declined from 1,797 to 1,776.

The CBF received 99 percent of its \$16.9 million ministries budget. Overall giving increased slightly, despite a 17 percent drop in designated giving from a record amount last year spurred by a special Kosovo relief fund.

The group's annual Global Missions Offering brought in \$5.3 million, 3 percent more than last year but under a \$5.5 million goal.

The Fellowship's 2001-2002 budget is \$18 million, including a \$6 million goal for the Global Missions Offering. (ABP)

Theologian named dean at American Baptist seminary

BERKELY, Calif. -- Theologian and pastor George Cummings has been named academic dean at American Baptist Seminary of the West. Cummings, a leader among African-American theologians articulating a "black theology," has taught at the seminary affiliated with American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. since 1987. (ABP)

Baptist school earns magazine's top ranking

LIBERTY, Mo. -- Baptist-affiliated William Jewell College has been named liberal arts college of the year by Time Magazine.

The Time ranking, published in the magazine's Sept. 10 issue, rates schools not only by traditional measures like number of volumes in the library and number of professors with a Ph.D. but an essential component that it says is overlooked by many guidebooks: "Are the students engaged by their courses? How well do they learn?"

"We are gratified that the work we are doing has received national recognition," said David Sallee, president of the school that is aligned with both the Missouri Baptist Convention and American Baptist Churches, U.S.A. (ABP)

Missouri membership proposal softened

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- A committee studying membership in the Missouri Baptist Convention is backing off earlier controversial recommendations requiring the state's churches to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" and aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Meeting Aug. 30, a committee on "continuing review" voted to "revisit" a proposed constitutional amendment that would have required churches to affirm either the 1963 or 2000 version of the SBC's faith statement. A replacement recommendation now expects congregations to affirm any faith statement "in harmony with" historic Baptist beliefs.

The committee also dropped the proposed requirement for single alignment, requiring instead that a church must have reported within the previous two years using an "Annual Church Profile" provided through the denomination.

In another development, trustees of Missouri's Baptist Home elected seven trustees in a meeting Sept. 11. The Missouri Baptist agency voted a year ago to move to a self-perpetuating board of trustees, partly in response to political tension between the state's moderate and conservative factions. (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

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