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IN THIS ISSUE:

- Baptist journalists rate Sept. 11 year's top story**
- Baptist chorale brings musical gift to White House**
- Christian Web sites being 'hijacked' by pornographers**

**Baptist journalists rate
Sept. 11 year's top story**

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Events of Sept. 11 overshadowed denominational controversy in a ranking of the year's top news stories by Baptist journalists.

Editors of Baptist newspapers rated reaction to and ministry following Sept. 11 terrorist attacks as the year's top story. Two other stories related to the attacks -- debate over Islam and controversial remarks by Jerry Falwell -- also made the top 10.

Denominational turmoil in Missouri ranked second, followed by a recent dispute between a Southern Baptist mission board and the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. A controversy over homosexuality within the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship came in fourth, with President Bush's "faith-based" initiative rounding out the top five.

Responding to an annual informal survey by Associated Baptist Press, Baptist journalists voted the following the top 10 stories of 2001:

1. Baptists and others react to Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, seek to minister in its wake.
2. Turmoil grips Missouri Baptist Convention. Several agencies, including Word & Way, adopt self-perpetuating boards. Conservatives who control the convention take steps to recover agencies by legal action, if necessary, and escrow funding for current year. Moderate churches develop alternative giving plan administered through Missouri Baptist Foundation. Speculation continues that moderates are preparing to form a separate state convention.
3. North American Mission Board questions its relationship with District of Columbia Baptist Convention, citing stewardship concerns about convention's triple alignment and indifference to SBC doctrinal concerns. In response, NAMB calls for unprecedented input into decision making of an autonomous state affiliate.
4. Cooperative Baptist Fellowship adopts a policy against funding of any organizations that promote or endorse homosexuality. Described as "welcoming but not affirming" of gays, some constituents protest the change. It is upheld, however, by wide majority at the CBF's General Assembly in July.
5. President Bush announces and pushes "faith-based" initiatives to make it easier for religious institutions to receive federal funds for performing social services. Supporters say restrictions on religious

ministries violate religious freedom. Opponents, however, say using federal funds to promote particular religious views violates the separation of church and state.

6. Professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary lose their jobs rather than endorse recent changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message."

7. (Tie) Atlanta Baptist Association debates and divides over whether to keep two member churches that include homosexuals in all areas of church life. Eventually one church leaves voluntarily and the second is dismissed.

7. (Tie) Debate over Islam results from Sept. 11. Fearing for safety of Muslim-Americans, President Bush highlights the religion's positive contributions. SBC president James Merritt urges prayer that Muslims will be converted to Christ. Evangelist Franklin Graham calls Islam an evil religion. Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler says Muslims and Christians don't worship the same god. Reaction from Muslim and interfaith groups mixed.

9. Jerry Falwell makes, then apologizes for, remark on "700 Club" that 9/11 attacks are evidence that God has removed a protective hand over America and blaming ACLU and others that seek to secularize the nation. Afterward, the episode shows up in a Falwell fund-raising letter as evidence of the media being out to get Falwell.

10. (Tie) A national "Mainstream Baptists" network begins to take shape with February meeting. Another national gathering is being planned for 2002.

10. (Tie) The International Mission Board says in January that, unlike other SBC entities, it won't force missionaries to agree with every detail of the "Baptist Faith and Message." Later, an IMB regional leader said he acted on his own in requesting workers under his authority to voluntarily endorse the document.

-30-

Baptist chorale brings musical gift to White House

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Members of a Baptist church chorale expected singing at the White House to be the thrill of a lifetime, but even they were surprised at how their gift of Christmas music would be so deeply appreciated and needed by the White House staff.

The 22-voice chorale, auditioned from the sanctuary choir at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, sang carols in the East Room of the White House on Dec. 7.

Terry Goolsby, minister of worship and music at the church, first contacted the White House in mid-summer to explore the possibility of the group performing a Christmas concert. Goolsby had taken a choir to the White House in 1996 when he worked at another church, so he was familiar with the procedure for requesting an invitation.

"Then Sept. 11 came along, and we didn't know what that would mean," Goolsby said. "By October, I was telling the chorale that the White House concert was looking iffy."

But about that time, he received word that the invitation had been granted.

The White House currently is closed to the public, but Goolsby learned that it would be decorated for the holiday season, and the concert would be open to volunteers, staff, their families and elected officials.

The chorale, along with accompanist Christina Harmon, arrived at the White House two-and-a-half hours prior to their scheduled performance to receive security clearance. The group passed through four security checkpoints before finally arriving in the East Room.

Neither the President nor the First Lady attended the concert. President Bush was in Norfolk, Va., at a memorial service marking the 60th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

But several hundred members of the White House staff and others passed through the East Room during the two-hour performance.

After the concert, when the group received a private tour of the White House, members learned just how meaningful their presence had been to the staff and their families. Even usually reserved Secret Service agents were "outgoing" in expressing their gratitude, Goolsby said.

"An administration representative who greeted us broke down and cried as she talked about the strain the staff has felt," Goolsby said. "She told me, 'It just didn't seem like Christmas around here this year. What a difference it made to have you sing for us.'"

-30-

Christian Web sites being 'hijacked' by pornographers

By Ken Walker

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Christian ministries are inadvertently becoming purveyors of smut as pornographers "hijack" expired Web sites, either to lure unsuspecting visitors to pornographic sites or to earn a profit by selling the URL back to its original owner at an inflated price.

The Indiana Baptist newspaper is among the latest victims of a scheme that has affected various ministries, non-profit organizations, government agencies and political leaders.

Six months after the Indianapolis-based paper moved its content to a new state convention Web site, www.scbi.org, it gave up its rights to a former domain name. The day the old URL became available, pornography appeared on the old site.

Registered to a person supposedly in an obscure location in Russia, the bogus Baptist page now warns that it contains adult content and includes a note that the site is for sale.

Editor Chip Bayer said he considers it an indirect form of extortion, which the newspaper has decided to ignore. He said he consulted an attorney about possible legal action but learned it would be expensive and might not succeed.

"It has not caused as many problems as we would have anticipated," said Bayer. He noted that when he told a public policy firm about the problem, a representative replied, "You're the second Christian group this has happened to this week."

Descriptive Web site names can be registered for only a small fee. When they aren't renewed, however, they become available first-come, first-served. With the growing influence of the Internet, domain names for promotional uses have become a hot commodity. Speculators can profit by registering desirable site names and then reselling them at an inflated price.

Internet pornographers, meanwhile, have long used innocuous-sounding URLs to attract unsuspecting Web surfers who wouldn't otherwise log onto their site.

In this latest twist, Internet pornographers look for domain terms like "Baptist" or "Christian" in hopes that groups will be willing to buy back expired sites in order to get offensive material off them.

It becomes an even greater problem, because search engines will continue to point to old sites even after they no longer are used and infrequent visitors may have outdated URLs listed as favorite places in their own Web browsers.

"What Christian groups need to realize is they've become a target for pornographers," said Steve NeSmith, who handles Internet content for LifeWay Christian Resources. "They offer content, knowing if they can get young people or someone to view their site for 30 to 60 seconds, they can hook them."

It isn't a brand new phenomenon. One problem Rick Clore faced last winter after becoming coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's Virginia affiliate was computer users getting directed to its old site, which had been hijacked not only by pornographers but other businesses as well.

The problem appeared via Yahoo, a well-known search engine that also offers free e-mails, chat groups and other services.

Despite numerous phone calls and e-mail requests that Yahoo remove the old address from its database, CBF of Virginia never got a response.

The coordinator described it as a David vs. Goliath battle, one that prompted CBF to contemplate legal action. But the group never followed through after complaints tapered off; it hasn't had any calls for about six months.

"For a while it was a nightmare," Clore said. "We spent a considerable amount of time on the phone making calls and sending out e-mails." Neither he nor his administrative assistant had ever built a Web site. "We were relying on other people's knowledge," he said.

A recent story in the on-line Wired News said the International Lutheran Woman's Mission League, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Ohio State Senate and municipalities from Kentucky and Iowa were among the victims of similar tactics.

So were a Christian legal organization and former Republican presidential hopeful Gary Bauer, according to Steve Watters, an Internet research analyst at Focus on the Family.

Steve Hewitt, the editor of Christian Computing magazine, said the practice of X-rated merchants buying up URL's was discussed at a technology and ministry conference in Anaheim, Calif., this fall.

"They represent a huge part of the economy of the Internet and they've got money," Hewitt said. "They may set up one page and buy 10 addresses, with links to that page."

Congress passed legislation in 1998 to prevent just this kind of phenomenon. But thus far, a Samford University law professor said there have been problems enforcing the Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act.

Thomas Berg, who teaches on constitutional law and intellectual property, said one problem is locating the culprit, such as the porn producer that reportedly operates from Armenia.

Another is when someone abandons the site, it allows others to lay claim to it. Whether the former owner can contest the new use, complaining it is fraudulent or confuses the public, is left for courts to decide, Berg said.

In the case of the Indiana Baptist, however, he thinks the newspaper could win a lawsuit.

"A defendant could argue once you're there you know this isn't their site, so you look somewhere else," the professor said. "Most courts have rejected that. They say the problem is attracting people to the site in the first place.

"It's like if a Burger King used (McDonald's) Golden Arches to get people in the door. That would be false pretenses."

However, the best protection against pornographers is to first weigh the costs of maintaining an Internet site, according to a member of LifeWay's e-business group.

"I hate to be simplistic about it, but they have to do some due diligence," said marketing manager Gary McClure. "Make sure it's viable and when it's close to expiring, renew it."

Watters, who recently wrote a book on overcoming Internet addictions, said there are ways of maintaining a site name without spending a lot of money. He advises Christians to exercise caution and think of who the new "tenant" might be if they release it.

With estimates that on-line pornography generated \$1.75 billion last year and may surpass \$3 billion by 2003, the threat isn't likely to vanish soon.

"There's no federal regulation that says it's illegal," NeSmith said. "It's unethical but it's not illegal."

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