



901 Commerce Street, #400
Nashville, Tennessee 37203-3130
Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

January 3, 2002

(02-01)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Missouri 'mainstream' group votes to close its doors
- Author promotes video as vehicle of worship
- Baptist chorale brings musical gift to White House

Missouri 'mainstream' group votes to close its doors

By Bob Allen

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Moderates have thrown in the towel on efforts to reclaim control of the Missouri Baptist Convention, disbanding an organization that unsuccessfully attempted to counter gains by conservatives in recent years.

Mainstream Missouri Baptists closed its offices Dec. 31 and will officially disband in March, according to a report in the Missouri Baptist newspaper Word and Way.

A spokesman said discussions of forming a new state convention for disenfranchised moderates and the recent introduction of alternative giving plans signal the time is right to disband.

"We want to step aside so that something more permanent can happen," said Doyle Sager, the group's president. Sager said the group never viewed itself as a permanent organization.

"We feel like we accomplished good things in terms of helping to create a climate of freedom in Baptist life," Sager said.

Conservative leaders said they were not surprised by the announcement and noted that Missouri would be the first state where moderates split off from a conservative-led convention. "Mainstream Missouri Baptists is closing its doors because it hopes to reopen in 2002 as a new state convention," said Roger Moran, research director for the Missouri Baptist Layman's Association.

Mainstream Missouri Baptists formed in 1998 to oppose a conservative movement named Project 1000. With Project 1000 leadership now firmly in control of the state convention, five MBC agencies recently changed charters to remove them from state convention control. Missouri Baptists responded this fall by withholding \$2.1 million in convention funds earmarked for the agencies unless they rescind those actions and once again allow the convention to elect their boards of trustees.

A group representing about 20 moderate churches announced in December it would launch three giving options for churches wishing to continue funding the affected agencies. The group asked the Missouri Baptist Foundation, one of the agencies that recently moved to a self-perpetuating board, to administer the giving plans.

Moran accused moderates in the state of "deceit and deception" in portraying themselves as mainstream Southern Baptists. "They are anti-SBC and pro-CBF," Moran said. "Obviously their hope is to start this new convention with five partnering institutions that hard-line moderate trustees stole from the MBC."

While the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Missouri also offers giving options to churches, none of the three newest plans announced by moderates include funding for the Atlanta-based CBF, which formed in 1991 over theological differences with SBC leaders.

The new options permit churches to divide gifts among just the five escrowed agencies by pre-determined percentages, to fund SBC and Missouri Baptist ministries including the five defunded entities or to customize their own distribution of funds among recipients listed in option two.

In other recent developments, the MBC executive board voted Dec. 10-11 to create a task force to obtain a legal opinion about how to respond to the decision by related entities to elect their own trustees. While not ruling out lawsuits, leaders said any legal fees would be paid from investment funds and not Cooperative Program dollars given by churches.

Another task group will study the feasibility of publishing a replacement news journal for Word and Way, which cited editorial freedom in its decision to go independent. A third will study use of convention facilities by groups that are no longer directly accountable to the convention, such as Word and Way and Windemere assembly.

The executive board also established a search committee to replace former Executive Director Jim Hill, who resigned last year saying he could not work with the convention's conservative leaders. Guidelines for the search pledge the candidate will view the Bible as "infallible and inerrant" and will support the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

-30-

Author promotes video as vehicle of worship

By Greg Warner

DENVER (ABP) -- Sally Morgenthaler foresees a day when digital video will be used as frequently and naturally in worship services as the hymnal ever was.

Making the visual element an integral part of worship is a passion for Morgenthaler, a popular speaker and author on worship.

Visual worship isn't just about cool gadgets or being culturally relevant, she said in an interview with the Christian lifestyle magazine FaithWorks. It's about giving Christians full-sensory freedom to experience the presence of God, and for most congregations it's a long way off.

While many churches already use multimedia in worship, it is most often to support a verbal message. Sermon outlines, song texts and movie clips are used as illustrations for the spoken sermon, which still is the main focus of worship.

But that limits the power of visual technology as a vehicle for the gospel message in its own right, Morgenthaler contends.

Like other worship planners, Morgenthaler confessed that she is "guilty of using [visual] resources to support the idea of Christ and not the person."

Instead of using video "just to stuff more information into people's heads," she said, "I want to use video to help people experience the person of God through Jesus Christ."

That distinction says volumes about a church's philosophy of worship, she said. A didactic, linear approach in worship is a "way to deliver a concept." A sensory, multimedia approach, in contrast, "invite[s] you into the Grand Story."

Western Christians are so conditioned to present the gospel as a rational argument that they view other elements of worship as supplementing the sermon, Morgenthaler said. But that ignores the powerful role the visual can play in transformation.

Pictures not only tell stories with incredible emotional power, but they can even serve a liturgical purpose, she said. For example, a scripture passage about the constancy of God could be paired with a video of waves continually crashing on the shore. If used without verbal commentary, she said, the video functions "parallel to the passage, and it's not didactic." By adding a visual experience of constancy, the video expands the message of the scripture.

Morgenthaler, whose 1996 book, *Worship Evangelism*, is becoming a contemporary classic, is completing a new book, *The Uncharted Now*, which explores worship in the emerging culture.

While examples are rare, Morgenthaler said a new visual-worship resource from Highway Video is the type that can make video an integral part of worship.

Highway, based in the Silicon Valley, recently released *Vibe Videos*, a collection of short generic videos for worship. They are more poetic than didactic, visually expounding broad themes like water, sunlight, the Cross and worship symbols. They come in DVD or VHS formats, with or without subtle text that supports the theme. They can stand alone to create "ambiance." Or they can accompany live music, serve as an offertory, or enhance communion, all to add texture.

"They're more ethereal," said Joe Perez, a producer on Highway's three-man team. "They're kind of like visual wallpaper. The beauty is in the simplicity."

Javad Shadzi, Highway's marketing director, agrees with Morgenthaler about video's potential to be worship, not just support it. "The visual arts can communicate a point or the visual arts can be the experience," he said.

But Highway is not pushing the *Vibe Videos* as "liturgy" or stand-alone experience. "We are all for video being the experience too, but it's hard to mass produce that," Shadzi admits. "The last thing we want to do is mass produce and sell spirituality."

"Generally, we have used video to supplement 'standard' teaching and worship, as opposed to Sally's approach of video being the content or teaching," he said. "Getting pastors to even supplement their teaching with a video is a big enough chore. . But as more and more worship leaders experiment with video, that could quickly change."

The *Vibe Videos* are a new direction for Highway Video, which also produces on-the-street interviews, short dramas, thematic commentaries and music videos, all for use in worship and other group settings.

Highway, which started as a video team at Highway Community Church in Palo Alto, Calif., is one of a very few companies that are producing original video for worship, and trying to make a living at it.

"I have no talent other than just seeing the world funky," said Travis Reed, founder, president and producer, whose offbeat humor has been part of Highway's trademark. While quality production is important, the guys say, telling stories is where the real power of video lies. "We try not to get hung up on the technology -- it's storytelling," said Shadzi.

Church media ministries tend to attract the techies, Shadzi added, but the storytellers are the ones who really need to be involved.

"The [medieval] church used to commission the greatest artists to tell its story," he said. Visual worship in part is about bringing art back into the church, he added, "because God created it and it works. It gives people a deeper connection."

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-

END
