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CBF proposing budget increase; reluctant to pick up SBC missionaries

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will propose a \$19.6 million budget for 2002-03 that promises increases in all five ministry areas, including half a million more for missions.

But Daniel Vestal, the organization's chief executive, said CBF would not automatically hire Southern Baptist missionaries who resign or are fired because they refuse to affirm the SBC's new faith statement.

The CBF's largest-ever budget, adopted unanimously by the group's Coordinating Council Feb. 23, is a 6.9 percent increase over the current year's budget. If approved by the CBF General Assembly in June, the spending plan will take effect when the Fellowship's fiscal year begins July 1.

Through seven months of this fiscal year, CBF revenue is about \$350,000 behind the pace required to meet its \$18.3 million budget but 4.4 percent ahead of year-to-date revenue for the previous year.

Budget planners said they are confident they can reach next year's \$19,588,267 budget goal. They point to revenues of \$2.6 million in January, the highest total for any month in CBF's 11-year history. "Even with the shortfall in (current) revenue, we are healthy and managing expenses," said James Strawn, coordinator for finance and administration.

During its three-day meeting in Atlanta, the Coordinating Council participated in a commissioning service for six new CBF missionaries. The three couples will minister in Ukraine, California and North Africa.

Vestal said many people are asking if CBF will hire any Southern Baptist missionaries who leave the International Mission Board because of pressure to affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" statement.

"The reason why CBF does not do that is because that would transplant a conflict in North America . . . all over the world," he said.

The CBF, which has a missionary force of 115 people, has an equal number of active missionary candidates that the organization can't afford to appoint, leaders say. Any missionaries that resign from the IMB may not match the CBF's priority of reaching people groups in parts of the world where the gospel message has not been heard.

CBF will help departing IMB missionaries "any way we can," Vestal added, "but we must look at the mission enterprise . . . from a global perspective."

However, CBF officials later said resigning missionaries could be candidates for appointment to mission positions that fit the CBF's global strategy.

The new "Baptist Faith and Message," revised by the SBC's conservative leaders in 2000, teaches that women should submit to their husbands, that only men can be pastors, and that the Bible -- not Jesus -- is the final authority in all matters.

Southern Baptist leaders say the revised faith statement should be used as "an instrument of doctrinal accountability" within the SBC. Critics say forcing missionaries and other SBC employees to sign or affirm the statement makes it a creed, which historically Baptists have denounced.

The new budget was developed by the CBF staff in a departure from past practice, in which the Coordinating Council itself drafted and debated funding for global missions and other CBF ministries, as well as for "partner" organizations, such as 13 theological schools that receive funding.

Since adopting a new strategic plan two years ago, the CBF budget has been organized into five "initiatives," or ministry areas.

The largest portion of the budget will support CBF global missions, which is slated to receive \$11,250,775, up 4.7 percent from the current year. That total includes approximately \$6 million in income from CBF's Global Missions Offering. The missions budget underwrites the selection, training and support of CBF's missionary force of 115 people and the promotion of global missions and mission giving among moderate Baptists. Also included is \$199,000 for mission partnerships with other organizations.

In the area of leadership development, which covers theological education, collegiate ministry and congregational leadership, the budget proposes spending \$2,372,632, up 5.5 percent. The largest portion -- \$1,728,500 -- supports theological education at 13 schools. Direct institutional support for those schools remains the same as in the previous budget. But money for scholarships increased 15 percent, with the increases going to six schools.

The schools (with institutional and scholarship funds in parentheses) are: Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (\$280,000, \$75,000), George W. Truett Seminary at Baylor University (\$175,000, \$71,500), Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan. (\$200,000, \$25,000), the M. Christopher White School of Theology at Gardner-Webb University (\$120,000, \$57,000, up 78 percent), McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University (\$228,000, \$47,000), the School of Divinity at Campbell University (\$65,000, \$55,000, up 57 percent), Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University (\$20,000, \$25,000, up 66 percent), the Divinity School at Wake Forest University (no institutional support, \$25,000, up 25 percent), the Baptist House of Studies at the Divinity School, Duke University (\$20,000, \$15,000), Baptist Studies Program at Candler School of Theology, Emory University (\$30,000, \$22,000), Baptist Studies Program at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University (no institutional support, \$50,000, up 25 percent), Baptist Seminary of Kentucky (no institutional support, \$15,000, new grant), and International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, the Czech Republic (\$108,000, no scholarship support).

Also receiving a grant for leadership development is Baptist Women in Ministry (\$30,000).

In the area of building community, which includes congregational health, Baptist identity, reconciliation and justice, and marriage and family, the budget earmarks \$1,221,955, a 20 percent increase. About half of that total will be spent on grants to partner organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee (\$250,000, up 5.3 percent), Associated Baptist Press (\$162,000, up 13.7 percent), Baptists Today (\$50,000, up 2.1 percent), and Baptist World Alliance (\$20,000, no increase). Other funds will promote the growth of various networks within CBF, including Asian, Hispanic and African-American networks.

In the area of faith formation, which includes evangelism and spiritual growth, the budget targets \$673,687, a 26 percent increase. Funded ministries include the CBF's "hospitality evangelism" emphasis, several conferences and missions education. Grants for partners include the Baptist Center for Ethics, a free-

standing Nashville organization that will receive \$100,000 (no increase), and the Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, scheduled to receive \$18,000 (up 32 percent).

The fifth "initiative" provides support for the CBF organization. This includes \$1,015,831 for communication and marketing, up 16 percent; \$363,457 for the organization's annual General Assembly, up 0.4 percent; \$300,000 for the new Benefits Board (no increase), and \$2,389,930 for administration, up 7.5 percent.

Reba Cobb, coordinator for the CBF's Atlanta-based Resource Center, said the increase in administrative costs is fueled mostly by a 67 percent increase in insurance costs. Otherwise, she said, the budget for administrative support is "flat." Two new staff positions would be included -- an administrative assistant and an information technology specialist. She noted the CBF's professional staff decided to forego any salary increases so that support staffers could receive raises.

"The real increase has come in our ministry support," she said.

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CBF reports upswing in chaplain endorsements

ATLANTA (ABP) -- In the wake of a decision by the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board to no longer endorse ordained women as chaplains, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship endorsed six of them.

In all, the CBF endorsed 25 chaplains and pastoral counselors Feb. 22, the largest group of new chaplains since a council on endorsement formed in 1998. To date, the Atlanta-based CBF has endorsed a total of 163 Baptist ministers for work as chaplains in the military, hospitals and industry or as pastoral counselors.

Thirty-six of those are ordained women. They comprise 22 percent of the CBF's total chaplaincy force.

"CBF gladly endorses ordained women who are qualified to serve as chaplains," CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal said. He said he views the organization as a partner with churches that ordain "God-called women" to the ministry.

George Pickle, associate coordinator for chaplaincy and pastoral counseling, said the endorsements indicate the CBF's commitment to helping men and women find their places of service. "CBF affirms that chaplains and pastoral counselors have been called by God and gifted by the Spirit of God for ministry in the Kingdom of God," he said.

In other action, the CBF commissioned six new missionaries in a service Feb. 22 in College Park, Ga., bringing the total of CBF missionaries to 115.

The three couples will serve in the Ukraine, North Africa and California.

Gennady and Mina Podgaisky will work with urban ministry in Kiev, Ukraine. A large part of their work will focus on ministries among Kiev's street children.

Lita and Rick Sample of Houston will minister to internationals in the Oakland/East San Francisco Bay area of California.

A third couple, assigned to serve among an unevangelized people group in Northern Africa and the Middle East, weren't identified because of security concerns.

Along with commissioning new missionaries, the Fellowship also recognized three individuals with many years of service in China.

The Fellowship honored CBF field personnel Ina and Ron Winstead, who retired in January. The

Winsteads served in Taiwan and China with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for 25 years and then came to CBF in 1996 to finish out their career.

In retirement, the Winsteads plan to take periodic trips to China to help facilitate work being done.

Global Missions co-coordinator Barbara Baldrige noted how the Winsteads inspired many others to serve in China, including CBF Envoy Sue Todd. Todd was also honored for her service as a teacher in China for several years. Todd, who became the prototype for CBF's current Envoy program -- where individuals not employed by CBF obtain secular employment and support Fellowship ministries -- went to China as a retiree. "It's never too late," Todd said, with a laugh.

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-- By ABP staff

Supreme Court hears arguments in voucher case

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Observers say a ruling on what may be the most important church-state case in 40 years will likely come down to "swing votes" by moderate justices on the United States Supreme Court.

The nation's high court heard oral arguments Feb. 20 in a landmark case involving an Ohio program that provides tuition vouchers for private and parochial schools.

The justices must decide if the program violates the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of religion.

The Cleveland policy is not the first to face legal challenge. Lower courts have ruled both for and against vouchers. Until now, however, the Supreme Court has declined to accept a case to resolve the church-state issue.

Supporters of so-called "school choice" programs hope that a favorable ruling will encourage the growth of similar programs around the country. Advocates of public schools and organizations that support the separation of church and state, meanwhile, hope a ruling against the Ohio program will halt other voucher programs.

Observers expect the most conservative members of the court to vote to uphold the voucher program and most liberal justices to vote against it. If so, moderate justices such as Sandra Day O'Connor would hold the decision in their hands.

During oral arguments, O'Connor asked hard questions on both sides. In a nod to the case's importance, the court extended the time for arguments to 80 minutes instead of the usual one-hour time frame.

Pro-voucher lawyers -- including U.S. Solicitor General Ted Olson -- argued the voucher program did not amount to government endorsement of religion. He said the law has a secular purpose of "rescuing" poor children from "failing public schools." Olson also said parents in the program had a genuine choice between religious and secular alternatives as to where they sent their children and their scholarship money.

Robert Chanin, lead attorney for the voucher opponents, pointed to recent studies confirming that at least 96 percent of the students in the Cleveland voucher program were using their scholarships to attend religious schools. [Most are Roman Catholic.] He argued the program was skewed in favor of religious schools because it capped tuition at a rate far lower than that charged by most secular private schools. Because such a large amount of money was being transferred from the public coffers to sectarian schools, Chanin and other opponents said the program created the "primary effect" of endorsing religion.

Outside the court's building, pro-voucher and anti-voucher demonstrators competed to get camera time and drown out opposing speakers with their chants. Advocates for each side spoke to a large group of assembled reporters, many of whom sat on the pavement of the Supreme Court building's front plaza.

Government-sponsored religion is always a bad idea, said Barry Lynn of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. "Religious schools and other ministries should always be supported with voluntary contributions," he said. "Taxpayers should never be forced to place their money into the collection plates of churches."

Kenneth Starr, the special prosecutor in the impeachment of former President Bill Clinton, served as an attorney of record for the pro-voucher group. He told reporters it's un-American to "discriminate against" religious groups in efforts at reforming the educational system. He noted America's religious diversity, and said -- as an example -- that Muslim parents should have the right to use government scholarships to enroll their children in Muslim schools. "Why would people oppose the right of parents to choose for their child?" he asked.

Asked by Associated Baptist Press after the press conference if he, as a professing Christian, would be comfortable with his tax dollars being used to finance Islamic religious education, Starr said: "Absolutely. I'm in favor of freedom."

Both sides of the voucher debate have waged extensive public-relations battles in recent months as the case moved closer to judgment.

Proponents say such programs -- which usually target economically disadvantaged children in public schools with poor records of educational achievement -- are the best way to lift many children out of education crises.

Opponents say such programs use the wrong methods to achieve a noble purpose. As Chanin told Justice Antonin Scalia: "I do not believe, Your Honor, that the crisis in the Cleveland public schools gives license to violate the Establishment Clause."

A decision in the case, *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, is expected by July.

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