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Hatch signs on to partial ban on human cloning

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Sen. Orrin Hatch has stepped into the contentious debate over cloning, parting ways with other anti-abortion advocates by supporting a bill that would allow research involving the copying of human genes.

In an April 30 press conference, Hatch (R-Utah) joined with Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), and Arlen Specter (R-Penn.) in announcing a bill that would ban human cloning for reproductive purposes. But unlike a competing bill, which would prohibit all human cloning, this one would allow a process known as "somatic cell nuclear transplantation" or "therapeutic cloning."

In that process, the nucleus of a cell from a living person is transplanted into an unfertilized human egg, creating an identical genetic copy of the individual. The egg is then stimulated in a laboratory to divide and grow into a zygote, from which cells known as "stem cells" are harvested. Stem cells have the potential to grow into several different kinds of tissues, which then may be transplanted back into the original DNA donor to replace diseased or damaged tissue.

Scientists say research using stem cells from cloned zygotes has great potential to find effective treatments for many terminal diseases, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's Disease, Lou Gehrig's Disease, and others.

Scientists already have done research using stem cells harvested from embryos left over from couples undergoing fertility treatments. But cloned embryos provide the added benefit of guaranteeing that the body of the person being treated will not reject the tissue created from the stem cells -- because the tissue will be genetically identical to that of the donor.

Believing that life begins at conception, most anti-abortion activists oppose any research on either fertilized or cloned embryos, because the process of harvesting the stem cells destroys the embryos. Some medical ethicists also oppose therapeutic cloning over fear that it could create loopholes that would ultimately lead to widespread reproductive cloning.

Another Senate bill would ban all forms of human cloning, including therapeutic cloning. Co-sponsored by Sens. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) and Sam Brownback (R.-Kan.), it is similar to legislation passed last year by the House of Representatives.

The debate over the competing bills has emerged as one of the most contentious currently on Capitol Hill. One issue is whether destroying an embryo that was created by cloning is the moral equivalent of taking a human life. Anti-abortion groups say it is, and President Bush has backed them up. In a recent speech, he said, "A law permitting research cloning, while forbidding the birth of a cloned child, would require the destruction of nascent human life."

But Hatch -- one of the Senate's most stalwart abortion opponents -- said he disagrees. "I think it's worth making a distinction between a living human cell and a fertilized human being," Hatch said when asked about it at the press conference. He said he does believe human life begins at conception, but cloned embryos are not conceived. They will not be carried in a mother's womb, which is the only place they could grow, he said, so they do not constitute human beings.

The second issue over which the competing Senate bills differ is whether allowing therapeutic cloning opens a loophole that would lead to widespread reproductive cloning.

The Hatch-Specter-Kennedy-Feinstein bill would impose harsh penalties, including 10 years in prison and minimum fines of \$1 million, on those convicted of creating human clones for reproductive purposes. It also provides several safeguards -- including the requirement that any therapeutic cloning research be approved ahead of time by an independent ethical-review board.

Opponents say such laws are unenforceable. But, as Specter observed at the press conference, so is the Brownback-Landrieu cloning ban. "There's always crazy people out there, and nothing's going to stop them," he claimed.

The aim of Hatch and Specter's version of the legislation has garnered star endorsements, including more than 40 Nobel Prize winners and former President Gerald Ford, who recently wrote President Bush a letter announcing his opposition to the Brownback-Landrieu bill and the House cloning ban.

But the National Right to Life Committee said the Hatch-Specter bill is nothing more than a "dressed up version of the existing 'clone and kill' bills" that would allow cloning and destruction of human embryos.

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Singing Men tour China in partnership effort

By Ferrell Foster

RICHARDSON, Texas (ABP) -- Forty-eight current and former ministers of music have become the "vanguard group" for an informal partnership between the China Christian Council and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Enthusiastic crowds in four Chinese cities greeted the north central chapter of the Singing Men of Texas in an April trip.

"We were able to say with excellence and love, Texas Baptists are here to partner with you, to encourage you and to learn from you," said Don Blackley, director of the chapter and associate pastor at First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas.

The trip was intended to "lay the groundwork for future ministry opportunities," said Joe Bruce, projects director for the state convention's Texas Partnerships Resource Center.

In addition to singing, the men and their home churches are contributing more than \$10,000 for the legal purchase of Bibles in China.

Amity Press will print Bibles for about \$1.50 each, said Don Sewell, director of Texas Partnerships. As a result, more than 7,000 Bibles will be "available for Chinese people because of the generosity of these churches."

Members of the Singing Men of Texas are, or have been, church music ministers. Forty-eight singers, plus some spouses, made the trip April 16-26.

They encountered "great enthusiasm in packed auditoriums," Blackley said.

Bruce said response to the concerts was tremendous. One Sunday morning, the group arrived early for a 7:30 service. "The building was already full, and people were sitting on benches in the courtyard."

"It was wonderful," said Don Orr, an 80-year-old retired music missionary and member of First Baptist Church in Burleson who had served in China during World War II. "We were so surprised at the strength of the church work there."

Blackley noted an "immense appetite for worship and celebration" in the Chinese churches. "We were allowed to say and sing and do anything we wanted to... within the bounds of the service."

The Richardson minister also noted "the sheer immensity of the population." With 1.3 billion people, China has a billion more people than the United States. And the city of Shanghai has 18 million people, compared to 20 million in Texas.

The large crowds in the churches, Bruce said, are "still only a small portion of the population."

The China Christian Council is the official umbrella group of Protestants in China. The organization says about 12,000 churches are open in China, and new ones are being opened at the rate of three every two days. In addition, an estimated 25,000 groups of Protestant Christians worship in homes.

Since 1980, more than 2,700 seminarians have completed their training at the 18 theological schools operated by the China Christian Council and regional and provincial Christian councils. More than 20 million Bibles have been printed and distributed within the country through the Amity Foundation, a Chinese Christian service organization started in 1985.

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-- Ferrell Foster writes for the Baptist General Convention of Texas communications department.

Herb Reynolds still dreams of a new Baptist convention

By John Pierce

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Herb Reynolds went to the Texas capital of Austin in the fall of 1998 and spent his own money to legally reserve the name "Baptist Convention of the Americas."

Chancellor of Baylor University at the time, Reynolds thought it might be used some day by dissatisfied Southern Baptists to form a new denominational body. He still does.

Reynolds, 72, continues devoting time to the university as president emeritus -- and still contemplates the future of Baptists.

"I think that we have no alternative but to continue to move ahead toward another larger body of Baptists who covet freedom in Christ and who embrace those essentials of the faith and Baptist principles," said Reynolds in an interview with the independent newspaper Baptists Today.

Surrounded by his vast collection of bears -- the Baylor mascot -- Reynolds added that Southern Baptists "have been two different peoples for more than a decade."

If and how the new convention ever formulates are undetermined, said Reynolds. If it is going to happen, however, he believes Texas Baptists will need to take the lead.

"Given our size and resources," said Reynolds, "Texas Baptists would be neglectful" if they did not give leadership to forming a larger new convention.

Reynolds said the formation of a national Mainstream Baptist Network in Atlanta in 2000 was "a step in the direction we'd ultimately like to go." However, he admits uncertainty about whether that organization can pull together the various parties needed for organizing a formal denominational structure.

"It is too early to assess the eventual outcome of the Mainstream Baptist Network," said Reynolds, "but it is an essential coalition at this time, and it does function as a political entity in seeking to thwart and deter the fundamentalist effort across the old SBC"

But isn't the 10-year-old Cooperative Baptist Fellowship already providing a viable alternative for disenfranchised Southern Baptists?

CBF has never been "a political entity," said Reynolds, and he doubts the organization is strong enough to "act as a stack pole in Baptist life and to expand upon its endeavors."

While expressing high regard for CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal, and his predecessor Cecil Sherman, Reynolds said he does not expect much growth from the Fellowship.

"The CBF was a vital alternative when it was founded and it gave our people a great deal of hope and satisfaction in the midst of the ongoing struggle within the SBC," said Reynolds, "(yet) there was never any intimation or suggestion that CBF would seek to become a convention."

Out of the decision not to formalize as a denomination, said Reynolds, "grew the notion that the CBF would be principally a small mission-sending agency and a source of fellowship for those who could not abide the power and control antics of the SBC leadership."

Vestal said he respects Reynolds and his opinion, but disagrees with that assessment of CBF.

"CBF is indeed a mission-sending organization, and I might add, a very remarkable one," said Vestal. "And CBF is much more."

After budget allocations next year, Vestal said CBF will have provided more than \$12 million to fund theological education including \$2 million for Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor.

"More than 1,400 students are studying in the consortium of CBF schools," said Vestal rejecting the idea that the Fellowship is small. "We have 18 state and regional networks. We have \$18 million in a foundation."

Continuing, Vestal said the Fellowship has recently started a benefits board "to provide retirement and medical benefits for congregational leaders" and offers "resources for local churches in a variety of ways."

"We're a partnering network," said Vestal, "that functions like a denomination in a post-denominational world."

In order to draw a larger number of dissatisfied Baptists, however, Reynolds said CBF must position itself more to the right theologically.

"You're not going to carry a lot of Baptists with you unless you are a little right of center," said Reynolds. "Baptists are conservative people."

But seeing the formation of a new Baptist denomination is not his greatest concern, said Reynolds. Rather he just wants to be sure that opportunities are available for the generations after him to understand the historic freedoms and principles he sees absent among current Southern Baptist leaders.

"This is not going to affect me," said Reynolds. "I'm concerned about my children and grandchildren and their children. I don't want them to grow up in fundamentalism. ... That's the real reason for my involvement."

And he admits that goal may be met in ways other than he has imagined. "New and different concepts may evolve over the immediate years ahead which will offer more promise and be more attractive to a greater number of Baptists than the Baptist Convention of the Americas," said Reynolds.

But just in case, the name is legally protected.

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-- John Pierce is executive editor of Baptists Today.

Estranged churches reunite in 'reconciliation' service

By Lacy Thompson

HOUMA, La. (ABP) -- Members of both Christ Baptist Church in Houma, La., and Bayou DuLarge Baptist Church in nearby Theriot had surely sung "I'm So Glad I'm a Part of the Family of God" before.

But it's unlikely that they ever sang it with more meaning than at a joint worship service April 26.

The "reconciliation" service, held at Christ Church and also attended by members of other area churches, represented the first time two estranged congregations had come together in seven years. It marked the end of a sometimes-bitter dispute that began back when the Houma congregation was sponsoring what was then Bayou DuLarge Baptist Mission.

"We need to do this more often," Christ Church pastor John Baye said to open the service. "We need to get together and worship. ... We're here to glorify God and lift up the Lord Jesus in our midst."

The dispute dates to February 1995, when then-Southern Baptist Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis visited Bayou DuLarge for an associational missions rally.

However, Bayou DuLarge pastor Jerry Moser and some of his church members commandeered the pulpit, refusing to allow Lewis to speak.

For Moser, the move was a bid to confront Lewis on his support of "Evangelicals-Catholics Together," a 1994 document outlining theological agreements and differences between evangelical Christians and Roman Catholic believers.

Lewis had signed on to the document, an action Moser decried. He charged the document embraced heresy by affirming Catholic doctrine and undermined the evangelical witness, especially in heavily Catholic south Louisiana.

Fallout from events at the rally was quick. As sponsoring church, Christ was responsible for hiring the mission pastor and held title to all of its property and funds. After the missions rally, Christ Church quickly fired Moser as pastor of DuLarge and evicted him from the mission building. It then took control of the facility, as well as DuLarge funds and accounts.

Moser did not go quietly, however. He continued to minister to his congregation in home meetings and eventually led them to constitute as a church.

While the DuLarge church continued to affiliate with the state and national conventions, it found itself out of favor with the local Adolphe Stagg Baptist Association.

Meanwhile, Moser continued his opposition to the original evangelical-Catholic document -- and to subsequent ones. He also protested the actions of Christ Baptist Church against himself and his congregation.

The ensuing years did not soften the emotion of the dispute or provide any resolution -- even though various individuals urged reconciliation at times.

With time, some of the principals changed. Baye became pastor of Christ Church, Steve Mooneyham became director of missions for Adolphe Stagg association and Dean Doster became executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

The dispute percolated last spring when Moser wrote to state convention leaders, charging that the actions taken against Bayou DuLarge were improper and that ongoing "public deception" was damaging the congregation's witness.

Members of the state executive board responded by adopting a five-point statement. In part, the statement acknowledged work at Bayou DuLarge had been hurt and sought forgiveness "for any hindrance, actual or perceived, by the LBC Executive Board or its employees." The statement also urged reconciliation between Bayou DuLarge and Christ churches.

Not quite a year later, that reconciliation came about suddenly, during a late March meeting between leaders of the two congregations.

Moser said he went to the meeting prepared to read a statement of repentance. However, before he could, Baye opened with a statement of repentance as well. The action of the leaders set the stage for official reconciliation and opened the door for Christ Church to give ownership of the DuLarge building to Moser and his congregation. The legal documents making it official were signed prior to the reconciliation service.

"There's only one reason why we're here tonight -- that's because God's love has prevailed," Dave Thibodeaux said to open the service. Thibodeaux is interim minister of music at Christ Church.

During the service, attended by some 150 persons, Moser and Baye both reflected on the turn of events.

"That night (of the March meeting) was a momentous night," Moser noted, urging persons to throw off all hindrances and focus on working together for God.

"The thing that Satan had a heyday with needs to be over," Moser emphasized. "We need to let it go. ... The conflict we've had has not been over doctrine. ... It's been a personal thing, ... and there's no room now for personal things."

Moser once again read his statement of repentance, insisting it was written from his heart. "I'm walking in a miracle," he added. "I told my people, 'You better be here tonight, 'cause you ain't never seen nothing like this.'"

"Hopefully, this will not be the end but the start of many more reconciliation meetings," Moser concluded to standing applause from service participants.

Baye said God spoke to him as the March meeting neared, asking, "You're going there, expecting a repentance of Jerry Moser, but what are you going to do?"

Baye said he got to the point where he didn't know what else to do but repent for his and his church's part in the situation and for the unkind things he had said and thought during the lingering dispute.

He recalled how a spirit of revival arose for those at the March meeting. "It went around the table," he said. "It was the Spirit of Almighty God going around that table."

Baye cautioned that persons can say they have eternal life without living a life that shows it. "We need to commit tonight that this is never going to happen again," he urged.

"For too long, the devil's had the victory in the church in this area of the state. ... But that's over."

Baye thanked persons who pushed for reconciliation, including Doster. He noted how the state leader and other convention personnel worked tirelessly behind the scenes, eliciting applause from service participants.

Doster later said he was grateful to have a difficult situation resolved. "I believe John Baye and Jerry Moser demonstrated in what they did and what they said a very Christian approach for reconciliation that could be a model for all of us," Doster emphasized.

"I think it will have a great positive impact for our work in south Louisiana. And I'm grateful the Bayou DuLarge building is no longer sitting empty."

Near the end of the reconciliation service, Mooneyham also offered personal words of repentance to Moser and the two men embraced. Mooneyham then read Scripture and the service closed with worshippers standing and joining hands for congregational singing of the popular chorus, "The Family of God."

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-- Lacy Thompson is associate editor of the Louisiana Baptist Message.

Two North Carolina churches face opposition in associations

By Steve DeVane and Tony Cartledge

CULLOWHEE, N.C. (ABP) -- Two Baptist churches in western North Carolina are under fire in their associations for calling women as pastors and declining to align with the Southern Baptist Convention.

A committee of Tuckasee Baptist Association voted 3-2 on April 23 finding that Cullowhee Baptist Church is in violation of the association's bylaws and should have its membership revoked "unless corrective action is taken," a committee member told the North Carolina Baptist newspaper Biblical Recorder.

The committee said the church violates two sections of the association bylaws.

One section says that the association is composed of Baptist churches "in cooperating fellowship with the Southern Baptist Convention and following the teachings of the New Testament."

The church, located west of Asheville, does not financially support the Southern Baptist Convention.

The other section says the association may "withdraw from any church which has become unscriptural in its doctrine or practices."

The votes came about three and a half months after the association's pastors' conference sent a letter to the committee alleging "matters of doctrine and practice within Cullowhee Baptist Church that do not conform to the clear teachings of the New Testament."

The head of the pastors' conference called having a woman co-pastor "a major doctrinal error according to Scripture."

The issue is expected to come up before the association's executive committee at its next meeting in July. The association could also consider the matter at its annual meeting in October.

Meanwhile, not far away, in Hendersonville, Providence Baptist Church received word it does not qualify for church-start funding from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

The decision, which was announced at a meeting of the state convention's executive committee April 11, stems from a policy of cooperation with regional associations in the disbursing of church-starting funds.

Leaders of Carolina Baptist Association, which earlier rejected the church's query about joining, indicated the new church "could have negative impact on the harmony and fellowship of the association."

Controversy has swirled around the young church, which announced last summer that it planned to affiliate with the state convention and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but not the Southern Baptist Convention. The church also called a woman, Gail Coulter, to serve as pastor and church planter.

Coulter was serving on staff at First Baptist Church of Asheville, the mission's primary sponsor. Providence has several other sponsors, most in the Buncombe Baptist Association. The church, however, is geographically located in Henderson County, which is home to the Carolina Baptist Association.

When church representatives made overtures for admission to the Carolina Association, they were told that the association requires affiliated churches to be cooperating members of the SBC.

Providence was eventually accepted into the United Association, which requested partnership funding for the church.

Milton Hollifield of the state convention's mission-growth team said the state has in the past funded new churches that support the Atlanta-based CBF and that the Providence refusal shouldn't be viewed as setting a new precedent.

"We shouldn't see this as 'the' situation, but as 'a' situation," Hollifield said.

Sandy Beck, director of missions for the Carolina Association, said the association's concerns were related to the church's lack of ties to the SBC.

"This is a church that is not a Southern Baptist church and we have adopted in our purpose statement that we are a fellowship of Southern Baptist churches," he said. "They do not fit in with our purpose."

Beck said he has no problem with United Association supporting the church and that his association's reaction has nothing to do with the church having a woman pastor.

"Gail's a real sweet person," he said. "I have no problem with her as a person."

In a written statement, Coulter said the church is disappointed with being refused funds but holds no ill will.

"The response from the state convention calls us as a congregation to renew our commitment to prayer for our ministry and for the convention," Coulter said. "We must voice our prayers of thanksgiving for the evidence of God's love in all those who do undergird us in such a fine fashion. This response also is a call to reinforce our efforts at ministering with the gospel to unchurched and unsaved people in this area and around the world. We know that the Holy Spirit of God is very present in our expression of being Christian and Baptist witnesses in this place. We thus trust God, as we follow, to provide for our needs."

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-- Steve DeVane is managing editor of the Biblical Recorder. Tony Cartledge is editor. This story is compiled from separate reports that appeared in the newspaper.

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

CBF receives \$4 million missions gift

ATLANTA -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship recently got a \$4 million gift from an anonymous donor earmarked for global missions.

The gift -- to be spent over three years and divided 80 percent for personnel and 20 percent for projects -- will support 12 career missionaries and 13 Global Service Corps missionaries, who raise part of their own support and take assignments lasting from one months to three years.

The CBF already has 115 missionaries, but about 120 more are candidates that the group can't afford to send.

"With increased numbers of field personnel, we can move into some areas where we've not been able to go before -- including to people groups on additional islands in Southeast Asia, to other minorities in China and to more groups in Arabic-speaking North Africa," said Barbara Baldrige, Global Missions co-coordinator. "This gift certainly will strengthen our work among the poorest of the poor and other neglected groups."

The Atlanta-based CBF has also signed a covenant with American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. for starting new churches that choose to relate to both mission organizations.

"In those areas of the country where American Baptist and Cooperative Baptist efforts overlap, we will be able to work together in aggressively pursuing church planting," said Gary Baldrige, the CBF's other Global Missions co-coordinator. (ABP)

Baptists Today adds director of development and marketing

MACON, Ga. -- The independent news journal Baptists Today has hired its first director of development and marketing.

Keithen Tucker, formerly director of church relations at Wingate University in North Carolina, joined the staff April 1. Tucker, 50, was a pastor in North Carolina for 22 years before taking the Wingate job in 1998.

A native of Albany, Ga., he is a graduate of Georgia Southern University, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Drew University, where he earned a doctor of ministry degree.

"We have a great product and people keep telling us how important Baptists Today is in providing a clear understanding of the issues facing our churches today," said Jim McAfee of Atlanta, chairman of the publication's board of directors. "However, there are so many more churches that could benefit from having their key leaders as regular readers. We look forward to Keithen helping us build our circulation as well as our support base." (ABP)

U.S. church leaders urge end to Middle East conflict

NEW YORK -- A delegation of 13 U.S. church leaders just back from a two-week tour of the Middle East faulted both Palestinians and Israelis for violence in the region.

The National Council of Churches delegation condemned both suicide bombings by Palestinians and Jewish occupation in Gaza and the West Bank. It called for "bold steps" by both sides, affirming both a Palestinian state and the right of Israel to exist within secure borders, plus a shared Jerusalem.

"Our delegation leaves the Middle East convinced that an enduring peace can be achieved if the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories ends and if the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure State of Israel follows soon," according to a statement released by the group April 30. (ABP)

JOT returning to airwaves

FORT WORTH, Texas -- JOT, the animated children's classic created by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission in 1964, is coming back to TV. FamilyNet Television in Fort Worth, Texas, said it would begin broadcasting JOT Classics beginning May 6.

The show, conceptualized in 1959 by Ruth Byers and Ted Perry, was aimed at reaching children with moral messages. "The Lutherans had Davey and Goliath, and I wondered what we Baptists could do for children's television," said Paul Stevens, the agency's president at the time.

The Southern Baptist-owned FamilyNet is a 24-hour television network on cable and broadcast television in 34 million homes. Denise Cook, a spokesperson for the network, said JOT Classics would also be compiled for video sales. (ABP)

Forest fire damages New Mexico camp

CLOUDCROFT, N.M. -- A New Mexico Baptist encampment was spared major damage as a forest fire raged out of control in the southern part of the state May 1.

The Sivells Baptist Retreat and Conference Center lost a bathhouse and eight cabins located on the lower part of the camp's mountain when the Penasco Fire unexpectedly exploded out of control.

None of the camp's major buildings was lost, however, though it appeared earlier in the day they might be.

"God is so merciful," said with Paul Klopfer, who manages the camp owned by the Baptist Convention of New Mexico. He said he believed most of 128 beds destroyed in the blaze could be replaced before the heavy camping season arrives in summer. (ABP)

Baylor gets grant for poverty study

WACO, Texas -- Baylor University's School of Social Work recently received a \$2 million grant from Pew Charitable Trusts to study how urban churches and faith-based organizations are making a difference in the lives of poor Americans.

"Poverty is not only a problem of not enough money to meet basic needs," said Diana Garland, chair of the social-work school. "It also figures prominently in problems such as unemployment, welfare dependence, illiteracy, gang violence, substance abuse and teen pregnancy. We will look for the effective ways the small to mid-sized congregations and faith-based organizations tackle these problems." (ABP)

University offering degree in worship leadership

MOBILE, Ala. -- The Alabama Baptist-affiliated University of Mobile has announced plans to offer a bachelor's degree in praise and worship.

"God is doing something wonderful through praise and worship," said university president Mark Foley. "With this bachelor's degree in Worship Leadership, we hope to teach students to go into a church, assess the situation, and use their best talents and communication methods to lead a particular group of people to encounter God in a way that is best for them."

The degree, being developed in cooperation with Integrity Worship Institute, a non-profit ministry, will be offered starting this fall. (ABP)

Richmond seminary adds faculty

RICHMOND, Va. -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond has added three members to its faculty. At their recent semi-annual meeting, the seminary's board of trustees elected Tracy Hartman as assistant professor of practical theology, Elizabeth Newman as professor of theology and ethics, and Scott Spencer as professor of New Testament.

Hartman, who has served the seminary this year as an adjunct professor, is the first BTR graduate to join the faculty full time. She went on to earn a doctorate from Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education.

Newman comes from St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Ind. An award-winning teacher, she is a graduate of Wake Forest University and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with a Ph.D. in Theology and Ethics from Duke.

Spencer comes from 13 years at Wingate University in North Carolina. He is a graduate of the University of Texas at San Antonio with a master's from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and doctorate from the University of Durham, England. (ABP)

Former Baptist leader succumbs

ALEXANDRIA, La. -- Mark Short, former executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, died March 20. Short, 73, had been diagnosed with cancer last year. A former pastor and manager of Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, Short led Louisiana Baptists from 1987 to 1997. (ABP)

Kentucky CBF ponders mission statement

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -- Kentucky's Cooperative Baptist Fellowship sent a mission statement proposed by leaders back to the drawing board.

The statement, developed by the state group's executive committee and approved by its coordinating council, defined the KBF as "a fellowship of Baptists in Kentucky partnering with churches and individuals, doing missions and providing mutual support."

Participants at the group's spring meeting, however, said the statement should be broadened to uphold Baptist principles and encourage partnering with organizations beyond the local church.

Leaders said a succinct mission statement is needed to counter opponents who label the group as "extreme."

"I have resisted being painted in the extreme," said John Lepper, KBF coordinator. He said the group has been extreme in fellowship, partnership and missions, however, "in that we are trying to minister to the least of these, to the marginalized and disenfranchised." (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

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