



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Virginia Baptists endorse new missions endeavor

By Robert Dilday and Robert O'Brien

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. -- Virginia Baptists overwhelmingly endorsed a new missions vision May 10 at a called meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia that drew more than 2,500 messengers and visitors to First Baptist Church in Charlottesville.

Executive Director John Upton, who introduced the plan called "Kingdom Advance" about a month earlier, said it would prepare the BGAV to minister more effectively in the 21st century while offering "a seat at the table" for its diverse 1,440 affiliated congregations.

The vote authorizes an ad hoc committee to draw up recommendations to implement the plan. Messengers will consider those recommendations at the BGAV's regular annual meeting, scheduled Nov. 8-9 in Virginia Beach.

A separate motion also approved at the five-hour Charlottesville meeting authorized the Alma Hunt Offering for Virginia Missions to include allocations for Kingdom Advance, if the BGAV opts to tap the offering for funds.

Upton has estimated that about \$1 million annually in new money is needed to fund Kingdom Advance. The BGAV budget committee will consider -- and recommend to the BGAV -- how to finance the plan.

Fewer than 100 messengers voted against the Alma Hunt offering expansion, according to estimates by observers. About two dozen voted against Kingdom Advance entirely.

The unusual called meeting tallied the largest attendance of any BGAV meeting since 1994, when about 3,375 met in Salem. Preliminary figures indicate 2,452 messengers registered, along with 110 visitors. About 385 congregations were represented.

The new plan calls for funding and administering several categories of mission workers in Virginia, the United States and around the world. It would also focus on church planting and revitalization, identifying and developing leaders for the next generation and helping pastors and churches to minister effectively.

But details are still developing, said Upton, who presented the vision to messengers in Charlottesville.

"There is no program or structure yet," he said. "This is a process, not a program. You are invited in at the beginning of the process. ... Everything you say will be video taped and written down and will be taken into consideration. You are at the front end of this piece."

Upton said he has already talked with hundreds of church leaders and lay persons about the plan. He said he plans to continue to travel across the state for more discussion. "I hope to have talked to 1,000 pastors by the end of the year," he said.

Upton said Kingdom Advance comes at a time when the state population is outstripping Christian growth, when there is a growing crisis in church leadership development and when ministries are opening up all around the world.

It envisions a flexible approach to missions that would avoid competing with other Baptist bodies, such as the Southern Baptist Convention's International and North American mission boards, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or the Baptist World Alliance.

Instead, it would expand current cooperation with these and other entities and open up opportunities for Virginia Baptists to partner with other Baptists around the world. Upton and other leaders have insisted they will not launch an effort to lead Virginia Baptists out of the SBC or undercut the SBC's Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong missions offerings.

"BGAV local churches will decide, in the Baptist way, what they will support. We will offer options and opportunities to all of them who wish to participate," Upton said.

During his discussions across Virginia, Upton said he got three consistent questions: (1) Can you give us something bigger than us to excite our church? (2) Is there a place for us at the table? (3) Is there anyway to lift ourselves out of this denominational controversy and get on with the gospel and ministry of Jesus Christ?

"Kingdom Advance says, 'Yes' to all three questions," he said.

Although approved overwhelmingly, critics of the plan predicted it would be doctrinally lax and loosen ties to the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Today is a sad day for the Southern Baptist Convention and many Virginia Baptists," said Rick Sadler, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Charlottesville. "What we have is not 'Kingdom Advance' but a kingdom divided."

Upton replied that his prayer is that history books would one day record that "Baptists divided became Baptists united" because of the historic vote. Messengers responded with a standing ovation.

"We all may disagree about some things," Upton said, "but we are going to find things we can agree on and get on with the main thing -- the gospel and ministry of Jesus Christ."

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-- Robert Dilday is associate editor of the Religious Herald. Robert O'Brien writes for the Virginia Baptist Mission Board.

## **Fired faculty member sues Midwestern Seminary**

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- A former music instructor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is suing the school for breach of contract and failure to pay wages.

Douglas Manley, who lives in Cleveland, Tenn., following his termination last December from the seminary in Kansas City, Mo., is seeking just over \$25,000 in unpaid salary and penalties.

Midwestern President Phil Roberts dismissed Manley Dec. 31 for allegedly viewing Internet pornography on his seminary-owned computer.

Manley claims the seminary still owes him the unpaid portion of his \$32,000 annual contract, citing a seminary policy that says terminated faculty members shall be paid until the end of the fiscal year.

In his termination letter to Manley, Roberts said the firing was based on "departure from the basic tenets" of the "Baptist Faith and Message." It cited Article XV, which says Christians should oppose "all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality and pornography."

The letter, which is attached to Manley's suit as an exhibit, continues:

"The information I have reviewed comes from the seminary's computer provided to you to be used for seminary business. Our technical services staff evaluated this computer and have determined that it was used by you on multiple occasions to not only visit, but also book mark, a number of pornographic Internet Web sites over an extended period of time, starting soon after it was issued to you in the spring of 2001 and continuing into November 2001.

"Your representations that this was the result of someone 'setting you up' is not believable under the circumstances of the overwhelming number and variety of occasions that pornographic sites were registered under your name."

Manley was appointed an instructor of music by then Interim President Michael Whitehead in June 2000 and reappointed by Roberts a year later. He claims the seminary is obligated to pay his salary through July 31, 2002, even if it terminates his employment before then.

Manley said he has made attempts to settle to no avail. He filed suit March 29 in Jackson County (Mo.) Circuit Court and requested a jury trial.

Manley's attorney, Katherine Worthington of Leawood, Kan., declined to discuss specifics of the case in an interview. She released a statement, however, saying: "Mr. Manley's claim against Midwestern is based upon Midwestern's failure to pay Manley through July of 2002 in violation of Midwestern's Faculty Handbook and its written agreement with Manley.

"Mr. Manley is also seeking a penalty under a Missouri statute for Midwestern's failure to pay. Mr. Manley looks forward to his day in court."

Malcolm Yarnell, dean of Midwestern's faculty, said through a spokesperson that the seminary has no comment "on this particular personnel matter at this time."

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## **ACLU says abstinence program promotes religion**

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The American Civil Liberties Union has sued the state of Louisiana over an abstinence-only sex-education program, claiming it is being used to unconstitutionally advance religion.

According to a lawsuit filed May 9 by the ACLU's Louisiana chapter, the federally funded Governor's Program on Abstinence promotes Christianity both in curriculum and by underwriting abstinence events run by religious groups.

"The principle of religious liberty is violated when public money is used to promote religious beliefs," said Catherine Weiss, Director of the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, in a release on the organization's Web site. "This kind of misuse of public funds has a long history in abstinence-only programs, even though the law requires that their content be secular."

The lawsuit cites documents given to students that blame an increase in sexually transmitted disease on "remov[ing] God from the classroom" and tout America's "Judeo-Christian heritage."

The suit also targets grants issued to Alexandria-based Rapides Stations Ministries, which uses the Bible in giving kids reasons to avoid sex, and to a "Christ-centered" drama troupe that includes an invitation to accept Christ in its skirts.

Other program funds, according to an ACLU brief in the case, went to support a chastity ministry run by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lafayette, which included prayer demonstrations at abortion clinics.

Critics accused the ACLU of trying to find a back-door way of ending all abstinence education in the state. "The ACLU has opposed abstinence education from day one," Louisiana Gov. Murphy "Mike" Foster, said in a statement. The Republican governor said that it was "typical of what I expect from the ACLU," adding, "shame on them!"

The ACLU suit asks a federal court to enjoin the Governor's Program on Abstinence from its "ongoing practice of distributing public abstinence-education dollars in a manner that advances religion," thus violating the Constitution's ban on the state establishing religion.

The program distributes \$1.6 million per year in federal funds designed to promote abstinence-only sex-education curricula.

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## **Kentucky Baptist board declines to escrow funds for children's homes**

By Trennis Henderson

CEDARMORE, Ky. (ABP) -- The Kentucky Baptist Convention executive board overwhelmingly rejected a motion to escrow funds for the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children over concerns about plans to sell the ministry's Spring Meadows and Glen Dale campuses.

Children's Homes President Bill Smithwick announced plans in February to sell the two facilities and use a portion of the proceeds to build two regional treatment centers.

In a presentation to the executive board May 6, Smithwick said the agency has been hurt by legal battles with the ACLU over the firing of a lesbian employee and a reduction in state referrals stemming from the controversy. He also cited national trends away from residential care to increased foster care.

"The challenge we are dealing with right now is how to pay all the bills," he said. "We have spent many hours of prayer and considered every option to avoid what we're doing."

Stepping aside from his role as presiding officer, KBC President Harold Greenfield, said he opposed the sale and that the broader community of Kentucky Baptists should have a say.

"I know the board is independent and can make decisions on this," Greenfield said, "but Baptists across the state have been giving money to this and supporting this."

He asked the executive board to escrow a \$10,100 increase in the KBC budget for the agency. "Because of my opposition to this action of the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, I, in good conscience, cannot endorse this increase," he said.

Board members overwhelmingly rejected Greenfield's proposed amendment, however, and then approved the full budget with no changes.

The 2002-2003 Cooperative Program budget total of \$23.2 million, approved last fall by KBC messengers, is an increase of 3.5 percent over the current budget. It includes 36 percent for Southern Baptist

Convention causes and 64 percent for KBC ministries and entities.

In other action, board members approved plans for a mission study committee to review Kentucky Baptist ministry needs.

The proposed committee "may very well be the most important action you are asked to consider at this meeting," said administrative committee chairman Charles Barnes.

The plan calls for the committee to review the changing ministry needs of Kentucky Baptist churches as well as KBC ministry objectives, organizational needs and financial resources. The group, which will report to the executive board next May, also will be responsible for recommending "any changes that are needed in order for the ministries of the KBC to be more effective in the 21st century."

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## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **Heritage society honors veteran Baptist journalist**

FORT WORTH, Texas -- The William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society will honor longtime Baptist journalist Walker Knight with its 2002 Whitsitt Courage Award at the society's annual meeting on June 27 in Fort Worth, Texas. The annual meeting is held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and will take place at the Fort Worth Convention Center.

This year's meeting theme is "Baptists: Advocates of a Free Press?" In addition to accepting the award, Knight will speak on the topic of "A Layman's Journey: My Struggle for a Free Baptist Press." Another noted journalist, James Wall, senior contributing editor of The Christian Century, will deliver this year's Penrose St. Amant Lecture titled "Religion and Media: The Need for a Free Press."

The award honors Knight for his advocacy of racial and gender equality while serving as a journalist at the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He ended his career by covering SBC controversy as editor and publisher of the independent newspaper Baptists Today. (ABP)

### **Texas Baptist Men leader retiring**

DALLAS -- Jim Furgerson, executive director-treasurer of Texas Baptist Men, has announced his plans to retire on July 15. Furgerson, 61, said he sought early retirement in order to spend more time with his family.

"Texas Baptist Men has been fortunate to have had a man with the experience and denominational background of Jim Furgerson to lead them in the worldwide ministries that TBM has been called on to carry out," said Leo Smith, president of Texas Baptist Men.

An ex-Marine, missions educator and volunteer coordinator, Furgerson joined the Texas Baptist Men staff in 1998.

"I love the men of Texas Baptist Men, and I pray for their success as they seek to know and do God's will for their lives," Furgerson said in his retirement announcement. (ABP)

### **Truett professor dies**

WACO, Texas -- A beloved professor at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary

died April 23. Bill Treadwell, 70, died of heart failure at a hospital in Waco, Texas.

Treadwell had taught Christian education, conflict management and leadership at the seminary since 1995. He started his career by working in churches in South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina and Texas.

"He was a very wise, caring man," said David Garland, the seminary's associate dean. "I don't know of a more beloved professor." (ABP)

### **Former Baylor prof gets prison term**

WACO, Texas -- A former Baylor University professor received a seven-year prison sentence in April after pleading guilty to possession of child pornography.

Bruce Watson, 45, a former assistant French professor at the Baptist-affiliated university in Waco, Texas, admitted on the stand that he has had fantasies about pre-teen girls since he was 18, but that he would never act on them.

"I believe I do have moral standards, and a very large part of those standards involves not doing harm to other human beings," Watson said, according to the Baylor Lariat.

Watson was arrested nearly two years ago after a Baylor computer technician found hundreds of images of nude children on his office computer.

Watson said he regrets and feels remorse for his behavior and that he no longer has any interest or desire to view the material. (ABP)

### **CBF-backed seminaries graduate 230**

ATLANTA -- A total of 231 seminarians at 11 "partner" schools supported by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are expected to graduate this spring.

Graduating classes range in size from 44 at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (its 10th) to two at the Baptist Studies Program at Texas Christian University's Brite Divinity School.

The number includes 20 students who comprise the first graduating class of Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C. (ABP)

### **FBC Dallas announces \$48 million building plan**

DALLAS -- First Baptist Church of Dallas has committed to staying put in its downtown location, announcing a massive \$48 million building program.

"I get no sense of the leading of the Lord to move this congregation," Pastor Mac Brunson told the church May 5. "We're in downtown Dallas for a reason."

A current education and office building, as well as a parking garage, will be demolished to erect an eight-story building to house classrooms, offices, a bookstore, coffee and snack bar, fellowship hall, two chapels, prayer tower, banquet hall/theater, catering facilities and underground parking.

The new construction would replace a parking garage and the Criswell Building, built in 1953, at the intersection of Ervay and San Jacinto. Like one of the buildings to be demolished, the new building will be named for former pastor W.A. Criswell.

The project may be the most expensive single construction effort undertaken by any Texas Baptist church not involving a relocation, but it isn't alone in a current building boom among Dallas megachurches.

A few miles north of downtown, Park Cities Baptist Church plans a \$35 million project for its property on Northwest Highway. Park Cities will build a three-level underground parking garage topped by a Community Life Center, gymnasium, great hall and classroom space.

Meanwhile, construction already is underway in the Dallas suburb of Plano on phase two of Prestonwood Baptist Church's facility. The current \$46 million project will add to the \$72 million first phase built in 1999 when the church relocated from North Dallas. (ABP)

### **Historic Texas church severs SBC ties**

AUSTIN, Texas -- Austin's oldest Baptist church voted May 1 to sever ties to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Organized in 1847, First Baptist Church has from the start supported the SBC but no longer espouses its beliefs. Differences cited by the congregation include roles of women, leadership style, religious liberty and "freedom to pursue missions without doctrinal rigidity." (ABP)

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