



Nashville, Tennessee
Associated
Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

June 5, 2002

(02-49)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Missionary says his e-mail factored in Rankin request**
- Overwhelming majority' of missionaries will sign BF&M affirmation, trustees told**
- New Web site offers voice for Missouri Baptists**

**Missionary says his e-mail
factored in Rankin request**

By Mark Wingfield

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Asking missionaries to affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" in January, International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin cited a growing "suspicion" that some missionaries might hold unorthodox views, which he viewed as "unfounded."

It now appears that suspicion stemmed, at least in part, from criticism of SBC leaders from abroad.

Christianity Today, in its April 21 issue, quoted Rankin as saying his letter to missionaries was motivated in part by persistent reports from short-term overseas volunteers that career missionaries were criticizing the SBC's conservative leadership.

A former missionary, who now is a pastor in Austin, Texas, says Rankin told him a year ago that missionaries might have to sign the faith statement as "damage control" over a letter the missionary had written criticizing a denominational newspaper.

Scott McIntosh, who until recently served as an IMB missionary in Scotland, told the Baptist Standard that he felt partly responsible when missionaries received the January letter, because of a discussion he and Rankin had months earlier.

McIntosh, a missionary since 1993, said he had grown tired of seeing articles criticizing moderate Baptists in SBC Life, a national newspaper sent free to pastors, other church leaders and missionaries.

He sent an e-mail last spring asking to have his name removed from the mailing list. "I realize that your paper aims to meet the needs of the majority of your readers, but there is a significant minority that does not share either the view or the constant barrage of negative remarks about others who also call themselves Southern Baptists," he wrote.

"We would rather not be a party to such negative journalism in a paper designed for use by all Southern Baptists," his e-mail continued.

McIntosh mistakenly sent the e-mail to LifeWay Christian Resources, the SBC's publishing agency, where he thought the paper originated. His request eventually made it to the desk of Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, the publisher of SBC Life.

McIntosh said the next he heard of it was in a phone call from Rankin, who said Chapman had asked him to find out why McIntosh wrote the e-mail and where he stood on denominational matters.

McIntosh said he wasn't concerned about the discussion until Rankin's closing statement: "Now we have to do some damage control, and this might cause the missionaries to have to sign the 'Baptist Faith and Message.'"

"Imagine the pressure on me when I get the letter in January saying all missionaries have to sign the 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" McIntosh said. "I couldn't sleep for three days. I thought, not only have I lost my job, but my actions have caused irreparable damage to the missionaries who felt like I felt and couldn't sign that piece of paper."

An IMB spokesman confirmed that Rankin called McIntosh over the matter, but said it is not uncommon for Rankin to call missionaries overseas. "He does it all the time, but not for 'damage control,'" said spokesman Mark Kelly.

Kelly said Rankin's recollection is that he called McIntosh on his own accord, not because he was asked to do so by Chapman.

Rankin's spokesman also confirmed that "this is one of the incidents that precipitated the request for missionaries to affirm the 'Baptist Faith and Message.'" However, he added, there was "no reason" for the McIntoshes to resign over it.

McIntosh and his wife, D'Lisa, decided to take a stateside church after Rankin's request that they affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" and agree to work within its parameters, something they refused to do.

They had already begun to feel disenfranchised, McIntosh said, by the IMB's recent New Directions strategy, which emphasizes church starting driven by lay people.

"The philosophy of the IMB has changed," he explained. "For years and years, we used to put pastors into small works to build them up and find an indigenous pastor to pastor that work. But ... in New Directions, they decided to focus almost entirely on church planting, which is not a bad idea. I don't have a lot of problem with that, except for the fact that a lot of people began to feel disenfranchised."

Missionaries like him, he said, "feel like our gifting is in pastoring. The job we felt like we could do the best was taken out of the program."

McIntosh said he holds no ill will toward Rankin and still supports the work of the IMB. He blamed SBC politics for creating a climate in which he no longer wanted to work. He said he believes missionaries are no longer valued as part of the SBC "family" but as part of an institution that has become politicized.

He criticized Chapman for contacting Rankin instead of coming to him directly, and said he has yet to hear from the Executive Committee CEO.

Chapman told a reporter that he didn't respond to McIntosh's e-mail because it didn't ask for a response. It contained a specific request, Chapman said, which was carried out.

He said he forwarded the e-mail to Rankin because he thought the IMB president would be "in much better position to respond" to the missionary's concerns.

"In forwarding the e-mail to Dr. Rankin, I inquired if he thought the type of concern expressed in Scott's e-mail was indicative of how a large number of international missionaries felt," Chapman said. "I had every confidence that Dr. Rankin, if he felt a need to so, would relate to Scott's e-mail in a manner consistent with normal communications between Richmond and missionaries on the field. Therefore, I had no reason to ask him to do anything specific about Scott's e-mail."

Chapman said he believes he and Rankin responded "reasonably and sensibly" to McIntosh. "My e-mail to Jerry Rankin was a courtesy, and I felt I had allowed a course of action that would best serve Scott and the Southern Baptist Convention. I regret that Scott, for some reason, feels otherwise."

McIntosh just completed his first month as pastor of Westoak Woods Baptist Church in Austin.

"I have nothing against the IMB," said the graduate of Howard Payne University and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. "I'm a pastor now, and I plan to support the IMB. I don't plan to support the SBC as a whole."

McIntosh said he and his wife weren't forced to resign for refusing to sign the "Baptist Faith and Message," but he isn't sure what might have happened if they hadn't had somewhere to go.

"It may have (forced us to resign) had we not found this church. By that time, we didn't have to make the decision."

He said other missionary colleagues are struggling with their response.

"Most of the ones I was close to signed it for any number of reasons," McIntosh reported. "One person told me they signed it simply because with whom they work it's a non-issue. Others flat out told me they signed it because they couldn't afford to be fired. Others signed it because they believed it. That's fine. I don't have a problem with that.

"The majority I know were very uncomfortable with it but indicated they would not sign the first part (Do you agree with the 'Baptist Faith and Message?') but would sign the second part (Will you act in accordance with the 'Baptist Faith and Message?'). It's a tough decision. I know some who haven't signed it yet."

-30-

-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

Overwhelming majority' of missionaries will sign BF&M affirmation, trustees told

By Mark Wingfield

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The "overwhelming majority" of International Mission Board missionaries will affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" as requested, IMB Vice President Avery Willis told agency trustees May 22.

To date, 10 missionaries have resigned citing specific concern with being asked to sign an affirmation of the SBC's faith statement, Willis told the trustees. Eight of those resignations were processed at the May trustee meeting among a total of 55 resignations.

According to a news report by an IMB staff writer, Willis gave no statistics on overall progress toward getting missionary signatures affirming the "Baptist Faith and Message." IMB regional leaders reportedly still are collecting responses and "dialoguing" with missionaries who have questions.

IMB President Jerry Rankin in January asked missionaries to sign a two-part statement that says they agree with the content of the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" -- or note areas of disagreement -- and pledge to work "in accordance with" the teachings of the document.

The 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message," which was drafted by a 15-member committee, has not been universally accepted among Southern Baptists. The Baptist General Convention of Texas, for example, has rejected the new version and continues to endorse the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message."

Critics of the new statement cite a number of concerns, primarily related to the document's language on Scripture and the role Christ's witness plays in interpreting Scripture, as well as the document's description of itself as an "instrument of doctrinal accountability." That language, critics argue, makes the "Baptist Faith and Message" a creed rather than a voluntary confession of faith.

While the IMB reports only 10 resignations over the administrative mandate, a missionary transition task force established by the Baptist General Convention of Texas reports it has heard from 69 IMB missionary units, meaning either a couple or a single adult.

As of June, the BGCT transition fund is assisting three missionary couples who have left the IMB over the doctrinal change, according to Don Sewell, chairman of the BGCT's task force.

Determining how many missionaries may resign or take early retirement rather than sign the affirmation is not a clear-cut proposition. By the account of numerous missionaries, not all who object to the faith statement will publicly cite that as a reason for their resignations or early retirements.

In some cases, missionaries have explained, their colleagues may resign or retire for a mixture of reasons, including concern about the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message." In other cases, missionaries are reportedly delaying making a decision at all, hoping to buy time to finish current projects or get children through school.

Although complete statistics were not immediately available for analysis, the number of missionaries resigning from the IMB appears to be up nearly 20 percent this year over the same period two years ago. Missionary resignations routinely are reported in the IMB magazine *The Commission*.

According to those published reports from the January through June issues of 2002, 136 missionaries have resigned, excluding those who resigned to assume administrative positions in Richmond. That compares to 114 resignations reported in the same six-month period for 2000. Complete data was not reported in 2001 issues of *The Commission*.

IMB administrators in Richmond, Va., have set no deadline for missionaries to sign the affirmation, although some area leaders earlier announced deadlines in their regions.

Missionaries in East Asia who have not signed the affirmation document received a letter in mid-May from their regional leader, Bill Fudge, admonishing them to sign as a matter of accountability.

Fudge compared Rankin's requirement of missionaries to that of the Jerusalem Council in the first century, which he said "called for its workers to give an account on pertinent doctrinal issues of the day." The Jerusalem Council was convened to settle the question of whether Gentiles had to become Jews before becoming Christians.

"If you are not able to be accountable to the IMB, I think you need to understand that you are out of step with and in a position contrary to the nature and ministry of this board, the East Asia region, our ethos and those who elect and send trustees who are charged with the oversight of this worldwide ministry," Fudge said.

"This whole issue is related to accountability," he continued. "To this point, you have said resoundingly that you are not willing to affirm and reaffirm your accountability in established areas of concern. You have appealed to your previous doctrinal statements, current ministry, etc., but you have refused to reaffirm ... your ministry in areas of concern."

Fudge then stated: "When a person continues to say he is not willing to affirm or reaffirm that he will be accountable in these areas, it highlights to me that that person even more needs to be held accountable. ... I love you, and out of concern for you, I continue to pray for you and look for a way to facilitate your accountability in these areas of concern."

However, he warned, "refusal (to be) accountable to our supporting agency ... is not acceptable."

Fudge concluded his letter to the non-signers by giving them the option of writing out in detail their own statement of beliefs "on each topic covered in the 'Baptist Faith and Message' and also sign a ministry-accountability statement saying that you are willing to be held accountable to the IMB and Southern Baptists in your ministry related to these doctrines to which you subscribe."

Meanwhile, the IMB continues to appoint new missionaries in large numbers. In the same week the IMB honored 60 retiring missionaries, it appointed 67 new workers for overseas service.

The IMB reports 5,284 overseas workers, including both long-term career appointees and various shorter-term workers and volunteers.

New Web site offers voice for Missouri Baptists

By Lacy Elwood

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Missouri Baptists looking to voice their opinion on Baptist life in their state have a new place to turn. MissouriBaptists.org was created to provide Baptists an arena to speak their mind without being affiliated with any Baptist organization.

"Our goal is to provide a place where views and opinions relating to issues of importance to Missouri Baptists can be shared so as to educate and inform," editor Jason Hertling said. " We are providing a place with no political agenda. We simply want to tell the facts about the good things happening in Missouri Baptist life."

Articles pertaining to Missouri Baptist life can be found on the Web site. Individuals can submit commentaries to the site for posting. The site also provides links to other Web sites containing information about Baptist life.

"We believe the information on this site can be of crucial importance to individuals and churches struggling with the issues that are difficult," Hertling said. "[If] we can assist a church in making decisions, we have had an impact."

Among decisions facing Missouri Baptist congregations is whether to affiliate with a new Baptist General Convention of Missouri, formed in April by moderates and centrists saying they have grown tired of controversies in the Missouri Baptist Convention.

The new convention has said it wants to affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention, but it also wants to support state agencies that the MBC defunded over a leadership dispute. The head of the SBC Executive Committee has said the national convention probably won't accept funds from the breakaway group, because leaders are comfortable with the conservative leadership of the MBC. Missouri Baptist Convention leaders, meanwhile, have indicated they might sue, if necessary, to regain control of five agencies that recently moved to self-perpetuating trustee boards.

Hertling said the goal of the site was not to counteract negative publicity about the Baptist General Convention of Missouri, but to remind people of the positive work of Missouri Baptists, such as the care of elderly Missouri citizens in the Baptist Home.

"It gives a level of balance," contributor Bart Tichenor said. "It isn't an instrument of any other organization. This will provide an opportunity to make Baptists think."

Tichenor, a Missouri attorney, is a frequent contributor to the site. The Web site lists him as "an active participant in Missouri Baptist life for many years." The site also says Tichenor has chaired a Missouri Baptist Convention committee, served as a moderator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri and aided the Baptist General Convention of Missouri in their start-up efforts.

Tichenor said the site's developers want to retain a level of anonymity. Hertling said the site was created by "persons within Missouri who care about the many good things that Baptists in Missouri are doing." He also said the site was made possible by the "donation of time and energy by myself and a few other writers such as Mr. Tichenor."

One link at the site criticizes a vocal Missouri conservative at length. The article challenges the credibility of information distributed by Roger Moran, research director for the Missouri Baptist Laymen's Association, by questioning his frequent changing of church memberships and a string of past lawsuits.

Moran said he has looked at the Web site only briefly. "Basically, the best I remember, it's the same basic stuff that David Currie was circulating in Texas," he said.

Moran said the material, obtained from records filed in his county courthouse, is basically true, but much of it dates back to the early 1980s, before he rededicated his life to Christ. The Web site lists 11 lawsuits in which either Moran or his business was a party. Moran admits he was divorced twice by the time he was 25.

"A lot of that stuff is what ultimately brought me to the Lord," he said.

Moran said he has answered all the charges publicly, but he doesn't believe his past is the issue.

"I really wish somebody in the moderate camp -- the CBF -- would address the issues we've raised," he said.

-30-

-- Lacy Elwood is ABP's summer intern. Bob Allen contributed to this story.

END
