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Rankin tells 'Mainstream' leader he isn't invited to IMB headquarters

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Despite an earlier announcement to the contrary, the leader of a self-described group of "mainstream" Baptists won't be visiting the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board for a chat with President Jerry Rankin after all.

As a leader of both Texas Baptists Committed and the Mainstream Baptist Network, David Currie has been a frequent critic of the SBC's conservative leadership. So it came as a surprise when he announced in February that he had been invited meet with IMB officials in Richmond, Va., by Texas pastor and IMB trustee David Evans.

At a Feb. 16 meeting of the Mainstream Baptist Network, Currie publicly announced he would accept the invitation to visit the IMB. He said he would use the occasion to ask firsthand about the concerns of unnamed people that Rankin said prompted him to ask missionaries to affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

Currie told the Mainstream gathering that Evans, a longtime acquaintance and pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Amarillo, invited Currie to meet with Evans and Rankin at IMB offices. When Currie asked why he received the invitation, he said Evans replied, "We just want you to see the work of the International Mission Board."

"I'm going to go to the IMB," Currie told the crowd. "I don't when, and I'm going to ask questions on behalf of mainstream Baptists."

Currie followed up his acceptance of Evans' invitation in a Feb. 21 letter to Rankin.

But now, Rankin says the whole thing was a misunderstanding.

Writing back to Currie June 18, Rankin said the moderate leader "perceived an invitation from an individual trustee as an official invitation" when it was not.

"The invitation was not authorized or issued by me or our board," Rankin wrote in his response. "As a Southern Baptist entity serving cooperating churches, associations and state conventions, there would be no apparent benefit in hosting a representative of Mainstream Baptists."

Contacted by a reporter, Evans declined to comment, explaining that he wanted to do no harm to Currie or Rankin.

Currie wrote Rankin again July 2. He expressed disappointment in Rankin's refusal to meet with him and disputed the IMB president's assertion that Evans acted alone in the invitation. "There are people's

ministries at stake here, and I cannot see the harm in sitting down as fellow Baptists and discussing the impact the 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message' is having on them as it is being implemented by the IMB," Currie wrote.

"I may be a leader of Mainstream Baptists, but I am also a member of a local church that sent over \$20,000 to Lottie Moon last year," Currie continued. "As a Baptist whose church is paying your salary and supporting IMB personnel on the field, why can I not receive answers to my questions? Some of the missionaries under your care are members of my church. I would like to know what the future holds and who has questioned their integrity."

Currie is a member of Southland Baptist Church in San Angelo, Texas. The Lottie Moon Offering is the SBC's annual designated offering for IMB work.

"It appears to me that you want our money but have no interest in accountability to those of us who give the money," Currie concluded in his response.

In his earlier letter accepting what he thought was Rankin's invitation, Currie also asked for names and addresses of all IMB missionaries "so that many may pray and share their concern with these missionaries as they consider your recent request that they sign the 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message.'" He further asked for "documentation/evidence of persons questioning the doctrinal purity of any current missionaries" and for a copy of the minutes of the IMB trustee meeting held in January 2002.

Rankin provided a copy of the minutes but declined Currie's other requests.

"As a matter of policy, we do not distribute names and addresses of our missionaries, not only for the sake of security but also to protect them from mass marketing and appeals," he wrote.

About naming names of those who prompted his decision to ask missionaries to sign an affirmation of the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message," Rankin wrote: "It would be inappropriate and impractical to share documentation of those who have expressed suspicion of our doctrinal accountability, as it reflects widespread and growing rumors as well as phone calls, e-mail and correspondence considered personal and privileged."

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Former Baylor lecturer, Waco organist, found dead

By Lacy Elwood

WACO, Texas (ABP) - A 32-year-old former Baylor University journalism lecturer and well-known organist was found dead in his home July 6, apparently of natural causes.

An autopsy was planned for Jason Ranton, who left Baylor in January to become dean of communications and organist at Christ Episcopal Church in Plano, Texas. But Sara Stone, a journalism professor at the Baptist-affiliated university in Waco, said the cause of death appeared to be complications from diabetes.

Carol MacDonald, who worked with Ranton at Christ Church, said Ranton did not seem to be sick recently. "It was totally unexpected," MacDonald said of Ranton's death. "It was just one of life's tragedies."

Stone said Ranton had talked with a friend Friday night and said he was feeling ill. Ranton was scheduled to play the organ at a wedding Saturday. Friends became concerned when he didn't show up, Stone said.

A longtime Waco resident, Ranton had recently been the featured organist in worship sessions at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, held June 27-29 in Fort Worth.

A 1993 Baylor graduate, Ranton worked as the university's director of student publications from 1995 to December of 2001. He oversaw student staffs and production of the campus newspaper, The Baylor Lariat; Focus magazine, and the campus yearbook, the Round-Up. After receiving a master's degree in journalism from Baylor in 1998, Ranton became a lecturer in the journalism department.

"He had such a zest for everything he did in life," said Stone, who knew Ranton both as a former student and a colleague. "A significant accomplishment of his was to have a connection with and an impact on young people through journalism," she said. "Over the years, he had about 250 students working at the Lariat for him that he had a close connection with. He helped them develop their own sense of professionalism."

Stephanie MacVeigh, general manager for Baylor student publications, worked under Ranton as a student. She said Ranton was "always there if you needed him."

"Jason was the kind of person, that if he felt you had great potential, he would give you free rein to find your own path," MacVeigh said. "He was the kind of person that would let you make your own mistakes and learn from them, instead of sheltering you."

MacVeigh said Ranton was popular with his students.

"Everyone who knew him loved him," she said. "I know students who used to come back at homecoming, just to visit him. There was just something about him that made you want to come back, and reminisce about the fun you had when he was around." Off campus, others in Waco knew Ranton as a member and organist at First Baptist Church. Senior Pastor Scott Walker said Ranton, the church's organist for seven years, liked to compose organ music and adapt existing hymns for worship.

"He was probably the best worship organist I had ever heard," Walker said. "His ability to lead worship services through the pipe organ was incredible. He had this amazing sense of artistry. You very rarely find somebody truly gifted in two separate areas as he was in journalism and music."

Ranton also designed many of the church's publications and worked with organ students to develop their skills, Walker said.

Several individuals close to Ranton recalled his sense of humor and a contagious laugh. Walker described him as "down to earth."

"He was just an exceptional individual," Walker said. "The entire First Baptist, Waco and Baylor community is going to miss him."

Ranton was serving as the co-chair of the regional American Guild of Organists convention at the time of his death. He also worked with Pipe Organ Encounters, a program designed to introduce teenagers to organ study, MacVeigh said.

He was a member of the Society of Professional Journalists, Delta Epsilon fraternity, and the Central Texas chapter of the American Guild of Organists. He also served on the board of advisers for the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association.

Visitation for Ranton was scheduled 6-8 p.m. Tuesday at Wayne Boze Memorial Funeral Home in Waxahachie, Texas. First Baptist Church of Waco planned a funeral service at 11 a.m. Wednesday, with a memorial service at First Methodist Church of Waxahachie following the burial at 3 p.m. Wednesday.

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