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**Affirming faith statement creates
dilemma for some missionaries**

By Lacy Elwood

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Missionaries who comply with International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin's request to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" might satisfy any Southern Baptists wondering if their beliefs match those of people in the pew who support them with tithes and offerings.

In some cases, however, doing so might create tensions on the mission field, where national Baptists fear imposition of American culture and/or the exporting of Southern Baptist Convention controversy abroad.

Representatives of the Japan Baptist Convention confronted then-SBC president James Merritt with concerns over the faith statement when he visited there in May.

Japanese Baptist leaders are particularly alarmed by revisions to the faith statement in 1998 and 2000 limiting pastoral roles to men and calling for wives to submit to husbands in the home.

In Japan, where one pastor in every 10 is a woman, Baptists worry that requiring IMB missionaries to agree with the "Baptist Faith and Message" might jeopardize future international cooperation, said IMB missionary Lydia Barrow-Hankins.

One article in the current faith statement says, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

"Frankly, [leaders of the Japan Baptist Convention] are troubled over the historic relationship with Southern Baptists if missionaries sent out with the IMB are required to sign agreement with such a statement," said Barrow-Hankins, an ordained minister and chaplain.

"In the Japan Baptist Convention," leaders declared in a letter to Merritt, "women are affirmed and encouraged in a God-given call to serve as pastors and deacons."

Another area of concern for Japanese Baptists is a 1998 amendment on the family that says, "A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband, even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ."

That "carries the danger of leading to sexual discrimination," the Japanese leaders said. In Japan, Christians often present the gospel as an alternative to a male-dominated traditional culture.

In their letter, the Japanese Baptist leaders expressed appreciation for "spiritual and financial support" from Southern Baptists over the years. Southern Baptist missionaries first entered Japan 110 years ago. Their work has grown to include the self-supporting, 330-church Japan Baptist Convention, two Baptist school systems and a hospital.

A newly formed fellowship for women pastors and ministers in the Japan Baptist Convention, in a separate letter, appealed to the legacy of famous missionary Lottie Moon in urging Baptists in America to reconsider their newly stated limitations on women in ministry.

"Hers is an exciting model of God's calling of a woman, leading her to engage in the ministry of proclaiming the gospel, of preaching and teaching, and of planting churches," the women said in their letter.

The ministers credited Moon, a pioneer missionary to China for whom the SBC's annual international missions offering is named, with inspiring other female missionaries to work in Japan and elsewhere.

In their letter, leaders of the Japan Baptist Convention commended Southern Baptists for condemning racism in their new faith statement, but said Japanese Baptists interpret Scripture differently on other issues, such as abortion and homosexuality.

"It is our agreement that the focus of divine revelation is Christ, our Savior," the letter states. "However, the new confession implies that every sentence of Scripture is a divine verbal revelation. The statement about the Scriptures in the 1963 'Baptist Faith and Message' that, 'The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ,' is a far better confession."

In January, Rankin wrote a letter asking all 5,100 SBC missionaries to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" and pledge to work "in accordance with and not contrary to" the confessional statement, as revised in 2000.

Earlier, trustees of the Richmond, Va.-based IMB had voted to grandfather in current missionaries and require only new candidates to agree with recent changes to the statement. In his letter, however, Rankin said that policy had created suspicion "that there are IMB personnel whose beliefs and practices are inconsistent with those represented by Southern Baptists."

While Rankin said he viewed such fears as "unfounded," he nevertheless asked all missionaries to affirm agreement with the statement in order to be "doctrinally accountable to those who provide our support and send us out."

Barrow-Hankins said missionaries in Japan recently received a letter from their regional IMB leader asking any who object to affirming the entire "Baptist Faith and Message" to instead write a personal faith statement in their own words. But she said the directive still emphasizes "that whether or not we agree with the ['Baptist Faith and Message'] we should conduct our ministries in accordance with it."

"The issue of women in ministry should never have become the issue that divides our convention," said Barrow-Hankins. "The issue of women in a leadership role is an emotionally charged discussion that has much more to do with one's own tradition, culture, upbringing and current leadership than it does with biblical interpretation."

"For those of us who feel strongly about God's claim on our lives and ministry, being told we are excluded from pastoral leadership is untenable," said Barrow-Hankins.

Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga., responded to Japanese Baptist leaders with a letter defending changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message."

"We do not believe that this is merely 'an interpretation' of Scripture," he wrote. "Scripture is very plain. A senior pastor must be the 'husband of one wife.' As you well know, this would be impossible for a woman to fulfill."

Merritt said the Bible is just as plain on the roles of wives and husbands. "Unequivocally, the Scripture states that, 'The husband is the head of the wife,'" he wrote. "The emphasis was on the love of the husband for the wife and on the fact that the husband should give sacrificial loving leadership to the home."

"We do not as a convention desire to be exclusive except where Scripture is exclusive," Merritt said. "We do not desire to be narrow except where Scripture is narrow, but I must tell you forthrightly the Southern Baptist Convention will stand unequivocally on the truth of God's Word, and all other relationships will have to be second to that."

One retired missionary predicted the doctrinal statement might meet resistance in other cultures, as well.

"It is a wrong mission approach," said Earl Martin, who spent 25 years as a missionary in Africa. Even in settings where national Baptists might agree with the faith statement, he said, it's improper to impose it from the outside.

"There is a certain attitude or arrogance in trying to impose it on others," Martin said. "That's wrong-headed and wrong-hearted."

Martin, who now lives in Dandridge, Tenn., shared an e-mail he received from a Baptist leader in Africa also expressing disfavor with the new "Baptist Faith and Message."

"I think it is a sad document for any group of Baptists," wrote Douglas Waruta, a product of Southern Baptist missionary work in Tanzania who now teaches in his native Kenya. "As Africans, we are very disappointed at the retrogressive direction some Baptists in the U.S. have taken. Worse still, they expect the rest of the world to 'learn' from them."

"Some of us became Baptist," Waruta continued, "because of the freedom to serve Christ and to obey the Word of God without a controlling authority."

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-- John Pierce of Baptists Today contributed to this article.

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Retired evangelism professor dies

BOLIVAR, Mo. -- Longtime Southern Baptist evangelist Jack Stanton died July 14 after a long illness. Stanton, 82, was associate professor emeritus of evangelism at Southwest Baptist University. He also was former director of the International Institute of Evangelism and the Jim Mellers Evangelism and Conference Center at the Baptist-affiliated school in Bolivar, Mo.

Stanton retired after 22 years at the university in 1997. Before that he worked 15 years as associate director of evangelism at the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He authored books and articles on evangelism and served twice as first vice president of the SBC. His wife, Mary, preceded him in death. Their two daughters survive. (ABP)

Graham preaches racial peace at Cincinnati 'mission'

CINCINNATI -- Evangelist Billy Graham preached to 200,000 people June 27-30 in Cincinnati in the first of his U.S. meetings to be termed a "mission" rather than "crusade."

Graham spokesman Larry Ross said Graham made the change after Sept. 11 in response to concern that "crusade" might have negative, militaristic connotations. He made a similar change from "campaign" to "crusade" after World War II for the same reason. Graham has used the term "mission" in many of his overseas meetings in recent years.

A Sunday night crowd of 65,600 shattered a previous attendance record at Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium. More than 10,000 people made public decisions for Christ, including 1,500 children who responded during a Saturday morning "Kidz Gig."

Preaching in a city wracked by racial tension, rioting and a downtown boycott, Graham proclaimed a message of racial reconciliation. "Whether the color of the skin is dark or is white, we're to love each other," the 83-year-old evangelist declared. "We're to work together."

Graham cited Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan, urging an opening-night crowd to reach out to people in need regardless of racial or cultural differences.

"Listen to this: The Samaritan was another race; he was another religion," Graham noted. "He had compassion on that man that was wounded. He didn't know who he was. ... He just knew he was a man in need and he went over and helped him.

"There are people in the Cincinnati area that need to be picked up," he emphasized. "They need to be cared for, whatever the color of their skin. They need to be loved." (ABP)

Richmond seminary receives Lilly grant

RICHMOND, Va. -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.) has received a \$2 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to participate in a national program that encourages high school and college age young people to consider careers in Christian ministry.

BTSR's program, titled "The Samuel Project: Awakening to God's Call," will attempt to identify youth who have the qualities and talent for ministry and provide opportunities for them to explore their vocational choices.

A key component in the BTSR plan is its partnership with Passport, Inc., a Christian camping organization that involves more than 6,000 youth in its camping programs each year.

Other partners in The Samuel Project, headquartered at BTSR, are two national Baptist bodies, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Educational Ministries of American Baptist Churches. Two Baptist-related colleges, Wingate University in Wingate, N.C., and Alderson-Broaddus College in Philippi, W.Va., will also be involved as locations for summer camping experiences for program participants.

An Internet site devoted to information about the project and about Christian vocation will also be developed. Additionally, in partnership with Smyth and Helwys Publishing Co., the seminary will develop a series of educational materials related to Christian calling for youth pastors and adult leaders in local churches.

"We, like the [Lilly] Endowment, are concerned about future leaders for our churches," said BTSR President Tom Graves. "This project will enable us to identify and, we hope, recruit able young people for the serious business of Christian ministry." (ABP)

'Faith-based' compromise finding little support in Senate

WASHINGTON -- A proposed law intended to stimulate charitable giving and make it easier for religious and other community-service organizations to do charitable work is getting a lukewarm response in the U.S. Senate.

The White House is supporting the CARE (Charity, Aid, Recovery and Empowerment) Act, sponsored by Sens. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) and Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), as a compromise with President Bush's touted "faith-based initiative."

Democratic critics, however, say the bill is little more than a watered-down version of a controversial "Community Solutions Act" passed last year along party lines in the House of Representatives.

At a "mark-up" session June 13, Senate Republicans criticized the Santorum-Lieberman bill for not expanding "charitable choice" programs, making it easier for churches and religious charities to receive government funds.

Other critics were skeptical that the bill's centerpiece, which would allow non-itemizing taxpayers to deduct charitable donations between \$250 and \$500 from their taxable income, would do much to stimulate giving.

"I am concerned that this deduction won't provide much incentive for charitable giving and will make the tax code more complicated," said Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) Baucus, chairman of the mark-up committee, said a similar approach was tried in 1986, but charitable giving did not increase much. (ABP)

Leaders say Texas 'listening sessions' reveal passion for missions

DALLAS -- After "listening sessions" at 15 sites over several weeks, leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas said the state's churches want help in "networking" with other churches that share their passion for missions.

More than 1,000 Baptists from 250 churches attended the regional meetings, sponsored by a subcommittee of a BGCT Missions Review and Initiatives Committee.

"We found a strong sense of local churches wanting to assume their appropriate responsibility in missions," said Keith Parks of Richardson, chairman of the networking initiatives subcommittee. "At the same time, we heard an emphasis on how we might meet needs that cannot be provided by the local church in terms of coordination, communication and networking."

Parks, who has retired as head of international missions programs for both the Southern Baptist Convention and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said he "was impressed by the high level of involvement and missions interest among those who participated, as well as by their enthusiasm for sharing with each other."

In several listening sessions, participants asked the BGCT to create and maintain a database that would allow churches to create linkages with other congregations with similar missions interests.

"When it comes to missions, Texas Baptists are no longer content just to pay and pray. They are going and doing," said committee member Stan Allcorn, pastor of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene.

While Baptist Press ran stories about one listening session in Midland where several pastors criticized BGCT leadership, conveners said most of the sessions focused on missions issues rather than denominational controversy.

Parks said that participants in more than one session said it was time for Texas Baptists to "move beyond" denominational differences and develop a missions vision that will captivate all Texas Baptists. (ABP)

Longtime Southern Baptist leader dies at 97

JACKSON, Tenn. -- A longtime leader among Southern Baptists in Tennessee is dead at the age of 97. R. Paul Caudill, former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Memphis died May 28 at a nursing home in Jackson, Tenn.

Caudill served the Memphis congregation from 1944 until his retirement in 1975, when he was given the title of "pastor emeritus." Caudill also retained that title at Trap Hill Baptist Church in Trap Hill, N.C., and the First Chinese Baptist Church of Memphis, which began as a mission of the Anglo congregation under his ministry.

During his tenure in Memphis, Caudill served as president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention in

1957-58, as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee from 1944 to 1952, and as head of relief for the Baptist World Alliance, 1947-1960.

Prior to coming to Memphis, Caudill served for seven years as pastor of the historic First Baptist Church of Augusta, Ga., where the Southern Baptist Convention was founded in 1845.

The author of more than 25 books, Caudill was born in Dockery, N.C., in 1904. He was the fifth generation in his family to be a Baptist minister. He led the Memphis congregation through a sustained period of growth, including moving the church campus to its present landmark location near the city's geographical center. He also was viewed as a voice of moderation during the city's racial crises of the 1960s, and led the church to remain in the inner city when other churches fled to the suburbs. Caudill preached at the church as recently as 1994, and testified against legalized gambling before a committee of the Tennessee Senate in 1998. (ABP)

Baptist volunteers aid Colorado fire victims

DALLAS -- Texas Baptist Men in Colorado since June 8 have served at least 900 meals a day to firefighters and victims of the Heyman fire from Castle Rock, southwest of Denver.

The meal count has increased as other emergency food-service sites are evacuated. Workers are based at the Douglas County fairgrounds along with the Baptist volunteers, allowing them to share the gospel with more people.

"You get the opportunity to witness to people in distress," said Tim Willis of First Baptist Church in Plains, Texas. "You get to help people. We are largely working with relief workers and firefighters, but there is still a need to feed and witness."

Officials have evacuated 7,500 people because of the largest of the Colorado wildfires. The blaze has charred 120,000 acres of the state and is threatening the southwestern suburbs of Denver. Drought continues to leave much of the country susceptible to wildfires, which have burned 1.5 million acres in the western half of the nation and Alaska in 2002.

In a separate project, Texas Baptist Men also recently delivered food to Palestinians in the war-torn Gaza strip.

Volunteers heard gunfire and watched from a distance as Israeli helicopters fired missiles at targets. Before returning to the United States June 23. Another team was scheduled to lead a children's day camp in Israel in July. (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

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