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D.C. Baptist leader says convention 'not for sale'

WASHINGTON -- The District of Columbia Baptist Convention is "not for sale," Executive Director Jeffrey Haggray informed the convention's 137 congregations in an open letter dated Aug. 1.

Haggray's lengthy letter, published on the convention's Web site and in the Capital Baptist, reacted to a recent announcement that the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board would cut off about \$476,000 in annual funding for the DCBC, beginning in 2003.

Haggray said NAMB's defunding, based on a perceived "growing distance" in policies and priorities between the two bodies, showed "contempt" for the District of Columbia convention's mission to unite Southern, American and Progressive National Baptists in the nation's capital.

"The agents of disunity and strife have willfully intruded into the Washington, D.C., region seeking to destroy Baptist unity and missions," he wrote. "Listen closely to their platform for they have only one agenda item: they oppose Southern Baptists on mission together with American Baptists and Progressive Baptists in the Washington, D.C., region."

Haggray said a last-ditch proposal by NAMB to segregate the DCBC staff along denominational lines "would have callously destroyed our 125-year-old missional strategy and identity."

Haggray also challenged a statement by NAMB President Robert Reccord that the DCBC has "moved away" from the SBC, saying that the convention has "increased consistently" its level of financial support for the SBC from year to year.

The last two years, he said, amounts given to the SBC by D.C. churches exceeded the amount of funds expended in the District by NAMB. According to NAMB's own research, he said, SBC giving by D.C. churches grew 69 percent during the 1990s.

Haggray asked D.C. churches to "conduct intentional discussions" about ways to increase missions support for the D.C. convention. He said the DCBC would "continue to support the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention, so long as we consist of Southern Baptist churches."

He said some SBC pastors have indicated to him that they might no longer want to contribute to NAMB. Home mission agencies of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and Progressive Baptist National Convention have signaled a willingness to increase support, he said. "There are also some signals outside DCBC from individuals, churches and Baptist organizations that they are interested in partnering with D.C. Baptists on selected mission projects," Haggray said.

"All of those entities want to see whether DCBC churches will increase their giving to DCBC," he said. "I believe DCBC churches will rise to these challenges."

Martin King, a spokesman for NAMB in Alpharetta, Ga., said agency officials had no comment on Haggray's letter.

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-- By ABP staff

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Alabama pastor to edit devotional journal

MACON, Ga. -- Smyth & Helwys Publishing in Macon, Ga., has named an Alabama Baptist pastor editor of its daily devotional guide, "Reflections."

Jim Evans of Montevallo, Ala., will continue as pastor of Crosscreek Baptist Church in Pelham, Ala., while editing "Reflections" on a contract basis, said David Cassady, publisher and executive vice president for Smyth & Helwys.

"Reflections is one of the best resources available for personal worship and devotion," Evans said in a statement. He said he looks forward "to contributing whatever I can to the continued excellence of this important guide for personal worship."

Evans has previously been a pastor in Selma and Atmore, Ala., as well as an associate professor in religion at Samford University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He is a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary with a doctor of ministry degree from Samford's Beeson Divinity School.

He has published numerous articles and several books. "We feel blessed to have Jim join our team," Cassady said in a press release. (ABP)

Survey says alcohol consumption on the rise

PRINCETON, N.J. -- Drinking in America is on the rise, according to a survey on alcohol consumption by the Gallup organization.

According to a July survey, 66 percent of Americans said they drink liquor, wine or beer at least on occasion. That is up 4 percent from a similar survey last year and the highest percentage since 67 percent in February 1985.

Just over a third (34 percent) in the current poll described themselves as "a total abstainer" from alcohol, compared to 38 percent last July.

More than one fourth of male drinkers (28 percent) admitted that they sometimes drink too much, as did 32 percent of younger drinkers, those under 30. While a smaller percentage of women said they overdrink (13 percent), women were more likely than males to say that alcohol has ever been a cause of trouble in their family (31 percent of women; compared to 25 percent of men.)

Gallup said there doesn't appear to be any clear, consistent patterns to explain the variation in the number of admitted drinkers, which has ranked from a low of 55 percent in 1958 to a high of 71 percent in 1976-1978. (ABP)

Dilday interim president at Howard Payne

BROWNWOOD, Texas -- Former seminary president Russell Dilday is serving as interim president of Howard Payne University, a Baptist-affiliated school in Brownwood, Texas.

Dilday served 16 years as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth before being fired in a dispute with conservative trustees. He later worked in leadership roles at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco.

Meanwhile, trustees continue a search for a permanent president to succeed Rick Gregory, who resigned this summer. (ABP)

Conference on postmodernism, Baptist freedom, planned

WASHINGTON -- A conference on postmodernism and Baptist freedom is scheduled Oct. 8-10 in the nation's capital.

"Baptist Freedom in the 21st Century: Engaging the Postmodern Culture" will be held at First Baptist Church in Washington. The Roger Williams Fellowship, Baptist Joint Committee and Alliance of Baptists are sponsors.

Pulitzer-Prize-winning cartoonist Doug Marlette will deliver the keynote address. Other scheduled plenary-session speakers include Thomas Halbrooks, president of Colgate-Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Phyllis Rodgerson Pleasants, a professor of church history at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.); Jim Somerville, pastor of First Baptist Church of Washington; BJC Executive Director Brent Walker; Kate Harvey of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., and David Wheeler, pastor of First Baptist Church in Los Angeles. (ABP)

"Simpsons" Sunday school lessons published

ORLANDO, Fla. -- Orlando Sentinel religion writer Mark Pinsky has developed a study guide to accompany his book from last year, "The Gospel According to the Simpsons."

Westminster John Knox hired a Methodist minister, Samuel Parvin, to adapt Pinsky's book into a 10-week lesson plan for Sunday school and Bible study groups. The publisher says the lessons are suitable either for youth or adults.

Pinsky's "The Gospel According to the Simpsons," which examines religious themes in the popular animated TV series, has sold 70,000 copies since coming out last fall. (ABP)

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