



# Associated Baptist Press

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September 6, 2002

SEP 12 2002

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: The following story updates and replaces Wednesday's version. It includes responses from Daniel Vestal and Jerry Rankin in paragraphs 14-17.

### Texas Baptists to consider launching missions network (revised)

By Bob Allen

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptist leaders are proposing creation of a world missions network to help churches and individuals sponsor missionary work across the United States and around the world.

The network, which would be established as a not-for-profit affiliate of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, does not replace existing relationships with mission boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, but augments them with "fluid and flexible structures" that are church-driven and responsive to changing needs.

"Texas Baptists are interested in a bold new vision, not recreating what already exists through traditional missions-sending agencies," said Charles Wade, BGCT executive director. "This world missions network would create a way to connect churches and institutions with needs, opportunities and resources."

The world missions network is the centerpiece of a 25-page report by a 24-member missions review and initiatives committee. The BGCT administrative committee gave its preliminary approval at an Aug. 29-30 meeting in Dallas.

The BGCT executive board will vote on the proposal Sept. 24. If approved, it will go forward for final approval by messengers to the state convention, scheduled Nov. 10-11 in Waco.

Sharp disagreements between leaders of the BGCT and SBC in recent years have led some to speculate that the state organization might begin appointing its own national and international missionaries. The report stops short of that, but it does suggest Texas Baptists will take more initiative in setting their own worldwide missions agenda.

"Anybody who wants to come to the table can do so, but they can't set the menu for everyone else," said Clyde Glazener, pastor of Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth and chairman of the missions review and initiatives committee.

The report faults the SBC International Mission Board for asking its missionaries to affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" and for its "New Directions" missions strategy that some complain diminishes cooperation with national Baptist conventions and de-emphasizes support for institutions and meeting human needs.

It calls upon the BGCT to "find ways to enable missionaries" who refuse to affirm the "Baptist Faith and Message" as a matter of conscience.

The report also takes aim at the SBC North American Mission Board for its decision to no longer appoint ordained women as chaplains and for attempting to control the spending of funds it gives to the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

It urges Texas Baptists to adopt a new cooperative agreement with NAMB that recognizes the state convention's right to reallocate funds to accommodate jointly funded state missionaries who object to signing the "Baptist Faith and Message."

The report doesn't call for severing ties with those agencies, however. It instead pledges to "work closely with existing Baptist agencies," including the two SBC mission boards, the Baptist World Alliance and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and also with BGCT-affiliated ministries and institutions involved in missions.

The study committee affirms relationships that exist between the Atlanta-based CBF and various groups, associations, churches and individuals in Texas. Citing "certain political facets of the relationship of the CBF with various Baptist bodies," however, the committee recommends that the BGCT continue to work with CBF on projects but not enter into a formal relationship.

CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal said he had several discussions with subcommittees of the task force, which he described as "cordial."

"I never expected this committee to recommend a connectional relationship with CBF like they've had in the past with the SBC," Vestal said. "I had hoped for and am pleased with their recommendation that BGCT find ways to partner with CBF. We look forward to that. We already partner with Texas Baptists in a number of ways."

Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC International Mission Board, questioned the need for the new network. "Southern Baptists in Texas already have -- in the International Mission Board -- an excellent network for personalized involvement," Rankin said in a statement.

"Rather than diverting missions gifts to create and maintain a new institution that duplicates work already being done by other entities, we encourage Southern Baptists in Texas to stand by their missionaries and press forward with them in taking the good news of salvation to a lost world."

The missions-review-and-initiatives report cites scholars who point "to hands-on involvement as the future of missions." Many churches already sponsor volunteer mission opportunities, the report said. As a result, the distinction between local and worldwide missions is "blurring rapidly."

"Texas Baptists need a mission vision that recognizes missions as the responsibility of every church and every Christian," the report says. "Churches increasingly want to own that vision, but they also want a collective vision of what Texas Baptist churches can do together. They see any vision that views missions exclusively in the context of institutions or boards that they only pray for and pay for as an incomplete vision. For many, the question is not only, 'How do we support missions?' It is also, 'How do we do missions?'"

The proposed network would be responsible for facilitation and support of missions efforts; training; screening of personnel; establishing a database of missions opportunities, resources and activities; research; education; and helping churches develop missions strategies.

Partial funding for the new network would come through Texas Baptists' unified budget, the Cooperative Program, along with direct gifts. Some work done through the network would be funded directly by churches.

It would be structured as an independent non-profit, similar to other free-standing agencies like Buckner Baptist Benevolences and the Baptist Standard, to maintain a close working relationship to the BGCT while allowing quick response to developing global situations. Not-for-profit status would qualify it for recognition as a non-governmental organization, which in some cases gives credibility and better access.

In a separate action at the same meeting, the administrative committee approved changes to a form it sends to churches to record the amounts they contribute to the BGCT.

The new form removes a controversial cap on the amount of BGCT funding for SBC seminaries. It also ends negative designations against the SBC Executive Committee and Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Wade said the change is intended both to simplify the form and to promote peace with the SBC. Texas Baptists will no longer comment on how the SBC spends the money it receives from the BGCT.

The new form increases the percentage of church gifts remaining in Texas in the BGCT Cooperative Giving Budget from 67 percent to 79 percent. Churches may channel their 21 percent earmarked "worldwide endeavors" to the SBC, CBF or BGCT world missions, including the new missions network. As before, churches can instead choose a designated giving option, in which they set their own percentage distributions between BGCT and global missions.

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-- Ken Camp and Marv Knox contributed to this story.

## **Confidence erodes in First Amendment**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Nearly half of Americans surveyed said the First Amendment goes too far in protecting the rights it guarantees, suggesting new public concerns in light of the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

"The stakes have risen for the First Amendment in the wake of Sept. 11," said Ken Paulson, executive director of the First Amendment Center, an arm of the Freedom Forum.

A 2002 survey by the University of Connecticut found 49 percent suggesting the First Amendment hinders the war on terrorism. That's up 10 percent from a similar survey the year before.

Freedom of the press raised the most concern, with 42 percent saying they thought the press has too much freedom to do what it wants. That is roughly the same percentage as last year.

About half said the government should be allowed to monitor religious groups in the interest of national security, even if it means infringing on religious freedom. More than four in 10 said the government should have greater power to monitor the activities of Muslims living in the United States than it does other religious groups.

More than four in 10 said they would limit the academic freedom of professors and bar criticism of the government's military policy.

Paulson said Americans aren't monolithic in their views on the First Amendment. "While a majority says they respect the First Amendment, a significant percentage seems inclined to rewrite it."

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-- By ABP staff

## Psychotherapist/pastor urges churches to commemorate 9/11 anniversary

By Susan Lockwood

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Local churches can be "agents of healing" by holding special services to commemorate the anniversary of 9/11, says a New York-area Baptist minister/psychotherapist.

In preparing for such services, he advises pastors to first get in touch with their own feelings before trying to help others, save prophetic challenges for another day and emphasize emotional healing.

Will Ashley is founder and senior pastor of Abundant Joy Christian Center, a Baptist church in Jersey City, N.J. He also maintains a psychiatry practice at The Riverside Church in New York City.

He recently sat down for the following interview with Susan Lockwood, disaster-response coordinator for American Baptists in the Metro New York region, who is also an ordained Baptist minister.

Q: Dr. Ashley, as both a pastor and trained psychotherapist, why do you think it's important for a local church to deal with the anniversary of 9/11? There are a number of other commemorations and services taking place that people can attend.

A: The local church can be an agent of healing by hosting a service in memory of 9/11. It is one of the roles of the local church to offer the comfort of a safe place to share common experiences associated with 9/11. In addition, the local church can normalize the feelings and behaviors of persons who have had a reaction to the bombardment of images of 9/11. The local church can also serve as a triage station to take notice of and refer people who need additional support to trained mental health professionals. We are uniquely positioned to assist people with 9/11 because we share a personal, intimate relationship with our membership, and it is a continuation of our ongoing role of assisting people with life transitions from birth to death.

Q: Why do you think remembering 9/11 in worship is important? What's so special about the worship context?

A: There is power in rituals and anniversaries. It is one of the ways we mark transitions in life. We lost any illusion of innocence on 9/11. That day marked a transition in how U.S. residents view the world and ultimate concerns. The local church can interpret, reframe and offer contextual meaning to the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. We can answer questions on the hearts and minds of many. Where is God? Are we really the evil people Bin Laden describes as infidels who must be destroyed? Where is God's sense of justice in this matter? Why do bad things happen to good people? How safe am I? Where will I find inner strength during this time?

Q: Are we in danger of re-traumatizing people by looking backward rather than forward?

A: We do face the danger of people being re-traumatized by the anniversary of 9/11. Mental health care professionals anticipate an increased caseload as a direct result of the media, commemorative events and other reminders of 9/11. However, it's the elephant in the room, and there's no way to escape its presence. Better for us, then, to acknowledge its impact and tell the stories of our sorrow and survival and heroics in the construction of a story that leads us out a life-giving future.

Q: What kind of underpinnings should a pastor have for planning a service that reflects on the anniversary of 9/11?

A: The pastor in planning a 9/11 service is called upon to know his or her people. How hard-hit was the congregation by this tragedy? What has been the impact on youth and children and other special groups within the congregation and community? What were the losses? Who are the survivors? Where is the congregation today, mentally, spiritually and socially? What has changed in the congregation as a result of 9/11? What has the church done to bring healing and support to the congregation and community? Who are the local heroes and heroines of 9/11? How does the congregation celebrate life? What is the best way for your congregation to celebrate and affirm the contributions made in the aftermath of 9/11? In short, the goal is to be contextual in planning your 9/11 acknowledgments and services.

Q: What are some practical tips for preaching and worship planning around 9/11?

A: Being relevant, practical, contextual and theological is the key to offering quality pastoral care in our preaching and worship around 9/11. It is important for pastors to remember that this is an emotional event. Thus, the service will be a greater source of healing as opportunities to reflect and emote are provided. Model, label and embrace appropriate responses to 9/11 throughout the worship service. Sermons can offer some history and an analysis of the events of 9/11; however, the main focus should be on God's healing power. Offer real hope in God.

Q: What other awarenesses and ideas will be helpful to pastors as the anniversary of 9/11 approaches?

A: Pastors must be in touch with their own feelings before going to help others. Be honest with yourself and God. Pray. Cry. Yell or scream. Get help. Take a vacation. Write, listen and/or talk to peers. See a therapist. Check the emotional health of your family on this matter. Do not attempt to handle this load alone. Do not spiritualize your feelings away. This happened in America. You have feelings about it. Own your feelings and thoughts. Christians get angry. Christians have fears. Our Lord got angry. Jesus wept. We see in the New Testament where right before the crucifixion Jesus had a brief bout with depression. These are normal human reactions.

Q: Any other word of counsel that you would like to offer pastors at this time?

A: Be human. Be compassionate. Be a friend. Save the prophetic challenges to our nation or the overly patriotic views for another sermon. Today is about healing. The congregation does not really expect you to have all the answers to this puzzle. What is expected of pastors during the 9/11 anniversary is a person who can offer comfort, healing and provide a safe place to ask out loud, "God, what do you have to say about this day?"

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## **Cancer survivor celebrates with athletic competition**

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- Deborah "Deb" Treat, registrar at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, decided to enter the Show-Me State Games -- an Olympic-style sports festival for amateur athletes in Missouri -- as a way to celebrate both her victory over colon cancer and her 50th birthday. The result: she won gold in shot put and bronze in discus.

Treat, who lives in Gentry, Mo., spent 17 days in the hospital in 1991 when her colon problems surfaced. For 10 years, she carefully watched what she ate and gulped medicine by the handful. After doctors discovered a tumor in November 2000, they removed Treat's colon in December that year.

Her physician declared her cancer-free at her one-year check up in January 2002. "Later that day, she told me she would like to participate in the Show-Me Games," said her husband, Darrell, pastor of Gentry Baptist Church.

"When I asked why, she said, 'Because I can. This time last year, we didn't know if I would be alive. Now I am alive and blessed. Also, I will be 50 this year and would like to do it for my own birthday present.'"

Although she had not participated much in sports before, Treat bought a shot put and a discus, began to workout and spent lots of practice time.

"Every day on her lunch hour she would walk, and every evening after work she would walk," her husband said. "Every day she would bundle up and practice her throwing. Our 11-year-old son, Andrew, would shag and return them to her."

The former Deb Singleton of Faucett, Mo., earned a bachelor's degree from Missouri Western State College, a master of education degree from Colorado State University and a master of religious education degree from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

A former instructor at Dakota State University and Oklahoma Baptist University, she served with the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board) in Nigeria and Lebanon for about eight years. She is currently the registrar at Central Baptist Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

In addition to their church position, the couple operates "Fish and Loaves," a ministry to locate goods and ship them to 34 countries and 41 states.

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