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**Baptist Peace Fellowship
executive director resigns**

By Bob Allen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America since its founding in 1984, is resigning Jan. 1, citing "personal vocational needs."

The president and vice president of the organization's board of directors jointly announced Sehested's resignation in a letter dated Aug. 28. LeDayne Polaski is also resigning after four years as managing director of the Charlotte, N.C.-based BPFNA, in order to spend more time with her infant daughter, the letter said.

"These resignations come as the result of a variety of factors, most notably Ken's and LeDayne's own vocational leanings, and the current stage of development of the BPFNA as an organization and movement," board president Lindsay Penn-Matheson of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and vice president Paul Hayes of Suffield, Conn., said in their letter.

The leaders said Sehested has expressed a need for more time to work on writing projects, including a book manuscript.

"While the principle reason for my resigning has to do with personal vocational needs, I also believe my doing so now is an opportunity for you as a board to move ahead with finding new leadership and charting the future for this organization," Sehested wrote in his resignation letter to the board of directors.

Penn-Matheson did not immediately respond to a reporter's e-mail asking her to elaborate on the reasons behind Sehested's resignation.

"Our growth as an institutional presence places a number of challenges upon the board and staff leadership as we seek to maintain our original identity as a peace and justice ministry within Baptist life," she and Hayes wrote in their letter.

Sehested is on sabbatical and could not be reached for comment as this story was being written Sept. 10.

The officers said they would soon hire an interim executive director until a permanent successor is named.

Sehested, a graduate of New York University and Union Theological Seminary, worked as associate pastor of Manhattan Baptist Church in New York City before moving to Atlanta in the early 1980s to become co-editor and director of education for SEEDS, a magazine and educational ministry on world-hunger issues.

He attended a founding meeting between American Baptist and Southern Baptist peacemaking groups and became the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America's first and only executive director in 1984.

He has written articles for magazines and books and traveled extensively in his role at the BPFNA. American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. honored Sehested in 1995 with their Dahlberg Peace Award. In 1996, he received the Martin Luther King Jr. Peacemaker Award, given by the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center in Memphis, Tenn.

Polaski came to oversee day-to-day operations at the BPFNA in July 1998 after working five years as minister of youth at Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte. She is married to Tom Polaski, a professor of mathematics at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C., a Charlotte suburb.

Polaski said she is staying on part-time to continue to coordinate an annual summer conference for the group.

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Outspoken campus minister laid off in budget cuts

By Tony Cartledge and Steve DeVane

MARS HILL, N.C. (ABP) -- A North Carolina college has laid off its campus minister and her assistant in a series of budget cuts. But some question whether officials used that as an excuse to get rid of a high-profile woman minister tagged as too liberal for a Baptist school.

Paula Clayton Dempsey, campus minister for 11 years at Mars Hill College in western North Carolina, and her assistant Debra Huff were fired Sept. 4 in what school officials described as a budget-cutting move. They are among five layoffs announced by the financially strapped school, which will also leave some vacant positions unfilled.

Dempsey is a past president of the Alliance of Baptists, a small group of progressive churches and individuals that supports controversial notions including women's ordination and the inclusion of gays in church life.

School officials insist terminating her position was solely a budgetary decision. Dempsey declined to comment until after she leaves her job Sept. 20.

Trustee chairman Fred Pittillo, a businessman from Hendersonville, N.C., told the Biblical Recorder newspaper that Mars Hill had budget deficits the last two years, and the board was determined to have a balanced budget in the 2002-2003 budget year.

Pittillo said the school is not using budget cuts as a pretext for firing liberal or conservative staff members, but he acknowledged his desire for the school to take a centrist approach.

"The school should stay away from the extremes to the left or the right, but should stay near the middle," he said.

Some students at Mars Hill suspected political motives behind the dismissal of a woman minister who has often taken controversial positions on issues, according to The Hilltop, the online student newspaper at the school.

"Mars Hill has always been rooted in the Baptist faith. That's what we were founded on, so why is it that the campus ministry was the first to go?" sophomore Ben Tallcott said in a student forum Sept. 5. "Shouldn't it be the last resort? And I wonder if this is not a political move to get rid of a woman campus minister."

Mars Hill Interim President Dan Lunsford replied that the decisions were made "purely on a financial basis."

After meeting with students, Lunsford addressed a weekly faculty forum. Faculty members had already discussed the issue "for a long time" before Lunsford arrived, the campus newspaper reported.

Lunsford said in a statement that "hard decisions" were necessary for the college to comply with financial-stability standards for accreditation and legal obligations for sound financial management.

The cuts in campus ministry, he said, are "in no way a step nor an effort to lessen our commitment to our Christian principles and our heritage." He said the school would attempt to continue its campus ministry with volunteers. "We are absolutely committed to providing for the spiritual needs of our students, while reducing expenditures," he said.

Lunsford said he hoped to restore some of the services that had been reduced or eliminated, perhaps as early as next year.

Some wondered why campus ministry seemed to be the prime target in the budget cuts.

"We can't be loyal to our traditions and values without a campus minister," history professor Jim Lenburg said.

"To eliminate campus ministry, even for a year, is an extraordinary decision for a Christian college," said sociology professor Tom Plaut.

Rick Trexler, campus-ministry leader at Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, said he was shocked at the news. "I just think it's drastic to take that much from that area," he said. "I'm speechless."

Trexler said the state convention gives North Carolina Baptist colleges \$15,000 a year to help pay the salary of campus ministers. If Mars Hill shuts down its campus-ministry program, it would be state's only Baptist college without one.

The Hilltop reported that the office of associate campus minister, currently filled by 2000 Mars Hill graduate Beth Honeycutt, will continue because it is not funded by the school. The position is funded by donations from area churches that are solicited each year by the campus minister's office.

In addition to Dempsey and her assistant, positions held by two secretaries and a media technician were also eliminated. Several other vacancies won't be filled, school officials said.

Lunsford said he appreciated the work done by those who are losing their jobs. "The college has been well served by these dedicated employees, who have given generously of their energies," he said. "I regret the impact on their personal lives."

Pittillo said that since February school trustees saw a need to cut expenses as much as possible, and had already implemented some cost savings to the school's approximately \$25 million annual budget. When estimated income based on final enrollment figures for the fall semester came up short, trustees directed Lunsford to cut an additional \$1 million from the budget, he said.

"We're putting Mars Hill's financial house in order so that when a new president comes he can take it where it needs to go," Pittillo said. The college's former president, Max Lennon, retired in January.

Lunsford, a Mars Hill alumnus who took over as interim president Jan. 25, told students and faculty that the school's accreditation agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, has warned that the college could be placed on probation if it does not pay outstanding debts.

Derek Hodges, president of Mars Hill's Christian Student Movement, reacted strongly to the news. "We have had our arms and legs cut off, been thrown into a river, and have to learn to swim," he said. "Nothing will operate to the same level without the work of Debra and Paula."

But not every student felt that way. Junior Dan Miller told the Hilltop that Dempsey had not met the needs of all students. "I believe that a woman shouldn't be the head of a congregation," he said.

Mars Hill isn't the only Baptist college in the state facing financial difficulties. Trustees at Chowan College in Murphreesboro declared a state of "financial exigency" in August and announced that seven faculty members and seven other employees would be terminated.

New Mexico church scene of fatal shooting

By John Loudat

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (ABP) -- An armed 14-year-old boy who walked into an Albuquerque church shortly after Wednesday evening activities Sept. 4 was shot by police. Early the next morning, police announced that he had been killed.

Fewer than a dozen people were at Taylor Ranch Baptist Church in northwest Albuquerque when Dominic Montoya approached choir member Lori Marsh in the church's sanctuary, requesting prayer, said Cindy Harrison, the church's minister of education.

Harrison said choir practice had ended a few minutes earlier, and she had locked the front doors leading into the foyer at about 9 p.m. and left for home. She speculated that someone may have propped the doors open or that the boy entered as someone else left.

Marsh visited briefly with the young man, who told her that he felt he was being tormented by demons, Harrison said. He asked for "prayer for his soul," she added.

Harrison said that Marsh and another choir member, Janet Clark, later told her that after they prayed with Montoya, he seemed more calm and coherent.

Also in the sanctuary when Montoya entered was Marsh's husband, music minister Danny Marsh, and their two children, who are preschool and elementary ages.

Danny Marsh and others saw the boy's gun, which, Harrison said, was not concealed. Marsh left the sanctuary with his children and called 911 at about 9:15 from the church office. Choir member Amanda Miller then left the building with the couple's children.

Meanwhile, back in the sanctuary, Miller's husband, Curtis, asked the boy for the gun, which he refused to surrender. Miller then walked Montoya to the foyer, arriving there at the same time three police officers were entering. They told Montoya to put the gun down and his hands up, Harrison said.

The Albuquerque Police Department reported that Montoya instead pointed the gun at the officers in a threatening manner. They opened fire, striking him at least twice.

Choir member Linda Heckart saw the youth enter the church as she was leaving. She called Pastor Tim Marrow, who was home at the time, to alert him. Marrow's wife, Melody, answered the phone and Heckart told her that a boy who was obviously disturbed had just gone inside the church.

The pastor's wife, who is also Baptist Convention of New Mexico evangelism ministries' ministry assistant, spoke with the Baptist New Mexican about an hour after the incident. She said that she immediately informed her husband of the call from Heckart, and he jumped into the car to return to church.

Tim Marrow said he heard three gunshots when he pulled into the parking lot. He looked into the foyer and saw Montoya lying on the floor.

Marrow said the morning after the shooting that he was trying to get hold of Montoya's family so he could minister to them, and he was praying that God would bring some good out of the tragic event.

"We need to be praying for his family," said Marrow, a former state convention president and currently a trustee for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He said the church plans to go on with its regularly scheduled activities. "Our word to our people are the words of Jesus: 'Do not be afraid,'" Marrow said.

Police kept Marrow and Harrison at the church until 2 a.m. Police called Marrow at 4:30 a.m. when they wrapped up their investigation. Marrow then went back to the church and locked up.

Harrison said she was back at church by 7:45 a.m. and Marrow arrived a little after 9. They said they had been busy all morning dealing with the aftermath of the shooting -- counseling those involved and speaking with the swarm of media.

By 11 a.m. the carpet in the foyer had already been cleaned and bullet holes in the walls spackled.

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Sept. 11 survivor finds joy amid unfathomable tragedy

By Matthew Finch

NEW WINDSOR, N.Y. (ABP) -- Leslie Haskin's morning last Sept. 11 began with a late start to her two-hour commute to work on the 36th floor of the World Trade Center's north tower.

A director of operations for Kemper Insurance, she kicked off her workday with a hectic start to iron out some details for a client. She set her coffee on her desk and walked to her assistant's work area. "I'll get back to this before 9 o'clock," the 39-year-old single mom of two teens thought.

Moments later, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the upper floors of the 110-story tower, the first of four flights commandeered by terrorists who used America's own airplanes as missiles to collapse the twin office skyscrapers and devastate a portion of the Pentagon. As many as 2,800 people -- from building occupants to rescue workers -- died in lower Manhattan.

While the nation mourns the death toll and devastation from the worst terrorist attack in American history, Haskin will have a personal oasis of joy in the somber anniversary. That day she stopped running from God and began a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. "If I had died on Sept. 11, I know I would have lifted my eyes up in hell," she said in a telephone interview from her home in New Windsor, N.Y.

Haskin admits it seems strange to associate any kind of joy with Sept. 11. She also will grieve for the unfathomable loss of life on that day. But for her it marked a turning point, because "the Lord saved my soul in the middle of all that destruction and catastrophe."

The horror millions of Americans watched on their television sets was only a glimpse, Haskin said. "What was going on inside the building was much worse than what you saw on TV," she said. "From the moment of impact that building just started to crumble."

Many people who weren't there couldn't fathom why some victims jumped out of the building to certain death. Haskin can. With flames engulfing whole floors and exits cut off, the slim possibility of surviving a jump would seem to be a better alternative to burning alive.

The plane hit the tower about 60 stories above Kemper's office, where some 150 people worked. The explosion seemed as if it had come from below, Haskin recalled. As the building swayed and tilted, she heard glass exploding and sirens sounding. From the floor-to-ceiling windows encircling the 36th story, she saw the once "awesome view" of New York marred by plummeting rubble.

Haskin rushed to the bank of elevators near the reception area. People were already crowding into the narrow stairwells, wide enough for only two people at a time. She saw flames coming from the elevator bank, and also upstairs on the 37th floor, which she could see through a collapsing part of the ceiling near the reception area.

Fuel and water made the stairs slick. Lights were out, and people clutched the rails through the darkness. Smoke billowed through the stairwell, at first concerning Haskin, a severe asthmatic. She had no problem breathing, however. "That was the Lord."

About 18 minutes after the first crash, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the south tower. Haskin and others felt the impact from the adjacent tower. A portion of the stairs gave way behind her, and a woman fell through. She doesn't know if she survived.

When she and the others reached the concourse floor near ground level, the door wouldn't budge. "God, help us," Haskin remembered whispering. People were crying and screaming. After coming so close to freedom, they all thought they were going to die. Soon, a man opened the door from the other side. He smiled and said, "You'll be OK."

The danger was far from over, however. The concourse was where Haskin saw the most fatalities. One man in front of her was sliced in half by a large pane of flying glass. She had to run around him. She heard a thud behind her and saw where another man smashed into the concrete, apparently trying to jump to safety from above.

"I just stopped and stood there. I wanted to cry," she said. "Death was all around and so close that it was unbelievable." She felt numb, almost as if she were outside her body and watching the horror unfold. A firefighter pushed her and said: "You can't stay here. It's not safe."

Outside, she caught a ferry to Hoboken, N.J., and made her way home before going to the hospital. "I don't even remember getting home," she said.

Her 61-year-old neighbor called her children at their grandmother's house to let them know she was safe.

Later that day, she talked to an older brother, Lawrence Haskin, pastor of Household of Faith Christian Assembly in Chicago. As they spoke, she knew it was time for her to make a change and "stand up for holiness."

"We don't know from one minute to the next where life is going to end," she said. "Nothing's worth sacrificing your soul. Nothing."

A year later, she's still on leave from Kemper Insurance, after taking time off with workers' compensation. Her position has since been filled, and she doesn't know if she will go back to work for Kemper in another capacity or at a different location. She does know she wouldn't trade her life now to get back her old career and salary.

Shortly after Sept. 11, she became a member of Goodwill Church, an evangelical Presbyterian church in Montgomery, N.Y., where she teaches children's Sunday school and is joining several other women at the church to begin a ministry to the community's teenagers.

Before, she had shunned church involvement. Now she has taken in a young mother and her two small children. They had been living in their car at a truck stop after being evicted.

Ministry to others, she said, begins by "completely submitting yourself to the will of the Lord." Where that will lead she doesn't know.

"I don't know what the next step is," Haskin said. "I just know the Lord wants me to keep walking."

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