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**Couple says IMB won't appoint missionaries with woman pastor**

By Bob Allen

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- A couple from Birmingham, Ala., say they were rejected as Southern Baptist missionaries because their church recently hired a woman as pastor.

Don Gardner, a former pastor and chaplain, has worked as a volunteer missionary in Africa since retiring a couple of years ago. He just got back in July after three months of video work overseas.

Gardner, 67, said field directors in Kenya "were very interested" in him and his wife, Esther, returning, and even mentioned them by name in a request to offices of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board in Richmond, Va.

But Gardner said after an IMB trustee called Richmond and informed officials that the Gardners' church, Baptist Church of the Covenant, had called a woman pastor, they were told "there might be a problem" with their application.

Gardner said he received word Sept. 10 that a decision had been made "at the top level" of administration that the IMB would not appoint anyone from a church with a woman pastor.

Baptist Church of the Covenant voted Aug. 11 to elect Sarah Jackson Shelton as pastor by a count of 131-2. She is the first female to lead the Birmingham congregation and thought to be the second woman pastor ever affiliated with the Alabama Baptist Convention.

While females are rare in Southern Baptist pulpits, the issue has drawn greater attention since the SBC changed its "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement in 2000 to say that the Bible forbids women pastors. Early this year, IMB President Jerry Rankin wrote missionaries asking them to affirm the faith statement, even though trustees a year before had voted not to require them to do so.

Gardner said in an e-mail to friends that he and his wife were disappointed but not surprised at their rejection. "The lack of inclusiveness in the SBC will surely hurt their mission ministry," he wrote. "They are already experiencing a funding shortfall and have had to reduce mission budgets."

Gardner told Associated Baptist Press Sept. 12 he believes that "narrowness" by IMB trustees is hurting missions work. He cited a new proposal by Texas Baptists to divert some funding away from the IMB and into a new network they control directly as an example.

Gardner said he was in Kenya when missionaries received word this year that they were being requested to affirm 2000 revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message." It "didn't sit very well," he said. "A lot of them were incensed that they were having to, in a sense, sign a creed."

He said the IMB has had to cut its budget, and his son-in-law, an IMB missionary in Kenya, cannot buy equipment he needs, because officials tell him that money is not available. "I feel that this fighting with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Texas Baptists Committed and Mainstream Baptists and other organizations is having an effect," he said.

Gardner said he doesn't blame IMB personnel, whom he sees as under pressure from trustees and other SBC leaders.

"I am disappointed, but I'm not angry or vindictive," he said. "I see where all this is coming from. It's coming from the top level of power in the SBC, and it doesn't really represent the missionaries and administrators that I've met and come to know."

"They're good people, and they're working under very difficult circumstances," he said.

Gardner said he would continue to seek ways to serve as a volunteer. Two seminaries have expressed interest in him coming to teach, he said, but he doesn't know if that will work out since he can't be appointed.

He said his wife was going to Africa Sunday, Sept. 15, to care for their daughter, who is hospitalized in Johannesburg with a potentially serious circulation problem following a foot injury. Gardner said he will follow, if details can be worked out for him to stay on and work on a hunger-relief project in Swaziland, about two hours from South Africa.

An IMB spokesman said Sept. 12 he was unaware of the Gardners' application but would ask the agency's personnel department about it.

A spokesperson at Baptist Church of the Covenant said Shelton wasn't in the office Thursday.

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## **Theology schools gain accreditation**

PITTSBURGH, Pa. (ABP) -- Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary and McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University have been fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.

Both are accredited for five years, the longest period of time the ATS gives for a first-time accreditation.

Truett's accreditation covers the master-of-divinity program and gives preliminary approval to the doctor of ministry at the school in Waco, Texas.

The accreditation vote follows a two-year self-study by the seminary and on-site visits by accrediting officials. "While our self-study was incredibly hard work, it proved to be a most gratifying experience for us," said David Garland, associate dean.

Garland said a glowing report by the site team caught him by surprise. "We knew that we were doing good work, but [we] were heartened to have that confirmed by a rigorous examination by our peers," he said.

Truett Seminary enrolls 360 and has had 160 graduates since opening in the fall of 1994. In January it opened a 64,000-square-foot building on the edge of the Baylor campus.

The McAfee theology school opened in Atlanta in 1996 and graduated its first class in 1999. The ATS gave the school associate status in June 2000, the earliest date it could qualify under accreditation guidelines.

"This is a tribute to the leadership of Dean Alan Culpepper and the faculty of the School of Theology," said Mercer President Kirby Godsey. "We congratulate them on this achievement, which was at least one year earlier than the traditional accreditation schedule would have indicated."

Culpepper said ATS accreditation is a milestone, "because it affirms that the school has an excellent academic program and that it is sound financially."

Both schools are also accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools through their connections to universities. ATS accreditation will allow them to qualify for grants. It also means that graduates of the school can be accepted into other accredited schools.

Headquartered in Pittsburgh, the ATS accredits more than 240 theological schools, seminaries and divinity schools representing all major Christian denominations.

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-- By ABP staff

## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **Alliance leader 'sets the record straight'**

WASHINGTON -- Alliance of Baptists Executive Director Stan Hasteley is challenging former Cooperative Baptist Fellowship leader Cecil Sherman's account of why the two groups failed to merge in the early 1990s.

Speaking to a Mainstream Baptists group in June, Sherman referred to "elitist groups" that are "not very smart" in advancing Baptist causes. Sherman recalled a conversation a decade ago when he said an Alliance leader said for a merger to work, "Every church in CBF should hold our position on the women's issue." Sherman responded, "Then we'll never merge."

In a recent Alliance newsletter, however, Hasteley wrote a column to "set the record straight." He accused Sherman of "reconstruct[ing] history to his own ends" in his June 27 speech.

"As one of the Alliance's delegates in those merger talks, I can say unequivocally that no such exchange took place during our negotiating sessions," Hasteley wrote. "Nor is it true that the Alliance demands conformity of its own churches on women's issues or other matters, as if we could."

Hasteley said it was the CBF, and not the Alliance, that pulled the plug on a proposed merger over the course of 15 months in 1991 and 1992. He said talks broke down because the Alliance's promotion of women in ministry and welcoming of gays and lesbians "scared off other moderate Baptists."

Citing accomplishments of the Alliance, including the founding of a seminary, membership in the National Council of Churches, fraternal relationships with other groups and groundbreaking statements on racism and Jewish/Christian relations, Hasteley concluded, "We deserve better than to be dismissed as 'nuts' and 'fruitcakes.'" (ABP)

### **New Missouri exec supports legal action**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- The Missouri Baptist Convention's new leader says he supports legal action brought by the state convention against five agencies that moved to self-perpetuating trustee boards.

David Clippard, elected executive director Aug. 27, said Missouri Baptists have "through 167 years of blood, sweat, tears and sacrificial giving, created these entities to meet strategic ministry needs."

"We look forward to their soon return to the family of Missouri Baptist life, so together we can fulfill the very purposes for which they have been supported."

Clippard, who comes to the post from the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, where he was associate executive director, said he also agrees with the conservative direction of both the Missouri convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

He succeeds Jim Hill, who resigned last October, saying he could not work with the MBC's conservative leaders. (ABP)

### **Campbell divinity school reports record class**

BUIES CREEK, N.C. -- Campbell University's divinity school is expecting the largest crop of new students in its six-year history.

A total of 51 new students from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and three foreign countries will be commissioned Sept. 17, bringing the total student body to 177.

The service will also welcome five new faculty members. Roy De Brand, professor of preaching, comes from the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Franklin, Va. Timothy Brock, assistant professor of Christian education, comes from a minister-of-education position at First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala. Derek Hogan, who is finishing a doctorate at Baylor University, comes as theological/reference librarian.

Kathryn Lopez joins the undergraduate religion program as assistant professor of religion. She is from Decatur, Ga., where she earned a Ph.D. from Emory University. She also has a bachelor's degree from the University of Richmond and a master of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Jerry Wallace moves to a named professorship at the divinity school after many years at the university as academic dean and provost. (ABP)

### **Missouri Baptist 'college' now 'university'**

ST. LOUIS -- Missouri Baptist College has changed its designation from a "college" to "university." President Alton Lacey announced the change Aug. 29.

Officials said the change reflects more diversity in programs and a more complex institution. The school has four campuses in the St. Louis area with a combined enrolment of 3,200.

It is one of five Missouri Baptist Convention agencies being sued in a leadership dispute. Trustees voted last year to amend the school's charter to make them responsible for electing their own successors, taking that power away from the state convention. Missouri Baptists responded by freezing funding for the school and four other agencies that took similar action. In August convention leaders filed a petition for declaratory judgment in an effort to regain control of the school. (ABP)

### **Former SBC recording secretary dies**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Former Southern Baptist Convention officer Martin Bradley died Aug. 26 from cancer. He was 75.

Bradley served 1978-1990 as recording secretary of the SBC. He retired in 1992 after a long career with LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, Tenn.

Retired SBC Executive Committee President Harold Bennett remembered Bradley as "a man of integrity and strong commitment," according to Baptist Press.

The recording secretary records minutes of SBC annual meetings, which are in turn published in the convention annual. (ABP)

### **Jimmy Allen to lead Baptists Today fund-raising effort**

MACON, Ga. -- Longtime Baptist leader Jimmy Allen has been named chairman of a "Friends of Freedom" campaign to raise money for the national newspaper Baptists Today.

The campaign seeks to raise \$300,000 a year for three years for the independent news journal, which is supported by individuals, churches and organizations including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"I believe Baptists Today provides the most dependable source of news and views available in Baptist life," said Allen, a former Southern Baptist Convention president and agency head who now lives in Big Canoe, Ga.

James McAfee, chairman of the Baptists Today board, said Allen is "one of the most respected Baptist leaders I know."

"He is the ideal person to lead us in an effort to build broad support for this vital publication that keeps clergy and lay leaders informed about the important issues facing our churches today," McAfee said.

John Pierce is editor of Baptists Today, which has offices in Macon, Ga. (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

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