



Associated Baptist Press

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DC Baptist Convention faces steep budget cuts

By Robert Marus

FORT WASHINGTON, Md. (ABP) – In its 126th annual meeting Nov. 11-12, District of Columbia Baptist Convention supporters heard that the regional association faces some of the most difficult financial challenges in its history.

The group -- unique among Baptist conventions for its historic "dual alignment" with both the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches, and a more recent affiliation with the predominantly African-American Progressive National Baptist Convention -- may face a significant downsizing of its ministry staff due in part to a withdrawal of funding from a Southern Baptist agency.

The convention's 195 registered messengers and about 100 guests heard DCBC executive director Jeffrey Haggray explain that year-to-date income lagged \$265,190 behind expenditures for the same period. Haggray also lamented the fact that D.C. Baptist churches had contributed only about \$25,000 toward a total goal of \$125,000 for the 2002 National Capital Area Missions Offering.

In addition to falling revenues from contributions, in June the convention will lose nearly \$500,000 in funding it had received annually from the SBC's North American Mission Board. NAMB officials made the decision to defund the convention last summer, citing theological differences with the two other national denominations affiliated with DCBC. Attempts to reach an agreement between the two parties to allow the funding to continue were unsuccessful because DCBC leaders said the convention would have to give up too much of its autonomy and sacrifice its relationship with American and Progressive Baptists in order to meet NAMB's demands.

"Tonight, I come to you with candor and utmost concern to solicit your support for missions," Haggray told messengers in his executive director's report.

DCBC finance committee chairman Leonard Pinkney, a member of Washington's Metropolitan Baptist Church, said that although most of the decrease in the convention's income was attributable to the sour national economy, part was attributable to the controversy regarding the NAMB defunding. "Some [DCBC

member] churches have withdrawn, and others have given considerably less since [NAMB's] decision was made," Pinkney told messengers.

Attendees also heard a report – but took no action – on Vision 2010, a plan to re-structure the convention's ministry programs and staff in order to make them more efficient. DCBC recording secretary LaTricia Jones said Vision 2010 could result in "several" staff cuts. It would re-structure DCBC's current department-based program into six different "centers" – for evangelism, ministerial leadership, community ministry, discipleship and congregational health, governance, and administration. The centers would focus on providing resources and support to already-existing ministry initiatives of churches rather than the convention creating new programs itself.

The executive board postponed action on the plan until a special called meeting to allow more time to discuss the ramifications of the re-organization. The board will meet Jan. 25 to discuss the plan once more, and then vote on it at its regularly scheduled March 10 meeting. The board also adopted a provisional 2003 budget that holds spending at the 2002 level of \$1.5 million and postponed action on a final 2003 budget of \$1.2 million until the March meeting.

Despite the difficulties, Haggray said he is upbeat about the convention's future because of its importance to the cause of Christ in the U.S. "I know what it means to face financial challenges, but I also know what it means to say 'God provides,'" he said. "We say that we serve in the most strategic region in all the world. God has placed our churches here for such a time as this."

In other action, messengers elected Charles Updike, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gaithersburg, Md., as DCBC president. He had previously been vice president. They also elected Fred Herring of Fort Foote Baptist Church in Fort Washington, Md. -- the meeting's host church -- as vice president and re-elected Jones, a member of Washington's Georgetown Baptist Church, as recording secretary.

The convention will hold its 2003 meeting Oct. 27-28 at Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Md.

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Shorter College trustees vote to become self-perpetuating

By William Neal and Greg Warner

MARIETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- Trustees of Shorter College approved changes Nov. 22 that will sever ties between the Rome, Ga., school and the Georgia Baptist Convention.

The new structure will allow the Shorter trustee board to become self-perpetuating. Previously, the Georgia Baptist Convention elected the school's trustees. Shorter trustees also agreed to take any means necessary to recover \$9 million in convention funds earmarked for Shorter but withheld during the dispute over control of the school.

"I'm relieved that the uncertainty is over, but I continue to be sad that two Christian groups have not been able to settle their issues without going to extremes," Ed Schrader, Shorter's president, told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

The new trustee structure was approved by more than 70 percent of trustees meeting in Marietta, Schrader said. All but about half a dozen trustees have agreed to continue serving.

The new bylaws call for at least 70 percent of the trustees to be members of Georgia Baptist churches. It does allow for the inclusion of others -- such as non-Baptist alumni or Baptist alumni who live out of state -- to be considered within the remaining 30 percent.

Shorter officials say they have been under pressure from their accreditation agencies to make changes in the trustee selection process to avoid undue political influence. The convention says the college is using accreditation as a smokescreen to distance itself from the GBC.

"We do not deny that accreditation by SACS is an important issue," said Robert White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention. "We do not agree that the course Shorter has taken which they declare as the only way to remain accredited is, in fact, 'the only way.' ...

"When Shorter says that a self-perpetuating board or separation from the convention are the only two options, it is not difficult to feel that this is actually the desire of the college and is driving this entire crisis. Other colleges under the identical system we have had with Shorter are both accredited and happy."

The convention has placed endowment and trust funds -- valued between \$8 million and \$9 million -- in escrow until the dispute is resolved. The convention says the money is for groups in "friendly cooperation" with the convention and interprets that as entities whose boards are elected by the convention. Shorter argues that money designated in the past as endowment for the college belongs to the school.

It remains to be seen if the convention will challenge Shorter's legal right to change its charter. Shorter's trustees have authorized its legal representatives to pursue the funding. Both sides have said they prefer to settle their differences without going to court, but neither have ruled out the possibility of lawsuits as a last resort.

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Fired missionary's teaching addressed tough Bible topics

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Some of the most vexing issues of Old Testament interpretation are among areas of concern cited in the teaching of fired Southern Baptist missionary professor Chris Harbin.

In what time frame did creation occur? Is the Bible a book of science? Does the Hebrew term "adam" refer only to a specific individual or also in general to the first humans? What is the explanation when biblical texts appear to contradict each other or known scientific fact? Should the Old Testament be read only in light of the New Testament, or should it also be read in the context of what its first hearers would have understood? Where did Cain's wife come from?

These issues surface in 13 passages excerpted by International Mission Board administrators from Harbin's 200-page "Narratological Theology and Homiletics" syllabus as evidence that he was teaching outside the boundaries of the Baptist Faith & Message 2000.

Trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention mission board on Nov. 1 affirmed Harbin's termination by area administrators on grounds of "persistent advocating of doctrinal positions inconsistent with the Baptist Faith & Message."

Harbin and his wife, Karen, who also was terminated, question every implication of the IMB's language used to describe their firing. "Persistent advocating" means repeated action, Karen Harbin noted, but that her husband was confronted by IMB leaders only in April. Between then and the time of their firing this fall, he stopped teaching the one seminary class under scrutiny until questions could be cleared up.

Further, the Harbins say Chris Harbin's teaching was not inconsistent with the Baptist Faith & Message. Harbin contends passages from his classroom syllabus used at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil have been lifted out of context and misconstrued to bring charges against him.

He contends no complaint about his teaching ever was lodged by a Brazilian student or administrator at the seminary where he taught the last six years. The seminary's student body and the organization of local pastors wrote letters of support for the Harbins after learning the IMB was sending them home.

IMB spokesman Mark Kelly insisted the Harbins' termination is in no way related to their refusal to sign an affirmation of the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, currently a contentious issue among some missionaries. "He was terminated because his teaching stood outside the boundaries of what Southern Baptists believe about the Bible," Kelly said.

Harbin's teachings, Kelly said, "cannot even be reconciled with the 1963 Baptist Faith & Message."

"In general, the problem was that his teaching on critical theories about the Bible was not balanced with a strong advocacy for the Bible as God's word, totally true and trustworthy," Kelly said. "Understanding theories of biblical criticism is important, but we must never undermine trust in the Bible as God's word. When that happens, Christians begin to think they are too sophisticated to believe the Bible's stories are true. Inevitably, they are drawn away from a God whose heart breaks for a lost world -- and they lose their sense of urgency for proclaiming salvation in Jesus Christ."

Harbin has responded in writing to the 13 passages cited by the IMB as evidence of doctrinal lapses. The passages were taken from his course syllabus, originally written in Portuguese but translated into English this summer at the request of IMB regional administrator Robin Hadaway.

Hadaway, who has supervised IMB missionaries in Brazil for about six years, does not read or speak Portuguese.

Harbin, whose parents were IMB missionaries in Brazil, arrived at the Brazilian seminary as a career missionary with the IMB in 1997. He previously started a Hispanic church in Aiken, S.C., after serving two years with the mission board in Mexico in church planting and seminary extension teaching.

Harbin earned the bachelor of arts degree in modern languages from Mississippi College in 1989 and the master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1992. Karen Harbin, a South Carolina native, also is a graduate of Southern Seminary.

The Harbins received notice of their termination Sept. 12. However, they contend, they did not receive a list of specific accusations regarding doctrinal issues until Oct. 26. The deadline they had been given to appeal their termination was Oct. 6.

"The quotes in question as extracted do not represent my beliefs," Harbin said. "My course text was apparently searched for content that could be used against me, regardless of whether a specific passage reflected my position or whether I was stating a position I was attempting to refute."

The Baptist Faith & Message 2000, which is the doctrinal guideline for IMB missionaries, states in Article 1 on Scripture: "It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy."

At multiple points in his syllabus, Harbin affirms the Bible's authority and trustworthiness. For example, in the introduction to the syllabus, he writes: "The authority is the word of God, supremely expressed in the Bible."

Harbin affirms the Bible as authoritative, despite what some would consider inconsistencies or errors. In a section on divine inspiration of Genesis 2, Harbin writes: "The church has a canon due to recognition that the books in the Bible are truly God's word, as opposed to history or science. These books do not claim absence of scientific and historical errors but present witness to the word of God. This is what the people of God recognized and approved -- the message of God to the people, transmitted through God's spokespersons, the prophets."

However, the citations given against Harbin apparently require him to meet a definition of biblical "inerrancy" never formally adopted by the SBC.

An introduction to the 13 citations against Harbin begins: "The following quotations in Chris Harbin's syllabus are in conflict with the Baptist Faith & Message statements on Scripture and go beyond the parameters of the 1991 SBC Doctrinal Study's definition of inerrancy."

The doctrinal study in question, titled "The Doctrine of the Bible," was written by David Dockery, who at the time was academic vice president at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and now is president of Union University in Jackson, Tenn. It was the text for the SBC's annual doctrinal emphasis in churches nationwide.

Neither the book nor Dockery's definition of inerrancy have ever been put before messengers to an SBC annual meeting for affirmation or rejection. An IMB spokesman did not respond to an inquiry about whether IMB trustees have officially adopted Dockery's definition of inerrancy as a guideline.

According to Dockery, inerrancy means that "when all the facts are known, the Bible (in its autographs, that is, the original documents), properly interpreted in light of the culture and the means of communication that had developed by the time of its composition, is completely true in all that it affirms, to the degree of precision intended by the author's purpose, in all matters relating to God and his creation."

Harbin, in his syllabus, notes the difficulty of claiming the Bible is infallible only in its original manuscripts: "If it were necessary for the autographs to be completely absent of any error to be deemed inspired, then a copy would also need to obey the same criterion to correctly express the divinely inspired message. The logic also fails, as there are no extant autographs."

Harbin also addresses the matter of biblical inspiration in Genesis, noting: "The Bible claims its own authority, but it does not claim infallibility, especially of scientific precision regarding every topic. Its writers were not worried with such ideas. The Bible teaches about the reality of God, God's identity, God's grace and will for humanity -- it is the supreme authority for questions of theology. The matter of scientific knowledge does not interfere with the inspired authority of the Bible. Its purpose never was to teach science or history. Its purpose was always to reveal God's action, identity, character and purpose among the people and humanity in general."

While that definition did not draw the ire of IMB administrators, two sentences and a footnote in the same section were singled out as evidence of unacceptable doctrine.

In a section explaining how the biblical books were written and passed down over time, Harbin addressed the accusations of biblical critics that the Bible contains errors: "What some apparently overlook is that the type of 'error' that such an ancient text presents has much more to do with concepts in conflict with modern science and not in the presentation of its theological message. This in reality is no serious error in any sense, as the biblical objective is neither scientific nor historical in character."

That explanation was not acceptable to the IMB, nor was a footnote to the text that cautions students not to make the Bible a precise book of science: "Remember the church's treatment of Galileo Galilei, who declared concordance with Copernicus that the earth revolved around the sun, while the Bible declared the opposite. Currently, very few people would argue that science is wrong on this point, yet the Bible continues describing the universe in a contrary manner. If it is acceptable to agree that the Bible is wrong on this point, one should also accept that the Bible is not a text of science and its scientific presentations can be ignored without invalidating its theological teaching."

That the Bible is not a book of science, but of theology, is a recurring theme throughout Harbin's syllabus on Genesis.

IMB officials selected passages from the syllabus they found objectionable, often linking passages together with ellipses and thus dropping out explanatory or contextual text that spans a full paragraph or more.

In discussing Genesis 1, Harbin advises not reading the biblical text with an eye toward understanding the complete scientific process by which God created the earth.

The IMB excerpts this portion from the middle of a paragraph: "As a scientific account of the progress of creation, there are serious problems with this sequencing, unless the interpretation given with regard to the

term 'day' is expressly a time period equivalent to 24 hours or the light from the first day is sufficient to sustain plant life. According to current scientific thought, it would be inconceivable for the earth to be formed prior to the sun, moon and stars, for it is gravitationally dependent on these celestial bodies."

In this section, however, Harbin does affirm God as creator of the universe. The sentence immediately following the text excerpted by the IMB adds: "The interest of the narrative, however, is not scientific description, but theological -- it was God who created, not an aimless undirected process, nor the activity of a pantheon of gods."

IMB officials drew heavy attention to a section of Harbin's syllabus in which he discusses the Hebrew term "adam," which is literally translated "man" or "humanity."

Harbin argues that a literal first couple existed but says the Hebrew vocabulary of Genesis "goes beyond that idea to present characters that can be understood as 'representative humanity' -- all of humanity role cast as the first human couple."

He added: "This is not to say the narrative does not deal with the issues regarding the very first human beings, but it does this in a representative manner."

By reading the Hebrew word "adam" as both specific and general, other perceived problems with the biblical text disappear, Harbin wrote. For example, how else to explain Cain's flight to another region, where he finds a wife, builds a city and fears vengeance?

A passage in which Harbin appears to argue for the doctrine of the original sin of humanity also drew criticism from the IMB. In that passage dealing with Genesis 3, Harbin wrote: "Returning to consider the use of the term 'adam,' it is important to realize that this term essentially indicates that it was not the sin of a third party which gave way to the fall, but the sin of humanity itself."

At other points, Harbin seemingly draws IMB criticism for advocating that Old Testament texts first must be considered in terms of how they would have been heard in their time before reading them in light of the New Testament. Two of his principles of biblical interpretation outlined at the beginning of the syllabus state that "a text must be read within its own context, in search of its contextual message" and that "only after dealing with what a specific text says for itself should its message be compared to the message of another text."

Based on this principle, Harbin draws attention to the role of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and urges readers to consider that "Satan" is not mentioned in the Genesis text and "there is no evidence of a developed doctrine of Satan until quite late in the history of Judaism, (and thus) it would be anachronistic to assume that the narrator of Genesis 3 had a well-defined understanding of Satan."

That passage is highlighted by the IMB, but not the sentence immediately following that adds: "This does not rule out a connection between the image of the serpent here and the later concept of a malign character that acts in opposition to the will of God."

In his written response to the IMB's accusations, Harbin explains: "My intent here is to firstly treat the text in regard to the intent of the author. That done, the text may be read in light of a developed concept of Satan."

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Amateur photos capture moments surrounding JFK assassination

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- For more than three and a half decades, the retired treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas possessed a historical treasure he didn't even recognize.

Jay Skaggs shot one roll of slide film in downtown Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. Never particularly impressed with his photos from that fateful day, he shared them only with close family.

But when he and his wife decided to make their first visit to the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, site of Kennedy's assassination, Skaggs brought along his slides and a series of prints made from them.

The museum curator said Skaggs had the last known still image of President John F. Kennedy taken prior to his assassination. He also had one-of-a-kind color photos taken inside the perimeter of the crime scene investigation. Those rare images are part of an exhibit that opened Nov. 22 at the Sixth Floor Museum.

Skaggs, 82, who later served 26 years on the BGCT financial management staff, was working as business administrator at Cliff Temple Baptist Church in 1963. He went to downtown Dallas for the presidential parade at the prodding of his teenage daughter, who was granted an excused absence from Adamson High School in Oak Cliff to attend the event.

He and his family arrived early, parked their car not far from the School Book Depository, and then walked to the corner of Main and Houston. Skaggs, with the characteristic precision of an accountant, had studied the parade route to determine the best place to get photographs.

"I knew they had to make a turn onto Houston Street, and I thought the car might slow down enough that I could get a good picture," Skaggs recalled. "But when the president's car made the turn, he was looking the other direction."

Skaggs yelled, trying to attract the president's attention, but Kennedy never turned around. Giving up on capturing the image he wanted, Skaggs instead snapped a photo picturing the back of Kennedy's head, a profile of the First Lady, and a slightly obscured view of Gov. John Connally and his wife, Nellie, turned partly away from the camera.

Then he heard the first gunshot. "I thought it was a firecracker -- somebody just being stupid. Then I heard a second shot and a third one, and I knew it was a rifle," Skaggs said.

Telling his wife and daughter to stay where they were, Skaggs crossed the street, dashing between cars. He snapped a photo of the assassination scene on Elm Street, about one minute after the last shot was fired.

In the next block, he talked with -- and photographed -- Charles Brehm, an eyewitness to the shooting. Moving up to the railroad track overlooking the plaza, Skaggs continued to take photos. In the process, he met and photographed Clyde Haygood, the Dallas motorcycle officer who was the first policeman to investigate the grassy knoll area after the shooting.

When Skaggs learned that the School Book Depository was the suspected site from which the sniper fired, he hurried to that building. There he took photos of crime lab investigator Carl Day carrying out the rifles that ultimately were linked to Lee Harvey Oswald.

By that time, police officers had cordoned off the crime scene, but Skaggs was inside the secured area. At one point a member of Cliff Temple Baptist Church, attorney Jerry Gilmore, spotted him and yelled, "Skaggs, what are you doing in there?"

"I just ignored him. I learned a long time ago, if you act like you are supposed to be somewhere, nobody will question whether you belong," Skaggs said.

While he was at the School Book Depository, he heard on a police officer's handheld radio the report from Parkland Hospital. President Kennedy was dead.

Skaggs had one roll of film in his camera. He shot all the photos, had the slides processed, and then put them away. For years, only his immediate family knew they existed. Like many Dallas residents at the time, he wanted to put the events of that day behind him. "That was a tragic time for Dallas," Skaggs said.

Many years later, Skaggs' daughter asked to borrow the slides, and she had prints made from the originals. Skaggs framed a few images, taping the original slides to the back of the frames.

Last year, Skaggs returned to Dealey Plaza for only the second time in 38 years. He presented his slides and prints to the Sixth Floor Museum.

Ironically, Curator Gary Mack knew the photographs probably existed, but he never realistically expected to see them. Three years ago, the Sixth Floor Museum received a film that showed a man with a camera on the corner of Main and Houston.

“It’s been kind of a joke among the staff here: ‘Wouldn’t it be great if somebody walked in here one day with a shoebox full of pictures from that location?’ And that’s exactly what happened,” Mack said.

In the intervening months, the curator matched the slides and prints, reviewing each image to identify it, and preparing the exhibit that opened recently. He discovered that one slide was missing – the image of President Kennedy that Skaggs took on the corner of Main and Houston. Skaggs has not found the missing slide yet. And he’s not in any hurry to locate it.

“When I retired from the Baptist Building, my wife and I decided to travel. We visited all 50 states and Nova Scotia, and I have slides from all our travels. I have over 8,000 slides that nobody is interested in seeing,” he said. “Gary Mack wants me to go through all of them to find that one missing slide. I haven’t got the time to do that.”

Skaggs’ donation to the museum captured national attention, rating a mention on NBC’s Today Show and articles on news wire services. A filmmaker in California also has contacted Skaggs regarding a documentary that he is making for the Discovery Channel on the photographers of Dealey Plaza.

But Skaggs takes it all in stride. “When you’re nearly 83 years old, you don’t get too excited about this kind of thing anymore,” he said.

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--EDITOR’S NOTE: One of Jay Skaggs’ photos has been sent to Baptist state newspapers.

Judge declines to dismiss lawsuits against Missouri Baptist agencies

By Vicki Brown

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- The conservative leaders of the Missouri Baptist Convention have won one battle and lost another in their fight against five breakaway convention agencies.

Cole County (Mo.) Circuit Court Judge Thomas Brown has denied a motion to dismiss a lawsuit MBC leaders filed against five MBC-related institutions. The convention is seeking to regain control of the institutions’ governing boards.

However, Brown will allow a group of Missouri Baptist individuals and churches to file a friend-of-the-court brief saying the convention does not represent them in its lawsuit against the agencies.

Brown’s decision came on Nov. 20, the day after attorneys for the institutions and the convention presented arguments in court. The judge’s ruling means the case will go to trial.

In August, the convention filed a petition for declaratory judgment against the Baptist Home, a statewide system of assisted-living and nursing-home facilities; Missouri Baptist University in suburban St. Louis; the Jefferson City-based Missouri Baptist Foundation; Windermere Baptist Conference Center in Roach, Mo.; and Word&Way, historically the convention’s weekly newspaper.

The convention’s petition seeks to void changes the institutions made to their charters over the last two years that allow them to elect their own trustees rather than accepting trustees appointed by the convention. Attorneys for the institutions filed motions to dismiss the suit on Oct. 15.

In a written statement released Nov. 21, MBC lead attorney Michael Whitehead called the judge’s order “a very important step in the legal process.”

"The agency boards and their lawyers have based their actions for the past two years on these same legal arguments," he said. "They have told themselves and they have told the world that the law is so clear that they are right, that it is beyond dispute. But today they must admit they were wrong. Their legal theory was not convincing enough to win these motions."

However, attorneys for the defendants said the judge's decision is not unusual for a state trial court. "The ruling determines only that the plaintiffs can proceed to trial," explained the Foundation's attorney, Lawrence Tucker of the Kansas City firm Armstrong, Teasdale. "It is important to note that the judge made no specific findings on the merits of the case or on any of the arguments. No attorney can say why the court made the ruling. From a purely statistical point of view, it would have been unusual for the court to dismiss the cases."

Attorney Jim Shoemake, whose firm represents the Baptist Home, Windermere and Word&Way, agreed. "This is nothing more than a preliminary ruling. It doesn't go to the merits of the claim at all," he said.

Arguments at the hour-long hearing Nov. 19 centered on the convention's legal standing to file the suit in the first place and whether the MBC, as an unincorporated voluntary association of churches, is a "member" -- a legal owner -- of the agencies.

Shoemake noted that the institutions previously had simply given the convention the "privilege" of electing their trustees, not the "right." He cited a Missouri Supreme Court decision from 1935 that the convention could not sue or be sued, and that its right to elect agencies trustees was an "incidental benefit."

Attorneys for the convention said Missouri law has changed since the 1935 case, arguing that under those changes an unincorporated entity could be a member of an institution and has rights as a member.

Whitehead, the convention's lead attorney, used a chart to demonstrate that the MBC takes two legal forms -- the annual meeting of messengers that exists for a few days each year and an unincorporated association of churches with continuous ministry that funnels money from cooperating congregations to each agency. He said the institutions' most recent charters gave the convention the right to elect trustees through messengers' votes. "The majority vote constitutes the will of the convention," he said.

In another twist in the case, a friend-of-the-court brief signed by 2,548 individuals and 37 MBC churches says the convention's suit against the institutions doesn't represent their views.

Over the objections of the convention's attorneys, the judge allowed attorney Bart Tichenor to file the brief at the Nov. 19 hearing. Tichenor said his brief includes signatures of 2,548 individuals who are members of 149 Missouri Baptist churches. The 37 churches took official action to sign onto the brief corporately.

The churches and individuals oppose the lawsuit on the grounds they represent the unincorporated MBC as much as the six MBC churches in whose name the suit was originally filed. Because the judge overruled the motions to dismiss, Tichenor must file another request for the brief to be considered if the case goes to trial.

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- Robert Marus contributed to this story.

ABP drops editor position in budget-cutting move

By ABP Staff

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Associated Baptist Press will eliminate one of its six staff positions at the end of the year for financial reasons.

The move will leave news editor Bob Allen, a nine-year ABP employee, without a job as of Dec. 31. Faced with a projected \$40,000 deficit for 2002 and a reduced budget for 2003, ABP's board of directors voted

unanimously to eliminate the news editor position. Executive Editor Greg Warner will assume responsibility for the daily news operation.

"We hope our supporters and users of our news service will understand that this is our way of focusing on our essential mission -- providing the best quality information about Baptist work and life," said board chair Rebecca Wiggs, an attorney in Jackson, Miss. "Downsizing is never easy. There is a real human cost involved. This was the only way we could secure the financial future of ABP ... that would keep our overall organization intact."

Associated Baptist Press is a 12-year-old independent news organization based in Jacksonville, Fla., and funded by subscribers, churches, organizations and individual donors. Since 1998, ABP has doubled its budget in order to start a development program, begin publishing FaithWorks magazine and open a news bureau in Washington.

Warner said the current economic slump has affected almost every source of ABP revenue. "We have not recovered from the drop in contributions that almost all non-profits suffered last year," he said. Gifts from individuals alone were down 52 percent in the 12 months after the terrorist bombings of Sept. 11, he said.

The organization's revenues dropped 16 percent in 2001 to \$569,547 and are expected to dip another 3 percent by the end of 2002, board members were told.

ABP's 21-member board, meeting in executive session in Jacksonville Nov. 22-23, considered several options to reduce the 2003 budget, all of which involved eliminating personnel, Warner said.

"We've already cut all the non-essentials and many employee benefits from our budget," he said. "The only way to protect our core ministry is to reduce personnel. But with two full-time journalists and two others with journalistic skills on staff, we are ready and able to make it work."

"We hate to lose Bob's talent and commitment to ABP," Warner continued. "He's a seasoned journalist with impeccable news judgment who has helped us shape this organization. All of us are grieving this loss, both personally and professionally."

The ABP board delayed action on a budget for 2003, but it is expected to total approximately \$550,000 once approved.

In addition to eliminating the news editor position, board members agreed to reevaluate other staff and programs in the spring, including FaithWorks. The four-year-old magazine is funded by subscriptions, advertising and designated gifts but has likewise suffered from the sluggish economy.

Allen was hired by ABP in November 1993 while editor of the Baptist True Union, now Baptist Life, a newspaper serving Baptists in Maryland and Delaware.

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