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\*\*\*\*\* MAR 24 2003

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February 18, 2003 Volume: 03-17

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SBC may cut BWA funds to start  
network of 'like-minded' Christians

By Philip Poole

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention will remain a member of the Baptist World Alliance but will begin developing a "new concept" for worldwide relationships that is expected to divert money from BWA.

The SBC Executive Committee approved a recommendation Feb. 17 that allows the convention's Empowering Kingdom Growth task force to "look toward strengthening relationships with other like-minded Christian bodies" worldwide. Empowering Kingdom Growth is an evangelism initiative launched at the 2002 SBC annual meeting in St. Louis.

The move stems from Southern Baptist dissatisfaction that BWA is poised to grant membership to the rival Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The recommendation was made by a nine-member study committee reactivated in September 2002 to consider the SBC's membership in BWA. The recommendation was approved with no dissenting votes and with virtually no discussion. The 88-member Executive Committee conducts Southern Baptist Convention business between SBC annual meetings.

The committee's recommendation requested that the Executive Committee consider "providing funding for Empowering Kingdom Growth in the SBC operating budget that begins Oct. 1," but the report did not include specific amounts. Chapman said he anticipates that some of the SBC's current \$425,000 annual funding for BWA would be "redirected" to the Empowering Kingdom Growth initiative.

That funding change could come as early as today (Feb. 18) when the Executive Committee concludes its meeting in Nashville. The SBC is the

largest contributor to BWA.

The background report provided to Executive Committee members said the study committee is not recommending withdrawal from BWA "at the present time" despite growing concerns by some Southern Baptist leaders about the possibility that BWA will approve a membership request from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. CBF is a breakaway group of moderate Southern Baptists that employs its own missionaries and has its own funding plans.

The written report and comments by Executive Committee president Morris Chapman focused on the CBF membership application. The report said the study committee was "offering no statement on the issue of the [CBF's] membership in the BWA" but noted that the SBC has "much more than a passing interest" in BWA's decision.

The Baptist World Alliance, founded in 1905, is an umbrella organization of 200 Baptist unions and conventions worldwide, representing 45 million baptized believers in 193,000 churches.

"Last summer we found ourselves in a dilemma," Chapman said, referring to the CBF membership application to the Baptist World Alliance. He said it is "not the place" of the SBC to tell BWA how to act on the membership question but that Southern Baptists are "grappling with the question of whether the Baptist World Alliance or the Southern Baptist Convention is the best representative of Southern Baptists around the world."

Chapman later told reporters that he was "deeply disappointed" in the procedure used by the BWA membership committee in considering the CBF request. In July 2002 the membership committee reported to the BWA executive committee that it was considering approval of the request if the CBF would distinguish itself as "separate" from the SBC, which the CBF did last September.

Chapman said the usual procedure for membership was not followed during the July discussion. "[The membership committee] seemed determined to report their recommendation before they made a formal recommendation," he said. That action made the "300-member body a membership committee of the whole" and seemed to turn the process "on its head."

"For the first time in my 12 years of involvement with the BWA, I felt disappointment," Chapman said.

The issue is not so much that there was a "glitch" in the process but in the procedure, Chapman said. "It caused us to stop and rethink that maybe we'd been spinning our wheels rather than making progress" in relationships with BWA.

He also expressed concern about who would monitor whether or not the conditions are being followed. "If [CBF] separates from the SBC, does that mean that from now on they will build churches from the historical perspective of starting new churches rather than soliciting funds from existing Southern Baptist churches?" Chapman said.

Chapman later told reporters that the new SBC-led worldwide emphasis "won't be a duplication of the BWA." Initiatives might include Bible conferences and church-growth conferences that would involve "primarily Southern Baptist entities" around the world. He emphasized that Empowering Kingdom Growth is "not a formal organization with formal membership" and the focus would be "on relationships, not organization." It will take 18-24 months to "determine how that will evolve," he added.

Chapman noted that Southern Baptists "have strong relationships with other Baptist groups who are not part of the BWA." He said that he expected mixed response to the new plan but that any new idea "often has room for misunderstandings."

The study committee will continue to meet "as needed in carrying out its assignment of evaluating the relationships between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist World Alliance."

He said there is uncertainty about the process "at this time" but the ultimate decision may be for the SBC to be members of BWA while still "reaching out in kingdom relationships" with other groups.

Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Virginia-based Baptist World Alliance, was not immediately available for comment.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship declined to comment on the SBC action. "We are in due diligence in our application process with the BWA," said CBF spokesperson Ben McDade. "When we hear from that body, we will have a response."

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Texas men's group to work  
with both Baptist conventions

By John Hall

AQUILLA, Texas (ABP) -- The executive board of Texas Baptist Men adopted a resolution reaffirming the organization's unique relationship with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and agreeing to "officially work" with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, the newer conservative convention.

The board unanimously passed the resolution and faith statement by secret ballot at its Feb. 15 meeting at the Latham Springs Baptist Encampment. Board members stood and applauded when the outcome of the vote was announced.

"This permits us to go into every single [Baptist] church in Texas to do the ministry we are called to do," said Andy Andreason, president of Texas Baptist Men. "We want to be able to do what God wants, whenever he wants and wherever he wants."

Although Texas Baptist Men is a self-governing missions affiliate of the BGCT, it is housed in BGCT facilities and depends heavily on the BGCT for funding (\$926,888 in 2003).

The new document affirms the "unique affiliation and partnership" with the Baptist General Convention of Texas but also confirms partnerships with other state conventions and the two mission boards of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Lastly, the statement says Texas Baptist Men "will officially work" with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, its churches and associations in a "mutually supportive relationship."

The SBTC is not required to provide any monetary support. "There's no commitment," Andreason said. "There's no money. That's the way we wanted it."

The resolution should unify Texas Baptist Men and quell threats from some SBTC churches to remove their volunteers from the organization, said Leo Smith, interim executive director of TBM and coauthor of the document.

The resolution follows more than two years of negotiations and several unsuccessful attempts to define a working relationship between the three bodies.

In December 2000, Texas Baptist Men declined to sign a formal agreement

to enter into a fraternal relationship with the SBTC. Instead, the men's organization revised its constitution to allow membership for laymen from Baptist churches affiliated with a "Baptist association in Texas, the Baptist General Convention of Texas or the Southern Baptist Convention." Later the TBM executive board adopted a resolution that enabled the group to help any Baptist church in Texas.

But those actions did not satisfy leaders of the new conservative convention, who wanted to be recognized for a working relationship to occur, Smith said at a Texas Baptist Men meeting last February.

At that meeting, a task force presented a resolution that proposed a "working relationship" with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention and all Texas associations. A heated discussion followed and, although the resolution was approved 44-15, it was tabled.

The 2003 resolution was presented after months of revision and conversations with leaders of both Texas conventions. The SBTC executive committee will consider the working relationship April 3. The BGCT does not have to offer any further approval of the resolution.

The approved resolution includes a series of theological clarifications of the group's beliefs. TBM affirmed a belief in the Bible as a completely accurate "final authority" for its faith and practice, salvation by grace, Jesus as the model for ministry and a Christian calling to ministry. The document does not include the term inerrancy or reference the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message statement.

"I commend Leo Smith on his hard work in helping to clear the way for Texas Baptist Men to work with the men in the SBTC churches," said Charles Wade, executive director of the BGCT. "Our close and unique relationship with Texas Baptist Men will continue and we will work to encourage and help them to the glory of God."

In a statement, Jim Richards, executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, said the organization "is delighted that Texas Baptist Men want to provide missions services through an official relationship. Hopefully, together we can touch many lives for Jesus."  
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CBF mid-year contributions  
down 6 percent from last year

By ABP staff

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Midway through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's fiscal year, contributions from churches and individuals are down 6 percent from the same period last year.

Contributions from churches and individuals, the largest portion of CBF's budget, totaled \$6.3 million during the six-month period, which is 16 percent behind the budget projection. The CBF's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.

There was some good news in the revenue report, however. Total revenue during the period reached \$8.5 million, an increase of 24.5 percent compared to the same period last year. The boost came from an increase in designated giving, most notably a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment.

The CBF's Offering for Global Missions also increased. So far this year, the offering has brought in \$1.35 million, a 9.4 percent increase over the \$1.23 million collected during the same period last year. In total, designated contributions are up 78 percent over 2001-02.

The number of churches contributing directly to CBF declined slightly for the first six months, while the number of individuals contributing increased.

More than 1,385 churches made contributions by mid-year, compared to 1,409 churches during the same period in fiscal 2001-02. Church counts are approximate because CBF does not receive the names of churches that contribute through the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

A total of 2,238 individuals made contributions during the period, compared to 2,168 individuals a year ago.

The \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment is funding the new Initiative for Ministerial Excellence. According to CBF, the grant indicates that respected funding agencies are finding CBF to be a worthy ministry partner for their resources.

Subtracting the Lilly grant, total CBF revenue for the period is down 4.7 percent. That discrepancy, CBF leaders said, is explained in part by an increase in 2001-02 designated giving in response to the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

CBF leaders said they are responding to the lower-than-projected contributions.

"When we approved the budget for this year at the general assembly in Fort Worth, we knew it was an ambitious budget," said Jim Strawn, chief financial officer for CBF. "We put in place controls to monitor revenues month-to-month. We were prepared to make adjustments as necessary. We have been making internal adjustments. We also have been contacting our partners to inform them of the changes we have had to make. We believe this fiscal restraint is responsible and will help us remain financially stable in an overall unstable economy."

Lower contributions to CBF mirror a national trend among nonprofit organizations and religious groups. Nationally, about half of all nonprofits had a decline in contributions through the first 10 months of 2002, according to a survey by Philanthropic Research. The report also showed more than 68 percent of religious nonprofits surveyed experienced flat or declining contributions.

"When you do ministry and strive to be the presence of Christ in the world, there is a certain level of frustration from having to quantify growth," said Daniel Vestal, coordinator of CBF. "We took a bold position last summer in Fort Worth when we set this budget because we believe we are called to be bold and visionary people. Planning, responsible spending, fiscal restraint and God's grace are helping us cope with a bad economy. We continue to send personnel to a world without borders and provide quality resources to congregations, even while we grapple with financial realities."

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Insecurity fosters conflict  
in human family, Forbes says

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Sibling rivalry in the human family springs from insecurity, renowned preacher James Forbes said at a recent family conference.

War, racism, class distinctions and socio-economic barriers all are expressions of humankind's attempts to "hold insecurity at bay," said Forbes, senior pastor of the historic Riverside Church in New York City.

Drawing on the Old Testament stories of brothers -- Jacob and Esau, as

well as Cain and Abel -- Forbes said that hunger for security is the force that drives apart members of the human family. "No matter how healthy your baby is, that child has this Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau stuff in him," he said.

Quoting theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Forbes said, "At the heart of human suffering is humankind's unwillingness to accept and trust God's offer of security. Therefore, we set about in myriad ways to create our own false sense of security."

God has told humanity that each individual is "precious, honorable, beloved" in his sight, but many people refuse to allow God's grace to "penetrate the shell of defensiveness."

Individual families can become places where the human family hears God's offer of security, Forbes maintained. "Family has got to be the place where God gets you ready to trust," he said.

And God blesses individual families so they can be a blessing to all the human family, Forbes continued, building upon that theme in another message.

"Our faith does not permit narrow narcissistic nuclear nesting," he said. "We each must be secure enough to venture out into the world as an emissary of grace... God works through individual families -- ecclesiastical, national and nuclear -- that God may bless all the families of the earth."

Forbes spoke at a statewide conference sponsored by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

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Americans United files suits against  
faith-based prison program in Iowa

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Should the state of Iowa continue funding a prison rehabilitation program that gives special benefits to inmates who agree to study a conversion-based Christian curriculum?

A Washington religious-freedom group doesn't think so. On Feb. 12, Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed two lawsuits against the InnerChange program at Iowa's Newton Correctional Facility.

The case could have significant implications for President Bush's faith-based initiatives because it deals with a program Bush has touted as a model of cooperation between government agencies and religious social-service providers.

The suits -- one on behalf of a Mormon inmate and the other on behalf of family members of other inmates -- accuse Iowa state officials and InnerChange of a host of First-Amendment violations. Among other things, the plaintiffs allege:

-- That InnerChange illegally uses government funds to support religious indoctrination;

-- That InnerChange illegally discriminates against inmates who are not willing to subscribe to the tenets of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity;

-- That InnerChange illegally uses government funds to discriminate in hiring against workers who will not agree to abide by a fundamentalist Protestant statement of faith that includes an assertion that the Bible "is without error in all its teachings" and that Christ will return

before his kingdom is established on earth;

-- That InnerChange and prison officials illegally give preferential treatment to inmates who agree to be part of its program while not offering the same privileges to the general prison population.

InnerChange is run by Prison Fellowship, the Virginia-based charity headed by popular Christian author and former Watergate figure Charles Colson. Prison Fellowship officials said in a Feb. 12 press release that the suit is off-base. "The InnerChange Freedom Initiative in operation in Iowa in no way violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution," the release said. "In fact, federal law allows a state to include religious organizations as social-service providers."

They also pointed to studies that suggest the program is much better at rehabilitating offenders than other programs, calling it "the nation's most successful program for reducing prisoner recidivism."

But the program's success may be irrelevant if it does not pass constitutional muster.

For example, Americans United's complaint alleges that the program uses government money to pay for the program's religious indoctrination. "According to InnerChange's own promotional materials, 'Biblical principles are integrated into the entire course curriculum of IFI, rather than being compartmentalized in specific classes,' and 'all programming - all day, every day - is Christ-centered.' It is therefore impossible to separate the sectarian aspects of the InnerChange program from the non-sectarian."

Although federal courts in recent years have upheld delivery of some social services by deeply religious organizations, they have not allowed government funding to pay for indoctrination.

In a phone interview with Associated Baptist Press, Prison Fellowship president Mark Earley defended his program's constitutionality. "Although this program is a distinctly Christ-centered program, not everything that goes on in the program has a spiritual aspect to it," Earley said. "A lot of what goes on in the program is how to get along in the outside world."

But Americans United lawyer Alex Luchenitser said program officials are being disingenuous by simultaneously claiming the program is both thoroughly "Christ-centered" and partially secular. "There's no way you can separate the religious parts from the non-religious parts," Luchenitser said. In fact, pointing to a part of AU's complaint, Luchenitser said that, in an attempt to justify their use of public funds, "what Prison Fellowship is trying to do is apparently arbitrarily apply different percentages to parts of the program and say, 'this part is sectarian, and this part is not sectarian.'"

The complaint notes that, in official documents, InnerChange indicates the percentage of each staff member's salary that supposedly covers secular purposes, including a position called "biblical counselor." According to InnerChange, their biblical counselors devote 16 percent of their time to secular work.

But Earley said that such a contention could have unintended consequences. "Following the logic of [AU's] argument, it would mean there could be no chaplains in prisons."

Likewise, Earley disputed Americans United's claims that the program discriminated against inmates who were not willing to convert to evangelical Protestantism. "One does not have to be a Christian to participate in this program. We have people of different faiths participate in the program, and people of no faith at all," Earley said.

"It's open to everyone, as long as they understand it's a Christ-centered program."

According to Americans United, however, InnerChange allows an inmate to continue in the program only if he "demonstrates a belief in Jesus Christ," "prays in the Spirit," and "acts as a witness of God's grace to others."

Earley of Prison Fellowship said inmates could complete the program without ever becoming Christians. "Someone could be in the program and finish, and, you know, we don't know if someone comes to Christ or not."

Additionally, Americans United contends that prisoners in the program are given preferential treatment in many areas of prison life over other inmates. The suit says the InnerChange prisoners are housed in an area of the prison that was formerly the "honors unit," for inmates with especially good behavior. "They gave that part of the prison to InnerChange, and that's the best part of the prison to live in," Luchenitser said. "Prisoners who are either fundamentalist Christians or willing to become fundamentalist Christians get that part of the prison."

That section of the prison, according to the lawsuit, contains private bathrooms and other amenities not available in the rest of the facility.

Earley declined to address specific claims, saying he was not sufficiently familiar with the program's details to comment. But he did note that prison programs frequently offer special arrangements to prisoners. "I think it's important to understand that ... every program carries with it certain responsibilities and what some people would call 'privileges,'" he said. "There's no question that there are people in [the InnerChange] program who get to do things that other prisoners don't."

Earley contended that Americans United is attacking the program because of its success. "The fact that this program works is incredible, and it's a testimony to the power of the gospel to change lives. It's amazing," Earley said. "This program, and this approach, has an attempt to radically change the hope that the prisoner has and the hope that society has for what the correctional program can do for individuals."  
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