



counsel missionaries after a shooting at a Southern Baptist hospital in Yemen in December.

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BCE hires veteran journalist  
as editor of EthicsDaily.com

By ABP staff

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Baptist Center for Ethics has hired veteran journalist Bob Allen as managing editor of EthicsDaily.com, an Internet service operated by the independent, non-profit agency based in Nashville, Tenn.

Allen, 47, most recently worked nine years as news editor of Associated Baptist Press in Jacksonville, Fla., until the news service eliminated his job last year due to lack of funding.

Before that, he worked eight years for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, first as associate editor and then for five years as editor of the two-state convention's news journal.

"EthicsDaily.com has already emerged as an influential voice for news and perspective, but it is still a well-kept secret to many," Allen said. "I would like to see it become a primary source of information for Baptists around the world."

A native of Marion, Ill., Allen has a journalism degree from Southern Illinois University and in 1985 earned the master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He has won awards for news, feature and editorial writing.

Allen begins his new job April 15 and will move to Nashville. He and his wife, Vicki, have two children -- Patrick, 17, and Amy, 13.

Allen succeeds Cliff Vaughn, BCE's associate director for EthicsDaily.com. Vaughn will work part time as a culture editor, writing and coordinating movie, TV and website reviews, as well as commenting on culture and media.

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Retired BJC director Dunn  
improving after surgery

By Robert Marus

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- Retired Baptist Joint Committee executive director James Dunn is improving after experiencing a tear in his aorta March 26.

Dunn collapsed while with a colleague on campus at Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C., where he is serving as a visiting professor.

The hospital reports it has upgraded Dunn's condition from critical to serious. He remains in the hospital's intensive-care unit.

According to Chris Chapman, Dunn's pastor at Knollwood Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, quick medical attention averted what could have been an even more serious condition. Doctors at Winston-Salem's Baptist Hospital performed emergency surgery March 26 to repair the tear.

Chapman said that Dunn has continued to improve after a difficult few hours following the surgery. "Since about 8 or so Friday morning, he's been very stable the whole time, and progressed like [his doctors would]

want," the pastor said in a phone interview. "Everything looks to be on course for what he's dealing with. But it's obviously a very, very serious enterprise."

Chapman reported that, as of April 1, Dunn remains attached to a ventilator for breathing. He is also heavily medicated to keep him unconscious. However, Chapman said, doctors are attempting to wean Dunn from the ventilator slowly. If his progress continues, he should be breathing on his own permanently in the next couple of days.

Dunn served as executive director of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee from 1980 until 1999. Upon his retirement, he began teaching at Wake Forest. He and his wife, Marilyn, maintain a home near the BJC's Capitol Hill offices, and Dunn continues to serve as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee Foundation.

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Illinois pastor sentenced  
to 7 years for sexual assault

By Michael Leathers

OLNEY, Ill. (ABP) - A former Illinois Southern Baptist pastor received a seven-year prison sentence March 31 for two counts of criminal sexual assault involving a teenage girl.

Leslie Mason, 35, former pastor of Olney Southern Baptist Church in southeastern Illinois, pled guilty in January to the felony counts as part of a deal with prosecutors to dismiss eight other counts involving two teenage girls.

The single pastor's assaults began when the two women, now in their early 20s, were 15 and 13 years old and continued for six years. The women, whose identities are being protected, both testified Mason told them he would have to leave the church and could never see them again if they told anyone about their sexual relationship.

"I would have liked to have seen him get more time," said the mother of one victim after the sentencing. "I'm disappointed that he continues to manipulate others into believing he is something that he is not."

Mason, stoic throughout the sentencing hearing, became emotional when he read a statement before Judge James Hill passed sentence. Sobbing loudly, Mason said, "What I have done is without excuse. ... From the bottom of my heart, I am sorry for the hurt I have caused."

Mason pleaded with the judge to give him probation but no jail time, pointing out he already has lost his career, been labeled a sex offender, and brought embarrassment to his church, friends and family. The judge said probation would be "inconsistent with the ends of justice."

In building his case for the maximum 30-year sentence, Richard Rybak of the Illinois Attorney General's office called both young women, their parents and a sergeant with the Illinois State Police to testify.

Mason's attorney, Richard Kline, called witnesses who each testified that Mason was now repentant and remorseful and no longer a danger to society or young girls.

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CARE Act primed for passage  
with controversial section dropped

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The sponsor of a Senate bill, which the White House counted as an important part of President Bush's "faith-based initiatives," has agreed to drop a provision that opponents said would cross church-state lines and allow employment discrimination with federal dollars. Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) announced in a March 27 press conference at the Capitol that he agreed with fellow Senate leaders to drop a portion of the CARE (Charity, Aid, Recovery and Empowerment) Act of 2003 in order to ensure its passage.

Santorum and other Senate leaders "have agreed in a unanimous-consent request to remove that provision from the bill," he said. "We have spoken to several who have expressed concerns... The ones I have spoken with have said that, if that issue is off the table, this can pass."

The CARE Act is the Senate version of President Bush's faith-based initiatives. Bush's plan would expand the ability of the government to grant funding to deeply religious organizations -- including churches and mosques -- for the provision of social services.

The plan has proven controversial on two fronts: strong supporters of church-state separation say the government should not provide direct funding to heavily religious organizations, even for the delivery of so-called "secular services"; and the government should not fund religious organizations that are, under special provisions in federal civil-rights law, allowed to discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion or ideology.

Although the House passed a faith-based bill that included both controversial provisions, the CARE Act was crafted in the Senate last year as a compromise that would avoid those two pitfalls. However, a section of that proposal stated organizations that have religious names, religious art or icons on their walls or religious requirements for service on their boards of directors should be treated the same as other potential government grantees for social services.

Federal law already allows for organizations with some religious affiliation to receive funding under all federal programs so long as the groups are not pervasively religious in their make-up or their work.

Therefore, some congressional critics thought the CARE Act provision left the door open for the Bush administration to interpret the statutes as expanding government's ability to fund pervasively religious groups directly. "The Senate language is less direct than the House language, but it could be just as devastating in its impact by potentially allowing billions in federal tax dollars to go to churches, along with the regulations and red tape that go along with that money," said Rep. Chet Edwards (D-Texas), a frequent congressional watchdog on church-state issues, regarding last year's version of the CARE Act.

Edwards echoed other congressional opponents of the legislation when he also questioned why the bill did not include explicit protections against federal dollars being used to fund religious organizations that could practice employment discrimination. "I just can't imagine...the U.S. Senate wanting to be silent on this question: Should a church associated with Bob Jones University be able to use federal tax dollars in making a sign that says, 'No Jews, no Catholics need apply here for this federally funded job'?" Edwards asked. "When it comes to the fundamental principles of church-state separation and not discriminating on people based on their religion, silence [in the bill] is totally inadequate."

Opponents in the Senate, led by Sen. Jack Reed, (D-R.I.), attempted to amend the bill to address such concerns last year. However, when Republican leaders rebuffed their attempts, the opponents kept the bill from coming to a floor vote.

Reed spokesman Greg McCarthy said Santorum's announcement was welcome,

though Reed and his colleagues will make sure that Senate leaders don't allow the controversial parts to be re-added into the bill -- either from the Senate floor or in a conference committee when House and Senate members hammer out any differences between versions of legislation passed by each chamber. "Obviously, the legislative process is a long one," McCarthy said. "So they'll work with Sen. Santorum and members of the House to ensure that a final bill will represent the spirit of what Sen. Santorum had to say today."

Some of the White House's toughest critics on faith-based issues said they were encouraged by Santorum's surprise announcement. "Right now, the consensus is this is something that our side can work with and they're willing to look at this as a serious proposal," Joe Conn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said following the press conference.

The CARE Act is S. 272.

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