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**Southern Baptist messengers cut
BWA allocation by \$125,000**

By Trennis Henderson

PHOENIX (ABP) – A proposal to reduce the Southern Baptist Convention's allocation to Baptist World Alliance by more than 30 percent was approved June 17 with no discussion almost.

The funding cut, included in the SBC's 2003-2004 operating budget, initially was adopted by messengers to the annual SBC meeting without discussion or debate. Moments later, after the convention had moved on to other business, messenger Jim Stroud was recognized by SBC President Jack Graham.

Stroud, a messenger from Tennessee, asked about the possibility of reconsidering and amending the earlier action. When told that would be out of order, Stroud requested "an explanation from the committee as to their reason for decreasing the allocation to the Baptist World Alliance."

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee and a BWA vice president, said a study committee recommended decreasing the amount being contributed to the BWA because "it appeared Southern Baptists were not being ... heard adequately" on issues of concern to SBC leaders.

Sherry Reynolds, a messenger from Georgia, asked what the specific issues were that prompted the funding cut. Chapman said while press reports focused on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's pending application for BWA membership, SBC leaders primarily were concerned about the membership application process.

Chapman charged that the BWA membership committee "exceeded their authority by going to the full general council and relating to them the conditions on which the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship would be accepted" as a member later this year. Chapman said he and other SBC representatives "took strong issue with the process."

As a result, the SBC's 2003-2004 operating budget of \$7.84 million includes a \$300,000 allocation for BWA, a cut of \$125,000 from the current \$425,000 line item. The remaining \$125,000 was earmarked for "Kingdom relationships," a proposal for the SBC to "look toward strengthening relationships with other like-minded Christian bodies" worldwide.

When the proposal initially was approved in February by the SBC Executive Committee, Chapman said the Kingdom relationships emphasis "won't be a duplication of the BWA." He said initiatives might include Bible conferences and church-growth seminars that would involve "primarily Southern Baptist entities" around the world.

In an interview after the June 17 vote, BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz said BWA leaders are "very sorry that the SBC has partially defunded the Baptist World Alliance." He noted that the BWA "has been close to the heart of Southern Baptists in working together with Baptists around the world" since the organization's founding in 1905.

The SBC is a charter member of BWA. An umbrella organization of 200 Baptist unions and conventions worldwide, the alliance represents 43 million baptized believers in 193,000 churches.

"We shall continue to work and pray for Southern Baptists and to express appreciation for their encouragement and support over the years," Lotz said.

Emphasizing that he and BWA president Billy Kim of Korea "want Southern Baptists to know that we shall continue to work with all Southern Baptists and their leadership," Lotz added "We belong together because we belong to Jesus Christ. We want to work with all Baptists all over the world."

In other business, Executive Committee proposals adopted by SBC messengers include:

— Approving a 2003-2004 SBC Cooperative Program allocation budget of \$182.3 million. Budget allocations include International Mission Board, 50 percent; North American Mission Board, 22.79 percent; SBC seminaries and historical library and archives, 21.64 percent; SBC operating budget and Annuity Board, 4.08 percent; and Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, 1.49 percent. The first \$250,000 of any budget overage will be allocated "to fund the enhancement of Cooperative Program education at the six seminaries."

— Revising the IMB's ministry statement. IMB President Jerry Rankin described the change as "a restatement and updated wording that more accurately reflects the focus and work of the IMB. The revised document focuses on "nurturing church planting movements" as a strategy to make the gospel accessible to all people. It also highlights "sending" rather than "appointing" missionaries, recognizing a growing emphasis on volunteer workers.

— Selecting San Antonio, Texas, as the site for the 2007 SBC annual meeting to be held June 12-13.

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Southern Baptist president says homosexuals can change

By Greg Warner

PHOENIX, Ariz. – Homosexuals are able to change and leave the gay lifestyle, Jack Graham told reporters soon after his re-election as Southern Baptist Convention president

Graham threw his support behind a new SBC emphasis, announced earlier in the day, to convince homosexuals to become heterosexual. "We do not believe that a person is captured by a lifestyle that does not please God," Graham said during a press conference at the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix, Ariz.

This year's convention is emphasizing a "biblical view" of the family, which Graham and others said does not include homosexuality. A group of protesters who gathered outside Phoenix Civic Plaza disagreed and urged Southern Baptists to change their anti-gay stance.

Homosexuality is "obviously a huge cultural issue," Graham said. "Perhaps some would assume that Southern Baptists are angry or full of hatred toward this group of people. We have those, of course, who have expressed their views and opinions here on the streets with pamphlets and so on," he said, referring to the protesters.

Graham said Southern Baptists "oppose the homosexual lifestyle" but want "lovingly" to persuade gays to change. "We want every person to know that Jesus loves them and that the message of the gospel is for every person," said Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in suburban Dallas.

Graham and other speakers held up a traditional view of the family as the answer to many social problems. "I believe [the breakdown of] the family is the greatest social issue of our time," Graham said. Broken families are a problem not only outside the church but inside as well, he said.

Graham noted the elevated importance of the family in the recently revised Baptist Faith and Message. While the doctrinal statement takes no position on women working outside the home, he said, "we're clear on the responsibilities of both mom and dad to be good parents and to prioritize their children."

On other issues, Graham said Southern Baptists will make every effort to remain a part of the Baptist World Alliance, even though the convention voted earlier in the day to reduce SBC funding of the international umbrella group from \$425,000 to \$300,000.

The SBC has been the largest participant and largest funder among the 200-plus BWA member bodies. But Graham said Southern Baptists and the BWA are "struggling" in their relationship. "There are issues at stake that are very serious issues."

Southern Baptist leaders oppose BWA's plans to grant membership to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which is composed mainly of former Southern Baptists.

"We were concerned the process was becoming flawed and Southern Baptists were not being heard or properly understood [regarding] our viewpoints on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and other issues I'm not prepared to talk about today," Graham said.

"It's our desire ... to work these difficulties out and [be] able to join hands with Baptists across the world," he said. "Southern Baptists will do everything we can, with integrity to our own denomination and in stewardship of our own funds, to make this work."

"I think we'll know more after this year as to where we stand," he added.

"We will be working with Baptists around the world in some way," he said, suggesting the SBC might create or join another international Baptist group. "It's not our desire to be isolated from other Baptists. It's not our desire to be fragmented in any way."

Graham also said he is not concerned about the rise of Calvinistic doctrine among SBC

seminary professors and students. "I believe we have a healthy balance among various views," he said. "I am confident that our Baptist Faith and Message encompasses both streams on that issue."

But he added he would not want to see Southern Baptists embrace "an elitist doctrine" or minimize the importance of evangelism, which are common criticisms of Calvinism.

Graham said he also is not worried about the future of missions in the SBC despite a funding shortfall at the International Mission Board. He said the shortfall was due to the economic downturn and added the mission agency had suffered only "a small fallout" from its decision to require missionaries to sign the Baptist Faith and Message statement. "I have a great deal of confidence in our International Mission Board," he said.

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Mohler says Jewish evangelism hangs on biblical authority

By Mark Wingfield

PHOENIX (ABP) – Jewish evangelism, homosexuality and the authority of Scripture are three "trip wires" confronting the evangelical Christian church, Al Mohler told a gathering of Messianic Jews June 16.

Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a frequent apologist for the Southern Baptist Convention on national TV, spoke to the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship. The fellowship held its gathering prior to the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix.

Jewish evangelism relates to homosexuality, Mohler declared, because both issues are based on the authority of the Bible.

If Christians reject the Bible's authority on Jewish evangelism, they also loosen the Bible's authority to call homosexuality sinful, he asserted, according to a Baptist Press report. "The bottom-line question is this: Will we obey or disobey the Word of God?"

The Bible must be the absolute standard of truth and authority, Mohler said. He called up Romans 1:16 and passages in the book of Acts to declare the Christian gospel is "the power of God unto salvation for the Jew first and then the Greek."

Jewish evangelism begins with the understanding that Jesus Christ rightly claimed to be the promised Messiah who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, he explained. "It is clear from biblical text, in the Gospels, that Jesus is claiming to be none other than the Messiah, the promised one of Israel."

Christians who shy away from Jewish evangelism misunderstand what it means to be a Jew, Mohler asserted. Previously, he said, a person who identified himself as a Jew made a statement about adherence to the Jewish faith, but today claiming to be a Jew may mean only an ethnic designation, he added.

Thus evangelism of Jews is viewed as aggressive imperialism or "ethnic genocide," he said. "Judaism has been turned into a folk way, a way of life, an ethnic identity, and it is now considered impossible in a postmodern society to address Jewish people theologically."

Also, Christians who avoid Jewish evangelism by arguing that God established one covenant with Jews and another covenant with everyone else wrongly interpret Scripture,

Mohler said. Jews must hear the gospel just as much as anyone else who does not profess faith in Christ as the Messiah, Mohler said, comparing evangelists to doctors who warn patients about life-threatening tumors.

"The act of Christian truth-telling, telling the truth of the gospel to an unbeliever, Jew or Gentile, is the ultimate act of Christian love," Mohler said.

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Vines defends 'exclusive' gospel in family-themed Pastors Conference

By ABP staff

PHOENIX (ABP) – Just in case America didn't hear him the first time, Jerry Vines made a point of speaking clearly at this year's Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference: "All religions are not the same. All religions are not equally true."

Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., and a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, drew the ire of Muslims and others when at last year's Pastors' Conference he called the founder of Islam a "demon-possessed pedophile" and declared that Christianity is superior to Islam.

That led to a later segment aired on the "NBC Nightly News" in which anchor Tom Brokaw described Vines as "preaching hate."

Speaking in Phoenix this year, Vines acknowledged the media waiting to hear whether he would address the topic again. He didn't disappoint, although he did not speak specifically about Islam.

"I'm going to give all you media what you came for, and I'm going to say it slowly, so that even Tom Brokaw can get it," he said to a round of applause. "All religions are not the same. All religions are not equally true. There is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved except the name of Jesus."

In a conference organized around a family emphasis, Vines preached on the Old Testament prophet Enoch, whom Scripture says "walked with God." He urged pastors to "walk on" and live "in step with God," continually preaching the Bible rather than sugar-coating the truth.

The two-day Pastor's Conference, which opened on Father's Day, was held immediately prior to the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix. Away from the convention hall, ministers took advantage of a free family counseling service. "We know pastors are experiencing difficult days," said conference president Mac Bruson of First Baptist Church of Dallas as he urged participants to take advantage of the counseling.

Christian apologist Josh McDowell of Dallas cautioned parents about temptations facing their children – particularly temptations to believe non-Christian doctrine. He cited a poll that found 65 percent of "Bible-believing, church-going, born-again children" don't believe Satan is real and 68 percent aren't sure Christianity is true.

The poll, he added, also said 65 percent of church youth believe there is no way to tell what is absolute truth. Only 9 percent believe in absolute truth, he explained, while only 33 percent say God and the church will play a part in their lives when they leave home.

These statistics illustrate the No. 1 problem in America, McDowell said, which is fathers not living up to their responsibility as Christian leaders of their homes and children. "We are

losing our kids not because they are not hearing the truth, but because we are not building relationships with them," he exclaimed. "Truth without relationships will lead to rejection in most cases."

Ergun Caner, assistant professor at Criswell College in Dallas, garnered sustained applause, bursts of laughter and a few moments of shock from those attending. Preaching from Romans 8, Caner, a former Muslim, addressed the question, "Is God a man or a woman?"

While the recent controversy over a gender-neutral or "gender-accurate" Bible served as foundation of his sermon, Caner also dealt with the concepts of a gender-neutral God and political correctness.

With a taunt to the media about his opposition to political correctness, Caner looked directly into the TV camera and said: "I spank my child ... not to leave a mark but to leave an impression, out of love, and I love him a lot. If social services shows up at my door, I will spank you too."

Political correctness, Caner said, also has shaped the church's teaching on God and gender, causing many to miss the point. "God is not male in relation to his gender," the professor asserted. "God is Father in relation to his children. This is a theological issue, not a biological issue."

He later added: "For all embedded media, get the message right. Southern Baptists don't believe God is our God, but the God, the one and only God. Is God a man? No. Is God a woman? No. More than a man, more than a woman, he is Father."

- With reporting by Stella Prather, Jennifer Rash and Stacy Hamby

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SBC family rally promotes plan to strengthen families

By Tony Cartledge

PHOENIX (ABP) – After three years of planning, the Southern Baptist Convention unveiled seven "pillars" leaders say will strengthen American families.

A Kingdom Family Rally held June 16, on the eve of the SBC annual meeting in Phoenix, attracted more than 4,000 participants, about half of whom remained through the nearly two-and-a-half-hour program.

Oklahoma pastor Tom Elliff served as chairman of a special SBC council on family life that planned the event. Building on principles Elliff has used in his pre-marital and family counseling, the council developed a statement of Christian family principles called "The Seven Pillars of a Kingdom Family."

Contemporary Christian artist Steve Green and his wife, Marijean, billed as hosts of the event, talked about how they have helped care for Green's father, a former missionary who suffers from Parkinson's disease.

Elliff and his wife, Jeannie, reviewed statistics describing sharp increases since 1960 in the rates of divorce, cohabitation and children born out of wedlock as evidence of a need for change in American families.

In a video presentation, James Dobson of Focus on the Family said the "anti-family" trend that began in the 1960s has peaked. Dobson reported a shift toward conservative, pro-moral, pro-family values. As evidence, he reported that favorable attitudes toward abortion are declining among young people, and the acceptance of sexual abstinence is growing.

Dennis Rainey of Family Life Today said, "No nation, state or church can survive the breakdown of the family." Marriage and family were designed by God to reflect his image a fallen earth, he said, so it's no wonder Satan has worked so hard to break into Christian homes, resulting in a divorce rate for Christians that is no different from non-Christians.

Rainey said his organization's research shows that less than 3 percent of Christian couples in churches pray together. "I believe we could slash the divorce rate if we could just get husbands and wives to pray together every day," he said.

A parade of SBC leaders spoke briefly as each of the "seven pillars" rose symbolically from the stage floor. "Mystery guests" gave testimonies relating to each pillar's emphasis:

– Honor God's authority. Families are called to live under God's authority, explained Morr Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee. He introduced Army Chaplain Jeff Struecker of "Black Hawk Down" fame, who used the insignia of his uniform to illustrate that he is under the authority of others and called to lead those under his authority by example.

– Respect human life. Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said life must be treasured from conception to death, including faithful care children with special needs and for aging parents. Land introduced Trey and Brenda Palm who have five children but also help care for an uncle who was seriously injured in an electrical accident.

– Exercise moral purity. Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, "We are living in a day of moral confusion leading to moral anarchy." Mohler introduced Pete and Debbie Livingston, whose marriage survived a rocky 10-year start during which he was devoted to work and she had an extra-marital affair.

– Serve the church. Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, challenged Baptists to guide their churches to lead others in faithfully serving the church. Draper introduced Gary Chapman, author of popular books such as "The Five Love Languages." Chapman's own marriage improved when he learned to ask his wife how he could serve her better and be a better husband, he said.

– Use time wisely. SBC president Jack Graham said he never regretted a moment of the time he has given to his wife and children. "Time is a treasure, and we are to use it wisely," he admonished. Graham introduced motivational speaker Zig Ziglar, who said building a successful marriage involves a lot of little things, beginning with the understanding that men and women are different and a commitment to work together.

– Practice biblical stewardship. Annuity Board President O.S. Hawkins spoke briefly on the importance of stewardship and introduced professional bass fisherman Jimmy Houston, who spoke via videotape. Houston, who has given up prize money because he refuses to wear the patch of a beer company that sponsors a bass fishing circuit, said Christians who don't tithe are not short-changing God but themselves, he said.

– Share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The final pillar was introduced by North American Mission Board President Bob Reccord and International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin. Reccord promoted the value of families participating together in mission trips. Rankin spoke of how all family members contribute to the effectiveness of missionaries.

Participants in the rally were given a card and encouraged to sign a covenant declaring that they will encourage their families to "build their lives upon these seven pillars of the kingdom family."

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Baptist volunteers provide pure water for Iraqi hospitals

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) – Baptist volunteers entered war-torn Iraq in a U.S. military helicopter that sustained enemy fire and they returned to Kuwait in a C-130 cargo plane bearing the remains of four Marines killed in action. But the relief workers' mission was peaceful – showing Christian compassion by providing pure water for Iraqi hospitals. Dick Talley, logistics coordinator for Texas Baptist Men, was among the 10 Baptist volunteers who served on the humanitarian aid mission last month, installing five water purification units at hospitals. "We worked through an organization over there that was looking for groups like Texas Baptist Men that do food service, water purification and medical help," he said. "We felt like the window of opportunity might be open just for a short time." Originally, the Baptists had planned to install water purification systems in remote rural villages of southern Iraq after the Saddam Hussein regime was removed from power. But after arriving in the area, they learned the greatest need was in the hospitals of Karbala and An Najaf, just south of Baghdad. "The hospitals needed safe water. Children particularly, and adults too, were getting sick from parasites that the chlorine in the water wouldn't kill," said Talley, a member of Lakeside Baptist Church in Dallas. In addition to installing the water purification units, the Baptist volunteers also trained the military personnel and hospital engineers who would be responsible for their ongoing operation and maintenance. The volunteers said that even before they entered Iraq, they experienced God's provisions for them.

While in Kuwait assembling the supplies they needed for their mission, they realized they lacked the necessary granulated charcoal filters. One member of the crew remembered that any bottling company should have them, so the volunteers kept their eyes open for a soft drink truck, which they soon spotted. They followed it back to a warehouse, and talked with the supervisor in charge. He secured the supplies they needed from the local bottling plant at no cost to them.

The Baptists felt God's provision and protection even more keenly as military helicopters transported them to their assigned workstations in Iraq. At one point, a helicopter passed through a hail of gunfire unscathed.

"We realized right then that the prayers of the people back home were being answered," Talley said.

The volunteers assembled and installed five water purification units on hospitals, including two rooftop units. And before they could install the new units, they had to remove old water tanks filled with sediment.

"The radiant heat on the roof was 140 degrees, with no air movement. It was taking its toll on all of us," Talley recalled, noting that nearly all of the workers suffered from heat exhaustion to some degree.

The other great challenge the Baptist workers faced was sand. "We found out that after purifying about 450 gallons of water, we'd have to flush the filters on the units because there was so much sand," Talley said. "Normally, we'd be able to go thousands of gallons before having to do that, but the fine sand clogged the filters."

It also obstructed visibility as the workers traveled from one site to another in military Humvees. "There was so much sand in the air, we'd lose visibility frequently, and the driver would have to drive by GPS (global positioning system)," Talley recalled.

The Baptists bunked alongside military personnel, shared meals-ready-to-eat with them, grew close to many of the armed services personnel serving in Iraq. When a helicopter crashed with four Marines on board, the Baptist relief workers shared the experience with the military personnel in a way few civilians ever can.

"We were honored to be the only passengers on the C-130 going back to Kuwait with the Marines whose bodies were recovered," Talley said.

The volunteers left Iraq convinced they had "opened doors" for future humanitarian aid projects in Iraq and in conjunction with the military.

"The hospital administrators, the mayors of the cities and everyone we worked with appreciated the fact that we didn't come in with any agendas," Talley said. "We didn't try to push anything on them. Our hearts' desire was strictly to help them, and they appreciated

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SBC re-elects Graham, chooses two Californians as vice presidents

By Greg Warner

PHOENIX, Ariz. (ABP) -- Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, was re-elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention June 17 without opposition.

Graham won by one vote but it was the only vote that counted. With no other nominees, registration secretary James Wells was instructed to cast the vote on behalf of the messengers, giving Graham the traditional second term as leader of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination. At the time of the election, 6,830 messengers had registered during the first day of the annual convention.

Bobby Welch, pastor of First Baptist Church of Daytona Beach, Fla., nominated Graham, calling the Texas pastor an "energetic, focused soul-winner." He said Graham led the SBC "with certainty and conviction" during 12 months "loaded" with controversy.

Earlier in the day, during his president's address, Graham urged Southern Baptists to penetrate a "decaying" culture with the gospel rather than retreat into an ineffective subculture.

Graham, whose church is in suburban Dallas, is the 12th person to serve as SBC president since conservatives gained control of the denomination in 1979.

The convention's two vice presidents, both Californians, also were elected without opposition.

Rob Zinn, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Highland, Calif., was elected first vice president. Zinn was nominated by Walter Price, pastor of Fellowship in the Pass, a Baptist church in Beaumont, Calif., who noted Zinn is pastor of the only church of which he has been a member. Zinn was a member, youth minister and associate pastor before becoming pastor of the 7,300-member Highland church. He is a member of the SBC Executive Committee and a former trustee chairman of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary near San Francisco.

William Wagner, professor of evangelism and missions at Golden Gate Seminary, was elected second vice president. Wagner has "lived out a life of missions," said Paul Kim, a

Southern Baptist missionary pastor of Brookland Baptist Church in Cambridge, Mass., was nominated Wagner. "Our convention would be blessed to have a man like him ready and willing to serve."

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