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Welcome To
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**Patterson confirms nomination
to Southwestern presidency**

By ABP staff

PHOENIX (ABP) -- Paige Patterson confirmed June 19 that he will be recommended as the next president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"What happens after that nobody knows," Patterson, current president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., told reporters. "Betting on what a group of Baptists is going to do is more risky than putting down your bet on Funny Cide [the race horse]."

"I don't know what they are going to do, but there is a fairly good chance they may extend the call to come to Southwestern," he added.

A Southwestern Seminary spokesman confirmed to reporters that the school's trustees have been called to a special meeting in Fort Worth June 24. Patterson reportedly met with the presidential search committee two weeks ago.

If elected, Patterson, a native Texan, would succeed Ken Hemphill, who left for another denominational position. Southwestern, a Southern Baptist seminary, is the largest theological school in the world.

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**Senate leader taps Navy admiral
as first African-American chaplain**

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) – Rear Adm. Barry Black will achieve a trio of firsts if he is confirmed as the U.S. Senate's 62nd chaplain, which is expected to happen in late June.

Black, head of the Navy's chaplaincy program since 2000, will become the first African-American, the first Seventh-Day Adventist, and the first military chaplain to serve in the post. On June 17, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) announced that he was tapping Black for the position. Frist said Black was the choice of a bipartisan committee of senators. The confirmation of chaplain nominees by the Senate is usually a formality, and Frist said he expects Black to be in his post before the Senate's July 4 recess.

Black, 53, said he would retire from the Navy within the next several days. He enlisted in the Navy in 1976, after a stint as a "circuit-riding pastor" and evangelist.

The Senate has appointed chaplains since 1789. The full-time position carries a salary of \$130,000. Today, the role of the Senate chaplain consists mainly in opening sessions of the chamber with prayers and attending to the spiritual needs of the Senate community. The chaplain's office provides such services as Bible studies and pastoral counseling to senators, their families and the thousands of Senate staffers – which altogether make up a community of about 6,000 people.

"I look forward to this great opportunity and challenge and I am grateful to the senators already," Black said to reporters.

Black will replace Lloyd John Ogilvie, who came to the position after a tenure as pastor of Washington's National Presbyterian Church. Ogilvie had served in the role from 1995 until he resigned in March to take care of his ailing wife. She later died.

In making the announcement, Frist praised Ogilvie's service. "In the eight years Dr. Ogilvie has served as Senate chaplain, he has been an inspirational and comforting voice to the Senate family and a friend to me and my colleagues," Frist said. "He has left a tremendous mark on the Senate and on the lives of everyone who's had the privilege of hearing his spiritual counsel."

Black, a Baltimore native, earned three masters' degrees – in art, counseling and divinity. He also holds the doctor of ministry degree from East Baptist Seminary in Lancaster, Pa., and a doctor of philosophy degree from United States International University in San Diego.

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Israeli authorities conclude burial box inscription forged

By Robert Marus

(ABP) – An inscription on an ancient stone box that has been touted as the only physical evidence of Jesus' existence is almost certainly a forgery, a panel of Israeli archaeologists has concluded.

Officials with Israel's Antiquities Authority announced June 18 that the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus" on the stone ossuary was almost certainly forged in recent decades.

Ossuaries – small coffins for holding the skeletal remains of deceased persons – were commonly used as burial containers by families in first-century Palestine. The discovery became worldwide news in October, when an article in the Biblical Archaeological Review cited it as the first direct physical link to Jesus' existence and claimed that it was "very

probable" that the box actually had held the bones of Jesus' brother, James.

But months of investigation by archaeologists and antiquities authorities have raised doubt about the authenticity of the inscription. A statement released by the Israeli officials said, "The inscription appears new, written in modernity by someone attempting to reproduce ancient written characters."

The archaeologists cited close investigations of the inscription – written in Aramaic, an ancient Palestinian language – that seemed to show that the letters had been carved through layers of patina, or discoloration caused by aging, on the stone. If the letters had been carved in the stone around the time it was produced, the patina would cover the inscription as well.

But Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeological Review*, said June 19 he is "not convinced at all" that the inscription is a forgery, according to the *Washington Post*. Shanks' magazine subjected the ossuary to extensive testing before publishing its article. He also said that archaeological politics may have caused the Israeli board to be biased against the inscription's authenticity.

The box's Israeli owner also stood by his discovery's authenticity. "I am certain the ossuary is real, I am certain that the committee is wrong regarding its conclusions," said Oded Golan according to the Associated Press. Golan said he got the artifact from a Jerusalem antiquities dealer in the mid-1970s.

But the Israeli experts said there was another piece of evidence that the ossuary probably didn't actually belong to James. They said the stone used to make it likely came from Cyprus or northern Syria rather than ancient Palestine.

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News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

By Robert Marus

Conservative groups seek anti-abortion voters

WASHINGTON – As part of a new attempt to bring conservative Christians into the political process, three groups have announced a plan to get churches to register voters.

The Christian Coalition, Priests for Life and the National Pro-Life Religious Council announced June 4 that they will hold a church-based voter-registration drive on four different Sundays between now and the 2004 elections.

The project will be called "National Christian Voter Registration Sundays." The groups sponsoring the program have said it's simply a non-partisan attempt to get Christians to be responsible citizens.

But critics of the Religious Right see in it another attempt by the Christian Coalition to box the chances of social conservatives at the polls. "This voter registration drive is part of a larger scheme to forge a church-based political machine," said Barry Lynn, president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "It's no secret that Religious Right leaders want to repeal church-state separation and write their religious beliefs into laws that everyone must obey." (ABP)

Two appointed to religious-freedom commission

WASHINGTON – An independent federal panel charged with monitoring the state of religious liberty around the world has two new members and has extended the terms of three other members.

Preeti Bansal and Bishop Ricardo Ramirez will become members of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, thanks to appointments by Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.). Bansal is a visiting professor of constitutional law at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. She was the solicitor general of New York until 2001. A graduate of Harvard Law School, she has served as a law clerk to U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens.

Ramirez is bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces, N.M. He was the first to hold the position. He has also served as auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of San Antonio, Texas. Ramirez is a graduate of the University of St. Thomas and the University of Detroit.

Congressional leaders also reappointed Felice Gaer, Nina Shea and Michael Young to the commission. Gaer, currently the commission's chair, is director of the Blauvelt Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights at the American Jewish Committee. Shea is the director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House in Washington. Young, currently the commission's vice chair, is a professor at George Washington University Law School.

The president selects two of the commissioners, two are chosen by congressional leaders of the president's party, and four by the congressional leaders of the opposition party. Commissioners serve for one- or two-year terms and are eligible for reappointment. (ABF)

Georgian Orthodox leader retracts attack on minority faiths

WASHINGTON – A notorious Russian Orthodox church leader has apologized for public statements that many in the former Soviet republic viewed as incitement for his followers to attack those of minority faiths.

Metropolitan Atanase of Rustavi, Georgia, apologized in person May 18 to Malkhaz Songulaashvili, president of Georgia's Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches. He had earlier written a letter of apology to Central Baptist Church in Tbilisi, Georgia, for remarks he had made in February on a Georgian television station.

Atanase reportedly said, "We don't need sects – we are a pure Orthodox nation," to television viewers. Of those of minority religions, including Baptists, Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses, he said: "You should destroy not only their computers – they have been shot dead. Had it been in the old times, I would have thrown them all in jail."

Minority religious groups in many former Soviet republics have experienced recent upswings in attacks by renegade bands of Orthodox Christians, as well as increased restrictions on their religious freedom in majority-Orthodox nations, such as Belarus.

The Georgian Orthodox Church earlier disavowed Atanase's remarks and said they were "astonished" by the apparent incitement to violence. (ABP)

American Baptist volunteers, Carters build Habitat homes

VALDOSTA, Ga. – A team from the National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches worked in conjunction with Baptist former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, on a project to build homes for the working poor.

A team of 15 American Baptists sponsored and built a house in Valdosta, Ga., the week of June 6-13 as part of Habitat For Humanity's 2003 Jimmy Carter Work Project. During the project, called "blitz build," the Baptists and other volunteers built 77 Habitat homes in Valdosta, La Grange, Ga., and Anniston, Ala. The Carters have been longtime supporters of Habitat for

Humanity, which enlists volunteers to help build inexpensive housing for families who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford their own home.

"Home ownership positively impacts the lives of the working poor, offering the opportunity economic stability," said Aidsand Wright-Riggins, executive director of National Ministries who also was part of the American Baptist construction team. (ABP)

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