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BWA adopts 'bare-bones budget,'
seeks additional income sources

By Trennis Henderson

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (ABP) -- Responding to mounting financial pressure, members of the Baptist World Alliance General Council adopted a zero-growth budget for 2004.

The action during the council's July 9-12 meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, followed an earlier \$425,000 reduction in the current year's budget.

The Baptist World Alliance is comprised of 211 member bodies representing more than 46 million baptized believers worldwide.

While the organization has operated with a "bare-bones budget" for several years, General Secretary Denton Lotz told council members: "This is not only bare-bones. This is leukemia. We are bleeding."

The Virginia-based BWA, already suffering from the weak economy, lost another \$125,000 in revenue for next year when the Southern Baptist Convention, its largest funder, voted in June to reduce its allocation by about a third. Southern Baptist leaders objected to BWA's decision to admit the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as a member.

The past year "has been a very challenging year financially," noted Wallace Charles Smith, chairman of BWA's budget and finance committee. He said preparing next year's budget required "a great deal of

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stress, strain, agony and prayer."

Despite the financial hardships, Lotz said, "We believe God is going to provide for us."

The projected \$1.69 million in revenue includes more than \$520,000 from member bodies; \$780,000 from individuals, churches and other groups; and more than \$300,000 from administrative fees, investments, rental income and other sources.

Major expenses include \$1 million for personnel-related expenses, \$126,400 for publications and media, \$118,260 for general office expenses and \$89,600 for staff travel. BWA is involved in global evangelism and education as well as work in the areas of religious freedom, human rights and Christian ethics.

Efforts to increase revenue for the alliance include recruiting "Global Impact Churches," congregations that contribute at least \$1,000 annually.

Leaders also proposed bylaw changes that would expand BWA membership to include individual and associate members. Associate members would include local churches and other Baptist entities such as colleges and seminaries, as well as associational, regional or state Baptist organizations. The proposals will be considered during next year's BWA General Council meeting in Seoul, Korea.

In addition to BWA's operating budget, council members approved a 2003-2004 funding goal of \$2.66 million for Baptist World Aid, BWA's relief and development arm.

Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid, noted the funding goal is a significant drop from the current year's \$3 million goal. Only \$1.2 million was received last year, resulting in several unmet ministry needs.

Among proposed ministry projects for the coming year include \$100,000 for hunger relief and \$100,000 for HIV/AIDS ministry efforts. Development projects -- in Bangladesh, Liberia, Nicaragua and elsewhere - would fund housing for street children, AIDS prevention programs, and water and sanitation projects.

In other action, council members adopted resolutions addressing such issues as religious liberty and the Middle East conflict.

The resolution on religious liberty affirms that "one of the basic rights of each human being is the right to worship openly and freely according to the dictates of one's own heart."

Noting that "this basic right is denied in many countries and areas of the world," the resolution emphasizes that "religious freedom is not merely the right to continue to worship in the faith in which one was born but also the right to examine fully the convictions and beliefs of others." It calls for "all peoples to recognize this basic right of all human beings and allow its full expression in each and every society."

The resolution on the Middle East describes the "Road Map to Peace" crafted by leaders in the U.S., Europe, Russia and the United Nations an "an opportune moment for all parties involved in the Middle East conflict."

BWA leaders urge compassion

for needy, unity among Baptists

By Wendy Ryan

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (ABP) -- Baptist unity and compassion for the world's needs were primary themes during the Baptist World Alliance General Council meeting July 9-12 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Billy Kim of South Korea, current BWA president, cited the parable of the Good Samaritan to appeal to Baptist leaders to address the needs of fellow believers around the world.

Speaking to more than 350 participants during the council's opening session at First Baptist Church of Rio de Janeiro, Kim declared: "We as Christian workers must go where the needs are. ... Somehow, we as Baptist brothers and sisters have lost compassion. I am so wrapped up in my nation, family, area, church that I have blind eyes to the needs of the world. A lot of time we give lip service. ... They want a demonstration of our love."

Kim recounted a conversation with a pastor from Turkey last year. The pastor reported that his church has been burned and his people were persecuted. "I long to sit next to him, pray with him and weep with him," Kim noted. "That is what the world is asking us to do. May God help us."

During the council's closing session, Kim again challenged Baptist leaders to respond to the world's physical, emotional and spiritual needs. "I want to be known as a little peacemaker in a difficult, conflicted, fighting world," he said. "I cannot help everybody but I can help one person. ... Work becomes worship when done for the Lord."

Speaking after the General Council voted to grant membership to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship despite strong opposition from Southern Baptist Convention leaders, Kim told council members: "I leave here with a heavy heart. We do not know the outcome of the SBC decision [about continued funding of BWA]. But they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We love them and we will work with them in the BWA."

Tomas Mackey, a seminary professor in Buenos Aires, Argentina, also talked about unity, urging Baptists to model the humility of Jesus. Maintaining a non-divisive spirit in the midst of diversity is a personal struggle, Mackey acknowledged. He added, however, "it is the hope that we have that pushes us to reach for the goal of humility, unity and love in Christ."

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz also emphasized the need for reconciliation and peacemaking. He highlighted BWA's recent reconciliation efforts in Cuba and among the Telugu Baptists in India.

While reconciliation efforts among Telugu Baptists remain unresolved, Lotz said reconciliation between two Cuban groups -- the Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba and the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba -- led to the acceptance of the Fraternity of Baptist Churches as a new member body of BWA.

He also cited efforts in South Africa, where five Baptist groups have formed an alliance to work together.

Affirming the grace of reconciliation, Lotz added, "So many people around the world hate each other

and there is the same lack of reconciliation in the church. ... One of the joys of the BWA is when we go out and see reconciliation.

"How can we call the world to reconciliation if we ourselves are not reconciled?" Lotz asked. "... "Let us go away knowing that we have been called to be ministers of reconciliation."

-- With additional reporting by Trennis Henderson

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Vote on controversial judge

postponed over new dispute

By Hannah Lodwick

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Senate Judiciary Committee faced yet another partisan dispute July 17 when Democratic members again succeeded in delaying approval of one of President Bush's controversial nominees for a federal court.

Democratic committee members convinced the committee's chairman, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), to postpone a vote on the nomination of Alabama Attorney General William Pryor to a judgeship on the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The debate is the latest of a string of conflicts between the committee's Republicans and Democrats over federal court nominees and their views on church-state issues and civil rights. Now Democrats want to prolong an investigation into whether Pryor misled members about his fundraising tactics.

"This is not a delay," Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said, according to the Washington Post. "This is getting the facts out."

Hatch initially rejected the calls for a postponement but eventually agreed to postpone the vote until at least July 23. Nonetheless, he expressed optimism that Pryor would be approved. "There comes a time you have to quit playing politics ... and come to a vote," Hatch told the Post.

Democrats believe Pryor solicited political donations from corporations that fell under state government authority -- a conflict of interest for Pryor and perhaps six other state attorneys general who made similar calls.

Schumer raised questions about Pryor's June 11 testimony at a confirmation hearing, during which the Alabama Attorney General denied soliciting funds from either Alabama companies or tobacco firms involved in a legal settlement with his office.

Republicans on the panel said Democrats have made the latest claims only to "smear" Pryor's name. In an earlier hearing, Hatch said Pryor "was a victim of religious profiling" over his views on abortion and church-state issues.

Hatch said "half-truths" provided ammunition for liberal interest groups that want to defeat President Bush's judicial nominees. Senate Democrats have already used filibusters to prevent confirmation votes

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on two previous appellate-court nominees, Miguel Estrada and Priscilla Owen.

Several church-state watchdog groups have voiced concern over the nomination of Pryor. "This [delay] suggests that the nomination is in increasing trouble, and with good reason," said Joe Conn, a spokesperson for Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Conn also said Pryor's history of making extreme comments has hurt his credibility. "This will further complicate things," Conn said.

For instance, Conn's group has pointed out, Pryor spoke at a 1997 rally in favor of the campaign by Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore, then a state judge, to post the Ten Commandments in his courtroom. "God has chosen through his son Jesus Christ this time, this place for all Christians -- Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox -- to save our country and save our courts," Pryor said at the time.

Despite the controversy, many believe Pryor's nomination has a good chance of advancing to the full Senate. Republicans hold 10 of the 19 Judiciary Committee seats.

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DC voucher plan passes House panel

but meets stiff Senate opposition

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Congress' latest attempt to use the District of Columbia as a laboratory for school-voucher programs hangs in the balance after a Senate panel unexpectedly postponed a vote on the proposal.

The Senate Appropriations Committee, in a raucous July 17 session, postponed a vote on the District's \$5.6 billion budget for at least a week. The bill contains a controversial provision that would create a program of publicly funded scholarships for private schools, including religious schools.

The committee's Republican leaders were scrambling to find enough votes to pass the bill after the defection of one of their own. Committee member Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), citing his own objection to vouchers on church-state grounds, said he would oppose the measure.

Senate Democrats have threatened a filibuster to kill the bill if it is brought to the floor with the voucher provision intact.

A House committee approved a similar D.C. voucher plan earlier in the week.

Congress directly oversees much of the way Washington's government operates. City leaders have objected to voucher proposals in the past. But Mayor Anthony Williams and D.C. School Board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz recently acquiesced to the voucher proposal, reportedly under pressure from the White House. Vouchers are a central part of President Bush's education policy aims.

However, the city's non-voting delegate to the House, Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), hailed the Senate decision to put the brakes on vouchers. "I very much regret that vouchers have returned to haunt and halt

another D.C. appropriations bill," she said, according to the Washington Post. "People really underestimated how unpopular vouchers are in Congress."

Norton referred to a 1997 attempt by Republicans to attach vouchers to a D.C. appropriations bill. They backed away from that plan after then-President Bill Clinton promised a veto of any bill containing a voucher program.

Voucher opponents object to providing government money to religious schools and often claim that vouchers will hurt struggling public schools by diverting money that otherwise would have been spent on those schools. Voucher supporters claim that "school choice" -- delivered through private schools and public charter schools -- is the only hope many students in failing inner-city schools have to get the kind of education that those in their communities with more money can afford.

The District of Columbia already has one of the nation's largest charter-school programs. About 68,000 students are enrolled in regular public schools, while almost 12,000 more are enrolled in public charter schools. Another 14,000 attend private schools located in the city.

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Missouri Baptist leaders vote

to defund William Jewell College

By ABP staff

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) - Leaders of the Missouri Baptist Convention voted July 15 to eliminate funding for William Jewell College because of the school's handling of homosexuality and other moral issues.

The convention's executive board deleted the school from next year's budget after investigating the college's practices and policies. If approved by messengers to the fall Missouri Baptist Convention, the move would effectively end the convention's 154-year relationship with the Baptist school.

David Sallee, William Jewell's president, said the board's decision reflected a desire to control the college. But Charles Burnett, chair of a committee investigating the school, said funding should be denied because the college failed to "fall in line with what we believe are God's teachings."

William Jewell receives about \$1.1 million a year from the convention, which accounts for 3 percent of the school's budget.

During the executive board's July session, Burnett said the interagency relations committee had met with college administrators to iron out differences, but the college's response to the committee's inquiry was "not sufficient" for continuing funding.

Among the committee's concerns:

-- The college allowed student senators to consider a change in the Student Bill of Rights to add sexual orientation to its list of characteristics protected from discrimination. Students defeated the proposal Jan. 28.

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-- A theater student was allowed to produce portions of the play "The Vagina Monologues" as the student's senior recital.

--The committee asked the college for information about trustees and faculty, including their church membership and affiliations with organizations other than those related to the school.

-- The committee wanted college officials to outline the official teaching position on the Genesis account of creation.

The convention also sought the right to elect William Jewell's trustees, which was denied by the college.

Only four of the 48 executive board members voted against defunding the college.

After the vote, Sallee, the college president, described the motion to defund as "an expression of the philosophy of the executive board that it will not fund anything it does not control."

"This is about governance," he added. "The sensitivities of our Missouri Baptist constituencies are considered in decisions made by the college. However, when this board or its representatives demand that the college change its policies or apologize for decisions, that is an attempt to interfere with the governance function of the board of trustees of the college."

Sallee told executive board members that college administrators "wrestled" over the decision to allow the theater student to perform the controversial play. "[It was] an agonizing discussion.... But we came down on the side of academic freedom."

"Since then, we have revised the process...so that we will not find ourselves in that position again," he added.

Sallee told board members he recognized that the institution and the convention had reached an impasse. "As I said in this room in December, you do not agree with the way we do our work," he said. "We each feel strongly that we are right. It appears that the unavoidable result is that our relationship must end."

Jay Scribner, chairman of the board's administrative committee, called the move to cut William Jewell's funding "a belabored, prayerful decision." "It is about holiness, righteousness and godliness," he said.

He called the decision "a catalyst for the years ahead for the Missouri Baptist Convention and William Jewell to come back together in oneness on the foundation of the Word of God."

The \$1.1 million in convention funds are used primarily to provide scholarships to Missouri Baptist students who attend William Jewell, Sallee said. He added the college will seek other revenue sources to continue providing those scholarships.

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