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**New Orleans Seminary trustees
reject SBC's corporation request**

By Mark Wingfield

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) -- Trustees of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary have unanimously rejected a request by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to name the SBC the "sole member" of the seminary's corporation.

Meeting Oct. 6-8, the trustees voted without dissent.

All other SBC entities have agreed to the request, which was intended to prevent the possibility of a seminary or mission board ever declaring its independence from the national denomination.

New Orleans Seminary President Chuck Kelley voiced strong opposition to the request on grounds of Baptist polity, suggesting such a change would result in a form of Baptist "connectionalism" rather than traditional Baptist autonomy.

He and trustees also objected to the change because of some peculiarities of Louisiana law, which is based on the Napoleonic Code rather than the British Common Law tradition upon which the other 49 states base their legal codes.

Despite rejecting the Executive Committee's request, New Orleans did approve a motion expressing their "deep and abiding commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention."

In a chapel address given to open the current academic year, Kelley told students, faculty and staff he supports the SBC and the changes in leadership that have occurred within the convention over the past 25 years. However, the trust held between the seminary and the SBC should be sufficient to maintain the relationship without opening the door to what he called the dangers of connectionalism.

Executive Committee President Morris Chapman expressed disappointment in the trustees' position.

"I deeply regret the New Orleans Seminary board of trustees has chosen to pass on this opportunity to secure that

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institution for SBC posterity," he said. "Had the board adopted the Southern Baptist Convention as sole member, it would have legally clarified the seminary's relationship to the convention, the seminary's parent corporation and benefactor. More importantly, as sole member, the Southern Baptist Convention could have more easily protected the Cooperative Program, the financial lifeline for all our entities, from the avarice of today's new breed of aggressive litigators."

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Anglican world leaders rebuke American church

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Worldwide leaders of the Anglican Church have delivered a rebuke -- but no formal discipline -- to their brethren in the United States and Canada after a meeting dealing with sexuality issues.

Convening in London Oct. 15-16, the primates -- or governing heads -- of the 37 national and regional denominations that make up the worldwide Anglican Communion agreed to a statement condemning recent pro-gay actions by the Episcopal Church USA and a diocese of the Anglican Church in Canada.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams called the extraordinary meeting at Lambeth Palace, the communion's historic headquarters, in response to controversy over the American church's approval of the election of a non-celibate gay man as bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire and the decision of the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster to create a liturgy for blessing same-sex marriages.

In their statement, the primates said those actions "threaten the unity of our own Communion as well as our relationships with other parts of Christ's Church, our mission and witness, and our relations with other faiths, in a world already confused in areas of sexuality, morality and theology, and polarize Christian opinion."

The statement also authorized the creation of structures by which Episcopalians and Canadian Anglicans who disagree with their churches' decisions on sexuality issues to come under the authority of bishops and dioceses that oppose homosexuality.

Conservative Episcopalians hailed the statement as an affirmation of their position by world leaders.

In a statement, David Anderson, president of the American Anglican Council, called the statement "a clear rebuke to the leadership of the Episcopal Church," which is generally more liberal than Anglican bodies in other parts of the world.

Anderson continued, "ECUSA has now been put on notice -- with warnings. We are grateful for this action and applaud the mainstream Anglican primates for boldly standing firm for the gospel."

However, pro-gay leaders in the Episcopal Church noted satisfaction that the leaders did not do what some conservatives had asked -- declared the Episcopal Church and the Canadian diocese to be illegitimate.

And the bishop of the Canadian diocese in question said the primates' decision to create alternative governing structures for theological minorities cuts both ways. "We should welcome the strong recommendation that special care be taken in every part of the Communion for 'dissenting minorities,'" said Bishop Michael Ingham of the Vancouver-based Diocese of New Westminster. "In many places, this must mean that gay and lesbian Christians may now expect to be given the

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episcopal pastoral care they have not been receiving."

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Stanley disagrees with SBC's new stances on wives, women pastors

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A former conservative president of the Southern Baptist Convention ridiculed the denomination's mandate that wives should submit to their husbands and doesn't support the denomination's ban on female pastors, according to a Texas newspaper.

Charles Stanley's comments were reported in an Oct. 18 Fort Worth Star-Telegram article. The story, written by veteran religion writer Jim Jones, was based on an interview given during Stanley's visit to Texas to promote his latest book, "Finding Peace: God's Promise of a Life Free from Regret, Anxiety and Fear."

Stanley, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, was elected SBC president at the peak of the battle between moderates and conservatives. His re-election victory in Dallas in June 1985, when more than 45,000 messengers registered, is considered a pivotal moment in the denomination's so-called "conservative resurgence."

Both edicts Stanley criticized were additions to the SBC's Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement -- the first approved by convention messengers in 1998, and the second in 2000. Those controversial additions were penned and promoted by some of Stanley's allies in the fight to change the direction of the SBC beginning in 1979.

The section on women being submissive to their husbands is based on a misreading of Scripture, and the topic should not have been dealt with in a general statement of doctrine, Stanley told the Star-Telegram.

"If a woman is going to be submissive, she's not going to be submissive because of the Southern Baptist Convention," he told the paper. "It's just ridiculous."

Even though SBC leaders have said the statement is not intended to make women "doormats," that is the impression it gives, Stanley said. "They should never have discussed the issue."

A proper reading of the New Testament book of Ephesians -- the main text SBC leaders used to justify their statement -- leans more toward mutual submission, said Stanley, who is divorced. "Jesus said we are to honor one another. Submission means you should submit yourself one to another."

Stanley disputed the prohibition on women serving as pastors based on his own experience. He told the paper: "Let me put it this way: I was saved by a woman preaching. I was saved at 12 years of age, and I'm still saved."

The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message ignores the fact that in some places around the world, men are not taking responsibility for leading churches while women are, Stanley said. "You can go to India, Japan and other countries and find women are preaching the gospel. People are being saved. Lives are being changed. Big churches are growing up. Are we going to tell these women, 'You can't do that?'"

The fact that Stanley was converted under the preaching of a female Pentecostal preacher in Danville, Va., has been previously reported.

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This isn't the first time Stanley has made comments on the issue of women that were viewed as departing from the denomination's conservative party line. In the summer of 2000, soon after the revised Baptist Faith and Message was adopted, Stanley told a group of pastors in North Carolina: "There are some godly women out there. I would never say that a woman could not preach.... You just can't put God in a box."

Stanley quickly backed away from that report, however, saying his words had been "twisted and distorted" by the Charlotte Observer. At the time, he drew a distinction between a woman being a preacher and being a pastor.

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CBF becoming 'denomination-like,' Vestal tells Coordinating Council

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is not really a denomination, says CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal, but it is becoming more and more like a denomination and indeed functions as one for some churches.

The question of what CBF will become has been a constant topic of speculation and some controversy since the organization was formed by moderate Southern Baptists in 1991. Vestal told members of the group's Coordinating Council that CBF has undergone a "progression in the development of our identity." And while no final answer has emerged, some consensus is developing around the CBF's mission, he said.

Vestal spoke during the council's Oct. 16-18 meeting in Atlanta, during which the group adopted a budget goal of \$16 million for 2004-05, began a study of funding for "partner" ministries such as seminaries, and agreed to re-evaluate the vacant position of resource center coordinator, the organization's chief operating officer.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship most often describes itself as a "network of churches and individuals." When it was founded, Vestal said, CBF served as "a relief and rescue operation" for moderate Baptists and their causes. It soon became a movement centered on Baptist principles, he said, and in 1993 it became a "missionary sending and supporting organization."

"In the last three to five years," he continued, "we have become something of a denomination-like organization for some people."

"We have about 150 to 175 churches ... that do not have any kind of relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention," Vestal said. For those churches that relate to CBF and no other Baptist body, CBF serves in the role of a denomination or convention, he said. "For a significant and growing number of them," Vestal said, CBF is becoming the most significant denomination-like organization to which they relate.

"When I get past that, however, I get real squishing about numbers," he added.

About 5,000 churches have contributed funds to and through CBF since its inception, including about 2,000 that did so last year, Vestal said. But those churches identify with CBF in various ways and for various reasons, so those relationships become difficult to classify, he said.

"Our emphasis has been not so much on membership as on partnership," he explained.

When he is asked "What is CBF?" Vestal said he often responds: "What do you want us to be? We can be for you

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whatever you want us to be."

While CBF is taking on more traits of a denomination or convention, Vestal said, "we are not a denominational magisterium, we are not a denominational headquarters, and God knows we are not a denominational authority" for churches.

Instead, Vestal said, CBF is becoming more defined by its vision and mission.

"We are gaining something of a consensus around our vision," Vestal said. "We want to be the presence of Christ. We want to incarnate the presence of Christ in the world. Our mission is to serve Christians and churches as they discover and fulfill their God-given mission. And the goal of that mission in every context is to become the presence of Christ."

Some people use terms like denomination, convention and mission-sending organization to describe CBF, Vestal said, "but the word 'fellowship' captures us more than any other word because it describes relationships and partnership."

The Coordinating Council heard about new or expanding partnerships with several other Baptist bodies. Last July CBF was granted membership in the Baptist World Alliance, an international network of Baptist conventions and bodies.

"We can't fully grasp the significance of what that is going to mean for us and for Baptists and for the Baptist witness around the world," Vestal said of the new BWA relationship. Already the CBF is well known and respected by BWA members, Vestal said, adding, "Our missionaries are held in high esteem around the world."

Additionally, CBF is collaborating with American Baptist Churches in the USA, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas, the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and Canadian Baptist groups, among others.

Philip Wise, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas, and chair of the Coordinating Council's finance committee, reported that through the first three months of this fiscal year, which began in July, revenues are keeping pace with the budget. That is an improvement over last fiscal year, when CBF had to reduce its budget.

The Council adopted a "not-to-exceed" figure of \$16,008,000 for the 2004-05 annual budget, the same as the reduced budget for 2003-04. Specifics of the budget will be drafted by the CBF staff and presented to the council later in the year.

The study of partner funding was prompted in part by budget constraints that forced CBF last year to cut funding for its partners, which include 13 theological schools, the Baptist Joint Committee, Associated Baptist Press, Baptists Today, Baptist Center for Ethics and others.

The study committee's assignment included a suggestion to reduce CBF funding of partners by another 30 percent. Vestal said he is aware of "a lot of anxiety among our partners" over the study.

The partner study committee met for the first time during the council meeting. Chair Charles Cantrell of Mountain View, Mo., reported the group began by defining the questions the committee needs to address and set the parameters for the committee. "My hope is that this process can be about far more than money," Vestal said. "I want it to be a celebration of our partners."

The personnel committee announced it is evaluating the scope of the resource center coordinator position, which became vacant in August when Reba Cobb resigned to accept another position. A search committee was named.

The 72-member council was led in devotions by and heard reports from regional missions team leaders representing CBF work in Europe, Northern Africa, the Middle East, North America and Asia.

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-- With reporting by Lance Wallace of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

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Southern revises master plan, closes child-care center

By David Winfrey

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Citing a need for classroom space, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary officials announced plans last week to close the school's Child Development Center.

The transition of Rankin Hall from day care to teaching space was one of several changes detailed in a revised campus "master plan" approved last week by trustees at a meeting where they also adopted a resolution against "open theism."

In addition to closing the day care, the master plan outlines transforming a 76-year-old auxiliary gymnasium into two large classrooms and selling the 251-unit Village Manor Apartments to a private company, which will renovate the complex and maintain it as a low-income housing facility.

Seminary President Al Mohler characterized the Child Development Center's closing as a "forced option" based on the need for more classrooms.

"The moves reflect a concentration on our core assignment," Mohler said in a written statement. "We are forced by enrollment gains to make difficult choices and must look to other options for child-care needs."

Rankin Hall was built originally for the school of music and used later as the seminary's school of social work.

Three years ago, the seminary announced plans to close the center but reversed that decision after an outcry from those who had children enrolled in the center.

"We are very concerned for the well-being of the children and families currently using the Child Development Center's excellent program," Mohler said last week. "We will work with staff and families over the next several months to develop a transition plan."

Currently, 72 children are enrolled in the center, according to seminary spokesman Lawrence Smith. Of those, 23 are students' children, 12 are employees' children and 37 are children of community residents.

The seminary currently has a "full-time equivalency" of more than 3,500 students, including more than 600 at Boyce College, Southern's undergraduate school, Smith said.

The child-care facility will be closed at the end of the academic year in May 2004, and the resulting classrooms will be used for Boyce College, he said.

The sale of Village Manor will allow a private entity to receive grant funds for renovation of the apartments, Smith added.

Village Manor currently is 77 percent occupied. Of the 193 occupied units, only 75 are leased by seminary students and their families, according to officials.

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Other changes forecast in the master plan were:

- A technological upgrade of Alumni Chapel.
- Installing sprinkler systems to Carver and Mulins Hall.
- Adding 136 parking spaces.

Also during the board meeting, trustees approved spending \$215,000 to repair and renovate the Olympic-size swimming pool. Mohler said the emergency repairs were related to the copper content in the water.

Trustees also approved a \$100,000 allocation as the first step in a \$1 million renovation for the Alumni Chapel organ. Mohler said organ renovations have been needed for more than 30 years, and he predicted the seminary's future budgets will include maintenance accounts for both the pool and organ.

Regarding open theism, trustees passed a resolution identical to one already adopted by seminary faculty.

"Open theism's denial of God's exhaustive definite foreknowledge constitutes an egregious biblical theological departure from orthodoxy and poses a serious threat to evangelical integrity," the statement reads, in part.

-- Compiled from reporting by Southern Seminary's public relations office

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High-placed general's comments renew controversy over Islam

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Comments by a high-ranking Pentagon official casting America's struggle against terrorism as a Muslim-versus-Christian holy war are causing some prominent news outlets to call for a reprimand by the Bush administration.

Meanwhile, some on the Religious Right have stood up to defend Lt. Gen. William Boykin, who is a highly decorated veteran of several covert and small-scale American military operations.

Boykin, as the Pentagon's newly-named deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, sparked nationwide controversy after two news outlets -- NBC News on Oct. 15 and the Los Angeles Times on Oct. 16 -- revealed a series of comments he made to evangelical Christian audiences.

Appearing in uniform, he has repeatedly described the war against terrorism to these groups as a conflict between a "Christian nation" and radical Islamists.

For example, during a Jan. 28 speech at a Southern Baptist evangelism conference in First Baptist Church of Daytona Beach, Fla., Boykin described his 1993 efforts to capture a Somali warlord who had boasted that Allah would protect him from defeat. "I knew that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol," Boykin told the audience.

In other situations, Boykin has cast American conflicts with Islamic warriors in starkly spiritual terms. Speaking in

June 2002 at First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow, Okla., he described an aerial photo he had taken of the city of Mogadishu during the 1993 conflict in Somalia. Noting strange black marks in the sky in the image, the general claimed they were evidence of a demonic presence over the city.

"Ladies and gentleman, this is your enemy," he said. "It is the principalities of darkness. It is a demonic presence in that city that God revealed to me as the enemy."

Additionally, Boykin has said that radical Islamists hate the United States "because we're a Christian nation;" has described the U.S. Army as "a Christian army;" and has said that President Bush was appointed by God "for such a time as this."

Boykin's job requires him to work closely with intelligence officers from Muslim countries. President Bush and other White House officials have taken pains since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to insist the war on terrorism is not a war against Islam.

However, a recent study released by the White House's own Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy found that an overwhelming majority of respondents in nine Muslim countries surveyed perceived the United States as being anti-Islamic.

The day after they published the story revealing Boykin's comments, the L.A. Times called for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to remove him from his position. On Oct. 21, the Washington Post called President Bush to, at minimum, criticize Boykin's comments in light of the fact he recently rebuked Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad for anti-Semitic comments.

So far, the White House has been silent on Boykin. Rumsfeld and Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he had not violated any military rules.

Boykin issued an apology on Oct. 17, saying both that his comments had been taken out of context and that he had never intended to denigrate the Islamic faith or all Muslims.

Regarding his comments on the Somali warlord, Boykin said he had been referring not to the man's Islam, but rather to his "worship of money and power" as the "idolatry" that was inferior to Boykin's God.

However, several commentators -- such as Newsweek columnist Fareed Zakaria -- have said Boykin's explanation is implausible given the plain meaning of his original comments and their context.

Boykin's apology also contained a defense of his earlier descriptions of the U.S. as a "Christian nation."

Nonetheless, Boykin was careful to point out in the Daytona Beach speech that he wasn't attempting to foment a holy war. "Bin Laden is not the enemy. No mortal is the enemy," he told the audience. "It's the enemy you can't see. It's a war against the forces of darkness. The battle won't be won with guns. It will be won on our knees."

Conservative commentators such as Family Research Council President Tony Perkins have defended Boykin's comments and suggested they are part of an attack on the free-speech rights of Christians.

The pastor of the Daytona Beach church where Boykin delivered some of the controversial comments defended Boykin, whom he described as a "dear friend," in a strongly-worded editorial released Oct. 20 by Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's public-information arm.

Bobby Welch, himself a military Special Forces veteran, compared Boykin to past U.S. generals who "called on God, prayed to God, gave God praise and glory for victories and called upon God to defeat their enemies." Welch said that

"not a single one of those military leaders ever was belittled, harassed or chastised for speaking out about their spirituality."

Lauding Boykin's past heroism, Welch said, "I despise the unthinkable and asinine fact that some take cheap backstabbing shots at a real God-fearing American hero who continually risks his life to protect all of us."

But a moderate Baptist ethicist said that Boykin's comments seemed to reflect "bad theology." Robert Parham, head of the Baptist Center for Ethics, said the real question about Boykin was whether his public statements were appropriate for someone in his position.

"Can he be trusted to act in the nation's interest instead of pursuing his own twisted theological agenda?" Parham asked in the Oct. 17 edition of the organization's e-mail newsletter, EthicsDaily.com "The nation can ill afford a commander who sees the war on terrorism as a war between dueling deities."

Rumsfeld announced Oct. 21 that Boykin had asked for an investigation of his past comments by the Pentagon's inspector general. The defense secretary again declined to comment on Boykin's statements, and said he would wait for the inspector general's findings.

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