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Reporter says he didn't mischaracterize Stanley's statements on SBC and women

By Mark Wingfield and Robert Marus

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- For the second time in three years, Charles Stanley has contended a secular-newspaper reporter mischaracterized his expressed views on Southern Baptists and women -- but the reporter firmly denies misreporting Stanley's comments.

In an interview with veteran religion reporter Jim Jones of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Stanley said it is "ridiculous" to think that wives should submit to their husbands simply because the SBC said to.

Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta and a popular radio and television preacher, is a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention. His re-election to that office at the convention's annual meeting in 1985 is considered a pivotal point in the decade-long struggle for control of the denomination's governing structure.

In his story, Jones -- whose body of work was honored in 2002 when he received the Associated Baptist Press Religious Freedom Award -- also indicated that Stanley doesn't support the convention's prohibition on women serving as pastors.

The article was published in the newspaper's Oct. 18 issue. It was based on an interview given during Stanley's visit to Texas to promote a new book he has authored.

Six days later, the SBC's Baptist Press issued an article in which Stanley asserted that Jones had misrepresented his views on the issues and twisted his words. However, Jones released a transcript of the tape-recorded interview that verified the words he had quoted Stanley as saying.

According to the transcript, Jones asked Stanley about some other Christian denominations that allow women to serve as pastors.

Stanley responded: "Yeah, and for example in other countries of the world where men are not taking responsibility, women are beginning to be pastors of churches. The women are rising up in different places. So you can't go to

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somebody [in] like India or Japan or wherever it is and tell some woman who is preaching the gospel, people are being saved, lives are being changed, big churches [are being established] and say, 'You can't do that.'

"My feeling is this: You have to leave God's calling to whomever God calls. Period. And I just say no. I think getting into that was a mistake. What happened was it just stirred up anger and resentment toward Baptists that probably people hadn't even thought about Baptists before. And you know, if a woman is going to be submissive, she's not going to be submissive because of the Southern Baptist Convention. So it's just ridiculous."

According to the transcript, Jones then asked about SBC statements on wifely submission.

Stanley answered: "Well, Jesus said to honor one another. Submissive doesn't mean doormat. Submissive means should submit yourselves one to another. That husband and wives understand each others' needs, try to meet each others' needs. The Bible talks about unity and oneness. If I love my wife and she loves me, we are going to come to some kind of agreement. But the emphasis is usually, 'OK, the man is up here and the woman is down here.'

"And so, that's the message that gets sent no matter what you believe. So my feeling is that we don't need to discuss the issue."

Jones asked further: "So you disagree on that issue with Southern Baptists?"

Stanley responded: "My opinion was it wasn't necessary for it to come up."

In the Baptist Press coverage, Stanley contends Jones "did not quote me accurately, and I noticed he sort of rearranged a few things."

The quotations attributed to Stanley in the Star-Telegram story, however, appear verified by Jones' transcript. Jones told ABP that the transcript, which BP described as "partial," covers the entire portion of the interview dealing with the issue of the SBC and women.

While Stanley insisted to Baptist Press he does not disagree with other conservative SBC presidents and leaders on theological issues, the BP article conceded that Stanley does in fact take some issue with the Baptist Faith and Message's statements on women. Stanley "believes one amendment should have been clarified and another not included at all," according to the story.

Further, according to the BP article, Stanley said of Jones: "He asked me specifically, which he did not include in his article, 'Would you vote for a lady to be the pastor of a church, a woman?' I said, 'No, I would not.' I said, 'That's my personal opinion, and I certainly respect other people's opinions, but I would not vote for a woman to be the pastor of a church.' But he never put that in the article."

Jones responded that he has no recollection of asking such a question and that no such question or answer appears on his tape recording of the interview. He said leaving out such information would have been "a gross omission" from his story.

In an Oct. 28 interview from his Fort Worth home, Jones told ABP that he does not believe he mischaracterized Stanley's comments. He said his interview with Stanley left him "with the strong impression" that Stanley disagreed with the SBC's stances on women.

Alluding to Stanley's insistence in the BP story that he did not oppose the faith statement, Jones said, "He elaborated on that to other people, but what he told me left me with the strong impression that he opposed them."

Stanley also asserted in the BP story that he thought his interview with Jones was to have been about his book and not

about SBC issues. But Jones said that "there were no stipulations by [Stanley] or the publisher or anybody" regarding subjects of discussion for the interview.

Both edicts Stanley reportedly criticized were additions to the SBC's Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement approved by convention messengers in 2000. Those controversial additions were penned and promoted by some of Stanley's allies in SBC politics.

This isn't the first time Stanley has taken issue with the reporting of his comments on the issue. 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.

Jones suggested that part of the controversy over the latest interview may stem from Stanley confusing the two interviews. Discussing why Stanley claimed he told Jones he wouldn't vote for a woman as pastor of a church when Jones said his tape revealed no such discussion, the journalist said, "I don't know how he came out -- why he said that. Unless he was confusing; maybe he was thinking back to that earlier Charlotte Observer interview."

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Baptist pastor elected to NCC interfaith relations post

By NCC staff

NEW YORK CITY (ABP) -- Pastor Shanta Premawardhana, a leader in interfaith work in Chicago, has become the third Baptist elected to one of five key administrative positions with the National Council of Churches. He will serve as Associate General Secretary for Interfaith Relations and director of the NCC Interfaith Relations Commission.

For the past 14 years, Premawardhana has been senior pastor of Chicago's Ellis Avenue Church (formerly Cornell Baptist Church), and during that time has been active in the Hyde Park and Kenwood Interfaith Council. Founded in 1911, this organization is said to be one of the nation's oldest interfaith organizations. He served from 1996-98 as president of that organization, which currently includes 38 Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim congregations and organizations.

More recently, Premawardhana has been a leader in the Gamaliel Foundation, a network of 51 community organizations uniting Christian, Jewish and Muslim congregations to work for economic justice and immigrant rights, and vice president of the Chicago-based Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations, which currently has a membership of about 100 congregations. Recently, these congregations successfully lobbied to pass legislation that allows immigrant students to pay in-state tuition in Illinois colleges and universities. He also serves as vice president of the Alliance of Baptists, an NCC member communion.

Premawardhana was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and received his seminary education in Sri Lanka and India. He went on to do graduate work at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., earning both a master's and a doctoral degree.

The National Council of Churches is the leading ecumenical organization in the United States. Its 36 Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican member communions (denominations) comprise 50 million adherents in 140,000 local congregations nationwide.

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First Baptist church of N.M. celebrates 150 years

By John Loudat

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (ABP) -- "Our church will thrive as long as the River of Life flows in our midst and as long as our feet are firmly planted on a mountain called 'Calvary,' " declared the pastor of the first non-Catholic church west of Texas, during the recent celebration of the congregation's birth 150 years ago.

Pastor Steve Taylor's words were reminiscent of those of the church's first pastor, Hiram Walter Read, who said, "Deo Volente (God willing), it is here to stay so long as the Rio Grande flows and the adjacent mountains abide."

"Occasionally it does us good to 'look back' and consider our heritage in order that we may 'live forward' with the legacy of a solid foundation," Taylor told church members Oct. 19.

First Baptist Church, Albuquerque, was the only non-Catholic church in the American Southwest on Oct. 10, 1853, when it was founded in a rented adobe building in what is now Old Town by 33-year-old Hiram Walter Read.

The dust scarcely had settled behind the hooves of Gen. Stephen W. Kearney's conquering army when the Baptist missionary came down the Santa Fe Trail into the New Mexico territory four years earlier, under the auspices of the American Baptist Home Mission Society of New York.

In 1854, Read's wife, Alzina, was severely injured when she jumped down from a buggy. The following year, Read turned the Albuquerque flock over to another missionary, Samuel Gorman, and took his wife to Boston.

Read would serve as a doctor and chaplain in the Civil War, during which he was captured by the Confederates and sentenced to hang for treason. After a daring rescue by Union troops, in 1863 he was sent by President Lincoln to help set up the territorial government in Arizona, where he would be captured by Apaches, threatened with death by fire, but then spared. After the war, he served as a missionary and a pastor in Missouri.

In 1866, the American Baptist Mission Society that had funded Baptist work in New Mexico for 17 years, decided to shift all its funds into work with the south's newly freed slaves. First Baptist, Albuquerque, disappeared for a time, its members absorbed by arriving Presbyterian and Methodist congregations.

In 1880, at age 60, Read went to Nevada to pastor a church for two years, before accepting a position in El Paso as general missionary for the American Publication and Bible Society to New Mexico, Arizona, West Texas and the two northern provinces of Mexico.

In April of 1887, the 67-year-old missionary, now known to many as "the Apostle Paul of the American Southwest," rode a train from El Paso and gathered 11 Albuquerque Baptists together in the upstairs meeting room of the YMCA. He stayed for a month, and the church was refounded on May 1.

The church's first building was erected in 1891 under the leadership of Pastor John H. Thompson. The church would worship there until 1927, when it went "underground" for 10 years, meeting in the basement of its current building. In 1937, Pastor H.A. Zimmerman led the church to build the auditorium which is still in use today.

During the sesquicentennial celebration, much was said around the church and in newspapers comparing the church's

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current pastor with its founder.

Read was known as a man of great daring who traveled the region on tall stallions, and Taylor occasionally brings his mount to church to give children rides and often tells the congregation about some of the very real dangers he and his family experienced while serving as missionaries in Africa.

Taylor tells church members the most important thing he and Read have in common is a "passion for reaching people with a passionate love for the Lord and for his purpose in the church."

The pastor of the historic church says he looks to the future as one of "promise and potential" as the church continues to "impact the lives of those around with the transforming truth of the gospel."

-- Dale and Betty Danielson contributed to this article.

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God laid his will in church's hands

By John Hall

BEDFORD, Texas (ABP) -- Some congregations spend years trying to discern the Lord's will. Leaders of Woodland Heights Baptist Church in Bedford, Texas, feel God laid it in their hands.

In July 2000, a Brazilian church started a trend when it asked to share the facilities of Woodland Heights Baptist Church. Soon a Korean church did the same. Later a 50-member Chinese church would come to use the buildings, too. Now Sudanese people are coming to services and may start a church on the premises soon.

"This has not been in our plan," Woodland Heights Pastor Doug Riggs admitted. "It's not something we set out to do necessarily. But it's something God laid in our hands."

Riggs acknowledged he was not used to working in a multicultural setting. Yet he said he has been willing to learn about the people meeting on the church grounds. One thing he has learned is that a host church must be willing to treat the other congregations as equals. While the leaders interact and encourage each other, the congregations essentially function independently.

"It is working out perfectly," said Jair Campos, pastor of Igreja Batista Brasileira Central. "Woodland Heights respects the mission churches."

The host church needs to emphasize reaching people, not just growing the church, Riggs added. If more people can become Christians through these churches, Riggs wants to help.

"I think the only thing it requires from an English congregation is a mindset that this is not our castle that we need to protect with a moat," he said.

There were initial concerns about sharing the space with other churches, but Riggs noted they quickly disappeared as the congregations reached people in the community without altering the host church's activities.

Not only were the concerns gone, but the congregations wanted to come together for a multicultural worship service.

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Worshippers sang in four languages - Chinese, English, Korean and Portuguese - and each pastor performed the Lord's Supper in his native tongue. The service was followed by a fellowship potluck dinner featuring ethnic food.

Campos described the service as being "like heaven," saying that all the missions and the host church functioned as one large congregation.

Christopher Sham, pastor of the Bedford Chinese Baptist Church., echoed Campos' thoughts, calling the congregation a "group of saints."

"It was a great experience to see how people do things differently," said Campos, who also serves as music minister at Woodland Heights. "Even though people have different cultures they can come together to worship and feel the Spirit."

The Korean church has since moved to its own facilities, but the worship event has opened the congregations to further cooperation. Leaders are planning a Christmas drive-through presentation of Christ's life complete with 13 sets, costumes and a cast. Each car will receive a tape or compact disc that narrates the story as they drive through. Audio will be available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Cantonese and Mandarin.

"There's a bigger mentality that is growing that is 'It's not about me. It's about the kingdom,'" he said. "The multicultural thing is such a blessing. You just have to try it."

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BGCT missions network chooses its name, leader

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Nearly a year after the Baptist General Convention of Texas voted to create a new missions network, the entity now has both a name and a staff leader.

Meeting in Dallas Oct. 23, the network's board adopted WorldconneX as its corporate name and elected Bill Tinsley, the BGCT's current associate executive director, to lead the new entity.

The 32-member board, with 27 present, met for more than three and a half hours in executive session before publicly announcing Tinsley as the inaugural leader of WorldconneX.

During the open portion of its meeting, the board of trustees formally approved the WorldconneX name, adopted articles of incorporation and bylaws, and named a seven-member administrative committee to work with the new leader, who begins his duties Dec. 1.

"WorldconneX reflects what we are about as a network, and that is connecting God's people with mission opportunities and resources both here in Texas and the world beyond. It also reflects the connection of Christ to the world," said Justice Anderson, chairman of the board.

Anderson will serve on the board's administrative committee with Albert Reyes of San Antonio, Keith Parks of Richardson, Carol Childress of Rockwall, Leon Miller of Kerrville, Frankie Harvey of Nacogdoches and Mike Stroope of Dublin.

Eschewing terms such as "chief executive officer" or "executive director," the board of trustees chose simply to

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describe Tinsley's role as "network leader" for the time being.

"From the beginning, we have asked the Holy Spirit to be our CEO, and our search for a network leader could not have ended better," Anderson said. "Bill Tinsley is a deeply spiritual, mission-minded individual with leadership experience at every level of Baptist life. He is a superb choice."

Accepting the position, Tinsley said the challenge facing WorldconneX is "stepping beyond the traditional methods" of missions.

"God is moving in the emerging generation and among the laity with unprecedented power. Our task is to connect thousands of people in whose hearts and minds God is giving visions and dreams to serve him around the world in bold and creative ways," Tinsley said.

"To say I have all the answers about how we will do this and where it will take us would be misleading," Tinsley continued. "The only way we could have all the answers would be to do what we have done before. We are moving into new regions and new areas where we will be challenged to learn together."

Tinsley, 56, has been BGCT associate executive director for two years. Previously he was executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention from 1993 to 2001.

Tinsley grew up in First Baptist Church of Corsicana, where he was licensed to the ministry. He graduated from Baylor University in Waco and earned master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He served as pastor of churches in Bremond, Mexia and Franklin before becoming founding pastor of First Baptist Church in The Colony.

Tinsley and his wife, Jacqueline, live in Rockwall where they are members of Lake Pointe Church. They have three children and three grandchildren.

Messengers to the 2002 BGCT annual meeting approved recommendations calling for the creation of the missions network. It was established as a separate not-for-profit affiliate of the BGCT "to help churches, associations, institutions and individuals fulfill their missions calling through both short-term and long-term missions endeavors across the United States and the world."

"We do not intend to be a reactionary replacement of traditional Baptist missionary entities," Anderson said, "but want to offer an additional way to help churches who want to administer and support their own missions personnel and projects.... We're not trying to create another traditional missions agency to compete with the existing ones. We want to be a broker of missions relationships and resources."

- A photo is available from Associated Baptist Press.