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Wingfield leaves Standard, joins Dallas church staff

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Mark Wingfield, managing editor of the Baptist Standard, is leaving denominational journalism after 21 years to join the staff at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas.

At a called church conference Nov. 19, the Dallas congregation overwhelmingly voted to call Wingfield as associate pastor with specific responsibilities in communications, outreach and stewardship education. He will assume the new post Jan. 1.

Wingfield, 41, joined Wilshire Baptist five years ago, when he came to the Baptist Standard.

"I am passionate about our church and its vision, mission and ministry," he said. "To be able to invest my full attention on advancing the work of the church is invigorating and challenging."

Rather than retreating from action, Wingfield said he sees the move to a church staff as putting him at the heart of Baptist life. "The reality is that the local church is the center of action for Baptist ministry. And I know of no other church that presents a better place to serve than Wilshire," he said.

"In some ways, I feel I am becoming part of a national trend that I have written about. More churches are calling out staff leadership from among their members. The proposal put together by our pastor and personnel committee is visionary, and I'm thrilled to be part of Wilshire's long tradition of stepping out on faith to fulfill the church's mission in creative ways."

Wingfield is vice chair of deacons, an adult Sunday school teacher, and a member of the strategic planning council at Wilshire, a congregation affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"The opportunity to call Mark to our church staff gives us someone of immense competence and confidence," said

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George Mason, pastor of the church. "His admirable courage in speaking for and to Baptists in the wider church assures us of his clarity of vision and conviction.

"His commitment to Wilshire's mission has been evident in everything he has done. I can't wait to see what God will do among us with the addition of Mark to our team."

The new associate pastor's position is part of a transition plan as Wilshire's senior associate pastor, Preston Bright, moves toward retirement in two years.

Wingfield has been recognized by his peers as one of the top investigative, enterprising reporters in Christian journalism. Over the past two decades, he reported on tumultuous changes at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, conflict at Baylor University, and the often divergent paths taken by the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention.

As managing editor of the Baptist Standard, Wingfield made the paper "sparkle," according to Editor Marv Knox. "Mark is one of the most insightful, thorough, fair and committed journalists Baptists ever produced. His insatiable curiosity, tenacity for truth and passion for people have shaped his remarkable ministry for more than two decades. Plus, his impeccable eye for design and ear for the ever-changing conversation of faith have made the Standard fun to read" he said.

Even so, to those who know him best, Wingfield's decision to join the Wilshire staff seemed a logical step, Knox observed.

"He has always been one of the finest, hardest-working church members anywhere. His training in ministry, experience in Baptist life and investment in the ministry of the church have shaped him for this new opportunity at Wilshire. While his departure saddens all of us who work with him, we're also excited for Mark and for his wonderful church," he said.

Before coming to the Baptist Standard, Wingfield was editor of the Kentucky Baptist Western Recorder, where he earlier served as news director.

Previously, he worked as associate director of news and information for the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board and as director of news and information with Southwestern Seminary.

Wingfield has been a prolific contributor to the Associated Baptist Press independent news service, which recently made him the inaugural recipient of the ABP Writer's Award.

"We knew the first award had to go to Mark," said ABP editor Greg Warner. "He has epitomized quality, truthful Baptist journalism for so long, and ABP and its readers were most often the beneficiaries of his talent."

Warner went on to say that Wingfield's move from denominational journalism to a church staff position "testifies to why Christian journalists do what we do -- because we believe in God's people as firmly as we believe in God's truth."

He is a past president of the Baptist Communicators Association and has been a frequent winner in its Wilmer C. Fields Awards Competition, including the organization's top writing honor, the Frank Burkhalter Award. He also received a Katy Award from the Dallas Press Club.

Wingfield earned an undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of New Mexico and attended Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Alison, have 11-year-old twin sons, Luke and Garrett.

Concerning the Baptist Standard's future, Knox noted, "Since this move so obviously clarifies God's will for Mark Wingfield and Wilshire Baptist Church, I'm confident it's also God's will for the Standard. We will seek his successor

and maintain the paper's commitment to inform, inspire, equip and empower Texas Baptists to follow Jesus Christ and expand God's kingdom."

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Republicans add DC voucher plan to unamendable appropriations bill

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Republican leaders in the House and Senate have quietly slipped a measure into a federal appropriations bill that would create the first federally sponsored school-voucher program.

The proposal, which would create a publicly funded scholarship program for low-income students in the District of Columbia, has been added to a massive spending bill by a House-Senate conference committee. The catch-all package - with a price tag of \$280 billion at last count -- would fund vital government operations for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1.

Although conference reports are designed to hammer out differences between legislation passed by the House and Senate before both chambers give final approval, congressional leaders have wide latitude to insert extraneous measures into such spending bills.

This means the bill containing the voucher provision is unamendable and virtually certain to pass when it reaches the floor of the Senate, which Republican leaders hope will happen before Congress breaks for Thanksgiving.

The \$13 million measure would provide per-pupil scholarships of up to \$7,500 a year that low-income students in Washington could use to attend private schools, including religious schools. The bill would authorize a five-year pilot program. It also would provide \$27 million in additional funding for traditional D.C. public schools as well as public charter schools in the District.

The voucher plan has not been brought to the Senate floor for consideration. The House narrowly passed a similar D.C. voucher plan -- by a single-vote margin -- in September. However, because of the controversy and a filibuster threat from Democratic voucher opponents, Republican leaders removed the measure from the D.C. appropriations bill that passed Nov. 18.

The inclusion of the measure in the omnibus spending package means voucher opponents have virtually no options for opposing it. Blocking the bill would risk a showdown that could ultimately lead to a shutdown of the federal government. Even simply voting against such a bill is difficult, because it contains funding for many lucrative home-district federal projects that lawmakers have worked hard to include.

"I think that it's pretty unfortunate that they're going to be attaching such a controversial amendment to a bill that will be tough for senators to vote against," a Senate Democratic aide on education issues told ABP. The aide also said that, despite deep opposition to vouchers, a filibuster to block the final package is not likely.

Although the majority of elected officials in D.C. oppose the voucher proposal, it gained momentum earlier this year when Washington Mayor Anthony Williams (D) reversed his long opposition and threw his support behind the legislation. He was joined by the city's school board president and a key city council member.

A key legislator -- Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) -- threw her support behind the plan as well, despite a long record

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of past opposition to vouchers.

In a Nov. 19 statement, Feinstein hailed the provision's inclusion in the spending bill. "I believe that we will learn something from this program," she said. "The prejudices about vouchers run deep and are filled with emotion. The question is, do children do better in different academic programs?"

Press reports have indicated that Feinstein received promises from Senate leaders that the provision would include language that prohibits schools participating in the program from engaging in religious discrimination against students. As of press time, Feinstein's office had not returned a reporter's calls requesting information on that aspect of the program.

Voucher opponents condemned the move. Holly Hollman, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said the use of "parliamentary ploys to pass legislation is careless and utterly irresponsible." Hollman's organization opposes government funding for religious schools, even though the Supreme Court ruled last year that voucher programs do not necessarily violate the Constitution's ban on government establishment of religion.

"Creative responses are needed to address the problems in our public schools, but subsidizing religious education with tax money is not one of them," Hollman said.

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Eldorado bus crash claims another victim

By Ken Camp

ELDORADO, Texas (ABP) -- The October bus crash that killed five members of First Baptist Church in Eldorado, Texas, and three of their friends has claimed another life.

Billy Frank Blaylock, 78, died Nov. 17 at a San Angelo hospital from injuries sustained when the church-owned bus ran into a parked tractor-trailer rig near Tallulah, La., Oct. 13. After the wreck, Blaylock spent about two weeks in a Jackson, Miss., hospital before being flown to San Angelo's Shannon Medical Center.

His wife, Mabel Blaylock, also was injured in the bus wreck, sustaining numerous broken bones and a punctured lung. She remains hospitalized in Eldorado.

Billy Frank Blaylock was a World War II veteran who lost a leg in the battle of Iwo Jima. He was a retired rancher, saddle-maker and mail carrier, a deacon at First Baptist Church of Eldorado and a Boy Scout leader.

"More people considered Billy Frank Blaylock their hero than any other person I've ever met," said Andy Anderson, pastor of First Baptist Church.

During Blaylock's 33 years as a mail carrier with the U.S. Postal Service, he kept a Bible on the front seat of his vehicle and memorized a verse of Scripture every day, Anderson noted.

"He could recite huge sections of the Bible from memory," the pastor said. "One time in a Sunday school class discussion, the teacher asked the class how they would define wisdom. And one of the men said, 'Billy Frank Blaylock.'"

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Other members of First Baptist Church killed in the Louisiana bus wreck were: Kenneth and Betty Richardson, both 81; Delia Pena, 72, and Domingo Pina, 65; and Mary Ruth Robinson, 63. Three non-members lost their lives: Jean Demere, 74, and Jimmy Teel, 68, of Water Valley and Laverne Shannon, 76, of San Angelo.

Fifteen senior adults from the Eldorado area were on the second day of a planned 16-day tour of historic sites when the bus accident occurred.

Ken Thomas, 66, treasurer and past chairman of deacons at First Baptist Church in Eldorado, was driving the bus at the time of the wreck. He received a misdemeanor citation for careless operation.

No criminal charges have been filed. The trucking company that owned the 18-wheeler involved in the wreck has initiated a civil lawsuit.

The Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration assessed a \$2,200 fine against First Baptist Church of Eldorado for failure to comply with some of that agency's regulations. The FMCSA regulates vehicles carrying more than 15 passengers across state lines.

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Daytona Beach church ousted over female co-pastor

By ABP staff

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (ABP) -- Central Baptist Church in Daytona Beach, Fla., has been removed from membership in the Halifax Baptist Association because of the congregation's female co-pastor.

Sonja Phillips and her husband, Dave, were hired as co-pastors of the 750-member church in July.

During the associations' annual meeting Oct. 28, a motion was approved to expel the congregation. "We need to take a stand on this issue" of female pastors, said Chris Lybarger, pastor at Rima Ridge Baptist Church in Ormond Beach, who made the motion, according to the Daytona Beach News-Journal.

The ouster was confirmed by the unanimous vote of the association's executive committee Nov. 18 after some confusion arose about the association's earlier action.

Dennis Belz, director of missions for the Halifax Association, said the calling of a woman pastor is contradictory to the Bible.

Female pastors, while common in some denominations, are rare in Southern Baptist life. Three years ago, the Southern Baptist Convention revised its Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement to limit the role of pastor to men. While the statement is not binding on congregations, it often is used as a tool of acceptable doctrine by local associations.

This is the first time a church has been expelled from the 46-year-old Halifax Baptist Association for any reason, reported the Florida Baptist Witness.

Central was a charter member of the 33-church association but has been less active in recent years. It also is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which welcomes female pastors.

Sonja Phillips, 40, said her decision to become a pastor was "not about me being a woman."

"It's about me being a child of God," the former social worker told the News-Journal. "I'm just trying to serve God the best way I know how."

Sonja and Dave Phillips take turns preaching for the Daytona Beach church, which has a reputation for its multiple social ministries.

Longtime church member Jim Page represented Central Baptist as a messenger to the October associational meeting but was not allowed to participate. He said the church's ouster doesn't matter nearly as much to church members as their relationship with the co-pastors. "I feel sorry for those other churches that have such restrictive thinking and policies," he added.

- A photo is available from Associated Baptist Press.

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Alabama Baptists affirm display of 10 Commandments

By ABP staff

MOBILE, Ala. (ABP) -- Messengers to this year's Alabama Baptist State Convention voiced their support for publicly displaying the Ten Commandments and approved a status quo Cooperative Program budget for 2004.

Messengers overwhelmingly adopted a Ten Commandments resolution that encouraged elected officials to "uphold righteousness, acknowledge the biblical foundations of government, and contend for the right of religious expression provided for the American people within the Constitution of the United States of America."

After a brief debate, messengers deleted the mention of Judge Roy Moore from the original resolution. Moore recently was removed as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court after refusing a court order to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from the state's judicial building in Montgomery.

In an otherwise harmonious meeting at Cottage Hill Baptist Church Nov. 18-19, messengers adopted a 2004 budget that is the same as the 2003 budget -- \$40,427,480. Projected gifts for this year were expected to be below budget, according to Executive Director Rick Lance.

Attendance at this year's convention was one of the lowest in recent years. The 1,093 messengers re-elected all officers without opposition. Joe Godfrey, pastor of First Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove, will serve again as president; Henry Cox, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bay Minette, as first vice president; and Roger Willmore, pastor of First Baptist Church, Boaz, as second vice president.

Other resolutions included support of the Federal Marriage Amendment, the ban on partial-birth abortions and the liberation of Iraq.

Messengers will meet next at the Montgomery Civic Center Nov. 16 and 17, 2004.

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**Board member named
interim at Central Seminary**

By ABP staff

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- James McCrossen, an ordained American Baptist, has been appointed interim president at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan. McCrossen, a member of the school's board of directors, was named to the position by his fellow directors at a meeting in early November. Thomas Clifton retired as president in August.

Central is affiliated with American Baptist Churches USA and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Benjamin Griffin, president at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Mass., since 1995, announced he will retire June 30, 2004. Andover Newton is also affiliated with the ABC.

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