

Associated Baptist Press

November 25, 2003 Volume: 03-107

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**Baptist newspaper barred
from Missouri Baptist meetings**

By Vicki Brown and Greg Warner

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- In a move unprecedented in Southern Baptist circles, a state convention president will attempt to bar a Baptist publication in Missouri from attending or reporting on state Baptist meetings.

David Tolliver, recently elected president of the Missouri Baptist Convention, informed the editor of the Word & Way that the staff of the 107-year-old news journal will no longer be allowed to attend convention meetings, including executive board sessions and committee meetings. Tolliver also will attempt to bar Word & Way from the convention's 2004 annual meeting, which are frequently attended by secular media.

In a Nov. 19 letter to Editor Bill Webb, Tolliver explained that his "directive" is a result of the action the Word & Way and four other convention agencies took to establish self-perpetuating trustee boards.

Word & Way, Missouri Baptist University, Windermere Baptist Conference Center and the Missouri Baptist Foundation changed their charters in 2001 to allow each entity to elect its own trustees rather than allow the convention to elect them. The Baptist Home trustees took the same action a year earlier.

The Missouri Baptist Convention filed suit in August 2002 to force the boards of the five entities to rescind their charter changes.

"It is simply a matter of prudence that litigants not have direct communication or personal interaction with one another," Tolliver said in the letter. Tolliver said his directive will be withdrawn once the litigation is settled.

Tolliver, pastor of Pisgah Baptist Church in Excelsior Springs, is a member of the convention's legal task force charged with overseeing the legal effort to recover the five breakaway agencies.

The convention's action against Word & Way is probably unprecedented, according to longtime Baptist observers, who could not recall another incident in which a state convention had excluded a Baptist publication from all its meetings.

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In a telephone interview Nov. 24, Tolliver emphasized the lawsuit as his primary reason for expelling Word & Way from board proceedings. "This was not done in animosity but in prudence," he said.

When asked why the convention waited more than a year to bar news journal staff, he responded: "In my opinion, it should have been done a year ago ... but I wasn't in a position to do it. ... I have said in several instances [in the last year] that it should have been done. ... This is not anything personal. I think it's the right thing."

Tolliver said the directive would not apply to other news organizations because they are not involved in legal action with the Missouri convention. "If ABP [Associated Baptist Press] calls and asks if they can attend, I will let them. We are not in a lawsuit with them," he said.

The convention president added that he plans to ask all executive board members to refrain from talking with Word & Way, although he acknowledged that he cannot force them to comply.

Traditionally, all convention meetings have been open to members of Missouri Baptist churches and to visitors. Tolliver said he does not plan to break that tradition, noting that convention sessions are open to all Missouri Baptists. However, he noted that if a Word & Way staffer refuses to leave an executive board meeting, he will simply call the board into executive (closed) session.

Tolliver's directive is not limited to Word & Way. "I plan to close those meetings to folks who work for the five agencies. None will be allowed to attend," he said.

In his letter, Tolliver also noted that Word & Way would be barred from the convention's annual meeting -- an action that he probably cannot enforce. Under the Missouri Baptist Convention constitution and bylaws, convention leaders must allow elected messengers from recognized MBC churches to participate in the annual sessions. Word & Way staffers are members of MBC churches.

Tolliver said his "desire" is that any Word & Way staff member who attends as a messenger not represent the newspaper. He acknowledged that he would not be able to stop the staffer from taking notes and writing a story.

The convention president said he also plans to discontinue the convention board's practice of allowing a Foundation staff member to give a verbal report of the accounts the Foundation administers on the board's behalf. The Foundation staff had not received any official word from Tolliver as of Nov. 24.

Tolliver did not explain how broadly "direct communication or personal interaction" would be defined. When asked if Word & Way would be banned from entering the Baptist Building in Jefferson City, Tolliver responded, "That's not my call. That would be [MBC executive director] David Clippard's call."

Clippard was on vacation Nov. 25 and unavailable to comment on the enforceability of Tolliver's ban. Kenny Qualls, the convention's associate executive director, did not respond immediately to a request for comment from Associated Baptist Press.

Word & Way board chairman Bob Cox said he does not understand Tolliver's reasoning for the ban. "I understood that any Baptist could go [to MBC meetings]," he said. "... I don't know how you can bar anybody from the convention. I don't understand how you can just bar somebody from a public meeting. The reason behind it doesn't make sense to me."

In a phone interview Nov. 24, Tolliver repeated his pledge to lift the ban once the lawsuit is settled. "I will bend over backwards to meet with people and talk with people to end this lawsuit," he said.

- Vicki Brown is a newswriter for the Word & Way. Greg Warner is executive editor of Associated Baptist Press.

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Alternative Christmas catalogues turn gift-giving into ministry

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- A number of Christian ministries have borrowed a page out of the Neiman-Marcus Christmas Catalog.

Like the upscale retail chain, these ministries use the seasonal catalogs to offer unique gift ideas, ranging from the simple to the extraordinary.

But unlike Neiman-Marcus, which offers a luxury ice-fishing house and a custom-made mermaid outfit, these Christian ministries provide alternative Christmas gift options that benefit third parties.

Organizations such as World Vision, Samaritan's Purse and even Dallas-based Buckner Baptist Benevolences publish Christmas catalogs as an extension of their year-round efforts to help the world's neediest people.

The idea is to shop for something to help a person in need and then send a gift card to a friend or loved one announcing that this item has been donated in their name.

A pioneer in this field is Heifer International, a non-profit organization based in Little Rock, Ark., that works to end world hunger by providing livestock and small animals to farmers and impoverished families.

The Heifer Christmas catalog features a barnyard variety of gift ideas, ranging from a flock of chicks or ducks for \$20 to a sheep or goat for \$120, a llama for \$150 or a heifer for \$500. The extravagant giver may choose The Ark for \$5,000, which will provide a veritable Noah's Ark of animal sets.

For the listed price, Heifer will purchase and transport animals to those who need a sustainable source of nutrition and income. They, in turn, are asked to share the gift with someone else.

For example, a family that receives a heifer obtains a source of protein to nourish children and adults alike. A good dairy cow, Heifer reports, can produce 4 gallons of milk a day -- enough to feed the family and have some additional to sell. Further, a healthy cow may bear a calf once a year, furthering the supply of nourishment for a community.

A family that receives a heifer is asked to donate to another needy family the first female calf born to their cow.

Heifer International works in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia and the South Pacific.

This year's Heifer International catalog features a plethora of celebrity endorsements, from Walter Cronkite and Jimmy Carter to author Barbara Kingsolver.

World Vision, an international Christian humanitarian relief organization based in Federal Way, Wash., offers a similar catalog but one that stretches beyond animals.

Through World Vision, donors may give Christmas gifts of water wells in Haiti (\$10,000), wheelchairs for disabled children (\$250), education for an orphan child for one year (\$150), or immunizations for a child in a developing country (\$25).

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This is the eighth year for World Vision's Christmas catalog. Last year, the catalog raised \$5.8 million from more than 30,000 donors.

"The gift catalog vividly communicates the needs of our global neighbors and explains the help that caring individuals like you can provide," explains a promotional piece. "It's a great educational tool for families that also helps instill compassion in children."

The gift catalog originally was developed as a way to help World Vision's existing donors, explained spokeswoman Karen Kartes. However, it quickly became a way to introduce new donors to the world's needs, she added.

About 70 percent of those who give gifts through the catalog are women, Kartes said, and many of those women are mothers of young children. Giving alternative gifts from a ministry catalog provides children a personal illustration of the greater meaning of Christmas, she said.

Officials at Heifer International agreed, noting in a news release: "While kids might have difficulty understanding what it means to write a check to charity, they can easily grasp the power of giving an animal ... to poor families in 48 countries around the world."

Samaritan's Purse, the international relief ministry headed by Franklin Graham, is best known for its Operation Christmas Child drive of shoebox gifts. However, the North Carolina-based ministry also offers a Christmas gift catalog. Available gifts include wheelchairs for disabled people who cannot afford them (\$75), Bibles in a variety of languages (\$10), training for international evangelists (\$25) and airfare to transport sick children to the United States for specialized care (\$2,000).

One of the newest organizations to offer a Christmas catalog is Buckner Baptist Benevolences, a ministry affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

For the second year, Buckner has produced a catalog featuring gift opportunities for its retirement services, international orphan care work and statewide ministries of child and family services.

Featured items include supplemental medications for senior adults who cannot afford all their medicine (\$15), large-print Bible study materials for senior adults (\$20), winter coats for orphans (\$30), medicine for an orphanage for one month (\$50), diapers and formula for an infant in foster care (\$30) and counseling for a child who has experienced personal trauma (\$200).

"We've realized the attitudes of many of our donors are changing. Many people want to see a tangible use of their contributions, and the gift catalog approach is a practical way for us to show them how their money is used," explained Scott Collins, vice president for communications.

"This is only our second year, so our constituents are just getting used to the idea," he added. "But because most consumers use catalogs, this is an easy transition. The gift catalog approach also translates easily to the Internet because people today are so accustomed to shopping online. Ultimately, we believe that holds the most potential for non-profit organizations."

In addition to the specific gifts available in Christmas catalogs, many ministry organizations -- including child-care agencies, family ministries, schools and hospitals -- rely heavily on year-end donations. These agencies often will provide acknowledgement cards to those in whose name gifts have been made.

Prisons are 'fertile fields' for message of redemption, compassion, chaplain says

By Craig Bird

FLORENCE, Colo. (ABP) -- "People tend to think that everyone in prison is beyond redemption socially or spiritually, that anyone who comes to chapel or asks spiritual questions is just playing games to get out of their cells or improve their chance of parole," said Susan Barnett, a prison chaplain in Florence, Colo.

"Certainly, there are plenty of hard cases," said Barnett, who serves at a medium-security federal prison for men. "In September, an inmate threatened to kill me. But prisons are fertile mission fields where people are ready to hear the gospel."

That "How can we hear unless we are told?" environment is a prime motivator for Barnett, one of three women chaplains in the Federal Bureau of Prisons endorsed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. "A chaplain brings a sense of humanity and compassion into a hard and sterile setting," Barnett said. "There are chances to minister in the midst of crisis as prisoners deal with bad news, such as the death of family members or being served with divorce papers."

Women chaplains also have the opportunity to provide positive female role models, "something most men haven't seen a lot of," Barnett said. She urges Christians to volunteer for prison ministry, "because they appreciate that you are choosing to be there with them because you love God and love them."

Volunteers are becoming increasingly important in prison ministry as many state-run chaplaincy programs nationwide are threatened by state budget woes. In Georgia, the Department of Corrections plans to cut its entire chaplaincy staff -- three full-time and 49 part-time chaplains - to save \$1.3 million. The state, which has the nation's sixth-largest prison population (47,000), is training volunteers it hopes can plug the gap.

George Pickle, chaplaincy coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said Christian churches should support correctional chaplains in their call "to be the incarnational presence of Christ among people with as much need of that presence as anyone."

"They lovingly care for inmates in their relationship to God and society, while accepting them as men and women Jesus loved and died for," Pickle said. The Fellowship now has a total of 352 endorsed chaplains and pastoral counselors in a variety of settings.

Susan Barnett first got involved in prison ministry by volunteering while she was a seminary student.

"I didn't have any history with correctional facilities, hadn't had any family or friends imprisoned," she said. "But I realized, for me, being lost was like being in prison. I wasn't saved until I was 21, and until then I was lost and had no real purpose in life. I related to how the prisoners felt."

"I like to remind people that correctional chaplains are doing a ministry specifically commended by Jesus by visiting those in prison," Barnett added.

- Craig Bird is a free-lance writer in San Antonio, Texas.

Associated Baptist Press appoints new director of development

By ABP staff

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Associated Baptist Press has named Tim Norton of Atlanta director of development for the independent news service.

Norton will provide leadership in developing new sources of annual revenue for ABP and will direct its fund-raising campaign, Dateline: Tomorrow.

Norton, 41, comes to ABP from the Lord's Day Alliance of the U.S., where he serves as executive director. Norton owns Crux Communication, a communications, marketing and development consulting firm based in Atlanta.

Norton will continue to live and work in Atlanta, explained Greg Warner, executive editor of ABP, which is based in Jacksonville, Fla. "This will place Tim in proximity to the majority of our supporters, who are spread out across the South," Warner said. "Tim has already proven his deep commitment to the ministry of ABP and to maintaining a free press for Baptists. I really believe our friends and donors are going to respond to his enthusiasm and to our possibilities for growth."

Norton fills a position left vacant since the 2001 resignation of Charles Qualls, who joined the staff of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Norton previously served as business manager for the Christian Index, the newsjournal of Georgia Baptists; associate vice president for development at Palm Beach Atlantic University; director of marketing and development at the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission; and associate director of marketing and development for the former Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

A graduate of the University of Central Florida and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Norton is married to the former Dawn Shirley. The Nortons are the parents of one son, Luke, 9.

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Maston Foundation honors founders of Habitat for Humanity

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Nobody ever earned God's favor by building a house for a poor family, according to the president and co-founder of Habitat for Humanity. But whether it's in rural Georgia or the war-torn Middle East, that's part of how "the people of Jesus" should show gratitude for their blessings, Millard Fuller said.

The T. B. Maston Foundation presented its annual award for applied Christian ethics to Fuller and his wife, Linda, at a recent banquet in Dallas. The Maston Award is named for a pioneering Baptist professor of Christian social ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Millard and Linda Fuller started Habitat for Humanity in 1976 with the vision of every person in the world having "a simple, decent place to live." Since that time, Habitat for Humanity International has built about 160,000 homes for nearly 800,000 people. Currently, Habitat has chapters in 3,700 cities in 92 countries and on 779 college, university and

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high school campuses.

"We build a house every 26 minutes. We built another 21,600 this year. And by 2005, we will have built housing for a million people -- 200,000 families. It's beginning to look like a little movement is taking shape," Fuller said. "It's exciting that this little mustard seed ministry has grown and developed and blossomed."

Fuller cited the influence of Clarence Jordan, New Testament scholar and founder of the interracial Koinonia Farm near Americus, Ga., on his life and on the development of Habitat.

"I gained the insight from Clarence Jordan that the thrust of the gospel is not from earth to heaven but from heaven to earth...I learned from him that the best evidence of the resurrection is not a rolled away stone but a carried away church," Fuller said.

"I believe, and Clarence Jordan believed, that we are saved by the blood of Jesus on the cross, not by any amount of houses you build or hungry people you feed. We receive the free gift of salvation through the sacrifice Jesus paid on the cross. But how do we express gratitude for that? It is by living a life of giving back, by being the salt of the earth, and by being the presence of Christ."

Linda Fuller was praised not only for her involvement with Habitat but also as a social-justice advocate for women, the poor, immigrants and the mentally ill. Christians should be good stewards of the "power to bless," she told those assembled at the awards banquet.

She spoke forthrightly about those years when her husband made his first million dollars but their marriage suffered.

"I learned pretty quickly that being rich isn't all it's cut out to be," she said. The couple reexamined their values, made the decision to sell all their possessions, gave their money to the poor, and started searching for a new sense of purpose for their lives. That search led to the founding of Habitat.

"When we were rich, when we had a lot of money, our power was taken away from us. We were so consumed with material things, making more and more money, and fixing the boats and cottage on the lake that our power was drained. We had no power left to be a blessing to somebody else," she said.

In contrast, she pointed to recent experiences she and her husband had in Jordan and remote Third World countries. In places where friends told her she was placing her life in danger, she recognized that she was empowered with the ability to bless.

"You have the power, I have the power, we all have the power to make a difference in the world, to be blessed and also to bless," she said.

The Fullers previously have been honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Bronze Medallion from the Points of Light Foundation, the Harry S. Truman Public Service Award and the Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award, among others.

Maston Foundation board member Foy Valentine told those assembled at the banquet that he hoped the ethics award would not be the last recognition the Fullers receive.

"It is my fervent hope that they will get the Nobel Peace Prize," Valentine said, though he questioned whether the award could go twice to members of the same small Baptist church in Georgia. The Fullers attend Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., where former President Jimmy Carter, winner of the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize and a volunteer with Habitat, teaches a Sunday school class.

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Help keep Habitat Christian, founder urges Baptists

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Habitat for Humanity needs Baptists to help preserve its Christian character, founder Millard Fuller pleaded.

Fuller and his wife, Linda, launched Habitat in 1976 to provide "a simple, decent, good place in which to live" for every person on earth. Since then, Habitat has built almost 160,000 homes for nearly 1 million people all over the globe, Fuller reported.

"I have a deep concern that Habitat for Humanity remain firmly a Christian ministry," said Fuller, the organization's president. "From the beginning, I have seen Habitat as a new frontier in Christian missions -- a creative and new way to proclaim the gospel.

"The missionary enterprise has been going on for many, many years, and there have been traditional ways to do missionary work -- hospitals, schools, agriculture, preaching, revivals -- and all of that is authentic. There's nothing wrong with that.

"But I see Habitat for Humanity as a new and creative work to do what we are commanded to do in Matthew 28, which is to proclaim the gospel, and proclamation occurs in many ways -- verbal and incarnational."

Incarnational proclamation involves living out the gospel, much like Jesus did when he came to earth to demonstrate God's love for people, Fuller explained. "The prophets had proclaimed God's word, but God chose to send his Son, Jesus, as the message of his love."

Ironically, success may be the biggest impediment to Fuller's vision, he conceded. Habitat has attracted millions of volunteers who want to help end poverty by providing affordable housing.

"Some of them are not Christians," he noted. "We have an open-door policy" to accept all volunteers who want to build homes in order to end poverty. Consequently, people of all kinds of faiths and no faith have stepped up to participate.

This trend offers a couple of benefits. First, more homes get built. And second, since Habitat crews begin each day with a devotional and prayer and Christians work on the projects, the non-Christian workers theoretically receive a spiritual witness when they work on a project.

But if evangelical Christians don't do their part, if they get crowded out, then Habitat could lose its Christian flavor and the spark of its witness, Fuller fretted.

"My greatest concern for Habitat for Humanity is going secular," he said. "It's not foreordained that this ministry remain a strong Christian ministry. All that it will take for Habitat to go secular is for Christians to stay away from it."

Consequently, Fuller has been focusing his attention on challenging Baptists and other evangelical Christians to get involved in Habitat.

"We urgently need [Baptists], not just to saw boards and pound nails, but to have a presence on site that introduces

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people to Jesus," he stressed. "But you can't do that without presence ... without Christians on site."

Fuller gets most frustrated with his "evangelical brethren" who tell him they're uncomfortable on a Habitat work site with non-Christians.

"How can you say you're an evangelical if you don't want to work around folks who aren't Christians?" he asked. "That's precisely where an evangelical Christian ought to be -- on a site sponsored by an overtly Christian organization with no restriction on what you share with people. Why shouldn't you be there?"

Because of the scope of Habitat's mission -- "to end poverty housing on earth" -- the organization cannot afford to turn away volunteers, Fuller said.

"We have an open door to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, atheists, agnostics, whoever wants to join us, but we are Christian," he said. "In that sense, we are no different from a church. The church says, 'Whosoever will may come.'

"A church should rejoice if an atheist wants to come ... but the pastor doesn't alter the sermon. If anything it is stronger."

Presbyterians and Methodists have provided the strongest support to Habitat, but Fuller is singling out Baptists. "I want to issue the strongest possible appeal to Baptists to come out and join us, to keep Habitat for Humanity faithful to its founding principles," he said.

Those principles are distinctively Baptist, Fuller insisted, pointing out Habitat's Baptist lineage.

The Fullers founded Habitat in 1976 out of Koinonia Farm, a Christian community near Americus, Ga. Two Baptist couples -- Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mabel England -- sought to model Christian justice and racial reconciliation on the farm.

The Fullers visited Dallas recently to accept the Maston Award for applied Christian ethics from the T. B. Maston Foundation. Prior to his death, Maston taught Christian ethics to generations of ministers at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and guided Baptists toward racial reconciliation. Maston was a contemporary with Clarence Jordan in the civil-rights movement.

The Fullers are members of Maranatha Baptist Church in nearby Plains, Ga. And Habitat's most famous volunteers, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, also are members of the church.

"From the very beginning, the leadership of Habitat for Humanity has been Baptist," Fuller said. "But that deep Baptist connection is not known by a lot of Baptists."