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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Jeremy Ball** and **John Barber** have begun spring internships at the Baptist Joint Committee. Ball is a junior at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn. Barber is pursuing a master's degree at Baylor University's J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies.

◆ **Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott**, R-Miss., and former House Speaker **Newt Gingrich**, R-Ga., made their appointments to a religious freedom panel established by the International Religious Freedom Act. Named were former U.S. Sen. **Bill Armstrong** of Colorado; **John Bolton**, a former assistant secretary of state; **Nina Shea**, director of Freedom House's Program of Religious Freedom; and **Elliot Abrams**, a former assistant secretary of state. Democratic lawmakers and President Clinton will name five other panelists.

◆ **Larry Stogsdill**, pastor of Lighthouse Baptist Church in St. Maries, Idaho, said that the church did not violate tax laws when it made Christian Coalition voter guides available in the church before the 1998 elections. Americans United for Separation of Church and State asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the Idaho church and seven other congregations for engaging in political activity. "Our church has never promoted a certain candidate for office," Stogsdill said. Δ

Battles over vouchers expected on Capitol Hill, in states

It may be a while before lawmakers send much of a signal about how church-state issues will fare in the 106th Congress.

Oliver "Buzz" Thomas, special counsel at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said congressional action on religious liberty issues depends "on how quickly the Senate can dispose of the impeachment trial of President Clinton."

Congress watchers expect that many popular church-state issues will resurface, with plans to use public funds for religious schools likely to be high on the agenda.

James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said education vouchers will likely prompt a major battle between "compassionate conservatism and logical liberalism."

"Conservatives worth their salt do not want government regulating religion, presuming to force guidelines on faith-based groups. Any liberal worthy of the name, demands that public funds are dedicated to public purposes," Dunn said. "Yet some misinformed, misled, short-sighted political animals both inside and out of the church keep screaming for voucher schemes for parochial schools."

Thomas said other religious right priorities may surface, including a second attempt to pass a bill that would strip courts of jurisdiction in cases involving the hanging of the Ten Commandments in public places.

Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala., sponsored the bill during the last Congress. Laura Woolfrey, spokeswoman for Aderholt, said that "we are absolutely going to reintroduce the bill" in the 106th Congress.

Thomas, who opposes the Aderholt proposal, said, "I do not think it has a chance of passing, but it's a distraction."

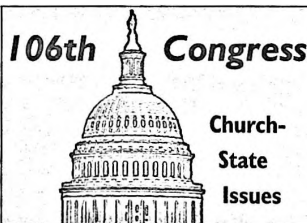
He predicted that "a lot of what happens this year in religious liberty is going to happen at the state level."

He expects voucher battles to rage in the states following the Supreme Court's refusal to review a Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling that allowed education vouchers to be used at Milwaukee parochial schools.

Also, Thomas said the religious coalition seeking a legislative remedy to the demise of the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act will work to break barriers that thwarted momentum behind the Religious Liberty Protection Act last year.

Thomas said religious groups will continue to seek passage of state religious liberty legislation, with target states including New York, New Jersey, Texas and California.

An aide to Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., said no decision has been made on whether to reintroduce a constitutional amendment that opponents say would open the door for government sponsorship of religion. The measure failed in the House last year, and Thomas predicted it will be "hard to get momentum for something like that in an off-election year." Δ



Christian leaders protest attacks on churches

Christian leaders in India denounced a series of attacks against churches and Christians during the Christmas holidays, calling on the government to protect the nation's Christian minority.

Incidents in the Dang region of Gujarat in northwestern India included the burning of churches and attacks on priests and pastors. At least seven people were reportedly treated for gunshot wounds after an armed mob of 500 attacked a church and looted nearby shops in the village of Vaki.

The attacks reportedly were prompted by militant Hindus who accused missionaries of forced conversion of Hindus. Christian leaders deny those charges.

India's prime minister criticized the attacks Jan. 4.

About 2.3 percent of India's 960 million citizens are Christians, while more than 82 percent are Hindus. The National Council of Churches in India, based in Nagpur in northern India, called on the government of Gujarat to ensure "an immediate halt" to violence and threats against minorities. Δ

Judge rules Jesus statue can stay in Wisconsin park

A federal judge has ruled that a controversial statue of Jesus can remain in a park in Marshfield, Wis.

District Judge John C. Shabaz dismissed a lawsuit by the Freedom from Religion Foundation and Clarence Reinders, a city resident and foundation member, who argued the statue was unconstitutional. They sued the city and the Henry Prashchak Memorial Fund, which purchased from the city the site of the statue and is responsible for maintaining the area.

Although the city sold the statue to the fund to accommodate the foundation's concerns about church-state separation, the foundation said the sale of the property was unconstitutional because it showed a preference for Christianity.

Shabaz ruled that the city did not show a preference for Christianity in violation of the U.S. or Wisconsin constitutions.

The Midwestern office of the American Center for Law and Justice helped represent Marshfield in the case. Francis Manion, senior regional counsel for the Midwestern group, said that "fortunately, common sense and a realistic view of the First Amendment requirement prevailed."

Anne Nicol Gaylor, president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, said her organization achieved a partial victory. "In arranging to sell the property, the city did recognize that government shouldn't own shrines and that's a step forward," she said. The foundation is studying whether to appeal the decision. Δ

Religious leaders announce summits to promote civility

Warning that meanness and strident partisanship are taking a heavy toll on American politics, Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders announced plans for a series of summits to promote civility in the public arena.

A national summit scheduled Jan. 26 in Washington, D.C., is designed to highlight the importance of civil discourse in public life and ways the religious community can foster "a more civil debate and a more tolerant society." The national summit will be followed by local forums at various sites around the country.

"Incivility must be stopped before it completely stops the progress of our nation," said Welton Gaddy, executive director of The Interfaith Alliance and one of the organizers of the summit.

Gaddy said the country is "reaping the

bitter fruits of politicizing faith and defining morality in terms of a partisan agenda. It's time for that to stop."

That view was underscored by Azizah Al-Habri, a law professor at T.C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond. She said the vindictiveness, meanness and character assassination common in American politics "can only undermine the democratic structure of this country."

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said public discourse has "reached an alarming low" and that the politics of personal attack is "chasing away the best and the brightest from the call of public service."

National summit participants will include Martin Marty of the University of Chicago; the Rev. James Forbes, senior minister of Riverside Church in New York; the Rev. Robert Drinan, a former congressman and now law professor at Georgetown University. Local forums will be convened in New York City; Des Moines, Iowa; San Francisco; Atlanta; Orlando; Manchester, N.H.; and Nashville, Tenn.

China Christian Council denies reports of arrests

The China Christian Council has denied reports that 140 Chinese Christians were arrested in early November in Henan Province, according to a news release from the Amity Foundation of China, a Christian non-governmental organization.

Earlier news reports indicated that the arrests were made at unregistered church services on Oct. 26 and Nov. 5.

"The CCC has learned from Henan Province authorities that five foreign nationals were detained for having violated Chinese law regarding alien religious activity in China. ... There were no arrests or imprisonments," the release said.

Albert Pennybacker, associate general secretary for public policy at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said he has been unable to confirm the arrest reports.

"We have tried hard to verify them, and to date there is no verification," said Pennybacker, who was a member of a recent NCC delegation to China.

"We need to remember that the leadership of the Christian community in China all experienced persecution and suffering during the cultural revolution, and they are sensitive to both the difficulties of their present life and the opportunities for Christian witness," he said. Δ

Newsletter readers share views on Baptist Joint Committee future



James M. Dunn
Executive Director

In the November 24, 1998, *Report*, I asked: "What do you think?" You told me — by mail, fax, e-mail, telephone, face to face, and a few asked friends to nominate them as the next executive director. Input! Thanks.

You may hold polling generally in the same low regard that I do, but you are eager to respond when asked for help. Together we rethink direction for the Baptist Joint Committee, take stock and assess priorities. Even our unscientific survey is instructive.

The most overwhelming consensus came to the question about BJC philosophy. Over 200 people urged us to keep the BJC's present posture. Four respondents felt we should be a bit more about church-state separation and two wanted more emphasis upon the free exercise of religion. Several suggested that a balance on all of the above was good and should continue.

The next most clearly significant answer to our inquiry came to the question about the next executive director. You, dear readers who spent 20 minutes and a 32 cent stamp, want the executive director to be primarily a "spokesperson."

Twice as many see the director's primary role as "spokesperson" as favor the next closest category — "preacher" (as one person wrote, "if he/she can preach"). Coming in a tie for third are "lawyer," "educator" and "administrator."

Of course, the categories are not neat and mutually exclusive. One writer suggested that vocation is secondary to fulfillment of the executive director's role. One answerer said, "The person elected should make a good appearance on (television) camera — a must for effective engagement today."

Three areas emerged as those upon which the Baptist Joint Committee "should spend more of its always limited resources." Coalitional legislative efforts, legal involvement and *Report from the Capital* are clearly top priorities. (I figured it three ways: the priority ranked first, the

priorities listed in the top three and a weighted calculation of all answers.) Least druthers are the "web site" and expenditures on the Religious Liberty Council.

When it comes to content of *Report from the Capital* you want more "news," more "legal analysis," and more "interpretation." You like "editorial comment" almost as much. There is less interest in "international reports" (shame on us), "feedback" (some suggest that we use the web for that) and "personality profiles." "Book reviews" and "guest views" are only half as popular with our correspondents as "Baptist distinctives."

I don't regularly use this column for BJC business, navel gazing, or collective introspection. Yet, now is the time, if there ever is one, for those in the religious liberty community who care to address the future of this agency and the cause of religious liberty. It's not too late if you haven't answered. What do you think? It's not too early, either. By June 1999, the rubicon will have been crossed, the die will have been cast, the direction of the BJC for the immediate future will have been determined.

You suggested 17 different persons for executive director. An interesting mix: six present or former BJC staff members, six Ph.D.s, five attorneys, three pastors, three organization executives, two denominational leaders, two college deans, one member of the U.S. Congress, one editor and one near Ph.D. about to come out of the academic chute.

Don't say to me, "James, no one can take your place." Potential successors are all over the place. At least 15 of the 17 could do it.

If you would like to recommend someone for the executive director position or submit a resume, send correspondence to:

BJC Search Committee
c/o Ms. Barbara Williams, Esquire
Director, Human Resources
American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.
P.O. Box 851
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Thanks for telling our board what you think. Δ

Top Vermont court upholds church property exemption

The Vermont Supreme Court has ruled that the separation of church and state is not violated by a state law that exempts churches and other charitable organizations from "adverse possession" claims against their property.

The ruling came in a dispute over a driveway separating a Methodist church and an adjacent business. Surveys showed that the driveway, which had been used for years by Cold Hollow Cider Mill, was owned by Waterbury Center Community Church.

In most cases, Vermont law sets a 15-year time limit for property owners to assert exclusive possession of property that is being used by others. But the 15-year limitation does not apply to property owned by "public, pious or charitable" organizations.

Eric and Francine Chittenden, owners of the cider mill, argued that exempting churches from the time limitation unconstitutionally advances religion.

But a trial court and Vermont's highest court sided with the congregation. The state Supreme Court said the exemption's purpose and effect are "not to advance religion but to shield real property devoted to charitable purposes from adverse ownership claims." Δ

Baptist Joint Committee

Supporting Bodies

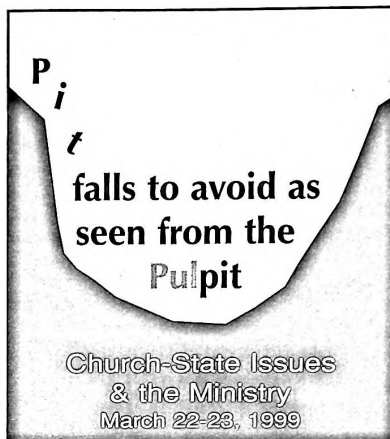
- ◆ Alliance of Baptists
- ◆ American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- ◆ Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
- ◆ National Baptist Convention of America
- ◆ National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.
- ◆ National Missionary Baptist Convention
- ◆ North American Baptist Conference
- ◆ Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- ◆ Religious Liberty Council
- ◆ Seventh Day Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Southern Baptist state conventions/churches

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Book Reviews

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Upcoming event



Explore these and other vexing questions at this workshop, scheduled March 22-23, 1999, at Truett Baptist Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas. The workshop — sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee, the Religious Liberty Council and Truett Seminary — will address the theological and legal underpinnings of religious liberty and church-state separation and provide practical advice on church-state issues that regularly confront the clergy. Speakers/breakout leaders will include:

- ◆ **Charles G. Adams** — pastor, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, Detroit, Mich.
- ◆ **Rosalie Beck** — associate professor of religion, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
- ◆ **Michael Bourland** — Bourland, Smith, Wall & Wenzel, Fort Worth, Texas.

What do you do when someone threatens to sue your church for employment discrimination?

What do you do when you are invited to pray before the local high school's football game?

What if the local zoning board tries to shut down your church's feeding program for the homeless?

- ◆ **David Currie** — executive director, Texas Baptists Committed.
- ◆ **Derek Davis** — director, J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
- ◆ **James M. Dunn** — executive director, Baptist Joint Committee.
- ◆ **Julie Pennington-Russell** — pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Waco, Texas.
- ◆ **Phil Strickland** — director, Christian Life Commission, Baptist General Convention of Texas.
- ◆ **J. Brent Walker** — general counsel, Baptist Joint Committee.

Registration: \$40. A limited number of scholarships of up to \$200 (to help pay for registration, travel and lodging) are available. To obtain information about registration and lodging or scholarship applications, contact Karen McGuire at 202-544-4226 or Karen_McGuire@bjcpa.org



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