



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Jeni Cook** has become the first Southern Baptist and the first woman to oversee chaplain work for Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) hospitals nationwide. A federal employee for 16 years, Cook most recently was chief of chaplain service at the VA North Texas Health Care System in Dallas.

◆ A jury awarded **Mary Lou Jones, Sharon Walsh** and **Helen Poole** a combined \$169,000 after it found that Montrose Christian School in Rockville, Md., and its principal, **Greg Scheck**, fired the three employees based on their religion. Jones and Walsh, both Catholics, held secretarial posts at the school. Poole, a Methodist, worked in the cafeteria for six years. They claimed the school fired them because they were not Baptists and were not members of the Montrose Baptist Church. **Craig Parshall**, the school's attorney, said an appeal will be based on a challenge to the constitutionality of the county's anti-discrimination law.

◆ **Paul Friedman**, a federal court judge, ruled March 30 that the Internal Revenue Service acted properly in its 1995 decision to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Church at Pierce Creek in Vestal, N.Y. In 1992, the church bought newspaper ads suggesting it would be a sin to vote for presidential candidate Bill Clinton. Δ

Texas congressman honored for stand on religious liberty

The Baptist Joint Committee awarded U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas, the first Barbara Jordan-Mark Hatfield Courage Award for his role in defeating a measure that would have altered the Constitution's religious liberty protections.

The Texas Democrat received the award March 22 at a banquet on the campus of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, during a conference on church-state issues in ministry sponsored by the BJC and George W. Truett Theological Seminary.

The award is named for a Democratic representative and a Republican senator who were champions of religious liberty during their terms of service, said James M. Dunn, BJC executive director.

In the House of Representatives last year, Edwards led the fight against the Religious Freedom Amendment proposed by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla. It would have allowed forms of government-sponsored prayer and tax-funded religious education and activities.

The BJC joined other religious and civil liberties groups in opposing the measure, while some more conservative groups supported it. It garnered a simple majority in the House but not the two-thirds vote needed for passage.

Edwards highlighted the importance of religious liberty for all in a brief acceptance speech. "I cannot imagine any freedom more important than religious freedom," he said. "If you can't practice your

faith ... believe in God without the intervention of the government's hand, ... then all other freedoms are at risk."

Edwards, a Methodist who married the daughter of a Baptist pastor, said his life was changed when Baylor University Chancellor Herbert Reynolds showed

him the text of a 1920 speech delivered on the steps of the U.S. Capitol by Baptist preacher George W. Truett. The speech became a landmark statement of Baptist belief on church-state separation.

Truett's speech "has haunted me ever since," Edwards said. "It has changed me and caused me to change my political priorities." Truett said that "God doesn't want forced worshippers. God wants free worshippers and no other kind," Edwards said.

He said the "God that can make the most intricate atom work in ways so profound that even our finest scientists don't understand it, and yet make a universe so large that none of us can begin to fathom it ... surely has the ability to make this one small person think whatever he wanted me to think."

He said God gave "all of us the wonderful gift of free will" and for government to take that away is "sacrilege."

Failure of the Istook measure should give concerned Baptists only slight comfort, Edwards warned. "While we defeated the Istook amendment, ... the fact is over half the members of the House of Representatives voted to change the first 16 words of the First Amendment." Δ



U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards accepts BJC courage award

Teach, preach religious liberty, speakers say

Baptist leaders must teach and preach about the unique Baptist contribution to religious liberty, said two speakers at a two-day church-state conference sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee and George W. Truett Theological Seminary.

Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, said religious liberty sermons may be unpopular, but if we don't preach them, "how do we distinguish ourselves from entertainers?"

He said, "If the church is merged with the state, giving the state an absolutism which is not rightly due it; or the state identifies with the church, giving the church enforcing powers that would enslave rather than liberate human beings, both liberties (civil and religious) would be lost and American democracy destroyed."

Also speaking at the conference was Rosalie Beck, associate professor of religion at Baylor. Religious freedom must be affirmed by every generation because "it is always one generation away from extinction," she said. "We must be free to be prophetic critics of the government ... without undue governmental interference." Δ

Supreme Court will decide college student fee dispute

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review a lower court's ruling in favor of students who objected to the use of their mandatory fees for political and ideological groups with which they disagree.

In 1998 the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the University of Wisconsin-Madison places a burden on the free speech rights of objecting students when it uses their fees to fund the groups.

A three-judge panel of the appeals court said requiring objecting students to pay the fees engenders "a crisis of conscience."

Each semester students attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison must pay student activity fees or they cannot receive grades or graduate. During the 1995-96 academic year, students paid \$166 in fees each semester.

Students sued the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, charging that the school's use of a portion of the fees to fund certain groups violated their rights of free speech and association.

The students presented evidence on 18 organizations that both receive student fees and engage in political and ideological activities such as publishing voter guides and lobbying the state legislature.

The appeals court said the "students do not ask that we restrict the speech of any student organization; they merely ask that they not be forced to financially subsidize speech with which they disagree."

In 1995 the Supreme Court ruled in *Rosenberger vs. University of Virginia* that college officials wrongly refused to subsidize a student-run Christian publication while at the same time funding nonreligious publications. Δ

Senate OKs Seiple to head religious persecution panel

The Senate confirmed March 24 Robert Seiple, past president of World Vision Inc., to be ambassador-at-large of the newly established Office on International Religious Freedom at the State Department.

Seiple has been at the State Department since last year as special representative of the secretary of state for religious liberty.

The Office of International Religious Freedom was established last year after passage of the International Religious Freedom Act. Seiple will also act as a non-voting member of the Commission on International Religious Freedom — a second body established under the law that

will evaluate religious persecution abroad annually and will recommend penalties against countries that permit persecution.

At his March 17 confirmation hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Seiple said the sanctions in the bill are designed to "first, do no harm."

Seiple, former president of Eastern College and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said officials from many countries ask: "Why do you think that you're the moral cop, the international standard for morality?"

"To that I would reply," he said, "that ... this particular right of religious freedom is a universal right. It does not stop at our borders. We did not invent it." Δ

High court declines dispute over 'unacceptable' prayer

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from a Utah man whose plea to give a prayer at a Murray City Council meeting was rejected by a city attorney who said the prayer was "unacceptable."

Left intact was a ruling by the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that said Murray officials did not violate the Establishment Clause in rejecting the prayer. The appeals court said the city "has the power to open its meetings with the kind of legislative prayer that our nation over the course of 200 years has come to see as 'tolerable.'"

In 1994 Tom Snyder sent the text of a prayer he wished to give to the Murray City Council. It began, "OUR MOTHER, who art in heaven (if, indeed there is a heaven and if there is a god that takes a woman's form)." The prayer also asked that Utah officials "never again perform demeaning religious ceremonies."

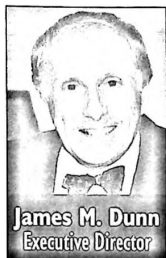
City attorney H. Craig Hall told Snyder that the prayer was "unacceptable." Snyder filed a lawsuit, charging violations of his First Amendment and other rights.

The appeals court only considered Establishment Clause claims and said Snyder's prayer could be characterized as "political harangue." It quoted Supreme Court precedents, saying "legislative" prayer is "deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country."

It said Snyder's prayer fell outside the appropriate "genre of legislative prayer" and it "disparages those who believe that legislative prayer is appropriate."

However, a dissenting opinion said the city did violate the Establishment Clause by "rejecting Snyder's request to speak based on its distaste for the content of his tendered prayer." Δ

Support for school vouchers driven by darker dimensions



James M. Dunn
Executive Director

Two news stories on the front page of the *New York Times*, March 4, 1999, help define the dilemma facing public education.

One headline reads: "School Chief Drawing a Line Over Vouchers." New York City Schools Chan-

cellor Rudy Crew warned Mayor Rudy Giuliani that he will resign if the mayor pushes through a voucher program to spend tax dollars for children to attend private schools. A person close to Crew said, "He feels that it is the beginning of the end of public education, period, if you start funneling taxpayer dollars into private education."

The other headline: "Court Says Schools Must Pay for Needs of Disabled Pupils." The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public schools must pay all nonmedical costs for disabled students. The specific decision requires Cedar Rapids, Iowa, schools to provide continuous one-on-one, in-school support for a quadriplegic 16-year-old. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantees a "free appropriate public education to students with disabilities" (emphasis added).

The headlines touch the tough choices we all face regarding public schools. The high court sustained the idealistic goals of common schools for all. Jefferson said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

Over the years, we have as a people, spelled out those ideals to mean that it is the responsibility of all of us to teach the disabled, the difficult to discipline, the distant child not near a school, the disturbed young person and any other child. "School choice" is well-named because the nonpublic school makes the choice. Rudy Crew is right. Voucher schemes would begin the end of public education. Some people want that.

Most voucher advocates, however, have simply been misled, have not thought it through or are thinking too

anecdotally. Some folks turned a blind eye to Hitler's grand schemes because the trains ran on time. Their personal lives were easier.

One's heart goes out to all those who have bought the limited vision of voucher propagandists: "it's about competition," "the public schools have failed," "it's your money to spend as you see fit," "public education won't suffer."

It's not politically correct, nor is it sweet and gentle, to name the demons that drive the push for vouchers. Yet, those darker dimensions can be characterized as:

Political — appeals to cynicism and hopelessness, the worst aspects of our nature.

Selfish — "I only want what's best for my child." Exactly.

Parochial — I mean "restricted to a narrow scope" (*American Heritage Dictionary*).

Greedy — Prophets of economic justice have always been accused of fomenting class hatred. Remember Amos, chapter 4, when the eighth century prophet took on the "fat cows of Bashan" and James, chapter 5, when the earthly brother of Jesus said, "howl and weep you rich," a category into which most well-to-do Americans fall.

Racist — I recently heard a lovely looking and sophisticatedly socialized South Carolina lady lament what has happened "since we let 'them' into our schools."

Short-sighted — It's always tempting to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary.

Please, please, don't get defensive. I know all these awful adjectives don't apply to you. I understand earnest, honest people of good will differ. It's true that there is vast ignorance and much misunderstanding on both sides of the debate.

But if public education is broke, let's fix it. Every child is entitled to a free, quality public school. Δ

REPORT CARD ON SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Vouchers represent an effort to finance non-public schools with public funds under the guise of "choice." Because they merely transfer tax dollars to private schools through parents, vouchers do not in fact change the public money source. Public money must be spent only for public purposes. Education voucher plans also run as "privatization."

Fiscally irresponsible — The first freedom spelled out in the Bill of Rights has government from supporting religion. Religion has no right to appropriate private schools, and parents have the right to send their children to them. But they don't have the right to compel other taxpayers to pay for it.

Educationally ineffective — Every dollar invested in a voucher scheme is a dollar diverted from non-public schools. Contrary to voucher propagandists, public schools are generally underfunded. Teachers receive the lowest pay rates in the nation. Public money must be spent only for public purposes. Education voucher plans also run as "privatization."

Discriminatory — Voucher proponents attempt to divert the taxpayer from thinking that nonpublic schools, particularly the poor, would receive a better education in private or religious schools. But there are no convincing arguments to back up the claim. Recent studies of existing programs indicate that voucher programs do little to improve student achievement.

Uncertain — Voucher laws test the idea that public schools will improve because of increased competition. The non-public sector is certain because private schools are not subject to the same rules as public schools. For example, they can select the best and brightest, leaving students with disabilities and behavior problems in public schools. Funding private schools will not make nonpublic schools better without reducing public schools' state contributions will reduce the public money supply.

Disaster — With vouchers, parents serve as a conduit for the "transfer" of public funds to private and religious schools. Nonpublic schools who deliver the vouchers to all amounts to a transfer of tax dollars to support non-public schools, or the vast majority of which are religious schools.

Educate your congregation on vouchers

Do you want something short, simple and reader-friendly on school vouchers?

Order as many copies of "Report Card on School Vouchers" as you can use in your church. It's a one-page bulletin insert designed to accompany an order of worship.

It was carefully prepared by Dr. Jimmy Williamson, education professor at Baylor University, who was a scholar-in-residence at the BJC in 1998.

We will ship them without any cost to you. One request: Order only the number you will use! We must be good stewards of a generous grant.

— JMD

Contact Karen McGuire to get copies of the BJC's Report Card on School Vouchers:

202-544-4226 or

Karen_McGuire@bjcpa.org

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Book Reviews

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Avoid dumbness on church-state issues

Invoking a line from country-pop diva Shania Twain, David Currie offered simple advice to help Baptist leaders dodge church-state pitfalls: "Don't be stupid. Don't be ridiculous. Don't be absurd."

Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, presented interpretations of the theme "Pitfalls to Avoid as Seen from the Pulpit" at a conference on church-state issues and the ministry. The conference was sponsored by George W. Truett Theological Seminary and the Baptist Joint Committee.

"Most pitfalls we fall into can probably relate to a very simple factor: dumbness," Currie said, adding that Americans "don't talk enough about stupidity anymore." Likewise, most church-state problems in ministry could be avoided by more careful thought, Currie said.

Returning to the Twain theme, Currie exhorted ministerial students and others at the conference: "Don't be stupid in relation to authority and confuse your kingdoms."

Christians have dual citizenship in the kingdom of God and in an earthly nation, and problems arise when they fail to realize that the two are not the same, he said.

"Don't be ridiculous and forget your role," Currie urged, pointing out that pastors are called to be servant leaders, not just servants and not just leaders.

Finally, "Don't be absurd and practice bad theology," he said, noting that Baptists, of all people, should operate from a foundation of biblical teaching and a clear sense of their own history.

Currie said the religious right is "theologically liberal" because it has a watered-down doctrine of sin and a warped view of salvation. Rather than recognizing the impossibility of human perfection and the futility of bringing about heaven on earth

by human effort, the religious right tries to use governmental powers to enforce morality and public piety, he said.

Also speaking at the conference were three attorneys from the Fort Worth, Texas, firm of Bourland, Smith, Wall and Wenzel. In a discussion titled "Keeping Your Church Out of Court," they told conference participants that the day when churches were considered off-limits to lawsuits is gone.

The lawyers identified several legal pitfalls common for churches, including issues of incorporation, church bylaws, charitable immunity, taxes and child care programs.

Churches can help prevent child abuse and protect themselves and their workers from lawsuits by putting together prudent policies, attorney Butch Korb told conference participants.

Korb suggested that churches adopt worker-screening policies, become acquainted with potential workers for at least six months before allowing them to work and follow the "two-adult" rule — at no time should one adult be left alone with children, Korb said.

Calling on church leaders to "memorialize" due diligence, Korb said church leaders should document steps taken in the selection and supervision of workers with children. Δ



David Currie

Texas Baptists Committed

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