



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Earl Trent**, house counsel for the National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches USA, will resign Sept. 30 to seek election as judge of the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia County, Pa. Trent, a Baptist Joint Committee board member, won both the Democratic and Republican primary elections in May and will be endorsed by both parties in the Nov. 6 general election. National Ministries Executive Director **Aids and Wright-Riggins III**, also a BJC board member, said "lovers of religious freedom in this country are indebted to Earl for his legal work on separation of church and state issues."

◆ **Sen. Jeff Sessions**, R-Ala., lashed out at Judiciary Chairman Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., for not including the words "So help me God" at the end of the oath taken by nominees appearing before the panel. "Ninety-five percent of the people believe in God," Sessions said. "An invocation of his name, in conjunction with the seriousness of telling the truth, has an importance beyond mere legal requirement."

◆ **Billy Graham** was designated a "favorite son of North Carolina" by a state Senate resolution approved Aug. 8. It praises Graham as a man "admired and beloved by both Christians and non-Christians," and urges the governor to establish a "Billy Graham Day" next year. Δ

Administration report cites restrictions in social services

Community and faith-based social service providers face "burdensome" restrictions and receive "very little" federal support, concludes a White House report released August 16 at the Brookings Institution.

The 25-page survey, titled *Uneven Playing Field*, makes no specific policy recommendations but lists 15 barriers faith-based and community organizations face in seeking and receiving federal funds. The report finds a widespread bias against these organizations and concludes that the federal government often ignores them despite their "vast, varied and vital community-serving roles."

President George W. Bush mandated the audit of five cabinet departments to identify barriers to the participation of faith-based groups in the delivery of social services. Included were the departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Education, Labor and Justice.

John Bridgeland, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, said the report "shows systematically that government has been hostile to the participation of faith-based and community-based organizations when it ought to have been neutral."

Melissa Rogers, executive director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, said that while that may be the view of the White House, "there's a very important other side to the debate."

"In some respects the field is not level," Rogers said. "That, to some, is not a problem ... because their feeling is that

to treat religion differently ... would actually be consistent in honoring the religious liberty principles."

Of the 15 barriers cited, six were listed as obstacles to faith-based organizations seeking federal support. The remaining were referred to as barriers to small and community-based organizations.

John Dilulio, who announced Aug. 17 that he would resign as head of the White



John Dilulio

House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, said nonprofit organizations play a large role in the delivery of social services. However, he said, an explanation for the wide funding gap between large providers and grass-roots organizations has long been debated. Charitable choice provisions added to 1996 welfare reform legislation "[have] not been vigorously or well implemented by those charged

with implementing it," he said.

The report claims the government has focused more on the "prohibition" of governmental establishment of religion than "honoring the protection" of religious liberty when it comes to doling out federal aid to social service providers.

But Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said that what the administration calls "barriers" to government funding for faith-based groups are really safeguards needed for the groups' own protection.

"Barriers, like bureaucratic red tape and unnecessary regulations, should be eliminated," Walker said. "Much of what the White House calls barriers are really guardrails keeping faith-based, government-funded programs from falling into a constitutional ditch." Δ

Sri Lankan Buddhists seek to ban Christian conversions

Leaders of Sri Lanka's majority Buddhist population are asking the government to ban conversions to Christianity.

Such conversions are increasingly prevalent in rural areas of the country, and the Buddhist leaders have drafted a plan to thwart the efforts of proselytizers.

"We call on the authorities to immediately bring legislation to prevent the conversions taking place under the cover of helping rural communities to improve their standards," read a statement released by the monks.

Buddhism loses some 23,000 people each year to Christianity, whose followers have focused their efforts on about 5,000 of the country's 25,400 villages, the monks said.

The Buddhists suggested a media campaign to promote the religion, and encouraged nuns to help do the same among schoolchildren.

The monks said Christian evangelists owed much of their success to the dwindling number of Buddhist monks in various temples.

Last May, Sri Lanka's prime minister, who also leads the nation's ministry of Buddhist affairs, placed advertisements in newspapers urging 1,000 young men to preserve Buddhism by becoming priests, according to Reuters news agency. Δ

Bush faith czar to leave post; critics say initiative in trouble

After six months at the post, President Bush's director of the office on faith-based initiatives, John Dilulio, is calling it quits.

Dilulio, a registered Democrat on leave from the University of Pennsylvania, made the announcement Aug. 17.

He said that he had intended to stay only a short time to help launch Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. But he also gave other reasons in news interviews, including health and family reasons, as well as exasperation with partisan politics over the faith initiative.

Supporters of the initiative want to see tax dollars fund religious groups to provide social services, but opponents of the measure say it would violate the separation of church and state and threaten the independence of churches from the government.

In news interviews Dilulio said that he had always intended to re-evaluate his position after six months. A CNN website story said he had become frustrated at internal White House politics on the issue and with critics from the right and left.

"Things that should be bipartisan can turn partisan," said Dilulio.

In an interview with Cox Newspapers, Dilulio said, "We had every possible criticism from every possible side."

Bush's faith initiative has passed the House of Representatives but is stalled in the Senate where lawmakers appear unwilling to approve the bill in its present form. One major stumbling block is the measure's allowance for religious groups to take federal dollars while continuing their long practice of discriminating in hiring practices based on religious beliefs. Churches have long been allowed the exemption from civil rights laws but not while receiving tax dollars.

Bush spoke in support of his faith-based initiative in his Saturday radio address on Aug. 18.

"A compassionate government should find ways to support their good works," Bush said. "Unfortunately, government often treats charities and community groups as rivals instead of partners." Δ

Survey: Air Force chaplains experience discrimination

The chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force is pledging to address discrimination in the military service's chaplain corps after a

survey found that many chaplains experienced racial, gender or religious bias.

The "climate assessment study" by Global Services and Systems Inc. found that 97 percent of African-American chaplains sensed or directly experienced racial discrimination. Ninety-one percent said they believed a "good old boy system" existed in the chaplain service that contributed to assignments and promotion possibilities.

Eighty percent of female chaplains reported sensing or directly experiencing gender discrimination. Eighty-seven percent said they agreed or strongly agreed that a "good old boy system" existed in the chaplain service.

Researchers concluded that 58 percent of Protestant chaplains sensed or directly experienced religious discrimination and 53 percent believed a "good old boy system" existed. Twenty-nine percent of all chaplains said they sensed or directly experienced religious discrimination by their leaders.

The study said that evangelical Protestants "appear to continue to lag behind" mainline Protestants in promotion to senior ranks and significant leadership assignments.

Gen. Michael E. Ryan, the Air Force's chief of staff, said in a July 30 memo that he was concerned about the survey results and planned action to address them.

"There is no place in our Air Force for discrimination, preferential treatment or unfairness of any kind," he said. "Each of us has the obligation to address perceived injustice when it rises."

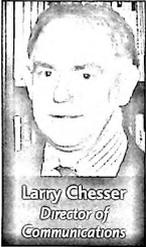
The study also reports anecdotal responses from Roman Catholic chaplains saying their "single status" leads them to receive more remote assignments that might create hardships for chaplains with families.

The assessment also said there were "a significant number" of references to reverse discrimination, in which chaplains perceive that Catholic, female and African-American chaplains get preferential treatment even when they seem to lack necessary skills for certain assignments.

Ryan ordered the assessment after an investigation into an alleged racist statement by the then-deputy chief of the chaplain service revealed perceptions of racial discrimination.

The Air Force determined that the complaint against Maj. Gen. Lorraine K. Potter was "unsubstantiated" and she became the first woman chief of chaplains in the U.S. military in April. Δ

Is the Baptist Joint Committee too partisan and liberal?



Larry Chesser
Director of
Communications

The late Brooks Hays, the former Arkansas congressman and Baptist leader, understood both the folly and utility of labels. "We are all conservative sometimes and liberal sometimes," Mr. Hays used to say. "We're like my old dog Fergus. He's a

conservative when he buries a bone, but liberal when he chases a rabbit."

While labels can be helpful, they can also mislead. For instance, Focus on the Family's *Citizen* magazine contends that the BJC is too partisan and liberal? In its September issue, writer Matt Kaufman asserts in his second attack on the BJC this summer that the agency's base is on the left and that its former executive director is noted for "denouncing Republicans and hailing Democrats."

Little effort is needed to dismiss the claim that the BJC is partisan. For six and a half decades, the agency has stood for the principle that separation of church and state is good for religion and vital for religious liberty. It repeatedly has supported and opposed proposals by politicians of both parties. Its positions have been guided by how a proposal advanced or harmed religious liberty, not the party stripe of its author.

Dealing with the liberal label takes a bit more thought. Is the BJC **liberal**? Yes, if that label means it seeks to expand religious liberty in this country and around the world. Is it **conservative**? Yes, if that label means to work like the dickens to preserve our God-given religious liberty and defend the constitutional provisions that our Founders gave us to protect it.

So, which is it — liberal or conservative? I confess, even after 16 years on the staff, I have trouble making up my mind.

Some base their view on the groups the BJC has worked with in Washington coalitions. Since it has worked with People For the American Way and the American Civil Liberties Union, shouldn't the BJC be considered liberal? But, wait, it also has worked with the Christian Legal Society and the National Association of

Evangelicals, so maybe it is conservative. At best, this analysis results in either guilt or praise by association.

A better handle is how the BJC has addressed church-state issues. Its work reflects a full-blown respect for both religion clauses of the First Amendment. Together they bar government from sponsoring or supporting religion and from interfering with its free exercise.

Few have taken issue with the BJC's support of Americans' free exercise rights. Politicians and organizations across the liberal-conservative spectrum recognize its work for the free exercise of religion.

But some who consider the First Amendment's ban on governmental establishment of religion inferior to its guarantee of free exercise frequently have targeted the BJC.

Whether deemed liberal or conservative, support for church-state separation once was a hallmark of Baptists. Its popularity may be fading in some circles, but not at the BJC. To paraphrase what Winston Churchill said about democracy, the separation of church and state may be the worst form of church-state relations except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Decide for yourself — is it **liberal** or **conservative**:

- to support the right of the Good News Bible Club to meet after hours in a public school;
- to support student religious expression in public while opposing government-sponsored religion;
- to work to protect churches from burdensome zoning laws and land-use regulations;
- to oppose government-funding of religious organizations because government strings follow government dollars;
- to oppose tinkering with the First Amendment;
- to seek to conserve the Baptist heritage of soul freedom and the American tradition of church-state separation; or
- to hold that the Founders had good reasons to write both religion clauses into the First Amendment?

A hint before you decide — you likely will want more information than *Citizen* magazine has provided. Δ

AA meetings private religious talk, judge says

Ruling that the conversations are a form of confidential religious communication, a federal judge has overturned the manslaughter conviction of a man who talked about his memories of the crime with other members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The remarks made by Paul Cox — convicted of two 1988 stabbing deaths — should be accorded "a privilege granted to other religions similarly situated," U.S. District Judge Charles Briant ruled.

"Treating AA meetings with less protection than any other form of religious communication which carries assurances of confidentiality" violates the Constitution, Briant concluded, citing a 1999 federal appeals court declaration that Alcoholics Anonymous is a religion.

That ruling was prompted by a case that concluded that a criminal defendant cannot be forced to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings "because of the religious nature of the 12 steps" espoused as a measure to defeat alcoholism.

The July 31 ruling came amid renewed focus on the confidentiality of private statements. On July 24, a man who had been convicted of murder and jailed for 12 years was released after a priest testified that during confession 12 years ago another man had admitted guilt. Δ

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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First: The First Baptist Church in America

J. Stanley Lemons. Charitable Baptist Society, Providence, R.I., 2001. 137 pp.



In 1637, Roger Williams banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for preaching and arguing for the disengagement of the church from the government. Williams and 20 or so of his supporters then traveled to what would later become Providence, R.I., where they were baptized in 1638. This small group was the beginning of the First Baptist Church in America. Shortly afterward, Williams left the Baptist fold; yet the church he started has continued for over 350 years.

J. Stanley Lemons, a history professor at Rhode Island College, originally prepared a volume on the history of the First Baptist Church in America for the 350th anniversary of the church in 1988. *First: The First Baptist Church in America* is an expansion of that earlier work.

The title of the book may prove deceiving to some. Far from being a narrow history of one building and its congregants, the work also traces Baptist and, more broadly, church history in New England and the rest of the country to a more limited degree.

In addition to the text, Lemons' volume contains numerous photographs and drawings. While the presentation of the book is excellent, producing the book in a coffee table size format introduces a risk that it will become merely a showpiece and not be appreciated for the work of scholarship that it is. One might be tempted to flip through the book thereby missing the church's rich history. Other excellent features of the volume include extensive endnotes, biographies of all the pas-

tors of First Baptist and an index.

Over the long history of the church, several issues have proven both divisive and damaging. These have included the role of women and African-Americans in the church and the changing demographics of Providence. Despite these obstacles, the church has persevered.

The narrative of the book is also peppered with interesting and likely little-known details about the church. For example, the church profited from the closing of Boston Harbor as a result of the Boston Tea Party. Craftsmen who found themselves out of work because of the closing of the port traveled to Providence to work on the construction of the Meeting House, allowing it to be finished in record time. Lemons also notes that the church in 1775 was the first Baptist meetinghouse to have a steeple.

This history of the First Baptist Church in America reminds us of the important principles we continue to champion today. Lemons' narration of the early years of Baptist life in America reminds the reader of a time when Baptists did not have the strong presence in American life that they do today. In 1700, 65 years after Williams began the first Baptist church, there were only 300 Baptists in all of New England. The fact that Baptists were once a tiny minority serves to reinforce the importance of religious liberty for all. Even today, as Oliver S. Thomas has noted, "Baptists are as thick as hogs in east Tennessee, but move to Utah, or southern California, or Miami, and [they're] in the minority." The pursuit of religious liberty for Baptists and all people, therefore, is as important now as it was in 1638.

— Meredith Stewart
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