

(BP)**-- BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE:

SBC Executive Committee

901 Commerce #750

Nashville, Tennessee 37203

(615) 244-2355

Herb Hollinger, Vice President

Fax (615) 742-8910

CompuServe ID# 70420,1r

BUREAUS**ATLANTA** Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250**DALLAS** Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115**NASHVILLE** Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57**RICHMOND** Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72**WASHINGTON** Tom Strobe, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

July 1, 1996

96-113

VIRGINIA--Mission board denounces ruling of death to Kuwaiti Christian; photos.
 TENNESSEE--Internet appeal for Disney sent to homosexual groups.
 TENNESSEE--'95 VBS attended by 3 million; almost 500,000 prospects found; photo.
 CALIFORNIA--Golden Gate to begin courses at Rocky Mtn. campus this fall.
 TENNESSEE--SBC Cooperative Program month down, year still up.
 MISSOURI--Town's churches help build ties between blacks, whites.
 VIRGINIA--WRAPUP: CBF wants chaplains endorsed; says no to convention status.
 VIRGINIA--For now, CBF says no to separate convention.
 LOUISIANA--Louisiana College professors sue state conservatives group.
 ILLINOIS--Country or contemporary, this church puts it to use.
 TENNESSEE--Correction.

Mission board denounces ruling
 of death to Kuwaiti Christian

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
 7/1/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has joined a rising cacophony of voices protesting an Islamic court's recent ruling that Kuwaiti Christian Robert Hussein should be killed for his faith.

Board President Jerry Rankin June 27 denounced the ruling as a "miscarriage of justice" and appealed to all "freedom-loving Americans" to raise a cry. "We are asking believers in the United States to petition God with prayer and petition the Kuwaiti government for Mr. Hussein's safety," he said.

Human rights advocates see Hussein's case as precedent-setting in Kuwait and have called on people worldwide to mount a letter-writing campaign to Shaikh Saad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's crown prince and prime minister, and Mohammed Sabah Al-Slim, its ambassador to the United States.

Hussein, 45 -- a small, almost frail man in stature -- is in hiding. "We find it ironic that the very freedoms American soldiers sought to protect in the Gulf War are being violated through this ruthless act of intimidation by those who most benefited from our involvement in the war," Rankin said.

At the close of Hussein's May 29 hearing, Judge Jaafar Al-Qazveeni denied Hussein's assertion that his life was in danger. But in a verdict released June 8, Jaafar clearly stated Hussein should be executed by a Muslim religious leader for apostasy.

In February the court had ruled Hussein should lose his wife and custody of his two children, ages 8 and 11, at least four houses, his contractor's business and about \$4 million in assets and inheritance. It gave him until May to repent. His refusal to renounce Jesus Christ -- claiming freedom of religion based on the Kuwaiti constitution -- led to the Islamic judge's latest ruling.

In recent days, a deluge of faxes has churned into Kuwaiti government offices, signed by members of parliaments in Canada and throughout Europe, and from congressmen in the United States. All are protesting the ruling, saying it violates international standards for individual freedom. Human rights advocates also have asked former President George Bush to discuss the matter with Crown Prince Shaikh Saad, his personal friend.

--more--

"Human rights represent a seamless garment in this world," said Don R. Kammerdiener, the Foreign Mission Board's executive vice president. "It's not possible for human rights to be violated in one part of the world without diminishing the concept in all of the world."

Maurice Graham, a former Foreign Mission Board missionary to Kuwait, called on Kuwait to defend freedom of conscience. "The Kuwaiti court needs to support its own constitution," said Graham, who first met Hussein in March.

For a short period before the Persian Gulf crisis in 1990, Graham worked with the only evangelical congregation in Kuwait. He was among American hostages holed up in the U.S. Embassy compound for four months after Saddam Hussein took over Kuwait.

Since 1992, the Islamic wing of Parliament in Kuwait has fought for the total adoption of sharia (Muslim law). If he is able to stay alive, Hussein might appeal his case to government courts. That appeal would test whether Kuwait will apply its constitution over sharia -- and protect by law a Muslim who changes religions. It would determine the future of the hundreds, or thousands, of closet Christians in Kuwait, and possibly in other countries.

Nations throughout the world are facing the dilemma of appeasing a loudening minority cry from extremist Muslims who reject the Western view of human rights and seek to rule by force. In the extremist Muslim mind-set, the government and the practice of Islam are one and the same.

"My experience with Kuwaitis is that they are people who really believe in freedom," Graham said. "That's why I feel like if it was left up to the people there, they would choose the right thing to do, human rights. It is not an extreme country. I appeal to Kuwaiti people that they would uphold their own constitution."

Hussein is a lone exception to the pattern in Kuwait that Christians remain quiet about their faith. "He felt God is issuing to him that he couldn't be a silent Christian," Graham said. "He has made it an issue. He wears a cross and carries a Bible. But he feels like it's his right as a Kuwaiti."

So far, Hussein has been unable to find a lawyer in Kuwait who will dare to take his case. Human rights advocates are asking the government to supply him with one. Meantime, they have secured lawyers outside Kuwait to help him prepare a legal appeal.

--30--

Editors' note: Interested people should address protests to: His Highness Shaikh Saad Al-Sabah, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, The State of Kuwait, P.O. Box 4, Safat, Kuwait 13001, and fax 965-539-7791; and Mohammed Sabah Al-Salim, The State of Kuwait, Chancery, 2940 Tilden St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, fax 202-966-0517 and phone 202-966-0702.

(BP) photos (2 horizontal) mailed 6/28/96 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet News Room.

Internet appeal for Disney
sent to homosexual groups

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
7/1/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--An Internet solicitation of support from homosexual activists for the Walt Disney Company has made its way from a Disney vice president's office across the country.

The electronic-mail (e-mail) message, which originated in the office of Disney Vice President for Studio Operations Reid Cline on June 13, states: "If anyone wants to write to Disney to support them in light of the Southern Baptist Convention's condemnation yesterday, you may write to: Michael Eisner, c/o S. Buena Vista St., Burbank, CA 91521-1010, (818) 560-2431."

Eisner is Disney's chairman and CEO. The e-mail is signed by a secretary in Cline's office at Disney, Brad Bergman, with the Internet address reading: "brad_bergman@studio.disney.com."

--more--

"We don't have any comment" was the response of a Disney spokeswoman after the corporate communications office there received a faxed copy of the e-mail appeal and a response by Bill Merrell, SBC Executive Committee vice president for convention relations.

Said Merrell: "It is yet another sad reflection of the state of Disney -- that a Disney vice president's office must turn to the homosexual Internet crowd to solicit support for the company's drift away from family values and its buckling to the homosexual-activist agenda.

"It is noteworthy that Disney cannot find support for its eroding morality among the vast majority of Southern Baptists, other evangelicals and others who adhere to the family values that once made Disney great," Merrell said. "Actions like these continue to damage the Disney name in the minds and hearts of countless Americans."

The e-mail solicitation of homosexual support for Disney was brought to the attention of Baptist Press by a Wilmington, Del., Catholic layman, Scott Stirling, who had been alerted to the message on the Internet by a friend unsympathetic to the homosexual movement.

It had been circulated by a self-described "lesbian, gay, bisexual" student group on the Internet at Duke University, Durham, N.C.

There is no way to determine exactly how many homosexual Internet sites and e-mail lists currently exist, according to Internet watchers, but, Stirling said, "This message from Brad Berman is likely circulating in all these homosexual e-mail chat groups across the country and even internationally."

Stirling wrote a letter to Eisner challenging the e-mail appeal from Cline's office, saying, "That you would allow your employees to use company e-mail to solicit support for a broad political agenda illustrates that Disney is willing to use its resources for social change rather than upholding traditional family values and virtues.

"I am a young, Catholic married man with one child," Stirling's letter continued. "God willing, I will have many more. Because your company is attempting to effect radical social change, I will never spend my money on any Disney product or activity."

The Southern Baptist Convention resolution adopted June 12 encourages Southern Baptists "to give serious and prayerful reconsideration" to whether to attend Disney theme parks and purchase Disney products -- and to boycott Disney if it continues "this antiChristian and antifamily trend."

The resolution cited five examples of Disney "corporate decisions, which have included but are not limited to:" 1) granting insurance benefits to partners of homosexual employees; 2) hosting homosexual "theme nights" at its parks; 3) a subsidiary's hiring of a convicted child molester to direct the movie, "Powder;" 4) a subsidiary's publication of a book aimed at homosexual teenagers; and 5) a subsidiary's production of the movie "Priest," which "disparages Christian values and depicts Christian leaders as morally defective."

The SBC resolution asked the Christian Life Commission "to monitor Disney's progress in returning to its previous philosophy of producing enriching family entertainment."

Criticism of Disney practices also was voiced last fall by messengers to the Florida Baptist Convention.

--30--

'95 VBS attended by 3 million;
almost 500,000 prospects found

Baptist Press
7/1/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Vacation Bible Schools in Southern Baptist churches in 1995 attracted more than 3 million people and resulted in the discovery of almost half a million Sunday school prospects, according to statistics recently released by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

--more--

According to the Annual Church Profile, 28,196 churches reported conducting VBS last year, with a total attendance of 3,146,054.

More than 16,000 churches also mailed in more detailed VBS reports to the BSSB.

According to these records, 485,862 Sunday school prospects were discovered and 54,067 people accepted Christ during last year's Bible schools.

Becky Martin, a VBS consultant for the board, said the actual numbers of decisions and prospect discoveries were likely "significantly higher" since many churches did not return their VBS reports.

"We're really trying to encourage churches conducting VBS this summer to fill out and return these reports," she said. "It's not that we're hung up on numbers, but these records speak to the continued effectiveness of VBS. What other program or event can result in these kinds of decisions and prospects in a five-day period? Last year's numbers show that we can't afford to put VBS on the back burner."

In other statistics from the '95 VBS report:

- 2,262 people made decisions for church-related vocations;
- 49,149 students were enrolled in Sunday school through the VBS transfer plan;
- 729,948 children; 444,518 preschoolers; 116,625 youth; and 98,856 adults were enrolled in VBS;
- 4,234 mentally handicapped people and 7,332 hearing and visually impaired people were enrolled in VBS.

Again, Martin said the actual numbers in the above categories were likely much higher because of unreturned VBS reports.

Another interesting statistic, she said, is that 56 percent of last year's Bible schools were held at night.

"That says to me that churches are finding VBS to be an effective avenue in reaching people, so they're willing to schedule it in the evenings if they can't find people to serve during the day. Flexibility is the key."

--30--

(BP) photo, VBS-related (vertical), is posted in the SBCNet News Room.

Golden Gate to begin courses
at Rocky Mtn. campus this fall By Cameron Crabtree

Baptist Press
7/1/96

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary is offering its first two courses in Colorado this fall in a partnership with the Colorado Baptist General Convention designed to assist Southern Baptist churches in the Rocky Mountain states.

Golden Gate plans to offer courses regularly toward the master of divinity, master of divinity in Christian education and diploma in theology degrees. Seminary officials are in the process of searching for a full-time on-site director to provide day-to-day administrative and academic support.

Graham Sadler, a member of University Hills Baptist Church, Denver, and a retired public librarian, has been retained as library development consultant to help provide for academic research and study resources at the regional campus. The library will be located on the first floor of the state convention's office building in Englewood.

"Our mission of shaping effective Christian leaders for the churches of tomorrow is clear," said Golden Gate President William Crews. "It is important we do that in partnership with Baptist leaders in the growing centers of mission outreach in the western United States."

Golden Gate is one of six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and the only SBC agency in the western United States. It has campuses offering master's-level degree programs in Mill Valley and Brea, Calif., Portland, Ore., Phoenix, Ariz., and Albuquerque, N.M.

--more--

Colorado Baptist Convention leaders and seminary officials began discussions in 1994 about partnering together to assist with church leadership training needs in the Rocky Mountain context. Convention leaders asked Golden Gate Seminary to establish a master's-level program that "meets the unique desires and traditions of Southern Baptists" and assists churches to achieve "significant goals for church growth and evangelism through theologically trained leadership" within the Rocky Mountain context.

Last fall, the Colorado Baptist Convention included \$40,000 in its annual budget to assist with start-up and operation of the regional campus. In addition, the Denver Baptist Association recently made a \$10,000 gift toward the effort.

"We believe training for a contextually and culturally unique area like the Rocky Mountain region is best done in that region itself," Crews said.

The two courses slated this fall are Foundations for Ministry I, a seminar designed to assist students in beginning to build the necessary foundations for lifelong ministry, and Introduction to Preaching. Both courses will be held in offices of the state convention.

Admissions requirements for the Rocky Mountain Campus are the same as other Golden Gate degree programs. Students applying for the master's programs must have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. Individuals over the age of 30 who do not have a bachelor's degree may apply for the diploma in theology program.

For more information, or to request an application, call 1-800-735-5060, ext. 251.

--30--

SBC Cooperative Program
month down, year still up

Baptist Press
7/1/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program gifts for the month of June dropped 1.77 percent under the previous year's month but the year's total is 1.93 percent above last year, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee.

The total for June, \$12,494,743, is \$225,217 below that of June 1995, or a 1.77 percent decrease.

But the SBC's year-to-date total, from October through June, is 1.93 percent above the same period for the previous year: \$111,422,676 compared to \$109,314,279, or an increase of \$2,108,396.

Designated gifts for the month of June dropped from the previous year's month: \$14,151,977 compared to \$15,919,773, a \$1,767,796 difference, or an 11.1 percent decrease. However, for the year to date, the 1995-96 year totals are \$128,430,793 compared to the previous year of \$121,703,728, a difference of \$6,727,065, or a 5.53 percent increase.

For the SBC Cooperative Program Allocation Budget, the June totals are 5.87 percent above the budget requirement of \$11,802,427. For the year-to-date total, the budget requirement of \$106,221,845 was exceeded by \$5,200,830 or a 4.9 percent increase.

The SBC Cooperative Program total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 1995-96 Cooperative Program Allocation Budget.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

--more--

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

--30--

Town's churches help build
ties between blacks, whites

By Pat Hindman

Baptist Press
7/1/96

SIKESTON, Mo. (BP)--Sikeston, in the Bootheel of Missouri, is a community with a distinct southern flavor. White-columned homes are fronted with magnolia trees; cotton fields once surrounded nearly the entire town. People are linked through community, churches and businesses.

Sikeston and its neighbor, Miner, have a combined population of 20,000, 18 percent of whom are black. Like most southern towns, Sikeston has had its share of racial problems and it has tried programs to offer solutions to the problems.

Now, even as black churches in the South are facing persecution, Southern Baptists and other Christians in the city are seeking solutions to racial tensions through efforts toward reconciliation. A Christian block party sponsored by area churches June 7 demonstrated how churches, community and businesses are coming together as part of a long-range effort.

"God has done a lot of work here already; we are pulling down walls between races and denominations," said Janie Pfefferkorn of Sikeston, educational director for Morley Baptist Church, a predominantly white congregation that helped plan the party.

More than 2,000 people attended the all-day event, which opened with a parade through the city and closed with evangelistic services in the evening.

The groundwork for unity among races and churches in Sikeston has been prayer and planning.

"We're sensing a spirit of unity in this city like never before," said David Carnell of Calvary Temple, Sikeston, an active Chamber of Commerce member. "We're bringing our city together through prayers; that's what's happening."

For three years, Sikeston churches, including several Southern Baptist churches, have been active in uniting black and white churches in worship. Miner Baptist Church, predominantly white, and Cornerstone Baptist Church, a black congregation, have held a joint service to acquaint church members with one another.

Members from West End Baptist Church, a predominantly black church, and First Baptist Church, a predominantly white church, also attended one another's services. On Race Relations Sunday in February, Bill Williamson, a black Sikeston minister, spoke at Morley Baptist.

When the time came to organize a citywide event -- a Christian block party -- the offers of help were overwhelming, Pfefferkorn said. The local YMCA volunteered to organize games and recreation; a soft drink distributor provided free soft drinks all day; a local chicken farm donated 1,500 chicken breasts for an evening meal; a local grocery donated food at cost; other businesses and churches donated cash; and the public school allowed the use of a vacant building for workshops.

"The Christian block party was just a natural outflow of everything that's been happening in the city," Pfefferkorn said. "It's not just the churches anymore; the town seems to want to break down the walls between races. We've just been amazed at how God has opened doors here. It seems like everyone is taking part."

Williamson, pastor of Lighthouse Outreach Ministry in Sikeston and a major planner in the event, agreed.

"The whole city has been coming together in prayer and unity," Williamson said. "And this is just the start. It's going to be better and better year after year."

--more--

Williamson, a Sikeston native, knows firsthand the hatred and misunderstanding prejudice can bring.

"I had hatred for all white people," Williamson admitted. "I was raised poor, on the other side of town, and it seemed white people had all the breaks."

Eight years ago Williamson became a Christian. "I realized it was time the walls come down," he said. "If we can't get along down here, how are we going to get along up there?"

Churches have found support from the Sikeston's Chamber of Commerce executive director, an outspoken Christian witness. Steven McPheeters, a southeast Missouri native, worked for nine years in the news department of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in Virginia Beach, Va.

One of the first attempts at reconciliation between races came through the Chamber of Commerce. The chamber has been hosting monthly prayer breakfasts where members of the Ministerial Alliance, a white Christian organization, and members of the Ministers' Union, a black organization, join with Christian businessmen to pray for unity and healing, McPheeters said.

"People always talk about quality of life when they look at a city," McPheeters pointed out. "Churches reflect the quality of life as much as anything, and in this city we are breaking down the walls between races and denominations by lifting up Jesus Christ. There's a healing taking place."

He said there is still work to be done in the city.

"Not everybody is going to take part today," McPheeters said as he looked over the Christian block party. "All over the South people have been living in separate ends of town, but this party and other events in the community will carry into everyday life."

Tom Geers, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church for 22 years, agreed.

"Not all churches, black or white, are involved yet," Geers said. "But I see the beginning of a coming together. I can sense a real love and fellowship beginning to develop among races and denominations."

--30--

Hindman is a correspondent for Missouri Baptists' newsjournal, Word & Way.

WRAPUP

CBF wants chaplains endorsed;
says no to convention status

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
7/1/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Members of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship approved a process to endorse CBF chaplains, voted no on becoming a separate convention, heard a report indicating difficulty in finding a new chief executive and appointed 41 new missionaries at the CBF General Assembly, June 27-29, in Richmond, Va.

The sixth assembly of the five-year-old moderate Baptist organization registered 3,809 people with about 4,000 attending the two evening worship services at the Richmond Coliseum. The CBF, a protest movement against Southern Baptist Convention leadership, is a response to the victory by a "conservative resurgence" in a battle begun in 1979 with moderate Southern Baptists.

A vote on the much-discussed question of separate convention status for the fellowship came when Bill Montgomery, retired chaplain from San Antonio, Texas, repeated his failed 1995 motion to declare the CBF a separate convention. The CBF during the year had conducted a study of the matter but it drew no conclusions.

The leadership of the CBF vocally opposed the convention status and the Saturday morning vote by the General Assembly was overwhelmingly negative as well. Earlier a motion to table the matter had been ruled out of order by the chair.

Montgomery said too many CBF supporters do not want to "cut the apron strings" to the SBC.

The chaplaincy issue, however, seemed to indicate many CBF people are concerned about their place in the SBC.

--more--

Two motions were offered to the General Assembly concerning the chaplaincy endorsement, one by Barbara Donaldson, Dandridge, Tenn., and one by David O. Moore, Liberty, Mo.

Donaldson's motion was merged with Moore's and the motion was carried with only a smattering of no votes.

The CBF's Coordinating Council will appoint an ad hoc committee "whose purpose shall be to develop a proposal, and make application to, the appropriate governmental agencies and other certifying entities, in which approval is sought for certification of applicants to the ministry of chaplaincy in the various areas where religious group certification is required . . ." The committee will report back at the 1997 General Assembly in Louisville, Ky.

In the discussion on the chaplaincy question, one speaker said no one (CBF-affiliated) who has applied through the HMB has been turned down. However, one woman said she didn't want to be endorsed by an organization "I don't endorse."

At a Friday night missions rally, the CBF appointed 41 new missionaries. It was the largest number of missionaries appointed at one time by the CBF and increased its total global missionary force to 139.

Keith Parks, head of the CBF's missions unit and former president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board which has more than 4,000 missionaries, brought a challenge to the new missionaries who will serve from "St. Louis to Siberia."

The struggle to find a new chief executive for the CBF was apparent when a committee to find the successor for Cecil Sherman reported it was turned down by one man and was still interviewing others.

Sherman, 68, retires June 30, although he had apparently told the leadership he would stay through August. No reason was given for his change of mind. But the fiery former pastor and CBF coordinator since 1992 was named "coordinator emeritus" and was honored during the meeting.

Carolyn Crumpler, former CBF moderator, chaired the 12-person executive search committee formed in July 1995. She said the committee mailed hundreds of letters to CBF members for input and received more than 300 responses. A total of 40-45 people, including nine women, were recommended, she said, and three meetings were held before the interview process started.

News reports have said Daniel Vestal, early leader in the movement and Texas pastor, turned down the committee's offer of the job. Crumpler said the committee has interviewed five people.

It was announced a nominee would be presented to the Coordinating Council in April and some expected a name to be presented at the General Assembly.

Even though Crumpler said there was no overwhelming desire (on the committee's part) to have a male or female, layperson or clergy, east of the Mississippi or west of it, she did tell the assembly "we felt it would be a short process."

Some observers at the meeting said the election of the coordinator is crucial to the CBF's future because the organization is stagnating without a clear definition of its purpose. Sherman, in his closing remarks, told the assembly to "trust the next generation."

As a result of Sherman's desire to retire June 30, the General Assembly heard the Coordinating Council had hired longtime Sherman friend and retired Atlanta banker Tommy Boland to fill the post through the end of the year. Boland, 61, active in the early years of CBF, is a member of the Coordinating Council. Not a preacher, he said his focus will be to strengthen the CBF's administration. He is not expected to match Sherman's combative style with CBF detractors.

Boland will be paid the same base salary as Sherman, although that amount was not disclosed. When hired in 1992, Sherman's annual salary was disclosed at \$100,000.

Voters also turned down a constitutional change to allow the Coordinating Council to change, as needed, the CBF's budget which is approved at the General Assembly each year. The council develops the budget and then recommends it to the General Assembly. The CBF apparently will fall short of its 1995-96 budget goal of \$13.3 million and had cut the appropriations for some CBF-supported agencies earlier this year. Sherman told the assembly receipts would total about \$12 million for the July-June fiscal year.

In discussion on the request, Bill Stevens of Nashville, Tenn., said it would give the council "far too much power." Rodney Wilcox of Statesville, N.C., said the move to alter decisions of the General Assembly would lead to "more distrust among the fellowship."

Stevens moved to refer the matter to the legal task group but Bill Snyder of Asheville, N.C., said, "I do not see the need to refer."

Moderator Pat Anderson first tried to take a voice vote on the referral but ruled that was not conclusive. Then he asked for the voters to stand but again could not determine the outcome. A second standing vote, and a long count, resulted in the chair's ruling the motion was referred which put the issue off for a year.

Following that, the assembly approved a \$14,102,000 budget for 1996-97, of which \$3,950,000 is expected from the Global Missions Offering. The budget goal is 6 percent above the previous year, far short of the double-digit increases of the CBF's first years.

Included in that budget are: Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, \$293,000; Associated Baptist Press, \$160,000; Baptists Today, \$55,000; Baptist Theological Seminary, Richmond, \$391,600; Truett Seminary, Waco, Texas, \$191,700; Mercer Divinity School, Atlanta, \$341,700; and Central (American) Baptist Seminary, Kansas City, \$200,000.

Although the Richmond registration total of 3,809 was greater than the 1995 total of 2,969 in Fort Worth, Texas, it fell short of the 4,433 counted in Greensboro, N.C., in 1994. The CBF General Assembly missions rally on Friday night, traditionally the largest crowd, totaled about 4,000, similar to the missions rally crowd in 1995. About 5,000 were counted in 1994 while 1993, Birmingham, Ala., and 1992, Fort Worth, counted about 6,000.

Richmond organizers had hoped an earlier meeting date, only two weeks after the SBC annual meeting, would help the attendance and were hoping to have more than the 1994 meeting in neighboring North Carolina. CBF draws more than 50 percent of its support from churches in Virginia, North Carolina and Texas.

CBF General Assembly participation requires only that a person has contributed to the CBF during the past year. Whereas messengers to the SBC are elected by SBC churches, any person contributing to the CBF during the year can vote at the CBF General Assembly. CBF counts churches and individuals as members. One Virginia church reportedly had 70 members at the CBF meeting. The SBC allows a maximum of 10 messengers from a church at its annual meeting.

The assembly also elected 29 people to the 83-member Coordinating Council which acts for the CBF between General Assemblies, much like the SBC Executive Committee does for the SBC. Four people were added to the CBF Foundation board of directors.

LaVonn Brown, Oklahoma pastor, is the CBF moderator for 1996-97, and was elected last year. Martha Teague Smith, 56, Gastonia, N.C., pastor's wife, longtime piano teacher and CBF activist, was elected moderator-elect for 1997-98. Cindy Johnson, Gaithersburg, Md., was re-elected recorder.

In his address as CBF moderator, Pat Anderson said his year as moderator was the "most rewarding year of my life, but also exhausting and frustrating." Anderson, 52, is a professor of criminology at Florida Southern College, Lakeland.

Anderson also criticized the Southern Baptist Convention's 80-member Executive Committee which, he charged, controls the decisions of the SBC. After the Executive Committee makes decisions, messengers to the SBC annual meeting don't challenge the decisions but follow meekly "like a cattle drive," Anderson said.

The assembly also heard Martin E. Marty, University of Chicago professor, historian and author, at Thursday evening's worship service; C. Anne Davis, retired school of church social work dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., at Saturday morning's worship service; reports from several affiliated groups; and several dramas, musical performances and video productions.

--30--

For now, CBF says no
to separate convention

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
7/1/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship may become a convention/denomination someday, as some of its leaders concede, but not this year, according to a vote of the organization's General Assembly June 29.

The overwhelming vote against a motion to declare the CBF a "convention" was registered near the end of the annual meeting of the five-year-old moderate Baptist group critical of Southern Baptist Convention leadership. About 4,000 gathered in Virginia's capital city for the June 27-29 assembly just two weeks following the annual meeting of the SBC in New Orleans.

About half of the 3,809 registered for the meeting actually voted on the "convention" issue which has been clearly the hot topic for more than a year. Although there were a smattering of votes for the motion, first proposed at last year's CBF meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, the standing vote against the motion was decisive.

Just as he did last year, retired chaplain Bill Montgomery of San Antonio, Texas, proposed the General Assembly declare CBF "to be a new convention." Though the matter had been heard in CBF circles for a couple of years, Montgomery's proposal in 1995 ignited a flurry of activity by CBF leadership. Montgomery's motion eventually was ruled out of order at last year's meeting by then-moderator Carolyn Crumpler of Cincinnati.

However, the 1995-96 moderator, Pat Anderson of Lakeland, Fla., called for an ad hoc commission to study the question. That five-member commission, led by Randall Lolley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C., spent the past year surveying CBF membership and seeking input from a number of its leaders. The "Lolley Commission," as it was called at the General Assembly, produced a 141-page booklet of its findings but made no recommendations.

Anderson had charged the "Lolley Commission" to study the denominational question but not bring a specific proposal, nor was it given a deadline.

"Its purpose is to raise our level of conversation and understanding about issues involved in CBF becoming or not becoming a separate convention," Anderson told the commission.

Ironically, Lolley is the former president of the SBC's Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary who resigned in a dispute with the seminary's trustees in the 1980s.

The "Lolley Commission" in its findings agreed "there are persons who will be disappointed that the Special Study Commission stops short of making any specific recommendations concerning the future of CBF. Yet, that was not the assignment."

But for Montgomery, a year of study, a detailed booklet and countless hours of discussion still had not produced a vote on his desire to remove any link with the Southern Baptist Convention.

So, following the guidelines required by the CBF, he made his motion which was made public during the Friday morning business session of the General Assembly. Also, following procedure, a "breakout" group, or discussion group, followed that afternoon at which Montgomery and his supporters made their case.

--more--

As it turned out, Montgomery didn't find much support. In a room full of people critical of his motion, Montgomery was told, in jest, he shouldn't have come into the room "unarmed." He later told the General Assembly the discussion group turned into a "crying room," because most of the people there did not want to "cut the apron strings (from the SBC)."

Even a request by Elizabeth Thompson of Alabama to table the motion until next year "to reflect on the matter and take it back to the state organizations" was ruled out of order by Anderson.

Montgomery's motion in printed form was handed out to those attending the session Saturday morning with the terse reminder that the CBF's administrative committee "discussed the various issues thoroughly, concluding that they do not recommend approval of this motion."

Even with the decisive "no" vote on the convention issue, some observers say it cannot be long until the CBF will find it necessary to declare itself a convention. Several of the CBF national leadership, including retiring Coordinator/Chief Executive Cecil Sherman, have publicly said the CBF will become ultimately a separate convention but not for a while.

However the CBF vote, SBC leadership still claims the dissident group is operating as a separate convention/denomination.

There may be several reasons why the CBF has decided not to become a convention but, according to the "Lolley Commission" study, money may be a principal reason.

In the study, the commission looked at a survey of 500 members of CBF who were asked 60 questions. The answers were registered on a scale from one to five by respondents who "strongly disagree" or "strongly agree."

One portion of the study asked past and present Coordinating Council members, the 83-member board of directors for the CBF similar to the SBC's Executive Committee, "If CBF declares itself a new convention, support from my local church will likely increase." Of those responding, 61 out of 92 said their churches might give less if the CBF did become a convention. Some speakers said CBF declaring itself a convention would put tremendous pressure on local congregations and their pastors whereas presently they can funnel some money to the CBF without splitting longtime SBC-affiliated congregations.

Those same leaders voted 75 out of 92 that they felt "separated from the SBC."

SBC leadership would like the dissidents to "separate" themselves because they charge CBF supporters are using their affiliation in Southern Baptist churches to funnel off mission moneys which would otherwise be available for SBC-funded mission work.

The CBF claims more than 1,400 churches, nearly all SBC-affiliated, support the CBF and 2,700 individuals. However, a church is counted in that total even though it may not include CBF in its budget but is simply passing on a designated gift to CBF. Sherman has said the number of churches that include CBF in their budgets is a small part of that total. The SBC claims 40,000 affiliated churches and 15.6 million members.

The CBF annual budget, including its \$4 million Global Mission Offering, is \$12 million while the SBC Cooperative Program budget, not including the home and foreign mission offerings, is more than \$142 million. The two SBC mission offerings receive more than \$125 million by themselves.

--30--

Louisiana College professors
sue state conservatives group

Baptist Press
7/1/96

PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--Four Louisiana College professors have filed suit against the "Louisiana Baptist Conservative Resurgency" for distributing what they claim are defamatory and derogatory statements meant to harm their professional and moral reputations.

--more--

The lawsuit was filed by professors Carlton Winbery, Fred Downing, James Heath and Connie Douglas against Leon Hyatt of Pineville and others who were involved in the publication of a packet of letters early last summer. The college itself is not involved in the suit.

The president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, Michael Claunch, a Slidell pastor, denied the charges. Although not named specifically in the suit, Claunch said conservatives in Louisiana had tried over and over to resolve their grievances with the faculty but to no avail.

A lawsuit is a legal statement of grievances against a defendant and must be proven in court. In this case, the professors' suit alleges the distributed letters "all contain defamatory and derogatory information and statements which seek to harm the professional and moral reputation of the plaintiffs and to attempt to lower them in the estimation of their peers in the local and denominational community."

"Further, these malicious and derogatory statements attempt to wrongfully expose the plaintiffs to ridicule, contempt and hatred, as well as further seek to deprive them of public confidence," the suit reads. "Finally, these false and malicious statements were specifically targeted to injure the plaintiffs in their occupation."

Claunch and other conservatives in the state deny the charges and say their goal "has been and still is to get the truth about what is being taught and practiced at Louisiana College to Louisiana Baptists. We believe that when Louisiana Baptists know the truth, they will do the right thing," Claunch said.

"It is not our (conservatives') desire that these matters go before a secular court," he said. "The Scriptures strictly forbid one Christian from suing another. We believe the passage in 1 Corinthians 6 is God's truth for us today, and we believe we ought to obey it. If, however, these plaintiffs insist on bringing the truth out in a secular court of law, we have no choice. We will speak the truth in love as we have tried to do all along and let witnesses confirm the testimony. Ultimately, I believe God will cause the truth to come out where all can see. I will rejoice to see that day."

The suit was filed June 10 with the Ninth Judicial District Court in Alexandria and requests a jury trial.

Attorney for the plaintiffs Vic Sooter said the decision to file the suit came after months of efforts to resolve the issue through other means. Sooter is joined in the suit by co-counsel Randy Fish of Lacombe.

"It is a true tragedy that this lawsuit had to be filed," Sooter said. "Our clients ... have sought to discuss the allegations made against them in a prayerful, Christian manner. This lawsuit could have easily been avoided by defendants simply discussing their concerns directly with our clients before their media blitz and mail-out smear campaign or by setting the record straight in the same media in which they defamed our clients."

Claunch said "Mr. Sooter is in error.

"Dr. Winbery, in a report he wrote on the Conservative Resurgency's Criticism of Louisiana College, referred to conversations between the letter writers and professors about issues raised in the letters. These conversations took place long before the letters were ever written. The letter writers refer to other such conversations. To indicate that no one tried to resolve the issues raised through personal conversations prior to the distribution of the letters is misrepresentation of the fact," Claunch said.

But Sooter said the conservatives bear responsibility for the suit.

"Our clients sought every non-legal means to seek redress for the harm visited upon them by persons in pursuit of political gain, under the guise of divine guidance," Sooter said. "As the defendants have woefully fallen short of their Christian responsibility to redress harms caused to others, it is they who must bear Christian responsibility for this suit."

Claunch said the record will prove otherwise.

"The suit refers to a packet of letters printed in a booklet entitled 'Louisiana Baptist, Speaking the Truth in Love.' In the opening letter of the packet, Hyatt says, 'I do not want to see my college, its president, faculty or trustees hurt ... I do want to see Louisiana Baptists insist that (the college) return to being the spiritual institution it was when I was a student there. The effort to try to return our institutions to the Biblical and moral roots upon which they were founded is what the conservative resurgency is all about.'"

Hyatt responded to the suit by saying, "It is very regrettable." He declined comment on details of the suit, saying he was in the process of securing counsel and had been "strongly urged" not to make public statements.

Since that time, the Louisiana convention newspaper, the Baptist Message, said Hyatt has retained the services of Pineville attorney Dale Smith. Smith was unavailable for comment. However, it is expected he will file a response to the suit.

Hyatt is chair of a group of Louisiana Baptists formed for the purpose of calling the state denomination "back to its biblical and moral roots." The group was organized in May 1995 with adoption of a covenant document and four goals.

Two goals called for amending the state convention constitution to affirm the Bible and for convention workers and trustees to affirm their commitment to the Bible. The other two focused on establishing a process by which persons could receive "specific and verifiable" responses from Louisiana College faculty and staff regarding such things as fidelity in belief and practice to Christian doctrines such as the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture and violations of Christian values at the school.

In the weeks that followed its organization, the group began circulating its covenant around the state to collect signatures and holding rallies in various locations. It also prepared and distributed a packet of 21 letters citing concerns with Louisiana College. The letters addressed a range of past and recent incidents at the school.

Louisiana College trustees responded to the developments by calling a special meeting last July to address the published concerns. Trustees eventually adopted a nine-point statement, which said they had reviewed the charges and rejected the idea that the school had strayed from its moral and biblical roots. The statement also called on faculty members to communicate their deep belief in the Bible to students.

In October, the resurgency group -- by then named Louisiana Baptists Speaking the Truth in Love -- announced support of Claunch for state convention president. Claunch won that post at the annual meeting.

Meanwhile, tensions continued to simmer at Louisiana College. The most recent point of contention came with trustee rejection of a proposed professor of religious education by a one-vote margin. Shortly after that action, a local newspaper reported several faculty members at the school were set to file suit regarding the letters. Of the plaintiffs in the suit, three are from the religion department of the school. Douglas teaches in the language and literature department.

The 10-page lawsuit outlines events leading up to the filing. It alleges Hyatt and others sought the letters on Louisiana College "in order to put pressure on the administration and board of trustees ... to change the direction and focus on the school and to influence faculty changes, initially in the religion department and subsequently in all other departments and areas of teaching." The suit claims the letters were defamatory in their original forms and even more defamatory as edited.

The suit also contends the Louisiana Baptists Speaking the Truth in Love group sought to move the state convention to a more creedalistic stance and to implement procedures that would "greatly subvert the legally established trustee-run system of governance at Louisiana College and could lead to private intimidation of the college and its faculty."

But Claunch said the conservatives have worked within Baptist polity and the convention system.

"After the initial distribution of the letters, I proposed in a letter to the trustees to call an open meeting based on the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15. I suggested that the trustees sit as elders, that each side be allowed to present its cases with evidence and witnesses and that a transcript be made available to every Louisiana Baptist who desired a copy. ... I received no response from the president of the college and no action from the board of trustees. The only response offered to me was from Dr. Stan Lott, then vice president for academic affairs, who told me my suggestion was ridiculous and that the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15 had nothing to do with today. The leadership of the conservative resurgence has been and remains committed to participating in a forum open to Louisiana Baptists where the facts can be presented and both sides can present their case."

The lawsuit says the letters distributed by the group allege the plaintiffs taught in violation of traditional Christian values, assigned and exposed students to pornographic materials, accepted homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, justified and approved of sexual impurity, engaged in or approved of displays of nudity, condoned the use of profanity, disparaged the sanctity of human life, declined to recognize the divine inspiration of the Bible, saw the Bible as no more significant than other books on religion, expressed disbelief in biblical miracles and departed from the biblical and moral roots held by most Louisiana Baptists.

"Such statements attack the basic moral character of a minister of God and professor of religion, wrongfully offering up these plaintiffs for public ridicule based upon the political agenda of those who may disagree with them on finer points of theology," the filed lawsuit argues.

The lawsuit asserts that the charges made against the plaintiffs are "absolutely and patently false."

The lawsuit contains a clause reserving the right to expand the list of defendants. Sooter said there is no way of knowing if others will be named and who they will be until the discovery part of the process is undertaken. That is expected to begin within weeks and will involve obtaining testimony from various parties connected with the issue.

Sooter also explained the plaintiffs included a call for a jury trial as a means of reserving that option. A request for a jury trial can only be made at the time of filing but can be waived later, he said. Sooter said no amount of monetary damages is cited in the suit because that is no longer allowed as a part of the filing process. However, he said the amount in question is "not insubstantial."

Sooter rejected the view of some that the case involves a church matter the courts will choose not to handle. "We feel the court has jurisdiction in this matter and will continue to exercise that jurisdiction throughout the suit."

--30--

Adapted from the Baptist Message, Louisiana Baptists' newsjournal, with additional reporting by Herb Hollinger.

Country or contemporary,
this church puts it to use

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
7/1/96

HARRISBURG, Ill. (BP)--The man on the platform wears blue jeans and boots, a band backs him up, and the country music comes out loud. It's worship at First Baptist Church here.

Later on Sunday morning, that same man, Steve Martin, is on stage in a dark suit, a choir usually backs him up, and the music is more traditional. It, too, is worship at Harrisburg First.

--more--

In November 1994, the church launched its 8 a.m. "country worship" service, which is followed by Sunday school at 9:30 then "contemporary worship" at 10:45. Since then, worship attendance has grown 12 percent and now averages 336, and Sunday school attendance has grown 5.7 percent and now averages 296, said pastor Mike Davis.

Before going to two services, the Harrisburg church had "maxed out" its worship space, said associate pastor Martin, thus making more growth difficult.

The church's four-person staff initiated a door-to-door survey to better understand community needs and opinions, and what they found surprised them.

"We thought we would go with contemporary music," Davis said. But the staff discovered country gospel and southern gospel were "overwhelmingly" the most popular music styles.

They also learned that many unchurched people felt "church is a show," the pastor said. The respondents, in effect, said, "We don't like to dress for show."

The survey results helped the church see the need for change, and today the early worship service is a reflection of what the survey revealed about the community.

Everyone on the platform wears blue jeans during the country service -- including the pastor when he preaches. There are no neckties nor a choir. A "Country Sunrise Band" aids Martin in leading the music. The band has three singers and musicians playing drums, electric guitar, electric bass and electronic keyboard.

The volume is loud. The pace is fast.

"Wake'N Up Music" started the program on a recent Sunday. Then came a "Startin' Song" written by Martin. "Talkin' to God," a prayer, came next. Later there was a vocal solo, called a "Country Delicacy," then "Something to Chew On" referred to the sermon. Then there was "Steppin' Out to Commitment" and "Song of Challenge," followed by "An Opportunity to Give" and "Partin' Words."

Many in the congregation wore jeans, while others wore casual clothing. (A couple of neckties were spotted.)

The second service is called "contemporary worship." The order of worship is more traditional but at a brisk pace, and the congregation is more likely to be dressed in Sunday finery.

Attendance is about equal in the two services, Davis said. But he speculated the first one may outgrow the second because of its effectiveness in attracting people.

Through the country service, "we have reached several families that did not go anywhere to church," Martin said. "They enjoyed it. They felt comfortable."

Comfort is not what the pastor felt when the country service began. "I was saying, 'God I don't even like this,'" Davis recalled. "It took me about three months, but it started dawning on me, 'You know, these people aren't laying back.' I started realizing ... these people are more willing to become involved in worship than what I was used to in the traditional service."

The pastor repeatedly spoke of Martin's importance in making the two services work. Martin, through his music abilities, brings diversity and excitement to the services, Davis said. "He's good. ... He watches the people, and he gets them involved. Music is the thing."

Martin grew up with southern gospel music at First Baptist Church, Metropolis, Ill., and he learned classical music at Union University in Jackson, Tenn. Now he's working in more modern musical forms.

"I love hymns, but we've done them over and over again. They go in one ear and out the other," Martin said. "God moved me to work in variety." He discovered the power of simple choruses in encouraging participation. But, he added, "I never gave up on the hymns."

Most of the material for the country service "comes out of the Baptist Hymnal," the associate pastor said. "We just change the rhythms around."

The rhythms and syncopation are what make a song sound country, Martin said. Syncopation refers to "singing on the off-beat."

Country music is "back porch-type singing," he said. It "tends to be a little more storytelling" than southern gospel. At First Baptist, Harrisburg, they try to relate to the country style of artists Paul Overstreet, Michael James and MidSouth. "We hear what they are doing and try to do that."

One result of the new approach to worship has been changed church members. "Because we're reaching people, God, through his Spirit, is changing our people," Davis said. "Our mentality is changing. ... People are honestly realizing it's not the way you look and it's not really the way you sing, though we all have our preferences.

"It's all a process" for the members and staff of the church, Davis said. "This is just their spiritual life developing ... so that they can reach people."

--30--

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Education Commission takes steps toward SBC agency's dissolution," dated 6/27/96, please change the name of the first member of the administrative committee in paragraph 11 to Tommy Middleton, not Middletown.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

HOUSE MAIL

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, TN 37234

F
I
R
S
T

C
L
A
S
S

Southern Baptist Library
and Archives