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Okla. pastor Tom Elliff elected
SBC president without opposition

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
6/12/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention messengers elected Oklahoma pastor and former missionary Tom Elliff as president of the Southern Baptist Convention June 11.

He succeeds Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., as president of the nearly 16-million-member denomination.

Elliff was unopposed for the SBC presidency, the first time in more than 50 years that a non-incumbent president did not face opposition.

In other elections:

-- Bob Anderson, pastor of Parkview Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La., was elected first vice president by a 3,423-2,884 margin -- 54.27 percent to 45.73 percent -- over Fred Powell, president of Communicators Ministries of Richmond, Mo.

Anderson has served in numerous denominational roles and is a trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

-- African American pastor Fred Luder of New Orleans was elected second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention June 11 in a runoff election with another Louisiana pastor. Luder, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans, received 2,417 votes (72.28 percent) to 936 votes (27.92 votes) for Leon Hyatt, a retired pastor from Pineville, La., and former chairman of the Foreign Mission Board trustees. Four pastors were on the first ballot.

-- Lee Porter, of Lawrenceville, Ga., was unopposed for a 20th term as registration secretary. A former pastor and retired Baptist Sunday School Board employee, the New Orleans convention marked the 50th consecutive SBC meeting he has attended.

-- David Atchison of Franklin, Tenn., recording secretary since 1991, also was elected for another term.

Elliff, 52, a third-generation Southern Baptist pastor from Paris, Texas, currently serves First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla. From 1981-83 he was a Southern Baptist foreign missionary in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He also has held pastorates in Arkansas, Texas, and Colorado. He is a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

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Alabama pastor Fred Wolfe, a candidate for the SBC presidency himself two years ago, nominated Elliff.

"Tom Elliff has a clear focus of what God would have us do," said Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile.

Wolfe noted that under Elliff's 10 years of leadership that First Southern Baptist Church has baptized almost 5,000 people and its members have participated in more than 100 partnership missions endeavors.

"He has a missionary heart at home and around the world," Wolfe said.

Wolfe called Elliff "a real spiritual leader who can lead us to all God would have us to be."

Elliff and his wife, Jeannie, will celebrate their 30th anniversary this year. The Elliffs have four children, ranging in age from 19 to 26, and six grandchildren.

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(BP) photo of Elliff and outline posted in SBCNet News Room.

New SBC President Elliff urges
Baptists to be people of God By Lee Weeks

Baptist Press
6/12/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--About an hour after quickly being elected without opposition to the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention, Tom Elliff practiced what he said he plans to preach: calling Southern Baptists to turn to God.

"I feel like Solomon, who said, 'I don't know how to go out and I don't know how to go in,'" Elliff said before leading reporters in prayer, asking God for discernment and wisdom as he fielded questions about the convention's future.

But the 52-year-old pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., appeared poised and confident in laying out the direction of the SBC as outgoing President Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., prepares to pass the convention gavel June 13.

In his opening statement, Elliff called Southern Baptists to work together in ushering in worldwide revival. "I believe we need genuine revival," he said. "We need to turn to God in our nation. ... The direction of my leadership would be that we would turn to Christ. Step up to the plate and be the people of God he expects us to be."

Elliff expressed positions on issues ranging from the conservative resurgence in the SBC to President Clinton's veto of a bill prohibiting partial-birth abortions.

-- On divisive issues in the convention: "I'm not interested in encouraging people who want to divide, split and to tear apart the fabric of our convention. The last thing any of us would ever want to see would be a ripping apart of the framework of the Southern Baptist Convention. It's not these conservative groups that are causing that. It is convention groups that would take Southern Baptist money and send it to non-Southern Baptist organizations. That's what would cause the fragmenting of our convention."

-- On inclusion of "moderates" in Southern Baptist fellowship: "If you mean by 'moderates' someone who does not hold to the inerrancy of the Scripture and principles of Scripture, the word would be the same to them that I would share with anybody, and that would be to repent and to understand that the Scripture contains the absolutes of God. ... Southern Baptists have very clearly said, 'This is what we believe. This is where we stand. We are a Word-driven denomination with a mandate from Christ to reach people with the gospel.'"

-- On the Walt Disney organization's support of the gay and lesbian movement: "Over the years the Disney corporation has been associated with family and family values. ... The children would say, 'Can we go to the movies? It's a Disney movie.' You say, 'Well, if it's a Disney movie, OK.' But you can't say that anymore. That's unfortunate for us. It's even more unfortunate for Disney because it means they have taken a direction that we can't support financially, we can't support morally. I believe that's the sentiment of our convention."

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-- On women as senior pastors: "I cannot find in the Scripture any passages which would support the role of a woman ... being pastor of a local congregation."

-- On the likelihood Elliff would appoint to a committee position a Baptist who believes Scripture contains error: "That's like asking me if I would be willing to have in the United States Army someone who would not pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and thereby espouse principles of our nation. In a word, no, I would not knowingly, and I would work long and hard to make sure I knew who I appointed. ... We have said as Southern Baptists: 'We believe in this.' And so now we are moving a step beyond as Southern Baptists. We are taking the Word, which we hold up to be the Word of God -- inerrant and infallible -- and we are seeking as a convention to live by the principles of that Word. I would encourage those whom I have appointed to look very carefully at their appointments. I would want them to ensure their appointments would have that same standard, those same principles."

-- On the integrity of conservative leaders in SBC: "I have found the men associated with the conservative resurgence to be aboveboard in every way. I have found them to be men who are genuinely concerned about their churches and their lives, but also they have a heart large enough to be concerned about the Southern Baptist Convention. I have not found them to be acerbic or acrimonious in their statements or actions toward others."

-- On race relations in the SBC: "I can say without reservation that Southern Baptists have set their face toward racial reconciliation, ethnic inclusion. No one needs to question whether we are bent on doing that. We're going to go to school over the next several years on how to do that. I hope other denominations can go school over how Southern Baptists handle that."

-- On inclusion of other religious groups: "The record shows Southern Baptists over the years have held hands with many different religious groups in this country, especially on specific issues: the racial issue, the pro-life issue. When we find other groups which ... have at the core the central message of the cross, ... we also join together with them in sharing the gospel with the nation."

-- On the United States' trade status with countries where Christians are persecuted: "It's absolutely ridiculous for our nation to offer most-favored trade status to a country that knowingly persecutes believers. If you'll look at the record, you'll find that we trade with many nations which do not accord basic human rights, especially to people who are believers in Christ."

-- On the letter signed by 11 former SBC presidents sent to President Clinton opposing his veto of a bill to block partial-birth abortions: "It's a letter of outcry. Abortion is the taking of life. There is no question about that. D (dilation) and X (extraction) is the heinous taking of life. It's cruel and unusual punishment."

-- On the importance of character as a campaign issue in the nation's presidential election: "Whether's it's President Clinton or whether it's any president or any candidate that's running for president, the truth of the matter is, as far as I'm concerned, all God cares about is a man's character. ... Whoever is president of the United States needs to be a man who by his moral standards and character is seen as one who understands the principles of God's Word and lives by the Word of God."

-- On missions: "Frankly, I believe that our goals at this time are too small." Elliff said he would like to see the convention appoint several thousand more missionaries and send heightened number of college students abroad for missions service.

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Mark Kelly contributed to this article.

Messengers approve bylaw
to implement restructure

Baptist Press
6/12/96

By Herb Hollinger & Lonnie Wilkey

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Southern Baptists made it official June 11 -- the denomination as it has been known for decades is being reshaped for the 21st century.

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The restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention, which reduces the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12, is part of the "Covenant for a New Century" approved at the SBC's 150th anniversary meeting in Atlanta in 1995.

Messengers to this year's annual meeting, June 11-13 at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans, approved for the second year a change in Bylaw 15 which lists the SBC agencies. The bylaw change was the only part of the restructuring plan which needed approval at two successive SBC meetings.

The adoption of Bylaw 15 "provides a new moment for the Southern Baptist Convention," said Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., and chairman of the SBC Executive Committee.

"Do you realize you have just changed possibly the course of denominationalism in all of America?" he asked.

"Never before has a denomination of this magnitude ever restructured all of its entities, moving from 19 to 12, all for the purpose of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world," Floyd said.

Messengers were given an eight-page "Transition Plan for Covenant for a New Century," a report from the 10-member Implementation Task Force, as they entered the Superdome for the opening session of the convention. A motion failed to delay the vote on the restructuring recommendations until the afternoon session to give messengers time to look over the report.

The ITF was appointed in September 1995 by the SBC Executive Committee to implement the changes required by the Covenant for a New Century. The task force was assigned "to analyze, study and take actions necessary, including monitoring the transitional actions of all SBC entities, to facilitate the orderly and timely transitions approved by the SBC in adopting the Covenant for a New Century."

The ITF report given to messengers is the first detailed look at the transition of the SBC restructuring which, organizationally, will be in place at the end of the SBC meeting in Dallas in 1997. The report includes cost/benefits associated with the mergers and dissolutions of the seven agencies and addresses personnel issues.

The bottom line of the report, said ITF Chairman Bob Reccord, is a savings of approximately \$34-\$41 million over five years.

Monies saved will "be made available for the front lines of missions church planting and evangelism," said Reccord, pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.

A major part of the report deals with the creation of a new agency, the North American Mission Board, from the merger of three agencies: the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission.

The report says the one-time costs of severance, relocation of personnel and non-real estate implementation costs are between \$4.1 million and \$5.7 million. The recurring savings from labor efficiencies (derived primarily by eliminating redundancies and duplications) are estimated at \$6 million per year for five years. Another \$3 million in recurring savings will come from non-labor efficiencies, the report says.

Net savings for the NAMB in the first five years are estimated to be \$30-\$37 million with the recurring costs recaptured "within two years." Approximately \$4 million in additional savings will be realized from restructuring and dissolution of other agencies, the report estimates.

The report lists in detail how each affected agency will deal with the restructuring. The Historical Commission and Southern Baptist Foundation will be dissolved; the Education Commission and the Stewardship Commission will be dissolved through a legal merger into the Executive Committee; the Southern Baptist Commission on the American Baptist Theological Seminary will be dissolved; and the Home Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission will become the North American Mission Board.

In addition, the Foreign Mission Board will become the International Mission Board and the Christian Life Commission will become the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The SBC Annuity Board does not change under the restructuring.

The legal phase of the restructuring will be completed and effective in June 1997.

Reccord encouraged Southern Baptist messengers to embrace the plan. "We cannot become what we need to be by remaining where we are," he said.

In the conclusion of its report, the ITF says it will need the "goodwill and the cooperation of the leadership of the affected entities. Because the implementation is a strategic, complex and ongoing enterprise, the ITF covets the prayers of all Southern Baptists for this work."

Bill Prince, a messenger from Lawrenceville, Ga., moved the convention go on record as affirming the work of the ITF "as manifested in the spirit and content of its report to this convention and that the interpretations of the ministries assignment to the Sunday School Board and North American Mission Board be included in the official record." His motion was approved.

Following Reccord's report, SBC messengers adopted three other recommendations from the Executive Committee dealing with the mergers and dissolutions of the affected agencies.

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SBC restructuring to bolster
work 'out on the front lines'

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
6/12/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Restructuring national entities of the Southern Baptist Convention is not a move that will accomplish evangelistic goals but one that will facilitate the witness and work of local churches, a member of the SBC Implementation Task Force said during a news conference June 11.

On the first day of the June 11-13 annual SBC meeting at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans, messengers approved a bylaw change reducing the number of national entities from 19 to 12, paving the way for implementing restructuring changes approved in 1995.

Ted Warren, executive vice president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and a member of the 10-member ITF created last September by the SBC Executive Committee, said a change in "heart drive" among Southern Baptists is needed to effect changes in the SBC.

"Just changing the agencies doesn't get the people saved in your hometown," he said. "It's you out there on the street, where you work and with your families that really makes a difference. If that wasn't the goal of the whole program ... it just would be much less meaningful for all of us."

Robert Reccord, ITF chairman and pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va., agreed that "churches ... aren't going to sit back and say some restructuring is going to solve this, that or the other. It can only facilitate it. The job has got to be done out on the front lines.

"This is a movement directed to most effectively use the ministry Southern Baptists have been called to work at and implement," he said.

C.B. "Bill" Hogue, a task force member and retired executive director of the California Southern Baptist Convention, brought the original motion to the SBC to examine its structure in 1993. He said he has been pleased with the manner in which Southern Baptists have viewed the process.

At the time he moved a study of the denomination, Hogue said: "I didn't think in terms of the structure that finally came to be; I didn't think in terms of programs as they came to be. I just simply had the desire to get Southern Baptists on track to prepare themselves to move into the 21st century in order to become a very evangelistic missions group of people, utilizing all of their different agencies and program statements to accomplish this task."

Reccord said he "was amazed at the wonderful affirmation, the positive spirit, the excitement that the people seemed to exhibit, not only in the response to the report but in their votes."

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"There has not been one decision made in the entire process of the task force that has not been unanimous," Reccord said. "We have not had one person try to influence us or tell us what to do. We have really had the freedom to work under the grace of the leadership of the Lord and to do what we felt was best and right and good for the long-term of the convention. For that I applaud the Southern Baptist Convention."

Other points made in response to media questions during the news conference included:

-- The number of jobs to be eliminated in the restructuring has not yet been determined.

--Over the first five years after restructuring, an estimated \$34 million to \$41 million is expected in savings.

-- A decision has not been made about location of facilities for the Radio and Television Commission functions when the agency becomes a part of the new North American Mission Board. Administrative personnel likely will be located in Alpharetta, Ga., home of the NAMB. An answer related to operations' functions is more likely to be available in 90 to 120 days.

-- Savings from restructuring will be required for ongoing needs for churches to be planted, for new mission work to be started, for added missionaries in the field and for more training and equipping. A surplus of funds is not anticipated, but funds will be redirected, and the same level of giving from churches will be needed. Less money will be spent on administration and more money will be spent on work resulting in new churches and more persons reached.

--The process for selection of a new president for the NAMB has not yet been established.

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SBC restructuring must include
revitalization of hearts: Henry By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
6/12/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Restructuring the Southern Baptist Convention is not enough to ensure the largest Protestant denomination's strength in a post-denominational age, outgoing SBC President Jim Henry said in his final presidential address June 11 during the annual SBC meeting in the Louisiana Superdome.

A revitalization of Southern Baptist hearts also is essential to the denomination's future, said Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Although Henry outlined eight elements essential to revitalization, the crowd stopped him with a standing ovation when, speaking about effective participation within the denomination, he condemned the burning of African American churches.

"We deplore these acts of blind hatred," said Henry. As applause ended, he added, "May the world hear that as the heartbeat of Southern Baptists."

Challenging Baptists to "back up our words with actions," Henry said the convention will "pass the bucket" Wednesday night, June 12, to collect an offering for the black churches that have been destroyed or damaged by fire.

Henry also called for pastors, church and state convention leaders to "go home and take collections and free up resources to assist in rebuilding."

"Out of the smoldering ruins of those houses of worship, new buildings will rise," Henry said. "But also a new message -- built on our common bond of fellowship in Jesus Christ. That message is that we no longer say, 'you shall overcome,' but say with (these churches), 'we shall overcome.'"

Another example of the effective participation necessary to the future of the SBC is including more women and ethnics in leadership roles, Henry said.

"Failure to take advantage of these valuable resources would be a tragic waste," he said. "We should not ignore them or pay lip service with low visibility and narrowed opportunities."

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Affirming the denomination's return to biblical authority, Henry nevertheless said some are continuing to "manipulate the procedures for denominational service" beyond what is necessary. He called this a "shadow on the soul of Southern Baptists" that, if lengthened, could potentially cause more damage than the battle for the Bible.

Henry also warned against the splintering of state conventions, saying it would only lead to the Balkanization of the SBC as resources were poured into more structures, legal entanglements and increased division.

"The long-term effect will not be healthy, and we will see the demise of our SBC as we know it," he said.

Shared values is another element essential to revitalization, Henry said.

"The core of Southern Baptist shared values is the Bible.

"If we stay true to the Book, we will not fail," he said. "We will not have to have study committee meetings for years to discuss if same-sex marriages are acceptable; if priests, bishops or ministers who marry them are heretics; if abortions are permissible; if suicide on demand is a right to choose; if racial discrimination is optional; if gambling is a social benefit to our communities; if poverty is tolerable."

Henry said a third element to revitalization is a wholeness that incorporates diversity.

Pointing to the New Testament church, he said, "It was not the whole splintering into diverse parts, but rather diverse parts uniting to form the whole."

Noting that truth must be mixed with grace, he said the Southern Baptist flock should not allow itself to be pigeonholed by a few who have a legalistic and narrow spirit.

Other elements he cited as essential to revitalization were:

-- teamwork: Pastor burnout is at an all-time high, with 125 SBC ministers a month being terminated.

"We are in this together," Henry said. "What weakens one, weakens all -- what strengthens one, strengthens all."

-- affirmation: Almost 700,000 persons were baptized by Baptists last year which also marked the second-highest year for church starts, at 1,600; it was a record year for volunteers.

-- links beyond the community: Our "magnificent obsession" must remain evangelism. To succeed at reaching the world for Christ, he said Southern Baptists must reach out to those of like faith, such as the National Association of Evangelicals.

-- develop young people: Over the last 25 years, the 12-17 year-old age group has declined more than any other among those coming to Christ, Henry said. In addition to evangelizing them, Southern Baptists need to provide these young people with mentoring relationships so they will be less likely to burn out in ministry.

-- a forward view is needed: "The God of yesterday and today is also the God of tomorrow, and you cannot walk with him without walking forward," Henry said. "Revitalization is of the heart. It occurs in the prayer closet, in the seasons of fasting, in experiencing God in our personal walk.

"This 'power walk,'" Henry said, "will, in turn, have a positive impact on our churches and communities and denomination."

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WMU launches project
to assist children

By Orville Scott & Teresa Dickens

Baptist Press
6/12/96

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The urgency for churches to respond to the needs of children was stressed at a June 11 news conference as the Southern Baptist Convention got under way in the Louisiana Superdome and one day after Woman's Missionary Union launched Project HELP: Child Advocacy.

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WMU, with more than 1.1 million members, will seek to lead Southern Baptists to do more to serve the needs of children through volunteer projects, said WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien.

Joining O'Brien in the news conference were Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, and Diana Garland of Louisville, Ky., who is helping lead a two-year study funded by the Lilly Foundation on incorporating children into the life of the church.

In its Project HELP series, WMU previously has launched emphases on hunger and AIDS. The hunger emphasis resulted in the donation of more than 1.2 million cans of food and more than \$378,000 to food ministries across the United States, O'Brien said. More than \$17,000 and 123,000 items have been given to support local AIDS ministries. More than \$108,000 has been given to support House of Hope in Vitoria, Brazil, an AIDS hospice under direction of Southern Baptist foreign missionary Karen Gray.

Garland, author of "Precious in His Sight," a book on ministering to children, said more American children today die from violence in a year than died during any year of the great polio scare of the 1950s.

Recalling Jesus' admonition to his disciples to let the children come to him, Garland said, "All too often children have no voice in a church.

"Do you want to experience God in your life? Then invite a child into your life and serve that child," she said.

Garland said all children need advocates in the community and in government. She called on Christians to "speak out in behalf of our children."

Land said America in one generation has gone from a child-centered culture to a child-neglecting and child-abusing society.

"The fastest-growing poverty group is children," Land said, noting there is widespread hunger and malnutrition among children. He applauded efforts to alleviate hunger on the part of WMU as well as agencies such as the Christian Life Commission, Foreign Mission Board and Home Mission Board.

Land also called for public policy to help parents including greater tax breaks.

"Tax deductions have not kept pace with inflation," he said. "If we give a family of four the same standard deductions as in 1952, they would have to earn \$29,000 before they would pay a dime of taxes."

Noting he is not against women working when they choose to, Land said economic necessity has forced many parents into the work place when they had rather be at home with their children.

Noting that children most at risk do not have two loving parents, Land urged churches to develop ministries to such families.

"Most church members are not aware of the extent of the problem," he said, noting that one in three 6-year-old girls and one in five 6-year-old boys will be sexually molested by age 16.

Land said there is undeniable evidence that violence on television has dramatically increased violence in American society.

He said studies of South Africa and two towns in Canada, which didn't get American television until the 1970s, showed major increases in murder and other violent acts within a few years after the advent of TV.

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Garland said children are growing up with fewer caring adults in their lives.

"There is a growing and deepening poverty for children who feel there is no one who cares or who can help them. It makes them feel there is no hope," she said.

In addition to problems at home, O'Brien urged Southern Baptists to help alleviate problems in other countries, such as large numbers of street children in Thailand and Brazil where leaders sometimes decide the solution is to eradicate them through murder squads at night.

"Jesus told His disciples, 'If you want to be great, welcome this child,'" she said.

Project HELP: Child Advocacy will focus on ways to educate and involve Christians in responding to the needs of children (birth through 18 years) and the churches' role as their advocate within the church family, community and the world.

The project outline includes four categories which will help participants become aware of the needs of children, learn how to pray for children and involve them in spending time with and becoming an advocate for children.

The categories are:

- Researching what needs to be done and what currently is being done in the community.

- Recognizing children in the church and community and those individuals who serve them.

- Resourcing the needs of children and those who care for them through one-time or ongoing projects.

- Relating faith through caring by participating in ongoing ministries for and with children.

The global component of Project HELP: Child Advocacy involves collecting money for a ministry in Naan, Thailand, that provides housing and training for underprivileged children.

Donations will be channeled to the ministry through the WMU Vision Fund, P.O. Box 830010, Birmingham, AL 35283-0010.

Full details of the project are outlined in the Project HELP: Child Advocacy Resource Kit. This kit and a variety of other materials related to the project are available through WMU Customer Service at 1-800-968-7301. Additional information may be obtained from Trudy Johnson, Special Projects Manager, P.O. Box 830010, Birmingham, AL 35283-0010; phone (205) 991-4972; CompuServe 70423,355.

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**Henry expresses disappointment
at Clinton's abortion response**

By Tom Strode

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6/12/96**

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry expressed disappointment June 10 in a letter he received from President Bill Clinton reiterating Clinton's opposition to a bill prohibiting a late-term abortion procedure.

Clinton sent a June 7 letter to Henry after the Orlando, Fla., pastor and 10 former SBC presidents had mailed him one two days earlier asking him to "repent of your veto" of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act. The White House and Henry released the letter Monday.

The president's three-page defense of his veto was "not the way we'd like for him to have said some things," Henry said at a news conference in the Louisiana Superdome, site of this year's SBC annual meeting.

If the president had changed his mind, "then we go to bat for him, and I think a lot of other evangelicals would have too," Henry said. "But we didn't get that response. We wish we would have."

Henry also expressed regret at the reaction of three former SBC presidents who refused to sign the letter. They are Wayne Dehoney, who served in 1965 and 1966; Carl Bates, 1971 and 1972, and Jimmy Allen, 1978 and 1979.

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They "felt like it was politically motivated," Henry said of the reasons the former presidents gave him for their refusal. "They spoke also about the priesthood of believers and the first time Southern Baptist presidents have ever done something like this and it may represent a sense of a group of cardinals, and Baptists don't have those.

"I was disappointed that they felt this way about it."

He asked one of them, Henry said, "What if people had not spoke up about slavery? Would you have considered it political to have spoken up about slavery?"

"It didn't enter my mind about it being political. If it had been Republican, Democrat, Reform Party or whoever, to me it was a moral, biblical issue, and we needed to say we cared and were concerned and wanted to say something about it."

The former presidents who joined Henry on the letter are Franklin Paschall, 1967, 1968; W.A. Criswell, 1969, 1970; James Sullivan, 1977; Adrian Rogers, 1980, 1987, 1988; Bailey Smith, 1981, 1982; James Draper, 1983, 1984; Charles Stanley, 1985, 1986; Jerry Vines, 1989, 1990; Morris Chapman, 1991, 1992, and Edwin Young, 1993, 1994. Henry will complete his second one-year term at this convention.

They realized "as presidents we can't speak for every Southern Baptist," Henry said. "But we think in light of what our convention has already said ... about abortion, we're on the right track for the majority of them."

He asked the former presidents to join him in such a letter because it "seemed like (the president's veto) was pushing the envelope," Henry said. "We're very concerned about abortion anyway. This seemed to take it another step."

The partial-birth abortion procedure is "another step on the slippery slope to moral degeneration," Henry said.

The legislation about which the SBC presidents and Clinton disagree bans a method used, apparently rarely, in the last half of pregnancy. During the procedure, a baby is delivered feet first until only the head remains in the birth canal. The doctor pierces the base of the baby's skull with surgical scissors. The doctor inserts a catheter into the opening and suctions out the brain, so the head collapses.

In his letter, Clinton's defended his veto as an attempt to protect those mothers who need the option of choosing this procedure in order to protect their health.

"I do not contend that this procedure, today, is always used in circumstances that meet my standard," the president said. "The procedure may well be used in situations where a woman's serious health interests are not at risk. But I do not support such uses, I do not defend them and I would sign appropriate legislation banning them."

The medical community "broadly supports the continued availability of this procedure in cases where a woman's serious health interests are at stake," Clinton said.

Some abortion doctors, however, have said the procedure is not the only one available for women with health problems late in pregnancy. Warren Hern, a Colorado physician who has written a widely used textbook on abortion, said he refuses to use the procedure.

Henry told The Washington Times, "This is clearly a procedure no obstetrician needs to do."

Clinton told Congress he would sign the bill if it included an exception in the case of "serious adverse health consequences to the mother."

The SBC presidents called his exception a "discredited, catch-all loophole which has been demonstrated to include any reason the mother so desires."

Clinton said that was "not the kind of exception I support."

In Doe v. Bolton, the 1973 companion case to the Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, the Supreme Court defined "health" to include "all factors -- physical, emotional, psychological, familial and the woman's age -- relevant to the well-being of the patient." This expansive definition of "health" would not be limited by the president's modifying language, pro-lifers contend.

A congressional attempt to override Clinton's April veto is expected but not before July. The House of Representatives, which passed the bill with a 286-129 vote in March, may be able to achieve the two-thirds majority needed for an override. It appears doubtful in the Senate, where the legislation was adopted by a 54-44 margin in December.

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Jeannie Elliff gives priority to Christ, family and church

By Tammi Ledbetter

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--When a friend walked down the aisle to profess faith in Christ, Jeannie Elliff followed along, motivated by the thought that she knew she was "better than that kid."

In the years that followed, Jeannie -- whose husband, Tom, was elected as president of the Southern Baptist Convention June 11 -- struggled with "whether I really knew Christ as my Savior, but I put it in the back of my mind."

Her childhood days in Little Rock, Ark., revolved around her membership at Immanuel Baptist Church where she admits being passionate about her love for church. Though her family attended on Sunday mornings, she went to the trouble of walking alone to the nearby church so she could be a part of the Girls in Action missions group.

When Tom Elliff's family moved to the same city where his father served as director of missions, Jeannie noticed that "a lot of the girls in our church fell for him."

But not Jeannie.

"I thought he was kinda skinny and I wasn't going to like someone all the other girls liked," she said.

Since Tom was two years older, he soon left for college.

They met again when Jeannie entered her sophomore year at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark. They married when he graduated.

During her college days, questions remained about her salvation, but on the surface she was a committed churchgoer, leaving her dorm to teach GAs "when nobody else was going on Wednesday nights."

Jeannie looks back on those years as a time of "trying to get God's approval" through the work she did for her church. She was happy to be marrying a pastor because it gave her even more opportunities to prove her worth to God.

"And he was thrilled that I was so supportive," she said.

In those early years of serving as a pastor's wife to two congregations in Texas, Jeannie remembers God tugging at her heart during revival meetings.

"I felt like my heart was going to explode. It was like God said, 'You are so full of pride, full of the good things you've done all your life, all the awards you've got.'"

She prayed to receive Christ as Savior and was later baptized by her husband.

Jeannie describes that time as "a wonderful experience because I relaxed in Christ." The many things she desired to do could be done from the heart. "I wasn't trying to get God's approval."

Today, she systematically prays for her own family members and the needs of others, including missionaries serving around the world.

"Two years ago, the Lord put on my heart to pray for the 50 missionaries who were commissioned at the convention." She wrote all of them to express her commitment and received photographs and correspondence from many.

Marking their locations on a map that she keeps with her prayer list, Jeannie says, "it's good for me to get outside of myself" by praying for the needs of others.

With a large family with whom she is regularly involved, she believes, "I can get so wrapped up in me and my world and our family and think the world revolves around me, and it doesn't."

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Though she and her husband were on the mission field (in Zimbabwe) less than two years, Jeannie says, "I understand the heartache they've gone through and some of the trials of learning a language and all the things they face."

Describing herself as "a background person," Jeannie prefers to sing in the choir and teach Sunday school to children.

"But my very favorite thing to do is lead women's Bible study at our church," she says, describing almost 20 years of involvement in Precept Ministries, more than half of those in a teaching role.

She is quick to acknowledge to her students she never finished her college education, lacking her practice teaching.

"When we got to seminary, I had to have \$100 for out-of-state tuition" to finish her degree, she said, "and we didn't have it."

When women express amazement that she is able to teach so well without a college degree, she lets them know they have the same tool available by simply opening their Bibles.

She considers Saturday night the "most fun time together" with her husband as he refines his sermon for Sunday. As he asks her opinion of an approach he plans to take with a passage or she offers a different angle for expressing that belief, she looks forward to "back-and-forth" discussion of biblical texts.

Reliance upon the Word of God has been a hallmark of her family's faith in God, seeing them through difficult days in ministry. "I think once I really was saved and having memorized

all those Scriptures in GAs, it was like a match lit those Scriptures in my heart and I began to see how this works," Jeannie recounts.

When their oldest daughter was severely injured in a car accident while they served as missionaries to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the Elliffs turned to the Bible for strength.

"We were very frightened and relied on the Lord," she says. "We had unbelievable support from the Foreign Mission Board and it was just like we were on a pillow."

More difficult were the days when they dealt with the marital breakup of Tom's parents. "I began to feel that I couldn't trust God's Word anymore," Jeannie says. "The Lord really brought me through a crisis of faith to know that it didn't matter what other people did or what I perceived to be God's will, that God was right and I wasn't going to give up on him."

The Elliffs also have made communication a priority in their lives.

"We get up at 5 every morning and have our quiet time separately and then together from 6 to 6:30," she explains. "It's a time when nobody calls, nobody interrupts."

Those priorities will remain as Elliff serves as SBC president. "Once Tom felt it was the Lord's will to be nominated, we set some parameters," Jeannie says. She plans to travel with her husband as much as possible. They have committed themselves to maintaining their own relationships with the Lord, continued communication with each other, not letting their church ministry suffer and maintaining a close relationship with their own family.

"I guess I've never had any big ministry," Jeannie says. "I don't want to be a big speaker, even though I've done some of that. I just want to be Tom's wife and the mother of our children."

With seven grandchildren and two of her four children in college, she adds, "I'm not through being a mom."

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Extended SBCNet family
gathers for annual reunion

By Tim Tune

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A new type of extended family has sprung up and is expanding among Southern Baptists through SBCNet, the on-line computer service of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Many new friendships, prayer partnerships, ministry relationships and at least three marriages have resulted from SBCNet interaction, according to Gerald Steffy, the acknowledged patriarch of the close-knit but informally organized group. They also have seen several people become Christians through on-line witnessing and ministry materials, Steffy said.

Members of this "virtual family" met June 11 for what has become an annual reunion at the SBCNet exhibit on the floor of the Louisiana Superdome during the June 11-13 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. They started such reunions in conjunction with the convention's annual meeting several years ago.

The family gathers with the encouragement of Steffy, director of missions for the Metro Peoria Baptist Association in Illinois. He is not only a patriarch, but some have come to regard Steffy as an elder brother.

Steffy finally got to meet "Brother" Bill Phillips of Portland, Ore., at this year's gathering. Steffy had responded to some prayer requests Phillips posted on SBCNet. Phillips, pastor of Mill Park Baptist Church, said the two had "mutually prayed for a lot of needs" and had teamed up to encourage new Christians.

Steffy described the annual gathering as a way to put a face with a name. But chances are the initial face-to-face meeting has been preceded by hours of "chatting," a term used by on-line users to describe interactive computer conversations. It's much like having a telephone conversation, except the participants type in responses from their computer keyboard.

In addition to chatting and posting prayer requests, SBCNet users also can send E-mail and download all kinds of ministry and Bible study materials. But the uses of SBCNet for communication seem endless.

"Being on line is an extension of my ministry," Steffy said. He said SBCNet allows him to minister, witness, encourage, counsel and pray.

Steffy said he has had many opportunities to counsel on line with people who might not otherwise share sensitive information face to face. And he maintains relationships via E-mail with missionaries in Taiwan and Scotland.

Some cyber-relationships blossom.

SBCNet participant John Guillott, pastor of Oberlin (La.) Baptist Church, will soon gain a son-in-law who met his daughter on line.

Guillott said his daughter, Valerie, starting chatting with Danny Odom of Maryville, Tenn. The two shared pictures and soon "began talking on the phone and eventually got together." Valerie has since moved to Tennessee and the couple will soon marry.

Steffy said he is familiar with at least two other "cyber-romances" among SBCNet participants.

SBCNet became a support system and an electronic lifeline for David Eastland and his wife, Jennifer, when the couple had to be separated for several months.

Eastland graduated from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and took a position as minister of education in Waco, Texas. His wife, also a student, had a semester to complete and remained in New Orleans. The couple kept in touch through SBCNet and saved a lot of money on long distance calls, said Eastland, now minister of education at Sherwood Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.

Nathan and Cheryl Angel, messengers from Temple Baptist Church, Franklin, Ind., found lodging in New Orleans by posting a notice on SBCNet. They got a response and were elated they could stay at a bed and breakfast for \$50 a night.

Nathan Angel, who served on his church's pastor search committee, posted a classified ad on SBCNet that eventually was published in a state Baptist newspaper. They got one response from the ad. The man who responded, John Cook, is now the church's pastor.

Steffy related that even non-Baptist and non-Christian participants are quite active on SBCNet. He said a once-antagonistic Jewish woman was influenced by a sermon posted on the network. After reading the sermon and being exposed to a Christian witness, the woman accepted Christ, Steffy said.

As might be expected in any Baptist group, food is discussed.

Ken Branham, pastor of First Baptist Church, New Albany, Ohio, often discusses on line his affinity for cherry pie. He has even received recipes from other participants.

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(BP) photo and cutline posted in SBCNet.

**Jewish fellowship introduces
missionary, urges resolution** By Karen L. Willoughby

**Baptist Press
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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--For the first time since the birth of the nation of Israel, Southern Baptists have a home missionary to Jewish people.

Jim R. Sibley, appointed by the Home Mission Board, was presented June 10 to members and guests of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship at its annual meeting in the Louisiana Superdome preceding the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Sibley was a Southern Baptist representative in Israel for 13 years.

"Jim expressed his sincere hope and desire that he and the fellowship work together to reach Jewish people with the gospel," R. Michael Smith, fellowship president and an attorney

in Columbus, Ohio, said in an interview after the fellowship's meeting. Smith said Sibley has expressed a desire for "a cooperative effort."

There is a great need to develop leaders for Jewish work, Smith said. This will be done by working through local churches and seminaries.

"This year's convention has been incredible for us," Smith side. "People have been coming to us, asking us about starting work out of their churches. This pastoral openness is an incredibly unexpected phenomenon."

The fellowship's Jewish members are distinctive because they wear the kippah, a small skull cap, which gets its name from the Hebrew word for covering. The caps are also known by the Yiddish word yarmulke.

Gus Elowitz wears a yarmulke. He is congregational leader at Beth Yeshua Hamashiach in Houston, a fellowship started in 1985 by Jerry Young as the first Southern Baptist Messianic congregation.

"The Great Commission is to the Jewish people too," Elowitz said. "Jesus said we are to go into all the world, starting with Jerusalem."

For the fourth year, the Messianic Fellowship has submitted to the SBC a resolution on Jewish evangelism. None of the group's resolutions have yet been recommended to the SBC by the Resolutions Committee.

"We desperately want to see this resolution passed so the convention will recognize what we're doing in the Lord's work," Elowitz said. "We believe the Scriptures, the words of the Lord,

are clear. Our people will not get to heaven by any other covenant -- John 14:6."

Smith voiced his agreement.

"This resolution would seem to be the next logical step in continuing efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention to reclaim its evangelical roots and its commitment to minister to all

people," Smith said. "There can be only one fundamental ministry to all people: Preach the gospel."

Russell Begaye, director of language missions for the Home Mission Board, met with members of the Messianic Fellowship's executive committee. He proposed an expansion of Sibley's duties to include planting Messianic congregations. He also requested that the fellowship help him identify people who could become catalytic missionaries to Russian Jewish people in the Northeast as well as one each for the large Jewish populations of south Florida and California.

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The purpose of the fellowship, begun seven years ago, is to serve as a clearinghouse for information of importance to Jewish believers, Smith said. The fellowship makes statements on issues of interest to Jewish people -- including the state of Israel. Its primary function, however, is to aid in evangelizing Jewish communities in the United States.

As part of its communications effort, the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship has a three-time award-winning home page on the Internet's World Wide Web. The multi-layered page includes articles, audio -- some in Hebrew -- and graphics to help keep people's interest.

"There is a lot of biblical information on the page to show how to reach Jewish people," said the page's founder, Rick W. Drebenstedt of Denver, congregation leader at Or HaB'rith. "Nothing will ever replace nose-to-nose contact, but there are some people who have sent us E-mails that they have received salvation through Yeshua."

The web site's address is <http://www.rmii.com/~menorah>. The E-mail address: or-habrith@menorah.org.

The next meeting of the Messianic Fellowship, a training conference, is slated for Aug. 11-15 in Nashville, Tenn.