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**Land: Religious liberty panel
inadequate, despite SBC rep**

By Tom Strode

**Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Clinton administration has established a State Department-administered advisory committee on overseas religious liberty despite pleas from the U.S. Senate and evangelical Christian leaders for an adviser or commission reporting directly to the president.

The recent announcement of the committee's formation followed nine months of calls by evangelicals and other activists for the White House to act to prevent the widespread persecution of Christians, in particular, in foreign countries.

Although former Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry was named to the panel, SBC Christian Life Commission President Richard Land described the Clinton administration's response as inadequate, partly because the State Department "has been part of the problem rather than the solution."

In addition to Henry, only two other members of the 20-person committee have been outspoken on the burgeoning issue of Christian persecution. They are Don Argue, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and Nina Shea, director of the religious freedom program of the Washington-based Freedom House. The committee also includes Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the left-leaning National Council of Churches, which has opposed evangelical calls for a presidential adviser. It also includes representatives from a variety of religious groups.

In September, both houses of Congress passed non-binding resolutions condemning the persecution of Christians and calling on the president to initiate a study of the government's policies affecting persecuted Christians. The Senate and House of Representatives' resolutions encouraged Clinton to name a special adviser on religious persecution.

The CLC's Land has joined several other evangelical leaders in calling for a presidential adviser or commission. In May and October letters to Clinton, Land and others called a possible State Department-managed advisory committee unsatisfactory.

"The concerns raised in our joint letters are not addressed successfully or adequately by the appointment of this committee," Land said.

Land cited the following reasons for his dissatisfaction with the committee:

-- Its nature.

"It's a special advisory committee within the State Department, not a special adviser to the president. So, it's an in-house committee dependent on the State Department for its staffing and support. The State Department has been part of the problem rather than the solution."

-- Its emphasis.

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"The focus must be on Christian persecution. It is Christian persecution which is the most widespread. It is the persecution of Christians which is the most ignored around the world. Thus, it is Christian persecution which should be the focus. ... (The committee) flies directly in the face of the resolutions that were passed by Congress, which focused on Christian persecution."

-- Its membership.

In the Oct. 11 letter to Clinton, Land and 12 others -- including new SBC President Tom Elliff, Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright and Focus on the Family President James Dobson -- said the "proposed committee may include persons who have long opposed and been skeptical about the very efforts now being made to address the problems of persecuted Christians."

Land said, "Now I'm sure that there will be people like Nina Shea and Jim Henry who, when concerns are brought to them, will raise them. OK, so they bring forth examples of persecution and State Department insensitivity and State Department neglect. They will be investigated by and responded to by officials from the State Department. ... I fear that many people of genuine goodwill who are serving on this committee will be extremely frustrated."

Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., said in a written statement:

"It is my fervent prayer that the work of the committee will visibly raise the attention of our government and public consciousness to the increasing persecution against Christians and other religious minorities in many places in the world. Hopefully, the full weight of the government and the public outcry against the violation of these basic religious and human rights will alleviate the loss of life, property and imprisonment currently being experienced. We cannot be silent and indifferent in the face of the mounting losses of religious freedom."

In the May letter to Clinton, Henry joined Argue, Land and five others in calling the proposed advisory committee "manifestly inadequate." Henry served two years as SBC president before Elliff was elected in June.

Since a January summit of more than 50, mostly evangelical, leaders, calls for the U.S. government to act have been similar to a statement of conscience issued by the NAE the same month. The NAE and others asked for an end in U.S. foreign assistance to countries which allow persecution of Christians and other people of faith. The NAE and others cited politically edited reports by the State Department on religious persecution and indifferent treatment by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of those escaping Christian persecution as reasons an independent adviser or commission is needed to gain appropriate changes in U.S. policy.

In announcing the advisory committee on religious freedom abroad Nov. 12, State Department Assistant Secretary John Shattuck, chairman of the panel, said its primary goals include "fostering greater dialogue between religious communities and the U.S. government; increasing the flow of information to the U.S. government concerning the conditions of religious minorities facing persecution around the world; and informing interested groups and individuals about the U.S. government's efforts to address issues of religious persecution and religious freedom."

The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, which Shattuck administers, has established a working group "to bring greater attention to this issue and ensure its integration into our overall foreign policy," he said in a prepared statement.

In addition to Henry, Argue, Shea and Campbell, the committee members and their identifying organizations or titles are: Diana Eck, Harvard University; Wilma Ellis, Baha'is of the Americas; Irving Greenberg, National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership; Frederick James, African Methodist Episcopal Church; Leonid Kishkovsky, Orthodox Church of America; Samuel Kyles, Memorial Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn.; Deborah Lipstadt, Emory University; David Little, U.S. Institute of Peace; Laila Al-Marayati, Muslim Women's League; Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Newark; Wallace Mohammed, Society of Muslim Americans; Russell Nelson, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Ricardo Ramirez, bishop of Las Cruces, N.M.; Barnett Rubin, Council on Foreign Relations; Elliot Sperling, Indiana University; and Archbishop Spyridon, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

It is estimated this century has had about 100 million Christian martyrs, more than the 19 previous centuries combined. Reports of persecution are prevalent in the communist countries of China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba and in Muslim-dominated countries such as Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan and the Sudan.

The SBC adopted a resolution at its June meeting calling for prayer by Christians worldwide and urging the president and Congress to protect religious liberty. On Sept. 29, churches throughout the world observed the first International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Christians. The SBC resolution called on Southern Baptists to participate in the observance.

**BWAid shifting Rwandan focus
to seeds, tools, other items**

McLEAN, Va. (BP)--Baptist World Aid is increasing its efforts in behalf of programs to resettle refugees returning to Rwanda from Zaire.

In recent weeks, BWAid has supported Baptists in Rwanda as they have cared for returnees, particularly in the Cyangugu area. Now, the Baptist World Alliance relief arm additionally will support a larger initiative of Rwandan Baptists as they provide care for returnees living close to their churches. The program will include the provision of seeds, tools, basic household equipment and emergency food aid.

Rwandan Baptists have asked BWAid for \$500,000 in support of the program. Since 1994, BWA has expended more than \$750,000 for relief work among Rwandan refugees in Zaire and rehabilitation efforts inside Rwanda.

The flood of returning Rwandan refugees has placed a huge demand on the resources of international agencies. Many had made contingency plans for a more gradual return of the refugees, with food and water being made available at transit stations. These plans have had to be abandoned and priority is now being given on getting assistance to the villages. This is causing concern to some relief workers who believe feeding at the village level would require more manpower, more transportation and more time.

However, Claver Buzizi, the Baptist Union of Rwanda's project officer, does not see any alternative to the immediate focus on villages.

"I think that the best way of assisting returning refugees is not to feed them in the camps," Buzizi told Baptist World Aid, "but rather to equip them with the appropriate basic materials which would enable them to struggle for their own lives or survival within their lands." Buzizi estimated \$200 will provide a family with their basic emergency needs of seeds, tools, household goods and food.

BWAid Director Paul Montacute has been working with Baptist aid groups around the world to try to encourage a coordinated response to these needs. Already, a diverse group including a consortium of National Baptists in the United States, Australian and Norwegian Baptists is seeking ways to support this initiative.

Another concern is what people will find when they return home. If their house is still standing, it is likely to have been looted. It may even have another family living there.

Immediate food provision is another concern; while the land is fertile, clearing the land, planting seeds and the eventual harvest all will take time.

A human rights question also arises. More than 80,000 people currently are being held in Rwandan jails, accused of involvement in the 1994 genocide and still awaiting trial. Accusations will also be leveled, rightly or wrongly, at some among the influx of refugees. "Where will they be held? When will they be tried?" Montacute asked.

There also is great concern about the large number of refugees who remain in Zaire. It has still not been possible to contact the Baptist leadership of the Baptist Community of Kivu (CBK), who have provided care for Rwandan refugees since 1994. Neither has it been possible to locate Baptist leaders who were living in the camps.

"There are still an enormous number of refugees from the camps in the Bukavu and Uvira areas who are not accounted for," said Montacute, who visited Bukavu and a camp at Izarangabo in 1995. The Izarangabo camp was centered around a CBK church and had been refuge to a large number of Baptist families, whose whereabouts are not currently known.

Montacute said BWAid remains concerned about ongoing difficulties in Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda. "My real fear is that many people around the world who have seen those incredible TV pictures of masses of people returning home will think that the crisis in central Africa is now over," he said.

But, he continued: "With the majority of Rwandan refugees still in Zaire; with Kivu, Zaire, being governed by a rebel force in opposition to the Zairian government; with hundreds of thousands of returnees stretching the infrastructure of Rwanda; and with Burundi still in turmoil -- we will need to continue to be responsive to massive human need for many months to come."

Baptist World Aid continues to seek funds for its work among refugees and returnees in central Africa.

Donations may be sent to: Africa Refugee Assistance, Baptist World Aid, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101; phone, (703) 790-8980; fax, (703) 893-5160; e-mail, BWAid@Baptistnet.org.

EDITORS' NOTE: Fred and Samilee Sorrells are featured in Southern Baptists' 1996 Foreign Mission Study for adults, which focuses on their former ministry in Madagascar. Since the mission study was printed, the Sorrellses have transferred to Zimbabwe, where he is engaged in a sports evangelism ministry.

Sports missionaries 'step onto moving escalator'

By Mary E. Speidel

ROCKVILLE, Va. (BP)--Fred Sorrells opens a narrow notebook. It's full of business cards tucked into clear plastic holders.

The cards say a lot about Sorrells, who has developed an amazing network of contacts as a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board sports consultant in Africa. Though appointed in 1980 as an agriculturalist, God so blessed a 1990 foray into sports evangelism that Sorrells has taken up that ministry full time and transferred to Zimbabwe.

He's made friends with sports stars and coaches from World A, that part of the globe where people have little access to the gospel. He's met with government officials in several Muslim countries. He knows Olympic athletes from all over the world.

"Sports helps build bridges to people," said Sorrells, from Brady, Texas.

For example, on his way to Atlanta for the 1996 Olympics and Paralympics, Sorrells spotted some Africans -- wearing Olympic pins -- drinking coffee in a London airport. He struck up a conversation with them and learned they were the Olympic delegation from a Muslim nation in Africa. When they learned he was assisting delegations of athletes from several other African nations, they asked him to help with sports programs in their country.

"I've seen the Lord open a lot of doors," said Sorrells during a recent interview at the Foreign Mission Board's Cauthen Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Va.

Sorrells marvels that he's the one walking through them. "I'm just a country boy. I don't have a background in athletics," he said.

But in Madagascar -- an island nation off Africa's eastern coast -- God showed Sorrells that didn't matter. More than 650 people accepted Christ as Savior through the first sports evangelism project Sorrells coordinated during the 1990 Indian Ocean Island Games on Madagascar. Malagasy Baptists, Southern Baptist volunteers and missionaries participated in the evangelistic outreach.

The project was a turning point for Sorrells and his wife, the former Samilee Quarles of Houston. The missionary couple, currently on furlough in Austin, Texas, are featured in Southern Baptists' 1996 Foreign Mission Study for adults.

"God showed us he was doing something through us for which we really had no 'credentials,'" said Sorrells, who went to Africa as an agricultural evangelist in 1980. "Once we make the adjustments God requires of us, it's like stepping onto a moving escalator."

A big adjustment was the family's 1995 move to Zimbabwe.

"I fought (going there) for a number of months," Samilee Sorrells admitted. "I didn't want to leave Madagascar. But God just wouldn't let the idea go away."

The couple and their four children moved to Zimbabwe in April 1995, so Sorrells could help with the All Africa Games held there later that year. The games -- a preliminary for the 1996 Olympics -- drew 6,000 athletes from 49 countries. As an administrative officer for the games, Sorrells established ministry contacts across Africa.

"Isaiah 55:5 says that 'nations that do not know you will run to you, because of the Lord your God,'" he said. "We're seeing that happen through these mega-sporting events."

But the Sorrells family makes a difference on a small scale, too.

In Zimbabwe the Sorrellses' two oldest children -- Benjamin, 13, and Daniel, 11 -- studied the youth edition of the "Experiencing God" discipleship course. God later led Daniel to teach the material to an African Baptist man and his family. They met every morning at 6:30 for the study.

"It's exciting to see our kids learning the importance of following the Lord," said Samilee Sorrells.

She and her husband are good role models in that. "Being on mission with God means we must constantly adjust our lives to his plans," Fred Sorrells said. "God wants us to get in step -- by faith -- with what he's already doing."

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For information on volunteering for Southern Baptist sports ministry projects, contact Cheryl Wolfinger at (901) 272-2461. (BP) photo (horizontal) and cutline mailed 11/14/96 to state Baptist newspapers and posted in SBCNet News Room by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

4,000 Christians gather to fast, pray, seek God

By Stacey Hamby & Vicki Stamps

ST. LOUIS (BP)--About 4,000 Christians from across the nation gathered for three days of fasting and prayer Nov. 14-16 in St. Louis. Thousands more joined the third annual event -- this year called "Fasting and Prayer '96" -- via 140-plus satellite sites in churches and homes.

"We're here to challenge Christians to humble themselves before the Lord and pray," said Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright, who co-chaired the event with his wife, Vonette. "We are experiencing what other nations have experienced when they turned their backs on God. The goal here is to say, 'Lord, we have sinned against you, and we ask you to forgive us and heal our land.'"

The event originated two years ago when 600 Christian leaders from numerous denominations met in Orlando, Fla., to fast and pray. This year in St. Louis, in a room the size of two football fields in America's Center, people from California to Florida gathered in groups of 10 to 12 to pray for revival in their lives, their churches and their country. Many also fasted for the three days.

"This event is all about God and God's people doing what they ought to do," said Dick Dixon, a participant from Bolivar, Mo. "Relationally, we're bankrupt. We're reaping what we've sown. For me, this is a time to be prepared to endure. We can't miss reaping what we've sown, but we can repent and pray for God's mercy. America is in crisis because the church is in crisis. The church is in crisis because the people in the church are in crisis. Revival's got to start with me. The bottom line is repentance."

Sally Crockett from Knoxville, Tenn., said she believes revival in America must begin with Christians getting on their knees. "I need a personal revival. This event is just as much for me as it is for the nation. I'm realizing just how desperately we as Christians need to be humbled. We think the problem is with everybody else, but it's got to begin with us."

The event was divided into seven themes beginning with confession and forgiveness during the Thursday evening session. Speakers focused participants on praying for other themes Friday and Saturday -- leaders and government; the church; the family; the Great Commission; "specialty groups," including the media and athletes; and personal spiritual growth.

"I think the fact that we're praying for specific needs, such as our leaders in our nation and communities, will impact me," said Wendell Sapp, pastor of Compton Heights Baptist Church in St. Louis. "And having done that, I think I'll be more inclined to lead my congregation in praying for our leaders."

Speakers included Tom Elliff, president of the Southern Baptist Convention; Shirley Dobson, chairperson the National Day of Prayer; Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers; Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network; and Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn.

"We as Christians have been saying too much of 'Our Father who is in Washington,' instead of 'Our Father who is in heaven,'" Rogers said in a news conference preceding the event. "The problem is not in the White House, Hollywood or the schoolhouse; it's in the church house. We're here to seek God's face, not God's hand. Revival is the smile of God. He's had to turn away his face from a nation rotten in sin. We're here to beg his forgiveness."

Planners of the fasting and prayer gathering hope to make it an annual event. The emphasis is part of Mission America, an interdenominational network of 100 denominational and para-church groups, with a mission statement of, "The whole Church in the United States taking the whole gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole nation in our generation -- and to all the world."

Larry Lewis, retiring after a 10-year tenure as president of the SBC Home Mission Board, will join the Mission America organization beginning Jan. 1.

Elliff, in addressing the conference, said he had one request for the participants.

"Weep for the church," Elliff said, "as Christ wept over Jerusalem. Christ loved the church and gave himself for the church, so that we might present a glorious, holy church to God without blemish. But we are not without blemish."

Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., described several things right with the church, such as Jesus at its head and Jesus being the only way to a right relationship with God. He cited the ministry of the church and the inspiration of missionaries doing the will of God with the perspective that Jesus will come again.

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Elliff said the imminent return of Jesus increased the urgency of his warning to the church. "We are not as many as we think we are," he said. "We've victimized ourselves by preaching and teaching a synthetic gospel. It looks like the real thing, but it ... is short on Holy Spirit conviction, true repentance, genuine faith, lordship and a changed life."

Elliff urged prayer groups and the church to stay the watch. He described the role of a watchman on the wall of ancient cities and the responsibility of warning citizens of impending danger. "If a watchman ran for his life or hid from the destruction, when the enemy entered the city, they forced the watchman to stack the bodies. Many of these bodies were friends and family."

Elliff asked participants to turn their chairs to form an altar to weep for the church. "Pray for what's happened on our watch," he said. "Unless there is a great renewal born of prayer and preaching, their blood will be on our hands."

In an interview, Elliff described the effect of the synthetic gospel on Baptists. "Christ demands a changed life," he said, "and our churches are filled with inactive Southern Baptists. What changed? We must get back to the true gospel for people to be truly born again."

Elliff said the Nov. 5 election offers classic evidence. A minority of the people of voting age voted, and less than 25 percent of the people elected the president. "You could see it during the exit polls, when more than half of the people said their primary concern was the economy and not character," Elliff said.

The SBC president said he is encouraged about the response to Fasting & Prayer '96 and other large events. "God is calling us to prayer, and I see all of the events as our response to renewal and awakening," he said.

Elliff said he was excited about the nearly 4,000 participants in St. Louis as well as the 140-plus satellite sites of the conference across the nation. "I never attended one of these conferences without changing," he said. "When people gather together to focus on the Lord, the outcome is always good. All efforts to purify ourselves are in harmony with the heart of God. A refusal to do this is lamentable."

Lewis told Fasting & Prayer '96 participants there is a succinct explanation of the Great Commission: "Go to all the world. That is the scope of the assignment -- every nation, people, nationality. No one on planet earth should be born, live and die without hearing the gospel."

Lewis said that when he was a child he followed his mother around and distributed political information to every household. "Question: Are the Republicans and Democrats more interested in winning office than we are for Jesus?" Lewis asked. "Why aren't we out there?"

Preaching from Mark 16:15, Lewis said Christians have a mandate to share the gospel, and the Great Commission must be part of the strategy to conclude the millennium with everyone hearing the gospel. "An organization can't do this," he said. "The Holy Spirit will raise up people in every town."

Lewis urged participants to pray for another great awakening in America and for community groups to have the boldness to share the gospel.

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Hamby is a news writer for Word & Way, Missouri Baptists' newsjournal, and Stamps is one of its correspondents.

**Floyd says fasting, prayer are
'gateway to supernatural power'**

By Stacey Hamby

**Baptist Press
11/19/96**

ST. LOUIS (BP)--"God used fasting and prayer to bring major change to my life," Ronnie Floyd told the opening-night audience at "Fasting & Prayer '96" in St. Louis.

"When you come to God in fasting and prayer, it is very obvious that the more death to self you experience, the more you encounter the living Christ of the Lord God," Floyd told the interdenominational gathering of 4,000 Christians from across the country.

Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., and president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, said he has discovered "through the ministry of fasting and prayer that when you humble yourself before God you will enter into God's gateway to supernatural power."

God wants to release his supernatural power upon his people so the gospel can be spread throughout the world, Floyd noted.

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"It seems to be an impossible task, and that is why we must get the God of heaven involved in our lives and involved in our ministries. And the way we do that is that we reach into one of the greatest and most powerful weapons the church has, and that weapon is the ministry of fasting and prayer."

Fasting means abstaining from food with a spiritual goal, he explained. "Fasting is when you neglect the most natural desire of your body -- which is food -- in order to appeal to the God of heaven to do something supernatural in your life, in your ministry or in your nation."

Floyd said God began giving him a burden for the ministry of fasting and prayer in 1991. Floyd fasted and prayed 40 days a year, not consecutive days, but about once a week. Then the Holy Spirit moved upon his heart one morning in March 1995 that he needed to spend 40 consecutive days fasting and praying.

"The Spirit of God came into my heart and said, 'I want you to fast and pray for 40 days in a row so that this nation might have spiritual revival, that your church might have spiritual revival and that you might have spiritual revival in your life.' Those 40 days changed my life. God had my attention not only on America, and not only on the church, but God had my attention strongly upon myself and upon the sins in my life."

Floyd said he had told God that he would interpret all sleeplessness as a call to prayer. He spent three hours one night "in the woodshed" with God, being convicted of his sin of pride. "God wants to begin with you this week," Floyd told the audience. "We cannot begin with the church. We've got to begin with ourselves. We are the problem. Revival is determined by the sovereignty of God, but it's also by the condition of the church."

As a result of that sleepless night in prayer, Floyd related his journey to the Springdale congregation during a Sunday service. "That's the day God came in fresh power and fresh anointing in the First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark."

In January 1996, Floyd said, God called him to spend another 40 days in fasting and prayer in preparation for the annual sermon he would deliver in June at the Southern Baptist Convention. "God gave me a strong word, a tough word from Joel," to issue a call Southern Baptist leaders "simultaneously from Oct. 27 to Nov. 3 to participate in calling our people by preaching on the subject of fasting, calling them to a solemn assembly by observing a day of fasting and prayer by Christians everywhere and then by preaching on revival asking God to come upon his church. God moved in a powerful way."

Since then, Floyd has taken the fasting and prayer message across the country through Focus on the Family by radio and "The 700 Club" on television.

"We must begin to confess seriously the sins of our nation, personalizing those sins, because America is where it is because the church is sick. The church needs healing, and when the church gets healed, then America will get healed," Floyd told the Prayer & Fasting '96 audience.

God is giving Christians hope with pockets of renewal around the country, he said. "Revival occurs when you experience the manifested presence of God in your life." Christians are supposed to take the initiative of humbling themselves before God, Floyd said, and that is done through fasting and prayer. Referring to Matthew 6, Floyd noted that Jesus said, "When you fast" not "If you fast."

"Isn't it interesting that when he talks about fasting, he talks about it in the same way as when you pray, when you give and when you fast. We talk a lot about praying and giving, but who's talking about fasting?"

Citing Joel 2:12-13, Floyd said God is calling his people to return to him and telling them the way is through "fasting, weeping and mourning." In Joel 2:28-32, Floyd pointed out after the people have prayed, wept, mourned, called a solemn assembly and fasted, God will pour out his Spirit on all mankind.

Floyd concluded his message by challenging listeners with two questions: "How much will it cost to bring revival to America -- our churches, our lives?" and "How is God calling you to return to him?"

"We know what the cost is, and when we see the price tag, we want to walk away. Don't walk away. But even as you ask, 'How much will it cost?' God reverses the question to 'Will you pay the price for revival?'"

**Calif. Baptist issues include
women as pastors, Disney values**

By Mark A. Wyatt

PASADENA, Calif. (BP)--Another attempt to reject messengers from a church with a woman pastor and a move to boycott the Walt Disney Company for anti-Christian values failed during the California Southern Baptist Convention's 56th annual meeting Nov. 12-13 in Pasadena.

But the entertainment giant was censured for alleged anti-Christian policies, in a statement messengers adopted affirming a resolution critical of Disney passed at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting last summer in New Orleans.

Total registration for this year's meeting -- 853 messengers -- was the lowest attendance for a CSBC annual meeting in nearly three decades.

For the fourth year in a row, one of the convention's first matters of business was to decide whether members of 19th Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco could register as messengers. At issue once again was that the congregation has a woman pastor.

Upholding a challenge brought by Greg Harvey, pastor of First Baptist Church, Crescent City, the CSBC credentials committee recommended the church's messengers not be seated. Chairman Richard Barker said the committee's motion was based in part on biblical statements about "women as bishops and overseers in the local church."

Barker, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waterford, indicated committee members recognized the issue's complexity. "The autonomy of the local church is an important right in our convention. We do not wish to revoke that right," he said.

"Standing beside that is the right of the convention to determine its members. It is vital to keep our focus," Barker continued, cautioning against the discussion becoming "overly emotional or personal as an attack against any person or church."

Harvey said his challenge was made "in a spirit of love and upholding the Word of God." The Scripture he cited, 1 Timothy 3:2, describes a bishop or overseer of the church as the "husband of one wife."

Speaking in support of his motion, Harvey explained: "I am concerned about the direction of this convention regarding our interpretation (of Scripture) ... and the unscriptural direction this may take the convention in the future."

Dan Coker, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Seaside, spoke against the challenge. He noted believers once used biblical texts to justify slavery and said differing views exist today on whether Scripture permits women pastors.

"We are dealing not with the inerrancy of God's Word, which I believe in. We agree on the inerrancy (but) we do not agree on the inerrant interpretation of God's Word," Coker declared.

Mary Green, a messenger from First Southern Baptist Church, Oakdale, supported the challenge while giving a qualified endorsement of Julie Pennington-Russell, the San Francisco pastor at the center of the controversy.

"I sympathize with my sister from 19th Avenue Baptist Church," Green said, "but I still cannot support her being a bishop from that church."

Pennington-Russell, addressing the messengers, said, "Some of us here who take the Bible very seriously point to some passages and say the Bible prohibits women pastors. Some who take the Bible very seriously say the Bible leaves the door open for women pastors. Is the subject of women pastors a central biblical issue worth cutting off a part of the body over?"

She continued, "There will always be differences, sometimes deeply felt differences between us. Where our differences are not central to the gospel of Jesus Christ can we not embrace each other or at least cooperate together?"

President Harry Lewis then stated the scheduled discussion time had expired and gave instructions for a ballot vote. The challenge was defeated, 268-289.

The question of whether churches with women pastors are welcome in the California Southern Baptist Convention remains unclear, however, as a motion presented the next day assures the issue will be addressed again at the 1997 CSBC annual meeting.

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Ron Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Thousand Oaks, presented the motion after messengers rejected two proposed constitutional amendments that would have more strictly defined requirements for convention membership.

Earlier, Dan Nelson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Camarillo, spoke in favor of an amendment he proposed during the 1995 CSBC meeting in Modesto. Nelson's proposal would have denied membership to churches with women pastors as well as those not contributing to the Cooperative Program and those not "practicing evangelism which will be evidenced by new members added" to the church roll.

"We're wide open here for anybody to come in and join our convention and not have any Baptist tenets," Nelson declared. He characterized his motion as a positive standard.

"As we grow ... we need to have some parameters about what it means to be Baptists or we will cease to be Baptist. If we don't have some kind of standard we stick to and positively affirm, we are putting ourselves in serious danger and opening ourselves up to change," Nelson said. "We need to do this not as a matter of fear but as a matter of positively affirming what we believe."

Opponents said the amendment's strict reference to the Southern Baptist Convention Baptist Faith and Message doctrinal statement made Nelson's proposal resemble creedalism.

"I think this is getting us into territorial grounds we don't want to be in," said Jim Murcraay, director of missions for the Mendo-Lake Southern Baptist Association.

"I don't see that as a test of fellowship for membership," Murcraay said. "In the name of purity people have been killed, witches have been burned. I'm saying that pure people don't point fingers. They encourage, support and try to help."

Mark Chamberlin, pastor of Hillview Baptist Church, Union City, disagreed with Nelson's assertion that the amendment would safeguard Baptist beliefs.

"What I do see is the passage in 1 Timothy 3 would not only apply to female pastors, if that indeed is what it is saying," Chamberlin said. "It would also target single pastors and those of us whose children have chosen to walk away from the Lord for a while. If that were the case, then maybe you ought to challenge my church."

Chamberlin said offering such amendments amounted to "tinkering" with the constitution in an effort to address one issue. "We have a good constitution and we have a good convention. We do not need this amendment," he said.

Most messengers apparently agreed, rejecting the amendment by a show of ballots. The second proposal also was defeated, which would have toughened existing language in the state constitution to define cooperating churches as those which "have not adopted articles of faith in conflict" with the SBC statement.

Later the same day, Wilson reintroduced the amendment to Article III Section 2 for action during the 1997 CSBC meeting in Visalia. Wilson's proposal includes the exact language messengers rejected just hours earlier and adds the words "and whose practice does not contradict the same tenets" of the Baptist Faith and Message.

Messengers approved without discussion the basic budget proposal for 1997 totaling \$13,625,295. Of that amount, California congregations are expected to contribute \$6,322,165 during 1997.

The 1996 budget contains a \$6,267,182 CP goal.

In a related matter, messengers went along with a recommendation from the executive board to increase SBC Cooperative Program giving only if California churches give more than the basic budget goal. That means any overage normally counted toward the challenge section of the budget -- once again set at \$250,000 next year -- will be divided evenly between state and SBC causes starting in 1997.

That recommendation came in response to a motion introduced last year by Wilson calling for a 50/50 split between state and SBC causes by the year 2000.

Currently 29 percent of the CSBC budget is earmarked for SBC causes. The remaining 71 percent funds state convention programs.

Roger Spradlin, executive board chairman, presented a lengthy explanation for the board's recommendation. He said a decision by Southern Baptists in 1926 to recommend that state conventions move toward a 50/50 split was an ideal dependent upon churches also splitting their budgets 50/50 with state conventions.

"Of course that has not been done in your average church, I would say, and therein lies the problem," explained Spradlin, pastor of Valley Baptist Church in Bakersfield.

He noted the state convention income has been "relatively flat" since 1989.

"During the same period, from 1989 to 1996, (total) church income is up from \$89 million to \$130 million," he added.

Spradlin said, on average, California Southern Baptist churches gave 8.2 percent of their budgets to CP causes in 1959.

"In 1994 that dropped to 4.5 percent," he continued. He also noted the number of state convention employees -- 101 -- is down sharply from 125 just two years ago while the number of churches served by the staff has increased 22 percent.

"There's a feeling that in California there's tremendous needs we need to continue (working) on. Also, if more money comes in, we'll be happy to pass it along," Spradlin said.

Last year marked only the second time since 1982 that California CP income exceeded the annual budget goal. In 1995 churches gave \$61,602 more than the \$6 million Cooperative Program goal. One year earlier, income was \$420,603.84 greater than the \$5,474,159 CP objective.

The Disney resolution approved by messengers censured the company and other unnamed public-sector corporations for policies "made without regard to Christian values." That resolution was widely misreported in the secular media during the convention and for several days after it ended.

The 114-word statement affirms a lengthier resolution adopted at the SBC last June which called for a boycott unless Disney changed certain policies. Among other concerns, the SBC resolution cited Disney actions which benefit homosexuals.

Wiley Drake, the California pastor who pushed for an SBC boycott of Disney, tried unsuccessfully to get boycott language inserted in the California resolution.

As approved, it expressed "extreme disappointment in the continuing actions of these corporations in setting these types of policies." It also appealed to them to "re-evaluate their corporate policies" in light of "traditional family values that this nation was founded upon."

Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Buena Park, also sought to amend a brief resolution concerning public prayer. Messengers approved the resolution which "affirms the individual right to pray; and recognizes that this right is extended to expressions in public forums according to the dictates of personal conscience." But they rejected on a show of ballots Drake's call to endorse a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution which would allow prayer in public schools.

In motions proposed by messengers, Chamberlin moved that the CSBC "no longer consider the gender of any church's pastor as a test of fellowship or as a qualification" for determining membership at future convention meetings.

Parliamentarians ruled the motion out of order, however, since messengers may not enact rules which bind future conventions from dealing with any issue.

Messengers voted down a motion by Barker asking the CSBC president appoint a study panel to consider women in the role of bishop/overseer/senior pastor. Barker's motion would have required the panel to recommend "a constitutional change if needed" to resolve the issue of women senior pastors and the seating of messengers.

Verne Campbell, pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church, Lakeview Terrace, asked messengers to temporarily ban the purchase or construction of a new convention office building. Campbell said selling the current building in Fresno, as proposed by the CSBC executive board, "is fine." But he said action on new offices should be held up until a strategic planning team brings expected recommendations on restructuring the state convention in November 1997.

E. Glen Paden, president of the California Baptist Foundation and a messenger from First Southern Baptist Church, Fresno, called the motion "inadvisable." Paden said to "complete a sale, plan a building, get it through the City of Fresno and get it constructed" would take one to three years -- well beyond the strategic planning team's one-year assignment.

"I really think it's a well-thought plan to move ahead with the executive board's direction," Paden stated. On a show of ballots, Campbell's motion failed.

Bob Rooks, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Chula Vista, said low attendance at the Pasadena meeting was behind his motion asking the strategy planning team to "conduct a thorough study of the current format of our annual meetings."

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After consulting briefly with Fermin A. Whittaker, CSBC executive director-treasurer, President Lewis said the strategy planning team already has that assignment. No action was taken on the motion.

Lewis, pastor of Immanuel Southern Baptist Church, Ridgecrest, won another term as CSBC president, which typically is granted to first-year incumbents.

In a ballot vote for first vice president, however, the incumbent finished last in a three-way race. Horacio "Ray" Jones, pastor of Fremont Bible Fellowship, received 200 votes; James Page, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista del Sur, San Francisco, received 83; and incumbent John May, pastor of First Baptist Church, Glendale, received 81.

Don Taylor, pastor of Central Baptist Church, Alameda, was re-elected second vice president without opposition.

Next year's CSBC annual meeting will be Nov. 11-12 in Visalia.

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Ariz. convention to focus on churches' missions aims

By Elizabeth Young

**Baptist Press
11/19/96**

PHOENIX (BP)--Arizona Southern Baptists set a course for the future at their 68th annual meeting Nov. 12-13 at North Phoenix Baptist Church.

The future will entail a state convention emphasis on "Serving Churches on Mission," which also was the theme of the two-day meeting. In addition, churches will have more flexibility in their Cooperative Program giving in the coming year.

A total of 540 messengers registered for the meeting, down by about 70 from the previous two years.

David Johnson, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Phoenix, was elected convention president, over Bruce Coe, pastor of First Baptist Church, Chandler, by four votes, 136-132. The convention's outgoing president, Tucson layman David Butler, was ineligible for re-election.

For first vice president, Johnson nominated Coe, who was elected by acclamation. Byron Banta, pastor of Corona Baptist Church, Chandler, was elected second vice president, defeating Bret Burnett, pastor of West Yuma Southern Baptist Church. Frankie Wedergren was re-elected recording secretary.

Messengers unanimously adopted an ASBC mission statement which concludes by noting the purpose of the convention is "to serve churches in fulfilling the Great Commission." The mission statement lists four priority principles:

-- developing creative leadership with vision for a new day.

-- "resourcing" local churches who have a clear mission and purpose for fulfilling the Great Commission.

-- providing opportunities to reach the world through "hands on" mission experiences.

-- creating additional networks of cooperation in order to reach the world with the Good News.

On a voice vote, messengers overwhelmingly adopted a missions giving plan that provides churches with more flexibility in their Cooperative Program giving.

The missions giving plan, recommended by the ASBC executive board, was partly in response to a mandate from messengers to last year's ASBC annual meeting that the executive board consider increasing the state's Cooperative Program allocation to Southern Baptist Convention causes. Under the adopted plan, the SBC percentage is increased 1 percent, to 19 percent, in the 1997 budget, and an increase of an additional 1 percent will be considered for 1998.

The plan allows local churches an option to depart from the budgeted percentages and set their own formula for how their Cooperative Program funds are divided between the state convention and the SBC. The plan states "a church that chooses the alternative option will be credited by the ASBC Executive Board with Cooperative Program missions giving."

Messengers adopted an almost \$116 million composite budget encompassing the following: Arizona Baptist Children's Services, \$6,162,140; Arizona Church Growth Board, \$834,207; Arizona State Mission Board, \$1,899,456; Baptist Foundation of Arizona, \$85,128,805; Executive Board, \$1,369,449; and Grand Canyon University, \$20,389,005.

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The budget includes a Cooperative Program goal of \$3,067,021.10, an 8.5 percent increase over the 1996 goal. The Cooperative Program basic budget is \$2,788,201, with an advance budget of \$278,820. Under the basic budget, the SBC allocation is increased from 18 to 19 percent. All funds received in excess of the basic budget will be divided according to the advance budget, which allocates 18 percent for SBC causes.

Messengers adopted several constitutional changes recommended by the executive board. Three of the changes expand the communications task of the executive board beyond that of the state journal, the Baptist Beacon. The executive board is charged with the task of communicating with Arizona Southern Baptists, but the specific methods of communication are left to the board's discretion.

Another change will broaden representation on ASBC boards by allowing individuals to serve on any board from which they do not receive financial support. The constitution previously prohibited convention employees or individuals who receive financial support from the agencies from serving on any ASBC agency board or the executive board. For example, a pastor receiving church growth assistance will now be able to serve on any board except the state mission board.

Messengers adopted changes increasing the number of at-large members on the executive board from 12 to 15 and adding the ASBC second vice president as a full voting member. With this change, the executive board is comprised of the ASBC president and two vice presidents, 15 at-large members, one representative from each of the five ASBC agency boards, the executive leader of each of the five agencies and the ASBC executive director-treasurer.

Another change formalizes the recommendation process for agency board positions. One month prior to the first meeting of the committee on boards, the executive board staff will be required to publish an announcement requesting recommendations for agency board positions.

Resolutions adopted by messengers included:

-- appreciation to the ASBC staff "for sacrificial service to our churches and the convention" during a time of transition and restructuring.

-- appreciation to Virgil Stoneburner, Wendell Freeze and Bill Chambers, directors of evangelism/missions for Fourcorners, Yavapai and Cochise associations, respectively, upon their retirement.

In the only item of miscellaneous business, David Hall, pastor of First Baptist Church, San Manuel, made a motion all ASBC agencies be required to "plainly identify themselves as related to the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention" in all their communications.

Steve Bass, ASBC executive director-treasurer, explained the identification issue had surfaced in a Craig Communications study recently presented to the executive board and inter-agency council and that the council already is pursuing the issue. Messengers voted to refer the motion to the executive board.

Messengers voted to hold next year's annual meeting Nov. 11-12 at First Southern Baptist Church, Tucson. This will be the first time the annual meeting has been held outside Phoenix since 1988.

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**N.M. Baptists add laypeople
to convention executive board**

By John Loudat

**Baptist Press
11/19/96**

CARLSBAD, N.M. (BP)--Messengers to the 84th annual meeting of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico approved a proposal to decrease the number of members of its executive board, while increasing the number of lay members and increasing executive board terms.

Additionally, messengers turned back an attempt to remove the requirement that BCNM churches be members of local associations of churches.

The Nov. 12-13 sessions at the Civic Center in Carlsbad drew 378 messengers.

Elected president for the coming year: Tim Marrow, pastor of Taylor Ranch Baptist Church, Albuquerque, and son of late BCNM education director Dwain Marrow. Marrow defeated the convention's second vice president, Mark Robinson, 140-126. Robinson is pastor of West Main Baptist Church, Artesia. BCNM President Tom Martin, of Hobbs, was ineligible for re-election, having already served two consecutive terms.

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Former State Treasurer David King, a layman from Rodeo Road Baptist Church, Santa Fe, was elected first vice president over Craig Sundheimer, minister of worship at First Baptist Church, Farmington, by a 160-92 vote.

The remaining convention officers were elected by acclamation: Jim Laster, pastor of Castle Avenue Baptist Church, Hobbs, second vice president, and Jeanette Reaves, a member of First Baptist Church, Alameda, recording secretary.

Messengers approved a bylaw change to reduce the size of the convention's executive board from 40 to 30, not counting the BCNM president; increase the makeup of the board from 25 percent laymen to one-third; and allow board members to serve two consecutive three-year terms, instead of the previous one four-year term. Another bylaw change moves the executive board's fall meeting from immediately prior to the state convention to September.

A bylaw amendment offered by Gavin Vaughan II to remove the connection between association and state convention membership failed to get a majority of votes, much less the two-thirds required, with much of the discussion in opposition focusing on the association's ability to monitor doctrinal parity.

Vaughan, pastor of Hermosa Drive Baptist Church, Artesia, said the convention's current longstanding policy is "against historic Baptist polity."

Currently the BCNM is "composed of messengers from Baptist churches which have been received into and are cooperating with one of the Baptist associations in New Mexico ... " Likewise, members of the executive board must be members of such churches.

Vaughan's motion would have replaced that requirement with one requiring a contribution of at least \$250 during the preceding year to the work of the convention.

Constitutions for the convention's two camps, Inlow Youth Camp, east of Albuquerque, and Sivells Baptist Camp, near Cloudcroft, were approved. The action finalized a decision of the executive board earlier this year to make the camps separate corporate entities from the state convention, with their own boards. Another bylaw amendment empowered the convention's nominating committee to nominate members of the new camp boards.

An increase in camp fees intended by the executive board to enable the camps to meet their increased budget requirements was approved, but with considerable discussion and several votes in opposition. The main concern voiced involved the camps' affordability.

An expenditure of \$155,000 to make immediate necessary improvements at Inlow was approved with no discussion and no opposition, and messengers authorized BCNM Executive Director Claude Cone to raise \$1 million in funds and pledges "for camping ministries in New Mexico" during the coming year.

The recommendation for the \$1 million campaign, however, was a substitute motion made by executive board chairman Doug Brooks of Clovis after an executive board recommendation that Inlow remain open and continue to operate at its present location got bogged down in discussion during the previous session, Wednesday morning.

New BCNM President Tim Marrow and the past four convention presidents -- Martin, Frank Zamora of Las Cruces, Dean Mathis of Hobbs and Milford Misener of Belen -- were named to an advisory committee to assist Cone for the fund-raising effort.

Cone told messengers a recent survey told him New Mexico Baptists believe in camping ministry and like having two camps. His assignment for the coming year, he said, would reveal how willing the people are to support them.

Carlsbad pastor Leonard Foster was thwarted again in an attempt to move the dates of the state convention to the end of the week, when more bivocational pastors and working laypeople could attend.

Foster recommended the dates of the 1998 meeting, which will be held at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center Oct. 27-28, be moved to begin Thursday, Oct. 29, at 1 p.m., and conclude the next day after the afternoon session.

Foster had made similar recommendations at the last two conventions. This year's amendment failed by a vote of 97 in favor to 130 against.

Messengers also adopted budgets for the convention, its camps and children's home, during the report of the executive board.

Approved was a BCNM budget for 1997 that will require \$2,898,666 in Cooperative Program receipts from the churches, an increase of \$84,480, or 3 percent, over the 1996 budget.

The budget is still less than the 1995 budget, which was based on income from the churches of \$2,923,860.

After the exception of \$77,000 in preferred items (ministers' retirement and retirees' insurance) is applied, 30.5 percent of the Cooperative Program receipts, an estimated \$860,608, will be forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international missions and ministry, the same percentage as 1996.

The remaining 69.5 percent, \$1,961,058, along with additional income of \$980,432 from various sources (Baptist New Mexican subscriptions and advertising, Baptist Building rental income, Home Mission Board and Baptist Sunday School Board) will be used to support a total operating budget of \$2,941,490 for mission work in New Mexico.

Raises for convention personnel of 4 percent were included in next year's budget.

Budgets of \$197,984 for Inlow Camp and \$187,084 for Sivells Camp also were approved.

Neither camp will receive Cooperative Program funds beginning in 1997, since they are now separate corporate entities from the state convention. Items included in the BCNM budget in years past that were added to the 1997 camp budgets were personnel retirement, insurance and FICA expenses and property and casualty insurance. Those items amount to \$24,652 for Inlow and \$22,472 for Sivells.

Messengers also approved a 1997 budget for the New Mexico Baptist Children's Home in Portales of \$655,556, a reduction of 1 percent from the 1996 budget.

Resolutions included an expression of appreciation to retiring BCNM missions director M.V. Summers and opposition to the expansion of gambling in the state, television advertising of liquor, abortion and assisted suicide.

Messengers also passed a resolution supporting the recent decision of New Mexico's Board of Education to allow the teaching of theories of biological origins other than the theory of evolution.

Another resolution recognized the limited ability of government leaders and laws to transform society and resolved to concentrate the energies of their churches on presenting the gospel to everyone in the state.

Next year's annual meeting will be Oct. 28-29 in the Civic Center at Tucumcari.

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**Kansas-Nebraska Baptists
honor exec 'Peck' Lindsay**

**Baptist Press
11/19/96**

LAWRENCE, Kan. (BP)--R. Rex "Peck" Lindsay, executive director of the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, was honored for his 25 years of service to the convention during the 51st annual meeting of the two-state Baptist body.

Messenger registration totaled 261 for the Oct. 28-30 sessions at the Holiday Inn Holidome, Lawrence, Kan.

During a special recognition, Lindsay and his wife, Sue, were presented a cash award based on the 25 years with the convention, a gift given to all staff members for five-year increments of service. In addition, Lindsay received a gift certificate for a new tennis racquet and his wife was given a piece of jewelry.

Lindsay has been the convention's executive director since 1977. He was director of its division of missions from 1975-77; director of missions, evangelism and campus ministry from 1971-75; and Home Mission Board director of area missions for Nebraska, 1968-71.

He was pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Russell, Kan., from 1957-59 while completing his studies at Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kan., and of Northside Baptist Church, Omaha, Neb., from 1960-68 while earning his master of divinity degree at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo. An Oklahoma native, Lindsay also was a student summer missionary with the HMB in Lincoln and Omaha, Neb., in 1957.

All officers were re-elected at this year's KNCSB meeting: president, Neal Alford, pastor of First Baptist Church, Douglass, Kan.; vice president, Don Lacy, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Valley Center, Kan., and recording secretary, Bryan Jones, pastor of Wanamaker Road Baptist Church, Topeka, Kan.

Lindsay presented the 1997 KNCSB Resources for Ministry budget which was approved by the messengers at the Monday night business session.

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Proposed by the KNCSB executive board, the budget is a record high of \$3,910,080, a 3 percent increase over the 1996 budget. It provides for expenditures of \$2,578,440 for various ministry causes in Kansas-Nebraska and around the world. The budget is based on an anticipated income from Cooperative Program receipts in the amount of \$2,112,576, of which 30.5 percent will be allocated to Southern Baptist Convention national and international ministries, up a half-percent of budget from the current year.

The executive committee read into the minutes of the meeting a proposed change in associational representation as follows:

"This Convention shall elect an Executive Board consisting of one (1) member from each association. A second (2nd) member shall be added when the association's membership reaches 1,000 and a third (3rd) when the resident membership reaches 3,000."

The recommendation will be voted on at the 1997 annual meeting.

Currently, the board consists of two members from each association, with a third member added when the resident membership of the association exceeds 3,000 and with board members added for each additional 3,000 members.

Three Bible study sessions were led by Emmanuel McCall, pastor of Christian Fellowship Baptist Church, College Park, Ga., and a former staff member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

In other business, the convention established the dates and locations for the 1997 KNCSB annual meeting, Oct. 20-22, Westside Baptist Church, Omaha, Neb., and 1998, Oct. 19-20 at First Southern Baptist Church, Garden City, Kan.

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Reported by John F. Hopkins and Art Toalston.

**Servants despise 'trinkets,'
choose 'eternal stuff' instead**

By James A. Smith Jr.

**Baptist Press
11/19/96**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Rather than hoarding "earthly trinkets," true servants of Jesus Christ should "stockpile the eternal stuff," Ben Awbrey preached Nov. 14 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Only believers who despise worldly pleasures for spiritual wealth will earn an eternal reward and be regarded by Christ as a great servant.

"When you stand before Jesus Christ, you will be standing before the most prominent servant who ever lived," Awbrey said. "And he will be judging you on your service."

Awbrey is Midwestern's newest faculty member, having begun teaching this summer as assistant professor of preaching at the Kansas City, Mo., seminary.

With Matt. 6:19-24 as his text, Awbrey preached on five "hallmarks" of a true servant of Jesus Christ.

Like high school students he taught who were failing a course which would prevent their participation on the basketball team, Awbrey said Christians need to continually evaluate their service to God.

"What are we doing with our life? Are we living daily in such a way that we will make (Christ's) commendation a reality?" Awbrey asked.

The commendation Christians will hear from Jesus Christ at the judgment: "Well done thy good and faithful servant; enter now into the joy of thy lord" is "defined and contained in one word: service," Awbrey said.

True servants "never fall into this pitfall of being enamored with the things of this life; they live on a higher level than that and they despise earthly possessions," Awbrey said. "It is so foolish to be rich in the things of this world and in absolute poverty in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Although Christians should be grateful for material blessings, "you're not to be possessed by that. We're to think lightly of that," said Awbrey, noting Christians are "stewards" rather than "owners" of those blessings.

In contrast to hoarding earthly possessions, true servants "amass eternal treasure," Awbrey preached.

"I wish I could see more of this, especially as a pastor," he said. "Your heart is going to hunger and yearn for people who are wanting to serve and amass this eternal treasure. Those folks will be few and far between. That's been my experience. I hope it will be different for you," he told the seminarians.

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Moses, who left the wealth of Egyptian royalty for the spiritual reward of following God, is an example of a true servant, Awbrey said.

Awbrey had a message for students who believe their financial problems and the constant pressure of seminary life will be over on graduation day: "Not if you're a servant."

"My friend, don't be so deluded," Awbrey said. "One of the best things about seminary is it really prepares you for the ministry. Because you're going to be just as busy, just as poor. It's never going to change. This is how it is."

The true servant also must watch over his heart, Awbrey said, citing burnout in the ministry and the way seminary becomes a "grind" for students who were initially excited about serving God.

"A heart that is one day stalwart and pure and humble and serving the Lord and full of love toward God can get soured and weak and anemic and caught up into the frothy things of this world," Awbrey warned. "It happens. It can happen to you. And it can happen to me."

Believers who are "caught up" with worldly things have "a tremendous battle" to fight, Awbrey added. Instead, the heart of Christians should be "serving the great servant of God, Jesus Christ."

Grasping the "significance of single-minded obsession" also characterizes a true servant, Awbrey said.

Awbrey bemoaned the lack of commitment of many church members today, noting, "The saints of God have so many gods that clutter their time."

Many Christians are "waiting to get to some point in time where they can stop and call it quits and say, 'Hey, I've paid God off. I've placated my God. He ought to be satisfied.' As long as you have the breath of life, you need to be serving him," Awbrey asserted.

Of former church members who refused to serve, declaring, "Pastor, I've paid my dues," Awbrey said, "I always wanted ... to jerk their hands and say, 'Let's see your hands. I want to see the nail prints. You know nothing of dues. He paid it all. And we have the opportunity to serve him. ... He's called us to serve.'"

True servants also "understand the unchangeable requirement of his role," Awbrey said, noting no one is exempt from this truth: "You can't serve two masters. Maybe you think you've been pulling it off. But the truth is you never have."

"If you serve the things of this world, ... that's the passion of your life, that's your treasure, that's where your heart is. Guess what? Jesus says, 'I know your god and it's not me! Your heart is not after me. I do not accept this bone you're tossing my way because the truth is I know the hearts and I know you think little of me.' Friend that's serious," Awbrey warned.

"Every day is a tremendous opportunity for us to serve the Lord. And a great reward is coming for those who humbly serve him," Awbrey said. "Every day you have the opportunity for greatness, but it comes to the one who sheds his or her robe, takes up the towel and the water basin and stoops to wash the filthy feet of arrogant men who do not deserve to have their feet washed. That's how Jesus lived it. That's the example he gave for us. And he will be the judge of how we have followed his lead in serving him."

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CORRECTIONS:

In the (BP) story titled "SBC seminaries' enrollment up 6.3 percent in fall '96," dated 11/15/96, please update the 13th paragraph's last sentence to 61.6 percent, from 45 percent.

In the (BP) story titled "La. Baptists meet new exec; Bible stance misses 2/3 vote," dated 11/14/96, please correct one of the educational degrees mentioned in the 23rd paragraph to D.Min., not Ph.D.

In the (BP) story titled "Dakota fellowship adopts first \$1 million budget," dated 11/12/96, please correct the percentage listed in the third paragraph to 16 percent, not 26 percent.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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