



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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William G. Tanner to Head
SBC's Home Mission Board

By Dan Martin

ATLANTA (BP)--William G. Tanner was elected executive director-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board (HMB) here.

Tanner, president of Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), Shawnee, is the 14th person to be elected chief executive since the board was formed in 1845.

Tanner, 46, is the youngest man to head the denominational agency in the past three quarters of a century. He also is the third college president to lead the board since it was founded in 1845.

He succeeds Arthur B. Rutledge, who retires Dec. 31, after serving 11 years as HMB executive director-treasurer.

Tanner, elected during the July meeting of the 69-member board, is expected to move to Atlanta in October.

In presenting the nomination to the board, Gene Garrison, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, and chairman of the board's 6-member search committee, traced its work and procedures.

"When we began, we were aware that the person we would nominate would fill the most strategic position in the entire convention. Winning America for Christ is not an option, it is a must," Garrison said.

He added that 43 persons were suggested to the committee. Each was considered, he said.

"Never did we eliminate anyone. There was never a negative rejection but always a positive direction, praying that one name would surface. We feel this has happened."

He added the committee was never divided, but there always was a unity, and the nomination was unanimous.

"We have a deep feeling this morning that we are not presenting our candidate but that we are presenting the man God has chosen as executive director-treasurer of the Home Mission Board," Garrison said.

With his election, Tanner is the second OBU president to lead a major denominational agency. His predecessor at Shawnee, Grady C. Cothen left OBU to head New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and now is president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville.

In his remarks to the board following the election, Tanner said he comes "without any reservations. I am not in the fleece business. I am in the faith business."

Tanner also emphasized winning America to Christ through Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust emphases of "evangelize and congregationalize."

"We are facing a radically new situation . . . (calling) for new facts, and the Home Mission Board," he said, "must operate at the cutting edge of creativity" to reach people for Christ.

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In a press conference immediately after his election, Tanner said, "I think there needs to be a creative openness within the ranks of Southern Baptists," referring to a united effort to evangelize the world. "Our commissions, boards and agencies can work together and I would like to see this openness as a primary emphasis," he said.

In a pre-board meeting interview, Tanner likened his new responsibilities to "beginning a new career. I have been in an academic ministry and now I am going into a ministry of missions."

Tanner has been OBU president since July, 1971. During that time, enrollment has grown from 1,600 students to more than 1,800, and the school's budget has gone from \$3.6 million to \$5.2 million.

As HMB executive director-treasurer, Tanner will oversee a program which includes a \$26 million budget and support of 2,300 missionaries across the United States, Puerto Rico and American Samoa.

"It sounds corny to say I feel very humble about this, but it is very humbling," Tanner said. "The thing that is scary about it is that it is a tremendous responsibility."

While he admits he "doesn't know enough about all of the programs" of the HMB, Tanner says his philosophy of home missions is to "reach and to minister to the whole person. I think that is our job. I hope we have a strategy to win America to Christ. To me that is the first priority. We should have a strategy, and we should have a plan of how we are going to do it."

Speaking of Bold Mission Thrust, Tanner said, "I believe in the concept of Bold Mission Thrust to give the opportunity for every person in our country to hear the gospel and to make a decision.

"It is not too bold to say that one of our objectives is to win our nation for Christ. I think that is extremely important and that is what home missions ought to be about.

"There are different ways to accomplish this, but it means to me that when you get down to the bottom line, the program ought to be designed to win people to Christ."

Tanner said he is coming to the board as a "listener, a looker and a learner," and admits he has no "pre-disposed hobby horse" of favorite programs.

"I am sold on what the Home Mission Board is doing. That is not something I conjured up in the last few months, but I have been sold on the Home Mission Board for the last 12-15 years.

"I think the Home Mission Board has done some of the most exciting things of our convention. Literacy . . . language missions . . . interfaith witness . . . minorities . . . black America . . . rural work . . . inner city . . . metropolitan areas . . . pioneer areas . . . evangelism. These are exciting things.

"I think the board has been on the creative and cutting edge of the convention, and I suspect I am going to have to hurry to catch up . . ."

Of Rutledge, Tanner said, "I have heard him called the finest Christian many people have ever known. That is a tough pair of shoes to fill. If they had said he was the greatest administrator. . . , but when they say he is the greatest Christian, that is a pretty good bench mark.

"He is going to be difficult to follow. But we are different. We have different approaches. And that is the way it should be."

Tanner has two earned doctorates. In 1956, he received the doctor of education degree from the University of Houston and in 1966 the doctor of philosophy degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

He also is a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Tex., and received an honorary doctorate from Baylor in 1975.

Prior to becoming OBU president, Tanner was president of Mary Hardin Baylor College in Belton, Tex. He has been pastor of churches in Gulfport, Miss., Houston, Cleburne and Wheelock, Tex. His wife, Ellen, is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee. Tanner served two terms as chairman of the Southern Baptist Education Commission. The Tanners have three sons, Bill, Keith and Mark, and a daughter, Kim.
(BP) Photos mailed to Baptist state papers. -30-

Lesch Named Assistant
To BSSB Executive Office

NASHVILLE (BP)--Gomer R. Lesch, director of the office of public relations of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, has been named a special assistant to the board's executive office, according to President Grady C. Cothen.

In the newly created position, Lesch will be responsible for special assignments and studies for assistance to the president and executive vice-president. He will have additional responsibility for coordinated promotion planning relationships to state conventions.

Cothen pointed out that Lesch will serve as acting director of the office of public relations until that position is filled by trustee action.

"We are delighted that Mr. Lesch will be moving to this new position," said Cothen. "His lengthy service with the Sunday School Board, in addition to his wide contacts throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, will be particularly meaningful as he undertakes special assignments in furtherance of the board's mission."

Lesch joined the church administration department of the board as church public relations consultant in 1959. He was named assistant for denominational relations two years later and in 1962 was elected as the first director of the office of denominational relations. The office name has since been changed to public relations.

A native of Buffalo, N. Y., Lesch has a bachelor of science degree in education from State University College at Buffalo and did graduate study at George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville.

From 1950-59, he was program director of WFMY-TV in Greensboro, N. C. Earlier, he filled radio and television positions in Erie, Pa., and Buffalo.

Lesch and his family are members of First Baptist Church, Nashville, where he has served as chairman of deacons and director of library services.

A member of Baptist Public Relations Association, the Middle Tennessee Chapter of Public Relations Society of America, and the Nashville Chapter of Religious Public Relations Council, Lesch has served as president of each group.

He has written "Church Public Relations at Work" for Convention Press and "Creative Christian Communication" for Broadman Press. In addition, he compiled "Memos for Christian Living" and "Reach Out." He continues to contribute articles to curriculum and general publications of the Sunday School Board.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Philippine Families
Receive Food, Supplies

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MANILA, Philippines (BP)--Philippine Baptists distributed food and other supplies to more than 1,000 families in the aftermath of one of central Luzon island's worst floods.

Purchase of the supplies was possible as a result of a \$5,000 disaster relief appropriation by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board along with funds contributed by Filipino church members, according to Robert L. Stanley, Southern Baptist missionary press representative.

Caused by slow-moving Typhoon Olga in late May, the flooding isolated the entire central portion of Luzon for about a week.

G. Dean Dickens, pastor of Clark Field Baptist Church, said that relief money channeled through his church was used to feed 500 persons for four days. Rice, fish, and canned milk for small children were distributed. On the first day of the flood, Clark Church members waded through chest-deep waters to deliver the food. As the waters continued to rise, reaching some areas became impossible.

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In Manila, aid was administered through the Tagalog Area Baptist Churches Association. Pastors Larry Macasero and Henry Cabalang said 308 families received help.

Charles D. Brock, Southern Baptist missionary in San Fernando, La Union, estimated that some 50 families were given rice, vegetables, milk and bread through eight churches in that area.

F. P. Montenegro of Dagupan, editor of the Luzon Baptist Convention newspaper, said the West Pangasinan Association assisted 223 families.

More than 400 pesos or about \$55 was donated by individuals through the Luzon convention.

Damage to churches in the flooded areas appeared to be relatively minor, Dick ns reported. The roof of one church building was damaged when a tree fell on it. Several other churches sustained water damage as flood waters rose in the buildings, according to Stanley.

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'Baptists Should Influence,
Not Dominate Politics'

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7/21/76

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--"Southern Baptists must try to influence, not dominate the political process during the coming national election.

"Christianization of government should not be the goal of Christian citizens. Bearing a faithful witness of Jesus Christ and bringing his word to bear upon government decisions is the goal."

These views were urged by C. Welton Gaddy, director of Christian citizenship development for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, during the opening session of a conference on "Moral Issues in the '76 Elections," sponsored by the commission.

Gaddy cautioned Southern Baptists that they could abuse and be abused by the political process: "The most serious threat comes from persons who would wed the concept of Christian morality to the tenets of a certain political philosophy and thus prostitute Christian morality for political goals.

"On the surface," explained Gaddy, "the ideals, the language and methods of such persons appear in order; however, a close look uncovers a disturbing phenomena.

"Activities in the last 20 months point to a major initiative by the evangelical far right in this country," reported Gaddy. "New organizations have been created with a clear political purpose. While the various groups and persons involved vigorously claim no organizational ties, it is clear that the origin and direction of what has been a national effort is centered in a group who has close relationships to one another, who share a doctrinaire conservative ideological vision and who have come to cooperate together around common political objectives.

"Many Southern Baptist evangelicals have become worried about the hidden political agenda that seems to lie beneath the religious sounding talk of 'turning America back to God' and the election of 'real Christians' to political office. There have been reports of plans to raise large sums of money for these ends, including funds for overt political purposes."

Gaddy named the Christian Freedom Foundation and the Third Century Publishers as two such organizations which are "illustrative of this activity."

"The approach of this entire movement rests upon false assumptions," charged Gaddy. "These people have the idea that there can be a 'Christian America' or a 'Christian political party.' Such concepts are both theologically untenable and practically unrealistic."

Gaddy further charged that another myth perpetrated by these extremist movements is, "Christians will automatically adopt a political conservative philosophy and be like-minded in their positions on political issues. One has only to observe two devoted Christian legislators debating an issue to know that is not true," explained Gaddy. "Christians can and do work in politics from both conservative and liberal perspectives and from within both the Democratic and Republican parties. This is the way it should be."

Gaddy said Christian citizens should take great care lest their interest and activities be subverted "by persons seeking to use the impetus of Christian citizenship to further their own political philosophy or to obtain their goals as a candidate for political office.

"A great deal of time and money has already been solicited (by such persons) from Southern Baptists to support this new far right wing initiative. We must carefully examine all our involvements and tirelessly nurture a citizenship that is 'worthy of the gospel of Christ.'"