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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Business Officers Support
Annuity Board ERISA Fight

By Larry Crisman

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist business officers resolved to support the Southern Baptist Annuity Board's stand against an Internal Revenue Service ruling that the board is not entitled to treatment as part of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Meeting in their 18th annual conference in Dallas, the business officers also passed a resolution which supports legislation in Congress to clarify the "church plan" definition in the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974.

Both resolutions were adopted unanimously by the 180 business officers representing Southern Baptist agencies and churches. The Annuity Board and Dallas' First Baptist Church hosted the conference.

In the first resolution, the business officers agreed "to oppose the actions of the Internal Revenue Service in its attempts to define and limit the nature and ministries of churches through the 'integrated auxiliary' regulations."

Annuity Board President Darold H. Morgan explained that the IRS has ruled that the board is classified as other than "a church, an integrated auxiliary of a church, or a convention or association of churches."

The law excepts these organizations from filing information return Form 990 with the IRS. Form 990 calls for specific financial information about an organization and its activities and must be filed regularly.

If the IRS ruling stands, the Annuity Board would be required to file Form 990--an action it opposes because it disagrees with the IRS ruling on its classification.

In the resolution the business officers also said they "support the concept that the Internal Revenue Service remain a tax collector and not a social engineer in areas it is ill-equipped to handle."

By passing the ERISA-related resolution, the business officers give their support to efforts by the Church Alliance for Clarification of ERISA to clarify the federal pension law.

The Alliance, composed of representatives of 27 religious denominations in the U.S., sponsors legislation to amend the pension law's definition of church plans.

The legislation, now pending in both houses of Congress, would amend ERISA to recognize traditional church retirement plans which cover church and agency employees.

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The bills also would enable the ERISA "church plan" definitions to recognize unique differences in religious denominational structuring. Unless amended, ERISA threatens to fragment denominational pension plans and undermine how churches have functioned for years, according to Annuity Board officials.

In the resolution, the business officers called for U.S. senators and representatives to "support and pass" H.R. 1576, H.R. 1578, S. 1090 and S. 1091. This legislation would clarify the "church plan" definitions, according to the officers.

In other action, the business officers elected Arlis Hinson, business administrator of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., as general chairman.

Southern Baptist Computer Users, meeting in their annual conference at the Annuity Board, selected Charles J. Oliver Jr., assistant comptroller at Buckner Baptist Benevolences in Dallas, as president.

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Garrison To Retire
As Georgia Leader

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ATLANTA (BP)--Searcy S. Garrison, executive secretary-treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee since 1955, has announced his retirement effective Dec. 31, 1980.

Garrison made the surprise announcement to the Georgia Baptist executive committee, which had last year asked Garrison to continue in office through 1982, when he would reach age 70.

However, Garrison told the executive committee: "I am persuaded that it's a part of wisdom for me to step aside according to the established policy of the executive committee and the convention." That policy says that employees may retire at 65 but must retire at the end of the calendar year in which they reach 68. Garrison will be 68 in November.

Garrison has been chief administrative officer for Georgia Baptists longer than any other executive secretary in Georgia history. He came to the position Jan. 1, 1955, from the pastorate of Bull Street Baptist Church in Savannah and president of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

From 1955 through 1979 annual Cooperative Program gifts from Georgia Baptists have increased from \$1.8 million to \$12.7 million. During the same period total mission gifts through the executive secretary's office have increased from slightly more than \$3 million in 1954 to \$27.3 million.

During Garrison's tenure the Georgia Baptist Convention has completed four major capital improvement and endowment programs, with a fifth program now underway. Seven Baptist student centers have been constructed in Georgia, two assembly operations have been developed, and a \$6 million Baptist center in northeast Atlanta was built.

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Williams Radio-TV Agency's
New Executive Vice President

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Luke E. Williams Jr., for 18 years director of church activities at First Baptist Church, San Antonio, has been named executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, effective April 15.

He will be an assistant in internal administration to commission President Jimmy R. Allen with whom he worked 12 years when Allen was pastor of First Baptist, San Antonio.

A former president of the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association, Williams has served churches in Fort Worth, Jacksboro, Dallas and San Antonio, Texas; Chattanooga, Tenn., and Birmingham, Ala. He has been director of church activities at First Baptist Church, San Antonio, since May 1962.

Williams, 54, graduated from the University of Chattanooga and holds master of religious education and doctor of sacred music degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has served on the committee on boards for the Southern Baptist Convention and is a past chairman of the SBC committee on committees. He was also trustee chairman of the Mexican Baptist Bible Institute, and is a former president of the Training Union Convention of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and a former member of the state convention's executive board, and the committee on institution boards.

Mrs. Williams is the former Joyce Virginia Smith of Chattanooga, Tenn.

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Experimental Farm
Plants Bread of Life

By Terry Barone

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WACO, Texas (BP)--Ordinarily, goats, rabbits, worms and fish have little in common.

But on an extraordinary farm run by two Southern Baptist families, they are providing answers that may help alleviate world hunger.

The purpose of the 17-acre experimental farm near Waco, Tex., is to develop agricultural models which foreign missionaries and volunteers can implement in countries with severe hunger problems.

The farm is the result of a cooperative dream shared by Carl Ryther, a 17-year missionary to Bangladesh, and Bob Salley, a Baptist layman. Salley is president of World Hunger Relief Inc., a non-profit organization created to help battle global hunger.

Salley owns the farm and World Hunger Relief Inc. provides funding for the experimental projects. Ryther, who is on medical leave from Bangladesh, is the farm's agri-training director.

Under Ryther's guidance, everything being researched on the farm is interrelated and contributes to an ecologically balanced system that he believes can be duplicated in countries with "temperate, tropic and semi-tropic climates."

"Countries with these climates," he says, "are the population centers of the world which need food production knowledge."

Nubian milk goats raised on the farm would provide milk and meat for people of under-developed nations. The goats are already being raised in many villages in Mexico.

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Rabbits are raised because they are a good source of protein. "Most countries are short on animal protein and four rabbits, in one year, can produce enough meat to provide as much protein as half a beef," Ryther says.

The rabbits also have another use. Their waste is used to grow red wiggler worms.

"The red wigglers digest the rabbit waste, and in return the waste of the worms makes soil in which vegetables can be grown," explains Ryther.

Soil developed by the worms is then placed in "grow beds," 5-by-30-foot wooden boxes, where the vegetables can be grown "very close together and with very little water."

"Three grow beds," Ryther says, "can produce as many vegetables as a half acre of land."

But the balanced ecological system doesn't stop there. The vegetable waste is fed to the goats or rabbits or put back into the soil as fertilizer.

In addition to making the soil, the worms are fed to fish which are being researched on the farm.

Tilapia fish, which Ryther says are "scientifically easy" to raise, are started in a small pond and are transferred from pond to pond until they reach a desirable size.

The fish are then placed in rice fields where they feed on organisms in the water and, in turn, their waste products fertilize the soil.

Ryther and Salley have plans for many other agricultural projects.

They also would like to expand the farm to include a retreat where people could visit and learn about agricultural missions through firsthand experience.

In addition, they have plans for a project called MASS, Model Agricultural Systems Stations, where various situations could be artificially simulated to train agricultural missionaries.

An additional program would train mission volunteers in the most efficient methods of maximizing food production in the particular areas where they would be serving.

But the farm and its various projects are part of a larger purpose than simply providing food and resources for hungry people, Salley points out.

"Our solution," he says, "is to go to foreign countries and into their villages to work with people on solving their hunger needs. And when the people want to know, 'Why are you here?' and 'Why are you willing to do this?' you have an opportunity to share Jesus Christ."

Through agri-missions, Salley adds, "we are trying to share the Bread of Life."