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Adrian Rogers Declines  
2nd Term as SBC President

By Robert O'Brien

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Adrian Rogers declared May 6 that he will not seek a second one-year term as president of the Southern Baptist Convention because of pressing church and personal responsibilities.

"After much prayer and heart searching, I have decided not to allow my name to be placed in nomination for a second term" at the 1980 SBC meeting in St. Louis, the 48-year-old pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, told Baptist Press, the SBC news service, in an exclusive interview.

"As much as I love my denomination, my church is still my first responsibility," Rogers said, speaking in quiet, measured tones. "There are pressing duties and vast opportunities I face as pastor of Bellevue. Our church is in a period of growth unprecedented in its history. These are days, therefore, that I want to maximize for my church.

"Also, I desire more time to spend with personal pursuits, such as quality family time and writing," he said.

Rogers said he faced no pressure from his church, which has been served by two SBC presidents before him, nor from any other quarter of the 13.4 million-member SBC.

He emphasized that his decision had nothing to do with controversy which has swirled around him since a biblical inerrancy group headed by Paige Patterson of Dallas and Paul Pressler of Houston pushed for his election last year in Houston.

"That's something I want to make abundantly clear," he told Baptist Press. "I am sure that there will be all kinds of theories as to why I have done what I have done, but I have done it exactly according to the statement I have made."

"I just really wanted to be clear with the Lord and I think this afternoon (Tuesday, May 6) is about as soon as I have come to a point of clearness," he said. "I don't want to be wrong, and I have tried prayerfully and honestly to make this decision."

He said he did not try for any specific timing on his announcement but did want "to get the word out in enough time so that people will have time to think of whomever they wish to nominate."

"The decision I have made in my mind is final," he said when asked if any conditions could exist which would make him reconsider.

He also responded that he would "absolutely not" be actively involved in the selection of a successor and he declined to speculate on who might be nominated.

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Asked about what direct involvement he would have in any issues facing Southern Baptists at the SBC in St. Louis, June 10-12, he said that he would become involved in "no way other than what I might say in my presidential address. As a good moderator I would try to be fair and balanced."

Besides noting the church and personal responsibilities, Rogers' statement declared that he felt his election in Houston was "in the will of God." He said he has "received joy and fulfillment through serving the denomination this way."

"I have made many new friends and have come to a greater appreciation of many of our top leaders," he said. "They have given me full cooperation. The letters and statements of love and support from the grassroots of our great denomination also have been warmly assuring to me," he said.

"My desire for the denomination," his statement continued, "would be a spirit of love and revival that would help us solve any differences there may be in our constituency. I pray that Southern Baptists will forever be committed to God's Word as truth without any mixture of error and unswervingly committed to missions and evangelism."

Rogers' unexpected decision to decline a traditional second term, which only three others have done in SBC history, opens wide the door of presidential politics at the SBC in what was expected to be an "off year" in that category. SBC presidents usually are accorded a second term without opposition.

Controversy at last year's convention resulted in investigation of the registration process. It revealed violations and sloppy procedures and indicated some persons had been transported to the convention just to vote. But it failed to turn up any massive wrongdoing which would have affected the outcome of Rogers' first ballot election in a six-man race.

SBC Registration Secretary Lee Porter, who conducted the investigation at the request of the SBC, said "that even those who were guilty of violations did not come from any one political or theological persuasion."

In response to a question, Rogers said the recent report of a plan by the Patterson-Pressler group to take control of the SBC by controlling SBC presidential elections over the next 10 years had no bearing on his decision not to run.

He said that his decision process began during recuperation from gall bladder surgery in a Memphis hospital last February. "I had a good clear feeling as I meditated and prayed with the Lord about it and that was prior to my knowledge that Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler were holding continuing meetings," Rogers said.

Rogers has declared he has no involvement in such efforts. "Their approach is not the way I would go about it," he said in response to a question, "yet I believe that we as Baptists need to be very, very careful that we don't judge the heart motivation of anyone and that we give everyone the right to express his heart and convictions. I believe in the integrity of these men."

He did admit that he has not enjoyed the "negative" aspects of his term of office. "I am basically the kind of person who enjoys something positive rather than something that is negative," he said.

But he characterized his year as SBC president as "basically positive."

"I have received far, far more positive affirmation than I have negativism. There has indeed been some negativism, but it has come from a very small segment of the denomination," he said, noting that negativism "is a matter of the past...just a matter of history."

He emphasized that he feels that two years as SBC president is a reasonable term for a person to serve, but not in his case. "I feel that though my election was the will of God, it did not come at a time I had planned for and was not the most advantageous time for me to serve the two full years," he said.

"We are really in a period of unprecedented growth here," he said of the 10,500-member Bellevue Church from which his two predecessors, R.G. Lee and Ramsey Pollard, served as SBC president. Lee, the last president constitutionally able to serve more than two years, was a three-time SBC president, 1949-52. Pollard served two terms, 1960-61.

"For example," he said of Bellevue, "this past Sunday we had almost 50 additions, baptized 21 and had almost 4,000 in Bible study. We're just moving into new facilities (the result of a nearly complete \$4.7 million building campaign) and are making a lot of reorganizational gains. As much as I love my denomination, my church is still my first responsibility."

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Missionaries Preach, Cook  
To Sound of Distant Gunfire

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MONROVIA, Liberia (BP)--Small arms fire could be heard in the distance as Buddy Woods and Earl Williams, Southern Baptist missionaries, drove into the parking lot of Effort Baptist Church, Monrovia, Liberia, April 13.

Inside, a handful of people were sitting, waiting, expecting. They had risked their lives to come to the only place they could find comfort. Some had already lost loved ones in the military coup that had rocked Liberia the day before.

Woods and Williams gathered the people into a small group near the altar and shared with them James 1:2-3 (RSV): "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."

One person after another began giving witness to what God had done for him in the previous 24 hours. In that hour, they were reminded of God's love for them and his all-sufficiency.

For Woods and his wife Jody, this was not the first time they had offered comfort in trying times. They are dormitory parents for an MK (missionary kid) hostel in Liberia, and previously held the same job in Zimbabwe. There they provided temporary housing for missionaries evacuating Sanyati Baptist compound following the guerrilla murder of fellow missionary Archie G. Dunaway Jr. in 1978. As the Zimbabwe missionaries joined their children, the Woods greeted them with a smile, open arms and a pot of chili.

In Liberia, they responded in a similar way during the coup which began with the assassination of William R. Tolbert Jr., president of Liberia and the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention, Inc.

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While her husband offered comfort to Liberian Baptists, Mrs. Woods helped by doing many of the things she does every day: "You bake cookies, mix kool-aid, arrange a bouquet of flowers and pretend not to hear the chatter of gunfire," she said. "You fix breakfast for MKs who are trying not to worry about their parents in the interior. You plan lunch. You're not sure how many will have lunch with you.

"You greet missionaries coming in from other stations with a smile and a hug and an extra squeeze. You wonder if the extra beds have clean sheets on them. You find things for the children to do to keep them busy."

Because of its location in Monrovia and its large dining and living rooms, Mrs. Woods said the hostel is a logical place for missionaries to gather for supper, to share and just "be a family." And in a time of crisis, that's especially important.

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Luther Rice, Criswell  
Center View Merger

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Fla., and the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas are exploring a possible merger.

Should such a merger occur, Palge Patterson, president of the Criswell Center, will eventually become president of both institutions, Patterson and Robert Witty, Luther Rice president, confirmed in separate telephone interviews.

Patterson confirmed May 6 that he would attend a board meeting of Luther Rice, May 9, where he serves as a regent, to explore such a possibility. He said his board at the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies will make its decision "sometime in July" after the Luther Rice's May 9 decision.

Although both schools employ Southern Baptists as faculty members and have mainly Southern Baptist students, neither has any official connection with the Southern Baptist Convention or a state Baptist convention.

Luther Rice, a private non-accredited institution, grants diplomas mainly by correspondence. The Criswell Center, affiliated with the First Baptist Church, Dallas, is accredited by the American Association of Bible Schools.

Patterson said Witty approached him about the possible merger within the past six months. Since then the two presidents have been considering an approach in which the institutions would maintain their own names and, for at least a time, their own boards of trustees and presidents.

"Eventually, it is possible, but it has not been determined, that Dr. Patterson will be the president of each institution and I will be president-at-large of this institution (Luther Rice)," said Witty, who is already past retirement age. "None of that has been established."

Patterson said he envisions that in about a year after any merger occurs, he would head both institutions under one board of control.

Asked about merging with a non-accredited institution mainly involved in correspondence study, Patterson said, "We have no intention with merging with a non-accredited institution which would remain non-accredited." Luther Rice has no current accreditation, although Witty said the 18-year-old school is talking to several accreditation agencies.

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Baptist Press asked both Witty and Patterson if the proposed merger has any connection with a recently-reported plan by Patterson and Houston Appeals Court Judge Paul Pressler to gain control of the SBC by controlling SBC elections over the next 10 years. Last year in Houston, the Patterson-Pressler group led a biblical inerrancy effort which campaigned to elect Adrian Rogers as SBC president.

"This merger has no bearing on all of that," Patterson said. "I am operating on two levels. What I do in my personal activities in the Southern Baptist Convention is totally different from my efforts to make an educational contribution."

Witty responded: "We have never been political and do not intend to become political. We are not divisive and have a written policy that "no employee of Luther Rice Seminary ever makes any critical statement concerning any Southern Baptist agency, institution or personality."

Patterson noted that the connection with Luther Rice, should it occur, would give the Criswell Center access to graduates "all over the globe...and give us a direct involvement in missions."

Luther Rice reportedly has diploma holders in 55 countries and across the U.S. Witty estimated between 2,000 and 3,000 persons have been granted Luther Rice diplomas.

Patterson cited another benefit of the proposed merger:

"We are facing the necessity of developing an external studies program out of popular demand," he said of the Criswell Center which has about 250 students. "We were either going to have to do that ourselves or develop some sort of close connection with a school that could.

"It (the merger) would save us the necessity of developing what they are already doing."

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"Fire" Breaks Out During  
Worship at Pekin Church

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PEKIN, Ill. (BP)—Two firetrucks, a rescue squad, and a battalion of firemen rushed to the Marquette Heights Baptist Church during a morning worship.

By the time firemen arrived, however, the "fire" had been put out. They learned it had been set by Marge and Bert Ashbrook, and Lila Strickland, all charter members. Interim pastor Alvie Daily and Sunday School Director Clyde Davis also helped.

But no charges were pressed, for the "fire" was a single sheet of paper—a 20-year mortgage ignited during a note-burning ceremony.

Mrs. Charles Earley, a member of the congregation, said, "We wanted to do something different, to make the community aware of what was going on. And we really succeeded. You should have seen the curious spectators."

Mrs. Wick Crum, a member whose husband is chief of the Marquette Heights fire department, served as an intermediary in the unusual event. Members invited the firemen to stay for a potluck dinner, but they had to get back to the station.

After all, another Baptist church might catch "fire" the same afternoon.

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