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Luther Rice, Criswell  
Merger Apparently Off

By Dan Martin

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Regents of Luther Rice Seminary here are expected to terminate merger discussions with Criswell Center for Biblical Studies when they meet Dec. 4.

According to Michael Warr, a spokesman for the Jacksonville-based correspondence school, the nine-member board of regents has been polled by telephone and favor the recommendation of a three-member committee to terminate merger discussions with the Dallas-based Bible college.

The recommendation, printed in the Nov. 15 issue of the Pioneer, the quarterly newsletter of Luther Rice, asks termination of the discussions while continuing "good will and respect" between the two schools, neither of which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

It also asks that regents reaffirm their faith in the leadership of their 74-year-old president, Robert Witty.

The possibility of merger between the two institutions came about in May, and a three-member committee of Luther Rice regents went to Dallas to investigate the possibility. The committee was headed by Clint Hines, chairman of regents and a layman from Newton, Texas.

Warr did not speculate on the reasons, but said: "They apparently found some things incompatible and felt they were sufficient to lead them to call off the merger."

Under the arrangement proposed at the time the merger discussions began, Witty was to retire as president and Paige Patterson, a regent at the seminary and president of the Criswell center, would become head of the merged institution.

Patterson, who said he "sort of stayed out" of discussions because he did not believe "it fair to play both sides of the fence," said he believes "a number of regents felt Dr. Witty is still in excellent health and that it is not wise for him to relinquish his responsibilities...."

He also added he has the "impression" that some Luther Rice faculty members did not greet the possibility of merger with much enthusiasm, even though Patterson said Witty had initiated the discussions.

"There apparently was a good deal of uneasiness on the part of some of the Luther Rice faculty members," Patterson said, even though they had been assured they would not be terminated if the merger came about.

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The problem, he added, is not theological, but that "quite a number" of teachers at the Jacksonville school do not have doctorates from accredited institutions, but instead are graduates of Luther Rice, which is not accredited.

Criswell center, which includes a radio station; Shopar, a monthly publication; a Bible college and a graduate school of the Bible, is accredited by the American Association of Bible Colleges for its Bible school and "is within striking distance" of accreditation for the graduate school.

Luther Rice, which has a limited number of resident students and does most of its work through correspondence, is working toward accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools of the United States and Canada, but has not yet received its approved status.

Patterson said among the liabilities of merger would be the fact Luther Rice is not accredited and "unfortunately has the reputation of being a degree mill. We do not feel that is an altogether fair reading, but we would have had a public relations problem to some degree."

He added, however, that if Luther Rice regents had "felt comfortable about merger, we were willing to assume it and try to help get it through accreditation."

Another potential problem area, Patterson said, is that all 12 CCBS trustees are Southern Baptists while "several" Luther Rice regents are not Southern Baptist.

A source close to several of the Luther Rice regents said they were upset by published reports of Patterson's political activity within the Southern Baptist Convention, particularly accounts of a meeting in Lynchburg, Va., where Patterson and Houston appeals court judge Paul Pressler reportedly were "going for the jugular" in an attempt to control SBC agencies and institutions.

Patterson said about 325 students are involved in the Criswell program, 275 in the bachelor's program and 50 in the master's.

Luther Rice has 250 students in its residency program, with 150 in the undergraduate program and 100 in the graduate school. "Our external (correspondence) students number about 4,000," said Warr, who also is one of the 17 full-time faculty.

Patterson said Criswell trustees "were waiting on Luther Rice for their move. We had a number of plans which we shelved while waiting to see what would happen. We are in some sense relieved to be able to get back to our plans."

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Baptist Choir Performs  
For Perry Como Special

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JERUSALEM (BP)--Singers of Praise, a 40-voice choral group known locally as the Baptist Community Choir, will perform with singer Perry Como during his "Christmas in the Holy Land" show. The one-hour ABC-TV special will be aired Saturday, Dec. 13 at 10 p.m. (EST).

Despite the scorching October sun and the hot wind from the Judean desert, the choir was filmed for over four hours near the ancient wall of the Old City of Jerusalem. They sang several specially arranged Christmas songs with Como, including "The Holy City," "Christ Is Born," and "Ode to Joy."

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Additionally the choir sang the Hebrew accompaniment for an Israeli folk dance troupe and joined a kibbutz choir in a song for the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

Just a few hours before 80-100 million television viewers see the Como Christmas special, the Singers of Praise will present the first in a series of concerts in six cities throughout Israel during the Christmas season. The program, including Bach as well as carols, spirituals and folk songs, will be performed in churches, schools and cultural halls.

Singers of Praise, a volunteer choir based at Baptist Village, was chosen for the show by an Israeli agent. "Several professional choirs also were considered, but ours was selected on the basis of a tape made during the spring concert series," explained Southern Baptist representative Suzanne Mantooth, chairman of the arts committee of the Israel Baptist Mission.

She added the agent also spoke of the "special spirit" of the choir and the good press reviews of performances over the years.

Several members of the television crew told Mrs. Mantooth it had been meaningful to be in Israel, traveling around the country casting various scenes for the nativity tableaux to be interspersed with the music of Como, the choirs, Israeli singer Ilanit and scripture reading by actor Richard Chamberlain.

Besides various places in Jerusalem, the show includes scenes in Bethlehem, Nazareth, Ein Karem and the Sea of Galilee.

The choir, which performs classical and contemporary religious music throughout the year, was founded in 1965 as the choir of the Petah Tiqva Baptist Church at Baptist Village. Gradually many non-Baptists of various national and denominational backgrounds joined and the choir became known as the Protestant Community Choir. Southern Baptist representative John Karr is in his second season as director.

In 1974 the name Singers of Praise was chosen as descriptive of the choral group's purpose. The name was taken from Psalm 66:2, "Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Health Department Blocks  
Haitian Food Distribution

By Patti Stephenson

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MIAMI, Fla. (BP)--Efforts to feed hundreds of Haitian refugees in the Liberty City section of Miami have been hampered by health department regulations.

Plans to serve meals from a disaster relief van operated by the Louisiana Baptist Convention were scotched when health inspectors refused to grant a permit allowing the van to hook into the facilities at French Speaking Baptist Church, one of the largest Haitian congregations in Miami.

The converted tractor-trailer rig, which has been used to serve thousands of meals in disaster-stricken areas, arrived in Miami on Nov. 17. Its three-man crew—Cal Jones, Paul Carroll and Clarence Filipi, all members of Horseshoe Drive Baptist Church in Alexandria, La.—spent five days preparing the site and waiting for health department clearance.

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Health department officials had foreseen no problems with the project before the team's arrival, said Milton Leach, director of Southern Baptist refugee resettlement and relief efforts in Miami.

"They thought the van would fit into the same category as the mobile vending units which operate in Miami," Leach reported. After their inspection, however, officials ruled the van would have to meet requirements for a permanent installation, including having a separate sewer system.

"Everyone mutually agreed that it just wasn't feasible," Leach said. The "disappointed" Louisiana expedition headed home Nov. 21.

The next morning Leach met with seven Haitian pastors. "They were determined to find a way to feed these refugees," Leach said. The pastors hammered out a plan to serve meals at three churches: French Speaking Baptist, Haitian Evangelical Baptist and Bethanie Baptist. Three of them agreed to recruit volunteers to cook and serve meals, register refugees and dispense tracts.

The number of meals served will depend on response at each church. "Each church will contribute \$20 a week, together with \$160 a month from the Home Mission Board Christian Social Ministries Department, to have two workers overseeing the project daily," Leach said.

Food has been donated by Food For The Hungry, a non-profit hunger relief organization. Forty thousand pounds of bulk food will be prepared at the churches and distributed to those who have stoves at home and to those who come to the refugee office based at Highland Park Baptist Church.

The Haitian pastors "made their own rules," Leach noted. "They decided to require everyone who eats to also help cook and serve." All refugees who eat will receive an identification card in order to prevent anyone "from getting food and then selling it for drugs or some other abuse of the program," Leach reported.

The number of Haitian refugees registering for resettlement is climbing daily, he added. Though immigration officials are not predicting a major influx, the Haitian Baptist community is preparing for it.

"What we really need most now is sponsors," said Leach. "There is no expense involved for the sponsor in relocating the refugees. Interested churches can contact the Home Mission Board for more information."

Though he admitted disappointment that the disaster van project failed, Leach emphasized that "if the men from Louisiana hadn't come, I don't think our Haitian churches would have dared to do it on their own. Now they're enthusiastic and committed to do the best they can. I think it was all a part of God's plan."

## Baptists Rush to Aid Italian Quake Victims

NAPLES, Italy (BP)—Italian and Austrian Baptists are joining Southern Baptist missionaries in these two countries and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in rushing aid to earthquake victims in Italy.

The Foreign Mission Board has sent \$15,000 in hunger funds and \$15,000 in disaster relief funds to be administered by missionaries and Italian Baptists.

Missionaries in Austria and Austrian Baptists have collected clothing and other supplies and expect to spend two to three days assisting in the earthquake area east of Naples.

The Italian government has said that only those groups it specifically authorizes will be allowed in the devastated areas. John A. McTyre, a Southern Baptist missionary journeyman in Austria, has gone to Rome to secure permission for his group.

Also in Rome, missionary to Italy Stanley Crabb has a load of supplies ready to go as soon as he receives permission.

The Baptist Union of Italy joined other member bodies of the Evangelical Federation to distribute foodstuff and clothing, European Baptist Press reported.

Congregations in Naples and Pozzuoli collected food and materials, and churches at Altamura and Gravina equipped their buildings as collection centers for those areas.

Radio Tre-Vi, the Baptist Broadcast agency in Rome, announced its facilities would serve as a collection center. Southern Baptist missionary Marylu Moore of Gravina said Baptist church buildings at Tricarico and Miglionico were structurally damaged in the quake.

Piero Bensi, president of the Baptist Union and Evangelical Federation, said the vice president and the treasurer of the Evangelical Federation had gone to the Naples area to determine what further steps could be taken to alleviate suffering. Relief funds and supplies from fellow Baptists "would be most welcome," he said.

Five students from the Naples area, from among 11 from Italy enrolled at the Baptist Seminary of Ruschlikon, Switzerland, left Monday to join with other Christian believers in relief efforts, according to John Wilkes, director of European Baptist Press.

They reported a panorama of suffering, with people—afraid to re-enter their homes—living in city squares. Even those in homes were experiencing aftershocks as they kept a constant eye on hanging lamps and, at the slightest movement, rushed into the streets where they could only stand and weep helplessly.

The quake, which measured 6.8 on the Richter scale, jolted an area in southern Italy with a population of approximately 7 million Nov. 23. It is being called Italy's worst earthquake in 50 years. Early estimates indicated the dead may exceed 3,000.