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80-04

Radio-TV Commission Moves To Establish New Network

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission has moved to establish a 100-station low powered television network with a potential national viewing audience of 163 million.

Though some expressed concern over various aspects of the proposal, the commission, in a special called meeting Jan. 5, unanimously voted to establish the network and created a subsidiary corporation, the American Christian Television System (ACTS), to implement it.

The corporation, organized Jan. 6, will make application and hold licenses for the stations, establish the stations in partnership with local Baptist bodies and contract with the commission to provide network programming for them.

Jimmy R. Allen, RTVC president, also will be president of ACTS. Other members of the corporation will be Grady C. Cothen, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Daniel Rivera, president of Mexican Baptist Bible Institute in San Antonio, Texas; Harold T. Branch, pastor of St. John's Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, Texas; and Marvin C. Griffin, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

Cothen was named to the corporation and the Sunday School Board promised an hour of network time because the board will provide a \$10 million "insurance credit" to assure the Federal Communications Commission the corporation and commission have adequate financial backing to establish the stations. None of the \$10 million is expected to be spent, however, since local Baptist groups—churches, associations and others—are expected to construct the stations.

Rivera and the two black Southern Baptist pastors, Branch and Griffin, were named to the corporation because an essential requirement of the FCC in granting the licenses is ethnic representation among the license holders, Allen told trustees.

Allen said that although the ethnic makeup of the corporation is designed to meet FCC qualifications, no subterfuge is intended because each of the three ethnic members is an active Southern Baptist.

The FCC will apply a three-point system to any contested areas, Allen said, which will include date of application, whether the station is commercial or non-commercial—with preference to non-commercial uses—and minority representation in the ownership.

Hundreds of the low power 100 and 1,000 watt stations are expected to be established across the nation in the next few years, broadcasting over a limited radius of 10 miles. However, as Allen pointed out, the signals can be picked up by local cable systems to greatly expand the audience.

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Applications for licenses for the stations will be frozen by the FCC on Jan. 15, Allen explained, hence the hastily called meeting.

While the low powered translator stations have been around for many years, they have not figured in Southern Baptist plans because of their 10-mile range, Allen said. But, when the possibility of easier access to existing and developing cable stations was realized, Allen revamped his strategy.

"We stumbled onto this thing five weeks ago," Allen told trustees, relating he had a conversation with an engineer, John F.X. Brown of Louisville, Ky., in early December, and immediately began looking into the matter.

With Brown's help, RTVC staffers "worked almost around the clock," Allen said, to determine potential sites and assemble engineering data to support the applications.

About 200 of the station licenses already have been granted, Allen said, and hundreds more requested, which prompted the freeze. He said there is no way of knowing how many of the FCC requests will be granted, when they will be granted or when a network might begin.

Allen said applications will be made for more than 100 licenses, anticipating some contested areas. Several large companies, he said, have applied, as has the Christian Broadcasting Network. No other major denominations are known to have sought licenses, however.

Cost of the stations is expected to vary from \$50,000 to \$100,000 each, the basic cost of transmitters and tower at each local station. The station, in some instances, Allen said, could be limited to a room in a church if the station simply transmits network programming and originates nothing locally.

ACTS will provide network programming during specified times and the local body would determine how much and what type programming it would originate during the remaining hours. Allen emphasized, however, that the future of the system will depend on quality programming and agreements with assured time for small churches.

Network programming ultimately would be beamed to the stations through a satellite transponder system from an originating station in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Should the system begin operation before its satellite link can be achieved, Allen said, the stations would be supplied with network programs via videotape.

Cothen told Baptist Press: "We envision we will be able to use some of the same hardware to create and operate for the denomination a telecommunications system to communicate with associations, churches and state conventions by way of a satellite.

"The potential for the Southern Baptist Convention is that within 10 years as many as 10,000 churches may have the equipment to receive telecommunications."

Cothen said a satellite receiving dish can be built for about \$5,000, and once it is in place, a church, state or association would be able to receive live or taped programs, which might include Bible study lectures, teaching and training sessions or addresses delivered at Glorieta or Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Centers.

The network proposal will require the approval of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee which will meet in Nashville, Feb. 16-18. The Sunday School Board's participation in the \$10 million insurance credit, already approved by its plans and policies and executive

committees, will have to be ratified by the board when it meets in Nashville Jan. 27-28.

Although the commission members attending the special called meeting gave the proposal enthusiastic, unanimous endorsement, several raised questions and voiced concern about forming the separate corporation, the cost of programming for the network and where both the programs and money would come from.

Allen said he doesn't know where the money will come from, but feels that by better informing Baptists through the programs about what the Cooperative Program is doing, the whole level of giving among Southern Baptists will be raised.

He said he feels Southern Baptists now supporting various elements of the electronic church will channel those funds into the SBC network when they see the work being done "in our own family of faith."

However, he said, the commission would not appeal for funds on the air as is being done by some in the electronic media.

"I don't think God is running short of money," he said. "I just think we have got to be in tune with him."

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For TV Network

Tremendous Potential
Has Whopping Price

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1/9/81

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Satellite technology--necessary to make the Southern Baptist network television network a success--presents a tremendous potential but also carries a whopping price tag.

For instance, the satellite transponder linkup for six years of telecasting will cost \$18 million, said Jimmy R. Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

"That is astronomical," he said, "for an agency whose current annual budget is just about equal that over the next six years.

"But since God is certainly no stranger to astronomy--after all, he created it--," Allen said he was impressed to ask God for the money, "so we won't have to beg for it on television."

"I asked the Lord to give me \$28 million," Allen told the commission trustees in their special meeting in Fort Worth Jan. 5. He also said he prayed he would receive \$5 million by March 15, and the morning of the special called meeting he already had gotten a commitment for the first \$1 million.

"I asked for large gifts for the satellite," Allen said, "so smaller gifts would go to programming, so that people who give small amounts will know that what they are doing is not providing hardware but actually communicating the gospel.

"We have a lot of people who are now giving their money to other causes, through electronic evangelists, who would like to redirect some of that into our stream of Baptist witness, and we want them to be able to say, 'I have preached the gospel,' through what they give."

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Allen said the \$5 million by March 15 would be "evidence" from God to those people who might be skeptical about whether the job can be accomplished.

"I expect it to happen," he said, "I expect to have \$5 million by March 15."

In the meantime, he said, he will be consulting with pastors about persons in their congregations who might be interested in such an investment.

He never asked for money, he said.

"I always let the man or woman in on the challenge of what God is up to and then let them figure out how they can help meet that challenge. It is their lives I am asking for.

"My belief is that the Spirit of God initiates this kind of thing. He is pleased with his children and allows them in on what he is doing. It is a privilege."

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By Toby Druin

Judge Throws Out O'Hair
Challenge To Chaplains

By Stan HasteY

Baptist Press
1/9/81

WASHINGTON (BP)--Atheist leader Madalyn Murray O'Hair has failed in the first round of her legal challenge to ban the practice of maintaining chaplains in Congress.

In an oral decision announced Jan. 6, Judge Louis F. Oberdorfer of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled O'Hair did not have standing to bring the suit challenging the practice. His decision, announced at the conclusion of oral arguments, did not deal with the church-state arguments raised by the case.

Attorneys for both parties in the case say they expect a formal written opinion in the near future.

Reached at the Austin, Texas, headquarters of her organization, American Atheist Union, O'Hair told Baptist Press she will appeal the decision. She said she found Oberdorfer's announcement she did not have standing to sue "incredible."

O'Hair sued the government last summer, arguing that employing and paying chaplains from the federal treasury violates the Constitution's ban on an establishment of religion. Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have been serviced by chaplains for more than 200 years.

Three current members of Congress, Senators Jesse Helms, R-N.C., and Gordon J. Humphrey, R-N.H., and Representative Guy Vander Jagt, R-Mich., sought and were granted status as intervenors in the case representing all 535 members of the Senate and House in opposing O'Hair.

Later this month O'Hair is to be in court on three separate occasions in other cases. On Jan. 20 she faces trial in an Austin court on criminal charges resulting from an incident three years ago in which she allegedly disrupted the city council for opening its meetings with prayer.

She has challenged the practice at the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, where oral arguments in the case are scheduled for Jan. 29.

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One day earlier, Jan. 28, O'Hair will be before the same court challenging the practice of the Texas State Legislature to feature a nativity scene in the rotunda of the State Capitol each Christmas season.

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Peacemaker Newspaper
Started in Louisville

Baptist Press
1/9/81

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A new tabloid publication, The Baptist Peacemaker, began publication in December.

The newspaper, developed as a ministry of the Deer Park Baptist Church world peacemakers group, is edited by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor E. Glenn Hinson and Deer Park pastor C. Carman Sharp.

It is the second issue-oriented publication to have its birth in a Southern Baptist congregation. Seeds, a magazine directed toward world hunger, began as a ministry of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., through the efforts of editors Gary Gunderson and Andy Loving.

The initial issue of The Baptist Peacemaker featured a lead article by U.S. Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, R-Ore., a member of a Southern Baptist congregation in the Georgetown area of Washington, D.C.

Hinson said initial plans call for The Baptist Peacemaker to be published four times yearly, in connection with Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the bombing of Hiroshima.

In its premiere editorial, Hinson said the publication will seek "to explore the biblical basis of peacemaking, ...to foster a peacemaking lifestyle, and ...to examine the peacemaker's inward and outward journey."

In addition to articles and interviews, the publication will feature such items as sermons, sermon outlines, worship services, book reviews, prayers for peace and practical helps for peacemaking groups.

Among the contributors to upcoming issues, according to Hinson, are Woman's Missionary Union Executive Director Carolyn Weatherford, Southern Seminary professor Andy Lester, Greenville, S.C. pastor David Matthews and possibly, President Carter.

The publication is operating on a voluntary contribution rather than subscription basis. Persons interested in being added to the mailing list may contact Robert Broome at Deer Park Baptist Church, 1733 Bardstown Road, Louisville, Ky. 40205.

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