



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 27, 1981

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## SBC Pastors, Teachers Join Appeal for Human Rights

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--More than 20 Southern Baptists, including the current and a former president of the 13.6 million-member denomination, joined a large contingent of American religious leaders in requesting a meeting with President Reagan to express their concern for the nation's human rights policy.

SBC President Bailey Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., and former president W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, added their signatures to a letter to President Reagan from approximately 270 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders.

Two other Southern Baptist signers, Glen H. Stassen, ethics professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Bill Sherman, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church of Nashville, Tenn., also signed the letter, expressing their views on the value of Southern Baptist involvement in the battle for human rights.

Stassen told Baptist Press "Baptists pioneered in concern for human rights" during the Puritan revolution, and praised the Southern Baptist declaration on human rights adopted at its 1978 meeting in Atlanta. The declaration, he said, came "after an unfortunate period of neglect," but was a "powerful declaration of commitment."

"It's important that we act now on that commitment," Stassen said.

Sherman, former president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, said his support for human rights stems from his theological understanding. "I think that the same God we know in Jesus Christ who called for love and forgiveness is also the same God of Elijah and Amos who called for justice in the marketplace," Sherman said.

"I would hope that our orthopraxy would measure up to our orthodoxy," when it comes to helping the disenfranchised, Sherman told Baptist Press.

Originally, 71 American religious leaders sent a letter to Reagan in December expressing their concern for human rights.

The second letter, which requested a meeting with the president and contained an additional 200 signatures, followed after the leaders received what the letter called a "curt acknowledgement" from Richard Allen, assistant to the president-elect for national security affairs.

In the second letter, the religious leaders said they oppose human rights violations "wherever they occur," but are particularly concerned "about nations where the United States has extensive economic, political and military involvement."

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"This gives us influence whether we want it or not, and therefore, a greater responsibility," the letter said.

Human rights advocates have expressed alarm over Reagan's statement two days after his election that he doesn't "think you can turn away from some country because here and there they do not totally agree with our concept of human rights" and his appointment of two critics of the Carter administration's emphasis on human rights in foreign policy, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick as United Nations representative and Ernest Lefevre as assistant secretary of state for human rights.

Such actions have triggered fears the new administration will be more tolerant of repression by governments friendly to the U.S.

Stassen pointed to the current unrest in El Salvador as an example of the importance of whether U.S. foreign policy takes a "human rights approach" or "uses military imposition."

Stassen contends that a military approach has not proven historically effective in preventing communist takeovers of countries.

"It's a question of which way we're going to go," he said. "During the Carter administration, while we were pushing human rights, not a single nation produced a successful communist revolution."

Sherman added that in countries where there is a legitimate need for American military aid, the U.S. has "a powerful leverage" to expect those governments to treat their people decently.

The letter's signers included two SBC agency heads, Foy Valentine of the Christian Life Commission and James M. Dunn of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; and three other Southern Seminary professors, Timothy George, E. Glenn Hinson and Paul D. Simmons.

Among the 14 SBC pastors signing the letter were William E. Hull, First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La.; C. Carman Sharp, Deer Park Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.; W. Ches Smith of First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga., and current president of the Georgia Baptist Convention; and Alastair Walker of First Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C.

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Shoemakes Establish Chair  
At Southwestern Seminary

Baptist Press  
2/27/81

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has announced the Earl L. and Vivian Gray Shoemake Chair of Personal Growth and Ministry.

The Paducah, Ky., couple established the chair anonymously in 1974 as a charitable remainder unitrust fund at the Southern Baptist Foundation. Southwestern, the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home Mission Boards and two other nationally known religious organizations will be beneficiaries.

The seminary will receive one-half of the trust, now valued at \$515,000. The two mission boards each will receive 20 percent. The remainder of the fund will go to the American Bible Society and the Medical Assistance Programs Inc.

At the Shoemakes' request, the three SBC agencies will use their gifts to provide funds for studies concerning the mental health of ministers and their families. The money also will be used to establish training, counseling and guidance programs for missionaries and their families.

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The Southwestern chair will be in the school of religious education and will provide for study in the role assessment of family relationships in the ministry. The fund will benefit students in each of the seminary's three schools.

"We want to help ministers and their families understand themselves, their calling and their relationships before they are on the field of service," Shoemaker said.

"In our ministry we have seen so many instances where people had a poor understanding of the role of ministers," he added. "Problems were created because of this lack of understanding of self and family relationships. There are so many pressures in ministry of which people are not aware."

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Texas Group Urges  
'Press Safeguards'

Baptist Press  
2/27/81

WACO, Texas (BP)--A resolution urging safeguards guaranteeing press freedom for state Baptist newspapers has been passed at the annual meeting of Texas Baptist Public Relations Association at Baylor University.

The resolution said, "Events have accentuated the problems that can occur where the editor serves under administrative authority rather than a separate board of convention directors."

It commended state conventions such as Texas and a half dozen others "which have recognized the value of their newspapers operating under a convention board of directors."

Noting that state convention newspapers have long been the major method of informing Southern Baptists of the work of conventions, associations, institutions and churches, the resolution commended "executive directors and editors who—despite structure—still manage to effectively inform their constituency through granting editorial freedom."

The resolution encouraged state conventions "in keeping with historic Baptist autonomy and the rights of a free church and a free people" to establish safeguards that will guarantee freedom for the editors to adequately inform the people."

Although the resolution was not specific, concerns about press freedom have been heightened in the recent censure and subsequent resignation of Gene Medaris, editor of the Indiana Baptist.

Medaris was censured after printing a letter to the editor concerning use of convention funds, in which the letter writer's name was withheld.

Indiana leaders say the matter does not concern press freedom, but was a reprimand of a staff member over "poor judgment." In a recent meeting, the Indiana executive board specified the censure—said to be a reprimand—applied only to Medaris. It also pledged any future editor may freely fulfill his job description, and said the action does not give Executive Director R.V. Haygood "censorship powers."

Others, however, have claimed the censure was an effort to muzzle Medaris and prevent him from performing his duties as editor of the 9,500 circulation weekly tabloid.

Medaris was one of 18 editors directly responsible to convention executive directors. Nine other executive directors also serve as editors and seven of the state Baptist newspapers have independent boards of trustees appointed by the state conventions.

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The newspapers with independent boards are Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas.

The newspapers on which the executives also are editors are Alaska, Arizona, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Michigan, New York, Northern Plains, Pennsylvania-South Jersey and Utah-Idaho.

The remainder are part of the state convention executive board structure. They are California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas-Nebraska, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Northwest, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

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Baptists Play Host  
During Pope's Visit

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press  
2/27/81

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (BP)--First Baptist Church played host to the entourage of Pope John Paul II during the pontiff's three-hour visit to Alaska.

The church, a block and a half from the public park in which the pope celebrated mass, was both media center for some 300 reporters, photographers and television technicians, and a robing area for more than 100 bishops, priests, sisters and deacons.

The pope, however, never used the facilities because a mobile home had been provided for him at the park.

First Baptist Church became involved when the archbishop of Alaska, Francis Hurley, asked pastor Harold Hime for permission to use the church facilities as a staging area during the pope's visit.

"The response of our church members has been fantastic," said Hime, who has been pastor about a year after previously serving as Christian social ministries consultant for the Alaska Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Response from the Catholic community and from residents of Anchorage was just as favorable, added Hime. "Archbishop Hurley has been very complimentary and appreciative of our church's offering the use of its facilities," he said.

Hime added that several priests and archbishops participating in the mass expressed amazement that a Baptist church offered use of its facilities.

He also noted a reporter for Vatican Radio told him their research indicated it was the first time a Protestant church facility had been used as a base of service for a papal mass.

While he was in Alaska, Pope John Paul II spoke four times but did not mention the role of Baptists in helping host the visit. During the mass, with First Baptist Church in the background, the pope told the crowd he could see "the evidence of the Holy Spirit's call of faith in Alaska."

"Here," he added, "many peoples of diverse backgrounds and cultures are drawn into one community of faith. The present generation brings with it a new challenge and a new opportunity for the church in Alaska. The gospel needs to be proclaimed every day and the fire of faith needs to be fanned into flame."

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Hime, who said the church provided only its facilities for the visit and the Catholic diocese picked up all expenses, received only one phone call critical of the church for allowing Catholics to use Baptist facilities.

He explained: "To me, it was simple. We had two alternatives—to cooperate or to refuse and stand there as judgmental and resistant. I just did not want to be put in that position."

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

Northwest Executive's  
Son Found Shot To Death

Baptist Press  
2/27/81

DALLAS (BP)--David Alan Sims, 27, the son of Cecil Sims, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention, was found shot to death in his apartment Feb. 26.

The Dallas County Medical Examiner has ruled the death a suicide. Young Sims reportedly left a suicide note.

The elder Sims said his son suffered a severe emotional breakdown five years ago while attending the University of Washington, but the family thought he was making a satisfactory recovery.

The family has requested contributions be made in David Sims' name to the Northwest Center of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Portland, Ore.

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Carter's Establish  
Seminary Endowment

Baptist Press  
2/27/81

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A \$33,000 gift from the estate of Mrs. J. Perry Carter will establish a new endowment named for her and her late husband at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"The Rev. and Mrs. J. Perry Carter Memorial Fund" will provide a permanent endowment to support the work of the seminary every year. Carter, a 1930 graduate of Southern Seminary, was pastor of two Louisville churches, and in the 1940s was superintendent of the Long Run Baptist Association which serves the Louisville area.

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CORRECTION: In Baptist Press release "Executive Committee Adopts Budget, Proposes Revisions," please correct the ninth paragraph to read: "Further messengers, up to a total of 10, currently are allowed at a rate of one for every 250 members or \$250 in contributions to the work of the convention." (The SBC Constitution specifies contributions are "to the work of the convention" rather than through the Cooperative Program, as previously reported.)

Thanks,  
Baptist Press