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Forced Termination of Ministers Called A Baptist Emergency

By Linda Lawson

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--The burgeoning numbers of ministers being fired or forced to resign amid conflicts in Southern Baptist churches was characterized as a state of emergency and a cancer by several ministers who have experienced forced termination.

In sessions in which 30 ministers sought to honestly share their feelings, the experience of forced termination was compared to the grief of death and divorce. The loss of something they believed God had called them to do could not easily be explained or understood.

"I never woke up in the morning with nothing to do," said one minister. Another said his needs suddenly were as simple and as seemingly insurmountable as food and a roof over his head.

"I'm dying," another said quietly.

The two-day conference, believed to be the first of its kind in the denomination, was sponsored by the Missouri Baptist Convention and directed by C.D. Butler, church minister relations consultant. "Our purpose is to help these ministers and to find ways to help churches in conflict," he said.

Sessions on understanding the perspectives of the churches and the ministers and in dealing with financial problems and emotional hurts were led by Brooks Faulkner and Bruce Grubbs, both of the church administration department of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn.

"He's been here too long" is the reason most frequently cited by churches which terminate a minister, said Faulkner. "The congregations that keep their ministers a long time can relate to them as human beings and allow them to fail on occasions."

Other frequent factors listed in forced terminations included professional or interpersonal incompetence and power struggles in the congregation, Faulkner said.

He listed six early warning signs of potential problems, beginning with frequent complaints by church members on anything from a pastor's preaching to his sermon preparation to the way he moderates a business meeting.

Others include withdrawal from the pastor, drops in giving and attendance, radical changes in lay leadership, adamant stands being taken by groups who used to be flexible and changes in the pastor's behavior (such as becoming defensive).

Faulkner urged ministers to look at a church's history in ministerial tenure as part of considering a call. "You can't change a neurotic church, but you can keep yourself from being swallowed up by one," said Faulkner. "However, God can change the church."

He also urged the ministers to evaluate themselves and to be aware of problems they have which may have contributed to conflicts in the church. He warned a minister who has been fired by one church may, if not careful, repeat the mistake and be attracted to a similar situation.

Grubbs said the reasons the ministers were terminated each may be different, but they share the experience of termination and can support each other. "What is needed is for ministers who have been hurt to help others in the same experience," he said.

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The need for personal and professional support during unemployment and continuing concern for the churches they had left were two issues cited most frequently by participants.

"What I learned from my experience is terminated ministers are crying for help and nobody is helping," commented one pastor. "What these people are asking for is understanding, healing and placement."

Another observed, "My wife and I went more than a year without support. In churches where we had spoken and led conferences, we felt like an island by ourselves."

On the other side, a pastor said, "The support was there for me. We need the support plus the work in the interim. What bothers me is what's happening to the church in which I invested four years of my life."

Another pastor said he didn't attend any church for several weeks after his termination. "I needed a time just to realize God loves me anyhow and I didn't have to earn his love."

The ministers said urgent needs exist to help churches deal with problems leading to the termination of leaders.

They also requested help for the wives and children of terminated ministers who need assistance in dealing with their hurts. The need was cited for an insurance compensation program where ministers and churches could contribute so terminated ministers could receive compensation while unemployed.

"I really believe our churches love the concept of the pastor," said one pastor. "This (insurance program) would be a means whereby a pastor could offer his resignation before the conflict becomes too heated in a church and still know he will have compensation to live."

Illustrating the concern about finances, a pastor observed, "I was in no financial position to go to a counselor and in no emotional state to spill my guts to anyone at first. What I needed was food for my family, a roof over my head and a place to put my furniture when I had to leave the pastorium."

The pain of termination was perhaps best voiced by one pastor who pleaded, "I'm dying. I need someone to give me life. For a year and a half now I've died every day. I don't believe I'm the only one here who feels this way. I am concerned that I not be perceived as a complainer or a griper. I am someone who doesn't know what to do."

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House Social Security Bill
Would Hike Ministers' Taxes

By Larry Chesser

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Social Security taxes for ministers would rise sharply under a comprehensive package passed by the House of Representatives to bolster the nation's financially-troubled retirement system.

By a vote of 282-142, the House approved a wide range of Social Security tax increases and benefit cuts designed to enhance the system by \$165.3 billion over the next seven years as well as increase its long-term stability. Included in the package are two provisions which would affect clergy beyond the speedup of already-planned tax hikes for all participants.

Under the House bill, Social Security taxes for ministers and all other self-employed Americans would jump by one-third, although that increase would be partially offset by new tax credits. Also, ministers and other participants in denominational pension plans would be required to pay Social Security taxes on contributions to annuity programs made by their employing church, agency or institution.

However, the impact of the House-passed changes affecting ministers may be cushioned and part of it negated in light of more favorable treatment of clergy in the Social Security reform package approved by the Senate Finance Committee.

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The House bill followed the recommendation of the National Commission on Social Security Reform in raising Social Security rates for self-employed participants to equal the combined employer-employee level beginning in 1984. Currently, self-employed persons pay about 75 percent of the combined employer-employee rate.

Under the House bill, self-employment taxes would jump from 9.35 percent to 14 percent in 1984, but that increase would be partially offset by tax credits against Social Security taxes. In 1984, that credit would include both a one-time .3 percent credit the package allows to all Social Security participants, plus a larger permanent credit for self-employed participants. During 1984-87, the permanent credit would be 1.8 percent of a participant's self-employment income, changing to 1.9 percent in 1988 and years thereafter.

Although the tax credits would be applied against Social Security taxes owed, the general treasury, rather than the Social Security system, would sustain the loss of revenue.

The Senate Finance Committee bill would further offset the self-employment tax increases by providing larger tax credits. That plan calls for a tax credit of 2.9 percent of self-employment income in 1984, 2.5 percent in 1985, 2.2 percent in 1986, 2.1 percent in 1987-89 and 2.3 percent in 1990 and thereafter.

By law, ministers participate in Social Security as self-employed persons, but a bill designed to give ministers and churches the option of treating ministers as employees for Social Security purposes has been introduced by Rep. Berkley Bedell, D-Iowa. The proposal, H.R. 1754, was introduced too late to be considered by the House Ways and Means Committee as part of its Social Security package and its chances of passage remain uncertain.

The House bill also would make employer contributions to certain non-profit pension plans, including those administered by the Southern Baptist Convention's Annuity Board, subject to Social Security taxes. The Senate Finance Committee, however, agreed to include language in its bill which preserves the current law on these pension plans.

A Senate spokesman told Baptist Press he is confident the full Senate will approve the Finance Committee's action in preserving the current law under which many church pension plans operate and thinks chances of getting the House to agree to the Senate version at this point are good if church pension groups and other non-profit groups make House members aware of the consequences of the change.

SBC Annuity Board general counsel Gary Nash called the House decision to tax contributions to certain non-profit plans for Social Security purposes while excluding other plans "extremely severe and unfair."

Both the House-passed legislation and the Senate committee bill follow the national commission's recommendation of extending mandatory Social Security coverage to all employees of non-profit organizations beginning in 1984. According to a Ways and Means Committee spokesman, this change will not affect the exemptions granted under the Internal Revenue Code to ministers, members of religious orders and members of certain religious faiths.

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BJC Targets Tuition Tax
Credits, Court-Stripping

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
3/11/83

WASHINGTON (BP)--Statements opposing tuition tax credits and challenging proposals to limit the jurisdiction of federal courts were adopted at the annual meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs March 7-8.

The 45-member group, representing eight U.S. Baptist bodies with a combined membership of some 27 million, also elected new officers, including a Southern Baptist, R. G. Puckett, as chairperson. Puckett is editor of the Biblical Recorder, weekly news publication of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

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Updating a long held position, the BJC restated its opposition to tuition tax credits for parents who send their children to non-public elementary and secondary schools. Enactment of the credits, a plan pushed by the Reagan administration, "would alter public policy in order to favor and aid private and parochial schools," the statement reads.

In addition, the statement declares tuition tax credits violate the principle of church-state separation by channeling public funds into church-related schools, create "divisiveness among religious groups," and inequitably benefit families that least need help while penalizing those most needing assistance.

For the first time, the BJC adopted a formal statement of opposition to efforts in Congress over the past several years to limit the jurisdiction of federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, in cases involving prayer in public schools. Such measures often are called "court-stripping" bills.

The statement declares the nation's founders demonstrated "profound wisdom and clear foresight" by setting up a system of checks and balances among the three branches of the federal government, by guaranteeing certain personal rights in the Constitution and by providing a process for amending the Constitution.

Court-stripping bills, first proposed and still pushed by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., amount to a "new attack" on the nation's constitutional foundations, the statement says, by challenging the independence of the federal judicial system, a system that "must be preserved against all attacks."

In addition to Puckett, a former executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, three other BJC members were elected to one-year terms of office. American Baptist representative Wesley Forsline, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Minneapolis, was named first vice chairperson; Violet Ankrum, a lay leader in the Progressive National Baptist Convention, was chosen second vice chairperson, and Donald E. Anderson, editor of The Standard, monthly publication of the Baptist General Conference, was elected secretary.

In other actions, the BJC instructed its staff to begin planning for special observances in 1987 and 1991 of the 200th anniversary of the adoption, respectively, of the Constitution and Bill of Rights and voted to become a sponsoring organization of the Baptist Prayer Conference, slated for 1984 in Columbus, Ohio. It is believed to be the first such convocation of Baptists across denominational lines for a conference with an emphasis on prayer.

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Baptist Churches, Families
Affected By California Storms

By Don Hepburn

Baptist Press
3/11/83

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--The recent rash of Pacific storms which passed through California causing millions of dollars in damage to homes and businesses also affected four Southern Baptist churches either directly or indirectly.

First Baptist Church, Van Nuys, reported damages of approximately \$100,000. But according to church business administrator Don Ellis, "While we have had a pretty extensive amount of damage, you can't relate it all to this recent storm."

Ellis said the church's multi-purpose building had experienced damage from a tornado some months earlier. "But that repair work had never been completed because of insurance settlements," he explained.

When the recent seige of rainstorms occurred "the water was able to seep into the building and cause further damages," he related.

"It rained so long and so hard the ground would not take any more drain-off," he said. The excess water seeped into the basement through the walls, damaging the walls, carpet and some printing supplies.

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In the agricultural community of Lamont, located south of Bakersfield, a flash flood caused some damage to the Harmony Baptist Church and destroyed all or part of the belongings of 18 Baptist families.

Fifteen families, members of the Maranatha Baptist Church experienced flood damage to their homes. Eight of the families lost everything, according to Ron Cunningham, moderator of the Kern Baptist Association.

Cunningham's own church, Harmony Baptist, suffered \$1,000 in water damage in the kitchen and fellowship hall due to flooding. In addition three church member families reportedly lost everything due to flooding.

In response to the disaster, churches in the Kern Association provided one and a half busloads of clothing for distribution to all the affected families in the Lamont community. Baptist Men were on the scene to assist families in removing mud and silt from homes.

In addition, the Home Mission Board provided \$6,000 in disaster relief funds. According to Cunningham, the money will be used to help the displaced Baptist families secure used refrigerators, stoves and bedding to replace what they lost in the flood.

In northern California, the Open Bible Baptist Mission, located in the Vallejo suburb of American Canyon, continued to experience damage to its building due to water seeping through its walls and floor.

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Baptists In Ecuador, Peru
Practice What They Preach

Baptist Press

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Baptists in Guayaquil, Ecuador, are getting a reputation for practicing what they preach as they provide assistance for persons and communities affected by extensive flooding.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has released an additional \$68,500 in general and hunger funds to flood-stricken desert areas of both Ecuador and Peru, bringing the total to \$113,500 in the past few weeks.

Earlier funds helped Baptists repair streets near a hospital which could not be reached by garbage trucks for several days. The odor from accumulating garbage made patients want to leave, according to missionary Ed Ables. After the repairs had been made and the garbage removed, the head doctor told Ables, "I have heard a lot about conversion and religion, but you Baptists practice what you preach."

Relief funds to the area helped rebuild 10 houses, provided medicine to 50 families, bought 200 packets of food and provided 1,000 dump truck loads of fill dirt for repair of streets and walkways.

Of the latest releases, some \$40,000 in general relief will provide areas of Guayaquil with drainage pipes, home repair materials, landfill and supplies for replacing a small bridge. Most of the materials will be used in a slum area of 300,000 people.

An additional \$10,000 will buy food to be distributed in two nearby counties. Another \$5,000 has been designated for seeds, plants and small animals to help reestablish area farmers. Some \$6,000 will buy medicine to be used in the Portoviejo area, where missionaries Marvin and Ann Ford hope to begin Baptist work soon.

A release of \$2,500 enabled missionaries to rent a bulldozer when mudslides threatened Santa Eulalia Baptist Camp about 25 miles east of Lima, Peru. The machinery diverted water drainage on a nearby mountain to reduce the threat of damage to the camp and injury to 50 refugee families staying in the dormitory there. Another \$5,000 in hunger funds will provide food for those families.

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