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Rogers Confirms  
Candidacy Request

By Al Shackelford

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., has confirmed a Dec. 2 meeting in Atlanta with conservative leaders who asked him to be a candidate for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1986.

Rogers was elected SBC president in 1979, but declined nomination in 1980 for a second one-year term because of pressing church and personal responsibilities.

"I certainly have not decided to run and certainly have not encouraged anybody to support me as SBC president," Rogers told the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector Dec. 9. "I am praying about it," the Memphis pastor added.

Rogers said he met with 18 other conservative leaders in Atlanta Dec. 2 and "the consensus was I should run," he stated. "When these friends met, they seemed to have a spirit of unanimity and asked me if I would be willing to be nominated again for president."

Rogers said he felt the group asked him to be a candidate because the "moderate wing already has a candidate with a face and a name," explaining that "from all the straws in the wind, it appears that Winfred Moore will be a candidate."

Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, was elected first vice-president of the SBC in Dallas last June, after being defeated by Charles Stanley for the SBC presidency.

Emphasizing he has not given anyone permission to nominate him at this point, Rogers stressed he is not seeking the SBC presidency, as he did not seek it in 1979.

Rogers said it was a "tremendously difficult decision," noting that Bellevue Baptist Church is "in the midst of a tremendous program of relocating the church" from the downtown area to a tract in west Memphis.

The former SBC president said a number of people and pastors across the convention had urged him to allow his name to be placed in nomination at the 1986 SBC in Atlanta June 10-12. "I am committed to seeing our convention take a conservative course," Rogers said.

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Evangelism Leaders Blame  
Decline On Controversy

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press  
12/10/85

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Expressing concern over statistics projecting a decline in baptisms for 1985, almost a dozen state Baptist evangelism directors blamed continuing controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention as one of the major reasons for the decline.

According to projections prepared by the research departments of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and the SBC Home Mission Board, SBC churches will baptize about 346,000 new converts during 1985.

The projections would make 1985 the third lowest year in baptisms in the last 35 years. The projections indicate a decline of 6.9 percent from 1984 levels.

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When the statistical projections were announced during the national evangelism conference sponsored by the SBC Home Mission Board, the audience at the Holiday Inn groaned audibly.

Several evangelism leaders expressed dismay that the number of baptisms, considered by most as a key indicator of the denomination's efforts in evangelism, would decline during the year of prayer and preparation for a series of simultaneous revival meetings in the spring of 1986.

Bob Hamblin, evangelism vice-president for the Home Mission Board, said one of the major reasons for the decline is "we Southern Baptists have been saying to the nation we are more concerned about our little theological differences than we are about winning people to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Hamblin said he believes the continuing theological controversy in the SBC has had a direct effect on the number of baptisms last year and said the statistical projections were an indication of greater need for Southern Baptists to put top priority in 1986 on the "Good News America: God Loves You" simultaneous revivals.

He added that Baptists, however, shouldn't magnify the controversy and lament it as one of the reasons for the decline but instead should focus on the need for unity of purpose for the cause of evangelism.

Charles Harvey, state evangelism director in Louisiana where baptisms were down by more than a thousand from last year, said the controversy has put Southern Baptists in such an embarrassing position publicly that non-Christians are laughing at Baptists.

"They are saying we Baptists don't love each other and are fighting over things that don't matter, and they're using that as an excuse not to accept the Lord," he said in an interview.

Another evangelism leader from Louisiana, retired evangelism director Leonard Sanderson who was SBC national director of evangelism during the 1950s, said the controversy probably has had more effect on Baptists than on non-Christians, who don't really care about denominational squabbles.

"Instead of going out to witness to the lost, Baptists (especially the pastors) have been preoccupied with theological difference instead of putting their emphasis on winning people to Christ," Sanderson said.

Carlos McLeod, Texas Baptists' evangelism director, said he felt the major reason baptisms are down is because Baptists have not been putting their priorities on evangelism. McLeod said however, that the controversy has broken the hearts of many Baptists and made them realize they must quit fighting and put their major emphasis on winning people to Christ.

George Worrell, evangelism director in Missouri, said he was deeply distressed about a projected eight percent decline in baptisms in his state, and said one reason is because 115 of the key churches in Missouri did not schedule any revivals during 1985 because of schedule conflicts with other denominational programs. When that many key churches don't put major emphasis on evangelism, it affects the entire state, Worrell said.

Dan Agee, evangelism director for Virginia Baptists, discounted the effect of the SBC controversy on the number of baptisms, saying "the average Baptist doesn't really give a hoot about the controversy."

Agee said the reasons for the decline go much deeper. "I don't have the answers," Agee said. "It's far too complicated to come up with quick answers."

Agee said the decline is not because of methods or programs, because Baptists have developed the most effective methods and programs available. "I think the basic problem is that our pastors and people don't know how to build relationships in depth, discover the needs of people in their community, and develop ministries to meet those needs," Agee said.

Sanderson agreed reasons for the decline in baptisms are far more complicated than putting all the blame on one factor. He said that through the years, baptisms have gone up and down with no real pattern or understandable reasons. "You just can't blame it on one thing," he said.

Guy Henderson, evangelism director for Mississippi Baptists, agreed, citing multiple factors for the decline. "It's difficult to generalize."

Henderson said one major factor is that most members of most churches are not really burdened about reaching unbelievers in their communities. "In too many cases," Henderson observed, "we're just baptizing our own children who are growing up in Baptist churches."

Clay Price, director of the Home Mission Board's program research department who presented statistical projections at the conference, pointed out the data tends to confirm Henderson's belief. Price said that since 1980, there has been a 10 percent decline in the number of youth, ages 10 to 18, nationally.

"Since about 40 to 45 percent of the persons baptized by Southern Baptist churches are in that age category, the decline in youth population could account for the decrease in baptisms," said Price.

Price said the decline seemed to be across the board in a majority of states. Out of 24 state conventions providing data on baptisms to the board, 12 reported decreases and 11 reported increases, Price explained.

Price said the 1985 projected number of baptisms, a decrease of 6.9 percent compared to the 1984 baptisms, would make 1985 the third lowest year of baptisms in the SBC in the last 35 years. Since 1950, baptisms were below 345,000 only in 1977 and 1978, Price said. During that 35 year period, the number of baptisms increase 18 years and decreased 17 years, Price added. The peak year was in 1972 when SBC churches baptized 445,725 converts.

Almost all state evangelism directors said they believed baptisms would increase tremendously in 1986 when the "Good News America: God Loves You" simultaneous revivals are scheduled.

"It may be God has provided 'Good News America' as a providential opportunity for Southern Baptists to get our priorities straight," said Harvey of Louisiana. He added the statistical projections may be the kind of shocking reality which causes Baptists to get right with God and depend on him instead of on programs or plans.

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Joe Ford Named Pastor  
Of North Phoenix Church

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PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--Joe L. Ford, associate vice-president for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's evangelism section, has been named pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church.

Richard Jackson, pastor of the Phoenix church for the past 18 years, said he and Ford will share pastoral responsibilities of the 16,000-member church.

Jackson will be senior pastor and Ford will be pastor, moving to Phoenix Jan. 12.

Jackson said the unusual staff structure at North Phoenix would enable the church to double the effectiveness of the pastor. He said the pastor-senior pastor arrangement of shared responsibility was different from other churches which use a "co-pastor" structure in which two pastors are on an equal level.

"Joe will do everything I do and I will do everything he does," sharing responsibilities as equals, Jackson said. But as senior pastor, "the buck stops on my desk," Jackson explained.

Jackson said the load of leading the largest Southern Baptist church in the western United States had become so heavy he realized he could not continue without either limiting growth of the church, killing himself, or sharing the burden.

He came to the conclusion a shared responsibility with a pastor who does everything was the best approach for their situation.

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"I feel God has uniquely prepared Joe Ford to be our pastor," Jackson added. "He's been a team player in all his ministry, and I'm convinced a team can accomplish more than a soloist."

Ford, 37, has been on the staff of the Atlanta-based SBC Home Mission Board evangelism section for the past 11 years. He came to the board as director of evangelism for young adults, later became director of the board's evangelism development division, and was acting vice-president for evangelism for almost a year after C.B. Hogue resigned from that position in 1982 to go to a pastorate in Tulsa, Okla.

The Fort Worth, Texas native was associate in the evangelism department of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, 1972-74. He was pastor of Lane Baptist Church, Lane, Okla., from 1970-71. Previously, he had been youth director of several churches in Texas and Louisiana, and was involved in youth evangelism in Washington and Oregon for several years.

Ford is a graduate of East Texas Baptist College, Marshall, Texas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, where he earned the doctor of ministry degree.

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Chinese Educator Challenges  
Baptist College Leaders

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press  
12/10/85

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A longtime Chinese educator recently challenged Baptist colleges to form partnerships with colleges and universities in mainland China.

C.K. Chang, senior professor at Anhui Normal University in Wuhu, addressed approximately 90 presidents and deans during the mid-year meeting of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools in New Orleans.

The 75-year-old Chang, who considers himself a third generation Southern Baptist because his grandmother became a Christian through the efforts of Southern Baptist missionaries nearly 100 years ago, said missions opportunities abound in the communist country.

While acknowledging missionaries are not allowed in China, he emphasized Christian workers are not only welcomed but are encouraged by government officials.

Included among China's needs are teachers in the fields of English, mathematics and the natural sciences.

The opportunity for Christian witness is available despite common misconceptions about the country, Chang said. Christianity is now allowed as evidenced by nearly 3,500 churches and three to five million Christians, he estimated.

Chang said the Chinese government is not interested in global communism as is their Russian counterparts. As a result, he added, the government considers one's religion to be a personal matter.

Christian workers, Chang continued, who can perform needed tasks for the government are thus free to worship as they feel.

Chang and Vi Marie Taylor, an American who has spent the last eight years teaching in the Orient, told educators about possibilities of cooperating with Chinese educational institutions through Cooperative Services International.

CSI, according to Taylor, is an international organization with offices in Hong Kong and Richmond, Va. The Richmond office is headed by Lewis Myers of the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board.

Taylor, who will return to China in January as a consultant with CSI, said the organization seeks to identify service opportunities in overseas countries and interpret the needs and opportunities to interested Americans.

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Chang encouraged the Baptist college leaders to consider forming partnerships which would send some of their faculty members and/or graduate students to China.

By doing so, Chang said, Baptist colleges can play a vital role in reaching many of China's people which comprise one-fourth of the world's population.

"If one-fourth of the world's population is evangelized, it won't be long until the rest of the world is reached," he challenged.

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