

(BP)**- - BAPTIST PRESS**

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April 23, 1986

86-59

RTVC 'Stabilizing'
 Allen Tells Board

By Dan Martin

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Although progress has been relatively slow, trustees of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission were told the RTVC and its American Christian Television System is "stabilizing."

During their April board meeting, RTVC President Jimmy R. Allen told trustees: "We are not quite stable yet, but we are moving into a very healthy position. We have a game plan that will work and we are working our plan."

Since ACTS was launched at the 1984 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, it has been beset with financial difficulties as staff and trustees struggled to make the fledgling television network viable.

In September of 1985—after six months of study—the SBC Executive Committee approved a \$10 million loan with a 10-year payback and granted permission to launch a 5-year \$10 million development campaign.

The approval carried "very stringent" requirements "designed to help them develop a definite plan to retire their indebtedness without having to add additional indebtedness."

Following the approval, the RTVC reorganized its staff, naming Jim Edwards senior vice president and chief operating officer, and cut staff and expenses back to bare bones.

In the April RTVC trustee meeting, Edwards reviewed the financial situation and said: "The bottom line is that we are in the black by \$177,000 for the six months ending in March. Our cash flow has improved, we have borrowed \$700,000 less than projected and have paid that back more rapidly. Our expenses are down by \$163,000 and every major division is under budget."

Trustees also were told revenues have increased from satellite service fees, under which ACTS member churches pay 10-cents per resident member per month. Through March, \$440,000 had been generated, up \$45,000 from anticipated revenues.

Edwards said Cooperative Program receipts through April 15 are up 9.1 percent, about \$122,000 above budget estimates, and "even though that is important, it is not the single most important factor because the gains are a combination of every major factor" in the budget. He added the "development numbers are up by \$120,000."

Edwards said contributions in the fund raising efforts—telemissions dinners, partnerships and capital campaigns in Baton Rouge, La., Birmingham and Mobile, Ala., and Atlanta—are expected to provide revenue later this year. "The revenue stream is all in front of us," he said.

Allen said the reports from the development campaigns are "very encouraging. They are tough in some places and easy in others. The campaigns haven't closed yet and we already have about a million and a half (dollars) committed. I have not a question in my mind but that we will raise \$3 million this year. We have had to climb over a lot of misconceptions, but I am very pleased about the response."

The president said negotiations are underway with "four or five major financial institutions" concerning the refinancing of the debt. "We had to wait until we stabilized before we could do that (contact the lenders). Now we are ready and working toward that goal."

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Trustees were told efforts to syndicate five ACTS programs have not generated anticipated revenues during the first four months of the syndication unit. According to figures presented to the board, the effort has produced nine sales and \$20,000 in revenues, less than anticipated.

The unit is attempting to market five shows, Country Crossroads, The Sunshine Factory, Cope, The Plant Groom and The Sloppy Cook. Bob Taylor, senior vice president of programming services, said a major effort will be made at an international film festival in late April, and the four sales people in the unit are working "to saturate the country with the programming we currently have." The unit will be re-evaluated in about two months "to see if we have something that has caught on. If we find we don't have a marketable product, we then will determine if we are going to get one or if we are going to give up on that concept and put our attention somewhere else."

Trustees also were told ACTS currently is producing live four programs--Psychiatry and You, two daily segments of Cope and Life Today. Program time is filled with other acquisitions and film programming.

Taylor said some new programming is being held up until the syndication unit has time to work. When production begins again, he said, the shows can be pre-planned to get maximum use.

Allen told trustees ACTS currently is accessible to about "3.9 million homes, almost matching our goal at its minimal level. We wanted to have 4 million homes by now. We are not quite there, but we are making progress."

He commented he is asked if ACTS "is growing and paying its bills. I find myself wishing we could talk about how many folks are really finding the Lord and how many are being enriched. I am far more interested in what God is doing with folks. I am glad of expansion, not because it is the base out of which advertising (revenues) will come, but because it will be a bigger base out of which we will reach more people for Christ."

Allen said the system has added two full power television stations to its network--one in Birmingham, Ala., accessing 400,000 households and another in New York, with a potential 600,000 homes--and recently put on 212 low power stations serving 80,000 Eskimos in Alaska.

He reported some 240 local ACTS boards are functioning, of which 40-50 are doing some local production, and about "an equal number" are waiting for ACTS to be available in their areas. Trustees also were told revenues have increased from satellite service fees, under which ACTS member churches pay 10-cents per resident member per month. Through March, \$330,000 had been generated, up \$45,000 from anticipated revenues.

In other business, trustees:

--heard a report a national intercessory prayer network has been established, both to pray for the expansion of ACTS and for individual people discovered by the network shows.

--learned Cope, a call-in talk show, is having a significant response. "We are having 26,000 telephone calls per month our WATS lines cannot handle," Allen said.

--elected Linwood Perkins, a banker from Norfolk, Va., as chairman, succeeding T.W. Terral, a pastor from Baton Rouge, La. Other officers are Fred Roach, a businessman from Richardson, Texas, first vice chairman; Jewel Morris, a businessman from Fort Smith, Ark., second vice chairman, and Walter Garrett, a television station staffer from Cincinnati, recording secretary.

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(Martin, news editor of Baptist Press, the news service of the SBC, covered the trustees' meetings at the request of RIVC President Jimmy R. Allen.)

Lawyer Loses Religion-Based
Appeal Of Contempt Conviction

Baptist Press
4/23/86

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Florida attorney convicted of criminal contempt for refusing to appear in a federal courtroom on Jewish Passover days to defend his client has lost his own appeal that his refusal was protected by the Constitution's guarantee of free exercise of religion.

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The lawyer, Steven F. Jackson, of Fort Lauderdale, failed to convince the Supreme Court to review a federal appeals panel's ruling last year that his contempt citation did not violate the First Amendment.

Jackson was cited for contempt and fined \$1,000 after he failed to appear for four days in proceedings against nine co-defendants in a criminal trial, one of whom he represented. The presiding judge, Jackson argued in his written appeal to the nation's high court, had placed an "unconscionable burden" on his free exercise of religion.

But a brief filed by the Justice Department contended the judge's refusal to give Jackson the days off came only after the attorney stated in a pre-trial conference he had no schedule conflicts. The brief noted in all probability the judge would have postponed the trial had Jackson informed him then that his religion required him not to work during Passover.

The trial of Jackson's client proceeded when the judge appointed a substitute attorney. (85-1194, Jackson v. U.S.)

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HMB Sells \$2.8 Million
In 1st HMB Church Bond Issue

Baptist Press
4/23/86

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's church loans division completed the sale of its first church bond issue, selling bonds totalling \$2,850,000 in the "Series A" bond issue which ended March 31.

Funds from the sale of bonds are being used to make direct loans to Southern Baptist churches for building construction and site purchase as a part of the SBC's Bold Mission Thrust emphasis, said Robert H. Kilgore, director of the board's church loans division.

The bond issue, the first of its kind offered by the Home Mission Board, has enabled the board to go to the general public to borrow money on church bond investments which in turn can be loaned to churches, Kilgore explained. In the past, the board had to get funds for church loans from insurance companies and commercial lending institutions.

"This means that the Home Mission Board can lower interest rates on loans it makes to churches, because the board is no longer dependent on high interest rates of commercial loans," Kilgore said.

Since the board began selling bonds last December, the interest rate on church loans has been reduced three times, from 13 3/4 percent to 12 7/8 percent. Kilgore said the board is considering even lower interest rates on its loans and is considering a plan whereby churches currently paying higher interest rates can refinance their loans at lower rates.

Advertisements telling how readers could order a copy of the 34-page prospectus outlining details of the bond issue have been published by Baptist state papers in 12 states--Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

Depending on maturity date set forth in the prospectus, the bond issue offered interest rates to investors ranging from 10 to 12 percent, with maturity dates ranging from one to 20 years. Interest is payable semi-annually.

The Home Mission Board received requests for more than 2,000 copies of the Series A bond prospectus to possible investors in 30 states and three foreign countries, but that the board had to turn down requests for bonds totalling \$100,000 from individuals in states where bonds had not been registered with state securities commissioners or exempted by state law, Kilgore said.

Several institutions contacted the board about purchasing as much as \$600,000 in Series A bonds, he added.

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During their spring board meeting, directors of the Home Mission Board approved a second series of bonds, to be called "Series B" bonds, up to \$4.5 million. While Kilgore said the bonds probably would be available about May 15, he cautioned the bonds will be sold only by prospectus and interested investors should rely upon the information in the prospectus.

Kilgore said interest rates on the Series B bonds probably will bear interest ranging from 9 to 11 percent, depending on maturity dates.

William F. Reed, executive vice president of the HMB Service Corp., a subsidiary of the board's church loans division, said the board is seeking approval for advertisements offering the prospectus to readers of state Baptist papers in California, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri and Ohio, in addition to the 12 states where Series A bonds already have been advertised.

The Home Mission Board has been given permission by the Southern Baptist Convention and its Executive Committee to borrow on the open market up to two times the net worth of its unrestricted church loans funds.

In round figures, that is about \$82 million, since the unrestricted church loan fund is currently about \$41 million, Kilgore explained.

He estimated the additional \$82 million available to churches could double or triple the number of loans the HMB will be able to make during the next five years and could help finance loans to as many as 1,000 churches.

In the past 20 years, the HMB church loans division has approved 3,178 loans totaling \$186.8 million, Kilgore said. About two-thirds of the loans have been for construction and one-third for church sites.

He estimated the new bond issue could enable the board to make loans for new sites or for construction to about 50 to 75 churches.

The Home Mission Board is working with the Citizens and Southern National Bank in Atlanta as trustee and paying agent and with Citizens and Southern Securities Corp. as broker dealer for the bond issue.

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Southern Baptists Forsaking
Free Heritage, Sherman Warns

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press
4/23/86

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--An outspoken leader of the moderate-conservative wing of the Southern Baptist Convention who also is a member of the denomination's Peace Committee, told a Richmond, Va., crowd religious freedom is an "endangered" idea among today's Southern Baptists.

Cecil E. Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, told a gathering of Virginia Baptists celebrating the 200th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom that a "sizable number" of Baptists "are following preachers who have abandoned" the views of the nation's founders regarding religious freedom and separation of church and state.

In thinly-veiled references to television preacher Jerry Falwell, Sherman charged the dominant views among many Southern Baptist preachers "come not out of Nashville, but out of Lynchburg." (Falwell, founder of the Liberty Federation and Moral Majority, operates out of the southern Virginia city of Lynchburg.) As a result, Sherman added, religious freedom among Southern Baptists is "an idea that is endangered in the house that birthed us."

He said while most contemporary Southern Baptists probably would give a "ho-hum" vote of approval to Jefferson's historic statute—a document that helped pave the way for the federal Constitution's guarantees of free exercise and no establishment of religion—they largely have forgotten their roots as dissenters against a system that married church and state. Because "we have become big and rich and strong," Sherman added, religious liberty has become little more than a "quaint idea" to many Baptists.

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Noting early Virginia Baptist leader John Leland "made common cause with deists" in order to secure the Constitution's religious guarantees, Sherman asked, "Did you know that the American Civil Liberties Union lives closer to these ideas than most Baptists do?" Leland, he said, "was ready to defend people he disagreed with; it's an old Baptist idea we've forgotten."

Besides achieving power and prestige in many communities—a status unknown to their forbears—Southern Baptists feel threatened by "a militant, aggressive paganism" that permeates modern American life, Sherman said. "The more militant and aggressive the paganism becomes, the more some Baptists want to go back" to more predictable times.

"Authoritarian" clergy like Falwell have capitalized on such frustrations, he said, seeking an alliance with political leaders to establish a moral order. The resulting "civil religion," he charged, "threatens the vision of the founding fathers."

Another speaker, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary church history professor G. Hugh Wamble, issued his own warning. After praising early Baptists in Virginia for contending "anything short of freedom is not full freedom," he added, "Never, in my opinion, have the principles of religious liberty been under more severe attack than now."

Wamble traced developments in Virginia during the colonial period leading up to passage by the General Assembly of a series of laws that finally disestablished Anglicanism as the official religion and gave full freedom to all faiths. He credited Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and Quakers for bringing the agitation that resulted in those laws, including Jefferson's statute.

Foremost among the dissenters were the Baptists, some of whom suffered mob action and imprisonment, he said. Nevertheless, they "kept up a relentless barrage of petitionings," Wamble said, convinced that "in the absence of equality there is no freedom." He concluded that for modern-day Baptists to lose their religious freedom out of "indifference, apathy and inaction" would be "tragic indeed," adding, "We dare not pass this on in less perfect shape than received."

Another scheduled speaker, University of Virginia law professor A.E. Dick Howard, who did not attend because of illness, nevertheless had his speech read to the audience of 600 people.

Howard, on the eve of a trip to Hong Kong and the Philippines to assist those nations' governments in the process of drafting new constitutions, told his Baptist audience Virginia moved from religious toleration to free exercise of religion and, finally, to separation of church and state. Those developments formed the background for adoption of the religious guarantees for the whole nation in the First Amendment to the Constitution, he said.

"Those principles...are as valid as cornerstones of American constitutional law today as they were 200 years ago," Howard said. "Let no one tell you that either of these concepts is redundant of the other. The principles of free exercise of religion and of separation of church and state are, in combination, handmaidens of American liberty."

Howard, who helped draft Virginia's present state constitution, also said: "Religion in America best prospers when government leaves religious groups to chart their own course, without governmental sponsorship or interference. In no nation in the world is there as much genuine religious liberty as there is in ours."

Virginia Gov. Gerald L. Baliles also spoke, saying Baptists "led the crusade for religious freedom" in the Old Dominion. He said the unlikely alliance between Jefferson and James Madison—who were of the Virginia "gentry"—and Baptists and other dissenters "succeeded against the prevailing order" of an established church.

The issues raised by Jefferson, Madison and the dissenters, Baliles said, are just as relevant today as they were 200 years ago. Do people understand the meaning of Jefferson's statute today? he asked, "I sometimes wonder." But he concluded, "We must guard against ignorance of our own history.... We must remain true to the historical heritage of Virginia Baptists."

The anniversary service, held at the historic First Baptist Church of Richmond, was sponsored jointly by the Virginia Baptist General Board, Virginia Baptist Historical Society and Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

(BP)

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NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION