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State Court Lawsuit
Voluntarily Dropped

By Dan Martin

ATLANTA (BP)—A state court lawsuit against the Southern Baptist Convention and its Executive Committee has been "voluntarily dismissed" by attorneys for the five plaintiffs.

The suit, filed in Superior Court of Fulton County, Ga., on Jan. 23, was identical to one filed by Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Crowder of Birmingham, Ala., and two other plaintiffs in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.

On May 5, U.S. District Judge Robert Hall ruled for the SBC, declaring the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits secular courts from interfering in internal church affairs.

On the following day, the Crowders and their co-plaintiffs—Henry C. Cooper of Windsor, Mo., and H. Allen McCartney of Vero Beach, Fla.—notified the court they will appeal the decision to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, also in Atlanta.

John Floyd, an attorney with the Atlanta lawfirm of Bondurant, Mixson and Elmore, which represented plaintiffs in both cases, said the Superior Court suit was dismissed voluntarily, which means it can be brought back, if plaintiffs so desire.

"Judge Hall made his ruling fairly clear," Floyd said. "It was an interpretation of the federal Constitution, which would also apply to the Superior Court in the State of Georgia. The state court could disagree with Judge Hall, but obviously could not overrule him. If the superior court judge did disagree, Judge Hall's ruling would still stand and there would not be a complete victory."

"Therefore we feel it is more efficient to proceed with the direct appeal," he said.

Floyd indicated the dismissal "by no means is an admission of any sort that we think Judge Hall is correct. We respect him as a judge and realize the time he put in on his decision, but obviously we disagree with his ruling."

The state court suit was brought by five plaintiffs from five states: Katherine F. White of Atlanta, a member of Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church; Lucy Azlin of Alexandria, La., a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church; Betty Ann L. Upshaw of Winston-Salem, N.C., a member of Knollwood Baptist Church; Terry Black of Louisville, Ky., a member of Buechel Park Baptist Church and Jim B. Black of Lewisville, Texas, a member of First Baptist Church.

Floyd said a decision in the appeal is not expected in time for the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC, but "hopefully before 1987." He added an oral argument will be requested before the appeals court.

James P. Guenther of the Nashville, Tenn., lawfirm of Guenther and Jordan, attorneys for the SBC and Executive Committee, told Baptist Press: "The dismissal means we have the battle confined solely to the 11th Circuit Court.

"The case will probably rest with the 11th Circuit for several months and sometime after the convention it will be briefed and an ultimate decision made. That is some months away. The appeals court looks not only at the conclusions of the lower court, but also at the reasoning of the cases which are cited. The decision follows the reasoning of the U.S. Supreme Court and we believe the lower court opinion will be affirmed."

High Court Rejects
Scientology Appeal

By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)—The Supreme Court has foiled an effort by the Church of Scientology to expedite its challenge to a Clearwater, Fla., ordinance requiring churches to register with city officials before they are permitted to raise funds.

Attorneys for the controversial body had asked the high court to strike down the local law as a violation of the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion and guarantee of free exercise of religion.

But the court, in a one-line order, sent the case back to a federal district court for trial. As is customary, no reasons were given for the action.

Clearwater city officials and the church have engaged in a running battle since shortly after Scientology moved its headquarters to the Florida city in 1975. Two ordinances, the first of which was struck down earlier, have sought to limit the body's ability to solicit funds from the public. The second ordinance is the one currently being contested.

In a brief asking the high court not to intervene, an attorney for the city wrote the ordinances were enacted "because of revelations of a host of serious crimes and abuses" engaged in by church members.

In 1982 the city held five days of public hearings which, the city's attorney wrote, "disclosed a staggering array of criminal and abusive acts, practices and policies," including burglarizing and bugging critics' offices, framing opponents by manufacturing and planting false evidence, blackmailing former members, kidnapping and imprisoning persons wanting to leave the church, smuggling currency, extorting funds, attempting murder, lying to government officials and making threatening and harassing telephone calls.

Far from being a church, the brief continued, Scientology "is instead only a commercial and at times criminal organization not entitled to invoke the religion clauses" of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Although the first of the ordinances—adopted in 1983—was declared unconstitutional, the city passed a second the next year. In July 1984 a federal district judge upheld the law, but without conducting a trial. A three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals subsequently ordered the city not to enforce the ordinance pending the outcome of the church's suit against it. That order still stands.

On further appeal, a second panel of the same circuit court reversed the district court, ordering it to conduct a full trial on the merits of the ordinance. By its May 19 action, the Supreme Court let stand that action.

In its unsuccessful appeal asking the high court to intervene now, Church of Scientology attorney Eric M. Lieberman of New York City contended the Clearwater ordinance "is unique in modern American history in the manner in which it intrudes into the relationship between churches and their members...and in which it authorizes comprehensive state surveillance of internal church activities and expenditures."

By requiring churches to obtain licenses before soliciting funds, even from its own members, and by imposing "massive recordkeeping and disclosure requirements," Lieberman continued, the challenged ordinance inhibits the free exercise of religion and amounts to a governmental establishment of religion.

The dispute has attracted nationwide interest because of the potential impact on churches' ability to raise funds if the Clearwater ordinance is upheld. Among the organizations challenging the law is Americans United for Separation of Church and State. That group was not a party, however, to the procedural appeal rejected by the Supreme Court in its May 19 order.

Mark Shelby Pronounced Fit;
Plans Return To Bangkok

By Bill Webb

HARRISBURG, Ill. (BP)—Missionary kid Mark Shelby, who underwent surgery in January to remove a cancerous brain tumor, has been given a clean bill of health by his neurosurgeon.

On Thursday, May 22, the 16-year-old and his missionary mother, Avah, will fly home to Bangkok, Thailand, to be reunited with Mark's father, Jack, and 13-year-old brother, Scott.

Mark suffered from seizures before his parents took him to Barnes Hospital in St. Louis in December for testing and eventual surgery. Later, surgeons reopened the wound to remove infection.

In early May, the teen-ager accompanied his mother to the state Woman's Missionary Union Convention in Springfield, Ill. Avah, from Harrisburg, Ill., came to the platform first and asked: "Have you ever seen a dream walking?" As her son left his front row seat to join her, she continued: "Well, I've seen a prayer walking."

"I want to thank you for your prayers," Mark told the audience. Those prayers "kept me steady during the ordeal of surgeries and radiation treatment," he said.

Mark suffered severe headaches before the two-day meeting ended and returned to the hospital the next week for scheduled follow-up exams. They showed fluid had formed on his brain.

Further testing on May 17 indicated the tumor had not recurred. An eight-day culture of the fluid extracted from his head has shown no bacterial infection.

"Mark is now well," Avah said. "He has turned a corner. We are not to keep him under a microscope. Dr. (Sidney) Goldring, his neurosurgeon, told me to loose him and let him go.

"Mark will stay on medication for one to two years and will undergo periodic (brain) scans," Avah said. "He is having some trouble concentrating. But Dr. Goldring said the brain takes at least a year to settle down after being interfered with. He said, 'Forget it and move on.'"

The family will have to readjust to each other, Avah maintains. "Mark has changed. When we came, he was half child and half man," she said. "Now the child is gone.

"We've all changed during this time. The children have both matured and they're going to have to get together and rethink some things. We haven't been with Scott since December."

The family's work and field of service are changing, too. The family will move to Hong Kong on June 14, just after Mark and Scott participate in an annual "Missionary Kid" spiritual growth retreat on the Gulf of Thailand.

Jack has been named associate to the director of Cooperative Services International. He will assist Christians in China and other countries where missionary presence is not possible. Mark already has been referred to a Chinese neurosurgeon there.

"We're going to have to go back to language study," Avah said. "We speak Cantonese and Thai but we're going to learn Mandarin now."

The daily prayers of Southern Baptists have made the difference in Mark's recovery, she believes. Other acts of kindness also have been important. Two people loaned her cars. Others visited and made phone calls. "We've had total support," she said.

"Pray that we can all keep our priorities straight and that we will not be overwhelmed and won't try to depend on our own strength."

Black Church Meets Needs
By Emphasizing Teaching

By Frank Wm. White

SAN JOSE, Calif. (BP)—With an enrollment increase of more than 1,100 percent in less than 10 years, Emmanuel Baptist Church in San Jose, Calif., has become a model for Sunday school growth in the state.

Enrollment was 125 when Willie Gaines became pastor in 1977 and now is more than 1,500. The increase has been possible by relying on the basic theories of Sunday school growth, Gaines says.

Emphasizing Sunday school, training workers, following the Sunday School Growth Spiral and adapting materials have been key elements to the phenomenal Sunday school growth, notes Gaines, president of the Southern Baptist General Convention of California and the first black person to hold the position.

"The basic theory of Sunday school works anywhere. We have to make it apply to us," he says, adding Southern Baptist Sunday school literature and training have allowed Emmanuel to emphasize Sunday school without "reinventing the wheel."

Emmanuel utilizes Southern Baptist materials but "blackenizes" them to apply to the situation and cultural differences of a black church, Gaines explains.

The successful application of Sunday school principles has helped establish Emmanuel as one of the top 10 in Sunday school attendance among black Southern Baptist churches.

"Good Sunday school principles can only make the black church better," confirms Eljia Wells, associate pastor. He points out the worship service is the traditional strong feature of black churches, but Emmanuel has placed strong emphasis on the Sunday school.

"Sunday school to us is an enhancement to worship. It's part of the worship experience," Gaines claims. He also emphasizes Sunday school during the worship service: "I'm a Sunday school pastor. Not a Sunday goes by I'm not encouraging people to attend Sunday school."

But getting people involved in Sunday school requires more than the pastor stressing it. It requires good teaching with trained teachers, Wells admits.

Teachers receive 24 hours of training on Bible and doctrine background, Sunday school principles and teaching techniques before being assigned to a class, says to Kathy Gooden, minister of education.

The church has 60 trained workers for its 50 Sunday school classes. Workers participate in two-hour weekly workers' meetings, and many have attended Growth Spiral clinics, enrollment-training clinics and Sunday school training conferences at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

"The more you train workers, the better off you are in having a good Sunday school," Wells insists.

Southern Baptist training and assistance have been important in the history of the church. It began in 1965 and chose to identify with the Southern Baptist Convention because "it was the only denomination that offered assistance in getting the church started," Wells says.

The Sunday school enrollment has doubled since 1984 when the church began using the Sunday School Growth Spiral. The Growth Spiral is a Southern Baptist Sunday School Board plan for plotting growth potential and assessing needs to meet that potential.

"The Growth Spiral has put pressure on us to keep up with the growth," Wells reports.

The church recently moved into a new sanctuary and has plans for expanded educational space.

Gaines sees potential for continued growth as the church reaches out into the community. "Most of our Sunday school growth has been from within our own church membership," he says.

Tal Bonham Is The
Mr. Clean Of Jokes

By Jim Lowry

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP)—No kidding. Did you hear the one about the misunderstanding in the church business meeting? You can bet Tal Bonham has heard it.

Bonham, executive director-treasurer of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, is the author of seven books of clean jokes. He has jokes about church, sports, diets, country and some treasury collections.

Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman Press published Bonham's first joke book in 1981. It was a collection of jokes Bonham had saved for use in sermons and other special speaking occasions. He always has categorized the jokes by subject, not just recklessly in a giant file.

When his wife was ill for an extended time between 1977 and 1979, he started working on his first book. "It became a blessing for me to work on in my spare time," he recalls.

Since the publication of the first book and the succeeding ones, Bonham has heard from teenagers, laymen and ministers who appreciate the work he has done to collect usable humor and publish it for their use.

"I think preachers ought to be able to laugh at themselves," he says. "A sense of humor is like a medicine. I don't recommend a preacher try to be a stand-up comedian, but I think humor in preaching can illustrate truths and relax listeners."

"When we preachers can laugh at ourselves, then we can give people hope," he adds. "The Christian life is a life of joy and abundant life. Since we know Christ and know we are going to heaven, we really can be happy."

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine," from Proverbs 17:22, is one of Bonham's favorite Scripture passages.

He is quick to point out all of the jokes included in the joke books are not originals. He regularly receives jokes from friends and acquaintances.

Many jokes are included about the misunderstandings of young children which at times can be painfully insightful. For instance, there was the little boy who was asked by the pastor if he said his prayers every night. "Yes sir," was the response.

"And do you always say them in the morning too?" the pastor asked.

"No sir," the boy replied. "I ain't scared in the daytime."

Did you hear the one about the preacher? Where's the drumroll??? I'm waiting....

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(BP) photo to be mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press

Singles Ministry
Called Improving

By Terri Lackey

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ASHEBORO, N.C. (BP)—While single-adult coordinators agree singles historically have been on the losing side when it comes to churches meeting their needs, they also foresee a changing game with an improving score.

Ministry to singles is looking up, said Ann Gardner, single-adult consultant in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department. But she and state leaders agree churches and denominational leaders are not utilizing their full resources.

"Certainly, I can see an increase in states planning events for singles," Gardner said, "but there are other opportunities that are not being taken advantage of."

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She said examples of singles who are being slighted include ethnics, military personnel and "just plain, normal singles."

Libby Potts, associate in single and senior adult ministry for the Texas Christian Life Commission, said she believes churches should minister to single adults as enthusiastically as they minister to families.

"We need to educate our churches that there are adults, who happen to be single, who shouldn't be viewed as second-class citizens," she said. "We need to further educate that it's OK to be single. Our Lord was single."

Gardner said one problem is the state Baptist conventions "need to be doing things that are more specialized. Some areas we need to speak to more are never-marrieds, single parents and singles-agains, whether through divorce or death. We're just not speaking enough to ethnic groups or other specialized singles groups."

Gardner said Florida is one state doing an excellent job in its work with singles.

Jay Johnston, single adult coordinator for the Florida Baptist Convention, said Florida has set a precedent by enlisting single adult coordinators in 36 of its 49 associations.

"Florida, as far as associational work, is more advanced in single adult work," Johnston said. "I think if single-adult ministry catches on, it will have to be through associations picking up the ministry, because not every church can afford to have a single adult minister."

Johnston said associations can furnish the missing link between churches and state conventions by providing enrichment or equipping programs through the church.

Changing times has contributed to singles' need for a different type of ministry, he said.

"I definitely think today single parents need some direction from our churches," Johnston said. "Also, we seem to concentrate more on the single adults who are 35 or older, and I think we need more of a balance. From comments I've heard, younger single adults seem to feel they've been totally left out."

Several associations in Florida provide retreats, bi-monthly seminars to enrich and equip and leadership training events to better meet the needs of single adults.

Another method some states are using to identify the needs of singles is regional task forces, staffed with single adults and their leaders.

Clark Hensley, consultant for family ministry for the Mississippi Baptist Convention, said he presently is working toward creating his own singles task force.

"We are working with single-adult directors to develop a task force representing nine regions of the state to adapt and create programs for singles in our state," Hensley said.

He believes state-coordinated task forces identifying the needs of singles will become a trend. "We need to work with single adult directors within each association and train those people specifically as single adult consultants for their associations," he said.

Hensley said states are more apt to design single adult retreats for those unmarried adults who are undergoing crises, such as divorce, death or single parenting. "We're seeking to redesign our retreats and not just major on various crises, but on spiritual growth," he noted. "We need now to move forward to a growth experience in ministry for singles."

Potts agrees. "It's a sign of the times that our single adult people are changing," she said. "We need to move away from coping with crises so much.

"We need to start ministering to those who feel really good about themselves."

