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Peace Committee
Discusses Report

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)—After 18 months of work, the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee has begun the process of drafting a final report to the June 1987 meeting of the 14.6 million-member denomination.

The 22-member group was created in June of 1985 and charged with the responsibility of discovering the sources of controversy in the SBC, making findings and then a final recommendation to the 1987 annual meeting.

Following the group's 12th meeting Chairman Charles Fuller told Baptist Press:

"We come now to the composition of our report. We had hoped we would be ready with it or at least a preliminary report or outline to share with the SBC Executive Committee during their Feb. 16-18 meeting. We will not be able to do that, but we will have a progress report (for the Executive Committee).

"The Feb. 18 schedule for the Peace Committee to report on the Executive Committee agenda will afford us an opportunity to have input from Executive Committee members about our final report to the convention."

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., said that although the report will not be available as early as he at first predicted, he anticipates it will be ready for release to Southern Baptists "well in advance" of the June 16-18 annual meeting in St. Louis.

"I still think the report will be released between April 1 and 15," he said. "We have a goal that the people of the convention will have at least six weeks of lead time to study the report and its recommendations."

Fuller added the Peace Committee also will meet with editors of the 31 state Baptist newspapers Feb. 18, immediately following the Executive Committee meeting. "Invitations will go out to the editors to meet with us for a time of questions and answers and suggestions from them," he said.

The January meeting of the Peace Committee was the first meeting in which the structure and content of the final report has been discussed.

"This meeting was characterized by dialogue and exchange and, in discussion in particular, another hard confrontation with what must be dealt with in our recommendation to the convention, Fuller said. "We will continue to schedule discussion of political matters on our agenda as we did for the most part in this meeting. There are some recommendations which we must make on the political side of the controversy ledger. But we repeatedly rediscover that certain theological matters must be settled in order for the politically related matters to have a foundation."

Fuller said the Diversity Statement, which concerned the committee's finding that wide theological diversity exists in the SBC seminaries as well as the denomination at large, the two Foundational Statements adopted by the group during its December 1986 meeting, and the Glorieta Statement of the presidents of the six SBC seminaries "are all very pivotal and critical to our report."

Prior to the 1986 report of the Peace Committee, the group adopted a statement concerning theological diversity in the SBC. The committee said:

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"The Peace Committee has completed a preliminary investigation of the theological situation in our SBC seminaries. We have found significant theological diversity within our seminaries reflective of the theological diversity within our wider constituency.

"These divergencies are found among those who claim to hold a high view of Scripture and to teach in accordance with and not contrary to the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963.

"Examples of this diversity include the following, which are intended to be illustrative but not exhaustive:

"(1) Some accept and affirm the direct creation and historicity of Adam and Eve while others view them instead as representative of the human race in its creation and fall.

"(2) Some understand the historicity of every event in Scripture as reported by the original source while others hold that the historicity can be clarified and revised by the findings of modern historical scholarship.

"(3) Some hold to the stated authorship of every book in the Bible while others hold that in some cases such attribution may not refer to the final author or may be pseudonymous.

"(4) Some hold that every miracle in the Bible is intended to be taken as an historical event while others hold that some miracles are intended to be taken as parabolic."

The Diversity Statement also notes the Peace Committee "is working earnestly to find ways to build bridges between those holding divergent views so that we may all legitimately coexist and work together in harmony to accomplish our common mission."

During its December 1986 meeting the committee adopted two "Foundational Statements," one concerning theology, the other politics.

The theological statement:

"It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that the cause of peace within the Southern Baptist Convention will be greatly enhanced by the affirmation of the whole Bible as being 'not errant in any area of reality.'

"Therefore, we exhort the trustees and administrators of our seminaries and other agencies affiliated with or supported by the Southern Baptist Convention to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions receiving our support, and only employ professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is 'truth without any mixture of error.'"

The political statement:

"It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that fairness in the appointive process will contribute to peace.

"Therefore, we exhort the present and future presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Committee on Committees and the Committee on Boards to select nominees who endorse the Baptist Faith and Message statement and are drawn in balanced fashion from the broad spectrum of loyal, cooperative Southern Baptists, representative of the diversity in our denomination."

During a prayer retreat at the Glorieta Baptist Conference Center near Santa Fe, N.M., in late October 1986, the presidents of the six seminaries issued a seven-point plan aimed at bringing peace to the SBC. The plan came to be called the Glorieta Statement.

The statement was issued by Milton Ferguson, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., who said the presidents "are aware that we are perceived to be at the heart of the controversy in our SBC fellowship."

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The statement, which the presidents said was done at their own initiative and was "unilateral," included three philosophical statements and seven specific commitments. Most notable of the philosophical statements was one which said: "We believe that the Bible is fully inspired; it is 'God-breathed' (1 Tim. 3:16), utterly unique. No other book or collection of books can justify that claim. The 66 books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality. We hold to their infallible power and binding authority."

The specific commitments pledge the presidents: To "enforce compliance" of faculty to the seminary confessional statements; to foster in the classrooms "a balanced, scholarly frame of reference for presenting fairly the entire spectrum of scriptural interpretations represented by our constituency;"

To "respect the convictions of all Southern Baptists;" to commit the seminaries "to fairness in selecting faculty, lecturers and chapel speakers across the theological spectrum;" to lead the seminary communities in spiritual revival; and to "deepen and strengthen the spirit of evangelism and missions on our campuses."

In making his report following the January meeting Fuller added:

"It has been said that what we have done so far could have been accomplished in the first month of our existence. Various other evaluations have been placed on our efforts which have complimented us and criticized us. That is always the privilege of those being served.

"Those of us on the Peace Committee have an assignment, and we will 'stay by the stuff' until it is done. We cannot afford to stop and explain our every move.

"I ask Southern Baptists not to be weary in well-doing, but to continue to pray for the Peace Committee and that God will be honored in what Southern Baptists do at the St. Louis convention regarding our report."

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Hunger Grows In
Turbulent Haiti

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
1/12/87

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)—In the tumultuous 11 months since "president for life" Jean-Claude Duvalier fled Haiti, life in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country has gotten even worse.

While the nation struggles for a new social order, people continue to go hungry. Demonstrations, roadblocks, violence, hijackings and looting are making it almost impossible for Haitian Baptists and other relief workers to transport food to the rural areas where it is needed most.

Baptists have distributed virtually no food in months, reported Southern Baptist missionary Jack Hancox, who helps coordinate a variety of social ministries.

"We haven't been doing any food (distribution) at all because we can't get it up-country," Hancox said in early January. "Nobody has."

A band of robbers raided the Baptist food warehouse in Port-au-Prince last September, the latest in a series of lootings Baptists have suffered. Other agencies have faced the same problems.

"After we were hit, they raided the CARE warehouse up in Cap-Haitien and about ruined it," Hancox said. "Even CARE hasn't reestablished its program up in the north. ... So the whole thing has been sort of waiting to see if things calm down. This is putting a lot of pressure on the pastors, too. People know they receive the food, and they don't have any real secure storage up in the country."

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Hancox has canceled shipments of Southern Baptist food aid until better security for storage and transport can be guaranteed. But he and Haitian Baptists are willing to help distribute food shipped in by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). A large shipment of AID food reportedly is sitting in customs in Port-au-Prince, and Hancox is waiting for official notification that it is available for transport.

"We've got a lot of people still very nervous about it because we've still got trucks being hijacked," said the missionary. "But we don't have any choice about it. We've got to try. We have to pay a soldier to ride on the trucks from their (AID) warehouse to our warehouse. That's as far as he'll go. Getting it from our warehouse up to the churches and schools will be our next problem. The road hasn't been cleared yet."

Joe Coblentz, AID's Food for Peace officer, confirmed major disruption of food aid efforts in northern Haiti. But he said AID food distribution in other parts of the country is continuing through private relief organizations.

"It's no better," Coblentz said of the national hunger situation. "In some places, pockets of the country where the harvest has not been good, it's worse." But he added that food distribution through private groups had "forestalled much greater malnutrition and much greater signs of starvation."

Despite the near-anarchy in the countryside, Baptists have managed to continue other aid ministries. In 1986 Baptist work teams drilled 64 wells to provide clean water for communities, 55 of which were put into operation. That is the largest annual total for the well-drilling program. Agricultural ministries and reforestation work for soil-eroded rural Haiti also continue.

The Hancoxes eagerly await the spring arrival of new missionaries Mark and Peggy Rutledge, who worked earlier in Haiti as volunteers. Southern Baptist volunteer teams also have been trickling back into Haiti to help in church construction, medical work and agricultural projects.

Haitian Baptists have built "an enormous amount of credibility" — and a far more effective evangelistic outreach — through such social ministries, the missionaries have reported.

"This is a testimony we get all the time, that Baptists are concerned for the whole person," Hancox said. "We're not just here to lead you to the water, but we're here to see that in the name of Christ you lead a fuller life, that your kids don't die of diarrhea from lack of clean water or not go to school because there's no one to teach them."

"You can't very well preach about anything the Lord talks about, as far as I'm concerned, and not be concerned about little babies dying all around you because nobody provides clean water and they don't have the right kind of food to eat or a decent place to live. ... But I know what the pastors tell me, how people get turned on about the Lord because of the kind of commitment that's been made (to them)."

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Chaplaincy Provides
Opportunity To Minister

By Jerilynn Armstrong

Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)—A blonde woman stops by a patient's room to speak. They visit for awhile, and before she leaves they pause for a moment of prayer. It's unusual scene to many people, but part of the many responsibilities of Chaplain Jeni Cook.

Cook became a chaplain at the Dallas Veterans Administration Medical Center in 1984 and recently was named chief of the chaplain service there. She is the first woman to hold such a position among the 172 VA medical centers nationwide.

"Chaplain Cook is a jewel. I wish I had 10 more just like her," says Wayne Hawkins, medical center director. "One of the reasons for selecting Chaplain Cook is her ability to take off the 'collar and cloak' and become vitally involved in all aspects of the medical center."

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"Chaplain Cook easily integrates into other areas of the medical center without forfeiting or damaging her role and integrity as a chaplain. Her example has meant a lot to our patients and employees," he adds.

In her new role, Cook will supervise three full-time and three part-time chaplains as well as the center's clinical pastoral education program.

Her background includes graduation from Oklahoma University in Norman and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. She currently is working on a doctor of ministry degree at Texas Christian University.

Cook is endorsed by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Before coming to the VA medical center, she worked in several hospitals and the Federal Correction Institution in Fort Worth, Texas.

"Jeni Cook is one of more than 2,000 chaplains endorsed by the Home Mission Board," notes Bob Duvall, former director of hospital chaplaincy at the board. "An endorsement means that we verify a person has the credentials to serve as a chaplain and is in good standing with the denomination."

"Currently there are more than 80 women serving in this area of service, and Jeni is a very capable minister serving in a vital area of ministry. She has broken new ground for Southern Baptists in that she was our first female chaplain to serve in a federal prison system and now in a VA hospital," Duvall says.

When asked if she feels like she is breaking new ground for women, Cook reports she has not given it much thought: "I was thrilled to be selected for this post because the Veterans Administration believed I was qualified, and I think it will open additional doors for my ministry. I hope that other women looking into the area of chaplaincy work will be encouraged and perhaps see this as new opportunities available."

"Chaplaincy work was something I felt the Lord leading me into while I was attending seminary," Cook says. "When I entered seminary I knew I wanted to go into the area of pastoral care but was not sure what specific form that would take. After I served in a hospital as a part of my clinical pastoral education training at Southern Seminary, it all came together.

"I realized that chaplaincy work was a good fit for me personally and was where the Lord wanted me to serve," she adds.

"One of the most meaningful experiences that affirmed my calling was during my last semester of seminary when my home church ordained me to the gospel ministry, she says. "I grew up in Enid, Okla., and attended First Baptist Church with my family. It was wonderful for the people you have known all your life to say we love and support you and want to be a part of your ministry."

Cook believes ordination was important not only to her personally, but to the effectiveness of her ministry: "I guess I do not look like the typical chaplain and occasionally get asked by patients if I am an ordained minister. In their eyes, if I am not ordained, then I am a nice girl coming to visit. If I am ordained, then what takes place here is on a different level.

"When I am asked that question, I interpret it as being asked if I am coming authentically in the name of the Lord," she explains.

Cook views her chaplaincy responsibilities as similar to those of a local church pastor:

"I preach on Sundays, conduct weddings and funerals, provide personal counseling and have even done baptisms. The big differences are that my counseling and witnessing are done in the context of a hospital and my congregation turns over more often.

"One of the reasons I chose chaplaincy is because of the one-on-one contact I have with the patients and the opportunity to minister to people during a time of crisis. As a chaplain you quickly discover that people are much more responsive to the word of God when their defenses are down. It is a wonderful opportunity to minister."