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87-16

BSSB OK's Reorganization,  
4 Executive Officers

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A reorganization of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and reassignment of four employees in vice presidential slots were approved by the board's trustees Feb. 3.

After extended discussions about whether the Sunday school program, termed by President Lloyd Elder the "highest priority," was placed high enough in the organization, trustees voted to ask Elder to study the management level of Sunday school and report back at the August 1987 meeting.

During six hours of presentation and discussion, Elder said the reorganization is an attempt to "downsize" the structure of the board and reduce the number of levels of management between the president and the board's 17 programs. "We want to structure the board to say that Bold Mission Thrust and the urgency of evangelism are our heartbeat in service to Southern Baptists," he said.

The revision, which becomes effective March 1, changes the concept of the executive office from a president and executive vice president to an executive officers' team that includes the president, five vice presidents who report to the president and an assistant vice president for communications reporting to the executive vice president.

James D. Williams, associate to the president and director of the office of planning and research since 1984, was approved as executive vice president. Williams, 52, will be the first executive assistant to Elder.

James W. Clark, executive vice president since 1976, will become senior vice president for publishing and distribution. A 32-year employee of the board, Clark, 55, will direct the Broadman, Holman and book store divisions and the Genevox music group.

Jimmy D. Edwards, vice president for publishing and distribution since 1981 and an 18-year employee, moves to a restructured position as vice president for church programs and services.

Edwards, 48, will oversee the family ministry, national student ministries, telecommunications, art and materials services departments and a new marketing department, along with the church services division. That division includes Glorieta and Ridgecrest conference centers and the church media library, church architecture and church recreation departments.

Gary D. Cook, 44, director of the church and staff support division since 1981, was approved for a newly created position, vice president for church program organizations. Cook will oversee the Sunday school, church training, church music, church administration and special ministries departments.

The vote on the four personnel recommendations came after an effort to vote on each individually and a motion that Cook not be reassigned as vice president for church programs organizations.

Rick Forrester, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lilburn, Ga., questioned Cook's lack of experience related to the Sunday school program.

"There is nothing wrong with Gary or his commitments to the Lord and Holy Scripture. ... As great a fellow as Gary is, his qualifications are not in that background (Sunday school)," said Forrester.

Warren Hultgren, pastor of First Baptist Church of Tulsa, Okla., said Cook, an Oklahoma native, "has an excellent grasp of administrative skills. He is forthright and has a deep sense of personal piety."

The motion not to reassign Cook was defeated in a secret-ballot vote, 51-22. The four personnel recommendations then were adopted with four dissenting votes.

The structure revision was approved with two opposing votes after attempts to postpone a vote to the next meeting and elevate the Sunday school department to an office headed by a vice president who would serve on the executive officers' team. Elder was asked to study the possibility of raising the Sunday school department to a division.

Numerous trustees agreed with Elder that Sunday school should be the board's highest priority but differed about how the structure of the board should reflect the priority.

Gene Henderson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Brandon, Miss., called the discussions "the best interchange of ideas since I've been on the board."

Opposing an immediate vote on making Sunday school a division, Henderson said, "I don't personally think this is prudent, but I'm like the rest of us in that I'm totally, unequivocally committed to the Sunday school."

In the reorganization, three divisions — Bible teaching, Christian development and church and staff support — were deleted. Ralph McIntyre, director of the Bible teaching division, will become special assistant to the president until his retirement after August 1987. Howard Foshee, director of the Christian development division, will become director of planning services, a new post.

Also, Lloyd Householder, director of the office of communications, becomes assistant vice president for communications. Robert Turner, director of the conference center division, becomes director of an expanded church services division. E.V. King, vice president for business and finance, continues as the chief financial officer of the board.

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

Lebanese Baptists Want  
Missionaries To Remain

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
2/5/87

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)—Lebanese Baptist leaders have expressed "deep concern and utmost disapproval" of the U.S. government order that Americans leave their country.

The Lebanese Baptist Convention's executive committee has asked the U.S. Department of State to exempt Southern Baptist missionaries from the order. A pastors' group and at least four Lebanese Baptist congregations have made similar pleas.

The Jan. 28 order gives Americans in Lebanon 30 days of valid passport privileges before they must leave the country.

At the State Department, William Wharton, director of citizenship appeals, could not pinpoint when a decision will be made on allowing Southern Baptist missionaries to remain in Lebanon. He said his staff will handle the matter "as expeditiously as possible."

Ghassan Khalaf, a former president of the Lebanese Baptist Convention, urged Americans in a telephone interview, "Do not let us feel that you are forsaking us."

The vast majority of Lebanon's 2.7 million people "feel that they are a part of the free world," Khalaf said. "They are people of good will. We hope that the (American) government will understand our situation and not withdraw from Lebanon but help and support Lebanon."

The American government, Khalaf reiterated, should not "make decisions that harm many hundreds of thousands of people because of a few terrorists."

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The Lebanese Baptist executive committee's plea, adopted Feb. 4 in Beirut, argued the order "would result in the disruption or freezing of many ... projects that are of great benefit both to our local churches and to our convention." The convention consists of 11 Baptist churches in Lebanon.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Lebanon are "greatly appreciated by the community in the spiritual, humanitarian and social fields," the committee added.

The missionaries are engaged in media, publications and educational work. They also worked with Lebanese Baptist churches in 1986 to distribute \$150,000 in Southern Baptist relief funds to assist refugees from areas devastated by Lebanon's 12-year-old civil war.

Soon after the Jan. 28 State Department order, a group of Lebanese Baptist pastors met to urge prayer "morning, noon and night" that the missionaries could remain in Lebanon. Also, Friday, Feb. 6, was designated a day of fasting and prayer.

In a Feb. 3 meeting, the Hadath Baptist Church, where Khalaf is pastor, adopted a statement that noted: "For several decades, the Baptist mission in Lebanon has been a help and a blessing to the Baptist churches and our people in Lebanon. The deepest spirit of cooperation, understanding, fellowship and love has been established between the Baptist mission personnel and Baptists of Lebanon. We are one family, one household under God."

Khalaf was a program speaker at the 1985 Southern Baptist Foreign Missions Week at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in North Carolina. He said then that he and his family would rather die in the Middle East than see "Christianity abolished from the land (region) where our Savior was born." Just as Muslims look to Mecca, Christians in the Arab world look to Lebanon, he said. "When Christianity in Lebanon is safe and free, the morale of all Christians in the area is high."

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Annuity Board Reaches \$2 Billion,  
Elects Hobgood New Chairman

Baptist Press  
2/5/87

DALLAS (BP)--Total assets of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board exceeded a record \$2 billion, trustees learned during their first meeting of the year.

Board President Darold H. Morgan told the trustees total assests increased to a record \$2.03 billion on Jan. 31, after closing the calendar year at \$1.95 billion.

"We took 65 years to reach \$1 billion. In only four years we have crossed the \$2 billion mark," Morgan said. He cited substantial gains in income and excellent earnings in retirement plan funds as the reasons for the growth.

Total net income reached a record \$199 million for 1986. Member contributions to retirement plans totaled \$125 million, up 9.3 percent over 1985.

The surge in the stock market boosted earnings in the variable fund, which closed the year with a 15.8 percent annualized yield. The variable fund is invested primarily in common stocks. The balanced fund was the next most-productive fund, earning 12.86 percent. The fixed fund credited 11 percent, and the board will credit at least 9.5 percent in 1987. The short-term fund finished the year with a 6.77 percent credit.

The board paid a record \$48 million in retirement benefits to 16,375 annuitants last year. Morgan said, noting about 4,000 of those are widows. Total insurance benefits paid were \$50.9 million, up \$8 million over 1985.

The trustees elected W. Gordon Hobgood Jr., executive vice president of InterFirst Bank Dallas, as trustee chairman. Hobgood succeeded Willis L. Meadows of Shreveport, La., who has been chairman since 1985.

B.J. Martin, vice president of church relations at Houston Baptist University, was elected vice chairman.

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In other action, the trustees removed mandatory retirement provisions which required board employees to retire at age 70. The bylaws also were amended to include the insurance committee as a standing committee.

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BJCPA Joins Protest Of  
INS Church Infiltration

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press  
2/5/87

WASHINGTON (BP)—The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has joined a broad coalition of religious bodies in a legal protest to the infiltration of four Arizona churches by agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service during 1984.

In a friend-of-the-court brief filed Feb 2., the religious bodies asked the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals to review a federal district judge's finding that they had no legal standing to bring the case.

The religious groups had asked Judge Charles L. Hardy to rule the INS and its agents violated the constitutional rights of a Lutheran church and three Presbyterian congregations involved in the sanctuary movement. These and numerous other churches across the country have declared themselves places where political refugees may find refuge, or sanctuary.

In their brief asking the 9th Circuit to review Judge Hardy's decision, the religious bodies — led by the National Council of the Churches of Christ — insisted they were entering the case not because they approve of the sanctuary movement but out of concern for the free exercise of religion and other constitutional rights. Those rights were abridged, the brief stated, when INS agents posing as worshippers repeatedly entered the four churches to tape-record worship services and Bible classes through the use of "body-bugs." The agents also took down license plate numbers in the churches' parking lots, the brief charged.

Oliver S. Thomas, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, underscored his agency is involved in the suit seeking judicial review of the INS agents' tactics but was not a party in the criminal case brought against sanctuary workers in the four churches that followed the infiltration.

"Our case has nothing to do with the sanctuary movement," Thomas said. "It has everything to do with how government investigates churches. ... The free exercise clause requires that government utilize the least intrusive means of investigation. The INS didn't do that. This powerful government agency leapfrogged over all of the traditional methods of fact-gathering, such as the examination of witnesses and the use of subpoenas and search warrants. Instead, it infiltrated the churches with undercover agents and paid informants.

"It's the sort of thing you might expect in the Soviet Union but certainly not in the United States."

At stake in the case, Thomas said, is a legal and constitutional issue of importance to all churches in the country, conservative or liberal.

"No one is contending that churches should be above the law," he said. "But there is a right way and a wrong way to investigate churches accused of illegal activity. You don't kick down doors and drag people out of prayer meetings as was done in Louisville, Neb., and you don't send undercover agents to Bible studies and worship services as was done in this case.

"Can you imagine learning that your prayer partner is a federal agent who is tape-recording everything you say? It would destroy your trust and confidence in your church and fellow members."

Thomas noted the Baptist Joint Committee formally addressed the issue of church infiltration nearly a year ago, when the agency's trustees adopted a statement condemning "the use of paid informants, undercover agents and surreptitious tactics by any government agency investigating religious organizations as improper and illegal when less intrusive means of investigation or fact gathering are available."

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The statement continued: "We lament the chilling effect upon worship, prayer, faith and fellowship freely exercised when worship services are invaded through the use of electronic eavesdropping equipment. We abhor government agents' fraudulent use of the name of Jesus Christ to gain access to the household of faith."

The brief filed by the religious bodies echoed the same concerns about the Arizona investigations. "It is difficult to maintain a measured response to these events," the brief stated. "Their publication sent a shock of horror through the religious community. No matter what the sect or creed, no worshipping community could quite believe that its cherished First Amendment freedoms had been so callously disregarded."

Most of the brief, however, urged the 9th Circuit panel to reverse Judge Hardy's ruling -- issued orally from the bench with no written opinion -- that the churches lacked standing to bring the suit. Hardy said he might have ruled to the contrary had the case been brought by individual members rather than by the four congregations and their mother denominations, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the American Lutheran Church.

In his ruling, which came at the conclusion of a two-hour hearing last October, Judge Hardy decried the government's tactics. "It frankly offends me that the government is snooping into people's churches," he said.

But he added the churches lacked the standing individuals could have brought to the case. "Only individuals can go to hell," he declared.

In their appeal to the 9th Circuit, the religious bodies seek to convince the higher panel that churches should be allowed to bring such cases. "At the core of this dispute," the brief stated, "is a simple question: whether churches are entitled to the same constitutional dignity as adult bookstores and movie theaters, newspapers and commercial corporations. We think they are."

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Journalist Abrams  
Dies In Mississippi

Baptist Press  
2/5/87

GREENWOOD, Miss. (BP)--Joe Abrams, a longtime Southern Baptist journalist, died Jan. 31 in Greenwood, Miss., of a heart attack.

Before his retirement in 1974, Abrams, 80, had been employed by the Mississippi Baptist Convention for 25 years. He worked with the church training department, was director of the Mississippi Baptist News Service and was associate editor of the Baptist Record, newsjournal of the state convention. In his capacity as associate editor and director of the news service, Abrams was public relations director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

Earlier in his career, he worked on the staffs of three secular newspapers and was pastor of three Mississippi Baptist churches.

Abrams was a charter member and first president of the Baptist Public Relations Association. He was acting editor of the Baptist Record on two occasions.

Abrams is survived by his wife, Lillian; and three children, Joe III of Moorhead, Miss.; Mary Lillian of Arlington, Texas; and Shirley Young of Kansas City, Mo.

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Italian Baptist Leaders Urge  
Nobel Prize For South African

Baptist Press  
2/5/87

ROME (BP)--Imprisoned South African Nelson Mandela has been nominated for the 1987 Nobel Peace Prize by the Italian Baptist Union's executive committee.

Paolo Spanu, president of the union, said Mandela has become "the symbol of the struggle against apartheid." Mandela has been in prison more than 24 years for his activities against South Africa's racial policies.

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Spano also noted Mandela's expressed hope "to reconcile blacks and whites. (He is) a South African patriot acknowledged already by many as the right man to represent the people of his country ... (in) building a free and civil society."

The union's executive committee, in another mid-January action, forwarded a letter of support to the African National Congress on the 75th anniversary of its founding.

The committee said it affirms the congress "in the hope that soon the just expectations of peace and freedom of ... oppressed people of South Africa ... may become a reality."

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Prayer Prompts Pledge  
To Tithe On Prize

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
2/5/87

DALLAS (BP)—Some would spell it L-U-C-K, but when anyone asks Mary Jean Ackert of Dalrock Baptist Church in Rowlett, Texas, how she won \$9,000 in a local radio station's version of "Wheel of Fortune," she says the correct answer is the L-O-R-D.

KVIL-FM, a Dallas radio station, was conducting a "Sound of Fortune" contest based on the popular television game show, "Wheel of Fortune." In the radio version, contestants were invited to pick up free game cards at a local pizza parlor and then listen five times daily for opportunities to call the station. Each of the five times, one caller was given the opportunity to pick a letter and attempt to solve a word puzzle.

At 1:20 p.m., Feb. 4, Ackert called the station, requested the letter "D" and with only the letters "R" and "S" to go on, correctly guessed the puzzle solution — "Right Lane Closed Ahead" — for a \$9,000 prize.

"Praise the Lord!" Ackert said as the announcer confirmed she had won. Asked on the air what she would do with the prize money, she replied, "Well, the first thing I'll do is tithe on it."

In an interview with Baptist Press moments after her prize-winning call, Ackert said she believed God allowed her to reach the radio station and solve the puzzle.

"It may sound stupid, but as I was dialing I said, 'Lord, I have a rotary phone. If I manage to get through and win, the money is yours,' she recalled. "I just believe the Lord gave it to me. I had been thinking of signs and different things you see around town, and all of a sudden the answer popped into my head."

Akert said that after paying taxes, she might use part of the prize money to help her sister who is expecting a baby secure a private hospital room. She and her husband also might enjoy a weekend away together.

The mother of three said the family budget is pretty tight some months, and the prize money will be a blessing in helping to meet needs. But before she spends any of the money anywhere else, she plans to honor her pledge to tithe.

"I know my church will like that," she said.

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