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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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87-84

**CLC Seeks To Unify
Anti-abortion Forces**

By Tim Fields

ST. LOUIS (BP)—A diverse group of Southern Baptists have forged a statement on the sacredness of human life designed to unite forces against abortion in the 14.6-million-member denomination in spite of differing views on the controversial issue.

During the two-day consultation on alternatives to abortion sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the group also outlined steps for education and action in an effort to help stop the estimated 1.2 million abortions performed each year in the United States.

The pastors, laypeople and denominational workers hammered out the statement -- designed to set aside differences which have caused division in the denomination and to move beyond disagreements on allowances for abortion under certain circumstances -- in order to call all Southern Baptists to action on the issue.

The group voted 27 to 2 to adopt the following statement on abortion:

"Human life from conception is sacred and must be protected and nurtured in all its aspects. Abortion at any stage of pregnancy is ending human life and is a grave act with tragic spiritual, emotional, physical and social consequences. In those incidents in which this divine ideal is not fulfilled, there can be redemption in God's grace. Therefore:

-- "Let us speak forcefully and unequivocally against abortion on demand and with all vigor encourage alternatives to abortion.

-- "Let us pledge ourselves to be compassionate, aggressive agents of God's grace in nurturing human life and in taking God's grace to those caught in the tragedy of abortion."

Prior to the vote, CLC Chairman Lynn P. Clayton called the statement "a declaration of war against abortion that all Southern Baptists can move on."

"If we pass this statement, we can stop fighting each other over exceptions and start fighting together against abortion," Clayton added.

Larry Lewis, newly elected president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board said: "I see this as a common ground statement that this very diverse group can come together on for this particular meeting." Lewis added the statement does not address the human life amendment, the use of tax money and euthanasia.

CLC Executive Director N. Larry Baker told participants the statement simply is an expression of participants in the consultation but will be used by the commission as "a call to concern to galvanize Southern Baptists around the abortion issue."

A major portion of the consultation involved discussion of education and ministry needs the group felt are necessary to help Southern Baptists effectively combat abortion. Suggestions included:

-- More information is needed on crisis pregnancy centers operated by Southern Baptists.

-- The Home Mission Board should train home missionaries or Mission Service Corps volunteers and make them available to serve in crisis pregnancy centers.

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— Additional pregnancy centers need to be established by local churches or by the Home Mission Board.

— The Christian Life Commission should provide additional educational resources for Southern Baptists on the enormity of the abortion issue.

— The Christian Life Commission should put more passion into its pamphlets and other resources on abortion in order to convey the urgency of the problem and move people to action.

— The Christian Life Commission needs to develop biblically based sex education materials for children, youth and adults which can be used in the home and the church.

— Southern Baptist agencies need to develop programs and resources which will help churches minister to women who have had abortions.

In the concluding session of the consultation, Baker told participants: "I as executive director will be giving aggressive, highly visible public leadership to the abortion issue. I will be speaking strongly against abortion and will be calling on Southern Baptists to act in behalf of sanctity of human life."

He reminded participants of the decision less than a month ago to upgrade the abortion issue to a major program assignment. Robert Parham, an associate director of the commission whose previous major staff responsibility was for world hunger education and action, is now responsible for the abortion issue.

Baker also announced the following actions, which he said the commission plans to take in coming months:

— A national conference on abortion Aug. 31-Sept. 1, 1987, in Nashville and publication of proceedings of the meeting for distribution to Southern Baptists.

— A special October/November 1987 issue of Light, the commission's ethics publication, on the theme of alternatives to abortion.

— New resource guides and videotapes on alternatives to abortion for children, youth and adults.

— The establishment of a Southern Baptist repository and information center at the Christian Life Commission to provide current information on all aspects of the abortion issue.

— National seminars in Washington in March 1988 on Christian citizenship, including issues related to abortion, and in Kansas City, Mo. in 1989 on abortion and other life-and-death issues.

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A list of consultation participants is being mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Christian Life Commission.

Southern Baptist Ethicist
Defends Abortion Rights

By Stan Haste

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WASHINGTON (BP)—A Southern Baptist Theological Seminary ethics professor defended the Supreme Court's 1973 decision legalizing most abortions and warned against efforts to overturn the landmark ruling during an abortion rights conference in Washington.

Paul D. Simmons, who has taught Christian ethics at the Louisville, Ky., school since 1970, joined other scholars and activists at the conference, which explored scientific, ethical and legal perspectives of abortion rights.

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The meeting was sponsored by Americans for Religious Liberty, a group formed in 1982 largely by individuals who withdrew in protest from the Older Americans United for Separation of Church and State after a bitter dispute. The splinter group's stated objective is "preserving the American tradition of religious, intellectual and personal freedom in a secular democratic state." Listed on the organization's 27-member board of directors is one Southern Baptist, Baylor University church-state scholar James E. Wood Jr.

Speaking at a news conference before the meeting, Simmons praised the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* for "getting the government off our backs in matters of procreative choice" and for limiting "the intrusion of the state into our bedrooms." The decision had the effect of declaring that "the family, not the courts nor the Congress, was the proper forum for deliberations and determination of reproductive issues," he added.

Simmons also lauded the high court for protecting freedom of conscience and religious pluralism. "For free church Protestants," he said, "the decision was an exercise in the Protestant principle of soul competence or liberty of conscience. Conscience was regarded as both the necessary and sufficient constraint in deciding about abortion in the early stages of gestation."

American religious pluralism was protected in the ruling, he said, in that "the court refused to adopt a definition of fetal personhood that was based upon narrow religious dogma or abstract philosophical speculation. Each tradition was left free to believe and teach as it would; none was given favored treatment."

Referring to what he called the "challenge from the Religious Right," Simmons added: "Now we are testing whether those values should or can be preserved. A powerful coalition of religious and political interest groups has launched concerted efforts to return reproductive choice to the control of government. Ultraconservative religious groups and extremist political organizations have formed an alliance dedicated to the proposition that abortion is this nation's No. 1 moral problem and must be outlawed. They are determined to turn back the clock to an era of oppression and absolutism."

In an abstract of his address to the conference, titled "Fetal Personhood and the Abortion Debate in Biblical Perspective," Simmons said the Bible "does not support an absolutist position against abortion," adding, "Its teaching about personhood is far more complex than is assumed by anti-abortion evangelicals and their theocratic approach to public policy issues runs counter to Protestant and biblical perspectives on soul competence and religious liberty."

Citing Psalm 139, Jeremiah 1 and Luke 1 as passages used by fundamentalists to support the position that personhood begins at the moment of conception, Simmons argued those Scriptures "are actually reflections of what may better be called anticipatory personhood rather than declarations of actual personhood."

He also said proponents of an absolute ban on abortion as contained in several pending constitutional amendments ignore the difficult choices faced by women with problem pregnancies, including those that involve rape, incest and severe fetal deformity. What is at stake in such situations, Simmons said, "is whether or not persons are permitted to work against God or with God in making choices about the continuation of pregnancy under adverse circumstances."

A long-time advocate of abortion rights, Simmons recently wrote a lengthy article setting forth his views on a human life amendment to the U.S. Constitution that ran in two Baptist state papers. That article led to discussion of his views last month by trustees of Southern seminary, who questioned whether the 50-year-old professor ought to be dismissed.

But the trustees' academic personnel committee concurred with seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt "that there are no grounds for dismissal of Dr. Simmons," based upon the Abstract of Principles, the seminary's guiding document. The full board of trustees agreed but went on record expressing "concern with Dr. Simmons' position" and requesting Honeycutt "to encourage him to moderate his public involvement in this issue."

Staff Fear Said To Leave
Youth In Dark About Sex

By Norman Jameson

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)—Many girls who walk into Crisis Pregnancy Center in Oklahoma City, scared and alone, would not be there if their parents, pastors and youth directors had not been so afraid of talking frankly with them about sex, claims Sylvia Boothe, director of the center.

Convinced that is true, Boothe is campaigning to alert families and church staff members that their fear, or neglect, contributes to a parade of young women through her door who have reason to believe they are pregnant. "At least address the problem," she says. "Challenge them. They can live up to goals. Teenagers are not animals; they don't have to follow their instincts.

"Call them to chastity. Tell them they can decide in advance to be chaste and how important that is. For those who already have lost their virginity, tell them they can choose to be chaste again, that there is such a thing as secondary virginity."

Oklahoma is the only Baptist state convention to sponsor crisis pregnancy centers. It has centers in Oklahoma City, 13 months old, and Tulsa, 18 months old.

The Oklahoma City center counseled nearly 800 women in person during its first year, the Tulsa center almost as many.

A basket of roses adorns the pulpit of one Oklahoma City church closely involved with the local center, one red flower for each baby born when its mother decided not to have an abortion because of counseling received at the crisis pregnancy center.

Forty-one long-stemmed red roses now stand brightly in the basket.

Boothe, once in youth work as a missionary in France, says teens want to be challenged in church. Instead, they are being entertained and will go to whatever church is providing the best entertainment.

If church workers would inform themselves, they could kill the myth that a baby will give a girl something to love, like a doll, and counter the school lockerroom talk that says a boy doesn't become a man until he fathers a child.

A church that holds aloft a high moral standard but does not educate its youth on how to achieve and maintain that standard against secular pressures abdicates its right to set the standard, Boothe insists.

"Girls will have an abortion on the basis of not wanting their parents or church to know they were sexually active," she reports.

So there's the dilemma — sexually active youth in a home and church environment that condemns such activity but which fears addressing it directly in a way which would help youth combat both their "instincts" and the constant pressure of peers.

That basic conflict — strict Puritan principles on one hand and failure to address those principles directly on the other hand — is one of the things that puts Oklahoma's teen suicide rate among the highest in the country.

Statistically, just 37.8 percent of the women seeking counseling at Crisis Pregnancy Center in Oklahoma City are pregnant. But 100 percent have reason to believe they could be. Other statistics show 38.5 percent of the women are Baptist; 69.8 percent white; 36.8 percent aged 15-19; and 59 percent single.

Boothe still feels sex should be taught in the family. But many parents, she says, are ill equipped to do it, a small truth "the world" inflates into a big lie with the claim parents really don't know anything.

In Christian schools and churches where Boothe speaks, she finds youth frustrated because their parents won't discuss sexuality. The youth sense their parents' fear that talking about sex will encourage experimentation — if they don't talk about it, nothing "bad" will happen.

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Churches can help parents step past this fear into the truth that open discussion encourages responsible action, Boothe says. But they cannot if they are afraid or uninformed. Of course, their ignorance causes their fear. How can pastors and youth ministers become informed? "Like I did," Boothe says. "I read everything I could."

Boothe lists several organizations that provide information: Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Box 25266, Nashville, Tenn. 37202; National Right To Life, 419 7th St. NW, Suite 402, Washington, D.C. 20004; James Dobson, Box 500, Arcadia, Calif. 91006; Concerned Women of America, 122 C. St. NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20004; Christian Action Council, 701 W. Broad St., Suite 405, Falls Church, Va. 22046; and Southern Baptists for Life, P.O. Box 470050, Suite 128, Tulsa, Okla. 74147-0050.

Her current and best hope for a school curriculum is Respect for Sexuality, or Sex Respect. It teaches abstinence and family involvement with sex education. Boothe encourages churches to get a copy and consider it for their use. Write Respect for Sexuality, 347 S. Center, Bradley, Ill. 60915.

"There are more parents talking about sex than we realize," Boothe says. "Still, I think church is the greatest tool for helping."

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Early Messengers Received
Instructions, Historian Says

Baptist Press
6/2/87

NASHVILLE (BP)—Some early Southern Baptist churches told their messengers how to vote at the convention's annual meetings, a church historian said.

However, that practice has been viewed as unacceptable for most of the 20th century, Hugh Wamble wrote in an article in the April issue of Baptist History and Heritage, published by the Southern Baptist Historical Commission.

Throughout history, Baptist churches have not been uniform in their practice of instructing or not instructing their "messengers" — representatives from their churches who attend denominational business sessions, said Wamble, professor of church history at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

During the current century, instruction of messengers has been seen negatively because it implies "a delegation of the church's power to the appointees, something which a church cannot do," he said.

Nevertheless a church does have "the power" to instruct messengers, he added. The Southern Baptist Convention Constitution "does not prohibit a church from instructing its messengers, and it would find it difficult to enforce such a policy," he said.

But prudence may argue against a church's instruction of messengers, he noted: "A church, when electing messengers, rarely knows the details of business items to come before a denominational body. Instruction given in the absence of knowledge is prejudgment based on ignorance."

The related practice of electing messengers based on how they will vote on partisan matters within the current SBC theological/political controversy fosters "partisanship, distrust of those who differ and a divisive spirit," Wamble said. However, such election "is beyond the denominational body's power to prevent or correct."

Southern Baptist messengers will convene for the convention's 1987 annual meeting June 16-18 in St. Louis. About 28,000 messengers are expected to attend the meeting.

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Texas Baptists Assist
Saragosa Tornado Victims

By Orville Scott

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6/2/87

SARAGOSA, Texas (BP)—Baptists provided disaster relief immediately to victims of the tornado which nearly leveled the West Texas town of Saragosa, killing 29 people and injuring 121.

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Jerry Bob Taylor, manager of the Circle Six Baptist Encampment near Stanton and regional disaster relief director for Texas Baptists, led a crew of four volunteers from Westside Baptist Church in Odessa in feeding breakfast to about 100 people in the disaster area the morning after the tornado.

The only churches in the community were Catholic and Seventh-Day Adventist, but "Baptist disaster relief volunteers go wherever people are hurting to minister in the name of Jesus," said Bob Dixon, director of the emergency task force for Texas Baptist disaster relief.

Because the quick response of local volunteers met the needs of the disaster victims, the Texas Baptist disaster relief mobile unit was not requested, said Dixon. The big field kitchen and other emergency facilities carried on an 18-wheel tractor trailer has been used in disaster relief as far away as Honduras and in Mexico City following the earthquake in 1985.

Disaster relief volunteers from First Baptist Church of Pecos, 25 miles away, mobilized immediately, said their pastor, Gary W. Boyd. At the hospital, some volunteers assisted tornado victims and their families.

Others, using a 40-foot enclosed trailer van, began around-the-clock feeding operations to storm victims, utility and cleanup crews and law enforcement officials. They issued rain gear and flash lights and then began collecting loads of food and clothing. Other churches used First Baptist of Pecos, as a collection point.

The church has set up a food and clothing bank and is taking applications for assistance. During the first two days after the tornado, about \$13,000 was collected through the Baptist Saragosa Relief Fund set up by First Baptist of Pecos. Three days after the storm, volunteers from the church were helping rebuild homes of disaster victims.

"First Baptist, Pecos, also set up committees for counseling, which will be one of the primary needs of disaster victims after they have buried their loved ones," Boyd said. "In many ways, that's when the real ministry starts."

Dixon said Texas Baptist volunteers would be available to help in cleanup and rebuilding.

Meanwhile, Richard Faling, chairman of the Texas Baptist Family Assistance Task Force, was in nearby Balmorhea surveying needs of disaster relief victims and families who have taken disaster relief victims into their homes.

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Student Work Aid Surpasses
\$1.5 Million In New Areas

By Beth Harris

Baptist Press
6/2/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—More than \$1.5 million in funds and volunteer aid was channeled into Southern Baptist student ministries in newer state convention areas during 1986-87, a student ministry leader announced.

Aid included services of volunteer and career ministers to students and funding from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and Home Mission Board, said Bob Hartman, a member of the Sunday School Board's national student ministries department staff.

The largest single source was more than 100 Mission Service Corps volunteer missionaries, who contributed time and energy worth \$1 million, Hartman told participants in a Southern Baptist Student Ministry Advisory Group meeting May 20-21 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Other personnel included 11 US-2 missionaries serving out two-year assignments in 10 student work posts, 34 career missionaries working in 18 positions, 17 student semester missionaries, five HMB-sponsored seminary semester interns and about 80 teams of workers from established state conventions which helped newer conventions on college campuses as well as in local church, associational and state projects.

Hartman estimated the volunteers' worth at \$1.25 million. Funds from the Sunday School Board and Home Mission Board totaled \$286,000, bringing the aid total to almost \$1.54 million.

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Beth Harris is a promotion specialist for the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.