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Justice Powell Retires,  
Citing Age And Health

By Stan Hasteley

WASHINGTON (BP)—Supreme Court Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr. announced his retirement from the high court June 26, effective immediately.

Powell, who will turn 80 Sept. 19, read a retirement statement from the bench after the court handed down its last opinions of the current term.

Powell's surprise retirement presents President Reagan with his third opportunity to nominate a new justice to the nation's highest tribunal. Reagan's earlier nominees, Sandra Day O'Connor of Arizona and Antonin Scalia of the District of Columbia, gained overwhelming approval by the U.S. Senate, which under the Constitution must confirm all federal judges.

Powell has been considered a key member of the court, a centrist whose vote was sought frequently by attorneys arguing cases. His has been considered a "swing" vote in church-state cases and in other categories of disputes.

Powell, who came to the court more than 15 years ago as an appointee of former President Richard M. Nixon, cited his age and recent health problems as the primary reasons for his retirement.

Noting his upcoming 80th birthday, the Virginian said he had felt for some time the nation's founders "would have been wise" to require federal judges to retire "at a specified age, perhaps at 75."

Alluding to three other sitting justices who are in their late 70s, Powell displayed his characteristically understated sense of humor by adding: "Of course, such a limitation would have deprived the court of the service after that age by a number of the most distinguished justices ever to sit on this court. I specifically include present brothers among this group."

(The high court's senior justice both in age and length of service, William J. Brennan Jr., is 81. Two other justices, Thurgood Marshall and Harry A. Blackmun, will turn 79 later this year. Of the remaining justices, Byron R. White is 70; John Paul Stevens is 67; Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist is 62; O'Connor is 57; and Scalia is 51.)

Powell noted in his retirement statement that when Nixon asked him in 1972 to go on the court, he expressed reservations about his age, then 64. He said he told the former president if he were confirmed he intended to remain no more than 10 years. Yet, he added, when that time came his children persuaded him to stay on the bench.

Although he said a recent checkup at the Mayo Clinic revealed he is in "good health," Powell also noted he has undergone major surgery three times since becoming a justice. The most recent was for prostate cancer two years ago.

Powell said that while he has "no specific plans for the future," he expects "to continue to be active in appropriate public service when this is available." That might include sitting occasionally on one of the federal courts of appeal, he added.

Powell, quiet and unfliningly polite, said he leaves the high court "with a considerable measure of sadness." The Supreme Court, he said, is "a unique institution essential to the preservation of equal justice under law in our country."

Dial-a-Porn Convictions  
Broaden War On Pornography

By Tim Fields

WASHINGTON (BP)--The first convictions under a federal statute enacted in 1983 have put two national "dial-a-porn" distributors in Los Angeles out of business and stepped up the Justice Department's war on obscenity.

The two distributors, Adult Entertainment Network, Inc. I and II, were fined \$50,000 each after pleading guilty to the charges and permanently were enjoined from engaging in other such practices by the federal district court in Salt Lake City.

Rob Showers, executive director of the Justice Department's National Obscenity Enforcement Unit, said records of the two companies show they used 38 different telephone lines in 12 cities and received up to 2.8 million calls per month.

Showers said an FBI investigation revealed that a significant number of these callers were children between the ages of 10 and 16.

The lines were located in Los Angeles; San Francisco; San Diego; Sacramento, Calif.; Washington; Baltimore; Pittsburgh; Philadelphia; Seattle; Portland, Ore.; New Orleans and New York City.

Showers, a Southern Baptist attorney from North Carolina who was named in March by Attorney General Edwin Meese to head the new National Obscenity Enforcement Unit, said, "The purveyors of telephone sex are making money on kids at a cost which goes far beyond the mere expense of the calls. These prerecorded telephone messages contained explicit dramatizations of sex acts whose effect on young people who might tend to model their behavior on them is a serious national concern."

Establishment of the National Obscenity Enforcement Unit came after Meese made a public commitment last fall to make child pornography and obscenity prosecutions high priorities during the rest of the Reagan administration.

Meese cited the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography which in its 1986 report identified federal "dial-a-porn" legislation as an important step in curtailing the spread of obscenity in America.

Alan Sears, a Southern Baptist attorney who was executive director of the commission staff, told participants at a Christian Life Commission conference on pornography in May in California that the "dial-a-porn" legislation was one of two needed pieces of federal legislation.

Sears, now an attorney with Citizens for Decency through Law in Phoenix, Ariz., said legislation dealing with cable television also is needed.

According to Larry Braidfoot, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the successful prosecution of the Los Angeles companies comes at a time when federal legislation is pending that even more effectively would prohibit the use of telephones for commercial distribution of sexually explicit conversation.

"Congressional aides have indicated a strong possibility that this "dial-a-porn" legislation will be added to the appropriations bill for the Federal Communications Commission later this year," he explained.

"Too many persons have not recognized seriously the destructive nature of 'dial-a-porn' as a means of disseminating obscene communication," Braidfoot warned.

"The Southern Baptist Convention in its recent annual meeting in St. Louis adopted a resolution calling for the enactment of 'dial-a-porn' legislation," he added.

"With the first convictions of 'dial-a-porn' distributors and pending federal legislation on pornography, it is a good time to do something significant about pornography.

"A very specific way Baptists and other concerned citizens can do something about pornography is to communicate with members of Congress, asking for the passage of legislation prohibiting such commercial distribution of obscene material," Braidfoot suggested.

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1997 Overshadows  
Hong Kong Christians

By Erich Bridges

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HONG KONG (BP)—For just \$26, you can sponsor a Rice Paddy Baby.

That's the "emigration fee" for Hong Kong's tongue-in-cheek clone of the Cabbage Patch Kids. The cute Oriental dolls come complete with individual names and personalized Hong Kong-British "passports."

Hong Kong shopkeepers sell everything imaginable, so their sardonic attempt to merchandize the continuing exodus of the colony's well-to-do citizens is hardly surprising. Emigration is rising again after a two-year lull, and recent polls show waning public confidence in Hong Kong's future.

Hong Kong reverts from British to Chinese rule on July 1, 1997. A significant number of educated, affluent professionals are marking the beginning of the decade-long countdown by departing for the United States, Canada, Australia and other points abroad.

Observers say the emigration upturn reflects worries about the political shakeup in China earlier this year and the current debate over post-1997 social freedoms in Hong Kong. But the fact remains that the bulk of Hong Kong's 5.6 million people have no realistic prospect of leaving the tiny colony, even if they want to. And many, including numerous Hong Kong Christians, don't want to.

"We're tired of hearing about 1997," sighs Jachin Chan, president of the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong. "Whatever will come will come. We have faith in God."

Chan will stay in Hong Kong "until they chase me out," he jokes. "There will be changes. We don't know what kind, but we feel whoever is in power will probably honor the basic agreement."

Chan's comments reflect Hong Kong's growing acceptance, if not wholehearted embrace, of its inevitable future. The society and all-important economy are considerably more stable now than they were during the tense months of negotiations before China and Great Britain signed a joint declaration in 1984, announcing the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

One observer summarizes the public mood: "Those who can leave will leave, and those who can't will make the best of it."

The details of post-1997 Hong Kong remain a mystery, but the rough outlines are beginning to emerge. A joint Chinese-Hong Kong committee is drafting the Basic Law, a "mini-constitution" that will govern Hong Kong.

The Chinese government promises "one country, two systems" -- allowing Hong Kong to keep its social system, capitalist economy and a high degree of local autonomy for at least 50 years after becoming a special administrative region of China.

The Sino-British agreement guarantees freedom of religion and the right of religious groups to operate churches and other institutions, maintain ties with foreign religious groups and invite missionaries to Hong Kong. It pledges no interference in Hong Kong church affairs by Chinese government or religious organizations, with the understanding that Hong Kong churches in turn will not seek to influence religious affairs in China.

A survey of about 250 Hong Kong Christian pastors last year showed a high approval rating for the religion guarantees. But a majority of the pastors who responded admitted they are wary or anxious about whether the guarantees will actually be carried out. Many remain suspicious of China churches and religious organizations.

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In China, national Christian leader Ding Guangxun (K. H. Ting) has echoed the statements on Hong Kong religious freedom in the Sino-British agreement. Ding, head of both the China Christian Council and Chinese Protestants' Three Self Patriotic Movement, said neither organization will attempt to influence or interfere with Hong Kong churches.

Hong Kong religious groups should adopt the same attitude toward China churches, he added, as the two sides "adhere to the principles of non-subordination, non-interference and mutual respect." That doesn't mean contact and fellowship will be barred, Ding stressed. "I hope there will be a lot of mutual respect, mutual prayer, mutual learning and mutual exchange," he said.

Ding met recently with Sam James, East Asia director for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. He urged Southern Baptists not to let the approach of 1997 determine whether their 67 missionaries will remain in Hong Kong.

The future of missionaries there, the Chinese leader said, should be determined by Hong Kong Christians and the value of missionary work and relationships. Missionaries in Hong Kong leading up to 1997 could be a very positive influence on the church by providing an air of stability during an "anxious time," he said.

Another 20 Southern Baptist missionaries work in nearby Macao, which reverts from Portuguese to Chinese control in 1999. The social and legal system worked out for Macao is expected to resemble the Hong Kong model.

Meanwhile, a debate has been raging in Hong Kong's Chinese-language press over the definition of religious freedom and the separation of church and state after 1997. San Weisze (an apparent pseudonym for a writer widely assumed to be representing the Chinese government's perspective) wrote an article for the newspaper Ming Pao, advocating strict separation of the church both from government and sociopolitical affairs.

San took a dim view of the church's major political impact in recent years in the Philippines, Poland and other countries. And he issued a not-so-subtle warning that Hong Kong churches' increasingly vocal social and political stands could result in "unpleasant consequences" after 1997. San's article drew a flurry of responses charging him with intimidation.

Hong Kong's Baptists, traditionally cautious about politics, have kept a low profile, avoiding united statements about 1997. But single voices such as Carver Yu, head of the religion and philosophy department at Hong Kong Baptist College, have spoken out. Yu believes Christians must take a much more active role in the political arena -- both as individuals and as a group -- to guard their future religious freedom.

Individual citizenship is fine, replies Baptist College President Daniel Tse, who is himself an influential member of the Hong Kong government's Legislative Council. But he believes group action poses significant hazards to the church's spiritual health.

"I personally am very heavily involved in Hong Kong local politics but I don't get my church involved in it," says Tse. "I can only represent myself."

Tse thinks Hong Kong Christians have more than enough to do in renewing themselves and evangelizing the 90 percent of the population that is not Christian. "Many church leaders have left Hong Kong and that is a very sad thing," he observes. "If our churches are not strong spiritually, no matter how good the future is we will not exert our influence as the light and salt of the world. I think we are very weak at the moment."

Baptist convention leader Chan is more upbeat about church strength. He believes the 30,000 Baptists in Hong Kong can reach their ambitious goal of starting 100 churches within 10 years (which would more than double the current total) by focusing on the legion of huge, self-contained housing estates and residential high-rises mushrooming all over Hong Kong. He also says missionaries can have a "great role" in the future through consulting, teaching and helping Hong Kong Baptists start churches.

Southern Baptist missionaries hope and plan to have a future in Hong Kong. According to East Asia director James and Hong Kong mission administrator Gerald Hale, the best way to build the future is to build strong relationships now — through effective service to Hong Kong and its Christians.

And missionaries, both men believe, must spend more and more time with the grassroots believers who are sure to stay in Hong Kong for the long haul.

Says Hale: "Wouldn't it be a shame to work here 10 years and realize all the people you worked with are in Australia, Canada and the United States?"

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

FBI Agent Leads  
Recreation Sessions

By Terri Lackey

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)—Steve Tidwell claims people are constantly trying to get at his wallet. And he acknowledges when they ask him to open it, he usually complies.

What's Tidwell got tucked into the folds of his wallet? A shiny, gold badge signifying his employment with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Tidwell, who is based in Gamrills, Md., and works for the federal narcotics violations department — specifically cocaine trafficking — taught several seminars during church recreation week at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in early June.

Frank Hart (Pogo) Smith, program design and marketing specialist in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department, described Tidwell, a former youth minister, as "multi-talented. I met Steve Tidwell 15 years ago when he was a youth minister," Smith said. "He is now probably the most well-rounded and talented layperson I know. He works great with youth. The kids just love him," Smith said.

At Ridgecrest, Tidwell taught adults how to lead camps, overnight retreats and games as well as conducting a daily Bible study session with the youth attending church recreation week.

At home Tidwell is youth Sunday school director at Heritage Baptist Church, Annapolis, Md.

After graduating from Howard Payne Baptist University, Brownwood, Texas, Tidwell took some courses at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

He served as a youth and recreation minister for awhile, but "really felt strongly God was calling me into law enforcement."

He then joined the Richland, Texas, police force where he stayed for over nine years.

"I started as a patrolman, then I went to the S.W.A.T. team for a while, and finally I became a sergeant over a narcotics unit," said the self-described T-shirt fanatic.

Tidwell has chalked up some interesting experiences as an FBI agent, although he readily admits the life of a secret agent is not always abuzz with dangerous activity.

While his career has led him away from professional youth ministry, Tidwell continues to lead church recreation conferences and write for Church Recreation magazine.

Just as Tidwell is sworn to uphold the law and the good name of the FBI, he is also committed to upholding Christianity.

He considers himself an agent for a higher cause.

"I still feel very strongly about youth ministry. I really love kids."

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