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Fuller Will Suggest
Course In September

By Dan Martin

ROANOKE, Va. (BP)--Charles Fuller said he will offer "suggestions" of ways in which the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee will carry out its extended assignment when the SBC Executive Committee meets Sept. 21-23.

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., was chairman of the 22-member group created at the 1985 annual meeting of the SBC and charged with discovering the sources of the controversy in the 14.6-million-member denomination and making findings and recommendations. It made its final report to the 1987 annual meeting, but asked for continuation of up to three years to monitor responses to the recommendations.

Fuller told Baptist Press two of the committee's recommendations "are most at issue. One is Recommendation Five, wherein we called on denominational agencies to build their professional staffs in the future from persons who reflect the dominant theological convictions of Southern Baptists at large. The other is Recommendation Ten, which extended the Peace Committee for the purpose of following up on the recommendations for not more than three years," he said.

Recommendation Ten continues the 22-member Peace Committee "to serve for up to, but not to exceed, three years for the purpose of observing the response of all agencies, officers and other participants to the recommendations ... in an effort to encourage compliance and foster harmonious working relationships among all segments of our Baptist family."

Fuller told Baptist Press: "Right now, my feelings are not dissimilar to how I felt after the Peace Committee was created in 1985. Then, I did not want to try to meet quickly, immediately after the convention. I wanted to let some things settle down. We did not meet until August of 1985.

"Now, I think it is best to give the convention a little more time to get some things behind us before we start trying to follow up.

"What I have to think through is how we will communicate with the agencies and how they will communicate with us, what forum we will use and how they will report."

Fuller added the Peace Committee will have only one meeting, probably in the spring. "One of the seminaries (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) has only one trustee meeting per year and that will be in April. It would be foolish for us to have a meeting before all of the trustees have met."

He added he has written to members of the Peace Committee outlining his plan to announce suggested procedures in September, and also will write chief executive officers of all 20 national agencies a similar message.

"I plan to offer some proposals, some suggested approaches. I do not want to presume I will be the one to decide all of the things necessary for the continuation, but I will offer some suggestions," he said.

Fuller commented on the continuation of the Peace Committee: "We are aware that continuation of the committee -- or even the creation of a new committee -- has the risk of being an unbaptistic procedure. I have my own discomfort with the idea. But, we felt our task was to promote reconciliation, and we were the best group to handle the follow up because creation of a new group could have created another issue of contention by passing that responsibility on to the Executive Committee."

He said the procedures which have been in place since the beginning remain in place. "We know we report to the Executive Committee and to the convention in session. That procedure of accountability remains in place. We also were instructed to honor the trustee process, and that likewise will be honored, as it has been from the beginning."

Fuller also commented on Recommendation Five, which deals with theological issues. Part of the recommendation is that "trustees determine the theological positions of the seminary administrators and faculty members ..." and another part calls on "institutions ... in the future to build their professional staffs and faculties from those who clearly reflect ... (the) dominant convictions and beliefs held by Southern Baptists at large."

The chairman said: "Some people have been under the impression the recommendation is aimed at the seminaries alone. That is not true. It is an across-the-board recommendation. I know that sitting in the meetings and presiding over the committee, no one thought the recommendation was aimed only at the seminary presidents or faculty."

"I am aware the seminaries have been at the eye of the storm, and there is an obvious application to them, but we did not singularize on the seminaries. The recommendation is directed at all of the agencies."

The report, he added, is aimed at the future and not directed at the past. "The thrust of the report is to the future, and the wording is very specific that the Peace Committee calls upon agencies, in the future, to build their professional staffs from people whose position on doctrinal matters is in keeping with the positions of Southern Baptists at large."

He said the committee did not intend a list of "examples" to be a "checklist" by which current or future staff members would be tested or interrogated.

"Members of the Peace Committee understand the fear of creedalism and the impropriety of theological checklists," he said. "We took great pains to address those fears in the wording of our report. We used the four items in the findings section with great care, and said they reflect what we think most Southern Baptists believe about the Baptist Faith and Message Statement on Scripture."

"We listed those four things as 'examples.' However, in listing examples, we were convinced that the time had come, if we were to progress toward peace, where we had to give an explanation of the Baptist Faith and Message Statement on Scripture," he said.

The report section on theological findings indicates the Peace Committee "found that most Southern Baptists see 'truth without any mixture of error for its matter,' as meaning, for example, that

"(1) They believe in direct creation of mankind and therefore they believe Adam and Eve were real persons. (2) They believe the named authors did indeed write the biblical books attributed to them by those books. (3) They believe the miracles described in Scripture did indeed occur as supernatural events in history. (4) They believe that the historical narratives given by biblical authors are indeed accurate and reliable as given by those authors."

In the interview with Baptist Press Fuller also:

-- Declined comment on recent remarks by Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis which seem to indicate the report will be applied to current as well as future staff members.

"I have not seen his (Lewis') remarks and am unfamiliar with what he said. If I had a copy of the remarks before me, I am not sure it would appropriate for me to respond since Dr. Lewis is responsible for the agency which he leads and he must work with his own trustees."

Fuller reiterated, however, that the thrust of the Peace Committee report is toward the future and not the past.

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-- Said he assumes the procedures which have governed the Peace Committee from the beginning "will stay intact. The committee did not specifically deal with some of those things, but I assume the rules will remain the same."

That procedure would include the Executive Committee naming an replacement for W. Winfred Moore of Amarillo, Texas, who resigned following the committee's report, in disagreement with the continuation of the group. Previously, the Executive Committee named a replacement for a committee member who resigned.

Funding will remain the same, equally shared by all agencies.

Committee policies which name Fuller as chief spokesman and encourage members to protect the confidentiality of committee discussions will remain in place, he said.

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Fuller Expresses Gratitude
For Family, Church Support

By Jim Lowry

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Charles Fuller speaks with fervent sincerity as he describes the sensitive, spiritual support of his wife, Pat, during the last two years he has served as chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee.

He reflects pride and gratitude for his church family of 25 years, First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., who literally loaned their pastor to the denomination two years ago. They then undergirded him with prayer and understanding while moving forward with their mission of reaching people for Christ.

As the preacher for the Bible Preaching Administration Conference at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center, Fuller called with a special urgency for Bible preaching, forgiveness, compassion and understanding.

About every six weeks since the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas, Fuller has left his church family to lead a planned confrontation in search of peace for the denomination he has served extensively, including many other responsibilities before the Peace Committee.

With the pastor away so much, the church could have marked time while waiting for the return of their leader. That has not been the case.

In fact, with an average Sunday school attendance of 1,600, the church topped the 2,000 mark three times in the last year and began having two Sunday schools as part of a long-range growth strategy.

Responding to the urging of their pastor to lead their state convention in mission giving, the 112-year-old church gave \$90,000 to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and more than \$20,000 to the Annie Armstrong Offering for home missions last year.

Fuller proudly reports there are 13 people from the church family who are serving on mission fields or attending seminaries preparing for mission service.

He credits the continued progress to the longevity of the church staff and what he calls "familyism."

He said his confidence in the 10-member staff and the sense of family among staff members lends itself to sharing ministry and stepping into the gap when one person is away.

Every time he returned from a Peace Committee meeting, Fuller said the first question he always heard was, "How are you?" not "How was the meeting?" or "What progress was made?"

Similar family concerns have been shared by many Southern Baptists about the work of the Peace Committee since its inception, Fuller believes.

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"I was greatly bouyed by letters from pastors and lay people who always concluded with a promise of prayer," he said. "People I don't know in places I've not been took the time to ask questions and pledge prayer support for our work.

"Throughout the controversy, people have been much more aware of the exchange of statements made in the heat of controversy," Fuller explained. "But there is something to be said for the generous, thoughtful people, who though caught up in dismay and restlessness, didn't lose touch with the capacity for prayer.

"I know documents and reports are called for," he continued, "but the hope I hold for Southern Baptists rests more in the spirit and attitude of Southern Baptists.

"I believe we have been in a painful period and I sense that a painful period still surrounds us," he said.

"However, if we cannot learn to live with diversity and go about dealing with problems, we will have forfeited our witness opportunity to a lost world," Fuller warned.

"In the course of two years in the Peace Committee, diversity notwithstanding, an enormous amount of mutual respect was reached," he said. "All of the sharp differences were not resolved, but caring relationships were developed within the committee even with the sharp differences.

"I heard committee members say we have become family," he continued. "When you come to know people, even though sharp theological and political differences exist, it doesn't eliminate the capacity to be concerned, caring and have relationships you can enjoy. That says something to the denomination.

"Unfortunately, you can't lock 14 million people in a room for two years," Fuller said, tongue in cheek. "But if you could, some of the same things would happen because they did with 22 people.

"My great hope lies in the long view," he said. "I would like to call upon Southern Baptists to continue to pray, but to pray for a spirit among us neither given to pouting or gloating.

"I think one of the great obstacles we have now is to deal with each other without displays of arrogance or defensiveness," he continued.

Of his continued role in leading the Peace Committee, Fuller said, "I feel the strong leadership of the Lord to cultivate a spirit of generosity and patience, because I think that is the contribution I want to make."

Throughout the process, Fuller has not thought of himself as a neutral leader of the committee, but as evenhanded in dealing with opinions from both sides.

He said Southern Baptists do not have to ride the fence, but they must listen to others as they maintain their convictions.

"You have to have the courage of your own convictions, not someone else's convictions," he added.

The spirit of grace in diversity, without judgment, could give Southern Baptists the unity which has fragmented their ranks for nine years, Fuller emphasized.

Despite the intensity of the last two years, Fuller said he would accept the assignment again.

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

2 Southern Baptists
To Meet With Pope

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE (BP)--Two Southern Baptist leaders will meet with Pope John Paul II when the Roman Catholic pontiff visits the United States this fall.

Harold C. Bennett of Nashville and Carolyn Weatherford of Birmingham, Ala., will join a small group of U.S. Protestant leaders who will meet privately with the pope Sept. 11 in Columbia, S.C. Bennett is president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, and Weatherford is executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union.

The pope will greet each leader individually during the meeting, to be held during the afternoon at the home of University of South Carolina President James B. Holderman. Twenty-four non-Catholic leaders have been invited to participate in the private meeting.

In addition to the individual greetings, that meeting will include presentation of a paper produced by the Americans on the state of Christianity in the United States, a response by the pope and time for discussion.

Following will be a public service of Christian witness in the university's 70,000-seat Williams-Brice Stadium. The service will not be a Mass, but will focus on the family.

"I am pleased Southern Baptists will be represented in the small meeting with Pope John Paul II," Bennett said. "It will afford me the opportunity to express a personal welcome to one of the religious leaders of the world.

"In my capacity as president and treasurer of the Executive Committee, I will convey to Pope John Paul II a personal greeting on behalf of the largest non-Catholic group in the United States," he added.

Of the private meeting, Bennett said he hopes to share with the pope and other religious leaders "something of the life and work of Southern Baptists."

Weatherford added: "I have accepted the invitation and am delighted to be included in the dialogue. Southern Baptists have work in so many countries where Roman Catholics are in a missions relationship with us. We need to be talking with each other more."

She also expressed pleasure that the group includes a woman. "Simply because there are a lot of women who are Roman Catholic, I think the pope is wise to include a woman in the discussion," she said. "If he is seeking to understand religious life in the United States, he certainly needs to include the perspective of women."

Southern Baptist evangelist Billy Graham has been invited to participate in the meeting, but a spokesperson in his Montreat, N.C., office confirmed he will be out of the country in September and unable to attend.

SBC President Adrian P. Rogers of Memphis, Tenn., also has confirmed he will not participate. During a press conference shortly after his re-election to the presidency in June, Rogers declined to give his reasons for not meeting with the pope, saying "they are best not expressed in public media."

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House Committee Votes To
Continue Postal Subsidy

By Eric Fox

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--The House Appropriations Committee has voted to maintain current levels of postal rates for non-profit mailers through fiscal year 1988.

The committee passed an amendment to the Postal Service Appropriation Act of 1988 to appropriate \$556.5 million in federal funds to subsidize reduced postal rates for non-profit publications, including Baptist state newspapers and some church newsletters, through September 1988.

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In previous years, Congress has approved an annual revenue foregone appropriation to subsidize the difference between what the Postal Service would receive at full unreduced rates and what it actually receives at the reduced rates. However, the Reagan administration repeatedly has called for the elimination of the subsidy and the House Treasury, Postal Service and General Government Subcommittee voted in June to do away with the revenue foregone.

Rep. Edward R. Roybal, D-Calif., subcommittee chairman, proposed the amendment to restore the revenue foregone after a recently passed House budget resolution raised the Appropriations Committee's ceiling and provided an additional allocation.

A Postal Service spokesman said postal rates for non-profit publications will remain the same until the next general rate increase, which likely will take place next summer.

If approved by the full House, the appropriations bill will go to the Senate for action.

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Houston Baptist Receives
Sun Exploration Gift

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HOUSTON (BP)--Houston Baptist University has received a gift of real estate from Sun Exploration and Production Company valued at more than \$1 million, announced HBU President E.D. Hodo.

The proceeds of the gift will be applied to the William H. Hinton College of Education and Library Tower Campaign and will qualify for the current matching gift program.

An operational unit of Sun Company, Inc. of Dallas, Sun Exploration and Production Company explores, produces and markets oil and gas in the United States and outside North America.

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