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FMB Says Its Policies In Line With Peace Plan

By Bob Stanley

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in August pledged to remain committed to fulfilling the denomination's mission goals in a manner that is "biblically sound, evangelistically focused, and faithful to our Baptist heritage and conviction."

A resolution introduced by Mark Corts of Winston-Salem, N.C., affirmed the work of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee and acknowledged the positive affirmation the committee has given the board's work.

The action was taken after FMB President R. Keith Parks had explained in the four-day meeting that he sees no need to change the board's procedures for missionary or staff appointments as a result of the Peace Committee's report to the convention in June.

The board's staff and officers have taken the Peace Committee's report seriously and reviewed it carefully, Parks said. "In light of the Peace Committee's on-the-spot evaluation of how we are doing things and the fact that the committee itself gave us affirmation, I would simply report to you that I think we're in good shape, and the Peace Committee report does not require any action from this board," he said.

The Peace Committee, appointed in 1985 to discover sources of the controversy in the 14.6-million-member denomination and make recommendations for reconciliation, called upon Southern Baptist institutions to build professional staff and faculties from people who clearly reflect the dominant theological position of Southern Baptists at large, as reflected in the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963.

Parks noted that as the Peace Committee did its work, a subcommittee visited the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va. After its visit it reported, "You're doing a much better job than we had any awareness you were doing." He said no recommendations were made regarding the processes the board has followed in the appointment of missionaries and the selection of staff.

For many years, the board has had each missionary candidate write out a doctrinal statement, Parks said. Since 1963 there also has been the specific request, "Is your doctrinal position in agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message Statement, and if not, please explain why not."

"And occasionally," he added, "there is a jot or a tittle that some missionary will want to argue about. But that is the basic standard we have followed. I think our position is stronger than simply saying, 'Do you agree with the Baptist Faith and Message?' or 'Would you sign this statement?' Because we go well beyond that in requesting them to verbalize personally what they believe."

All these statements are carefully reviewed, and the missionaries appointed represent what has been accepted as the Southern Baptist doctrinal position, Parks noted.

Through the years, the doctrinal beliefs of a few missionaries already under appointment have been questioned, he said. In a couple of instances, he added, the conclusion has been the missionaries' beliefs no longer represented that of Southern Baptists, and they have resigned.

Missionaries and staff come under intense scrutiny as they speak at churches, associations and conventions and there are "lots of antennas out there checking us out," Parks said. But every time a question is raised by someone, a thorough investigation is made, and "I can report to you without any hesitation that your missionaries and staff are sound, solid, Bible-believing Southern Baptists," he noted.

The trustee meeting concentrated on dialogue sessions, with business held to a minimum. The board appointed 66 new missionaries, reappointed two and employed two for Cooperative Services International, the entity through which Southern Baptists can respond to requests from countries where missionaries cannot work. These additions bring the total force to 3,827.

One of the new couples will serve on the southern Pacific island of New Caledonia, the denomination's 111th mission field. The new personnel bring to 314 the number approved so far this year.

The board also moved ahead with steps to seek a vice president for communications. Nannie Lou Crofts of Phoenix, Ariz., chairman of the communications and public relations committee, said after a joint meeting with the strategy committee, any input on qualifications for this vice president or suggestions of names to be considered should be submitted to Parks by Sept. 1. Parks has indicated he hopes to nominate the vice president before the end of the year.

For the past year and a half, FMB Executive Vice President Bill O'Brien also has headed the communications and public relations office. An associate vice president and two assistant vice presidents have helped handle administrative detail. But in May the board's transition committee, as part of the recent reorganization, recommended the need for a separate vice president be studied.

In the dialogues, board trustees took another look at their policy limiting career missionaries to those who have not been divorced but made no recommendation for change. They also heard reports by two visiting Chinese pastors and discussed Baptist polity with James Sullivan, retired head of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Discussion of the divorce policy stemmed from questions raised at the board's April meeting. Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for mission management and personnel, pointed out that from its beginning in 1845, the board has not appointed divorced people as missionaries. The board's present policy statement on divorce, approved in 1980, reaffirms the long-standing policy for career missionaries and other commissioned categories of service. A few exceptions have been made for Mission Service Corp personnel based on careful study of individual circumstances and the fields where they would be serving, Spurgeon said.

In addition to the biblical concerns about divorce, the policy notes there are distinctive elements overseas that justify great concern in dealing with the question. These include the need for a clear presentation of the Christian ideal in marriage, convictions among national Christians in other countries and stress factors overseas that require missionaries to be unusually strong in personal qualities, emotional maturity and family life.

Two trustees expressed discomfort with the board's policy, one urging that each case be studied individually. But most trustees who spoke were against relaxation of the present policy, and no changes were recommended.

Chinese pastors Shi Qi Gui and Lei Tong, completing a four-week, nine-city preaching tour of the United States, received Bible concordances as gifts from the board. The pastors said they had felt a heart bond with Christians they had met in this country but were concerned about reports that many Southern Baptists did not attend worship services.

"God has blessed America," Shi said. He noted that for more than 100 years Americans have had no war on their own soil and said Christians here should remember God's grace and seek diligently to share the gospel in their own land.

Sullivan, author of the best-selling book, "Baptist Polity As I See It," previewed a manual the orientation committee has asked him to prepare to help new board members move more quickly into their responsibilities.

A good organization, he said, is like good digestion: "If it's functioning, you aren't aware of it. But if not, you aren't aware of anything else."

Tracing the historic streams that have come together to form Southern Baptist life, he predicted the denomination's "greatest history is yet to be written. All of us believe in the Bible and in evangelism. Let's not be afraid of each other." He urged unity in the task of winning the world for Christ.

Brotherhood, Mission Boards
Join In Japanese Renewal Retreat By Celeste Pennington

AMAGI, Japan (BP)--The lights were dimmed. Families huddled in small clumps throughout the auditorium in Amagi, Japan.

As they waited in the darkness, Cameron Byler, director of Baptist Men, for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, encouraged each family member -- mother, father, teenager and child -- to speak to each person in his or her circle. Said Byler: "Finish this sentence: I love you because. ..."

As Byler grabbed the hands of his own wife and began to speak, a murmur of voices followed.

"I love you because you have always been special to me -- from the moment you were born. ..."

"I love you even though I have never told you -- you are my sister -- and my very best friend. ..."

"I know I don't always make things easy for the family. I love you because you have shown me tough love and soft love. ..."

"Some daddies are up here. And some daddies are down here. I love you because you are way above all the rest. You're the best daddy any girl could have. ..."

By the close of the service, some were holding hands, praying for one another. Some were hugging. Some laughed nervously and brushed back tears.

About 90 people attended the retreat. Most were English-speaking families of pastors, missionaries and church leaders gathered for the final session of the renewal retreat in the Baptist assembly ground on a mountainous peninsula less than 100 miles southeast of Tokyo. They journeyed from across Japan for a time of relaxation and Christian fellowship.

Thirteen of the group were team members, including three teenagers and a youth worker, who paid their ways from the United States to lead the renewal in Japan.

They met in small groups to discuss how God was working in their lives and to seek his direction. Periodically they returned to the main assembly to share highlights of their small-group interaction, sing praises and pray.

This was one of the first opportunities for Baptists in Japan to experience church renewal, jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. They came at the invitation of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and Charles Barham, pastor of Kobe International Baptist Church.

"I think English-speaking people in Japan are just like those in America," said Barham. "They need affirmation and encouragement. And they need to realize that it is not just the person who is ordained, but each person in the church is responsible for ministry."

Byler also said perhaps they filled a special need related to cultural isolation experienced by many Americans doing business and living in Japan.

In Japan Christians are a minority. Often they do not read or speak Japanese. They miss the support of extended family and friends.

Barham agreed: "They are strange people in a strange world. When they leave the military base, they step into another culture. Those who do business here constantly are functioning in another culture. Because of the isolation here, people begin to feel like they are not coping as well as everyone else.

"It took courage on the part of the team members to talk about their individual needs, hurts and struggles. It built a real closeness between them and the people from Japan."

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As a result, Barham added, "Our people began to see that they weren't the only ones struggling with living out their Christianity."

One woman decided to start a Bible study for women. Another made a commitment to begin a ministry for those who, like herself, have been raped.

"One man already had felt called to preach," said Barham. "Here he began to see how God could use him in ministry, now. Another fellow, I think, was having trouble in his marriage. On that night of personal commitment, he determined to turn his life over to the Lord."

Byler, too, said he feels good about the results: "Things jelled. Everybody had a good time. A Japanese girl came to the Lord. That was the highlight."

And, he added, people feeling socially disconnected experienced a new closeness: "Sometimes family relationships become routine. We take them for granted."

"On that last night, everybody participated: parents, children, young people. I was very pleased the way it went. There was a lot of joy, a lot of crying, a heartfelt moment as families shared, 'I love you because....'"

"The folks in Japan were tremendously appreciative of the team that came," concluded Barham. "I believe this renewal will have a lasting effect."

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Tracts Used To Minister
In Variety Of Settings

By Charles Willis

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NASHVILLE (BP)--The stereotype of tracts as something to distribute on a street corner is fading as Southern Baptists and other Christians are thoughtfully and creatively providing brief Christian messages in unusual settings.

Bob Stout, for instance, set out to reach avid deer hunters with the gospel message last fall. As a Southern Baptist area missionary in Illinois, Stout took some 10,000 tracts to Golconda, Ill., for the annual deer hunting festival.

He arranged for a booth in the large tent set up for concerts, pageants and worship services. He displayed literature produced by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and offered tracts to people leaving the evening events.

Stout said he and volunteer workers purposely left tracts that had been dropped on the ground for a crew of prisoners to retrieve each morning. "We watched the prisoners picking up litter and saw some of them look at the tracts and quietly slip them into their pockets," he recalled.

In New Port Richey, Fla., Merl Faupel uses a tract titled "When We are Bereaved" as an insert in the memorial book he presents to families who patronize his funeral home. A member of First Baptist Church of New Port Richey, Faupel serves families who represent a variety of faiths, but said for five years he has shared a message of Christian hope when he feels the situation is appropriate.

Wilma Rankin, mission action director for the Galveston (Texas) Baptist Association coordinates a project that provides food to people seeking free medical treatment at John Sealy Hospital. People who visit the clinic dare not give up their places in line, she said, even for lunch. So churches in the association sign up to provide sack lunches on specified days.

Betty Summers, Woman's Missionary Union director at First Baptist Church of Texas City, said her church contributes at least 100 lunches once a month, enclosing the tract "I'd Like You to Meet My Friend."

Denton Bassett, a Southern Baptist chaplain with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said there is no way to know how many people find meaning in the caring message they find placed alongside a sandwich, but he insisted, "We have to believe they do."

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In Crane, Mo., population 1,185, some 13,000 people crowd the town each year for the annual Broiler Festival, an event that goes back to a time when poultry was a big business there.

Frank Arnall, pastor of First Baptist Church, said having a rack of the full-color Choice Creations Tracts available at the church's booth caused some people to ask, "How much are those?" A look of surprise almost always is the response when church members say, "They're free for the taking," he reported.

Oral surgeon Bruce Robert Trefz of Gastonia, N.C., has been providing tracts to his patients for more than five years. A member of Gastonia's Parkwood Baptist Church, Trefz offers a ready testimony in person, but uses tracts "when they are particularly appropriate to initiate discussions to help meet needs."

Southern Baptist-produced tracts are being used by Christians of other denominations as well.

Chimer Durham, a Methodist, and his brother Bill, a Presbyterian, are the owners of Durham's Restaurant in Wytheville, Va. Both felt they should be "doing something as a witness," Chimer Durham said. After mentioning their interest to Wesley Huff, pastor of Wytheville Baptist Church, the Durham brothers soon were introduced to the Sunday School Board's Choice Creations Tracts.

"People take the tracts by the handful," he added. "We want them to take whatever seems to suit their interest or concern."

Photographer Dave Bosse of Valdosta, Ga., began giving tracts to soon-to-be brides in 1981 because he "had done a number of weddings and, in some cases, a year later they had broken up." Bosse began including an appropriate tract along with wedding planning materials.

Last year, nearly 7 million tracts of more than 100 titles produced by the board's church media library department were shipped to individuals, churches and other groups. An additional eight titles produced by the board's church training department sold more than one-half million copies in 1985-86.

"Increasing numbers of persons are making inquiries about tracts in specific subject areas," said Mancil Ezell, director of the board's church media library department. "We are observing a definite trend toward giving tracts matched to individual circumstances, taking resources outside the walls of the church to meet needs where people work and live."

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