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Improve Relationships,
Bennett Exhorts Pope

By Marv Knox

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--The cause of Christ would be improved if Roman Catholics would seek to understand Southern Baptist missionaries, a Southern Baptist leader told the pope Sept. 11.

Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, and Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the convention's Woman's Missionary Union, were among 27 non-Catholic U.S. religious leaders who met with Pope John Paul II on the campus of the University of South Carolina.

Following the presentation of papers by the non-Catholics and the pope, Bennett was one of four Americans to address the pontiff.

"One of the pope's major points had to do with Christian unity," Bennett said. "I prefaced what I said by noting the Roman Catholic Church is promoting a program of outreach, and I paralleled that with a report on Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust -- our effort to share the gospel with the whole world by the year 2000.

"I told him: Southern Baptists have mission work in 111 countries of the world. In some of these countries, there is a need for better relations between Roman Catholics and our own missionaries. I feel this would give a much more positive witness for Christ if relationships could be improved."

The pope did not get to respond to verbal comments presented to him, Bennett said.

Both Bennett and Weatherford have been criticized by some Southern Baptists who have said they should not grant an audience with the Catholic leader. But both said they had specific reasons for participating in the gathering.

"My invitation came with no mention of being Southern Baptist," said Weatherford. "It came to me as a leader of a women's missions organization. In fact, I was presented to the pope as executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, with no mention of the Southern Baptist connection. I went as a representative leader, not as a representative voice for Southern Baptists or WMU members."

Only two of the 27 American leaders were women, Weatherford said, adding someone noted that fact to the pontiff. "He made that point during a discussion of the role of women in religious life today, and he emphasized the need for all religious groups to address that issue," she said.

Bennett told Baptist Press that five reasons compelled him to participate:

-- "A Southern Baptist should be present for such a meeting and to talk about the state of Christian churches in the United States, since the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest non-Catholic denomination in America.

-- "Article 14 of the Baptist Faith and Message is on cooperation between Christian denominations. I interpret the Baptist Faith and Message as having a friendly spirit toward other religious groups.

-- "I believe it was important for the pope to be told that we have missionaries in 111 countries and that he be told about the need for improved relations between Roman Catholics and our missionaries.

-- "Prior to the meeting, I talked with R. Keith Parks (president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board) and asked if my participation would hurt Southern Baptist foreign mission work. His response was that it would not. I also asked if my participation could be helpful to our mission efforts. He said that it would -- that it's always good to build relationships and that this could help our missionaries.

-- "It is important for me to develop a better understanding of the Roman Catholic Church, which this meeting afforded."

Weatherford indicated she placed the pope's visit and her participation in perspective: "As far as I was concerned, the pope is just another human being -- no more, no less. I was awed by the fact that he is a world leader of influence, not because I worship or reverence him."

The pontiff's trip to the Deep South or the Bible Belt was "no accident," she added. "I believe Southern Baptists were included because he recognizes that we are the second-largest religious group in the United States," she explained.

And although the interchange between the pope and the Americans did include "points of conversation" between Catholics and non-Catholics, the non-Catholics did not capitulate to the Catholic Church, Weatherford added.

"We did point out to the pope that ecumenicity, for us, could not mean becoming part of the Roman Catholic Church," she said. "We emphasized that we must remain true to our own politics and policies."

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Housing Reservations
Due For San Antonio

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9/18/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--People who plan to attend the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, next summer must make their housing requests Oct. 1, announced Convention Manager Tim A. Hedquist.

The annual meeting will be held in San Antonio June 14-16. The SBC is holding 4,000 downtown hotel rooms for Southern Baptist messengers, said Hedquist, vice president for business and finance of the SBC Executive Committee.

"If a person wants a chance for a room, he or she must mail the housing request Oct. 1," he added. "It doesn't matter what time of day the request is mailed; all requests will be opened by the date of postmark."

Housing request forms -- complete with instructions, room rates and a map of downtown San Antonio -- are available from state Baptist convention executive directors, he said. A copy of the request form and all information is printed in the September issue of The Baptist Program, a magazine published by the Executive Committee.

"The housing assignment process is conducted by the San Antonio Housing Bureau -- people who are not Southern Baptist and who do not know who anyone (in the SBC) is," Hedquist noted.

Housing request forms postmarked prior to Oct. 1 will be processed by the housing bureau after those postmarked Oct. 1 or Oct. 2, he said. History indicates all hotels listed on the form will be filled by individuals who mail forms those two days. Hedquist warned Oct. 1 postmarks probably will exhaust all 4,000 rooms.

Individuals cannot reserve blocks of rooms through the housing bureau, he said. A person or group can send multiple forms in the same envelope, but when that envelope is opened, each form will be treated individually. Requests in the same envelope are not guaranteed to be in the same hotel or even to all be assigned to rooms, he added. Duplicate forms will not be processed.

Once the housing bureau's rooms are assigned, the unassigned requests will be returned to the Executive Committee, he said. Executive Committee staff members will send the requestors information about other San Antonio hotels and travel agents who can help the people reserve rooms in the city.

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Individuals who do not want to be processed through the housing bureau may write the Executive Committee and receive the names and telephone numbers of hotels not included in the housing bureau block. The Executive Committee address is 901 Commerce St., Nashville, Tenn. 37203.

Also, mobile handicapped people who have written verification of their handicap may contact the Executive Committee before Oct. 1 to get housing reservations immediately adjacent to the convention center, he said. Individuals with special medical needs also may contact the Executive Committee for pertinent information.

San Antonio has about 13,000 hotel rooms and one of the highest concentrations of rooms near the convention center of any city where the SBC annual meeting convenes, Hedquist said. Because of that high concentration of nearby rooms and local ground transportation, a special shuttle for SBC messengers will not be offered during the annual meeting next summer.

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Baker Keeps Post
With 15-15 Vote

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NASHVILLE (BP)--An attempt by conservatives to dismiss N. Larry Baker as executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission failed by a 15-15 vote Sept. 15.

Joe Atchison, director of missions for Benton Baptist Association from Rogers, Ark., presented the motion to dismiss Baker immediately. The measure also would have empowered the newly elected commission chairman to appoint a search committee and name an interim director.

The call for Baker's dismissal echoed charges brought against him when commissioners voted 16-13 to hire him Jan. 15 -- displeasure with his positions on abortion, capital punishment and women in ministry, as well as displeasure with the composition of the search committee that recommended him.

During the January meeting, Baker cited four cases where he believes abortion "may be allowed as an exception" -- threat to the life of the mother, rape, incest and "perhaps in the case where traumatic and severe deformity to the fetus is involved."

He also expressed his beliefs that "God calls women to serve him in ministry as he calls men to serve him in ministry" and "capital punishment runs counter to the Christian ethic and the Christian gospel."

Several commissioners affirmed Baker and the progress the commission has made under his leadership, but they said he should be terminated because of the views he expressed in January.

Baker is doing "meritorious work," but the effort is marred by the "inconsistency between his expressed beliefs and his action," said Rudolph Yakym, a stockbroker from South Bend, Ind., who later was elected CLC secretary. "His (Baker's) stated positions are not what I would seek in a man ... to continue to lead us."

"I love Dr. Baker as a man. We have shared personal burdens, but those burdens are not the issue," said Fred Lackey, pastor of First Baptist Church of Athens, Ala., and the new CLC chairman. "I cannot support Dr. Baker on abortion, capital punishment and women in the pastorate. I do disagree with the (selection) process, that the committee did not include a single conservative."

Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas, and chairman of the search committee that recommended Baker as executive, told commissioners: "One of the issues raised is that the selection process was flawed. It may have been, but if you are unhappy (with the process) I suggest you attack me (not Baker)."

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Wade, also immediate past chairman of the commission, pointed out another issue concerned conservatives' unwillingness to concede on the exceptions to abortion: "Your stubbornness in that position has condemned millions of babies yet unborn to die. If you fire him (Baker), you may think you have pleased 52-53-54-55 percent of Southern Baptists. But there are 45-46-47-48 percent of us who want to work on abortion, who are polarized if you are so rigid you will not let us help you."

Wade asked: "Do you really want to end 98 percent of the abortions in America, or do you want to win a political point and let millions of babies die?"

C. Nolan Phillips, pastor of University Baptist Church of Middletown, Ohio, said he differs with Baker's views on abortion and added, "You cannot carry the flag if you do not believe what the flag stands for."

George A. Strickland, director of missions of Nine Mile Baptist Association in Pinckneyville, Ill., warned commissioners that firing Baker could trigger acrimony in the divided Southern Baptist Convention. "I don't think you know what kind of thing you'll unleash out in the field if you fire this man," he said.

Ben Mitchell, pastor of Middle Valley Baptist Church of Hixson, Tenn., who described himself as a "rookie" attending his first meeting of the commission, said Baker's views on abortion, capital punishment and the role of women in the church are "at best theologically imprecise, at worst theologically incorrect."

Another commissioner, Curtis Caine, a medical doctor from Jackson, Miss., twice asked Baker to answer questions clarifying his previously stated views on the three controversial issues.

Both times Baker declined, the second time saying he would be willing to sit with the commissioner "eyeball to eyeball ... and tell you how my heart is shaped ... but I would not be making a statement in response to you."

Baker added: "What I have experienced on the part of some persons on this board is either inability or refusal to understand my word. What I've experienced on the part of some is an adversarial relationship which takes my words and uses them in a combative way ... to try and tack my hide to the wall. I would rather not have my words to you (Caine) used by people whose ears are unhearing and hearts are unresponsive."

Three trustees who said they had voted against Baker in January told commissioners they would vote to support Baker in the effort to dismiss him.

Larrey Noia, minister of music and school administrator at First Southern Baptist Church of Fountain Valley, Calif., said he voted against Baker in January, but since has judged the executive on performance. "I have seen no position come out of the Christian Life Commission (since January) I oppose," he said.

Jerry Berl Hopkins, pastor of Reidland Baptist Church of Paducah, Ky., also said he voted against Baker in January, but said he did not feel the dismissal effort is right. "It is against the spirit of Christ. Would you want this done to you in this manner?" he asked.

Coy Privette, CLC vice chairman and executive director of the Christian Action League of North Carolina in Raleigh, said: "I voted against Larry Baker, but I was wrong. I have asked the Lord to forgive me." He looked at Baker and added, "Now I am going to vote for you."

The attempt to dismiss Baker was set in motion by James Wood, pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Atlanta, who in the opening minutes of the meeting presented an alternate agenda that postponed committee meetings and called for a business session immediately following Baker's first report to commissioners.

Atchison's motion to dismiss Baker was followed by a series of parliamentary procedures. Chairman Lynn P. Clayton, editor of the Baptist Message, newjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, ruled the motion out of order because it would rescind Baker's previous election. "You cannot rescind an election," Clayton said, but his ruling was overridden by a simple majority vote.

In the voting, all 30 of the present commissioners cast ballots, including Clayton, who said he was going to "exercise his prerogative" as chairman to vote, and cited Robert's Rules of Order to support his decision. The only commissioner absent was Tom Boland, a banker from Chamblee, Ga., who had a schedule conflict.

Commissioners turned down an amendment by Cledith Campbell, pastor of Altizer Baptist Church in Huntington, W.Va., that would have given Baker until next March to prove himself. Campbell's motion called for commissioners to meet in special session to reconsider Baker's performance on issues related to abortion, capital punishment and women in ministry.

Prior to the vote on his dismissal, Baker told commissioners the past six months had been eventful, turbulent and productive. "The piece of work of which I am proudest during the past months is the commission's initiative on abortion," he said. "We have focused our moral agenda on the issue of abortion on a scope never seen before in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"One of the commissioners told me recently, 'We've done more on abortion in the past few months than the Southern Baptist Convention has done in 40 years.'"

Baker outlined new or expanded CLC program initiatives, including those related to abortion, AIDS, citizenship, pornography, world hunger and gambling, as well as expanded efforts in production, marketing and distribution of ethics resources.

"In the coming year, we as a commission have a remarkable opportunity," he said. "If we focus our attention and direct our energies, this can be our highest hour and our finest year."

Atchison, who had made the motion to dismiss Baker, later acknowledged he was disappointed with the outcome but said he would accept the vote and work with Baker: "I think there's a good spirit on our board, and we have been able to accomplish some things we had on our conservative agenda. ... We did give the staff some guidelines they never had before and thus accomplished what we would have had with a man with those conservative concerns."

Asked if Baker's tenure would be challenged next year, Atchison, new CLC vice chairman, said: "I have no idea; it's not in my mind at all. Probably that question will have to be answered in what we see this year. We've given him another year to give the leadership we feel Southern Baptists need in this place."

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(Contributing to this article were Dan Martin and Marv Knox of the Baptist Press central office, Tim Fields of the Christian Life Commission and Greg Warner of the Florida Baptist Witness, representing the Southern Baptist Press Association.)

Conservatives Sweep
CLC Officer Election

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9/18/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Conservatives swept the election of the new officers of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, turning down nominations of three persons who supported CLC Executive Director N. Larry Baker.

Elected were Fred Lackey, pastor of First Baptist Church of Athens, Ala., chairman; Joe Atchison, director of missions in Rogers, Ark., vice chairman, and Rudolph Yakym Jr., a stockbroker from South Bend, Ill., secretary.

All three of those elected were supporters of an attempt to dismiss Baker, who had been hired in January 1987, on a 16-13 vote. All three were nominated from the floor, also by persons who had supported the firing attempt.

The nominating committee of Don Blanton, an engineer from Bel Air, Md., Larrey Noia, a minister of music and school administrator from Fountain Valley, Calif., and Jerry Berl Hopkins, pastor of Reidland Baptist Church of Paducah, Ky., nominated three persons who opposed the effort to fire Baker. The members of the nominating committee also were on record supporting Baker.

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Nominated, but not elected, were Coy Privette, director of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, Raleigh, N.C., for chairman; Carl Garrett, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church of Overland Park, Kan., vice chairman, and Virginia Hendricks, a homemaker from Glorieta, N.M., chairman.

Privette, who had been vice chairman who by tradition moves up to the chairmanship, had told the commissioners he voted against Baker in January, but had made a mistake. He said he was supporting Baker against the ouster attempt. Garrett also was opposed to the dismissal effort, saying it was "not Baptistic."

While Hendricks did not speak during the debate over Baker's firing, she had been a member of the search committee which selected Baker for presentation in January.

While no mention was made of the positions commissioners had taken in reference to the effort to oust Baker by the nominators, one commissioner -- Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas, and chairman of the search committee which presented Baker -- did plea that the officers represent "the balance of the board" and urged the election of Garrett as vice chairman to "give him at least one (person) who had indicated support of him."

The commission, however, elected as officers three persons who vocally had supported the dismissal move.

Lackey had praised Baker, but noted he did not support the executive on abortion, capital punishment and women in the pastorate. Atchison had made the motion to dismiss Baker, and Yakym said Baker's "stated positions are not what I would seek in a man ... to continue to lead us."

Lackey was nominated by C. Nolan Phillips, pastor of University Baptist Church of Middletown, Ohio; Atchison was proposed by James Wood, pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church of Atlanta, and Yakym was proposed by Harry Lane, pastor of Eutawville (S.C.) Baptist Church.

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CLC Tightens
Abortion Rule

Baptist Press
9/18/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Abortion is justifiable only "when the developing child represents a clear and present danger to the physical life of the mother," Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission members declared during their annual meeting Sept. 16.

The abortion statement, part of a broader recommendation regarding sanctity of human life, was one of several measures commissioners approved in a move to regulate staff activities and programs of the ethics agency.

They also withdrew two pamphlets on the role of women and set guidelines for materials that will replace them; adopted a statement on AIDS; restructured the CLC budget to give greater priority to anti-abortion efforts; created a guideline giving commissioners greater editorial input on pamphlet series; asked for a study of the procedure of conducting business by telephone, including the election of staff members; and suggested a study of the feasibility of twice-yearly, rather than annual, meetings.

All the measures to regulate administrative procedure were passed the day following a motion to dismiss N. Larry Baker as executive director failed by a 15-15 vote. Most of the regulatory moves were approved by about a three-to-two margin.

The sanctity of human life statement -- which addresses both abortion and euthanasia -- declares, "Human life, from fertilization until natural death, is sacred and should be protected, not destroyed." It decries abortion, infanticide and "active" euthanasia.

The statement calls on staff: to give anti-abortion and anti-euthanasia concerns highest priority in budget and personnel assignments for at least the next two years, to assist the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in developing alternatives to abortion for women facing a problem pregnancy, to oppose infanticide and euthanasia and to refrain from releasing any materials produced by the commission that are not consistent with the policy statement.

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Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas, failed in an attempt to substitute a statement on abortion passed by a diverse group of Southern Baptists during a CLC-sponsored abortion consultation in June.

"The (June) statement from St. Louis goes beyond exceptions" to abortion, Wade said. "With this (St. Louis) guideline, I can talk and counsel with people and work towards alternatives to abortion. The St. Louis statement will help Southern Baptists. It is a beautiful statement." He said that since the St. Louis statement denounces abortion but does not mention exceptions for abortion, it provides an opportunity for broad support.

Gary Crum, a professor of health services at George Washington University in Washington, said the CLC policy statement contained in the recommendation is "more prophetic, more specific and more directive to the staff."

The motion on the role of women withdrew "Issues and Answers: Changing Roles of Women" and "Critical Issues: Women in Church and Society" from circulation. It also called for CLC staff to produce new materials on women's roles by September 1988. The new materials are to reflect the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention resolution titled "Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry."

That SBC resolution interprets Scripture as excluding women from pastoral leadership and says "God's delegated order of authority" includes "Christ as the head of man and man as the head of woman." It also states that "women are not in public worship to assume a role of authority over men lest confusion reign in the local church" and "to preserve a submission required because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic Fall."

Skeet Workman, homemaker from Lubbock, Texas, who originated the motion to withdraw the literature, said the pamphlet on changing roles of women contains inaccurate statements: "The pamphlet says the Equal Rights Amendment was designed to guarantee constitutionally that equal rights under the law would not be denied anyone because of sex, and that is false. The No. 1 reason of the women's rights movement was the passage of the ERA, which would lead to legalization of homosexuality, abortion and many other things"

Workman took issue with the pamphlet on women in church and society, particularly for its statement that some women have suffered discrimination in churches. "I think if this brochure were given to a young homemaker in a Southern Baptist church and she reads it, she will begin to get the idea that there is discrimination among us as Southern Baptists," she said.

Wade and Don Blanton, an engineer from Bel Air, Md., pleaded with commissioners not to base their actions on the 1984 resolution, noting resolutions are not binding on SBC institutions. "As Baptists, we are not governed by resolutions; we are governed by Scripture," Wade said.

Focusing on AIDS -- acquired immune deficiency syndrome -- commissioners adopted a statement that commended the staff "for their efforts to date in this regard" and urged increased energy in the development of materials on AIDS.

"We call upon the CLC staff to produce literature which sounds a clear call to sexual purity, not simply from health concerns, but because of biblical, ethical principles," their AIDS statement says. Previously, they passed a committee recommendation concerning development of new audiovisual and printed resources on AIDS.

Abortion re-surfaced during an administrative committee discussion of the 1987-88 CLC budget. That budget -- \$1,040,600, which includes SBC Cooperative Program income of \$795,100 and \$150,000 from the sale of ethics resources -- was approved. Internally, the administrative committee took \$20,000 from two general line item accounts to create a new line item account giving priority to initiatives on abortion and euthanasia.

In an unprecedented move, the CLC promotion committee asked for and received permission to review and respond to "future printed materials in pamphlet series" prior to their publication.

In other business, commissioners:

-- Approved a response to the SBC Peace Committee from the CLC executive director that confirms the executive director and professional staff of the commission have been and will continue to be committed to work within the framework of the Baptist Faith and Message Statement.

-- Authorized a Cooperative Program request of \$984,855 for 1988-89. The request includes a 5 percent price index adjustment and a special request of \$150,000 for establishing a CLC office in Washington. The establishment of a Washington moral concerns office was encouraged by an SBC Executive Committee fact-finding committee that studied the work of the Baptist Joint Committee.

-- Approved a request to the SBC for approval of a proposed change in the CLC program statement that would remove language requiring the agency to work through the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs when working on Christian moral concerns in Washington.

-- Voted to give the CLC Distinguished Service Award to Doug and Evelyn Knapp, missionaries to Tanzania, and to Samuel T. Currin, U.S. attorney for the eastern district of North Carolina and chairman of the SBC Public Affairs Committee.

The Knapps were cited for their 23 years of work in agricultural missions and race relations, as well as for the 14,409 baptisms during the 1986 church year in the remote Kyela District of Tanzania.

Currin was nominated for the award by Crum as an addition to the CLC executive committee's nomination of the Knapps. Crum cited Currin's active leadership in the fight against drugs and pornography.

-- Approved a statement commending President Reagan for his role in reducing the federal government's role in abortions.

-- Authorized annual seminars in Kansas City, Mo., for 1989 on "Life in the Balance" and Birmingham, Ala., in 1990 on "Combating Moral Problems" and annual conferences at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist conference centers in 1988 on Christian moral concerns.

-- Approved conferences or consultations in the coming year on abortion, pronography, gambling, race relations and medical ethics.

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(Contributing to this article were Tim Fields of the CLC staff, Dan Martin and Marv Knox of the Baptist Press central office, and Greg Warner of the Florida Baptist Witness, representing the Southern Baptist Press Association.)

Chaplains Receive Endorsement
In Home Mission Board Ceremony

By Joe Westbury

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DECATUR, Ga. (BP)--Newly endorsed chaplains were commended for being faithful to God's call to ministry during a ceremony at Columbia Drive Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

Although friends and family members may equate chaplaincy as a secondary ministry to a pastoral calling, chaplains actually fulfill their spiritual obligation through another important avenue of service, said Gerald Palmer, vice president of missions for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"Going into the field of chaplaincy does not signify 'leaving the ministry' if you previously have served in some pastoral role. You are individuals on a mission for Christ and his church, representing Southern Baptists as you serve around the nation and the world," he added.

Twenty-seven chaplains were endorsed during the ceremony at the suburban Atlanta church. They join 1,858 other chaplains who serve "in every imaginable situation around the world," said Huey Perry, director of chaplaincy for the agency.

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The board does not appoint chaplains as missionaries but endorses them to the employing agencies. In addition to the endorsement, the board provides them with pastoral and professional support through personal ministry, seminars and conferences.

The chaplains, who are paid directly by the institutions they serve in industry, prisons, hospitals and the military, minister throughout the nation and in 17 foreign countries.

During the service Carol Mitchell, an Army chaplain stationed at Fort Carson, Colo., shared her struggle in obeying God's call to ministry.

She explained how she felt called by God to the ministry while in high school, but there were no role models for the profession. Following careers as a high school instructor and a military intelligence officer, she was forced to come to grips with God's original plan for her life.

"I did not wake up one morning and decide that I wanted to be in the middle of Southern Baptists' controversy over women in ministry, but neither could I deny that calling," she said. "I never felt I was going against what I was taught in relation to women and ministry, and I am a Southern Baptist right down to my roots. But I could not deny God's call."

As a newly endorsed chaplain, Mitchell said, she is proud to represent Southern Baptists and to extend a helping hand to people in spiritual need in the military.

Royce Ballard, chaplain at Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans, also shared his testimony during the ceremony. The hospital has previously supplied chaplaincy services through its clinical pastoral education program, but Ballard is the first staff person to serve in that capacity.

Ballard told how, after 14 years of marriage and a successful business career, he experienced a divorce. "It was during that extremely painful time following my divorce that I discovered anew the grace and love of God in my life," he said.

In his closing remarks Ballard, who has served as a pastor for the past decade, called for a sense of unity throughout the denomination and asked for a spirit of love to prevail.

"As we see each other broken and hurting, regardless of our theology, let us minister to each other in that grace and love," he said.

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Church Building
Priorities Urged

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
9/18/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Worship and religious education priorities should be established before plans are drawn to construct church buildings or remodel older ones, participants in a national church building seminar at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board were told.

National leaders in church facility planning and Bible study told church administrators, pastors and members of church building and long-range planning committees that questions of organization purpose must be answered before architectural questions.

Max Caldwell, director of the youth-adult group in the board's Sunday school department, said church building space should be treated as Christians treat money, time and talent, using it to its full capacity.

"In the same way we teach and understand the stewardship of money, time and talent, we need to understand the stewardship of space," he said. "As a denomination, congregation by congregation, we have an obligation to do something with our investment."

Southern Baptists have spent millions of dollars on buildings since World War II, he said, but he has seen first-hand "Sunday school classes that have too many tables and other equipment taking up space."

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Churches need to put people first and then decide how much equipment is necessary to meet their needs, he observed.

"We have got to make every square foot of space count for the cause of Christ," he said. "The way people are taught is more important than objects taking up space."

Gwenn McCormick, director of the board's church architecture department, agreed that church committees can no longer limit themselves to questions of building appearance, cost or location.

They must ask, "What is supposed to happen in worship, and how can the building enhance that? What does it mean to be the church gathered before God and each other? What is the relative importance of music, preaching and the ordinances in our worship?"

The church building committee and the architect must deal with theology, struggling with questions of purpose, mission and biblical witness, McCormick added.

"The crucial concern must be how the building can support, enhance and facilitate the congregation's witness to its own theological commitments," he said. "The committee should first give attention to theology and symbolism rather than architectural design."

Committees that are reluctant to accept responsibility for background surveys and extensive studies should re-read the Old Testament accounts of planning for the tabernacle and the temple, he said.

"These facilities clearly required a great deal of planning and preparation," McCormick said, adding that in each instance attention was given to details for both facility design and furnishings before construction began.

Observing that "poorly planned, hastily designed and shabbily constructed buildings are a negative witness," McCormick urged seminar participants to "offer to God only the highest and best of which we are capable."

The seminar was sponsored by the Sunday School Board's church architecture department.