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HMB President Discusses
Policies With State Editors

By Leisa Hammett-Goad

ATLANTA (BP)--Larry Lewis told Baptist state newspaper editors he will uphold Southern Baptist Home Mission Board policies, even if he personally disagrees with them.

Lewis, who was in his 15th week as HMB president when the board hosted the editors in Atlanta Sept. 23-24, additionally explained his interpretation of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee recommendations and the SBC political struggle. He also was questioned about board policies on divorce and glossolalia -- both recent decisions -- and women in ministry.

HMB trustee committees studied divorce and glossolalia and completed their recommendations before he became president, Lewis said. He noted he is not completely satisfied with the final policy on divorce. Still, he said the policy probably is the best one possible and added it matches Southern Baptist majority beliefs.

The new policy states divorced people rarely will be appointed or approved for HMB service unless their divorce was based on "biblical rationale." That rationale was defined as being limited to adultery or fornication and desertion or physical abandonment by a spouse.

The policy, adopted during the July 29 board meeting, also states no divorced individual will be considered for a pastoral role unless the divorce meets the biblical guidelines and the applicant has not remarried.

"I wish there were some provision for those whose marriages failed prior to their conversion," Lewis said. He emphasized the board will consider divorced people for missionary appointment to other types of service if the divorce is determined to be biblically based.

Prior to 1966, the board did not appoint divorced people, said Lewis, adding the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board still maintains such a policy. He also noted divorcees already are serving on the home mission field and will continue to be appointed to non-pastoral positions.

Individuals applying for missionary status also will be asked if they practice glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues." A new policy states the board will not appoint a person who actively practices glossolalia.

When the recommendation was presented to the board's administrative committee, Lewis suggested deleting the word "charismatic" because of its ambiguity. He also recommended the policy be qualified by adding the word "publicly." The policy would then have read that the HMB would appoint no person who publicly practices glossolalia. The committee did take his suggestion to delete "charismatic" but did not qualify the policy with "publicly."

Lewis told editors he is ready to lay aside the divorce and glossolalia issues and continue with board business: "I am anxious to get the war over so there can be peace. I am in quandry about how much we have to continue discussing issues which should be put to rest when we raise our hands and take a vote. ... We have voted our convictions and established our policy. Now let's go on reaching this nation for Christ."

Lewis said convention struggles have kept Southern Baptists from moving on to other issues. He noted in 1979, 1980 and 1981 the SBC took a conservative stance on the authenticity of the Bible: "I think it has been the political activities in recent years that have really divided us. Grassroots Southern Baptists have no real disagreement on the authority, authenticity and veracity of the Bible. Whenever that has been the issue at the Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist votes have overwhelmingly affirmed the Bible."

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Moving to another issue of controversy, Julian Pentecost, editor of the Virginia Religious Herald, told Lewis, "A lot of Southern Baptists are having difficulty catching the fire in your bones for starting churches when they feel penalized" by the board's decision last year not to appoint women as mission pastors.

Lewis said if the board administered a policy appointing women as pastors it would be contrary to the wishes of Baptist grassroots and the practices of most Southern Baptist churches. "We do not have the liberty to administer policies contrary to the convention," he said, adding that in its actions, the convention clearly has stated its views opposing women as pastors.

"The issue is not women's ordination, but women serving as pastors. We have several ordained women serving as missionaries, but we will not appoint women as mission pastors."

Lewis said he does not believe in ordaining women as pastors or deacons.

Referring to this and other policies, Lewis said he is responsible for and would back all board decisions since he assumed office in June. "They may not be my fault, but I stand behind every policy, whatever it is and whether or not it is my opinion," he said.

Lewis and editors concluded their dialogue by discussing the new president's interpretation of the Peace Committee recommendations. The day prior to the editors' briefing, Lewis sent a memorandum to HMB elected staff, asking them to read and affirm the Baptist Faith and Message statement and talk with him if they have any problems with its contents. A similar letter to missionaries and missionary associates will be mailed within a few days, he said.

The memo and letter are not an attempt to "weed out or ostracize" employees or missionaries, but they are following the "clear directive" of the Peace Committee, he said.

"How do we know if they (employees and missionaries) affirm the Baptist Faith and Message if we do not ask them?" he questioned.

Lewis explained he derived the directive from the total Peace Committee report. He acknowledged that although the report states the theological position of seminary professors and staff be determined, he took another section, which says the theological position of employees at institutions receiving SBC support should be determined, also as a recommendation.

He also noted Peace Committee Chairman Charles Fuller "made it clear that the recommendations were meant to apply to all agencies, not just seminaries."

"The process of qualifying employees on doctrinal bases is not anything new," said Lewis. "SBC agencies have always carefully scrutinized and qualified their employees. Some seminaries require faculty members to publicly sign a statement of faith. I guess the only new aspect of our recent action would be how seriously you take the matter of the Bible being truth without mixture of error and how you define that particular concept."

Lewis showed the editors a questionnaire that had been used for the past several years and has been expanded to include convention recommendations. Future missionaries and elected staff will be asked 11 questions including a testimony of the applicant's conversion experience; beliefs and understanding about God, Jesus, the inspiration and authority of the Bible, miracles and the Bible's historical narratives; evangelism concepts and practices; and belief about the Baptist Faith and Message Article I, stating the Bible has "truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter."

Lewis said the questions, excluding the one about the Baptist Faith and Message, have been used for several years. He added these parameters leave plenty of room for SBC moderates and conservatives.

Jack Brymer of the Florida Baptist Witness told Lewis that Southern Baptists perceive that he was an HMB presidential candidate of the conservative party.

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Lewis agreed that perception could exist. However, he said he has not been involved in the convention's partisan politics: "I have specifically, definitely and continually kept myself apart from the political activity. I have stood very strongly as a college president and now as board president, behind a conservative doctrinal stance. That is who I am; that is what I have been. But I have not been involved in those political maneuvers."

Lewis added that when he was pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church in St. Louis, he was asked to be a state coordinator for the conservative resurgence. "I not only refused that request, I adamantly opposed an effort I thought would be divisive," he said.

He said he still is opposed, as president, to being involved in partisan efforts. "At the Home Mission Board, we will not be involved in the partisan politics of the Southern Baptist Convention," he promised.

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High Court Asked To Uphold
Churches' Ability To Lobby

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press
9/28/87

WASHINGTON (BP)--Led by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a coalition of church bodies has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to affirm the constitutional rights of churches to participate in public referenda without registering as political action committees.

The church groups' views were communicated to the high court in a friend-of-the-court brief written by BJCPA General Counsel Oliver S. Thomas and Loyola (Los Angeles) Law School professor Edward M. Gaffney Jr. The brief was filed Sept. 23 on behalf of the BJCPA, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Christian Legal Society and National Association of Evangelicals.

Appealing to the First Amendment's protections of freedom of religion and speech, the brief asked the nation's highest court to review and reverse a decision earlier this year of the Tennessee Supreme Court. That ruling upheld a Tennessee law requiring churches to submit to the state detailed financial disclosure statements if they spend more than \$250 annually urging voters to support or reject any issue put on the ballot for public approval or disapproval.

The brief noted that several other states have similar laws, none of which has been tested in court, making the Tennessee case one of "first impression." If the high court were to agree to hear the dispute, the decision in the case could have nationwide application.

Thirteen Jackson, Tenn., churches were found to have violated the Tennessee Campaign Financial Disclosure Act by sponsoring paid advertisements opposing a liquor-by-the-drink referendum proposal. Nine of the 13 congregations are affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

The August 1984 referendum proposal to allow liquor-by-the-drink sales lost by 40 votes. Later that month, the state attorney general issued an opinion that the churches were political action committees as defined by the law and were subject to filing the financial disclosure forms.

Instead, the churches challenged the provision of the law defining them as political action committees. Although a trial court first ruled against the churches, a state court of appeals reversed, declaring the law unconstitutional. Later, however, the Tennessee Supreme Court overruled the appellate court, holding the law applies to churches.

In their brief to the nation's high court, Thomas and Gaffney argued that application of the Tennessee law to churches "severely chills the ability ... to advance their positions on a wide variety of public policy matters." The "religious autonomy and integrity" of churches are threatened, they wrote, "when the government seeks to regulate a religious body."

Appealing to the First Amendment protection of free exercise of religion, the Thomas-Gaffney brief argued that application of the law to a religious body "distorts that body's religious message by communicating to the public that it is not a religious group acting religiously, but simply another political interest group acting out of characteristically self-interested political considerations."

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Additionally, and "even more seriously," the argument continued, "the Act has had a chilling effect on the prophetic ministry of religious bodies" in Tennessee.

The brief also argued churches should be exempt from the law on free exercise grounds unless Tennessee could demonstrate "it has utilized the least restrictive means of achieving a truly compelling governmental interest."

Noting the Tennessee law provides a blanket exemption for the news media in deference to the freedom of press guaranteed in the First Amendment, Thomas and Gaffney told the court, "There is more than a subtle irony that the primary beneficiaries of the statutory exemption in the act are immensely powerful for-profit news media corporations and that the institutions directly burdened ... are less powerful not-for-profit religious bodies."

In addition, the brief argued the law violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment because its primary effect "has been to inhibit (the churches') religious activity" and "to entangle the government excessively in religious matters."

The brief noted further that while public authorities may conduct a "bona fide investigation of fraud, undue influence, private inurement or other misconduct," the state "has no business scrutinizing the internal financial affairs of religious bodies."

The Supreme Court is expected to decide whether to hear the Jackson churches' appeal sometime after it convenes for a new term Oct. 5.

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Shultz-Shevardnadze Meeting
Raises Hopes For Amnesty

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
9/28/87

WASHINGTON (BP)--Hopes for a general amnesty for 265 religious prisoners in the Soviet Union were given a boost earlier this month when U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz raised the issue with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze.

Both President Reagan and Shultz have said the American secretary of state brought up the matter during a three-day meeting in Washington in mid-September. While Shevardnadze made no commitment to such an amnesty, Reagan and Shultz have expressed hope it will be the subject of ongoing discussions with the Soviets.

In addition, two Baptist participants in a Sept. 10 meeting with Shultz, during which the amnesty issue was urged upon the secretary of state, also have expressed a similar hope. The 45-minute meeting was held in Shultz's office on the eve of Shevardnadze's visit to Washington. According to the Baptists present, Shultz indicated an immediate and enthusiastic eagerness to pursue the matter with his Soviet counterpart.

Olin Robison, president of Middlebury College in Vermont, led the three-person delegation that met with Shultz. He was accompanied by James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation in New York City. Robison, a lifelong Baptist, is one of the country's acknowledged experts on the Soviet Union. He participated in earlier talks with Soviet leaders resulting in the release of prisoners of conscience, including the noted Baptist dissident Georgi Vins and a celebrated group of Pentecostals.

Dunn, whose organization since its founding in 1936 has brought pressure on numerous governments to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental human right, underscored the importance to Baptists of the amnesty proposal. Baptists have a "disproportionate interest" in the outcome of the Shultz-Shevardnadze talks on the matter, Dunn said. "Because 116 of the 265 religious prisoners of conscience currently held are Baptists, Baptists in this country and elsewhere have a special obligation to pray and work for their release at this opportune moment."

He added the Soviets need to move beyond "the occasional and heralded release of a few celebrities" to a new policy. "If Soviet leaders have a genuine commitment to a new openness and a genuine respect for religion as they are now professing, they should grant a blanket amnesty," Dunn said.

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Noting recent gestures of increased toleration for the religious rights of Soviet citizens, Dunn said such an amnesty would be timely in view of next year's official observance of 1,000 years of Christianity in Russia. "Because Christians emphasize forgiveness as the central theme of our faith," he said, "nothing could be more appropriate as a symbol of understanding and appreciation for a millenium of Christian presence than to grant such an amnesty."

Dunn also called on Baptists "to pray for the leaders of our two nations and for the prisoners themselves at this most sensitive and delicate moment."

Shultz and Shevardnadze are scheduled to meet again Oct. 22-23 in Moscow. While they are expected to focus primarily on the elimination of medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe and the anticipated summit meeting later this year between Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the pair also is expected to continue conversations about the religious prisoners.

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Missionaries Gear Up
For '88 Seoul Olympics

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
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SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--The 1988 Summer Olympics begin next September in Seoul. Marathon runner David Bishop is ready.

Bishop, a Southern Baptist missionary and an avid athlete, won't be competing in the Olympics. But he's leading other missionaries and Korean Baptists in a wide-ranging effort to provide ministries before and during the Games, scheduled Sept. 17 - Oct. 2, 1988.

Bishop and his colleagues already are teaching English to staff members of the Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee. Next year they hope to work with the committee as guides and interpreters during the Olympics. They also hope to operate a Christian hospitality center for foreign visitors near the Olympic athletes' village or the main stadium in Seoul.

About 25 Southern Baptist missionaries have participated in the English teaching clinics for Korean Olympic committee staffers, which began early this year. Most of the Koreans have studied English before but are sharpening their conversational skills as they prepare for the 250,000 foreigners expected during the Games.

"It's sort of a lifestyle witness opportunity with the people who are planning to put on the Olympics, some people who are very influential in the country" said Bishop, a 37-year-old native of Greenville, S.C. "We've gained a trust level with them. I really believe they're going to call on us more and more for help as we get closer to the Olympics."

Park Seh Jik, president of the Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee, is an active Baptist layman and deacon.

In July the missionaries' "students" staged an English drama before about 2,500 Olympic workers and officials. "We coached them in the English pronunciations and so forth," Bishop said.

The drama was written to simulate situations they will encounter during the Olympics, like airport welcoming committees and checking in at the athletes' village. President Park of the organizing committee and other ranking officials were there and seemed impressed, Bishop reported. They gave the Korea Baptist Mission a letter of appreciation for their efforts.

Koreans view the Olympics as a historic opportunity to show the international community that South Korea has emerged as a world-class nation. They've spent several billion dollars preparing for the Games. Officials, politicians and most citizens seem determined to make the event a spectacular success, despite the current political turmoil and North Korea's continuing threats and demands for co-host status.

"The student demonstrators, the political parties, labor -- they all recognize that the Olympics have to be held here," Bishop said. "Nobody wants to hurt that possibility."

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They're also determined to make visitors feel at home. Everyone from taxi drivers to executives is studying English and other languages to make it easier for foreigners in Seoul. As in any Olympics -- and especially on the volatile peninsula -- security is the first priority. But close behind is communication.

"They fear that Korea is going to be known as the place where communication was difficult," Bishop explained. "So they're working very hard, and the International Olympic Committee is pushing very hard, to have good language services. This is an area we are finding we can help with."

Many of the missionaries who have taught English to Olympic workers already have volunteered all their time during the two weeks of the Olympics to provide language skills or other services as needed. Others will work at the proposed Christian hospitality center if the right site can be obtained. At the center, Bishop reported, ministries will include "just your basic things -- distribution of tracts, offering crisis assistance, maybe helping with food and doing what we're doing in Jesus' name."

Korean Baptist churches and associations also are participating in sports-related ministries and evangelistic rallies. The rallies usually feature Korean Christian athletes, including gold medal winners from last year's Asian Games. They demonstrate their skills, hold sports clinics or exhibitions and give their Christian testimonies.

"The emphasis is that it's exciting to be an athlete, it's exciting to be involved in sports, but it's not as exciting as the relationship with Christ," Bishop said.

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