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Southeastern Search Committee Narrows Candidate Field To 3

ST. LOUIS (BP)--Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's presidential search committee has narrowed its field of possible successors to W. Randall Lolley to "three highly qualified individuals," according to a Feb. 11 statement.

The search committee released the statement midway through a Feb. 11-12 meeting in St. Louis. The committee is seeking a replacement for Lolley, who resigned during a special called meeting of trustees Nov. 17, 1987, effective July 31.

In its statement, the search committee said the finalists are Charles L. Chaney, assistant to the chancellor and dean of the Courts Redford School of Theology and Church Vocations at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.; Lewis A. Drummond, administrative director of the Billy Graham Center and Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.; and Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies and associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas.

"The presidential search committee has made an exhaustive review of more than 25 potential candidates for the position of president," the statement said. "It has narrowed the field to three highly qualified individuals."

"Although there were many attractive candidates among those on the original list, these three men were clearly the best qualified for this particular job. We are pleased to name these three as our finalists and to undertake personal interviews with each of them. They have been notified and will be here for that purpose."

The statement added: "We are very proud of the qualities of these candidates and are convinced that any one of them would make a distinguished president for the seminary. After we have finished interviewing them tomorrow (Feb. 12) we will attempt to make a selection of one man to recommend to the board of trustees. If we are successful, we will have a further announcement tomorrow afternoon."

"We want to thank everyone who asked to be considered as well as everyone who made a suggestion about a candidate. The overall quality of the entire group made our job all the more difficult. It is gratifying that our Baptist family includes so many talented people."

The statement was released on behalf of the search committee by G. Paul Fletcher, Southeastern's director of business affairs who has been named executive vice president and chief executive officer during the presidential transition.

Lolley, Dean Morris Ashcraft and three assistants to the president announced their resignations in response to recent trustee actions at the seminary. In October, trustees approved changes in the school's hiring procedures to ensure that only people who adhere to biblical inerrancy will fill future faculty positions.

Southeastern's full trustee board will meet on the school's Wake Forest, N.C., campus March 14-15.

Samford To Start
Divinity School

By William A. Nunnelly and Marv Knox

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Samford University will open the Southern Baptist Convention's first university-based divinity school on its Birmingham, Ala., campus this fall.

The new school, which will offer a master of divinity degree, has been endowed by a gift designated for that purpose, Samford President Thomas E. Corts announced Feb. 11.

The gift was made by an anonymous donor who stipulated the amount of the gift not be revealed. However, Samford officials acknowledged the gift was the largest contribution from a living individual in Samford history, placing the amount at more than \$3.5 million.

Samford trustees approved the new program Feb. 9. The master of divinity degree is the standard graduate-theological degree offered by U.S. schools in preparation for ministry. Samford officials intend for the new degree to be accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

Seven Southern Baptist universities, including Samford, have schools of religion or graduate schools of theology that offer graduate degrees in religion. The six Southern Baptist Convention-related seminaries offer the master of divinity degree as their primary pastoral ministry degree. But Samford is the first Southern Baptist affiliated university to offer the master of divinity.

Samford's move to a divinity school is unrelated to theological/political controversy that has existed in the Southern Baptist Convention for about nine years, said Samford Provost William E. Hull.

According to recent reports, SBC moderates who are unhappy with the more conservative shift in the convention have been thinking about starting a new "alternative" seminary or encouraging a Southern Baptist-affiliated university to start a divinity program. Samford has not been listed among those potential sites, which have included Mercer University in Macon, Ga.; Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C.; the University of Richmond in Virginia; and Stetson University in DeLand, Fla.

"We are not attempting to positionize ourselves in relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention," Hull said. "There has been no consultation (with SBC moderates). There has been no relation to the SBC controversy."

Rather, the divinity school is Samford's response to a need in Alabama, Hull explained. The Alabama Baptist State Convention has more bivocational ministers than any other state convention in the SBC, he said, also citing statistics that reveal more than 3,500 ministers without ministerial degrees now serve Alabama churches.

"The central focus will be on the life and work of the pastoral minister," Corts said. "We intend to serve ministers-to-be and individuals now serving churches who long to complete their theological education.

"The new curriculum will be competency-based, offering comprehensive preparation for the tasks demanded by the local church ministry, while ensuring a solid foundation in biblical and theological study. By providing ministerial training in a university setting, Samford will offer the wide-ranging resources of six professional schools and the arts and sciences college, including library and computer resources and specialized undergraduate programs."

"The school will be pastorally oriented," Hull said. He noted the new three-year degree "will have a more innovative approach" than previous ministerial training programs, "emphasizing competencies for the pastorate, such as worship, evangelism, pastoral care and leadership."

"At the heart of the new curriculum will be applied, clinical training at the local-church level," Corts said. "Every student will develop practical skills through placement with a mentor in area churches."

Jefferson County, where Birmingham is located, and the counties that border it are home to more than 700 Southern Baptist churches, he added, stressing students will have opportunities in these churches to "learn ministry by doing ministry."

Samford will drop its master of arts in religion degree and consolidate its undergraduate department of religion and divinity school to focus on three areas of emphasis, Hull said: extension courses through which students with limited academic experience may work on an associate-level degree, a religion major in a bachelor's degree and the graduate-level master of divinity degree.

The undergraduate and master's-level programs will complement each other, with the undergraduate degree preparing students for continued education that the master of divinity program will continue, he said.

Samford will increase its faculty by adding a dean and about six graduate specialists in pastoral ministry, Hull reported. That will bring the religion faculty to about 15 members; about seven or eight will focus on the divinity school and six will major on the work of the undergraduate department of religion.

The gift that launched the divinity school will finance "all start-up expenses and endow the support of at least 100 students," Hull said. The school is expected to begin with about 30 first-year students this fall and promote that class through the three-year program, adding 30-35 people as first-year students each of the next two years. It is to be at full strength with about 100 students in the third year.

Start-up activity for the new school has begun, Corts said. A search committee to identify dean prospects has been appointed, and orders are being placed for thousands of additional library holdings. A computer lab and video equipment center are being designed. Architect's drawings are being made for remodeling campus facilities to make a home for the school.

Samford officials intend for the divinity school to offer "a quality, practical program characteristic of other professional schools within the university," Hull said. Samford already has schools of law, pharmacy, nursing, education, business and music.

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William A. Nunnelly is director of Samford's office of information services.

Poll Reveals Mixed Answers
To Church-State Questions

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
2/12/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--Although Americans favor a strict separation of church and state in theory, they prefer a blending of the two institutions in practice, according to a new public opinion poll.

A 51-percent majority of participants in the Williamsburg Charter Survey on Religion and Public Life said they prefer a "high wall of separation between church and state." In comparison, 32 percent think the government should take "special steps to protect the Judeo-Christian heritage."

However, 52 percent believe the "government should support all religions equally," compared to 44 percent who say the "government should not provide any support to any religions."

An analysis of responses to the survey revealed only 28 percent of the public consistently took a strict separationist position favoring both a "high wall of separation" and "no government help to religion." In contrast, 20 percent consistently advocated some form of government support. The majority, 51 percent, gave mixed answers.

The general public divided almost evenly over whether churches should have to pay property taxes, with 48 percent supporting such taxes and 41 percent opposing them.

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Most Americans agree public schools should set aside a "moment of silence" for voluntary prayer (77 percent) and allow student religious groups to hold voluntary meetings in classrooms when classes are not in session (70 percent). They also support teaching both the biblical account of creation and evolution (69 percent) and permitting public prayers before high school athletic events (59 percent).

But a 52-percent majority oppose having the government require that "Judeo-Christian values be emphasized in public schools." And 50 percent believe the government should not provide financial help to church schools.

An 80-percent majority think it is acceptable for a city government to put up a manger scene on government property at Christmas, and 79 percent say the same thing about displaying candles for a Jewish religious celebration.

The survey was conducted by the Center for Communication Dynamics for the Williamsburg Charter Foundation, a private, non-partisan, non-denominational organization concerned with the place of religion in public life. Researchers questioned 3,000 people in a national sample.

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VBS Statistics Show Increases
In Professions And Prospects

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
2/12/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Some people may remember Vacation Bible School for its cookies, punch and crafts, but its significance is in professions of faith in Christ, prospective church members discovered and new Sunday schools started.

Statistics for 1987 Southern Baptist Vacation Bible Schools, Mission Vacation Bible Schools and Backyard Bible Clubs show increases in professions, prospects and Sunday schools.

"An increase in the number of professions of faith emphasizes that VBS continues to be a strong evangelistic tool for churches," said Willie Beaty, VBS consultant in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Sunday school division.

Professions of faith reported through 1987 schools numbered 54,800, an increase of 3,380 from the 51,420 reported in 1986.

Churches recorded 576,916 prospective members who were discovered through the three Bible school programs. Mission schools and backyard clubs showed increases in prospects discovered. Church schools, while still recording the bulk of prospects, showed a decline from the previous year.

Church schools reported 522,165 prospects, down 1,677 from 1986, while mission schools reported 28,805, up 7,708 from the previous year, and Backyard Bible Clubs reported 25,946, up by 1,923.

Mission VBS is usually conducted in a setting away from an established church with five three-hour sessions for preschoolers, children and youth. Backyard Bible Clubs use five 90-minute sessions for preschoolers and children and are helpful to locate prospects for a new Sunday school or mission.

After a church VBS, leaders are encouraged to seek to enlist prospective members in Sunday school.

Total enrollment in 1987 for all three activities was 3,318,669, an increase of 40,373 over 1986. The number of schools increased by 148 to 35,118.

Churches reported 421 new Sunday schools started with Mission Vacation Bible Schools and Backyard Bible Clubs, an increase from the 113 reported the previous year.

Jerri Herring, consultant for new Sunday school starts, said she is comparing lists to find if the starts reported from Vacation Bible Schools are all included in the 826 new starts previously reported for 1986-87.

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"I hope we may find some new Sunday schools that weren't reported earlier," Herring said.

A decrease in the number of church VBS and the increase in Mission VBS and Backyard Bible Clubs may be attributed to a trend of churches moving to neighborhood Backyard Bible Clubs instead of church schools, Beaty said.

"We would rather see them have the Backyard Bible Clubs and then a church school, too," he said. "The combined approaches can help churches reach a larger percentage of their communities."

Reaching a larger percentage of the community through Bible school is an increasing challenge for churches in the post-baby boom years, Beaty pointed out.

With evening schools, VBS can be an effective tool for reaching the increasing adult population, he said. The 1987 statistics indicate 44 percent of Vacation Bible Schools were held at night, allowing more involvement of adults.

However, Beaty cautioned, using evening sessions exclusively can adversely affect prospect discovery, professions of faith and enrollment. Statistics for night schools are not as high as similar figures for daytime schools.

Beaty recommended night schools for reaching adults while continuing day schools for youth, children and preschoolers.

Vacation Bible School for 1988 will have a promotional theme for the first time. The theme, "Living for Jesus," will be used in the VBS promotional kit and on other VBS dated materials.

A pilot project of VBS Summer Explosion tested in 1987 will undergo additional testing this summer and will be introduced in 1989.

Through VBS Summer Explosion, a church follows a coordinated approach to conduct Backyard Bible Clubs, Mission VBS and a church VBS.

Using the plan, Beaty said, a church will be able to locate prospects for follow-up through Backyard Bible Clubs, assist in establishing a mission where new work is needed in the community or on a mission tour with Mission VBS and then conduct the usual church VBS.

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Jewish Convert Raps
SBC Outreach To Jews

By Bill Bangham

Baptist Press
2/12/88

ATLANTA (BP)--Jerry Nosin thinks it's time Southern Baptists learned something of the roots of their faith and addressed the real question of the Jew in contemporary America.

"There are 6.5 million Jews in America," said Nosin, a Jewish Southern Baptist and member of Second Baptist Church in College Park, Ga., "and we're not doing anything to evangelize them."

He points out that on the convention level the entire Southern Baptist Convention outreach program to Jews consists of a yearly fellowship week, which suggests churches dialog with Reform temples.

And beyond the convention level there's even less, said Nosin.

"You talk to Southern Baptist pastors about Jewish outreach," said Nosin, "and they say our evangelism program reaches all people. Ask them how many Jews walked their aisles last year and accepted Christ as savior. The answer is none. What I'm saying is that the first century church -- a Jewish church -- did a much better job reaching out to gentiles than we do reaching out to Jews." If we really believe people are going to hell, that's a sin."

Nosin accepted Christ as a student in 1978, in his apartment, on his knees, alone.

"I was never witnessed to by a single person," he said. "Yet for five years on the University of Georgia campus I was within a stone's throw of two Southern Baptist churches."

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He studied the New Testament for two years, then began searching for a church. When he began attending Southern Baptist churches, "People would ask how I knew the Bible so well," he recalled. "My question is, 'How could you be a Baptist so long and not know it any better than you do?'"

And therein lies the problem, Nosin said: "We're not equipping our children or adults. I'm convinced that part of the reason we don't have effective Jewish outreach is the same reason we don't have effective outreach to other persons. These people are going to ask questions and we haven't worked them out in our own minds."

Most Baptists know little of the Jewish roots of their own faith; a faith taken out of the Jewish context of Jesus' day, Nosin insisted: "When I first started reading the New Testament, I thought, 'How did these people get this Jewish book?'"

Few realize baptism comes from the mikveh, a Hebrew ritual purification by immersion; know why Jesus began his ministry at age 30; or that church structure and offices are based on the synagogue.

And few realize when Paul wrote, "All Scripture is profitable for instruction," he was talking about the Hebrew Scripture, not the New Testament. It wouldn't exist for years.

Fewer still know that by the end of the first century, one-quarter of the Jewish population was Christian; destined to be booted out by a church becoming increasingly anti-Semitic and more attractive to the Gentile, while less attractive to the Jew.

For Nosin, it is ironic that many Christians see an "implication that you cannot be a Jew and a Christian ... that you lose your identity," on becoming a believer.

"I'll be comfortable being known as a completed Jew when you're comfortable being called a completed Gentile," he said.

When Jews hear Christians talk about Jesus, they think about that implication, and about history -- the inquisition of the Middle Ages and the atmosphere of this century that allowed Hitler to state, "When I am fighting the Jew, I am doing the Lord's work," and it be consistent with church policy.

And Nosin said other problems face a Jew who considers becoming a follower of Christ.

"I understand Scripture when it says (Jesus) will come between parents and children," he said. "My mother still says, 'When you say Jesus, it's like putting a knife in my heart.'"

In terms of his own involvement in Jewish outreach, "I do what I can," said Nosin. "I'm an equipper -- sensitizing, teaching. In some respects it would be easier to work outside the system. But I've chosen to work within the denomination."

A psychologist and director of human resource development for Georgia's prison system, Nosin also serves Southern Baptists in a number of volunteer capacities. As well as speaking and leading seminars in churches on aspects of Jewish outreach, he is a church renewal coordinator, a member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's metro-evangelism council and a frequent contributor to Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission publications.

He was ordained a deacon at age 30, the same age Jesus began his ministry.

"It's consistent with the age for beginning Levitical service," noted Nosin, "just another of God's nice touches."

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