



**- - BAPTIST PRESS**

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March 1, 1988

88-34

N-CO

More Denominational  
War, SBC Leaders Fear

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention may face more denomination warfare, two leaders said in the wake of a news conference in Nashville in mid-February.

Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and former SBC President James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, had a confrontation at the conclusion of the hour-long news conference called by the current and two former presidents of the 14.7-million-member denomination.

The confrontation continued as Dilday released a two-page written statement to Baptist Press, with copies going to the executive leaders of the 20 national agencies of the SBC, as well as to Draper and others.

In his statement, Dilday said he attended the news conference "expecting some kind of constructive breakthrough in our tragic denominational deadlock. I was disappointed. I hoped for a statesmanly proposal ... but instead we were given another defense of the takeover strategies of the past 10 years. Instead of offering Southern Baptists a way forward toward reconciliation, we were given a statement which merely solidifies the hard line position of those who have gained control of the SBC.

"That statement (released by the presidents at the news conference) effectively eliminates any middle ground on which to build a consensus. It consigns those of us who do not agree with the efforts of these past 10 years to take what appears now to be the only choice: to elect other leaders who will build a consensus, move this denomination out of the morass and put us back to work again on our main tasks," Dilday added.

Draper told Baptist Press he is "grieved" by Dilday's statement and was "totally astonished" by the confrontation following the Feb. 24 news conference. The former president, who served 1982-84, said it was "inexcusable and unconscionable" for Dilday to "jump me out publicly."

"I am grieved by his reaction and basically feel it is a misunderstanding of what we tried to do," he added.

Draper went on to say Dilday says "the only alternative for us is to continue to battle it out at the ballot box. It seems to be a situation of who can outmuscle the other. They have given us no alternative."

Draper, also a trustee at Southwestern Seminary, added if Dilday's response to the content of the news conference "is the general reaction, then it was a waste of time. I regret that."

The news conference, called by current SBC President Adrian P. Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn., and also attended by Bailey E. Smith, an Atlanta-based evangelist who was SBC president 1980-82, had as its main feature the release of a four-page statement, "A Conservative Southern Baptist Affirmation." (See "SBC Presidents Issue Statement Of Beliefs," in Feb. 26 BP.)

Rogers said the fourth SBC president of this decade, Charles F. Stanley, president 1984-86 and pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, concurred with the statement but could not attend the news conference because he was ill.

The statement includes a preamble, 10 affirmations, six "prayerful desires" and five goals. It says Article One on Scripture of the Baptist Faith and Message statement of 1963 is "a synonymous phrase for inerrancy," and affirms the right of Baptists to "set parameters" about what they want taught in their agencies and institutions.

The preamble says: "As leaders elected by Southern Baptists, we sincerely feel that we should not and could not appoint anyone to positions of leadership who does not embrace the essentials outlined herein."

It notes a "prayerful desire" that all agencies and institutions "work and teach" in accordance with the Baptist Faith and Message statement, "especially concerning the article on the Scriptures." Another "prayerful desire" is that "nothing will ever be done intentionally in and by the institutions and agencies ... to shake anyone's confidence in the full reliability and infallibility of the Bible."

In his statement, Dilday says the affirmations, dreams and goals "reflect a one-sided spirit of triumphalism, 'to the conquerors go the spoils.' Peace seems to be offered only at the price of full surrender to the winners. Those who disagree are called 'the contras.' The only illustrations given of Peace Committee violations are those of the other side, but Southern Baptists know there have been blatant violations on the part of those on Dr. Rogers' side, whom he describes as 'people who share the same philosophical viewpoint.'"

He adds: "The SBC presidents claim there is no attempt to force their views on anyone; they do not want to exclude other Baptists. And yet they declare that no one will be appointed to a committee who does not affirm their personal interpretation of our Baptist Faith and Message statement."

Dilday goes on to say: "The statement proposes that the convention in St. Louis (1987 annual meeting of the SBC) was characterized by unity, a 'golden moment' of harmony, when in fact the convention is seriously divided, as the vote in St. Louis for the office of president would indicate. If we are going to move toward reconciliation and build the body of Christ, the 45 percent of our constituency who voted against the party in power cannot be ignored."

The SBC presidents, Dilday writes, "indicate it is unfair for their group to be labeled fundamentalists, but they offer no apology for the use of pejorative terms for those who disagree with them, claiming the term 'conservative' only for themselves."

He adds: "The affirmations declare that their measurement of orthodoxy is the 'nature' of Scripture, not the 'interpretations' of Scripture, when in fact they exclude those who disagree with their interpretation of such biblical issues as a woman's role in the church, abortion, eschatology and worship styles.

"It speaks of a 'conservative resurgence' which implies that theological conservatism was dead in this convention before 1979 and that only under the takeover movement have Southern Baptists experienced a rebirth of conservative theology. Admittedly, there never has been and never will be perfect theological purity in our denomination, but neither has there been evidence of a major drift from our basic conservative beliefs as Southern Baptists.

"The ultimate tragedy is that according to one of America's leading evangelical scholars, our denomination has lost its influence as an evangelical force because of the past 10 years of continuing controversy. He said that the denomination's theological and political struggle has produced an image of a divided denomination discouraging people from identifying with it."

Dilday charges the presidents' statement "suggests that we are divided theologically, when it has become increasingly clear that the division is between those who will join the takeover party and those who refuse to do so or who oppose it."

It says: "All Baptists will applaud the statement's inclusion of such time-honored principles as our commitment to evangelism and world missions, to cooperative mission endeavors, to the autonomy of the local church, to fairness and balance in reporting, to separation of church and state, to religious liberty, to the priesthood of believers and to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

"However, these affirmations cannot become a basis for consensus and cooperation unless they are accompanied by practical steps toward mutuality and trust."

Draper told Baptist Press the statement by the four presidents "did not defend any unreasonable position nor did it eliminate middle ground. I do not think the peace offered was peace at the price of full surrender. I don't see any of that. I regret Russell (Dilday) reads into this things which are not present."

The former president said Dilday "is reacting (to the statement) out of 10 years of distrust rather than taking it at face value. He is upset that we defended ourselves. Well, it was our press conference and his reaction illustrates the thing we are concerned about, that we have been misrepresented and accused of things we haven't done. His reaction is Exhibit A."

Draper called attention to Dilday's final statement, noting the "affirmations cannot become the basis for consensus and cooperation unless they are accompanied by practical steps toward mutuality and trust," by saying he has "repeatedly begged Russell to call some men together to map out a strategy to settle this. I believe he could do this if he would, but he has consistently refused.

"If a group of recognized leaders would get together and strategize about how we can go from here, we could keep from tearing ourselves apart. There has to be give and take, but right now there is not any. It is grab what you can grab, defend what you can defend.

"If some of those who are irate and vocal would get together and strategize a way out, we could bring this to an end before this denomination is destroyed."

"I call on Russell Dilday again to call some men together to map out a strategy to settle this," Draper said.

He added Dilday had called Feb. 26 to "apologize" for the confrontation at the news conference. "He was angry, and he knew it. I told him it was inappropriate, and he said he knew it and apologized. I accept it and that's it as far as I am concerned."

Draper said the question of Dilday's reaction may come up when Southwestern Seminary trustees meet in Fort Worth March 14-16, because "one of the trustees is concerned" about statements Dilday made on a nationally televised special on the SBC and "it might carry over."

As for himself, Draper said he "has no plans to pursue it. He has apologized and I have accepted it."

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Church Takes To The Streets  
In Abortion Clinic Ministry

F- (O  
(B'hood)  
By Bill Bangham

Baptist Press  
3/1/88

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Chris Crossan stands on a lonely corner in east Los Angeles. It's 8 a.m. The street before him is empty -- Sunday-morning empty -- and silent.

The human tide that ebbs and flows through twice each weekday is elsewhere -- Sunday-morning elsewhere. Only an occasional car rattles down this six-lane part of the funnel from the hills into the basin that is Los Angeles.

But it can be an unusually busy corner on Sunday mornings -- big-business busy. The low green building behind Crossan houses Family Planning Associates, an abortion-on-demand facility. On typical Sundays, Family Planning staff members terminate 85 pregnancies.

At \$300 each, Family Planning is a \$25,000-a-Sunday big business, and only one of 24 such facilities one physician owns in the Los Angeles area.

Crossan, founder-member-coordinator of Brady Lifesavers -- a group from Church on Brady, a nearby Southern Baptist congregation -- mounts a watch each Sunday and two days during the week, each day the clinic schedules abortions. He and 50 other church members are determined to do something about what many have termed a slaughter of innocents.

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Over the past three years Brady Lifesavers knows of at least 98 women who through their efforts have changed their minds and kept their babies. "When we get to 100," said Crossan, "we're going to have a celebration."

One Sunday morning, every second car turned into Family Planning. Crossan and three other volunteers greeted each one. Their approach was low key -- no banners, no placards, no intimidating language or militant rhetoric.

As cars turned into the clinic, Crossan approached each with: "Excuse me sir, we give this pamphlet to all couples who visit the clinic. Are you here for an abortion?"

Some waved him off. Others talked for a while. Almost all took the pamphlet.

"It's amazing how many women will talk to you and tell you they're going to have an abortion," said Crossan. "All you have to do is ask."

Crossan also spends lunch hours Tuesdays and Thursdays in front of the clinic. Typically he gives out 15 pamphlets and talks with four or five women. His favorite question is: "What is it you fear the most about keeping this baby?" He tries to get it within 12 seconds. "That's about all the time I have," he said.

When Crossan, a computer programmer for Southern California Edison, moved to Los Angeles, he wanted two things -- to live close to his church and close to his work. What he didn't bargain for was living down the street from an abortion clinic.

"It took me living here two years before I did anything about it," he said. "I'm really timid. I don't like to be viewed as an abrasive person."

But abrasive or not, Crossan doesn't see abortion as a political issue. "There's something higher here," he said.

As others have joined him, he's learned a few things. Support from his church is important. "Support at the church begins with the top man (Pastor Tom Wolf) on down," he said.

He's also learned that it's important to pace people or they get burned out. Most of the 50 people involved in Brady Lifesavers work one hour a month. And he's learned problems of perception exist with this type of ministry.

Initially he encountered problems at work with fellow employees who saw Crossan in front of the clinic. But he was given the opportunity of a five-minute presentation to explain his ministry, and now six colleagues have joined him.

Crossan believes it's important to offer post-abortion, as well as pre-abortion, counseling. Some women feel guilty following an abortion and need to know God still cares for and loves them. And finally, he's learned the most effective volunteers are women who have had abortions.

"They have a real gift of mercy," said Crossan. "They are people who are very appealing, attractive, affirming, yet will still tell the truth."

When other women hear them, the response often is initially one of disbelief: "Oh, you mean you've had one?" they say. "Yeah, and let me tell you what I felt and why I regret it," is often the response.

One Sunday morning was particularly rough. Few visiting the clinic were responsive to Crossan and the other volunteers.

One of them began to cry.

"I started thinking about all those babies," said Debbie Morehead. "There's a book by Dr. Seuss, 'Happy Birthday to You,' and a line in it that says, 'How much worse it would be if you wasn't.'"

"I just started thinking; there are all those wasn'ts."

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Brotherhood Commission

Crossan's Namesake  
Reflects Ministry

By Bill Bangham

FOCO  
(B'hood)

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Nicole Kristen Cardenas is named for Chris Crossan. Her father, Bob Cardenas, calls him her guardian angel.

"When the baby was born," said Cardenas, "he was the first one I called. She wouldn't be here without him."

Cardenas' wife, Angie, was in her first trimester of pregnancy with Nicole when she contracted chicken pox. A physician warned of possible damage to the baby and recommended an abortion.

The idea of an abortion was repulsive to her, and on the way to Family Planning Associates, Mrs. Cardenas prayed for what she should do.

"If you want me to keep this baby," she prayed, "give me a sign."

Crossan was standing at the clinic when she arrived.

"I kind of wanted to avoid him," she said. "I didn't want a confrontation with him about what I was going to do."

"Chris started talking with me about keeping the baby. I started telling him, 'No, no, no! I've made up my mind to have this abortion, and there isn't anything you can say that's going to change my mind.'"

Crossan told her he would take her child no matter how it came out, and that he would pay for everything.

"I figured if he was willing to do that, why can't I?" said Mrs. Cardenas. But she continued on into the clinic.

While lying on a table waiting for the procedure to begin, a nurse informed her the staff would not be able to do it that day, and she would have to come back.

"That's it," I thought. "I'm not going through with it," said Mrs. Cardenas. "'Twice God has spoken to me. When am I going to listen?'"

When Bob Cardenas called Crossan after Nicole's birth, Crossan asked again if he could have the child, who was born normal.

"No way," said Cardenas. "This one's ours to keep."

WMU Annual Meeting  
To Kickoff Second Century

By D'Lesa Carroll

N - C  
(WMU)

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union will launch its second century during its 100th annual meeting June 12-13 in San Antonio, Texas.

"A Future to Fulfill" will be the theme of the meeting, which will come on the heels of WMU's Centennial Celebration, celebrated May 13-14 in its founding city, Richmond, Va.

The first session will begin at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 12, in Henry Gonzales Convention Center. The final session will begin at 7 p.m., Monday, June 13.

A 30-minute centennial documentary tracing the roots of WMU will premiere at the Sunday evening session.

Foreign missionary Jewell Waldron, who works in Ethiopia, will be one of several featured speakers. Her husband, Troy Waldron, was killed last August in a helicopter crash in Addis Ababa.

Mildred McWhorter, who is widely known for her Baptist center work in inner city Houston, will bring a presentation.

Southern Baptist Home Mission Board speakers will be Esther Burroughs, national evangelism consultant with women, and Wendell Belew, associate vice president for missions strategy interpretation. Foreign Mission Board speakers will be William O'Brien, executive vice president, and Lewis I. Myers, Cooperative Services International vice president.

Carolyn Weatherford, national WMU executive director, and Marjorie McCullough, national WMU president, will bring addresses.

Daily program events will include Bible studies, general sessions, features presented by home and foreign missionaries, and meal events.

A Korean women's choir, a Hispanic children's choir and an agape choir will present special music.

The entire Monday afternoon session will be presented in Spanish and will be translated into English.

Closing the 100th meeting will be a commitment service, held on the San Antonio Riverwalk.

All other annual meeting events will be held in the theater in the convention center.

Scheduled meal events held during the WMU meeting will include a "prayer box" supper, a Baptist Nursing Fellowship dessert party and a "Hermanosphere" ethnic luncheon. These meal functions will be held at the Hilton Palacio Del Rio. For information on how to order meal tickets, contact the WMU at (205) 991-4985.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST WOMAN'S MISSIONARY UNION  
Annual Meeting  
June 12-13, 1988  
Henry Gonzales Convention Center Theater, San Antonio, Texas

THEME: "A Future to Fulfill"

Sunday Afternoon, June 12, 1988

- 1:50 -- Pre-session Music: Letha Crouch, organist, San Antonio, Texas; Ruth M. Wood, pianist, Phoenix, Ariz.
- 2:00 -- Invocation: "Let Us Come Near to God," Camille Simmons, musician, Auburn Hills, Mich.
- Theme Interpretation: A Future to Fulfill
- Call to Order: Marjorie McCullough, national WMU president, Alexandria, La.
- Hymns: "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth," "We've a Story to Tell"
- Procession of Flags
- Bible Study: Christ Opened for Us a New Way
- Hymn: "Jesus Loves Me"
- Address: Watching Children Grow, C. Sybil Waldrop, manager, preschool foundation curriculum section, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville
- Special Music: Hispanic Children's Choir
- Feature: Non-traditional Approaches to Missions, Lewis I. Myers Jr., Cooperative Services International, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Va.
- Hymn: "Thou, Whose Almighty Word"
- A Year to Celebrate: Executive Board Report Part I, Carolyn Weatherford, WMU executive director, Birmingham, Ala.
- Message: The Dark's A-Creepin', M. Wendell Belew, associate vice president for missions strategy interpretation, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Atlanta
- Dedication: "Awake Us to the Challenge of This Hour," Camille Simmons
- 5:00 -- Prayer Box Supper

Sunday Evening, June 12

- 6:50 -- Pre-session Music: Letha Crouch, organist; Ruth M. Wood, pianist
- 7:00 -- Invocation: "Let Us Come Near to God," Camille Simmons
- Theme Interpretation: A Future to Fulfill
- Hymn: "We Thank Thee That Thy Mandate"
- Prayer
- Premier Production: "Go Forward: The WMU Story"
- Feature: Youth in Today's World -- How Acteens Activators Did It
- Special Music: Agape Singers, San Antonio
- A Year to Celebrate: Executive Board Report Part II, Recognition of Acteens Panelists, Carolyn Weatherford
- Address: Master, When Saw We Thee Hungry? Robert M. Parham, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Nashville
- Hymn: "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"
- Message: Confront Us with the Needs of Our Generation, Mildred McWhorter, Christian social ministries missionary, Home Mission Board, Houston
- Dedication: "Awake Us to the Challenge of This Hour," Camille Simmons
- 9:00 -- Baptist Nursing Fellowship Dessert Party

Monday Morning, June 13

- 9:20 -- Pre-session Music: Letha Crouch, organist; Ruth M. Wood, pianist
- 9:30 -- Invocation: "Let Us Come Near to God," Camille Simmons
- Theme Interpretation: A Future to Fulfill
- Hymns: "O Zion, Haste," "All That Thrills My Soul"
- Prayer
- Bible Study: By a New and Living Way
- Hymn: "Glorious is Thy Name"
- Feature: Baptist Young Women Involved in Missions, Marsha Spradlin, national WMU Baptist Young Women consultant, Birmingham
- Feature: Missions Interview with the Dickerman family, foreign missionaries, Macao
- Hymn: "God, Our Author and Creator"
- A Year to Celebrate: Executive Board Report Part III, Carolyn Weatherford
- Recognition of Local Committee

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- Business
- Hymn: "Lord, Lay Some Soul Upon My Heart"
- Address: We Have a New Day Before Us, Esther Burroughs, national evangelism consultant with women, Home Mission Board
- Dedication: "Awake Us to the Challenge of This Hour," Camille Simmons
- 12:00 -- Hermanasphere Ethnic Luncheon

Monday Afternoon, June 13

- 1:50 -- Pre-session Music: Letha Crouch, organist; Ruth M. Wood, pianist
- 2:00 -- Invocation: "Let Us Come Near to God," Camille Simmons
- Theme Interpretation: A Future to Fulfill
- Hymn: "God of Grace and God of Glory"
- Prayer
- Bible Study: Let Us Encourage One Another
- Hymn: "In Christ There Is No East or West"
- Testimonies: New Ways for Baptist Women, Margaret Sledge, Arcadia, La.; New Directions for Teaching Missions, Marjorie Grober, Little Rock, Ark.
- Special Music: Korean Women's Choir
- President's Message: Marjorie J. McCullough
- A Year to Celebrate: Executive Board Report Part IV, Carolyn Weatherford
- Hymn: "Blest Be the Tie"
- Dialogue: Baptist Women of the World, Edna Lee de Guitierrez, Women's department president, Baptist World Alliance, Mexico City; Olivia S.D. de Lerin, treasurer, Baptist Women's Union of Latin America, El Paso, Texas
- Dedication: "Awake Us to the Challenge of This Hour," Camille Simmons

Monday Evening, June 13

- 6:50 -- Pre-session Music: Letha Crouch, organist; Ruth M. Wood, pianist
- 7:00 -- Invocation: "Let Us Come Near to God," Camille Simmons
- Theme Interpretation: A Future to Fulfill
- Hymn: "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"
- Prayer
- Bible Study: Hold Firmly to the Hope We Profess
- Hymn: "Hope of the World"
- Missionaries Speak: A Church for Everyone, Winford B. Oakes, church planter, Home Mission Board, Dallas; Faith for the Future, Jewell Waldron, foreign missionary, Ethiopia
- Hymn: "Have Faith in God"
- A Year to Celebrate: Executive Board Report Part V, Carolyn Weatherford
- Recognition of Missionaries
- Special Music: Macedonia Baptist Church Choir, San Antonio
- Address: Looking Toward the 21st Century, William O'Brien, executive vice president, Foreign Mission Board
- Hymn: "Anniversary Hymn"
- Recession of Flags ... Into the Future
- Finale on the San Antonio River

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Adverse Court Decisions Cloud  
Future Of Equal Access Act

By Stan Hastey

*N-BJC*

Baptist Press  
3/1/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--Two recent federal court decisions have shown that implementation of the Equal Access Act of 1984 -- a law that gives high school religious clubs the same right to meet on school property enjoyed by other non-academic, extracurricular groups -- will not come without legal and practical complications.

Neither court -- one in Nebraska, the other in Washington state -- struck down the historic law as a violation of the federal Constitution. But both ruled against groups of students whose requests for permission to hold prayer meetings and Bible studies inside public high schools were denied by local school officials.

Some church-state observers are convinced it is only a matter of time until a court somewhere declares the law a violation of the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion.

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If and when that happens, the country is likely to witness a renewal of the debate over the proper place of religion in public education.

From a politician's perspective, the equal access legislation was a dream come true, as evidenced by the overwhelming margins it received in both houses of Congress. The U.S. Senate vote was 88-11; in the House of Representatives, the margin was 337-77.

The act's passage came just two years after the then-Republican controlled Senate rejected President Reagan's school prayer amendment and gave senators who had cast votes against that measure -- and members of the House who were on record as opposing it -- a chance to vote in favor of what many thought was a good compromise for both sides in the school prayer debate. Reagan signed the measure into law in August 1984.

The law reads, "It shall be unlawful for any public secondary school which receives federal financial assistance and which has a limited open forum to deny equal access or a fair opportunity to, or discriminate against, any students who wish to conduct a meeting within that limited open forum on the basis of the religious, political, philosophical or other content of the speech at such meetings."

A "limited open forum" is described in the statute as being established "whenever such school grants an offering to or opportunity for one or more noncurriculum related student groups to meet on school premises during noninstructional time."

Other key provisions include the requirement that such meetings be "voluntary and student-initiated"; that there be "no sponsorship of the meeting by the school, the government or its agents or employees"; that teachers or other school personnel be present "only in a nonparticipatory capacity"; and that religious leaders from outside the school "may not direct, conduct, control or regularly attend" the meetings.

Additionally, the law forbids any governmental entity "to influence the form or content of any prayer or other religious activity"; "require any person to participate in prayer or other religious activity"; "expend public funds beyond the incidental cost of providing the space for student-initiated meetings"; or "compel any school agent or employee" to participate in the meetings "if the content of the speech at the meeting is contrary to the beliefs of the agent or employee."

Besides these and other statutory safeguards in the law itself, a diverse coalition of educational, religious and civil liberties organizations developed a set of guidelines for implementing the new law consistent with the constitutional ban on an establishment of religion.

Convened by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, this coalition included the American Association of School Administrators, American Civil Liberties Union, Christian Legal Society, Americans for Democratic Action, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, National Association of Evangelicals and National Education Association. A dozen other groups, ranging from Pat Robertson's Freedom Council to Norman Lear's People for the American Way, added their names to the document, stating they were "in general agreement" with the guidelines.

These guidelines then were printed in the "Congressional Record" and reprinted by many of the participating groups.

Despite enthusiasm for the new law, none of the attorneys who spent hundreds of hours hammering out the guidelines expected the law to go unchallenged.

That expectation has been realized in several instances, with the first significant legal tests coming in the Nebraska and Washington cases.

In the Nebraska dispute, U.S. District Judge C. Arlen Beam in February upheld the refusal of the principal of Westside High School in Omaha and the local superintendent of schools to grant permission to a group of evangelical students to form a religious club and meet on campus. The students took the school officials to court, contending the latter had violated the Equal Access Act and denied them their rights of free exercise of religion and freedom of speech.

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Beam agreed with the basic position of school officials that no "limited open forum" had been created at Westside High, in spite of the fact permission to organize and meet had been granted to 10 other "noncurriculum related" student groups, including a chess club and photography club.

Beam justified his finding that the religious club alone was not related to the curriculum on the basis of testimony by the school's principal that all 10 approved groups were so related. Further, the judge noted, the principal had testified "that he would consider doing away with all clubs at (Westside High School), if necessary, to ensure that a closed forum ... could be maintained," thereby avoiding all problems associated with establishing a "limited open forum."

Beam concluded: "The purpose articulated by (school) administrators for refusing to permit the plaintiffs' club to meet involves the school's goal of presenting a balanced view when political, religious and economic information is dispensed within (school) facilities. The court finds this to be a legitimate educational concern which reasonably justifies (Westside High School's) actions in this case."

In the second case, decided last December, District Judge Walter T. McGovern ruled against four Renton, Wash., students at Lindbergh High School who likewise were denied permission to meet under terms of the Equal Access Act. At Lindbergh High, 15 groups -- including a bowling club, ski club and chess club -- had been given permission to organize and meet on school property.

Like their Nebraska counterparts, the students who sought to organize a religious club in Renton sued school officials for violating the 1984 law, as well as their freedom of speech, free exercise of religion and what they called "freedom from state hostility toward religion."

McGovern, like Beam, held school officials at Lindbergh High had not created a "limited open forum" that would have triggered the Equal Access Act. Even more important to his ruling, however, was a prohibition in the Washington state constitution stating, "No public money or property shall be appropriated for or applied to any religious worship, exercise, instruction or the support of any religious establishment."

He also cited another provision in the state constitution stating, "All schools maintained or supported wholly or in part by the public funds shall be forever free from sectarian control or influence."

That both judges demurred from ruling on the validity of the Equal Access Act under the federal Constitution may be reassuring to supporters of the law, observers said. But they have added such reassurance almost certainly is temporary, as other similar challenges to the denial of student religious clubs' applications come elsewhere.

Eventually, the fate of the law -- as that of all others in this country -- will rest with the nine justices in the U.S. Supreme Court.