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FMB 'listening team'  
to visit Ruschlikon

By Bob Stanley

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--A team of trustees from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board will visit Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, in September to "listen and gather information."

Plans for the visiting team grew out of dialogue sessions between board staff and 64 of the board's 88 trustees who attended a four-day meeting during the Foreign Missions Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center. The group spent three hours discussing the seminary, with about half that time in executive session with John David Hopper, president of the seminary; Isam Ballenger, vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa; and other board executives.

In recent years the declining value of the U.S. dollar has aggravated the international seminary's financial problems, and the Foreign Mission Board also has had to respond to questions about some teaching at the seminary and the strength of its evangelistic outreach.

Hopper said he is seeking a balance between the academic excellence that has characterized the seminary and a passion for evangelism. He noted a positive influence already is being felt from the new Institute of World Missions and Evangelism, headed by former Africa missionary Earl Martin.

At the close of the discussion, board Chairman Mark Corts of Winston-Salem, N.C., said he believed there was consensus for sending a team to listen to all the constituencies of the international seminary, hopefully meeting with representatives at the European Baptist Federation Council meeting in September. Ballenger said he hopes to accompany the group.

Corts said he will confer with board President R. Keith Parks in the next few weeks and hopes they can announce a visiting team that can help the board determine some parameters for its involvement at the seminary. By looking at the seminary's curriculum and practical concerns, he said, he hopes the board can assist the school to make an even stronger contribution to evangelism and church planting in Europe. The board's staff emphasized the importance of working in close partnership with European Baptists, who with representatives of the Foreign Mission Board compose its executive board. The 39-year-old seminary has trained more than 1,000 students since its founding.

Hopper became the seminary's president this year after working 17 years as fraternal representative with the Baptists of Eastern Europe. The seminary is sitting on property worth at least \$17 million, yet "financially starving to death" because of the decreased value of the U.S. dollar, he said.

The seminary is considering options to help it escape its perennial budget deficits, which this year will amount to about \$200,000, he said. It also needs to spend about \$1 million for building repairs, plus other funds to expand the library and replace furnishings.

Among the options under consideration are mortgaging the property to obtain money to invest at a higher rate in other European countries; selling the present property and relocating in more functional quarters elsewhere in Switzerland; or selling and relocating in another country, such as Belgium or Austria. Depending on the sale price, the seminary might have enough money left to establish an endowment for operating funds.

The Foreign Mission Board retains title to the 10-acre property, bought originally for about \$250,000.

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European Baptists have continued to boost their contributions to the seminary, but a majority of its revenues come in U.S. dollars, which have lost 40 percent in value in the last three years compared to the Swiss franc. So the institution's financial problems have deepened despite continuing efforts to keep expenses to a minimum. Under an agreement reached in 1978, Southern Baptists provide more than \$300,000 a year to help fund the seminary and support five missionaries serving on its faculty or staff, including Hopper.

In the years ahead, Hopper envisions bringing future Baptist leaders from Asia, the Americas and Europe for one to two years of graduate study on the master's and doctoral levels. By using adjunct professors from these areas, he hopes the seminary can network with other international and area seminaries sponsored by Southern Baptists to further global evangelization.

Hopper said he would welcome an opportunity to give trustees a firsthand look at the seminary and its teaching and hoped they could talk with a variety of European leaders. European Baptists credit the seminary with unifying Baptists of the continent after World War II and see the seminary as strengthening work both in Western and Eastern Europe, Ballenger pointed out.

During a business session, Corts and Parks announced the names of a seven-member committee that will review the board's missionary appointment process in a detailed study. The committee, approved at the board's June meeting in San Antonio, Texas, includes four trustees and three staff members.

The chairman will be Donald H. Bowen, pastor of the Downtown Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., and a trustee since 1983. Other trustee members will be Hal Browning (Brown) Boone Jr., a Pasadena, Texas, physician and former child of missionaries, a trustee since 1984; Bryan W. (Bill) Judge, a farmer from Kissimmee, Fla., a trustee since 1984; and Noralee Stephenson of Richmond, Va., a trustee since 1982.

Staff representatives will be Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for mission management and personnel; Tim Brendle, associate vice president for mission personnel; and Don Kammerdiener, vice president for the Americas.

The board also decided to pursue the possibility of having other missionary appointment services at Southern Baptist Convention meetings. The first such service, held this year, drew affirmation and resulted in 1,000 decision cards, with 276 related to missions work, Parks said.

Other dialogue sessions focused on plans to increase the effectiveness of Southern Baptist efforts to accomplish Bold Mission Thrust and the desperate need for stronger financial support. Bold Mission Thrust is the conventionwide plan that calls on Southern Baptists to do their part in sharing the gospel with all people of the world by the end of the century.

Because of a \$5.1 million shortfall in the 1987 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the board faces a 12 percent cut in its operating budgets, both at home and overseas next year. Carl Johnson, vice president for finance, said annual increases in the number of missionaries require \$3 million more each year just to pay their support costs.

Southern Baptists are on target toward their goal of having 5,600 foreign missionaries by the year 2000. Appointment of 34 new missionaries at the Glorieta conference, plus four others reappointed or employed at its business session, bring Southern Baptists' total missionary force to 3,881.

Another major dialogue topic centered on goals to utilize more of the missionaries' time in direct evangelism and starting new churches. During the next 10 years, the board will move toward having 70 percent of its missionaries devoting more than 50 percent of their time to direct evangelistic tasks. The other 30 percent would work at tasks "essential to balance and enhance the work of those giving primary attention" to such outreach, said Bill Wakefield, vice president for Asia and the Pacific.

Wakefield emphasized this did not mean all those in this 70 percent must be classified as church starters. Many would be people like agricultural evangelists or other specialists who devote more time to direct evangelism. Many such missionaries already are among the board's most effective witnesses.

In a new dialogue time among trustees, missionaries and staff, missionaries said they would like to give more input when new policies are being considered, see the need for better communication between them, the staff and Southern Baptists, and have a growing uneasiness that polarization among Southern Baptists may affect the Foreign Mission Board or its work overseas.

"Please let us continue to believe that the Foreign Mission Board is above petty politics," said James Hampton, associate to the area director for eastern Africa. "We want to believe that the mandate for winning the lost world to Jesus Christ is above politics."

Trustee Howard Baldwin of Richmond, Va., assured the missionaries: "This board is united behind the missionaries. If there is any glue in the world that holds us together, it is missions."

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Baptists go unseen in platform  
roles at Democratic Convention

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press  
7/25/88

ATLANTA (BP)--Although millions of Americans watched on national television as Baptist preacher Jesse Jackson electrified the Democratic National Convention, few saw three other Baptist ministers who participated on the same program.

Even the invocation by Billy Graham, the nation's best-known Southern Baptist evangelist, received little attention. Graham prayed just as the major networks began their live telecasts Tuesday.

Graham's prayer was overshadowed by commentators on the network broadcasts. And most of the delegates and media representatives in the audience were busy talking or working while Graham prayed.

Delegates and media were still trickling in to the Omni Coliseum when an Atlanta Southern Baptist pastor led the first invocation at 3 p.m. on the same day. C. Robert Marsh, pastor of Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, opened the Tuesday convention with a prayer that the delegates would face the moral and ethical issues of the nation. Marsh implored God to "help us be partners with you in establishing peace and justice in the world. ... May we be servants of your peace, not only in talk but in walk, until every person held hostage by terrorism, injustice or poverty will be free."

Later in the evening, a Congressman from Pennsylvania who is pastor of a black Baptist church in Philadelphia, Rep. William Gray, presented the party platform on fiscal policy.

Although few people were listening, and fewer still knew Gray is a Baptist preacher, it was a different story when Jackson took the podium. Jackson, an ordained National Baptist minister, preached in the black Baptist tradition, beginning slowly and winding up to a feverish pitch that brought the audience to their feet.

Graham, in an interview during the convention, compared Jackson to Martin Luther King Jr. in charisma and powerful speaking ability.

Graham said he watched as a network television reporter tried to interview Jackson on the convention floor during the benediction. Graham said Jackson interrupted the reporter's question, saying: "We're praying now." Jackson bowed his head while African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Frederick C. James led the benediction and refused to continue the interview until the prayer was finished.

Of his own prayer, Graham said he had been a special guest of every Democratic and Republican National Convention since 1952. "I never accept one (political) convention invitation without accepting the other," he said.

Graham, who has become the unofficial chaplain for presidents and politicians of both political parties, said he does not want to be involved in partisan politics and refuses to endorse candidates. He tries to balance his involvement and do as much for one political party as the other, he said.

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In addition to leading the prayer at the Democratic convention, Graham also spoke to Democratic governors at a luncheon at the home of Georgia Gov. Joe Frank Harris.

At the forthcoming Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Graham said, he will lead the prayer, at the president's invitation, the night President Reagan speaks, and will be present with Vice President George Bush on the night he accepts the party's nomination as president. "I intend to be there, because they (Reagan and Bush) have been very close friends of mine for many years," he said.

Graham was in the White House many times when fellow Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter was president. Carter also addressed this year's Democratic Convention, reminding them of his Southern Baptist roots.

Graham said he does not know Gov. Michael Dukakis personally and has no idea if he might be invited to the White House if Dukakis were elected president. Dukakis is a member of the Greek Orthodox Church. His wife, Kitty, is Jewish.

Graham urged Christians to become involved in the political process, regardless of which candidate or party they might support.

He denied that most conservative evangelical Christians see the Democratic Party as more liberal than the Republican Party and therefore tend to support Republicans: "I've seen polls taken among evangelicals, and I think about 40 percent support the Democratic Party and about 60 percent the Republican Party.

"I think evangelicals should get involved in both parties, just like I think blacks should be in both parties. I think it is healthy for the country to have two strong parties that represent a broad cross section of America."

"Whichever party wins in November, what we need in America is a spiritual awakening."

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

Southern Baptists witness  
at Democratic Convention

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
7/25/88

ATLANTA (BP)--Amid protesters and entrepreneurs taking stands for everything from buttons to bombs, Southern Baptists demonstrated the good news of God's love at the 1988 Democratic National Convention.

Under a big blue-and-white tent on the parking lot of Baptist Tabernacle, convention delegates, reporters and guests found relief from the scorching Atlanta heat while walking between their hotels and the Omni Coliseum. Dubbed the "Good News Corner," the church parking lot is located only two blocks from the Omni and Georgia World Congress Center.

About 500 volunteers from 25 churches in the eight metropolitan Atlanta Baptist associations handed out cups of cold water, entertained, distributed Scripture portions and shared their faith in Christ during the four-day convention.

Volunteers from Georgia Baptist Hospital and their colleagues from other cities in the Georgia Nurses Association provided free medical screenings for vision, blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol. A Chick-Fil-A restaurant was set up in the church basement for breakfast and lunch.

At least 600 people stopped by the tent to hear the music, check their health or eat, said Bill Junker, chairman of the task force that planned the ministry. The cups of cold water were the most popular item, he said.

"We said a good word for Christ and for Southern Baptists through the literature," said Junker, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's editorial department. "We represented ourselves well as a warm, caring group."

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Brochures announcing the ministry and telling readers the plan of salvation in Christ were distributed in downtown hotels at the start of the convention. Volunteers from local churches and the Home Mission Board passed out tracts and did personal witnessing for Christ on the streets.

Baptists ministered in the midst of vendors lining the streets to hawk buttons, banners and boxer shorts emblazoned with Democratic logos. The ministry site was only one block from the official demonstration zone, where groups of every stripe took turns on the soapbox to chant, shout and argue for their cause.

Junker said the number of people coming by the tent was lower than anticipated, due partly to a change in traffic flow, as several downtown streets were closed for security.

People who did stop at the Baptist tent appeared relieved to find a quiet place that was free. That sentiment was illustrated by one woman who found shelter under the tent and joyously poured a cup of cold water from the spigot of a large metal cooler.

As she drank from the paper cup the woman declared, "This is delicious." Satisfied, she walked toward the brass ensemble playing an appropriate old hymn, "Count Your Many Blessings."

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

Dismissed missionary says  
others will be vulnerable

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
7/25/88

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--With his dismissal by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board now a fact, Michael E. Willett contended "No missionary will feel safe."

"He or she will always feel vulnerable to attack from fellow missionaries or from pastors in the United States," said Willett, who was fired during a July 21 meeting of Foreign Mission Board trustees after administrators recommended his termination as a missionary because of what was termed his "doctrinal ambiguity."

Willett, of Liberty, Mo., has been in language study in Costa Rica and was not present at the trustees' meeting. He was scheduled to move to Venezuela to teach at a Baptist seminary in August.

Willett, reached in Costa Rica by telephone, read a prepared statement that also said, "Administrators must stand firmly with missionaries against the prevailing winds of fundamentalism."

An investigation of Willett's theology was triggered by a fellow missionary in language study, Mike McGinnis of Birmingham, Ala., who wrote to a member of his home church complaining of an unnamed missionary's beliefs.

In his statement, Willett said his beliefs are "consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message," a statement of doctrine adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 and used by the Foreign Mission Board as a guideline for assessing doctrinal beliefs of missionary candidates. No doctrinal questions were raised, he noted, at three Southern Baptist institutions where he had taught prior to his appointment as a missionary.

Board administrators targeted three areas of concern in their initial discussions with Willett in June, the deity, miracles and resurrection of Christ. The missionary's views on Christ's miracles became much of the focus of a meeting with administrators July 11 in Atlanta.

Board President R. Keith Parks, in a letter to Southern Baptist foreign missionaries, called the dismissal a rarity. "It is not the beginning of a 'purge' of the missionary force," Parks wrote. "This decision was made carefully and prayerfully in accordance with convictions of those of us who had to make it."

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Willett, in an interview, said he has asked for permission to finish language school, which ends Aug. 11. However, during the July 11 meeting, board administrators asked him to leave Costa Rica in a week to 10 days. He has since been given a few additional days to complete plans for his departure.

He said he plans to return to Liberty "and write and read and study and be available for anybody who would like me to speak or preach or teach."

Among Christians, Willett commented: "Oftentimes there is a rift, there is disappointment, there is alienation. I have experienced that these past several weeks -- alienation from a fellow missionary, alienation from administrators, but my faith in God has not wavered. I do not believe that God has caused this pain."

Willett again discussed his views of Christ's miracles, saying: "All I'm asking for is the privilege to question. I do not want to make hard and fast statements" that Jesus did not perform some of the miracles recorded in the Bible.

"But I would allow the possibility that the miracles could have been expanded from 30 A.D. when Jesus performed them to 70 A.D. when they were written down." Perhaps the early church used the expanded miracle stories to glorify Christ and, at the same time, address their first-century circumstances, he said.

Jesus took on the limitations of human existence, Willett added, and that may have limited his ability to perform miracles, unless "there is some potential of human existence that Jesus tapped into, without violating his humanity."

Modern biblical scholarship, Willett said, has "yielded great fruit at the hands of faithful scholars."

"We have had nonbelievers who have turned away from the church and believers who have left the church simply because they can't accept fundamentalist preaching, the rather glib answers to their very deep, very profound, complex questions."

Modern scholarship "has allowed some of those questions to be asked," Willett said. "It has allowed thinking believers a place in the church."

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New Mexico hires  
3 staff members

Baptist Press  
7/25/88

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)--Francis Wilson, Jack O. Meeker and Bill Shearin were elected to the staff of the Baptist convention of New Mexico by its executive board July 18-19.

Wilson will become convention business manager, Meeker will be children's home administrator and Shearin will serve as associate director of the education division.

Wilson, 56, has been pastor of First Baptist Church of Alamogordo, N.M., for 12 years. Before moving to New Mexico in 1976, he was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas. Wilson will succeed Ted Roberts who will retire Dec. 31.

Wilson was on the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas two terms and was chairman of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico executive board. He was on the SBC Executive Committee from 1980 to 1987 and was chairman of that committee's institution workgroup.

Meeker, 39, is administrator of the Texas Pythian Home Inc. in Weatherford. He will become administrator of the New Mexico Baptist Children's Home Aug. 15, succeeding Michael Saffels, who has moved to Georgia to be a representative for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Meeker has worked at the Texas children's home since 1979 as both assistant administrator and administrator. He is a former Texas high school teacher, coach and pastor.

Shearin, 67, is a resident of Albuquerque, and will be a Mission Service Corps volunteer in the convention's education division. His responsibilities will be for church training and administration. Shearin has served several New Mexico churches through the years in music, education and youth leadership. He will begin his duties Aug. 1.

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