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Include women in decisions,
researcher urges churches

By Joe Westbury

ATLANTA (BP)--Women in the marketplace are bringing new self-confidence to church, and they should be acknowledged through more involvement in the church decision-making process, a researcher for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board urged.

Orrin Morris, director of the board's research division, warned that churches that refuse to adapt to women's changing role in society may be in jeopardy of losing those women.

Relegating women to "second-class citizen status" by accepting their financial contributions but excluding them from major committees could have serious repercussions, Morris said in an interview.

"The greatest danger most churches face today is not getting members together on Thursday night for churchwide visitation," Morris noted. "It is not attendance at officers' and teachers' meeting or enlisting Vacation Bible School leaders, as important as these concerns are.

"The greatest threat to church growth is the church's response to this revolution of women in the marketplace."

The rush of women into the job market, which began at the end of World War II, continues to bring about a social revolution that should concern the church, Morris said. Ignoring the revolution with pre-1946 stereotypes of women as secondary wage earners ultimately will backfire on congregations, he added.

In the past 25 years, the number of women in the workforce has more than doubled, from 23 million in 1960 to 51 million in 1985. During the same period, the number of women who have never married increased from 10.5 percent to 28.1 percent -- which, for many, may indicate a stronger commitment to a career than to a marriage and family, Morris observed.

Women also are not only more career-minded, but they are more business-minded. Additional research reveals that by 1995, half of all new businesses in the nation will be started by women.

Morris cautioned against confusing women's desire for more responsibility in their churches with the militant feminism movement of the past decade. The 1940s movement of women into the marketplace preceded the radical activism of the 1970s and continues to shape women's career mobility, he explained.

Women are revolutionizing the marketplace as they compete with higher job skills and greater educational background. As these women move up the career ladder, they generally sense greater independence and heightened self perception.

Morris urged churches to take advantage of the new self-esteem among working women the same way that business and industry has used women to increase productivity and efficiency.

"How will a woman who is respected as an expert in her profession cope in a church that in some instances views her as a second-class citizen?" Morris asked. "Her voice is OK during Wednesday night business session, but ultimately the male-dominated committees decide the more serious matters" before they reach the business meeting.

"When only men earned the income from which the tithe was given, church financial decisions were left to the men. Not so today," he said.

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"Many of our churches have a few 'token career women' -- mothers who are either part-time employed or recent entrants on a full-time career path. Few are the true career women who have long-range plans to remain and advance in the workforce.

"Loyalty to church and all it stands for will motivate these women for a while; however, the long-term prospect is questionable."

Not only will such an attitude by the church damage its relationship with women currently in church, but it will discourage response from women who are not church members but whom the church struggles to evangelize, he said.

"Women who work during the week in an environment that values their opinion and expertise will not tolerate second-class relationships very long," he added.

Equality of opinions and equality in the decision-making process will become the norm in churches that successfully reach unchurched career women, Morris predicted.

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Pastor starts
'alliance' church

By Tim Nicholas

Baptist Press
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BILOXI, Miss. (BP)--A Southern Baptist pastor in Mississippi has resigned his church to begin what may be the first independent moderate Baptist church.

Bill Jenkins, former pastor of Bay Vista Baptist Church in Biloxi, Miss., said that he can no longer continue within the context of Southern Baptist life "with the (theological/political) controversy going on, the power struggle and what I call the Baptist inquisition."

Jenkins has begun Alliance Baptist Church in Gulfport, Miss. The church will be for people who have convictions similar to those of members of the Southern Baptist Alliance, he said. The alliance is a coalition of moderates who have expressed distress over recent successful efforts to turn the convention to a more conservative direction.

Currently, neither Jenkins nor his new congregation are members of the alliance.

Jenkins left his church because "the fundamentalists have hijacked the Southern Baptist Convention. I felt I could not in good conscience hijack a local church," he told the Baptist Record, newsjournal of the Mississippi Baptist Conventin.

Of the members of Bay Vista Church, he said: "I'm not sure they would (leave the SBC) even if I asked them to. I felt the best thing was to move out of the convention and start from scratch."

Jenkins has no hidden agenda for making the move, he said, although he noted he had hoped others would make similar decisions following the SBC annual meeting this summer. "I had to make the first move," he said.

His new church is different from others in that "this church is seeking to align with the alliance, but not the SBC," said Jenkins, who was pastor of the Biloxi church since 1986. Previously, he was pastor of churches in Mississippi, Georgia, Wisconsin and Kentucky.

"The alliance has taken no position" on Jenkins' Alliance Baptist Church, reported Alan Neely of Wake Forest, N.C., interim executive director of the organization.

"We respect the right of any Baptist congregation to decide its nature and the scope of its work, and certainly we respect their right to choose their name and who they affiliate with. My judgment is they are supportive of the alliance covenant and the attempt of the Southern Baptist Alliance to preserve the heritage and principles we regard as distinctly Baptist."

A church is not required to cease being a supporter of the Southern Baptist Convention in order to support the alliance, Neely said.

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Indeed, Alliance Church is the first congregation known to plan sole affiliation with the alliance, said Dan Ivins, pastor of Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Ala., and secretary of the alliance.

"We'll take them just like we would any other church," Ivins said. "If a Catholic church were to join, we'd take them."

Jenkins plans to attend the alliance's listening sessions in Nashville Sept. 8-10 before making decisions such as what to do with missions funding, he said.

The new church has not reached any decisions concerning its giving to some Southern Baptist causes, he added, noting, "There are some agencies of the SBC we definitely would not want our money to go to." He did not name those agencies.

Jenkins has no quarrel with his former church, Gulf Coast Baptist Association or the Mississippi Baptist Convention, Jenkins said, although he added he does not plan to affiliate with Southern Baptists on any level. He resigned as a trustee of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission.

He resigned Bay Vista Church in July and only began Alliance Church's formal services in early August. About 12 families are meeting in a Shrine Temple while looking for permanent space.

Some new members are coming from other Southern Baptist churches, and some are not affiliated with any church, he said, adding, "All felt uncomfortable with the direction the SBC is taking."

Bay Vista deacon Walt Racey, father of Southern Baptist missionary Mike Racey, said the church does not share Jenkins' feelings "as far as I can see." Few members have left with Jenkins, he added, noting, "It's a one-man army."

Bay Vista Church gives 14.5 percent of its budget to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget and 4 percent to Gulf Coast Baptist Association.

"The church will continue to fully cooperate with the Cooperative Program and all the programs of the SBC. That's the way all the deacons feel," Racey said.

Jenkins, a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, said he loves what the Southern Baptist Convention has meant to him. But "there comes a time when spiritual divorce is the lesser of two evils," he stressed.

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Campus ministers challenged
to teach Baptist heritage

By Bill Bangham

Baptist Press
8/18/88

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Baptist students need to be taught about their heritage, because a consistent model of concern for their history can help alleviate some of the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, a seminary professor told a group of campus ministers.

The challenge, issued during student conferences at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, was addressed to student workers gathered from college and university campuses across the United States.

"If you don't teach your heritage, you lose it," said Ronnie Prevost, associate professor of Christian education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"I am very troubled that we have students so ignorant about who Southern Baptists have been that they are therefore ignorant about who Southern Baptists are," Prevost told the group. "We owe it to those who have gone on before to make 'Baptist' mean something again. In so many places, it doesn't. Many, because they have no sense of the past, have no commitment to the future."

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Some historians attribute current convention controversy to a de-emphasis in history that took place among Southern Baptists in the mid-1960s, Prevost reported. He also said this lack of emphasis continues, particularly in publications and conferences designed for students.

"You've heard it said," he noted, "we've all heard it said, 'Teach those students what we believe.' I think what they were saying is to teach them our heritage."

In order to share Southern Baptist traditions with students, Prevost said, directors of student ministries must become versed in Baptist history and be able to demonstrate that knowledge.

"The issue of modeling goes a long way," he said. "Read the books (on Baptist history). Having read the books, having them on your bookshelves says a lot to your students."

Modeling may address a current general feeling of apathy about Baptist history, he said, adding, "I think students feel what we do now is superior because it is now; that the past has been improved upon, that it isn't worth studying."

That view contributes to a narrowing of focus and a growing exclusivity, while past patterns among Baptists were broad and inclusive, he said. Even today, any campus group will contain students from among the most fundamental and most liberal churches Southern Baptists have to offer, he explained.

"Part of our heritage as Southern Baptists is varying perspective," Prevost said. "We need to continue that inclusivity. We can model inclusiveness. I do not want to exclude any student who is very much more conservative than I am. Or their churches."

"The moderate as well as conservative, these churches -- as diverse as they are -- are our Southern Baptist heritage."

A willingness to be inclusive marked early Baptist efforts, particularly cooperative efforts in missions, Prevost said, noting minutes of the first Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 demonstrate that fact.

Going further back in history, Prevost pointed to Baptist influence in the formation of the nation. "The recent 200th anniversary of the constitution (last year) should have been a primary emphasis for Baptists," he said.

He maintained most Baptists do not know the influence their forefathers had on the foundation document of the nation. The move from the colonial system of state-run religion to a freedom of religion was the result of Baptist efforts, stemming in part from long-held belief in the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

"Yes, I still talk about the priesthood of the believer," quipped Prevost. "My pastor said it's OK." He referred to a resolution approved during the 1988 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting that said while Southern Baptists still hold to the priesthood of the believer, the pastor has authority.

"If some of these people would read (their history)," said Prevost, "they'd see soul competency is a synonym for priesthood of the believer."

And it was Baptists' strongly held belief in the competency of the individual soul that helped shape religious freedom in the United States and forced inclusion of religious freedom in the Constitution, Prevost said.

"We go from the priesthood of the believer to a biblical theology," he said. "We don't need councils and bishops and popes. We really rely on the Bible."

"What we have (as a result) is a free church operating in a free society -- the separation of church and state."

"We have a rich, rich heritage," Prevost concluded. "No matter what happens to me, or you, as an individual, this story cannot be allowed to die."

Church music pioneers
reunite, remember

By Barbara Denman

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--In January 1946, the first five music secretaries serving Southern Baptist state conventions met with famed music pioneer B.B. McKinney to chart a new course for Baptist church music. The only living participants of that historic meeting, Ruth Nininger and C.A. Holcomb, were reunited in Jacksonville, Fla., in August.

In 1944, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board decided to encourage each state convention to employ a person to promote church music by offering to pay one-third of the salary. Arkansas was the first to accept the board's proposal.

Nininger became Southern Baptists' first state music secretary when she assumed that role for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention in 1942. From the beginning, she "went to war against mediocrity and sorry music," Holcomb recalled.

"She waged a battle against poor church music," he said. "And yet, everything she did was in love." Now 93, Nininger lives with her daughter in Jacksonville.

Holcomb, 80, lives in Nashville but recently returned to Jacksonville to attend Florida Baptists' summer music camps.

Holcomb first met Nininger, whom he calls "the first lady of Southern Baptist church music," when the pair went to Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center as state-approved music workers in 1943. They were reimbursed for their travel at 2 cents per mile. Two years later, Holcomb moved to Florida, becoming the fifth state leader among Southern Baptists.

When he stepped off the train in Jacksonville in 1945, he was still wearing the uniform of his previous employer, Uncle Sam, having come from military service in World War II. At the time no full-time music directors served Florida's churches.

In 1946, at McKinney's request, the five state music secretaries met for the first time in Nashville, where they planned future music activities for Baptists.

As pioneers in church music, Holcomb and Nininger faced many obstacles. They had no manuals on how to establish a church music program. Instead of volunteer choir members, many churches used paid quartets, which often were not Southern Baptist. Song leaders in smaller churches were chosen on the basis of loudness or gall rather than ability, the pair said.

Controversy existed between liturgical and entertainment musical styles. "We had highbrow and lowbrow and nothing in between," Holcomb said.

Most choirs still used shaped notes and knew little about the basics of music theory, such as scales. "You made up your own 'do,'" Nininger said.

Both Nininger and Holcomb eventually produced study course books to help music directors and churches. Holcomb admitted: "Before it was even off the presses, I wished I had it back. I said some things in there I wished I hadn't."

After he left Florida in 1952, Holcomb continued to influence church music as a consultant for the Sunday School Board. He retired from the board in 1973.

Nininger served Arkansas Baptists until her retirement in 1953.

Looking at trends in church music today, Holcomb praised the greater depth of music education among choirs. "Even sixth graders can read notes and know theory," he said.

But he deplored the tendency to overuse electronic and taped music, noting that in some churches he has visited: "I would not have known if I was in a church or nightclub.

"If anything dominates a worship service and calls attention to the person doing it, rather than to the Lord, then it's out of place."

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