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Groups ask high court to honor
worker's refusal of Sunday work

By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--Following the lead of a major Jewish group, half a dozen religious and civil liberties organizations have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn an Illinois panel's ruling last year denying unemployment benefits to a man who refused Sunday work on religious grounds.

William A. Frazee, who belongs to a conservative Presbyterian congregation in Peoria, was denied the benefits after turning down a clothing store sales position that required work on Sundays. At a hearing in which he appealed the state's denial, Frazee testified his conviction against Sunday work was based on his "personal faith in the Lord."

But the Illinois Appellate Court subsequently held Frazee could not invoke the Constitution's protection of free exercise of religion in contesting the denial of benefits because his observance of Sunday as a religious Sabbath was not found in "the tenets or dogma of an established religious sect." He then appealed to the nation's high court, which in October announced it will review the case.

In a friend-of-the-court brief filed in late November, the American Jewish Congress -- joined by the Synagogue Council of America, American Civil Liberties Union, Christian Legal Society, National Association of Evangelicals, Lord's Day Alliance of the United States and Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs -- asked the high court to overturn the lower panel's decision because it disregarded established Supreme Court precedents.

Those precedents -- rulings issued in 1963, 1981 and 1986 -- protect the free exercise rights of practicing Sabbath observers by requiring states to provide unemployment benefits to individuals whose religious beliefs conflict with job requirements. States must prove compelling reasons for denying the benefits, the high court has ruled.

The brief filed on Frazee's behalf noted that in one of the three precedent-setting cases, the court in 1981 said this principle applies "even if the claimant's religious belief appears odd or incomprehensible and even if other members of the claimant's religious faith do not share his religious belief."

American Jewish Congress attorneys argued further: "This court has never demanded that an individual prove that a belief is based on the doctrine of an institutionalized religion in order for it to be considered 'religious' under the free exercise clause (of the First Amendment). ... The court has wisely understood that the tenets or dogma of a religion are flexible concepts and that different individuals will have different interpretations of the commands of their faith."

Besides transgressing the free exercise guarantee, the argument continued, the lower court's ruling also "offends the most basic principle of the establishment clause, that government may not prefer one religious denomination over another" by denying benefits to persons who are not members of what the panel called "well-established sects."

The American Jewish Congress brief took particular exception with the Illinois court's observation that Sunday no longer is observed widely in the United States as exclusively a religious holiday.

"What would Sunday be today if professional football, baseball, basketball and tennis were barred?" the panel asked. "Today Sunday is not only a day for religion, but for recreation and labor. Today the supermarkets are open, service stations dispense fuel, utilities continue to serve the people and factories continue to belch smoke and tangible products."

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The lawyer one of the groups supporting the Jewish brief, Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel Oliver S. Thomas, called the lower court ruling "the worst church-state opinion I've seen in years, not just because it stands Supreme Court precedent on its head but because of the callous indifference the court showed toward religion. I can't remember any other court referring to Sabbath observance as being un-American."

Oral arguments in the case will be heard later in the current Supreme Court term, with a decision expected by next July.

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Southwestern Professor
Franklin Segler dies

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Franklin Segler, professor of pastoral ministry-emeritus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and author of several books on pastoral ministry died Nov. 30 in Fort Worth. He was 81.

Segler taught at Southwestern from 1951 to 1972. He is best known for his book "Broadman Minister's Manual," which is used widely as a guide for weddings and funerals. He wrote eight books on topics ranging from worship to aging.

Segler combined experiences as a pastor with scholarly study during his teaching career at Southwestern. He was pastor of churches in Oklahoma, Louisiana and Texas from the 1920s to 1950s, including First Baptist Church in Garland, Texas.

Segler joined the faculty at Southwestern after graduates expressed a desire for more pastoral training. He became the seminary's first professor in the department of pastoral ministry.

"His writing ministry will continue the broad expanse of his contribution," said C.W. Brister, professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern. "His greatest contribution was his insider's perspective of what the pastor needed to know in order to lead and guide -- not run and rule -- a Baptist congregation."

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Elder encourages unified
approach to church growth

By Jim Lowry

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Realistic and unified approaches to encourage church growth in the Southern Baptist Convention dominated the annual meeting of state consultants in church administration at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville.

Lloyd Elder, board president, told the state convention representatives that "isolated, individual" efforts to produce church growth will not be effective.

"If our programs and emphases make a powerful difference, they have to be built on New Testament patterns," he continued. "We must give our hearts and shoe leather and pens and publishing to authentic, effective, biblical evangelism."

"It frightens me that 23 percent of the members of Southern Baptist churches are non-resident," Elder said. "It shouldn't be more than 5 percent. And, 26 percent are totally inactive. That is 49 percent of our church members who are inactive."

Elder said the 14.7 million-member figure used as the membership of the SBC "is a large, inflated brag figure of little value to Southern Baptists. More are going out the back door than are coming in the front. Baptist heritage focuses on the whole gospel for the whole world."

One of the keys to changing the direction of the denomination is "the recovery of lay leadership," Elder said. Ministers cannot achieve growth by themselves, but ministry by the millions of church members can effectively reach out for lost persons around the world.

"In the New Testament and today, church growth is by personal conversion," Elder explained. "People are saved one by one."

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Elder went to talk about other aspects of church growth, including numerical increases, geographical expansion, national and racial inclusion, organization development, societal penetration, behavioral and ethical transformation and congregational expansion.

"There is absolutely no way Southern Baptists can make contributions to church growth unless we start new churches," he said, adding that there is no reason to be embarrassed for talking about numbers.

"Like it or not, Southern Baptists still measure pastors in their careers by whether or not their church is growing," Elder continued. "Let's be realistic -- without distortion-- and appeal to the desire of pastors to see their churches grow."

One way he encouraged the denomination to enhance the training of pastors is to cooperate by sharing knowledge and expertise in the field.

Pastors, ministers of education and other "practitioners" in the field could become the role models for recently graduated staff members to provide the realistic training to aid in establishing effective ministries.

Elder said even the excellent theological training students get in Southern Baptist seminaries does not prepare them for what they will encounter when they become staff members in local churches. They also need practical advice from experienced staff members who are available as models and mentors.

Leadership and support for church growth was the theme for the meeting, in which several plans for future emphases were shared to give direction to staff members for holistic growth in local churches.

One new emphasis, "Let's All Go to Church," which will be introduced in 1990, will be conducted as a cooperative effort between the church administration and church music departments.

A key point of emphasis will be to build the worship experience in local churches through better planning and understanding of worship.

Unified church planning was encouraged in pastoral ministries, which includes the deacon and the church council, to design worship services to draw more people into the church.

Joe Stacker, director of the board's church administration department, said if church growth is to be achieved, it must be through committed leaders.

Stacker said he hoped the church administration department and the state consultants could provide significant leadership and support for church growth in the next few years to help the denomination reach out more effectively.

State consultants also heard reports from department personnel about plans to honor pastors of small churches each year as a continuation of the first awards made this year at Ridgecrest and Glorieta Baptist Conference Centers during Bible Preaching Administration weeks.

Results of a new survey on forced termination also were reported for the first time, in which Norris Smith, consultant in forced termination in the church administration department, said the number of involuntary terminations of pastors in the denomination is now estimated to be 116 per month, which is up from 88 per month estimated in a 1984 survey.

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Plant churches to do ministry,
Lewis tells state leaders

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists must start indigenous, self-supporting churches to minister in America's cities, Larry Lewis told state convention leaders in Atlanta.

Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said ministries based in churches will be more effective in reaching the cities for Christ than ministries supported and staffed solely by the Home Mission Board.

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There are no plans to close or phase out any existing Baptist centers supported by the Home Mission Board, said, but added: "Our emphasis in the future will not be on opening more centers but on helping more churches become centers for ministry.

"The needs of the inner cities cannot be ignored by the Home Mission Board or the churches of our convention. I perceive the best way to meet those needs is by planting churches, not by creating Home Mission Board-sponsored ministries.

"We need indigenous churches, churches in harmony with the communities they serve," he said. "The Home Mission Board is the catalyst to provide materials and training for those churches to become loving, caring, ministering bodies.

"The result will be not just a few Home Mission Board-sponsored ministries but thousands of ministering Southern Baptist churches."

Lewis said this model of starting ministering churches will overcome two shortfalls of the past.

During the "golden years of church planting" Southern Baptists started new churches as Southerners moved into the Northern regions of the United States. While commendable, this effort produced affluent suburban churches for transplanted Southerners and failed to reach the native population, Lewis said.

"The end result was that we ringed the great cities with strong churches but left the inner cities unreached," he explained.

In response, the Home Mission Board stepped in to do inner city ministries churches would not do, Lewis said. "Some felt that if strong ministries could be established in the inner cities Southern Baptists from the suburbs would drive in and strong churches would result.

"I will give them an 'E' for effort," he said. "The idea was great, but the result was dismal. Home Mission Board-supported ministries produced few strong, indigenous, self-supporting churches."

Lewis said he wants to continue the strategy implemented by William Tanner and Gerald Palmer to find a balance between these two extremes. Tanner preceded Lewis as HMB president. Palmer soon will retire as vice president of the board's missions section.

"The church has to be the church," Lewis said. "The Home Mission Board cannot be the church. If all the resources of the Home Mission Board were expended in ministry, we still wouldn't have even scratched the surface.

"But the denomination as a whole with our 37,000 churches has significant resources to make a difference. The Home Mission Board can equip those churches to do ministry."

Starting churches in all segments of society poses at least three difficulties, Lewis said.

The first is limited resources, he said, noting that funds from the national Cooperative Program will remain the same in 1989 as in 1988 and that gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions have shown only a slight increase.

The second difficulty is accepting the proliferation of ethnic and black Southern Baptist churches, Lewis said. "Traditional Anglo congregations must learn to associate with people from radically different backgrounds.

"It is not uncommon now in some areas to have more black and ethnic congregations than Anglo congregations. This is changing the face of who Southern Baptists are."

The third difficulty is educating new congregations to appreciate and support Southern Baptists' cooperative ministries, Lewis said.

State mission directors discuss
Home Mission Board reorganization

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (BP)--Directors of missions from 41 state conventions and fellowships discussed reorganization of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, met with the agency's two new vice presidents and roasted a retiring vice president during their annual planning meeting in Atlanta.

This was the last meeting for Gerald Palmer as vice president of the missions section. Charles Chaney, vice president-elect for extension, and Paul Adkins, vice president-elect for ministry, met the group for the first time since their appointments.

In an open forum, directors asked HMB President Larry Lewis to clarify the reorganization of the board's Atlanta staff approved by the board of directors in October. Most debate centered on transfer of interfaith witness from the missions section to the evangelism section and the impact of the change on state convention staffs.

Charles Lee Williamson of Texas first raised the question about interfaith witness. "We mainly deal with cults on the basis of protecting our own members, not on the basis of converting people from cults," he said. "We have plenty of witnessing tools to evangelize them. We need help educating our members about the dangers of cults."

Lewis responded that he encountered more resistance on this one change than any other in the reorganization. However, he defended the action on grounds that cult members need to be evangelized.

"I feel very strongly that interfaith witness needs to enable Southern Baptists to share their faith effectively with people of other faiths and cults," Lewis said. "I think we're going to have to be aggressive in teaching Southern Baptists to address these people."

Conway Sawyers of Arkansas countered that "aggressive evangelism with these groups is not always the best."

Lewis said the change was not set in concrete but asked the state leaders to give it a chance to work. "If we decide later that it was a bad move, I'm open to change," he promised.

Later, Interfaith Witness Department Director Gary Leazer addressed the group. "We don't know what the future holds for interfaith witness," he said, referring to the fact that a new vice president for evangelism has not been named to succeed Bob Hamblin, who retires Dec. 31.

However, Leazer said the current leadership in evangelism had promised any changes would occur slowly.

Leazer said he does not want interfaith witness to become solely a direct evangelism program. "We've always been a resource to all Home Mission Board program areas and will continue to be."

State mission leaders reminded Lewis that changes at the Home Mission Board affect the structure of state convention staffs. "You are making decisions that impact our organizations, whether we like it or not," Williamson said.

Both Lewis and Palmer told directors they did not expect state conventions to immediately alter their staffs to conform with Home Mission Board structure.

Chaney and Adkins assured the group of their personal commitments to working cooperatively with state conventions. "Any plans I have for church starting are totally dependent upon you," Chaney said. "If we cannot do this together, it cannot be done."

Adkins said he intends to create a workgroup to define a philosophy of ministry for the board. This philosophy should promote reconciliation between God and man, the freedom of individuals to accept or reject God, and the servanthood of Christians, he said.

At a banquet during the meeting, state mission leaders surprised Palmer by roasting him on the occasion of his retirement. The group also presented Palmer and his wife, Libby, with several mementos, including a cash gift.