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Religious Liberty Commission  
creation will be recommended

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)--Creation of a new Southern Baptist Convention agency to represent the convention in Washington, D.C., will be recommended to the SBC Executive Committee when it meets Feb. 20-22.

The decision to recommend formation of the Religious Liberty Commission was announced following a Jan. 5-6 meeting of a seven-member committee appointed to study "alternatives" to the relationship between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a religious liberty coalition of nine Baptist denominations in the United States and Canada.

Since its formation in 1939, the BJCPA has been the SBC's spokesman on First Amendment issues, including church-state separation and religious liberty. The program statement governing SBC participation notes the SBC recognizes the BJCPA "as the sole office in the Washington area through which it maintains contact with the federal government."

In recommending creation of the new commission, the study committee also recommended steps to alter but not terminate the relationship between the BJCPA and the SBC, including reducing SBC funding and changing the way in which those funds are made available.

In recent years, the SBC has directly provided about \$400,000 per year to the BJCPA, representing about 90 percent of member contributions to the organization's budget.

The study committee recommended funding for 1989-90 "be reduced from the 1988-89 funding level" of \$400,000, but did not specify an amount.

Members of the study committee determined the exact allocation should be left to the program and budget subcommittee of the Executive Committee, which is charged with responsibility for planning the annual SBC budget.

Members, however, voted to communicate with the budget planning group, which meets in mid-January to plan the 1989-90 budget, that the "financial obligation of the SBC to maintain full representation on the BJCPA could be satisfied with a substantial reduction" in funding.

The study committee also voted to communicate to the budgeting group that funds are needed both by the SBC Christian Life Commission for an office in Washington and by the SBC Public Affairs Committee, the 18-member standing committee through which the SBC relates to the BJCPA.

A third "communication" explains funding can be reduced because "the expenses of the Washington bureau of Baptist Press will no longer fall under the purview of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs."

Baptist Press, the SBC's news service, has five bureaus, including the one at the BJCPA.

The relationship between the BJCPA and the SBC has been controversial in recent years, and several attempts have been made to either defund the BJCPA or sever all ties between the groups.

Critics say the SBC should not fund that which it does not control through election of a majority of trustees. The members of the SBC Public Affairs Committee are the SBC representatives on the 54-member BJCPA board.

Critics also have charged the organization has adopted positions contrary to SBC resolutions and is not responsive nor accountable to the SBC. Executive Director James M. Dunn also has been criticized for his style of operation.

Although the recommendation to create the Religious Liberty Commission, if adopted, would provide an exclusive Southern Baptist First Amendment presence in Washington, the study committee specified it wishes to maintain a continuing relationship with the BJCPA, cooperating "on those issues on which we can agree."

The recommendation, however, would change the way the BJCPA receives Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget funds. Currently, the organization -- although not officially an SBC entity -- is funded directly, the same as all boards, institutions and commissions.

The change would put funding in the SBC operating budget, which is administered by the Executive Committee and includes expenses for the Executive Committee, the annual meeting, the Baptist World Alliance contribution and all standing committees, which are not legal entities and cannot receive direct funding.

The recommendation will be presented to the Executive Committee's business and finance subcommittee during its February meeting. If it is approved there, it will be recommended to the entire Executive Committee.

If the Executive Committee agrees to the creation of the new agency, the action will be recommended to messengers at the 1989 annual meeting of the SEC in Las Vegas, Nev., and to the 1990 annual meeting in New Orleans. According to SBC Bylaw 15, creation of new agencies must be approved by simple majority vote in two consecutive annual meetings.

Other bylaw changes necessitated by the creation of a new agency must be approved only once, but by two-thirds majority votes. Such votes likely would come in the 1990 annual meeting.

If the recommendation to create the Religious Liberty Commission is approved in both annual meetings, it would be the first new agency created since 1960, when the Stewardship Commission was voted into being.

The SBC currently has 20 national entities, including the Executive Committee, four general boards, seven institutions, seven commissions and one auxiliary.

The seven-member study committee was appointed after the September meeting of the Executive Committee and is the third special committee assigned to study the program of or funding for the BJCPA and its relationship with the SBC.

The action that precipitated the newest study was a 10-2 vote in the business and financial plan workgroup concluding that it is "inappropriate to contribute Cooperative Program funds directly to any entity which is not controlled by trustees elected by" the SBC.

The study committee was created as a compromise after convention attorney James P. Guenther of Nashville told business and finance subcommittee members they did not have authority to override action taken at an annual meeting. In the 1988 annual meeting, messengers approved a CP allocation budget that included a line item directly funding the BJCPA.

The controversy first erupted in 1984, when messengers debated funding for the BJCPA and then narrowly turned down a vote on the matter in a parliamentary procedure.

It arose again in 1986, when a messenger moved to sever all ties with the BJCPA and establish an exclusively Southern Baptist presence in the nation's capital. The motion caused appointment of a committee to study the relationship between the BJCPA and SBC.

That study, done in 1986-87, opted to continue to relate to the BJCPA, but restructured the PAC. It also recommended the PAC continue to participate on the BJCPA, but authorized it to function separately in the interests of the convention on issues where the BJCPA did not act.

The second study, in 1987-88, appointed after a dispute on whether funding should be made directly to the BJCPA or be routed through the PAC, recommended direct funding continue.

In October 1987, at its first meeting in conjunction with the BJCPA, the PAC voted 8-4 to sever all ties with the BJCPA and in December 1987 discussed a merger with the Christian Life Commission.

The Executive Committee, in February 1988, declined to sever ties and instructed the PAC to try to work with the BJCPA. CLC trustees later declined to further consider the possibility of a merger with the PAC.

Also, in 1988, the Cooperative Program allocation for the joint committee was reduced from \$448,400 to \$400,000.

The most recent study committee was appointed by David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Lake Charles, La., and chairman of the business and finance subcommittee. Hankins, as well as Charles Sullivan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tenn., and chairman of the Executive Committee, serve on the study committee as voting members.

Chairman of the special committee is James Roach, an Albuquerque, N.M., attorney. Members are Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge; Frank Ingraham, a Nashville attorney; Sam Pace, director of associational missions in Lawton, Okla.; and Doyle Collins, pastor of Vine Street Baptist Church in Roseburg, Ore.

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High court accepts case  
testing dial-a-porn law

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press  
1/12/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case involving a challenge to a federal law that bans the sale of dial-a-porn telephone services.

The law, which Congress passed last year, outlaws selling dial-a-porn services that involve obscene or indecent speech. It carries fines of \$50,000 and a jail term of six months for each offense.

Sable Communications of California Inc. challenged the law as a violation of its First Amendment rights. A federal judge upheld the law's ban on obscene speech but struck down its ban on indecent speech.

Sable Communications appealed the judge's ruling on obscene speech, and the Federal Communications Commission appealed his ruling on indecent speech. The high court has combined the two cases and is expected to hear oral arguments this spring. (88-515, Sable v. FCC; 88-525, FCC v. Sable)

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Koop's report reveals new  
smoking-related hazards

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press  
1/12/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--On the 25th anniversary of the first federal report warning about the dangers of cigarettes, a new report reveals that smoking causes more than one of every six deaths in the United States.

Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's nearly 700-page report on the health consequences of smoking concludes that smoking remains the single-most important preventable cause of death in American society. In 1985, smoking killed 390,000 Americans, according to the report.

Other new findings include:

-- Cigarette smoking is a major cause of strokes, the third-leading cause of death in the United States.

-- Lung cancer has surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer death among women.

-- Cigarette smoking is associated with cancer of the uterine cervix.

But Koop's report also shows that since the initial report on smoking was issued, more than 40 million adults have given up cigarettes. That decline among smokers, coupled with the decision by many Americans not to begin smoking, has resulted in avoiding or postponing 750,000 smoking-related deaths, according to the report.

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Smoking remains more prevalent among blacks, blue-collar workers and less-educated people than in the overall population, the study shows. Also, the decline in smoking has been substantially slower among women than among men.

The report reveals that smoking begins primarily during childhood and adolescence. One-quarter of high school seniors who have ever smoked had their first cigarette by sixth grade, and one-half smoked by eighth grade, according to the report.

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'Nonresidential missionary':  
new way to reach hard places

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press  
1/12/89

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Christian missionaries may never gain permission to live in some places, mission agencies acknowledge, and an average of three additional countries are shutting their doors to missionaries each year.

One potential answer to the problem is appointment of "nonresidential missionaries," a new breed of mission workers now being assigned by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and other agencies to help evangelize unreached people groups from bases in separate countries, or even separate continents.

"Nonresidential missionary" sounds contradictory. But many of the estimated 1.3 billion unevangelized people in the world live in places where missionary residence is either impossible, ineffective or counterproductive.

At least 45 countries are "closed" entirely, mission strategists report, and more than 50 others are significantly restricted. Yet borders -- political, geographical or social -- need not impede the progress of the gospel, they insist.

"We've got to look at alternative means," says David Garrison, who recently was named to coordinate the Foreign Mission Board's nonresidential missions program. "The world situation demands a nonresidential approach."

In their rhetoric, Christians bent on world evangelization refuse to accept a closed border as a barrier to missions. "But in a sense we do accept it because we let that reality dictate where we do missions," Garrison contends. "When a country closes its doors and tells all missionaries to get out, we simply stop going there. But what we're talking about now is a quantum leap forward. Whether these peoples are in closed countries or not is irrelevant. What matters is that God has called us to do it, and he hasn't just called us to places where it is convenient for us to live."

Enter the nonresidential missionary. He is not an itinerant missionary who frequently travels in and out of a restricted area, Garrison explains. Nor is he a "tentmaker" who gains limited entrance to the restricted area by working in a secular profession. He is a full-time professional career missionary, assigned exclusively to a single unreached people group in a restricted city, region or country -- but based in another location.

To understand his task, suppose the target people group is a large but isolated ethnic minority living in a country off-limits to missionaries. The people group has a population of several million, but virtually no Christian churches, few native believers and little Christian literature. A Bible in the group's language exists but cannot be published or distributed legally. The government is hostile toward religion, domestic or foreign.

Despite its size, this people group has attracted little attention from world Christians because of its isolation. No mission agency has beamed broadcasts in its language across the host nation's closed borders. A few foreign Christians have toured the country, taught in its universities or engaged in its business. But they have had minimal contact with the target group, which lives far from the national capital and other major cities.

As envisioned by Foreign Mission Board researchers and strategists, a nonresidential missionary assigned to this people group would do the following:

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-- Live outside the group's host country in a major city with a free flow of information and international communication technologies, particularly computers with worldwide networking capability. Access to information and the means to receive and transmit it are essential to the nonresidential missionary's task -- more essential than extensive personal contact with the people group itself. Others he assists will carry out much of the actual evangelizing.

-- Research all aspects of the group's society, including its cultural and religious situation, by studying everything written on the subject, monitoring information emerging from the host country, interviewing expatriate members of the group and so on. Mastering the group's language is a must. At the same time, the nonresidential missionary will search out all the Christian resources, methods of outreach and personnel that potentially could be directed toward the evangelization of the group.

-- Tailor a comprehensive strategy for evangelizing the group, including multiple options for outreach. Those options might include Christian broadcasts; literature; evangelization and training of expatriates in other countries who may return to their homeland; selective use of tentmakers in education, health care, social service, relief and development -- in short, whatever may be effective evangelistically in the group's environment.

-- Network -- both directly and through the Foreign Mission Board's computerized World Evangelization Database -- with Southern Baptists and other Christians worldwide who are committed to the Great Commission, Christ's command to carry the gospel message to all people. Challenging, coordinating and cooperating, the nonresidential missionary should become an advocate for the target people group to the Christian world. And networking is a two-way street: He will receive updated information regularly from the world database, other nonresidential missionaries and other Christian groups.

The true potential of the nonresidential approach, according to Garrison, lies in the way it can multiply evangelization. The nonresidential missionary is not a solitary personal witness, but an "agent of evangelization." Working outside the target group, he can coordinate the efforts of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of others who will have a cumulative impact by their sheer number. He becomes a funnel for the wealth of evangelistic resources that have been going into the same places again and again and channels them into areas that previously had no evangelistic witness at all.

A number of missiologists and mission agencies have contributed to the concept's development in the last few years, including Foreign Mission Board strategists. A question follows: Is it a new idea? On a global, computerized scale, yes.

"As far as we know, it has never been tried before," says Garrison. "Fifty years ago, this kind of an approach would have been impossible, simply because of the slowness of communications."

Clark Scanlon, FMB research director, agrees: "We could never have done this without being in the electronic era. Now it is possible to gather detailed information, pull it together in our research database, pull out its significance and use it. It becomes grist for the mill from which we develop strategy. It's astounding what a dedicated person can find out in a matter of months, and the nonresidential missionary's first assignment is to know a people group as no one else does."

The Foreign Mission Board already has assigned five nonresidential missionary couples. It aims to add 25 more by the end of 1989. Eventually several hundred may be scattered around the globe -- all assigned to separate people groups in restricted areas. Several other mission agencies also have assigned nonresidential missionaries.

The nonresidential approach will not replace traditional missions and other methods in "open" countries or even in all restricted areas, strategists say. But in targeting severely restricted places and peoples, they believe it can be highly effective.

"It's the missing link," Garrison concludes. "It pulls all the other approaches together and makes them work. That's the key."

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