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89-108

Oklahoma church seeks hearing
for couple denied missions work

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The home church of a couple denied missionary appointment has requested a hearing during the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees' meeting Aug. 7-9.

Northwest Baptist Church of Ardmore, Okla., in a resolution adopted unanimously July 5, "strongly urges the trustees ... to reconsider" a subcommittee's action rejecting the missionary candidacy of Greg and Katrina Pennington. The church employed the couple in 1984 and ordained them to the ministry in 1986.

The congregation circulated its request for a hearing, along with a three-page open letter, to the Foreign Mission Board's 90 trustees, Baptist Press and nearly 40 newspapers published by state or regional Baptist conventions.

The church's pastor, William V. Johnson, also has written to the trustees' chairman, C. Mark Cortis, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., reiterating the request for a hearing.

Mrs. Pennington's ordination cost Northwest Baptist Church its membership in the Enon Baptist Association. A month before the ordination service, the association voted to automatically remove from its membership any church that ordains women.

The association also mailed two letters to the Foreign Mission Board opposing the Penningtons' application for missionary service, one in 1987 and the other on June 7 of this year. On June 27, a trustee subcommittee voted 9-4 against the Penningtons, who had been recommended for appointment as missionaries to Scotland by mission board staff members in Richmond.

Johnson, who wrote the open letter to trustees, contended that the church "had no opportunity to respond" to Enon Baptist Association's claim that the ordination of the Penningtons brought divisiveness to the association.

Also being mailed to trustees is a letter from the trustee subcommittee chairman, Paul Sanders, pastor of Geyer Springs First Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark. His letter reviews the subcommittee's reasons for the decision to reject the Penningtons.

The "primary concern" was the "disunity this (the ordination of Mrs. Pennington) had created" in the church and association, Sanders wrote. "Ordination of women to the ministry is an issue among Southern Baptists but was not the primary issue in this decision."

No church has ever requested a hearing with trustees on behalf of any rejected missionary candidate, mission board officials in Richmond said. Louis Cobbs, who directed the board's personnel selection department from 1968 to 1988, said several couples turned away by trustee subcommittees in the past 10 years have asked for a review by the overall trustee personnel committee. Cobbs declined to disclose the resolution of those cases.

Trustee chairman Cortis, in a telephone interview, reaffirmed the trustees' committee process. "We talk a lot about trust in Baptist life, and we have to trust committees to do their work ... even when they make hard decisions which may not please everybody," he said.

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"If some member of the committee on the prevailing side (of the 9-4 vote) wanted to reconsider, we would give it strong consideration to see if any consensus was building for some reconsideration," Corts said.

Corts did not dismiss the church's request to meet with trustees, but said, "After weighing that carefully, I would be very cautious about any kind of a 'hearing.'" Sanders, also wary of a hearing, explained, "We would open ourselves to hear everybody from now on who is not approved by the Foreign Mission Board, and that would be, I think, a dangerous precedent to set."

Pennington, who is minister of education at Northwest Baptist Church, would have done youth ministry in Scotland. Mrs. Pennington, Northwest's minister of preschool education, would have been assigned to church and home ministries.

"We'd like to pursue every avenue possible to merit reconsideration for appointment," Pennington said in a telephone interview. "Our calling is still there." His wife added, "We feel we've done the right thing and we've acted with integrity, courage and a clear conscience. We've been faithful to God's call to the mission field."

According to Johnson's open letter, "From the very beginning, the issue within the Enon Association has been the ordination of women." But the "encompassing issue," he argued, is the autonomy of the local church, which is upheld in the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement of beliefs traditionally shared by Southern Baptists.

Johnson noted that Foreign Mission Board trustees passed a resolution May 24 affirming the autonomy of the local church. The resolution responded to controversy that began when Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College, which is an arm of First Baptist Church of Dallas, was exploring the purchase of an evangelical school in Belgium.

"Would it not be proper," Johnson asked, also "to uphold the autonomy of the local church and appoint this compassionate, gentle, God-called couple as missionaries who would well represent all Southern Baptists?"

Corts acknowledged that the Foreign Mission Board honors the autonomy of the local church, but added, "We also honor the cooperative approach to missions," which calls the board to a concern for how a church's exercise of autonomy might affect churches and Baptist bodies overseas.

"The church may exercise its autonomy, and that's fine," Corts said. "But it can't force whatever that exercise leads them to do upon other bodies."

According to Sanders' letter, "The local church is autonomous but the local churches as well as our foreign missionaries must cooperate with one another to carry out our Lord's command of spreading the gospel. We must send those we feel will not be divisive and (who) have been able to work well with others."

Johnson, in his open letter, stated, "Northwest Baptist Church, including the Penningtons, has never sought conflict and controversy with the Enon Association." The pastor stated that Mrs. Pennington "did not 'adamantly pursue' ordination as was charged in the Enon Association letter. ... Rather, Northwest Baptist Church, after careful investigation of Scripture and led by the Holy Spirit, called Katrina out and set her apart for ministry through the act of ordination to the gospel ministry."

Until the church was excluded from the association, the Penningtons and then-pastor Phil Christopher had filled various associational roles and the church had supported the association financially, Johnson wrote. The church remains "fully cooperative" with the Oklahoma Baptist and Southern Baptist conventions, he added. "Rather than decreasing its giving, Northwest Baptist Church has continued to give 10 percent of its budget through the Cooperative Program (Southern Baptists' unified state and national budget process) and has added 1 percent to Southern Baptist missions causes through state and world relief."

Don Clark, director of missions for the Enon Baptist Association, was asked for comment. He said, "Our position has been well stated in our (June 7) letter. That's our position."

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"It is our conviction that the ordination of Mrs. Pennington violated clear Bible teaching," the association's leaders wrote in that letter. They added that the ordination violated another biblical principle, rooted in 1 Cor. 8:13, that Christians should refrain from actions that might offend fellow Christians. "The ordination of Mrs. Pennington," the letter stated, "was certainly offensive to a multitude in this association, and she and the Northwest Church knew it."

The associational leaders posed a hypothetical question: "What if the Penningtons should decide they want to do something that would run counter to the policies and doctrines held by the Foreign Mission Board? They have certainly proven that they don't care what the association here holds."

Mrs. Pennington said she hopes Southern Baptists frustrated with the subcommittee decision "will not lash out at the Foreign Mission Board. People need to hang in there ... and make their voices heard and be true to our Southern Baptist heritage."

"I hope people who feel a call to the mission field won't be deterred by this, won't be frightened, but will respond," she said.

Johnson, in a telephone interview, said, "There are still a lot of missionaries and students and professors who are doing wonderful work that needs to be supported."

"At the same time, the freedom to cooperate despite doctrinal differences has been deeply damaged by this," Johnson said. "If it continues in a step-by-step process, I think it spells eventually the destruction of any real freedom to cooperate, because you cut out more and more and more people."

Johnson noted that some of the money Northwest Baptist Church gives through the Cooperative Program "supports missionaries with whom we would not agree on some of the things they teach. But the spirit of cooperation demands that we support them, as well as our own, for the cause of the gospel."

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(BP) foreign bureau staff writer Eric Miller also contributed to this story.

Alzheimer's victims need
ministry, professor says

By Sheila Sullivan

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(SBTS)

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A pervasive phobia about aging is handicapping a critical need for ministry to millions of Alzheimer's victims and their families, a Southern Baptist professor of church social work said.

"It's hard dealing with our own fears of aging and finality, so that makes it difficult to deal with something like Alzheimer's," said Jon Rainbow, associate professor of social work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Yet, Rainbow emphasized, the need for ministry to people with this terminal disease is growing daily.

"Our society seems to have a phobia about aging," Rainbow said. In the midst of a youth phenomena in ministry, many churches are failing to reaffirm the elderly as valuable members of society, he said. This is true, he added, despite the fact that senior citizens are expected to comprise one-fourth of society by the year 2030.

Within America's senior adult population, an estimated 2.5 to 4 million people now have Alzheimer's, according to the National Association for Aging. Those figures represent about five percent of men and women age 65 and over and 20-25 percent of those age 85 and over.

Baptist programs are "geared more toward the active elderly who can participate in events that will yield impressive numbers," Rainbow said. He added that Southern Baptist literature has offered very little information and spiritual advice for families of Alzheimer's victims.

Rainbow encouraged pastors and other ministers to become educated about Alzheimer's in order to lead churches toward effective ministry.

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Many people still think Alzheimer's is akin to senility or is a normal part of aging, said Kathy Yates, a registered nurse and director of the Ruth K. Schmidt ShareCare program in Louisville. Both perceptions, she noted, are wrong.

Alzheimer's is an organic brain disease that can last from two to 20 years before causing death. The progressive deterioration robs the victim of memory, reasoning power and physical abilities. The cause of the disease is still being researched, but it has been linked to genetic and possibly environmental factors. There is no known cure.

News of Alzheimer's "is very heartbreaking for the families and the victims," said Rainbow. "That's why ministers need to learn about the disease, identify church members who need help and test the openness of the church to this kind of ministry."

Both Rainbow and Yates encouraged congregations to try to find ways to connect Alzheimer's families to the church so they don't feel isolated.

Individuals can help by doing household chores, providing transportation or meals and by staying with the Alzheimer's victim so the primary care giver can "get away" for a while, Rainbow said.

Yates added Sunday school classes or other church groups can sponsor ministry projects involving Alzheimer's victims and their families. She suggested groups form a "caring connection" where one or two members act as coordinators. The coordinators maintain a list of volunteers, duties to be performed and times volunteers are available. When certain needs are discovered, families can then be connected quickly to volunteers.

Yates also pointed out that respite care through programs such as ShareCare is available in many communities. ShareCare, sponsored by the Louisville chapter of the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Association, coordinates a volunteer program of care for Alzheimer's victims three afternoons a week. The program operates in space donated by St. Matthews Baptist Church.

Pastors and other church staff members can help by directing interested church members to available services and information, Yates said.

"They can't be everything to everyone, but they can be directors" who point persons in the right direction, she said. "If they know about Alzheimer's, they can guide the understanding and education of people who can help."

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(Sullivan is a communication intern at Southern Seminary.)

Chaplain helps troopers
overcome obstacles

By Pam Parry

F-60
(Md./Del.)

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BALTIMORE (BP)--The gun was raised to his face.

Transfixed by the cold, steel barrel, the Maryland state trooper knew his life was ending as the assailant squeezed the trigger.

"Click."

The misfiring weapon spared the trooper's life, but he and a fellow officer involved in the shootout were haunted by thoughts of what might have been. Unable to cope with the incident, one trooper left the agency. The other dealt with the fears and still remains with the Maryland State Police.

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Lt. Col. Frank Mazzone can't help but wonder if the first trooper would have stayed with the agency had he been able to talk out his problems with a chaplain. An avid supporter of the chaplaincy section of the state police, Mazzone remembers the days before chaplains and assures they make a tremendous impact on officers who daily face life-and-death decisions.

The Maryland State Police chaplaincy section, which was established in 1968, consists of 28 volunteer chaplains of various denominations, who are supervised by Southern Baptist Bill Andrews. Andrews, a longtime Maryland Baptist pastor, became a volunteer chaplain with the law enforcement agency in 1975 and became director in 1985.

Working undercover, watching friends die, engaging in shoot-outs combined to create personal and family stress for Mazzone. But he didn't have anyone to discuss his problems with him.

Even though his promotion took Mazzone off the streets, he says, the initiation of the chaplains corp is beneficial, because his officers go through many of those same stresses and problems.

Mazzone remembers one incident in which Andrews helped him deal with a death notification for one of his troopers. Death notifications are difficult any time, but "When it's one of your troopers, it's tough," he adds.

"I felt good about Bill being there," Mazzone recalls. "It's tough on the family, but it's a little tough on me. ... I was glad to have Bill there."

A native of Reisterstown, Md., Andrews is a clergy liaison between the chaplaincy section and the agency.

Helping in the selection of chaplains is a key part of Andrews' job, he says. He reviews the applications to see if they meet the qualifications of the Maryland State Police; all chaplains undergo the same investigation as the agency's civilian employees, he adds.

In addition to making sure prospective chaplains don't have any "skeletons in the closet," Andrews looks to see that they have a sensitivity or level of understanding to troopers, says Trooper 1st Class Ron Riffin.

"You just cannot talk to anybody about police work," says Riffin, adding officers need to know that chaplains are available and the director of chaplains provides that assurance.

Chaplains are vital to officers at the time of death notifications -- whether it's a trooper or accident victim, Riffin says. Andrews remembers his first and most difficult notifications. The first time he had to notify a family of a young boy who was shot by an officer during an burglary. His toughest involved the suicide of an officer.

Troopers also can turn to chaplains for counseling, Andrews says. All trooper-chaplain counseling sessions are confidential; in fact, the chaplaincy section has an office off the police compound to allow troopers to come for counseling unnoticed.

But counseling troopers is difficult because many of them think it unmasculine to seek help, Mazzone says.

The struggle comes in getting a "group of machos who think, 'I can take care of my own problems'" to see the need for counseling, says Andrews, who works part time with the state police and part time as chaplain at Franklin Square Hospital.

The officers have a very close knit community, Andrews adds, but they almost exclusively associate with one another because other people are the ones to whom they issue tickets.

Because state policemen deal with violators of the law -- not average citizens -- they easily become depressed and slip into a "us-them" syndrome, says Riffin.

"It's very easy for the trooper out here on the road, who hears all kinds of excuses, to become cynical," Andrews adds, noting "just being willing to shoot the breeze" can help.

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Visibility, availability and credibility are three keys to being an effective chaplain, says Andrews, who was named Career Chaplain of the Year by the International Conference of Police Chaplains last year.

"I am low-key in my approach. I don't come at them waving a Bible, but I try to gain their confidence. I have had many opportunities to share my faith."

"I cannot think of a better individual than Bill to serve in that role," says 1st Lt. Roy L. Chiavacci, commander of the employee relations unit. "He has not only the background and experience, but he has the desire and motivation to perform in this role; so, he ... looks at it as a real mission.

"Behind the scenes, he is able to continually motivate individuals that are serving as chaplains through the state," he adds. "He exemplifies the chaplaincy program."

But Mazzone, as one who remembers the days before Andrews and the chaplaincy program, says it best, "We are thankful (for him)."

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Adams declines PR
position at SEBTS

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(SEBTS)

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Gary D. Adams has declined to accept the position of director of public relations/communications at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

In late June, the seminary announced Adams, pastor of Kelham Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, would assume the post July 1.

However, in a news release July 5, the seminary announced Adams decided not to accept the position, citing differences in the cost of living between Oklahoma City and Wake Forest-Raleigh.

In his letter to George Worrell, vice president for external affairs, Adams said "family considerations caused me to reconsider acceptance of the position. ... I am thankful and humbled to have been considered for this position in our great Southeastern ... Seminary and wholly support the administration in their attempt to redream the dream that led Southern Baptists to begin our seminary in Wake Forest."

Worrell said he will continue to seek a director of public relations/communications to replace Rodney V. Byard, who resigned in 1988.

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