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89-134

Vines urges accountability,
emphasis on evangelism

By Robert O'Brien

N-CC

NASHVILLE (BP)--The denomination must maintain accountability to churches and support them in evangelistic efforts, Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines said in an address to the SBC Executive Committee.

"For the most part, I have found they (denominational agencies) have a keen sense" of accountability, Vines said. "For our denomination to be vital and vibrant, it must maintain accountability.

"The process of theological renewal is underway and must continue. The trustees of our institutions are accountable to see that this is done."

For example, he said, "accountability would require that our convention in (annual) session receive an update" on Recommendation V of the Southern Baptist Peace Committee report, adopted at the 1987 SBC meeting in St. Louis. Recommendation V called on trustees to "determine the theological positions of the seminary administrators and faculty members. ..."

All six Southern Baptist seminaries have responded to the SBC since the Peace Committee report was adopted by SBC messengers in St. Louis.

While noting that theological problems still exist in the SBC, Vines said that "those who believe there are errors in the Bible are in a pronounced minority in Southern Baptist life."

Vines described himself as "high" on the Southern Baptist Convention. "It's surely wise for us to do together what we cannot do separately. Though we must never allow the SBC to become a god, we must strive to make it very good," he said.

Noting signs of "a spiritual awakening" and a "move upward again in our vital statistics," Vines said he is "optimistic about the future of our denomination."

Vines, re-elected to a second one-year term as SBC president in June in Las Vegas, said his emphasis for his second year "will be on building great soul-winning churches." That follows a first-year emphasis urging Southern Baptists to increase personal witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ.

"The (first-year) emphasis reached a thrilling climax at the convention in Las Vegas," he said. "More than 500 people were won to Christ through the personal efforts of our messengers. I'm especially grateful to a number of (SBC) executives who shared a personal soul-winning testimony."

Earlier, Vines issued a news release calling on Southern Baptist churches to follow up Las Vegas by cooperating with an evangelistic effort planned at the 1990 SBC meeting in New Orleans by the SBC Home Mission Board and the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

"I am requesting and urging ... that every church in the Southern Baptist Convention elect its maximum allotted messengers to attend the 1990 convention and that, if possible, these messengers be the best soul winners in the church," Vines said in the release.

"New Orleans presents the messengers ... with another unique opportunity to make a maximum impact for Christ upon a great city," Vines said. "It is my prayer that tens of thousands of committed, soul-winning Southern Baptists will converge on the New Orleans area. ..."

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In his address to the Executive Committee, Vines called on "every facet of denominational life to help our churches maintain our soul-winning assignment."

"Our churches must never become magnificent aquariums swapping goldfish with one another," he declared. "Rather, our churches must give priority emphasis to its soul-winning task."

"Let us reaffirm the Bold Mission Thrust (effort to proclaim the message of Christ to the whole world by A.D. 2000) and make an all-out attempt to establish it as our priority from the local church down through the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

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SBC committee sets parameters for
considering Virginia 'memorial'

By Mark Wingfield

N-NMB

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NASHVILLE (BP)--A "memorial" sent from Virginia Baptists to the Southern Baptist Convention could be addressed next February in a meeting between Virginia Baptist leaders and members of the SBC Executive Committee.

However, the scope of the discussion has been limited to "matters related to the funding of cooperative ministries," by a Liaison Committee named to receive the "memorial." The committee, appointed by the Executive Committee, adopted a purpose statement, historical background and set of parameters during their initial meeting Sept. 18.

The Virginia memorial was sent to messengers at the 1989 SBC annual meeting, who referred the matter to the Executive Committee. The seven-member Liaison Committee was established by the Executive Committee last February to deal with such matters. Four Virginia representatives met briefly with the liaison committee Sept. 18 to request a formal dialogue. The liaison committee has invited members of Virginia's Task Force on the Denominational Crisis to meet with them in Nashville Feb. 19, 1990.

Virginia representatives had requested an earlier meeting with the liaison committee in order to bring a report to the annual convention of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in November. But due to scheduling conflicts, the committee could not find an acceptable date before February.

"We're happy to receive their proposal and will give consideration to their proposal," said Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. "We are disappointed that their schedule would not permit a meeting prior to our general association meeting, but we look forward to meeting with them in February."

"It appears they are going to limit it to discussion of the Cooperative Program," he noted. "While we would like to have broader discussions than that, we are pleased to talk with them about this issue because it is a very critical issue."

The Virginia memorial asks to open a continuing dialogue between the Baptist General Association of Virginia and the SBC. It raises five major issues for consideration: (1) continuing support of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, (2) allowing for "negative designation" of Cooperative Program funds, (3) the nature of SBC theological education, (4) allowing the Virginia Association to nominate its two representatives for the SBC Committee on Committees, and (5) developing a "new style of relating" between the state and national bodies.

Parameters set by the liaison committee will likely eliminate some of those issues from consideration. The parameters state that the committee may:

- Receive formal communications from Southern Baptist bodies when referred by the SBC Executive Committee;

- Engage in dialogue "only concerning matters which relate specifically to the joint efforts of Southern Baptist bodies in cooperative ministries;"

- Receive as information any instruments of communication from ad hoc Southern Baptist bodies or groups without obligation to respond;

- Not respond to charges or attacks against itself or against others, nor engage in questioning the actions and impugning the motives or character of any Southern Baptist.

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The parameters were prepared in advance of the meeting by liaison committee chairman Julian Motley of Durham, N.C. The committee adopted the parameters without change.

Based upon those parameters, Motley also presented a purpose statement which the committee adopted.

It says, in part: "The task of the SBC Liaison Committee is not to seek to define or to address theological or political issues, since they are the internal affairs of each autonomous Baptist body. Its task is, rather, to seek to find a common ground for continuing cooperation and fellowship in mission between the SBC and other autonomous Baptist bodies which admits to the reality of theological diversity but which stays short of discussion or debate of the internal affairs of any Baptist body."

Motley also presented a six-page document outlining a historical perspective of the committee's task. Although not voted upon, the document was received enthusiastically by the committee.

Motley noted that the committee's existence and assignment are "not without precedent" but are unusual. He cited previous inter-convention dialogues in 1918 and 1930 when Maryland Baptists sent memorials to the SBC.

"It appears in our Southern Baptist history that all dialogue between the SBC and state bodies has been confined to matters relating to the collection and disbursement of Cooperative Program and other denominational monies," Motley said. "There is no precedent to our knowledge in Southern Baptist Convention history of any joint effort between the SBC and state bodies to decide any issues relating to the internal affairs one of another, only to seek to achieve satisfactory agreement on the division of cooperative funds."

Cooperation between state conventions and the SBC in channeling funds to national causes is a "matter of convenience" and may be changed at any time, the document notes.

But discussing doctrinal issues adopted by the autonomous bodies is a different matter, Motley said. "There appears to be no precedent for opening a door to dialogue between bodies in which representatives of one body may call into question, or propose change in the internal nature of actions of another body.

"Autonomy would cease to exist at the door of any Baptist body into which official representatives of another Baptist body took the first step toward seeking to influence its internal affairs," he said.

Currently, the SBC has received the Virginia memorial and a "Conservative Response" to that document. At least one other body, the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, is currently considering sending a formal communication to the SBC.

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Some missionaries leave
Colombia; projects delayed

By Mary E. Speidel

N-7MB

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BOGOTA, Colombia (BP)--Amid Colombia's escalating drug war, several Southern Baptist missionary couples returned to the United States in mid-September, Foreign Mission Board officials reported.

In addition, five Foreign Mission Board volunteer projects in Colombia have been postponed, officials said. The projects, slated for September and October, involve volunteers from Alabama, North Carolina and Texas.

The missionaries leaving Colombia will take early furloughs, said Don Kammerdiener, board vice president for the Americas. Texans Arnold and Lucy Pessoa and Missourians Charles and Jamie Ruede were assigned to Medellin, the Colombian city that is headquarters for the world's largest cocaine ring. The other couple, Larry and Linda Booth of New Jersey, was assigned to Bucaramanga, near the Venezuelan border.

The Pessos, of Morton, Texas, have moved with their two children to Miami. The Ruedes and their two children have gone to Faucett, Mo. Mrs. Ruede, the former Jamie Singleton, was born in St. Joseph, Mo., and considers Faucett her hometown. Ruede is from Noel, Mo.

The Booths and their four children were scheduled to go to Raleigh, N.C. Booth is from Camden, N.J. Mrs. Booth, the former Linda Clark, is from Closter, N.J.

Violence erupted in Medellin after the Colombian government launched a crackdown on drug traffickers Aug. 18. The crackdown was triggered by the assassination of Colombian presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan. The killing was linked to Colombian drug lords.

In an emergency measure, Colombian President Virgilio Barco reinstated an extradition treaty with the United States voided in 1988 by the Colombian Supreme Court. The treaty allows Colombian drug criminals to be brought to the United States for trial.

Drug cartel leaders responded by declaring "total and absolute war" on the government. They also renewed threats to harm Americans in Colombia.

As tensions increased, the State Department advised U.S. citizens in Colombia to "carefully re-evaluate whether it is essential that they travel to or remain in Colombia at this time."

Meanwhile, mission officials offered Southern Baptist missionaries in Colombia several options, Kammerdiener said. Missionaries may return to the United States for furlough, stay in Colombia or move to another Spanish-speaking country. Those who stay in Colombia are free to relocate within the country for safety reasons, he said.

All missionaries assigned to Medellin have temporarily moved to other locations in Colombia, Kammerdiener said. A Medellin school attended by children of missionaries has been closed.

Colombia missionaries currently on furlough in the United States have been asked to delay their return to the field, Kammerdiener said. Decisions concerning missionaries in language school will be postponed until December, when the next group of new missionaries assigned to Colombia completes studies.

Bryan Brasington, the mission board's director for Spanish South America, assured Colombia missionaries of the support of the board and missionaries worldwide. "God will bring something good out of this crisis," he said in a letter to the missionaries.

During such crises, all Southern Baptist missionaries are allowed to make their own decisions about relocating, Kammerdiener said. "Missionary personnel throughout the world have Foreign Mission Board backing to move out of danger zones as local circumstances dictate," he said. "Colombia missionaries have that same privilege."

Southern Baptists have worked in Colombia since 1941 in evangelism, education, relief and human needs ministries. "We have maintained our work under all types of governments, serving the people to the limit of our resources and abilities," Kammerdiener said.

This year Southern Baptist volunteers have completed 15 projects in Colombia, according to board officials. All upcoming volunteer projects may be rescheduled, said James Cecil, associate director of the board's volunteer department. "The board is not canceling them," he said. "We are just placing them on hold."

Volunteers from Alabama had been scheduled to visit Columbia during September to work at a Baptist book depository and renovate a building at a Baptist camp. Two Southern Baptist seminary professors were to have led workshops and seminars in Cali in September and October.

Several projects slated for early 1990 also have been postponed, Cecil said.

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Honeycutt denies
student's appeal

By David Wilkinson

N'SBTS

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--An appeal by an avowed homosexual student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has been denied by President Roy L. Honeycutt.

Honeycutt's decision upholds disciplinary action requiring Missouri student Kevin Kouba to withdraw from the Louisville, Ky., school.

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Charging he had been misled in the initial hearing and that the seminary's policy on homosexual behavior is unfair, Kouba had appealed the original decision to two seminary disciplinary groups and then to Honeycutt. His appeal was denied each time.

In a letter to Kouba obtained by the Louisville Courier-Journal, Honeycutt said his review of the case indicated Kouba was "treated fairly throughout the disciplinary process." He said the school's policy is "clear and unambiguous" in stipulating that "homosexual behavior" and "heterosexual misconduct" are "unacceptable."

Honeycutt noted that the policy and Kouba's actions "relate to actual behavior and not just (sexual) orientation."

Kouba, who had planned to graduate next May from the seminary's School of Church Music, told the Courier-Journal he had anticipated Honeycutt's ruling and would consider reapplying for admission for the spring semester.

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New WMU head meets
SBC state editors

By Mark Wingfield

N-NMB

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--In a news conference with editors of Southern Baptist state papers, the new executive director of the convention's Woman's Missionary Union dodged controversial questions, declaring she hopes to keep the auxiliary focused on its primary task of missions.

Avoiding the denomination's ongoing theological political controversy does not reflect lack of courage or conviction, Dellanna O'Brien said, explaining she is "interested in providing leadership for all the women in the denomination."

At the end of her second week on the job, O'Brien hosted a one-hour news conference for members of the Southern Baptist Press Association, who were attending an orientation session at WMU's Birmingham headquarters.

O'Brien would not say whether she would speak out on controversial issues within the denomination that affect women and missions. She noted that WMU serves women from a variety of perspectives in the current denominational conflict.

O'Brien's predecessor, Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, had at times stated her perspective on current Southern Baptist Convention issues such as ordination and the auxiliary status of WMU. The editors asked O'Brien if she would make statements of conviction in the same way as Crumpler and two other agency heads who have been chastised by their boards for speaking out -- Russell Dilday of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Keith Parks of the Foreign Mission Board.

"In responding to controversial issues, I will attempt to do what is in the best interest of WMU," O'Brien answered.

"We are serving women who represent many views in our convention. Our goal is to see that the story of Christ and his redemption is circulated throughout the world. We would like to be able to focus on that and not on issues that we consider to be not that important."

O'Brien said she had not been instructed by her board to avoid speaking on controversial issues. "I have not been asked by any board member, the board as a whole or any staff member not to speak on any issue," she noted.

In the news conference, O'Brien was asked about specific controversial issues such as ordination of women.

On the ordination issue, O'Brien said: "It is my understanding that WMU has been very supportive of women, women who want to be used of the Lord, who feel called. The encouragement WMU provides them is significant, and that certainly will continue. We are concerned that women have opportunities of service."

Ordination is "not an issue" for missions involvement, she said: "It is not something that will equip or prevent service in missions. It is still a function of the local church."

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O'Brien acknowledged that certain positions, such as chaplains, may require ordination for service.

But when pressed to give her own view on ordination, she declined: "My own view is only important as it relates to my local church. I will continue to follow the position of WMU that ordination is a local church matter.

"It's important for me not to inject my personal views."

However, O'Brien added one disclaimer, noting, "The instant WMU requires me to do something against my convictions, I will leave."

She also refused to express an opinion about the controversial decision of a trustee committee of the Foreign Mission Board that denied appointment to Greg and Katrina Pennington of Ardmore, Okla. Because the denial appeared to have been related to an ordination controversy in the local Enon Baptist Association, the FMB has received hundreds of protest letters from WMU groups, pastors and other laypeople.

She described it as "a very unfortunate experience" but said she would have to see a pattern develop over time before making a judgment. If the situation is repeated, WMU might want to respond, she said.

On other issues, O'Brien said:

-- WMU should remain an auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention rather than become an agency with convention-appointed trustees.

-- She has no plans to make immediate changes in WMU structure or programs. "I've come into WMU at a time when it is very strong," she said. "I don't see any critical need for immediate change. The foundation is sure.

-- However, O'Brien said she does see a need to add to the good things WMU already is doing, in order to involve younger women and career women in WMU. "I see a generation gap in the churches in membership of WMU," she said.

O'Brien said modern women face new opportunities and challenges, such as careers, single-parent families, AIDS and other moral issues. Her challenge in leading WMU will be in motivating women to deal with these issues through missions involvement, she said.

-- She will not unilaterally set new goals for WMU. "I'm a team player," she said. "To act unilaterally in establishing goals for WMU would be a foolish thing to do. There are too many gifted women who love missions. Their expertise will be called upon to establish the direction for WMU."

-- WMU does not plan to become a missionary-sending agency to appoint candidates rejected by controversial policies of the mission boards. However, O'Brien noted that "none of us knows what will happen in the future."

-- She does not advocate reducing goals for the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong missions offerings. Neither offering has met its goal for most of the past decade, which has prompted some Southern Baptists to call on WMU to set more realistic goals.

"Setting a goal is always hard," O'Brien said. "You want it to be impossible enough that there is a stretch to get it done. On the other hand, you don't want it to be so impossible that there's no hope of making it. I hope we would continue to expect the impossible, pray for the impossible."