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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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September 21, 1989

89-135

Executive Committee supports
role of seminary trustees

By Marv Knox

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Executive Committee has adopted a document supporting the role of trustees at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Wake Forest, N.C., seminary is being examined by its accrediting agencies, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

Both agencies began their examinations in 1988. The studies came at the end of an academic year in which conservatives became the majority on the school's trustee board, President W. Randall Lolley and other top administrators resigned and new President Lewis A. Drummond was elected.

The Executive Committee statement was offered by Julian M. Motley, pastor of Gorman Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., at the end of its fall meeting Sept. 18-19 in Nashville.

The document includes a preamble and six sections. It states:

"The Executive Committee ... has been made aware of the current review of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary by its accrediting agencies. Southeastern Seminary is a seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention controlled by its trustees elected in accordance with the bylaws of the SBC. ... It is not our prerogative to direct the affairs of Southeastern Seminary. Rather, we wish to affirm:

-- "That we recognize the significance and value of the objective principles of accreditation standards. Accreditation agencies have a valid role in monitoring academic standards and in evaluating the viability of a school in terms of its use of available resources and in terms of its commitment to its educational purpose.

-- "That the trustees of Southeastern Seminary, duly elected by the SBC, have the right and duty to set policy and to direct the affairs of the seminary according to established seminary policies and procedures.

-- "That we value the various seminary faculties for their teaching skills, their theological expertise, their emphasis on local church ministries and their contributions to the lives of future SBC ministers.

-- "That we support the administrative structure of the SBC's seminaries, where trustees set policies and elected administrators carry out those policies.

-- "That all SBC educational institutions are accredited by the Association of Theological Schools and the appropriate regional accrediting agency and have experienced the same dynamics of recent leadership changes within the SBC.

"All SBC seminaries received visits by the SBC Peace Committee and were also subjects of its report to the SBC before the committee was disbanded. We did not and do not believe that these visits and reports in any way violated the academic freedom of the seminaries' faculties, nor is there any potential for loss of responsible academic freedom as a result of those visits and reports.

"No authority was granted to that committee beyond that necessary to fulfill its purpose of investigating and reporting on the possible causes of the controversy within the SBC.

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"Trustees retained full authority to set policy for each seminary in accordance with the primary documents of each school. Trustees were not put under any pressure to take action against individual professors nor against any group of professors. Findings were reported, but no condemnations were expressed in the report, nor were any voted by the convention nor any of its agencies or committees.

"Non-binding recommendations were made about future hiring policies as one possible solution to the controversy within our convention, but even these recommendations were not aimed at any one convention institution or agency, but were affirmed as suggested recommendations to all entities of the convention -- conditional in each case by individual situations, various primary documents and by our system of trusteeship.

"Each trustee board has voluntarily responded in ways that seemed appropriate in light of individual circumstances. We believe that each trustee has acted as he/she saw fit.

"Moreover, as representatives of the SBC, which provides major budget funding to Southeastern Seminary -- recognizing, of course, the separate identity and organizational structure of each institution -- we affirm that the SBC does not in our judgment desire to have a self-perpetuating faculty any more than it desires a self-perpetuating board of trustees.

"We believe in the principle of administrative leadership in new-faculty selection without denying the value of faculty input through consultation. Election to the faculty is a trustee responsibility and occurs on the basis of administrative recommendations to trustees through their organizational structure. We also affirm the right of a duly elected trustee board to set the new-faculty selection policies and procedures.

-- "That we believe that Southeastern Seminary has enhanced its image among many Southern Baptists through the election of Lewis A. Drummond as president and through the vision for theological education that he has articulated.

"We believe that the recent changes at Southeastern Seminary will greatly enhance the school's image and are supported by this Executive Committee."

Drummond expressed gratitude to the Executive Committee for its support. "I appreciate this very, very much," he said. "The Executive Committee, with counsel, has produced a very viable document that will be of positive benefit with our accrediting agencies."

Trustee Chairman Robert Crowley, pastor of Montrose Baptist Church in Rockville, Md., echoed Drummond: "I'm deeply grateful to the Executive Committee. This statement affirms what we did; we acted with integrity and within the framework of our official documents."

Motley said he felt he had an obligation to introduce the statement to the Executive Committee. "Because of my proximity to Southeastern and my awareness of what has happened on campus, I felt I had some responsibility to support the trustees," he said. "And the Executive Committee had some responsibility to give moral support to the trustees and administration in this time that they are trying to retain accreditation."

Motley noted he was not the "primary author" of the statement, although he originally drafted a shorter version of the document. He declined to say who wrote the statement but added: "It has been privately prepared. It is not the work of any group, officially or otherwise."

The statement was approved by Executive Committee members in the waning minutes of their meeting, and they authorized Motley, Executive Committee President Harold C. Bennett, Executive Committee legal counsel James P. Guenther and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt to edit the final draft "to make it legal."

That ad hoc committee held an open forum the next morning and produced the final draft. Motley expressed satisfaction with the final product, noting, "I do not think the substance of the document has been changed at all from the intent of the document as approved by the Executive Committee."

The statement should be valuable to the SBC's five other seminaries as well, Motley said, since it clarifies the role and authority of seminary trustees and describes their relationship to the SBC.

Missionaries survive Hugo;
relief efforts beginning

By Mary E. Speidel

N-FMB

POINT-A-PITRE, Guadeloupe (BP)--For 12 terrifying hours Sept. 16 and 17, the roaring winds of Hurricane Hugo blew trees, rain and gravel past their home in Guadeloupe.

But Southern Baptist missionaries Dan and Jan O'Dell survived, and so did the house, which sustained only a broken window. The O'Dells live in a house built on solid rock, 50 feet from the shore, in one of the hardest-hit areas on the island. Almost all the homes in their neighborhood were destroyed, along with the homes of 12,000 residents of the island.

"I did not fear personally for our lives," said O'Dell, of Snowville, Va. But during the climax of the storm, when the concrete house vibrated and almost moved, "I suddenly had the feeling that everything was going to go -- the house and everything. I just didn't see how the house could take anymore. Yet it kept going."

Four Baptist churches were destroyed on the island, two of which were built by Southern Baptist volunteer teams, O'Dell said. The hurricane leveled a public school. Five people were confirmed dead and more than 80 were injured, according to early reports.

With winds of up to 140 miles per hour, Hugo was reportedly the strongest hurricane to rip through the Caribbean in a decade. After battering Puerto Rico Sept. 18, Hugo missed the Dominican Republic and was headed toward the southern United States.

Puerto Rico, hard hit by Hugo, is a U.S. territory and relates to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. As of noon Wednesday (Sept. 20) telephone lines still were down and the San Juan airport remained closed.

The HMB staff in Atlanta had been unable to talk with any Baptist leaders on the island to determine the extent of damage to the 38 Baptist churches and missions on the island. The HMB supports 31 missionaries in Puerto Rico.

Southern Baptist relief efforts in the wake of the hurricane are being coordinated through the Foreign Mission Board and Brotherhood Commission, said John Cheyne, the board's director of human needs. State Baptist conventions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi have been alerted to organize Brotherhood volunteers. Disaster relief volunteers will help with reconstruction and electrical work, Cheyne said.

Five teams of 10 to 12 people each have been requested for Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts, Antigua and Guadeloupe. The team headed for Guadeloupe was scheduled to depart Sept. 24. Relief efforts in several areas are on hold pending the reopening of communications and airports on some islands, said Bill Damon, the Foreign Mission Board's associate director for Brazil and the Caribbean.

Relief coordinators also are waiting to see if Hugo hits the United States' eastern seaboard, Cheyne said. If that occurs, Georgia and Florida Brotherhood volunteers may be needed to help with disaster relief in their states. For that reason, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana have been designated as back-up states for sending volunteer teams to the Caribbean.

The mission board's general relief fund is low, Damon said, and he urged Southern Baptists wanting to aid the Caribbean effort to send contributions designated for general relief.

None of the 131 Southern Baptist missionaries working throughout the Caribbean were harmed, said Damon, and all of them had been contacted by Sept. 20. No missionary residences were destroyed. "There has been extensive water damage, but there's been no major damage to any of the homes," he said. Almost all islands are without electricity and water, he said.

On islands where missionaries work, the most severe damage was reported on Guadeloupe and Montserrat. "Thousands have been left homeless," said Damon. On Montserrat, about 90 percent of the homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, he said.

Missionaries Bill and Elba Womack of Fredericktown, Mo., have weathered some severe storms in their 30 years of living in the Caribbean. But they've never seen a hurricane like Hugo.

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"This is the hardest wind we've ever been in and the longest lasting," said Mrs. Womack from St. Martin in the Leeward Islands. The Womacks live on the Dutch side of St. Martin, where Hugo hit Sept. 16 and 17.

At the Womack's home in Cole Bay, winds damaged the roof, ripped off gutters and destroyed fences. "The phone is the only thing that's working," said Mrs. Womack.

In the Netherlands Antilles, the island of St. Eustatius was "hit very hard," said Womack, who is starting new Baptist work there. The roof was blown off Bible Baptist Church, a church where the Womacks have been working.

Extensive damage also was reported on Saba, where a journeyman couple, Bill and Julena Mounce of Somerset, Ky., are working.

On Martinique, missionaries Gerald and Maxine Reeves reported flooding and wind damage but said winds were only about 80-95 miles per hour. The Reeveses, who live in Lamentine, never lost phone service during the storm and lost electricity for only one day. "We were really blessed. We were expecting it to be a lot worse than it was for us," Mrs. Reeves said.

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Eric Miller of the Foreign Mission Board and Mark Wingfield of the Home Mission Board contributed to this story.

Executive Committee acts
on 27 referrals from SBC

By Dan Martin

N-CO

Baptist Press
9/21/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Members of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention acted on 27 motions referred to it at the 1989 annual meeting of the SBC in June during their Sept. 18-19 meeting in Nashville.

The committee declined to make the changes suggested in 20 of the motions; declared one matter moot although it will continue to study the issue involved; opted to continue studying four other issues; recommended one bylaw change; heard a report on another referral; and encouraged support of another item.

Most of the motions related to proposed changes in the constitution or bylaws of the SBC. Such proposals are referred to the Executive Committee for study by the committee and the convention's legal counsel.

Under annual meeting procedures, when a messenger makes a motion, if the proposal refers to internal operations, changes in the annual meeting, revisions of the operating documents, or needs further study, the motion is referred to the Executive Committee or the agency mentioned in the motion. Whatever action is taken must be reported to the subsequent annual meeting.

During the September meeting of the Executive Committee, members declared moot a proposal to remove Curtis Caine, a medical doctor from Jackson, Miss., as a commissioner of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Caine aroused the ire of some Southern Baptists with remarks on apartheid and race during a September 1988 meeting of the CLC. Caine reportedly said Martin Luther King Jr., was a "fraud" and apartheid "doesn't exist any more and was beneficial when it did."

Messenger Joe Arthur of Fort Worth, Texas, moved that Caine be removed from the commission, but the motion was referred to the Executive Committee to allow time to investigate the legal ramifications.

The Executive Committee approved an action which declared the matter "moot" since Caine completes his first four-year term on the CLC at the 1990 annual meeting and "consideration of his renomination ... is a decision to be made by the commissioner and the SBC Committee on Nominations."

However, the committee noted a possible modification of the bylaw on trustee election and trustee removal is being studied.

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The committee also is continuing to study three other matters. One relates to the possibility of having weekend sessions of the annual meeting; another concerns local and at-large members of boards of trust; and the third relates to the assignment of separation of church and state and religious liberty items to the CLC (see separate story on the Religious Liberty Commission).

A motion concerning support for the American Christian Television System (ACTS) network drew a recommendation encouraging Southern Baptists to use and reenforce ACTS, part of the Southern Baptist Radio & Television Commission.

Another motion -- a "memorial" from the Baptist General Association of Virginia, was assigned to a seven-member Liaison Committee which held its organizational meeting and reported it will meet with BGAV representatives Feb. 24. (see separate story).

The Executive Committee will recommend to messengers at the 1990 annual meeting a bylaw change which extends a prohibition against Committee on Nominations members electing a fellow committee member or spouse or a member of the previous year's Committee on Committees, or that member's spouse, to a first term on an entity board of trust.

Previously, Bylaw 16 prohibited nomination of a fellow committee member or a member of the previous year's Committee on Committees to a first term. The new bylaw proposal would extend the prohibition to cover spouses.

The committee, however, declined to declare that spouses of church or denominationally related employes fall into that category because of the work of their mate.

Under SBC rules, boards of trust must be composed both of laypersons and those who are in church or denominational employment.

J. Howard Cobble, pastor of Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, Ky., proposed the bylaw change because the current bylaw "is being violated by the practice of electing the spouse of a church or denominational employee and counting that individual as a layperson."

"Such practice means that the perspective of the pew is not fully represented. The spouse of a church or denominational employee will tend to represent the view of the vocational person rather than the view of the layperson," Cobble said in a letter to the bylaws workgroup of the Executive Committee.

Opponents of the change, however, pointed out the proposal would eliminate the spouses of church secretarial or other employes from being able to serve on boards or committees as laypersons.

The committee also declined to approve a bylaw change which would have limited a church to having only one trustee serving on the board of an SBC entity at a time. It noted it "shares the concern expressed in the ... motion" of John Hewitt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., but declined to establish the limit.

Members of the bylaws workgroup and administrative and convention arrangements subcommittee asked that their concerns be expressed to the 1990 Committee on Nominations, which proposes persons to serve on the boards of the national entities of the SBC.

The committee also declined to accept a proposal that any pastor nominated and elected to serve on the board of one of the six SBC seminaries be a graduate of one of the seminaries.

The committee also declined to recommend five proposals which related to the officers of the convention. One would have established the term of office at two years rather than one year. Bylaws workgroup chairman Eldridge Miller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Sallisaw, Okla., expressed the fear such a change would move the convention toward having biennial sessions, and said such a change would require a great commitment from any person elected to office in the convention.

Another motion declined would have required a candidate to receive two-thirds of the votes cast to become president; a third would have delineated the duties of the officers; a fourth would have limited nominating speeches to one minute rather than the current three minutes and a fifth would have established the times of the convention sermon and president's address by bylaw at the annual meeting.

The committee also declined to recommend changes which would have eliminated resolutions at the annual meeting; established a new committee on the Baptist Faith and Message; changed the name of the SBC; set minimum contributions at \$2,500 for representation at the annual meeting; established the annual meeting for the third week in June of each year; changed guidelines whereby meeting sites are chosen; picked Portland, Ore., as a meeting place; made changes in the exhibit policy at the annual meeting; and established hiring policies for denominational entities.

It also declined to provide financial help or housing scholarships to allow broader representation at the annual meeting. It was pointed out the annual meetings currently cost between \$400,000 and \$650,000, and such scholarships or help would make expenses of the annual meeting very high.

The committee also declined to adopt a proposal which would have set financial limits on the creation of a new agency or the expansion of an existing one.

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Baptists Committed warns
of state takeover attempts

By Toby Druin

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Baptist Press
9/21/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention charged that conservative forces in the SBC will begin attempts this fall to gain control of state conventions as they have the SBC in the last 10 years.

Saying the SBC is in the throes of a "moral crisis," laymen Steve Tondera of Huntsville, Ala., and John Baugh of Houston spoke at a half-hour-long news conference at the Park Plaza Hotel adjacent to the SBC Building in Nashville immediately before the opening session of the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 18.

Tondera, of Huntsville, Ala., and past president of the Alabama Baptist Convention, warned that conservative political forces this fall will begin with the Texas convention an attempt to ultimately control every state convention.

Tondera said a meeting of so-called young conservatives at First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, in May prior to last June's meeting of the SBC laid the groundwork for a pastors' conference in Texas that will be used to promote support for taking over the Texas convention.

The pastors' conference recently was announced by Rick Scarborough, pastor of Retta Baptist Church of Burleson, Texas, on the day before the opening of the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Scarborough, one of the speakers at the spring meeting of the "Young Conservatives," denies the Texas convention was discussed at the meeting.

Laymen and pastors must "wake up to this takeover threat" whose ultimate goal is control of the 54 colleges and universities and even local associations and churches," affiliated with the state conventions, Tondera said.

Baugh repeated his charge the state conventions have been targeted by conservative political forces, but claimed the plan is part of a larger scheme of Reconstructionism, an attempt by "zealots who are passionately committed to dismantling democracy and replacing it with a theological oligarchy" in the United States.

Whether "that crafty scheme" is successful, Baugh said, depends on whether or not Southern Baptists and the American people "are willing to forego individual liberty and religious freedom."

Baugh said Reconstructionist dogma teaches that such SBC doctrines as "freedom of choice and individual liberty, democracy and separation of church and state" are anti-Christian.

Those thoughts, he said, are laid out in a book, "The Reconstruction of the Republic," offered in a publication advertised in a publication of the SBC Public Affairs Committee.

"Reconstructionism merits careful analysis by every sincere American Christian," Baugh said. "Reconstructionism would supplant the democratic processes of this nation and impose arbitrary laws upon the people to be administered by a self-perpetuating theological oligarchy."

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The Houston layman charged that the terms "inerrancy" and "conservative" had been employed as "devices of deception" to seize the control of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He said some have told him God knows about the SBC controversy and will stop it, but he cautioned that God also knew about Hitler's atrocities and used "God-honoring Americans and allies" to finally end them.

"Our purpose is not to compare any Baptist contemporary with Hitler," Baugh said. "However, it is our purpose that Southern Baptists recognize that silence in the presence of shameful sin against fellow believers contravenes God's word regarding justice and what the Lord requires of us.

"We believe that God will stop the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. He will raise up strong men and women to begin the cleansing of this sin-stained denomination."

Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, presided at the press conference and reaffirmed the oft-stated promise that Baptists Committed will continue to fight to return the SBC "to its time-honored principles."

"We feel encouraged by the response of lay people all across the convention," Moore said. "We are encouraged and are in this effort for the long haul."

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South African Baptists
shot at, arrested

N-FMB

Baptist Press
9/21/89

PRETORIA, South Africa (BP)--Shots were fired into the home of a South African Baptist minister in August on the same day another Baptist minister was arrested while attempting to board a "whites only" bus.

Gunmen fired 12 shots into the Pretoria home of Ivor Jenkins early Aug. 28. A white Afrikaner, Jenkins is national coordinator of Koinonia, South Africa, an ecumenical group that promotes racial reconciliation. He formerly was pastor of a Baptist church in Pretoria.

Members of "White Wolf," a rightist Afrikaner organization, reportedly claimed responsibility for the action. Jenkins and his family had received threatening phone calls before the incident, he said, and a written death threat tied to bricks was thrown onto the porch of their home. The family went into hiding for several days following the incident.

Also on Aug. 28, Baptist pastor Gideon Makhanya was one of three blacks arrested in Pretoria as they tried to board a bus reserved for whites. He was released on bail Aug. 30 and is scheduled to appear in court Oct. 3.

Makhanya, former executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa, now works with the Pretoria Council of Churches. He and Jenkins helped organize "Standing for the Truth," a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign to desegregate public transportation in Pretoria.

Jenkins' role in the campaign may have prompted the attack on his home, observers said.

Baptist World Alliance President G. Noel Vose and General Secretary Denton Lotz sent messages of support to both Baptist leaders.

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Conference center attendance
registers slight decrease

N-SSB

Baptist Press
9/21/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Combined summer conference center attendance at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers registered a slight decrease in 1989 from the previous year, according to statistics compiled at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Combined attendance this summer at both conference centers was 53,165, compared to 54,371 in 1988, according to the board's conference center section, which compiles the statistics. Attendance at Ridgecrest was up by 302 over 1988, while Glorieta attendance was down by 1,508.

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Offerings given by summer conference participants, which are designated to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget, totaled \$57,418.

Combined attendance at six Sunday school leadership conferences at Glorieta and Ridgecrest was up by 240 from the previous year: 12,054 attended this summer, while 11,814 registered in 1988. A small-Sunday school leadership conference at Glorieta drew 1,268, an increase from 1,219 in 1988.

Centrifuge youth camp attendance at Glorieta and Ridgecrest totaled 11,157, a gain of 401 over 1988 attendance of 10,756. Centrifuge camps also were held at other locations during the summer.

Jericho missions festivals held for the first time this summer at Glorieta and Ridgecrest drew 3,214 participants. Jericho, which will be offered again in 1990, is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

Bible preaching-administration attendance registered a gain of 263 -- 2,912 in 1989, compared to 2,649 last year. Church (discipleship) training Summer Youth Celebration attendance at both conference centers increased by 173, from 3,838 in 1988 to 4,011 in 1989.

Registration at church music conferences was relatively unchanged -- 5,188 attended in 1989, and 5,169 attended in 1988. Student conferences also attracted almost the same number of participants -- 4,163 in 1988 and 4,150 in 1989.

Attendance at church recreation, church (discipleship) training and WMU conferences decreased from 1988.

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CORRECTION: Please change the 12th paragraph of the 9/13/89 BP story titled "Pulpit plagiarism lowers ministers' image, prof says" to read:

In addition to plagiarizing illustrations and ideas, Cox and Bailey said, preachers commonly borrow entire sermons. Preachers may adapt other preachers' sermons as long as credit is given to the original author, they said, but added that preachers should not make that a common practice.

Thanks,
BP

Writers begin work on addition
to student ministry guidebook

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

Baptist Press
9/21/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--A seven-member writing team has begun work on an addition to the Baptist Student Ministry Guidebook that is expected to be available by August 1990.

Max Barnett, director of student ministries at the University of Oklahoma in Norman and managing editor and a writer for the addition, met Sept. 11-13 with four student ministry directors and two staff members of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's student ministry department to begin work on writing assignments. Writing is expected to be completed by January 1990.

Campus ministers joining Barnett on the writing team include Brett Yohn, director of the department of student work for Nebraska and campus minister at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln; Bob Anderson, director of student work for Kansas and campus minister at Kansas State University in Manhattan; Dave Medders, director of student ministry at the University of Wyoming in Laramie; and Larry Woods, director of student ministry at Michigan State University in East Lansing.

Student ministry department members are Bob Hartman, consultant for newer convention work, and Milt Hughes, editor of student ministry materials.

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Publication of the addition was directed by trustees of the Sunday School Board Aug. 9, with Barnett specified as managing editor. Barnett also was authorized to approve writers, be given adequate pages to develop the addition and approve a field consultant to implement the approach.

Charles Johnson, director of the student ministry department, said an implementation plan for field services and consultant responsibilities related to the trustee action will be developed by the time the addition is published.

"We are working together with Max to develop plans with integrity to meet student ministry needs," Johnson said.

Barnett said the addition, of about 32 pages, will present details of a team approach to campus ministry as an alternative to the Baptist Student Union council organizational approach presented in the guidebook.

The team approach offers a flexible structure to meet ministry needs as they exist on different campuses, Barnett explained.

"No two people are going to approach an organizational structure in the same way. This is an effort to let people choose what they want to do," he said.

The addition will address the topics of ministry concepts, the lifestyle of the director, vision of the director, strategies and organization, he said.

The addition will make page references to sections of the existing guidebook and will rely on much of the material that is already there, Barnett said. Terms in the addition will be consistent with those in the guidebook so as not to create confusion, he added.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Church facility 'saturation'
not always basis to build

By Charles Willis

N-SSB

Baptist Press
9/21/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Some church leaders interpret too loosely a rule of thumb which stipulates that a church averaging 80 percent of its building's capacity needs larger facilities.

Gwenn McCormick, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church architecture department, said he hears pastors say, "We are now bumping up to 80 percent of capacity, so we must build."

"The point of the rule is not that you can't put more than 80 percent of the capacity in the building. The emphasis is that space is probably saturated when capacity is an annual average of 80 percent since there are some Sundays when every seat is taken.

"I know churches that are 95 percent and even 110 percent of recommended capacity, yet they are still growing," he told participants in a National Church Building Conference at the board Sept. 11-14. "Don't ever tell your people you can't grow until you get a new building. That is just not true," he told pastors, deacons and church building committee members.

"A church that wants to grow and is committed to a sound growth strategy will find ways to grow, even when space is saturated. They will rent, borrow or bring in temporary space, being creative in finding space for growth," he declared.

People needs, ministry needs and outreach challenges should be emphasized, with provision of a building as part of the church's strategy for response to needs, McCormick said.

"No church can do everything, fill all the gaps and use all the possible strategies for growth," he said. "The church must decide where it will put its weight down and how it will invest its energies."

He said churches need to ask how growth will be achieved and sustained.

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"Every church should develop its growth strategy before planning its facilities," he said. "If the strategy is to grow through an effective Sunday school, the priority facility will be an educational building. To build a recreation building before providing adequate educational space would be a denial of their commitment to growth or a betrayal of their growth strategy. If the growth strategy were recreation, the recreation facility would take first priority."

McCormick said the studies and evaluations involved in successful building programs provide opportunities to deepen congregational understanding of the mission and work of the church.

"Wise leaders will recognize these opportunities and the teachable moments they bring," he observed. "Good leadership will help the church study, debate, deliberate, pray and then decide."

"Building programs can consume time, resources, attention and concern," McCormick warned, urging leaders to "keep the focus on central issues. Reaching people, developing disciples, ministering in the spirit of Christ -- these are at the heart of the church's purpose. Never let the building become the main thing."

The Church Building Conference was sponsored by the Sunday School Board's church architecture department.