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28 trustees question O'Brien's
role; Parks defends action

By Robert O'Brien

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The appointment of William R. O'Brien as a top special assistant to the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board drew protest in a letter from 28 of the board's 89 trustees in October.

FMB President R. Keith Parks disagreed strongly with contents of the letter in a point-by-point written response to all 89 trustees Oct. 24.

News of the confidential letter broke after the Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch heard rumors about the letter, confirmed its existence from two trustees and published a story Oct. 21.

"I feel I must respond to all trustees point by point because the letter signed by 28 of you is now public and because I am personally offended by what it implies about me and my character," Parks wrote to the trustees.

The letter to Parks, sent to him by trustee Bob Claytor of Rome, Ga., on behalf of the signers, listed five areas of disagreement with Parks' decision regarding O'Brien. Parks named O'Brien to the post after O'Brien requested to step down from the board's executive vice presidency when his wife, Dellanna O'Brien, accepted the executive directorship of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. The O'Briens, former missionaries to Indonesia, now live in Birmingham, Ala.

The letter, received by Parks Oct. 16, said the signers disagreed with O'Brien's selection on grounds it (1) has the "appearance of cronyism" and makes an exception not available to other employees; (2) has "the appearance of linkage of two separate national organizations, the FMB and the WMU," which should operate independently; (3) is not cost effective in light of board emphasis on budgetary cuts; (4) makes it difficult for O'Brien to supervise employees from out of town; and (5) puts a person (O'Brien) with "open identification with the moderate faction in the Southern Baptist Convention" in a role the 28 trustees find objectionable.

"His role as liaison to other denominations and our agencies would not be our choice," the letter said.

Claytor, pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Rome, Ga., said the 28 trustees had no intention of questioning Parks' integrity or character but wanted to correspond with him privately to express an opinion.

"We highly support Dr. Parks," Claytor said. "It (O'Brien's appointment) is his shot to call. We feel like it was not a wise thing to do."

Parks' said he was "astounded" the 28 trustees felt the need to send the letter after receiving advance information on the selection and hearing a full discussion of it in several settings during a trustee meeting Oct. 9-11 in Richmond. Claytor said some trustees "didn't have an opportunity to respond in an appropriate setting" and chose to write Parks rather than deal with it publicly at the trustee meeting.

Claytor said questioning of O'Brien's role had nothing to do with any political effort against Parks or O'Brien, despite the letter's fifth point about O'Brien's identification with denominational moderates.

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"It would be dead wrong (for anyone) to say we're trying to get Dr. Parks or Dr. O'Brien," Claytor said. "There's no linkage, no broad pattern" connected to political activities at any other SBC agency, he said. "It was our looking at a decision he made and disagreeing with it" because of how it might be perceived by Southern Baptists.

"Bill O'Brien's open identification is with the cause of foreign missions," Parks responded in his letter to trustees. "On occasion, he and I and others are accused of political statements when we are speaking against something we believe negatively impacts missions but happens to have the endorsement of one political faction."

Noting his awareness of "accusations of political identity" made about O'Brien, Parks declared: "If this board ever reaches the point where 'perceived' Baptist political identity is viewed as a primary qualification for any staff position or for appointment as a missionary, we will greatly damage and probably destroy the weakened cords of cooperation that barely manage to hold us together. Thus far, this has not been a qualification and we have a mixture of both political viewpoints on staff and among missionaries. It must remain so if we remain the cohesive force of Southern Baptists."

Contacted for his reaction, O'Brien said he and Parks have taken and will continue to take steps to avoid the appearance of cronyism and conflict of interest and to make certain they practice good budgetary and administrative approaches.

On the political issue, O'Brien said, "I get shot at from the left and the right when I comment on priorities of the Kingdom of God. My commitment is to missions and, as the Psalmist says in Psalms 141, my eyes are fixed on the Sovereign Lord."

Parks responded to each of the other four points:

-- Appearance of cronyism -- "This makes it appear that my integrity is being questioned. I feel insulted by the allegation of cronyism and the statement that such an exception would not be made for anyone else. Bill O'Brien is not the only FMB staff member who has lived outside Richmond," he said, citing examples.

Parks also said management experts "are insisting on new approaches" and that "technology has allowed many others in other organizations to function effectively outside the home office." He cited O'Brien's "gifts which equip him uniquely for this role" and noted Birmingham "is more central to SBC agency constituency than Richmond." O'Brien oversees the board's denominational relations and serves as liaison with other evangelical groups in the board's world evangelization efforts.

-- Appearance of FMB-WMU linkage -- "As I have said before, there may be some potential for an initial misunderstanding here," Parks said. "We will work carefully to demonstrate there is no conflict of interest." He said O'Brien will not take part in specific working relationships between the two agencies and already has stepped down from roles that create an appearance of conflict of interest.

-- Budgetary concerns -- "My commitment to budgetary controls is well documented," Parks said. "That will be carefully monitored in this case." He noted that O'Brien's job requires a lot of travel, "which may be done as well or better from Birmingham" and added that O'Brien voluntarily accepted a salary reduction when he resigned as executive vice president and stepped into a position vacated by the retirement of another staff member.

-- Administrative supervision difficulties -- This "is something we have acknowledged and will evaluate as to effectiveness," Parks said. "Many assignments in the organization could not be handled this way. This is not one of them." He noted that much of O'Brien's responsibility relates to "travel, telephone and computer linkup," that he supervises "self-starters" and is involved in a careful planning process, regular meetings and monitoring.

Parks disagreed with a final paragraph in the trustee letter which asked that trustees be involved in the evaluation of O'Brien's role.

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"Staff evaluation is an administrative responsibility," he said. "Even staff cannot properly evaluate unless there is direct supervision and accountability. I evaluate only those reporting to me. It would be unfair to you and to me and to Bill to expect trustees to evaluate a staff member for whom they do not have administrative responsibility. The board does participate in the evaluation of the president. Beyond that each staff and each missionary is evaluated by administrative supervisors."

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Ministry no longer 'play'
for Birmingham chaplain

By Susan P. Moore

Baptist Press
10/26/89

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Lounelle Selle can remember "playing preacher" as a child.

But after high school, Selle -- who stands more than 5 feet 10 inches tall -- played on national and international softball and basketball teams for five years.

"I enjoyed playing ball, but I knew that wasn't forever," she recalled. "Circumstances shaped and opportunities became available, so I began working in the church."

In 1955, Selle entered the ministry. She worked in two North Carolina churches as secretary, children's worker, youth worker and, finally, education minister. Before continuing her education at Pfeiffer College in North Carolina and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky, she worked in Bolivia for two years with the Peace Corps.

After graduating from the seminary with master's and graduate specialist degrees in religious education, she spent 10 years as a Southern Baptist missionary to Taiwan.

In Taiwan, Selle said, she was able to do what she enjoys most -- help people. The focus of her ministry was teaching conversational English to university students, with whom she still corresponds. Today, that enjoyment continues in her congregation, Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Ala., where she teaches English to fellow members from the People's Republic of China.

In 1982, she completed a one-year residency in clinical pastoral education at Baptist Medical Centers in Birmingham and joined the pastoral care staff at Baptist Medical Center Princeton there.

She works with hospice and cancer patients and their families and likes "the opportunity of being with people in times of crisis, to help see them through, because people need extra encouragement during these times."

Her love for her work stems from her experiences with friends who have had cancer.

"Specializing in the areas of hospice and oncology allows relationships between patients, their families and staff to develop over an extended time," she said. And pastoral care "allows me to give encouragement and comfort while allowing patients to share their feelings."

Although her work generally is rewarding, Selle admitted she has difficult days. She and the nurses experience the most pain when a cancer patient is young, she explained, noting, "To see one face such a traumatizing experience young in life is difficult on caregivers."

But that is why helping people is so important, she said, adding, "Being with patients and walking with them in difficult times of their lives helps patients to adjust."

As coordinator for two kinds of support groups, she helps cancer patients and their families learn more about the cancer process and how better to cope with its effects.

Another part of her work involves strengthening relationships between cancer patients, their pastors and herself in order to provide the best support during the difficult times.

Her mission is to minister to the person as a whole, she said: "We cannot minister to people one part at a time. Rather, all different disciplines together minister to the total person."

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And for Selle, who recently received a mission values award for spiritual leadership from Baptist Medical Centers, that ministry is not child's play; it's a real part of her life.

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Moore is assistant manager of marketing communications for Baptist Medical Centers in Birmingham.

Getting busy, keeping happy
called keys to church growth

By Paul T. Brock

Baptist Press
10/26/89

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--"I believe getting everybody busy and keeping them happy are the keys to church growth -- letting them see how much fun it is," a Mississippi church starter told students at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dottie Williamson, an 1981 Southeastern Seminary graduate, told a Missions Emphasis Day crowd she originally came to the Wake Forest, N.C., school to prepare to be a youth minister.

"During the first year, all students had to go out to be an intern for about four months at the job you want to do," she recounted. "So they sent me to a church in Raleigh. In about two weeks, I knew I was in the wrong place. Pizza parties, bowling parties, ... and they eat all the time. Fifty for swimming, but only three for Bible study."

She concluded that the young people did not really want to know about Jesus, that they had too many activities and that she was too old to do all that running around.

But during her second year of seminary, a friend told her about the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's Praxis program, where student teams spend 10 weeks starting churches.

"My friend told me that you make \$50 a week and get free room and board for 10 weeks -- and that they send people to Hawaii, Florida, Colorado and Vermont," she said. "I thought, 'Oh, \$500, and you get paid for a vacation.'"

After she was accepted into the program, Williamson decided she should learn more about the kind of work required to start a church. A friend told her, "For 10 weeks, you do visitation." She responded, "I hate visitation."

However, Williamson said: "I began to pray again, because I wasn't sure I could do that. I'd never done visitation; that's the meanest job in the church."

Despite some apprehension, she was assigned to Long Island, N.Y. "When I went I was so scared. But you know, it was so much fun," she told the seminarians. "These people wanted a Bible study, and they wanted to talk about Jesus. I had been waiting for somebody that I could just sit with and tell about Jesus."

She recalled that children would say to her: "Would you take us to Jesus' house? He sound like a real nice man, and we would like to meet him."

After graduation, Williamson was appointed as a church starter in Virginia, where she began the first of numerous churches. She now serves in Mississippi, where she works with the Home Mission Board, the Baptist state convention, the local Baptist association and the Mississippi Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

"It's fun in a mission church," she insisted. "You don't have any old traditions or old pillars sitting there telling you you can't do it."

Williamson explained her approach: "I see that they are organized with all the Southern Baptist programs and committees, teach them about giving to missions, that they have a preacher every Sunday, and that they know how to call a pastor. Then I move on."

"After I find people who want to have a Bible study, I always have a pastor come in to lead it. That way they don't get attached to me, because I'm going to move on. Besides, people feel secure with a pastor sitting in the room. They feel good about him reading the Bible, interpreting Scriptures. They see him as the authority, rather than me sitting there.

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"They know I'm there to help them get organized. I'm not trying to be the pastor. I tell them I'm the 'gofer' -- I go for this and go for that. Whatever they need, I'm there to get the resources."

Because she is a woman, her ordination would only cause trouble, Williamson said: "I can still do the same thing, and I don't need ordination for what I do. Besides, I have no aspirations to be a pastor. I feel it causes too much conflict, and I feel there should be some other way to do God's work that doesn't cause conflict."

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Southwestern Seminary trustee
fights spiritual warfare

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
10/26/89

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Three years ago, Max Cadenhead was a broken and dying man.

His church was considering a split, his daughter was struggling with a drug problem and cancer had spread throughout his body. He was helpless, lying flat on his back in a hospital room.

But that's just where God wanted him, Cadenhead said: "The Lord told me, 'I've got you with your war boots off. If you had your boots on, you'd be out there trying to stomp out all those fires. I've got you flat on your back where you're helpless and you can't do a thing. Now I'm going to show you what I'm going to do without you.'"

Cadenhead realized he had been relying on his own strength or "battle plans" to solve his problems rather than the power of God, he said. He began praising God in the midst of his trial and a miracle soon happened in the pastor's life. He was healed of his cancer, his daughter recovered from her drug problem, and a new, sweet spirit swept across his congregation -- First Baptist Church of Naples, Fla.

"When you start getting into spiritual warfare, you cannot use conventional weapons," Cadenhead told students and faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, during an Oct. 17 chapel. "Holy ground is helpless ground, and when you get so broken you can't do anything else, and you have nowhere to turn but to God, you'll find in an amazing way, when you start praising and glorifying God, God will come through. He will not let you down."

Using the fifth chapter of the biblical book of Joshua as his text, Cadenhead noted that as God took away Joshua's war plans and sword before the battle of Jericho, so, too, God must sometimes teach Christians to rely on spiritual resources, rather than on their own power or techniques, to fight spiritual battles.

"When you find in 21 months, 1,800 pastors are dismissed from their pulpits, and when you read that 63 percent of our churches in the Southern Baptist Convention showed no growth, we begin to understand that there are a lot of our churches that are involved in carnal warfare and never get to the place of carrying on spiritual warfare," Cadenhead said.

The children of Israel, themselves, did not encounter spiritual warfare until they crossed the Jordan River and entered the land of Caanan, Cadenhead said. It was then that they began confronting Satan on his own territory.

And as Joshua's army encountered a formidable stumbling block in the walls around Jericho, Cadenhead said, Christians today face strongholds that arise to keep them from doing the work God has called them to do.

The strongholds "can be uncommitted lives, unbroken lives, unconfessed sins, things in our personalities that we have developed or have had passed down through the generations. But they are strongholds that must be dealt with if we are going to be effective for God," he said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

Cuban leader says
churches a bit freer

By Linda Fisher

Baptist Press
10/26/89

LERIDA, Spain (BP)--Baptists in Cuba have relatively more freedom today than in years past and have rebuilt 10 churches in the last five years, Cuban Baptist leader Luis Gonzales Pena told Spanish Baptists during a recent visit.

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Gonzales, 75, directs the Baptist seminary in western Cuba. He last visited Spain in 1955 and said he had wanted to return ever since. Not until this year did he receive permission to make the trip. During his visit, Gonzales spoke of his excitement about the growing freedom Cuban Baptists are enjoying.

Materials for church buildings are more available now than before, he said, although church members must do the construction work themselves. They usually put in a "second shift" at church construction sites after leaving their regular jobs each day, he said.

Cuban young people are showing great spiritual hunger, Gonzales said. A recent youth retreat drew 450 young people from the churches of western Cuba. Cuban youths are firm in their Christian convictions, he said, despite hardships their faith may create.

Gonzales told of one young couple who gave up secure jobs to enter the seminary, where they will live on one-fourth of the income they earned before.

A Baptist student dared to put a Christian emphasis into the dedication of his final thesis at graduation: "To my God, creator of all; to my church, which helps me spiritually; and to my church brethren."

He then quoted Scripture verses.

The student's classmates were appalled, Gonzales said, because in Cuba students customarily dedicate such theses to their teachers and schools. They feared his work would be rejected. Yet the young man received the highest marks ever given for a thesis at the school.

Even delinquent youths are being affected by the Christian witness of Cuban Baptists, Gonzales said. In Havana, a factory worker left his job to minister full time among the young people in his rough neighborhood. He is being supported by some of the Baptist churches. Because he is from the area, he can speak the street language of the youth gangs. He has gained the respect of both the young people and the police and has intervened in conflicts between gangs.

Once police came upon a group of youths gathered on a hill at midnight. They prepared to make arrests, assuming a gang meeting was in progress. Then they realized everyone was on their knees in prayer and recognized Morales, the "preacher of peace," in their midst.

In Campechuela, Baptist pastor Vicente Navarro also has won high praise for his work with delinquent youths, Gonzales said. A policeman came to the church to congratulate Navarro for his work and to ask the church to do even more. Young people involved in the church cease to be a problem on the streets, the policeman said.

During his three-week stay, Gonzales visited many of the same churches in northern Spain where he had preached 34 years before. He was accompanied by Julio Diaz Sanchez, pastor of the Baptist church of Bilbao, near Spain's northern coast.

The two men met during Gonzales' first trip, when Diaz was a new believer. Gonzales became a mentor to Diaz, and the two have kept up their friendship through correspondence over the years. Diaz and his wife visited Cuba in April 1988.

Both trips were financed by Samuel Moseley, an Alabama surgeon and member of First Baptist Church in Selma. Etna Moseley, the donor's grandmother, was an early missionary to Cuba.

In addition to his responsibilities as director of Western Cuba Baptist Seminary, Gonzales served 15 years as convention president and led three churches during 45 years of pastoral ministry. Born into a Baptist family, he was baptized at age 10. He attended seminary and the University of Havana simultaneously and later received a doctoral degree from the university.

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Linda Fisher is press representative for Southern Baptist missionaries in Spain.

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