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Study documents ministers' views of forced termination

By Trennis Henderson

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Forced termination. The very words conjure up feelings of pain, frustration, fear, anger, disappointment.

Yet for many Southern Baptist ministers, forced termination from a local church has become reality. According to a recent study conducted for the Missouri Baptist Convention, at least 53 Missouri Baptist ministers -- and perhaps as many as 85 to 90 -- have experienced forced terminations in the past three years. And even that statewide total is only about half the national rate noted in a 1988 Southern Baptist Sunday School Board study.

According to the Sunday School Board survey, more than 2,100 Southern Baptist ministers experienced forced termination during an 18-month period. That translates into 116 ministers per month experiencing involuntary termination throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, a 31 percent increase over a similar survey conducted in 1984.

The latest study was conducted by the Dehoney Center for the Study of the Local Church, a center affiliated with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Ernest O. White, director of the Dehoney Center, shared the report Dec. 11 with members of the Missouri Baptist Convention executive board's church services committee.

The purpose of the study was "to assess the scope of the problem of forced terminations for pastors so we could look at the width -- how widespread it is -- and the depth of it -- what it does to the minister," White said.

Among the study's findings was a profile of an "average" terminated minister: a pastor; 4 years old; male; married, with two children. He is seminary-trained and has served in the pulpit of a small-town, 250-member church for five years. When he was terminated, the pastor was torn between continuing in the ministry and going outside the ministry for work. He decided to stay in the ministry, and secured a full-time pastorate at another Southern Baptist church in about a month's time.

Other findings related to an "average" termination were that it came without warning, the minister faced some financial problems following termination, other stressful events such as the death of a relative or personal illness occurred during the pastorate and the individual's next ministry position generally was at a lower salary.

White hoped such findings help raise the consciousness of churches and the denomination concerning "the personal seriousness of the problem," he said. "I would hope for churches and pastors both to be more careful in their original covenanting together and in the processes by which they sever those covenants."

Although the study offers suggestions for ways the convention can help address the needs of terminated ministers, White emphasized, "We still view the problem as primarily and foremost one that the local church should address."

The survey included responses from ministers, directors of missions and congregational leaders who had been involved in situations resulting in forced terminations. The final results included information related to 27 terminations among Missouri Baptists. Although that number is too small to provide broad generalizations about all terminations, White noted that the direct responses from ministers who have experienced forced termination, along with information from previous studies, indicate the information is "valuable and valid."

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Among the 27 responses, 24 referred specifically to the termination of a pastor. The study noted that finding "suggests that associate pastors, ministers of education, music, youth, pastoral care and social ministries have even less information collected about their needs than pastors have."

Among respondents who experienced forced termination, the average amount of time they served the congregation prior to termination was 4.6 years. The average length of tenure was that high; however, due to a few respondents who served a congregation as many as 15 or 20 years before termination. Tenures of one to three years accounted for nearly two-thirds of the responses.

Among other findings in the study:

-- The majority of respondents said they were terminated with no warning, with less than 20 percent noting their terminations were the result of a process of which they were aware.

-- Nearly 63 percent said the church previously had terminated one or more ministers, yet only one respondent reported he had that knowledge before being called to the church.

-- Fifty-three percent continued living in the church parsonage for an average of 2.7 months following termination, 41 percent received severance pay and 29 percent continued to receive a salary for an average of 1.9 months.

-- More than half the respondents were unemployed from one to six months following termination. The study suggested that, on the average, about half of ministers who experience forced termination remain unemployed for three to six months.

-- Ministers' beliefs that they are "doing God's will" and family discussions concerning the termination are the primary ways individuals coped with their terminations. Other helpful factors included devotional reading, meditation, moving to another church and physical exercise.

-- Most ministers who experienced forced termination found their greatest emotional support from their spouses. Other major sources of emotional support included state Baptist leaders and staff, directors of missions, family members and Baptist pastors in their communities.

-- Factors that did not affect the number of terminations included the size and location of churches. The study noted, in fact, that "one must assume that forced terminations occur regardless of church size."

Responding to the question, "What would you say are the three biggest needs of ministers who recently have been terminated?" the ministers who have experienced that situation listed five primary categories: personal need -- encouragement and support, financial assistance, vocational assistance, housing needs and recognition by the denomination -- contact, support from denominational staff members.

Directors of missions and local church leaders added that ministers should be aware that issues of style -- handling complaints poorly, too authoritarian, lack of understanding -- and unwillingness to solicit help contributed to ministers' forced terminations.

As a result of the study, Dehoney Center staff members suggested a number of responses, including:

-- Develop state convention financial resources to meet needs of terminated ministers.

-- Maintain state convention efforts to deal with minister terminations.

-- Train directors of missions to deal with church conflict and termination issues.

-- Develop a network of counselors for terminated ministers.

-- Help churches seek out/hire trained personnel as interim ministers.

-- Develop a retreat program for terminated ministers.

-- Advertise resources and intervene aggressively.

Texans bring light
to Mombasa, Kenya

By Orville Scott

F - TEXAS

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in Mombasa, Kenya, center of a Christian awakening that has seen 132,000 people come to faith in Christ in 30 months, sometimes have had to discontinue services without giving an invitation.

"Our problem is that we aren't permitted to hold a service after dark without lights," explained missionary Ralph Bethea, whose parents also were missionaries to Kenya.

In villages with no electrical power, stopping a service is heartbreaking when people have come from far and wide to hear the gospel, Bethea said.

But soon missionaries and Kenyan Baptists will have lighted facilities to share the light of Christ, thanks to the efforts of volunteers from Midway Road Baptist Church in Dallas and the Texas Baptist Men organization.

The volunteers equipped an eight-by 20-foot flatbed trailer as a mobile evangelism stage that can be pulled to anywhere it is needed and rapidly set up for services.

The unit includes a generator to provide electricity for lights, an organ for music, a public address system and choir risers. It was painted in Kenya's colors -- red, green and black-- and will be transported to Kenya by boat as soon as possible, said Bob Dixon, executive director of Texas Baptist Men.

Dixon and his wife, Jean, are leaders of one of Midway Road Church's single adult II Sunday school departments, which led in refurbishing and equipping the mobile evangelism trailer.

At the dedication of the new facility, Bethea said it will be the only one of its kind in East Africa and will open new doors of evangelistic opportunity amid the greatest revival in history in a Muslim culture.

He recalled a recent meeting where "we counted over 32,000 people in a service but had to send them home (without an invitation to receive Christ) because it got dark."

He said Mombasa, for 1,000 years has been the center of the largest Muslim culture, Swahili

"China is 100 times more evangelized than the Muslim culture," Bethea said. "Up until 1985, there had never been a Christian revival among Muslim people.

"But in 1985, God's Holy Spirit came and moved on the Mombasa area. Nobody can explain it. We've just prayed, and God's Holy Spirit moved."

But he warned that the history of great revivals reveals that the culture opens for about six to seven years and then closes.

"Unfortunately, it sometimes takes us that long to get organized," he said. "We've already had 132,000 come to the Lord in a place where we used to see one or two people a month come to Jesus."

Kenyan Baptist leaders are praying for 100,000 new believers in the next six months, he said. Then they want to set a goal to win 1 million people.

During the revival, 758 new believers have been called of God to be home missionaries, and 257 new churches have begun, Bethea said.

"There are 108 field churches meeting under trees or on the decks of boats. One church meets in a mosque, and another meets in a Hindu temple," he reported.

Baptismal services often last all day, he said, recalling service where 778 people were baptized.

Among the new converts were people in an isolated village whose chief had heard of Jesus through an early-day missionary to Kenya. He had been praying for 40 years for a messenger from Jesus to come to his village.

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As Bethea and other Baptists arrived in his village, the aging chief was brought to them on a stretcher. With tears streaming down his face, he asked, "Are you sent from Yesu (Jesus)?"

At the dedicatory service for the new evangelistic trailer at Midway Road Church, Bethea was given two solar-powered cassette players for use in mission fields without electricity.

The donor, Bob Birchler of Dallas, president of Soularpower, said the new devices are designed to bring the gospel to 2 billion illiterate people around the world.

"Even if they can't read, they can listen," Birchler said. When sunlight is not percent, the cassette player can operate for up to eight hours through a solar-powered battery.

Bethea said plans are to use the new mobile evangelism unit to broadcast the good news of Jesus Christ in Mombasa at three peak traffic points, where a total of 250,000 people pass daily.

The public address system will alleviate a problem in large crowds where a network of crier has been used to relay the message to people far from the speaker.

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Seminary studies classes
come with translation

By Pam Parry

F - CO
(Md./Del.)

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BALTIMORE (BP)--Love transcends any language, but sometimes it needs a translator.

The Southern Baptist Baltimore seminary studies program, initiated in 1980 to break down geographic barriers, is pioneering ways to dismantle yet another parapet -- a language barrier.

For the first time in any Southern Baptist-sponsored seminary studies program, instruction simultaneously was given in two languages within the same classroom during the fall semester.

Seven of the 38 students -- the largest enrollment ever for the Baltimore program -- were Korean pastors who speak little or no English. They received instruction in their native language through an interpreter, while their English-speaking classmates were taught by the professors.

The translation process was aided by a transmitting system that allowed interpreter Tae Park, Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware Korean catalytic missionary, to translate as the professors lectured. Consequently, professors lectured for the entire class time uninterrupted by the translations.

Park provided a "Readers' Digest version" of the professors' lectures, rather than translating the material word-for-word, notes Ron Brown, BCM/D director of ministries in higher education. The non-literal translation allowed Park the freedom to make the material understandable within the students' cultural context.

Hal Poe, assistant professor of evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., taught personal evangelism. He gave Park copies of his lecture notes in advance and used overhead cells to help facilitate the translation from English to Korean, he says. If Poe had an important point to stress, he would pause and make sure Park understood and got that specific point across.

Korean textbooks from the Baptist seminary in Taejon, Korea, were secured for the students to help undergird the information received in the lectures, Brown says. The examination questions covered the material in the textbooks and were graded by a Korean doctor of philosophy student at Southern Seminary, which is the lead seminary for the Baltimore program.

Even though the English-speaking and non-English-speaking students used different texts and took different tests, the content of the course was the same for each, Brown says.

Most seminary studies programs require students to pass an English proficiency test before they can enroll, Brown says. But one aspect of the new approach is responding to the Korean Baptists' needs on their terms, he adds, instead of making them jump through hoops to get an education.

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Most of the Korean students have graduate degrees and are capable, competent people whose only problem is the English language, Brown says.

Poe admits the endeavor has required faith, because he relies on second-hand assessments of how the students have performed. But he quickly adds that providing the tests in Korean and having them graded by a Korean allows for security in the knowledge the students "are getting what they need."

His perception is they are good, conscientious students who have enhanced, rather than disrupted, the class for their English-speaking counterparts.

And his students agree.

Since 1983 Doug Alberts, pastor of Glen Dale Baptist Church in Lanham, Md., has been involved with the program, which meets at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore. Just the Korean students' presence is exciting and heart warming to him and the class, Alberts says. He remembers about two years ago two Korean students had to drop out of the program because they could not speak English well enough to keep up with the lectures.

Jerry Duncan, a layman from Oak Grove Baptist Church in Bel Air, Md., says he has enjoyed the fellowship with all Christians in his class, which has three additional Korean students who are proficient in English. Duncan has shared meals and prayer with these students, and they are in the class to learn more about how God wants to use them, just like their Anglo classmates, he says.

This new approach has made his class "aware of the exciting things going on in the (two-state) convention, which is reaching new groups of people for Christ," Poe adds.

The Koreans seem equally pleased with the results of the semester.

Park was somewhat anxious about translating the course material when the semester began, he admits, But the Korean pastors already have been able to incorporate course content in their local ministries, he says. In addition to personal evangelism, the program offered a New Testament course, taught by Steve McNeely, pastor of Columbia (Md.) Baptist Fellowship.

While both courses were beneficial, the personal evangelism class lent itself to immediate, practical application, Park says.

Jong Yoon Kim, pastor of Baltimore Korean Baptist Church, shared his faith with a man in order to fulfill a course requirement. The man not only made a public profession of faith in Christ, but Kim baptized him, and he now is an active member of the Baltimore congregation. Kim also helped to lead another person to a decision for Christ while doing his "homework."

Kirby L. Clark, seminary studies director headquartered in Nashville, says: "The significance of the program is the fact we demonstrated the ability to reach and provide quality graduate-level education to people of other cultures. Our program there is meeting their needs. We may have even more (Koreans) next semester."

However, the future of the program itself may be short-lived, but the spirit in which it was born will continue in an enhanced form.

The seminary studies program, which is sponsored jointly by the six SBC seminaries, allows participants to complete up to two-thirds of seminary master's degree requirements at any of the institutions. The remaining coursework must be done in residence at the seminary of choice. This alternative allows people to receive training for ministry without having to uproot themselves and relocate.

"The real value of the program is we are training indigenous ministers for our convention," Brown says. "So often what happens when students go off to seminary is they don't come back. This program will allow the people to be trained here and stay here."

But as the developing Northeast Baptist School of Ministry supersedes the seminary studies program, students -- and churches in the region -- will be even better served, Brown says. The Northeast School of Ministry opened centers in Pittsburgh and Boston this year, and the next two locations have been slated for Baltimore and New York.

The schools will allow students to earn the entire degree at home, providing more classes and flexibility, Brown says. However, the degree earned will be from Southern Seminary alone, and the choice of school will not be available, he adds.

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Southern Baptist ministers
in Catholic hospital

By Chip Alford

F - (CO
(SWBTS)

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DAYTON, Ohio (BP)--If Allen Weimer were looking for a label, the best self-imposed title might be "ecumenical chaplain."

As director of pastoral care at St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio, the Southern Baptist minister supervises an eight-member staff composed of three Catholic priests, a nun, three Catholic laypeople and an American Baptist.

He also is clinical field education supervisor for novices from the Society of Mary and first-year students from United Theological Seminary, a Methodist school in Dayton.

And beginning next year, Weimer will supervise chaplain interns from Mount St. Mary's Seminary of the West, a Roman Catholic school in Cincinnati.

Weimer admits his situation is unusual, but he sees it as a unique ministry opportunity.

"I'm doing my ministry as the Lord has given me the opportunity," he said, adding the hospital's diverse ministry staff "enables us to provide a more rounded approach to pastoral care."

While growing up in Baytown, Texas, Weimer never dreamed he would be as a chaplain in a Catholic hospital. Instead, Weimer felt called to preach while attending East Texas Baptist University in Marshall. He later enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

After being a pastor, Weimer sensed God's leadership to change directions.

By hiring him as director of pastoral care, Weimer said, St. Elizabeth took a risk of being criticized by the Catholic community in Dayton. "They took the risk anyway," he said, adding he has developed a good working relationship with the hospital's administration and staff.

"I have been afforded much freedom to be the best Southern Baptist chaplain I can be," Weimer said. "The respect that traditionally has been shown the priests and sisters has been graciously shown to me."

Despite theological differences, Weimer said, the pastoral care staff has also developed a harmonious working relationship.

"We have other agenda items to deal with on a daily basis than the theological differences that exist between the Roman Catholic Church and Southern Baptists," he said. "Our primary agenda is to minister to the sick, the injured, the spiritually poor in Jesus' name."

When the staff does find time to discuss theological differences, members show a common respect for other viewpoints, he said: "They are as open to learning from me as I am open to learning from them. We are able to walk away with a sense of being heard and understood."

"Along the way I also share the good news of God's love brought to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. And when I can, I proudly share what God is doing through Southern Baptists, too."

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