



BAPTIST PRESS

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90-5

Court hears argument
in equal access case

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--Attorneys in a dispute over the Equal Access Act focused the oral argument before the U.S. Supreme Court on what test should be used to trigger the law protections.

The 1984 law stipulates that if a "limited open forum" exists at a public secondary school, that school must provide student-initiated religious clubs the same opportunity to meet on school property as it does to other non-academic, extracurricular groups. Such a forum exists, according to the law, when non-curriculum related student groups are allowed to meet on school grounds before or after the school day.

The attorney for an Omaha, Neb., school board told the justices that no limited open forum exists at Westside High School because all of the school's student clubs relate to its curriculum.

Allen E. Daubman, who represented the Westside Community Schools Board of Education, said even such groups as a chess club, scuba diving club and service club are related to curriculum.

He argued in favor of a standard that would allow local school boards to determine whether student clubs relate to the curriculum of a high school.

But the attorney representing Bridget Mergens, who initiated the suit against the school board, advocated a test that would determine whether a "direct connection" exists between student clubs and a school's core curriculum courses.

The dispute arose in 1985 when the principal of Westside High School and the local superintendent of schools refused to allow Mergens and a group of fellow students to form a Bible club and meet on campus.

A federal district judge upheld the school board's position that a limited open forum did not exist. But the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the ruling and ordered the school board to allow the Bible club to meet.

Jay Alan Sekulow, Mergens' attorney, urged the high court to uphold the appeals court ruling that a limited open forum does exist at Westside High School. He argued that groups such as the chess club are not related to the school's curriculum.

Although agreeing with Daubman that Congress did not specifically define "curriculum related" in the Equal Access Act, Sekulow countered that the act's legislative history shows that Congress intended the term to require a direct relationship between a club and the curriculum.

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But Daubman called Sekulow's proposed test "not very accurate and educationally unworkable."

Solicitor General Kenneth W. Starr, who shared Sekulow's 30 minutes of argument, also challenged the Westside school board's interpretation of curriculum related, calling it "open ended." He said Congress intended to eliminate discrimination against groups based on the content of their speech, including religious speech.

Justice Byron R. White, who dominated the questioning from the bench, prodded the attorneys to provide a more concrete standard for when the Equal Access Act should be applied and by whom -- local school authorities or the court system.

But Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justice Antonin Scalia pointed out possible problems with the school board's interpretation of the law.

"Your construction would allow any school district to avoid the act," Rehnquist told school board attorney Daubman.

If a school's curriculum is interpreted to include more than just its formal courses, Scalia said, "anything becomes part of the curriculum if the school wants to teach it, even just through clubs."

An opinion in the case is expected before the court ends its current term this summer.

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Romanians will need
long-range Baptist aid

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

Baptist Press
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TIMISOARA, Romania (BP)--Romanian Baptists in three cities say their communities have food, clothing and medicine for now but will need long-term help from Southern Baptists and others in the West to rebuild their economy.

Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board administrators warned that the long-range forecast for physical conditions in Romania is bleak. Some observers fear the need for food and medicine in Romania could reach a crisis point as early as February or March, after donated stocks begin to dwindle.

Representatives of Southern Baptists will join with world and European Baptist leaders in planning long-range strategy not only for aid to Romania but to all of Eastern Europe as changes present new opportunities.

To assess emergency needs in Romania, the Foreign Mission Board sent three representatives there on a three-day fact-finding visit in early January. They talked with leaders of the national Romanian Baptist Union and several Baptist associations in the cities of Timisoara, Arad and Oradea. They also delivered a van full of supplies donated by Swiss Baptists, part of the aid coming from Baptists throughout Europe.

"Romanian Baptists feel they have what's needed for now but hope people won't forget them later," said Errol Simmons, one of the Southern Baptist team members and co-director of the International Baptist Lay Academy in Budapest, Hungary.

If the new government gives citizens plots of land as projected, they may need help developing livestock, crops and other agricultural resources, Simmons said. "This kind of help may be less dramatic than shipping in food and medicine, but it will be help that will enable them to help themselves," he explained. "Only the Romanians can tell us what they need."

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Some food given through non-Baptist channels is being sold in stores and the income used by the government for social services, Simmons said. But aid from the Foreign Mission Board has been distributed by Romanian Baptists, assuring that food, clothing and other items reach the neediest people first and are not sold. The board responded to the Romanian crisis in December by appropriating \$100,000 in aid.

But Romanians may need more help soon when current aid supplies dwindle, cautioned Keith Parker, the board's director for Europe. "The flood of food, clothes and medicine in these first days after the revolution is deceptive. For the moment, things are better, but it's feared that a real crisis in food and medical needs will develop in a month or two. Long-range, the situation looks very bad," said Parker, who has monitored the Romanian situation from his office near Zurich, Switzerland.

The Red Cross and other relief and church groups have appealed to all aid organizations to continue and coordinate their efforts, Parker said.

A meeting set for Jan. 22-23 in Dorfweil, West Germany, will bring together Baptist leaders from all Eastern European countries and officials of the Baptist World Alliance, European Baptist Federation, Foreign Mission Board and other Baptist mission groups. A key topic on the agenda will be coordination of Baptist efforts in Eastern Europe.

In addition, a task force of Foreign Mission Board representatives and Southern Baptist personnel working with Eastern European Baptists will meet with Baptist leaders of the region in February to develop new strategies in light of the radical changes sweeping the region. Board personnel met with Baptist leaders in the Soviet Union in December for similar planning. Also, in December board trustees appropriated \$1 million for ministries in Eastern Europe.

In February, John Cheyne, who heads the board's human needs ministry, will go to Romania to evaluate possible Southern Baptist responses to short- and long-range medical and hunger relief needs.

Remnants of executed dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's "Securitate," or secret police force, have continued to mount scattered resistance in Romania. Conditions were calm in Timisoara during the Southern Baptist team's early-January visit, Simmons said. But one area of the city was roped off as police hunted two suspected Securitate agents thought to be hiding in sewer lines beneath the street.

Fear of Securitate attack continues in the city, team members said. The uprising against Ceausescu began there. Soldiers checked identity papers of guests at a hotel where the team stayed. Securitate forces earlier had used part of the hotel.

The team saw much of the damage left by December's fighting and visited one of the mass graves where victims had been buried.

The government hospital in Timisoara lacked pain medicine or even thermometers when the uprising broke out, the Southern Baptist team confirmed. During the fighting, Securitate forces killed patients in hospitals. The facilities later kept lights off to avoid attracting attack. During this time, babies were delivered by the light of flashlights, Simmons said.

Securitate members also destroyed blood supplies on hand in hospitals to prevent the wounded from receiving emergency blood transfusions, he said.

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Southern Baptists provided some aid to Romania even at the peak of the crisis there, sending food and medical supplies through Petrila Traian, a Romanian Baptist layman living in Vienna. Traian risked his life to make daily trips into Romania after Dec. 24, even amid frequent gun battles.

In late December, Southern Baptists worked with Hungarian Baptists to deliver more than two tons of food, clothing and medical supplies to Romania, part of an international aid effort for the country. About \$10,000 in Southern Baptist aid bought food, emergency drugs and medical supplies that went into Romania as soon as borders were opened and fighting subsided enough for trucks to enter.

"All of Europe -- East and West -- has responded compassionately," Parker said. "And I'm pleased that Southern Baptists have been and will continue to be a part of that."

One benefit of the revolution for Romanian Baptist churches is that many Romanian Baptists have expressed an interest in attending the Baptist seminary or the new International Baptist Lay Academy, both in Budapest. The academy, a Bible school for Eastern European lay Baptists, will open in July.

Simmons called the likelihood that Romanians will be free to attend "an answer to prayer."

Another continuing need, Romanian Baptist leaders said, is for Bibles in the Romanian and Hungarian languages, and all kinds of Christian literature, long denied Romanians until recent days.

Romanians are struggling to build a new government and economy, but years of mismanagement have left the country impoverished. Baptists in Budapest said they had smuggled food and medicine to relatives in Romania for years because of the poverty there. Housing often is inadequate and underheated.

A campaign by the Ceausescu regime to boost population led to many Romanian women dying from illegal abortions. Other women had children whom they were too poor to support, so they were forced to turn them over to state orphanages. Children in the orphanages were said to have worn caps and mittens indoors during winter months; buildings were kept so cold that frostbite was a danger. Reports indicate the government sold many of them outside the country.

Meanwhile, Romanians remain hungry for any kind of reading material and news from both inside and outside their country. "People lined up around the block buying newspapers," Simmons said, "and each evening ... Romanians are glued to their TVs to find new revelations about Ceausescu's regime."

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Gay Baptists organize
group in Fort Worth

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Baptist Press
1/10/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Homosexual Baptists have formed a Fort Worth, Texas, chapter of Honesty, a new gay rights organization primarily for people from Southern Baptist backgrounds.

David Reed, who identified himself as a homosexual, said the group seeks "qual treatment and equal rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons."

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"We would like to see full integration of gays and lesbians into all aspects of church life, including ordination," said Reed, who holds a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He is a graduate of the University of Tennessee who lists his hometown as Millington, Tenn.

Reed said he was pursuing a doctorate in theology from the Fort Worth seminary until September 1989. "I finally decided that I wasn't marketable professionally in the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

The Fort Worth chapter of Honesty, which has had three meetings, was organized with five members, all of whom either have degrees from or attended Southwestern Seminary, Reed said.

The Fort Worth group is patterned after the first Honesty chapter, formed in June in Louisville, Ky., with about 15 members, Reed said.

The Louisville group has been supporting Kevin Kouba of Florissant, Mo., an avowed homosexual who is appealing his ouster from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

Kouba withdrew from Southern Seminary in July 1989 after a fellow student said Kouba was involved in homosexual behavior.

Reed attends Agape Metropolitan Community Church in Fort Worth, which has a predominantly homosexual membership, but he and others in the Honesty group want to hold onto their Baptist roots.

"I was a Baptist for 30 years and still look at myself that way. Some Southern Baptist churches do have bylaws prohibiting gays and lesbians from being members, but some don't," he said.

Southern Baptists and most other church groups do not allow ordination of avowed homosexuals. Southern Baptists have approved resolutions at state and national conventions condemning homosexual lifestyles as acceptable to professing Christians.

Southwestern Seminary ethics professor Guy Greenfield said seminary students are taught that homosexual behavior is not acceptable and that students inclined toward homosexuality should seek counseling.

"We believe homosexuality is a learned lifestyle caused by a complex set of circumstances. We don't accept the position that people are born homosexual," Greenfield said.

Although seminary officials said they have encountered few problems with homosexual conduct, Reed said he anticipates a major part of the work of the Honesty organization will be with seminarians.

"There are gay people at the seminary right now, but they are having to live a very cloistered life," Reed said. "Some are living irresponsible lives because they can't be celibate."

According to materials provided for new students at orientation, "heterosexual misconduct or homosexual behavior" is regarded as "immoral ... or unethical behavior."

The seminary catalog notes the seminary "is redemptive, but not rehabilitative, in nature. Therefore, a person should not come to seminary with serious family, health, emotional or financial problems."

Lawrence Klempnauer, vice president of student affairs, said: "Based on scriptural and moral grounds, the seminary does not tolerate homosexuality or heterosexual misconduct.

"People should be reminded that students are accepted on the endorsement of Southern Baptist churches. The seminary is dependent on the judgment of the local church to evaluate the student's call as well as moral fitness for vocational ministry."

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This story is adapted from an article by Jim Jones, religion editor of the Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram.

Foundation executive's
father dies in Nashville

N-CO

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Hollis Eugene Johnson, father of Southern Baptist Foundation President Hollis E. Johnson III, died in Nashville Jan. 6. He was 96.

A physician, educator, clinical researcher and chest disease expert, Johnson was a leader in developing treatments for tuberculosis. He organized the Clinic for Tuberculous Children in Nashville.

He was director of the Chest Clinic at Vanderbilt University in Nashville for 32 years and was on the faculties of Meharry Medical College and Vanderbilt University Hospital, both in Nashville. He graduated from Vanderbilt Medical School in 1921.

Johnson was named Physician of the Year for 1975 by the Tennessee Medical Association and received the Distinguished Service Award from the Southern Medical Association in 1964.

An active Southern Baptist layman, he was a trustee of Belmont College, a Baptist school in Nashville, and a deacon at Belmont Heights Baptist Church.

In addition to his son who directs the work of the Southern Baptist Foundation, Johnson's survivors include his wife, Frances Settle Johnson; two other sons, John Settle Johnson and Robert Marshall Johnson; and six grandchildren, all of Nashville.

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Dellanna O'Brien installed
as 6th national WMU exec

By Susan Todd

N-CO
(WMU)

Baptist Press
1/10/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Dellanna W. O'Brien was installed as the sixth executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union Jan. 9. The installation service, which was held during the WMU executive board meeting, was the first formal installation of an executive director in the organization's 101-year history.

In the service, O'Brien gave her first address to the WMU executive board. She told the group of almost 300 board members and guests that the causes for which WMU was founded will continue to be central under her leadership.

"I reaffirm that commitment (to missions), along with the pledge to continued loyalty and devotion to the cause which binds us all together," she said.

"The mission for '90 is 'Go.' Our charge is clear. The resources are available. The need is urgent. All that remains is to obey the command. Woman's Missionary Union stands ready to do our part. Our call to arms unifies and deploys us. So now, Go."

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During the installation service, a WMU insignia-shaped medallion was invested on O'Brien by WMU President Marjorie J. McCullough. The medallion was cast for the occasion and will be used during installation services for future national WMU executive directors.

The official portrait of O'Brien was unveiled during the service. It will hang in the national headquarters building in Birmingham, Ala.

O'Brien's husband, Bill, who is a special assistant to the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, sang a solo during the service.

A processional and recessional included representatives of the five age-level organizations sponsored by WMU; representatives from O'Brien's church, Mountain Brook Baptist in Birmingham; representatives of WMU leadership on the associational, state and national levels; the WMU executive director search committee chairman, Christine Gregory of Danville, Va.; missionary friends; and family.

Convention executives representing 15 agencies and associated organizations also participated in the program's processional and recessional. They included A.R. Fagan, Stewardship Commission; Richard McCartney, Radio and Television Commission; Richard Land, Christian Life Commission; James Smith, Brotherhood Commission; Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board; Darold Morgan, Annuity Board; James Dunn, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; Lynn May, Historical Commission; Denton Lotz, Baptist World Alliance; Arthur Walker, Education Commission; Sam Pace and Harold C. Bennett, Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee; Keith Parks, Foreign Mission Board; Roy Honeycutt, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Lewis Drummond, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

O'Brien recognized the six former national WMU leaders who attended the service: former presidents Helen Fling, Christine Gregory, Dorothy Sample and Marjorie J. McCullough, and former executive directors Alma Hunt and Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler.

In her address, she described them as "godly women who have contributed mightily to the cause of Christ through the Southern Baptist Convention. Through their able leadership, women throughout our convention have been mobilized, challenged, guided, informed, trained and inspired to study, to give and to go."

Guests of honor during the service included O'Brien's mother, Beatrice West of Birmingham, and O'Brien's children: Ross O'Brien of Arlington, Texas; Erin Puryear of Richmond, Va.; and Denise Basden of Irving, Texas.

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU

Memorized verses called
comfort in times of need

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Like dear friends, memorized Bible verses often reappear in times of need to comfort and soothe.

That is the belief of associational children's Bible drill coordinators in Dallas; Memphis, Tenn.; and Jackson, Miss. All three coordinators place stock in the importance of young people learning God's word intimately.

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"I've heard lots of reports of prisoners of war or people who are going through scary times remembering Bible verses instilled in them when they were young," said Bobby Walker, Bible drill coordinator and church services director for Dallas Baptist Association.

Walker breathed life into the Dallas Bible drill program when he "began investigating it and saw what value it offered young people as far as memory work and Baptist doctrine."

"We started with 13 participants in 1981, and that included children's Bible drill, youth Bible drill and youth speakers," he said.

Last year, Walker said, 33 churches and 171 children participated in the Dallas association Bible drill competitions for children.

Texas ranked second in the Southern Baptist Convention for the total number of children involved in the Bible drill program in 1989, with 1,356. Mississippi was first, with 1,449, and Tennessee was third, with 1,024.

About 10,000 children in the SBC participated in church, associational and state Bible drill competitions in 1989, according to Rob Sanders, children's specialist in the preschool-children's section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship training department.

While Walker said learning and memorizing Bible verses definitely pays off for the future, he did not discount what it does for children in the present.

"I think they get several things out of Bible drill participation," Walker said. "They get something out of standing before their peers, as well as their parents and strangers. They have to think clearly and recall things they have learned.

"I think that's valuable because it helps them deal with tense situations. And, of course, it helps children learn Scripture, doctrine and basic truths we believe as Baptists."

In the Shelby Baptist Association in Memphis, children do not just memorize Bible verses with no understanding of the meaning, said Mary Buckner, coordinator of the associational's children's Bible drill program and assistant children's director at Bellevue Baptist Church.

"We take each verse and talk about its meaning," Buckner said. "We make applications to present-day situations." Last year, the association had the largest number of children's Bible drill participants in the SBC, with 281.

The children's Bible drill program includes grades four through six. Competitions are held at three levels -- church, association and state.

"In three years, our children learn 75 verses -- 25 a year. Their skills also include learning to use their Bible, learning where the chapters are and learning how to pronounce the books," Buckner said.

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Buckner begins in March preparing the children at Bellevue Church for June state competitions.

"Children memorize so well and so quickly," said Buckner. "They can do it in a year, or they can do it in six weeks."

Walker encourages Dallas church Bible drill leaders to begin preparing their children in October or November before Texas state drills in April.

Lillian Walters, children's Bible drill coordinator for the Hines-Madison Baptist Association in Jackson, also begins drill training in October. She said 113 children in the association participated in Bible drill competitions last year.

"We start in October because some of the boys and girls don't know the books of the Bible very well or how to pronounce them," said Walters, who has been a children's Bible drill leader since 1957.

Walters, a member of Lakeshore Baptist Church in Jackson, said she learns verses with the children.

"There is a verse for every need you have in life. How much more wonderful it is for the children when they can pull a verse out of their memory in times of need rather than run to the back of the Bible and look it up," she said.

Sanders said the Sunday School Board offers "Bible Drill Kit Revised" through Convention Press. The kit, a one-time purchase for children's Bible drill leaders, completes a three-year learning cycle.

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