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90-84

Norris' congregation
seeks Southern Baptist ties

By Toby Druin

N-20

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas the congregation once headed by arch-Fundamentalist J. Frank Norris, has voted to seek membership in Fort Worth's Tarrant Baptist Association from which it was ousted 68 years ago.

Pastor Bill Ramsey attended the Tarrant Association Pastors' Conference June 18 and announced that the evening before some 400 adult members of his 2,000-member congregation had voted on the matter of rejoining the association -- and Southern Baptists -- and 80 percent had approved.

The vote came on the first Sunday after Ramsey had attended his first Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, he said.

"I came home with a peace in my heart that the time was a good time to pursue this within our church," he told the Baptist Standard in a telephone interview.

According to the Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists, First Baptist Church of Fort Worth was led by Norris to discontinue use of Southern Baptist literature in 1920. A year later he began to attack Baylor University for teaching "evolution and infidelity."

"Because of his spirit, methods, acts of non-cooperation, and the unbaptistic practices of his church, the association in 1922 withdrew fellowship from the church. The Baptist General Convention of Texas censured Norris in 1922, refused to seat him in 1923, and, after he had increasingly directed his criticisms against Baptist leaders and institutions, permanently excluded him in 1924," according to the encyclopedia.

Norris continued his criticisms from outside the denomination, forming his own World Fundamental Baptist Missionary Fellowship. He was pastor of the Fort Worth congregation until 1950. He died in 1952.

Norris was succeeded as pastor of First Church, Fort Worth, by Homer and Omer Ritchie, twin brothers. In 1981 the church merged with Rolling Hills Baptist Church and its pastor, Johnnie Ramsey, the father of Bill Ramsey, became pastor and his son was called as co-pastor. When his father retired in 1984, Ramsey said, he was called as pastor.

Ramsey said he had begun to pray about the direction of his church about two years ago and at the same time was "excited about the movement within the Southern Baptist Convention toward its historic moorings. I began to investigate that in as far as it related to the First Baptist Church."

He said he researched a number of Norris' papers at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, and said he found "the issues were essentially the same issues today as they were even then (when the church was ousted), in as far as inerrancy goes.

"I realized also that the First Baptist Church did not leave the SBC. In fact there is no record that the church ever voted to disassociate itself from the convention. In fact, one of our ladies in our church who was in the church under Dr. Norris at that time said that she recalled the announcement when it was made regarding the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"It was a time of mourning and sorrow within the church," she said. "It wasn't a time of rejoicing. Her words were, 'We wept when we had to leave and we will rejoice if we can return.'"

Ramsey said he felt the church never would have voted to leave the convention.

"Someone has said Norris left by eviction rather than conviction, and I think that is probably pretty accurate," he said.

He prayed about rejoining the association and conventions, he said, and began to discuss it among the church leadership and found an openness and receptiveness.

He has attended state conventions and the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in Fort Worth, Ramsey said, and has several friends in the denomination who encouraged him.

The New Orleans convention was the first Southern Baptist Convention he had attended, he said "I came home with a peace in my heart that the time was a good time to pursue this within our church."

The church held an open forum for questions and discussion June 16 and the next day voted to rejoin the association.

On June 18 Ramsey was accompanied by James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, to the Tarrant Baptist Pastors' Conference weekly meeting and was given an enthusiastic welcome.

A secular newspaper report about the church's action said some SBC moderates were viewing the return of the church as a tactic by conservatives to build power to take control of the state convention as they have the SBC. Churches can send as many as 25 messengers to the state convention, which meets in Houston in November.

Ramsey said nothing like that was considered by his church.

"I thought it might be perceived as such," he said, "but there is no strategy at work here from our point of view."

Asked if his church would follow associational membership, if it is approved, with support of the Cooperative Program, Ramsey said, "I don't really know what all is involved in this. We are going through it a step at a time, but it (association and BGCT and SBC affiliation) is the will of the church. That matter has been decided, and we are excited about it."

He said news of the church's actions had brought mixed reactions from his pastor friends in other independent Baptist churches, but he has emphasized the church is "burning no bridges with our past, just building some bridges for our future."

"The principle of the autonomy of the local church is involved here," he said. "and whether they agree or disagree they have to say the church had the right to do it."

Draper said Ramsey contacted him about a year ago indicating dissatisfaction with the direction of Independent Fundamentalist Baptists and the desire to renew association with Southern Baptists.

"With the conservative resurgence in our convention, Billy indicated he felt more at home among Southern Baptists than with the Independents," Draper said, who said Ramsey expressed appreciation for Southern Baptists' strong stand on the Bible in recent years.

"I believe this could be a symbolic act of tremendous healing," said Draper. He said it could be "just the opposite" if local Baptists view the action as part of a "takeover by Fundamentalists," but he noted Ramsey was warmly received at the pastors' conference.

Tarrant Association Moderator Ronald Beams, pastor of First Baptist Church, Benbrook, said the pastors responded "very positively" to Ramsey and the church's decision.

"Our pastors felt he was very courageous, welcomed him openly and covenanted to pray for him and his church as they seek direction," Beams told the Baptist Standard. "My feeling is the church will be accepted."

Walter Reid, pastor of South Hills Baptist Church, Fort Worth, is chairman of the petitionary letters committee of the association, which will receive the request from First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, to join the association.

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Reid said the church must obtain a form from the association office and submit it no less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting of the association this fall. The TBA constitution stipulates that the church will be investigated as to its desire to be a member of the association, its agreement with the Statement on Baptist Faith and Message, its determination to contribute financially to the association and its cooperative mission causes and to cooperate with the association and Texas Baptist and Southern Baptist conventions.

Neighboring churches will be contacted to determine if there are objections to admitting the church and the committee usually meets with the pastor and lay members of the petitioning church to determine whether or not to recommend membership.

James O. Combs, editor of the Baptist Bible Tribune in Springfield, Mo., the publication of the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the successor to Norris' World Fundamental Baptist Missionary Fellowship, said he had pleaded with Ramsey not to make the move but Ramsey had responded to "courtship" of conservative leaders in the SBC.

Combs said First Baptist Church, Fort Worth, has been only "loosely connected" with the Baptist Bible Fellowship, which has 3,500 churches and supports about 800 missionaries.

He does not predict many other churches in the fellowship will follow the Fort Worth church's lead, he said.

"The conservatives in the SBC need not expect a great influx, and the moderates ... need not expect an invasion," he said. "We will continue right on as we have the last 40 years. I would not think we will lose a dozen churches and that is probably an overestimate. We may not lose any churches."

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BSSB trustees approve
termination of BTN

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
6/22/90

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Emphasizing a continuing commitment of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board to video production for churches, the trustee executive committee approved unanimously a recommendation from President Lloyd Elder that the Baptist Telecommunication Network "cease its satellite transmission and terminate subscription agreements and production contracts, effective October 1, 1990."

During the June 21 meeting, Elder called the decision to close down the satellite teaching and training network "one of the hardest I have had to make at the Sunday School Board." He praised the efforts of employees and thanked subscribing churches for their support.

"BTN has been a noble, valuable effort, but it was never intended to become a subsidized ministry to a small number of churches," he said. "It was always intended to be a self-supporting network in service to the churches."

At present, 1,657 churches and other SBC entities subscribe to BTN, but a minimum of 3,800-4,200 subscriptions are needed for the network to reach a break-even point.

Elder said the board has invested about \$14.3 million in BTN to date and would have to continue investing about \$1 million per year for the foreseeable future if current subscription trends continued.

During 15 minutes of discussion, several trustees spoke, all in favor of the recommendation.

Gene Mims, pastor of First Baptist Church of Cleveland, Tenn., and chairman of the executive committee, said: "This is a good decision. It's just too bad it had to happen. We can't make this decision without realizing 1,600 churches are affected."

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The recommendation approved by trustees includes a commitment to continued video production after a time of study and research "to discover, design and deliver market-proven video communication products and services."

A video production unit will be restructured in the office of general publishing "to be a cost-recovery operation to serve the churches, the denomination and trade markets," the recommendation said.

Johnnie Godwin, vice president for general publishing, said recent research has shown churches "want video tapes, but they do not want them from a satellite transponder with taping equipment that has to be tended day in and day out."

The recommendation also included a pledge to conduct "conversations" with the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission "regarding the cooperative utilization of our resources, channels and convention program assignments to serve most effectively our denomination and other markets."

Elder said about 25 full-time positions related to BTN will be deleted. He said first consideration will be given to BTN employees in filling other vacant positions at the board and that assistance will be provided for those seeking placement outside the board.

"The transition will be radical and it will be immediate, but it will be as caring and supportive as possible," Elder told BTN-related employees in a meeting June 20 prior to trustee consideration.

Elder said all BTN subscribers are being notified by registered letter of the termination of the seven-year-old network.

He said some subscription contracts require 90-day notification of termination of the network while others require 30 days. Some subscribers have three-year subscriptions in return for free satellite dishes.

Elder said agreements will be worked out with all subscribers, and each subscriber will be dealt with in a "Christlike, businesslike way."

Elder reviewed earlier key corporate decisions about BTN.

As president-elect in 1983 when BTN was launched, Elder said: "I decided early and firmly I would give my full support to BTN. I am glad I did."

Between 1984 and 1986, he said additional resources were provided to try and ensure its success, including \$3 million in one year. A five-year business plan was developed.

Determining in 1987-88 "there is not adequate market support to justify this kind of continued expenditure," Elder said operating costs were reduced and a three-year business plan was established which included budget and subscription goals.

The budget goal was achieved in 1988-89 through the sale of video tapes, though subscriptions did not meet established goals, Elder said. However, goals for 1989-90 are not being met, necessitating the decision to terminate the network.

"We are expressing our regret to Southern Baptists," said Elder. "It is a necessary decision but one we make with regret."

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A list of subscribers by states will be mailed separately to state editors.

Bruce Corley to be nominated as dean
of theology school at Southwestern

N-^{CO} SWBTS

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Bruce Corley, associate professor of New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas will be nominated to become dean of the seminary's school of theology when trustees meet Oct. 15-16.

Seminary President Russell Dilday made the announcement in a letter to trustees June 14. In the letter, Dilday said the nomination comes along with "the strong, almost unanimous recommendations from the faculty."

Corley, 47, has taught at Southwestern since 1976. If elected by the trustees he will succeed William Tolar who was elected vice president for academic affairs and provost at the March board meeting.

Tolar is replacing John Newport, who is retiring.

Dilday described Corley as one of Southwestern's "best scholars one of our most gifted leaders, and one of our most popular preachers."

Corley taught at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, before joining the seminary faculty. He holds the master of divinity and doctor of theology degrees from Southwestern. He also is a graduate of Northeastern Oklahoma State University.

In addition to his teaching experience, Corley has been pastor of churches in Jonesboro and Breckenridge, Texas, and has been the interim pastor at Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

Corley has written commentaries on several New Testaments books, including Romans, Second Corinthians and the Gospels. He is also writing the commentary on Hebrews for the New American Commentary to be published by Broadman Press.

Corley has spoken at the Southern Baptist Convention Conferences on Inerrancy and at pastors' conferences in Texas, Louisiana, Illinois, Tennessee and Romania. He delivered the 1987 Staley Distinguished Christian Scholar Lectures at Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas, and has participated in graduate seminars at King's College, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, while on sabbatical leaves in Great Britain.

Corley's first wife, Lois, died in 1978. He remarried the former Linda Rae Boulware in 1986. He has four children.

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Moderate leader Bill
Self resigns pastorate

By Al Mohler

Baptist Press
6/22/90

N-^{CO}

ATLANTA (BP)--William L. Self, pastor of Atlanta's Wieuca Road Baptist Church announced June 17 he is resigning as pastor, effective Aug. 12.

Self's resignation came after several stressful months of conflict within the Wieuca Road congregation.

Local and national media reports suggested the conflict within the Southern Baptist Convention was a primary factor in Self's resignation, a suggestion rejected by both Self and Wieuca Road members. Self has been a prominent leader in the convention's moderate faction, and was defeated by Adrian Rogers in the election of SBC president in 1979. He had been second vice president of the convention in 1978.

Coming immediately after the overwhelming conservative victory at the 1990 SBC annual meeting in New Orleans, rumors connected Self's resignation to the denominational conflict. To counter that, the church released a statement June 21 denying "a fundamentalist takeover of the Wieuca congregation."

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In resigning from the pastorate he has held 26 years, Self said "events of the last eighteen months have been extremely stressful and detrimental to the health of my family and to my dearly beloved church family." He said two personal physicians suggested "a necessary lifestyle change," resulting in his resignation.

Sources within the congregation confirmed Self's report of a prolonged and stressful conflict over the future of Wieuca Road Church and its vision of ministry.

Self, contacted in Wiesbaden, West Germany, suggested that the Southern Baptist Convention conflict was a partial factor in his resignation, but was overshadowed by personal issues and the situation within the Wieuca Road congregation. Self and his wife Carolyn are vacationing in West Germany. They will have two Sundays at Wieuca Road upon their return.

Self has been president of the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1976; president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1977, and the preacher at the 1977 Southern Baptist Convention.

Self announced no future plans, but indicated that career plans were in place, and would be announced upon his return from Europe. He told the Wieuca Road congregation, "I am not leaving the ministry ... only making a change from the pastorate."

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Baptists aid Peru's quake
victims during SBC week

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
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N-7MB

RIOJA, Peru (BP)--While messengers gathered for the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans, six Baptist relief workers aided earthquake victims in northern Peru.

Southern Baptist missionaries and Peruvian Baptists distributed medicine and supplies June 11-16 to victims of a series of quakes that began May 29 near Rioja and Moyobamba, Peru. Two quakes measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale struck the region within 48 hours, killing about 100 people and leaving some 2,000 homeless. Subsequent temblors occurred June 8, killing eight people.

Workers distributed medicine, blankets, tents and plastic sheeting for temporary shelter in Rioja and surrounding communities. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board provided \$10,000 in disaster relief funds for the team.

No Southern Baptist missionaries live in the quake zone, but a Baptist church exists in Rioja, said relief coordinator Bob Williford, a Southern Baptist missionary from Lubbock, Texas. The concrete and brick church building sustained no damage during the quakes. However, the temblors demolished a house where the church was begun. A Baptist family who lived in the house is staying temporarily in the church building.

In the village of Porvenir, where relief workers also helped, not a single house was left standing, Williford said. In Rioja, about 95 percent of the homes were destroyed. "People are living in the streets," he said.

Some Peruvian Baptists lost relatives in the disaster, said Hayward Armstrong, chairman of the Southern Baptist mission organization in Peru. One church member in Lima lost seven family members who lived in Soritor, one of the hardest-hit towns.

The Baptist relief team members included Williford, his 13-year-old son, Clint; missionary Dennis Davidson from Albuquerque, N.M.; a Peruvian Baptist health worker and two Peruvian pastors.

After arriving in Rioja June 11, some of the team members helped save a man's life while they were walking to the mayor's office to make contact with city officials. They heard a commotion on a rooftop where several Peruvians were working. The Baptists hurried to the house to investigate.

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One of the workers had just been severely shocked by contact with a stray power line. Williford bounded up a ladder to help, but when he reached the roof the man's heart had stopped. He began administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation. "I learned CPR several years ago when I was in college but I had never used it," he said.

Williford revived the man, who was taken to a hospital. He tried to contact the victim later but wasn't able to find him.

As relief efforts got under way, team members distributed more than 100 tents. Since supplies were limited, workers surveyed individual houses to determine the neediest families.

Before the team left for Rioja, they thought they had only 86 tents, said Williford. Workers counted them three times before leaving and again after arriving in Rioja. "We came up with 86 every time," he said.

The team kept careful records as they gave away tents, said Williford. But when they examined their records at the end of the distribution, they had given out 101 tents.

"We don't know where the other tents came from other than the fact that the Lord just multiplied what we had," said Williford.

While pitching the tents for homeless families, team members witnessed to their faith in Jesus Christ. In one community, a man asked Williford why he was putting up a tent for his family.

"I'm erecting a tent, much in the same way that the Lord constructs our lives," Williford said. "When we have a need he's always present to meet that need." The Peruvian was "very open" to the gospel, he said.

Team members also led three nights of evangelistic services at the Baptist church in Rioja. About 40 people accepted Christ as Savior. The church usually has about 20 people attending, but at least 60 people came to each service that week, Williford said.

Three team members had planned to work in Rioja, while the others were to have gone to Mendoza, another community hit by the quake. But because of bad weather the team's plane was not able to land in Mendoza. As a result, all workers stayed in the Rioja area.

"As it turned out we just wouldn't have had adequate personnel if we had split up," said Williford. "Mendoza needed help, but the Lord knew we couldn't have handled our relief work with just three people."

Williford expects Baptists to provide follow-up relief, but plans are indefinite. Peruvian Baptists are planning another evangelistic campaign in Rioja in July.

"The people out there are very, very receptive to the gospel because of what has happened," he said. "If we wait three months (to return) it will be too late. Now is the time."

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Sunday School leader,
Bumpas, dead at 82

By Ken Camp

N-SSB

Baptist Press
6/22/90

DALLAS (BP)--W. R. (Bill) Bumpas, 82, former secretary of the Sunday School Department, Baptist General Convention of Texas, died June 22 at his home in Dallas.

Bumpas was minister of education at First Baptist Church, Midland, Texas, in 1958-1960 and from 1967 until his retirement. From 1960 to 1967, he coordinated the work of the BGCT Sunday School Department.

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Bumpas previously served as educational director for Travis Avenue Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas; First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas; First Baptist Church, North Little Rock, Ark.; and Trinity Baptist Church, Oklahoma City.

A graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Bumpas was past president of the Southwestern Religious Education Association and the Texas Baptist Sunday School Convention. He was a member of Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas.

Bumpas is survived by his wife, Frances; two sons, Joe Warren of Hitchcock, Texas, and Don Henry of Fort Worth; and two daughters, Jackie Sue Colbert and Sally Jean Collins, both of Dallas.

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Baptist teachers denied Vietnam
visas; other CSI work continues

By Mike Chute

Baptist Press
6/22/90

HONG KONG (BP)--Five Southern Baptist teachers planning to work in Vietnam this summer have been denied visas to enter the country.

But other Southern Baptist medical and agricultural work continues in the country, according to Jack Shelby, Hong Kong-based administrator for Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization.

The visa denial marks the second time the Vietnamese government has refused visas for teachers with CSI.

Shelby speculated the visas were denied because Vietnam's government fears current unrest in other parts of the world. In recent weeks Vietnamese security officials have denied visas for Americans, except tourists in organized tour groups.

"Because of the current security sweep, foreign English teachers are unfortunately caught in the situation," Shelby said.

A Menmonite English teacher, Miriam Hershberger, was expelled from Vietnam in early June. The government charged her with inciting student unrest by using English-language newspapers in classes she taught at Hanoi Foreign Language College. She had been in Vietnam since last September and was about to finish the school year.

Despite the difficulties, Shelby still hopes to secure visas for two of the teachers -- Frances Petersen and Hazel Garner, both professors at Mobile (Ala.) College. They taught in Vietnam last summer and hope to return to the University of Agriculture No. 3 of Bac Thai province in northern Vietnam.

But Shelby believes it's too late to reapply for summer visas for Vi Marie Taylor of Austin, Texas, and Glenn and Rose Davis of Frankfort, Ky.

"The timing just isn't right now," said Taylor, who also was denied a Vietnam visa last year when Vietnamese troops were pulled out of Cambodia. "The Lord is moving and when it's the appropriate time, doors will be opened."

Taylor had planned to design curriculum and teaching materials for an English language center in Hanoi. A retired CSI worker in China, she instead will move to Mongolia and work with secondary school English teachers there.

The Davises still hope to teach this fall at the University of Agriculture and Forestry in Ho Chi Minh City and help establish a master's degree program there. Previously, Davis was program manager for the Kentucky state education department. Mrs. Davis was a professor at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Both have spent the last two years teaching in China.

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Securing visas and the availability of Southern Baptist teachers were Shelby's two main concerns in preparing for the English-teaching projects in Vietnam.

"Anything like this has a negative impact," he said of the visa problems. "People don't like to live with uncertainty. But we'll keep on trying."

Currently, CSI works in 10 agricultural, health and social projects in Vietnam. The organization supplies basic medical equipment to small rural hospitals and clinics, assists in several agricultural efforts and provides literature and equipment for Vietnamese social workers.

CSI also is working with Grace Baptist Church and Vietnam's social welfare department to develop a vocational rehabilitation and education center for street children in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon).

CSI has preliminary plans to help Vietnamese doctors train community health nurses in anti-malaria and nutrition programs so they can in turn train families in rural areas.

The organization also hopes to send Clifford Randall, a water pollution control specialist, on a one-month assignment as consultant to the Tropical Medicine Center in Ho Chi Minh City later this year. He is a professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg.