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90-94

Palen resigns from position
at Baptist Joint Committee

N. BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--Kathy Palen, director of information services for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, will leave the staff of that agency in late August to begin study at Yale Divinity School.

Palen, 34, joined the BJC staff in September 1985. She was elected to her current position in March 1989.

During the past five years, Palen also has served as a Washington bureau correspondent for Baptist Press news service, as well as reporting for the interdenominational Religious News Service. She has provided news coverage of the Supreme Court, Congress and White House.

Before joining the BJC staff, she served as director of public relations at Oklahoma Baptist University.

Palen, a native of Tulsa, Okla., earned a bachelor of arts degree in journalism from OBU. She also has taken courses at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"We shall miss Kathy Palen and her dedicated service to the Baptist Joint Committee," said James M. Dunn, BJC executive director. "Her work as an award-winning journalist and public relations professional has greatly enhanced the reputation and effectiveness of the BJC.

"Her writing for Baptist Press and the Religious News Service has contributed significantly to the understanding of church-state relations and religion in public life.

"Her role as a member of the Baptist Joint Committee team has endeared her to us. We pray for her new ministry as she continues her preparation in divinity school."

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Challenged church apparently
cooperating with SBC causes

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
7/23/90

N-10 all

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--A church characterized during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting as not being a cooperating SBC church apparently was in "friendly cooperation."

Messengers from Emmanuel Baptist Church in McAllen, Texas, turned in their ballots before the June 13-15 meeting in anticipation of a challenge to their credentials.

The situation created some of the most emotional protests during the meeting in New Orleans because the church's pastor, Roland Lopez, was chairman of the SBC Committee on Nominations.

In a July 13 telephone interview, Lopez said he and another church-elected messenger turned in their ballots to help bring "peace to the convention." The church itself gave no money to SBC causes during an 18-month period from 1988 to May 1990, he said. But its mission, Prince of Peace Baptist Mission in McAllen, did give through the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget in 1989.

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Records of the Baptist General Convention of Texas show the mission gave \$881 in calendar year 1989, according to Roger Hall, treasurer.

"The membership of the mission church are members of our church," Lopez said, and thus its contributions count on behalf of the mother church. That giving, he believes, satisfies the technical requirements of the SBC for messengers to be seated at the annual meeting.

The SBC constitution says messengers will be seated from churches "in friendly cooperation with this convention and sympathetic with its purposes and work and has during the fiscal year preceding been a bona fide contributor to the convention's work."

Lawton Searcy, chairman of the SBC Credentials Committee during the annual meeting, said he believes Emmanuel Church was a cooperating church, but that information supporting that position was not available early on the opening day of the annual meeting.

"In my opinion, after viewing all of the information, after personally talking with Mr. Lopez and members of his congregation, I feel that Mr. Lopez's church is a friendly, cooperating church," said Searcy, pastor of First Baptist Church of Baton Rouge, La.

"Due to the lack of information at the time and due to the time factor itself, ... it simply was not possible to make the appropriate decisions" at the beginning of the annual meeting. On Tuesday morning, June 12, before the meeting began, Searcy asked Lopez and the other messenger from Emmanuel to turn in their ballots because of an expected challenge of Emmanuel's credentials. They did.

"The actions that were taken were taken according to information available at that moment that would follow the guidelines of our convention," Searcy said.

About an hour later, Lopez told Searcy of the mission's Cooperative Program gift, but he had no proof of his claim. Searcy had seen a document from the Baptist General Convention of Texas that showed no gifts from the church.

"If we could have seen anything that would have reflected that gift (from the mission), we would have said 'yes'" to Emmanuel Church's petition for credentials, Searcy said.

Beyond the technical requirements of the constitution, Lopez believes his church meets Southern Baptist standards for cooperativeness.

"This church has always been a cooperating Southern Baptist congregation," he said. "From the time it was founded it has been one of the largest contributors to the Cooperative Program ... of our Hispanic congregations in the state of Texas.

"In 1988, the Emmanuel Baptist Church gave a sum of \$3,141 to the Cooperative Program. That was for '88 and '89. The reason it shows \$3,141 in '88 was because in '89 they did not fill out a church letter, ... because this church knew that for 18 months they were not going to give on a monthly, systematic basis as they were before.

"The reason why was because the Emmanuel Baptist Church was sponsoring a mission that was going under, a mission church that we had to help."

The church gave \$20,000 to a building program for Prince of Peace Mission, Lopez said. Emmanuel Church committed \$300 to go to the mission each month for two years.

Another indication of the church's cooperativeness in general, the pastor said, was its housing of about 53 vacation Bible school workers and others from a church in Tyler, Texas, while he was in New Orleans at the convention.

Cooperation means more than money, he said, noting, "We cooperate with these folks."

Lopez has been pastor of Emmanuel since November 1989. The church went four years without a pastor, he said, but it had given to the Cooperative Program for years -- 7 percent of receipts for five or six years. "If a church has been cooperating all those years," Lopez said, "you just don't say that church is an uncooperative, unfriendly" congregation, when it doesn't give one year.

He said the challenge of his church's status was a "beautiful setup" and that it "smacks of racism."

Lopez said "several things" contributed to the challenge to his church's messengers. He said it was motivated 80 percent by racism, 10 percent by the convention controversy and 10 percent by the money matters involving his church's giving record.

Searcy said no racial motivations influenced decisions that were made, "none whatsoever." SBC Registration Secretary Lee Porter responded: "I'm sure our Credentials Committee and I dealt with him as I will deal with any church. I felt the Credentials Committee was meticulously fair in dealing with everyone. ... Our dealing with this church and any other church ... had nothing to do with the racial makeup of that church.

"SBC Bylaw Article III Membership was adopted by the SBC without racial bias and is interpreted annually by the SBC Credentials Committee without racial bias.

"A challenge came to us," Porter said, and the SBC constitution requires that such challenges be dealt with.

Lopez also criticized the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of Texas Baptists, saying its pre-convention coverage that showed the church had filed no Uniform Church Letter in 1989 and gave nothing to the Cooperative Program was motivated by racism.

Toby Druin, associate editor of the Standard, said: "We simply made an attempt to report to Texas Baptists information provided by the churches of the various nominees. We had no idea that Bro. Lopez's church had not supported the Cooperative Program until an inquiry was made regarding the church's Uniform Church Letter and the material contained in it."

Lopez "was called by the Standard to explain the church's lack of Cooperative Program support, and his explanation was carried in the news story," Druin said. "Subsequent comments by one of the nominees from his church, in defense of his pastor and the church, were also carried in full."

The McAllen pastor also said an anticipated challenge of four Hispanic nominations by his committee was racially motivated. He agreed to remove two who were members of his church. Lopez said that before giving his committee's report, "My thinking is that for the first time we have Hispanics on the boards." He said he had been asked to increase ethnic representation on SBC agency boards. "Here I give them that, and then they immediately try to knock down my Hispanics. ... I had to sacrifice the two from my church."

The pastor said his church has been hurt by recent events. "They're going to give to the Cooperative Program, but they're not going to give with their heart," he noted.

He described the church as a congregation of about 400 with an annual budget of \$100,000. It is in far southern Texas, about seven miles from the Mexico border.

The Mexican Baptist Convention of Texas met June 25-27 and passed a resolution affirming Lopez.

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Agency heads discuss 'threat'
to SBC Cooperative Program

By Mark Wingfield

N-DMB
Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Leaders of two Southern Baptist agencies disagreed about whether churches threatening to withhold Cooperative Program funds are holding missionaries hostage.

Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis and Sunday School Board President Lloyd Elder cordially disagreed July 22 at a town hall meeting during "Jericho: A Missions Festival" at Glorieta (N.M) Baptist Conference Center.

In later interviews, both affirmed the Cooperative Program, the denomination's unified funding mechanism for missions. Both Elder and Lewis last year joined other members of the SBC Inter-agency Council in support of the Cooperative Program and in opposition to negative designation (withholding of funds from certain causes).

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The topic of the Cooperative Program was raised as the last question during a one-hour dialogue with four SBC agency heads. Also participating were Dellana O'Brien, Woman's Missionary Union executive director, and James Smith, Brotherhood Commission president. Foreign Mission Board President Keith Parks was en route to Glorieta from Europe and did not attend the meeting.

The question, asked by an HMB employee, concerned whether the four agency heads perceived a threat to the Cooperative Program.

Since the denomination's annual meeting in June, some churches and state conventions have said they might redirect their national offerings to bypass certain agencies. Such decisions are in reaction to a 12 years of political victories by denominational conservatives, who now control most national SBC agencies.

"Yes, I think the greatest threat to the Cooperative Program in its history is being experienced right now," Lewis said. "I get very nervous and anxious when I hear talk of alternate plans, negative designation, withholding funds.

"Folks, let's understand what it is: it's a blatant frontal attack on the Cooperative Program, which has been our lifeline for missions support.

"There are a lot of problems in our convention," Lewis continued. "There are ways perhaps we need to go about solving them. But I don't believe holding our missionaries hostage is the way.

"I hope in your churches, I hope in your associations, I hope in your state conventions, you will do everything you can to dig in your heels and bow your back and say, 'No, no, no, this is not the Baptist way. We're not going to hold our missionaries hostage while we try to figure out who ought to be president of the Southern Baptist Convention. We won't put the gun to the head of the missionaries.'"

Elder replied: "I know of absolutely no Southern Baptist church wanting to hold our missionaries -- either home missionaries or foreign missionaries -- as hostages.

"I do know that Southern Baptists' missionary participation and support is built on trust," he continued. "We are a volunteer organization. I also know that local Southern Baptist churches have tough decisions to make. There's a vast number of ways to support missions, and broad-based participation and involvement and trust building have served us well.

"What I see happening is that we today should be very prayerful and mindful because decisions will be made in the local church on what folks will do voluntarily. And where they are given opportunity for participation and involvement in decision-making, there will be continued support.

"I know of absolutely no local church with a gun to the head of any missionary, trying to hold our mission agents hostage," Elder said. "I know of many Southern Baptist churches deeply troubled about a lack of opportunity for involvement in the missionary enterprise called Southern Baptist Cooperative Program.

"We need to be very prayerful and as careful as we can about our partisan statements," he concluded.

Elder concluded the meeting by emphasizing his appreciation for Lewis and the other mission leaders. "I hope you would perceive the five of us and these five agencies as working together day in and day out in support of our great missionary enterprise," Elder said. "We're working at this together, and I'm glad to be part of a team like that."

In an interview after the public meeting, Elder again affirmed his belief in the Cooperative Program but said he believes SBC agencies must listen to the churches to prevent damage to the unified funding plan.

"Those of us in service to the denomination must be careful not to accuse any church of holding a gun to the head of our missionaries," he said. "Our role, rather, is to do our work faithfully, to build trust in our work and to encourage the largest possible support in our mission work -- by all the churches."

Although not directly addressing the same topic as Elder and Lewis, both Smith and O'Brien did speak to the original question at the town hall meeting.

"You do not solve a situation by abandoning it," Smith said. "You've got to stay in, you've got to remain with."

"The problem is not going to be solved in the political arena. You cannot develop a political machine big enough to defeat another political machine, because that political machine will get bigger. I think that tactic is certainly offensive to God."

As an agency relating to laity, the Brotherhood Commission's role should be "to awaken our laity to pray for a genuine spiritual awakening and dynamic moving of God during these critical days," Smith said.

O'Brien concurred that the Cooperative Program "is in jeopardy."

While she believes "the love of missions in Southern Baptist hearts is indomitable," O'Brien expressed concern that churches might see this conflict as a chance to catch up on financing things at home and thereby lose their mission vision.

"My prayer is that this won't happen in any church," she said. "The commitment of WMU is to continue to support missions causes."

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Parks says Christians fail
to follow God's world plan

By Mike Creswell

N-JMB

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INTERLAKEN, Switzerland (BP)--Christians today have more opportunities to spread the gospel than at any time in history, but don't because they really don't feel God expects them to, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks told English-speaking European Baptists.

Scores of people responded to invitations to accept Christ as Savior, rededicate their lives or enter full-time Christian service as Parks spoke six times during the European Baptist Convention's summer assembly July 14-19.

"I come to you today with a conviction as deep as life itself," Parks told about 1,300 people from some 60 European Baptist churches attending the week of Bible study and Christian training.

"Every time I say this statement I pause to be sure if it's true, and I'm convinced it is true. And that statement is: you and I are living in a day when there are more people in more places in the earth who are ... saying 'We want to see Jesus' than have ever lived at one time in all of human history."

Acknowledging that Christian growth is slow in some areas, such as Western Europe and the Middle East, Parks told of rapid growth and major revivals in some parts of Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia.

"God's plan is very simple. We're to share the gospel with everyone in the world," Parks said. But because Christians have not been faithful to it, after 2,000 years only 34 percent of the world's population claims to be Christian, a figure that changes little from year to year, he said.

Another 48 percent of the world's people are not Christian but live in places where the gospel can be heard, Parks said. "There are enough churches around and enough Bibles around and enough religious programs on radio and television that they have exposure, they have access to the gospel. But they have said, 'No, we're not Christians. We don't believe that stuff.'"

Still another 26 percent of the world is isolated from the gospel, living in places without churches or Bibles or, in most cases, Christian broadcasts. "The vast majority wouldn't know the name of Jesus. They wouldn't know how to become a Christian. They wouldn't have access to the gospel."

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Christians of the world, making up at most 34 percent of the world's population, control 62 percent of the world's wealth, Parks added.

"You know what we do with that wealth? We use most of it on ourselves. We spend 97 cents of every dollar on ourselves in one way or another in a non-Christian way," he said.

On average, Christians spend a penny out of every dollar for secular charitable causes, a penny for parachurch or interdenominational causes and a penny for denominational work, Parks reported.

When \$100 is accumulated out of those three cents given, \$99.90 is spent on that part of the world already calling itself Christian, he said. Another nine cents is directed toward people within hearing of the gospel.

Just one penny out of the \$100 is used for the fourth of the world's people who have the least chance to hear about Jesus, Parks said.

"We do the same with missionaries," he continued. "There are about 261,000 missionaries in the world; 240,000 of them are directed towards the world that claims to be Christian. Twenty-thousand are directed towards the world that's lost and lives among Christians. And 1,000 ... go to the world that hasn't had a chance," he said.

Denouncing such inequities, Parks cited the story of the Ceausescus, rulers in Romania until they were executed last Christmas. "With their people freezing and starving, they were living in obscene luxury. Tell me the difference between (them and) those of us who claim ... Christ as our Savior and Lord, who revel in our affluence and luxury while the world starves spiritually and dies spiritually, and who do nothing about it. You see, we don't believe God expects us to. But Scripture says he does."

One "comfort index" study shows Switzerland to be the most comfortable place in the world to live, Parks said, with the United States not far behind. But places such as Angola and Mozambique fall near the bottom of the list.

Twenty percent of the world's population lives in abject poverty, Parks said. "They do not have adequate food, clothing, shelter. They have virtually nothing."

Another 25 percent of the earth's population -- some 1.25 billion people -- is always hungry. "That means one out of four people on earth are always hungry," he noted. "And out of those who are hungry, 500 million of them -- twice the population of the United States -- live on the very edge of starvation where the slightest shift in rainfall or in climatic conditions or in their own personal fortunes will mean death by starvation."

Sixty percent of the world's people do not have safe water -- a key factor in human suffering, Parks said, since many of the diseases that kill infants come from drinking impure water. The infant death rate from such diseases is five times the infant death rate in developed countries, he said.

"It's no surprise that people in such countries cry out, 'If there is a God, he's forgotten about us!'" Parks said.

"Visualize if you will a spindly-legged, potbellied, starving-to-death child on the high plains of Ethiopia and say to yourself, 'That little life is as loved of God and as valuable to God as I am.' We don't really believe that. Put it another way: that little child is as valuable to God as my child or my grandchild. We don't really believe that. But it's Scripture. And it really is true."

The task of missions, Parks declared, is not just the task of missionaries or preachers or chaplains.

"Every Christian is to wrap his or her body around Jesus, die to self-interest and self-glory and self-achievement and say to God, now take this body and use it to carry out your plan on earth. This is the essence of Christianity -- Jesus dies and lives in us!"

Mission Service Corps
assigns 3,000th volunteer

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-10MB

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--As the 3,000th person assigned to Mission Service Corps, George Cotton doesn't see himself as a typical volunteer.

But "typical" volunteers do not exist, says Bob Mills, MSC director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. The 1,260 self-supporting volunteers range from retirees to recent seminary graduates trying to find their niche in missions.

Cotton's niche is Pine Ridge Mobile Home Community in Alpharetta, Ga., where he has lived since 1982. In retirement he sees the 200-lot park as his mission field as well as his residence.

"Mobile home parks by their very nature are itinerant, so it's hard to build anything solid or permanent here," Cotton says. He describes his neighbors as "very friendly but isolationists."

Rather than expecting isolationists to attend an established church, Cotton is beginning a Bible study at the mobile home park. The Bible study got off to a slow start, but one couple whom Cotton describes as "hungry for God's Word" will be the core of the work, he believes.

Cotton is prepared for the work to mushroom. He removed a wall in his two-bedroom mobile home so the living room will seat 45 people. Working with the local Baptist association, he hopes to start Big A clubs and teen groups for latch-key children during the school year.

Yet Cotton's picture of success does not hinge on crowds. "I don't mind ministering to one person if I can see God working," he says, noting that Philip left a thriving ministry to witness to one Ethiopian eunuch.

Unlike many volunteers who are lay people, Cotton was a pastor for 16 years in New York. He could minister in the mobile home community without being a MSC volunteer, but he says the connection allows him to "tap the resources of the Southern Baptist Convention."

MSC volunteers work side-by-side with home missionaries to multiply the personnel force, Mills says. The volunteers' contributions help fill the gap between what missionaries can do and what needs to be done to reach America for Christ, he adds.

Volunteers may be found planting and developing churches or leading campus ministries. They are in resort areas and inner cities, in motorcycle clubs and at sports car races.

Mission Service Corps began in 1977 during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting at the suggestion of then-U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The first MSC assignments were made in 1978.

"We've learned that what motivates people is not money but a significant place of service where they can make a difference," Mills says.

MSC volunteers are assigned for one to two years in response to requests from home missionaries, and assignments can be renewed. Mills says the average stay is two-and-a-half years, with some people working in one place as long as 12 years.

Mills currently has about 1,100 requests for MSC volunteers.

The HMB has a toll-free volunteer hotline, 1 800 HMB-VOLS to receive requests for volunteers and to match prospective volunteers with needs.

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