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90-112

Stetson wants cut in funding,
change in trustee election

By Greg Warner

N (D) (JIA.)

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Stetson University has asked Florida Baptists to reduce their funding of the university in exchange for granting the Baptist-affiliated school more autonomy in the election of its trustees.

The proposal, which was drafted by Stetson President Douglas Lee and Florida Baptist Convention Executive Director John Sullivan, was presented to the convention's budget and allocations committee Aug. 17 in Jacksonville and will be considered by the state board of missions next month.

Under the plan, Florida Baptists would give up their right to approve the nomination of Stetson trustees, although they still would participate in the nomination process for the three-fourths of trustees who are Baptists. At the same time, the convention would cut its financial support of the DeLand school almost in half by 1995, and perhaps stop sending any more money to the school by the year 2000.

Lee and Sullivan emphasized the proposal would not sever or dramatically change the 105-year relationship between the convention and the school, which has about 500 Baptist students among the 2,000 enrolled. Instead, they said, the proposal would make an increasingly tense relationship more livable.

For years, Stetson has suffered criticism from some Florida Baptists for what they perceive to be a lack of Christian influence on both the curriculum and campus life. Several on-campus incidents, including an alleged rape two years ago in a fraternity house, have strained the relationship further.

While similar tensions have led some Baptist-affiliated universities to sever ties with their Baptist conventions, Lee says his proposal is intended to preserve the school's relationship with Florida Baptists despite differences. "Our charter defines us as a Baptist institution," he told committee members. "We have no desire ... to ever alter that relationship."

Sullivan told the committee he supports the proposal "wholeheartedly" as good for Stetson and the state convention. "It maintains the integrity of our mutual commitment to the gospel and at the same time allows us to address a long-standing problem, with Christian decorum rather than knee-jerk reality," he said.

Concern about Stetson "is a problem that is not going to go away," Sullivan explained. The proposal "takes the abrasion out of the relationship by doing something in a positive, long-range manner," he added.

The proposal gradually would reduce Florida Baptist funding of Stetson from the 1990 level of \$950,000 to \$500,000 by 1995. Convention funding would remain at the \$500,000 level from 1995 to 2000 and be used to build a \$3 million endowment.

Stetson, meanwhile, would seek to raise another \$3 million for the endowment. If the combined \$6 million goal is achieved, the Florida Baptist Endowment of Stetson University would provide the 2,000 student school an annual income of \$360,000, which Lee said would be used primarily for scholarships for Baptist students.

Lee said the proposal not only would provide much-needed endowment for the school but free up Florida Baptist money for urgent mission needs.

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Those urgent mission needs have caused Florida Baptists to shift their priorities in recent years, now focusing on evangelism, new churches, church development and selected social issues, Lee said.

"Liberal-arts education and/or university education is a priority for Florida Baptists, but it no longer ranks among the highest level of Florida Baptist Convention priorities," Lee added. Sullivan agreed.

While the Florida Baptist Convention sent 18.5 percent of its budget to Stetson in 1960, that percentage has dropped steadily ever since to the current 4 percent. The \$920,987 earmarked for Stetson in the current budget represents only 2.5 percent of the university's total income of \$37.5 million.

Stetson would begin the reduction in the current budget year by returning \$50,000 already allocated to the school for 1990. Reductions during the first five years of the plan would free up \$400,000 for other state convention causes, Lee said.

The proposed changes would not alter Stetson's commitment as a Christian institution, Lee said: "The issue for Stetson is that we are Baptist and Christian whether you give us any money or not. ... If you take all the money away, there's not one thing I would change."

Sullivan listed eight reasons why he supports the proposal: it keeps the long-standing relationship intact; it releases badly needed funds for other projects; it maintains Florida Baptist input into selection of Stetson trustees; it is not disruptive to Stetson's long-range budgeting; it maintains Florida Baptist influence on the religious life of Stetson; it affirms the many Stetson alums in the state; it says Stetson and Florida Baptists "can walk together in an orderly manner in the midst of significant confusion and denominational unrest;" and it represents a long-term solution rather than an impulsive response to a problem.

The budget and allocations committee, which later approved the convention's proposed 1991 budget, accepted Lee's suggestion that Florida Baptist funding of Stetson in 1991 be reduced to \$800,000. No action was necessary on Lee's funding proposals for the other years of the plan and the committee was not asked to act on the overall proposal. The committee asked the state board of missions, to which it reports, and other board committees to study the Stetson proposal further.

Both the budget and any change in the trustee-election process must be approved by the state board of missions, which meets Sept. 13-14, and the Florida Baptist State Convention, which meets in annual session Nov. 12-14.

Stetson's trustee executive committee already has endorsed the plan unanimously. The full board of trustees also must approve, Lee said.

Stetson's board of trustees elects its own members. But under a "working agreement" adopted by Stetson and the state convention in 1957, all 24 trustees are nominated by a six-member committee composed of three current trustees and three people elected by the state convention. Those nominees are approved by the Florida Baptist State Convention and then elected by the trustee board itself.

Under the new proposal, the nominating committee would be expanded to seven by adding a fourth Stetson trustee. The committee would not fill all trustee vacancies but only those or the 18 trustee posts that by charter must be filled by Baptists. The committee's nominations would be "reported" to the state convention but would not be subject to approval.

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Palestinian anger at America
disrupts Baptist work in Jordan

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

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LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Jeff Vann wanted only to be a representative of his Christian faith in two Palestinian refugee camps in northern Jordan.

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But against his will, the Southern Baptist worker became a symbol of America to many Palestinians angry over the U.S. military buildup in the Middle East and -- long before that -- angry over U.S. policies they believe are largely responsible for the plight of Palestinian refugees lacking a homeland.

So Vann decided it was time for his family to leave, believing their presence in Irbid, Jordan's second largest city with about 750,000 people, was doing more harm than good.

He hopes to return in a few weeks, Vann said in a telephone interview Aug. 22 after he and his wife, Susan, and their three children left Jordan and relocated in Larnaca, Cyprus, Aug. 17.

Vann is a first-term worker from Hickory, Ky., and his wife is from Sacramento, Ky. Their two sons are 10 and 5 years old; their daughter is 7.

In Jordan, they lived less than half a mile from a Palestinian refugee camp of 15,000 to 20,000 people. The refugees live in groups of 10 or 15 relatives sharing two-room houses of concrete block or wood-and-tin shacks.

The Vanns were the first Southern Baptist workers to evacuate Jordan. Two other couples since have left the country. A number of others among the 13 Southern Baptist workers still there also may leave. Additionally, 14 Southern Baptist workers in Yemen were scheduled to leave that country beginning Aug. 25.

In Jordan, Vann visited the nearby refugee camp and a larger camp several miles away with 30,000 to 35,000 Palestinians, and worked with several Baptist congregations in northern Jordan.

Leaving "has been a heartache," Vann said. "We left a lot of good people, friends and neighbors and church people." In both refugee camps he had made a number of friends and acquaintances.

"There are still many believing Christian folks trying to proclaim the message of peace and hope and love," he added. He issued a firm rebuttal to any stereotyping of all Arabs as terrorists or ardent supporters of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader who orchestrated the invasion of Kuwait Aug. 2.

Vann said he did not feel in any imminent danger, although "we almost had an incident with some shepherd boys who thrust their sheep out in front of us on a busy roadway. We had to slam on the brakes. As soon as they saw the luggage in our car and realized we were Americans, they began to throw stones and sticks."

Another Baptist worker in Jordan, Beverly Richardson of West Plains, Mo., also weathered a tense situation, Vann recounted. She happened upon an anti-American protest while driving between Amman, Jordan's capital, and Ajloun, a city where one of two Baptist schools in Jordan is located.

Young men began beating and kicking her car, but "there were people who were trying to protect her and stood between her in the car and the mob" until she could drive away, Vann said.

Many of the Palestinians in Jordan, who comprise more than half of the country's 4 million people, have adopted Saddam Hussein as "a kind of savior figure ... as strange as that might sound to us," Vann said. The Palestinians, he said, seem to have lost hope in their own efforts to return to their homeland, a region that was claimed by Israel when the Jewish state was founded in 1948.

"This is kind of like a last gasp of hope for them. They're turning to anyone who can promise them some results and right now they see Saddam Hussein as the one who possibly can do that," Vann said.

At the same time, Palestinians believe "Americans are the ones to blame for all the problems ... the aggressors," he said.

In Irbid, it became difficult for Vann even to strike up conversations with many people because "all they saw was that I was an American."

Even before global tensions came to a boil with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Vann said, he had been warned by friends in the refugee camps that some Palestinian activists "might do some damage to you." Such threats generally can be taken with "a large grain of salt," he said, because they are isolated and often voiced in a loud but ultimately benign bragging fashion and probably would be carried out only in the heat of a mob situation.

"You're always careful," Vann added. "You have to be. You choose words carefully. You choose friends carefully. You know where you're going and what you're doing."

But with anti-American sentiments soaring, Vann began to feel that "just our mere presence" in Irbid was an antagonizing factor to angry Palestinians who knew nothing more about his family than their American appearance.

"They can't easily protest the American government in Irbid" because there is no U.S. Embassy there, Vann said. "All they could do was see us as the American government ... the American system. We were in a situation out living among the people, and though our neighbors would have protected us to a certain degree, there would come a time, we felt, when they would not be able to do that."

Vann wants to return to his home near the refugee camp. "That's home," he said. His calling to ministry among Arabs came during his work with an Arab church in Fort Worth, Texas, in the early 1980s, when he was a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Christians in the Middle East and Southern Baptist workers in the region need prayer, Vann said, especially Maurice and Laurie Graham in Kuwait, who have taken refuge with their two sons at the U.S. Embassy there. And "those of us who have come out also need prayer because as soon as we came out, we were ready to go back."

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

Returning journeymen cite
church, campus influence

By Frank Wm. White

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F-55B

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Student missions projects and church mission organizations are key factors cited by two returning journeymen as the basis for their decisions to dedicate two years to missions involvement.

Jason Thrower from Jacksonville, Ala., and Carol Greene from Oxford, N.C., attended the Ridgecrest Student Conference after completing two-year journeyman assignments.

Thrower was youth director for the four churches of the Bermuda Baptist Fellowship, while Greene taught English at the Baptist Student Center in Bangkok, Thailand.

Both said they believe their assignments will impact their future career decisions and already have taught them patience as well as greater love and acceptance for others.

Thrower immersed himself in missions projects while a student at Jacksonville State University in Alabama.

Through summer mission projects in Wisconsin and New York, numerous other projects and the U.S.-Brazil Student Mission Encounter, campus ministry "played a very important part in my decision to become a journeyman," Thrower said.

In fact, entering the journeyman program in June 1988 after his graduation, seemed a natural extension of his missions involvement.

For Greene, the journeyman program came after a one-year work stint following college.

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Although she was involved in her church college choir and Sunday school department, mission organizations from Mission Friends to Baptist Young Women provided the foundation that led to her decision to become a journeyman.

At the student center in Bangkok, Greene had opportunities to share the gospel while teaching English to people ranging from high school students to professionals wanting to learn English. English training was a drawing card for the center in the capital city of the Southeast Asian nation.

For Thrower, training workers to lead discipleship programs for youth was difficult in the island colony that enjoys a high standard of living and low unemployment because of the tourism industry.

"People have the attitude that things are going so well for them that they don't need anything else -- including God," Thrower explained.

While there, he used the Survival Kits for New Christians and conducted one MasterLife group that he hopes will help develop the youth discipleship ministry, he said.

Both now are looking for their next step in ministry, realizing that their involvement in missions will impact their future decisions.

"Being a journeyman changed my whole outlook," Greene said. "I want to get involved in some type of international or language ministry."

Thrower plans to enter Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., this fall.

"I would love to go back overseas, but I'm open to other possibilities," he said.

No matter what his future role will be, Thrower said the time as a journeyman helped prepare him to trust God's leadership.

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Flowers gives students
key to successful life

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--After rising to the peak of success and plummeting to the depths of despair, Richmond Flowers discovered real power comes only from God.

Flowers, a former college track and football All-American and member of the Dallas Cowboys football team, told students attending the Student Conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center that "sooner or later we realize we are not the designers of our own destiny."

He said he learned from experience that self, others, possessions or worldly power could not provide the support he needed.

After overcoming physical and personal hardships, Flowers earned a football scholarship to the University of Tennessee where he became an All-American in 1969 and set several national and world track records.

He played professional football for the Dallas Cowboys before being traded. He then earned a law degree and became successful in the Chicago commodities market.

In the commodities market, Flowers earned a million dollars and seemed to be on top of the world. Then in 1984, the commodities market dropped and he suddenly lost everything he had gained.

Because of the market downturn, Flowers lost his job. Then his wife divorced him, taking their three children with her.

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He said it was then, when his life seemed hopeless, that he asked God to forgive his misplaced values and he began to try to piece his life together again.

"At that point Richmond Flowers became born again. I plugged in to the supreme power. Now the source of my power forever is Jesus Christ, and I don't have to worry about anything else," Flowers said.

Flowers married his high school sweetheart, now has his own company and is a member of University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, Fla.

A movie produced in 1984 about Flowers' life focused on his struggle to play football along with his father's struggle to fight racism in Alabama in the 1960s. His father was attorney general of the state at that time.

Students at Ridgecrest viewed the film on Tuesday evening before Flowers spoke on Wednesday evening.

"I had to get to the point where I was totally helpless before I realized God needed to be in control of my life," he said.

Flowers told students that no matter what the world offers, there is no real power without Jesus Christ.

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