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NOTE TO EDITORS: Baptist Press stories covering the fall 1990 meeting of the SBC Executive Committee were written and edited in their final form by Linda Lawson of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Mark Wingfield of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, and Scott Collins of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

SBC Executive Committee
holds solemn assembly

By Mark Wingfield

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee began their fall meeting Sept. 17 with a three-hour solemn assembly that included public confession and repentance.

At several points in the assembly, individuals stood at microphones to confess specific sins and "turn over to God" burdens and issues of personal pride.

This was the first Executive Committee meeting since July 17 when two Baptist Press journalists were dismissed in a controversial, special-called meeting. Al Shackelford, vice president for public relations, and Dan Martin, news editor, were terminated.

Although the incident was never cited specifically, several Executive Committee members alluded to pain they have experienced since that meeting.

"I have had deep resentment against moderates who think we're stupid and can't discern God's will," one member said in an emotional testimony. "I want to be free of any resentment."

Another member said he believes there has been a spirit of oppression on the Executive Committee caused by critical words. "We did some things we thought were right. People have misunderstood," he said.

"We have to forgive every person who spoke every word against us," the man suggested. "We also must repent of words we have spoken."

"Forgive those who disagree with us," another member prayed.

At one point, members stopped to pray specifically for Executive Committee chairman Sam Pace, who one speaker said has taken the brunt of criticism for the committee's July actions. Pace is an associational director of missions in Oklahoma.

Another common theme in testimonies was a desire for unity among Executive Committee members.

One member said she feared being "shunned" by fellow conservatives more than being criticized by moderates. As a result of the solemn assembly, the member said, "I'm not going to be so cautious about who I eat with or who I talk to."

One man said he had developed resentment because people and news reports had repeatedly "lied" about him. However, he said he prayed Executive Committee members would "come to a complete giving up of self" and stop "backbiting."

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"I know God will never move within us until fractured relationships are healed," another man said. "I think if any group of people in the Southern Baptist Convention is going to bring a sense of peace and wellness, it has to be us."

He said members of the Executive Committee have too often seen each other only as labels. "God can't use us until we get over that," the man declared.

The solemn assembly was led by Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. He was assisted by prayer leaders from three other Southern Baptist agencies: T.W. Hunt and Avery Willis of the Sunday School Board; Minette Drumwright of the Foreign Mission Board; and Doug Beggs of the Brotherhood Commission.

Blackaby said the prayer leaders received a burden two years ago that led to a call to solemn assembly issued one year ago. Solemn assembly is an Old Testament concept of gathering people together for confession of corporate sin.

The past year has been "the deepest year in our lives," Blackaby said. "Nothing can compare to what we've seen."

He reported that nine state conventions, dozens of associations and hundreds of churches have called solemn assemblies in the past year. Solemn assembly has helped those groups stop looking at what they are doing for God and instead focus on what God is doing in the world, he said.

"God's holiness is being manifested in a new kind of way," Hunt reported. Revivals resulting from solemn assemblies are "characterized by the dread of God," he said.

Willis told the assembly America is "living under the judgment of God."

"It is not God's fault we're not all he wants us to be," Willis said. "What more could God have done for our nation and our convention than he has already done?"

Willis said he believes sometime around 1963 God "took away the hedge" of protection from America. He cited a string of statistics to show increased crime and immorality since that time.

"We stand in this moment of time, and we must respond to our God," he declared. "We need caretakers that will intercede before God for our nation and our convention. Prayer is the answer."

"I think God in his mercy and love has given us a second chance. We ought to be praying, 'God, give us one more year.'"

At the conclusion of the solemn assembly, Beggs led the group in a covenant of recommitment to God.

"Movements like this don't solve everything," Blackaby told the Executive Committee. "What comes out of here will be far more important than what went on here."

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SBC President Chapman urges
Baptists to 'speak kindly'

By Scott Collins

N-EO

Baptist Press
9/18/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--The time has come to "speak kindly of one another," Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman, told members of the SBC Executive Committee during their meeting in Nashville Sept. 17.

"There is room for conviction, but there is no room for unkindness," Chapman said. "There is no room for lack of love, there's no room for refusal to communicate."

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Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, who was elected president of the SBC in June, said during his initial address to the Executive Committee he will "stand against all unkind, cutting, public proclamation against any other Southern Baptist, no matter from which corner those fighting words may come." Chapman also took the opportunity to introduce a plan designed to lead the SBC beyond the 12-year-old controversy which has consumed the denomination.

Cautioning all Baptists, and especially people in leadership positions, Chapman said: "A wrong attitude and a wrong word spoken, is that which does not honor our Lord Jesus Christ. I ask you to join me in conducting yourself and pray that I might conduct myself in such a way that our spirit would be Christ-like, sufficient, that all Southern Baptists, or at least those who will, will say this is a new day, and our Lord does know the way through the wilderness."

Chapman also warned against attempts to circumvent the Cooperative Program, the denomination's unified funding plan, saying participation in an alternative funding vehicle "is a giant step away from the spirit of cooperation which is dear to this convention. The organization of a funding program designed to go around the Cooperative Program is unacceptable to mainstream Southern Baptists and may well lead to a permanent break from the convention."

While he affirmed his promise to "enlarge the tent of leadership" in the SBC, Chapman restated his definition of an enlarged tent as one that includes those who are cooperating Southern Baptists committed to the "perpetuation of allegiance to God's perfect word through the institutional life of Southern Baptists" and who are "in agreement with the Peace Committee's 'Statement on Scripture.'"

"While I will unapologetically stay within these theological guidelines in my appointments, I will, as I have pledged, reach beyond perceived political parameters," he said.

Chapman said those parameters should be based upon the report of the SBC Peace Committee, issued during the 1987 convention meeting in St. Louis.

"I ask all Southern Baptists, denominational employees, pastors and their people, to restudy the Peace Committee report," Chapman said. "It is apparent to me that many Southern Baptists have either forgotten or ignored the call to peace and the conditions of peace which emerged from hours of prayer and days of deliberation by the members of the Peace Committee. The report has been adopted by Southern Baptists. Now it stands waiting and ready for acceptance and implementation."

Chapman asked the Executive Committee to mail copies of the Peace Committee report to pastors and denominational leaders. The report also has been published in booklet form by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

In his address, Chapman said, "If now the larger Southern Baptist family will stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, and heart to heart" on the issue of biblical authority, "our beloved convention will make a quantum leap beyond excessive politics, real or perceived, of any persuasion.

"Agreement will not always be reached on matters of biblical interpretation, but agreement must be reached on biblical authority," he said.

Saying "now is the time for reduced rhetoric, for Christ-like attitudes and for gracious communication," Chapman outlined what he called the next direction for Southern Baptists. "My suggestions are not all inclusive," Chapman said of his four-part plan, "but perhaps they shall serve as a beginning."

First, Chapman said he has enlisted Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., to head a task force encouraging Southern Baptists to engage in solemn assemblies. The solemn assembly is an Old Testament concept of gathering people together for confession of corporate sin. Members of the Executive Committee participated in a three-hour prayer meeting and solemn assembly earlier in the day.

Chapman said he will consider eventually incorporating "a call to prayer for spiritual awakening into the annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Second, Chapman said he has asked Landrum Leavell, president New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, to enlist "people from all spectrums of our convention to participate" in reading aloud the entire Bible during the SBC meeting in Atlanta, June 4-6, 1991. "Hopefully, this symbolic gesture will inspire us all the more to read the Bible to which we pledge our allegiance," he said.

Third, Chapman said he has asked the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission to televise the annual convention live on the ACTS cable network. Recent convention meetings have been carried by the Sunday School Board's Baptist Telecommunication Network, which will cease operation Sept. 30. "For the first time, the Southern Baptist Convention in annual session could be seen in every home in America which has the ACTS cable network," he said.

Finally, Chapman called for the cooperation of the foreign and home mission boards to utilize volunteers in extensive partnership mission projects in the future. Chapman said plans are being made by the HMB to sponsor the evangelistic emphasis called "Crossover America."

In conjunction with the "Crossover America" project, Chapman said he will soon announce the names of co-chairmen for "Crossover Atlanta," to be implemented during the SBC meeting there next year.

A similar project, "Cross Overseas," is being planned for 1991 "and perhaps beyond" through the FMB, Chapman said. "The board is presently studying potential countries where volunteer efforts in evangelism and discipleship would be most effective," he said. When those countries have been identified, Chapman said he will name co-chairmen for the project.

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Sunday School Board makes
major distribution change

By Charles Willis

N-55B

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP) --A six-month study of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's literature distribution system will result in a streamlined order-filling process, shipment of most orders by United Parcel Service and elimination of some temporary and regular part-time positions.

Recommendations of the study, conducted by the consulting firm, IFC/The Smock Quinn Group of Fairfax, Va., will be implemented Oct. 25 with filling and shipment of orders for January, February and March monthly and quarterly publications. The board publishes 211 monthly and quarterly titles.

The decision to use UPS is expected to provide reduced transit time and ability to trace shipments, said Andy Dodson, director of the board's distribution services division.

"Converting our dated literature shipping to UPS also offers an opportunity to combine shipments containing different types of products going to the same customer. As in the past, customers will not pay shipping charges on dated materials."

U.S. Postal Service regulations which govern shipping by size and type of product have prevented mailing some products in the same package.

Board management notified 23 temporary and regular part-time employees Sept. 13 of the decision to eliminate their positions in the periodical distribution section at the end of the current mailing cycle. An additional 24 persons working at the board through local temporary employment agencies were notified of the decision by their employers.

Jimmy D. Edwards, vice president for marketing and distribution, told board employees several ways help will be provided in job placement. "We want to go the second mile in helping you through this period of transition," he said.

Efforts to secure positions for displaced persons began Sept. 14 with on-site interview arranged with local companies and personnel placement agencies. Additionally, an advertisement alerting local employers to the availability of experienced distribution persons will appear in the Sept. 23 issue of The Tennessean, Nashville's morning daily newspaper. An outplacement seminar was scheduled at the board to deal with job search topics.

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The remaining 40 board employees will be retrained to a streamlined system which will result in shipment of orders of up to 40 pounds in a single box through UPS. Under the procedure which had been used for about 30 years, church customers received orders in multiple packages delivered by both the U.S. Postal Service and UPS.

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Baptist workers return
to Jordan and Yemen

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9/18/90

N. FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Four Southern Baptist representatives have returned to their work in Jordan and Yemen despite rising political tensions in the area, a Southern Baptist official said.

Gerry Volkart from Boonville, Mo., and Pat Frost from Parks, Ark., returned Sept. 16 to their teaching posts at the Amman Baptist School in Amman, Jordan, according to Dale Thorne, area director for Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa.

Cheryll Harvey from Sudan, Texas, also returned to her classroom at the Ajloun Baptist School in Ajloun, Jordan, Thorne said. In Yemen, Beverly Thomas from Senatobia, Miss., returned Sept. 18 to Jibla, Yemen, where she will resume her nursing work at the Jibla Baptist Hospital.

Mrs. Thomas rejoined her husband, Robert Thomas from Etowah, Tenn., after evacuating to Cyprus with 11 other Southern Baptist workers in late August.

Mrs. Thomas temporarily has left her two children, Beverly, age 12, and Ginny, age 10, with the 15 other Southern Baptist workers who evacuated to Cyprus, Thorne said.

Overseas messages from the returning workers did not say why they felt it was now safe to return, Thorne said. However, he said he believes each person considered the situation carefully and determined that she could still be an effective worker despite rising anti-Western and anti-American feelings in the region.

The current changes bring the number of Southern Baptist workers to 12 in Jordan and 11 in Yemen.

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Gulf crisis offers new opportunity
for Sunday school ministry efforts By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
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F-SSB

NORFOLK, Va. (BP)--The departure of four members of Paula Hemphill's Sunday school class to the Middle East has become one more opportunity to meet needs.

For Hemphill, wife of pastor Ken Hemphill at First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., and teacher of a class of young married adults, one ministry opportunity came in the form of a 3:45 a.m. trip to the hospital with a mother having a baby.

Hemphill had just returned from South Carolina where she had been caring for her own father who had suffered a heart attack. She stopped to check on Diana Randall, a class member who was nine months pregnant and whose husband was commanding a submarine headed for the Persian Gulf.

Don Randall was one of at least 45 members of the church who have been sent to the Middle East from nearby Norfolk Naval Station and Portsmouth Naval Hospital.

"The doctor had told her she wouldn't make it through the week without delivering the baby. She said she planned to drive herself to the hospital," Hemphill recalled. "I told her she shouldn't plan to drive herself and to call me."

The call came at 3:45 a.m., Sept. 7. "I got there at 4:10 and at 10:45 Gabrielle was born," Hemphill said.

Hemphill said her own family crisis and her need to help a church staff member whose husband had a heart attack have prevented her from facilitating her class's caring for Randall and her three children.

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"The class has pulled together to meet the family's needs because that's what they learned this summer," Hemphill said.

In recent months, four babies have been born to class members, three class members are pregnant, three had miscarriages and four husbands were deployed to the Middle East, she said.

Hemphill's class was one of 66 new units started a year ago. It began with six people and now has 60 on roll.

"Most of the members are new to the area. Many are new Christians, and few have Southern Baptist backgrounds," Hemphill said.

"We're a cosmopolitan community. Many people are far from home and don't have any family nearby. They (members) are finding the family aspects of the church. They're caring for each other and ministering," Hemphill said.

"If this class had not been ministering in other situations, we wouldn't have been able to minister in the Gulf crisis situation," she said. "It's not possible to make a grand effort in a crisis if the base is not already established."

Hemphill's class is just one example of how the church is ministering to military families affected by the deployment through the normal channels of Sunday school and discipleship training, said Dick Baker, minister to married adults.

"We stress caring in Sunday school. Deacons serve as care leaders in the Sunday school, and that's their only responsibility," Baker said. Church committees handle business while deacons handle ministry.

A Wednesday evening discipleship training military support group has been started for persons affected by the deployment. The session is open to the community, Baker said.

A military bulletin board has been placed in the church lobby. New information about the Middle East situation is posted twice weekly.

A church secretary was able to get military addresses for church members who have been deployed. Those names are placed on pre-addressed post cards, and church members are asked to write to them each Sunday and Wednesday evening.

Prayer cards with names of three persons who have left for the Middle East have been handed out for families to place on their dinner tables as prayer reminders.

A special Labor Day weekend service included a Lord's Supper and a special focus on families and concern for persons affected by the deployment.

The military support ministry is an opportunity for the church to highlight its family role, Baker said.