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Sunday School Board elects
'balanced' search committee

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board elected a 10-member presidential search committee Feb. 4 to find a replacement for Lloyd Elder, who was forced to retire as president last month.

By most accounts, the search group represents a balance of viewpoints on the 91-member board, which voted Jan. 17 to accept Elder's offer to take early retirement rather than face a vote of dismissal.

Trustees had accused the 57-year-old Elder of mishandling publication of a controversial history of the board, poorly managing the finances of three board ventures, and secretly tape recording three telephone calls involving trustees.

During their regularly scheduled meeting Feb. 4-6 in Nashville, trustees did not revisit the dispute that cost Elder his job. Their disagreement with Elder was not discussed except in closed-door committee sessions that preceded the board meeting.

Despite their differences, board members were cordial to Elder, who in turn thanked trustees for their encouragement during a time of "pain and sorrow." In his presidential address to trustees Feb. 4, Elder said: "An agreement to disagree and separate does not need to mean the end of our kingdom work, because we are kingdom people."

Elder has admitted making "some mistakes" but has not responded publicly in detail to the trustees' charges. He assured trustees Feb. 4 he will not trouble the waters of transition.

"No contrived self-defense is planned," said Elder, who is prohibited by the terms of his retirement from criticizing the trustees. Instead, he said, he and the trustees "would seek to be all God wants us to be ... so that God would get the honor and glory for our lives."

Trustee chairman William Anderson of Clearwater, Fla., had words of praise for Elder. "We have a president who is going through a difficult time, and he is doing it with grace and aplomb," Anderson told trustees.

Both Elder and trustees voiced a commitment to "move on" with the work of the 100-year-old Nashville-based agency, which is responsible for church programming and publishing for the Southern Baptist Convention.

The most pressing need is the election of Elder's successor. Two trustee officers said the search committee should be able to find a new president by the time Elder's retirement becomes effective Jan. 31 of next year. If a new president is found earlier, Elder would leave within 30 days, according to the retirement agreement.

Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, predicted trustees would be able to work with Elder until next January if necessary and that no interim president would be named.

Anderson nominated the committee, which was approved by trustees on a secret ballot. He nominated Wayne DuBose, pastor of Summer Grove Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., as chairman of the group.

The committee includes three ex officio members -- trustee chairman Anderson; vice chairman Gene Mims, pastor of First Church of Cleveland, Tenn.; and SBC president Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, who serves as a trustee by virtue of his office.

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The seven other members are Bobby Welch, pastor of First Church of Daytona Beach, Fla., who will be vice chairman of the search committee; Mark Brooks, pastor of Elmdale Baptist Church in Springdale, Ark.; Kirk Humphreys, a businessman from Oklahoma City; Frank Palmer, pastor of Forest Avenue Baptist Church in Redmond, Ore.; Iris White, a self-employed publisher from Columbia, Md.; and William Wilson, director of convention ministries for the Tennessee Baptist Convention in Brentwood, Tenn.

Three alternates were named, who will replace members who become unable to serve. They were elected in the order in which they will be called to serve: Gene Swinson, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Augusta, Ga.; James Hume, a pharmacist from Jeffersontown, Ky.; and Danny Strickland, pastor of Parkway Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla. As alternates they will not have voting privileges but will participate in some committee meetings.

Before nominating the committee, Anderson got approval for a motion limiting the group to seven at-large members.

A motion to add a prominent conservative leader to the committee failed.

Robert Tenery of Morganton, N.C., editor of the independent Southern Baptist Advocate, was offered as an additional nominee by Joe Knott, an attorney from Raleigh, N.C. "No trustee has been better informed than Bob Tenery," Knott said. "No trustee has been more involved than Bob Tenery. There has not been a more consistent voice for conservatives."

Trustees were told they would elect the seven by voting on each one in the order of his or her nomination, with the first seven who received majority approval being elected. Since that made Tenery's election unlikely, Dennis Lunsford of Humboldt, Tenn., made a motion to expand the committee to eight. That motion failed. A ninth nominee -- Lunsford -- was added to the list. Then a motion was made to vote for seven of the nine by secret ballot, improving the chances for the later nominees to be elected. The motion passed 38-30.

However, the secret ballot made no difference; all seven of Anderson's original nominees were elected. No vote count was reported.

Afterward, trustees on both sides applauded the committee selection.

"It's as balanced as you are going to get out of this group," said Jerry Brown, a pastoral counselor from Bayfield, Colo. "This is a very conservative board."

Mark Brooks, a member of the committee, said the group showed balance in terms of geographical distribution, age, length of service on the board, and theological leaning within the denomination. He predicted the group will "mesh well."

Committee chairman DuBose said members will search for a president with "open minds."

"We will take input from all Southern Baptists," he told trustees. "We have no preplanned agenda."

"We are looking for someone who has proven himself as a leader ... who has credibility with every Southern Baptist," DuBose said. The new president also must be "someone who can work well with people," he added.

"I covet your prayers, and that's not just preacher talk," DuBose told trustees.

The committee met for two-and-a-half hours Feb. 5 to begin outlining procedures for its work. In a statement afterward, the group invited "any Southern Baptist" to make a recommendation.

The submissions must be in writing, the statement said, and include a complete biographical sketch and "concise statement as to the reason" for the recommendation.

Recommendations should be mailed to BSSB Search Committee, P.O. Drawer L, Springdale, Ark. 72765.

DuBose told trustees their suggestions would be given added weight. He promised to communicate with them about the progress of the committee but emphasized the need "for a high level of confidentiality."

The presidential vacancy is expected to generate a lot of attention around the Southern Baptist Convention, particularly from conservatives, who have been successful at filling key agency positions with people committed to their cause.

Already several prominent conservative leaders have been mentioned as likely candidates, including SBC president Chapman, former president Jimmy Draper of Euless, Texas, and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas.

Despite frequent speculation linking Patterson to the presidential vacancy, the Dallas educator told the Florida Baptist Witness, newsjournal of the Florida Baptist Convention, he has not been contacted by any trustee about the job and has no aspirations for it.

Rumors rampant in Nashville said Patterson already is shopping for a home in Nashville, but he said he has not been in the Nashville area since last summer and has not spoken with any realtors. Patterson remarked about his own distinctive appearance to make a point: "We're not talking about a case of mistaken identity. We're talking about malicious rumor."

While it is "inevitable" that he and other high-profile conservatives would be suggested for the job, Patterson predicted the search committee will not be swayed by such pressure. Concerning Chapman and Draper, however, Patterson said, "I would be ecstatic if either one of them were elected."

Anderson told the Witness the committee "has no predisposition" for or against any potential candidate. "We're not excluding any Southern Baptist," he said.

Asked if a high-profile conservative could be elected, Anderson said only that the new president would need "a broad a base of support under him."

Chapman undoubtedly will have to resign from the search committee if he becomes a candidate for the presidency, Anderson said, but the committee has not yet established a procedure for such a situation.

Anderson explained Chapman's election to the committee by noting other SBC presidents have been asked to serve on previous search committees of the Sunday School Board. Chapman is expected to seek re-election as SBC president later this year, but if a new SBC president is elected before the search process is completed, Anderson said, the new president would replace Chapman on the committee.

Chapman's election to the search group was "gratuitous," Anderson explained, since the president likely will be unable to participate in most of the committee's meetings because of his busy schedule.

Anderson said he expects a board president to be elected within a year. "We are trying to dodge two extremes -- going too fast and going too slow," he said. He added it is conceivable the trustees would call a special meeting to vote on a candidate since they meet only twice a year, in February and August.

Before the meeting, some observers had predicted the trustees would act quickly -- perhaps even at their February meeting -- to replace Elder or at least to name an interim. But Anderson said he felt the trustees could work with Elder until his retirement becomes effective next January.

"I don't envision an interim," he said.

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Elder, trustees settle dispute
over tapings, but not letter

By Greg Warner

Baptist Press
2/8/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Lloyd Elder and his trustees have come to an agreement about unauthorized telephone tapings that Elder made, but they have not settled a dispute about a controversial letter from Elder that was leaked to the press.

Elder, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, and four of the board's trustee officers released a joint statement Jan. 29, one week before the trustees' semi-annual meeting, in which they expressed substantial agreement about the disputed telephone tapings.

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But after meeting with Elder and two of his associates behind closed doors Feb. 4, the trustee officers emerged saying they had not determined how Elder's Jan. 10 letter to trustees, in which he refused to resign under pressure, later appeared on local television. Both Elder and trustees deny leaking the letter.

Only Elder, his administrative assistant Joyce Byrd, board attorney Robert Thomas and a handful of trustees reportedly had access to the letter Jan. 11, when Elder gave it to trustee officers during a Nashville meeting.

The letter was addressed to the board's general administration committee and mailed by Elder from outside the board offices Jan. 11. However, local television reporter Tom Lee of WSMV read from an original copy of the letter on the air Jan. 12, before most General Administration Committee members could have received it through the mail.

In separate closed-door meetings Feb. 4, Elder, Byrd and the GAC members each denied leaking the letter to the reporter, said GAC chairman Dan Collins.

"It's a miracle!" Collins quipped.

Reporters were barred from more than three hours of closed-door deliberations by the GAC Feb. 4, during which the committee discussed the letter as well as the search for a new board president.

Afterward, Collins would give no details of the executive session because, he said, trustees did not wish to rehash "past issues. However, the unauthorized release of Elder's letter is still an issue," Collins said. "If there is a security leak of that kind, the GAC would want to know about it," he explained.

Following the GAC's meeting, Collins and at least two other committee members approached Lee, who was reporting on the meeting, and asked how he got the letter. Lee declined to reveal his source.

The issue of the telephone tapings first surfaced publicly Jan. 17 during a meeting in which the full trustee board voted to accept Elder's offer to retire next year rather than face dismissal. In the meeting, Elder denied taping telephone calls without permission, but the trustee officers offered sworn statements to the contrary.

The Jan. 29 meeting with the officers was scheduled to resolve the dispute. In the joint statement released afterward, Elder corrected his earlier response, which he said was based on his memory at the time.

"After a review of the events," the statement said, Elder acknowledged taping three conversations without permission between Nov. 1 and Nov. 15, 1990. At least some of the calls involved trustee chairman William Anderson of Clearwater, Fla., and board attorney Robert Thomas of Nashville, who the statement said were not told the recording was being made.

The calls were recorded over a speaker phone with a hand-held dictation machine for accurate follow-up on business matters and were erased afterward, the statement said. The tapes were replayed only for conference-call participants, which included other board employees. Two of those participants provided trustees with the sworn affidavits.

The secret tapings were one of three reasons trustees cited in forcing Elder's early retirement Jan. 17.

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Lebanon: hope
yet flickers

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
2/8/91

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--A fragile peace has settled over Lebanon, and prospects for Christian ministry have risen.

Life remains difficult and big problems persist, but Baptist schools are well-attended, orders for evangelical literature are up and some churches report growth, according to observers arriving in Cyprus. Most important, some say interest in the gospel is on the rise among war-weary Lebanese.

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As world attention has focused on the Gulf conflict, Lebanon almost has been forgotten. Lebanese Baptists who recently visited Cyprus reported many Lebanese laughed as they watched televised reports showing Israelis and Saudis scrambling to safety during Iraqi missile attacks.

The Lebanese have endured similar violence for 15 years. Thousands of artillery shells have pounded much of Beirut to rubble. A few Scud missiles sound like nothing to them, said one observer.

"I couldn't see much concern about the Gulf situation there," he said. Bitter civil war has continued in Lebanon since 1975; its ongoing death totals have long since slipped to the inside pages of most U.S. newspapers.

But now there's a change amid Beirut's maze of barriers and bullets. Electricity is being restored to some, traffic is flowing again and shrapnel-scarred stores are open. Fuel is available for cars, heating and cooking.

Land mines and barriers along the nine-mile "green line" dividing mainly Christian East Beirut from mainly Muslim West Beirut are being cleared away.

"The shelves are full in department stores, if you have money," said one Beirut resident. "They're trying to repair telephone lines, water lines, basic necessities, but it will take time.

"There's freedom to worship and witness," he continued. "There's no problem with that. You can worship, you can preach and you can teach anyone." But he added that an effort to preach the gospel in Muslim areas likely would produce a severe backlash from Muslim fundamentalist groups.

A measure of peace began to return to Beirut last October with the defeat of Gen. Michel Aoun. Some 40,000 Syrian troops joined with Lebanese troops to overwhelm Aoun, ending his 11-month opposition to the Lebanese government.

Aoun's troops, mostly Christian members of the Lebanese national army, surrendered. The Christian militia, known as the Lebanese Forces, withdrew to the mountains. Many Lebanese fear they could return, as militia groups often have done in the past. Many also worry about the continuing Syrian presence, fearing the country may be divided between Syria and Israel. Press reports say Syria now must approve all political appointments in Lebanon.

During artillery shelling accompanying the October battle, Lebanese Baptist leader Farid Bassous was killed when a shell struck his house east of Beirut. A dozen shells struck the Baptist seminary campus and three damaged the Baptist Publications wing of the International Ministries Building.

Since October, most damage to the seminary buildings has been repaired, said Southern Baptist worker Emmett Barnes, who coordinates the seminary's ministry from Cyprus. Buildings are shrapnel-scarred and trees have been chewed up by artillery shells, but the facility is fully functional.

Thirteen students are enrolled at the Baptist seminary, an increase over last year, Barnes said. Almost 1,000 students are enrolled at Beirut Baptist School, which includes elementary to post-high school grade levels.

In February Southern Baptist workers are marking the fourth year they have been banned from living in Lebanon by U.S. government order. They continue to monitor the work from their base in Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean just an overnight boat ride or a short flight from Beirut. Baptists in Lebanon make frequent trips to Cyprus to coordinate ministries.

Reports on ministry are more promising than any time during the past two years. In southern Lebanon, Marjayoun Baptist Church led by pastor Pierre Francis continues to grow amid persecution from traditional churches.

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Francis has been harassed and even been threatened with death. One Sunday morning he found that someone had cut the brake lines of his car. But the opposition and attacks reportedly have led more people to ask about Baptist beliefs. The church now has more than 40 members. Francis baptized 25 people last summer and continues to baptize new converts in public ceremonies in the Litani River, which usually attract large crowds.

The Mansourieh Baptist Church sent a check for \$170 to Southern Baptists' Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions in January -- a 300 percent increase over last year. "We're very proud of our people and their sacrificial giving. They're filled with the spirit of giving even under very hard economic conditions," said pastor George Attiyeh.

Baptist Publications, based in Beirut, had almost no sales during the last year of fighting, Southern Baptist worker Frances Fuller said. Now several full-time sales agents are on the road and returning with orders. "Many checkpoints slow them down, but it can be done," said a publishing worker.

Evangelical materials are being placed in Maronite Catholic bookstores and even Catholic and Orthodox parochial schools -- a response not due strictly to the excellence of the materials, Baptist workers say.

Many Maronite Catholics reportedly have become disillusioned with their church and its leaders because of their political entanglements. As members have become embittered, they have begun to examine more closely the gospel message offered by the evangelical churches. Many have liked what they hear.

"There's a lot of spiritual hunger, a lot of questions," said a Lebanese worker. "They're eager. Even some priests are more open to the gospel message and some of these spiritual-minded ones are leading the movement."

Despite such heartening responses, Christians in Beirut must still struggle just to live, much less minister. Living conditions continue to be bad. Starting salaries average only about \$45 per month, yet a 10-liter tank of gas for heating and cooking costs \$10.

"A young man like me is lucky to have a job," said a 26-year-old accountant who works with Baptist Publications. He tells of a friend, a university-trained engineer, who earns less than \$100 a month.

The accountant was just 10 years old when the war broke out in 1975. When he made a trip to Cyprus in January, it was the first time he had left Lebanon or even seen the other side of Beirut.

Lebanese have fled to other countries by the thousands, he noted, especially young, well-educated adults. "Six or seven of my best friends have left Lebanon for good," he said. "They'll never come back. Every day I hear of some young person who has left Lebanon. Most who leave are university graduates. I rarely talk to anyone who is not considering leaving."

The people drain has hit churches hard and created a financial burden, as remaining members stretch meager resources to cover high costs.

Continued presence of Syrian troops also keeps people on edge. A soldier threatened a friend of the accountant with death if he did not turn over his flashlight. "I can shoot you and nobody will say anything," he bragged.

"When it's dark, it's not easy to go out on the roads. People along the road tell you to stop, and if you don't, they shoot you. People still stay inside at night," he said.

Despite such difficulties, Lebanese Baptist workers say they believe that as long as bombs are not falling, they must work hard and fast to share Christ with their troubled country. And while they continue to welcome outside help, they acknowledge the basic responsibility in outreach is theirs. "If we don't do it, we shouldn't expect anyone else to," one worker declared.

It seems that 15 years of war have provided Lebanese Baptists with the kind of determination needed to share Christ in the Middle East of tomorrow.

Lebanon Christians
reach out to Mideast

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Despite their own hardships caused by a long civil war, evangelicals in Lebanon want to reach the entire Middle East.

Tens of thousands of books produced by the Beirut, Lebanon-based Baptist Publications operation are being ordered by a Christian agency in Cyprus, Southern Baptist worker Frances Fuller reported. To prepare for a possible opening of Middle Eastern countries formerly closed to the gospel, the agency is stockpiling Christian literature so its personnel will be ready to respond after the Persian Gulf war.

The war has meant a decline in responses from Iraq to a Baptist-sponsored radio program broadcast from Beirut, workers said. But response to the program from other areas continues to average 50 to 80 letters per month.

"We are so ignorant about the truth of who Jesus Christ is. Is he God or the Son of God? What does son mean? Please help us," wrote one listener from Saudi Arabia.

A leading sports figure in Egypt wrote that he has accepted Christ but has not made his decision public for fear of reprisals. Some Egyptian Christians have been jailed, and converts from Islam can face a violent response from family members or fundamentalist Muslim groups.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: To be called to minister to a people, and yet be unable to work among them, is a terrible thing. But that situation faces Southern Baptist representatives in Cyprus. Banned from living in Lebanon since 1987 by the U.S. government, they have tried to maintain contacts there by telephone or writing. In the last year or so, not even the telephones have worked. The following is a reflection by Southern Baptist representative Emmett Barnes on a letter he received from a young Lebanese woman. A snapshot of a woman standing before the ruins of what used to be a house accompanied the handwritten letter. Now, after bombing, it is little more than a pile of rubble. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has financed limited relief work in Lebanon but has not done extensive rebuilding projects because of the civil war.

A letter from Lebanon:
'please look at us'

By Emmett Barnes

Baptist Press
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LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--A letter just arrived from Lebanon.

It's from a young lady we do not know.

From the envelope, I can see that her name is Amal and that she lives in an area that was badly damaged in fighting there in the past several years. The letter opens in the ancient Christian greeting: "In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen."

I could see immediately that it was written in poor English, but this may indicate nothing of the writer's educational level. English is probably her third language. Lebanon's official languages are Arabic and French. But many speak some English.

The next line was confusing: "To the speak of God name." Was this a bit of praise to God? Perhaps it meant "to the proclamation of God's name." Or it could have been calling on the name of God to emphasize that the content of the letter is trustworthy. The letter is a bit clearer from that point.

"My name is Amal Aharayeh," she wrote. "We are a family consist of eight children with my mother. My father was dead because he was very ill and we can't help him to took him doctor because we are very poor. We haven't any money to bought the medicals to him. In spite of this the war came and damaged our house a year ago."

The picture emerges. A poor family is facing the winter with no housing. They may be able to take care of immediate needs like food, but are not able to restore their house.

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"In the name of God if you can help us to build our house to protect us from the cold weather because my mother is very ill and we haven't any relatives to stay in your house or to help us in any thing."

In the Middle East, the family is everything. It is the source of strength and protection. People have no other place to turn. For this reason the Bible often speaks of taking care of the widows and orphans. And now the young woman is calling on us to recognize their need and help in the repair of the house.

"We are very thanks to you. Please send to me the answer because we are very need to this help."

Of course this is not just one-way correspondence. Amal would like an answer. What shall I say?

"I am sorry about my language is not good."

Language is no problem here. I can understand clearly. And with the imposed humility of one who speaks broken Arabic, I certainly will not laugh at her English.

"Peace of God to you."

The blessing of peace. This young woman probably has seen more war than almost all of us. I wonder where she and her family were hiding when the shells were falling.

Then comes a quote from the Bible: "So then as often as we have the chance we should do good to everyone and especially to those who belong to our family in the faith (Galatians 6:10)."

At this point words are poor tools to convey what turmoil I feel within. If I could communicate in good English as well as Amal has expressed herself in her broken variety, I would. However, my feelings are so personal that I hesitate to talk about them.

But you must see that I realize in the depth of the purpose of God that the letter is from a member of my family. Amal was an unknown relative of mine -- until now. This is "our family in the faith."

Amal closed with this note: "The picture is our house. Please look at us. Thanks. Amal Aharayeh."

The picture enclosed shows a woman, probably Amal's mother, standing by a badly damaged single-story building. The interior walls seem to be holding up a concrete slab roof, but the external walls are gone, so far as I can see.

But the devastation is in my heart as I read the appeal, "Please look at us."

Through my tear-filled eyes and smudged glasses, I can see a woman who is about my age. She is clean, neatly dressed and composed, although standing in the rubble of her home. This is my sister, whom I did not know, with problems that I did not realize.

"Please look at us." Yes, Amal, I have been looking in other directions in recent days. Now, my niece, how can I do other than to look at you?

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Trustee actions prompt
accrediting visit to Southern

By David R. Wilkinson

Baptist Press
2/8/91

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has been notified by one of its accrediting bodies that an evaluation team will visit the campus later this year to assess the impact of recent actions by the seminary's board of trustees.

The Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada authorized the "focused visit" after reviewing an ATS staff member's report on a November fact-finding visit to the Louisville, Ky., campus.

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In response, the seminary's trustee executive committee voted Feb. 5 to set in motion a process for addressing concerns raised in the report. A committee was appointed to study the report and to "review and restate" several trustee actions in question.

Daniel O. Aleshire, ATS associate director for accreditation, said the investigation by a "peer evaluation team" may come as early as May following the trustees' annual meeting in April. Asked whether the 132-year-old seminary's accreditation is in jeopardy, Aleshire said such speculation is "premature at this point." He added that the evaluation team has a variety of options it may recommend to the accrediting commission, ranging from no action to probation.

The report, he noted, does not constitute an action of the accreditation commission.

Aleshire confirmed that the commission has invited the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the seminary's other accrediting body, to include a member on the evaluation team. SACS also sent a staff member to the November fact-finding visit.

In a letter to Southern Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt, the accrediting commission noted the fact-finding report had "provided sufficient evidence for the need for further review" of the impact of recent trustee actions on the seminary.

It said the commission plans "to determine the manner in which, if at all, these actions have prejudiced the appropriate roles of the various seminary constituencies, especially the faculty and internal administration."

The letter noted two ATS standards which will be given "special attention." One states that the governing board of an accredited school is responsible for "maintaining the vitality and integrity of the institution." A second states that the board "shall be responsible for the establishment, maintenance, exercise, and protection of the institution's integrity and its freedom from the unwarranted harassment of inappropriate external and internal pressures and destructive interference or restraints."

The 17-page fact-finding report noted concerns about the impact of several trustee-related actions on the welfare of the seminary. Among them:

-- Accusations against the seminary president. Trustee Jerry Johnson of Aurora, Colo., drew national attention last spring when he charged Honeycutt and several other faculty members with "doctrinal infidelity." The charges were made in a 16-page document circulated just before the April board meeting and published in *The Southern Baptist Advocate*, an independent publication.

After voting in April to postpone action, the trustee executive committee in June set up procedures to address the issue. In the meantime, Johnson's charges were challenged in a series of responses from Honeycutt, the seminary's faculty association and officers of the school's alumni association.

Five months later, trustees voted at a special called meeting to accept a written apology from Johnson. While standing by the essence of his charges, Johnson apologized for publishing the allegations rather than bringing them to appropriate trustee committees.

Although the fact-finding report commended the board for dealing "expeditiously" with the issue, it added that the seminary's reputation "was seriously damaged by the incident," noting, "The language of the charge and the attendant process resembled more that of a hostile corporate takeover than of an educational fiduciary responsibility."

-- Peace Committee Report. In September the board approved the addition of the 1987 Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee Report -- "both findings and recommendations" -- as a guideline for employment, promotion and tenure of all faculty.

According to the fact-finding report, that action imposes conditions on faculty personnel decisions "well beyond the approved academic personnel policies and the seminary charter and by-laws." Since its founding in 1859, the seminary has required all faculty members to sign the "Abstract of Principles," the school's governing theological statement.

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The trustee decision, the report added, places "an almost impossible burden" on the seminary administration in making contractual agreements with both permanent and temporary faculty and "raises a valid question as to whether the board by this action has exercised fidelity to the charter and therefore to the stated mission of the school."

-- Tape recorders in classrooms. Trustee approval of a policy to allow use of tape recorders in all seminary classrooms "constitutes a direct intervention by the board into the relation of faculty and students in the context of teaching," the fact-finding report stated. "Such an action," it added, "goes beyond the normal policy making function of the board and can be viewed as an abuse of its power."

The seminary previously had no policy prohibiting use of tape recorders, leaving the question to the discretion of the professor.

At its Feb. 5 meeting, the seminary's trustee executive committee voted unanimously to authorize release of the fact-finding report despite expressed fears that doing so might jeopardize ongoing efforts toward reconciliation between the board and seminary faculty.

Executive committee Chairman Wayne Allen of Memphis, Tenn., stressed that "ATS has taken no action; it has made no judgment."

Noting the report consists of "the impressions of one person," he added that "my fear is that people won't understand that."

The same seven-member trustee committee appointed to review the report has met three times with a faculty ad hoc committee in response to the faculty's unanimous appeal to trustees to rescind their action related to the Peace Committee report. The two groups plan to meet twice more before the April trustee meeting.

Although seminary president Honeycutt said the ATS notification is "sobering news," he praised trustees for their prompt response and reiterated his pledge to work with the board to "effect positive, constructive change."

"My fervent prayer is that the board and the seminary community will embrace the evaluation visit as an opportunity to dispel clouds of uncertainty and distrust and to recommit ourselves to the shared task of preparing men and women for Christian ministry," he said.

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CLC calls for reversal
of government AIDS policy

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
2/8/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has called on the Centers for Disease Control and Department of Health and Human Services to reverse their recently proposed ruling that would allow HIV-infected aliens to become permanent residents of the United States.

A letter from Richard D. Land, executive director of the CLC, was sent to the Centers for Disease Control Feb. 6. It requests that HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases be returned to the list of communicable diseases that previously disallowed applications for permanent residency.

The proposed rule that would eliminate such diseases from inclusion on the list was included in the Federal Register Jan. 23. Public comment on the rule will be accepted by the CDC through Feb. 22. "It's absolutely imperative that Southern Baptists express their concerns on this ruling as soon as possible," said Land in a telephone interview. "They may do so by writing the Director, Division of Quarantine, Centers for Disease Control, Mailstop E03, Atlanta, GA 30333," he continued.

"While we certainly believe that there must be a compassionate response to the AIDS epidemic, and we are currently educating and encouraging our churches to establish AIDS ministries, we do not believe that this proposed rule is either compassionate or good public policy," Land's letter said.

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"The response to this rule will most certainly be a significant influx into the United States of HIV positive individuals, who have the false hope that the medical profession in America can alleviate their pain or even heal them," the letter said. Public hospitals, already overtaxed by HIV patients, will not be able to handle the increased burden anticipated with the new ruling, Land's letter added.

"We find it curious that America's most feared deadly disease is not considered to be a 'communicable disease of public health significance' for the purposes of this proposed rule. The fact that HIV is not transmitted by airborne means fails to note that more than 80 percent of HIV positive individuals are not aware of their status," he said in the letter. In the interview Land said, "Unfortunately, many infected persons, unaware of their status as a consequence of the testing requirement's elimination, will become permanent residents. They will then through their drug abuse and/or sexual practices continue to spread the disease in this country."

His letter also notes that the American Medical Association supports the prohibition of permanent residency for persons who are HIV positive.

Copies of the letter were mailed to Louis Sullivan, secretary of Health and Human Services; John Sununu, White House chief of staff, and Richard Darman, director of the Office of Management and Budget.

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Revival continues
in midst of war

By Sarah Zimmerman

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ATLANTA (BP)--"Real spiritual revival" continues in Saudi Arabia despite the onset of Operation Desert Storm, an Army chaplain reports.

Charles T. Clanton, Army Forces Command Staff chaplain at Georgia's Fort McPherson, says a "groundswell" of spiritual renewal is taking place among troops in the Persian Gulf.

"Hundreds of people have been saved. This is not on a small scale," says Clanton, who bases his judgment on reports from other senior chaplains.

Before war began, chaplains held multiple daily Bible studies and requested discipleship literature. Southern Baptist chaplains reported up to 1,200 professions of faith prior to the first bombing on Jan. 16.

The onset of war increases concern about spiritual matters, Clanton says, because "people start thinking seriously about their own mortality. They're seeking spiritual help."

Clanton says he has seen pictures of baptisms taking place in everything from water storage tanks to holes dug in the sand and lined with plastic.

Christian laymen serving in the military also are working with chaplains to meet spiritual needs, Clanton says.

Southern Baptists now have about 200 chaplains serving in the Middle East.

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