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June 25, 1991

91-94

Executive Committee search  
chairman asks for input

NCO

DURHAM, N.C. (BP)--Recommendations for the successor to President Harold C. Bennett of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee are being accepted now in written form and with full resumes, according to the chairman of the search committee, Julian M. Motley, a North Carolina pastor.

Bennett announced his retirement, effective in October of 1992, at the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta earlier this month. He will be 68 at the time of his scheduled retirement.

A 10-member search committee was appointed at that time with Motley, pastor of Gorman Baptist Church in Durham, named chairman.

"The committee requests the prayers and input of our Baptist people across the convention and asks that all recommendations be in written form and accompanied by resumes containing full biographical and ministry information," Motley wrote in a letter to Baptist Press.

Recommendations should be sent to Motley at P.O. Box 15127, Durham, NC, 27704.

Motley said recommendations will be received through Aug. 1, 1991.

Motley commended Bennett who has been the committee's chief executive since 1979 and will continue as a consultant until Oct. 1, 1993.

"(As president and treasurer) he has served Southern Baptists exceptionally well and in which he continues to command deep respect and appreciation," said Motley. "(The search committee) recognizes the need to facilitate an orderly transition in this critical leadership role in Southern Baptist life."

Members of the search committee (all Executive Committee members) are: Stan D. Coffey, Texas; Doyle J. Collins, Oregon; Ronnie W. Floyd, Arkansas; Gwyna S. Parker, Texas; Guy S. Sanders III, Florida; Simon H.L. Tsoi, Arizona; Joe B. Warwick, Tennessee; Fred H. Wolfe, Alabama; David E. Hankins, Louisiana; and Motley.

Hankins is chairman of the Executive Committee.

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Missionary couple  
heading to Romania

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
6/25/91

BRUSSELS, Belgium (BP)--Charles and Kathie Thomas will become the first Southern Baptist missionaries to live in Romania in more than half a century when they take up residence in Bucharest this September.

The Thomases, missionaries to France since 1976, have accepted an invitation from the Romanian Baptist Union to represent Southern Baptists and work in evangelism and education projects in the Bucharest area. Thomas, from Atlanta, is better known by his nickname, "T." She was born in Cynthiana, Ky., and grew up in that state and in South Carolina.

"It is a leap into the unknown with a lot of faith," Thomas said of the transfer.

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Much of the unknown has to do with the continuing shaky economic and political conditions in Romania. The country held democratic elections after the overthrow and execution of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989, but many citizens still question the government's policies. Those evolving policies do not yet include a full commitment to religious freedom, critics say. And a new law on religious affairs could have a chilling effect on Christian ministries, Baptist leaders have said.

But Thomas had high praise for the estimated 80,000 Baptists of Romania. "They are the warmest, most delightful Christian people you can ever want to be with," he said. The 1,000 or so churches in the union have moved ahead with an aggressive campaign of outreach and church-starting since attaining freedom, he said.

Despite those numbers, four decades of communist rule have left the Baptist union with only 172 qualified pastors, Thomas said. "Almost every pastor has five to 10 churches he's responsible for. The Baptists are going to be putting a high priority on leadership training."

Baptists have a seminary in Bucharest, but government restrictions have kept the number of students there very low until recently. A Bible school begun last August by the 2,600-member Second Baptist Church, Oradea, likely will be the first of several lay training schools begun by churches and associations, Thomas said.

The missionary has talked with leaders of three associations eager to begin such schools, which would train lay people for church leadership through a two-year, part-time course of study. Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board administrators anticipate additional missionaries will be sent in coming years to help meet the pressing educational needs.

Discipleship training, also limited during the Ceausescu years, is another need among the churches. The Thomases helped introduce the MasterLife discipleship program in France and other French-speaking countries during recent years. A week after their arrival in Romania, they will help coordinate the first workshop on the popular program adapted for use in scores of countries. MasterLife materials are being translated into Romanian.

Southern Baptist workers were forced to withdraw from Romania before World War II, but the Foreign Mission Board has maintained steady contact with Romanian Baptists in recent decades and provided help with teaching projects, church-building programs, medical projects and hunger relief.

Board representatives also helped Romanian Baptists in their relationships with government authorities in times of persecution. Many of these efforts could not be publicized earlier because of the sensitivities involved.

The Thomases have five children. Three will be with them in Romania; two older children will be attending college in the United States.

"We are extremely pleased that our brothers and sisters in Romania have invited this exceptional couple who represent some of our more experienced missionaries in Europe," said Keith Parker, director of Southern Baptist mission work in Europe. "The Thomases are well-established evangelists and church planters, having served in France in a solid way. T has been able to travel to Romania on numerous occasions to assist in other programs and has already made a solid shift from the French language to the Romanian language."

Transfer of the Thomases to Romania is part of a major drive by the Foreign Mission Board to send workers into the opening countries of Eastern Europe as soon as possible. Already workers have been assigned to Hungary, the Soviet Union, Poland and Bulgaria. Southern Baptists have long worked in Yugoslavia, currently torn by internal conflicts. More personnel will head to the region in coming months.

Southeastern trustee group  
sets meeting July 2

By Herb Hollinger

N-10  
SEBTS

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--A special group of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees will meet July 2 to hear progress reports from seminary officials regarding "financial and theological integrity" at the beleaguered school.

The July date was approved at the March trustees' meeting as was a January 1992 meeting of the same ten trustees, called "local board members." Apparently, the two meetings are to hear progress reports from the institution regarding finances and theological integrity and then, if necessary, to make recommendations to the regular, full board meetings in October and March.

Specifically, the meeting was called to hear responses to an address in March by President Lewis Drummond dealing with the two critical issues of financial and theological integrity at the school.

However, next week's meeting has generated a number of rumors, according to Academic Dean L. Rush Bush III. The school has received numerous phone calls about the meeting, including whether Drummond was going to submit his resignation, Bush told Baptist Press.

"It would be a complete surprise to me if that happened," said Bush who reiterated the July meeting was scheduled back in March and for a specific purpose.

"This is not an official meeting of the board of trustees," said Bush. "(The local board members) cannot take official action, they can only recommend to the full board."

Bush did say trustee chairman Roger W. Ellsworth, Illinois pastor, also is planning to attend the meeting. The ten "local trustees" fit a special category for trustees living within 300 miles of the seminary.

Reports expected to be made at the meeting include a business office examination of the school's finances, especially regarding what would happen if and/or when the seminary funding formula is unfrozen. The SBC Executive Committee froze the seminary funding formula, the distribution of Cooperative Program funds to the six seminaries is primarily based on enrollment, in 1988 for five years. Southeastern has suffered a drastic drop in enrollment and would have been financially crippled if the formula had not been frozen.

Costs incurred in the remodeling of the president's home and some expenses related to his office also have drawn criticism from people both within the trustee board and outside the seminary family. It was unclear whether those items also will be discussed at the July meeting.

Bush said his office would make a report dealing with the matter of theological integrity but gave no details.

Asked if the news media would be allowed in the meeting, Bush said the normal procedure of the board is to go into executive session when dealing with personnel matters only. However, since this is not a full board meeting and apparently not scheduled to deal with personnel issues he did not know if the media would be allowed to cover the meeting.

Later, Ellsworth told Baptist Press the meeting would be open to the media although trustees primarily would hear reports with the possibility of later recommendations.

In a related matter, Baptist Press has learned Wendell L. Page, trustee from Lee's Summit, Mo., has submitted his resignation. The letter was dated June 6 and cited differences with the majority view of the trustees as part of the reason for the resignation.

Ellsworth confirmed the seminary had received Page's resignation and said Page was "very gracious" in his letter. However, Ellsworth said he would rather not comment on the resignation but rather let Page make his own comments.

Page was out of town and unavailable for comment at the Baptist Press deadline.

Prayer, not ticker tape,  
urged for missionary heroes

By Robert O'Brien

*N-CMB*

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Prayer -- not ticker tape parades -- should characterize Southern Baptist response to missionaries engaged around the world in spiritual warfare, R. Keith Parks told trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

The Foreign Mission Board president noted the ticker tape parades that have greeted military personnel returning from Operation Desert Storm. But he said more than 3,900 Southern Baptist missionaries are heroes of a different kind -- heroes of commitment, integrity, expertise and evangelism.

"In a day when so many are reluctant to make long-term commitments to anybody or anything, it continues to be a remarkable phenomenon that so many come forth from Southern Baptist churches to acknowledge God has called them to open-ended, unrestricted, unlimited commitment of service," Parks said at the trustees' June meeting.

He recounted examples of missionaries who have worked to meet the spiritual and physical needs of people worldwide amidst danger, stress and difficulty.

"Some of them, week after week, month after month, and even year after year, encounter ... (situations) which deplete them emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually," Parks said. "We need to pray for them in times of discouragement and burnout and temptation and exhaustion and depression, and in times of victory, enjoyment and excitement."

Missionaries set the tone for evangelism and church-starting, he said. For example, mission field baptisms show a ratio of one baptism for every 12 church members, compared to a ratio of one for every 42 in Southern Baptist churches in the United States.

And 2.6 million overseas Baptists showed a net growth of 2,880 churches in 1990, he added, while 15 million Southern Baptists recorded a net growth of 189 new churches.

Parks stressed his purpose was not "to make odious comparisons" but simply to show the strong evangelistic emphasis of missionaries and overseas Baptists.

On doctrinal integrity, Parks pointed out only two missionaries have been dismissed for this reason among the 4,000 long- and short-term personnel named in his 11 years as president.

"For anyone carelessly to make generalized derogatory statements about these missionaries and their commitments or beliefs is a sin against God, as well as fellow Christians," Parks stated. "It is seriously unbiblical besides being detrimental to the cause of world missions."

Missionaries are "examined thoroughly by this board," he said, but also must pass other evaluations -- from grassroots Southern Baptists who hear them speak in churches and state and national meetings and read what they write.

"These missionaries represent the total spectrum of authentic Southern Baptist life and must always do so," he said. "They come from all of our states, all of our Southern Baptist seminaries as well as a few other seminaries, all sizes of churches and a multiplicity of locations."

Missionaries go out not only as evangelists but also in a variety of professions -- agriculture, finance, education, business, social ministries, student work, music, communications, education, medicine, literacy training and a variety of other avenues.

"They not only go to serve in these various professions, but many of them rank at the highest level of expertise" -- qualified to teach in medical schools, seminaries and universities and preach in influential churches, Parks said. "They're recognized by governments overseas and honored with prestigious awards and known internationally in many of their fields of expertise. We can be proud not only of the variety of vocations they represent, but also in the expertise and effectiveness they demonstrate."

Birmingham chosen as site for 1994  
National Acteens Convention

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union officials have named Birmingham as the site for the National Acteens Convention to be held June 21-24, 1994. *N-CO WMY*

The National Acteens Convention is held once every five years for Acteens members and their leaders. Acteens is the WMU-sponsored missions organization for girls in grades seven through 12.

Registration for NAC will open sometime during 1993 and continue up to the time of the convention. Only those who register in advance will be allowed to participate in NAC activities.

More than 13,500 girls and their leaders are expected to attend NAC. The last NAC was held in San Antonio, Texas, July 12-15, 1989, with more than 13,000 attending.