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91-100

Southeastern trustees hear
financial, theological reports

By Todd Deaton

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Ten trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary met July 2 essentially for the school's administration to share information with local board members as to how far they have progressed in a plan for financial and theological integrity.

No decisions were announced since the local trustees cannot make decisions that are binding on the full board. They may make formal recommendations to the full board when it convenes in October.

"The whole scheme ... is we have gotten administrative input, we've gotten faculty input, and now we're getting trustee input ... that we will have a real body of material on hand to put together and have a definite 'one, two, three, four' kind of plan" to accomplish the theological and fiscal integrity of Southeastern Seminary, President Lewis A. Drummond explained.

What local trustees heard were reports from the Wake Forest seminary's two vice presidents on plans for financial exigency and rebuilding the Southern Baptist Convention's perception of the school's theological integrity.

"What we have tried to do is stick with the (Association of Theological School's) guidelines on retrenchment," Paul Fletcher, vice president for internal affairs told the trustees. "They are very fair. They bring in the total community -- administration, trustees and faculty -- into a cooperative effort to solve the problems that we are facing."

He outlined three ATS guidelines for retrenchment which trustees were striving to abide by in formulating the school's financial exigency plan:

1. The formation of a credible statement of the nature and dimensions of financial exigency at the school.
2. Detailed information regarding the nature and extent of financial exigency should be made available to all people and groups potentially affected by the crises.
3. A panel of outside and disinterested persons should be invited to confirm the reality of financial exigency and to render judgment on the fairness of tentative proposals.

Fletcher said the administration was in the process of carrying out the second guideline in the called meeting of local trustees.

"We're trying to get the information that we have into the hands of those people who will be affected," Fletcher stated. "Let me tell you at this point, there could be some human lives affected because we are getting down to a point where we need to make some very, very careful decisions about what we can do based upon our financial situation."

Fletcher's report focused on the seminary business office's projection of what would happen if and/or when the seminary funding formula is unfrozen in the 1993-94 academic year.

The SBC Executive Committee froze the seminary funding formula for distribution of Cooperative Program gifts in 1988. The formula, which is based primarily on enrollment, would have financially crippled the institution since (full time equivalent) enrollment has dropped from 1,098 in 1987 to 603 last year.

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Citing a 2.46 percent increase in 1989-90 Cooperative Program funds, Fletcher said, "One of the dynamics that has affect this institution...is that the Cooperative Program has not kept up with the rate of inflation since 1986-87."

Pointing to the 1991-92 Cooperative Program budget increase of 1.52 percent for Southeastern Seminary funding, Fletcher noted, "Even though there was an increase of 2.49 percent in Cooperative Program in 1989-90, the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention decided that the seminaries were not going to get their full share of that increase."

From 1984-87, Fletcher stressed, the seminary had received Cooperative Program increases ranging from about \$250,000 to \$300,000. Since 1988, Southeastern received a total of about \$175,000 over the three-year period in which Drummond and the new administration have been in office, he added. About 66 percent of the school's funding comes through the Cooperative Program.

In response to the financial stress the seminary implemented a hiring freeze, Fletcher said. Since August 1988 about 75 persons have left seminary employment while only 43 positions were filled, five of which were professors. In the 75 positions vacated, he underscored, there was a net decrease of one in the number of professorships, with most of the cuts being made in administrative areas, he said.

Citing the 4.3 percent drop in pre-registration for Fall 1991, Fletcher added, "If we assume the 4.3 percent on the total number of FTEs (full time equivalent students of 12 course-hours of study) for the Fall of 1992, we can expect 586 total FTEs."

Fletcher projected when the SBC's freeze on the seminary funding formula is lifted in 1993-94, the seminary would have a budget shortfall of between \$1,057,477 and \$1,158,506. Data indicates a potential drop of 14.75 percent from \$4,163,703 in 1991-92 to \$3,549,377 in 1993-94, or \$614,326 -- in Southeastern Seminary's portion.

"After three years of financial stress in which we have cut numbers of personnel in administration, we're down to a point where we can't find a million dollars without somebody being affected," Fletcher stated.

Trustees then went into the first of two executive sessions dealing with "personnel matters."

In executive session, the trustee group discussed faculty vacancies in light of a fiscal exigency plan. Paul T. Brock, director of public relations, told Baptist Press four professors and one vice president had recently resigned and several more professors were in the process of negotiating early retirements or resignations.

L. Russ Bush III, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty, reported on the need for reconstructing the Southern Baptist Convention's perception of the school's theological integrity.

Noting Southeastern's Abstract of Principles was a "confessional document" to identify the school and give people a willingness and desire to support the institution, Bush highlighted recent incidents which have caused the erosion of the perception of the school.

"The institution no longer has the reputation of being a center of calm, high quality (theological) education, it had at the beginning of the controversy," Bush said.

Emphasizing entities can be deleted from the SBC budget because of negative perceptions--a reference to the elimination of funding for the Baptist Joint Committee in Atlanta--Bush urged, "As a denominational institution, we cannot simply ignore the direction our convention has taken. You must respond."

Bush said the first items in order to address theological integrity of the institution was to guarantee faculty members would not be harassed or attacked, to make a study to determine the proper legal procedure for investigating faculty members, and to create a forum for faculty input concerning the institution's problems in shared governance.

"Southern Seminary was headed for the same crises we are headed for," Bush noted. "They pulled off a covenant agreement between their faculty and trustees on future hiring policies. ..."

"I don't know if we can get the same kind of covenant agreement. But I think one of the goals of the theological integrity program is to come up with some kind of a document which will not replace our Articles of Faith, but which will state clearly the identity of the institution from a theological standpoint."

Trustees from North Carolina participating in the meeting were Cecil D. Rhodes Jr., Wilson; William D. Delahoyde, Raleigh; Robert E. Hand Sr., Kernersville; Ralph E. Holt Jr., Wilmington; Eddie Lee Sellers, Morganton; W. Dade Sherman Jr., Monroe, and Ned L. Mathews, Gastonia. Others included W. Jerry Holcomb, Virginia Beach, Va.; Daniel E. Johnston, Jonesville, S. C., and Roger W. Ellsworth, Benton, Ill.

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(Herb Hollinger of Baptist Press contributed to this story.)

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Thanks,
Baptist Press

Strife in Yugoslavia
affects religious life

By Art Toalston

N-EMS

ZAGREB, Yugoslavia (BP)--With Yugoslavia's army battling freedom fighters in the republic of Slovenia, church life in the splintering nation now revolves around television and prayer.

"We're watching the news on television all the time," said Nela Williams July 2 from her home in Zagreb, capital of Croatia, the other breakaway republic. Williams, a New Testament Greek teacher and mass media worker, is one of three Southern Baptist representatives in Yugoslavia.

"Today is like the first day of war," she said. "Please pray for us."

Williams is a native of Yugoslavia whose husband, James, also was a Southern Baptist representative in the country until his death in a 1980 auto accident. The other Southern Baptist workers there, Bill and Debbie Steele of Columbus, Ga., are involved in starting churches in Belgrade. They left the country for a vacation June 29.

Tensions in Yugoslavia -- Europe's most volatile political hot spot -- began spiraling June 25 when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Yugoslavia. The declarations met with opposition in Yugoslavia's largest republic, Serbia. The nation's capital is located there, in Belgrade, and the government is dominated by Serbs.

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Yugoslav troops took up positions in Slovenia June 26 and met armed resistance. Violence eased June 30 when Yugoslav and Slovenian officials agreed on a troop pullout. "You can sense relief in the air when listening to the news every hour," Williams reported July 1. But negotiations failed to stop hostilities from breaking out again the next day.

"It's really unfortunate that now, when we have all this freedom, we have these tensions among the nationalities," Williams said. "There's no atheistic government anymore ... and there's no state church. It's very open now for all religious movements. New opportunities are opening up all the time."

Her church in Zagreb, First Baptist, has launched a nightly 10-minute radio program, for example, and received permission in June to minister in Croatian prisons.

Still, political tensions can provide opportunity "for witnessing about the power of the gospel, the freedom and peace the Lord gives us," she said.

Williams said she believes Baptist and other evangelical congregations -- many with members from several nationalities -- can continue to set an example of unity in contrast to Catholic churches, which are almost exclusively Slovenian or Croatian, and Orthodox churches, which are Serbian.

"It has been a great testimony that we could overcome the barriers of nationalities," she said. "Polarization is on the ethnic level, but in the churches ... our faith is something that bound us together."

But months of tensions among Serbs, Slovenes, Croats and other nationalities in Yugoslavia have altered Baptist life in the country, she said.

Instead of one union representing some 3,000 Baptists in Yugoslavia, Baptists now are creating separate unions in the republics of Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia. The breakup occurred without anger, Williams said; rather, Baptists chose to follow "the trend that all the country was taking."

Although they're forming separate structures, representatives of the new unions remain in contact with each other, Williams said. They plan to meet in September to decide how to handle mission work in Yugoslavia's other two republics, Bosnia-Herzegovina, a heavily Muslim region, and Montenegro.

The representatives also will decide the fate of a theological school in Serbia, a Baptist camp in Croatia, and Yugoslavia's membership in the Baptist World Alliance and other such organizations. More than half of Yugoslavia's 120 Baptist churches and missions are in Croatia.

The Baptist camp on the Adriatic Sea is closed this summer, a victim of the country's ethnic tensions. Typically attended by several hundred youths and adults, the camp's summer sessions drew only 15 registrants this year.

Despite the Baptist union's breakup, some positive results are possible, Williams said. It may open avenues for Baptists to build better relations with each republic's increasingly autonomous government.

It also may result in more effective Baptist work, Steele said June 29, "when each nationalistic group is forced to take responsibility in their own region and can't rely on anybody else to do the work." It's akin to Southern Baptist work in the United States, where state conventions assume primary responsibility for evangelism and other efforts in their states, he said.

Worldwide Church of God
moving closer to orthodoxy

By Sarah Zimmerman

A-NmB

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Changes under consideration in the Worldwide Church of God indicate the group Southern Baptists consider a cult is moving closer to orthodox Christianity, an interfaith specialist said.

"The Worldwide Church of God is undergoing what may be radical reform," said Tal Davis, associate director of interfaith witness with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. "To what extent it will come to Christian orthodoxy, we're not sure."

The Worldwide Church of God is best known for its radio and television program, The World Tomorrow, and its free magazine, The Plain Truth. Founded by Herbert W. Armstrong in 1934, the organization has 829 churches and 98,074 members in 120 countries.

Armstrong's son, Garner Ted Armstrong, formed the Church of God International in 1978. Davis said the two groups operate separately, but hold similar theological views.

During a seminar at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, Davis outlined historical teachings and changes the Worldwide Church of God is considering. Davis based his comments on a paper presented by the group's leaders this spring.

The Worldwide Church of God claims the Bible as its authority, but Armstrong claimed to have discovered the "lost key" to biblical interpretation. Therefore the group's authority is based in Armstrong's teaching, Davis said. Armstrong claimed God purposely closed much of the Bible from human understanding until Armstrong began his teaching.

Armstrong's death in 1986 caused division in the group, Davis said, and some of Armstrong's books began to be withdrawn.

Armstrong's teachings rejected the Trinity and the personality of the Holy Spirit. The document Davis reviewed "looks favorably on the trinitarian concept of God, but it hedges on absolutely affirming the Trinity," Davis said. It also begins to affirm the personality and diety of the Holy Spirit.

Armstrong taught Christ existed prior to his incarnation, but was subordinate to God. Davis said it appears the Worldwide Church of God is now embracing Jesus as eternally divine.

Salvation, according to Armstrong's teachings, is not a present reality and is something only Jesus achieved. Davis said new material from the group teaches salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ that results in good works.

Davis emphasized the changes are not definite yet. As the proposed doctrinal changes trickle down from the leadership, many Worldwide Church of God members may be confused about their beliefs, he said.

As the changes are debated, Davis said informed Southern Baptists will have opportunities to share their faith with members of the Worldwide Church of God. He urged Baptists to know what they believe and why they believe it before they attempt to witness to anyone who adheres to another religion.

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Baptists turn block
parties into outreach tool

By Cameron Crabtree

F-CO Calif.

Baptist Press
7/3/91

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--To penetrate neighborhoods with the message of Jesus Christ, California Southern Baptists have retooled the customary block party into a vibrant outreach program.

"The block party is the most significant method we have for reaching the disenfranchised, the poor and the unchurched," said Tom Kelly, director of the California Southern Baptist Convention's black church extension department.

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Mass picnic-style meals, concerts, clothing giveaways and other ministries undergird many block parties. Most vital to the effort, however, are personal witnessing and scripture distribution, said San Francisco Bay Area evangelism consultant Bill Sims.

Last November, prior to the state convention's annual meeting in Bakersfield, more than 200 people accepted Christ and a church was started as a result of a block party in the area. Plans are being made for a similar event next November to coincide with the 1991 annual meeting in Oakland.

Most recently, members of Brister Memorial Baptist Church in Compton hosted, in conjunction with a revival, a day-long block party for 160 residents. Meanwhile, other church members shared the gospel door-to-door nearby. Neighborhoods in Sacramento, San Diego, Modesto and other cities boast similar success stories.

"Evangelistic block parties and revival meetings work for us and we plan on conducting more in the future," said Bobby Cain, Brister Memorial's pastor.

True Vine Baptist Church in Oakland is recognized nationally for using the new outreach method. Newton and Sallie Carey have led the church in reaching thousands of residents. Efforts to hold "Here's Hope: Jesus Cares For You" revivals were canceled twice last year because the church couldn't accommodate more people.

"We're winning more people through the block parties than we are in revivals," explained Los Angeles area evangelism consultant Monty McWhorter. "It really works."

During block parties and accompanying events, McWhorter noted, at least one in for people who receives a marked "Here's Hope" New Testament -- with proper help and explanation from volunteers -- accepts Christ.

Sims, extensively involved with block parties since California Southern Baptists started using them nearly two years ago, said that percentage is sometimes even higher.

About 25 block parties have been held up and down the state with "miraculous" results, according to Sims: "We've seen literally tens of thousands come to Christ. It could be one of the greatest tools we've ever had in California."

The Bay Area evangelist also noted block parties are usually more successful and far more inexpensive than revivals. Block parties generally cost less than \$500, he said.

Despite their success and economy, Sims acknowledged opposition from some church leaders, mainly because of the unconventional nature of block parties -- they don't involve a lot of traditional preaching, they sometimes mean providing ministries to meet basic physical needs of individuals, church members are as essential to the process as church staff, and they are held in a neutral location rather than a church building.

Sims also blamed prejudice; block parties work effectively in white neighborhoods, but they've been primarily used in lower-income and ethnic/minority areas.

He said a block party "opens the door" of the church to the surrounding community and "revolutionizes a church's ministry." That's part of the problem, he suggested.

However, Sims said block parties are useful evangelism and ministry tools that deserve consideration from all quarters of the church community. "We've not had a failure yet," he said.

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(Cameron Crabtree is news editor of The California Southern Baptist.)

Home missionary says
growth comes in suffering

By Sarah Zimmerman

F. NMB

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Earlier this year, suicide seemed like the only way Michael Thurman could relieve his suffering.

But instead of taking his life, the home missionary says he found strength for life in Scripture.

Thurman is a church planter and pastor in Ames, Iowa. He shared his recent struggles with 1,700 people attending a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board meeting at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

In May 1990, Thurman's wife became pregnant. She miscarried a child in June, but doctors discovered she was carrying twins. The second child was born in December. Though the boy was born healthy, he developed heart and lung problems and died in January.

"I spent many days groping, wondering. There were many lonely hours when I was not able to focus," Thurman said. "I asked God how he could do this to me after all I'd done for him."

Thurman said his despair drove him to consider suicide, but he could not go through with it. Instead, he found strength to continue in Proverbs 3:5-6.

"It's difficult. It's not easy, but somehow I'm foolish enough to believe that God has great things in store for those who love him."

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Volunteer coordinator
shares blessings

By Sarah Zimmerman

F. NMB

Baptist Press
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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--As a home missions volunteer, Phyllis Foy says, "I don't get paid, but I get blessed every day."

Yet it was years before the North Carolina volunteer coordinator claimed those blessings.

Foy said she developed a low self-esteem from being raised in an abusive home. Having the confidence to share her testimony with 1,700 people attending a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board meeting at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center was a "major miracle," she said.

One of her first mission experiences was cleaning a woman's home in New York City. The woman was about to be evicted from her residence, and she had been without water and electricity for days.

"The smell of urine was so strong we were nauseated," Foy recalled. "I prayed, 'Lord, don't let her touch me.'"

Yet the woman touched Foy more profoundly than a physical embrace. As Foy was cleaning the kitchen, she asked the woman if she loved Jesus. The woman said yes and asked Foy a question.

"If the Lord loves you and the Lord loves me, why has he blessed you so much?"

Foy said she didn't have a good answer to that question, but she made a commitment to share her resources.

Since then Foy has returned to New York City as a missions volunteer and also has been a volunteer in North Carolina.

Being a volunteer, she said, is being part of God's support system. "It is using the gifts God has given me to meet the needs of one of his children."

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