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91-132

California pastor nominee
for next SBC president

By Herb Hollinger

CO-N

NASHVILLE (BP)--Mississippi comedian Jerry Clower will nominate California pastor Jess Moody for president of the Southern Baptist Convention as the result of a campaign begun by an ad hoc group of Florida pastors.

Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Van Nuys, said he seeks to bring the convention together in what, he termed, may be the "last hope for the Southern Baptist Convention." Moody, 66, was president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in 1965 and an unsuccessful candidate for president in 1966.

Moody said he "reluctantly" agreed to be nominated, would not actively pursue the nomination, and would bow out by December if he felt there were not an enthusiastic response to the announcement.

The ad hoc committee is led by Don Letzring, pastor of Wellwood Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla. In letters sent to Baptist leaders in a number of state conventions, Letzring was identified as chairman of the steering committee of "Convention Effort." The letters, sent in July, indicate Moody would be nominated and gave eight reasons why he could be elected.

According to the letters, Letzring wrote "(1) we are being very low-key. No fighting with any group; (2) we are quietly organizing in every association; (3) we have a nominator par excellence in Jerry Clower; (4) we are going to have large representation from Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia; (5) the Fundamentalists are weakening because of their insistence in pastor control of the church;

"(6) for the first time, we are picking up large numbers of very conservative Baptists who have, up to this point, not been involved; (7) we have almost 1,000 retired missionaries who are supporting our efforts; and (8) more churches are going to have their full contingent of messengers in Indianapolis. The laymen and women will be in Indianapolis. This is the key. Our lay people, when they understand what is happening, are for the return."

There is a "mushrooming swell" of people who believe the election in Indianapolis in 1992 can be won, said Letzring. "Despite the feeling of some that our convention is lost to the control of a few," wrote Letzring in the letters.

The letters asked for the names of pastors and laymen to be coordinators for each association.

"There is only one way this will fail and that is for good people to do nothing," wrote Letzring.

Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., was also identified as a candidate from the group for president of the SBC Pastor's Conference. However, he has declined the invitation.

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"We are asking thousands of pastors to quietly show up for the Pastor's Conference to vote for Richard and bring the (conference) back to its original purpose of being a conference where the wide spectrum of preaching is presented and not a 'pep rally' for a particular political agenda," Letzring said in the letters.

Moody went to the California pastorate in 1976 from Florida where he was pastor of First Baptist Church of West Palm Beach. He also founded and was president of Palm Beach Atlantic College, now a part of the Florida Baptist Convention.

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Texans launch campaign
to defeat state lottery

By Ken Camp

Texas-N

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DALLAS (BP)--Texas lottery opponents are shifting their focus from the statehouse to the church house after Labor Day.

Anti-lottery activists suffered a major setback when Texas lawmakers voted during the summer special session to approve a referendum on lottery legalization. But gambling opponents have pledged an all-out campaign to defeat the government-run numbers game on the statewide Nov. 5 ballot.

The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Texas IMPACT, Texas Conference of Churches and other religious organizations are providing leadership for the campaign under the direction of Texans Who Care.

"We have a moral and ethical responsibility to see that the people of Texas are exposed to the truth about this state-run numbers racket before the vote is taken," said Weston Ware, CLC citizenship associate.

Organizers hope to involve at least 15,000 Texas churches of all denominations in the anti-gambling campaign, Ware said.

"Churches are our singular most important weapon in this fight," said Sue Cox, executive director of Texans Who Care.

"The advantage we have over our opposition is a broad base of committed people who truly care about the issue and about the future of our state. If we can publicize the truth about the issue and mobilize our people around the issue, we can win in November."

The first of several local organizational meetings for a church-based anti-lottery campaign is slated for Sept. 3 in Dallas.

And in a letter mailed to all Texas Baptist pastors, Ware outlined the strategy for an October church-based campaign against lotteries.

The church-based campaign is one aspect of the overall Texans Who Care plan that includes a network of local grassroots organizations, press conferences, editorial board meetings and targeted broadcast advertisements, he noted.

By Oct. 1, Ware explained, all pastors will receive an anti-lottery campaign packet including sermon resources, church training discussion materials, documented information about lotteries, instructions on mobilizing voters and a request for a one-time offering to help finance the campaign.

"Find your lay leaders to help plan these campaign activities now," Ware stated. "Put preaching on lotteries on your own schedule now. Talk to church leadership now about how your church can be a part of defeating the lottery in November. If church people care about the state running a numbers game, we can win in November."

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Georgia layoffs send warning
to chaplains in other states

By Sarah Zimmerman

HMBP

ATLANTA (BP)--As 56 Georgia chaplains face losing their jobs in state government cutbacks, other states should brace themselves for similar action, chaplaincy advocates warn.

"State budget cutbacks across the nation are a big issue during these tight economic times," said Huey Perry, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board chaplaincy division. "Chaplain positions are not recession proof."

In August the Georgia legislature approved a plan to trim \$415 million from next year's state budget, resulting in 2,189 state employees losing their jobs. Planned lay-offs include all of the 31 full-time chaplains in state hospitals, mental institutions and juvenile centers and 25 of 43 chaplains in the Department of Corrections.

Similar action was taken in Maryland about 10 years ago, said Bill Donovan, HMB director of institutional chaplaincy. He noted full-time chaplains were reinstated when Maryland discovered the administrative costs were higher with contract chaplains than with full-time chaplains.

Georgia Gov. Zell Miller proposes using volunteers and contract chaplains to offer religious services in state institutions.

"I resent Gov. Miller saying he'll ask us to provide volunteer chaplains," Perry said. "He's calling on us to do something we're opposed to doing."

Volunteer and contract chaplains can lead worship services, Perry said. However, he said they cannot "have a clear understanding of the dynamics of the prison, hospital or juvenile facility because of their limited involvement in the day-to-day operation of the institution."

Contract chaplains are often paid about \$10 per hour, work a limited number of hours and receive no benefits, Donovan said. Consequently, the contract system does not attract qualified professionals, he said.

Many volunteers, including clergy, do not have clinical training required to work in mental health or correctional institutions, noted Clarence Drummond, director of special ministries for the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia.

Chaplaincy leaders in Georgia did not learn the lay-offs would include chaplains in time to effectively protest the action, although they did present protest letters from 18 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish organizations to the governor.

Perry and James Griffith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia, have speculated Miller is using the current budget crisis to strengthen his plans for a state lottery next year. When Miller was elected in 1990, a key campaign issue was a lottery, which Miller favored.

Drummond said he is encouraging people in other states to be careful observers of the state budget process and be prepared to act quickly.

Perry said he is encouraging chaplains to keep employers aware of their role and to keep their church, association and state convention informed of their work as a chaplain.

Perry challenged Southern Baptists to become more politically astute and to be active in government. He advocated building personal relationships with lawmakers. "The people you influence are people you have relationships with," Perry noted.

Chaplains are endorsed by the religious group they represent, but they are paid by the organization which employs them. Southern Baptists endorse 2,200 chaplains nationwide.

Baptists recruiting drillers
to give Iraqi Kurds clean water

By Art Toalston

FMB-N

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Well-drilling specialists are needed to provide clean water for 10 villages in Iraq where some 35,000 Kurdish refugees have settled.

The specialists should be skilled in operating a rotary drilling rig with mud pumps and in repairing water systems, said Tim Brendle, who heads the Persian Gulf Response Unit of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond.

"The need is urgent," Brendle said. A mud-drilling rig purchased in Turkey with \$125,000 in Southern Baptist relief funds was to be transported into Iraq Aug. 30, he noted.

Water systems operated in numerous villages inhabited by Arabs in northern Iraq until the recent Kurdish uprising forced them to flee. They ransacked their water sources as part of their angry exodus. Now displaced Kurds moving into the villages have no clean water.

Minimum commitments of three weeks are needed by the volunteer well drillers, and a series of specialists may be needed for up to six months, Brendle said. The project may expand to provide clean water to more than 100,000 Kurds settling in northern Iraq.

The volunteers will work in two-member teams, assisted by a worker fluent in English and Kurdish. The specialists also will train Kurdish workers to operate the equipment and ultimately take charge of the project.

Mud-drilling expertise is needed because of sandy soil and stones common to the region and similar to limited parts of the United States.

Two Southern Baptist volunteers -- Buddy Kellett of Simpsonville, S.C., and Ed Brentham of Belton, Texas -- helped save a considerable amount of money by negotiating the \$125,000 purchase of the well-drilling equipment in Turkey. Initially, the board had planned to buy it in Texas for \$250,000, along with \$150,000 in related supplies, and airlift it to Iraq.

The villages the Kurds are resettling are in a region where thousands of ancestral Kurdish villages -- 5,000 according to Newsweek magazine -- were destroyed by the Iraqi government in a 30-year campaign against the country's sizable Kurdish minority.

In razing the Kurdish villages, the Iraqi government forced tens of thousands of Kurds into exile from their homeland, often with nothing but their clothes.

The onslaught also claimed nearly 2,500 mosques and churches, including 13 that were more than 1,000 years old, according to one report. Then the government built new villages of small concrete block houses for Arabs who were transported in from elsewhere in Iraq.

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Russian student leaves Moscow
despite tanks, dissenters

By Connie Davis

CO-Tenn-F

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Moscow was just as she had been warned -- its downtown streets were filled with armored tanks and dissenters.

Alia Dzhiembaeva and her father were in Moscow to see her off for a year of study directed by her new Baptist friends in the United States. Her father had decided it was less dangerous for them to be in Moscow during last week's coup than it was for Alia to stay in the country.

A Baptist friend, Tennessean Harry Rowland, whom she met during the Kazakh-American Cultural Exchange held in the republic of Kazakhstan June 21-July 7, arranged her exchange program. Dzhiembaeva served as an interpreter for the exchange, which was developed by Southern Baptists through the Central Asian Foundation, a non-profit corporation that directs Christian aid.

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However, her father feared her American friends, and her appearances in meetings and on TV with them, might place her under the suspicion of new Soviet leaders.

In Moscow, Dzhiembaeva and her father couldn't help remembering the Soviet tanks and troops which entered Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, in 1985. The military quelled the rioting against the new Kazakh president, but about 100 people died, said Dzhiembaeva, although the number was never reported.

And her father recalled a former era of Soviet violence. "My father remembered the Stalinist period of time when people just disappeared and no one knew where they were. Sometimes it was because they had friends that were foreigners," she said. "I had many friends who were Americans."

Her father, who had been ambivalent about her plans to study in the U.S., quickly changed his mind after the news of the coup. "He wanted me to be safe. Many people were worried about our future when the army came to power," she explained.

Because of her father's persistence in the face of little information and his influence as a chemist at the Academy of Sciences in Kazakhstan, on Tuesday morning they caught the last flight out of Alma-Ata after the coup.

In Moscow, information was even at a higher premium. Except for one TV and radio channel directed by the coup leaders, word of mouth and unauthorized information were the only sources of news. One-page newspapers were posted in subways and trolleybus stations, only to be removed by soldiers, said Dzhiembaeva. Unauthorized radio transmissions could be picked up with the proper equipment, she added.

Housed downtown in the Kazakh Embassy and forced to move about the city to complete paperwork for her trip, Dzhiembaeva saw the crowds, mostly young people and students, gathering to protest. In spite of the military presence, she also viewed Muscovites going to work and shopping, she said.

"The soldiers were not impolite to us," she said.

On Thursday she and her father waited about two hours to cross a street jammed by tanks leaving downtown, which they assumed were going to a battle. They then heard the news of the failed coup. Everyone was "shocked," she said, when Russian Republic President Boris Yeltsin and an emergency session of the Russian parliament appeared on TV exposing the junta and its leaders.

"Young persons, every person wants to be against this dictatorship. They guarded parliament; they stopped tanks -- everybody -- that it might be like that."

On the way to the airport on Thursday evening, she saw fireworks lighting the sky to celebrate the end of the coup. Arriving the evening before her scheduled Friday morning flight because of the curfew, they found crowds that didn't allow them seating room.

The fact she was able to leave was a "miracle," Dzhiembaeva said. She not only referred to the political barriers, but logistic, noting many people wait two years for an airline ticket to the U.S.

The efforts of Rowland, associate pastor at Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, allowed her departure, which was "so unSoviet," she explained.

"God has had his hand in this in a lot of ways," said Rowland, who noted the biggest hurdle was initiating the process because a student exchange is still an uncommon procedure in the U.S.S.R. The Ministry of Education usually has a three-month waiting period and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires a 21-day delay for issuing exchange permits, he added. Then she had to get an airline ticket.

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Rowland and his wife spent about 30 hours trying to make contact with the Dzhiembaeva family during the coup as were thousands of others worldwide. Another miracle allowed them to make phone contact twice, he reported.

He and his family, with assistance from Woodmont Church, will sponsor Dzhiembaeva for a year while she studies at Belmont College in Nashville. Rowland also is working toward an exchange for another interpreter to return to Mobile (Ala.) College, where she studied previously.

He noted the colleges, both Baptist, are making the exchange possible, by offering financial assistance to the young ladies.

The exchange will allow Dzhiembaeva "to have a chance to grow as a Christian," said Rowland.

She learned about God for the first time while studying at Ouachita Baptist University, in Arkadelphia, Ark., last year for four months. She competed with about 1,000 other students for one of 18 openings. Since then she has become a Christian.

Concerned for her family and home, she predicts Kazakhstan will become an independent member of a Soviet federation. It has rich natural resources, she noted. "I don't want us to lose our national identity," she said.

But the changes will be traumatic, she added. Her father, who has been a Communist Party member, and others of the "older generation" have "stereotypes" of capitalists which are ingrained. False information about capitalism has been taught and believed, she said.

She said democratization of the Soviet Union will be traumatic, as it has been for her family. They haven't visited her grandmother in Lithuania for three years because of the republic instituted new restrictions for visitors and the prejudice shown to those who speak the Russian language.

"Everything will change much now," said Dzhiembaeva.

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(Davis is assistant editor of the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector.)

Argentine penal code could
limit religious freedom

By Mary E. Speidel

FMB-N

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--A new penal code before the Argentine legislature contains clauses that could limit religious freedom, according to an evangelical leader there.

The code, reportedly designed to clean up corruption in the country's judicial system, was passed by the Argentine Senate last year. It now is being studied in committee by the country's House of Deputies, according to Baptist pastor Arnoldo Canclini, an evangelical leader in Argentina.

The need for a new penal code is generally accepted in Argentina, but the proposal has several points that "have worried many of the evangelical churches as well as sectors of the (Roman) Catholic Church," Canclini said.

For example, one article imposes a jail sentence of one to four years for anyone who "in the name of a superior being or a religion promotes or implies a cure or relief of physical or spiritual ills" and collects an offering.

This clause would stop those who abuse faith healing, such as swindlers who promise miraculous healing of the sick for a "donation." But it also could be applied to "any preacher who prays for the sick or afflicted" in a church that receives offerings, said Canclini.

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Another article of the new code calls for a prison sentence for someone who holds a worship service "without fulfilling the corresponding laws and specifications," he added. But no such laws and specifications now exist in Argentina, except for a law requiring religious groups (other than the Roman Catholic Church) to register with the government, he said.

The code also imposes a prison penalty and fines for anyone who carries out "disturbing religious acts" or does not show respect for "an officially recognized religion."

The problem with this clause is, strictly speaking, the Roman Catholic Church is the only church that has "official recognition" in Argentina, according to Canclini.

Argentina has no official state religion, but the Roman Catholic Church has strong ties to the government. For example, the current Argentine constitution requires the country's president to be a Roman Catholic and allows the government to provide economic aid for the Roman Catholic Church.

Some observers have warned the clause might also be interpreted to limit the locations of public worship services, according to missionary Marion Lineberger. Lineberger, of Mount Holly, N.C., is administrator of the Southern Baptist mission organization in Argentina.

Such a limitation would cause problems in starting churches in Argentina, he said. "Property is expensive, and to put many requirements on where a church could or could not be located would really complicate the situation for practically all of us," he said of evangelicals.

The problem, Canclini said, is no one knows how the proposed code's religious clauses would be enforced if adopted.

In addition, public opinion varies about who is behind the clauses that could limit religious freedom. Some U.S. press reports have quoted evangelical sources placing the blame on Roman Catholics. "The Catholics are playing for keeps," the National and International Religion Report quoted a source as saying. "Religious freedom will disappear at the hand of bureaucrats."

But Canclini doesn't believe Roman Catholics are behind the move. "It's not easy to say why these new issues have been included (in the code). Some say the Roman Catholic Church is to be blamed, but I don't think so," he said.

Neither does a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board official who was based in Argentina for a decade. "My reading of it is that it does not favor the Roman Catholics," said Don Kammerdiener, the board's executive vice president. "It's actually prejudicial against any religious group."

A Roman Catholic lawyer affiliated with the Argentine government wrote about the issue in a Catholic publication, Canclini noted. The lawyer said the code, if applied broadly, could affect Catholics since Catholic churches pray for healing of the sick and receive offerings.

Some observers suggest the clauses restricting religion may be linked to opponents of Pentecostals, who are growing rapidly in Argentina. Some Pentecostal groups in Argentina have been criticized for conducting loud outdoor worship services and for exploiting the practice of faith healing.

Regardless of who is behind the religious wording in the code, Argentine evangelicals -- including Pentecostals -- are banding together to oppose it. They have formed a committee to lobby against the proposal in the House. The committee includes representatives of several evangelical groups, such as the Argentina Evangelical Baptist Convention and the Association of Christian Evangelical Churches of the Argentine Republic.

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Besides such opposition, Argentine evangelicals have committed themselves to prayer about the matter, Canclini said. "Our hope is that it will not be passed," he said. He asked Southern Baptists to pray toward that end.

The proposed code also has opponents from other sectors of society, including some government leaders, Canclini said.

He doesn't expect the House to vote on the issue this year because legislators will need more time to study the issue and the legislative year ends in September. Elections for Argentina's governors and deputies are slated for September and October.

Besides voicing concern about the penal code, evangelicals are working behind the scenes to seek reforms in the Argentine constitution "so that it would not ... permit the state's interference in the free exercise of religion," the Baptist leader said. They also advocate changes in a law requiring registration of religious groups because "it could become a hidden means of prohibiting some worship services," he said.

Evangelical opposition to such issues "is only a part of a general situation arising from the rapid growth of evangelicals of every kind," he said.

Evangelicals are growing rapidly in Argentina and throughout traditionally Roman Catholic Latin America. Since the 1960s, evangelical ranks reportedly have grown from 15 million people to about 40 million. In some countries, the growth is reflected in election of increasing numbers of evangelicals to public office.

In Argentina, evangelicals have organized a new political party, the Independent Christian Movement, to voice to their concerns. "The populace is asking for honesty, and evangelicals have a good reputation on that. There are many issues on which something must be said. The whole political picture is in crisis," said Canclini, a leader in the new party.

Argentina's crisis includes severe economic readjustment caused by hyperinflation. The country also is still healing from defeat in the 1982 Falklands War against Britain and from human rights abuses reportedly committed during military rule in Argentina from 1976-83. Also, Argentine President Carlos Menem has declined in popularity because of charges of corruption in his administration.

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Adversity leads to outreach
and ministry for Texas church

By Ken Camp

Texas-N

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DALLAS (BP)--When Highland Avenue Baptist Church in Beaumont, Texas, began experiencing tough economic times, the congregation could have turned its focus inward. Instead, church leaders reached out to neighborhood residents who also were hurting financially.

Located in a transitional neighborhood that is becoming largely black and low-income, the church launched a Wednesday evening meal program for children and youth.

"We were feeding about 150 street kids every Wednesday night," said Richard Roach, pastor.

However, as the local economy worsened and the church began to have trouble meeting its budget, that ministry was jeopardized. The program was further endangered by a cut-off of domestic hunger funds from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and through the Baptist General Convention of Texas, due to decreased world hunger offerings.

"We had to cut back some places in the church budget, but we didn't feel led to cut back this feeding ministry," Roach said. "We said, 'This needs to be maintained. There are too many people who need this kind of aid.'"

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"This is an economically depressed community. According to last year's figures, our neighborhood had the highest rate of kids on free lunches and reduced-cost lunches of any of the schools in Beaumont."

Roach agreed to accept a decrease in his salary rather than eliminate the Wednesday night meal program. Since then, he said, God has continued to provide resources to sustain that ministry.

"It's put a strain on our budget, somewhat, but it's just amazing how the Lord has provided," he said, noting local businesses have contributed to the ministry.

"And one person who is not a member of our church just came in and said, 'I like what you're doing. Here's a check for \$1,000,'" Roach recalled.

The meal program is only one aspect of the church's ministry to its neighborhood. To provide area children recreational opportunities in a safe and drug-free environment, the church has started opening its gymnasium for skating rallies about once a month.

"The kids skate for two hours, then there's a concert by a contemporary Christian band followed by a message. Then we offer an invitation, giving them an opportunity to respond to Christ," Roach said, noting attendance has averaged about 125 people at the skating rallies.

Though he acknowledges follow-up has been difficult, Roach noted church members try to lead through the "Survival Kit for New Christians" discipleship program all of the youth who make commitments.

In conjunction with the city council and community leaders, the church also sponsored an interracial, intergenerational neighborhood block party.

Police blocked off the street, allowing church members to set up a dunking booth, game tables, free refreshment stands and a stage on which a local Christian music group performed. More than 400 people attended the first block party, and a second event tentatively is slated for sometime in September.

"There were senior adults, single adults, children and teenagers all mingling and getting to know one another there. Things have been pretty hot in the neighborhood, with racial division and some gang activity. The tendency has been for people to barricade themselves inside their homes," Roach said. "This gave them the opportunity to meet their neighbors."