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SOUTH CAROLINA -- Southern, African-American Baptists join force in S.C. for missions.
ALABAMA -- Mobile College to open campus in Nicaragua.
ATLANTA -- Landmark 'Atlanta Manifesto' stemmed from Baptist's sermon.
OHIO -- Election-day convention start makes Ohioans mindful of nation.
SOUTH CAROLINA -- Congregation split 26 years ago healed by hope, reconciliation.

Southern, African-American Baptists
join forces in S.C. for missions By Ben L. McDade

Baptist Press
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COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--The largest white and African-American Baptist bodies in South Carolina have announced their intentions to sign an agreement to send volunteers to work together in church projects in Kenya, Africa.

The two religious organizations, the South Carolina Baptist Convention and the Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention of South Carolina, made a joint statement during a Nov. 9 news conference.

The three-year agreement will be signed during the Nov. 10 evening session of the 172nd annual meeting of South Carolina Baptist Convention at the Carolina Coliseum in Columbia.

Ed F. Johnson, president of the state's Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention, and B. Carlisle Driggers, executive secretary-treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, made a joint statement at the news conference.

"Today we stand before you to proclaim a common belief," Driggers said. "Our mission to share the love of Jesus Christ with all the world knows no limits imposed by race, by human prejudice, by political or national boundaries, even by continents."

Johnson told the group of reporters that for more than a decade the two Baptist groups have been exploring avenues for cooperating in sharing the love of Jesus.

"Our public announcement today is to send clear signals to all in our state, that when united in a common goal, all races can work together without tension, hatred or violence."

Total membership of the two religious organizations represents one-third of the state's population.

As part of its commitment to minister in the state and around the world, the South Carolina Baptist Convention was invited by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the Baptist Convention of Kenya and the Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to Kenya to join in a three-year missions partnership with these groups beginning in January 1993.

"We saw what seemed a very natural opportunity to work side by side with our black Baptist brothers and sisters in South Carolina as partners in this project," Driggers said.

"Because the Baptist Educational and Missionary Convention ... shares this common commitment of telling people everywhere about God's love, we voted last May to become partners in the Kenya missions partnership," Johnson said.

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Representatives from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the Baptist Mission of Kenya also were present for the announcement.

"Christians of all colors working shoulder to shoulder to expand and strengthen the cause of Christ is exciting," said Sam Turner, mission administrator for the Southern Baptist Mission of Kenya. "God is working in Kenya. To be a part of what God is doing (in Kenya) is a tremendous feeling, and we want South Carolina Baptists to experience it with us."

Samson Kisia, moderator of the Baptist Convention of Kenya, echoed Turner's excitement. "This partnership between Baptists in South Carolina and Kenya will be a great mission," he said. "The circumstances surrounding all of us such as cultural, political, economic and religious background may be different, but if we work into the bigness of our God who has promised to take us step by step, our partnership will be a great success."

More than 50 mission projects already are scheduled in 1993, Johnson, and trip lead rs will come from both state conventions. Also, volunteers, many already committed, will be enlisted from both conventions.

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Mobile College to open
campus in Nicaragua

By Mark Baggett

Baptist Press
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MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Mobile College has announced plans to open a branch campus in San Marcos, Nicaragua, in August 1993 to serve Latin American students and provide a "beachhead" for Baptists in the region, according to President Michael Magnoli.

The college's board of trustees approved the plans for the campus during their Oct. 27 meeting -- and a change to university status for the 28-year-old Baptist college. It will become Mobile University beginning July 1, 1993.

In moving to university status, the college, with 1,700 students, will increase enrollment to 2,000 students within two years, Magnoli said, and the four graduate programs now in place are expanding and pressing for university status in order to establish doctorate programs.

In Nicaragua, Mobile College's campus will be located in a vacant college facility encompassing 22 classrooms, a library, a three-story dormitory for 250 students, a science building with four laboratories, an administration building with 15 rooms and a kitchen and large cafeteria, Magnoli said.

After a series of negotiations with local officials, the municipality of San Marcos has agreed to lease the facility to Mobile College for \$100 per month for 30 years, Magnoli said.

Mobile College hopes to recruit 150 students from across Central America as the freshman class for 1993, Magnoli said. He said he expects the campus to serve an average of 450 students eventually, including American students studying there. Courses will be taught in English by a predominantly American faculty.

Magnoli said Mobile College's campus will be an "elite institution" compared to the other state universities in the region, many of which suffer from antiquated facilities and poorly trained instructors. Although the Catholic Church has recently opened a new university in Nicaragua, its campus houses more than 5,000 students in only one small building. State universities charge no tuition; the Jesuit university charges about \$200 a month. Mobile College will charge the same rate as its U.S. students pay: about \$600 per month (for 10 months) for tuition, plus \$250-300 for room and board.

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Magnoli said recruiting efforts would target students from the key high schools in the area as well as students in the United States whose parents moved out of Latin America to escape political turmoil. The college is advertising in Nicaraguan newspapers in Miami, Magnoli said, to attract Latino families in the United States who would like to return home but cannot because their children cannot receive a quality education.

Magnoli expects the college to invest no more than \$400,000 in the project, most of that in the first few years in renovating the present campus. "That's not a tremendous investment when you consider the physical plant down there would cost \$15 million to replace," he said. Magnoli estimated the campus would generate at least \$300,000 a year for Mobile College after the fourth year of operation.

The campus will be a base for a Southern Baptist presence in Central America and will contribute to political stability in the area, Magnoli said. "We will be intimately involved in helping the new democratic government establish concepts of free enterprise and democracy."

Magnoli already has met with cabinet ministers of Violeta Chamorro, who won the democratic election in 1990. Prior to Chamorro's election, the communist Sandinista regime, supported by Cuba and Russia, controlled the country in the midst of a 12-year civil war between the Sandinistas and the Contras, supported by the United States. Magnoli said he has been working extensively with Chamorro's son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, who is the minister to the presidency.

"I don't think we'll see the kind of political instability there that will bring war to the country," Magnoli said. "For one thing, no country like Cuba or Russia can underwrite a communist regime as they once did. From time to time, people will be unhappy and this will be reflected in changes within the government. But from what I've seen, Mrs. Chamorro has made pretty sound decisions in walking a delicate line between Sandinista criticism (that she is moving the country into democracy too fast) and U.S. criticism (that she is moving too slow in installing a free market society)."

In his four trips to Nicaragua since last May, Magnoli said he has seen the devastating economic effects of communist rule.

"The communists stole everything of any value and totally destroyed the remnant of a stable economic system," he said. "Consequently, the country is having to rebuild its economic base."

Magnoli said the country's leaders are eager to have Mobile College help in the economic redevelopment. Lacayo, for example, has asked if the college could help develop alternative crops in the San Marcos region, a project Mobile College could direct with experts from other U.S. colleges and universities.

"All the ministers are asking us to help their country put things back together and move to the next plateau," Magnoli said.

Besides the opportunities in contributing to economic renewal and the opportunities for cultural exchange, Magnoli said the most exciting prospect is "to provide Mobile College and Baptists a beachhead from which we can launch all sorts of missions projects."

"It will provide a substantial Baptist presence there with a residential facility and will support the six Southern Baptist missionaries now in Nicaragua," he said.

With the location of the campus in the population belt (50 percent of the country's population lives within 50 miles of Managua, 40 miles away from San Marcos), Magnoli hopes the college can begin Christian missions.

"The country is overwhelmingly Catholic," he said, "and the Catholic Church has sensitized people to the importance of religion and has helped establish values despite the communist rule. We can build on that. Nicaragua is a very fertile field for Christian ministries."

The conception for a Mobile College campus in Nicaragua grew out of efforts by Roger Gonzalez, a Mobile businessman, who approached the college in the spring of 1991 with the idea of sending instructors to Nicaragua to teach English to local students. Gonzalez, a native of Nicaragua, came to the United States in 1978 to escape the Sandinista regime. He planned to return to Nicaragua to reclaim his family's property and realized the need for English language instruction.

As a result of Gonzalez's recommendations, Mobile College professors Hazel Petersen and Frances Garner have made trips to Nicaragua the past two summers. Magnoli made exploratory trips last May and last July, and in August the executive committee of the college's board of trustees authorized a feasibility study. That study was conducted with Magnoli, other college officials and local engineers and contractors.

Petersen, Mobile College dean emeritus, has agreed to serve as academic dean for at least the first two years of the project. Although most of the faculty will be from the United States, Mobile College will use adjunct faculty from Nicaragua as needed. The academic program will emphasize courses in business, computer science and natural science because of the economic needs of the country.

"I went down there initially skeptical," Magnoli said, "but I felt a loyalty to Roger (Gonzalez) who had been so vigorous in his support for such a project. But because of the warmth of the people and their desire to learn English, I began to see that we could make a difference.

"I talked to the leaders and saw how much they need expertise for economic redevelopment. At first, the barriers seemed like mountains, but one by one, those mountains -- the political problems, the language barrier, the purchase of the physical plant -- seemed to melt down. As Christian people, we ought to believe when we implement the Great Commission, God can take care of the problems."

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Landmark 'Atlanta Manifesto'
stemmed from Baptist's sermon

By James Dotson

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ATLANTA (BP)--It was 1957, the Brown v. Board of Education ruling addressing segregation in schools had fanned smoldering racial tensions in the South -- and the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta decided it must take a stand in leading Christians toward inevitable change.

The result, published 35 years ago, was the "Atlanta Manifesto," a six-point statement signed by 80 Christian leaders, including nine Southern Baptists, urging Christians to accept the law of the land and move toward racial reconciliation.

The manifesto was commemorated with a conference titled "Race, Religion and Reconciliation: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow" in October that reviewed the significance of the 1957 document and served as a forum for developing an updated manifesto. Organizers anticipate the new document will be ready by early 1993.

O. Norman Shands, pastor of West End Baptist Church at the time, said the document can be traced to a sermon by Roy McClain, then pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta.

McClain preached "silence is not always golden; sometimes its yellow," Shands said. "He called attention to the silence in the pulpits of Atlanta on the issue of desegregation."

Ralph McGill, editor of The Atlanta Constitution, later asked 30 ministers to write a column on the subject. One of those ministers, Covenant Presbyterian Church pastor Herman Turner, called for a meeting of those 30.

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"His view was that we could all take individual positions on this question and possibly hang separately or we could consult in such a way as to arrive at a common statement," Shands recounted.

The result was the Atlanta Manifesto. It had six points:

- "Freedom of speech must at all costs be preserved."
- "As Americans and as Christians, we have an obligation to obey the law." The statement noted individuals have the right to work for alteration of rulings with which they disagree but they "have no right to defy the constituted authority."
- "The public school system must not be destroyed."
- "Hatred and scorn for those of another race, or for those who hold a position different from our own, can never be justified."
- "Communication between responsible leaders of the races must be maintained."
- Recognition that difficulties can be solved "only through prayer and in obedience to the will of God."

Within a 48-hour time period, 80 ministers had signed the document, giving added strength to efforts that eventually led to desegregation of Atlanta public schools.

"The ministers then were the first group of some public respectability to challenge (support for segregation). This created enough polarity in the community to enable a dialogue," Shands said.

Another signer was J.T. Ford, pastor of Wieuca Road Church at the time.

"It was hammered out through prayer and interaction, and that in itself was a very wholesome process for the ministerial leadership of the city," he said. Ford also noted there were other pastors at the time who supported the concept but were unable to sign the document in time for publication in the Constitution.

Several Baptist signers noted Georgia Baptists at the time weren't the most outspoken advocates of desegregation: In 1956, the state convention voted by a 3-1 margin to remove from the report of its Social Service Commission suggestions calling for churches to accept the Supreme Court decision as "law of the land" and to encourage an atmosphere that would allow schools to comply with instructions of the courts.

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Election-day convention start
makes Ohioans mindful of nation By Theo Sommerkamp

Baptist Press
11/9/92

VANDALIA, Ohio (BP)--The annual meeting of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio began on election day. A few speakers or those who led prayers during the three-day session referred to the challenges ahead for Christians in America the next four years, and a resolution pledged prayer for newly elected officials and for Christian morality in the nation.

The meeting, at First Baptist Church in the Dayton suburb of Vandalia, was typical of Ohio's annual conventions, which often take on some of the atmosphere of an evangelism conference. As in previous years, no slates or competing groups vied for the convention's leadership posts.

The \$5.8 million total 1993 budget adopted by 500-plus messengers at the meeting includes \$3.6 million to be given through the Cooperative Program from the state's nearly 600 churches and chapels, a 2.53 percent decrease from 1992 to 1993. The budget reflects a decrease in percent of the budget designated for SBC causes, from 41.5 percent of the 1992 budget to 40 percent next year.

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Income from the churches for the first nine months of 1992 topped 1991 but still fell a little short of the 1992 budget goal to date.

Forty percent of the Cooperative Program receipts from churches, \$1,438,524 if all the budget is raised, will be forwarded to the SBC for home and foreign missions and other SBC agency support. On the other side of the coin, the Ohio convention will receive \$923,934 next year from SBC boards and commissions for jointly-sponsored programs, most of it coming from the Home Mission Board.

The new president of the Ohio convention is F. Joe Baker, director of missions for the Greater Dayton Association, the host area of the meeting site. He was elected in a two-way race with Douglas Alexander, pastor of Sharon Woods Baptist Church in Columbus.

Both first and second vice presidents were elected by acclamation. Respectively, they are James Downey, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waterville, and Don McMurry, pastor of First Baptist Church in Fairborn.

It appeared for at least two or three minutes no one might be nominated for the second vice presidency. There was silence after nominations were called for until a name finally was put forth. This also is not new for Ohio Baptist convention and has even happened when a presidential nomination was pending.

Greater Dayton Association is the largest of 19 in Ohio and perhaps the largest association in what formerly was called the pioneer states area of the Southern Baptist Convention. The association itself is self-supporting and has a multiple staff. Baker has been a pastor or missions director in Ohio for 22 years.

The convention meeting was the first for Orville H. Griffin as executive director of the body. Griffin, a veteran Ohio pastor and denominational leader, in addressing the convention, remarked it had been 26 years since he last delivered a formal message on the program; he was convention president at the time.

In addition to the national scene, resolutions commended Ohio disaster relief ministry and church building volunteers who have committed themselves to aiding in the hurricane-stricken area near Miami. They also called for a resurgence of evangelism and church planting and for Cooperative Program support.

The 1993 convention will be Nov. 2-4 at a Toledo-area hotel.

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Congregation split 26 years ago
healed by hope, reconciliation

By Sue Harper Poss

Baptist Press
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GAP CREEK, S.C. (BP)--This is the story of a divorce that failed, a 26-year separation that ended in reconciliation.

And for the people of the Gap Creek/River Falls community of South Carolina, it is a return to the harmony and fellowship of "once upon a time."

In 1966 Gap Creek Baptist Church, a small congregation with about 120 members, suffered a split. A new church, River Falls Baptist, was organized just down the road and became the larger congregation with 140 resident members compared to Gap Creek's 93.

The congregations went their separate ways, maintained separate buildings and programs and competed for members in the small geographically-isolated mountain community for 26 years.

But River Falls members unilaterally voted to turn over all of their church's possessions to Gap Creek in August and 78 members of River Falls returned to the fold.

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"The members at River Falls didn't say, 'We want to merge,'" said Steve Rutledge, North Greenville Baptist Association's director of missions. "They did like I've never heard of anybody doing. They went back and joined and turned over their facilities to Gap Creek."

The reconciliation promises to make Gap Creek a stronger church. On Aug. 23, Gap Creek had 19 in three Sunday school classes. That was the day River Falls voted to reunite.

On Aug. 30, Gap Creek had 104 in 14 classes in Sunday school and about 175 in worship with 50 in the choir.

The churches' reconciliation fulfilled the hopes of Steve Hardin, who had been married in one church and was pastor of the other.

Hardin, River Falls' pastor for four years when he resigned in July, recounted, "I told the church I would be leaving and told a couple of people I thought this would be a good time to consider reuniting with Gap Creek."

Throughout his pastorate, he had geared his sermons to subjects such as fellowship, cooperation and the common good, having hoped for years he could facilitate a reconciliation to create one strong church.

A bivocational pastor, Hardin said a growing youth department in need of a youth minister was the most recent indication a reconciliation was needed.

"We had an average attendance at River Falls of about 70 with 25 youth," he said. "We had a tremendous need for a youth minister but no funds. Being bivocational, I didn't have the time to give to the group."

Hardin's church also was outgrowing its facilities and wanted a minister of music. The deacons and other leaders agreed with their pastor that now was the time to reunite with Gap Creek.

So one Sunday morning in July, the River Falls deacons showed up unexpectedly at the home of Gap Creek pastor John Sizemore. "They told me they were going to recommend that morning that River Falls disband and reunite with our church," Sizemore said. "That was the first I knew about any plans to reconcile."

Since that time, Sizemore said there has been nothing but unity in the community and the church. "We have seen relationships mended that had been broken for more than 20 years," he said.

The Gap Creek sanctuary, built in the early '30s, will seat only 208 and is in need of repair, Sizemore said. Building and renovation plans already are under way.

Plans for the River Falls church building, located one mile to the west, have not been made.

"From the human standpoint, it doesn't make sense what they did," Sizemore said of River Falls' members. "They were a thriving, growing congregation who at their very last service had to join the church. But it was through the work of the Holy Spirit and the fact that Steve Hardin caught a glimpse of the vision God had for this community that they made their decision."

For Hardin, the reconciliation has been "far and away the highlight of my ministry. This community can now go forward and do things it has never done before."

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Poss is assistant editor of the Baptist Courier, South Carolina Baptist newsjournal.