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Virginia conservatives weighing
possible breakaway convention

By Art Toalston

Baptist
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NORFOLK, Va. (BP)--The possibility of a breakaway Baptist convention of Virginia conservatives has broken onto the front page of a Norfolk newspaper.

And several "input" meetings of Southern Baptist conservatives across the state have been scheduled toward a statewide meeting early next year to decide whether to remain in the 167-year-old Baptist General Association of Virginia or create a separate convention.

"You just reach a point where you say, 'Hey, I don't want to be involved in this further,'" Virginia Beach pastor Tommy Taylor told Mark O'Keefe, religion writer for Norfolk's Virginian-Pilot.

Among Taylor's frustrations: moderate-oriented budget decisions during the BGAV's Nov. 10-11 annual meeting in Virginia Beach and, to him, a less-than-satisfactory stance on homosexuality.

"If divorce is the answer," the newspaper quoted Taylor as saying, "and I know that's a strong word, then we need to get a divorce." Taylor was unavailable for comment to Baptist Press Nov. 25.

"I'm very sorry to see this," reacted Reginald McDonough, BGAV executive director. "We've worked hard to try to be inclusive of all Baptists in this state. I did not interpret the action of the General Association in the same way that these individuals are interpreting it.

"The BGAV meets all the qualifications of cooperation with the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) and we have strong working ties with the (SBC's) agencies," McDonough said. "I do not see our relation with the SBC changing as a result of this potential action."

But the SBC would face an unprecedented decision if faced with relating to two conventions from one state, said SBC legal counsel James P. Guenther of Nashville.

Taylor's readiness for divorce proceedings is not shared by all Virginia Baptist conservatives, at least not yet.

T.C. Pinckney of Alexandria, a retired Air Force general widely regarded as the leader of Virginia Baptist conservatives, told Baptist Press Nov. 25 he has not made up his mind about parting company with the BGAV. Pinckney was defeated for the BGAV presidency by moderate-backed Deltaville businessman and retired school superintendent Walter A. Harrow.

"The criterion I would use is, What's going to further the Lord's work the best?" Pinckney said. "If I became convinced that a separate convention would best further the Lord's work, I would support it. Until I became convinced, I would be opposed to it.

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"Virginia conservatives need to go to the Lord in intense prayer," Pinckney said, "seeking his will and wisdom. No decision has been reached yet and, whatever the decision may be, we must proceed with unity and humility of heart."

Pinckney noted, "It's certainly correct that Virginia conservatives are very concerned, even upset, about the results of the BGAV convention. As one would expect, there are a variety of reactions. Some have raised the possibility of a separate convention. Others have been energized to work harder along the lines we've been following in the last several years."

Pinckney said six, and maybe seven, "input meetings" will be held in the near future "to give everyone an opportunity to express their views and make recommendations as to what conservatives should do now. Sometime after the first of the year, we will hold a statewide meeting of conservatives to come to some decisions."

The first such input meeting will be Nov. 30 at Liberty Baptist Church in Hampton.

Pinckney said the meetings will be closed to the news media. "We want people to speak frankly," he said, commenting that the presence of reporters could keep some participants from speaking openly.

A preliminary meeting was even held Nov. 25 at a Norfolk Shoney's restaurant, confirmed one of the participants, Kelly Burris, pastor of Virginia Beach's Kempsville Baptist Church.

The meeting, described by Kelly as "a sharing of frustrations" lasting an hour and a half, was attended by about 30 people mostly from Norfolk and Portsmouth.

Kelly said conservatives are "discouraged and concerned" about the BGAV's direction. "We came together to pray and seek the will of God" about directions for the future. Kelly reported a consensus "that we need to take action very soon."

James A. Bradshaw, pastor of Norfolk's Norview Baptist Church and an organizer of the Nov. 25 meeting, told The Virginian-Pilot, "We're Southern Baptists. There are certain things Southern Baptists stand for. The Baptist General Association of Virginia does not stand for certain fundamentals of the faith. The Bible tells us we should, 'Therefore come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord.' To me, I think the time is right. But we're not going to do anything hastily."

Pinckney said conservatives' concerns include budget decisions adopted during the recent BGAV annual meeting. A new avenue for local church giving, titled "World Missions 3," allows for funding solely to the BGAV and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization formed by moderates in 1991 now widely regarded by conservatives as in direct competition with the SBC for local church funding.

Pinckney said one of the other three giving avenues, "World Missions 2," re-routed some \$630,000 in funds -- formerly designated for the SBC's Foreign and Home Mission boards and the Annuity Board -- to several CBF-related ventures. ("World Missions 1," meanwhile, will channel offerings to the SBC Cooperative Program fund for national and international missions and ministry.)

Concerning homosexuality, Pinckney voiced concern that wording from a resolution adopted by the BGAV general board in October -- that homosexuality is sinful and that homosexuals should not be in positions of church leadership -- was overwhelmingly rejected by messengers at the annual meeting. Messengers instead adopted a resolution affirming redemptive ministry to homosexuals.

"What was said was correct and good," Pinckney said. "But ministering to them is not enough. We need to acknowledge publicly that homosexuality is a grievous sin before God. It is included in the list of sins God specifically said he hates. The sinner must be confronted with his sin -- confronted in a loving way but a firm way. Otherwise he will not repent."

Pinckney also bemoaned an overwhelming vote against a motion encouraging churches to pray that Islam would collapse as Soviet communism has.

Harrow, the new BGAV president, issued a statement on the possible split, commenting: "I believe I speak for most Virginia Baptists in expressing regret and sorrow that this action is taking place. We have been very busy in the task of creating a framework in Virginia which would allow each church a place to stand. Even though diverse in our approach on occasion, we have created a budget that allows each church to participate in a program of giving that meets various needs up and down the theological spectrum and at the same time emphasizes missions.

"We believe honoring autonomy in the local church is the Baptist way," Harrow continued. "Virginia Baptists are able to accommodate diversity and still focus on missions. I trust this approach is the one that will prevail."

Concerning the BGAV messengers' resolution on homosexuality, Harrow said he feels the majority of those voting were not rejecting the general board's earlier resolution. "Rather, I believe they were saying that the (board's) statement was sufficient, and they were simply stating we should extend a ministry of redemption to these people and to their families."

Harrow told Baptist Press, "We've got quite a job to do" as Christians. "And it takes all of us. And our strength is in our diversity. We ought to stick together as best we can to get the job done."

Guenther, the SBC's legal counsel, issued a statement noting that the SBC traditionally has related to one Southern Baptist body in each state.

"If the convention were to be confronted with the existence of two Baptist general bodies in a state, each seeking a relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention, the SBC would be required to consider a new paradigm," Guenther said.

"Since the SBC is autonomous, it could choose to relate to more than one state general body or it could choose between and among state general bodies and relate to one or more but not to others." Guenther said messengers at an SBC annual meeting would have to adopt appropriate changes in the convention's constitution and bylaws for whatever course they choose.

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Robert Dilday and Michael J. Clingenpeel contributed to this story.

Annuity Board asks Kmart to curb
Waldenbooks policy on porno sales

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By Thomas E. Miller Jr

DALLAS (BP)--The Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention will seek a shareholder action to confront Kmart over the sale of pornographic materials through its Waldenbooks subsidiary.

Paul W. Powell, the board's president, said, "We could simply have sold our Kmart holdings, but selling stock has no influence on the company and has no effect on the company's profitability.

"Our trustees, in both the investment committee and as a full board, have twice discussed divestment of the stock," Powell continued, "but that would have had no effect whatever on the sale of the publications. If we are not successful in our efforts, then we will divest for the sole purpose of distancing ourselves from the corporate policy."

After the board's August trustee meeting, Powell wrote a letter to the chairman of Kmart's corporate board in which he said, "Our own independent investigation has caused us to conclude that Waldenbooks does, indeed, offer products we consider grossly offensive to prevailing community standards.

"It is obviously impossible for you to monitor every product, service and title in your corporate family," Powell wrote, "but when a title or publisher becomes identified with sexual exploitation and you choose to sell that product, you are making a conscious decision to pander to baser instincts."

In their most recent meeting Nov. 3, trustees approved a plan in which Powell will attempt to put together a coalition of like-minded investors to file a resolution at the 1993 Kmart shareholders meeting.

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Because the date of the Kmart annual board meeting was unknown, trustees set two years as parameters for the effort. "There is no intention to drag our feet on this," Powell said. "We are moving immediately. But the trustees realized there would be nothing accomplished by setting a time limit that might be impossible to meet. For all we knew, we could be 11 months away from a directors' meeting, or two months away, which would have been too soon to put together a coalition."

Kmart also has been a target of a national boycott by Donald Wildmon's American Family Association since March 1990. Its Waldenbooks chain carries Penthouse, Gallery, Genesis, Playboy and Playgirl magazines.

The Annuity Board has a policy that prohibits investments in what are informally referred to as "sin stocks." It states: "Investments are prohibited in the liquor, tobacco, gambling, and pornography industries or any company whose products, services or activities are publicly recognized as being incompatible with the moral and ethical posture of the Annuity Board. This would also include any companies which fail to subscribe to the Statement of Principles, the seven-point code of affirmative action for companies with operations in South Africa."

"The Annuity Board makes a good faith effort to stay in compliance with this policy," Powell said. "Where divestment is necessary, we will carry out the divestment in a prudent manner."

"In this day of conglomerates, it is sometimes difficult to know all the far-flung activities of a given corporation. Nevertheless, the Annuity Board is diligent in supervision of our managers. We intend to be socially responsible and we are confident we can do this while maintaining competitive earnings for our members," Powell said.

John R. Jones, senior vice president for investments, is charged with monitoring activities of the outside managers who purchase and sell stocks for the board. He said the staff investment committee is prepared at any time to eliminate a holding if a company is clearly in violation of the policy.

"For instance," Jones said, "we formerly held Time Warner stock. By action of the staff investment committee, that stock is no longer approved for the portfolio."

Jones said there are currently 18 stocks among the S&P 500 list that are prohibited. "But," he said, "there are many other stocks our managers would not buy for a variety of reasons. Any moral question is moot if we wouldn't own the stock anyway."

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Kammerdiener urges SBC leaders
to affirm FMB, giving channels

By Robert O'Brien

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Citing events he said could damage financial giving, the Foreign Mission Board's interim president urged Southern Baptist leaders Nov. 24 to throw their public and private support behind the board and traditional Southern Baptist Convention channels of mission giving.

Don Kammerdiener made his appeal in a letter to chief executives of Southern Baptist agencies and state conventions, state Baptist newspaper editors and state and national leaders of the denomination's Woman's Missionary Union and Brotherhood mission education programs.

The timing of two actions -- one by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the other by retired FMB President R. Keith Parks -- is having "a disruptive effect on our denomination as a whole and on the giving patterns of churches and individuals," he said.

"The first," Kammerdiener wrote, "was the action of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to promote among many Southern Baptist churches a competitive missions offering just at this crucial season of the year" -- the time for the 1992 Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.

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"The second was Dr. Keith Parks' publicly released statements regarding the type of missionary program he envisions for the (fellowship) and his possible relationship to that organization."

The fellowship was formed by moderate Southern Baptists unhappy with the direction of the denomination's theological and political controversy. It has urged Parks to assume leadership of its missions program.

Parks, who retired as FMB president Oct. 31 because he disagrees with changes he said are taking place in the board's direction, noted he was invited to speak Nov. 19 at the CBF missions committee's regularly scheduled meeting.

He told the fellowship he might consider its longstanding offer to head its missions program under three conditions: It would have to remain Southern Baptist, recruit new missionaries instead of just ones now related to the Foreign Mission Board, and focus on "World A" -- the vast area of the globe where 1.2 billion people are isolated from the gospel.

Still undecided on his future as of Nov. 25, Parks told Baptist Press he wouldn't comment on any developments until he makes a decision.

Kammerdiener, the FMB chief until a successor is found for Parks, called for three actions from denominational leaders in view of what he feels is a "substantial challenge" to Southern Baptists' world missions program:

-- "Satisfy yourselves as to the course being followed by the Foreign Mission Board. It is true to our heritage.

-- "Use your influence both publicly and privately to challenge Baptists to be guided by principles rather than personalities. Denominational leaders of other generations have faced the challenge of controversy and have stood firm for a missions program that was and is worldwide in scope, holistic in intent and denominational rather than societal in its structure. Surely this generation of leaders can do no less.

-- "Specifically reaffirm your commitment to the Cooperative Program, ... the Lottie Moon (Offering) ... and (the) Annie Armstrong (Easter Offering for home missions) as the Southern Baptist way of providing financial support for us to reach the ends of the earth."

The Lottie Moon offering will fund nearly 46 percent of the Foreign Mission Board's \$183.8 million budget for 1993 if it reaches its \$84 million goal. Last year's offering fell short of its \$84 million goal by about \$2.6 million. But it topped the previous year's goal by 2.5 percent.

"Our denomination has suffered an endless stream of blows during recent years," Kammerdiener said of the ongoing Southern Baptist Convention controversy. "We have survived due to the grace of God and ... the common loyalty that the vast majority of Southern Baptists have felt toward the Foreign Mission Board."

"These are perilous times even in the midst of unparalleled opportunities," Kammerdiener said. "I pray that all of us may be found faithful in answering the challenge before us today."

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Christian care can help lift
sad spirits during holidays

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By Susan Simko & Mark Christie

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A flood of Christmas time depression overtook Jim Walter as he pressed the money into his son's hand. The 11-year-old hopped out of the car and walked across the crowded parking lot toward the shopping mall to buy a present for his father -- alone.

"This is a sorry way to spend Christmas," Walter muttered. The month before, November 1983, his wife had committed suicide. She should have been there to take their son shopping. Instead, Walter sat awkwardly in his car while the boy braved the Christmas crowds by himself.

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"I was missing my wife. I felt sad for my son," Walter said. "At 11 years of age he didn't know much about department stores or buying things."

The entire season was miserable for Walter and his son, Steve. Every Christmas decoration they pulled out of storage and every picture on the mantle reminded them of Walter's wife.

Walter's experience is not unusual, because the glitz of Christmas feeds depression, said Wynona Elder, associate professor of psychology and counseling at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"Christmas is supposed to be a time when everyone is supposed to be happy," she said. Even the songs demand it, proclaiming, "Tis the Season to be jolly."

"We feel obligated to be happy and then we feel guilty if we aren't," Elder said. "And guilt spirals downward into depression."

Depression especially strikes single people and people who have lost a spouse, Southwestern professor of psychology of religion and counseling Pat Clendinning said.

"They don't have the same natural roots as a married person," Clendinning said. "They don't have the children. They don't have the mate. Christmas morning comes and they are all alone."

Theodore Dowell, director of the Walsh Marriage and Family Counseling Center at Southwestern, said those who do have family around them also are prone to Christmas depression because the American family is in decay.

"We didn't have this depression around the holidays until we began to have the breakdown of the family," Dowell said. Many Christmas carols and traditions began before World War II when the American family was still healthy, he said. The family deteriorated but Christmas remained the same.

"You have the same season. You have the same music. You have the same traditions, but what you no longer have is the reality of what so many of these things once symbolized. We continue the traditions but there is an emptiness," Dowell said.

"Giving things one time a year can't be a substitute for giving of yourself the other 364 days a year," he said.

That lack of self-giving makes it painful and depressing for families to follow the mandate of tradition and gather at Christmas, Dowell said.

"To be together or contemplating being with people who have hurt you, that will make you sad," he said.

This depression can be overcome by taking the focus off the painful memories and placing it on making positive changes in the present -- especially for Christians, Dowell said.

Christians should examine their immediate families, pinpoint and abolish problems carried over from their families, Dowell said.

"To look back and lay blame doesn't change anything," he said. "You've got to break the cycle."

Elder said Christians also can fight depression by refusing to give into the secular commercialism and unrealistic demands for bliss.

"We have made Christmas into the kind of holiday where we spend too much money. We're expected to kind of buy happiness," she said. "What we need to do as Christians is to put the real meaning of the holiday back and focus not on spending money, but on worshipping the Lord. That's not easy to do, because (spending money) is so much a part of our culture."

One way to serve God and fight depression at the same time is to meet others' needs, Elder said.

"Depressed people are likely to withdraw from others," Elder said. "Withdrawal is a real danger. That gives place for all the symptoms of depression to take over. So, they should be involved as much as possible with other people during that time."

That principle worked for Jackie Overstreet, a Southwestern Seminary student who battled holiday depression. It was not the loss of a spouse or the breakup of a family that depressed her every Christmas, just an overwhelming longing for the lost Christmas magic of childhood.

"It sounds so simplistic, but mostly I did it by getting involved with other people -- people outside my family," Overstreet said.

She made the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions her personal crusade at her church. She helped lead the G.A.s. She took her Sunday school class to a boys ranch and the youth group Christmas caroling at a nursing home.

Then she looked beyond her church to two international students in her town. Overstreet invited them to her home for an American Christmas dinner where they tasted stuffing for the first time. She took them with her family to cut down the Christmas tree and hang up their first-ever stockings.

"They thought it was wonderful," Overstreet said.

A few weeks before the Overstreets were moving to another town, one of the students came to say goodbye. This time, Overstreet had the opportunity to share the gospel and the student accepted Christ.

"Get involved in something outside yourself," Overstreet said. "Get out of your little world."

Elder said every Christian -- depressed or not -- should look for and reach out to people who might be alone or depressed during the holidays.

"That's a kind of two-fold response, on the part of the person who is depressed not to allow themselves to withdraw, and on the part of those of us who are to be expressing love and warmth and fellowship to be on the lookout," she said.

Walter and his son overcame the Christmas grief of his wife's suicide with help from their church, First Baptist Church in Nashville.

"That church knit together a safety net for both of us that carried us through those days," said Walter, who is now associate professor of adult education at Southwestern.

One December morning, a group of friends dropped in to clean his house. Steve's Sunday school teacher not only visited him, but encouraged Walter as well. The singles department welcomed Walter immediately as part of their group.

"I got back on my feet emotionally through the prayers of many people," he said.

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Simko and Christie are writers for Southwestern Seminary.