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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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91-183

Chapman invites input in committee selections

WICHITA FALLS, Texas (BP)--In an open letter to Southern Baptists, Morris Chapman, SBC president, has asked for recommendations for four committees he will appoint prior to the annual meeting in Indianapolis, Ind. in June.

"During the next two months I am seeking recommendations for possible appointment to these important committees," Chapman, Wichita Falls, Texas pastor, said in the letter. He will appoint members to the 1992 Committee on Committees, Resolutions Committee, Credentials Committee and Tellers Committee.

"I welcome and encourage recommendations from any person within our Southern Baptist family. Complete and accurate information can best be provided (using) a recommendation form," said Chapman. The form is available by writing to: Martha Gaddis, SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce Street, Nashville, TN, 37203.

"I know every Southern Baptist recognizes the importance of recommending persons who have qualities and abilities which are uniquely suited for serving on SBC committee. Only the names submitted on a completed recommendation form will be fully considered," Chapman said. The form may be duplicated for multiple recommendations and must be returned with a postmark no later than Feb. 15, 1992.

Chapman said every recommendation would receive his "careful and prayerful consideration."

Recommendations should be sent to him at: First Baptist Church, 1200 Ninth Street, Wichita, Falls, TX, 76301. Envelopes should be marked "SBC Committee Recommendations."

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SBC Foundation directors
affirm disputed funds rule

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
12/5/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Foundation affirmed an earlier decision of the agency's executive committee to "ask the SBC Executive Committee for instruction" on the distribution of nearly \$400,000 in disputed funds.

Meeting in Nashville Dec. 3-4 for its annual meeting, the 34-member board affirmed its executive committee's decision in July to seek instructions from the SBC Executive Committee as to how to distribute funds given the Foundation in 1964. The account was established in 1964 using a \$300,000 allocation from a capital needs budget approved by the SBC in Atlantic City.

In other action by Foundation trustees: elected as chairman, William C. Lovell, Jr., an investment manager from Brentwood, Tenn; vice chairman, Robert F. Wilhite, broker from Hendersonville, Tenn.; and recording secretary, Roy L. DePue, estate planner also from Hendersonville.

The disputed account, grown to nearly \$400,000, came from the 1964 convention with a footnote that "The \$300,000 allocation to the Public Affairs Committee to be subject to conditions approved by the Executive Committee or the Southern Baptist Convention."

At that time the PAC related to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

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The BJC requested the funds in September by citing the purchase of land which, the BJC said, fulfilled the conditions of the 1964 investment. However, the SBC no longer helps fund the BJC and the SBC Executive Committee in September voted to sever formal ties with the Washington based church/state lobby agency.

The SBC Christian Life Commission also contends the 1964 allocation was to the "Public Affairs Committee" which has since been merged with the CLC. Trustees of the CLC have asked for the funds on deposit with the Foundation.

The SBC Executive Committee indicated in September it would study the matter and a decision is expected when the committee meets in Nashville in February.

Assets for the Foundation increased 26 percent during fiscal year 1991-92, according to President Hollis E. Johnson, III. More than \$129 million is now invested with the Foundation, Johnson said. Assets have more than doubled over the past five years.

"We have been able to maintain (earnings) at a little higher level, even though interest rates are declining," said Johnson. Also, a number of state Baptist foundations have asked the SBC agency to manage some of their assets, he said.

The Foundation board of trustees consists of a representative from each SBC board, agency, institution and commission, plus 15 members at-large.

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Stewardship Commission
elects vice presidents

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NASHVILLE (BP)--The executive committee of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission elected two new executive vice presidents and took two economic measures "to offset losses experienced in the last fiscal year."

Meeting in Nashville Dec. 2 for its annual audit review, the committee elected Carl Hoffman as Executive Vice President of Endowment and Capital Giving upon the retirement of Leon B. Patterson, effective June 1992. Also, Ruben Swint was elected Executive Vice President upon the retirement of Harry Bonner, effective September 1992.

Both Hoffman and Swint are currently Together We Build consultants for the commission. Bonner will have served more than 11 years with the commission upon retirement while Patterson will have served 15 years.

The committee voted to discontinue furnishing automobiles to any employee whose business use does not exceed 20,000 miles per year, according to A. R. Fagan, President. Also, health insurance premiums paid by the commission for employee dependents have been frozen at the present level.

"These two actions were taken as economic measures to offset losses experienced in the last fiscal year," said Fagan, who noted the commission needed to dip into reserves last year to offset a deficit.

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To evangelize North
America: new churches

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--New churches are required if we are to thoroughly evangelize North America, Charles L. Chaney urged participants during the New Work/Language Missions Conference Nov. 25-26 at the Missouri Baptist Convention offices in Jefferson City.

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"The United States of America is one of the great mission fields of the world," said Chaney, vice president of the Home Missions Board's extension section and past president of Southwest Baptist University, Bolivar, Mo.

"The U.S. is not a Christian nation that needs to be fixed but is a mission field that needs to be evangelized thoroughly. That can only be done if our churches are multiplied," Chaney told more than 70 Missouri new work starters and language workers attending the conference.

The record of Southern Baptist churches starting new congregations in the last 10 years "had probably exceeded any decade in the 145-year history of the convention, even the total number of new starts in the heydays of the 1950s," said Chaney.

"From 1981-1990, according to the Uniform Church Letter, Southern Baptist churches began 12,288 new congregations. That is 3.3 congregational starts every day for 10 years," he said.

"By the end of 1992, the Southern Baptist Convention will have more than 45,000 congregations," said Chaney. At more than 1,000 annual new church starts, the convention is "on schedule" to reach its goal of 50,000 congregations established by the year 2000.

"Why should we start churches? Why should you and I lend our moral influence and spend our spiritual capital to persuade our churches to start new congregations?" he asked.

"We cannot sustain our efforts for 10 more years without knowing why we need more churches," he speculated.

Using Acts 9:31 as a basis, Chaney outlined five reasons for establishing new works.

"First, we should start churches because of the constant obligation laid on us by lost men and women," he said. "The most effective way to reach any person for Christ is through a church that worships, witnesses and serves using that person's language."

Citing a paper prepared by Orrin D. Morris, Chaney estimated there were more than 172 million unsaved people in the U.S. "More lost people live in this nation than are in the total populations of all but four nations of the world," he said.

Many unsaved people in America may not speak English as a first language and may not live a middle-class lifestyle, Chaney said. "The most effective evangelistic method in the history of Christianity is a church indigenous to the people among whom it is planted," he explained.

Second, he said Southern Baptists have an unprecedented opportunity for spreading the gospel in the nation.

"For the first time in the history of American Protestantism, one denomination has the numerical strength; the ethnic, social and racial diversity; and the geographical dispersion to address all of North America with the gospel of Christ," Chaney commented.

"We stand at an open door. We now have 5,000 ethnic congregations among 97 American tribes and 101 ethnic groups, we worship in 98 different languages and have more than 1,500 predominately black congregations," he said.

"For the first time, we're able to do in fact what we have claimed in our rhetoric: preach the gospel to the whole nation in all its cultural diversity and geographical variations."

The third reason for establishing new works is the "American crises in morality," Chaney said.

Speaking of abortion, murder and abuse, he said human life in the nation had been "devalued" and that Christian moral influences on society were declining.

"The best thing we can do to halt North America's slide into moral chaos is to plant Bible-preaching, Bible-living and soul-winning churches in all segments of society," he said. "Only by multiplying colonies of righteousness all across this continent can this moral decline be stopped."

Fourth, Chaney said Southern Baptists' concern for the pragmatic should influence them to establish new congregations.

"We want to be effective. We want our churches to reach unsaved and unchurched people. We believe God wants that for our churches also," he said.

"With that passion to be effective comes the often repeated truism, 'If you want to build a great church, you must not start congregations. They detract from the growth of sponsoring churches.'

"That truism is untrue. The quickest way to turn the growth graph of a church straight up is to begin meeting in two places or at two times," Chaney explained. "Both the creation of dependent satellites and the creation of pre-independent satellites contribute to the growth of the sponsoring church."

Chaney said a fifth reason to start new churches is the commitment to obey the Great Commission.

"I have studied carefully all seven commissions of the risen Christ recorded in the New Testament. Not one of them said 'Go, plant churches,'" he said.

Chaney said, though, that when he looked at what Christ through the Holy Spirit continued to do through empowered believers, he saw the believers making disciples, meeting needs and gathering new congregations.

"Nothing is more of the essence of the mission of the church than planting of congregations of believers wherever they are needed."

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Southwestern seminary graduate
cracks down on drugs in Fort Worth By Lydia Murphy

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The most successful businessmen in Willie Bennett's Fort Worth, Texas, neighborhood have been shut down.

Thanks to the soft-spoken, mild-mannered Bennett, it's not "business-as-usual" anymore.

And while Bennett, who earned a master's of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, may not look like the kind of person who would run someone out of business, when it comes to drug dealers, he knows how to play hardball.

As director of the Bethlehem Center in east Fort Worth, Bennett was told to ignore the drug pushers along his street. They weren't bothering him, he was told. Instead, it would be better to just let them go about their business.

But their "business" was something Bennett could not tolerate, especially around the center, which cares for 100 children in various programs each day.

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"What do you mean they aren't bothering us?" Bennett said he asked city officials and police. "I would go out each morning and pick up bags full of needles and crack bags, all sorts of drug paraphernalia, even condoms, all over the playground where my kids would soon be playing.

"We've had people so doped-up they would crash through neighborhood yards. One man almost crashed into our building. They would speed down our streets."

Drug users and dealers were just one problem Bennett faced.

"The prostitutes were so bad about peddling right in the middle of the street that there were often traffic jams. One day I looked up from my desk and saw a bare-chested prostitute walking down the street. All this was going on while my kids played outside," Bennett said.

What Bennett found is crime in the area was connected with other crime. Start with the drug problem, and other problems would be easier to beat, he learned.

"I realized the prostitution was so bad because of the crack houses around, but I couldn't have all this around my kids," he said.

"When I first came here, most of the houses were open and vacant. It was my priority to find the owners and have the houses boarded-up and lawns cut.

"When they (crack houses) were closed around the center, it changed the area dramatically," Bennett said.

But the task hasn't been easy for Bennett, who was raised in the more pastoral setting of Brenham (population 11,000) in southeast Texas.

In those days, Bennett wanted to become a lawyer because, "blacks could only be a mortician or a preacher, and certainly not have their own businesses. I wanted to be something different and something special."

To residents in the heart of Fort Worth's low-income, high-crime area, "special" is just what Bennett has become.

Under his direction, the community applied for a federal grant to fight substance abuse. The result was a \$1-million grant to the city of Fort Worth earmarked to clean up Bennett's community.

"The problem is not an area of town. It is a problem of the city and economics," Bennett said. "Centers like mine will not solve the problems of the neighborhoods. Even preaching to these people will not solve it unless the church gets involved and stands up for the injustices that these people are facing.

"There are a lot of influential Southern Baptists in cities who vote the policies which perpetuate poverty," Bennett said. "For Southern Baptists, they can help by advocating for the poor and for the policies and programs that help the poor."

To Bennett, that does not mean welfare. "The best welfare system is a job. Welfare systems penalize the recipients.

"For people born in housing projects, they don't have positive role models, two-parent homes, people going to work regularly, or church attendance regularly. They are trying to live the best way they can to support their families.

"People change from the power of the gospel which makes them better able to withstand their circumstances, but they are still in bondage to their circumstances," he said.

While attending Southwestern Seminary, Bennett became involved with the Bethlehem Center and after graduation in 1989, he was named the director. The position had remained unfilled for six months, a circumstance Bennett attributes to God's will.

"The Lord was holding the job for me. I believe the Lord had me in mind for this job because of what has happened over the years and my leadership approach to the center and the community."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

Gymnastics coach helps
athletes find "Spirit"

By Breena Kent Paine

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Dressed in a leotard and tights, with tears in her eyes, little gymnast Renee Hall found a new life in Christ because her gymnastics teacher believed in "body, mind, and Spirit."

Eric Sheaffer had always been up-front with his faith, pointing his students toward Jesus' love, leading them in prayer during workouts and competitions, and even naming his gymnasium Maranatha Academy. Now nine-year-old Renee was the last one on her team to accept Christ, and she knew it.

"Renee would listen quietly as we talked about what Jesus had done in our lives and how someone else got saved," Sheaffer said. "Then one day, she was on the balance beam and I was leaning against the beam coaching her. All of a sudden, she said, 'Someday, Eric, I'm going to get saved.'"

"When she said the same thing later on, I realized she wanted me to show her how." So Sheaffer took her outside and explained the plan of salvation to her, and Renee accepted Christ.

Sheaffer began learning gymnastics while at Richland College in Dallas, Texas. Then at Stephen F. Austin State University, in Nacogdoches, Texas, he competed collegiately as a rings specialist.

Teaching a boys' gymnastics class in an inner-city program, Sheaffer found he had a rapport with children. His last semester of college, he had to make a decision whether to go into forestry, which he had spent five years in training, or to teach gymnastics.

Then Sheaffer was offered a summer job at a girls' gymnastics camp in western Massachusetts, where most of the gymnasts were wealthy, Jewish girls from New York, and the four coaches under him were not Christians.

Still a new Christian himself, "my heart died for those kids because I knew they were all lost. They had a lack of basis for morals," Sheaffer said. "And the girls were highly intelligent, highly motivated, but they were lost as well.

"That's when God moved in my life to use gymnastics as a ministry, because those three months I was there, I never heard the (name) Jesus Christ. I tried to witness, but my knowledge was so small; I just noticed the kids needed Christ. When that camp ended, I was broken."

Then Sheaffer was offered a job as director of a gymnastics school in Long Beach, Miss., where he taught for two years. "I was very open about my faith. It was a small town. Everyone knew where I stood," he said.

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"We prayed and read scripture before every workout. We dedicated our gymnastics team to the Lord, and got top honors in state championships. It caused quite a stir because we would join together and pray before competition. Everyone thought we were strange, but then we started winning!"

As Sheaffer's wife, Jody, was a dance instructor, they decided to open their own business together in an old warehouse building in Pensacola, Fla.

"We started off right away with the fact that we were Christians, and named our business Maranatha Academy, with the motto 'Maranatha believes in body, mind, and spirit.' By our third year of business, we had 800 students in dance and gymnastics," he continued. Three years later, they built their own building, and then had to build yet another to accommodate their booming business.

"Again our gymnastics team put God first, and again we had a powerful team. Florida wasn't used to our type of breed either. At our first meet, our girls were first, second, third, fourth, and fifth every event. When the word got around, people started looking at us saying, 'Where did these folks come from?'

"At performances, at recitals, we would always have prayer first -- sometimes giving testimony in front of 1,000 spectators.

"Even those who were not Christians began liking the idea of a moral atmosphere for their aspiring athletes. They wanted their children to not only develop physically but as individuals as well. That seemed to supersede any problems they had with Christianity," he said. "It was the best business principle we could have ever had."

Some of the coaches Sheaffer hired were Christians; but some were not, and one of his greatest joys was leading several of his staff to Christ.

One girl, Laura, who had started on Sheaffer's gymnastics team as a 13-year-old, came on staff at 18. "I didn't know where she stood with Christ," Sheaffer said. "I knew her father drank, her brother was in rebellion, and her family was in pieces. So I asked her, 'Do you feel there's anything in this world other than yourself you can depend on?'"

When Laura answered "No," he told her of Christ's love, and how she could always depend on Him if she would only accept Him as her Savior. That afternoon, Laura asked Jesus into her life.

Every story did not have a happy ending, however. Sheaffer interviewed one intelligent, good-looking, gymnast with charisma to be his business' new director. "I thought he was the one for the job, but my wife said, 'Don't hire him; I don't feel right about it.' I hired him anyway."

"Within a few months, he almost stole the business right out from underneath us; and with his ability to manipulate adults, he had turned a large section of our closest parents against us.

"Right before we fired him, I noticed an insignia on his shoulder I'd never seen before," Sheaffer said. "It was the satanic symbol of the moon and stars. Then I remembered that in the interview, he had said, 'I go to church, but it's a lot different than what most people do.'"

"We fired him and we lost some of our customers. But we were reminded that any time you're trying to get things done for Christ, Satan attacks."

Not long afterwards, Sheaffer left his Pensacola business to enroll as a student in the Master of Divinity degree program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary because he felt God calling him to preach.

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As a gymnastics teacher, Sheaffer believed in body, mind, and Spirit, pointing his students toward Christ's love. But now, as a preacher, he wants to point the world to Christ.

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(BP) photo available upon request from New Orleans Seminary.