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February 11, 1992

92-25

Florida church establishes foundation,
gives \$2.5 million for church planting

By Jack Brymer

WINTER PARK, Fla. (BP)--Despite a debt of \$750,000 and the need to improve and enlarge its own worship center, First Baptist Church of Winter Park, a suburb of Orlando, has created a foundation and given \$2.5 million in "seed money" for church planting, primarily in Florida.

Also, the church's pastor of 20 years, John C. Mitchell, resigned Dec. 31, 1991, to become the foundation's executive director.

Taking its name from real estate in which the church invested 10 years ago, the Pembroke Foundation is seeking to create a corpus of at least \$10 million which could provide up to \$1 million a year for starting new churches.

Florida Baptist Convention Executive Director-Treasurer John Sullivan called the new foundation "an answer to prayer."

"If we started 800 churches tomorrow, that would only bring us to the 1970 church-population ratio," said Sullivan, who serves as a trustee of the foundation. "And the fact that J.C. Mitchell, the past president of our state convention, is to head this church-planting ministry can help bring a new day to Florida."

Mitchell has been involved in starting 18 churches during his 43-year ministry, including one in Tanzania, Africa and another in Kiev in the Ukraine.

One of the most recent church starts sponsored by the Winter Park congregation is Celebration Baptist Church in nearby Lake Mary. Mitchell's son-in-law, Kevin Chubb, is the mission's pastor.

Noting that Florida is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation with a net population gain of 830 persons each day, Mitchell said: "We are falling farther and farther behind in church planting and winning people to Christ."

In his resignation as pastor, Mitchell acknowledged the new venture is one of faith and at times he had wrestled with the thought of "deserving retirement." In recent months, however, he said he had come to "a growing conviction ... that God wants me to be a part of what He would do ... in calling more of our exploding population to Himself by starting more churches in the state."

The Florida Baptist State Convention voted last November to establish a fraternal relationship with the foundation. The foundation already has provided \$100,000 to the state convention to help offset a shortfall in funds which threatened to slash mission pastor salaries by 40 percent.

A native of Morganton, N.C., Mitchell moved to Winter Park in 1971 from the pastorate of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. Before that, he was pastor of First Baptist Church in Suffolk, Va., for 10 years. He was president of the Florida Baptist State Convention in 1990-91.

The Pembroke Foundation is headquartered at 445 North Wymore Road, Winter Park, FL 32789.

Parks' tenure not discussed;
four-point agreement affirmed

By Robert O'Brien & Erich Bridges

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees did not discuss the tenure of board president R. Keith Parks Feb. 10 -- either in a closed two-hour meeting of the chairman's council with Parks or in an open one-hour session of the full trustee board.

The board did, however, adopt a four-point agreement drafted in the chairman's council, made up of trustee officers and committee chairmen.

The agreement:

1) affirmed the mission agency's seven-point statement of basic principles authored by Parks, which has been a basis for FMB work in recent years. Trustees denied they have a worldwide "fundamentalist agenda" for foreign missions, as charged by the board's two senior executives overseeing mission work in Europe, Isam Ballenger and Keith Parker. The two announced early retirement in January because of disagreements with trustee actions and philosophy.

2) condemned the wide release by the press and others of a personal letter trustee Ron Wilson wrote to trustee chairman Bill Hancock, on which Ballenger and Parker based their view of a "fundamentalist agenda." Trustees also emphasized that Hancock never implemented the letter's recommendations.

3) noted a committee appointed in December will pursue efforts to heal relationships with European Baptists.

4) affirmed willingness of trustees "to be led by our president" (Parks) in accomplishing the board's Bold Mission Thrust goals and strengthening support for FMB staff and missionaries.

Wide speculation before the meeting centered on fears trustees might take steps to hasten Parks' departure as president.

Many trustees had expressed anger that Parks allowed Ballenger and Parker to hold a press conference at the board Jan. 7 to announce their early retirement and that he appeared at the conference.

Parks and Hancock said no discussion of Parks' tenure or role as president came up in the closed chairman's council session and no mention was made of it in the open session. Instead, Parks said, the closed session reflected the spirit of the open meeting, although the participants aired tensions and concerns about relationships that "we'll have to work on."

Other observers agreed tensions between FMB staff and trustees, which increased after trustees defunded the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, will not disappear quickly.

But trustee Paige Patterson of Texas said in an interview the chairman's council members got at "the beginning of an understanding" of working together under Parks' seven mission principles.

Parks' principles are "1) a biblical basis for all we do; 2) a primary purpose of evangelism that results in churches; 3) an incarnational approach to foreign missions, emphasizing the career missionary; 4) a conviction that every Southern Baptist is a witness and can be involved in foreign missions by giving, going and praying; 5) a commitment to the indigenous principle, which calls for churches established to be 'natural' in their environment; 6) a comprehensive approach, not ... focusing on a single issue or method but ... seeking to express the total scope of ministry; and 7) a responsibility for communicating foreign missions opportunities, challenges and results to Southern Baptists regarding their efforts in foreign missions."

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"I think it was one of the most wholesome meetings I've seen in a long time," Patterson said. "Everyone felt at perfect liberty to share what was on their heart ... and vent their spleen." The council, he said, was "absolutely unanimous" on the four points Hancock stated.

Parks, who will turn 65 in October, would not speculate on the announcement of any retirement date.

Asked why Parks' tenure was not addressed in the meeting, Patterson said, "that should be an indication" to people who listen to pre-meeting predictions of various trustees that they aren't always accurate.

Patterson said he couldn't predict if or when the tenure issue would arise again. Asked if he feels Parks is indispensable to Southern Baptist foreign missions, Patterson said that Parks "has many gifts and assets" but is not indispensable to carrying out mission work. Parks had asked to remain in his post until 1995 to lead the way in implementing his ambitious 10-point plan for global evangelization.

On the subject of the Ballenger-Parker news conference, Hancock said the two men's allegations about Wilson's letter had caused many to malign his reputation. Those who anonymously released the private letter and news reporters who distributed it, he added, "have been less than aboveboard in ethics and integrity." He strongly asserted he had not implemented even one of the letter's suggestions for changes in Southern Baptist foreign missions.

Wilson charged that only one reporter -- from Kentucky -- called him to verify his authorship of the letter. However, Baptist Press contacted Wilson about the letter after the press conference and obtained a detailed response from him to Parker's and Ballenger's charges. Wilson said later he had not meant to imply that Baptist Press and other news people had not contacted him. He said he meant only to point out that Ballenger and Parker did not verify his authorship and that the Kentucky reporter knew in advance what they would say at the press conference and what the letter said. He said he did write the letter.

Parks said he chose to convene a press conference because two senior staff members were taking the unprecedented action of retiring in protest. A press conference seemed to be the quickest and cleanest way to get out information to the many media that surely would report on the action, he stated.

The FMB president cited a policy memo he wrote in 1981 that outlines his "deep conviction that open, honest, credible reporting of news is essential for a healthy organization."

His strong view of news openness intensified during his years as a missionary in Indonesia under a communist-dominated press. The people did not believe the press "because of its agenda to put communism in (only) a good light," he said.

The FMB president said he appeared on the platform with Ballenger and Parker to affirm and praise the work they had done over the years, not to make anyone angry.

Trustee Bill Blanchard of Tennessee asked Parks why he had not rebutted Ballenger's and Parker's comments at the press conference about trustees having a worldwide fundamentalist agenda. Parks said he let the two present their own point of view without prior censorship and didn't see it "as something to argue with."

Patterson said in the interview that the press conference, because it included allegations against trustees, was not fair or balanced. "Any number of things in the press conference were said" that should have been challenged, he said, particularly the charge of the trustees having a "global agenda" to impose their theology and the "parading" of the Wilson letter to Hancock.

The trustee meeting was to continue with committee meetings Feb. 11 and a another full board session Feb. 12, followed by a concluding news conference which Hancock said would answer reporters' questions.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Sunday school enrollment growth
shows largest increase since 1976 By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
2/11/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--The largest Sunday school enrollment growth since 1976 is the result of innovative approaches to Bible study while maintaining the basics, according to the leader of Southern Baptist Sunday school work.

Statistics from the recently reported 1991 Uniform Church Letter indicate Southern Baptist Sunday school enrollment increased 174,303 for a total enrollment of 8,183,801. That represents a 2.2 percent increase over the 1990 total of 8,009,498.

Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school division at the Sunday School Board, said 1991 was the first year of a five-year Breakthrough emphasis in Sunday school.

"The Breakthrough theme's time was right. We are having a breakthrough in studying the Word of God. We are on the edge of a spiritual breakthrough with a renewed emphasis on prayer and Bible study across the convention," he said.

Piland said more churches are relying on mission Bible studies, Saturday night Bible study and schools at times and locations other than the traditional church setting to reach people who would not attend traditional Sunday morning Bible study.

Enrollment figures for persons enrolled in ongoing Bible study away from the church or at times other than Sunday morning are now included in Sunday school enrollment totals.

"There is a proliferation of multiple Sunday schools and alternate Bible study times. The more times you offer for people to come, the more you will get," Piland said.

As many as 1,500 Southern Baptist churches are offering multiple Sunday schools or ongoing Bible studies at times other than Sunday morning, he estimated.

Holding on to the base of a strong, age-graded Sunday morning Bible study "is absolutely essential. The strength is in Sunday morning, and that provides the base to branch out," Piland said.

The Sunday morning attenders provide the leadership and resources to support Bible study at other times, he said.

The growth in Sunday school enrollment represents growth across the convention, Piland noted. Only four conventions -- Michigan, Minnesota-Wisconsin, New York and Pennsylvania/South Jersey -- reported declining Sunday school enrollment. The total reported decrease for those conventions was less than 1,750.

The largest percentage growth was reported from churches in the District of Columbia Baptist Convention with a total increase of 34.5 percent.

While Sunday school enrollment in District churches has increased, Paul Clark, director of Christian education for the District convention, said the reported increase can most likely be attributed to churches that reported in 1991 but did not report in 1990.

While there are 82 churches in the convention, only 43 churches reported statistical information in 1991. However, only 34 churches provided Uniform Church Letter information the previous year.

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California churches reported a 5.1 percent increase in enrollment for a total of 204,479. Following a 3.5 percent decrease the previous year, the increase "gives us a renewed excitement," said Mike Miller, church growth division director for the California Southern Baptist Convention.

"There has been a great excitement among black churches for Sunday school. Much of our growth is in the black and language churches," he said, which constitute about 46 percent of SBC churches in California.

Illinois Baptists had the first Sunday school enrollment increase in nine years with a 4 percent increase.

Several churches in Illinois are having Sunday school at times other than Sunday morning, said Al Riddley, director of Sunday school services for the Illinois Baptist State Association.

Churches in the Chicago area reported Sunday school enrollment increases totaling more than 5,000 following a metro enrollment-training clinic there in September 1990, Riddley said.

Although the improved Breakthrough Sunday school literature was not used in churches until October 1991, after the end of the reporting period, Riddley, Miller and other state convention Sunday school leaders said training, planning and promotion for the literature improvements created an excitement that contributed to increases in Sunday school enrollment.

The Sunday school enrollment increase of more than 25,000 or 4.7 percent for Florida Baptist churches represents the state convention's largest enrollment increase since at least 1960, according to David Cunningham, director of the Sunday school department of the Florida Baptist Convention.

"I'd call that a breakthrough," Cunningham said. "We are focusing more on outreach and evangelism. Also, we can't discount God's timetable. I believe he is moving in our churches."

Texas Baptists led the convention in numerical gains in Sunday school growth with an increase of 34,749 for a new state enrollment of 1,381,231. Texas remains the only state convention with a Sunday school enrollment of more than a million.

While the Southern Baptist Convention Sunday school enrollment gain is the largest since 1976, it is the ninth in the past 12 years of reported Sunday school enrollment growth.

Enrollment declined during 1986-88, following steady increases during the "8.5 by '85" enrollment campaign. "We had two years of growth at the end of 'Challenge 10/90' (enrollment campaign), and we moved right on in to Breakthrough," Piland said.

Piland optimistically predicts Sunday school enrollment will reach 9 million by 1995 and 10 million by the year 2000.

The goal for 1995 would require increases averaging more than 200,000 for the next four years. "In the past, we haven't done that. It's reachable. It's stronger than anything we have done since 1954 when Sunday school was in its heyday," Piland said.

An annual Sunday school enrollment increase last topped 200,000 in 1955 when it increased 285,226. That increase followed the 547,361 increase of 1954. Those increases were part of the "Million More in '54" enrollment campaign which was the prototype for the more recent "8.5 by '85" and "Challenge 10/90" campaigns.

"I'm not hung up on numerical goals," Piland said. "The goal is getting people to do the reaching, and numbers will take care of themselves."

**SBC officer takes
Florida church post**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Lee Porter, registration secretary for the Southern Baptist Convention, has accepted a staff position with a Florida church.

Porter, 62, will become assistant to the pastor and administrator of St. Andrew Baptist Church in Panama City, effective March 1. Porter resigned from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board last year after 15 years and has been the bivocational pastor of Bell Road Baptist Church in Nashville for the past 10 years.

Porter was narrowly re-elected registration secretary at the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta last year following an earlier controversy over statements he made critical of SBC leadership. Earlier he had resigned from the Sunday School Board when board officials made it known they were opposed to his holding the SBC office.

The north Florida church records more than 800 in attendance, Porter said. Pastor is Randall Perry.

Porter's wife, Pat, will conclude 17 years as an employee of the Tennessee Baptist Convention where she also has been the state's registration secretary.

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**RA Racer competition set
at Indy speedway prior to SBC**

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
2/11/92

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Southern Baptist Royal Ambassadors, who run their five-ounce, pine-wood RA Racer cars by the thousands every year at church, associational and state events across the SBC, will have the "dream track" of a lifetime opened to them on Saturday, June 6.

That's when the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, home of the "greatest spectacle in motorsports," will host "M & M Race Day." It is sponsored and organized by the Brotherhood leadership of the Missouri Baptist Convention and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan and will be the first interstate RA Racer competition.

The event started out as a two-state challenge match, which arose after 11 Missouri Baptist Men from the St. Louis Metro Baptist Association built and delivered a regulation RA Racer track to Detroit for the first statewide RA Racer event in Michigan.

However, with thousands of messengers heading for the 1992 Southern Baptist Convention at Indianapolis' Hoosier Dome the following week, organizers decided to open the field to any member or leader of a Royal Ambassador, High School Baptist Young Men, Acteen or Girls in Action organization in a Southern Baptist church.

Trophies will be awarded to the first, second and third place finishers in each age-level category and to participating unit leaders.

Registration will open at 9 a.m. the day of the event, with races to begin on several regulation tracks in the infield at 10 a.m. There is a registration fee of \$3 for each car, which includes a bus tour of the "real" track. Groups are encouraged to bring their own picnic-style lunch.

RA Racer car kits, available from RA Racers, P.O. Box 67, DeSoto, TX 75115, must be used and owners must adhere to the rules provided in the kit. The price for one car kit is \$3, with volume discounts applying to two or more. Order forms may be found in the annual Brotherhood Catalog available at Baptist Book Stores or from the Brotherhood Commission, 1-800-727-6466.

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Leaders of participating units must register and pay all registration fees by April 1 to the Brotherhood Department, Missouri Baptist Convention, 400 East High St., Jefferson City, MO 65101. For more information about the event and area accommodations, call 314-635-7931, ext. 444.

The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission officially sanctioned RA Racer competitions 13 years ago as an interest activity for the Royal Ambassador program, which involves boys in grades 1-9 in missions education and missions-related activities.

"There's no denying the racer activity is a lot of fun but it does have a higher purpose," according to Jim Jones, Brotherhood director for the Michigan convention. "It helps generate interest and participation in our other activities. And because fathers and sons often work together in preparing the racer, it helps build family ties."

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Moderate Baptist leaders
to visit Swiss seminary

Baptist Press
2/11/92

ATLANTA (BP)--Moderate Baptist leaders depart for Europe Feb. 16 for a five-day mission to "shore up damaged relations with European Baptists," according to a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship news release.

Fifty people from nine states and the District of Columbia will be led by John H. Hewett, moderator of the CBF and Asheville, N.C., pastor. Fellowship leaders are expected to deliver a check for \$250,000 to Ruschlikon seminary president John David Hopper during Feb. 28 chapel service, the news release said.

The group plans to meet with John Merritt, general secretary of the European Baptist Convention; Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation; faculty and students at the International Baptist Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland; members of the International Baptist Church in Stuttgart, Germany; and individual Southern Baptist missionaries.

The U.S. Baptists also will survey capital needs at Ruschlikon "with the intention of encouraging congregational mission teams to return to the seminary to do necessary renovations and repairs." The group will return to the United States Feb. 21, officials said.

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