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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strobe, Chief, 400 North Capital St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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92-53

**Parks tells FMB staff
reasons for retirement**

By Robert O'Brien

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--R. Keith Parks told staff of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board his decision to retire as president in October was based on spiritual leadership, not political pressure.

But he added the decision, made at a retreat with 78 board trustees, did not change basic differences between him and trustees that make his continued service as president impractical.

Parks, who returned from the March 19-20 retreat in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, was greeted at a chapel meeting March 23 by several hundred mission board staff members bearing candles symbolizing appreciation for his leadership.

He told the staff his decision to retire in October -- despite a worshipful retreat atmosphere with trustees asking him to remain as president -- has confused some people.

"For a long time there has been the impression that if you can get together and pray together and have a good spiritual experience, that means you will all come out with the same conclusion," said Parks, a 38-year veteran of foreign missions and FMB president since 1980. "Although many of us had a very honest spiritual experience, that didn't change some of our basic ideas ... convictions ... and differences."

Some trustees "insist there are no basic differences (between us)," Parks said. But he noted at least five trustees told him at the end of the retreat he had done the "only honorable thing" by stepping down if he couldn't agree with them philosophically.

Interspersing his remarks with humor that eased tension and sorrow in the chapel session, Parks said his decision came out of "a strong sense of the Lord's leadership rather than in the midst of confrontation and anger." He commended trustee chairman Bill Hancock of Louisville, Ky., for his efforts to create a spiritual atmosphere at the retreat.

But he cited basic differences with trustees and said questions asked by trustees during the retreat indicated those differences would remain. He outlined three reasons discussed at the retreat that "reinforced my sense of the Lord's leadership" that October is the time to retire:

- 1) no clear trustee support for his request to remain until 1995.
- 2) differences with the trustees over the president's role.
- 3) basic philosophical differences regarding missions.

Parks gave similar reasons in a letter he and his wife, Helen Jean, have sent to all Southern Baptist foreign missionaries.

Elaborating on the second and third reasons, Parks said part of the disagreement over the president's role was his refusal to endorse the "conservative resurgence" or "new order" in the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Parks reaffirmed his belief in the Bible and his conservative theology. But he told trustees he can't endorse the conservative movement "in good conscience ... because my basic concept of the Bible is what I think Baptists have always stood for" -- to cooperate in a non-creedal manner.

The denomination is moving toward a creedal approach of imposing theological control, he said, and FMB trustees expect him to exert more theological control over staff, missionaries and overseas Baptists than he feels comfortable in exerting.

Parks said he disagrees with an approach in which theology takes first place in missions decisions over sound missiological principles. Sound missiology includes sound theology, he stressed, but theology is not the totality of missiology and other factors must be considered.

Missionaries must strip away Southern Baptist and American cultural customs "that many of us assume are Scriptural" and focus on telling the heart of the gospel message -- the birth, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he said. That does not water down belief or create an "anything goes" approach, he added. Instead, it gets overseas believers in tune with the New Testament to apply the gospel to their own culture.

The Foreign Mission Board is in danger of modifying that approach to indigenous missions by imposing "a Southern Baptist standard of theology or other matters" on groups overseas, Parks warned. "They are not Southern Baptists We have no right to require them to use the terminology or have the theological views that we have," he said.

"Many trustees strongly feel we ought to have agreement with the theological position of people we work with overseas. I hope that can be modified, but it's a very serious matter as I understand it."

Parks also noted concern about a trend toward considering individuals qualified for denominational and missionary service only if their theology and politics are "right."

"There are many people whose theology would be very conservative, even more conservative than some who are in control, but they aren't acceptable because they haven't endorsed the political activity within the denomination," he said.

Parks said he felt trustees, who issued a statement after the retreat supporting Southern Baptists' historical principles of missions, had done so honestly. But he added it will take time for them to work through their differences about what the principles are and what they mean.

Beyond philosophical and theological differences, Parks reiterated the retreat produced no clear-cut sense of trustee support for him to remain until 1995. Last August he asked to remain until then, the Foreign Mission Board's 150th year, to lay the groundwork for his 10-point vision for global evangelization.

Retirement, he said, was the only way to resolve the confusion and uncertainty surrounding his tenure and his authority as president.

The question of 1995 was discussed at the retreat, he said, "but it became apparent to me that, although the majority (of the trustees) would have said, 'Yes, we want you stay,' there was no sense of an unreserved commitment to my leadership through 1995. I heard from some, as recently as last Saturday, stating in public meetings that I'd probably get affirmed in (the retreat) but I might be expected to retire in July or in June.

"So I had a strong conviction that it would just be a continuing saga of 'Does he retire this month or next month or what about the first of the year?'"

Given the worldwide opportunities in missions and evangelism, he felt it was best to retire because "my staying would not provide the unfettered, enthusiastic moving ahead that's desperately needed right now."

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Parks also said he told trustees his authority as president has been blurred by the tendency of many trustees to get involved in administrative matters with staff and missionaries, rather than sticking to the formation of policy. That prevents the board from operating properly and indicates a lack of confidence in his leadership, he said.

If a missionary doesn't like an administrative decision he can just go to trustees to get it reviewed, Parks said. That may let trustees feel they have more control and are not "rubber stamps" but what really happens is "nobody is in control," he said. Such confusion might end, he added, if the trustees "had somebody they trusted" in charge.

Parks added, however, that he feels many trustees heard concerns he expressed in the retreat and would try to improve relationships.

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

Christians encouraged to expect,
prepare for false prophets

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
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CHICAGO (BP)--Christians should not be surprised when they encounter false prophets but Christians also should not minimize their ability to share Christ with people of other faiths, a national researcher said.

"Jesus told us to beware of false prophets who were going to come to us," Kurt Goedelman reminded participants in a Home Mission Board meeting of interfaith witness leaders.

Goedelman is founder and director of Personal Freedom Outreach, a Christian organization based in St. Louis to help people involved in alternative religions.

Goedelman noted that Jesus said false prophets would mask their message like wolves in sheep's clothing. Yet he urged conference participants to minister to cult members with a spirit of love and concern.

"Without love," Goedelman said, "We could win arguments but never win a soul for the Lord.

"Remember, the problem is not the cultists but the organization which has deceived them," Goedelman said. "Pray for the veil to be removed. Pray for our witness."

To witness to cult members, Goedelman urged Southern Baptists to take advantage of information available from the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department. He said HMB resources are "second to none."

He also encouraged Christians to be patient as they share their faith. He said it will typically take hours and hours of counseling before a member of another religious group will make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

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Home Mission Board honors two men
for interfaith witness leadership

Baptist Press
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CHICAGO (BP)--Wayne Taylor of Louisiana and Frank Rueckert of Iowa were recognized for their leadership in interfaith witness during a Home Mission Board conference in Chicago.

Taylor, associate director of special missions for the Louisiana Baptist Convention based in Alexandria, was named state coordinator of the year. Rueckert, pastor of Van Meter Baptist Church in Van Meter, Iowa, was named interfaith witness associate of the year.

Interfaith witness is the HMB program to train Southern Baptists to share their faith with members of other religions, cults and sects.

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Taylor has worked with interfaith witness since 1983 when he joined the Louisiana Baptist Convention staff. Taylor also coordinates volunteer missions, resort and leisure ministries and creative, innovative ministries for the state convention.

As an interfaith witness associate, Rueckert serves as a resource person for people seeking information. He has helped organize an interfaith witness training event this fall for Iowans interested in New Age movements and Islam.

Rueckert has been certified to lead conferences about Mormonism, the Reorganized Church of Later Day Saints, the Roman Catholic Church, the occult and New Age movements.

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New SSB computer software
aims to help small churches

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
3/25/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--With a new trustee-approved business plan under its belt, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Church Information System is "alive and well and moving on in a new direction," said Charles Wilson, assistant vice president for business.

Wilson, who temporarily is overseeing CIS as part of a renewed corporate emphasis on the church computer technology-producing department, said the first course of action in that new direction is the development of affordable and workable "technology packages" for small churches.

Beginning April 30, CIS will begin selling, "Quicken," a low-cost accounting software program designed for use in smaller-budget companies. To help churches adapt the software for their use, CIS also is developing a "how to" manual explaining applications for preparing financial statements, payroll checks and other church bookkeeping and accounting needs. Both the software and manual will be sold for less than \$100.

"Offering this software is a significant step toward getting computer technology into the smallest churches in our convention," Wilson said. "I really see this as the first product in a family of products for small churches."

While CIS will continue to offer its more sophisticated NewViews accounting software, Wilson said it is suited more for larger churches with 1,000 or more members.

In addition to reaching out to small churches, Wilson said CIS also is taking steps to improve the satisfaction level of its current customers through development of a "First Call Response" system.

Currently, an operator answers calls from CIS customers with computer problems, takes down a message and refers it to a CIS support trainer. The trainer then researches the problem and returns the call with the appropriate help. Details of problems, however, sometimes become confused in translating the message, Wilson said, so customers often end up repeating details of the problem a second time.

As part of the new system, support trainers will answer the help calls themselves and work toward providing immediate solutions for customers. In addition, all case files will be kept in a computer database, allowing trainers to track and provide solutions for recurring problems.

"This will mean our customers won't have to wait as long to get their problems solved. We hope to be able to answer their questions on the first call," CIS director Mike Overcash explained.

Overcash said CIS currently has nine support trainers to assist customers, two for churches with Xenix or multi-user computer systems and seven for churches with DOS or a single-user computer.

Although working in a limited capacity now, the "First Call Response" system is scheduled to be fully operational by June 1.

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Chance meeting leads Czech
to California Baptist College By Brenda S. Flowers

RIVERSIDE, Calif. (BP)--Walking down the streets of Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, during a three-hour visit, businessman Jim Knuppe of Hayward, Calif., handed a business card to a young Czech with whom he had chatted.

Two years later, Knuppe, a member of Hayward's Palma Ceia Baptist Church, again met the young Czech, John Kafka. This time he was in Montreal, Canada -- and Kafka was a Christian.

During the two-year separation many changes took place in Kafka's life, including the land of his birth taking on a new freedom he had never imagined.

In their initial visit in the summer of 1989, Kafka took Knuppe's offer to keep in touch and become pen pals. "I would write Jim in order to practice my English," said Kafka, now a first semester student at California Baptist College. "He would write me so I would become more familiar with English."

The fall of communism came several months after that visit. "It was a miracle of God," Kafka reflected. "The hold of communism, to which I lost my childhood, was not broken by man but by God."

In the spring of 1990, after the November 1989 fall of communism, a group of Canadians and Americans were in Bratislava teaching English as a second language. Some of the visitors used the Bible as a means to teach English and reach people for Christ.

It was through reading an English Bible for the class that Kafka became a Christian.

After a few months, Kafka had the opportunity to travel to Canada where he lived with the people who led him to Christ. He had several odd jobs including work in the lumber industry in order to earn money to travel.

Through their correspondence, Kafka and Knuppe decided to meet in Montreal. "That, too, was a miracle. I really did have the opportunity to 'see ya later' as Jim had told me back in Czechoslovakia," Kafka said.

After their meeting in Montreal, Knuppe realized Kafka's desire to continue his education. They looked at many colleges and decided on California Baptist College.

Jim and Bobbie Knuppe introduced Kafka to Cal Baptist the first day of spring classes. Within the first week in the United States, he had the opportunity to share his story with California Woman's Missionary Union leadership as they met at the college.

Kafka, a business administration major, realizes many adjustments are ahead for him.

"Everything is so new, right now I am adjusting to college, especially the Christian ethic economy based on the free enterprise system," Kafka said.

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(BP) photo available upon request from California Baptist College.

Burns joins national WMU
as preschool leader

Baptist Press
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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Kathleen "Kathy" Burns has joined the staff of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union as Mission Friends specialist.

Mission Friends is the missions organization sponsored by WMU for preschoolers in Southern Baptist churches.

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In her position, Burns will speak and conduct leadership training for Mission Friends leaders. She also will assist in planning and designing Mission Friends curriculum.

Burns previously was director of childhood ministries at First Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Prior to her position in Tuscaloosa, Burns worked for nine years in the Sunday school and church administration department of the Alabama Baptist Convention as associate in preschool and children's work.

Burns is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Constitutional reforms bring
big changes for Mexican churches By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
3/25/92

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Jorge Lee Galindo is a sign of changing religious times in Mexico.

Lee, a Mexican Baptist attorney, has begun a new legal department of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico. He's helping pastors and churches understand what recent Mexican constitutional changes mean for them.

The constitutional reforms grant legal recognition to all religious groups, something Mexicans haven't known for more than 70 years. The amendments, to be drafted into laws later this year, are among reforms begun by Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari since he took office in late 1988.

The changes also bring freedom to conduct religious services outside of churches, Lee said. Before, some Roman Catholics and Protestants circumvented the law to hold such services, but now these activities will be fully legal, according to news reports.

The amendments give clergy the right to vote but not to run for office, unless they give up their ministerial activities. Mexican clergy now will be required to pay income taxes.

The reforms also legalize parochial education. Public education in Mexico will remain secular but schools will be able to teach religion. This was happening before illegally, said Lee, but now it will be permitted by law.

"These changes are very important," said Lee, noting that they affect both Protestants and Roman Catholics. "The government is recognizing many churches in Mexico," not just the Catholic Church.

Mexico's population is about 3 percent Protestant; up to 97 percent is at least nominally Roman Catholic.

The religious reforms represent a major shift from Mexico's anti-church policies dating back more than a century. The 1857 constitution attempted to break the power of the Roman Catholic Church -- then closely aligned with wealthy landowners. It nationalized all church property and required civil marriage ceremonies.

More reforms came during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The revolutionary constitution of 1917 denied legal recognition to religious groups, banned an established religion and enforced confiscation of church property. It also prohibited parochial education and clergy participation in politics.

These restrictions triggered a violent uprising in 1920 by conservative Roman Catholics known as "Cristeros." Government soldiers quelled the bloody revolt, closing some churches and massacring priests in the process.

Some observers believe current amendments will pave the way for future diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Vatican. President Salinas received Pope John Paul II in Mexico in 1990 and visited the Vatican last summer.

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In that context, many evangelicals are concerned -- perhaps too concerned -- about how the changes will affect them, according to Mexican Baptist convention president Rolando Gutierrez. "Some are more worried about the laws than about preaching the gospel, in my opinion," said Gutierrez, a Baptist pastor in Mexico City.

A more pressing issue than constitutional changes, Gutierrez believes, is the long history of persecution evangelicals in Mexico have suffered from Roman Catholics.

"The problem is not the government changes; it's the Catholic attitude (toward evangelicals)," he said.

But the constitutional changes will significantly affect churches in business and legal matters, Lee said.

"Before, the church was an institution that did not exist for the law," said Lee. "Now with the changes, we're going to be regulated -- in the positive sense of the word -- and we will have to proceed as the law says."

Having legal status is significant to Mexicans, added Larry Gay, a Southern Baptist representative in Mexico. "For Mexicans, a title, a name is very important," said Gay, from Birmingham, Ala. "One major thing this could do for the churches is that by their having legal identity, they will feel freer to speak out louder and in a more public way."

The changes also could officially legalize the presence of foreign clergy, according to news reports. But it's not clear how the reforms will affect Southern Baptists or other foreign evangelicals working in Mexico. "The specifics are still up in the air," Gay said.

Once the laws are in place, religious groups in Mexico will be designated by the government as "religious associations" and will be able to do business and own property in the association's name, Lee said. Churches also will have to pay property taxes.

No one knows yet which entities will be given the status of "religious associations," Lee said. "It could be the whole body -- such as the (national Baptist) convention -- or it could be individual churches."

Some evangelicals worry the new freedom for parochial education may work to the advantage of Roman Catholics. "We're saying to our people (evangelicals), we have to think positive and try to build schools and teach our religion," Lee said. "But it's going to be very difficult because the Catholics are stronger here in Mexico."

In the meantime, Lee is traveling across Mexico explaining religious reforms to Baptist pastors as evangelicals await the drafting of the final laws.

"We are saying that we have to adapt to whatever the laws says instead of complaining. We want to have a good testimony," he said.