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April 6, 1992

92-59

**N.C. church approves
homosexual for ministry**

By Art Toalston

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (BP)--Members of Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church approved the licensing of a homosexual man to the ministry by a 57-42 percentage vote April 5.

The Chapel Hill church is believed to be the first Southern Baptist congregation to open the ministry to homosexuals. The vote to license John Blevins, 24, a Duke University divinity student, was taken during a Sunday night meeting open only to church members.

The church adopted a seven-paragraph statement that concluded: "The Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, when it calls persons to provide pastoral leadership and when it considers requests of members for licensure or ordination to the Christian ministry, shall disregard the sexual orientation of those under consideration. It shall expect that, while all humans are weak and prone to sinfulness, members and ordained leaders alike will strive for behavior which conforms to the Gospel of Love."

Reaction to Binkley's vote may come April 7 when the executive committee of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina meets at Wake Forest University.

Top leaders of the state convention drafted a recommendation in March to disqualify churches publicly approving homosexuality and refuse their funds. The recommendation is to be presented during the May 19 meeting of the convention's general board, which acts in behalf of the convention between its annual meetings.

In February, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee initiated efforts to change the SBC constitution and bylaws to bar any church "affirming, approving or endorsing in any way the active practice of homosexuality," according to one proposal targeting Binkley and Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, which has approved a marriage-like ceremony for two homosexual men.

The Executive Committee will meet prior to the SBC's June 9-11 meeting in Indianapolis to formulate any specific proposals to be presented to messengers representing Southern Baptist churches across the country. The committee also adopted a resolution in February stating, "Unrepentant homosexuality is repeatedly condemned in Scripture."

Binkley Memorial is not a member of the Chapel Hill area Pace Baptist Association.

Binkley "has been committed in its history to inclusiveness," Linda Jordan, the church's pastor since May 1990, told Baptist Press, "and so this is not as foreign as it may look." The church was heavily involved in the civil rights movement, she said, and has been part of "the struggle for women to hold places of leadership in the church" and has adopted sexually inclusive language in its worship.

In its seven-paragraph statement, Binkley noted: "Jesus said: 'Come unto me, all who are weak and heavy-laden, and I will refresh you.' As a community of Christians, we recognize that we are all sinners. We welcome as members of this church all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, regardless of sexual orientation."

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Noting that all people seek "love, acceptance and support of others," the church also stated: "As a majority group, heterosexuals have found many different ways of gaining acceptance. As a minority group, homosexuals have been subjected to a wide range of discrimination, harassment, misunderstanding, intimidation and violence. These reactions by heterosexuals are clearly contrary to the commandment to 'love your neighbor as yourself.' Moreover, they greatly restrict the ability of lesbians and gay men to form the life-affirming relationships that we all desire."

The congregation added its endorsement of "allowing homosexual men and women to pledge their faithfulness to God and to a same-sex partner within a loving, faithful and lifelong relationship."

Binkley's deacons voted in February to recommend Blevins be licensed to the gospel ministry. "John is a member of Binkley Church and has openly acknowledged his homosexuality," the deacons told the congregation. In March the deacons listed five reasons for making such a recommendation and seven reasons against.

Reasons listed in favor of licensure were:

-- "We believe that John has been called by God to the Christian ministry. He is a qualified candidate for the ministry by the accepted educational standards. Licensure simply recognizes John's qualifications and call, and our congregation's support of his pilgrimage to ministry.

-- "Binkley Church has long accepted homosexual persons into full membership and church life. Once a person is baptized, that person is a full member of the community of faith. There should be no restrictions on that person's service to the community.

-- "The scriptural testimony on homosexuality condemns abusive and/or exploitative sexual behavior.. Jesus did not speak to the issue of homosexuality. The overall biblical message is one of love.

-- "Christian faith compels us to examine church tradition in the light of new evidence. The present state of knowledge and insight can no longer sufficiently support the unqualified condemnation of all homosexual practice.

-- "Homosexuality can be practiced within an intimate relationship which expresses the love, respect, mutuality and commitment possible in a heterosexual relationship. When practice in this way, homosexuality can be life-affirming and harms neither individuals nor the community."

Reasons listed by the deacons against licensure included:

-- "The Scriptures speak clearly to the point that homosexual behavior is sinful. The creation story, biblical teaching about marriage, and specific admonitions against homosexuality support this position. Specific Scripture references include Genesis 1-2, Romans 1, and 1 Corinthians 6:9.

-- "A practicing homosexual is an inappropriate role model as a minister.

-- "While we celebrate the inclusive nature of our congregation, being inclusive does not require approval of sinful behavior. In the same way, moral disapproval cannot be equated with having a lack of love, acceptance, or regard for civil rights and social justice.

-- "The traditional teaching of the Christian Church for 2,000 years opposes the practice of homosexuality. There is not sufficient evidence to abandon this position."

**BWA churches challenged
to start new congregations**

SWANWICK, England (BP)--Each of the 141,667 Baptist churches in the 200-plus countries represented in the Baptist World Alliance have been invited to start or help start another church by the year 2000 "so that more and more people gain the opportunity of hearing the Good News of God in Jesus Christ."

The challenge to establish new churches, called the "Derbyshire Declaration," was issued by 250 Baptists from 45 nations at the March 23-27 "Baptist International Conference on Establishing New Churches" convened by BWA's evangelism and education division.

"We believe," the delegates said, "that a powerful means for growth at the disposal of the Christian church and a most effective means to fulfill the Great Commission is the establishing of new congregations."

Pledging their personal recommitment to evangelism through new church starts, delegates asked Baptist leaders and pastors to involve lay people in planting new churches "that would enable the character and teaching of Jesus Christ to become incarnate within particular communities."

"This is a great statement and I endorse it," said Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Lewis led one of the three Bible studies at the conference.

The call to establish new churches concluded a conference in which, through statistical evidence and global personal testimony, the value of new church starts was emphasized. It was also a response to the challenge of Tony Cupit, BWA director for evangelism and education who, in the opening Monday evening session, said he wanted the conference "to make an impact in the world for Jesus Christ by planting new churches."

The conference was the largest conference on evangelism held by the BWA.

"More than ever before, Baptist churches throughout the world are establishing new congregations," Cupit said. "The Holy Spirit is the inspiration and motivation for this unprecedented movement."

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**Inerrancy requirement proposed
for Romanian Baptist seminaries**

Baptist Press
4/6/92

By Mike Creswell & Stanley Crabb

BUCHAREST, Romania (BP)--A proposal to require teachers to accept the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy or be fired has been rejected by the president and a majority of the faculty of the Baptist Theological Institute in Bucharest, Romania.

The proposal, presented by Romanian pastor Josef Ton, asks the Romanian Baptist Union's general council to require professors teaching at both the Bucharest institute and the Baptist Bible Institute in Oradea to agree with the inerrancy statement or be fired.

Ton heads the Oradea school, which is owned and operated by Second Baptist Church in Oradea, where he is pastor. He teaches at both schools and is chairman of the union's committee on education. The Bucharest school is operated by the Romanian Baptist Union, but the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board owns the property.

Ton asked Vasile Talpos, president of the Baptist Theological Institute in Bucharest, to join him in signing the proposal. It is now circulating among Romanian Baptists bearing the typed names of both men.

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But Talpos has refused to sign it. He and most of the seven faculty members at the Bucharest school have rejected Ton's proposal in principle although it has not been presented officially to the faculties of the two schools. . . At least one of seven teachers at the Oradea school -- Otniel Bunaciu -- also has refused to sign.

The three Southern Baptist missionary teachers at the Bucharest school are Charles "T" Thomas, Bill Richardson and Gerald Milligan.

Thomas, who has resigned effective May 1 and will leave Romania in late April, said he would refuse to sign the statement. Instead, he signed the Romanian Baptist confession of faith and nailed it to his classroom door.

Richardson told Baptist Press the matter should be worked out among Romanians. "If it should be presented officially, I'll consider it at that time," he said.

Milligan told European Baptist Press Service, "I would really have to look at (it) and pray a long time before I would sign any creedal statement, especially the Chicago statement, which I haven't seen as yet."

In recent months Ton has criticized European Baptists and moderate Southern Baptists as liberals. He sent a letter to Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees congratulating them for defunding the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, last fall. Thomas resigned in protest of the defunding.

Talpos told European Baptist Press Service he does not intend to back Ton's proposal because he and others who teach at the school believe the present Romanian Baptist confession of faith is adequate. He said any changes in that should be made only by Romanian Baptists in their next general congress in 1995.

But one Romanian Baptist leader familiar with the situation predicted Ton will persist in seeking approval for his proposal with the union's general council, which has some 50 members. The leader, who requested anonymity, does not believe Ton's effort will succeed but he predicted the issue could become divisive within the union.

The Chicago statement is a detailed, 19-article document compiled in October 1978 during a three-day international conference on biblical inerrancy in Chicago. Almost 300 pastors, teachers and laymen from a wide range of denominations were present to adopt the statement.

It defines Scripture as "wholly and verbally God-given" and holds that the Bible's authority is "inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own." Despite the statement's position on inerrancy, its preface says the writers did not intend that it be given "creedal weight."

In an interview with Baptist Press, Ton said he feels no teacher in Romania has taught anything contrary to the Romanian confession of faith and that they are all "inerrantists."

"The only discussion is whether, besides our statement of faith, we need another statement," he said.

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy would be an "explanation" of the present Romanian Baptist confession of faith which already affirms the Bible is "without mistake," Ton wrote in his proposal. The Romanian statement affirms the Bible as "the unmistakable source of the awareness of God."

Otniel Bunaciu, who teaches at both Romanian schools, rejected Ton's proposal outright, saying neither he nor his father, Ion Bunaciu, would sign the statement.

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The younger Bunaciu teaches systematic theology and church history at the Bucharest school and church history at the Oradea school. He also heads the Bucharest Baptist Association's education committee. His father teaches at the Bucharest school, was its president for some 15 years and wrote the textbook on systematic theology used there.

Ton's proposal, the younger Bunaciu said, would amount to changing the union's statement of faith and any changes should be made by the whole union. A requirement involving the Chicago statement would not be an explanation, he said, but a "reinterpretation."

"Practically, I don't see a need for it. We don't have people in our country which the document mentions. We are just simple Bible believers," Bunaciu said. Debate about the Bible is foreign to Romanian Baptists, he said. "Our denomination does not belong in that landscape, that context."

Other problems with Ton's suggestion, he said, are that the word "inerrancy" does not even exist in the Romanian language and the group that adopted the Chicago statement was not completely Baptist.

"This (the Romanian document) is a Baptist confession of faith. If we're thinking of changing it, let's change it in a Baptist way," Bunaciu said. Instead, he understands Ton's proposal to have "larger implications" in terms of denominational politics. "That's a danger from our point of view. We don't have liberals in Romania. I'm not aware of any. Why create problems? Romanian Baptists don't know what a liberal is -- we just don't have them."

The threatened firing of teachers refusing to sign the statement is not helpful, he added. "This is not an expression of Christian charity by any means," he said.

In the Baptist Press interview, Ton declined to say what he would do about Talpos' refusal to back his proposal, since he had not heard from Talpos.

He also declined to say whether the teachers at his school in Oradea -- including Otniel Bunaciu -- have signed the Chicago statement. "We're in the process of defining our position in Romania," he said, and so they would need some time to make a decision.

Even if teachers refuse to sign the Chicago statement, they will still emphasize they are inerrantists, Ton said. "If they don't sign it I guess they feel they interpret it as a political act, just as the liberal side in the Southern Baptist Convention will say the issue is not a theological one, it's a political one. That's the way they want to hide but actually the issue is their attitude towards the Bible."

Ton described the Chicago statement as an "academic explanation" of what one means by saying the Bible is without error. "Our statement of faith says that we believe the Bible is without error but what do we mean when we teach in the seminary?" he said. "You have to teach different ideas about different schools of thought. We have to have this kind of academic explanation, an elaboration of the idea that the Bible is without error."

"My only concern is that we have it well-defined academically for the future, also to define whom we accept to come from abroad and teach in our schools," Ton said. "We don't care to pursue anybody in our midst. We don't have an internal fight on this issue, so we don't argue with anybody here."

In his printed proposal on inerrancy, Ton stated, "Some theology professors affirm that only if they receive the freedom to question the Bible do they have academic freedom and can be accepted in the academical (sic) world. In the name of this freedom they sow in the minds of their students the doubt in the Bible and produce pastors who are not believing in the whole Bible, destroy the faith in the Bible in the churches, dampen their enthusiasm and kill their life. In this way many of the Baptist churches in western Europe have been emptied.

"Liberal theologians, who are tolerated in many Baptist denominations abroad, affirm that one can take the freedom not to believe parts of the Bible, such as: the creation of the world in six days, the wonders which Moses did in Egypt, Jesus's birth from a virgin, the wonders of Jesus, etc., etc. It is true that some of these (theologians) are more 'moderate,' questioning only some parts of the Bible. And others go so far as to deny the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the existence of life after death and the bodily return of the Lord on the earth," Ton wrote in his proposal.

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House, monastery, school -- Nevada
congregations meet where they can

By Terri Lackey

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4/6/92

MINDEN, Nev. (BP)--Pastor Bob Anderson slides open the closet doors in the master bathroom of his ranch home and points out the storage area for the nursery equipment.

That is the most appropriate place to store it, he says, since the preschoolers of Sierra View Baptist Church meet in his master bathroom.

Every square inch of space in Anderson's Minden, Nev., home doubles as a church facility. Even the church van and a huge, yellow-orange school bus parked beside the house are used as classrooms. Anderson grabs a visitor by the arm for a tour to prove it.

The adults meet in his office and outside on an upstairs balcony when the weather is right. Third- and fourth-graders meet in the one guest bedroom; fifth- and sixth-graders meet in the master bedroom; and able-bodied youth meet in the van and bus.

"In the winter, we have to get out there and warm the vans up two-and-a-half hours before church just so they'll be warm enough for the kids to meet," Anderson declares.

A pastor's class meets in a tiny utility room at the back of the house. They cram in there with the washer, dryer and the dog's 40-pound bag of food.

Worship is held upstairs. When Mary and Bob Anderson designed their home, they did so thinking a church would meet there. What a normal family would probably call a recreation room, the Andersons consider their sanctuary. With 135 members, it sometimes gets so crowded, Anderson said, the people stand lining the walls, sit on the stairway, and bunch two to a chair.

Church functions are held almost every night of the week at the Anderson home. When the Andersons are not included, they just leave. For example "Little Dudes" meet on Monday nights, youth choir practice on Tuesdays; prayer meeting on Wednesdays; adult Bible study on Thursdays; youth Bible study on Saturdays; and the church's Spanish mission meets on Sunday nights. Sierra View members convene in someone else's home on Sunday nights.

Anderson, 67, said the inconvenience doesn't bother him. He has done this type of thing before. In the ministry for 45 years, Anderson said he's also started churches in Hawaii and California.

"You do what you have to do," he said. "We came here to build a church and there's no other way to do it until we get it built."

Don Ledbetter, director of evangelism for the Nevada Baptist Convention, said Southern Baptist churches in the state "meet wherever they can find to meet."

Nevada has only 140 Southern Baptist churches and missions and many of those are young, he said. "This is a place where people are trying to start new churches. Because of the high price of land and building, new congregations just meet where they can."

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A discrimination suit literally won East Sparks Neighborhood Church seats in Reed High School on Sunday mornings. The issue of separation of church-state lost its oomph when a Nevada judge ruled in December that not allowing churches to meet in school buildings is discrimination.

Other organizations had always been allowed to meet on school properties but churches were barred from meeting there until "a conservative Baptist church sued the state on the issue," East Sparks pastor Lloyd Byers said.

The East Sparks Neighborhood Church began in March paying for two hours every Sunday to meet at Reed High School in the Sparks area of Reno, Nev. During those hours, they set up about 150 chairs, arrange classrooms and haul in Sunday school literature, Baptist hymnals, an industrial-sized coffee pot and a tray of doughnuts. They hold Sunday school classes for all ages. They gather for worship. And then they break it all down again to meet a deadline of removing everything, including a sign stuck in the ground, by 1 p.m.

Byers, former pastor of West Main Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., said he feels fortunate to meet in the high school. East Sparks has relocated about five times since he and his family "started it from scratch" in 1989.

They first met in the reception room of a doctor's office but the city banned its use for lack of a permit. They then moved to a retirement home. Again the city intervened; the area was not zoned for a church.

They next moved to the ballroom of a local hotel. But the facility became uncomfortable and it wasn't really located in the Sparks area, Byers said.

From the hotel, the church moved into La Petite Day Care Center. To meet there, Byers said, they had to break down the itty-bitty facilities, including play stoves, refrigerators and chairs, and reconstruct it all when worship was over.

"We had to have about 10-20 people to help us do all that," Byers said.

Now, youth study WordData Sunday school materials in the home economics room; adults study Bible Book Series curriculum in the cafeteria; the nursery is in the teacher's lounge; and children's classes are squashed in hallways throughout the high school.

Byers said his 105 members, who meet in homes during the week, take it all in stride. Until they secure land to build a church, Byers hopes they can continue meeting in the school. The city recently denied the church rights to purchase a repossessed piece of property. When their sponsoring church, First Baptist of Louisville, Ky., heard the news, they sent a video tape of encouragement.

"Until we can build our own church, this will be it for a while," Byers said of the high school meeting place.

Marcus Ely, pastor of Lake Meade Baptist Church in Overton, Nev., stays busy on Sundays -- as does his wife, Kathy.

Ely wakes early on the Sabbath and drives 25 miles south to Echo Bay Resort campground where he conducts services for campers who are expected to "bring their own chairs."

He then drives the 25 miles back to Overton, making it just in time to conduct 9:45 a.m. Sunday school classes at his church and 11 a.m. worship. After a quick lunch, the Elys, their two children and two Sunday school teachers drive the 25 miles back to the campground to meet at 2:30 p.m. in a recreation center to hold Sunday school classes for the children of Echo Bay Resort employees.

Then it's back to Overton for supper and Sunday night church.

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For Kathy Ely, the day is draining "but worth it." Thirty-three children are enrolled in the resort Sunday school class; many have never seen the inside of a sanctuary, she said.

"The church we hold for these children at the resort is the only church they might ever get," said Ely, who with her husband hails from Texas. "We've seen some changes in the children since we started these Sunday school classes about a year ago."

Several other Nevada churches must conduct services in unusual places. Among those are Donner Springs Community Church and Mt. Charleston Baptist Church.

Donner Springs uses a gymnasium owned and located behind a Catholic monastery about a mile from one of Reno's largest casinos.

"People come here who have been through the mills of life," bivocational pastor Ron Castill said of the church's 30 or so members.

Mt. Charleston Baptist Church, located about 35 miles northwest of Las Vegas in a mountain resort area, meets in two single-wide trailers located beside a riding stable. The congregation constantly contends with the persistent smell of horses and huge, buzzing flies, its pastor Earl Greene says.

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

Grand Canyon faculty, staff
take voluntary salary cuts

By Art Toalston

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PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--Faculty and staff members of Grand Canyon University have taken voluntary pay cuts to move the 1,750-student institution to a cash-based budget.

"We hope this is the only time this will have to occur," said Grand Canyon Provost Martha Taylor Thomas. The mid-year budget adjustment will allow Grand Canyon to avoid a deficit this year and, with a cash-based budget in the future as recommended by its banks, the university will be able to use gifts from donors to build endowment and meet needs in addition to the operating budget, Thomas said.

A 100-student decline in enrollment was part of the anticipated deficit but Thomas noted completed applications for fall enrollment are up by more than 100 over last year.

Thomas said faculty and staff had "100 percent participation in spirit" in salary reductions that were part of Grand Canyon's overall budget revision.

Cuts were implemented on a salary-range basis: up to \$15,000, 1 percent reduction; \$15,000-\$25,000, 3 percent; \$25,000-\$40,000, 6 percent; above \$40,000, 10 percent. Various methods were used in the faculty reductions because of differences in wording among their contracts, Thomas said.

Faculty and staff, in individual meetings, were given "100 percent of the information" about how much their take-home pay would be affected, Thomas explained. "The quality of commitment was absolutely phenomenal," she said, to a budgeting shift that was both "very tough" yet "very positive" for the university. "The Holy Spirit was present, alive, (with) people saying, 'Whatever it takes.'"

The budget adjustments will strengthen the 42-year-old university's fiscal position so that its mission will be preserved, along with the quality of its academic program and environment for students, Thomas said. Yet the adjustments remain sensitive to faculty and staff in "their ability in a recession to make it," she said.

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Bolstering Grand Canyon's long-range fiscal outlook, Thomas said, are eight gifts valued at \$1 million or more received since the university instituted a new "Founders" donor program three years ago.

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