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**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 Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

January 29, 1993

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**NASHVILLE --** Editors' Note.

**VIRGINIA --** Candidate declines FMB president nomination; search continues.

**NASHVILLE --** Denominational Relations group violates law, says SBC counsel.

**HOUSTON --** While teaching Psalm 103, former pastor's voice is healed.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Baptist Press will carry Feb. 1 reaction to President Clinton's Jan. 29 announcement regarding homosexuals in the military. Effective immediately, according to Clinton's order Jan. 29, questions can no longer be posed to recruits about their sexuality. And the military is not to pursue dismissal charges against alleged homosexuals during an interim period through July 15. On July 15, Secretary of Defense Les Aspen is to present to Clinton a draft of a presidential order ending the ban on homosexuals in the military. Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, issued this comment Jan. 29: "Our commander in chief is pursuing a policy which is dictated by the homosexual political lobby and is opposed by the overwhelming majority of military personnel. There are good, sound reasons of military discipline, good order and morale for keeping the time-honored policy in place until now. It is disturbing that the president would so casually disregard these reasons and years of military policy."

**Candidate declines FMB president nomination; search continues**

**Baptist Press  
1/29/93**

**By Robert O'Brien & Herb Hollinger**

**DALLAS (BP)--**The trustee committee searching for a president for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board said Jan. 29 it had "narrowed its interest to a single candidate" but that the candidate had not accepted the nomination.

Committee chairman Joel Gregory declined comment on whether that candidate was Oklahoma pastor Tom Elliff, a name widely reported in news media.

But Elliff told Baptist Press Jan. 29 he talked to the committee Jan. 27 and gave them his decision not to accept the position.

Elliff said the committee and he and his wife had prayed extensively and "had a desperate desire to hear God, not man."

Gregory said he was bound by a covenant between committee members to go no further than to say the committee had narrowed the list to one man in its nine-month search and he had decided not to accept.

A search committee statement, released Jan. 29, said: "The committee recently narrowed its interest to a single candidate, only to find with prayer an apparent mutual and bilateral determination by the candidate and the committee that the will and timing of God rested in another direction."

Gregory categorically denied a rumor the 15-member committee might resign.

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He said the committee, which has met 13 times and held five teleconferences since April 8, has invested a lot of effort in the search and will continue to seek a candidate.

The search committee statement said: "We intend to follow the prayerful and deliberate process already under way to find God's person for leadership. We covet the prayers of Southern Baptists everywhere in the continuation of this process."

The statement said the committee will make no recommendation on a candidate at the Feb. 8-10 meeting of Foreign Mission Board trustees in Richmond, as many had anticipated. Gregory declined to speculate on when a candidate will be presented to the trustees. The board's other meetings for 1993 are April 19-21 in Columbus, Ohio, and June 28-30, Aug. 16-18, Oct. 11-13 and Dec. 6-8, all in Richmond.

By trustee action any candidate elected to succeed R. Keith Parks as Foreign Mission Board president must receive a 75 percent vote of the trustees.

Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., told Baptist Press he and his wife "haven't had any peace that we should continue in this process."

He said he told the committee last fall to remove his name from the list but agreed to meet with the committee and to go through a medical evaluation at the Cooper Clinic in Dallas at the committee's request.

"The search committee really impressed me, especially in the last couple of weeks, that they are far and above any political agenda," Elliff said in apparent reference to denominational political and theological controversy. "They are untouched by this issue."

Referring to news reports circulating about its process to seek a candidate, the search committee statement said:

"On two occasions the press has indicated that the committee was close to closure when there was no indication from the committee itself that such was the case."

The statement said the committee interviewed four nominees "on two occasions each." It said it had 74 total nominees and received 289 letters. It said the nominees were ranked into four tiers, with 16 nominees in the top two tiers.

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Full statement of the Search Committee seeking a president for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

January 29, 1992

The Presidential Search Committee of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention continues its search for a new leader. The committee has met thirteen times since April 8, 1992. There have been seventy-four nominees with some 289 letters of support or information for the nominees.

Those nominated have been ranked into four tiers or levels of interest. The top two tiers contain sixteen nominees. Tier One reflects those nominees under immediate and serious consideration. Tier Two relates to those under secondary yet serious consideration. Four nominees have been interviewed on two occasions each.

On two occasions the press has indicated that the committee was close to closure when there was no indication from the committee itself that such was the case. The committee recently narrowed its interest to a single candidate, only to find with prayer an apparent mutual and bilateral determination by the candidate and the committee that the will and timing of God rested in another direction.

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The Search Committee expects to make no recommendation in the February 8-10 meeting of the Board. We intend to follow the prayerful and deliberate process already underway to find God's person for leadership. We covet the prayers of Southern Baptists everywhere in the continuation of this process.

Joel C. Gregory  
Chairman

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Denominational Relations group  
violates law, says SBC counsel By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
1/29/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--A Tennessee-based "Southern Baptist Denominational Relations Information, Inc." is not affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and has been asked to cease using the name "Southern Baptist," according to SBC legal counsel.

In a Jan. 8 letter, James P. Guenther, Nashville attorney and SBC legal counsel, advised the denominational relations group that its name "implies that your Tennessee nonprofit corporation is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, a religious organization."

Guenther said that violates Tennessee law because the SBC has not certified in writing any fact of affiliation as the statute requires.

The risk that the SBC could be charged with knowingly permitting the use of its name and thereby assuming responsibility in "wrongs and debts" relating to the denominational relations group also was cited by Guenther.

"We ask you to immediately confirm to us that you will cease the use of this name and that you will promptly either amend your articles of incorporation to change the name or dissolve the corporation," Guenther said in the letter made available to Baptist Press.

However, the letter was returned because the address of the corporation, an office building in Knoxville, is not actually the corporation's principal office but rather the office of the C.T. Corporation, a national company which acts as a registered agent for legal purposes.

The denominational relations group was chartered April 3, 1992, as a nonprofit (but not religious nonprofit) corporation. No name of an officer or director is required to appear on the document and none appears.

However, in an October news conference in Dallas, Randall H. Fields, a San Antonio, Texas, attorney was identified as the leader of the denominational relations group. John Baugh, a retired corporate executive from Houston, also has been identified with the corporation.

Contacted at his law office, Fields said he was unaware of the letter from Guenther. However, he added, it was "utterly amazing" that the SBC could claim confusion in the minds of the public with the use of the term Southern Baptist because there are more than 30,000 churches in the nation with that same name.

"It seems to be an attempt to appropriate the name (Southern Baptist) and, once and for all, to establish a hierarchy in Southern Baptist life," Fields said. That would confirm, he said, what many have suspected would happen.

Fields, a corporation director, could not recall who the officers of the corporation are but said he would contact the other members of the board of directors about the matter. Before any formal response could be made a thorough research of the Tennessee law will be made, he said.

"The purpose of the corporation is to inform the Baptist public," Fields said. "The SBC Executive Committee must have asked Guenther to do this and they must be scared to death to have Baptists informed."

Baptist Press was unable to reach Baugh at his Houston home.

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Guenther said the denominational relations' group's existence as a Tennessee corporation heightens the chance of the public and SBC constituency being misled into thinking the group is affiliated with the SBC. Tennessee is the home of nine of the SBC's 19 entities and where the SBC building is located.

A copy of the letter was sent to the Tennessee Secretary of State as a matter of public record and also if that office's assistance might be required in the future. However, Guenther's letter did not specify what action the SBC would take if the denominational relations group did not act on the request.

The SBC holds a trademark on its symbol and Guenther said the name is not in the "public domain."

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While teaching on Psalm 103,  
former pastor's voice is healed      By Toby Druin

Baptist Press  
1/29/93

HOUSTON (BP)--Duane Miller welcomed an old friend Sunday morning, Jan. 17. He got his voice back.

After three years of dealing with a throat-wrenching, laryngitis-like ailment that had forced him to leave a pastorate, Miller's voice returned to normal as he taught a Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Houston. The event was recorded on audio tape.

Equipped with a special microphone, Miller was teaching a class of 200 people and was reading from Psalms 103 in the New International Version of the Bible: "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives my sins and heals all my diseases ... "

He had been talking about two extremes in current belief systems in commenting on Psalms 103: First, that extreme dispensationalists believe miracles ceased with the close of the New Testament and will never happen again and, on the other side, that some people believe everybody should be healed because Christ died on the cross and healing was in his atonement.

"I had said that on the one side there is the group that believes God always heals miraculously and on the other is the group that says it never happens. But what you have to realize is that puts God in a box, I said, and he won't be put in a box.

"I told them that what you have to do with divine healing is just stand back and say, 'I know God does that from time to time, and I can't tell you why. I don't understand why some are healed and some aren't and leave it there and say that is in the Lord's wisdom; so be it.'"

"I had just finished saying that and started to read the next line of the Psalm: 'He redeems my life from the pit ... '

"And my voice changed.

"I heard the first word and felt in my throat that what I had been feeling was gone. There was none of the feeling there that I had had for three years.

"I would love to tell you I knew exactly what it was ... and that I expected God to do it and wasn't surprised. But it would be a lie. It scared me to death.

"I stopped, startled, and then said two or three more words, thinking, 'Am I hearing what I think I hear?'"

The class realized what was happening, too, Miller said, and nobody seemed to know what to do.

"I said to them that I didn't understand what was going on, but that God was doing something.

"I tried to get back to the lesson, but I couldn't and nobody cared. People began to applaud. Everybody was weeping. There were about 200 in the class and there were no dry eyes. Somebody began to sing the doxology. Someone else said we needed to get down on our knees because we had witnessed the power of God. We just thanked the Lord for what he had done and walked out of the church."

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Miller lost his voice while preaching at First Baptist Church in Brenham, Texas, where he was pastor, on Jan. 15, 1990. He had the flu and a sore throat, he said, but had to preach twice on Sunday morning and again that night.

After preaching and singing at the first morning service, his voice was almost gone. By that night he could hardly speak and just told the people to go home and pray for him.

He got over the flu, but his voice was still affected. At first, Miller thought it was just because of the strain he had put on it when he was sick, but it got no better. He was told to take a six-month leave of absence. Finally the doctors told him the flu virus had gotten through the myelin sheath to his vocal cords and that he should get used to his condition -- that if he were going to recover he would have done so in 60 to 90 days.

Voice therapy didn't help, and in the fall of 1990 he resigned his pastorate and returned to Houston.

Early last year, equipped with the special microphone, he began to teach the class at First Baptist in Houston. His throat would be so sore after teaching that he could hardly eat or drink until Tuesday night, he said, "but that one hour of the week gave me fulfillment." His wife, Joylene, encouraged and helped him, he said.

The Millers have an Assembly of God background. Her father is an executive with the Assemblies foreign missions organization, and Miller's grandfather was one of the church's founders, Ezra Miller.

Duane left the church in the 1970s, however, because of disagreement with some key Assemblies theology -- speaking in tongues and divine healing. He had served three Assemblies churches as pastor when he severed relationships with the denomination.

His wife had grown up in Tanzania and knew Hal Boone, then a Southern Baptist missionary there, and his son, Browning, who invited them to come to First Baptist in Houston and meet Pastor John Bisagno.

"I just needed a place to sit," Miller said, "and Dr. Bisagno let us do that."

But soon Bisagno found something for him to do. He became a part-time young adults director, taught a Sunday school class and did many other jobs. "Dr. Bisagno told me once, 'Your job description is putty -- if there is a hole, fill it,'" Miller said.

In late 1986, he accepted the pastorate of First Baptist of Brenham and served there until the voice problem forced him to step down.

That Jan. 15, 1990, morning when it happened, he said, he had sung a song, "Jesus, Just the Mention of Your Name." The Sunday after he got his voice back the first thing he did was sing it again.

"Singing was always a part of my life," he said. "When I couldn't sing it almost killed me. I said I wanted to pick up where I had left off."

He doesn't know why he had the voice problem, he said, but he told his class the fact that he got over it three years to the Sunday after it happened is evidence of how detailed God is.

"The Bible Book Series runs on a seven-year cycle and the writing of this particular material, which had been changed in our church from Jan. 3 to Jan. 17, had been written at least a year and a half ago," he said, "and had to be scheduled in 1986.

"What this means is that before this (throat problem) ever was, God already had the end of it. It was already over before it even started. Now do you understand what it means when it says Jesus was the Lamb slain before the foundations of the world?"

Miller has begun to receive requests to share his story with other congregations.

"I don't know where this will lead from here," he said. "I just want to be used, and I don't care how or where."

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