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Masons responding to
Baptist investigation

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
2/1/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--From letter writing campaigns and special meetings to a call to attend the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston, Masons are defending their lodge membership and denying any conflict with Christian doctrine.

"We are simply trying to set the record straight," said John Boettjer, managing editor of The Scottish Rite Journal, which expanded and dedicated its February issue to the topic of Freemasonry and religion.

Masonic response comes as Southern Baptists await a study on Freemasonry by the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

Meanwhile, Freemasonry critic Larry Holly said he will publish a second book on the subject to be available at this year's convention. Holly, a Beaumont, Texas, physician who initiated the call for a study of Masonry, mailed his first book to several thousand Baptists prior to the SBC 1991 meeting in Indianapolis.

Holly said his second book also will be mailed to HMB trustees before they vote at their March meeting on whether to accept the study by the board's interfaith witness department and send it to the convention for consideration. Holly contends that a sound study of Freemasonry will find it to be occultic and incompatible with Christian doctrine.

The HMB study is similar to those by other Christian denominations that have raised such questions as whether Masonry teaches salvation can be achieved through good works.

Masons counter that critics misquote Masonic writings, use outdated material or elevate one Mason's beliefs to the level of doctrine. Freemasonry encourages church involvement, they say, and it simply refuses to allow religious differences to prevent good men from becoming better through civic and charity projects.

"Even a casual perusal of these pages should convince any person open to reason that Freemasonry is not only compatible with religion but also confirms and complements religious faith and church participation," wrote C. Fred Kleinknecht, sovereign grand commander of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, in the Journal.

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The Journal, which has a circulation of 550,000, features essays and letters by Southern Baptist pastors and laymen, as well as others such as Guideposts publisher Norman Vincent Peale.

Its cover features a photo of Baylor University as well as photos of Baylor President Herbert Reynolds and President Emeritus Abner McCall. The issue contains articles by both men.

Though not a Mason, James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, wrote that Masons are to be credited with aiding the spread of the gospel because of their stand for religious tolerance.

"Ask anyone who knows about Baptist beginnings in Brazil," he wrote. "The Gospel could not have been preached, the Bible not distributed, and missionaries could not have stayed in many instances without the courageous intervention of Masons who risked all for the free expression of all religious ideas."

Essays also note that George W. Truett, former pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, was a Mason, as is U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina.

Holly said the reaction is not surprising. "Anyone could expect that the Masons, who are very powerful and very wealthy, were not going to roll over and play dead."

He said Southern Baptist Masons who defend their lodge are "ignorant to the true nature and spirit of Freemasonry. I know these men are not involved in some black conspiracy against Christ and his church, but it's amazing how they can be ignorant of the nature of what they are involved in. It's pure cultism."

Officials with the southern jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry have mailed about 2,800 copies of the journal to Southern Baptist leaders, Boettjer said.

Also in the journal, two Baptist laymen call for Baptist Masons to attend the annual SBC meeting in Houston, June 14-17 as messengers. The grand master of the Oklahoma lodge also wrote a letter encouraging Baptist Masons in Oklahoma to consider becoming messengers.

Meanwhile, some Masonic lodges have held special meetings on the subject of the study, Boettjer said. Masons also have written letters to Southern Baptist leaders, stating they are Christians and see no conflict between their church and lodge.

Mark Coppenger, SBC vice president for convention relations, said he has received about 250 letters, half of which are from Southern Baptists.

The Home Mission Board's report will be reviewed in early February by the HMB trustee administrative committee before being mailed to the full board prior to the March meeting, said HMB President Larry Lewis.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The two following stories deal with increasing Muslim-Christian conflicts around the world.

**Muslim-Christian conflict
escalates on many fronts**

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
2/1/93

KHARTOUM, Sudan (BP)--In the freezing desert night of Sudan, children stare at the stars until they sleep -- or die.

Desperate Christian mothers bury their babies in the sand, leaving only their faces uncovered. With no blankets, it is the only way they can warm the infants' trembling bodies.

Nearly 2 million black Christians and animists in the north African nation have been forced into isolated concentration camps by Islamic government forces, according to human rights groups. The decade-long civil war between Arab Muslims in the north and black Christians and animists in the south is an ethnic and political conflict. But it also is a religious one.

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Only those who convert to Islam can get food in the camps, observers charge. Torture and execution are common. Islamic law has been declared. Churches have been closed and Christian missionaries expelled.

The most common phrases used by human rights workers to describe what is going on in Sudan: jihad (Muslim holy war) and genocide. The government's "forced Islamization appears to have ... one relentless aim: eradication of the black Sudanese as a cultural entity," reports Waddi Abdulhaqq of News Network International. The Khartoum regime denies the charge, but the campaign reportedly goes on.

A year ago the head of Sudan's Arab Militia reportedly called for "a new effort to propagate Islam through the use of force, money and food. We must crush the Christians down."

The cultural, political and religious struggle between Islam and Christianity has been going on since long before the Crusades. And Muslims have been victims just as often as Christians. At this moment Muslims are being "ethnically cleansed" in Bosnia (i.e., driven from their homes, raped and murdered) by "Christian" Serbs as fierce fighting continues after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Elsewhere in Europe, Muslim immigrants from the Mideast often are exploited, abused and attacked.

In fact, traditionally "Christian" nations have had the upper hand in the battle since the decline of Islam's cultural golden age centuries ago. Dominated, colonized and often oppressed, many Muslims have nurtured a sense of grievance ever since. The militant brand of Islam sponsored by Iran and other hard-line Muslim states has fanned that long-smoldering resentment into open flames.

Sudan is perhaps the most horrifying front in militant Islam's expanding war against Christianity, but it is far from the only one: -- Christians are under attack in Egypt. Every week believers are killed or injured, reports say. More than 100 died in such attacks last year, by one count.

-- Muslims destroyed scores of churches in Indonesia after one Christian group compared Jesus to Muhammad, Islam's prophet.

-- Pakistan postponed enforcement of a new law requiring citizens to carry identity cards listing their religion only after a major outcry from its Christian minority. Christians and other religious minorities fear the law will lead to more discrimination against them in the nation, where Muslim clerics want the "Sharia" -- Islamic law -- enforced as law of the land.

-- Saudi Arabian authorities beheaded a man accused of blaspheming Islam and reviling Muhammad. The real reason for his execution, sources believe: his conversion to Christianity and attempts to spread his new faith. The beheading was widely publicized in Saudi Arabia to pacify rising Muslim militants. Two Philippine Christian expatriates there were tortured and deported for worshipping at home; one reportedly was slated for death before his government intervened. Saudi "religious police" have arrested more than 300 other Christians over two years, according to Amnesty International.

-- A Christian radio host, his guest and a technician died in the Philippines after being shot in their studio following repeated death threats from Muslims. Several Christian missionaries have been kidnapped by Muslim extremists. At least 40 Christians were killed before Christmas by Muslim guerrillas in Mindanao.

-- Muslim fundamentalists assaulted a Christian village in Bangladesh, burning a church, destroying homes and attacking a Christian hospital.

"We're experiencing a wave of activity sparked by Muslim fundamentalism," said a Christian worker in the Middle East. "It's been there all along under the surface, but it certainly has intensified. Each country sort of has its own brand of it. It seems to come in waves. Things rock along pretty quietly and then someone stirs it up. It's also a manifestation of the fundamentalist resurgence in all religions. All those factors may be coming together at once."

Whatever happens in the political-military sphere, Islam will not crush the Christian church even in its own heartland, Christian observers predict.

A Christian revival apparently has broken out in Egypt. Even in Iran, evangelical Christians reportedly have grown nearly fourfold in 15 years. Nine of every 10 baptized believers are Muslim converts.

"Among Muslims today, Iranians are the most open to the gospel," one Iranian Christian leader claimed.

"It's interesting," added the Christian worker. "It seems like the church under persecution does better."

Yet rising Muslim fundamentalism, political turmoil, repression and economic hardship are combining to drive more and more Christians from the land of the Bible, according to the Middle East Council of Churches. The number of Christians leaving the Middle East, the council reported last year, "has reached an unprecedented level."

Governments also are feeling the impact of Muslim fundamentalism. Egypt's government faces an ongoing challenge to its very existence from the same extremists who cheered the assassination of Anwar Sadat. Algeria could fall into hard-line Islamic hands within a year, predict Western diplomats. Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto charges Pakistan is headed toward Muslim theocracy. Even the conservative Saudi state faces opposition from militants.

Egypt has cracked down hard on the movement, arresting scores of Muslim militants, seizing their mosques and dissolving their organizations. So has Algeria's military junta. Egypt and Tunisia have called on other Arab states to fight Muslim "terrorism, extremism and backwardness." Government and moderate Muslim authorities across the region have called for religious tolerance and an end to violence.

Yet the possibility remains in the future of a virtually unbroken string of hard-line Muslim states across the Middle East, North Africa and south Asia: Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan.

Many other countries could be swept into the militant tide. Muslims are streaming into the former Soviet states of Central Asia to reclaim the traditionally Islamic region. In some republics the effort comes through politics and the building of mosques. In Tajikistan, Muslim forces are fighting a civil war with the government for control.

For all their brutality, "the Soviets could not stand chaos," notes Southern Baptist observer Jim Maroney. "They kept order. But now they have withdrawn and that has given a kind of permission for these seething animosities to become more and more apparent. The bullies are patrolling the playground."

In southern Africa, well-funded Muslim missionary, educational and social efforts combine with aggressive pursuit of political power. The Islam in Africa conference, meeting in 1989, declared its intention not only to evangelize Africa but to "ensure that only Muslims are elected to all political posts of member nations (and) to ensure the ultimate replacement of all forms of legal and judicial systems with the Sharia (Islamic law)."

Saudi Arabia and other Islamic powers heavily fund Muslim mission efforts. But behind the political action, many believe, is the determined hand of Iran, the "new Moscow" of Islamic revolution. With the vacuum left by the Cold War's end and the weakening of archrival Iraq, Iran reportedly has embarked on a five-year, \$10 billion arms build-up and drive to become the dominant force in the region.

Meanwhile, Iran sends revolutionary guards to Egypt and other moderate Muslim states to strengthen militant ranks and foment violence against governments and non-Muslims.

Iran also has sent a brigade to fight alongside besieged Muslims in Bosnia. But the Iranian regime is "in no way concerned about the fate of Muslims in Bosnia," charged Iranian opposition leader Mohammed Mohaddessin. "The primary objective of the (Iranian) regime is to ... use (Bosnia) as a base for future plans to export fundamentalism and terrorism."

**Muslim attackers destroy
46 churches in Indonesia**

By Donald D. Martin

JAKARTA, Indonesia (BP)--Radical Muslims have damaged or destroyed at least 46 Christian churches in recent months in Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population.

The attackers, wielding such tools as shovels and sledgehammers, pounded concrete churches into piles of rubble on several islands. No one has yet been injured in the attacks, according to local press reports.

Indonesian Baptists have received threats of similar destruction, but none of their churches has been damaged, said Southern Baptist missionary Edward Sanders.

"We've had meetings to pray for the Christians affected by this," said Sanders, from Tulsa, Okla. "We've also had (Baptist) churches threatened, but nothing has come of it."

Baptists haven't always escaped similar attacks in the past. In 1991 a band of about 400 people destroyed the meeting center of a 35-member Baptist congregation in a Jakarta housing complex. The reason wasn't made clear, but the congregation had received threats from Muslims in the neighborhood.

Recent attacks, which started late last year, broke out when a Pentecostal church in east Java upset Muslims by printing a pamphlet comparing Jesus Christ to the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

"Some radical people got hold of this bulletin and then stirred up the populace in the (east Java) area," Sanders said. The assaults soon spread, targeting other church groups which had nothing to do with the pamphlet. Mobs damaged churches on the islands of Java and Sumatra. The worst incidents occurred in east Java, according to press reports.

However, the nation of more than 13,500 islands has recently seen a decrease in religious tension, Sanders explained.

"The government has reacted strongly," he said. "They have promised to make arrests and have published statements condemning the attacks, saying this is contrary to state philosophy of freedom of religion. They have worked hard to get on top of this."

Indonesian President Suharto and Islamic clerics have called for peace in recent weeks.

"As followers of a religion we must certainly be convinced of the rightness of our faith," Suharto said at a meeting of Buddhists in December. "But at the same time we must also honor another person's right to his religion."

About 80 percent of Indonesia's 185 million citizens are Muslim, and about 15 percent are Christian. Baptists number about 60,000.

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**Oklahomans continue to debate
cancellation of Graham's daughter By Art Toalston**

Baptist Press
2/1/93

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Debate continues in Oklahoma over the cancellation of Billy Graham's daughter from the Baptist convention's evangelism conference.

"In retrospect, I believe it was a mistake" to cancel Anne Graham Lotz, Wayne Bristow, director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma's evangelism department, wrote to some 1,600 churches in the state. His letter also was printed in the Jan. 21 edition of the Baptist Messenger, convention newsjournal. Bristow wrote he regrets "the embarrassment and distraction that has issued from this pisode."

Meanwhile, a pastor has defended his stated intention to interrupt Lotz to protest her being in a position to preach to men, which he believes is unbiblical.

"A generation ago," wrote Wayne Keely of Claremore in a letter to be published in the Feb. 4 issue of the Baptist Messenger, "any denominational employee that would dare to have a woman on the program to preach to the men would have been dismissed from his position."

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Keely added, "I am fully aware that other views are held by other denominations, but for centuries Baptists have held to this view: Galatians 4:16, 'Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?'"

Lotz, Graham's daughter, was to have addressed the Jan. 18-19 convention-sponsored evangelism conference at First Southern Baptist Church in Del City. Bristow, in his letter, took responsibility for cancelling Lotz because of Keely's threatened disruption of her two 45-minute presentations.

"My intention," Bristow wrote, "was to avoid knowingly putting Mrs. Lotz in an embarrassing situation and opening the conference to a disruptive atmosphere which would distract us from the primary focus."

Bristow wrote that Lotz "is a godly woman, with great courage and a confidence in her Lord. She is a woman who speaks under the authority of her husband, pastor, Lord and those by whom she is invited."

Lotz "was willing to follow through with the conference," Bristow wrote. "It was my decision not to position her for the embarrassment and controversy that had been threatened."

A few days after that decision in December, Bristow wrote, evangelical speaker Jill Briscoe was interrupted by Keely during the convention's Dec. 29-30 youth evangelism conference.

Keely, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Claremore, explained in his letter why he interrupted Briscoe: "You will find scriptural grounds for what I did" in Galatians 2:11,14, which tells of the Apostle Paul publicly confronting Peter over the issue of believers following Jewish law.

"Much has been said of my attitude towards women," Keely wrote. "1 Corinthians 11:1-9 clearly lays out that a woman can prophesy . . . , speak under inspiration. My wife is a gifted teacher that speaks under the inspiration of the Spirit, but never to men without my being present as she is a woman under authority and never in the church: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35."

The 1 Corinthians 14 passage, Keely said, involves prophets "hammering out the doctrine of the church. Women are to be silent in the meeting of the church when men are dealing with doctrine. The Holy Spirit gave the reason for this in 1 Timothy 2:8-15."

Thus women are to exercise the "gift and calling of God to prophesy" in evangelistic settings outside the church.

"I pray that my own daughters grow up to prophesy . . . to be an inspired speaker . . . just not to men!" said Keely, who has three daughters, two of whom are grown and married.

"If you were to visit Faith Church, where I pastor," Keely added, "you would find gifted, godly, submissive women in every role in the church serving our Lord in complete harmony with the Word of God. This precludes their being teachers of men."

Keely cited various other Bible passages in his letter: Genesis 3:16; Isaiah 3:12; Luke 2:36-38; John 4:6-29; Acts 21:9; Galatians 2:11,14; Titus 2:3-5; and 1 Peter 3:1.

Bristow had devoted much of his letter also to a review of biblical teachings of women's roles in the church.

"The Bible does not indicate a pattern for, nor does it give an example of a woman in the role of a pastor (over 'overseer')," Bristow wrote. "It does, however, speak much of women, in submission to Jesus as Lord, who are involved in various ministries."

Tackling specific Bible passages, Bristow wrote, "When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that a woman should cover her head when she is praying or prophesying, I believe he is encouraging a spirit of humility. When he speaks in 1 Timothy 2:12 of a woman not exercising authority over a man and remaining in quietness, I believe he is saying that a woman under the authority of her husband or pastor is not to be vain, pushy or obtrusive. Jill Briscoe and Anne Graham Lotz are beautiful examples of the kind of Christian woman Paul is encouraging. This is in complete contrast to one who campaigns for ordination and a platform with an assertive spirit and out of human ambition."

Bristow also addressed various other passages: Matthew 28:2-10; Luke 23:49-55; Luke 24:1,4-11; Mark 14:1-9; John 4:39-42; Acts 2:17; Acts 21:8-9; Romans 16:2-4.

"Missionary history is replete with great women such as Lottie Moon and Amy Carmichael," Bristow wrote. "During the past 50 years, God has used women such as Henrietta Mears and Bertha Smith to impact conservative, evangelical Christianity.

"It is urgent that we recognize the necessity of every Christian's being personally involved in carrying out the Great Commission," Bristow continued. "If we are to make a significant impact on a lost world, we must see every believer in Christ as one who is called to ministry. ... The call is to be humbly obedient to our Lord as both men and women."

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Opponents of lifting ban
criticize Clinton's stance

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
2/1/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Clinton's arrangement with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, D.-Ga., may have bought him some time on his plan to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military, but it did not satisfy many of those opposed to changing the policy.

Congressional Republicans, as well as leaders of military, evangelical, pro-family and conservative organizations, decried the president's Jan. 29 announcement of a period of consultation leading to a July 15 deadline for a draft executive order permanently dropping the ban.

"The political trade-offs are continuing," said Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Although President Clinton cannot claim a mandate for radical, social change in his election, he will nonetheless pursue such change because his coalition demands it.

"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," Land said.

"The delay until July 15 has nothing whatsoever to do with serious reflection on the merits of the policy. Instead, President Clinton is following the political advice of his secretary of defense in order to head off a political loss."

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin had presented to Clinton early in inauguration week a proposal on how lifting the ban could be accomplished.

Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind., leading the Senate opposition to Clinton's position, said after the president's announcement of his plans, "It is hard to conclude that this delay is anything but an attempt to gain cover in a political firestorm of the president's own creation."

In his press conference, Clinton said, "I don't expect to change my position."

Coats and other Republicans plan to act quickly to try to write the ban on homosexuals into law. Coats is expected to seek to add to the family leave bill an amendment codifying the policy. The bill probably will be voted on quickly.

In the House of Representatives, Rep. Robert Dornan, R.-Calif., has introduced a bill, H.R. 667, which would have the same effect as Coats' amendment.

The arrangement announced by Clinton, one which Nunn and he described as a compromise, not only sets the date for a draft executive order but the following policies in the interim:

-- The question on homosexuality will be eliminated from the enlistment application, a change which Clinton said the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to.

-- Members of the military in the process of being discharged under current policy because of their homosexual status will be put on standby reserve. He or she may return to active duty if the ban is lifted.

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-- Members found guilty of homosexual conduct under the Uniform Code of Military Justice will be discharged.

-- Commanding officers may reassign members who are in the course of discharge proceedings.

Clinton also announced the executive order would "set rigorous standards regarding sexual conduct to be applied to all military personnel."

"I think this is a dramatic step forward," Clinton said. "Normally in the history of civil rights advancement, presidents have not necessarily been in the forefront in the beginning."

The Armed Services Committee will hold a series of hearings on the homosexual ban, Nunn said. While he favors maintaining the ban, Nunn said he would make a final judgment based on the testimony at the hearings.

"I have a feeling on the subject, and I don't have any present intention of changing my mind," Nunn said. He would not say whether he would sponsor legislation lifting the ban if Clinton issues the executive order.

Controversy over the president's proposal to lift the ban has resulted in more than 400,000 calls to the Capitol switchboard on some recent days. An overwhelming number of those reportedly have been opposed to changing the policy.

"I'm deeply concerned for our nation when the president will use the power of his office to extol and defend such reprehensible, immoral behavior," the CLC's Land said. "God will not be mocked -- that which we sow, we shall also reap. I fear for America's future if the president continues to pursue this path of giving approbation to unrighteousness and immorality.

"Will the commander in chief also lobby for validation of homosexuality by authorizing or requiring military chaplains to perform same-sex marriages?" Land asked. "Does President Clinton also propose that homosexual partners be given the same privileges and benefits of true military spouses, including housing and medical services?"

"How will this decision impact the military's medical services and budget if homosexuals who have the HIV virus but have not yet tested positive are accepted into the services?"

"We will be working with members of the House and Senate and other organizations to encourage Congress to pass legislation codifying the current policy," Land said. "We urge all Southern Baptists to contact their representatives and senators and inform them of their convictions and concerns on this matter."

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Wake Forest church denies
Paige Patterson request

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
2/1/93

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--A request by Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, for a "watchcare" relationship with Wake Forest Baptist Church in Wake Forest, N.C., was denied by church deacons who asked Patterson to withdraw his request.

Patterson, acknowledged as one of the architects of the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979, and his wife, Dorothy, had submitted a written request to the church for "watchcare" status.

On Jan. 24, however, the deacons voted 16-1, with one abstention, to recommend to the church that the request be denied.

The deacons voted to ask Patterson "out of respect for your feelings and with regard for the well-being of this church, that you be given the opportunity to withdraw your request." (sic) The Jan. 25 letter to Patterson requested a response by midday Jan. 27, "the day of our regular business meeting."

Patterson and his wife did withdraw their request Jan. 27 and church members were notified at the business meeting, church officials said.

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Concern for members' feelings and potential division in the church were cited as the basis for the request, according to pastor Thomas Jackson, who along with Carroll Trotter, deacon chairman, signed the letter to Patterson.

"Please understand that this matter has been difficult for us and has been dealt with only through much agony and prayer," reads the letter, which was provided anonymously to Baptist Press. "We wish to spare both you and our church any further distress. Your membership in this church (even on a watchcare basis) would certainly result in disruption and division in this congregation."

Baptist Press tried to contact Patterson but he is in the former Soviet Union with a team from Southeastern helping establish a Bible institute in Obninsk, Russia.

Southeastern faced turmoil following the forced departure of President Randall Lolley in 1988 and a short term with Lewis Drummond as president. Patterson came to Southeastern in 1992 amid declining enrollment, a faculty exodus and probation by the seminary's two accrediting agencies.

"Watchcare," for the Wake Forest church, is a type of temporary relationship primarily for those who do not want to move their membership, Jackson told Baptist Press. In an earlier day, when the campus was Wake Forest University, non-Baptist students who wanted a "church home" were given the special status but it did not allow them to vote on congregational matters, Trotter said.

The letter to the Pattersons did conclude with an invitation to worship at the church "at anytime, and we would expect that our congregation would join us in this welcome."

The church's buildings sit within a rock wall which surrounds most of the campus. Traditionally, it has been the church home to many students, first at the college and now the seminary, as well as faculty. With a membership of more than 500, worship and Sunday school attendance approximate 250 "and growing," Jackson said.

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Virginia conservatives form
group to expand influence

By Michael J. Clingenpeel

Baptist Press
2/1/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Claiming Virginia Baptist leadership is moving away from the Southern Baptist Convention, conservative Virginia Baptists have voted to form an organization to increase their fellowship and influence.

The organization, named Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, was formed to "assist local Southern Baptist churches in Virginia to win the lost to Christ, to develop believers and to promote missions and evangelism," according to a vision statement adopted by almost 700 conservatives Jan. 28 in Lynchburg.

Meeting at Old Forest Road Baptist Church, where 13 years ago Paul Pressler announced conservatives were "going for the jugular" to win the SBC, Virginia conservatives took steps to build "a solidifying organization" and "to have a more influencing voice in the Baptist General Association of Virginia," said Bill Templeton, pastor of Charlottesville's Northside Baptist Church and one of the pastors who mapped out strategy for the meeting.

However, the new organization is not a new state convention to rival the BGAV, insisted Tommy Taylor, pastor of London Bridge Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, who was elected president. "Some felt like we need to make a break now. I don't feel that way and obviously most here do not. Two state conventions is not my goal."

Taylor denied that an unstated purpose of the SBCV is to take over the BGAV. "This is not an anti-BGAV movement. Our tone will be positive. There are many good and wonderful people in the BGAV, many good and wonderful programs.

"We would organize more only if Virginia Baptists continue to move from the SBC," Taylor said. "Virginia Baptist leadership needs to make a move back in the direction of the SBC."

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One person at Thursday's gathering who said he wanted to make a break with the BGAV was Ronald Young, pastor at Plantation Road Baptist Church in Roanoke. As the four-hour meeting opened Young made an appeal to begin the process of forming a new convention of "Bible-believing churches in Virginia" that would seek formal recognition by the SBC.

Several others endorsed his proposal, saying it would be more appropriate to withdraw from the BGAV out of protest rather than remain in a divided fellowship.

T.C. Pinckney, member of Good News Baptist Church in Alexandria and one of Virginia's members on the SBC Executive Committee, countered that "conservative strength is growing every month in Virginia." Pinckney, a key organizer of Virginia conservatives, noted his records indicate conservative pastors in the state had increased from 373 to 672 since 1988, while moderate pastors had declined from 584 to 577. He also cited the "turnaround" at Southeastern and Southern seminaries as evidence that conservative strength was gaining.

Young's motion was defeated and, when a recommendation was offered to form a conservative Baptist organization, not a new state convention, consent was almost unanimous.

The action comes in response to a defeat of conservative candidates and agenda at last November's annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in Virginia Beach. At that meeting conservative-backed candidates garnered only 25 percent of the vote. Also at that meeting messengers elected to take no action on a statement condemning homosexual behavior adopted by the Virginia Baptist general board and adopted a resolution that many conservatives felt approved homosexuality.

In December Virginia conservatives held six regional meetings to discuss whether to pull out of the BGAV and form an alternative state convention. Results of surveys taken at these regional meetings showed most conservatives preferred to organize a fellowship within the BGAV rather than a competing state convention.

The strategy for the Jan. 28 meeting subsequently was mapped out Jan. 5 at a meeting of 10 conservatives at Swift Creek Baptist Church near Richmond.

During the Jan. 28 meeting, conservatives elected a 26-member executive committee to guide their development over the next year. Apparently one of the first actions of the newly elected SBCV executive committee will be to set up a channel to receive and disburse funds from conservative churches dissatisfied with the new giving plan adopted by the BGAV last November.

The BGAV giving plan provides missions-giving options opposed by conservatives, funding in part the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Taylor said funds would be used for "our own evangelism conference, regional church growth conferences and upgrading our own publication, the Baptist Banner." He added some conservative churches were escrowing funds from the BGAV until a channel could be arranged.

The executive committee also will prepare a constitution and bylaws, acquire non-profit status, form workgroups to implement the new vision statement and plan another statewide meeting during the next year.

Before the meeting adjourned resolutions condemning homosexuality and endorsing sanctity of human life were read and adopted with applause. Taylor acknowledged different positions on these social issues were factors in the formation of the SBCV, but said "the root issue is our view of Scripture. That determines where you stand on social issues."

In addition to Taylor, other officers are James Bradshaw, pastor of Norview Baptist Church in Norfolk, first vice president; Howard Baldwin, vocational evangelist from Richmond, second vice president; Ann Frazier, a lay woman from Roanoke Rapids, secretary; and Doyle Chauncey, associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Norfolk, treasurer. Robert Jackson, director of missions for New River Baptist Association and an SBC Executive Committee member, was moderator at the meeting.

**More than 2,000 churches
participate in prayer alert**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Now in its second year of encouraging Southern Baptist churches to pray for spiritual awakening, the Watchmen National Prayer Alert includes 2,050 churches committed to praying at an assigned hour each week.

"This means 12 churches are praying each hour of every day," said Mary Betts, Watchmen National Prayer Alert coordinator at the Baptist Sunday School Board. Participants are asked to gather as a group at their appointed hour, pray and then "pass the watch" by calling the church with the next hour on the schedule.

"When the churches are really networked, the relationships they form are unique," Betts said. "In the churches where people are able to get together as a group, they are getting more from the experience."

Participating churches come from all 50 states, Canada and Puerto Rico. Texas leads all states with 264 participating churches, followed by Georgia, 131; Tennessee, 121; North Carolina, 117; and Alabama and Missouri, 106 each.

Norma Parlier, prayer coordinator at Highland Baptist Church in Hickory, N.C., reported: "Although we have to get up around 3:30 in order to get to the church by 4 a.m., we all agree this is a good hour. Our prayer time has been a wonderful experience for all of us. The church before us is faithful to pass the watch at 4 a.m., and the church after us is always ready to reach the watch at 5 a.m."

Joe Guthrie of Fairhaven Baptist Church in Demopolis, Ala., wrote Betts to cite "the positive impact the Prayer Alert is making in our church. We are having around 23 people come out to pray each Thursday morning at 5 a.m. We're seeing God answer our prayers, people are being saved, lives are being turned around and the overall spiritual temperature of our church is going up."

Betts said churches interested in participating in Watchmen National Prayer Alert may contact her at the Baptist Sunday School Board, 127 Ninth Ave. N., Nashville, TN 37234 (615) 251-5037.

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Lists of participating churches, by states, are being transmitted on SBCNet to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.

ANALYSIS

Clinton's first days in office:
from jubilation to controversy By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
2/1/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--Bill Clinton rode into the nation's capital Jan. 17 in a caravan buoyed by good will and jubilant expectation. Within 10 days, however, his administration was struggling with its second wave of controversy.

By the evening of Clinton's second day as president, Zoe Baird withdrew her nomination as attorney general in the face of a public outcry against her hiring of illegal aliens and failure to pay Social Security despite her financial affluence.

By his second week in office, Clinton made it clear he would not back down on his intention to drop the ban on homosexuals in the military. Though he planned to do it with a two-step process culminating in an executive order several months in the future, Clinton showed no willingness to waver on his basic commitment to change the policy.

He did so despite opposition from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and indications from the Democratic leadership an immediate vote in Congress would result in a loss. The Capitol switchboard reportedly received more than 400,000 calls on the issue in one day, with an overwhelming number of those opposed to lifting the ban.

Seasoned Washington observers noted the issue was consuming Clinton's political capital on a pledge which was not central to the program he offered to the American people during his campaign.

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In contrast, a week before his inauguration, Clinton backed away from a middle-class tax cut, a promise he had made during th campaign.

In the days marking the crowning achievement of Clinton's political career, other contrasting images included:

-- In his inaugural invocation, evangelist Billy Graham confessed to God the country's need for a change of heart. He prayed, "We have sinned against you. We have sown to the wind and are now reaping a whirlwind of crime, drug abuse, racism, immorality and social injustice. We need to repent of our sins and turn by faith to you."

In the same ceremony, homosexuality gained its first endorsement at an inauguration. Shortly before Graham's benediction, poet Maya Angelou placed homosexuality on the same level of ethnicity, religious affiliation and occupation. In a segment of her poem listing 20 different identities in America, one line said, "The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher."

Graham and Angelou both participated at Clinton's request.

-- Clinton and Al Gore, now vice president and a fellow Southern Baptist, began their week worshipping in a Culpepper, Va., Southern Baptist church on their bus trip from Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, to Washington. It was Jan. 17, the day Clinton and Gore's denomination observed Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.

Five days later, Clinton signed presidential memoranda wiping out more than eight years of pro-life policies. Before signing them, he said the country should have an "approach that seeks to protect the right to choose while reducing the number of abortions. Our vision should be of an America where abortion is safe and legal, but rare."

His actions, however, "will result in the deaths of untold millions at the hands of abortionists," lamented Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. The president's reinstatement of funding to organizations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation means "U.S. tax dollars will be used to pressure African and other Third World governments to accept abortion as a method of birth control ...," said Douglas Johnson, legislative director of the National Right to Life Committee.

-- Although Culpeper (Va.) Baptist Church did not observe Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, the pastor preached a message to the Clinton party and others attending the service on "Living Our Convictions" before they headed to Washington. Bert Browning, using the account of Daniel and the lion's den in Daniel 6, challenged his listeners to make decisions based on convictions, not based on convenience or fear.

Any president "is faced with an incredible number of pressures put upon them, and the decision that Daniel had to make is the same decision that I think the president has to make and any of us has to make ... whether we'll do what is convenient or what other people think we should or what we honestly feel led of God to be and do," Browning said after the service. "That was the thrust and intent of what I said."

When Clinton pushed forward with his pledge to drop the ban on homosexuals in the military, however, critics complained he was caving in to liberal special interest groups.

-- Images from Clinton's inaugural parade included the Budweiser Clydesdales and beer wagon, a lesbian couple on the "Family of America" float and, in pre-parade entertainment, the Gay and Lesbian Band. Homosexual groups celebrated the new administration with a reception, banquets and an inaugural ball. At the Presidential Gala on the eve of the inauguration, Warren Beatty and Barbara Streisand, both well known for their political liberalism, were among the elite of the entertainment world who praised the new Southern Baptist team leading the country. Streisand said she feels like America has a feast spread before it because of the new administration.

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Later the same evening as the Presidential Gala, the Clintons and Gores attended a prayer meeting at First Baptist Church of Washington. It was cosponsored by the church and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. They began the next morning with an inaugural prayer service at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, a service in which Clinton appeared to be emotionally moved.

In an intriguing sidelight, when Clinton placed his left hand on the Bible held by his wife, Hillary, to take the oath of office, it was opened to Galatians 6:8, a verse chosen by the former Arkansas governor, according to a Washington Times article.

Galatians 6:8 reads, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

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Seminary to expand its efforts
in Korean-American instruction

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
2/1/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A January gathering of Korean-American pastors and church leaders at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary revealed a high-level interest among Korean-Americans in theological education, according to seminary Provost Larry McSwain.

"We found that for most Korean pastors the instruction must be in their own language," said McSwain. "There is a great need for instruction in Baptist theology and history since about 90 percent of Southern Baptist Korean pastors come from some other denomination."

The interest in theological education expressed by the Korean-American church leaders is consistent with climbing enrollment figures for Korean students at the Louisville, Ky., school, McSwain noted. "Koreans are the fastest-growing group in our student body. We had one Korean student in 1978. We had 52 last year and now there are about 75."

The consultation with Korean-American Baptists was hosted by the seminary to determine how it could better address the needs of Korean pastors. Eight Korean-American leaders from around the nation joined Korean students and seminary faculty for the third in a series of conferences at the seminary funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. in Indianapolis. Previous consultations focused on the needs of Hispanic pastors and African-American pastors. The seminary plans to invite Chinese, Southeast Asian and Filipino pastors to campus for a similar meeting.

The seminary has opened a center for Koreans in Silver Spring, Md., where classes are taught in Korean or translated into Korean. Southern plans to begin a center for Koreans in New York City and to offer some courses on its Louisville campus taught in Korean, McSwain said, noting two courses in Louisville have been taught in Korean during the past year. Koreans who have earned doctorates from the seminary will be a primary source of instructors for the classes, he added.

Many Korean-American pastors have been to college or seminary in Korea but have not yet attained the necessary English skills to do that level of academic work in the United States, said Tae Hwan Park, a Southern Baptist language missionary in North Potomac, Md. Park, who directs Southern's Korean program in Silver Spring, said he is "excited that the seminary is concerned about the Korean population in the United States."

McSwain said he anticipates the seminary may be able to offer in Korean up to half the courses necessary for the M.Div. degree. Students will be encouraged to develop further their English skills and take the remaining courses in English, he said.

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**California Baptists tap Ellison
to lead WMU, women's programs**

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--Edna M. Ellison, editor of Royal Service for Woman's Missionary Union, auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, was elected WMU/women's ministry director for the California Southern Baptist Convention Jan. 28.

Ellison will begin her duties Feb. 1 in planning, promoting and conducting missions education programs for WMU and women's ministries. California is one of the few state Baptist conventions which has a women's ministry program. She also will be responsible for promoting home and foreign mission offerings and providing leadership for the S.G. Posey Offering for State Missions.

Lon Chavez, director of the CSBC missions growth division and Ellison's supervisor, said, "Edna is a significant addition to our staff who brings with her a great experience and preparation to lead our churches in the areas of missions education and support and women's ministries."

A native of South Carolina, Ellison taught high school English 15 years prior to her WMU service. She also has taught English on the college level.

She holds a bachelor of arts degree from Presbyterian College in Clinton, S.C.; a master's in English from Converse College in Spartanburg, S.C.; and a doctor of philosophy in education from the University of Alabama.

A widow, Ellison has two grown children.

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Also available upon request:

-- Feature by Connie Davis on a new tie between an African-American congregation in Memphis, Tenn., and one in Michigan.

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