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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 23, 1993

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R. Albert Mohler Jr. nominated  
as Southern's next president

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
2/23/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Receiving "a sense of God's will" sooner than expected, the search committee for a new president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary announced its unanimous nominee Feb. 22: R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Mohler, nominated to become Southern's ninth president since its founding in 1859, is a master of divinity and Ph.D. graduate from the Louisville, Ky., seminary and a former assistant to Roy Honeycutt, 66, Southern's president since 1982 who will retire at the end of the year.

Mohler has been editor of Georgia Baptists' newsjournal, The Christian Index, since 1989 and an articulate spokesman for conservative causes in the SBC.

"At 33 years of age, he would be the fourth person to become president while in his 30s," Wayne Allen, chairman of both the seminary's trustees and the seven-member search committee, said during a news conference at the Southern Baptist Convention Building in Nashville.

"James Boyce founded the institution at age 32," said Allen, a pastor in suburban Memphis, Tenn. "E.Y. Mullins became the president of Southern at age 39. And Duke McCall became the president of Southern at age 36."

Acknowledging Mohler's age "could be viewed as a liability," Allen said it also "may well be a strength. Studies of institutions reveal that long-tenured administrations have the most significant shaping influences on the school," he said.

Mohler voiced his acceptance of the nomination "with a humble and an awe-filled heart but with a clear sense of God's direction."

"I cannot express to you how precious Southern Seminary is to my heart," he said. "I do feel the absolute, unmistakable consistency of God's calling in my life which brings me to this day."

Allen said trustees will vote on Mohler during their next regular meeting April 19 or perhaps in a called meeting in late March to allow for a lengthier time to dialogue with the nominee.

"We believe that Dr. Mohler will receive a very strong vote ... a very significant majority of the trustees," Allen predicted.

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The search committee, the week of Feb. 15, interviewed Mohler and two other potential nominees, Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, and Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. A fourth candidate, Bob R. Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University, withdrew from consideration after the four candidates' names were revealed in news media reports.

"We had not planned to reach a decision until early March," Allen recounted, "but we all had such a sense of God's leadership and a peace concerning God's will that we came to a unanimous decision on Friday afternoon."

Explaining why the committee decided to make an announcement the following Monday, Allen said, "We felt, rather than information to be dispensed by conjecture or rumor, that it would be best to officially declare who our candidate is."

Allen said other trustees had been notified of Mohler's nomination by fax or overnight mail and Southern's faculty was being notified in a meeting at the same time as the news conference.

Honeycutt said regarding Mohler in the news conference: "I predict for him an outstanding career as president.

"Personally, I have great confidence in him as someone with whom I have worked closely," Honeycutt said. Mohler was an assistant to Honeycutt, as coordinator of foundation support from 1983-87 and director of capital funding from 1987-89. He earned his master of divinity degree at Southern in 1983 and his Ph.D., specializing in systematic theology, in 1989.

"He (Mohler) is well-prepared academically," Honeycutt continued, "and though this is not a teaching post, I think the skills, the logic, the abilities that one develops in an outstanding Ph.D. program can but help one in the kind of position he will fulfill."

Allen also addressed the question of Mohler's experience.

"While Dr. Mohler has no academic classroom experience or academically related administrative experience," Allen said, "there are impressive precedents: Duke McCall (who earlier had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) and Ellis Fuller at Southern; Robert Naylor and Russell Dilday at Southwestern (Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas); and Landrum Leavell at New Orleans."

Asked how he will deal with a climate of anxiety as his new administration takes shape at Southern and his vision for the seminary, Mohler said he felt a responsibility to discuss such matters first with the trustees. "It's not a matter of reticence to speak," he said, "but a commitment to maintain trust with the process." After his trustee discussions, Mohler said he intends "to be very open and clear and candid, sensitive ... a listening ear" and a president who will provide "a firm sense of direction."

After the search committee's announcement, Land and George issued written statements of best wishes for Mohler.

Land said: "At the request of the Southern Seminary Search Committee, I entered prayerfully with them into their process to seek God's will concerning their next President. I rejoice with them that they have found common agreement as to their nominee and I wish my good friend, Al Mohler, God's blessings and Godspeed."

"Dr. Al Mohler is one of my dearest friends," George said, "and the most brilliant student I have ever taught." George, an associate professor of church history and historical theology at Southern from 1978-88, had Mohler in master of divinity- and later doctoral-level courses.

"He (Mohler) loves Southern Seminary dearly and knows its great heritage thoroughly," George continued. "I know his heart and his burden for the renewal of theological education throughout our beloved denomination. Al will make a splendid president for Southern Seminary. The Lord has raised him up to lead this great school back to its historical evangelical roots and forward into the next millennium."

Allen, in his comments during the news conference, outlined several ways the search committee was impressed with Mohler.

The committee scored each potential nominee on its 17-point presidential profile, and each member scored Mohler highest, Allen said.

In the committee's interviews, Allen said Mohler "clearly articulated his personal vision for the institution. His statements reflected a complete knowledge of the history of the school, a thorough understanding of the present climate of anxiety and a conceptual course for a positive future direction."

In a written interpretation Mohler provided of the seminary's traditional Abstract of Principles, Allen said, the committee was "impressed with Dr. Mohler's biblical, conservative, Baptist, evangelical theological positions."

Mohler and his wife, Mary, "exude a strong presence as persons and as a couple," Allen said. "The committee views this as a valuable asset, as the president and his spouse represent the seminary before the community, before professional groups, churches and donors.

"The marriage is exceptionally strong, and the young family is a role model for ministry-oriented students," Allen said.

Mohler chaired the SBC Committee on Resolutions in 1992 and was a member of the committee the previous year.

He is the general editor of "The Gods of the Age or the God of the Ages?: Essays by Carl F.H. Henry" to be released by Broadman Press and author of "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth" to be released by Eerdmans, both later this year.

Mohler is a native of Lakeland, Fla., who considers First Baptist Church of Pompano Beach his home church, where he was licensed to preach in 1978 and ordained to the ministry in 1982.

He graduated magna cum laude from Samford in 1980 and, as part of his doctoral work at Southern, studied at Oxford University in England and St. Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana.

He was pastor of Union Grove Baptist Church in Bedford, Ky., during five years of his studies at Southern.

He and his wife have a daughter, Mary Katherine, 3, and a son, Christopher Albert, nearly 1.

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Lewis removes HMB official from  
further work on Masonic issue

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
2/23/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Home Mission Board has removed the director of its interfaith witness department from an ad hoc committee preparing a "report and recommendation" on Freemasonry for the Southern Baptist Convention.

HMB President Larry Lewis removed the department's director, Gary Leazer, from the committee Feb. 22 for what Lewis termed "inappropriate" comments Leazer made about the Freemasonry issue in a letter.

Leazer's letter, to a Chattanooga, Tenn., man, was circulated to Home Mission Board officials, Baptist Press and other news media Feb. 22 by James "Larry" Holly, a Texas physician intent on the SBC declaring Freemasonry incompatible with Christianity.

During last year's SBC meeting in Indianapolis, Holly made a motion for the creation of a special ad hoc committee to study Freemasonry. But messengers voted to amend the motion, instructing the HMB Interfaith Witness Department to do the study and the HMB to bring "a report with recommendation" to this year's annual meeting, June 15-17 in Houston.

Holly, in an interview with Baptist Press, said he obtained a copy of Leazer's letter about the HMB Freemasonry study after it was "circulated indiscriminately" in Chattanooga and in a particular church. A church member gave the Jan. 17 letter to another church's pastor, and that pastor read it to yet another pastor, who Holly said called him.

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Leazer, in the letter, voiced appreciation to two Masons, including Abner McCall, former president of Baylor University, for reviewing the report he was preparing to submit to Lewis Jan. 22. Leazer wrote he had incorporated suggestions made by McCall and the other Mason.

"I appreciate all of the help that Masons have been to me," Leazer wrote. "Jim Tresner, editor of The Oklahoma Mason, and Abner McCall, former president of Baylor University, have each read the report and offered suggestions which I have used."

Leazer wrote of Holly: "He, of course, will explode when he sees it. I am reaffirming our department's 1986 position that Freemasonry is NOT a religion and recommending that the SBC take a stand neither for nor against Freemasonry."

Leazer additionally noted: "Of course, anything can happen between now and the SBC . . . . Holly is already marshalling his forces to counter-attack. It is essential that as many Southern Baptist Masons get to the SBC as possible."

Lewis, in a written statement Feb. 22, said an ad hoc board committee is handling the "second portion" of the SBC motion passed last year, preparing a report and recommendation to be submitted to the full board of directors for approval during their March 17 meeting.

Of Leazer, Lewis wrote: "Due to the controversial nature of his involvement and to the fact that his work is completed, I have requested that Dr. Leazer not be involved in development of the report or the recommendation." Lewis said HMB chairman Ron Phillips, a Chattanooga area pastor, had concurred with the decision.

Lewis also noted the interfaith witness department had completed the "study" portion of the two-part SBC motion. "The study has been reviewed by a number of directors of the Home Mission Board and will be sent as information to the full board prior to the March (17) meeting," he wrote.

"I would like to renew my call for all Southern Baptists to continue in prayer," Lewis added, "for our board as they endeavor to deal with this difficult assignment."

Lewis's actions fell short of Holly's call for action in a news release sent to Baptist Press and other media.

Beyond Leazer's removal from the HMB's handling of the Freemasonry issue, Holly said HMB directors should determine whether to ask for Leazer's resignation from the agency's staff "as he appears to have confessed to collusion with the Masons in this study."

Holly also called for:

-- "The rejection of the study prepared by Dr. Leazer and the preparation of an honest and objective study without Masonic oversight."

-- the Home Mission Board, "on the basis of the wealth of information which they have received, (to) send a recommendation to the SBC in Houston that Freemasonry be declared incompatible with Christianity."

-- the HMB's executive staff to explain "why they ignored earlier calls for Dr. Leazer's removal after questions of his bias were raised." Holly first called for Leazer's removal from the study last August, charging that his "prejudice is overwhelming." Lewis responded Leazer would continue to lead the study and that "it will be a thorough and honest study of Freemasonry."

Lewis, in his written statement Feb. 22, acknowledged Leazer "sent an early draft of the study to two Masons asking them to review his facts and understanding of Freemasonry due to the very complex nature of the subject."

"Personal observations and projections by Dr. Leazer about Dr. Holly," Lewis continued, "were inappropriate and unfortunate as was inclusion in the letter of Dr. Leazer's own conclusions and recommendations." Lewis added the interfaith witness department study contains no recommendations.

"Dr. Leazer's statement regarding Masons attending the SBC was also inappropriate," Lewis wrote, "even though he says he was attempting to respond to numerous requests from Masons about what avenues of response were open to them."

Lewis also said, "Dr. Leazer has assured me that he has not sent a copy of the final study to anyone outside the HMB."

**SBC study of Freemasonry  
continues to stir debate**

**By Art Toalston**

NASHVILLE (BP)--The issue of Freemasonry's compatibility with Christianity continues to heat up -- in Masonic lodges and in Southern Baptist churches.

John Boettjer, managing editor of the Scottish Rite Journal, said at least one issue of the Masonic monthly will focus on the Southern Baptist Convention-assigned study by the Home Mission Board of Freemasonry prior to the SBC's annual meeting June 15-17 in Houston. The journal dedicated its entire February issue to the topic of Freemasonry and religion, targeting the SBC study in particular. The journal's March issue also carries an essay on the SBC study, Boettjer said.

Freemasonry critic James "Larry" Holly, meanwhile, has prepared another book on the fraternal organization which he claims is ultimately satanic in origin.

Holly said he has ordered 10,000 copies printed of his new 192-page book on Masonry. He said 120 copies will be mailed Feb. 23 to Home Mission Board directors and various news media. 2,000 copies will be mailed the week of Feb. 28, he said, to all officers and trustees of SBC agencies and to state Baptist convention presidents, executive directors, editors and others. The remaining copies will be placed on sale in bookstores, Holly said.

Last year, when Holly initiated his call for the SBC to study Freemasonry, he ordered a printing of 10,000 copies of a 58-page book he wrote. He said he mailed 4,800 copies to various Southern Baptist leaders across the country prior to the SBC meeting in Indianapolis.

One of the writers in the Scottish Rite Journal's February edition, John J. Robinson of Cincinnati, said the SBC study of Freemasonry is the "most vicious attack in 100 years" against the fraternal organization.

Another writer, Fred W. McPeak, a Baptist layman and Mason from Knoxville, Tenn., wrote, "It is urgently important that Masons who are Baptists get themselves elected messengers by their local churches, attend the (Houston) convention, and vote."

James B. Wilkinson, a Baptist layman and Mason from Richmond, Va., wrote, "The result (of the SBC study) could be a devastating blow to Freemasonry. Minimally, it is estimated, we could lost 20 percent of our present members, not to mention the loss of prospective members."

Holly, in a Feb. 22 news release, continued to challenge Masonic denials that their fraternal organization is a religion.

"The question before the SBC is, 'Is Freemasonry compatible with Christianity?'" Holly wrote. "It is not necessary to establish that Freemasonry is a religion in order to establish that it is incompatible with Christianity. Homosexuality is not a religion, but it is incompatible with Christianity."

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**Missionary nurses invited  
to start program in Albania** By Marty Croll

**Baptist Press  
2/23/93**

TIRANA, Albania (BP)--The government of newly opened Albania has invited Southern Baptists and others to create a model hospital staff versed in modern medicine.

Southern Baptist nurses Gerry and Arylis Milligan of Tulsa, Okla., planned to arrive Feb. 22. They are among the first missionaries invited into the East European nation since democracy was declared there in March 1992. The Milligans are transferring from Romania, where they were to direct a nursing program that never materialized.

Others participating in the medical teaching effort will be a Scottish Baptist physician; an American nurse assigned through Youth With a Mission; and the Missionary Aviation Fellowship, a group of support pilots who will fly in medical experts to help teach.

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Albania will make a hospital available for the medical team to run.

Albania once was considered the most atheistic country in the world. A repressive communist regime not only stifled economic growth but brutally enforced the atheism it declared in 1967. Now primitive compared to the modern world, Albania suffers Europe's highest infant mortality rate.

At the hospital, the Milligans plan to direct nursing education and eventually create a nursing school. They also hope to share the gospel with each of their students, who would enroll for a three-year program including religious teaching.

The Milligans feel prepared for the opportunity because of their past work in Gaza and Jordan with Muslims. Despite its era of atheism, Albania's population -- at least in family tradition -- is about 70 percent Muslim, 20 percent Greek Orthodox and 10 percent Roman Catholic.

"Since the nursing school is being funded by Baptists, I want to call it the Baptist Nursing School and have religion as part of it," Milligan said. "We plan to graduate qualified nurses who could conceivably go anywhere in Europe and practice nursing."

While the Albanians plan to pay most of the salaries of their own staff, Baptists -- including the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the European Baptist Federation -- plan to pay the greatest portion of operating expenses.

Mission workers also hope the government will raise health workers' pay at the hospital to what officials project it will be in five years. This would keep workers from taking their newly gained knowledge elsewhere.

Milligan compared medical life in Albania to that in a rural Southern hospital 40 years ago. "They suffer from lack of modern equipment, modern techniques and modern medicine," he said. Nursing education in Albania now consists of two years of vocational study after 10 years of public schooling, he said. The Milligans will propose a program of 12 years of public schooling and three of nursing education.

The Milligans plan first to train nurses at the hospital and then talk with nursing leaders throughout the country, encouraging them to upgrade their skills. Then, in about 18 months, the Milligans want to open the nursing school.

During the first month or two the missionaries hope to take leaders at the hospital to London and Frankfurt, Germany, to observe hospitals there. "We want them to see what a real hospital looks like," Milligan said.

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**Annuity Board marks anniversary  
with plaque honoring first CEO** By Thomas E Miller Jr.

Baptist Press  
2/23/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention marked its 75th anniversary at Edgefield Baptist Church in Nashville, dedicating a bronze plaque Feb. 21 in memory of the board's first chief executive officer.

The Annuity Board provides a wide range of products and services to churches, ministers, agencies, institutions, state conventions and their employees. The number of individual retirement accounts is approaching 100,000.

William Lunsford was pastor of Edgefield Baptist Church when he conceived the idea of a convention agency to provide relief to old or disabled pastors, their widows and orphans.

Commemorating Lunsford's vision, agency representation from across the nation joined Annuity Board officers and the congregation in a special service Feb. 21. Baptist Sunday School Board President Jimmy Draper taught the Sunday school lesson and Annuity Board President Paul Powell delivered the morning message. The date for the event was set to coincide with the winter meeting of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention Feb. 22-24.

The ministry of the Annuity Board began in the heart of a lawyer-turned-minister.

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On a Monday morning in 1916, Lunsford went to the regular meeting of the Nashville Baptist Pastors' Conference. For a long time he had agonized over the wretched plight of old and disabled Baptist pastors, their widows and orphans.

There was no Social Security in those days, no Southern Baptist pension plan and little personal insurance. Meager salaries paid to ministers made savings hard at best and impossible for most. Other denominations, with central church authority, were addressing the problem. But Baptists, with complete local church autonomy, were leaving most pastors and their families to fend for themselves in times of crisis.

It was not a good time to raise money. The United States was in the midst of a world war, but Lunsford would not be deterred.

"Our nation takes care of its soldiers and sailors who are disabled;" he said, "our great industries pension worn-out employees; why cannot our denomination provide for its veterans and worn-out workers?"

This champion of the unfortunate was born in 1859. His childhood in Virginia was marked by Civil War and Reconstruction. Educated in law at the University of Virginia, Lunsford was 39 years old when he sensed a call from a successful practice to become a minister. His first pastorate was in Roanoke.

He attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Louisville, Ky., and was pastor of churches in Virginia, Kentucky, Texas and North Carolina before his call in 1909 to the Edgefield Baptist in Nashville, where he won the respect of his peers who accorded him the right to speak prophetically.

The Pastors' Conference made an appeal to the Sunday School Board. The Sunday School Board sent it to the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention. The denominational conscience was stirred and, in 1917, a committee was appointed by SBC President J.B. Gambrell.

The Sunday School Board set aside \$100,000 to begin a ministry of relief if the convention chose to create a commission for this purpose. After Lunsford, as chairman, reported for the committee, a Commission on Ministerial Relief and Annuity was created. The commission would use earnings from the Sunday School Board gift for relief while plans for a suitable pension plan were worked out. The commission work included delicate communication with the several state societies doing relief work on their own.

The commission recommended the Southern Baptist Convention create a Board of Ministerial Relief and Annuities. William Lunsford was named first corresponding secretary on July 10, 1918. A charter was issued by the Texas Corporation Commission on July 31, making the board "a going concern."

Seed money provided by the Sunday School Board and gifts of nearly \$1 million by prominent Northern Baptists John D. Rockefeller and John D. Rockefeller Jr., were crucial to the board's early development and survival.

Early years were marked by careful diplomacy with state societies, appeals for contributions and needs large enough to threaten the board's survival. The call for a national relief and annuity program also was unanimously embraced. Eventually, all the states joined the cause.

To this day there is a basic tie between the state conventions and the Annuity Board. While the Southern Baptist Convention elects trustees of the Annuity Board, it is the state conventions who approve the "Plan Document" for the Church Annuity Plan. Each state convention determines eligibility to participate, and the state conventions make certain contributions in behalf of most members in the Church Annuity Plan.

Today, the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program includes about \$1 million per year for relief and state convention educational programs, but no money for Annuity Board operating expense comes from the mission budget. The board is completely self-supporting.

For many years there was more willingness to apply for and accept relief and benefits than there was commitment to pay in contributions. Yet, each time there was a crisis, the states responded.

Prior service credits resulted in unfunded liabilities that threatened the future of the board through the administrations of Thomas J. Watts and Walter R. Alexander. R. Alton Reed, who became executive secretary in 1955, addressed the critical unfunded liability in annuity contracts. State conventions joined the board in an intensive campaign of enrollment and contributions. New plans were introduced and membership grew dramatically. Eventually, infusion of new money and good earnings erased the unfunded liability.

During the 1972-90 administration of Darold H. Morgan, assets of the board grew from \$292 million to more than \$2.7 billion. Since Paul Powell became president, assets have grown to almost \$4 billion and annual benefits paid now exceed \$117 million. The Annuity Board is the 128th largest pension fund in the United States.

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BSSB leadership department  
changes to growth leadership

Baptist Press  
2/23/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--The name of the Baptist Sunday School Board's general leadership department in the church growth-Sunday school division has been changed to growth leadership department.

"The new name more clearly represents the work of the department which gives leadership to the area of growth in the church -- numerical, disciple, fellowship and administrative work and mission expansion," department director Joe Stacker said.

The department includes the former church administration and Sunday school growth and administration departments, he said. Department personnel work with pastors, deacons, church staff members and Sunday school leaders in the areas of personal spiritual growth and helping their churches grow.

Gene Mims, vice president for church growth and programs, said, "We believe the name change will allow us to focus the department on growth through strong effective leaders in churches. This is especially true for pastors."

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Too much TV watching outweighs concern over TV content, prof says," dated 2/17/93, please replace the third paragraph with the following:

He reported the average child in the United States watches three and a half hours of TV a day but only spends an average of 12-15 minutes a day communicating with his or her mother and an average of two to four minutes per day communicating with the father.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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