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-- BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 4, 1993

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VIRGINIA -- Applications increase for career, short-term service through FMB.
NASHVILLE -- Committee weighed board nominees' Bible beliefs, SBC commitment.
DALLAS -- Atheist's son, church-state experts cite differing views on school prayer.

**Applications increase for career,
short-term service through FMB By Mary E. Speidel**

**Baptist Press
5/4/93**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Applications for career mission service through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board are up 7 percent from last year, and mission officials predict a similar increase in 1993 appointments.

At the same time, about 39 percent more people than this time last year have applied for short-term assignments through the board's International Service Corps. So far this year, applications approved for the service corps have increased by almost 26 percent compared to last year's total.

These statistics "show some very encouraging projections for what the rest of this year will hold" in career appointments and assignments through the service corps, said Thurmon Bryant, the board's interim vice president for mission personnel. Bryant assumed that responsibility April 26 after Harlan Spurgeon took early retirement, expressing disagreement with trustee actions.

Career missions applications numbered almost 2,900 a year ago while current applications stand at more than 3,100, according to Lloyd Atkinson, director of the personnel selection department. Based on that increase, Atkinson projects career missionary appointments for 1993 will total between 215 and 220, up from last year's 205 appointments.

Service corps applicants have increased from 210 a year ago to a current total of 292, said Wendy Norvelle, director of the international service department. Since the corps' first full year in 1990, total Southern Baptists approved for service increased by 30 percent, based on 1992 year-end statistics. Positions with the corps range from four months to two years.

Despite these increases, the total missionary force has not yet grown at the rate needed to achieve Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust goal of 5,000 missionaries overseas by the year 2000, according to an April report issued to trustees by the board's research and planning office. The mission force total includes career and associate missionaries and two-year workers.

The annual growth rate for the total foreign missionary force has averaged a little more than three-tenths of 1 percent since Southern Baptists adopted Bold Mission Thrust in 1976. An annual increase of 3.18 percent is needed to achieve the 5,000 goal, the report indicated.

Since 1991 the board has seen a steady increase in the percentage of two-year personnel in the total missionary force in relation to career personnel. Two-year personnel make up almost 12 percent of the current missionary count of 3,953. That's up from just over 10 percent at the end of 1992 and 9 percent at the end of 1991.

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Some board officials, including Spurgeon before he left the agency, have expressed concern that career missionaries are steadily becoming a smaller portion of the missionary force. They fear that trend eventually could dilute the board's principle of developing indigenous missions through planting career missionaries to learn language and culture.

Until this year board officials operated under an informal, unwritten guideline that its service corps should not exceed an arbitrary 10 percent of its total missionary force.

After hearing a report from a Foreign Mission Board task force that studied this issue, the board's global strategy group decided earlier this year not to limit the percentage of two-year workers, according to Norvelle. The strategy group is the board's long-range planning body of top administrators. Its members decided these numbers would be determined by strategic needs based on budget and field support.

Although the percentage of career personnel in the board's total missionary force has declined slightly, Atkinson said he wasn't troubled by service corps workers exceeding 10 percent of overseas personnel. "I think it can get out of balance, but I don't think it's out of balance yet," he said, adding, "If you look at the areas of the world where (service corps workers) are significantly over 10 percent, most of these are in World A, where some of the highest priorities of the world exist."

"World A" -- so named by mission strategists -- encompasses vast regions of the globe where people live and die with little or no knowledge of Jesus Christ. Most of World A's 1.2 billion people live in an area stretching from northern Africa to southeast Asia.

"We can't wait around for career missionaries to be ready to go to fill those needs in World A. We need to fill them now, and if we can fill them with people who will go for two years, praise the Lord," added Atkinson. "And God may use that experience in many of these people's lives to call them to a lifetime commitment to career missions."

Norvelle noted a third of Southern Baptists assigned through the service corps at the end of 1992 were serving in World A. At the same time, 13 percent of all service corps workers overseas were in the career appointment process, she said. In addition, many career missionaries first felt God's call to missions after going overseas through the board's volunteers in mission program, assignments that are usually about two weeks.

Among career missionary candidates currently in contact with the board's personnel selection department, about 100 live overseas, Atkinson said. More than 70 of these are service corps workers.

Previously the board did not allow candidates to count service corps or journeyman experience toward the two-year experience requirement for career mission appointment, according to Atkinson.

That policy change is one of many reasons Norvelle believes the service corps program has grown. Another is the corps provides short-term service opportunities for an experience-oriented generation. "People are choosing to taste, touch, hear, see and smell missions rather than just learn about missions," she said.

In addition, when people get the chance to serve through the corps, some choose to go again, Norvelle said. Of the 168 applicants approved so far this year, 30 previously have served with the corps.

Meanwhile, the board's career appointment process has shown some other encouraging signs after a decline in appointments during the past two years. After rising almost 28 percent, from 185 in 1989 to 236 in 1990, appointments fell by about 11 percent in 1991 to 209. Appointments for 1992 numbered 205.

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But during March 1993, the personnel selection department received a record 44 written life histories, a requirement for career candidates in later stages of the appointment process. "Candidates don't write life histories unless they're seriously looking toward appointment in the next six months to a year," said Atkinson. During the last four years Atkinson has monitored those statistics and found the number of candidates in the final stages of the appointment process has increased by 17.2 percent.

Another significant increase over the past few years is in numbers of seminary students who have contacted the board about career appointment, Atkinson said. "Some of these people may be several years away from appointment. But it does say that the pipeline of candidates is strong at this point," he said.

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Committee weighed board nominees'
Bible beliefs, SBC commitment

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
5/4/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Biblical beliefs and commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention were two key factors the Committee on Nominations used in selecting nominees to SBC boards and commissions, according to the committee chairman.

Joe Atchison, director of missions for the Northwest Baptist Association in Bentonville, Ark., told Baptist Press May 3 the 70-member committee "carried on in the tradition of (nominating) people who believe in an inerrant Bible."

"And we did not feel that those who support the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship should serve on a board," Atchison said. The CBF is an organization of Baptists formed in 1991 in opposition to the conservative direction of the SBC.

Atchison also noted the Committee on Nominations sought to expand minority representation on the SBC boards.

The committee released 240 nominations April 29. Those names will be voted by messengers during the June 15-17 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston.

The nominees will serve on a range of SBC bodies, such as the Executive Committee; Foreign and Home Mission boards; Sunday School and Annuity boards; the six SBC seminaries; Brotherhood, Radio and Television, Christian Life, Education, Stewardship and Historical commissions; and several other bodies.

The Committee on Nominations did most of its work during a March 25-26 meeting in Nashville, Atchison said. The members came well-prepared after various telephone conferences and mailings detailing the committee's responsibilities, he said. One such responsibility is balancing each board so no more than two-thirds of its members are in church-related vocations such as the pastorate or are lay church members.

During the meeting, Atchison said, "There were differences expressed, there were discussions about things, but when we finished there was a good unanimity of spirit."

A committee member from each state Baptist convention reviewed with the entire committee the background of each nominee from their state, as well as reasons the nominee was being recommended, Atchison recounted. Then time was allotted for questions from committee members.

As he listened to the nominees' qualifications, Atchison said, "I was impressed that they're just mainstream Southern Baptists."

Atchison said he also was impressed with fellow committee members for "the convictions, the concern and the understanding of Baptists" they had and "how single-minded in purpose all of those folks were for the SBC, in how much they loved it and were committed to it."

A seven-member subcommittee will make any additional nominations that may be needed before the SBC meets in Houston, Atchison said.

Atchison has been a member of the SBC Christian Life Commission 10 years and was a 1981 Committee on Nominations member. He also was 1979-81 president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention's executive board.

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**Atheist's son, church-state experts
cite differing views on school prayer** By Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)--Thirty years after his mother's court challenge of public school prayer and Bible reading, the son of atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair rues the far-reaching implications of the Supreme Court's school prayer rulings.

"God is out of the public school system," said Bill Murray, who is now an evangelist and a member of First Baptist Church in Carrollton, Texas.

"In the name of separation of church and state, we have seen the removal of all moral teachings whatsoever. Anything that could be considered part of the Judeo-Christian tradition of principles has been removed. It has resulted in terrible damage to the moral fiber of this country."

Murray became a born-again Christian in 1980. He immediately generated national media attention with a letter to the Austin American-Statesman publicly apologizing for his role as a 16-year-old plaintiff in the public school devotions case. Murray soon launched the "Faith Foundation" educational organization and about two years later became a full-time evangelist.

Murray has scheduled a religious rally June 17 in the 12,000-seat Baltimore Arena to mark the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision. He also is asking churches across the United States to hold simultaneous revival services or prayer vigils that evening to call America to "turn back to God."

Today, Murray refers to his mother's Austin-based American Atheist Center as a cult. Murray said O'Hair broke all ties with him when he began to reject his Marxist and atheistic upbringing, even before he became a Christian.

"She ceased to speak with me when I wouldn't be a part of her cult -- when I refused to be controlled by her," he said.

Michael K. Whitehead, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, agreed with Murray a "moral and spiritual vacuum" has developed in public school policies as a direct result of strict church-state separation.

"Of course, the omnipresent God has not really been 'kicked out' of school. But with policies based on strict separationism, it just looks that way," Whitehead said. "Strict separationism tends to produce the same results as practical atheism when forced upon citizens serving as public officials."

But Murray claims more credit -- or blame -- than he is due, according to some advocates of church-state separation.

Murray's sweeping charges are gross over-simplifications based on flawed history, according to Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

"Madalyn Murray O'Hair, in fact, could claim some credit for the school prayer decisions. But the results were inevitable in that there already were deeply religious persons -- as well as atheists like herself -- who were poised to challenge publicly sponsored religious activities in the schools," Lynn said. "She played a catalytic role to some degree, but without her the results would have been the same."

Oliver S. Thomas, general counsel for the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, maintains it is "nonsense" to say anyone can banish God from the public schools.

"No one has the authority to do that," Thomas said. However, he is quick to agree that some school officials have overreacted to the rulings by trying to avoid any religious expression in public schools.

"There is a difference between government speech and private speech," he said, drawing a clear distinction between state-sponsored religious exercises and student-initiated expressions of faith.

In 1963 -- one year after the Supreme Court ruled in *Engel v. Vitale* against state-composed school prayers in New York -- a case brought by Ed Schempp of Philadelphia, challenging Bible reading in Pennsylvania schools reached the high court. At the same time, Murray's mother was challenging recitation of the Lord's Prayer and devotional Bible reading in Maryland public schools.

Consolidating the cases, the Supreme Court ruled in *Abington v. Schempp* state-sponsored religious devotions in public schools are unconstitutional.

While most Southern Baptists do not want public school children to be compelled to recite "a daily, mandatory prayer to a Brand-X God," Whitehead insisted they do want a less strict and absolutist separation of church and state.

"They support a more accommodating view of church-state separation whereby schools freely permit student-initiated, student-led religious expression both in and outside the classroom," he said.

According to Murray, there is "a direct correlation" between the secularization of public schools following the banning of prayers and the rise in crime, incidents of abortion and other social ills in the United States in the last three decades.

But that claim, according to Lynn, is a "nonsensical proposition" built on "the completely bogus use of statistics" based "not a whit on history or science."

"Murray ignores the fact that society has undergone a vast transformation in the last 20 to 30 years completely unrelated to the existence or non-existence of prayers in the public schools," he said.

Murray acknowledges the "couple of minutes" of devotions dispelled from morning activities in school classrooms were not that important in themselves. However, he said the Supreme Court prayer decisions have been used to enhance secularism and to squelch the free speech rights of Christians.

"Basic freedoms are being suppressed in the name of separation of church and state," Murray said, claiming that periodicals advocating homosexual rights can be distributed freely in public schools but religious publications cannot.

Both Whitehead and Thomas agreed the Supreme Court prayer decisions have resulted in "a lot of misunderstanding" on the part of some school officials concerning the proper expression of religion in public schools.

"Religious freedom is still not adequately enjoyed by students and parents in America's schools today," Whitehead said. "Even good Christian teachers and administrators feel forced to keep all mention of God and the Bible out of public school curriculum and programs, for fear of a lawsuit by the ACLU or other strict separationists."

Thomas pointed to history textbooks that were purged of religious references and student-led religious groups that were denied equal access to meet on school grounds as examples of overreaction to the *Schempp* decision.

However, Thomas said, in recent years many of the misunderstandings have been corrected, in part through initiatives such as the Equal Access Act of 1984.

While a few overly zealous "school bureaucrats" have limited legitimate religious expression by pupils, Lynn said, "In the main, school officials have responded sensibly to the religious needs and claims of students."

Lynn said a "decent distance" between church and state benefits both institutions, but Murray maintained religion is suffering under a one-sided application of the wall of separation.

"What we have is one-way separation of church and state," Murray said. "The original intent was to safeguard religion. Our forefathers were concerned that there be no official church. They never in their worst nightmares supposed the First Amendment would be used by a secular society to suppress religion."

Murray is "dead wrong," Thomas said, if he believes the founding fathers wanted only to ensure non-preferential treatment for churches, and he needs to "go back to school for some history lessons."

While the founders certainly did not intend to exclude the influence of religious people from public life, they clearly intended that government should neither promote nor inhibit religion, he said.

"Separation of church and state is good for government and it is good for religion," Thomas said. "That's what Baptists have been saying for 350 years."

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