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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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ILLINOIS -- Widows voice faith despite flooded homes.
GEORGIA -- Add 1 more to computer options available to Southern Baptists.
KENYA -- Evangelism efforts net 9,000 responses in Kenya, Tanzania.

Hospitals' independence vote
protested by S.C. Baptist exec By Ben L. McDade

Baptist Press
8/10/93

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--The chief administrative officer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention has challenged a vote by South Carolina Baptist Hospitals Inc. trustees Aug. 9 to make their board independent of the convention.

"I am grievously disappointed to learn that the trustees of South Carolina Baptist Hospitals Inc. have taken action to take our hospitals away from South Carolina Baptists and give the hospitals to themselves," said B. Carlisle Driggers in a prepared statement following the hospital trustees' vote.

"Their action is not legal and represents a betrayal of the trust placed in each of them by South Carolina Baptists when they were elected as trustees of this asset," said Driggers, the convention's executive secretary-treasurer.

South Carolina Baptist Hospitals Inc. trustees are entrusted with two hospitals that state Southern Baptists purchased and have continued to support. In 1914 the convention purchased the Knowlton Hospital in Columbia, renaming it South Carolina Baptist Hospital and, now, Baptist Medical Center, Columbia.

The second hospital, located in Easley, was begun by the community. When they were unable to fund its completion, South Carolina Baptists were asked to take over the project in the mid-1950s. The convention successfully completed it and named it Easley Baptist Hospital, today known as Baptist Medical Center, Easley.

In his statement, Driggers said, "The financial investments of South Carolina Baptists launched both institutions toward their positions of tremendous community impact today. Through annual Mother's Day offerings and more than \$850,000 in Cooperative Program funds this year, we continue to support this ministry of healing."

Approximately 20 percent of trustees to oversee the hospitals are elected each November as the convention meets in annual session.

Since being informed trustees were considering action to amend the hospitals' charter to create a self-perpetuating board, Driggers said he and other convention leaders have attempted to negotiate a mutually acceptable arrangement. In his statement, Driggers said he wrote hospital trustees a letter Aug. 6, 1993, and pleaded with them not to take such action.

In part the letter to trustees reads, "To amend the hospital's charter without the consent of South Carolina Baptist Convention would violate the convention's rules and the affiliational agreement between the hospital and the convention. It would be illegal. It would violate the hospital's own charter which specifically declares, '... this charter cannot be amended without the prior consent of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.'"

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Hospital attorney Charles Porter and convention counsel Jim Guenther conferred Aug. 6. The hospital's attorney said the trustees may legally amend the charter to void the convention's rights because South Carolina statutes give trustees of nonprofit corporations the right to amend the charters of those corporations.

"Not so," says Guenther, who is based in Nashville. "The statutes give the hospital's trustees the power to amend the hospital's charter, but the trustees lack the legal right to exercise that power. The hospital's own charter declares that fact. The affiliational agreement between the convention and the hospital vests ultimate control in the convention. It is a trust agreement. The trustees of the hospital are elected by the convention to manage the hospital in trust for the convention. The trustees' action is a breach of the trust."

Recalling the convention's recent break with Furman University in Greenville, Driggers said, "Some will wonder what is wrong with the Baptists in the state -- first Furman, now the hospitals. Who will be next? For 16 months we have had a blue ribbon committee studying our relationships with our schools, benevolent institutions and our agencies. In just a few months they will make public their findings and recommendations."

In October 1990, Furman University trustees voted to sever ties with the convention by making its board self-perpetuating. The legality of that board's actions never was tested in court. In May 1992, state Baptists, in a called convention in Columbia, voted to avoid court action and to sever all ties with their oldest institution.

As a result of the Furman issue, a 13-member committee was appointed by the convention president to study the historical, contemporary and future relationships of the convention with its agencies and institutions. The committee is scheduled to give a report with any recommendations when the convention meets Nov. 16-17 at the Carolina Coliseum in Columbia.

The action by the hospitals' trustees came after hospital president Charles Beaman was advised May 25 of convention plans to legally enforce the convention's rights to elect the trustees of the convention's institutions. In addition to the two hospitals, the convention has eight other agencies and institutions.

The convention's committee had advised the chief executive officers of its agencies and institutions the committee planned to recommend to the convention a new format for convention and institutions relationships made possible by a new state nonprofit corporation act expected to be enacted next year. Beaman expressed concern at that meeting over one aspect of the new plan and was assured by committee and convention officials then and subsequently that every effort would be made to accommodate the hospital's needs.

"I regret the hospital's administration and trustees were not willing to give this process adequate time for success," Driggers said, "because I believe we could have negotiated an arrangement that would have met the needs of the hospital and the convention."

"While we are confident that our legal standing is firm in these matters, we deeply regret the distraction from our primary tasks that sustaining those rights would require," Driggers said. "Again, I plead with the hospital administrators and trustees to yet reconsider this matter."

Whether legal action will be taken by the convention to enforce its rights against the hospitals and the trustees who voted to amend the hospitals' charter will be determined by the convention's general board. That board's executive committee, scheduled to meet Sept. 2, is expected to review the hospitals' action and make a recommendation to the general board, now scheduled to meet Oct. 11-12.

**Widows voice faith
despite flooded homes**

HULL, Ill. (BP)--Mary Shirley says the Mississippi River floodwater that has invaded her lifelong home are "by no means the darkest part of my life God has walked me through."

Three years ago, Shirley's mother died just two days after suffering a stroke; five weeks later, her husband was killed in an auto accident, leaving her a single mother of two.

"God was very faithful," Shirley recounts. "He kept me going when I didn't want to go on. He sent friends when I needed them."

Members of her church, Payson Southern Baptist Church, also helped and prayed. "We're just a part of the family there," she says.

Now, more than two feet of water are holding her Hull, Ill., home hostage. "I know that God loves me and he wants the best for me," Shirley says, "and he will not let me down in this situation."

Another widow, Margaret Huebel of Cape Girardeau, Mo., said she doesn't plan to return to the house where she has lived 47 years, where water has reached the windows. "I'll get an apartment in Cape Girardeau," she says. "I had planned to later anyway."

Besides, she says, "A house is a house is a house. We owned it; we were attached to it; but it's just a house. Those who don't have their churches; those who don't have family; those who don't have the Lord -- those are the ones who are bad off."

Huebel, whose belongings have been taken to three different houses, adds, "There are so many more who are really hurting. There are those who didn't get their furniture out of their homes. There are those who lost everything."

Huebel's church, Red Star Baptist in Cape Girardeau, also was flooded. And she's concerned; she teaches the first- and second-grade Sunday school. "I worry about the bus children," she says. "We may lose some if we don't get to hold services at the church soon."

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Bill Webb and Pat Hindman contributed to this story.

**Add 1 more to computer options
available to Southern Baptists**

By James Dotson

**Baptist Press
8/10/93**

CONYERS, Ga. (BP)--Imagine, for a moment, a system in which pastors, denominational workers and lay Baptists could engage in free and open discourse on any topic from their own offices at whatever time was convenient for them.

They also could share information and data to coordinate efforts, such as a list of local benevolence providers and recipients. Specific questions could be immediately addressed to all, and the one person with an answer could be located with a minimum of effort.

It is just such a denominational environment that David Travis, director of missions for the Stone Mountain Baptist Association, envisions for the future of Southern Baptists. And it's a dream that is already being implemented in his association.

The tool that makes it possible is ChurchNet, one of about 30,000 personal computer-based "electronic bulletin board systems" in the country serving the modern telecomputing culture, but one of only a handful specifically designed to serve Southern Baptists.

"We are now starting to reach critical mass in computing among churches, where there are enough to really do something with them," Travis said, noting the concept of bulletin boards is no longer as foreign to Baptists as it once was.

"A lot of our younger pastors coming out of seminary ... are computer-friendly already, so they've really bought into the idea," he said.

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Nationally, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board sponsors SBCNet, a subsection of the CompuServe Information Service that serves as an on-line link for Southern Baptists. Travis encourages use of that system and uses it as a source of files, but he believes it can be complemented through a national network of locally operated bulletin board systems not operated by a single organization.

"I think that to have really a free flow of information, you have to run everything," he said of plans for ChurchNet. "It's a free exchange of ideas and opinions. There are no filters."

The idea for ChurchNet began last year, Travis said, when he envisioned it primarily as a system for helping the association coordinate benevolence assistance. The advantage would be to provide a referral list of churches that provide specific needs, so recipients could be directed to the best source in the association. One church might have a food pantry, for instance, while another might have a large clothes closet. Likewise, a list of benevolence recipients could be maintained to prevent abuse.

But as ChurchNet developed, other ideas began to develop. Now on the system are eight topical conference areas, where individuals can leave messages and participate in discussion, and 20 file areas, where participants can contribute articles and other resources.

One of the areas he thinks will be most helpful is a section titled, "It Worked In Our Church," a name borrowed from a column in The Baptist Standard, Texas Baptists' newsjournal. In this file area, churches could explain projects and programs that have been successful.

"I think that has one of the greatest potentials," Travis said.

A conference area called Brain Trust will serve as a forum for discussion of key topics facing churches today, similar to a regular feature in The Baptist Program.

In both these areas, the advantage is individuals will be able to share their own thoughts, screened but unedited, whereas publications are limited in the amount of material they can publish.

The concept would be enhanced if and when the idea catches on nationwide and information can be shared, Travis said. With a technology called "Echo Mail" that comes with the BBS software, each machine in a nationwide network of bulletin board systems could be updated each night for the cost of two brief long distance calls.

The computers would call each other in a long chain from coast to coast, adding information to a "packet" of data that is passed along. Then, at the end of the chain, the process would be reversed, and information would be passed back to all the computers, with each system receiving only the data that was required for its electronic mail, conference and file areas.

"It's a way of sharing files and electronic mail across the country," Travis said. "A pastor in a racially transitional area in Los Angeles could share ideas and information with a pastor in a racially transitional area in Atlanta. ... It's a way of clustering and developing affinity groups."

Travis said users outside the association are welcome in ChurchNet, and it can be customized to include areas for other associations. But he said "what I'd really like to do is help the other associations establish their own systems, where they would have ownership," he said.

Operation of a system is not difficult, Travis said. Startup costs are small. For the Stone Mountain association, a donated, slightly obsolete PC clone was used as the workhorse for the system, and the only expenses were \$50 for a modem (the device that allows computer communication by telephone), \$80 for a generic bulletin board software package customized to meet the needs of ChurchNet and a phone line that is shared with the office fax machine. Recently, the host computer was upgraded with another office computer that had itself been displaced by a still-faster machine.

Nominal fees to some users -- who need only a computer, modem and communications software to connect -- could help offset costs.

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"You can start cheap," he said, noting it shouldn't be hard to find a suitable machine donated by a business for a tax write-off. "So many people are upgrading to larger systems now that they're looking for places to donate," he said.

A complete grasp of computer technology also is not a necessity, Travis said. In most associations, he said, there are lay people who are familiar with computers who could spend a couple of hours with the software and a manual getting it set up. Training for maintenance of the board is relatively simple.

The ChurchNet system has only been operating a few weeks, but Travis said the concept is drawing attention. At a national conference of directors of missions in New Mexico recently, Travis said many expressed interest.

"Even the ones that didn't know anything about computers were saying, 'Yes, tell me how I can get this started.'"

For information on becoming a registered user of ChurchNet or details on how your association can develop such a system, contact the Stone Mountain Baptist Association, P.O. Box 911, Conyers, Ga. 30207, or call (404) 483-2776. For information about the SBC's national SBCNet, call David Haywood at the Sunday School Board, (615) 251-2895.

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Evangelism efforts net 9,000
responses in Kenya, Tanzania

By Craig Bird

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NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--Summertime is spiritual harvest time this year in Tanzania and Kenya.

A nine-day crusade in the southern Tanzania city of Mbeya resulted in 2,425 people professing faith in Christ, while an eight-day effort in the old Kenyan port of Mombasa saw 6,588 professions of faith. Both crusades ended in July.

The two events hundreds of miles apart both used the combined resources of local Christians, Southern Baptist missionaries and short-term volunteers from the United States.

The Mbeya evangelism group was part of the ongoing partnership between Tanzania and Florida Baptists. The Kenya group included three Foreign Mission Board trustees working with the Mombasa Baptist Association.

"This was the 34th mission trip I've led, and I've never seen a team work with such singleness of purpose," Bob Clements, chairman of the FMB trustees' Africa committee, said of the Mombasa experience. "The volunteers, the (Kenyans) and the missionaries all had one focus: to win people to Jesus."

In Mbeya, a city whose population has exploded from 50,000 to 200,000 in the past decade, 22 volunteers (19 from Florida and two from Texas) worked with missionaries and Tanzanian Baptists in 16 churches and two area-wide crusades. Daily activities included pastor training seminars and street evangelism.

The city crusade was held on a four-acre site where a church was started.

One of the volunteers is financing construction of a 1,000-seat auditorium. The building also will be used as an associational training center and a pastors' school. A medical clinic and lab will be on the same land, staffed by two African Christian doctors and a medical assistant.

The 264 people baptized at the end of the nine days included two former Muslims and one former Jehovah's Witness.

Clements brought 27 volunteers from six states -- Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, Virginia, Missouri and Florida -- and worked with missionary Rusty Pugh, church developer for Mombasa. The 1,000-year-old city has a population estimated at more than 500,000.

"We pretty much went from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day," said Clements, an evangelist from Austin, Texas. The sun came up each morning on teams spreading the gospel on the ferry that connects Mombasa with the south coast, at the city's general post office and on the bridge that connects the island city with the north coast.

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After a breakfast break, Mombasa pastors and laymen, the volunteers and Pugh worked with churches on door-to-door visitation until 4:30 p.m. Each night the "Jesus" film was shown at or near a Mombasa Baptist church.

"Every one of those 6,588 people who prayed to receive Jesus was enrolled in Bible Way (a correspondence study)," Clements said. "Plus the more than 4,000 folks who accepted Christ in the afternoons and at the film showings were enrolled in a 10-week discipleship program at the area church."

The American volunteers bought Bibles to give to everyone who completes the "Growing in Christ" course written by another Southern Baptist missionary in Kenya, John Witte.

Alan Thompson, pastor of Valley Heights Baptist Church in Phoenix and vice chairman of the FMB trustees' Africa committee, was overwhelmed by the openness of the Kenyan people to the gospel.

"In two hours one day I led 16 people to the Lord," he said. "That's six months of work in Phoenix!"

A third trustee, Karen Gilbert, said she "learned more from the Kenyan Baptists than they learned from me." Her husband, Al Gilbert, is pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Hampton, Va.

One highlight for Gilbert: "to share Christ with a young Muslim man whose heart was crying out to know the truth, and seeing his face light up after he prayed to accept Christ and the joy of freedom filled his eyes."

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