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Uniform Church Letter
to be revised, renamed

Baptist Press
10/6/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Changes in the Southern Baptist Uniform Church Letter, to be effective in 1994, have been made to make the annual report easier to complete, result in more accurate statistics at the national level and be of greater benefit locally, according to Tom Carringer, denominational statistics specialist at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

In addition to providing a statistical report to the association, state convention and Southern Baptist Convention, Carringer told members of the SBC Coordinating Committee Sept. 28 the UCL will be a more effective tool for churches to measure their health, growth and progress.

To better describe the dual purposes, Carringer said the name of the Uniform Church Letter will change to "The Annual Church Profile."

As Carringer surveyed church, associational, state and SBC leaders who have church letter responsibilities, he said he repeatedly was told the appearance and number of items of information requested were intimidating to those unfamiliar with the process. As a result, some churches simply didn't complete the forms, necessitating telephone and mail follow-up at the associational or state convention level.

Respondents also asked that the UCL be reformatted with items in a more logical sequence. As a result, The Annual Church Profile will reverse the order of enrollment figures, requesting the total first, followed by age-group breakdowns.

Confusion also has existed in churches reporting statistics on mission-type churches they sponsor. Through 1993, mission statistics are reported in the totals for sponsoring churches. Beginning with 1994, churches and mission-type churches will be reported separately and then totaled together.

Carringer said more churches and associations are using computer software to complete church letters -- approximately 30 percent in 1992 -- and the number is expected to increase this year.

"Since the software has built-in error-checking capabilities, it has become the preferred method of collecting data for those churches and associations having computers," Carringer said. The result is a higher accuracy rate and lower cost.

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For the future, he envisions wedding denominational statistics and geo-demographics information whereby a church or association could, among many things, analyze its own growth patterns and identify growth and ministry opportunities in a specific community.

He called the changes for 1994 "the beginning of a process. I believe the statistics will not only become more accurate but more meaningful on church, associational, state and denominational levels."

In response, Ernest Mosley, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, affirmed Carringer's research and analysis, terming the changes a "mid-course correction."

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Court refuses to accept
'fetal personhood' case

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
10/6/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court has refused to hear a case which some pro-life supporters hoped the justices would accept to determine whether an unborn child is a legally protected person from the moment of conception.

The court announced Oct. 4 it would not grant a hearing to the case. It was the first day of the court's 1993-94 term.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission had joined in a brief by the University Faculty for Life asking the court to grant a hearing to the case. The brief argued each human being from fertilization is a person with a constitutional right to life. There is no valid scientific or philosophical difference between a human being or person, and there should be no legal distinction either, the brief said.

In the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, the Supreme Court said it did not need to decide when life begins and the "unborn have never been recognized in the law as persons in the whole sense."

"We are disappointed but not surprised," said Michael Whitehead, the Christian Life Commission's general counsel.

"The court apparently would like to avoid another abortion case this term. Pro-life groups will continue to urge the court to revisit the issue of 'fetal personhood' under the current scientific evidence."

The case, J.M. v. V.C., involved the attempt of a father, J.M., to assert constitutional rights on behalf of his unborn child and to prevent the mother, V.C., from having an abortion. The abortion was performed when the New Jersey Supreme Court lifted an injunction.

Another group joining in the pro-life brief was Holston Baptist Association in Tennessee.

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Florida Baptists closing
Andrew relief operations

By Don Hepburn

Baptist Press
10/6/93

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--After a full year in operation, the Florida Baptist Convention's disaster relief center in Florida City is being dismantled.

The decision to shut down the operation Nov. 1 was precipitated by the depletion of financial resources and the significant reduction of volunteer laborers who have been diverted to other disaster needs in the Midwest and elsewhere.

Arrangements have been made with the Miami Baptist Association to coordinate commitments for further repair of private homes.

"Volunteerism has dried up," said John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention. "The volunteers have been coming over a year. Sustaining volunteerism for that time is a tribute to all that we are as Southern Baptists."

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"We will spend every dime we have received but we are not going to expend more than we have," said Sullivan, who noted, "All of our churches are up and running."

All equipment and excess materials used at the operations center in Florida City will be relocated into storage for future use.

Sullivan called the response by Southern Baptists during the aftermath of the hurricane "phenomenal" both in the commitment of volunteer relief workers, donated supplies and more than \$3.2 million in financial assistance.

Immediately after the hurricane, Southern Baptists responded in the thousands, cooking hot meals for survivors, distributing water by the hundreds of gallons and packaged foods, as well as performing temporary repair jobs on 78 homes.

Another 4,397 volunteers participated in the next phase of relief -- rebuilding homes for those people without adequate insurance. This repair and rebuilding effort aided 745 homes and churches in south Dade County between Oct. 31 of last year and Sept. 15 of this year.

The past year for 35 south Florida churches has been one of recovery and rebuilding of memberships as well as facilities. Many of the damaged churches were insured. Those with inadequate insurance received volunteer labor, donated funds and building materials provided by Baptists from around the country.

Additional labor and materials were underwritten by the \$3.2 million disaster relief fund and by partnership churches from across the state who were linked with sister congregations in Miami. These partner churches committed volunteer labor, funds, materials and prayer support toward the rebuilding effort.

The disaster relief fund subsidized \$104,000 in salary supplements to church staff in the first six months. Another \$1.49 million was provided in direct financial support to assist in rebuilding the underinsured churches, while nearly \$500,000 was spent on home repairs and furnishings.

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Hepburn is director of public relations for the Florida Baptist Convention.

Robert Allen leaves True Union
to become ABP associate editor

Baptist Press
10/6/93

COLUMBIA, Md. (BP)--Robert Allen, editor of The Baptist True Union, has resigned to become associate executive editor of Associated Baptist Press, effective Nov. 1.

Allen, 37, has been editor of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware newsjournal since 1988.

At ABP Allen's responsibilities will include editing, writing and handling administrative duties for the twice-weekly independent news service.

Allen said, "I'm looking forward to the opportunity to work with ABP. It's been a real privilege working in Maryland. I've enjoyed the people and learning about Maryland Baptists. The opportunity ABP has given me is probably ideal given my perception of call and giftedness in ministry."

A native of Marion, Ill., Allen graduated from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. He received the master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1985.

Northwest Baptist newsjournal editor James Watters, president-elect of the Southern Baptist Press Association, the organization of state Baptist newspaper editors, said, "Bob Allen represents the best in denominational journalism. Temperate and fair, as well as unflinching in seeking the truth, Bob sets an example for all who give their lives to telling the news about the good news among Southern Baptists."

Allen, his wife, Vickie, and their two children, Patrick, 7, and Amy, 4, will move to Jacksonville, Fla., where APB is based.

Ron Chaney, the True Union's associate editor, has been named interim editor of the paper by the convention's Baptist True Union committee. A search process for Allen's successor will begin at the convention's general missions board meeting Dec. 13.

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**Court denies challenge
to Equal Access Act**

By Tom Strobe

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court has denied a hearing on a challenge to the scope of the Equal Access Act, thereby assuring protection of the free exercise of religion by high school students.

The court announced denial of the case Oct. 4, the first day of its 1993-94 term.

In the case, Renton School District v. Garnett, a district in the state of Washington, had denied the request of a student religious group at Lindbergh High School to be formally recognized as a club and to meet on campus before or after classes, when other clubs meet. The school district said authorization of the student club would have violated the state constitution and the establishment clause of the United States Constitution's First Amendment.

A district court ruled in the school district's favor, saying the Equal Access Act does not prevent application of the Washington constitution.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, however, reversed the lower court's opinion, ruling the federal law implicitly preempts the state constitution.

"Chalk up another loss for the ACLU and strict separationism and another win for free religious speech," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The Widmar case in 1981 already established the principle that a state constitutional claim of 'strict separation of church and state' cannot trump a federal constitutional claim of free speech and free exercise. The trial court tried to justify the school district's disobedience of the Equal Access Act on this ground."

In the 1981 Widmar v. Vincent decision, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of equal access to college facilities by religious students. The Equal Access Act of 1984 provided the same rights for high school students. The court upheld the law in the 1990 Westside Community Board of Education v. Mergens opinion.

Whitehead was a member of the law team arguing for students' free-exercise rights in the Widmar case.

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**Alliance of Baptists
to study homosexuality**

Baptist Press
10/6/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Alliance of Baptists' board of directors has established a special task force to develop a "working statement" on sexual issues, with particular attention to be given to homosexuality.

The task force was created during the board's semiannual meeting, Sept. 30-Oct. 2, at First Baptist Church in Washington. The task force is to present its proposed statement during an upcoming annual convocation of the organization of Baptist moderates. The 1994 convocation will be March 3-5 in Greenville, S.C.

The board voted overwhelmingly but not unanimously for creating the task force.

Stan Hastey, the organization's executive director, reported to the board that the Alliance, after discussions with leaders of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, will work alongside the CBF but not merge with it.

In other board action, a 1994 budget of \$246,173 was approved and an ecumenical development committee was created.

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Florida Baptists stepping up
ministry to migrant families

By Barbara Denman

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Sweating day after day in the hot Florida sun, toiling in back-breaking tasks that no one else will do, Florida's migrants have little hope of rising beyond their present status.

Few have had opportunities to pursue an education. Many cannot read or write in their native language, whether it be Spanish, French-Creole or English.

It is in this context that Florida Baptists have stepped up their efforts to win to Christ the 88,000 to 150,000 migrants who work in the state's agricultural industry each year.

Although these evangelistic efforts have met with success, the new converts are ill-prepared to assume the mantle of church leadership. "God has transformed their lives," said state Baptist migrant consultant Miguel de la Cruz. "But here we are, we have these people who are not trained spiritually or are even literate.

"As our pastors try to disciple them for Christ they must first teach them how to read and write Spanish. Only then can they make them better disciples so they can disciple others for Christ. So it's a very difficult situation."

Adding to the dilemma, many of the pastors who minister to the migrant families are not very well educated. "Most are bivocational, in stressful jobs and do not have time to get additional education," de la Cruz explained.

De la Cruz said he would like to see Florida Baptists provide these pastors with additional ministerial training in the form of a "prophet school" where "pastors can be taught homiletics, how to prepare a message, how to do an invitation, lead outreach and can receive encouragement."

According to pastor Ramon Banda of the Wahneta First Baptist Church in Eloise, such training would help migrant pastors determine "how we can be more effective in our ministry and find encouragement from other pastors." Encouragement is needed because the churches "minister to people with limited means," Banda said.

Every year since 1990, Florida Baptists have provided \$15,000 to undergird Florida Baptist churches ministering to migrant field laborers. Because the needs have increased and the response to the gospel is positive, this year that amount has been increased to \$30,000.

A portion of that money in recent years has funded an annual migrant childrens camp at Lake Yale Baptist Assembly.

According to de la Cruz, that money has been a good investment for Florida Baptists. "I have participated in the last three camps and it's wonderful to share in the hunger of the kids wanting to know more (about Christianity). We are sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with them at their level. Last year, we had 12 in my group (attend the camp) and out of the 12, 10 came to know Christ."

In addition to a prophets school, de la Cruz would like to see the additional money fund such ministries as a family camp and youth camp and resources to help the migrant pastors in their work.

Pastor John Gallegos is excited about the possibilities for a camp where migrant families can learn the basics of Christian discipleship.

"That is really needed," he said. "A lot of these people go through divorce. Many are living together without being married. I have performed more than 30 weddings of people who are already living together. A family camp would help them understand the basics of faith and what is sin."

Gallegos said drugs, alcohol and physical abuse are common ills among migrant families.

There also is a need for stewardship education. Many of the migrants work in Florida to send money back to their families in Mexico or Haiti. Even after they are saved and become members of Florida Baptist churches, few migrants give financially to the church, because they are trying to survive.

This affects pastors of the 73 Florida Baptist churches that minister primarily to migrants and seasonal farm workers and severely hampers their ability to grow a church. Little money is available to purchase buildings, literature and supplies or even to pay a pastor's salary.

Gallegos said the struggles once frustrated him but added he has since found peace. "We are called to minister and let the Lord work out the rest."

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CLC's Mitchell honored
for temperance work

By William H. Perkins Jr.

Baptist Press
10/6/93

PASS CHRISTIAN, Miss. (BP)--C. Ben Mitchell, who handles alcohol and drug abuse issues for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, has received the American Council on Alcohol Problems' 1993 Distinguished Service Award.

The award was presented during the council's annual meeting, during which anti-alcohol organizations from 22 states met to share ideas on stemming ever-increasing tolerance for the problem drug across the country.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention's Christian Action Commission hosted the Sept. 21-23 meeting at Gulfshore Baptist Assembly in Pass Christian.

Speaker after speaker from organizations represented at the meeting recounted the destructive effects of alcohol and called on the group to provide leadership in the campaign to control alcohol in the United States.

United Methodist Bishop Felton May of Pennsylvania, who heads his church's task force on drug abuse and violence, pointed out alcohol poses a special abuse problem because of its widespread acceptance in America.

"Alcohol is a national phenomenon," said May, who received the council's Clarence True Wilson Christian Leadership Award. "No community is untouched.

"This is a spiritual problem; we must call together all Christ-loving denominations to bring their considerable resources to bear," he said.

May related his grief at the human degradation he sees in the United States caused by alcohol and other abused drugs -- degradation he said is unmatched in poorer, more primitive parts of the world he has visited.

"They are enslaved to the bottle. ... You can become 21st century emancipators. Could it be that God is saying, 'Let my people go?'" he said, to a standing ovation.

Several ACAP state directors reported success in convincing legislators to drop the legal blood-alcohol limit from .1 to .08 for a driving under the influence charge, with even tighter limits for underage drinkers.

David Schneider, state director for Kansas, recounted the tragic story of a Kansan who mangled his face in a botched shotgun suicide attempt after beating his girlfriend to death in a drunken rage. He suggested the proven link between crime and alcohol abuse should be spotlighted.

"Crime is a hot-button issue right now. This will shift public opinion rapidly," he said.

The award to Mitchell involved recognition of the Christian Life Commission's recent revisions of various substance abuse-related pamphlets and Sunday bulletin inserts, new video tapes now available, news stories on the issue and legislative work for alcohol warning labels.

In other awards, Tennessean Herman L. King, who has been active in the temperance movement for more than 60 years, received the William N. Plymat Temperance Award.

Workshops included information on how to write fund-raising letters; orientation to the work of ACAP; legal advice for nonprofit organizations; and getting churches involved.

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