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Clinton: Even his critics
should express faith publicly

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/17/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--Before signing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, President Bill Clinton exhorted Americans, including those who oppose his policies based on religious belief, to bring their differing convictions to the public arena in an attempt to strengthen the country.

"It is high time we had an open and honest reaffirmation of the role of American citizens of faith -- not so that we can agree, but so that we can argue and discourse and seek the truth and seek to heal this troubled land," Clinton said Nov. 16 after departing from his prepared statement.

"There is a great debate now abroad in the land which finds itself injected into several political races about the extent to which people of faith can seek to do God's will as political actors. I would like to come down on the side of encouraging everybody to act on what they believe is the right thing to do," Clinton said.

"There are many people in this country who strenuously disagree with me on what they believe are the strongest grounds of their faiths. I encourage them to speak out."

Some of those who have opposed the president's policies the most forcefully have been, like Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, Southern Baptists.

Richard Land, whose agency, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, has criticized the Clinton administration's support of abortion and homosexual rights, said he was "greatly encouraged" by the president's comments.

"I think everyone present at the signing ceremony was moved as the president put down his notecards and spoke from his heart of the moral crisis in our nation and of the desperate need and right of people to bring their faith convictions to the public square in a joint search for truth and meaning," said the CLC's executive director, who was among about 200 people attending the event on the White House grounds.

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In encouraging the expression of religious convictions, Clinton referred for the second time recently to the influence on him of Stephen Carter's new book, "The Culture of Disbelief." In it, Carter, a Yale University law professor, offers compelling evidence influential people and institutions have trivialized religion. The result, Clinton said of Carter's assertions, is a "climate in this country in which some people believe that they are embarrassed to say that they advocate a course of action simply because they believe it is the right thing, because they believe it is dictated by their faith, by what they discern to be, with their best efforts, the will of God."

The CLC's Land said, "I personally believe President Clinton's reading of this book and its impact on his thinking is a direct answer to the prayers of millions of Southern Baptists and other believers who have prayed for the president as one who is in authority in the sure and certain faith that (quoting Scripture) 'the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.'"

Clinton also said, "We are a people of faith. We have been so secure in that faith that we have enshrined in our Constitution protection for people who profess no faith. And good for us for doing so. That is what the First Amendment is all about.

"But let us never believe that the freedom of religion imposes on any of us some responsibility to run from our convictions. Let us instead respect one another's faiths, fight to the death to preserve the right of every American to practice whatever convictions he or she has, but bring our values back to the table of American discourse to heal our troubled land."

Americans "can stand that kind of debate in this country," Clinton said. One of the reasons such a debate should occur is because the "most central institution of our society, the family, has been under assault for 30 years," he said.

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EDITORS' NOTE: This story replaces one in (BP) dated 11/16/93 with the same headline.

Clinton signs RFRA,
reverses Smith decision

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/17/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Bill Clinton concluded a three-and-a-half-year struggle to regain protection for religious liberty by signing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act into law Nov. 16.

The president signed RFRA as about 200 people watched on the south grounds of the White House. Those present included representatives of a diversity of religious groups, as well as leaders of civil liberties organizations and members of Congress.

Clinton's action, in effect, reverses the Supreme Court's *Employment Division v. Smith* opinion in the spring of 1990. In *Smith*, the court ruled government no longer has to demonstrate a "compelling interest" before restricting religious freedom. RFRA was introduced in mid-1990 as a legislative response.

Since *Smith*, it had been easier to limit individuals' religious expression. More than 60 cases after *Smith* had been decided against people making religious claims, the coalition supporting RFRA said.

The new law will require any government body to demonstrate a policy serves a "compelling interest" and is the "least restrictive means" in fulfilling the government's interest before limiting the free exercise of religion.

"The power to reverse ... by legislation a decision of the United States Supreme Court is a power that is rightly and infrequently exercised by the United States Congress," Clinton said before signing RFRA, "but this is an issue in which that extraordinary measure was clearly called for."

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RFRA "re-establishes a standard that better protects all Americans of all faiths in the exercise of their religion in a way that I am convinced is far more consistent with the intent of the founders of this nation than the Supreme Court decision," Clinton said.

The Senate had passed the religious liberty legislation by a 97-3 vote Oct. 27. Although the House of Representatives had passed the bill in May, it approved the Senate version, which included a technical amendment not contained in the House bill, without opposition Nov. 3.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs were part of the 68-member coalition supporting RFRA.

CLC Executive Director Richard Land said, "I think everyone who cherishes religious freedom should be delighted with and gratified by the signing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act into law. It is particularly appropriate that a Baptist president should sign this historic act into law, since the religious freedom embodied in the First Amendment to our Constitution is the particular Baptist gift to the Reformation and to America.

"The egregious Supreme Court decision in the Smith case, which occasioned RFRA, was the greatest defeat for religious liberty in America in my lifetime," Land said. "The passage of RFRA, which negates that decision, is thus the greatest victory for religious freedom in my lifetime and probably in this century."

"Since Smith, there has been a steady drumbeat of bad decisions for religion. . . .," said Oliver Thomas, chairman of the coalition and former BJC general counsel. "Today, we celebrate the end of that dark night."

BJC Executive Director James Dunn said in a prepared statement, "We believe passionately that our religious liberty is a gift from God. The state should protect that liberty, not work against it. Now, our elected representatives have answered (the Supreme Court) that our religious liberty is a right that we cannot afford to live without."

Though RFRA was introduced originally in 1990, it was not voted on by either the full House or Senate until this year. The bill received what impetus it lacked when Clinton and the United States Catholic Conference endorsed it in March upon RFRA's reintroduction.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton had endorsed the need for a legislative remedy to the Smith decision without specifically supporting RFRA.

The Catholic Conference had opposed earlier versions of RFRA largely because of concerns the legislation would enhance religious liberty claims made by women seeking abortions. Some other pro-life groups, as well as several pro-life members of Congress, had opposed the bill for similar reasons.

The USCC re-examined the abortion question after the Supreme Court's 1992 Planned Parenthood v. Casey opinion, which affirmed a constitutional right to abortion. Language added to a committee report satisfied the USCC the bill would not expand abortion rights. Other pro-life opposition also faded.

The Christian Life Commission, which is pro-life, examined the abortion question for several months before deciding to endorse RFRA in August 1991.

RFRA's most controversial issue in 1993 involved prisons and jails. As the bill awaited a Senate vote, many state attorneys general and prison directors in every state called for an amendment exempting prisoners from its application. The RFRA coalition opposed the amendment. It failed 58-41 shortly before the Senate passed RFRA nearly unanimously.

The coalition members, some which oppose each other on nearly every other issue, included conservative groups, such as Concerned Women for America, National Association of Evangelicals, Traditional Values Coalition and the CLC, and liberal groups, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, People for the American Way and National Council of Churches.

Among those attending the bill's signing was Clinton's pastor, Rex Horne of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark.

Diverse RFRA coalition
celebrates cooperation

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--In the afterglow of a long-awaited victory for religious liberty, members of the diverse coalition supporting the Religious Freedom Restoration Act expressed the desire such cooperation would continue.

As a result of often diametrically opposed groups working together on RFRA, "business as usual amongst our respective organizations will never be the same," said Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom. "I hope that we have learned that replacing stereotypes with substance makes sense."

During a press conference shortly after President Clinton signed RFRA into law Nov. 16, others praised the coalition's efforts and also called for its members to continue working together on religious liberty and to talk about other issues with civility.

"Given that so much public speech and thought has been focused on polarizing social issues, RFRA is a gratifying reminder of the common values that we all share," said John Buchanan, senior vice president of People for the American Way.

Oliver Thomas, chairman of the coalition, praised the members' willingness "to lay aside their deep political and ideological differences to unite in a common vision for the common good -- religious liberty for all people."

"Seeing Paul Weyrich, Nadine Strossen, John Buchanan and Beverly LaHaye work together on something has done my heart good," Thomas said.

"I hope I shall never again have to hear someone say that People for the American Way or the American Civil Liberties Union don't care about religion. I hope I never have to hear again that Mike Farris is an extremist who can't work with other people," said Thomas, who recently resigned as the Baptist Joint Committee's general counsel.

Weyrich is chairman of Coalitions for America. Strossen is president of the ACLU. LaHaye is president of Concerned Women for America. Each group was a member of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion.

Farris, one of RFRA's original drafters, is president of the Home School Legal Defense Association. He recently lost the lieutenant governor's race in Virginia after the Democratic incumbent Don Beyer used advertising to portray Farris, a conservative Christian, as an extremist on social and educational issues. He also accused Farris of seeking to ban from public schools such books as "Cinderella" and "The Wizard of Oz," a charge proven false.

Despite the diverse groups' cooperation in passing RFRA, it is possible, maybe even probable, some coalition members may oppose each other in court on religious liberty issues.

"The fact that evangelicals and the ACLU shared common ground on the need for RFRA does not mean, of course, that these diverse groups have a common view of religion in public life or a common vision about how the statute will apply in future cases," Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission General Counsel Michael Whitehead said in early November.

The CLC and others will continue to engage groups like the ACLU and PAW "in the battle for our culture, while agreeing on the legal principle of non-engagement by the government or non-interference in religious free exercise unless there are supremely overriding societal interests," Whitehead said.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The U.S. Senate passed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act by a 69-30 vote Nov. 16. The House of Representatives is expected to vote on the measure Thursday, Nov. 18. Baptist Press plans to story Nov. 19 on the action by both houses.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

California Baptists refuse to seat
messengers of church with woman pastor

By Mark A. Wyatt

SANTA ROSA, Calif. (BP)--In a series of close votes at the start of their annual meeting, Southern Baptists in California overruled their credentials committee and parliamentarians and refused to seat messengers from a San Francisco church because its pastor is a woman.

"This is amazing," Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church, said after the decision. "The tent has just gotten considerably smaller."

Dan Nelson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Camarillo, challenged messengers from Nineteenth Avenue Baptist as the 53rd annual meeting of California Southern Baptist Convention was called into session Nov. 16. But John Bohrer, pastor of First Baptist Church in Red Bluff and chairman of the convention's credentials committee, reported the challenge had been ruled invalid by convention parliamentarians.

"We have come to the conclusion that this challenge is not valid in that it does not conflict with the constitution as written," explained Ed Collier, chairman of parliamentarians and pastor of First Baptist Church of Prunedale.

"These messengers may be seated," Collier declared.

Collier explained the CSBC constitution calls for accepting messengers "who are members in good standing of Baptist churches cooperating with the convention." Churches are considered cooperating which are in sympathy with the purpose of the convention, support it financially and "have not adopted articles of faith in conflict with the Baptist Faith and Message," the constitution states.

But Nelson pressed his challenge.

"I do not know that they have adopted articles," Nelson said. "I do know that they have called a woman pastor.

"The practice of this church is their business, but when we seat these messengers it does reflect what our churches believe," Nelson said.

Robert Lewis, pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Fairfield, agreed. Calling the San Francisco church's choice of a woman pastor "unscriptural," Lewis urged the convention to overrule the parliamentarians' decision. Lewis' remarks were punctuated with a scattering of amens from other convention-goers.

But some were opposed to the action. Mario Hernandez, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista in Salinas, said the convention "ought to honor" its constitution and seat the messengers.

Martha McNiell, associate pastor of Tiburon Baptist Church in Tiburon, said voting not to seat the messengers would be "going against Baptist history, every precedent of what has made a Baptist church a Baptist church.

"You will be intentionally abandoning your heritage" by refusing to seat the messengers, McNiell told those gathered for the convention.

In another appeal to Baptist history, Pennington-Russell pleaded with messengers to reject the challenge to her church's messengers.

"One of the proudest hallmarks has been our unity in diversity," she said. "If you open the door today and find that we are not acceptable, next year it will be someone else for some other reason. In 10 years we may have a very lonely convention," Pennington-Russell said.

"Today I beg you, I implore you to leave the tent big enough to accommodate us because you may find one of these days it won't be big enough to accommodate you," said Pennington-Russell.

Her remarks were greeted with applause from many in the audience.

After an unsuccessful attempt to divide the motion, messengers voted to end debate.

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Convention President Scott Williamson, pastor of Rose Drive Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, called for a voice vote on whether to overrule the parliamentarians and refuse to seat the messengers from Nineteenth Avenue Baptist. When the vote was inconclusive, Williamson asked for a show of hands but that, too, was too close to call. Finally a written ballot was taken.

Some questioned whether the votes were even legal since no messengers had been seated when the challenge was pressed. Only after the Nineteenth Avenue Baptist vote was taken did the convention formally vote to seat the other messengers. Randy McWhorter, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Fountain Valley, confirmed he and fellow parliamentarians had advised Williamson the action was unconstitutional since the votes were taken before any messengers had been seated.

Later, however, on a voice vote affirming the earlier ballot, messengers upheld the 213 to 204 vote against seating Nineteenth Avenue's representatives.

After the results were announced, two messengers from other churches turned in their credentials in protest. Additionally, a flurry of related motions and resolutions were presented seeking, among other things, to return missions gifts contributed by Nineteenth Avenue Baptist during the past year. Another motion called for unseating messengers from all churches which have women deacons.

Following a lengthy discussion during a subsequent business session, the motion to refund missions gifts to the church was referred to the state convention's executive board. Another motion directing the convention president to write a letter to Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church was approved on a split vote. Exter Hardy, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Davis who offered the motion, said the convention should apologize for insensitivity and laughter which occurred during the discussion and vote to exclude messengers from Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church.

The narrow nine-vote margin seemed to confirm a fear expressed in Williamson's convention sermon following the controversial votes.

"Some of us are busy trying to determine if everyone has the right theological positions and in the meantime people are dying and going to hell and Satan sits on his place in hell and he is laughing," Williamson declared.

"My fear is the controversy that has swept our national convention will sweep us here in California, and rather than working at reaching people for Jesus, we will be taking shots at one another.

"If that happens, we won't be lifting Christ very high," Williamson said.

Noting he had prepared the sermon before the convention began, Williamson asked for understanding and unity to avoid the kind of division among California Baptists that has marked the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The lesson is not hard to see," Williamson said. "We need every one of us lifting together to present Christ to our lost world and to our state if we are going to make a dent in the numbers of the lost.

"The sad thing is that there are some who are too busy doing other things that distract from the task we have," Williamson said.

Some "are taking potshots at others," he said, and some are complaining about everything from worship styles to "the names on the churches," a reference to frequent criticism about some churches removing the word Baptist from their names.

"Here in California, with millions of people drowning in sin, we need to be passing out the life belt of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not shooting at one another," Williamson said. He urged California Baptists to work together to "lift up Christ."

One of those affected by the convention vote not to seat messengers from Nineteenth Avenue Baptist was Francis DuBose, senior professor of missions at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

DuBose, who retired last year after 26 years but continues teaching as senior professor, was reluctant to say anything that might reflect on the seminary.

"It's a sad day for our convention," DuBose said when informed of the convention's action. "Nineteenth Avenue has been a great witness in the city.

"We were not on a crusade, not trying to make a statement," DuBose said of the church's choice of a woman as pastor.

Asked what signal the vote sends to other churches, DuBose said: "It means we're closed to much of Scripture."

Pennington-Russell questioned whether other churches will be excluded in the future on the basis of open/closed communion, baptism or divorce. She said the message of the vote was, "Let's weed out the folks who do not believe as we believe."

But DuBose said the church will stay active in the San Francisco association "unless the state (convention) puts pressure on them."

"We still consider ourselves Southern Baptists," DuBose said.

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Health-care reform may
squeeze church budgets

By Laurie A. Lattimore

Baptist Press
11/17/93

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Revamping the nation's health-care system has drawn an unusual consensus of support among Americans. Deciding the best and most cost-efficient way to do it is another story. But the ultimate goal most likely will remain the same -- basic health-care coverage available to everyone through employers or government aid.

The overhaul could have a massive impact on churches, said Gene Foster, director of annuity and insurance for the Missouri Baptist Convention. Foster said churches not providing for health care for their pastors and other employees may find themselves in even more of a budget crunch when mandated health-care reforms are put in place.

"This could be a very big deal," Foster said. "For our small churches health-care reform could be devastating. And the vast majority of our churches are small -- 75 percent have less than 100 in Sunday school."

Of Missouri's 1,948 Baptist churches and missions, Foster said 564 provide life, medical and disability insurance to employees through the Southern Baptist Convention Annuity Board. A total of 905 individual members have medical insurance through the Annuity Board.

Acknowledging some churches may provide insurance through other companies, Foster said most churches do provide medical coverage for the pastor. However, many times the church offers an annual salary and lets the pastor divide it himself. But Foster said the salary often is not enough to live on plus pay insurance premiums.

"I talked to a pastor who just could not pay for medical insurance because his \$6,000 yearly premium would have been half of his salary," Foster said. "It is sad what some of our ministers are living on."

Some Baptists believe health care should be provided by churches to their staff. Others argue dictating health care provision could be a violation of religious liberty.

Putting an end to unaffordable health insurance is the goal of President Clinton's Health Security Act, a project directed by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Scheduled to begin officially in 1995, the plan would be phased in through 1998. The president put the plan before Congress Oct. 27, launching the health-care debate in earnest.

Sen. John Chaffee (R-R.I.) countered with his own health-care package that promises less expensive reform but still embraces universal coverage. Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.) introduced a plan that does not adopt universal coverage but makes health-care coverage accessible to anyone who wants it. Cooper's plan represents a managed competition system with less government involvement.

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In theory, Clinton's plan would operate mainly through purchaser cartels, known as regional health alliances. David Powell of the Washington office of the Minneapolis-based Faegre & Benson law firm said the alliances would negotiate prices for standard health-care packages available to all Americans -- through managed care plans, health maintenance organization (HMO) networks and fee-for-service plans.

Faegre & Benson serves as the legislative counsel for the Church Alliance -- a lobby group for Christian and Jewish denominations including the Southern Baptist Convention.

Doctors, hospitals and insurance companies would organize into networks and compete for patients based on price and value. Market pressure from competing prices between doctors would keep insurance companies from increasing health-care costs through premiums.

Although several health plans are being introduced, Powell said, Clinton's plan is the most complete and is the one everyone else is working off of. The president's plan focuses on preventive health care, offering a standard care package that would include doctor's visits, hospitalization, prescriptions, home and hospice care, ear and eye exams and mental health.

Clinton's concept calls for corporations to pay 80 percent of their workers' premiums, with the remaining 20 percent to be paid by the worker. A corporation with 5,000 or more employees would have the option of forming its own alliance and offering its own various health care plans.

Small businesses (corporations with 75 or fewer employees) also would pay 80 percent and the worker would pay the rest. Government subsidies in the form of caps on premium payments would be offered to small businesses to help defray costs.

The premium cap serves to ensure that an employer does not pay a higher amount on premiums than its payroll. For example: A church with five full-time workers would be responsible for 80 percent of a typical \$4,360 annual health insurance premium for each employee -- \$21,800 total -- and the employee would pay the remaining amount. But, if the average salary for that organization is \$12,000 or less, the employer would pay no more than 3.5 percent of its total payroll on health-care premiums. Therefore, with a \$60,000 payroll, the church would only pay \$2,100 of its share of the premium. In some form, government would pay the rest.

If the average salary exceeds \$12,000, the church would cap its premium according to the sliding scale. The sliding scale to determine the cap would be based on the number of employees in an organization with fewer than 75 workers -- from 3.5 percent up to 7.9 percent. A 7.9 percent general cap would apply to small employers with an average salary above \$24,000 and to all businesses that employ 75 to 4,999 workers.

The 80 percent paid by an employer refers to 80 percent of the "average weighted premium" offered through the health alliance. Powell said the average would be determined by each regional alliance according to the prices of numerous plans offered. This would encourage employees to choose less expensive health plans from the alliance so 80 percent coverage would not leave a large amount left for the worker to pay.

Adding another wrinkle to the issue, Powell said the Health Security Act does not address whether parsonage values and housing allowances would be considered part of the worker's salary when calculating payroll for the caps on insurance premiums.

Self-employed workers would be responsible for 100 percent of health insurance premiums, but the insurance payments also would be 100 percent tax-deductible.

Pro-rated coverage of part-time workers also is being bounced around in the president's plan. Employees working 39 hours a month or less would not be covered, but employees working between 40 and 120 hours a month would have a percentage of their premiums paid depending upon the number of hours.

Such stipulations could cut down on part-time work within a church and cause churches to become "more serious about who is a self-employee," Foster said.

Deciding how churches fit into the employer categories is one of the biggest issues in health care for churches, Powell said. Defining who is the employer for health-care benefits is a major unanswered question: Is the employer the denomination, the state or regional office or the individual church? "This question has been bedeviling the IRS for years," he added.

Powell said money to pay for health insurance will come out of the individual church budget, but how much must be paid is determined on whether churches are classified as small businesses or part of a corporation.

The Health Security Act defines employers in two categories, for-profit and not-for-profit. The not-for-profit definition--which states the Secretary of Labor will proscribe regulations based on principles that apply to taxable organizations - does little to clarify how churches will fit into that definition.

Churches as small business employers in the Clinton plan would be eligible for the premium caps on health care to all full-time employees. The potential danger is having the denomination considered the employer, making individual churches ineligible for the lower premium payments.

A congregational denomination such as Southern Baptists' would be a likely candidate for classification as an organization that has several small employers, Powell said. A more hierarchical denomination, such as Presbyterians, could be considered a single employer and therefore a corporation with more than 5,000 employees.

Powell added it would be difficult to apply two standards to different denominations. "Why should the Baptist denomination, which is structured one way because of its theology, be treated different than other denominations that are structured according to their theological position?" Powell asked.

The details of health care are fuzzy where churches are concerned, but Powell is confident some form of health care reform will be hashed out in Congress before the 1994 elections. And no matter what form the final bill will take, the bottom line is churches will be paying at least part of medical coverage for their workers.

J. Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said religious liberty considerations could dictate some limited church exemption from the final health-care bill.

"There could be some room for statutory exemption for those churches who have sincerely-held beliefs and convictions that may be against mandatory health care," Walker said.

The recent passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act now requires the government to show a compelling reason, not just reasonable, to limit free exercise of religious practice. Even without RFRA, Walker said limited exemptions similar to the Social Security tax exemption for clergy could be in order.

Foster said even though such a government mandate on health care could put a tighter squeeze on church budgets, taking care of the pastor is a biblical mandate. Scriptures such as I Corinthians 9:14 and Galatians 6:6 instruct Christians to pay their spiritual leaders so they can provide for their families, Foster said, so proper medical coverage is part of good stewardship.

"I Timothy 5:8 says if you do not provide for your own, you are worse than an unbeliever," Foster said. He added life, medical and disability insurance for the family is part of providing, and churches should make it possible for ministers to have insurance. "Baptists are often guilty of not treating ministers of God the way they should. We expect them to be humble and poor."

Foster acknowledged a health care mandate, whatever form comes down the pike, will cause many churches to reallocate their budgets at the expense of the Cooperative Program and other missions spending.

"There will be some serious financial considerations facing our churches," he said. "Churches have fewer and fewer discretionary dollars. After you pay utilities and salaries, the missionary budget is about the only thing to cut into.

"I hope the government mandate doesn't hurt our churches," Foster said, "but I believe churches should be doing this anyway."

She credits God for gift project
to inmates' kids at Christmas By Tim Palmer

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--The angel who dreamed up Angel Tree was once an unlikely angel indeed. But because God gave her the dream and blessed it, hundreds of thousands of the world's children have a merrier Christmas every year.

Angel Tree, a ministry of Prison Fellowship, coordinates the purchase and delivery of Christmas gifts for the children of prison and jail inmates. More than a quarter-million children benefited last year.

The founding angel is Jefferson City, Mo., resident Mary Kay Beard, who spent six Christmases behind bars herself. A native of Springfield who grew up in Eldon, Beard left home at age 15 to live with a married sister in Illinois.

A dozen years later, she was wanted by law enforcement authorities in four states. Laughing, as she does frequently, Beard claimed Alabama got her because it was first in the alphabet.

Laughter didn't come easily to the 27-year-old woman who was taken to the Jefferson County Jail in Birmingham, Ala., a few days before Christmas 1972. She was surprised to see a Christmas tree in a hallway with wrapped gifts beneath it. Local churches had brought the inmates presents.

Though she was moved by the gesture, Beard recalled, she kept her feelings to herself. As a hardened, violent prisoner, she spent five months in solitary confinement.

She did take advantage of the one chance she had to leave her cell each week -- a 7 a.m. Sunday school class organized by the same churches that had brought the Christmas gifts.

Beard was raised a Southern Baptist. She was a charter member of GAs and the first GA queen at her church. Her mother was president of the Woman's Missionary Union.

"I already knew the Roman road, and it didn't seem to have worked for me," she said. She also knew "Churchianity" -- how to talk, act and look like a Christian -- and that's what she expected from the Sunday school group.

What she got was a woman who told her, "We love you enough to come and tell you about Jesus."

Back in her cell, Beard asked herself, "If you're so smart, what are you doing here?" She surrendered her life to Jesus.

Scripture passages she had memorized as a child came back to her and blessed her. She recalled the words to hymns she had grown up singing and they comforted her. "As a good Baptist I only remembered the first, second and last stanzas," she explained, laughing again.

Saved in March, she was convicted -- this time by the court -- in June. Her sentence for armed robbery and grand larceny was 21 years and a day.

As her first Christmas in the Julia Tutwiler State Prison at Wetumpka, Ala., approached, Beard noticed "every kind of church" visited and brought little gifts, served cookies and Kool-Aid and sang carols. "And we wouldn't see them again until the following year." Beard explained, "What I discovered in prison was that Christians have an IRS mentality. You have to get in your good deeds before the end of the year or they don't count."

Even the most cynical women inmates attended every such party and accepted every gift they could get. Beard learned the women weren't collecting stuff for themselves. It was for their children.

The inmates could be quite creative in wrapping and decorating items such as soap, toothpaste, hand lotion and shampoo. On the last visiting day before Christmas, the women would give out the presents.

Beard said she didn't think children would get too excited about toiletries, but they surprised her. "The kids didn't complain -- they thought it was the greatest gift in the world. The important thing was it came from Mama."

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Though the once-a-year charity of the visitors enabled the inmates to give their children Christmas gifts, the people the prisoners respected were those who didn't bring anything but came every week. "In prison, perseverance is what's significant."

Beard persevered in her faith, growing in the Lord and working to better herself. When she was paroled in March 1978, she had completed two years of college with the support of Centercrest Baptist Church of Birmingham. "I was their missions project."

The project was a success. Beard won a full scholarship to Auburn University in Alabama, where she completed her bachelor's degree in secondary education in 1979 and a master's degree in psychology/counseling in 1982.

Also in 1982, she became the first woman in the United States to be named a state director for Prison Fellowship. She had met Prison Fellowship founder Charles Colson a few years before. Having been helped by prison volunteers as an inmate, she liked the idea of Colson's organization.

In August of that year, Beard spoke to a Christian businesswomen's group. Her purpose was to recruit volunteers.

A woman approached her and said she couldn't care less about the adult convicts -- as far as she was concerned society could lock them up and throw away the keys. "That's a typical response so I didn't take it personally," Beard said.

The woman went on to say she would be interested in working with children, and she suggested getting them Christmas gifts. She actually was talking about juvenile offenders, but Beard misunderstood her to mean the children of inmates.

Prison Fellowship was looking for a Christmas project already, and Beard's advisory board gave her the go-ahead. "We decided to put Christmas trees at two malls -- one in Montgomery and one in Birmingham."

She went to the prisons and got names and addresses of inmates' children. Working after hours at an insurance company office, volunteers called the youngsters and found out what they wanted for Christmas.

An angel -- red for a girl and green for a boy -- was hung on a mall tree for each child. Each angel had that child's wish list.

Shoppers were invited to "come and buy Christmas for an angel." Volunteers from churches stood by to receive the items the children had requested. The response from the public was immediate. So many people stepped forward that Beard had to go back to the prisons to get more children's names. "It just touched the hearts of people."

Beard came to realize that Angel Tree struck a responsive chord with the public because Christmas has become so commercialized and much gift-giving has become routinely reciprocal. "They were delighted to do it," she said. "It was a real Christmas gift that meant something."

The volunteering churches enjoyed the fellowship time at the mall so much they signed up for the next Christmas. Volunteers who delivered the presents to the children's homes found many unchurched families and invited them to church.

And at the prisons, Beard reported, January and February Bible studies tripled in attendance because the inmates wanted to meet the volunteers who had provided Christmas for their children. In letters and photos, the youngsters had communicated their joy to their parents. Beard found herself scheduling additional Bible studies and seminars to meet the increased demand.

"Our goal was to provide Christmas for the children," she said. "God had a much greater impact planned."

The following summer, Beard attended the national Prison Fellowship staff conference and reported on the Angel Tree experience in Alabama. The national board authorized 12 more states to try it. "They had the same overwhelming response."

One of those states was Missouri, where state Prison Fellowship director Janice Webb helped organize Angel Tree at Capital Mall in Jefferson City. From 476 children in 1983, Angel Tree this year expects to reach 6,000 Missouri young people.

Webb noted Angel Tree has evolved from a mall project to a local church project, with churches in about 75 percent of Missouri counties taking part.

"It can be an introduction to ministry to families of prisoners, to get them involved in local churches and to help prevent future generations of that family from getting involved in crime -- actually to change their lifestyle," Webb said.

Angel Tree ministers to the people sometimes called the "unseen victims" of crime -- the criminals' families.

"I think Angel Tree helps people see that the families of inmates are real people with real problems and real feelings, and they hurt, too," Webb said.

Today, Angel Tree is active in all 50 states and in a number of foreign countries, including Great Britain, France, Germany, Peru, Australia, New Zealand and Papua, New Guinea.

It served 271,000 children in its 10th anniversary year, Christmas 1992. The goal for this year is 350,000.

Charles Colson, commenting about Beard and her role in Angel Tree, said, "Mary Kay is one of the most dedicated women I've met. She has a glorious testimony for Christ.

"It was out of her own experience in prison, and her vision for inmate families, that one of the most wonderful and unique ministries I know of evolved -- Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree."

Beard and her husband, Don, moved to Jefferson City earlier this year. They are house parents at House of Clare, an alternative to incarceration for females. The two, members of Southridge Baptist Church in Jefferson City, have a counseling ministry as well.

Beard continues to be active in Prison Fellowship. "I'm sort of an ambassador for Angel Tree." She speaks in churches and at fund-raising events.

And she continues to be amazed at what Angel Tree has become. But she won't take credit for being its founder.

"God found me and allowed me to be the instrument he used."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Missouri Baptists' newsjournal Word & Way. Further information about the Angel Tree program can be obtained by calling 1-800-398-4673.

Sex not only drawing card
for marriage conferences

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
11/17/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--While the subject of sex might have been a drawing card to about 13,000 participants in 20 Fall Festival of Marriage conferences held across the country this autumn, it wasn't the only one, the coordinator of the enrichment events said.

"Word of mouth about the relevance and usefulness of the conferences also helped bring in couples," said David Huebner, marriage enrichment event specialist in the discipleship and family development division of the Baptist Sunday School Board. The theme for the 93 conferences was "Celebrating Sex in Your Marriage."

"Married couples demonstrated they are eager to understand the biblical message of sexuality within marriage by the enormous response to the workshops dealing with (sexual) issues," he added. Other conferences were held on the subjects of conflict resolution, communication, affirmation, romance, parenting, finances, stress, dysfunctional families, spiritual oneness, friendship, forgiveness, self-esteem and remarriage.

In the four years Huebner has been coordinating the conferences, they have grown from eight events to 20. Next year, 30 Fall Festivals are scheduled, Huebner said.

Fall Festival attendance rose to 13,000 in 1993, an increase of 4,200 over the 1992 totals, Huebner added. Next year, Fall Festivals will grow to 33 weekends, with an expected attendance of more than 25,000.

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Beginning in 1994, the Sunday School Board will hold six spring festivals as well as a Hispanic Festival of Marriage and a Festival of Marriage for seminary students. "Celebrating Sex in Your Marriage" also will be the theme of the Spring Festivals, Huebner said. The 1994 Fall Festivals theme is "Husbands and Wives: The Best of Friends."

The Spring Festival of Marriage conferences will be March 4-6 in San Antonio, Texas; March 25-27 in San Bernardino, Calif.; April 8-10 in Nashville; April 15-17 at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center; April 29-May 1, at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center; and April 29-May 1 in Anchorage, Alaska. For more information on the conferences, call (615) 251-2294.

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Demands for sex can generate
'approach-avoidance' problem

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
11/17/93

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--If a husband or wife increasingly demands sex, he or she will get less and less of it.

Marriage enrichment speakers Harold and Bette Gillogly noted an "approach-avoidance" problem often weighs down marriages in which one spouse is demanding sex.

The husband-and-wife team, whose Growing Toward Oneness Family Ministries is based in Nashville, led a sexual intimacy workshop during a Fall Festival of Marriage at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center in early November. The Gilloglys are authors of "Achieving God's Design for Marriage," published as couple's and leader's guides for use in church settings.

If one partner feels he or she must demand sex 15 or 20 times just to get a spouse to submit even once to intercourse, that partner likely will get the opposite of his or her desire for more sex, the Gilloglys said to crowds of more than 100 packing their classroom.

If a wife, for example, doesn't want to engage in sex, she will make more and more efforts to avoid it, Bette said.

To break the cycle, the aggressive partner must back off and give the other partner "some space" -- while still touching and kissing but not making guilt-generating statements of their needs not being met, Bette advised.

The other partner, meanwhile, should not be satisfied with negative feelings toward sex and should seek to understand what has caused such feelings, Bette said.

"This is worth your going to a therapist about," she said, adding it's a shame "to do so little" with the great potential God has given to the marriage relationship, Bette said.

Intimacy, Harold noted, involves sharing one's "essential or deepest self" with a marriage partner.

He added there are four kinds of intimacy:

-- Emotional: "Sharing the real me with the real you," the feeling that "I have finally found someone who understands me," Harold said.

-- Aesthetic: "The 'we' experiences of life," a couple's history together, their "Remember when we ...?" recollections, he said.

-- Spiritual: "Sharing our lives and faith in Christ," not just reading the Bible but also praying together, "which will develop trust and closeness in your relationship more than anything else on earth," he said.

-- Physical: "The culmination of all the other intimacies. Sex is the celebration of your relationship," Harold said. "It is not the establishment of it."

A number of pointers were offered by the Gilloglys for finding enjoyment and fulfillment in the physical dimension of marriage:

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-- "Plan for sexual encounters," Bette said. Spontaneity is "highly overrated," Harold added, "but it's still nice when it happens." If one partner is a night owl, he or she should turn the TV off early in the evening to help the other partner who may need an early bedtime, Bette said. Couples should find baby-sitting for one date a week, one night a month away from home and one weekend away every six months, she said, explaining, "You've got to have quantity time in order to have quality time."

-- Respect each other's personality, Harold said. One partner may have a "compartmental" orientation to life, mentally and emotionally separating family, work, church and societal concerns and, perhaps, being able to wage a heated argument in the living room and yet want to make love in the bedroom. The other partner may have a "global" orientation, with all facets of life shaping their feelings at any given moment. Too, husbands need to put aside any "one, two, three, go!" view of sex, allowing their wives ample time to respond to opportunities for intimacy, Bette said.

-- Husbands and wives should take responsibility for their own sexual pleasure, Harold said, explaining men and women respond differently to different intimate moments at different times. "You know (how you're feeling)," he said. "Don't make your partner guess what would please you."

-- Be creative, Bette said, perhaps with music, notes under the pillow, adding a touch of perfume to the sheets or never-before-spoken compliments and never-before-tried loving gestures that may take time and energy to think up. And, she said, the bedroom should be the nicest room in the house. "It should be the place where you rendezvous."

-- Enjoy the afterglow of relaxing, cuddling and appreciating, Harold said. "Do not let this one go by unenjoyed."

-- Turn to such widely used Christian books on intimacy as "The Gift of Sex" by Clifford and Joyce Penner and "Intended for Pleasure" by Ed Wheat.

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Northwest Baptists change
building site location

By Don Sorenson

Baptist Press
11/17/93

TACOMA, Wash. (BP)--Messengers to the 46th annual meeting of the Northwest Baptist Convention in Tacoma, Wash., Nov. 9-11, heard positive reports about the development of a new convention office/training complex, approved a 1994 Cooperative Program budget conservatively based on current CP receipts and adopted resolutions addressing the nation's moral crisis.

The executive board reported to messengers unanimous approval for the purchase of nine acres in Vancouver, Wash., as the site for a campus complex to house convention offices and services, the Northwest Baptist Foundation and Northwest Campus of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

The new site will replace another Vancouver site purchased by the convention four years ago but recently ruled by county officials not to qualify for the type of development planned by Northwest Baptists.

Messengers were told zoning approval by county officials for the new site is highly probable. The offer to purchase, however, is contingent on receiving proper permits to build and completing the sale of the other property.

Construction on the new campus development in Vancouver, Wash., across the Columbia River from the present office building in Portland, Ore., is expected to begin in mid-1994. The new property is fully graded with utilities available.

Currently the convention has raised about \$500,000 toward a \$1 million goal to help pay for the project. Sale of the present convention facilities in downtown Portland is expected to provide a considerable portion of the relocation costs.

The 1993 convention attracted 545 messengers and 103 registered guests, with a full-house attendance of about 750 for the evening sessions.

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A Cooperative Program budget goal of \$1,850,000 was approved, with 31 percent going to the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program causes, the same percentage as currently being contributed. However, the first 1 percent above this basic goal also will go to the SBC Cooperative Program.

"The 1994 budget reflects the commitment of our executive board to operate with financial integrity," said Cecil Sims, executive director. "The first nine months of 1993 indicated that CP receipts were not growing enough for our 1994 budget to exceed what has been recommended. However, our commitment to CP growth in 1994 is indicated by our vote to dedicate to Southern Baptist cooperative missions the first 1 percent of receipts above our basic budget goal."

The convention's executive board also discontinued retirement medical benefits to staff retirees after Dec. 31, 1993. Currently retired employees will not be affected, and currently employed staff will have the option, at retirement, of continuing medical insurance through the convention by paying their premiums.

The action also discontinues the retirement medical and life insurance benefits for staff personnel hired after Dec. 31, 1993. These steps were taken because of the spiraling costs of benefit programs.

Messengers approved resolutions opposing pornography and supporting the Baptist Sunday School Board's "True Love Waits" campaign, along with three resolutions addressing local issues.

Re-elected president of the convention was Roy P. Belcher, pastor of Grant Avenue Baptist Church, Corvallis, Ore., and re-elected first vice president was Mitch Martin, pastor of Quinault Baptist Church in Kennewick, Wash. Mark Bradley, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Pullman, Wash., is the new second vice president.

The 1994 Northwest Baptist Convention meeting will be Nov. 15-17 at the Wenatchee (Wash.) Center Hotel.

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Baptist Nursing Fellowship
celebrates 10th anniversary

Baptist Press
11/17/93

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The Baptist Nursing Fellowship celebrated its 10th anniversary by formalizing a disaster relief agreement with the American Red Cross and voting to become an international organization.

The BNF met in Birmingham, Ala., for its annual meeting Nov. 11-14 in conjunction with the Baptist Medical/Dental Fellowship.

The BNF, sponsored by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, is an organization which provides nurses with Christian professional fellowship, promotes continuing professional education for its members and missionary nurses and encourages nursing service evolving from a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. BNF has a membership of more than 900 active and retired nurses.

During the annual meeting, BNF members voted to accept an agreement with the American Red Cross which will allow the group to participate in an official capacity with the Red Cross during disaster relief efforts and at other times.

The group also voted to become an international organization. BNF accepted an invitation from the women's department of the Baptist World Alliance to launch the endeavor at the 1995 BWA Congress meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Nurses participated in a continuing education course on parish nursing led by Jan Striepe, project manager of the Kellogg Parish Nurse Project in Spencer, Iowa.

BNF's plan for parish nursing envisions a nurse as a paid or volunteer church leader to give guidance in five areas of ministry: health education, personal health counseling, referral services as liaison with community resources, teaching volunteers and interpreting the relationship between faith and health.

The group also will focus volunteer work in two areas of the United States during the upcoming year -- the Mississippi River area and the Appalachian Mountain region.

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Officers were elected for the coming year: Marjorie Grober of Little Rock, Ark., president-elect; Annie Ruth Yelton, Columbia, S.C., secretary/heritage chairperson; Jimmy Payne, Hattiesburg, Miss., student liaison chairperson; Linda Garner, Dallas, education/professional growth chairperson; Nina George, Collinsville, Ill., nominating committee member; and Vickie McCall, Clinton, Miss., nominating committee member.

During a banquet celebrating the organization's 10 years, the group recognized Ludis Moncada, a nurse from Venezuela who helped organize mission projects which several BNF members participated in during the past year through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

The next BNF annual meeting will be in conjunction with the Second North American Conference for Nurses at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., June 25-29, 1994.

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Cable networks to air
'True Love Waits' special

Baptist Press
11/17/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Three cable television networks will carry a 30-minute special on "True Love Waits," a national sexual abstinence campaign initiated by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

The special will air Nov. 28 on the Contemporary Christian Music Television (CCM-TV) program which is broadcast on the VISN-ACTS Network, Family Channel and the Inspirational Network. The program will include comments and music video clips from several contemporary Christian recording artists who have endorsed "True Love Waits," including DC Talk, the Newsboys, DeGarmo & Key and Lisa Beville.

Also featured will be a short interview with Allen Weed, president of interl'inc, a Nashville-based agency which links contemporary Christian recording artists and their music with local churches and Christian ministries. Weed produced the "True Love Waits" audiocassette released earlier this year by the BSSB's Genevox Music Group.

The audiocassette, which can be ordered through the BSSB's customer service center, features 10 songs that focus on God's original design for sexuality and marriage.

Check TV listings for times the special will be aired on each network.

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HMB Tentmaker founder
dies at 100 years of age

Baptist Press
11/17/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Former Home Mission Board field worker Fred McCaulley, who instituted the board's Tentmakers program in 1951, died Nov. 15 following an illness. He was 100 years old.

McCaulley, a Lake City, Iowa, native, worked for the board from 1946 until his retirement in 1960.

The tentmaking program is for people in home missions work who receive at least some support through secular employment. The board's Mission Service Corps department estimates that one-third of its 1,730 MSC volunteers are tentmakers.

McCaulley also was pastor at Bellmead Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, from 1936-43, and a chaplain for the U.S. Army from 1943-46. He was a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

He is survived by three daughters.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

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