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-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 5, 1994

94-76

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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CLC, BJC lawyers debate
merits of graduation prayer

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/5/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--Public school graduation exercises provide opportunities for schools to demonstrate tolerance for religious diversity, two Baptist church-state specialists say, but they disagree on whether student-initiated, student-led prayers should be permitted.

"Commencement prayers are socially profitable," says Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Critics fret that prayers will fracture our pluralistic society along religious lines, whereas secular programs will preserve peace. But how does religious censorship build religious understanding? Schools can teach tolerance for diversity by letting students lead in prayer."

Prohibiting public prayer at graduation ceremonies furthers tolerance, counters Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

"As we approach public school graduations this year, we should make every effort to avoid politicizing the sacred act of prayer to Almighty God," Walker says. "Let's use this season as an opportunity to teach our students a lesson about civic toleration and mutual respect for our religious differences, not to give them a lesson in how to run roughshod over the Constitution and the rights of others."

The church-state lawyers present their arguments in the April 26 issue of the Western Recorder, the newspaper of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Whitehead and Walker argue the pro and con sides, respectively, to the question "Should public schools have a prayer at commencement?"

The Christian Life Commission is the religious liberty, moral concerns and public policy agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Baptist Joint Committee represents several Baptist conventions and groups. The church-state organization no longer includes the SBC, which pulled out in 1992.

Critics of commencement prayers have described them by such terms as "least common denominator" and "worthless," but graduation prayers should reflect the convictions of the one praying, the CLC's Whitehead says.

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"Don't ask Baptist students or any other students to pray 'non-sectarian' mush to a brand-X god," he says. "Let there be real, robust prayers, in Jesus name, by whosoever will. Let God grade the prayers, not church-state 'experts.' Let God decide when and how to release real power for real revival in our land."

The BJC's Walker responds to such a suggestion: "In our pluralistic nation involving hundreds of religious traditions, how can this be done? It can't. Even if it could, how would you like it when it comes time for the Satanists to pray?"

In communities where Baptists are in the minority, religious freedom still should reign, Whitehead says.

Elijah "challenged the majority religion to an equal-opportunity prayer meeting" on Mount Carmel, Whitehead says. "God can handle the competition, even from false religions."

Both lawyers cite the Supreme Court's 1992 Lee v. Weisman decision, which declared school-sponsored graduation prayers unconstitutional, but Whitehead says the opinion did not ban student-initiated, student-led prayers. The following year, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of a ruling which OK'd a vote by a Texas high school senior class to include a student-led prayer at commencement. Therefore, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals' decision in Jones v. Clear Creek Independent School District remains the law in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

While private prayer at commencement is permissible, Walker argues, "substituting a student to pray at a graduation ceremony doesn't cure the constitutional problem."

"First, since the prayer will be delivered in the context of a school-sponsored event, it still violates the Constitution even if given by a student," Walker says.

"Second, our constitutional rights are not up for a vote -- by Congress, a city council, a school board or even a student body. The Bill of Rights is by definition 'counter-majoritarian;' those rights do not depend on the approval of the majority. Do you think the students could get together and vote to suspend the free speech or free press clauses? Of course not. Neither can they suspend the establishment clause."

While Whitehead also says majority vote does not determine rights, he argues "there is no constitutional right to stop students from praying at a commencement just because I find the prayer offensive or disagreeable. In such cases, majority rule is the fair and democratic way to decide community desires."

The solution, Walker says, is a "church-sponsored, voluntarily attended baccalaureate service. ... That way like-minded students and adults can come together to pray, sing hymns, hear a sermon and otherwise worship as they choose without fear of violating the Constitution or ravishing (sic) the consciences of those who don't want to pray."

Whitehead says a baccalaureate service is great but not sufficient if students choose to pray at commencement.

"If Christian students are to have life-changing convictions about the God of the Great Commission, they must model Jesus' lifestyle and speech patterns in public," Whitehead argues. "Can you imagine Jesus as a 'senior speaker' at his commencement service obeying a state order not to mention the name of Jehovah? Neither can I."

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AIDS speaker advocates use
of hearts, heads and hands

By Kim Medley

Baptist Press
5/5/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--To some, they are just statistics.

In the United States from 1981-1993, 339,250 AIDS cases and 204,390 deaths resulting from AIDS have been reported.

To Betty Dawson, people living with AIDS have faces, names and families. They are her friends and her ministry.

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Dawson, professor of social work at Memphis State University, shared her experiences with AIDS ministry during the panel "Rescue the Perishing: Ministry to People in Need" as part of the "Ministries of Baptist Laypeople" conference sponsored by the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Southern Baptist Historical Society in Memphis, Tenn.

Dawson is a Red Cross certified AIDS educator and coordinator of an AIDS ministry group at Prescott Memorial Baptist in Memphis where she is a member. According to John McBride, Shelby Baptist Association director of missions, Prescott Memorial is the only Southern Baptist congregation in the Memphis area with an AIDS ministry.

"For the past seven years I have had the privilege, and the pain, of being involved in ministry to Persons Living with AIDS (PLWAs)," Dawson began. "There are three imperatives I would want to share with you ... they can be characterized by three 'H's' ..."

Heart: "Until the love of the living Christ gently holds our hearts, teaching us compassion for all God's people, we are '... as sounding gong or a clanging cymbal,'" Dawson reminded. "As God educates the heart, we learn that the love of the living Christ is not reserved for 'us' folks, whoever that is -- for 'they' are 'us.'"

Dawson related an experience of taking Martha, a new AIDS ministry volunteer, to the home of a PLWA. During the visit, Dawson asked the AIDS victim about the Kaposi's bruises visible on his body. (Kaposi's sarcoma is one of the many infections from which some PLWAs suffer). While talking to the man, Dawson touched one of his bruises. As they prepared to leave, Dawson hugged the man and so did Martha.

"(Martha) later told me that when I had touched the Kaposi's bruise, all her fear had disappeared, and I recalled that Jesus taught us about the power of healing touch (in Matt. 8:1-3)."

Head: Dawson maintains Christian ministers need to accept the responsibility to learn as much as possible about the virus in order to help their congregations and Sunday school classes, educate others and combat the myths. "We need to be educated about the demographics of the epidemic -- in which groups is it growing the fastest."

Dawson said, "Ignorance promotes fear, and fear separates us from each other and from our calling to ministry."

Meeting participants broke into applause when Dawson shared a conversation she had at an AIDS ministry seminar. "One evening a man asked, 'How do you respond to those who criticize your ministry because of who 'these people' are?' I replied, 'It's really very simple. We make it a point never to minister to anyone whom God does not love.'"

Hands: "The changing of the heart and the education of the head leads us to seek ways to involve our hands in meaningful work," Dawson said, citing some examples that AIDS ministry can take -- delivering meals, providing transportation, mowing the yard, cleaning the house, washing the clothes or inviting a PLWA to dinner.

"I would not have you believe, however, that the work is easy. ... It is at times ... deeply saddening, and even angering," Dawson said. "I have heard far too many insulting and hurtful AIDS jokes from people who know better ..."

"There is some truth in the paraphrase by the novelist Flannery O'Connor, who said, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd,'" Dawson continued. "Many will not understand your motivations or your efforts."

Dawson acknowledged the church is "agonizing over" AIDS ministry but offered a Scripture passage to churches seeking direction for how they should respond:

"Then the righteous will reply, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you?' And the King will answer, 'I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me' (Matt. 25:34-40, NEB).

Copies of Dawson's presentation and others focusing on work with illiterate, homelessness, physical/sexual abuse and other ministry areas will be available in the July 1994 issue of Baptist History and Heritage, available from the Historical Commission by calling 1-800-966-BAPT.

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SBC lay people, staff members
recount lay ministries, roles

By Kim Medley

Baptist Press
5/5/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--In a "Ministries of Baptist Laypeople" conference, a church history professor noted the New Testament and the early church had "no distinction between the clergy and the average church member -- all were God's laos."

Rosalie Beck, associate professor of church history at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, was among the lay people and denominational workers who addressed the April 25-26 conference jointly sponsored with the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Southern Baptist Historical Society in Memphis, Tenn.

Beck, outlining different views on the history and value of lay ministry, said early Baptists, adopting Martin Luther's renewed emphasis on the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of believers (the concept that every Christian is a priest in the universal ministry), also showed no distinction.

According to Beck, Landmarkism brought a change in Southern Baptists' understanding of the pastor, as Landmark leaders such as J.M. Pendleton asserted pastors "have an authority not belonging to other church members." As licensing and ordination became necessary for ministers, Sunday school and missions became the major areas for lay involvement.

Beck asked, "Will Baptists remain true to their heritage of equality in ministry before the Lord or will they move into a new structure based on business models of administration rather than biblical precepts?"

Ben Mitchell, Christian Life Commission director of biomedical and life issues, shared how Southern Baptists have met physical needs in times of crisis through Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union disaster relief units and teams. Mitchell noted the SBC mission boards, CLC and other agencies also have been involved by calling attention to world hunger through special emphases and annual mailings to churches.

"Followers of Christ have a moral obligation to God and their neighbors to attempt mercifully to meet the needs of those who are hurting, regardless of their personal or social merit . . .," Mitchell said.

Volunteer missionaries Walter Sandusky, a Memphis dentist who has served as a medical missionary to Venezuela and India, and Janice Davidson, a school teacher in Memphis who works each summer with Big A clubs and Acteens Activators, shared highlights of their experiences as members of the panel "To The Ends of the Earth: Lay Volunteers in Missions," moderated by Nell Bobo, Home Mission Board senior adult consultant.

Meeting participants toured the Mississippi Brotherhood Disaster Relief Unit and were served refreshments from the unit by crew members and SBC Brotherhood Commission staff.

The April 27 session featured presentations by the panel "Rescue the Perishing: Ministry to People in Need." During the session, Warren Jordan, founder and board member of the International Chemical Corporation in Memphis, spoke about his work on behalf of the homeless with the Memphis Union Mission.

Joy Garcia, ministry to abuse victims resource person for the Shelby Baptist Association in Memphis, spoke on ministering to victims of abuse. Raped at age 4 and a survivor of 25 years of incest, Garcia said sharing her "experiences, strength and hope in Jesus helps me continue in my recovery, keeps me honest, and gradually brings healing. I can't tell you how important it is to an abuse victim to be able to tell the truth, no matter how awful . . . , and to be understood, believed and accepted -- period.

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"One out of every four girls and one out of six boys are sexually abused," she noted. "Abuse victims are all around you in your neighborhood, your church, perhaps even in your home, and they are afraid to let you know."

Also on the panel were Betty Dawson, associate professor of social work and coordinator of an AIDS ministry group at Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, and Sue Stancil, Memphis literacy missions worker. Dawson cited some examples that AIDS ministry can take -- delivering meals, providing transportation, mowing the yard, cleaning the house or washing the clothes.

"I would not have you believe, however, that the work is easy. . . . It is at times . . . deeply saddening and even angering," Dawson said. "I have heard far too many insulting and hurtful AIDS jokes from people who know better. . . . There is some truth in the paraphrase by the novelist Flannery O'Connor, who said, 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd.' Many will not understand your motivations or your efforts."

James Williams, Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission president, offered a challenge for the future of Baptist lay people. "As we move toward (the year) 2000, . . . turbulence will characterize our entire society. The local church will have to earn its place in peoples' hearts. Institutional loyalty will disappear. . . . There is still a clergy-laity dualism in our churches. If a hundred years of teaching hasn't resulted in change, it is likely that the church in the year 2000 will be hindered by the same dualism.

"Indeed if the Bold Mission Thrust dream of sharing the gospel with every person by the year 2000 is realized, then it is absolutely necessary for every believer to express his or her own God-given gifts in active Christian witness," he continued. "Being Southern Baptist is not the first thing on the agenda for a lot of our people. It is first being a Christian and being what God wants us to be."

Williams conducted in-depth telephone interviews with eight missions and denominational strategists in order to address several key questions concerning the future of Southern Baptist laity. Respondents to Williams' survey said they believe fewer laity are involved in ministry in large churches or churches with large staffs. William O'Brien of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., noted, ". . . if we were really with the times, . . . in the future we would be putting more emphasis on discovering and enhancing the spiritual gifts of every (church) member, and then the issue of volunteerism could come home more comfortably in the local church."

Copies of "Ministries of Baptist Laypeople" conference presentations will be printed in the July 1994 issue of Baptist History and Heritage published by the Historical Commission. People interested in receiving the issue can call the commission at 1-800-966-BAPT.

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Historical Commission
adopts vision statement

By Kim Medley

Baptist Press
5/5/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention Historical Commission adopted a new agency vision statement and revised its program statement during their 1994 annual meeting.

The April 25 meeting was hosted by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and held at First Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

According to the new vision statement to direct the agency into the 21st century, the Historical Commission will seek to "aggressively" meet the history needs of Southern Baptists by "providing innovative products and services," "focusing major attention on historic Baptist ideals" and "injecting historical insights into the shaping of Southern Baptist programs, directions, strategies, and identity."

Commission trustees updated their program statement to clarify the commission's purpose, functions and relationships.

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Commissioners adopted a revised 1994-95 budget of \$593,800 reflecting a reduction of \$6,101 in the Cooperative Program allocation for the commission compared to 1993-94, and they projected a 1995-96 budget of \$599,695 based on a proposed Cooperative Program allocation of \$522,695.

Slayden Yarbrough, Dickinson professor of religion at Oklahoma Baptist University, and Theodore D. Wilson, an Indianapolis attorney, were elected to second terms as commission trustee chairman and vice chairman for 1994-95.

Trustees and staff recognized Kim Medley for five years of service with the commission and Kathleen Clements from Louisiana, Johanna Dawson from New Mexico and Louis Brinker from Illinois for the conclusion of their service as commission trustees.

Trustees and participants also heard plans for the commission's new videotape for the SBC 150th anniversary, "One Sacred Effort," to be released Jan. 1, 1995, and a special anniversary program of the commission and Southern Baptist Historical Society, "The Spirit of Southern Baptists, 1845-1995" to be held May 8-10, 1995, in Augusta, Ga.

The commission presented its distinguished service award for outstanding contributions to Baptist history to William R. Estep Jr., distinguished professor of church history, emeritus, at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. An international church history teacher and lecturer since 1956 in Latin America, Europe, England, Asia and the United States, and professor at Southwestern since 1954, Estep is a renowned scholar of the Protestant Reformation and the Anabaptist movement. His writings show intense interest in Baptist beginnings, religious liberty, and missions.

The Norman W. Cox Award for the best article published annually by the commission was given to Carolyn Blevins, associate professor of religion at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., for her article, "Baptist State Papers: Shapers or Reflectors of Southern Baptist Thought?" in the July 1993 issue of the commission's journal Baptist History and Heritage. Blevins has served as a commission trustee, a member of the agency's long-range planning committee and vice president and president of the Southern Baptist Historical Society.

Betty Danielson of Albuquerque, N.M., received the Davis C. Woolley Award for outstanding contributions in state Baptist history work. Without financial help or staff assistance from the New Mexico Baptist Convention, Danielson and her husband have voluntarily gathered and housed the New Mexico Baptist collection, containing hundreds of history books, missionary albums and handwritten records, in their own home. Researchers interested in Baptist work in New Mexico have come to the Danielsons' home from as far away as Germany.

Jim Powell, SBC Stewardship Commission vice president for Cooperative Program promotion, described for trustees the importance of the Cooperative Program for commission work and urged their strong support.

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Historical society
votes to restructure

By Kim Medley

Baptist Press
5/5/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Historical Society voted to take steps to increase interest and membership in the organization during their April 26-27 at First Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

"If declining membership statistics are indicative of a decline in commitment to the task of preserving and the joy of celebrating our common heritage, then our society ... must come to terms with an ominous trend," the society's president, Hargus Taylor, said in his 1993-94 report to the society.

"Proposed changes to the society's bylaws ... are designed, in part, to facilitate a reversal of that trend." Society membership totaled 742 churches and individuals in April 1994 compared to 851 in April 1993.

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Society members voted in April 1993 to "form a Study Committee to study both the composition, election, duties, and viability of the Society's Advisory Committee, and the purpose, role, and function of the Society as a whole ..." The study committee, comprised of the society's 1993-94 president and vice president along with the Southern Baptist Historical Commission's professional staff, was instructed to report the results of their findings to the society at its 1994 meeting.

The study committee recommended that the society "streamline the efficiency of its work by adopting the ... proposed revision to the bylaws."

Each society member received a draft of the proposed changes prior to the April 1994 meeting. Taylor encouraged the membership to lend their influence to the society, which is an auxiliary of the Historical Commission.

Society members voted to add two new membership categories -- "sustaining" and "lif" -- to its regular, senior citizen and student memberships. A sustaining member will be identified as any person who maintains membership via one of the three approaches above and agrees to contribute a \$25 gift annually to the society's endowment fund. Life members will consist of persons willing to pay a one-time fee of \$500, which also will be placed in the endowment fund.

The fund, invested with the Southern Baptist Foundation, provides annual benefits for life members and funds for society programs, projects and publications. Benefits for society members include two quarterly publications, Baptist History and Heritage and Baptist Heritage Update.

Members also voted to: add to the vice president's duties the task of assisting in the planning of the annual meeting program over which he/she will preside; add two new society officers -- membership coordinator and development coordinator -- for two-year terms; restructure the board of directors by making its members the society's five officers (president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, membership coordinator and development coordinator); discontinue the society's advisory committee; and adopt a budget of \$14,000 for 1994-95.

Following the adoption of the bylaw changes, members elected Albert W. Wardin Jr., retired professor, Belmont University, president; Rosalie Beck, Baylor University, vice president, Lynn E. May Jr., Historical Commission, SBC, treasurer; W. Morgan Patterson, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, membership coordinator; and Jesse C. Fletcher, Hardin-Simmons University, development coordinator.

The May 8-10, 1995, joint meeting of the Historical Commission and the society in Augusta, Ga., will recognize the 150th anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention by featuring "The Spirit of Southern Baptists, 1845-1995."

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Entertainers needed
for Orlando outreach

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
5/5/94

ATLANTA (BP)--Calling all clowns, puppets, magicians and singers. Organizers for Cross Over Orlando's block parties say they still need entertainers for six of their June 11 parties.

Nineteen parties are scheduled in connection with Cross Over Orlando, an evangelism emphasis before the Southern Baptist Convention. Entertainers of all types are welcome, said coordinator Bill Cox.

"They're very vital to us, especially with the children," said Cox. "If we get more, we can also use some on the street witnessing."

The parties will be Saturday, June 11, from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Officials would like to hear from potential volunteers by May 25. Entertainers also are asked to attend a Friday night training session.

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Block parties have been an effective witnessing tool for local churches in past Cross Over events. Last year, 374 people made professions of faith as a result of 24 block parties at Cross Over Huston. Organizers for this year's event have prayed for 1,000 people to profess faith in Christ as a result of all Cross Over Orlando activities.

Anyone interested is asked to call Cox at (615) 883-7024.

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CBF directors approve unnamed
western regional representative By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
5/5/94

GREENSBORO, N.C. (BP)--The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship coordinating council approved a western regional representative, although his name was not revealed, and conducted other business in a meeting prior to the CBF annual general assembly set for Greensboro, N.C., May 5-7.

The council conducts business between annual assemblies of the CBF, a three-year-old group of moderate Southern Baptists critical of SBC leadership.

The regional, or field, representative "to work west of the Mississippi" concept was brought to the council by Cecil E. Sherman, the CBF chief executive officer. But his request came directly to the council and not through normal administrative channels. That, and the fact Sherman wouldn't identify the person, upset some on the 83-member council.

"I'm concerned about the idea of hiring a specific person, (yet) we don't know who it is," Nancy T. Ammerman said. "I want everything done in the open."

Ammerman, an associate professor and director of the Baptist studies program at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Atlanta, said she was not so much concerned about the \$84,000 salary but the rationale for that amount.

In his request, Sherman said, "I would expect some to wince at the salary. We have people who expect very low salaries. But the kind of person who does this job must be able to move into the offices of pastors of the largest churches in the West."

Ammerman offered her thoughts at the end of the two-day meeting and said a number of other council members also had concerns about the action. She said she was not asking for the action to be rescinded but hoped "it never happens again."

Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, defended Sherman's "forthrightness," although he called the process "strange."

"I appreciate Cecil," Wade said, "he wants to tell everything he knows. It's part of the process of getting started."

Hardy Clemons, CBF moderator and pastor of First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., said the action, approved by the officers, was needed to "move quickly and decisively. We knew we were coloring outside the lines."

Two Texas pastors and one from Oklahoma were mentioned in informal discussions following the meeting. The three: Daniel Vestal, pastor of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, and Ben Loring, pastor of First Baptist Church in Amarillo -- both strong CBF supporters in Texas -- and Lavonn Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla.

However, Brown, a coordinating council member, told Baptist Press he was "flattered" to be mentioned in hall talk but was not the mysterious person and "not interested" in the position.

Sherman said he couldn't name the person because "he hasn't told his church yet."

The probability of the person being a Texan was obvious. Sherman said of the 266 churches contributing to the CBF, or churches with contributing members, from the five major "western" states -- Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Oklahoma -- 165 are in Texas.

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"CBF aspires to be a national organization," Sherman said. "(As of December 1993) CBF has received gifts from 34 states." In 1993, 1,210 churches or their members contributed to the moderate denomination.

"For all our growth there is an unevenness. We are growing faster east of the Mississippi than west of the river. Now about 24 percent of our churches are in the West, down from two years ago," Sherman said.

But 33 percent of CBF funds come from those churches, Sherman said. "So, one third of the money for this organization comes from west of the Mississippi.

"This imbalance will diminish CBF if left alone. By the very nature of having an office in Atlanta, the staff works the East more than the West. ... Churches in the West do not feel so free to call upon us. It is an expense. So, we enlarge our problem."

Sherman added, "In the light of the upheaval in the West over the firing of Russell Dilday, the person needs to be in place as soon as possible."

Effective July 1, the western representative will work under the direction of Sherman. He will make "at least" one trip a year to the far west, to Arizona, California and other western states. He also will represent the CBF's interests in Truett Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and report on CBF missionary activity in the West.

Council members also approved a position of coordinator of Christian education at a \$60,000 salary. The coordinator will serve as a Christian education specialist to encourage and facilitate "indigenous efforts in Christian education by locating and making accessible the creative work of local church practitioners, publishers, Baptist centers and agencies, seminaries and colleges, and the larger academic community."

With the appointment at the CBF general assembly of 10 new missionaries, Sherman said the organization will have 41 missionaries requiring "three-fourths of our income."

Speaking of income, Sherman said the funds received in March "were not that strong" but April "bounced back."

Theological education has become an "enormous need" in the CBF, Sherman told the council. "We have no ownership of any school." He asked for permission to take a one-time offering among CBF supporters for theological education; however, no vote was taken on his request.

"We need to jump start some schools that are in the process (of theological education) or about to be born. This is not endowment, it's money they can use," Sherman said. He cited costs for a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, an SBC school, at about \$1,800 a year while at the new Truett Seminary at Baylor costs will be from \$6,500 to \$8,000 per year.

The council spent more than an hour discussing a 10-page document offered by a visioning and growth task force. The document, which drew both praise and criticism, is to be a "long-range plan for the Fellowship that will shape its work and future."

John R. Tyler, a telephone company manager and member of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis, said the task force would take the input and continue its work.

In other action, the council approved rescinding action taken in the council's February meeting which would have made the close of the 1997 general assembly as the date for a bylaw change regarding members serving consecutive full three-year terms. The recommendation will be withdrawn at the general assembly leaving the present reading intact which forbids consecutive full three-year terms.

Council members also approved a commitment to increase racial and ethnic diversity within the CBF; approved a revised retirement benefit program for employees; approved \$40,000 for salary and "seed money" for a professor of Christian education at Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va.; set a policy to move the fall meeting of the council to the city where the general assembly would be held the following year; and honored 24 council members who concluded terms with the Greensboro meeting.

The council's next meeting will be Sept. 8-10 in Atlanta.

**Lloyd Elder letter challenges
Southwestern trustee officers**

By Art Toalston

NASHVILLE (BP)--A six-page letter challenging the firing of Russell H. Dilday Jr. has been mailed by Lloyd Elder to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees and other individuals.

Dilday, Southwestern's president 16 years until fired March 9 by trustees, selected Elder as seminary executive vice president and worked with him from 1978-83. Elder was named Baptist Sunday School Board president-elect in 1983 and led the agency until taking early retirement in 1991 in conflicts with BSSB trustees.

Elder, in his April 27 letter, poses an array of questions and challenges to the trustees' vote to fire Dilday and asks for a response to Southern Baptists by May 15. Elder also recommends Dilday to the trustees' search committee to fill the post.

Elder's letter is addressed to three trustee officers who mailed a four-page letter to Southern Baptist pastors and directors of missions defending the trustee action. The officers are chairman Ralph W. Pulley Jr., a Dallas attorney; vice chairman Lee Weaver, a Fort Worth businessman; and secretary T. Bob Davis, a Dallas dentist.

Examples of the questions raised by Elder concerning the trustee officers' letter:

-- "Were the trustee officers explicitly authorized by a vote of the Trustee Board to draft and send such a letter in behalf of the Board?"

-- "Is every charge made against Dr. Dilday true, factual, documentable, and measurable against known standards?"

-- "Are you willing to bear the responsibility and accountability for negative impact your letter is having on the total missionary enterprise of the Southern Baptist denomination?"

Pulley issued a statement to Baptist Press May 5 concerning Elder's letter:

"Lloyd's letter has been reviewed. There are a number of errors. To give just one illustration, there were 27 votes in favor of the trustee action and not 26. The trustees, through the presidential search committee, are heavily into the search process.

"The concentration now is on completing the semester, with about 420 graduates to receive degrees at the spring commencement; moving into the summer school program, where over 1,000 are expected; preparing for the fall semester; and seeking a new president. Lloyd's recommendation for president has been passed on to the search committee.

"We ask Lloyd and all Southern Baptists to join us in daily prayer that our Lord will lead the search committee to God's man for this time in the life of the seminary."

Elder, in addition to his former post at Southwestern, earned a master of divinity degree there in 1961 and a doctor of theology degree in 1966.

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**Church's deacons venture
int array of ministries**

By Tim Nicholas

Baptist Press
5/5/94

YAZOO CITY, Miss. (BP)--The role of the deacons at First Baptist Church in Yazoo City, Miss., is changing before their very eyes -- from administrators to ministers -- and they like what they see.

Since they accepted a challenge from their pastor to change the focus of their work, they've become enthusiastic supporters of the New Testament model of deacons as ministers of the church.

Their former chairman, Ron Wilkinson, manager of nitrogen sales at Mississippi Chemical Corporation, said, "When a man is chosen by God and elected by the church to serve, it's a touching experience but we quickly get involved in the business experiences and forget what we should be doing." He added, "This gives us respite from the unhappy issue of being a 'board' to actually performing a service."

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The "should be" was outlined in February by David Raddin, their pastor the past two years. He proposed the 21 elected deacons join in ministry with all the other deacons in the church. "I told them that in the Bible the words deacon and inactive are mutually exclusive," Raddin said.

That nearly tripled the number of deacons available for ministry. The 21 elected deacons would form the deacon council to coordinate the general deacon ministry.

Raddin suggested the deacons form five committees: fellowship, ministry, prayer, spiritual growth and visitation. Each committee would coordinate its assigned work, but all the deacons would be involved in carrying out the work.

The visitation committee, for instance, makes personal contact with church visitors within seven days of church attendance. Committee members began the visitation themselves, but have now included Sunday school outreach directors in sharing information and opportunities to visit.

Jo Bryan, visitation committee chairman and senior vice president of the Bank of Yazoo City, likes the visiting. "If you're not doing something for the Lord you genuinely enjoy, you shouldn't be doing it. I feel very comfortable visiting and witnessing so that's what I'm involved in."

The spiritual growth committee is more inwardly oriented for the present. They began with a weekend retreat and have special studies on Sunday nights for deacons. All the deacons are encouraged to keep a spiritual journal where they write in weekly Bible verses for meditation and memorization. The verses are printed in the church bulletin for the coming week.

This fall, the deacons will be writing short devotionals for publication. And they plan a special youth emphasis for spiritual growth.

Said Owen Cook Jr., spiritual growth chairman and cooperative director of planning at Mississippi Chemical Corporation, "Spiritual growth comes when individuals make commitments to Bible study and prayer. The result is synergistic -- the group becomes stronger than the sum of the parts."

At the monthly council meeting, discussion flows freely -- after a fellowship supper prepared by members of the fellowship committee.

The prayer committee asked for others to participate in going to pray with the youth group the next Wednesday evening in anticipation of a youth minister being hired. Committee members are developing a prayer chain and regularly meeting on Sunday mornings to pray for spiritual renewal.

The ministry committee passed out sign-up forms for ministry projects and visitation. One project will help a Baptist retreat center with some electrical work, clean up and erection of tents for the summer program for boys; at another Baptist camp they plan to clean the pool and cookout sites for a girls' camping program. And the group agreed to provide 60 Bibles for a nearby church and to help build a porch on a double-wide trailer where another church is meeting.

The fellowship committee is planning an arts and crafts fair with a fish fry this summer. Then this fall, they will hold a Harvest Day fellowship during which they expect the church to subscribe the 1995 budget in one evening.

Other committees -- deacon and church-wide -- still operate, but William Byrd, current deacon chair who recently retired after more than 32 years with Mississippi Chemical Corporation as director of sales and marketing, said he believes the deacons owe a lot to their pastor who inspired them. He said a good indication of attitudes is "the fact that we've got this many men excited enough to maintain 30-35 coming each month."

Raddin said, "I take very seriously my role as an equipper so the gifts the Lord has brought together can be used and we can broaden our ministry."

The wife of a deacon said, "I'm so happy seeing my husband doing what he ought to have been doing."

Wilkinson added, "I am anxious to see what the Lord is going to do."

Urban kids unaware of Jesus
confirmed her missions call

By Shari Schubert

HANNIBAL, Mo. (BP)--Dottie Williamson credits Christian parents with starting her on the road to service as a multihousing missionary.

"I used to think I didn't have a testimony, 'cause, you know, the good on s, people come out of the gutters of sin," said Williamson, director of new work and multifamily housing ministry for Hinds-Madison Baptist Association in Jackson, Miss. Williamson shared her lighthearted testimony during the mid-April Missuri Woman's Missionary Union annual meeting in Hannibal, Mo.

"I was in the nursery when I was one week old," she recounted. "I don't remember the first time I ever heard the name Jesus. ... That's all my mother ever talked about.

"When I was 8 years old I made a profession of faith. There were three reasons why I did that. No. 1, I knew I was supposed to. ... Second reason, I wanted to be a member of the church. ... Third reason, I wanted to go to heaven.

"Don't sound real theological, do they? But that's the best I could do at 8 years old. Who says you're supposed to know it all? Did you know it all when you walked down the aisle? You'll never learn it all till the day you die."

Growing up in the church, she admired her Sunday school teachers but thought she could never be one.

She recalled that missionaries came to her church and told of the wonderful things God was doing in foreign lands. "I saw the suffering servants of the jungles of Africa. Oh, they really worked hard. I thought, I could never be a missionary.

"I looked at everybody else and saw what they could do and I said, 'I can't do anything.'"

She said she didn't realize that every Christian has a job to do. "I was just attending programs and being a good person."

The extent of her involvement in missions at that time was helping collect food for food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas. She wasn't about to go to a nursing home or help with visitation.

"I thought about how I felt. I didn't think about somebody needing me."

All the while, her mother kept saying, "I wish you'd be a missionary for Jesus." But young Dottie wasn't interested.

She decided she would marry a rich boss. But "I never could catch one," she said. Then she decided since she was an old maid, she would teach school. But after a few years, "I said, 'Lord, get me away from the seventh and eighth grade and I'll do anything for you' -- but I did not mean missions."

She eventually decided to attend seminary, thinking her calling might be youth ministry. But after one lock-in, she was ready to look at education ministry. Or maybe, she thought, "I'll find me a preacher to marry ... and I won't have to worry about this anymore. Well, I couldn't catch one. They all married piano players." Still, her mother kept encouraging her to be a missionary.

In the summer of 1980, she signed up for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's PRAXIS program, which took her to New York City to help start a church. That summer "the Lord taught me about missions."

"There were children that wanted to go to Jesus' house because he sounded like such a nice man and he loved them. They thought he was in a house down the street.

"A mother came and said, 'The man Jesus you're telling my children about -- from the things they're telling me about that man, I'd like to know him.'"

Williamson had never seen anything like this. "I thought all the heathens were in foreign lands -- that's why they send all the missionaries over there. But they'd all moved to New York that summer," she quipped. Ultimately, she came to realize how many lost people live in every place.

"I thank the Lord that my mother never stopped praying -- that she didn't stop praying for 39 years until I answered that call" to missions, Williamson said.

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In the Jackson area where Williamson serves there are 176 apartment complexes, some with as many as 500 units, others with only 20. Traditional visitation or Bible and literature distribution often can't be used because of "no soliciting" policies.

"I found out if I wanted to get on the inside, I had to get the manager on my side first. I had to meet that person. If they liked me, maybe I could come in there and do something for Jesus."

With the help of some WMU women, she sent out letters, praying that by the end of the year managers of six complexes would accept the offer for people from local churches to provide activities for children, youth and adults.

Within two weeks, she had her first response. She went to visit the manager, a Christian lady, who told her about lonely elderly residents, young women going through divorces, fighting couples, a 5-year-old paraplegic, a handicapped man, an alcoholic, a maintenance worker whose mother was dying.

Williamson began listing things local church members could do: home Bible study, children's activities, kids' Bible clubs, cooking and weight classes, fire safety, money management, aerobics, parenting, makeup and beauty, auto mechanics, trips to the shopping center, discussion of current events.

"Doesn't sound very religious, does it?" she asked. But "don't you think you can take Jesus with you?"

Williamson emphasized successful multihousing ministry can be done when people in local churches simply use the abilities they already have in Jesus' name.

"Everybody in this room can do something," she said.

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