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July 15, 1994

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Accrediting agency wants
follow-up visit to SWBTS

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
7/15/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The major accrediting association for theological schools has asked for a second visit to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the wake of the firing of President Russell H. Dilday Jr. in March.

The Association of Theological Schools recently sent a letter to Southwestern advising the school that a "follow-up" visit this fall is planned, according to a Nancy Merrill, a spokesperson for ATS. It would follow a May visit by an ATS team to the Fort Worth, Texas campus that resulted from the March 9 firing of the president.

However, William B. Tolar, acting seminary president, said the seminary will ask the ATS to postpone the fall visit until next spring. Tolar said with the seminary trustees voting on a new president July 28 and the regular board of trustees meeting in October, the spring 1995 period would give the trustees and a new president time to get ready for the visit.

ATS issued a written rebuke in March to the trustees viewing "with utmost seriousness ... such precipitous action (by the trustees) ... a clear violation of accepted governance practices and places in jeopardy the vitality and basic integrity of the institution."

At that time, James L. Waits, executive director of ATS, asked the trustees to rescind the action firing Dilday.

The May fact-finding visit, called a "focused visit without prejudice" by the ATS, was by a five-member team which spent a full day interviewing current and past trustee officers, Dilday, faculty, administrative staff and elected student leaders.

Merrill said the team's findings were presented to the Commission on Accrediting for "formal action." She said the findings are confidential and preliminary but prompted the request for a second visit.

The seminary's other accrediting association, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, took part in the May visit and those findings were to be presented to a commission subcommittee the end of June in Atlanta.

Trustee chairman Ralph Pulley, Dallas attorney, and Scotty W. Gray, seminary executive vice president, attended the subcommittee meeting June 23, by invitation, but no further information is available, seminary officials said.

Baptist Press has learned that repr sentatives of SACS will be included in the follow-up visit by ATS.

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Southwestern trustees will vote July 28 on the search committee's nominee for president. Ken Hemphill, director of the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth and former Virginia pastor, would become the seminary's seventh president, if elected.

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**Murdered Iranians buried;
others reported still missing**

**Baptist Press
7/15/94**

TEHRAN, Iran (BP)--Murdered Christian leaders Mehdi Dibaj and Tateos Michaelian were buried in mid-July as conflicting charges about their deaths and the fate of other missing Christians swirled around Iran's capital.

Dibaj was laid to rest July 12 in Tehran and Michaelian was buried a day later. Dibaj, 59, an Assemblies of God minister, was found dead a week earlier in a part of western Tehran, according to IRNA, Iran's official news agency.

He had not been seen since July 1, when he left a Christian conference in a Tehran suburb to go to his daughter's home. He never arrived.

Police said they discovered Dibaj's body while seeking the killer of Michaelian, senior pastor of St. John Armenian Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church in Tehran and chairman of the Council of Protestant Ministers in Iran. Michaelian, 62, was killed some time after he left home June 29.

Relatives were summoned by Iranian authorities to identify Michaelian's body July 2. They said he had been shot several times in the head, but an independent examination was not allowed. Dibaj's relatives were allowed to see his body only two hours before his burial, and a full examination also was barred.

The authorities "showed the body for just a little while, and only the face," an Iranian source told News Network International, which specializes in reporting on persecuted Christian communities worldwide. "Then immediately they covered it and screwed the box shut very firmly. The authorities themselves carried (the coffin) to the cemetery for burial."

The Iranian news agency reported security officials have arrested three women in connection with the killings. The women were reported to have confessed to the murders in a campaign to foment "ethnic and religious division" and embarrass the Iranian government. The three are members of the opposition Mujahedeen Khalq Organization, the news agency claimed.

But the opposition group called the charge "foolish fairy tales" and accused the Iranian government intelligence ministry of the murders.

Meanwhile, at least four other Iranian Christians reported missing or detained since July 1 remain unaccounted for, including Hassan Shahjamali, an Iranian Muslim convert to Christianity and U.S. resident married to an American. Shahjamali went to an airport in the Iranian city of Shiraz to board a flight to Tehran July 1. But he never arrived in the Iranian capital.

Iranian security officials now reportedly claim Shahjamali and another Christian said detained in Ahwaz never were arrested. The allegations, they charged, are part of a foreign media "plot to disrupt the peaceful coexistence in Iran between Muslims and followers of other religions." But Shahjamali's family members have not seen him.

Iranian Christian leaders fear for the lives of those still missing, and international human rights groups are calling for independent investigations of the murders.

Dibaj made international headlines last December when Iranian authorities announced he would be executed -- after 10 years in prison -- for abandoning Islam. But following an international outcry he was released from prison Jan. 16.

Dibaj and Michaelian became the second and third Christian leaders to be murdered this year in Iran. In January Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, superintendent of the Assemblies of God, also was murdered. He preceded Michaelian as chairman of the Council of Protestant Ministers in Iran.

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The murders, arrests and disappearances form a pattern of ongoing persecution of Christians in the predominantly Muslim nation. Christians charge government surveillance of Iranian believers has increased in recent weeks. The latest violence continues earlier anti-Christian actions, including execution, detentions, torture and church closings.

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Needs will rise as flood recedes,
Southern Baptist officials say

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
7/15/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--With the close of the first full week of disaster response to floods in the Southeast, Southern Baptist disaster officials say meal counts at their feeding units -- and the need for clean-up volunteers -- will continue to rise as the waters recede.

"I think we're starting to turn the corner with the floodwaters themselves," said Mickey Caison, a Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission staffer serving as national on-site coordinator. "But we expect our overall meal counts to rise in the next few days as more volunteers come in."

Caison also said July 15 he did not expect to call any additional feeding or child care units into the affected three-state area.

Since the flood emergency began, more than 82,600 meals have been provided.

Most of the relief activity is focused in southwest Georgia. Feeding units from Georgia are operating in Perry, Cordele and Albany. A South Carolina feeding unit is located at Donaldsonville; a North Carolina unit is at Albany. A child care unit from Tennessee is operating at Albany as well, with another child care unit from Illinois expected to arrive today.

The Georgia Baptist Convention's Brotherhood department continued to call for volunteers and for clean-up equipment and supplies, including pressure washers, pumps, shovels, buckets, disinfectants, brooms, mops, and rubber gloves. Prospective volunteers and equipment providers should call 1-800-746-4422.

In Florida, the state convention continued operating two feeding units in Bonifay. Cecil Seagle, the on-site coordinator for Florida, predicted July 15 one of the units might be deactivated by early next week and added the Florida operation had sufficient volunteers and supplies.

Meanwhile, an Alabama Baptist Convention unit at Enterprise, Ala., prepared 1,800 meals yesterday and expects to provide 2,000 today, according to Tommy Puckett, Brotherhood director for the convention. Alabama will decide early next week whether to call for volunteers and supplies. Floodwaters there are expected to continue receding.

American Red Cross estimates of homes damaged in the three states increased to nearly 14,600 yesterday and could go higher if rain continues over the area.

The response by Southern Baptists to last year's flooding in the Midwest still includes the largest-ever total for meals provided -- 1.6 million over several weeks. This year, units have been active in the Southeast since July 5, 11 days as of July 15.

People who wish to make donations for initial disaster relief may send contributions to the Brotherhood Commission, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104. Designate the gift for flood relief.

Prospective volunteers for long-term relief and recovery efforts should call their state convention Brotherhood director or the Home Mission Board at 1-800-HMB-VOLS.

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Board recommends adjusting
Oklahoma's share of CP gifts

By Dave Parker

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Citing rising expenses, a lean staff and a stagnant economy resulting in decreased income from the churches, the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma's board of directors voted in a special called meeting July 12 to recommend a change in the percentage of Cooperative Program receipts going to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Directors unanimously approved a 1995 Cooperative Program objective of \$17.45 million that sends 40 percent of receipts to SBC causes and keeps 60 percent in Oklahoma for state missions needs. In 1992, messengers to the state convention approved a budget that lowered the division to 42 percent, also down two percentage points.

The board also approved the budget itself, three items related to budget overages and underages, and the state mission offering goal.

Alan Day, pastor of First Baptist Church of Edmond, chairman of the administrative committee, presented the recommended budget, which must be approved by messengers in November.

Lawrence Cox, director of missions for Johnston-Marshall Baptist Association, questioned lowering the SBC percentage when the Foreign Mission Board and Home Mission Board already are experiencing shortages.

Day agreed the timing seemed to be bad, but noted the BGCOC already has made cutbacks for several years and cannot make more cuts without seriously jeopardizing programs provided for the churches.

"We only have two ways to get more income," Day said. "We need the churches to send more money, or we need to change the formula. The budget committee looked at a number of factors. Programming needs continue to go up. The departments of the BGCOC have given up personnel and program needs over the past several years. Our first responsibility is to take care of the ministry needs here."

Cox asked if the reduction is critical for the state convention to survive. Day replied the BGCOC would find a way to survive without the change, but it would make things more difficult.

"What message does this give to the churches in Oklahoma?" Cox asked.

"One message we're sending is that we believe Oklahoma Baptist ministries are missions," Day replied.

"I'm going to give you some facts," Day said. "Our staff has had two salary increases in eight years. We are one of the lowest paid staffs in the SBC. Some pioneer conventions pay better than we do. Our people are not overpaid, they are underpaid."

He also noted the BGCOC is number three or four in percentage given to the SBC, and will remain so with the adjustment.

"Unless we see the local churches do better, including the First Baptist Church of Edmond, we need to change to 60/40," Day said.

BGCOC President Keith Russell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Elk City, said giving is down because stewardship is not being preached enough.

"We need to teach stewardship in our churches," Russell said. "Those of us who can need to look real hard at our giving through the CP. When God has blessed us, we have to encourage our churches to increase their CP percentage."

"There were times when other state conventions were not doing so well, and Oklahoma was, and we had a lion's share of CP giving. Maybe it's time for other states to help more."

Allen McHam, pastor of First Baptist Church of Perry, said he was concerned staff members had a total of 9 percent in pay raises over eight years, while the cost of living went up 27 percent. He said he would have supported a 62-38 division.

"In this proposed budget, there are no provisions for a salary increase in any position," he said. "I have to wonder about the wisdom of letting it go another year."

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William G. Tanner, executive director-treasurer, noted the budget does include a one-time bonus of 3 percent of the employees' base salary, up to a maximum bonus of \$750.

The 1995 budget of \$17.45 million, with a 60-40 division, was unanimously passed.

During discussion of the budget itself, director Winston Curtis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Texhoma, asked any overage be used to augment salaries.

Anthony Jordan, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church of Oklahoma City, noted the 60/40 division would bring a projected increase of \$349,000 to the BGCO; of that, \$75,000 was going to Oklahoma Baptist University.

"I support OBU and have a son who will be going to OBU," Jordan said. "I support OBU and I love OBU. I do think we ought to do something for OBU. I do not know where else we can get \$75,000."

Jordan made a motion to take \$25,000 from the increase going to OBU and put it into the special projects fund.

Gerald Peters, director of missions for East Central Baptist Association, noted Tanner wanted even more money going to OBU, but the budget subcommittee cut that amount.

Dennis Wright, pastor of First Baptist Church of Meeker, asked how much money it would take to bring BGCO staff salaries up to par. Controller Marlin Hawkins estimated it would take \$150,000, and Wright moved to amend Jordan's motion, to put in \$150,000 for salary increases.

McHam pointed out a 62-38 division would bring in an additional \$349,000 to be used for salaries and programming needs.

After several minutes of discussion, Russell ruled Wright's motion out of order because it did not deal specifically with the \$75,000 allocated to OBU.

Tanner pointed out the strategic planning committee and a board realignment committee are looking at several areas to make the BGCO more efficient, including more pay for more responsibilities, experience and supervisory roles, and he suggested those committees take up augmenting salaries if they feel there is a need.

"It is a credit to Oklahoma Baptists that during some of the toughest years in our state, the giving pattern has stayed strong," he added.

Tanner also noted Oklahoma's allocation to OBU is already the third highest for any state-supported Baptist university.

Directors voted to cut OBU's increase by \$25,000; about 10 voted against the move. They then unanimously approved the budget.

Also unanimously approved were recommendations on overages and underages:

-- If the budget goal is not reached, all budgets will be cut across the board.

-- If the goal is exceeded by 5 percent or less, Tanner is authorized to distribute Oklahoma's portion. If receipts are more than 5 percent over budget, Tanner will recommend, through the board of directors' administrative committee, Oklahoma's portion.

-- If Tanner feels it would be "prudent or necessary," he may adjust the budget by no more than 5 percent.

In addition, directors approved the Edna McMillan State Mission Offering goal of \$675,000. The September offering is used for new church starts, language missions, camps, seminary scholarships for women, international work and other missions ministries.

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Religious leaders found group
to counter religious right

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
7/15/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--A coalition of religious leaders recently announced the formation of The Interfaith Alliance to counter what it calls the extremism of the "radical religious right."

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The alliance believes the "groups which represent the radical religious right pose a serious threat to tolerance and liberty," said Presbyterian Church (USA) official and alliance board chairman Herbert Valentine at a July 14 news conference. "The radical right arrogantly asserts that its voice is the only true religious voice speaking in America today."

"Yes, we believe the voices of the radical right are a very real threat to (religious) freedom," said Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches.

The alliance, which has an office in Washington, intends to work to restore civility to the public debate, educate citizens in states where the religious right is most active, and serve as a national clearinghouse for grassroots organizations responding to the right, spokespersons said.

One of the 11 directors on the alliance's board is Foy Valentine, former executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. The other directors are members of mainline Protestant denominations, as well as Catholics, Jews and a Universalist.

Campbell and others said members of the religious right describe those who disagree with them as non-Christian. When asked at the news conference for evidence, she said she could not provide a "quote right now" but the NCC "certainly (has) been attacked by the Christian Coalition as un-Christian."

Ralph Reed, director of the Christian Coalition, said later in a CNN television interview no one "at the Christian Coalition has ever said that if you don't agree with our politics that somehow you're not a good Christian. What we're saying is ... we're not trying to legislate ... our theology; we're trying to legislate our public policy views."

When asked if they condemned Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders' frequent descriptions of those opposed to her policies as the "un-Christian religious right," some alliance spokesmen said "demonization is unacceptable -- whether from the right or left."

Other than Christian Coalition, the only other religious right organizations cited by Interfaith Alliance speakers at the news conference were the Traditional Values Coalition and Oregon Citizen's Alliance.

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Student cowboy
ropes for Jesus

By Brian Smith

Baptist Press
7/15/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--After spending most of the last five years traveling across North America as an expert calf roper on the professional rodeo circuit, Dan Haby has found himself in a new arena as a diploma student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In his years on the pro circuit, Haby performed in at least 25 states, Canada and Mexico. In addition to being a professional calf roper, Haby is skillful in team roping and steer wrestling. He also has competed in bullriding, bareback riding, and saddlebronc riding.

Although he's currently off the circuit and living in the men's dormitory on Southwestern Seminary's main campus, Haby doesn't feel as if he's retired.

"When God called me to seminary I just hung up my ropes until I could get used to the classes. Just as soon as I can, I'm going back to competing," he said. In the meantime, he practices by roping a pretend calf made of metal on the lawn outside his dorm.

"I try to get out there several times a week and rope my dummy," he said. "It relaxes me after I take a test."

The roping dummy, nicknamed "Patience," has become a celebrity in the dorm.

"I've got half the dorm roping now," Haby said. "They're calling home and telling people that they roped something today."

While Haby teaches his dormmates the intricacies of roping, he looks forward to getting back on the pro circuit and sharing Christ with his fellow cowboys.

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"When you're just traveling from place to place, many of those hours it's just you and someone else in that vehicle," Haby said. "Conversation always seems to revert around, and you'd be amazed how many people want to know about Christ. When you're in that pickup or airplane or van or camper or whatever, you can really have an opportunity to witness."

Haby's earliest rodeo experiences include his first youth rodeo in 1967 when he was only four years old. He roped his first calf when he was eight. He was the captain of the Uvalde (Texas) High School rodeo team for four years and competed in the Texas high school rodeo finals each year.

Haby's rodeo and academic successes in high school landed him a scholarship to Southwest Texas Junior College, one of the top rodeo schools in the nation. He continued to win rodeos while at SWTJC and later at Sam Houston State College. Although he was on his way to realizing his dream of being a pro rodeo cowboy, Haby couldn't escape his call from God to preach.

"After a year in college, I realized I was in school for all the wrong reasons," he said. "I had put rodeo ahead of everything in my life -- ahead of God, ahead of family, and ahead of school."

That's when he became active with Cowboys For Christ. Near the end of his first year in the group, he was elected president of his local chapter.

Haby's rodeo successes in high school and college followed him to his first pro competition at the Mesquite (Texas) Championship Rodeo.

"Thanks to the Lord, I won the calf roping and was interviewed on TV," he said. "I was so proud my head could hardly fit my hat."

Yet for all the excitement of being a member of the pro rodeo circuit, Haby's most enjoyable experiences occurred outside the arena. He said, "At the rodeo, when the crowd wants to know about your lifestyle, or when you're signing autographs, it gives you the opportunity to witness to masses of people."

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Georgia church grows
by focusing on boomers

By Michael Duduit

Baptist Press
7/15/94

MARIETTA, Ga. (BP)--Bryant Wright has discovered two important things as pastor to a congregation filled with baby boomers: they want to know more about the Bible, and tradition has little significance to them.

Understanding and responding to those two realities helps explain how, in just over a decade, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta has grown from 20 families to a congregation of more than 3,500 members. Most of the 2,500 worshippers on a typical Sunday are between 35 and 45 years old, which parallels the demographics of the surrounding community and the church's own identity.

"We have intentionally made a decision that our primary target group is baby boomers and their families," explains Wright. "We make it clear that everybody is welcome in this ministry, but our main call is the mission field that God has placed us in, and that is a mission field of baby boomers."

The "baby boom generation" -- composed of people born between 1946 and 1964 -- now makes up a third of the nation's population and sets the tone and shape of American culture. Much church growth literature in recent years has addressed the troublesome issue of reinvolving this group in the life of the church.

Bryant and Anne Wright are themselves members of the "boomer" generation. H was a chemical sales representative prior to his call to ministry and study at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. That secular work experience offers additional insight into the needs and interests of the people the Johnson Ferry church is trying to reach.

As a pastor with a commitment to expository preaching, Wright recognizes many people who begin attending the church "don't know anything about the Bible, so we do things to help them."

One of those things is offering clear, simple directions on finding biblical texts -- including reference to page numbers in the pew Bibles.

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"One of the most intimidating things for an educated boomer is to be told to turn to John 5, and they have no idea what you are talking about. Nobody wants to feel dumb or left out. So continually in my messages I'll repeat over and over, 'If you are new to Bible study, the book of John is the fourth book of the New Testament. The Bible has the Old Testament and the New Testament, and John is the fourth book in the New Testament, and you can find the page number in the pew Bible.' I am constantly guiding and coaching them, assuming there is always that guy out there who doesn't know anything about it."

Another key element in Wright's preaching is using common, everyday language and illustrations "the guy at IBM" can understand.

"We are to take the best academic preparation from a theological perspective, along with your own spiritual growth in ministry, and present it in language that is relevant and contemporary," says Wright.

Ministry to baby boomers requires understanding common characteristics, Wright indicates. One of the most important is boomers are not traditional in the sense that earlier generations may have been.

"They have got to come to their own decision. They have to reinvent the wheel sometimes," he observes. "They may wind up doing what was traditional, but they are not going to just accept it because it has been handed down."

Another characteristic of boomers is an insistence on quality in every area of life, including the church.

"They are looking for quality in child care, quality in preaching, quality in the worship services and teaching," Wright asserts, describing it as part of a consumer mind set. "It carries over to the church. We can sit back and say, 'Aren't these people terrible to have consumer minds in the church,' but that is how they are. They shop for church, and that is a reality."

That "church shopping" practice tends to lead boomers to larger churches where they have more choices, Wright acknowledges.

"They are used to switching channels on the TV. They are used to shopping malls, so they tend to like a larger church because of multiple choices-staff, ministry. That makes it tough on smaller churches."

"Boomers are not loyal," Wright says. "They are weak on commitment, and when you are trying to build folks in Christ and build a church, that obviously presents a real challenge. What has to occur is something so significant and life transforming that they want to be loyal to that church, because it is making such a difference in their lives."

During a 1988 sabbatical, Wright visited 36 growing churches across the country and discovered "churches that are reaching boomers are transdenominational. They may be Baptist, they may be Presbyterian, they may be Lutheran, but they understand the community in which they have been put" and find ways to attract and involve people no matter what their past denominational connections.

Wright's own preparation for the pastorate was a combination of seminary training and practical experience. Following seminary graduation in 1979, Wright spent two-and-a-half years as Minister to Single Adults and College at Second Baptist Church in Houston, where Ed Young recently had arrived as pastor. Young had been Wright's college pastor at First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C.

"That was my doctoral work in church life," Wright relates. "Ed Young is the Bobby Knight of the ministry -- he has an intensity that is 110 percent, and he expects that of everybody around him. Our worship style is very similar to Second Baptist, although it has evolved over the years."

A dozen years after arriving in Marietta as pastor of the new church, which then was meeting in a medical office building, Wright preaches in a 2,000-seat sanctuary that houses two Sunday morning services. Another Sunday service, targeted directly at non-churched people, meets in a nearby school; that service is led by Associate Pastor Gary Wingo.

The primary element in Johnson Ferry's success is the fact "that God has his hand on this church in a way that we cannot adequately explain, in a way that we are thankful for," Wright says. "I will forever be thankful to have been brought into a situation where there was a lot of vision and people really wanting to see a church have an impact."

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