

**(BP)**

**-- BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**NATIONAL OFFICE**

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

**BUREAUS**

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 7117006  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,17  
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,17  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,17  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 7117006

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

November 7, 1994

94-181

TEXAS--Newspaper: Baylor committee ready to nominate new president.  
SOUTH CAROLINA--First-Person: God's Word speaks to our hurting community.  
GAZA--Gaza quiet, hopeful despite continuing Mideast violence; photos.  
GAZA--'One-man nursing school' in Gaza needs volunteers.  
GAZA--English: a door to Gaza's people; photos.  
TEXAS--Baptists use former drug plane for humanitarian relief to Haiti.  
CALIFORNIA--Former Calif. pastor/HMB official elected to lead Calif. Baptists.  
WEST VIRGINIA--West Virginia Baptists hike SBC-Cooperative Program percent.

Newspaper: Baylor committee  
ready to nominate new president

Baptist Press  
11/7/94

By Art Toalston & Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (BP)--A special meeting of Baylor University's board of regents has been called Nov. 17-18 to consider a nominee for the university's presidency, the Waco (Texas) Tribune-Herald reported Nov. 5.

According to the newspaper, "Many believe the search committee will recommend Thomas E. Corts, currently the president of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala."

However, the newspaper noted, one unnamed Baylor professor warned "that last week's rumor mill was cranking out an entirely different name: Paul Powell," president of the Southern Baptist Convention Annuity Board.

Baylor President Herbert Reynolds confirmed the special called meeting to consider a nominee from the search committee, but he would not engage in any speculation about possible nominees.

Reynolds, 64, Baylor president since 1981 who will retire May 31, 1995, confirmed a written notice was mailed the week of Oct. 31 by Gale Galloway, an Austin business executive and newly elected Baylor regents chairman, calling the meeting "to receive, review and fully discuss the report of the Presidential Succession Committee and, if deemed necessary by the regents, to vote on the committee's recommendations."

Reynolds told Baptist Press he would not speculate on the individual or individuals to be discussed, that he had no preconceived notion of how any vote would go and that he has tried to maintain an appropriate distance from the presidential search process.

Corts has been Samford's president since 1983 and, earlier, president of Wingate College in North Carolina for nine years. He was instrumental in leading Samford's board of trustees in a change of Samford's charter Sept. 13 to a self-perpetuating board rather than one selected by the Alabama Baptist State Convention. Corts is the brother of John Corts, president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and Mark Corts, longtime pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C., and former chairman of the SBC Foreign Mission Board trustees.

--more--

Powell, Annuity Board president since 1990, was a member of Baylor's trustees when they moved to self-perpetuating status as a board of regents in 1990 rather than continuing the traditional trustee selection process through the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Powell then was elected the first chairman of the new regents board and led the regents through a period of negotiations with Baptist General Convention of Texas leaders to a 1991 agreement for Baylor to name 75 percent of its regents and the convention to name the other 25 percent.

A majority vote by Baylor's 36 regents will be required to elect a new president, the Waco newspaper reported.

--30--

EDITORS' NOTE: The following sermon was preached by Allen Raines, pastor of First Baptist Church, Union, S.C., the Sunday after Susan Smith of Union was charged Nov. 3 in the murders of her two sons, Michael, 3, and Alex, 14 months.

#### FIRST-PERSON

God's Word speaks to  
our hurting community

By Allen Raines

Baptist Press  
11/7/94

UNION, S.C. (BP)--Since late Thursday, there has been hanging over our community a difficult situation. Many, if not all of us, have been asking "Why?" or "How could such a thing happen?" Two small boys were drowned, apparently by their mother. How could anyone do such an awful thing?

It causes some to ask even a deeper question, a question that digs at the very foundation of faith: "Why would a loving and all-powerful God let this happen?" If he is all-powerful but does not stop evil, then he must not be loving. If he is loving and lets evil win out, then he must not be all-powerful.

Several years ago I heard a story of a young male student who was attending a large university out West and selling magazine subscriptions for additional income. He thought that a likely buyer might be the dean of the university. He made his way to the home of the dean. The young man was greeted at the door by the dean's wife who was able to resist his sales pitch by saying that her husband already subscribed to more magazines than he could read. The student thanked her and turned to leave. It was then that the dean's wife saw something she had not noticed before. The young man was crippled. A pain of guilt came over her for turning him down. She called out to him and said, "I did not know you were a cripple." The young man replied that he was crippled as the result of polio. The dean's wife then replied, "My, how being a cripple must color your life." "It sure does," responded the young student, "but, thank God, I can choose the color."

How indebted we are to those who like this young crippled student bring a perspective of hope into a difficult situation. I can assure you he was not born that way, but chose the attitude that he demonstrated.

This morning I stand before you to confess that, as far as I know, there is not an intellectually satisfying response to the good and evil dilemma. However, God's Word can shed some light for us.

Ours is not the community to hurt, nor shall it be the last. In a time of intense hurt, we can choose to turn to God's Word and find help to get us through tough times.

The first thing for us to do is to fix our eyes on the Lord. In chapters six and seven of Acts, we have the story of Stephen, a good man who was described as being "full of grace and power, and one that performed great wonders and signs among the people." We do not know the length of time covered in the story. Stephen and the other five men were working to help solve a problem, but it was not long before he found himself in a difficult situation. He was in the hands of some evil men. These men had such hatred in their hearts. They rushed him, chased him from the city and stoned him to death. Stephen did not get all absorbed in his problem and perplexed about how badly he was being hurt.

--more--

Turn with me in your Bible to Acts 7. In verse 55 of the seventh chapter, we find that he found help by looking to his Lord and not focusing on his misery. As a hurting people, ones who may feel forsaken, we can as the hymn written by Helen Lemmel so accurately put it: "O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? Turn ... Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim." We can choose to look to Jesus.

As a Christian, when we feel that the hurt is just too much, when we feel so all alone and forsaken, Christ has promised never to leave us. Listen, His Word says, "I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5c NASB).

When we hurt, it is good to know that God is aware of our situation. We are not having unnoticed troubles. God is looking at us. The Psalmist wrote, "From His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth" (Psalm 33:14 NASB). It helps to know that the Lord is alive and well.

All the attempts to silence him have failed. All those who would like to think that they have progressed beyond the need for a personal relationship with God have failed. When man reaches the point of his greatest need and is crying out in agony and desperation, when his hurt drives him to seek, to search for meaning, a living God is looking and listening.

There is another example of a good man in the Bible. This time a book in the Old Testament describes "a man ... blameless, upright, fearing God" (Job 1:1 NASB). This man is named Job. The Book of Job is the story of a good man who suffers total disaster -- he loses his children, his property, and is afflicted with a repulsive disease. Job has a difficult time, for he cannot understand how God can let so much evil happen to one like himself. However, he does not lose his faith. It is in this story that we find one of the sublimest expressions of faith ever uttered. Job says, "as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25). Job really understood that God is greater than what man has depicted. Job was not alone; he was being watched. "For his eyes are upon the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps" (Job 34:21 RSV). We like Job can choose to believe that God is looking at us.

Once we have come to look to God, and then, to realize that God is looking at us, we need to look ahead. "Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life" (Jude 21 NASB). We are not promised that all will get better, that no more hurt or suffering will come, or that if we will only wait, it will go away. No. Instead, it could get worse. However, with the look ahead, we have a promise that he will never allow more than we can bear.

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul shares some of his most difficult times. Five times, he received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one. Three times, he was beaten with rods; once, he was stoned. Three times, he was shipwrecked. He spent a day and a night adrift at sea, faced many dangers, had sleepless nights, had hunger and thirst and endured the cold. Instead of quitting like many would when life deals a harsh hand, Paul declared, "I count it all joy." No matter how dismal and catastrophic our present circumstance may be, we know we are not alone.

Our Christian faith makes it possible for us to accept that which cannot be changed, to face rejection and hurt and to deal with the most intense pain without abandoning our sense of hope. "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28 NASB).

Your can choose whether to be a victim or victor!

EDITORS' NOTE: Middle East correspondent Mike Creswell and photographer Don Rutledge recently visited Gaza, where the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement has brought an end -- for now -- to the violence of the long uprising against Israeli occupation.

Gaza quiet, hopeful despite  
continuing Mideast violence

By Mike Creswell

GAZA (BP)--Violence still swirls around the new relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, but conditions are much better than during the bloody Intifada resistance movement against Israeli occupation, Southern Baptist workers in Gaza say.

"People here are just waiting to see what's going to happen," said Dona Fitzgerald, chairman of the organization of Southern Baptist representatives working in Gaza.

Baptist workers have seen promises of peace come and go before during 40 years of Southern Baptist work in Gaza. But with the end of Israeli occupation of Gaza -- and of the Intifada -- earlier this year, pressure-cooker days and nights have ended for a time. Palestinians are beginning to think about the future, Baptist workers say.

But all agree it's a wary optimism.

"Right now people are rejoicing around the campfire, but out in the darkness beyond the light there are some glowing eyes," said Southern Baptist representative Dean Fitzgerald, a surgeon at Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City.

The Fitzgeralds are from Tulsa and Bartlesville, Okla., respectively.

No violence disturbed Gaza during late October -- no tire burning or confrontations with the army or police like on the West Bank, Mrs. Fitzgerald reported.

The quiet contrasted sharply with the scene in Tel Aviv, Israel, where the bombing of a city bus Oct. 19 killed 22 people and injured dozens of others. In mid-October an Israeli soldier was kidnapped; he and four others were killed when soldiers tried to rescue him on the West Bank.

The Palestinian group Hamas, or the Islamic Resistance Movement, is blamed for both incidents. Hamas opposes peace between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization or surrounding Arab nations.

Israel and Jordan signed a treaty Oct. 26 that ended a 46-year state of war. A strike protesting the treaty was called among West Bank Palestinians, but Gaza remained quiet.

City workers in Gaza have been whitewashing fences and walls throughout the city. During the Intifada, virtually every square foot of wall space was covered with warnings or announcements about the resistance movement. Now writing on walls is illegal.

As foreigners, Southern Baptist workers can leave the tiny strip of land on the Mediterranean and go into Israel, although the passage becomes less convenient when the border is closed. But the periodic border closings are much more serious for the 20,000 Gaza Palestinians who depend on work in Israel for food. Each afternoon a long line of cars and buses backs up at the Gaza border as workers return from their day jobs in Israel. When the border closes, workers can't earn a living; jobs are scarce in impoverished Gaza.

"That makes the situation worse," Mrs. Fitzgerald said.

Palestinians rejoiced when Israeli troops withdrew from Gaza following the signing of a self-rule pact by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization May 4. But self-rule has caused some practical problems for Palestinians. Travel to Israel or the West Bank is only one of them.

When an X-ray machine broke down at the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, Israeli technicians refused to come repair it. Eventually repairmen came from the West Bank, but it was hard for them to cross through Israel, said Fitzgerald.

--more--

Another problem: mail. Since attaining self-rule, Palestinians don't want to sell Israeli stamps but have none of their own. As a result it's hard to post letters at all.

Still, daily life is easier since the Intifada, which began in 1987, finally ended. After years of seething tension, Gaza lurched into virtual chaos in late 1993 and early 1994 as armed gangs shot people suspected of sympathizing with the Israelis. Schools closed for months. Shops were often shuttered. Violence had become a way of life.

Southern Baptist representatives pursued teaching and Christian work as much as possible during the Intifada. But simply staying in Gaza was perhaps their biggest victory. Now, with relative peace, they look forward to building more relationships and sharing the gospel with more people.

"We're praising the Lord that we were able to stay during the difficult time and see the new government take over," said Mrs. Fitzgerald.

But the number of Southern Baptist workers has shrunk from more than 30 seven years ago to just 12 today.

The Intifada strengthened Islam among Gaza Palestinians. The wearing of Muslim-style scarves became a political act; appearing to be a devout Muslim became patriotic. During those tense days the mosques were filled for prayer services; people sometimes had to stand on the sidewalk. Now attendance has slacked off.

Religion is somewhat less a politicized topic than during the Intifada, said Southern Baptist representative Debbie Peterson of Dallas.

"Now you can discuss God without it having to be a political thing, and that's a big freedom," she said. During the Intifada it was hard to get people to even consider hearing about spiritual matters. "They were afraid of what their neighbors would do to them," she said.

"Peace has opened for doors for effective ministry," added her husband, David of Friendswood, Texas. He teaches English at Gaza College, a high school program which has developed an accelerated program for motivated students.

For Southern Baptist workers Paul and Harriet Lawrence of Leeds, Ala., peace has meant their son, Ben, 12, can play with friends and ride his bike without fear of getting shot. And it's easier for their daughter, Bonnie, 14, to attend school in Jerusalem and come home for weekends.

When peace finally came, "things just lightened up. People could breathe again," said Mrs. Lawrence. Stores are stocked better and shopping is easier without constant strikes. They knew things were improving when they found American-style potato chips in a market recently.

Peace also has moved Gaza Baptist Church out from under a dark cloud.

Members meet on Sunday mornings and sing spirited hymns with the doors and windows open. With no curfews, members can worship freely -- unlike the days of the Intifada, when they had to cancel services or meet secretly.

"Now there are no soldiers, no checkpoints, no wires, no shooting, no stones thrown," said Jaber El Jildah, one of the church's leaders. "We think it will be easier to reach out now, but we must have wisdom."

The modest stone church building sits across a square from a fortified building that was the final outpost occupied by the Israeli army. El Jildah, a jeweler, said the church had to keep a low profile during the Intifada.

"We were afraid to do anything against the Intifada. We did not want others to look at Christians like that," he said.

Official estimates count perhaps 3,000 Christians in Gaza, mostly members of the Greek Orthodox Church. But some Baptists believe the actual number of adherents is much lower. Gaza Baptist Church has only about 30 members, but more than 100 people attend services each week. With about 850,000 people living in Gaza, Christians of any kind account for less than 1 percent.

Despite their small numbers, Gaza Baptists have strong believers, especially among the youth and young adults, said Lawrence.

"During the Intifada things were dead, stressed out," Mrs. Lawrence explained. "Now we're building an addition to the building. Looking back, it's probably not that there was a lack of faith. It's just that people were emotionally drained."

Added her husband: "It took so much energy to live, they just didn't have much left over."

Now there's cautious hope for the future.

"We're praying for Yasser Arafat, the new government leader," said El Jildah. "As Christians we believe in Gaza. We believe the will of God will happen here. We're praying for (Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak) Rabin, too, for God to give them wisdom on how to deal with this situation."

--30--

(BP) photos (three horizontal) relating to this story and the two below mailed to state Baptist newspapers Nov. 4 by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outlines available on SBCNet News Room.

'One-man nursing school'  
in Gaza needs volunteers

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
11/7/94

GAZA (BP)--Southern Baptists gave up a nursing school in Gaza in 1993, but instructor Paul Lawrence still teaches nursing.

The Baptist Nursing School, a force in Palestinian nurse training for many years, closed in 1993 after graduating its final class of 14 students. It closed because too few Southern Baptists were willing to serve as teachers in a land where violence had become a daily event.

Dean Fitzgerald, a surgeon, and Lawrence are the only Southern Baptist medical workers left in Gaza.

The nursing school was turned over to the United Nations, which is continuing to teach nursing. Baptists leased the school building to the United Nations for five years.

Over the years graduates of the Baptist school won recognition for their high-quality training. That made it easy for Southern Baptist teacher Lawrence, a nine-year veteran in Gaza from Leeds, Ala., to continue teaching.

A year ago Lawrence opened his own "one-man institute," teaching needed courses. In fact, he has certified all the nurses at Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza as well as about 70 medical workers at the government-sponsored nursing school.

In September he taught an advanced course in resuscitation skills -- a technically demanding class that had the students groaning.

"It's a difficult course, modeled after one taught by the American Heart Association," Lawrence said. "In the first session only three people passed the course. But even in the evaluation, people who did poorly didn't want the standard lowered."

Lawrence is committed to helping improve Gaza's nursing -- an area of medical care considered weak in most Middle Eastern countries. But by being a one-man school, he avoids the cost of maintaining an institution.

"I had some stationery and calling cards printed, but that's all," he said. "It's low-budget."

But he's seeking Southern Baptist volunteers to help him teach nursing. His background is in intensive-care nursing, but he would like to have one or more volunteers help teach courses in cardiac intensive care, clinical oncology and newborn intensive care.

"I could use one person for three months or a couple of people six weeks each," Lawrence explained. "In fact, I could use someone with advanced teaching skills in any nursing specialty."

In Lawrence's new role he is meeting more people from across Gaza, rather than just the limited number of students who once attended the nursing school. He has taught classes as far south as Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city.

--more--

The new approach also gives Lawrence more time for ministry at Gaza Baptist Church. He has taught a course in Old Testament survey, preaches once a month and now helps promote decentralized theological education for believers. The fact that Lawrence and his wife, Harriet, have been in Gaza for nine years helps them win respect from new people they meet.

"I just have to trust the Lord to deepen the relationships he brings to us," he said.

--30--

English: a door  
to Gaza's people

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
11/7/94

GAZA (BP)--If you want to know how much Gaza Palestinians are looking to the future, ask Southern Baptist representative Nancie Wingo.

She'll tell you she has more students than ever who want to learn English. That's a good sign more people are thinking of the future, because speaking English is seen as a passport to jobs.

This fall more than 60 students are attending classes at the Baptist library in Gaza. A dozen of these are preparing for the tough English test required for admission to American universities.

With the coming of peace to Gaza, she can teach throughout the day, rather than constantly cancelling classes because of strikes or violence. A veteran Southern Baptist worker who served in Lebanon during its long years of civil war, Wingo has worked in Gaza since 1987. She arrived in March that year; the Intifada uprising against Israeli occupation began in December.

She teaches English at the Baptist library, called the Center of Culture and Light. The center has recovered from a 1991 fire that burned about 3,000 books. Now it has about 11,000 books on loan. It's the only general public library in Gaza and certainly the only one offering books on Christian topics, said director Isam Farah.

"Our library is for everybody," he said.

A new video library begun this fall offers Christian videos on loan. The English classes offered by Wingo and others are one of the center's most popular offerings.

But Wingo, from Fort Worth, Texas, also has been teaching English to the teachers at a school for the deaf and to workers at the Save the Children office in Gaza. The contacts with so many new people provide valuable opportunities for a Christian worker.

In December 1993 Southern Baptist worker Glenn Glover arrived to help with the English classes for 15 months through the International Service Corps program. A native of Bessemer, Ala., Glover graduated from the University of Alabama in 1992 and took a 16-hour training program offered by the Georgia Baptist Convention to prepare for the teaching.

Glover admits he was scared at times during the Intifada days. He saw a young person shot and saw a crowd tear-gassed. "I saw enough; let's put it that way," he said. January and February of 1994 were the worst months, he said. Some Palestinians he knew were killed.

Still, he went to Gaza following a sense of God's direction in his life. Also, "I thought it was a perfect time in my life to do something like this," he said.

Despite the fear and the rough times, he still does.

--30--

(BP) photos (two horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers Nov. 4 by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet News Room.

**Baptists use former drug plane  
for humanitarian relief to Haiti** By Ken Camp

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A plane once used to smuggle drugs leaves Fort Worth today filled with Baptist relief equipment for Haiti.

More than \$40,000 worth of supplies, including a water purifier and equipment to repair damaged wells in Haiti, will be loaded aboard the C-97 which is scheduled to land at 4 p.m. at Alliance Airport, north of Fort Worth.

The plane, now owned by the Grace-Aire ministry in Corpus Christi, will fly to Memphis, Tenn., to pick up additional supplies. It will then go to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., for refueling before making its way to Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Terry Elder, a Baptist layman and trauma physician from Corpus Christi, purchased the cargo plane at a government auction a couple of years ago after it was seized by the federal Drug Enforcement Agency.

A 12-member volunteer construction team will work in Haiti Nov. 9-19 to renovate annex offices for the Baptist Convention of Haiti in Port-au-Prince.

The annex will be used as a warehouse for relief supplies and a staging area for volunteers. Sleeping and cooking facilities will be built at the annex to house and feed up to 24 volunteers.

After the renovation work has been completed, the first 10-person food distribution team will arrive Nov. 19 for two weeks of work. Food service teams will consist of a cook and nine packaging and distribution workers. During the food distribution effort 17 teams will be needed.

Repair and replacement of an estimated 500 of the country's water wells is projected to start in early 1995. About 500 of the 800 wellheads in Haiti were believed to have been destroyed by the Haitian military. Volunteer teams of four men with plumbing skills will be recruited for well repair.

By February, volunteers medical teams will work with churches and schools to provide for basic health care needs.

John LaNoue of the Texas Baptist Men missions organization represented the Baptist General Convention of Texas on an 11-member assessment team that recently returned from Haiti. The team also included personnel from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Brotherhood Commission and Florida Baptist Convention.

"The people are so hungry. They are so oppressed by the economy, the embargo and life itself," LaNoue reported. "They are absolutely living on the edge."

--30--

**Former Calif. pastor/HMB official  
elected to lead Calif. Baptists** By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press  
11/7/94

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--Fermin Whittaker, a Home Mission Board executive and former California pastor, was elected Nov. 3 to become the next executive director-treasurer of the California Southern Baptist Convention executive board.

Whittaker accepted the position after CSBC executive board members voted by secret ballot 22-9, with one abstention, during a called meeting in Fresno to hire him. An eight-member search committee had voted 5-3 to recommend Whittaker over two other finalists for the California Southern Baptist Convention's top job.

The executive director-elect and his family are scheduled to be introduced during the 1994 CSBC annual meeting in San Diego Nov. 16-17. Whittaker will begin his new job Feb. 1, 1995.

Whittaker, 53, has worked as a regional coordinator in the Home Mission Board planning and finance section since 1987. His job has involved planning, budgeting and evaluating missions, evangelism and ministry work with state Baptist conventions in California and nine other Western states as well as Canada and Puerto Rico. He is a former assistant director of the HMB's language missions division and director of the ethnic church growth department.

--more--

From 1964-1968 Whittaker was pastor of First Spanish Southern Baptist Church in Pico Rivera. Following his appointment as a Southern Baptist home missionary in 1968, he continued as pastor at the Pico Rivera church until 1976. For one year after that, Whittaker served as an HMB Hispanic church growth missionary with California Southern Baptist Convention in Fresno.

Whittaker was greeted with applause as he thanked board members for their vote of confidence. "It is a joy to be in the center of God's will," he said.

Whittaker was born in the Republic of Panama and became a naturalized United States citizen in 1969. He described himself to California Baptist leaders as "the product of Southern Baptist Home Mission work in Panama" noting he became a Christian through the influence of Southern Baptist missionaries.

Accepting the call to lead the California convention, Whittaker said, "Years later, the young man from the mission field is here in California to serve with you, along with many others, to say to this world of ours, 'Jesus Christ is still the answer and the only answer for all of our needs.'"

Accompanied by his wife, Carmen, a native of Monterey, Mexico, Whittaker told board members: "My wife and I promise you our best. We ask your prayers and your support, and above all things we ask your love and your friendship."

Whittaker's election culminated a six-month search to replace C.B. Hogue, who announced last April he will retire Feb. 28, 1995 after completing 10 years as CSBC executive director. A search committee selected Whittaker from a list of three finalists chosen from seven recommendations it received between April and August.

Hogue welcomed his chosen successor, telling executive board members "for 18 years, Fermin and I have been friends. Time and time again he would say to me, 'I may live in Atlanta but my heart is in California.' I'm glad it's going to be here now to stay," Hogue declared.

Participating in Whittaker's election were 31 of the executive board's 40 members who attended the special meeting, and the state convention president, who has voting privileges. After a 90-minute closed-door session, Doug Metzger, executive board chairman, reported Whittaker accepted the post on a vote of 22 to 9, nearly 71 percent, in favor of his election. Metzger said one member abstained from the vote.

The meeting had been called to consider a search committee's majority recommendation that Whittaker become the seventh executive director in the California convention's 54-year history. A San Rafael pastor who chaired the search committee said the panel was unanimous in deciding to bring the recommendation even though three of the eight committee members did not support Whittaker's nomination.

"The recommendation we bring today is a majority, though not a unanimous decision of our committee," Sam Williams, pastor of BayMarin Community Church, said before the meeting was closed to everyone but executive board members and one secretary. "This does not mean that our committee is divided or that a power struggle exists, as some have rumored. What it does mean is that some of our committee have not received the same sense of certainty concerning our candidate that the majority have.

"There are no specific problems with our candidate," Williams, reading from the search committee's written recommendation, assured his fellow executive board members.

Copies of the recommendation were distributed to executive board members as the meeting began. It said rumors circulated about Whittaker after his nomination became known "created confusion and hurt by sharing information that was knowingly or unknowingly untrue."

The two-page recommendation said search committee members "conscientiously sought out the facts by thoroughly investigating all of the concerns and issues that have been brought to us. We are satisfied that there is no factual truth to any of the questions raised. Quite to the contrary, everything we have discovered has vindicated our candidate's character and actions," the statement continued.

Attached to the recommendation was a letter dated Oct. 31, 1994, from Larry Lewis, HMB president, affirming both the search committee's selection of Whittaker and the nominee's ministry.

"I am happy for Fermin and convinced he will do an excellent job leading Southern Baptists in California should he choose to accept the position," Lewis wrote. "At the same time, we grieve to lose him as part of our staff and will greatly miss the excellent work he is doing as a regional coordinator."

Following Whittaker's election, executive board leaders indicated the split vote was more a reflection of concern over the search committee's lack of unanimity than it was a statement of opposition to the executive director-elect.

"A good part of our closed session was spent in discussing the fact that our committee was not totally unanimous in coming to us with a nominee," Metzger told The California Southern Baptist newsjournal. "That troubled many members of our board and therefore we had to deal with that issue before we dealt with the issue of voting on the candidate," he said.

Besides the secret ballot to elect Whittaker, Metzger said executive board members cast only one other vote during their closed meeting. Voting by a show of hands, Metzger said, members soundly defeated a motion "that we send (the recommendation) back to committee until they could come back unanimously."

Williams also noted the motion to proceed with Whittaker's nomination without a unanimous recommendation had been made by one of the three search committee members who voted against the recommendation.

Whittaker, asked earlier whether he would hesitate to take the position if it were offered on a split vote, said he would accept a less-than-unanimous call.

"You don't find in the Scriptures accepting a calling on a unanimous vote," Whittaker said. "I recall most of the prophets and leaders in the Scriptures had to make decisions where it was not a unanimous vote. To us it is a calling of the Lord through the board. That will allow us to take whatever decision he makes and we are at peace with that," Whittaker said.

In other questioning prior to the closed session, Whittaker said he believes the Bible is the inspired Word of God "without attachment." He said there is "a move in some areas to add the Chicago Statement on Innerancy to the Baptist Faith and Message. I think we ought to keep things the way they have helped us in the past 50 years and hang on to the Word of God and move on."

Asked if he believes the concept of women serving as pastors is "out of harmony with the Baptist Faith and Message", Whittaker replied, "Yes." In response to a related question, however, Whittaker signaled he intends to be inclusive in his term as executive director.

Whittaker was asked how he will relate to 19th Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco, in light of controversy over seating messengers to the 1993 CSBC annual meeting from the church because of its a woman pastor.

"The responsibility of a leader is to relate to all churches in Christian love," Whittaker said. "I would hope we're not so exclusive and negative that we hate others."

When one board member referred to his ethnic heritage, Whittaker said, "If you are looking for a Hispanic executive, I'm not your man." Although he knows some people will identify him as the first ethnic executive in a major state Baptist convention, Whittaker prefers not to be viewed in such narrow terms.

"I know who I am. I know what I am. My accent gives it away. That's who I am," Whittaker said of his Hispanic background. "We are not ashamed of it, (but) we will not allow it to be used as a weapon against someone else."

Asked whether the SBC is better off after 15 years of theological controversy, Whittaker said, "First of all, I believe you have been extremely fortunate in the spiritual leadership that you have had in Dr. (C.B.) Hogue. You have kept focus."

"In Baptist life there will always be controversy," Whittaker said. "How you allow that to affect you will determine your ministry. Our focus is to reach souls."

"The controversy has sapped the strength of our denomination. Right or wrong it has happened. Bold Mission Thrust has not been where it ought to be.

"It grieves my soul that we have had a goal, and it has slowed down," Whittaker said. He urged California Southern Baptists to "keep your convictions firm, your vision open, expand your mind and look upon the next millennium as the best opportunity we have to reach the world for Christ."

Whittaker is a 1969 graduate of California Baptist College in Riverside where he earned a B.A. degree. He received the Th.B. and M.Div. degrees from Toronto Baptist Seminary in Toronto, Canada. And in 1992 Whittaker received a doctor of ministry degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.

Married 23 years, Whittaker and his wife are members of Briarlick Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga. They have two sons: Carlos, 21, a student at Berry College in Rome, Ga.; and Eduardo, 19, a student at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

While details of Whittaker's compensation package were not disclosed, a spokesman said his starting salary is below the \$91,100 midpoint of the Grade I salary range on the board's salary administration schedule.

--30--

West Virginia Baptists hike  
SBC-Cooperative Program percent By Tom Young

Baptist Press  
11/7/94

FAIRLEA, W.Va. (BP)--West Virginia Baptists voted to increase the percentage of their Cooperative Program budget for national and international causes by a half-percent during their Nov. 4-5 annual meeting.

Messenger registration totaled 223 at First Baptist Church, Fairlea.

The anticipated 1995 Cooperative Program budget of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists was set at \$812,034, with 29 percent designated for Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program-supported missions and ministries, an increase in percentage of the CP budget of a half-percent over the previous year.

Counting all other sources, the overall convention budget was set at \$1,639,891, a 1.26 percent decrease from the 1994 budget.

J. David Jicka, pastor of Highlawn Baptist Church, Huntington, was elected president; Alvie Edwards, pastor of First Baptist, Fairlea, first vice president; and Mark McClung, pastor of Southern Baptist Fellowship Church, Summersville, second vice president. Jack Dial, present recording secretary from Highlawn Baptist Church, Huntington, was re-elected for another term.

The 1995 annual meeting is slated for Nov. 3-4 at First Baptist Church, Ceredo. Plans are being made to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the convention at that time.

Resolutions passed included an expression of appreciation for Maxine Bumgarner, WVCSB state WMU director, for 15 years of service to the convention.

--30--

Young is interim editor of the West Virginia Southern Baptist.

**(BP)**

**BAPTIST PRESS**  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, TN 37234

F  
I  
R  
S  
T  
  
C  
L  
A  
S  
S

Southern Baptist Library  
and Archives