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95-26

TEXAS--Southwestern Seminary to appeal probation.
VIRGINIA--FMB expands efforts to involve students in foreign missions; photos.
MISSOURI--Hannibal-LaGrange names Woodrow Burt president.
TENNESSEE--Adrian Rogers underscores truth for broadcasters.
FLORIDA--Pastors' alternative to offer Jess Moody, Richard Jackson.
TEXAS--Christians must not 'hibernate,' Southwestern students reminded.
TENNESSEE--Southern Baptists: a trusting people?

Southwestern Seminary
to appeal probation

Baptist Press
2/14/95

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary will appeal the probation ruling issued earlier this month by the Association of Theological Schools, according to the seminary's president, Ken Hemphill.

"It is in the best interest of Southwestern to participate in the appeals process to present our case," Hemphill said Feb. 14. "As we have stated, probation was too strong of a decision based on the facts of our case."

The Commission on Accrediting, an arm of ATS, has placed the seminary on a two-year probation, citing concerns about presidential evaluation and trustee accountability to constituencies, academic freedom, and faculty tenure and promotion. Probation does not mean a loss of accreditation, according to Hemphill and Daniel O. Aleshire, associate director of the commission.

"Other SBC agencies have encouraged Southwestern to take advantage of the appeals process," Hemphill noted. "Our approach will strengthen the cases of similar institutions when transition may create a sense of fear about the future."

ATS soon will be informed officially of the seminary's decision to appeal, Hemphill said.

Steps in the appeals process include consultation with at least three representatives of the commission, followed by a written notice to the ATS appeals panel. The five-person panel is composed of former members of the commission or the agency's executive committee.

Within 120 days of receiving written notice, the panel must arrange for a hearing on the commission's findings. The seminary and the commission have the right to representation in person before the panel. The decision of the panel is final and binding.

"We have been working to answer all concerns that ATS has noted from their first visit, and we will continue to strengthen every area of our academic process," Hemphill said. "We see the appeal as a normal part of the ATS process and will not cease to work internally during the time the appeal is being considered."

FMB expands efforts to involve
students in foreign missions By Mary E. Speidel

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Two Southern Baptists with backgrounds in student work and missions have been tapped to help the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board expand its efforts to involve students in foreign missions.

Mike Lopez, an administrator in the board's international service department, will head that department's student section. Lopez, 41, earlier worked in student ministries as a missionary in Taiwan with his wife, Ann. They also were home missionaries in Pennsylvania. They have two children.

Jeff Lewis, a consultant for national student ministry at the Baptist Sunday School Board, has been named student and youth consultant. Lewis, 42, will relate to the mission board's student section, working on contract from a location to be determined. He and his wife, Elaine, currently live in Mt. Juliet, Tenn. They have seven children.

Since 1990 Lopez, from High Springs, Fla., has promoted the Foreign Mission Board's International Service Corps and journeyman programs and directed screening conferences for applicants to those programs.

Most recently Lewis, from Columbus, Ohio, coordinated Mission 95, Southern Baptists' global mission conference held in December in Louisville, Ky. Before joining the national student ministry staff in 1990, he was associate director for Mission Service Corps at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

They begin their new assignments March 1.

"We're seeing among college students a growing momentum of interest in missions that needs to be nurtured," said Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin. "On college and university campuses, I believe God is raising up our next generation of missionaries. But the exciting thing is they don't have to wait until the future (to serve). There are massive opportunities already available for students to impact a lost world for Christ."

Meanwhile, the international service department is reorganizing to increase its focus on nurturing students for mission service, said Wendy Norvelle, department director.

The shifts will help the Foreign Mission Board "reach more students and have more sustained, quality time with them," said Norvelle. "Before the turn of the century, they will be the young adults who will be our missionaries. And if we are going to fulfill the Great Commission, we need a lot more than 4,000 missionaries ready to give their lives" to missions.

That's the approximate number of Southern Baptist missionaries now assigned overseas.

The Foreign Mission Board has regular contact with about 2,800 Southern Baptist college students interested in foreign missions. In addition, 408 students made commitments to mission service at Mission 95, which was attended by about 3,000 students. About half of those commitments were for foreign missions.

Currently the board offers young people several channels for mission service. The journeyman program provides two-year service opportunities for single (never married) college graduates under age 30. The International Service Corps places Southern Baptists who are at least 21 in overseas assignments lasting from four months to two years.

Through the agency's volunteers in missions department, plans also are being developed to provide volunteer opportunities for high school students, Norvelle said.

The board also offers overseas assignments in summer and semester missions for college and seminary students. With the recent reorganization, the application process for those programs is being shifted to Quintin Ratliff, staff consultant in the student section. Ratliff, 31, a former journeyman to the Philippines, will continue to travel to college campuses and student gatherings across the country.

These changes and the board's effort to expand its focus on young people show that "we see students as an investment," said Lopez. "And the return on our investment is very high, because students aren't just the leaders of the future -- they ARE the future."

In his new role Lopez will serve as the board's liaison with student work leaders in Southern Baptist agencies and state conventions. He fills a position earlier held by Helen Wood, who left the board in 1993 to work with Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia. Lopez' portfolio also will include developing ministries to international students in cooperation with Bill Wakefield, the Foreign Mission Board's vice president for international outreach.

Lopez "has a heart for missions and for students," Norvelle said. "He knows how to communicate with students. He's innovative and creative, but he knows how to get things done."

Lewis, whose role is new to the board, "feels God has given him a vision of God's heart for the nations," she added. "We think that vision will be a guiding light for the future generation to be on mission with God. We want to enable Jeff to be out there and to share that with as many students as possible."

A popular speaker at Baptist student conferences, Lewis will speak on campuses and at student and youth gatherings across the country. He also will develop strategies and materials to help nurture a mission interest and calling among students.

Lewis said he hopes to help high school and college students "develop a heart for the world."

"Our future is in helping teen-agers and young adults get a handle on God's global purpose of reaching all nations -- and how their lifestyles should reflect that purpose," he said.

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(BP) photos (two mugshots) mailed to state Baptist newspapers Feb. 14 by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outlines available on SBCNet News Room.

Hannibal-LaGrange names
Woodrow Burt president

Baptist Press
2/14/95

HANNIBAL, Mo. (BP)--Woodrow Burt was named the 16th president of Hannibal-LaGrange College Feb. 9 during a news conference on the school's Hannibal, Mo., campus.

Roger Nelson, chairman of the Baptist-affiliated college's board of trustees, announced the decision following a meeting of the board.

Burt, 48, was interim president of HLG following the retirement of Paul Brown last June 30. He has served Hannibal-LaGrange in various capacities during two different periods, most recently as executive vice president/chief development officer since July 1991 and executive vice president/academic dean, 1987-91. From 1976-84 he held positions of dean of student affairs, associate academic dean, registrar, director of admissions and speech communications teacher.

"We've known Dr. Burt from his exceptional work on campus as executive vice president, and in the last six months as interim president, he has shown true effectiveness as an administrator," Nelson said. He added faculty, staff and students at HLG also have expressed to the board their confidence in Burt's leadership abilities.

Previous college positions held by Burt include assistant director of development at Southeast Missouri State University; vice president for student development at William Carey College in Mississippi; and director of admissions and dean of men at the former Clarke College in Mississippi.

Burt holds a doctor of philosophy degree in higher and adult education from the University of Missouri in Columbia where he also received an educational specialist degree. He received a master of education degree and a bachelor of arts degree from Mississippi College in Clinton.

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In addition to community efforts, Burt serves on the Missouri State Governor's Advisory Council and is a trustee of the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Commenting on his selection by the HLG trustee board, Burt said, "I appreciate the confidence they have placed in me to lead this fine institution." He said the emphasis during his tenure at HLG would be on achieving excellence and building a reputation for HLG in both the region and beyond. "Having served 23 years in higher education on four different college campuses and in a variety of responsibilities, I believe I am equipped for the challenges ahead," he said.

Hannibal-LaGrange is a four-year liberal arts college affiliated with the Missouri Baptist Convention. Established in 1858, it has an enrollment of approximately 950 students.

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Adrian Rogers underscores
truth for broadcasters

Baptist Press
2/14/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Adrian Rogers emphasized the importance of truth in the broadcaster's life in his keynote address opening the National Religious Broadcasters annual meeting Feb. 11-14 in Nashville.

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn., and a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said: "I will not have strings attached to me. What God says to me that will I speak."

His message noted several points concerning truth: "It is better to be divided by truth than united in error; it is better to speak truth that hurts and then heals than to speak a lie; it is better to be hated for telling the truth than to be loved for telling a lie; it is better to stand alone with truth to be wrong with the multitude."

According to Rogers, the religion of today is "get-along-ism."

"It is time for men and women of God to stand, if they have to stand alone," Rogers said. "We need to stop comparing ourselves to each other. It is not a matter of right and left; it is a matter of right and wrong. It is time to stop trying to win a popularity contest."

Rogers went on to say the Bible is the precept of truth, Jesus the person of truth and the Holy Spirit the power of truth.

First-time NRB attendee Israeli Minister of Tourism Uzi Baram extended a personal welcome to NRB for its international conference in Israel during May 1996. "This will be a year of festivities and many activities," Baram said, because of the 3,000th anniversary of Jerusalem's founding by King David.

Concerning its decision against inviting President Clinton to address the NRB, the organization's executive committee released a three-paragraph statement:

"In recent years it has been the decision of the National Religious Broadcasting (NRB) leadership to invite the President of the United States to address the annual convention. This has always been a non-partisan choice, with both Republican and Democratic presidents participating. However, for the 1995 convention, it is the decision of the NRB executive committee that no invitation will be extended.

"During a White House briefing with Baptist leaders and religion journalists in October, President Bill Clinton again reiterated his position on the issues of abortion and homosexuality by claiming the Bible is 'ambiguous' about them. Statements such as these reaffirm our decision to withhold an invitation to address our convention from the President.

"As believers, we are admonished to pray for those in authority, and commit ourselves fervently to that task. However, we cannot give a platform to a leader who so aggressively supports and puts forth policies and positions which are blatantly contrary to scriptural views."

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Pastors' alternative to offer
 Jess Moody, Richard Jackson

By Art Toalston

TAMPA, Fla. (BP)--An alternative to the Pastors' Conference preceding the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta is being organized by a Tampa, Fla., pastor.

Don Letzring, pastor of Tampa's Wellswood Baptist Church, said the June 18-19 "Preaching and Worship Conference" is "not identified with any political group. We just simply want to offer a conference that is in contrast with the Pastors' Conference -- not in opposition to it."

Eight speakers will be featured during the conference's Sunday evening session and three Monday sessions at Atlanta's Wieuca Road Baptist Church, Letzring said.

The traditional Pastors' Conference will be in Atlanta's Georgia Dome, which also will be the site of the SBC's June 20-22 annual meeting, this year marking the convention's sesquicentennial.

James Merritt, president of the Pastors' Conference, told Baptist Press Feb. 13 he holds the same attitude toward the conference as expressed by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:18: "... whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice"

"I hope that Christ is high and lifted up," said Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Snellville, Ga. "High and Lifted Up" will be the Pastors' Conference theme, he added.

Letzring, pastor of Tampa's Wellswood church the past six and a half years, said he chaired a committee for California pastor Jess Moody when he allowed his nomination for SBC president at the 1992 convention in Indianapolis. Letzring, who said he has been in the ministry 31 years, since age 19, said he attended his first Pastors' Conference in 1976 and most recent in 1992.

Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church, Porter Ranch, will be among the alternative conference's speakers, along with Richard Jackson, former pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, now an evangelist and conference leader in Brownwood, Texas; Frank Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.; Dan Francis, pastor of First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn.; Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas; Phil Lineberger, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tyler, Texas; Ralph West, pastor, Brookhollow Baptist Church, Houston; and one yet-to-be-named preacher.

Pollard declined comment to Baptist Press regarding his participation in the conference. Moody and Francis could not be reached for comment Feb. 13.

Said Letzring, "While some people may question the need for a conference, I really believe God is big enough to bless two conferences at one time."

Whether subsequent conferences will be planned depends on this year's response, Letzring said.

"I'm committed to recognizing that within the parameters of the Southern Baptist Convention there's room for diversity," he said. "The preachers of this conference represent a broader spectrum of Southern Baptists, though every one of them is conservative in their theology. I believe there are pastors who need a broader-based conference, and if it meets the need of 1,500-2,000 pastors, it's been worth it. Not that we're trying to compete in numbers. But there are those who still come to the Southern Baptist Convention who are more comfortable with this kind of conference."

Costs for the conference, which will include a mailing to all SBC pastors in early April and the program distributed to attendees, will be met by offerings taken at the conference, Letzring said.

Among musicians Letzring said would be featured during the convention will be the ministers of music drawn from Georgia Baptist churches and recording artist Frank Boggs.

Christians must not 'hibernate,'
Southwestern students reminded By Bob Murdaugh

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--At a time of "astonishing opportunity and frightening risks and threats," when more people are alive than all who have lived before, Christians must avoid "hibernation," said Leith Anderson.

Anderson, a noted church growth authority and pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minn., delivered Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's annual Northcutt Lectures Feb. 7-8.

Alister McGrath, author and lecturer at Oxford University in England, delivered the annual Day-Higginbotham Lectures Feb. 9-10 at the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary.

Anderson emphasized the importance of understanding current trends affecting the American church. One he mentioned is complexity.

The world is so complicated that people need the plain truth of the gospel, Anderson said. "What people want in times of complexity are simple answers that cut through and say, 'What it's all about is this one thing.'"

Other cultural trends Anderson mentioned were expansion, isolation and, simultaneously, pessimism and hope.

"Most churches in America are old, small and well-established. It's my desire that old, established churches do more than survive but that they thrive as well," Anderson said. Making adjustments to society is crucial because "we have an enormous investment as Christians in this high number of established congregations," he said.

Urging students to be "of the broader culture," Anderson recommended ministers be "superficially familiar" with diverse music, movies and publications ranging from PBS to MTV and from Reader's Digest to Rolling Stone. But, he said, ministers should not "step over a line into anything that is inappropriate."

McGrath reminded students of the wonder of the Christian gospel, challenging them to make it their own and gain a sense of excitement about all that God can do through them. Many longtime Christians, he asserted, often become bored with the gospel and no longer feel motivated to evangelize.

Ministers should realize the privilege they have to carry the gospel to someone who has never heard it, McGrath said. He recalled growing up in Northern Ireland and feeling animosity toward Christianity, but later accepting Christ due to the influence of a man named Michael Green.

"In this audience, there will be more Michael Greens, people who will shatter the illusions, destroy the stereotypes of generations to come, and sweep away those obstacles between people and the living God," McGrath said. People will listen to the Christian gospel because they're disillusioned with secular alternatives, he said. "There are many people who will say, 'Death doesn't worry me,' but in the depth of the night they're frightened. You and I can bring them a glorious hope."

Many Christians' feelings of inadequacy toward the task of evangelism are healthy because they show that those Christians are realists, McGrath said. "But you also must be realistic about the strength and compassion of the God who has called you."

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the ninth article in "The Spirit of Southern Baptists, 1845-1995" series. The Historical Commission, SBC, will release one article each month from June 1994 to May 1995.

Southern Baptists:
a trusting people?

By Roy L. Honeycutt

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Trust rests at the heart of every relationship, human and divine. The Bible consistently affirms the reality of God's trust in humanity. From Genesis through Revelation, the Lord trusts individuals to choose good or evil, life or death, goodness or perversity. The Lord refuses to clutch us as puppets on strings or to predetermine by divine decree in the halls of eternity our destiny for salvation.

He remains the trusting God, running the risk of persons making wrong choices. Yet, through such a process he preserves the authenticity of individual freedom counterbalanced by human accountability.

Not only does the Lord trust us humans, we also trust the Lord. In our modern day, we often describe our experience of salvation by saying, "I trusted the Lord at Providence Baptist Church."

These assumptions that God trusts us and we trust him remain true and establish a foundation for our trustworthiness toward one another as fellow believers. What remains as a fundamental question of Christian discipleship focuses on neither God's trust in us nor our trust in him. Our unsettled question is to what extent do we who form the body of Christ, the Church and its expression as churches, trust one another?

Historically, Southern Baptists have been a trusting people. Mutual confidence in one another enabled us to achieve worthy kingdom goals. International missions shared the gospel with the world rather than a region. We trusted Foreign Mission Board personnel to fulfill their calling. They, in turn, trusted us in the churches to maintain supply lines of spiritual and material necessities.

Trust also characterized our relationship to denominational seminaries, whatever their age or locale. Through such trust, in theological education we reached the point in the early 1980s when about one out of five theological students studying in accredited seminaries in the United States and Canada enrolled in the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

The funding of denominational commitments at all levels -- associational, state and national -- through the Cooperative Program has also been a hallmark of Southern Baptist trust. Although providing funds for missions and ministry, the Cooperative Program was always more than an effective fund-raising mechanism. Rather, it enabled believers to cooperate as trusting persons committed to a mission larger than individual or congregational self-interest.

As James L. Sullivan once wrote, the Cooperative Program is a "rope of sand." Individual grains flowed together through trust, overcoming forces which might have moved us away from one another. Just as quickly and easily, however, the lack of trust creates forces which can destroy that "rope of sand."

As Walter Shurden demonstrated in his book, "Not a Silent People," we Southern Baptists have lived through one conflict after another. The Southern Baptist Convention emerged because of controversy over whether a slave owner could serve as a missionary. Later we survived a series of controversies such as the Whitsitt debate over a Baptist seminary president's conclusion that the first historical reference to Baptists came in England during the 17th century.

Sometimes the crises were fiscal, theological or ecclesiological. Yet, decade by decade trust eventually prevailed. Even in the theological furor over Genesis that emerged in the early 1960s, through the wisdom of then-convention President Herschell Hobbs, Southern Baptists showed their trust in each other by revising the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message as a way of reaffirming the convention's theological conservatism.

Although we were conceived in controversy, yet, through decades of conflict, we still trusted one another, nurtured by God's sustaining grace. However, during the last two decades, Southern Baptists have been embroiled in a controversy that has shaken that longstanding tradition of trust. Each side mistrusts the other and those who remain unaligned are mistrusted by both sides. We are on the verge of losing authentic trust in one another and this despite the fact that God trusts us and we trust him.

The Southern Baptist challenge for the future is to restore our trust in each other. If God is the author of trust, as we believe him to be, then surely he will respond positively when we seek to learn again how to be trusting Baptists.

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