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WASHINGTON--Religious equality, not just prayer, needed in Constitution, lawyers say.

MISSOURI--Whitehead: Recent case underscores religious liberty amendment's need.

ATLANTA--Volunteers needed for Crossover Atlanta.

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**Religious equality, not just prayer,
needed in Constitution, lawyers say**

**Baptist Press
3/8/95**

By Ken Walker

WASHINGTON (BP)--Some of the nation's leading Christian legal organizations are advocating a religious-equality amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would address more than prayer in the public schools.

The current issue of the Christian Legal Society's magazine says such an amendment should:

- address all forms of student religious expression;
- apply from preschool through graduate school; and
- be valid in all 50 states.

"Do we need an amendment? Yes," said Sam Casey, executive director of the Christian Legal Society. "Christian advocates continue to have to litigate over equal access, religious leafletting and graduation prayer. We have situations where students in public schools are being discriminated against solely because of their Christian faith."

Jay Sekulow, general counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), said the prayer amendment in the Republican Party's "Contract for America" represents a meaningless "political bone." Christians shouldn't get that excited about it, Sekulow said, because more is needed.

"The First Amendment has been turned on its head when it's an individual citizen speaking from a religious perspective," Sekulow said. "That's why the Constitution has an amendment process."

The attorneys made their comments during a recent panel discussion at the National Religious Broadcasters convention. Casey and Sekulow outlined a variety of infractions of students' free-speech rights that have occurred across the country, such as:

- Students in Nashville, Tenn., were prohibited from posting a sign about their club's sponsorship of an Easter event.
- A girl in Dallas was suspended for drawing a picture of Jesus for an art project.

-- Principals in Virginia have threatened to suspend students for their silent prayers in the cafeteria.

Then there is the case argued March 7 before a panel of judges in the federal 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. The American Civil Liberties Union is contesting a school board policy that allows two-minute student talks on any subject at graduation ceremonies.

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"The ACLU came in and said, 'No, courts, you must force this school not to censor their speech -- but only to censor the religious aspects,'" commented Mat Staver, who argued on behalf of the school board. "I don't think students shed their Constitutional rights when they enter the graduation podium. If they can say, 'I love you,' then they can say, 'God loves you.'"

Staver said he believes the policy would withstand a Supreme Court challenge, but the president of the Orlando, Fla.,-based Liberty Counsel said another case is ahead of it in the courts. Involving student-initiated prayer, it was overturned by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals; its free-speech merits aren't as strong, he added.

Such continuing legal snarls are an example of the need for a religious-liberty amendment, Casey said. The issue of school prayer, he said, has turned into a power struggle over which group can get its message aired over the loudspeaker or through teachers.

"Unfortunately it's become more of a power play and it's not all that important," Casey said. "What is really important is the message being sent to the kids in this country every day: that religious thinking, ideas and matters of the soul are not real, not true."

Nor would a religious-equality amendment represent an intrusion on states' rights, Casey said. He asked what could be more democratic than an amendment approved by two-thirds of the House and Senate members and three-fourths of the state legislatures.

Sekulow said he supports pressing the debate even though he thinks the drive for either a prayer or religious-equality amendment is likely to fail. When the issue of school prayer erupted in the media last November, the ACLJ chief said he questioned denying children the right to pray when they had to walk through metal detectors to reach their classrooms.

"That doesn't have a lot to do with the constitutional amendment process, but we're affecting (the media's) thinking," Sekulow said. "We could lose this process and completely win the battle in the hearts and minds of America.

"If we're going to have a national debate, it needs to be about religious equality -- that people of faith do not get treated like second-class citizens simply because they're a Christian."

Casey agreed, saying even though supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment lost that fight, they won in the court of public opinion. The founding fathers envisioned such a process, he added, as a way of reminding the public that it's their Constitution.

"We need a national debate on this subject," Casey said. "Not just school prayer, but the little kid who can't even fold his hands and pray at lunch. (We need to discuss) what kind of symbols you can wear, what you can say in your homework and even beyond the school yard ... whether you can be involved in the public square and not be disqualified because (you have) a religious motivation."

For example, Casey said the Salvation Army has spent \$500,000 the past three years defending itself from charges that it has engaged in discriminatory practices. Ironically, he said, this organization is providing more social services to America's inner cities than any other group. But it fights political battles solely because of its Christian identity, he said.

Nor should believers worry about an amendment opening the door to other religious groups, Sekulow said.

"If we think the gospel is as strong as it is, we don't have to be afraid of whether the Buddhist or Satanist is going to give their prayer. Let them call on their god, and we'll call on ours, and let's see who answers with fire," he said to rounds of laughter and applause at the NRB meeting in Nashville, Tenn., in mid-February.

In pushing for an amendment, Casey said Christians should avoid limiting it to schools -- and they should give up the idea of a compulsory period of time where a power figure can compel prayer.

"I'm not sure I want some heathen school teacher shaping a prayer for my kids to pray," he said.

"If we in the body of Christ can come together" and broaden the debate beyond a compulsory period of prayer in schools, Casey said, "We can get an amendment."

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Walker is a free-lance writer based in Louisville, Ky.

Whitehead: Recent case underscores
religious liberty amendment's need

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
3/8/95

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The University of Virginia's refusal to fund a Christian student newspaper is a perfect example of the need for a religious liberty amendment to the U.S. Constitution, according to the general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Michael Whitehead, who filed the CLC's friend-of-the-court legal brief in *Rosenberger vs. University of Virginia*, said government officials currently are deciding what speech is permissible.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments March 1 in the appeal of a Christian group at Virginia denied funding for its "Wide Awake" newspaper. The school funds 15 other student newspapers and groups like the Muslim Students Association and Jewish Law Students Association.

"You've got the University of Virginia trying to draw an artificial line between the (Muslims) and (Jews), saying they're going to call their speech cultural," said Whitehead. "And call the C.S. Lewis Society meetings religious but not proselytizing. So we've got government officials drawing all these lines about character of the speech.

"I think that's a classic example of why we need such an amendment. Not just to solve problems in public high schools but on university campuses and in other public settings. Private religious speech, when it's accommodated by government, is not an establishment of religion."

Despite that contention, lawyers are bitterly divided over the "Establishment Clause" interpretation of the First Amendment, he added. Whitehead predicts the Supreme Court will split its vote by a 5-4 margin when it hands down a ruling in *Rosenberger*, probably in late June.

"But we shouldn't leave this kind of divided issue among lawyers," he commented. "Let's let the American people state their opinions. I think they're going to decide that religious speech should not be treated as second-class speech in any sense."

The CLC's general counsel has been working with other Christian legal groups and Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., on wording of the religious-equality amendment. He said it spells out that there is no prohibition against any person -- including students in public schools -- from engaging in prayer or religious expression when non-religious expression is permitted.

Whitehead said a free-speech, equal-treatment principle will resolve the legal battles with "strict separationists" who argue the Constitution's Establishment Clause is violated when private citizens speak on public property.

The battle should be waged regardless of the outcome, Whitehead said. Already discussions with groups on the religious left have helped clarify their objections to such an amendment, he said.

In addition, he said public debates over an amendment through the Congress and state legislatures will help the cause of freedom: "Regardless of how the American people vote on this issue, I think it's fundamental they have the right to vote and not let the Constitution be amended by judicial fiat and legislative action. Let the people decide what they want the Constitutional text to say on this issue. "I think it's been kind of fuzzied by up the courts over the last 50 years," Whitehead said. "Even if the American people through their legislative assemblies say, 'No, let's don't add to the 16 words we already have,' we'll have crystallized some ideas about the positions of various folks."

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**Volunteers needed
for Crossover Atlanta**

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--With Crossover Atlanta three months away, organizers are praying for 1,000 out-of-town volunteers and 1,000 people to make professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

Crossover is the evangelism emphasis preceding the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Last year, 811 people made professions of faith during crossover activities.

Volunteers are needed to help with block parties, street evangelism and door-to-door witnessing, said Don Smith, associate director of evangelism for the Baptist Convention of Georgia.

"We're trying to recruit as many volunteers from as many places as will come," Smith said. Volunteers are not required to have special skills or training, he added. A training session is scheduled for Friday, June 16, before the one-day Crossover Atlanta thrust June 17.

Individuals or groups with special interests or skills, however, will be assigned to local churches with those needs.

An evangelism effort is needed in Atlanta, Smith said, because 57 percent of residents in the metro area are not affiliated with any church. "Our goal is to win people to Christ and impact the city for Christ."

More than 20 churches have agreed to host block parties, Smith said. During block parties, free food is served and entertainment is provided to draw a crowd. The gospel is shared individually and in groups during the parties.

Street evangelism uses Christian artists such as mimes and puppet groups to attract pedestrians in a high-traffic area. Individuals are trained to share Christ with people who gather for the performance.

Door-to-door witnessing involves going to homes to ask residents about their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Crossover is sponsored by local Baptist associations, the state convention and the Home Mission Board. To be part of Crossover Atlanta, contact the evangelism department of the Baptist Convention of Georgia, 2930 Flowers Road South, Atlanta, GA 30341-5562 or (404) 936-5233.

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**Texas Baptists create office
to address forced terminations**

**Baptist Press
3/8/95**

By Orville Scott & Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)--Texas Baptists have tapped a former state convention president and veteran pastor to tackle the problem of churches firing their ministers.

At its March 7 meeting in Dallas, the convention's executive board elected James R. "Dick" Maples, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bryan, for 16 years, as coordinator of the new office of minister/church relations.

And in response to a restructuring proposal approved by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, the Texas board overwhelmingly approved a resolution supporting Woman's Missionary Union and affirming its independence as an auxiliary "free from outside control."

Maples, president of the 2.6-million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas from 1991-93, was chairman of the BGCT minister/church relations task force. The group was formed in 1993 after a study committee reported "an epidemic of forced terminations of ministers and widespread discouragement and disillusionment among ministers in all size churches."

The committee noted the president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board revealed an average of about 2,000 Southern Baptist pastors a year are dismissed by their churches.

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Texas Baptists and other evangelical denominations must approach the minister/church relations crisis with multiple ministries, Maples said.

"This involves seminary training in leadership, interpersonal relations and communications, as well as continuing education for pastors and other church staff," he said.

"Also, it would be our intent to offer education to congregations on the work of pulpit (search) committees and the development of realistic expectations on the part of church members concerning ministers and their families who serve in the churches."

Maples also cited a need for developing a cadre of ministers who can serve as intentional interims in preparing congregations for the coming of a new minister.

"The whole matter of the terminated minister and his family must be addressed. We must help the terminated minister to return to the ministry or find secular employment," Maples said.

Support groups for terminated ministers need to be started all over the state, he said.

"I hope churches will determine to minister to the terminated minister and his family by providing a position, housing and a small salary till he can get on his feet and be called by another church."

Calling Maples "a pioneer in a new ministry," BGCT Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr. said the central Texas pastor "brings with him a wealth of knowledge and experience to help churches and ministers jointly serve Christ and their communities in the most effective way."

Before becoming pastor of First Baptist Church, Bryan, Maples served churches in El Paso, Texas City and Abilene, Texas, and Waynesville, N.C. He earned the bachelor of arts degree from Mississippi College, Clinton; bachelor of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth; and doctor of ministries degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

In other business, the board approved without debate a resolution in support of WMU presented by David Becker, pastor of University Heights Baptist Church, Huntsville.

The resolution noted WMU's historic role in beginning and promoting the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions.

It stated the proposed SBC restructuring places responsibility for the offerings with the mission boards because WMU "elects its own board and refuses trustee control by the Southern Baptist Convention."

The resolution expressed appreciation both to the Texas and national WMU and affirmed WMU's decision to remain an auxiliary. It also encouraged WMU "to support missions and missions education with Baptist churches, Baptist conventions, Baptist fellowships or Baptist organizations in their efforts to be obedient to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom's work."

The proposed SBC changes, to be enacted, must be approved by a majority of the messengers to the SBC's annual meeting this June in Atlanta and next year in New Orleans.

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Chapman cites revival yearning
shared by Baptists, evangelicals By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
3/8/95

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--For the sake of revival, Southern Baptists and evangelicals need to focus on the common threads that bind them together, Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, told the National Association of Evangelicals in the organization's annual meeting.

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"Oh, we have our differences," Chapman said March 5 in Louisville, Ky. "Nevertheless, we (Southern Baptists and evangelicals) both believe in the virgin birth, the sinless life, the atoning death, the bodily resurrection and the coming again of Jesus. With these convictions in common, we can work together at getting the word out to an unsaved world."

This one witness should propel Southern Baptists and evangelicals into the world, where "we can tell it and tell it and tell it until we've gone to see Jesus face-to-face," Chapman said.

"This country will be shaken when believers begin to pray until their hearts melt into a white heat of flame full of passion for our Lord Jesus Christ," Chapman said. "Revival will come when the desires of our own hearts are submerged into the desires of God."

Chapman, quoting the late Chicago pastor D.E. King, said, "The early Christian preachers preached Christ, we preach sermons." Chapman said King went on to add: "One of the great deterrents to preaching today is the preparation of literary masterpieces which we prepare to suit people instead of glorifying God."

The church is becoming filled with spectators enamored with superficial religion rather than filled with saved sinners engaged in a supernatural relationship with God, Chapman said. Citing Barna statistics, Chapman said 42 percent of Americans polled believed Jesus sinned and 25 percent of those claiming to have made a commitment to Jesus believe Christ sinned during his earthly life.

Chapman, referring to Revelation 3, noted the Philadelphian church had little strength, but God set an open door before it because the church had kept God's Word and not denied his name. Revival, then, will not come based upon a church's prestige or a pastor's eloquence.

Throughout the nation, God is cracking open the door for revival, Chapman said. As an example, he pointed to the recent outbreak of revival in Texas that began at Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood.

The Texas revival began on Jan. 22 when a student from Howard Payne University came forward during the invitation at Coggin Avenue. After reading from the Book of Joel, the student expressed concern for the spiritual lives of his classmates. Within minutes, the congregation, under God's conviction, enveloped the church alter, Chapman recounted. The revival spread throughout the community and broke out on the campus of Southwestern Seminary March 1.

Chapman said denominations and the evangelical movement will fail if they forget that their reason for existence is to assist the local church. Referring to possible changes within the Southern Baptist Convention, Chapman said: "The Lord Jesus Christ did not die for the Southern Baptist Convention. The Lord Jesus Christ did not die for the National Association of Evangelicals. The Lord Jesus Christ died for the church, and our denominations will become dinosaurs unless they consist of churches built upon one foundation: our Lord Jesus Christ."

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled, "Southwestern revival spreads into surrounding community," dated 3/7/95, 10th paragraph, a Southwestern student and youth worker at Southwayside Baptist Church was incorrectly identified as Bobby Miller. His correct name is Jonathan Barnes.

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