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Oklahoma City blast
revamps prayer meetings

Baptist Press
4/19/95

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Wednesday night prayer meetings throughout Oklahoma City - and the nation -- were revamped by a bomb blast at a downtown federal building in the state capital shortly after 9 a.m. April 19, with the death toll climbing to more than 70 -- including at least 17 children -- at Baptist Press' mid-afternoon deadline April 19.

The Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma was among numerous offices that closed for the afternoon due to "bomb threats in the area," according to an answering machine at the building. The building is about a mile from an office building with four floors of FBI offices.

Although the building is about five miles from the site of the blast, according to one Oklahoma Baptist staff member, it felt as if it was being shaken four or five times when the blast occurred.

According to news reports, more than 70 people were killed and more than 200 injured when the blast blew out a huge portion of the nine-story Alfred Murrah federal building in downtown Oklahoma City.

More than 500 federal workers work in the building, which has a day-care center and various federal offices.

Investigators initially said the explosion was caused by a large bomb, perhaps 1,000 to 1,200 pounds, located outside the building, perhaps in a car, according to a federal Bureau Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms spokesman, although he said other possible causes, such as a gas leak, had not been entirely ruled out. A second, unexploded bomb was believed to have been found in the building, authorities said.

Southern trustees affirm Mohler;
change faculty hiring process By Herb Hollinger

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Following more than five hours behind closed doors, trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary voted overwhelmingly April 18 to affirm President R. Albert Mohler Jr. and to revise the faculty hiring process, eliminating a full faculty vote on candidates.

In the second day of their regular April 17-19 meeting at the Louisville, Ky., campus, trustees also amended the bylaws to allow the election of chairman Richard D. White to an unprecedented third term and affirmed Mohler's actions regarding the recent firing of Diana R. Garland as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work.

Trustees were to conclude their business April 19 by approving a 1995-96 budget and a number of other items. But the focus of the meeting centered on the controversy surrounding Mohler's firing of Garland.

In an interview with news media following the April 18 marathon session, White used the term "overwhelmingly positive" when asked how the trustees viewed Mohler's leadership. White said trustees "deeply regretted" the controversy and "we are working through it, as is everyone connected with the seminary's life."

Apparently confirming their evaluation of Mohler, trustees voted to affirm "both the process followed and the actions taken by the President concerning (the Garland firing)." In so doing, trustees also affirmed Mohler's desire to consider only faculty candidates who are conservative and who can "relate constructively to the Southern Baptist Convention."

Garland had charged Mohler with using criteria outside written policies and guidelines to turn down the nomination of David Sherwood, to teach at the Carver school. Mohler said he wouldn't approve Sherwood's nomination because of Sherwood's stand regarding women as pastors.

Critics of Mohler's March 20 action alleged processes had been ignored and said it would bring problems from the seminary's accrediting agencies. However, Mohler told news media he had only one inquiry, an "initial" contact from one agency, the Council on Social Work Education. The two major accrediting agencies, the Association of Theological Schools and a regional group, have not made any contact with the seminary.

Trustees put into writing that candidates will be evaluated regarding their views on the Abstract of Principles, the Covenant Renewal (enacted in 1990) and "current pressing issues of concern to evangelicals and Southern Baptists." Listed as "pressing issues" were:

- the exclusiveness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for salvation;
- the sanctity of human life;
- the sinful nature of homosexuality;
- the restriction of women from serving in the church office of pastor/overseer.

The document said those issues "are only indicative examples, and (are) not to be viewed as exhaustive."

Also approved was a statement on the "issue of women in the pastorate." It cited the "autonomous" churches of the SBC, "which overwhelmingly reflect" the view that women should not serve as pastors and which have "expressed this collectively in annual conventions by adopted resolutions." The statement said the trustees have and will continue to expect the president to recommend to the faculty only those candidates who reflect "the biblical position and the convictional consensus of the churches of the SBC."

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Trustees also approved an amendment to the faculty-staff manual, adding a paragraph which includes "an obligation on the part of all faculty and staff to support and relate constructively to the institution, its policies and administration. Faculty members may not use class time (or any forum designated for instructional purposes) for the purpose of undermining or obstructing the policies of this institution. Faculty members and staff of this institution are not to act in ways that are injurious or detrimental to the seminary's relationship with the denomination, donors or other constituencies within and without the seminary community."

White said the amendment was "in response to what has taken place in recent days at the seminary." Asked if any disciplinary measures would be taken against seminary faculty who publicly opposed the president's decision in the Garland matter, Mohler deferred a response until the end of the trustees' meeting April 19.

But the trustee action that will garner immediate attention from the faculty was the revising of the faculty hiring process in place since 1958.

The major change is that the entire faculty will no longer vote on a prospective candidate, something that Mohler said accrediting agencies do not require and most schools do not include in their hiring processes. Faculty will continue to have an evaluation process of prospective candidates in the new 10-step procedure.

Mohler and White said the new process, which took effect immediately, would be presented to the faculty immediately following the trustee meeting. White said trustees could revise or even change the process in their October meeting, if needed.

Mohler said the new process is "more open, in terms of involvement of the administration and the president," including involving the president at a much earlier point in the search process.

Asked if actions by the trustees changed the Covenant Renewal Agreement reached by faculty and trustees in 1991, Mohler said the trustees' action "doesn't address it."

In response to an earlier request by Mohler, trustees voted to create a committee to study the Carver school. White said he had appointed five trustee members to the committee, which is expected to bring a preliminary report regarding the school's relationship to the seminary, its history and other matters to the October meeting.

Appointed to the Carver study committee are Paul B. Stamm, Apex, N.C., chairman; Dorothy J. Barker, Morton, Texas; Jerry Rexroat, Louisville, Ky.; John D. Pennington, Douglasville, Ga.; and Morris W. Denman Jr., Lynn Haven, Fla.

White's election to a third one-year term as chairman was hinted at when it was announced at the beginning of the trustee meeting there would be a motion to amend the bylaws. Several trustees said White's leadership during the current controversy was very important and was needed for another year.

White, pastor of First Baptist Church, Franklin, Tenn., has been a trustee since 1988 and will rotate off the board in 1997.

But in order to re-elect White, trustees had to vote to amend the bylaws to allow a suspension of a rule which allows only two consecutive years for a chairman. Once a suspension was included in the bylaws, by a two-thirds vote, trustees voted to "suspend" the restrictive bylaw to allow for White's election, all without dissent.

Also elected were first vice chairman, Ruffin Snow, minister of evangelism, First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla.; second vice chairman, Dorothy J. Barker, homemaker, Morton, Texas; secretary, John G. Hicks, attorney, Louisville, Ky.

SBTS approves \$17.7 million budget;
concludes 'historic' campus meeting

By Herb Hollinger

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Called a "historic meeting," trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary ended their April 17-19 meeting by approving a \$17.7 million budget for 1995-96 and a host of policy decisions affecting the entire seminary community.

President R. Albert Mohler Jr. told a news conference following the conclusion of the trustees meeting that it was a "most historic meeting" in which the trustees "carefully and deliberatively" set the course of the seminary in a conservative direction.

Among the actions approved:

- a new faculty hiring process giving the president more and earlier input and eliminating a full faculty vote on candidates;
- Mohler's actions regarding the March 20 firing of Diana R. Garland as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work;
- a study of the Carver school and its relationship to the seminary;
- policies which identify issues such as the exclusiveness of the Christian gospel, homosexuality, women as pastors and abortion as among the "pressing issues" to be used in evaluating prospective faculty;
- and an addition to the faculty-staff manual identifying proper and improper behavior of faculty in relationship to the seminary.

However, Mohler and board chairman Richard D. White told news media there would be no disciplinary action taken against faculty for the controversy surrounding the firing of Garland.

White, pastor of First Baptist Church, Franklin, Tenn., was elected for an unprecedented third one-year term as chairman after the 64-member board changed its bylaws to allow his election.

Although the 1995-96 budget is an 8.1 percent increase over fiscal 1994-95, considerable cuts in expenditures will be needed in order to meet the goal, as well as an increase in fees.

Budget adjustments totaling \$918,497, which Mohler said are yet to be identified, will be necessary, trustees were told. The new budget, effective Aug. 1 through July 31, includes an increase of 3 percent for faculty and staff compensation, an increase in appropriations for capital needs but less resources than those available for the 1994-95 budget.

Revenue for the budget is expected to drop by \$434,131 compared to the current year, some due to an expected drop in enrollment and its accompanying income. Student enrollment for 1994-95 fell short of projected enrollment, trustees were told. Mohler said enrollment has been "relatively stable," although in decline. Depending on how enrollment is counted, Southern has about 2,900 students of which 1,400 are on the main campus in Louisville.

Mohler said an early retirement package for qualified faculty members -- a response to a faculty request -- will be made available soon, but he wouldn't give details until the plan has been presented to faculty.

Trustee William W. Causey of Jackson, Miss., in a report said gifts to the seminary's annual fund have been in decline for three years and there was a need for a "rebuilding of (the seminary's) donor base."

Student fees and charges will go up -- matriculation fees to a benchmark fee of \$900 per semester from \$800, rent up 5 percent, and an average of 3 percent in child development fees. For employees retiring after July 31, the seminary will no longer make "contributions for post retirements benefits, including supplemental health insurance and life insurance."

In other action, trustees approved the election of three new faculty members with tenure: Craig A. Blaising, professor of Christian theology; Daniel I. Block, professor of Old Testament; and J. Mark Terry, associate professor of Christian missions. Sabbaticals for six faculty and promotions for five were also approved.

Trustees also approved:

-- the renaming of the Boyce Bible School board of overseers to "advisory council" and elected a new member, David Butler, pastor of Springdale Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.

-- an architect for the renovation of Rice and Judson halls.

-- two new graduate degrees, the doctor of missiology and the doctor of philosophy in Christian education.

-- responded positively to two motions referred from the SBC meeting last year in Orlando, Fla., regarding not accepting Cooperative Baptist Fellowship funds nor subsidizing students from churches not supporting the Cooperative Program.

-- a three-phase construction plan totaling \$4.6 million for the north wing of the campus center contingent upon "funds being in hand and/or committed prior to the approval of contracts for each phase."

-- a new auditor for 1994-95 at a cost of \$19,500.

-- Oscar Hornsby, Somerset, Ky., to the board of directors of the seminary's foundation with a term ending in 1998.

-- resolutions of appreciation for faculty members William R. Croner, Jr., for 35 years teaching; Marvin E. Tate Jr., also for 35 years; J. Phillip Landgrave, 30 years; C. Anne Davis, 25 years; and T. J. McGlothlin, Jr. for 30 years on staff.

-- resolutions of appreciation for five trustees rotating off the board.

Other officers elected were: first vice chairman, Ruffin Snow, Del City, Okla.; second vice chairman, Dorothy J. Barker, Morton, Texas; and secretary, John G. Hicks, Louisville, Ky.

At the conclusion of the meeting Dixie Petrie, president of the seminary's student government association, was allowed to address the trustees. Petrie, an ordained Southern Baptist minister and grandmother, who is presently a pastor of an American Baptist church in Kent, Ind., told trustees "you have followed the desires of men and not the example of Christ." She chided trustees for "muzzling" the faculty and hindering women in ministry.

Trustees listened quietly and impassionately for several minutes but made no response to her.

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Garland statement addresses
charges by Mohler, White

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
4/19/95

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In her first public statement since her firing as a dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Diana Garland admitted April 18 she did publicly release information as President R. Albert Mohler Jr. and trustee chairman Rick White have charged but the information was not confidential.

Meanwhile, trustees holding their regular meeting at the Louisville, Ky., seminary campus April 17-19 were scheduled for an executive session the afternoon of April 18.

Also, trustee parliamentarian Paul Stam of Apex, N.C., gave notice April 18 a motion would be made at the time of trustee officer elections to suspend the bylaws regarding the trustee chairman's two-year term, presumably to allow White to serve as chairman for a third year. The motion will require a two-thirds majority of those voting.

Mohler fired Garland March 20 as dean of the seminary's Carver School of Church Social Work after she told social work students the school's future is in "serious jeopardy" due to Mohler's self-imposed limitations on faculty hiring.

Garland specifically cited the nomination of David Sherwood to the faculty. Sherwood's nomination, she said, had been blocked by Mohler because of hiring criteria Mohler had established outside the seminary's governing documents. Later, both Sherwood and Mohler confirmed Mohler rejected Sherwood because of his personal belief that God might be able to call a woman to be a pastor.

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The April 18 issue of the Kentucky Baptist newsjournal Western Recorder includes an open letter from White and a response from Garland.

In his letter, White explained: "... the sole reason Dr. Garland was asked to resign is that she took an internal, administrative conflict which Dr. Mohler and others were seeking to resolve with her and made it public in a meeting with students, faculty and invited media. In a printed statement distributed to these groups, she asked them to join her in pressuring the president and trustees to adopt her position."

In an appeal to laypeople, White continued: "If you are a layperson who manages a business, you could not allow one of your managers to publicly advocate positions in conflict with yours and to encourage employees to pressure you to change."

Garland challenged that report.

"In Chairman White's letter, he suggests that an academic institution is a business and that deans are managers that need to agree with the boss," she wrote. "But seminaries are not businesses any more than churches are.

"We use business principles, but we must be guided by the Holy Spirit and the Bible. A dean in a seminary is responsible to the students and the churches who send them, the faculty and the trustees, as well as to the president," she said.

Garland continued: "Students and faculty are included in the search process for new faculty members, and I had a responsibility to report to them the outcome of these processes. The Organization of Student Social Workers had a meeting scheduled on March 20, and they had invited me to report to them the outcome of the faculty search process at that time, which I did. None of what shared was confidential; I simply recounted the processes of the institution, which are supposed to be open."

Garland said it was Mohler, not her, who told the media the issue of concern in this case had been the role of women in ministry. "My statement did not name any of the president's criteria, including women in ministry, because I did not think it was right to speak for the president or to give the reasons he had found Dr. Sherwood to be unacceptable."

Garland said the only thing that got her fired was asking the administration to be faithful to the seminary's governing documents and established procedures for faculty hiring.

In his letter, White asserted the "underlying issue behind the conflict" between Mohler and Garland is Mohler's position that women may not serve as senior pastors in churches.

But Garland rebuts that report.

Citing the seminary's Faculty/Staff Manual, she said, "My primary concern ... was the president's new requirements that were in conflict with the basic guideline that 'The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary must strive to be a community of teaching and learning in which freedom of mind and spirit are accepted as fundamental under the lordship of Jesus Christ.'

"Within the confessional guidelines of Christian faith and with a deep respect for one another's differing ideas, a seminary must be a place where persons can respectfully hold differing views and explore God's truth together," Garland said.

She agreed with White's statement that the president has the right to ask prospective faculty members any questions he deems appropriate. But "if there are going to absolute criteria which must be met by faculty candidates, they need to be clearly spelled out in our seminary policies."

Without such clear communication from the president and adherence to published guidelines, deans waste Cooperative Program money in transporting faculty candidates to the campus for interviews, only to have them rejected based on previously unspecified rules, she said.

Garland said she has "taken seriously the stewardship entrusted to me by God and by Southern Baptists as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work."

"It would have been far less costly for me personally simply to resign. I have acted in what I believe are the best interests of Carver School, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, of the churches we serve and of the ministries for which we prepare students."

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Herb Hollinger contributed to this story. The complete text of both White's and Garland's letters are posted in the SBCNet News Room.

Russian evangelicals introduce
amendment to head off resistance By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
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MOSCOW (BP)--Russian lawmakers passed April 14 a measure that bars dangerous religious groups but stops short of citing other religions outside the traditional Russian Orthodox Church.

The measure, approved 264-0 with two abstentions, represents a compromise proposal framed by evangelical legal experts and introduced in Parliament by the Christian democratic faction. It comes in the form of an amendment to Article 4 in Russia's religious freedom law, passed in 1990 to sweep away communist oppression of faith.

Evangelicals hope its passage will relieve the pressure legislators feel to return the country to the safe harbor of Russian Orthodoxy, its centuries-old tradition predating communism.

"The Parliament is under a lot of pressure -- from the Orthodox Church as well as national leaders -- to limit nontraditional confessions and curtail missionary work," said Vladimir Ryakhovsky, president of the Christian Legal Center in Moscow. "Their argument is, 'We have no law on the books to restrict the activities of any totalitarian religious organization.' We chose to introduce this amendment to prevent these people from using this argument."

Ryakhovsky serves on the legal advisory commission to the Russian parliament's committee on religious organizations and has worked to guarantee religious freedom as a new government has emerged in Russia.

The amendment's next steps: two more readings and then on to President Boris Yeltsin. Ryakhovsky expects it to sail through the adoption process with wide-based support. But now it isn't known whether the amendment goes far enough to placate hard-liners, he said. Sources in Moscow have reported a new Orthodox attempt to introduce their own set of religious liberty restrictions.

Meanwhile, the 53 Foreign Mission Board missionaries in Russia -- among other non-Orthodox -- have fallen victim to growing Russian nationalism, an anti-western mood seeking to favor the Orthodox. Recently, missionaries learned of a new policy not to grant renewable visas. That means they must leave the country and re-apply for a visa each time their current one expires.

"This will add a tremendous stress factor," said Danny Panter, the Foreign Mission Board's associate to the area director for Eastern Europe. Also more travel to and from the country will add expenses.

"The Orthodox Church keeps pushing this ... that they are the Russian church. They do have a great deal of authority, and they have the ear of many political leaders."

Before the amendment, hard-liners had proposed severe restrictions, including registering churches and requiring foreign religious workers to pass an accreditation process.

A myriad of foreign cults is active in Russia, some requiring children to leave their families and members to sell their possessions. Russians have responded sharply to such activity and to what they perceive as rude, greedy and insensitive conversion tactics by Christians and non-Christians alike.

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Among the cults active in Russia is one recently accused of leaking poison gas into Japanese subways. In Russian news reports about the gas attacks, video clips of evangelist Billy Graham preaching in Russia also were aired to show the proliferation of outside religious influence.

"There is a rather severe backlash" from the Tokyo gassing incident, said Jack Shelby, who directs Foreign Mission Board work in Russia and several other former Soviet republics. "And this has made grist for groups that are opposed to evangelicals."

The new Russian amendment would bar religious groups that:

- violate public safety and order;
- preach war, violence and hatred for people, and inspire social, racial, ethnic and religious conflicts;
- use unlawful means of coercion, commit crimes against people and violate their rights;
- harm the health of Russians, including drug use;
- prevent children from obtaining basic general education;
- motivate people to break the law or refuse to carry on civic duties.

Human rights advocates are concerned how the law might be interpreted and enforced. The complex and unwieldy Russian Federation encompasses people of many religions. Much of Russia is in a state of lawlessness, controlled by local power brokers waving flags of various political, ethnic, economic and religious identities.

Five years ago Russian lawmakers passed the religious freedom law as they flexed their political muscles to stand freely against the old-style atheism of the former Soviet Union. The law still stands, despite many attempts by staunchly nationalistic players in the former political system to dilute it and gain the praise of one of the country's most powerful institutions -- the Orthodox Church.

Hard-liners' most serious attempt to rein in religious freedom came just before Yeltsin defeated a coup attempt in late 1993. They introduced and won parliamentary approval for an amendment that would have limited missionary work and other evangelical activity.

Yeltsin vetoed it twice. But the measure was among laws passed by breakaway Parliament leaders just before they were defeated in a military confrontation inside and around the Russian White House. Yeltsin declared their actions illegal.

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FMB focuses Albania efforts
on starting new churches

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
4/19/95

TIRANA, Albania (BP)--Foreign Mission Board missionaries have withdrawn from European Baptists' Albania team to pursue a more focused strategy of starting churches in this nation reeling from a history of brutal atheism.

Europe mission officials for the board announced their intentions at an Albania committee meeting March 23. They said their aim is to use Southern Baptist Convention resources more effectively to help the team create a union of Baptist churches that can relate to the European Baptist Federation (EBF). The EBF is an alliance of Baptist unions from various countries in Europe.

"All we want to do is start churches," said John Floyd, who directs FMB work in Europe. "The program in Albania has moved far enough that now we feel individual agencies on the team need to be free to do what they can do best."

The team began in 1992 after the EBF general secretary, Karl-Heinz Walter, invited several mission-sending agencies to become involved in a cooperative venture. Its many aspects included medical, humanitarian, educational, evangelistic and agricultural work. Now, 19 full-time missionaries and three volunteers are members.

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Floyd praised the EBF effort for its value as a springboard into Albania and for offering an umbrella of identity under which mission agencies could work. But, he added, the EBF does not consider itself a missionary agency.

Floyd met with Walter Feb. 17 at EBF offices in Hamburg, Germany, to explain FMB plans to maintain a working relationship with the team but pull out of active participation. At that meeting Floyd said Walter told him the Albania team, as it stands now, was not meant to be a permanent arrangement, and that it should move toward a more advisory role, rather than a hands-on approach.

In announcing their decision to withdraw from the team, FMB representatives proposed maintaining a close relationship with the team. Danny Panter, FMB associate to the area director for Eastern Europe, agreed that missionaries would communicate strategies and plans for new personnel as they emerged. But they would no longer be required to submit their ideas for team approval, he stressed.

The committee invited the FMB to participate in future meetings as a non-voting member.

Agencies still working through the EBF effort include the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Baptist Missionary Society, Canadian Baptist Ministries, European Baptist Women's Unions, the Italian Baptist Union and the Swedish Baptist Missionary Society.

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Judge halts prayers
over school intercom

Baptist Press
4/19/95

PONTOTOC, Miss. (BP)--A federal judge ruled April 18 that a north Mississippi school must stop its practice of prayers and morning devotionals over its intercom system.

In a 25-page preliminary injunction, U.S. District Judge Neal Biggers Jr. ruled the Pontotoc County school district wrongly advanced religion by permitting prayers and Scripture reading at North Pontotoc Attendance Center.

"It has the effect of endorsing or placing the governmental institution's seal of approval on these religious practices," Biggers wrote, according to an April 19 news story in The Clarion-Ledger, Jackson, Miss.

The rural district "has excessively involved itself with religion and crossed the line drawn between church and state," according to Biggers, addressing a school prayer fight that has gained attention on CBS' "60 Minutes," NBC's "Today Show" and other national news programs.

"We may not like the court decision but we will obey it," Pontotoc County School Superintendent Jerry Horton was quoted by The Clarion-Ledger as saying. School prayers on the intercom would cease April 19, Horton said.

Biggers sided with plaintiff Lisa Herdahl, 34, of Ecu, whose lawsuit in December contended the constitutional rights of her five children at the school were violated by the practice. She argued that her children, who were baptized as Lutherans, suffer undue embarrassment for not participating in Bible classes or prayers at school.

The ruling "states what I've stated all along -- that prayer in the intercom and the classroom is not legal and not right," Herdahl, a convenience store employee, told The Clarion-Ledger. "They can go to church if they want to. They can pray in their homes. They don't need to bring it into the school," she was quoted as saying.

"It is clearly a victory for us," David Ingebretsen, executive director of the Mississippi chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union in Jackson, told the newspaper. Lawyers with the ACLU and Washington-based People for the American Way joined Herdahl in the lawsuit. "I hope the school board and attorneys read the decision and realize they have no chance to prevail," Ingebretsen said.

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In the ruling, Biggers wrote: "Invoking the name of Jesus Christ and broadcasting it throughout the school at times when attendance is mandatory necessarily chooses religion over nonreligion. And, moreover, Christian beliefs over other religious beliefs."

School officials had turned over the loudspeaker to the students' Aletheia Club for morning prayers. It "is pressuring, if not mandating students to attend and participate in prayer," Biggers wrote.

However, the judge refused to end all prayer at the school. Students in grades seven through 12 may have voluntary devotionals before school hours each morning in the gymnasium, with younger children also able to attend, Biggers ruled. Students remain free to exercise their rights before and after school hours, he wrote.

Biggers also set a March 4, 1996, trial for the lawsuit.

Horton said he and school board members will study a possible appeal. "This is only the first battle in a long fight," Horton told The Clarion-Ledger. "It is not over by any means. But we know it is an uphill battle based on the experience of the last 30 to 40 years."

Trying to squeeze 1,200 students into the school gym for prayers will be difficult, but he told the newspaper, "I know the student body feels strongly about voluntary prayers."

Mitzie Robbins, president of the North Pontotoc School Parent Teacher Organization and a medical receptionist, reacted that the devotionals were "something that was good and very helpful to our students. It teaches our kids morals and values. It is important that (students) make God part of their lives every day."

Robbins told the newspaper she is glad the judge allowed for students to pray in the gymnasium.

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Mo. group states opposition
to Historical Commission's end

Baptist Press
4/19/95

LIBERTY, Mo. (BP)--Missouri Baptist Convention Historical Commission trustees lamented the proposed elimination of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission in a statement approved at their semiannual meeting April 12 at William Jewell College in Liberty.

The statement reads: "Prior to the 1951 founding of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, preservation and interpretation of Baptist history was haphazard and ineffective. Since its founding, the Historical Commission has performed an outstanding job in fulfilling its mission with autonomy and accuracy to the benefit of Southern Baptist churches. The Missouri Baptist Historical Commission is deeply concerned that the significant achievements of this agency continue. Therefore, we the members of the Missouri Baptist Historical Commission unanimously urge messengers to the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta to maintain the ongoing work and mission of the Historical Commission, SBC, by promoting its continued existence as an agency of the SBC."

The Southern Baptist Historical Commission is one of seven SBC agencies targeted for elimination under the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring plan proposed by the seven-member Program and Structure Study Committee, which was appointed by the SBC Executive Committee.

Under the proposed dissolution of the Historical Commission, its archival duties would be assigned to a council of presidents of the six SBC seminaries and its educational duties would be assigned to the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Messengers to the SBC annual meeting in June 20-22 in Atlanta will vote on the plan, which must be approved for two consecutive years to take effect.

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Missouri Baptist Historical Commission chairman Larry E. Davis, minister of education at Third Baptist Church, St. Louis, pointed out the SBC Historical Commission receives less than 1 percent of all Cooperative Program dollars to preserve, interpret and communicate Baptist history.

State commission member Robert E. Johnson, associate professor of church history at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, noted that since 1958 the SBC Historical Commission has been responsible for more than 90 percent of all published scholarly historical articles about Southern Baptists.

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HMB president underscores
all are called to serve

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
4/19/95

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--On the wall of Larry Lewis' office in Atlanta is a map of the United States covered with 22,000 colored dots. Each dot represents a place identified by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board as a locale where a new church work needs to be started immediately.

Lewis, president of Home Mission Board based in Atlanta, said April 18 he is personally concerned everyone in North America have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ: "God is calling out the called and sending them to these mission locations which so desperately need to hear the gospel.

"All of us are called," he said in remarks at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary during a home missions emphasis. "The question is to what place and what vocation and to what service. We need to be asking God how we are to walk and minister and witness in that place."

From 1970 to 1990, U.S. population grew by 22 percent while the number of churches only grew by 7 percent. "You look across the northlands of America and we have 400 counties where there are no Southern Baptist churches," said Lewis, who himself started 13 churches in 14 years in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey after graduating from seminary.

While the number of Southern Baptist churches grew by 12 percent during that period, Lewis said even Southern Baptists have not been able to keep up with the need for new churches. "We have made significant inroads, but we really have an unfinished task of churching America still ahead of us.

"We believe every ministry ought to be pointing people to Jesus. We don't do anybody any eternal good if we don't get them saved," Lewis said on the seminary's Wake Forest, N.C., campus.

The HMB continues to encourage new church starts among people groups not traditionally represented in the Southern Baptist Convention, having started churches in 100 different languages, Lewis said. "We believe that ours is a gospel for all people regardless of race or ethnicity. It is for all kindred tribes and tongues."

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Lewis: Evidence of God's will
includes persistence, urgency By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
4/19/95

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--God does not typically reveal his will by supernatural phenomena as earthquakes or mighty winds but instead by a still small quiet voice that speaks to the heart, said Larry Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"It is an impression he puts in our mind or a burden he places on our heart that won't go away," Lewis said at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., for home missions emphasis week.

"You'll try to sleep at night, but you'll wake up thinking about that which God has planted in your heart. You try to hide from it -- to get away from it -- but there is no way you can escape it," Lewis said.

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Christians can know if a matter is God's will for them by its consistency, Lewis said April 18. "The impression will be there day after day and it will be same impression, not a fickle thing that varies with the weather.

"There is an urgency in it, a quality about it that won't let you rest," said Lewis. "The thought will stir your soul continually as God calls you to respond."

Lewis said the intensity of the impression will hold the believer captive: "It will not only be the same thing day after day but will be before you day after day. You'll try to do something else and you won't be able to concentrate for this thought God has placed upon your heart."

The Christian longs to know the source of the impression so as to know how to respond, Lewis said. "If it is a persistent longing that is both consistent and insistent, it has to come from God. It's not some Satanic plot to try to get you do something that God would not have you to do."

He said particularly if the calling does not offer the lure of fame or fortune it is an impression planted in a person's mind by God, noting rarely does Satan tempt believers to do a work for the Lord.

"If there is an impression in your mind that God is wanting you no matter the cost, there is only one option if Jesus Christ is truly Lord of your life -- you must come asking: 'Lord, what would you have me to do?'"

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CLC's Whitehead to receive
religious heritage award

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ST. LOUIS (BP)--Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, has been selected to receive a national award for contributions to preserving America's religious heritage.

Religious Heritage of America, an interfaith, nonprofit organization, recently informed Whitehead of his selection as one of its 1995 honorees. Whitehead will receive an award in the business and professional category at RHA's annual meeting in October in San Antonio, Texas.

RHA's business and professional honors are awarded to people "who, by practical application of religious principles in their daily lives and the lives of their industries or professions, have made an impact for good on national or community life."

RHA's mission is "to help America reclaim the religious values upon which it was founded by demonstrating how these values add to the quality of life." It annually honors clergy as well as leaders in churches, businesses, professions, schools and communities.

Among the more than 600 men, women and youth honored during RHA's 44-year history are evangelist Billy Graham; theologian Carl F.H. Henry; Southern Baptist pastors O.S. Hawkins, Nelson Price and Charles Stanley; author Joni Eareckson Tada; entertainer Dale Evans Rogers; Chik-fil-A executive Truett Cathy and fitness expert Kenneth Cooper.

Whitehead, who received his bachelor and law degrees from the University of Missouri at Columbia, has worked for the Christian Life Commission since 1990 while continuing to practice law in Kansas City, Mo. In 1981, Whitehead and his partner, James Smart Jr., won a landmark Supreme Court case, *Widmar v. Vincent*, which established the right of college students to equal access to facilities for Bible study and prayer meetings. As CLC general counsel, Whitehead files friend-of-the-court briefs in Supreme Court cases on religious liberty and abortion.

The late J. Ward Walker, vice president of spiritual life at East Texas Baptist University in Marshall, Texas, nominated Whitehead for the award, according to RHA. Walker, 47, died March 24. Walker and Whitehead had been friends for several years.

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Seminary classroom stretches
500 miles via new technology

By Debbie Moore

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"This is so cool!" is not the typical response expected to be heard while walking past a master's-level English exegesis class on a seminary campus.

But students eager to be in the history-making first class of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's new Distance Learning Project were on the edge of their seats as they listened to the professor discuss the history of the Gospel of John -- and interacted with classmates 500 miles away at New Orleans Seminary's North Georgia Campus in Decatur.

The technology behind this project is "compressed interactive video," referred to in the video conference industry as CIV. Seminary trustees, who approved the expansion into CIV classes during their fall meeting, were the first to see CIV in full operation during their spring meeting.

Through the use of multiple cameras, microphones and large-screen monitors, students attending classes at extension center campuses can interact in person and in real time with professors and classmates on the main campus. The CIV technology requires six data channels, equivalent to six simultaneous long-distance calls.

Another amazing piece of equipment with the project is a special overhead projector, known as a visual presenter, allowing students on both campuses to see perfectly what the professor has written, as well as zooming in on a page in a textbook.

When a student raises his hand with a question for the professor, the person operating the control panel can zoom in one camera on the student's face and another camera on the professor's face so they can talk "eye-to-eye," although they actually are hundreds of miles apart. With another touch of the control panel, each camera can pan back to sweep across the entire classroom.

"This really helps make the extension center student feel as if he's more a part of what's going on at the main campus," said Eric Reed, a third-year master of divinity student. "These CIV classes will help us feel connected to each other in the whole New Orleans Seminary family."

For the professor, some of the benefits are measured by the clock. "This technology will significantly reduce our travel time," said Charlie Ray, NOBTS professor of New Testament and Greek; "but I also really enjoy the increased interaction of students on the main campus with students at our extension center campuses." Ray is teaching this inaugural CIV class, an English exegesis of the Gospel of John; he has had experience over the years in making the daylong round-trip journeys to teach a class at an NOBTS extension center.

NOBTS currently operates 12 extension center campuses across the Southeast in addition to the main campus in New Orleans and a new complete campus just east of Atlanta in Decatur, Ga. Enrollment at NOBTS extension centers currently ranges from 50 to 500. The seminary began offering classes through extension center locations in 1979 after receiving repeated requests from local pastors, denominational leaders and interested students. Extension center students usually have some extenuating circumstances that keep them from being able to move to the main campus.

The CIV classes initially are being used just between New Orleans and Georgia, but within the next few years it should be in full operation with all NOBTS extension center campuses.

"My interest in using available technology in the classroom is related to my desire to enhance the learning process between professors and students," said Billy K. Smith, NOBTS provost and academic dean of the graduate faculty.

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"CIV offers an added dimension and dynamic of interaction between a campus-based professor, his campus students, and his extension students. CIV will save the time and wear and tear on our professors, since they will not have to travel as often to the centers, and will offer extension students on-campus exposure to our resident faculty and students in the learning process."

"It's good to have the contact with students from diverse backgrounds and different lifestyles," said David Phillips, another master of divinity student. Phillips did not need to take the class to graduate this May; "I just wanted to take it because it's something different, and it's exciting!" he said.

"This is one of those experiences that will make a great story for the grandkids!" Reed added. "This is the school of the future. It's a great feeling to be a part of history in the making."

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(BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Seminary's office of public relations.

Southeastern evangelism prof
announces 1996 retirement

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
4/19/95

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--A pioneer in evangelism among Southern Baptists has announced his retirement from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's faculty. Delos Miles, professor of evangelism at Southeastern since 1981, will formally retire from the classroom Jan. 1, 1996.

Miles was the first full-time permanent professor in evangelism at the Wake Forest, N.C., school.

Graduating with a bachelor of divinity degree from Southeastern in 1958, his appointment to the faculty fulfilled his longing to teach at the seminary. "It was a dream really come true because from the time I felt God's leadership to teach I had hoped that God would put me at Southeastern," said Miles, a native of Florence County, S.C.

His appointment as a professor of evangelism marked the beginning of a new respect for evangelism in the classroom, he said.

"At that time, evangelism was not an acceptable theological discipline in all of our seminaries and divinity schools," said Miles, who earned his doctorate from San Francisco Theological Seminary, San Anselmo, Calif.

"One of the things I have seen change here is the full acceptance of evangelism as an academic discipline," Miles said. "I think it's fair to say that was not the case before I arrived at Southeastern. Now everybody fully embraces evangelism as an academically respectable discipline that should be taught in a seminary setting."

Expressing regret at Miles' decision but appreciation for his service, Southeastern President Paige Patterson said, "Southeastern will miss him profoundly. Delos Miles has been as fine a representative of this seminary as anyone could have asked or hoped for across his many years of service. He is consistent in the classroom, outstanding in his pastoral service and a gentle lover of men's souls."

After serving as pastor to churches in South Carolina and Virginia, Miles worked with the departments of evangelism within each state's Baptist convention. He was also associate professor of evangelism at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., prior to coming to Southeastern.

Calling Miles an accomplished author, Southeastern's vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty, Russ Bush, said Miles was probably the most prolific writer currently teaching evangelism at a Southern Baptist seminary.

"His writing in church growth, considered to be a standard in the field, was ahead of its time," Bush said. Miles wrote "Church Growth: A Mighty River," published by Broadman Press in 1981. His most recent work, "Evangelism and Social Involvement," released by Broadman in 1986, focused on Miles' conviction of a positive relation between effective evangelism and social ministry, Bush noted.

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"He is an unassuming man who has had a tremendous impact on many students," Bush said.

Miles directed the seminary's associate of divinity degree program for the last eight years. The degree program admits students who have not completed the college work necessary for entrance into the master of divinity degree program, but who are nonetheless called to theological study.

While he has no definite plans following his retirement, Miles said he will continue to be active in the local church. "That's where my heart is," he said.

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Pioneer Baptist broadcaster
Norvell Slater dies in Dallas

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
4/19/95

DALLAS (BP)--Norvell Slater, whose warm voice on "Hymns We Love" on Dallas radio stations encouraged generations of Texans to "go to church," died April 18 in Baylor University Medical Center, Dallas. He was 87.

A pioneer broadcaster, Slater was announcer-producer of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission's syndicated radio series, "Master Control," from 1959-62.

In 1970, he received the first annual Abe Lincoln Broadcasters Award from the RTVC. In 1971, while he was public service director for WFAA-TV of Dallas, the Texas Baptist Public Relations Advisory Committee honored him with its annual Communications Award.

"Hymns We Love" was thought to be the longest-running program of Christian music with the same host on any commercial radio station. Slater began the program the first Sunday in May 1952, on WFAA, Dallas, and continued it on KAAM, Dallas, until Dec. 12, 1993.

After his wife, Lois, was struck and killed by an automobile in 1976, Slater was assisted in the program by his sister, Estelle Slater, former dean of women at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Belton, and former student work consultant with the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.

Slater's colorful radio career spanned more than 60 years. He began in 1929 on WBAP, Fort Worth, as a part-time announcer, piano player and singer while studying church music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

He served with WHB Radio, Kansas City, from 1930-38 before joining WFAA in 1941 where he was producer and singer on the "Early Bird" show. With the development of religious music on records in the early 1950s, he pioneered the playing of recorded religious music through "Hymns We Love."

Meanwhile, Slater served as part-time music director for Highland Park and Lakewood Baptist churches of Dallas and for churches in Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas.

"The Lord blessed me by giving me the opportunity to be part of 'Hymns We Love,'" Slater said. "It gave me an outreach to many people who wouldn't have listened to a Christian station."

Slater was a member of Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, where he was an active deacon.

He served on the advisory council of Southwestern Seminary, the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the BGCT public relations advisory committee and the boards of trustees of Dallas Baptist University and the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

Besides his sister, Estelle Slater, he is survived by his two daughters, Linda McGilvray of San Francisco and Ann Slater of San Antonio, and a brother, Richmond Slater of Plattsburg, Mo.

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5-year-old burn victim is
God's gift to new parents

By Susan Simko

ARLINGTON, Texas (BP)--Five-year-old Rebecca Rosengren, giggling with every breath she took, bounded into her bedroom and opened the cabinet doors on her blue toy grill, which was wedged between a doll house and several dozen stuffed animals. Snatching out plastic hamburger meat with yellow tongs, she placed the patties on the grill and closed the lid. She put her hand on her hip, waited several seconds, opened the lid again and served all the adults in the room.

The grill is a Christmas gift from Rebecca's parents, Bret and Sidney Rosengren, who adopted her Nov. 15 with the aid of Buckner Baptist Benevolences. The grill is her favorite gift. She is their favorite gift.

"We cook out on the grill three or four times a week," Bret said. "She always wants to help."

As he talked, Rebecca couldn't hear her father's words, but she could see her mother sign "thank you" when she handed Sidney a plastic hamburger.

Rebecca is deaf. She survived a house fire three years ago, but the tragedy left her with burns over 75 percent of her body. The antibiotics that saved her life stole her hearing. Scars from dozens of surgeries cover her arms and legs, and only a tiny tuft of hair dots her head. But her face is flawless.

Rebecca's face was all that was visible the first time Sidney, a registered nurse, saw her three years ago. Rebecca was Sidney's patient in intensive care burn unit at Dallas' Parkland Memorial Hospital.

Sidney pushed her way through a jungle of IV poles and respirator cables to reach Rebecca, whose entire body was wrapped in blankets and bandages. Tubes snaked out of her nose and mouth. Water saturation bloated her tiny features.

Sidney remembers looking at the child's blue eyes and thinking, "That's the most beautiful face I have ever seen." Right there, surrounded by the buzzes and beeps of hospital equipment, Sidney knew she had to adopt Rebecca.

Rebecca's biological parents were jobless when their house burned. Soon after Rebecca entered Parkland, her parents stopped visiting her. Sidney began pouring her heart into Rebecca's care.

"I just started trying to be a mother for her," she said.

Sidney asked to be assigned to Rebecca every chance she could. She cuddled and rocked her. She painted her nails. She lugged Rebecca in a wagon, respirator and all, around the hospital room. With each of the 192 days Rebecca was in the hospital, Sidney grew more attached to her. Sidney and Bret had not planned to have any children, but she told him she wanted to adopt this one. But Rebecca couldn't be adopted, even though problems kept the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services from letting her return home.

Rebecca's burns required detailed medical care too serious for her to be placed in a regular foster home, so DPRS had two choices: Assign Rebecca to a nursing home or place her in a unique Buckner foster care home in Tyler. Buckner got the nod.

The Green Acres Foster Group Home, founded in 1968, is a joint venture between Buckner and Green Acres Baptist Church, where houseparents Judy and Stephen Foster care for critically ill children.

DPRS told the Fosters about Rebecca four months before she was released from the hospital. Although she was not yet officially their foster daughter, the Fosters began traveling to Dallas to be with Rebecca.

"I've never seen an agency like Buckner that would allow you the time and expense to meet and be with this child to be able to get a bond, without them (Buckner) ever receiving a penny," Judy said.

It was on one of those trips that Judy met Sidney, who told her she wanted to adopt Rebecca.

The Fosters spent months nursing Rebecca through painful, often gruesome therapy and taking her to Dallas for surgeries. When the DPRS worker had an agreement with the biological family, he asked the Fosters, not the Rosengrens, if they wanted to adopt her. The Fosters have cared for more than 200 children, but they have adopted only one.

"When I prayed to God for a child, he gave me Stephen Jr.," Judy said. "When I prayed for a daughter, he gave me Rebecca. He just said I couldn't keep her."

While the adoption details were being finalized, the Fosters helped the Rosengrens get a respite-caregiver license. That meant the Rosengrens could keep Rebecca for a few days at a time.

"When she'd leave, we'd shut the door to her room because it hurt too much to go in there with her not there," Sidney said.

On one visit, Rebecca looked out the car window at the Rosengrens and signed the words "my home." During another visit, the Rosengrens took her skiing in Colorado. It was there that she first called Sidney and Bret mom and dad. After that, the Rosengrens couldn't bear to let her leave.

"This is the best placement we have ever made," Judy said. "There just hasn't been a thing in this child's life that hasn't been guided by God."

Sidney said she also believes God was involved 100 percent.

"He pointed me into nursing," she said. "I had only been a nurse six months when Rebecca came to be, so if I had waited much longer to pursue a nursing career I would have never found her. I firmly believe it has been set in stone for thousands of years what was going to happen."

God also has used Rebecca to touch other lives, Sidney said.

On one occasion, when Rebecca was touring an airport with her deaf class, a pilot invited the children to the plane's cockpit. After meeting Rebecca, the pilot was compelled to return to his home in Houston and start an air ambulance organization for sick children.

Bret, who is a flight attendant, said he believes God will continue to use Rebecca. He often tells passengers about his daughter.

"I just feel it's our job to watch over her and help her until it is time for her to do what she is supposed to do," he said.

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