

Students meet Baptist activist Will Campbell

MT. JULIET, Tenn. (ABP) — Religion majors at Belmont University ended their semester on a high note Dec. 14, visiting and chatting with legendary Baptist civil-rights activist and author Will Campbell at his home in Mt. Juliet, Tenn.

Two dozen seniors graduating either in December or May from the Baptist school in nearby Nashville crowded into the historic log cabin, relocated to Campbell's property, that serves as his office. The annual visit caps a colloquium class designed to help students transition from college to whatever lies next.

"We try to integrate the various disciplines they've experienced and we work to get them thinking about how to be practicing theologians," said Judy Skeen, the Belmont religion professor who teaches the course.

Skeen starts students off in the semester by requiring them to read either *Brother to a Dragonfly*, Campbell's 1977 memoir that earned him the Lillian Smith Prize, the Christopher Award and a National Book Award nomination; or *The Glad River*, a novel that won Campbell a first-place award from the Friends of American Writers in 1982. As a result, by the time they arrive at Campbell's cabin they are well-acquainted with the reputation of the man whom many regard a living legend.

Displaying trademark humility and self-effacing humor, Campbell, most widely known as inspiration for "Rev. Will B. Dunn" from the late cartoonist Doug Marlette's comic strip "Kudzu," downplayed his place in history. "I'm not any big wheel," he remarked. "You know, I've written a few books. Big deal. I'm a fair writer, I think."

Brett McReynolds, whose trip to Mt. Juliet was his last act before graduating Dec. 18, begged to differ. After the meeting he described Campbell as an "icon" and an example of a life lived "trying to do what you are supposed to do."

Student Hailey Reynolds termed it a "highlight of the semester." (Bob Allen, ABPnews.com)

Study says majority of world's population faces religious restriction

WASHINGTON (ABP) — Nearly 70 percent of the world's 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Titled *Global Restrictions on Religion*, the study gauges the level of restrictions due to both government actions and acts of violence and intimidation by private individuals, organizations and social groups.

Researchers combed through 16 primary sources — including reports by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom — and rated countries by 20 indicators of government restriction and 13 markers of social hostility.

The study counted 64 nations with high or very high restrictions on religion. That is about one-third of the countries in the world. Because some of the most restrictive countries are very populous — like China, India and Pakistan — however, seven out of every 10 people live in a country with high restrictions on religions.

The highest overall levels of restrictions are found in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, where both the government and society at large impose numerous limits on religious beliefs and practices. (Bob Allen, ABPnews.com)

College to require faculty assent to SBC faith statement

CLEVELAND, Ga. (ABP) — Truett-McConnell College in northeast Georgia plans to become the first Baptist college to require its faculty to affirm the Baptist Faith and Message as revised by the

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Worth repeating

"Somewhere in Oklahoma, a family made a decision to give life, my life. We hope we have the opportunity to meet this family someday and to thank them personally for their sacrifice. There are currently many people, young and old, waiting on transplant lists, hoping and praying for a chance at life. Unfortunately, many will die due to a lack of donors."

-- Liver transplant recipient Linda Baker, former assistant to the editor of *Word & Way* (ABPnews.com)

Southern Baptist Convention in 2000.

Trustees of the four-year school — named after George W. Truett, the legendary pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas for 47 years, and Fernando McConnell, Truett's cousin and the longtime pastor of Druid Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta — voted Dec. 4 to adopt the policy intended to signal solidarity with the Georgia Baptist Convention.

"The Georgia Baptist Convention and our churches deserve nothing less than a faculty that will abide by nothing less than the essentials of the faith," said Truett-McConnell President Emir Caner, according to the Georgia Baptist *Christian Index*.

"Institutions that do not faithfully support the theology of Southern Baptists do not deserve the faithful support of Southern Baptists," Caner said. (*Bob Allen, ABPnews.com*)

Carter apologizes to Jews for controversial past statements

ATLANTA (ABP) — Criticized in the past for remarks that upset many in America's Jewish community, former President Jimmy Carter apologized Dec. 21 for any of his words or actions that might have served to stigmatize Israel.

Carter, 85, wrote a letter made public by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency offering an AI Het, a Yom Kippur prayer asking for forgiveness, timed with Chanukah, the Jewish festival of lights.

"We must recognize Israel's achievements under difficult circumstances, even as we strive in a positive way to help Israel continue to improve its relations with its Arab populations, but we must not permit criticisms for improvement to stigmatize Israel," Carter wrote. "As I would have noted at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but which is appropriate at any time of the year, I offer an AI Het for any words or deeds of mine that may have done so." (*Bob Allen, ABPnews.com*)

Appeals court allows suit over Ky. Baptist institution to proceed

CINCINNATI (ABP) — The full 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals declined Dec. 16 to review the August ruling of a three-judge panel allowing a case challenging taxpayer funding of a Baptist children's home to move forward.

Sunrise Children's Services, formerly known as Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, planned to appeal the ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, the Louisville *Courier-Journal* reported.

A lawsuit filed originally in 2000 claims the ministry is using taxpayer funds unconstitutionally to indoctrinate children who are wards of the state with religion.

A district court dismissed the case last year, citing a Supreme Court ruling limiting the rights of taxpayers to sue over taxpayer funding of religious organizations. In August a three-judge panel of the appellate court disagreed with the lower court's interpretation and said the question of whether \$12 million in annual state funding for the home violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause could move forward. (*Bob Allen, ABPnews.com*)

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Lilly-funded program to help seminary grads serving in first churches

ATLANTA (ABP) — A \$1 million grant is funding a new center at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology that aims to create a new paradigm for transitioning new ministers from the academic setting into the realities of local-church ministry.

The five-year grant from the Lilly Endowment builds on an earlier ministerial-transition grant to the Atlanta-based Baptist seminary and will fund the establishment of a new McAfee Center for Teaching Churches.

"With the Center for Teaching Churches, the McAfee School of Theology is breaking new ground," said Alan Culpepper, the school's dean. "This center will provide a network of support for both graduates and churches while bringing new voices from the church into the process of nurturing young ministers."

According to Dock Hollingsworth, a McAfee assistant dean and professor who will serve as the center's director, it is needed in Baptist life and other congregationally oriented denominational traditions. The center — and other seminary-based schools like it — can help create a support structure for new ministers and their churches in navigating the sometimes-tough transition from divinity school to local-church ministry.

"Among the things we have documented as difficult parts of that transition are moving from an academic world of just solitary pursuit to working in community," he said. "Part of that is inspiring and motivating other people to do your work, but part of it is being judged — in many ways for the first time — on relational and emotional giftedness, which is not a part of the academic pursuit."

"Part of it is the transition around pastoral identity — what it means to move from being somebody whose primary identity is a graduate student with a backpack to somebody who is now seen as the 'holy person' in a community."

(*Robert Marus, ABPnews.com*)

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