

Alma Hunt, longtime Baptist missions advocate, dead at 98

ROANOKE, Va. (ABP) -- Alma Hunt, one of Baptists' best-known missions advocates, died June 14 in a Roanoke, Va., hospital. She was 98.

The Virginia native gained national recognition in 1948 when she became executive director of the Birmingham, Ala.-based Woman's Missionary Union, an auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention. She led WMU until her retirement in 1974. But Hunt's influence remained profound over the next 34 years as a volunteer worker with the Baptist World Alliance, the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign (now International) Mission Board, Global Women and numerous Virginia Baptist organizations.

"[Alma Hunt] heralded the cause of missions straight from her heart," said John Upton, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia. "She has been a bold and influential leader not only for women, but also for all Baptists around the world."

Born in Roanoke in 1909, Hunt grew up at First Baptist Church there and was baptized at 10. She left briefly to earn a degree at Longwood College in Farmville, Va., but returned to teach in Roanoke's public schools. In 1943, she became dean of women at William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., a post she held for four years before being elected WMU executive director.

During her tenure, WMU's membership grew to an all-time high of 1.5 million and its publishing arm expanded. Hunt led the organization to help form the Baptist World Alliance's women's division and the North American Baptist Women's Union, which she also served as president from 1964-67. She was vice president of the BWA from 1970-75.

After retiring in 1974, she joined the staff of the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va., as an unpaid volunteer, traveling to 45 countries as a consultant for women's mission work. She maintained a rigorous stateside schedule speaking and writing on behalf of missions. In 1998, Virginia Baptists' 106-year-old state missions offering was named for her. (*Robert Dilday, ABPNews.com*)

Baptists to have place to worship, baptize near Jordanian site

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Baptist visitors to Jordan will soon have a place to worship near the historic spot traditionally viewed as the site of Jesus' baptism.

King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein of Jordan has conveyed a plot of land to the Baptist World Alliance for a Baptism Center to be constructed on the bank of the River Jordan, alongside many other church buildings being built in the area. The Baptism Site Commission, an independent board of trustees appointed by the king, will own and manage the center, expected to be completed and opened next spring.

BWA president David Coffey and King Abdullah II first discussed a possible center for Baptists in September, but reached an agreement during Coffey's visit to the site May 26. As part of the agreement, an inscription will be placed at the center's entrance: "The Commission of the Site of the Baptism of Jesus Christ welcomes here in particular foreign visiting pilgrims from the member churches of the Baptist World Alliance." Baptist pilgrims to the site will be able to worship and be baptized at the center. (*Vicki Brown, ABPNews.com*)

SBC officials reject idea of sex-offender database

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- Citing Baptists' "belief in the autonomy of each local church," a Southern Baptist Convention official announced May 10 that the denomination's Executive Committee would not support the creation of a database of sexual offenders in SBC churches. The committee recommended that SBC churches instead use the Department of Justice's national sex-offender database, calling it the best resource for protecting congregations against employing known abusers.

"Southern Baptists believe that the local church in New Testament times was autonomous, and thus our local churches are autonomous," Executive Committee President Morris Chapman said in

Greg Warner, Executive Editor
greg@abpnews.com
800.340.6626



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Worth Repeating

"I know I haven't lost anything that feels important because I have a big family."

-- Lois Russell, 83, as she watched flood water surround her house near Gulfport, Ill. (*Time*)

"The best price on a gallon is the gallon not used."

-- Patarick Donahoe, Deputy Postmaster General, explaining why the U.S. Postal Service is packing mail more tightly into trucks to save fuel. (*Time*)

his address to messengers at the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis.

The move came in response to a motion, passed nearly unanimously by messengers to last year's SBC meeting, asking officials to study the database idea. However, in its report to messengers, the Executive Committee noted, "it would be impossible to assure that all convicted sexual predators who ever had a connection with a Baptist church would be discoverable for inclusion on such a list." The report also stated that a Baptist-only database would likely omit sexual offenders coming to SBC churches from other denominations.

But one Baptist child-abuse activist said that was a strange rationale. Dee Ann Miller, an Iowa mental-health and former Southern Baptist missionary, said, "I'm sure people in every state could argue the same, yet names of convicted offenders are readily available to the public. ... That's like saying: 'Don't arrest any murderers because you might miss some!'" (*Drew Nichter, ABPNews.com*)

SBC business items include bids to re-join BWA, oust churches

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention will consider rejoining the Baptist World Alliance, removing churches that hire women pastors and restricting agency heads from serving as SBC president.

Messengers presented those and 20 other motions during the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis June 10-11. Other motions referred to the Executive Committee included proposals to:

- Set new eligibility requirements for service on SBC committees, commissions and boards. Nominees would be required to "give evidence of having received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior," hold membership in a church that supports the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget, be in good standing with a local church, abstain from using alcoholic beverages and recreational drugs, and "support all the principles" in the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message doctrinal statement.

- Change SBC election procedures so that, if no candidate receives a majority vote on the first ballot, the two candidates with the most votes would face each other in a second round.

- Study how to improve cooperation with other denominations and "work with all men of goodwill to improve society and the establishment of righteousness rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his word." (*Marv Knox, ABPNews.com*)

SBC resolution could shrink church membership rolls further

INDIANAPOLIS (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention, struggling with a membership decline nationwide, passed a resolution June 11 that could significantly shrink church membership rolls even further. Messengers to the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis also turned back efforts to encourage Christians to remove their children from public schools and asked Congress to defund Planned Parenthood.

A resolution calling on churches to "lovingly correct wayward members" was toughened even more with two amendments that encourage tighter definitions of a "member." The resolution, which reflects the growing influencing of Calvinism in the SBC, comes on the heels of denominational statistics that showed the 16 million-member convention shrinking. Membership fell in 2007 for the second time in a decade and baptisms in SBC churches dropped for the seventh time in eight years – down 5.5 percent in 2007.

(*ABPNews.com*)

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OPINION

The moral influence of a market economy

(ABP) -- I was at the mall the other day, walking by a brand new car that was being displayed just off the food court. It had all the marks of a new car, including one of those information sheets in the window telling about its gas mileage and average annual fuel costs. It promised 15 whole miles per gallon in the city, and 23 on the highway.

But what I was most struck by was that it calculated average annual fuel costs with gas priced at \$2.80 a gallon. Was it so recently that gas actually cost \$2.80 a gallon?

For those who wondered just what it would take for Americans to change their conspicuous consumption of gasoline, the news is in -- \$4 per gallon demands a lifestyle transformation for all but the richest Americans.

News stories abound with the details: More and more people are unable to fill their tanks when they go to the gas station. Trying to scrape by until the next paycheck, many are running out of gas. The poorest are spending as much as 15 percent of their take-home pay on gasoline and are facing choices of gas vs. meat and gas vs. health care.

What are we to make of all this? What does this mean for stewardship and the life of the church?

One disappointing lesson is that the market often affects behavior a whole lot better than moral suasion. For decades, a number of church leaders and environmental activists have been calling us to a simpler lifestyle. But nothing focuses the mind like paying \$75 to fill up your car.

Churches and families will get those energy audits, build greener buildings, buy more fuel-efficient vehicles, and stay closer to home. People will turn off lights and stop cooling their buildings to the freezing point in the summer.

It would have been nice if a hundred earnest books and a thousand sermons had triggered these behavioral changes. Necessity seems to work better. (*David Gushee, ABPNews.com*)

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