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CLC, others ask high court
to reject assisted suicide

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/15/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has joined other religious bodies, as well as the Clinton administration and the American Medical Association, in calling on the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn lower-court decisions legalizing physician-assisted suicide.

The high court will hear oral arguments Jan. 8 in appeals of rulings which struck down Washington and New York state laws prohibiting doctors from prescribing drugs for patients to use in committing suicide.

In March, the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California overturned the Washington law, saying there is a "constitutionally protected liberty interest in determining the time and manner of one's own death." In April, a three-judge panel of the Second Circuit Court struck down New York's law prohibiting physician assistance in a suicide, ruling there is no difference between the prescribing of drugs for a suicide and the withdrawal of artificial life support. The Second Circuit based its opinion on equal protection rights in the Constitution's 14th Amendment, rejecting the Ninth Circuit's rationale, which found a right to commit suicide in the 14th Amendment's due process clause.

The Christian Life Commission signed onto friend-of-the-court briefs filed in both cases by the United States Catholic Conference.

In Washington v. Glucksberg, the USCC brief argues, the Ninth Circuit's reasoning is misguided because the due process clause "would be emptied of meaning were it read as protecting a right to be deprived of life and liberty."

There "can be no constitutional guarantee to choose to be dead," the USCC brief says. "Indeed life is more fundamental than any other right, for it is the 'right to have rights.'

"The due process clause also guarantees 'liberty.' But choosing to be dead does not enhance one's liberty. Instead it brings all human freedom to an end. It is difficult to see how one can speak coherently of a freedom to give up all one's freedom."

In Vacco v. Quill, the USCC, CLC and others contend assisted suicide is not the same as withdrawing life support because assisted suicide does not result from natural causes and it involves an intention to cause death. It also argues the Second Circuit's opinion actually creates an equal protection problem where none existed. "It is abhorrent to the principle of equal justice under law to withhold from terminally ill patients 'the same protections from suicide the majority enjoys,'" the brief says, quoting from another court decision.

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"The importance of these cases cannot be overemphasized," said Will Dodson, the CLC's legal counsel and director of government relations. "The decisions of the lower courts to somehow find a right to kill yourself and have someone help you do it should be patently offensive to anyone who believes in our constitutional form of government, not to mention the fact that it's clearly wrong according to the standards of God's Word.

"The judges who made these rulings in the lower courts ought to be ashamed, and they ought to be subjects of scrutiny by the American public. Whatever the Supreme Court decides in these cases, their decision will definitely be a landmark decision on the order of Roe v. Wade (the 1973 opinion which legalized abortion). It is no exaggeration to say that these cases will be among the most important decisions in the history of the Supreme Court."

Joining the CLC on the USCC brief were the National Association of Evangelicals, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Evangelical Covenant Church, American Muslim Council, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod-Lutherans for Life and the Catholic conferences of New York, Washington, Oregon, California and Michigan.

The USCC brief in Washington was filed Nov. 8, while its Vacco brief was filed Nov. 12, the deadline for briefs supporting the states cases to uphold their bans of physician-prescribed drugs for patients to use in committing suicide. The Clinton administration and the AMA filed their briefs Nov. 12. The deadline for filing briefs in support of assisted suicide is Dec. 10.

Quoting from the AMA's brief, Nancy Dickey, chair of the organization's board of trustees, said finding a right to physician-assisted suicide "will create profound danger for many ill persons with undiagnosed depression and inadequately treated pain, for whom assisted suicide rather than good palliative care could become the norm. At greatest risk would be those with the least access to palliative care -- the poor, the elderly and members of minority groups."

Others joining briefs in support of the states included the International Anti-euthanasia Task Force, American Geriatrics Society, American Hospital Association, American Nurses Association, National Association of Pro-life Nurses, American Life League, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Health Association, Catholic Medical Association, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, 50 bioethics professors, 20 states and members of the legislatures of New York and Washington. In addition, a brief supportive of the states was filed on behalf of U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah; U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde, R.-Ill.; and House Constitution Subcommittee Chairman Charles Canady, R.-Fla.

The assisted-suicide crusade of Michigan doctor Jack Kevorkian has brought notoriety to the issue in this country. In recent years, Kevorkian has become a household name by promoting the practice while assisting in more than 40 suicides.

Opponents of the practice have pointed to The Netherlands as an example of what may happen when physical-assisted suicide is legalized. According to statistics from 1990, about 50 percent of deaths caused by physicians in that European country are done without the patient's permission.

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SBC seminaries' enrollment
up 6.3 percent in fall '96

By Lee Weeks

Baptist Press
11/15/96

WAKE FOREST. N.C. (BP)--Each of the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries reported increases this fall in student enrollment.

Two seminaries showed significant gains over their fall 1995 figures en route to setting enrollment records, while the four other seminaries experienced growth ranging from 12 to 78 additional students.

Overall, total enrollment at the six seminaries for fall 1996 rose by 6.3 percent. In 1995, 9,177 students were enrolled in seminary courses for academic credit. This fall, 9,755 students are taking courses for academic credit at an SBC seminary.

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Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Kansas City, Mo., and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., have established record highs in student enrollment this fall.

Midwestern reported the largest increase at 32 percent. Southeastern showed a 23 percent increase.

The Kansas City, Mo., seminary reported a student enrollment of 654 students. Their fall 1996 enrollment reflects an increase of 160 students over fall 1995. Midwestern topped its previous high mark of 606 students in 1986.

"These students are a treasure and a trust," said Midwestern President Mark Coppenger. "It's exhilarating and humbling to see whom God's led our way."

Southeastern's fall enrollment of 1,353 students has surpassed the school's previous high mark established in 1982 of 1,282 students. This fall's enrollment marks the third consecutive year the seminary has experienced double-digit percentage growth. In 1995, Southeastern's enrollment increased by 19 percent to 1,098 students. In 1994 student enrollment grew by a 34 percent.

Southeastern's fall enrollment has skyrocketed, since 1992 when Paige Patterson became president of the seminary, increasing by 115 percent.

"I don't know how to account for it in any way other than the smile of God," Patterson said.

Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif., reported the third-highest increase in student enrollment. Its enrollment rose from 1,142 in 1995 to 1,220 in 1996. The seminary's 6.8 percent increase follows an 11.2 percent rise in 1995.

"It is our mission to shape effective Christian leaders for the churches of tomorrow and to be a significant provider of church leadership in the West," said Golden Gate President William Crews. "It is exciting to see the numbers of students from across the globe who come to Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary with great enthusiasm for learning and training to reach the world for Christ."

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, rebounded from a 7 percent drop in 1995 with a 1.6 percent increase in 1996. The seminary's fall enrollment of 3,077 students represents an increase of 51 students over 1995. The seminary experienced a 45 percent increase in the number of new students enrolled in fall 1996 who were not enrolled in fall 1995.

"There is a growing sense of spiritual excitement on campus with our emphasis on spiritual formation, revival and renewal," said Southwestern President Ken Hemphill. "Innovative teaching methods like compressed video, and experiential learning and new offerings like the lay theological education program and the master of divinity in church planting, mean Southwestern is equipped to prepare young men and women with a variety of gifts and calls."

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., with 1,643 students, saw a 1 percent increase over fall 1995. The 22-student increase represents a positive turn following a 13 percent drop a year ago.

"We are pleased to have 1,643 students studying in programs at The Southern Baptists Theological Seminary this fall," said Southern President R. Albert Mohler Jr. "We see this as a critical turning point as Southern Seminary moves into the future. We were extremely pleased with a 20 percent increase in new students and we see that as a very critical sign of future development in our enrollment. Nevertheless, my greatest satisfaction is in the quality and commitment represented by the students sent to us by the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. We should also note that this figure does not represent a final fall enrollment, because the registration process is not yet completed in our extension centers."

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary experienced little noticeable change in their fall enrollment, netting an increase of 12 students over 1995. New Orleans reported an enrollment of 1,808 students for 1996 compared to 1,796 for 1995.

"After going more than a year without a president and graduating one of the largest classes in the history of this school of providence and prayer, we are pleased to have this strong fall enrollment," said Charles S. Kelley Jr., who was inaugurated Oct. 29 as New Orleans' eighth president. "God is up to something in New Orleans, and we are delighted to have these students become a part of it."

The seminaries fall enrollment figures are based on the "non-duplicating headcount" of students enrolled in pre-baccalaureate programs, basic degree programs and classes for academic credit.

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26-year-old gets saved,
now ready to evangelize

By Douglas C. Estes

Baptist Press
11/15/96

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--As he walked down the Binkley Chapel steps after the Tuesday night revival service, Eric Cartrette could not stop thinking about his past.

Like Johnny Hunt, the week's revival preacher, Cartrette spent much of his young life hanging around bars shooting pool. He now attended Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, of which Hunt, now pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., is an alumnus. And Cartrette, like Hunt, sensed God's call to preach.

But it was a striking contrast between the two men that stopped Cartrette in his tracks as he headed for his vehicle to go home.

"When I walked out of Binkley Chapel once the invitation was over, I pulled my wife to the side and I told her ... 'I can't take a chance of getting in that car and going down the road and hitting something and dying and (going) to hell. I do not feel like I am saved. I do not think that I have accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and I feel like that's what the Lord is telling me (to do) tonight.'"

Before getting in his vehicle that Oct. 22, Cartrette turned around and began running back to the chapel to seek counsel from Hunt.

"He (Hunt) kneeled down with me right there in the parking lot of Mackie Hall, and he led me in a prayer, and I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior at that point. And, praise God, I'm saved and ... I'll be baptized at Beulah Christian Baptist Church," Cartrette said.

Cartrette, 26, of Zebulon, N.C., said he made a public profession of faith in 1988 at Union Chapel Baptist Church in Zebulon. But the experience, he said, was not a true conversion.

Cartrette said he thought he was saved until the Lord started convicting his heart that he was lost shortly after he began attending classes this fall at Southeastern.

"Every time an evangelistic service was preached, I would just get the feeling that I had never accepted Jesus and that I needed to ... that I needed to accept him into my heart as Lord and Savior," said Cartrette.

Cartrette, an Army veteran of the Gulf War, said he preached several times over the last three-and-a-half years without having a burden for the lost.

"Before I was saved ... I did not have a hunger to see lost people saved," Cartrette recounted. "I didn't have that desire as a minister should have. But since Tuesday night, ... I'm ready to go out to witness to people and see people come to the Lord."

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Lawsuit challenges military
on directives to chaplains

By Darrell Turner

Baptist Press
11/15/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--A policy barring military chaplains from encouraging their constituents to lobby Congress on legislation is being challenged in a lawsuit before a federal judge.

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The lawsuit was brought by the Becket Fund, a nondenominational public interest law firm in Washington. It says directives issued by the chiefs of chaplains of all three armed services "directly interfere with every chaplain's ability to counsel and preach what his or her conscience dictates on any number of moral issues, particularly with respect to their congregants' moral duty to act."

The controversy arose in May, when Roman Catholic officials urged Catholic chaplains to speak out against partial-birth abortions and urge their constituents to write to President Clinton and members of Congress protesting Clinton's veto of a bill that banned the late-term pregnancy procedure except when the life of the mother was at stake. The presidential veto was denounced by SBC President Jim Henry and 10 of his predecessors and by a resolution adopted at the SBC's annual meeting in New Orleans in June.

The chief of chaplains for the Air Force advised chaplains of that branch in a memo in June that "the applicable directives prohibit you from participating in this campaign or encouraging other Air Force chaplains or members to participate in it."

Similar memos were sent to Navy and Army chaplains by their chiefs.

The lawsuit challenging the policy was filed Sept. 10 on behalf of a priest, a rabbi and the Muslim Military Association. U.S. District Judge Charles R. Richey received initial presentations from both sides Nov. 8 and will be considering responses to the initial arguments throughout the month.

Bob Vickers, director of military chaplaincy of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said, "It is important that we separate our beliefs about the partial-birth abortion issue from this lawsuit. The sanctity of life must always be upheld. On the other issue, the lawsuit brought by the Becket Fund charges that chaplains are being told they cannot preach their consciences and moral imperatives from the pulpit. Department of Defense Directive 1344.10, 'Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces,' prohibits members on active duty from using their official position to solicit votes or expend government funds or resources to directly or indirectly influence congressional action. While we support the right of the plaintiff to challenge the directive, it appears that the guidelines as to what chaplains in the three services can do in their official capacities is not restrictive as the lawsuit may imply."

An article in the September newsletter of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces said the policy "does not place any restriction on the ability of chaplains to discuss the morality of current issues in their sermons or religious teachings pursuant to their religion," nor does it restrict the right of chaplains "in their personal or private capacities from communicating with members of Congress on any issue." It cautioned, however, that chaplains must take care "not to violate the anti-lobbying laws imposed on all military members."

Vickers said he agreed with the interpretation of the directives expressed in the newsletter.

Kevin J. Hasson, president and general counsel of the Becket Fund, told Baptist Press, "The question is, can a chaplain get up in his pulpit and say to his congregation, 'Partial-birth abortion is an outrage. You must ask Congress to override this veto'? The military says no. We say yes."

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N.C. conservative re-elected;
exec Roy Smith sets retirement

By Victor Lee

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GREENSBORO, N.C. (BP)--Conservative pastor Greg Mathis was re-elected president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, turning back a challenge from moderates. But the convention's executive director, Roy Smith, created more news at the Nov. 11-13 annual meeting with a condemnation of the politicizing of the state convention by conservatives and moderates and a surprise announcement he will retire at the end of 1997.

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Mathis, of Mud Creek Baptist Church, Hendersonville, won 60 percent of the vote -- 3,209-2,078 -- against challenger Ray Howell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lexington. Mathis won by only 96 votes last year and was eligible for a second term in a state where the incumbent traditionally has been re-elected.

"I'm very overwhelmed the messengers chose me for another year," Mathis said. "I will follow the same plan as last year. I'm not going to exclude anyone. I will reach out to anyone who will reach back -- and even if they don't, I'll be kind."

The convention also elected conservatives as first and second vice presidents.

The new first vice president, Phillip Davis -- the convention's first African American to hold office -- unseated moderate incumbent Ann Smith, a Greensboro layperson and a former president of North Carolina Woman's Missionary Union.

Conservative pastor Kenneth Ridings, of Grassy Branch Baptist Church in Asheville, was re-elected second vice president.

Of African American inclusion in state offices, Davis said, "I think it bodes well for us as a convention. I think it's a recognition that this is not simply a white denomination. It can't help but help."

Mathis, Howell and Smith each spoke of the need for unity in the convention. The conservative-moderate debate dominated questioning of Mathis and Howell in news conferences and impromptu hallway chats with messengers.

Of Mathis' re-election, Smith said in a news conference, "I do not see that Greg Mathis failed to do anything or did anything to unseat him."

In his address to the convention, Smith called the division "lethal" and said, "We are a convention almost equally divided into two distinct groups. There is a 'hold-on-at-any-cost' mentality on the one hand and a 'takeover' mentality on the other hand. The clash of these forces is evident for all to see and I can see no positive fallout from the divisions that afflict us."

Smith said he would like to see the Conservative Carolina Baptists and the Friends of Missions (the moderate group) disband.

Smith stated that the politicizing to the drop in Sunday school enrollment and the failure of missions giving and baptisms to keep pace with inflation and population growth, respectively. "Our intellect, energies, time and resources are being expended on other things," he said.

In announcing his retirement at the end of his address, Smith, 67, said he wanted to retire while he was still healthy. He has served as executive director since 1989. Previously he had been interim director for a year and associate director for six years. He also served as a regional missionary for four years and a pastor for eight years. The convention's general board will appoint a search committee for Smith's successor at its January meeting.

Smith said that as he prepares to leave his feelings are "a mixed bag." The negatives of his tenure included the political polarization of state Baptists, he said, while the positives include partnerships in missions and making it possible for the state Baptist schools to elect more of their own trustees.

Of a successor, Smith said, "I hope they'll find someone who will be committed to seeking reconciliation, a traditional Baptist, one committed to our agencies and missions work."

Among other actions by messengers, a motion was passed calling for the general board to appoint a committee to look into why the circulation of the state newspaper, the Biblical Recorder, is declining. That committee will report at next year's convention.

According to published figures, the journal declined from a circulation of 95,400 in 1986 to 60,000 in 1996.

The 1997 budget represents an increase of only \$150,000 over 1996, one of the smallest budget increases in recent years. The budget calls for 32 percent going to missions, the same as in 1996, under three different tracks.

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Among resolutions passed was one condemning acts of racism, violence and hostility and expressing sympathy to the churches in the state that were destroyed or damaged by racially motivated acts of arson. The resolution also called for churches to promote reconciliation with churches of various ethnic composition. A resolution also was passed that pledged support for those who suffered from damage caused by Hurricane Bertha and commending the many agencies which assisted in relief.

In his presidential address on the first night of the convention, Mathis set the tone of the three-day meeting by addressing "lack of unity" in the state. "How secure are we when our relationships to each other are so fragile? How healthy are our relationships? How dangerous is the division among us? How serious is it tonight? Let me say it plainly, 'It is very serious!'" North Carolina Baptists exist "with fear and suspicion of each other," Mathis said, and the disunity reveals "the work of Satan among us."

Howell, in a news conference, challenged the conservative pastor to "practice what he preached" by enacting a policy that Howell said he would have enacted if elected: one to de-politicize the presidency by giving away its power to nominate people to key committee on committees, which appoints the committee on nominations to make trustee recommendations.

Mathis, in a subsequent news conference, answered that he would consider Howell's plan, but said, "I already have practiced what I preach. I don't have to take a new plan to practice it."

Mathis pointed out in his one-year tenure the five people nominated to join the committee on nominations represent two moderates, two conservatives and a minority. That should alleviate fear he is part of a conservative group desiring to take over the convention, Mathis said.

"I can understand some of the fear and suspicion of 12 months ago, but this past year I have been nothing but fair," he said.

Mathis noted he urged the Conservative Carolina Baptists and the Friends of Missions to disband. "The fact of the matter is that Greg Mathis is his own man under the leadership of Jesus Christ. I don't have a takeover plan, and I won't be a part of it.

"I'm not looking for people I can work against; I'm looking for people I can work with."

Under the convention budget, a "Plan A" option provides for a 68/32 percent division of all undesignated Cooperative Program gifts between the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. Churches may exclude up to three items in the budget and still have their gifts considered Cooperative Program funds. In Plans B and C, 68 percent of funds remains in North Carolina (as in Plan A) with 10 percent of the remaining 32 percent sent to the SBC (Plan B) and 10 percent sent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (Plan C). The plans differ only at this point and both include allocations for special missions and theological education at universities affiliated with the state convention.

The 1997 through 2000 conventions will be held in Winston-Salem, with next year's meeting scheduled for Nov. 10-12.

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Lee is a freelance writer in Wake Forest, N.C.

Kentucky convention votes
reduction in SBC giving By Mark Wingfield & David Winfrey

Baptist Press
11/15/96

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (BP)--The Kentucky Baptist Convention will keep an extra 2 percent of Cooperative Program receipts for in-state use beginning in September 1997.

The recommendation, which originated with a study committee and was approved earlier by the KBC executive board, was approved by messengers to the KBC annual meeting Nov. 12 at First Baptist Church, Bowling Green. After a lengthy period of debate, the measure was adopted by a 57 percent majority on a 664-503 vote.

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In other action, the Kentucky convention elected as president Floyd Price, pastor of Scottsville Baptist Church in Scottsville, Ky.; approved creation of a new entity to own and manage the convention's two campgrounds; rejected a motion to study allowing churches to determine their own percentage split of Cooperative Program gifts between the KBC and Southern Baptist Convention; and heard the first reading of a motion that could amend the convention's definition of qualifications for seating messengers.

The change in Cooperative Program percentages means the KBC will reduce by 2 percent the portion of Cooperative Program receipts it forwards to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international causes. Currently, the SBC gets 37 percent of all gifts to the Kentucky Cooperative Program and the KBC keeps 63 percent. Beginning with the 1997-98 fiscal year, the SBC will get 35 percent and the KBC will retain 65 percent.

The change returns the split between KBC and SBC causes to the level where it was before Southern Baptists adopted goals for Bold Mission Thrust, a plan to share the gospel with every person on earth by the year 2000.

KBC leaders said the change was necessary because churches had not caught the vision of increased giving necessary to fulfill the financial goals of Bold Mission Thrust. In 1981, the KBC had begun moving its percentage split with the SBC from 35 percent toward 40 percent. In subsequent years, however, churches have decreased the percentage of their budgets given to the Cooperative Program rather than increasing percentage giving as anticipated.

Herb Booth, a medical doctor and member of Florence Baptist Church in northern Kentucky, spoke on behalf of the executive board to explain the recommendation. He said the 40 percent goal was an arbitrary number chosen in 1981 "in the light of double-digit inflation" and rapid growth in giving by churches.

However, the dream of continued increases in giving "did not catch fire in the churches, where Cooperative Program giving originates," Booth said.

While giving a greater percentage to the SBC and receiving a smaller percentage from the churches, the KBC has faced its own needs for increases in funding state missions, Booth said. He told messengers adopting the proposed change would "allow for a balance of missions and a balance of our checkbook."

Larry Baker, director of missions for Christian County Baptist Association and a member of Second Baptist Church, Hopkinsville, spoke against the recommendation.

"We sent our missionaries overseas, and now we're getting ready to pull the rug out from under them," said the former missionary to Peru. "Two percent may not sound like a lot, but 2 percent will mean the difference in whether some projects are funded."

Chester Badgett, pastor emeritus of Campbellsville Baptist Church, Campbellsville, and a former trustee chairman of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, also argued against the change.

"Kentucky is far better off as far as the possibility of people knowing Christ than any of our mission fields," he said. "We ought to be ashamed that we would rob 1.7 billion people in order to spend more on ourselves."

Among those speaking in favor of the recommendation was Gene Willett, pastor of Jackson Grove Baptist Church, Bowling Green, who identified himself as the father of a missionary.

Willett said he spoke in favor of the proposal "with a heavy heart." However, he declared that Kentucky Baptists have "a big mission field that's not just foreign missions."

"We have to do what we have to do, even when it hurts," he said.

Adoption of the change does not mean the percentage split between KBC and SBC causes will remain at the new level forever. The recommendation also contained a provision that future decisions about the percentage split will be based on "the percentage of growth or decline in Cooperative Program giving from the churches."

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For the 1997-98 fiscal year, the KBC adopted a Cooperative Program operating budget goal of \$19.22 million, a 2.5 percent increase over the current year's budget goal. If the budget goal is reached, Kentucky ministries will receive \$11.7 million and SBC ministries will receive \$6.9 million, not including special offerings for either state or national causes.

Prior to the vote on amending the Cooperative Program percentages, Don Cole, pastor of Salem Baptist Church near Brandenburg, offered the motion on studying Cooperative Program splits. The motion would have directed the KBC president to appoint a committee to study letting churches set their own percentages for splitting money between KBC and SBC causes. Money from churches that failed to indicate a preference would have been divided according to percentages determined by the KBC, Cole said.

"I'm a firm believer that the local church exists on its own and that the state convention exists to serve the local churches," said Cole, an at-large member of the KBC executive board.

But Earl Bell, a messenger from First Baptist Church, Frankfort, spoke against the motion. "I doubt the pragmatism of it. How could our convention ever develop a budget?"

Messengers defeated the motion, 301-481.

Later, Bob Fox, pastor of West Point Baptist Church, Centertown, offered a first reading for the proposed constitutional change.

If ratified next year, it would alter Article III, Section 2 of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's constitution concerning membership. The change would break the link requiring a church to give to Southern Baptist causes in order to be considered a member of the state convention.

According to the constitution, a church currently is allowed two messengers to the annual meeting for contributing to the state convention's work. A church is allowed an additional messenger for every \$250 contributed to the Cooperative Program. A maximum of 10 messengers are allowed per church.

If changed, all representation at the annual meeting would be based on giving to the "convention's work."

Fox said he proposed the change to address what he called inconsistencies between the two methods of messenger appointments and to break the connection between the state and national convention.

"It is my understanding we are one of the few state conventions that require giving to the Cooperative Program to qualify for messengers to the state convention," he said.

"That creates a connectionism that is traditionally anti-Baptist," he added. "We have our own convention, and gifts to that convention ought to count toward representation in that convention."

The amendment must get support from two-thirds of next year's messengers to be enacted.

Price was elected KBC president in a race with evangelist Don Short of Eddyville. Price received 57 percent of the vote, compared to 43 percent for Short.

Other officers elected include: first vice president, Paul Welch, pastor of Eastwood Baptist Church, Bowling Green; second vice president, Steve Hadden, pastor of Crestwood Baptist Church, Crestwood; and secretary, Wilma Simmons, a layperson from Ekron.

Throughout the convention, messengers paid tribute to Bill Marshall, who will retire in February after 14 years as KBC executive secretary-treasurer.

Messengers also passed four resolutions, including one expressing opposition to partial-birth abortions.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 11-12 at Porter Memorial Baptist Church, Lexington.

**Florida convention cites Bible
as key to 'cooperating' church** **By Barbara Denman**

LAKELAND, Fla. (BP)--Keith Thomas, pastor of the First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Fla., one of the largest churches along Florida's Gold Coast, was elected as president of the Florida Baptist State Convention during its Nov. 11-13 annual meeting at the Lakeland Center.

Thomas, 40, who ran without opposition for the one-year term, represents the third president in as many years from the baby-boom generation.

He will succeed Ted Traylor, pastor of the Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola, who was not eligible for re-election.

In other business, after a spirited 45-minute discussion, messengers approved a lengthy document that defines parameters for churches wanting to affiliate with the state convention.

According to John Sullivan, the convention's executive director-treasurer, the document, which revised the convention's constitutional bylaws, offered theological standards as a "yardstick to measure cooperation."

"We must identify who we are as Baptists. You cannot be a Baptist and believe anything you want to believe," said Sullivan, to resounding shouts of "amen" and applause.

According to Dan Southerland, president of the state board of missions, which presented the revision, the bylaw is needed because there is no definition of a cooperating church or association. As it stands now, a church which donates \$250 to the state's Cooperative Program can have membership in the Florida Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Don Walton, director of missions for the Pasco Baptist Association, opposed the revision, saying the bylaw would erode a historic Baptist principle of freedom. "My point of concern is once we have given the state convention the power to define what is a cooperating church, what is to prevent the state from drawing more lines in the sand and further limit our freedoms?"

The parameters require that churches requesting an "at-large status," without affiliating through a local association, first must agree with a statement of faith consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message. That document states that the Bible is "truth, without any mixture of error."

Messengers voted down an attempt to refer the recommendation back to the state board for further study. The request to refer the matter was offered by Ed Gilman, director of missions for the Suncoast Baptist Association in St. Petersburg, who said referring the document would give it "a broader base of support."

The 1,719 voting messengers authorized Florida Baptists to explore a relationship with churches in Cuba, in cooperation with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the Western Cuba Baptist Convention. The relationship will provide resources of evangelism, church starting and church leadership development, through the use of Florida Baptist Convention staff and volunteers. The Cuban relationship will be similar to the relationship Florida Baptists have with Baptists in Haiti, where Florida churches have started more than 150 new churches in that country.

According to convention officials who have traveled to Cuba, the financial and personnel resources to the Baptist churches there will assist pastors who live near or below poverty level while serving several churches at once. The nation is experiencing a religious revival during these harsh economic times, the Floridians reported. Many Florida Baptist pastors serving in south Florida were trained and educated by the churches and pastors in western Cuba.

In making the recommendation, Southerland, who has sent members of his church to the island nation, noted that Cuba is less than 90 miles in distance from Key West, closer to Florida than Atlanta, Ga.

Southerland said he feared that when he arrived in heaven, "God will say, 'I was at work in Cuba in the 1990s. What did Florida Baptists do about that?'"

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Messengers approved a 1997 budget of \$26,015,892, up from the current budget's \$24,878,698. The budget retains the percentages of 51.75 percent for Florida Baptist ministries; 40 percent for Southern Baptist Convention national and international ministries; 5 percent for church pastoral aid; and 3.25 percent for church annuity programs.

The convention gave unanimous approval to resolutions opposing same-sex marriages, asking church leaders to contact their Florida legislators to support the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act; calling upon the Federal Communications Commission to consider the development of a regulation to prohibit liquor advertising on radio and television; and asking Florida Baptists to pray for President Bill Clinton and other elected national and state leaders.

At the conclusion of the resolutions committee report, prayer was offered in behalf of the president. Later, David Rice of Tampa, chairman of the resolution committee, noted that although President Clinton is a Southern Baptist, he is "not enormously popular with Southern Baptists." But, he added, all Southern Baptist could pledge to pray for his decisions.

Other officers elected to serve with Thomas were Morris Denman, a pastor from Lynn Haven, as vice president; Joe Napier, a businessman from Pensacola, as second vice president; and Ronnie Hobbs, a minister from Jacksonville, as recording secretary.

Thomas, born in Pasadena, Texas, has led the West Palm Beach church to reach its community with a strong commitment to evangelism. The production and disbursement of an evangelistic video tool reached more than 75,000 homes with the gospel message. The church ministers through a crisis pregnancy center, medical help for the poor, food for the homeless and a home for unwed mothers.

Under his ministry, First Baptist's morning and evening worship services reach more than 2,000 in attendance, with 2,200 in weekly Bible study. Thursday's "Power Lunch" reaches an average of 300-area employees from a variety of businesses.

Prior to coming to West Palm Beach in 1990, Thomas had served as pastor of several Texas churches. He is a graduate of Howard Payne University and holds the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

The Florida Baptist State Convention will next meet Nov. 10-12, 1997 in Jacksonville.

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Stella Anderson contributed to this story.

Don't forget need for, joy of
salvation, Yarbrough implores

By Don Hinkle

Baptist Press
11/15/96

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--For the most part, history only records the accomplishments of statesmen and rich people. Rarely does it herald the actions of men like the blind beggar Bartimaeus.

John Yarbrough, pastor of First Baptist Church, Perry, Ga., implored a chapel audience at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to examine what happened to Bartimaeus as he sat outside the gate of Jericho with a band of beggars pleading for alms.

When Jesus showed up, things began to change, said Yarbrough, preaching from Mark 10:46-52.

"If you'll notice, Bartimaeus cried out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,' indicating that he knew who Jesus was, that he was of the lineage of David," the Messiah foretold by the prophets.

"Bartimaeus cried out because he realized he had a problem," said Yarbrough, immediate past president of the Georgia Baptist Convention and president of the Louisville, Ky., seminary's national alumni association.

"We must understand that if we are going to see people come to Christ, then they must first understand that they have a need for Christ," Yarbrough said.

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"This 'I'm OK, you're OK' philosophy in our society that says, 'Everybody is good, everybody can do their own thing, there's nothing wrong, that everything is condoned, and nothing is condemned,' won't cut it. I'm not OK and you're not OK. We've got a problem in our lives called sin that we can't cope with, handle or address on our own. And unless the world realizes that it is lost, it will never realize that it is in need of being saved."

People today are living in the valley of the blind, "a valley full of Bartimaeuses," Yarbrough said. "Blindness seems to be the norm, not the exception."

"There are plenty of people in the world who realized last night that they have a problem and called their psychic friend for \$3.50 a minute. Rather than Jesus, they turn to the next pill or the next thrill. Bartimaeus realized that Jesus was not just a good answer to his problem, but that he was the only answer."

When Bartimaeus called to Jesus, many around rebuked him, telling him to be quiet, Yarbrough continued.

"I'm afraid the disciples were among those telling Bartimaeus to be quiet. I guess they were on their way to seminary, or their next conference or seminar, and didn't have time for a blind man."

Yarbrough warned the seminarians about getting too busy to do the business of the church. "I'm so thankful Bartimaeus didn't listen to them and kept on shouting until Jesus called for him to come."

Bartimaeus knew Jesus would give him his sight, Yarbrough said.

"That's why he threw his cloak away when Jesus called for him. It was hindering his effort to reach Jesus. That's why he threw it in the dust. That's what many of us need to do. We need to leave whatever it is that's hindering us in our relationship with Jesus in the dust. We've gotten so used to being saved, we've forgot what's its like to be lost."

Yarbrough emphasized that Bartimaeus didn't return to begging after he received his sight, but followed Jesus instead. He said Bartimaeus was so excited that he likely was among those with Jesus when he traveled on to Bethany and raised Lazarus from the dead -- and among those in the crowd shouting "Hosanna!" as Jesus rode into Jerusalem and, perhaps, among those weeping in the crowd as he watched the man, who had given him his sight, die on a cross for his sins.

"Bartimaeus never got over Jesus. We in the church had better start realizing, proclaiming and celebrating the healed man's cheer. We should never get over our salvation. We should be shouting that we were doomed, but now we're saved and we're never going to get over it."

"May God forgive us and convict us if we ever get too sophisticated, sanctified and sanctimonious to pay attention to the Bartimaeuses along the way."

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EDITORS' NOTE: In (BP) story titled "Virginia Baptists retain more money inside state," dated 11/14/96, please add the following paragraph to the end of the story.

Virginia Baptists will hold their 1997 meeting Nov. 11-12 at the Roanoke Civic Center.

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