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SBC Inter-Agency Council names
racial reconciliation task force By Bill Merrell

Baptist Press
2/19/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Voicing "agreement in spirit and in substance" with the resolution on racial reconciliation approved at the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, the SBC Inter-Agency Council has named a task force "charged to work toward strategy and implementation of full racial and ethnic reconciliation" in keeping with the resolution.

The SBC resolution from the Atlanta SBC sesquicentennial called for Southern Baptists to "commit ourselves to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry."

The IAC, composed of chief executive officers of all SBC entities, unanimously approved a resolution during its Feb. 18 meeting in Nashville, Tenn., to commit the IAC "to work as an agent for racial reconciliation in the Southern Baptist Convention, and in our agencies and institutions."

The IAC resolution calls racial reconciliation a "priority issue for our own study and strategic planning." The task force is to consist of one representative from each agency who will serve from 1996-2001. Richard D. Land, president of the Christian Life Commission, was named its chairman. Land will release the names of task force representatives as soon as the appointments are made by respective agency heads.

The task force is required to report to each of the IAC meetings. R. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and vice chairman of the IAC, noted, "The reporting requirement clearly indicates the high profile and priority the IAC gives to the racial reconciliation task force."

Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and newly elected IAC chairman, explained the background of the decision to name the task force, saying, "As the IAC reflected on the resolution made last year on racial reconciliation and as we listened to the thoughts and the counsel of a number of our fellow Southern Baptists of African American ethnic background, we decided that it was essential that we take a direct leadership role in putting actual feet to the resolution. We felt the way in which we could most profoundly influence the implementation of racial reconciliation in our convention was the naming a task force with Dr. Land to head it and with regular reports to be made to us."

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The resolution commits IAC members "to strive for representation on our boards of trustees, our staff and faculties, and all other bodies, based on biblical qualifications and embracing the ethnic diversity of the Southern Baptist Convention and its churches."

It also called on the SBC Committee on Nominations to "set a priority to nominate persons representative of all ethnic groups to our boards of trustees." The resolution places this priority within the larger context of nominating "persons who will be careful stewards and trustees of our institutions, and who will stand with Southern Baptists in Great Commission commitment, theological integrity, institutional accountability, and Cooperative Program support."

Direct IAC involvement in this matter is somewhat unusual. Mohler stated the "IAC assumed direct responsibility for this matter (and did not refer it elsewhere). In so doing, the Inter-Agency Council spoke clearly its own commitment to take action and accept responsibility. This action is historic and substantial and will involve our agencies individually and in concert."

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Land says U.S. policy needs
change on suffering Christians

By Tom Strobe

Baptist Press
2/19/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. government "has been woefully negligent in dealing with" the global persecution of Christians and should take firm action to remedy this shortcoming, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention's religious liberty agency told a congressional panel.

"This issue has not occupied a significant place in American foreign policy. It has often not even been on the State Department's radar screen, and that must change," Christian Life Commission President Richard Land said Feb. 15.

Land's testimony was part of a hearing on the persecution of Christians before the International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee of the House of Representatives International Relations Committee. It was the subcommittee's first time to hold a hearing specifically on the persecution of Christians, subcommittee chairman Christopher Smith, R.-N.J., said.

Most of the 12 witnesses cited widespread persecution of Christians, especially under communist and Islamic regimes. Some also testified to the U.S. government's failure to assist believers in escaping such suffering.

President Bill Clinton should take the following steps, Land said, to reverse the United States' indifference toward persecution of Christians:

-- Deliver a "hard-hitting, major policy address, making it clear that governments seeking to be on favorable and friendly terms with the United States must not persecute Christian minorities."

-- Appoint a special adviser on religious liberty "who would have broad-based authority" to investigate and monitor accounts of persecution and report them, as well as the response of U.S. government agencies, to the president.

Land also made recommendations to remedy failures by the U.S. State Department:

-- Jim Sasser, U.S. ambassador to China, should be recalled and fully briefed on the extent of the persecution of Christians in that country. In January, Sasser said at a meeting of non-governmental organizations he was unaware of the house-church movement in China and of the persecution of its members, Land said. It is reprehensible "that in the many months of briefings given him by the State Department that they did not brief him on the persecutions of a movement that may number 80 million people in China," Land said.

-- An investigation should be initiated as to why the State Department did not make the ending of religious persecution a prerequisite for diplomatic recognition of Vietnam.

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-- Attorney General Janet Reno should dispatch a bulletin to Immigration and Naturalization Service hearing officers ordering them to process diligently claims of refugees from anti-Christian persecution. There is an "anti-Christian bias in U.S. government circles" which prevents believers from escaping suffering and fleeing to this country, Land said.

-- The head of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Commission should speak on persecution of Christians and other religious adherents at the commission's meeting in March.

-- An investigation should be launched to determine what State Department official was responsible "for advising participants not to carry Bibles or religious literature with them" to the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in September.

-- A full investigation and report should be forthcoming into reports the U.S. consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, relented to the Saudi government's demands for the cessation of Christian worship by U.S. personnel on consulate grounds.

The United States should take a "hard look" at its policy with regard to Vietnam and China, Land said. Vietnam probably will be considered for most favored nation trade status this year for the first time, and China's MFN status will be up for renewal in May.

"It seems that at least in regard to persecution of Christians, often the State Department has been in the posture of abject surrender to the most repressive of regimes which have denied fundamental American values of freedom from religious persecution," Land said.

"A focused campaign against these persecutions supported by a committed domestic constituency, such as sensitized and informed American Christians, can, and we believe will, have tremendous and far-reaching results."

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Marathon offers 26.2 miles
of ministry opportunities

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
2/19/96

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--Call it a practice run for the Olympics. Southern Baptists had a literal marathon of ministry opportunities in Columbia, S.C., during the U.S. Olympic Trials Women's Marathon, Feb. 10.

South Carolina Baptist Convention leaders were given responsibility for organizing activities along the race course for the Olympic Trials and, later that morning, the Columbia Marathon. The committee organized nearly 80 groups that lined the route with cheers for racers and entertainment for fans.

Among those groups were 20 Southern Baptist churches, half of which will work in Atlanta this summer with Atlanta International Ministries '96, the Southern Baptist ministry to the Olympic games.

The event provided numerous witnessing and ministry opportunities for churches and South Carolina Baptist Convention staff, said home missionary Bo Simms.

"We said to the community that Christians can be involved in events like this and provide the opportunity for family centered entertainment," said Simms, who serves as state director for missions ministries. "And in the midst of that, we earn the opportunity to tell them about Christ and the difference that he makes in our lives."

Rick Noble, vice president of the Columbia Marathon Association, said Baptists were invited to work because planners wanted an organization that could pull the community together. "I have been most impressed with the quiet assertiveness that they've used."

Baptists used the opportunity to introduce themselves to the community, he added. "It is evangelism that is appropriate to the circumstance."

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Kilbourne Park Baptist Church was on the 26.2-mile course. Members mingled with neighbors and handed out Olympic ministry materials. Among them was a pocket guide to the Olympics that lists the events, world records and a four-page explanation of the gospel.

"Mainly we just hope to make an impact for Christ on those who come," said pastor Bob Cline. The race offered members a chance to meet residents, he said, "and use the interactive guide as a way to open doors to talk about the Lord."

North Trenholm Baptist Church members rolled out their marionette wagon, complete with a two-person horse suit and host "Ricky the Ringmaster." The team, which will be in Atlanta this summer, produces secular and Christian marionette plays for children, said Roger Orman, associate pastor, who plays Ricky.

"We have bookings all the way through '98," Orman said. "Our goal is to help new work sites and mission churches."

Meetings for the "course environment committee" were held at the state convention building and started with prayer, Simms said. Committee members from the community were impressed that Baptists prayed for a successful race, fans and organizers as well as for ministry opportunities, he said.

Organizers even joked Baptists were in charge of the weather for the event, prompting Simms to remind them, "We're in sales, not management."

Dependability and availability helped Baptists gain ministry opportunities, he said. Simms said volunteers learned the importance of flexibility to make the most of opportunities that arise.

"You prepare well, but you also take advantage of the immediate opportunity. What are the needs here and how do we respond to them? What that says to the people in the secular community is that we're willing to go the extra mile to meet their needs," he said. "It's one thing to stand on our soapbox. It's another for us to really be out there showing them that we really do care."

Debbie McDowell, director of partnerships and volunteerism for South Carolina Baptists, said the race gave many residents a new impression of Baptists and gave Baptists a new impression of ministry.

"It was the first time many of them have been outside the church walls and it's been a positive experience," she said. "I hope most people will realize missions is fun."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Color slides are also available by calling (770) 410-6535.

Haddon Robinson says TV
is recasting pulpit message

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
2/19/96

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Churchgoers may not be carrying their TV remotes in their hands every Sunday morning, but Haddon Robinson said if a preacher doesn't "hook them" in the first minute of his sermon, many in the pew are tuning out.

"When people come to hear you preach, they come with clickers in their heads. They make up their mind if this (sermon) has anything to do with them or not," said Robinson, Harold J. Ockenga distinguished professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. "If you don't tell them in the first minute that this is going to be important to them, they're gone."

"Television has put a tremendous emphasis on the introduction," Robinson said Feb. 15 in remarks at the second annual Preaching as Exposition conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. "You can't take time to get under way."

Noting older movies open with scenes dedicated only to the credits and title before getting to the story, Robinson said, "Movies now start with the action. They flash the title over the action. They have to hook you."

Opening a sermon by telling the congregation to open their Bibles to the third chapter of Galatians because you plan to talk about legalism in Galatia will prompt many listeners to immediately tune out, Robinson said.

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"Those folks sit there and, to them, Galatia sounds like a dessert. The truth is they don't care about legalism in Galatia. They don't care about David; they don't care that Abraham went down into Egypt," Robinson continued, adding, "Probably not a person in your congregation is tempted to go to Egypt."

Introductions have taken on a new importance, he said. "Good preachers know they have to go for the jugular fast." He said good preaching moves to where people are: "Communicators have to put what they are saying into narrative form. I'm not speaking about preaching skyscraper sermons -- one story after another with very little in between. It is imperative that we take the truth of God and move it toward experience and life in our preaching."

Many Americans are more comfortable with the frantic pace of a music video on MTV than a traditional sustained argument for the gospel presented from a church pulpit, Robinson said during the conference's closing session on Southeastern's Wake Forest, N.C., campus.

Attribute it to television, Robinson reiterated, saying, "TV has made it more difficult for young people to follow a defined, precise argument."

Preaching then by necessity has moved toward conversation and away from its foundation in Greco-Roman rhetoric, no longer deductive but inductive in nature, Robinson explained. It is a matter of what is said as well as it is said that is changing, he said. The shift in communication style, Robinson said, is no more clearly evidenced in the way sportscasters handle a matchup between two last-place teams on a Monday Night Football broadcast.

"They know unless they put the game into a story form, they may well lose the power of the game. Within the first three minutes, they'll find something to put drama into the game," Robinson said, adding, no matter if it's real or imagined, they know they have to create an interest to hold the audience.

"We are in a story culture," he said. "We are back to an oral culture -- the way values are communicated and the way ideas are transmitted."

There is a fine balance to be struck, Robinson said, warning communicators should not become so consumed by the audience that the message is sacrificed or so interested in the message that the audience is ignored.

"Television has done as much to change us -- the way we comprehend the world and the way we communicate -- as the printing press did in the 16th century," Robinson said, noting the average person watches nearly 26 hours of television a week.

"I don't like the world this way," Robinson admitted, "but I have to communicate to the world I've been given."

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**Robinson lists qualities
vital for today's preachers**

By Lee Weeks

**Baptist Press
2/19/96**

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Describing the Sunday preaching hour as an oasis in the midst of a world perishing in sin and corruption, Haddon Robinson said ministers are derelict in duty when they deliver boring sermons that fail to address their congregations' spiritual needs.

Robinson, professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Mass., lectured Feb. 13-15 at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on the theme "Preaching and the Pastoral Ministry."

Robinson said notions adopted by many careless preachers that God can speak through any sermon no matter how little preparation has been made is comparable to the attitude of the New Testament church in Corinth who said, "Let us sin that grace may abound."

"The more boring and ill-conceived our sermons, the better it is for God to work, and if he can work through this, that shows his power," Robinson mused.

"Our working and God's working are not two separate things," he noted. "They're two parts of the same thing."

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Robinson said the church's godly impact on its community is influenced in large part by the direction from the pulpit.

"The preaching of God's Word is crucial to the life of the church," Robinson said.

Citing the apostle Paul's admonitions to his protege, Timothy, Robinson said a preacher must first give attention to himself.

A preacher, Robinson said, should not gauge his walk with God by the attendance and offering statistics of the church he leads.

"We often get so caught up in the life of the church that the life of the church, we feel, is our life," he said. "Sometimes preachers can be robots wired for sound. You begin to believe that because the church is growing, you are growing -- not true."

Gone are the days when preachers were respected by virtue of their position, Robinson said. Today, preachers are only as effective as their witness is outside the pulpit, he said.

God is more concerned with character before ministry, Robinson said. "God always puts 'to be' ahead of 'to do,'" he said.

"You're not going to get the respect you deserve, you're only going to get the respect that you can win for the office," he said.

Like Paul's instructions to Timothy, love, faith and purity in word and deed are essential in shepherding God's flock, Robinson said.

"They need to know that you care for them and that you care about them," he said. "For a God who couldn't care more cannot be represented by a person who couldn't care less."

Robinson said preachers of the 21st century must preach the universal and timeless truths of God's unwarranted grace and the lordship of Christ to a generation of people who think they deserve the best.

"What they don't understand is that God does not owe us," he said. "God owns us. How do you preach grace in a culture where everything from hamburgers to new cars you deserve? And if everything in life you deserve, how do you preach grace that you don't deserve?"

The pulpit, however, should never be the preacher's whipping board, Robinson said.

"The task of the pastor is to catch people doing something right and tell them rather than to catch them doing something wrong and scold them," he said. "God grows roses out of manure piles. When you go into the ministry, your task is to find the roses and if you can't stomach the smell of manure, you better leave. A lot of it is out there."

The key, Robinson said, to applying God's revealed moral will to people in the modern world is first understanding the Scripture in the context of the day and culture it was written.

"To be a preacher of the Scriptures, you have to be familiar with a number of different worlds," he said. "If I expect to know this Word of God, I have to know it in the context in which it came, before I can apply it in the context in which I live."

Robinson said that while preaching is a spiritual gift, it originates as a tiny seed and not a giant oak.

"If there's not practice, there will not be the performance," he said. "If there's not the thought, there will not be the ministry. You will only think biblically as you study biblically."

"The God who called you will enable you; you can bet your ministry on that."

Robinson's lectures were featured as part of the seminary's annual Theodore F. Adams Lectureship. Adams served as visiting professor of preaching and director of Southeastern's counseling center from 1968-78. The seminary's largest classroom building also is named in his honor.

Home missionary's snowboards
undergird drug rehab ministry By David Winfrey

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--It's not exactly snowboarding for Jesus, but a Southern Baptist home missionary has linked his ministry with winter's hottest sport.

Troy Smith started a snowboard manufacturing company 18 months ago so his drug rehabilitation clients could gain marketable skills before re-entering society.

Since then, he says, TSS Manufacturing has become a popular snowboard subcontractor, making boards for several industry leaders. The demand helped Smith's drug rehabilitation program reach a new level of financial stability.

"Our boards are just really special," he says. "It's a very durable board. It's very alive. It carves well."

The company employs 12 clients of SAFE, an acronym for Setting Addicts Free Eternally. While most enter the program because of a chemical dependency, Smith contends that is only a symptom, not the real problem.

SAFE focuses on factors Smith says lead to drug and alcohol addiction. It also encourages clients to develop a Christian foundation for their lives. "We work a lot in our program, teaching them relationship skills and problem-solving skills."

The program has been in existence six years, now serving more than 55 clients.

Two years ago, however, SAFE Ministries couldn't afford to buy the building it occupied and had to move from downtown to a suburb of Portland. Smith mortgaged his house to begin TSS, and a group of friends invested in the company.

The Mississippi native admits he never rode a snowboard before making one. The company, however, is ideally located in Portland. Nearby, Mt. Hood is continental America's only year-round ski area.

"I've always been sort of an inventor When I first started looking at snowboards to make them, I saw a design defect in just about every board I picked up," he says. "I didn't tell anybody about it, but when I built our presses I took a totally different route than most companies."

One difference is Smith presses his boards upside down, which he says keeps the edges from becoming unglued. "We've never had one of our boards returned because it was broken," he says. "I knew the concept of what I was trying to do. We press the shape into the board that will give, I'm convinced, the very best ride."

The design is a secret Smith is determined to keep. "I know why it does that, but I didn't even tell my vice president."

One competitor admitted to dissecting TSS boards, hoping to improve its boards, Smith says. "We were flattered," he said. "But they still make one of the sorriest boards on the market."

Smith says TSS Manufacturing's clients are among the industry's leaders, but confidentiality contracts forbid him from saying whose boards he makes. His line of boards are sold in America and in Japan. "I'd be happy to say that ours is just one of the best on the market, and I know it is. There may be a better one out there, but I don't know which one."

In the shop, SAFE clients see the drug rehabilitation lessons at work, Smith says. "We just applied all the principles that we use in the program when we were setting up this business." Workers research each problem or obstacle, focus on the solution and implement the best answer.

Smith believes in promoting a positive work environment, with no profanity or negative talk. That and the shop's success go hand in hand, he contends. "The attitude of your workers has as much to do with whether you get a good board as anything else," he says. "You can put the best materials in, but if you have a bad attitude among your workers, what you get out is a piece of junk."

The company is also under contract to a Japanese company to develop "ski-boards" -- a shorter version of skis, designed for trick riding and marketed toward in-line skaters.

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Financially, TSS Manufacturing supports SAFE ministries and clients' expenses. The company makes about 200 boards a week, trying to keep up with demand from buyers. "A Japanese buyer has already ordered 2,000 boards. If we had the capacity, he'd buy 10,000," Smith says.

Still, Smith has no plans to expand any larger than the SAFE program needs. "I refuse to grow any faster. I started this snowboard shop to help these guys in the program and I'd rather stay small and be able to control the work environment," he says. "SAFE is my business, and God's really blessing it. I enjoy dabbling with the snowboard stuff, but that's not what I want to give my life to."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Church's baptisms surpass
its Sunday school enrollment

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
2/19/96

ELECTRA, Texas (BP)--When retired U.S. Air Force Sergeant Bob Webb was asked to become pastor of Hillside Baptist Church in 1993, it was averaging 10 in Sunday school and had baptized about a dozen people in five years.

During the 1994-95 church year, the Electra, Texas, congregation baptized 44 persons -- 117 percent of its average Sunday school attendance of 37.5.

Thus, Webb and his wife, Arlene, received Texas Baptists' top "Pacesetters" award at this year's Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference, given for churches baptizing 20 percent or more of their average Sunday school attendance.

The previous year, Hillside ranked second among pacesetters, baptizing 42 new converts -- 135 percent of its average Sunday school attendance.

"It's the work of the church, the Lord working through his body," Webb said. "I just praise the Lord that we're able to be associated with it."

"The bottom line is that we pray a lot," he added. "We spend the biggest part of our time on Wednesday evenings in prayer."

Some of the members asked Webb about praying in homes in addition to the regular Wednesday evening services. Now they pray in someone's home every Friday night. People from other denominations also participate.

"We're known as the church that prays a lot," said Webb.

Hillside Baptists also share their faith by knocking on doors.

"Our members have brought a lot of souls into the church," Webb said. "We're reaching down and outers, alcoholics and drug addicts. When they get saved, they bring their family and friends and fellow alcoholics."

One of the problems is that with so many new Christians, the church doesn't have enough trained teachers. Members have just completed the "Experiencing God" discipleship course and are really on fire, Webb noted.

During the "Experiencing God" course, a man who was illiterate stood and recited a memory verse, explaining, "God told me he wanted me to read." Learning to read, he has become an active leader and drives the church van.

In January, he was among eight members of the church attending the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in Fort Worth for the first time.

Another member said Experiencing God had changed his life, and he was going to be doing prison ministry at a new prison near Electra.

"Our people don't have much money, but they give freely of their time," Webb said. One woman decided because of her age she should quit teaching Sunday school class, but she asked Webb about teaching elderly persons in their homes. So, the church is beginning a homebound Sunday school ministry.

Another of the church's special ministries is a coat exchange in which the church asked people to contribute coats and in November invited needy persons to get a coat. They distributed 150 coats and made contacts with many new prospects. "This is the sweetest fellowship and most love-filled church I've ever experienced in my whole life," Webb said. "We want people to get so full of the Holy Spirit that they'll go out and lead somebody to Jesus."

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Southwest Baptist University begins presidential search

BOLIVAR, Mo. (BP)--Trustees of Southwest Baptist University set in motion a presidential search process at their regular meeting Feb. 5-6 on the Bolivar, Mo., campus. Current President Roy Blunt has announced plans to run for U.S. Congress and to leave the university at the end of 1996.

A nationwide search will begin immediately, according to a process adopted unanimously by the board. Blunt, SBU's president since January 1993, had recommended to board members at their October 1995 regular meeting that the board review the university's search process and begin their official search when that review was completed. A five-member trustee committee presented the recommended search process to the board Feb. 6.

An 11-member search committee will be appointed by board chairman Walter Rarrick of Springfield, Mo., prior to a Feb. 26 organizational meeting in Bolivar. The committee will include six trustees, two faculty members and one representative each from students, staff and alumni.

Rarrick announced trustee Graham Williams, a retired state education administrator from Jefferson City, Mo., will serve as search committee chairman. Although the process adopted by trustees provides some framework for the search, the committee will determine final processes for criteria, advertising the position, communication and candidate screening. The full board will make the final selection based on recommendations from the search committee.

In addition to adopting the search process, trustees approved a transition agreement that provides for Blunt's continued relationship with the university should a new president be selected prior to the end of Blunt's current contract on Dec. 31.

Trustees have asked Blunt to continue an association with the university by leaving with the rank of associate professor of history. Rarrick said trustees have indicated interest in having Blunt teach periodic short-term history or political science classes or seminars as his future schedule allows. He has taught history classes at SBU during his tenure as president. Former Oklahoma Sen. David Boren maintained a similar affiliation with Oklahoma Baptist University during his Senate service.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Covenant transition team reports meetings with agency leadership," dated 2/16/96, please end the third paragraph's first sentence after the word, restructuring. Then add the following sentence to the last paragraph of the story: Beyond messengers' approval of the Covenant for a New Century last June, an amendment to SBC bylaw 15, which identifies SBC entities by name, requires two consecutive votes by messengers to SBC annual meetings. The first approval came last year at the Atlanta SBC meeting; the second vote will be at this year's meeting in New Orleans.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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