



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

460 James Robertson Parkway

Nashville, Tennessee 37219

Telephone (615) 244-2355

W. C. Fields, Director

Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 234-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Stewardship Commission Urges Seminary Stewardship Courses

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--The Stewardship Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting here for its annual session, urged each of the six Southern Baptist seminaries to investigate the possibility of establishing a chair of Christian stewardship by 1975.

The action came in approval of a resolution which stated that "there exists a crucial need for a deeper theological understanding of the doctrine of Christian stewardship by ministers and other vocational church leaders."

The commission also took actions calling for plans for the celebration in 1975 of the 50th anniversary of the Cooperative Program, the denomination's unified budget plan which supports financially each state convention and 19 agencies of the SBC.

Commission staff members were requested to work with the SBC Executive Committee and its executive secretary in selecting a planning committee to initiate plans for the 50th anniversary celebration, and to request sufficient funds to carry out the plans from the SBC Executive Committee.

Another proposal called for a feasibility study on holding a national seminar related to a biblical study of mission support no later than 1975, the anniversary year. Such a seminar would be planned in conjunction with other SBC boards and agencies related to missions.

A recommendation from the commission's Cooperative Program promotion committee suggested that recognitions be made on both national and state levels to state conventions that have shown a significant increase in cooperative program giving over a three to five year period, to the top 25 churches in the SBC in dollar giving through Cooperative Program, and to the top 25 churches in the SBC in percentage of budget to the Cooperative Program.

Each of the recommendations adopted by the commission came from one of three new committees set up by the commission to coordinate the three major programs of the commission--a stewardship development committee, a Cooperative Program promotion committee; and an endowment and capital giving committee.

Elected new chairman of the commission was A. Rudolph Fagan, pastor of Delaney Street Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. He succeeds Joe L. Ingram, executive secretary-elect for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and host for the meeting.

New vice chairman was W. R. Roberts, SBC Annuity Board representative for Mississippi, and named secretary was William J. Purdue, pastor of First Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tenn.

A recommendation from the stewardship development committee called for an expanded commission emphasis on tithing, including Bible study materials. It said the suggestion was made in the light of recommendations from the commission adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis in June.

In other actions, the commission approved a 1971-72 operating budget of \$236,500, and voted to request a Cooperative Program allocation of \$250,000 for 1972-73.

The commission also asked its staff to work closer with the SBC Education Commission in offering assistance to Baptist institutions in the area of development and to study the need for foundation trustee orientation provided by the commission's endowment and capital giving office.

Sessions for the meeting were held here at the Hilton Hotel. Previous action of the commission had provided for meeting at some city outside Nashville every other year.

Next year the commission will meet July 6-7 in Nashville. In 1973, the meeting is scheduled July 12-13 in Orlando, Fla.

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Move For Prayer Amendment
Gains Momentum in Congress

7/21/71

by Beth Hayworth

WASHINGTON (BP)--Efforts to adopt a constitutional prayer amendment, much like the proverbial "cat with nine lives," is experiencing another revival in Congress.

This time observers in and out of Congress, including those who support and oppose the movement, see the prayer amendment as a live issue.

In the House of Representatives, where the powerful House Judiciary Committee has succeeded in stopping the movement in the past, a "discharge petition" to bypass the committee and get a resolution on the prayer amendment to the House floor is gaining momentum. Emanuel Celler (D., N.Y.) is chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

The discharge petition, to date signed by 180 Congressmen, was started by Rep. Chalmers P. Wylie (R. Ohio). The petition needs 218 signers to bring Wylie's resolution past the Judiciary Committee to the House floor for a vote.

Wylie's resolution on a prayer amendment is the same as the Dirksen Amendment which was gaining in popularity prior to the death of Sen. Everett Dirksen (R., Ill.) during the previous session of Congress. It reads:

"Nothing contained in this Constitution shall abridge the right of persons lawfully assembled, in any public building which is supported in whole or in part through the expenditure of public funds, to participate in nondenominational prayer."

The resolution, if it passes the House and Senate, would have to be ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states within seven years for it to become an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, made up of representatives from eight Baptist denominations in the United States, has warned repeatedly against any effort to change the meaning of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

A number of Baptist conventions, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Convention have passed resolutions affirming their support for the concepts and the vocabulary of the First Amendment and appealing to the Congress to let the First Amendment stand as it is "as our guarantee of religious liberty."

John W. Baker, the acting executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, warned that any new constitutional amendment dealing with religious activity could "circumvent the First Amendment freedoms."

Specifically, Baker said that such an amendment could "alter existing church-state relations, and lead to a series of cases affecting such sensitive areas as aid to religious education, taxation of church property and forms of religious worship."

The revival of the prayer amendment in the House of Representatives is credited mainly to the zeal of an attractive young mother, Mrs. Ben Ruhlin, from Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

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At the present time Mrs. Ruhlin and a group of 35 are lobbying in Congress for additional members to sign the discharge petition. Mrs. Ruhlin, from Rep. Wylie's home district, is operating out of the Congressman's office on Capitol Hill.

Mrs. Ruhlin, in an interview with Baptist Press, identified a number of local and state groups which are putting the pressure on their Congressmen to sign the discharge petition. Among the groups she named are Veterans and American Legion groups, the Retired Teachers Association, the Back to God Movement, Citizens for Public Reverence, Project Prayer, National Parents for Prayer, the National Association of Republican Women, the National Grange, and the National Association of Evangelicals. Also, Mrs. Ruhlin said that "teachers, Jaycees and letter carriers" are involved in the movement in each state.

One Congressman who is a direct object of the lobbyists' efforts is Rep. Fred Schwengel (R., Iowa). Schwengel, who describes himself as a "devout Christian Baptist," is a lay leader in the North American Baptist General Conference and a member of the Calvary Baptist Church here.

Schwengel told Baptist Press that when he was approached by one of the lobbyists, he related his convictions on the adequacy of the First Amendment to protect the religious freedom of all citizens. When he finished giving his side of the issue, the lobbyist, Mrs. Virginia Pruitt, a Baptist lay worker from Washington, D.C., said, "Well, it looks like I am campaigning for the wrong side."

Mrs. Pruitt, also a member of the Calvary Baptist Church in the nation's capital, told Baptist Press that she felt "she had been misinformed about the need for a prayer amendment ... and that she had not really understood the Supreme Court decisions" handed down in 1962 and 1963.

"I think a lot of Baptists are as ill informed as I was," Mrs. Pruitt said. "I am not going back to work with that group on Capitol Hill," she declared, referring to Mrs. Ruhlin's prayer campaign committee.