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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**NATIONAL OFFICE**  
460 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219  
Telephone (615) 244-2365  
W. C. Fields, Director  
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

**BUREAUS**

**ATLANTA** Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1330 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041  
**DALLAS** Orville Scott, 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) 254-5461  
**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

November 21, 1972

State Conventions Report  
Calmer Sessions in Years

By Jim Newton  
For the Baptist Press

Thirty-two Baptist state conventions weathered their annual fall sessions, not only without any major storms, but with hardly a ripple on their placid surfaces.

It was the calmest fall of state conventions in the memory of most convention-watchers who reported the sessions for Baptist Press, newsservice of the Southern Baptist Convention.

There were no great burning issues raging through the majority of the state conventions--no big debates on accepting federal aid for Baptist institutions, no hassels over such controversial matters as infallibility of the Bible or race relations.

In almost all the conventions, there appeared to be an unusual sense of unity, peace, and harmony, according to reports from the states.

Probably the most intense debate came at four conventions over the question of whether to restrict representation at the conventions to only messengers from churches which require baptism of all members by immersion in a Baptist church.

Nine states faced constitution revisions of some sort, or proposals for restructure of the state convention staff. Six dealt with the future of state Baptist institutions. Four proposed new pastor-church relations services for churchless pastors and pastor-less churches.

Resolutions adopted by the state conventions sounded like a broken record, replaying the same words and topics in state after state.

Fourteen states adopted resolutions opposing tax aid to parochial or private schools. Ten states opposed liquor law revisions and seven repudiated gambling. Eight states commended efforts toward ending the war in Vietnam. Six protested proposals to withdraw tax deductions for contributions to churches.

Throughout all the conventions' reports, the spirit of unity and harmony seemed to prevail. Even when controversial issues were involved, the reports indicated a good spirit.

Some observers pointed out that the messengers seemed to be tired of bickering and fighting. A few commented that the same feeling of apathy which seems to abound in society might have spilled over into the denomination. One editor described a convention as a "do-nothing" session. Another said his session was "bland." Others observed that the messengers wanted to get on with the main tasks of evangelism and missions.

In several conventions, miscellaneous business sessions scheduled on the program were not needed. In Kentucky, for example, there was no business from the floor, so the messengers sang a hymn instead. A similar situation developed in Oklahoma.

In Arkansas, the only debate during the entire convention came over whether or not the state Game and Fish Commission should schedule the opening day of hunting season on Sunday.

Even the question of baptism potentially the most explosive issue faced by the state conventions, was handled with a minimum of debate and a spirit of harmony and unity.

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North Carolina reached a compromise solution on two proposed constitutional amendments requiring that only churches which practice baptism by immersion or messengers who have been immersed be seated at annual sessions. The two amendments, which threatened to divide the convention, were withdrawn and the convention instead reaffirmed its "belief in" baptism by immersion, but did not set this as a requirement for membership.

In a similar respect, South Carolina defeated an amendment which would have rejected messengers from churches which accept members who have not been baptized by immersion, later reaffirming the "Statement on Baptist Faith and Message" position on baptism by immersion.

In both cases, the conventions expressed an opinion that immersion is the proper form of baptism, but were unwilling to set this as a requirement for membership in the constitution.

California and Kansas, however, continued their current constitutional restrictions against so-called "alien immersion," that is, acceptance of church members who have been baptized by immersion by a church of some other denomination.

Kansas rejected by a better than two-to-one margin a complete new constitution which would have eliminated the current restrictions denying membership to churches which practice alien immersion, open communion or have ties with ecumenical organizations. Kansas also defeated a move to define these terms in the current constitution.

The question was left unresolved for the fourth straight year in California, where messengers rejected three proposed constitution amendments designed to clarify the constitutional meaning of "alien immersion." The issue will be carried over until next year's session.

Indiana Baptists also rejected a constitutional amendment which would have deleted a phrase that a church must be a cooperating member in good standing with a district association to send messengers to the state body. There was no reference to the baptism question, except an oblique reference in debate that the local association is in a better position to judge a church's doctrinal stance than the state convention.

A doctrinal question came up briefly at the Ohio convention, but a motion to oppose sale and distribution of the Broadman Bible Commentary published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board was quickly tabled. Later the convention did reaffirm "our continuing faith in the infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God as outlined in the Baptist Faith and Message," but there was no reported connection between the two actions.

New Mexico Baptists also reaffirmed the Baptist Faith and Message Statement, pointing out "the distinctive plank in the Baptist platform"--the capability of every believer to interpret scripture for himself as led by the Holy Spirit.

Mild debate was sparked in Florida and Louisiana over proposals to establish a pastor-church relations service to provide counseling to ministers, and information to churches seeking staff members. Some argued that such a service would interfere with "the leadership of the Holy Spirit."

Both Florida, Louisiana and Kentucky, however, approved the proposals by a strong majority to establish the information and counseling services. The Alabama Executive Board reported its plans to initiate such a program, but no convention action was needed or taken.

Under such programs, already operative in five other states, biographical information would be supplied, without comment or recommendation, to churches seeking staff personnel on pastors, or other staff members, who authorize the convention to supply such information. Some counseling would be available also to ministers and church staff members who face personal problems from pressures of the ministry.

Unlike several previous years, no state convention in 1972 voted to sever ties with a Baptist school or hospital, permitting them to operate as separate self-supporting institutions.

Tennessee Baptists rejected a proposal to close down Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy in Seymour, Tenn.; Georgia Baptists agreed without debate to the merger of Atlanta Baptist College and Mercer University; North Carolina approved a six-point plan outlining

relationships with its hospital in Winston-Salem; and Florida Baptists authorized their Executive Board to deal with a plan to sell its childrens home property and create instead two small r homes for children.

Mississippi Baptists approved a fund campaign to rebuild a state assembly destroyed by Hurricane Camille, and rejected a proposal that would have made the vice president a president-elect to become president the following year. A similar proposal will likely come before the Southern Baptist Convention in its national sessions next June.

Restructure studies or proposals were authorized or approved in the Michigan, Illinois, Louisiana, and Northwest conventions, but none were considered as drastic as several reorganization programs approved several years ago by numerous other conventions.

About six state conventions voted to increase the percentage of their allocations going to world missions through the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program.

West Virginia, Northwest, and Illinois conventions jumped the percentage by one per cent; while Colorado and Michigan increased it one-half of one per cent. Kentucky Baptists amended their budget to provide almost one-third of any surplus received to SBC causes, rather than all overages going to capital needs as first recommended.

It was also the year of the woman vice president. Three conventions, Alabama, Virginia, and Florida, elected women as vice presidents. For the first time, a woman presided over the District of Columbia Convention as president this year.

Indiana Baptists, however, defeated a motion to withhold any financial aid to the New York convention because an association in the state had accepted a church with a woman pastor as a member church. Georgia, likewise, declined to adopt a resolution opposing ordination of women as deacons or pastors, reaffirming that "such matters must be left to the local church."

Resolutions in 14 states upheld separation of church and state, and opposed any tax funds going to parochial or private schools. Six states also opposed the so-called "Tax Policy Review Act of 1972" proposed by Rep. Wilbur Mills and Sen. Mike Mansfield, which would end tax exemptions and deductions for gifts to churches.

As usual, there were the annual resolutions against pornography, liquor by the drink, gambling and drug abuse. Three states opposed X-rated or morally offensive movies stressing sex and violence on television.

At least eight states commended recent peace efforts to end the war in Vietnam, several praising President Nixon. But the president was also criticized by several other states for supporting tax credits and other forms of federal aid for parochial schools.

Three states, Illinois, Arkansas and Michigan, opposed abortion on demand or liberalization of state abortion laws. In Virginia, the hottest debate came on a recommended statement favoring amnesty for conscientious objectors to war. The proposal was soundly defeated.

The Virginia convention was described as "one of the most tranquil sessions in its 149 year history." Perhaps that same description could apply to almost all of the 32 state Baptist bodies which met from Oct. 21 through Nov. 22.

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Utah-Idaho Convention  
Opposes Pornography

11/21/72

PROVO, Utah (BP)--The Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention pledged support of a fight "to dam the pornographic flood running rampant in our theatres, book stores, magazine racks and mail" during their annual convention here.

In major business, the convention adopted a budget of \$279,574, an increase of 12 per cent; and elected Luman Gilman, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Salt Lake City as president. In another resolution, the convention pledged prayer for newly elected state and national political leaders "that they might be receptive to God's leadership in the discharging of their responsibilities."

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