



BAPTIST PRESS

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November 4, 1974

Missouri Convention Discord Settled Amidst Harmony

JOPLIN, Mo. (BP)--Messengers to the 140th annual session of the Missouri Baptist Convention here bound up rather than salted the wounds of disunity inflicted by a protracted controversy over financial management procedures.

In a convention markedly different from the divisive 139th meeting last year in Columbia, Mo., 1,771 registered messengers overwhelmingly approved, without change, recommendations from the convention's structure and reorganization committee.

"Joplin was a long way from Columbia in terms of the mood and temperament of messengers, who dealt with difficult and potentially divisive problems in a tolerant, sometimes light hearted manner," a convention spokesman said.

The committee, born out of turmoil over reported mismanagement and commingling of Missouri convention funds, brought six recommendations, featuring sweeping changes in convention procedures and structure.

In other action, the messengers headed off possible controversy over budgeting of four convention colleges, re-elected Hugh Wamble, a professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, president by acclamation, and voted a \$5 million statewide Cooperative Program budget for 1975, and an additional \$750,000 as a challenge budget.

On committee recommendation, involving mandatory retirement of executive board employees, drew sharp, but good natured debate, as did a section of the executive board's reorganization recommendation dealing with the Word and Way, the convention's weekly newspaper.

Three recommendations, dealing with the business and financial plan, implementation and continuation of the structure and reorganization committee, passed without serious debate.

Another, involving constitutional changes, got a first reading and was referred for final action at the convention's 1975 meeting, Oct. 27-29, First Baptist Church, Poplar Bluff, Mo. in keeping with constitutional stipulations.

Debate crystallized around a committee recommendation that executive board employees be compelled to retire, effective the first day of the month following the employee's 65th birthday and that any employee who has reached the age of 65 prior to January 1, 1975, must retire effective no later than that date.

An integral part of the debate involved a decision by the Missouri Baptist executive board to terminate some convention employees under a similar policy before the convention met in Joplin to react to the committee's recommendation.

Earl Tharp, pastor of First Baptist Church, DeSoto, Mo., asserted that the executive board's action in terminating the employees violated action taken at last year's meeting.

Messengers to the 1973 convention had declined to refer the retirement issue to the executive board, referring it, instead, to the structure and reorganization committee.

However, observers report last year's convention also instructed the executive board to operate the convention's financial affairs in 1974 without deficit spending.

One method the board chose to cut costs, a convention spokesman said, was to terminate employees aged 65 or older. That move terminated three employees before the convention met.

A motion by Richard Adams of Portageville, Mo., to reprove the executive board for its action, was tabled, and another motion, calling for reimbursement of financial losses to employees over age 65, terminated prior to the convention, failed to pass.

In defense of the executive board's action, Don Evans of Joplin, board chairman, said the body acted on the basis of powers granted it by the existing constitution. Don Wainwright of Eldon, Mo., who successfully moved to table the motion to reprove, said the 1973 convention did not specifically prohibit the executive board from acting on the retirement issue.

W. Ross Edwards, editor of the Word and Way, would be one of the first convention employees affected by the new ruling, a convention spokesman said. Under the new ruling, he would retire Sept. 1, 1975.

The Word and Way was the subject of another debate, which centered around whether it should continue to be incorporated in the executive board structure or put under a separate board of trustees.

The committee's reorganization plan, adopted by the convention, calls for a communications division headed by the Word and Way editor, but another motion, which would involve a constitutional change, urged a separate, nine-person board for the Word and Way, answerable only to messengers in annual session and not to the executive board.

The motion for a separate board, made by M.E. Spurgeon of Alexandria, Mo., was referred to the 1975 meeting, when other constitutional changes will be considered.

O. K. Armstrong of Springfield, Mo., who had been defeated in an earlier motion to have retirement evaluated at 65 with the individual rather than uniformly applying to all, moved that the section on the Word and Way in the reorganization recommendation be deleted. That section dealt with the communications division.

Messengers later allowed a request by Armstrong to withdraw his motion in light of Spurgeon's motion on a separate board of trustees for the Word and Way.

Part of the Word and Way debate, observers report, centered around the freedom of the paper's editor to attend executive board meetings.

Edwards said he was invited to general meetings of the executive board but that he had not been invited to attend executive board committee meetings.

Recent editorials in the Word and Way by Edwards have implied, a convention spokesman said, that the editor would have greater editorial freedom if the paper had separate trustees.

Multiple copies of a cartoon depicting executive board "strings" of control on a puppet editor, identified as "Ross," were circulated among messengers.

The structure and reorganization committee, chaired by Gerald Sprong, a bank president from St. Joseph, Mo., designed recommendations to eliminate procedures which led to charges of financial abuse.

Some points in the recommendation on the convention's business and financial plan include strict budget drawing and control procedures, bonding of employees handling funds, reporting of all funds and sources of them, and maintenance of cash flow and control in keeping with proper accounting procedures.

Also included are stipulations that trust funds be used only for their intended purpose, that there be no commingling of funds and that the convention and its agencies, in addition to internal auditing procedures, retain independent certified public accountants to conduct an annual audit and that their findings be made available to the public.

Basically, the reorganization plan calls for the executive board to be reorganized into five standing committees--an administrative committee (made up of the chairmen of the other four committees), a church development committee, missions and evangelism development committee, communications committee and interagency relations committee.

The executive board's elected administrative staff will consist of an executive director, directors of offices of general program coordination and general stewardship and Cooperative Program promotion and four division directors.

The executive director post, now filled on an interim basis by Thomas Nelson, chief executive of the Missouri Baptist Foundation, will be filled by the executive board, upon recommendation of a search committee which has been looking for a replacement for the late Earl O. Harding.

The newly adopted reorganization recommendation stipulates that the new executive director "shall be annually evaluated by the standing committees for his performance in their respective areas in keeping with a formal plan developed by the board."

The four divisions, under the new structure, will be business division, church development division, missions and evangelism division and communications division.

The convention accepted a recommendation to continue the structure and reorganization committee to present a revision of the convention bylaws to the 1975 convention, harmonized with the proposed constitution. It also will report on the progress of implementation of revisions of convention affairs.

Before the convention, observers report, many messengers felt the financial support of the four colleges would involve divisive debate. But, in a move obviously designed to maintain harmony, a convention spokesman said, the executive board temporarily abandoned a complicated formula, based on student population factors, it had planned to propose for distribution of funds to the colleges.

Missouri Baptist College in St. Louis had closed during August, due to lack of funds, but reopened when friends of the college launched a drive to raise funds.

Robert Sutherland, acting president of the college, pledged to messengers that the college would not finance on a deficit basis this year.

The four college presidents, although all did not get everything they would have liked, a convention spokesman said, agreed on a fund distribution which will give \$300,000 each to William Jewell, Southwest Baptist and Missouri Baptist Colleges and \$200,000 to Hannibal-LaGrange College from the regular budget. Additional funds, anticipated up to \$200,000 from the challenge budget, will be divided on a formula basis between William Jewell and Southwest Baptist Colleges.

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Penn-Jersey Baptists
Elect Frank Bowman

11/4/74

McMURRAY, Pa. (BP)--The Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey, in its fourth annual meeting, elected Frank E. Bowman, the pastor of Main Street Baptist Church in Boylestown, Pa. as their new president.

Messengers also approved a record 1975 budget of \$653,700, recognized the formation of a new association of churches, Northwest Baptist Association in the Erie, Pa., area and heard that 18 new congregations had been formed in the convention since the 1973 annual meeting. The convention now has four associations with more than 12,000 members in 108 congregations.

The 1975 Penn-Jersey convention meeting will be Nov. 7-8 at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Cherry Hill, N. H.

The Penn-Jersey convention, formed in 1971, raised its percentage of Cooperative Program (unified budget) giving to 24 per cent for national Southern Baptist Convention causes.

A.C. Queen, editor of the Penn-Jersey Baptist, said convention messengers had increased the SBC giving on per cent annually since the convention's founding.

Queen noted a "joyful, family reunion spirit" present among those participating in the two-state convention.

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story dated 11/1/74, titled "SBC Cooperative Program Giving Continues to Rise," graph 1, line 3, change ". .total by more than \$240,000" to ". .total by more than \$420,000.

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