

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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November 15, 1976

76-194

Northwest Baptists Send
Carter Telegram, Elect Canadian

PORTLAND (BP)--The Northwest Baptist Convention, in annual session here, sent a telegram to President-elect Jimmy Carter commending him and urging him to use his influence to encourage Baptist bodies to avoid restricting membership on the basis of race or national background.

In other action, the convention's "messengers" also elected a Canadian pastor as president, refused to seat messengers from a church accepting "alien immersion," voted their first \$1 million annual budget, and received a report that their outgoing convention president will become editor of the convention's news publication.

The telegram to Carter, apparently prompted by the earlier refusals of the Plains (Ga.) Baptist Church to allow a black minister to attend services, was approved and sent before the Plains Church voted on Sunday, Nov. 14, to end racial discrimination.

The telegram said: ". . . We . . . encourage you in your membership in a Southern Baptist church and thereby involvement in other Baptists bodies to, along with us, use your influence in not restricting membership in any Baptist body because of racial or national background only."

In a separate resolution, the Northwest Baptist Convention commended Carter and Charles Jordan, a black and one of the city of Portland's commissioners, for their "public stands of affirmation of their faith and allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus Christ . . ." Jordan spoke to the convention.

The election of the Canadian pastor, Allen E. Schmidt of Royal Heights Baptist Church, Delta, British Columbia, as president, to succeed William O. (Bill) Crews of Portland, raises an interesting point of Baptist polity, a spokesman said.

Under Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) rules Schmidt, although pastor of a church affiliated with the Northwest Baptist Convention, would not be eligible to serve as an elected messenger to annual, national SBC sessions because his church is outside U. S. borders. The Northwest Convention, which covers Southern Baptist work in Oregon, Washington and northern Idaho, has also allowed some 25 churches in the four westernmost provinces of Canada to affiliate.

The convention also named another Canadian pastor, Bo Brantley of Victoria Baptist Church, Victoria, British Columbia, to preach the convention sermon at its 1977 meeting, Nov. 8-10, Spokane, Wash.

A native Canadian, Schmidt is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, a Baptist school in Abilene, Tex., and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif. Brantley is a 1975 graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Tex.

After debate, Northwest Convention messengers, for the second consecutive year, refused to seat messengers from First Baptist Church, Bothell, Wash., because the church cannot agree with the convention's statement of faith, which disallows acceptance of baptisms from other denominations, the spokesman noted.

Since the convention's constitution committee did not act on a proposal that the SBC's 1963 statement of Baptist Faith and Message be substituted for the Northwest Convention's statement of faith, a messenger brought the motion from the floor.

The messengers defeated a motion to table that motion but then defeated the motion itself, 269-115. Later convention president Crews was asked to appoint a special committee to look at the convention's statement of faith and report back to next year's convention.

In passing their budget for 1977, the messengers approved a total budget of \$1,194,824, of which \$748,200 is expected from Northwest Convention churches through the state Cooperative Program unified budget. Twenty-seven percent of the Cooperative Program goal will go to worldwide causes of the SBC.

In other action, messengers heard a report that the convention's executive board, in a pre-convention session, had elected Crews, pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church, Portland, to head the convention's newly-formed communications division and also succeed the retiring C. E. Boyle as editor of the Northwest Baptist Witness. Crews will supervise the convention's printing operation, in addition to editing the newspaper and handling public relations.

Va. Baptists Commend Churches
Recognizing Women Ministers

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. (BP)--Virginia Baptists, meeting here in their statewide annual meeting, commended Virginia churches which have set aside sex role discrimination and have given official recognition to women as ordained ministers and deacons.

Elected "messengers" to the Virginia Baptist General Association also elected an Arlington Va., lawyer as president and a pastor's wife as second vice president, and voted a record budget of \$7,250,000.

In what was described as a smooth convention, messengers approved reports of standing committees, almost without debate. But the report on the service of women, which like the others, came as a commendation, rather than a recommendation, drew debate.

In the end, however, a spokesman said, messengers voted overwhelmingly to defeat a motion to delete the commendation on women.

Pointing out that the number of women graduates in Southern Baptist seminaries have doubled over the past two years, the commendation said, "The critical test of our churches is the ordination and the employment of women in positions comparable to men, believing there is neither male nor female in the church, where we are 'all one in Jesus Christ' (Gal. 3:20).

"The awakening of conscience with respect to the personhood of women, including their identity, dignity, freedom and rights, may well be the work of the Holy Spirit in our time," the commendation said. "The challenge to Southern Baptist churches, where women comprise an estimated 50 percent of church membership, is acute now that women seek official recognition as deacons or deaconesses and as ordained ministers.

"Many women, whose training in our seminaries equips them for positions of leadership previously held exclusively by men, have a deep personal sense of calling as well as an ethical concern for the liberation which Christ offers," said the commendation, which praised churches who have set aside traditional patterns and have given official recognition to women as ordained ministers and . . . (provided) opportunities for employment of women as pastors."

It said a survey of Virginia churches, which number about 1,500, drew 422 responses and indicated that "large numbers of women are serving in important leadership positions, some of which have been traditionally limited to men." It listed nine ministers, including associate 520 deacons or deaconesses, with the role of deaconess "in some instances . . . subordinate to that of deacon" and all concentrated in 57 churches; 15 home missionaries; 54 Sunday School directors, 352 church clerks, and 359 church secretaries.

Kenneth McFarlane Smith, an Arlington attorney, was elected president, and Mrs. Walter Bradley, wife of the pastor of Haymarket (Va.) Baptist Church, was elected second vice president.

The record budget, a spokesman said, represents a \$1 million increase in mission giving. Thirty-eight percent of the state's Cooperative Program receipts will go to worldwide causes of the Southern Baptist Convention through the SBC's national Cooperative Program unified budget.

**Carter Invited to Address
D. C. Centennial Convention**

Washington (BP)--The District of Columbia Baptist Convention voted to invite President-elect Jimmy Carter to address its centennial celebration, Nov. 10-11, 1977, at Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D. C. The dually-aligned D. C. Convention was organized in 1877 at Calvary Church.

Rosalynn Carter, wife of the U. S. President-elect, will be invited to speak to the annual meeting of Baptist Women, missionary organization, according to convention action.

Delegates also voted to remember President-elect Carter "in both our private and public prayers asking God to give him the moral courage, the spiritual vision and the physical strength to lead our nation."

In further action, delegates adopted a budget of \$662,731. In 1975-76, the D. C. Convention gave 41.5 percent of the receipts from its churches to national and international missions with the greater part going to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The D. C. convention is dually aligned with the SBC and American Baptist Churches in the USA, Inc.

Harold W. Sorrill Jr., pastor of Clinton Baptist Church, Clinton, Md., was elected convention president.

Delegates referred a proposed resolution from the floor opposing school busing of children to a committee. The convention last year approved a resolution in favor of "a reasonable amount of busing" to achieve quality education and improved racial attitudes.

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**Plains Baptist Church Ends
Racial Discrimination Policy**

By Robert LaFavre

**Baptist Press
11/15/76**

PLAINS, Ga. (BP)--"There are no more closed doors at this church," said Hugh Carter, as he stood on the front steps of Plains Baptist Church following an almost three hour church conference.

Carter, deacon and church clerk, was announcing results of an agonizing decision of the church membership that both upheld the cherished Baptist tradition of congregational authority and ended racial discrimination.

Along with his announcement of the new open-door policy at the small south Georgia church, he reported the congregation action to retain the services of its pastor, Bruce E. Edwards, despite a vote by its deacons to ask for his resignation.

Hugh Carter, a Georgia state senator, church chorister and cousin to President-elect Jimmy Carter, told also of another action of the church establishing a "watchcare" committee. The committee, which will be elected by the church, will "investigate persons who apply for membership at Plains Baptist Church and make recommendations to the church as to whether or not to accept that person," he said. He noted that race will not be a factor in the recommendation.

He made these revelations amid the glare of television spotlights and popping strobes, mixed with the clicks of cameras. They followed a confrontation which began two weeks before when a non-denominational black minister from Albany, about 45 miles from Plains, said he wanted to seek membership in the church.

When Clennon King, minister of Divine Mission in Albany, first showed up at the church, he found the doors barred and services cancelled by action of the deacons. The next Sunday services were held but King was locked out. He was outside the church again while it voted to reverse its closed door policy and said he would return on Sunday, Nov. 21, to renew his request for membership.

King's first encounter at the Plains church came two days before the presidential election in which Jimmy Carter, a member and currently an inactive deacon at the church, won his race against Gerald Ford.

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While King had set up the situation with the release to the press of a letter of his intent, almost before the pastor of the church received it, he denied any political motives. He had refused a request by Edwards that he delay his appearance until after the lection.

But because Edwards expressed strong opposition to a 1965 church resolution which barred "Negroes and other civil rights demonstrators" from services at the Plains church, the deacons unanimously voted to ask him to resign.

Edwards called for the full church to vote on the matter, pointing out that a Baptist church is under authority of the congregation, not its deacons. Those events set the stage for the dramatic action on Sunday, Nov. 14.

Hugh Carter, speaking on behalf of the church at its request, said, "We worked it out among ourselves."

Edwards, speaking from the same rainy and cold steps as Hugh Carter, noted: "Our church had a family problem. We settled it in a family manner. I'm grateful to the church and proud to be pastor of Plains Baptist Church. I believe that we will pull together and have an effective ministry for Jesus Christ."

When asked if he would stay on as pastor in light of the positive action of the church, Edwards said, "for the time being, yes."

Four distinct actions were taken in the almost three-hour church business meeting that was closed to all but church members. A motion to not consider a recommendation of the deacons to fire the pastor was defeated. Many who later voted in favor of the pastor voted against the first motion so that a clear cut and well defined decision could be reached, a church member said.

A motion then to fire the pastor at once failed by a vote of 106-87. Then the "watchcare" committee was created by unanimous action and an open door policy established by a vote of 120-66.

The motion to open the doors to all people wishing to worship regardless of race was made by Jerome Ethredge, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board appointee to the French-speaking African nation of Togo. A member and former deacon chairman at the Plains church, he is in missionary orientation at nearby Pine Mountain.

James L. Sullivan of Nashville, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, joined many other Southern Baptist leaders across the U. S. in lauding the church for its action. He called it "wonderful news" and said the doors of a church should be open to allow all persons to worship, regardless of race.

President-elect Jimmy Carter, who attended the church conference, expressed real joy at the action his church took. In his brief statements to newsmen and the crowd of tourists and curious onlookers outside the church, he expressed gratitude for the spirit in which the situation had been resolved and said, "I am proud of my church."

Although Carter modestly said he had been just another member of the church casting a vote against racial discrimination, insiders say he worked quietly and diligently behind the scenes to bring about reconciliation. But many others, including State Sen. Hugh Carter, made the same kind of effort, observers say.

Hugh Carter, one of the 12 deacons who originally voted to ask Bruce Edwards to resign, summed up the feeling of most of the church's membership when he said, "We all acted too hastily. I know that I am sorry that I had voted to dismiss the pastor myself. I have apologized to the pastor and the church."

The congregation has acted, its voice has been heard, and history made in a small south Georgia town, dragged into the global arena.

As Hugh Carter noted, "The church has the final vote, not the deacons, not a committee, but the church."

Missionary Makes Motion
In Plains Church Decision

By Ruth Fowler

PLAINS, Ga. (BP)--W. Jerome Ethredge, a Southern Baptist missionary, made the motion to drop racial barriers at the Plains (Ga.) Baptist Church, the home church of President-elect Jimmy Carter.

Ethredge, now in missionary orientation in Pine Mountain, Ga., is currently an inactive deacon of the Plains church, although he served previously as chairman of the deacons for two years. He was elected as a deacon in 1970, five years after the original 1965 resolution barring blacks. But, as an inactive deacon (the same status as President-elect Carter), he was not eligible to vote as a deacon in the events preceding the Nov. 14 churchwide meeting.

In the Nov. 14 meeting, Ethredge's motion to drop the racial barriers at the church carried 120-66. Observers say Ethredge made an eloquent plea that his effectiveness as a missionary would be impaired if his hometown church was segregated.

"I think it was an answer to the prayer of Christians across the world," Ethredge said of the church's action.

Ethredge, a native of Baker County, Ga., will serve as an agricultural evangelist as a Southern Baptist missionary in the French-speaking African nation of Togo.

For 10 years prior to missionary appointment in April 1976, Ethredge was assistant superintendent of the Plains-based Southwest Experimental Station of the University of Georgia.

Ethredge was graduated from the University of Georgia in Athens with the bachelor and master of science degrees and attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the same seminary from which Bruce E. Edwards, the Plains church's pastor, was graduated.

The missionary to Togo said he accepted Jesus Christ as his savior while attending Bethany (Ga.) Baptist Church, where he grew up, and that he committed his life to foreign missions while at the Plains Baptist Church.

Ethredge has served on various deacon committees at the Plains church, and has taught Sunday School and served as president of both the local and associational Brotherhood organizations (for Baptist Men and Royal Ambassador boys). Carter is a former trustee of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, which sponsors missionary education for men and boys.

He is married to the former Joann Davis of Roberts, Ga., also a foreign mission appointee to Togo. They have two children.

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Ruth Fowler is a staff writer in the press office of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond, Va.

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It Rained
On Plains

Baptist Press
11/15/76

By Robert LaFavre

PLAINS, Ga. (BP)--A cold, damp and icy rain fell all day on the town of Plains, in south Georgia, and yet people stood and shivered and waited for more than three hours as the congregation of Plains Baptist Church resolved its famous controversy over racial discrimination.

It was hard to tell what brought out some of those who kept the long vigil. Was it the racial question that the church was dealing with, or the fact that its most famous member, President-elect Jimmy Carter, would be in the service?

Whatever the reason, they came and stood. Campers and trailers and station wagons filled with kids; reporters from around the world; people with enough cameras to open a retail store; Ku Klux Klanners, with their white sheets and literature; and Clennon King, center of the controversy--all were there.

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King, a non Baptist now, but admitted to the membership in a Baptist church (not Southern Baptist) in Albany when he was 14 years old, found little support from those who questioned and taunted him during his stay on the church grounds.

Beside him was the "Prophet Elijah" from New York, his main visible supporter. Most black reporters seemed to disapprove of his actions. A black teacher and a student from Fort Valley, Ga., were openly critical of his method. Two black men passed by and suggested that he go "to Africa and get off our backs." If this spectacle was not sufficient, add to that the appearance of a white woman, who said that she was "the messiah" and a special envoy of the Holy Spirit.

No matter which way a person looked, there were cars as far as the eye could see.

At times it seemed as if all room under the spacious oak trees that dot the church's grounds was filled with humanity.

Couple this with the tight security proclaimed by the Secret Service for President-elect Carter, the fact that only members would be allowed in the church for the 11:00 a.m. service, members of the Georgia state patrol and Georgia Bureau of Investigation doing their job and you had an unreal scene . . . something dreamed up, not natural.

But it was real. It had been only too real for the Plains congregation for some weeks. Now it was over. The crowds were gone, the rain continued to fall coldly down and litter, scattered on the churchyard, acted as a sponge for its icy splashes.

Plains Baptist Church had faced its crisis, met it firmly and surely, and acted decisively against racial discrimination. It has done what is right, and its members are tired of the public spotlight and ask now only to be left alone.

Tomorrow's another day and perhaps the sun will shine. The people of Plains will welcome its warm rays much more than the glaring lights of a cold and sometimes misunderstanding world.

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CORRECTION

In the BP story of 11/11/76, headlined "Colorado Baptists Elect Larry Jerden Editor," last graph, line 1, Jerden is a native of Kansas (instead of Arkansas).

Thanks--

Baptist Press