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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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78-180

Texas Baptists Avoid  
Bold Mission Derailment

AUSTIN, Texas (BP)--The annual Texas Baptist Convention meeting in Austin gave a resounding vote for Bold Mission Thrust with actions that range from increasing lay involvement to strengthening church-state separation.

Bold Mission Thrust is an ambitious effort by the 13-million-member Southern Baptist Convention to reach every person on earth with the Christian gospel by the year 2000.

Texas Baptists pledged their financial support for Bold Mission with a record-breaking \$31 million budget, including \$10.9 million for the national Southern Baptist Cooperative Program for world missions.

Messengers refused to be derailed for long from their Bold Mission task despite a proposed resolution on oral genital sex which got sensational headlines in media.

Milton Cunningham, whom messengers reelected as president, pled with messengers and media not to let the oral sex resolution, toned down without debate from the original version, obscure the Bold Mission emphasis.

The oral sex resolution followed in the wake of an action by Union Baptist Association (Houston area) the previous week, asking convention leaders to drop author Charlie Shedd of Georgia, as a speaker at the statewide Conference on the Family, March 29-31, in Dallas.

Houston Pastor Glynn Little charged in the Union Association resolution that Shedd, in a series of tapes, condoned oral genital sex relations between husbands and wives.

Without debate, messengers adopted a toned-down statement from their resolutions committee requesting convention agencies to make sure that the emphasis of speakers who address the issue of human sexuality is "positive and biblically sound."

Cunningham, pastor of Westbury Baptist Church, Houston, had launched a drive for more lay involvement in annual sessions. The messengers put feet to the movement with a resolution suggesting that consideration be given to changing the convention dates to begin Thursday afternoon and end Friday night. They further encouraged churches to provide financial assistance to lay people who wish to attend the convention.

Southern Baptists have a goal to recruit 5,000 lay volunteers for one to two years service in a Mission Service Corps, one of the Bold Mission emphases. Texas Baptists have a Bold Mission goal, according to Executive Director James H. Landes, to begin 830 new congregations by 1982.

Landes called for "planting of small churches in communities of different cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds" and said they would increase the Southern Baptist population in Texas by about 300,000.

A note of urgency for the Bold Mission Thrust goal to present Christ to the world by the year 2000 came from Dr. Wana Ann Fort, medical missionary to war-torn Rhodesia. "In Rhodesia we may not have that long," Dr. Fort told a pre-convention session of the Texas Woman's Missionary Union.

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A personal Bold Mission incident took place at the convention when a security guard at the Austin Municipal Auditorium said he had found a peace he'd never known by accepting Christ as personal Savior.

The incident took place, said Lawrence Quinonez, 24, while he was talking with Bill Barnett, who heads the Mission Service Corps in Texas. Barnett invited Quinonez to accept Christ, and he did. "I felt a warm glow all over me," said Quinonez. "I came to work with a lot of questions, doubts and fears, and I'm leaving a different man."

Texas Baptists adopted updated guidelines on church-state relations, opposing government restrictions "that adversely affect the ability of the institutions to fulfill their distinctive purposes as Christian institutions."

Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission statements endorsed by the convention asked Texas Baptists to support legislation and programs which give Mexican farm workers power to improve their working conditions. "It is not surprising that the wages for picking a sack of onions remained the same for 15 years," said the statement, noting that the three poorest areas of the United States are in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas.

Another Christian Life Commission statement approved by Texas Baptists supports "churches as they maintain the dignity and honor of women who choose to be homemakers while at the same time they affirm the expanding role of women in vocations outside the home."

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Home Board Staffers Find  
Vibrant Baptists in Cuba

By Judy Touchton

Baptist Press  
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ATLANTA (BP)--For the first time in 17 years, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board leaders have visited Cuba.

Gerald Palmer, director of the missions section, and Oscar Romo, director of the language missions department, spent nine days in October viewing the work of the Baptist Convention of West Cuba.

The last official contact between the Home Mission Board and the Cuba convention was in 1966 when Herbert Caudill, then a home missionary, was freed from prison and allowed to return to the United States. Since then, information about Baptists in Cuba has been channeled through the Baptist World Alliance.

Cuban Baptists invited the Home Mission Board staffers to visit, but the necessary permission was granted by the Cuban government. Romo and Palmer were permitted to travel the Cuban countryside and preach in all the churches they visited.

At the time of the revolutionary takeover by Fidel Castro, Baptist churches numbered around 100. There are now 105 churches and five missions, Romo reported.

The convention also sponsors a theological seminary with 12 students enrolled and assembly grounds with facilities for more than 200 persons.

All of the 50 or so pastors and church leaders originally imprisoned by the government have been released. Many have joined families in the United States.

Neither Romo nor Palmer had been to Cuba before, "So we did not go there comparing the old Cuba with the new Cuba," Romo explained. "We just wanted to see what is happening in 1978, not what happened in 1960."

They reestablished once strong relationships and found that even with the passing of so many years, many leadership positions are filled by the same men. Yet the young people--too young to ever have known Cuba before the revolution--have also become involved in Baptist work.

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In a fellowship in a pastor's home, Romo and Palmer met many young people in university and seminary committed to the work in Cuba. "They intend to stay in Cuba, live and work there," Romo said.

Romo and Palmer visited both large and small churches. At many churches, though no announcements were made that they were coming, auditoriums overflowed.

Several churches had revivals in progress. Some had begun refurbishing buildings which had lacked repairs since the revolution. As paint and other building materials become more available to the population, Romo said, the government also makes them available to churches.

Romo and Palmer were impressed by the quality of the music program in the churches and attributed it to the foundation laid by Mrs. Herbert Caudill. Cuban Baptists have maintained most traditional Southern Baptist church programs.

While some churches in the United States have phased out some traditional programs because of new lifestyles of members, Romo said, "The Cuban Baptists have found ways to keep programs going. It's almost like stepping back 20 years ago into the Southern Baptist Convention."

Romo said part of the reason for the Cuban churches' success in keeping programs going was that "they were so locked in that there was nothing that came in from the outside to influence changes."

Romo and Palmer agreed they were most impressed by "how the people have learned to have a Christian witness in their contemporary setting."

Romo added, "What happened in Cuba may have been the best thing that could have happened in terms of strengthening the indigenous church." He emphasized the Home Mission Board and others look to Cuban Baptists as "brothers in Christ, not with paternalism."

"Neither the government nor the Baptists should fear our coming back and trying to take over the work," Romo insisted. "But we are hoping to establish such a relationship that we will not only be able to pray for our brothers, but to help as they desire."

Missions work in Cuba, if reestablished, eventually would be transferred to the Foreign Mission Board, in keeping with convention policy, Romo said, adding that for now, the Home Mission Board will attempt to reestablish and strengthen relationships.

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President Signs New  
Government Ethics Law

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11/6/78

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Carter, declaring that he was fulfilling one of the major promises of his campaign, signed into law an ethics in government act.

The measure, passed by Congress shortly before its recent adjournment, requires personal financial disclosure for high officials in the executive branch, for members of Congress, and for many federal judges, including Supreme Court justices.

In addition, the new law seeks to shut down the traditional "revolving door" practice through which officials go into high-paying positions with private companies they dealt with while in government.

The law also establishes a Special Office of Government Ethics within the new civil service structure. It calls for the appointment of a special prosecutor in the event of allegations of crimes committed by high public officials.

Alluding to Watergate-related crimes, Carter said he was "hopeful" that a special prosecutor "will rarely be needed." At the same time, he said, "I believe it is necessary in response to the lessons that we have learned to the embarrassment of our country in the past."

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5-Year Mission Plan  
Launched in Spain

VIGO, Spain (BP)--With the dedication of a new chapel in Vigo and a record home missions offering, Spanish Baptists have launched a five-year plan of home mission work which calls for all-out efforts in evangelism.

The immediate plan for Vigo, a city of about 200,000 in northwestern Spain, calls for contacts with local newspapers and radio stations, courtesy calls on public officials, and saturation of the city with Christian literature.

Such a plan involving widespread public attention would not have been possible until a few years ago in this predominantly Roman Catholic country. Up until that time, churches could not even have signs identifying themselves as Baptist congregations, and no public notices or meetings were allowed.

The continued efforts of Spanish Baptists and other evangelicals brought the cause of religious liberty before the Spanish government, which also felt the moderating influences of Vatican Council II and Pope John XXIII.

Some changes in government attitude toward non-Catholic religious groups began during the rule of Generalissimo Franco, but the greatest changes came with the new government of King Juan Carlos following Franco's death.

Two full-time evangelists have moved to Vigo to cooperate with Southern Baptist Missionary S. Dennis Hale, pastor of the chapel, in carrying out evangelism efforts.

A record home mission offering of more than 3 million pesetas (about \$45,000)--ten times more than ever before--was announced at the Spanish Baptist Union meeting. Part of the money will pay the full-time salary of one of the evangelists and a half-time salary to the Baptist Union's promoter of missions, Maximo Garcia, who resigned his pastorate in Madrid to work with the plan. The other full-time evangelist, Southern Baptist missionary Joseph W. Mefford, is supported through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, which has also given two contributions to help carry out the plan.

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Missionaries in Iran Keep  
Watch On Teheran Unrest

Baptist Press  
11/6/78

TEHERAN, Iran (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in this riot-torn capital are staying in their homes as much as possible but are keeping close touch with the American embassy in case it becomes necessary for them to leave the country.

James F. Kirkendall, field representative for South Asia stationed in Teheran, reported in a telephone conversation early Nov. 6 that the city had been quieter in the past few hours. He told J. D. Hughey, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area secretary for Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, that the missionaries would leave if advised to do so. Southern Baptist missionaries will depart with groups employed by American business firms in Iran if the need arises.

Newspaper accounts said the crowds shouted anti-American slogans, burned the British embassy and attempted to burn the American embassy during the riots.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Teheran include Mr. and Mrs. Kirkendall and one son; Mr. and Mrs. Henry E. Turlington; and Michael Joe Sowder, missionary journeyman doing youth and music work in Teheran. Turlington plans to continue his work as scheduled, including guiding a group of his church members on a trip to Israel if travel is advisable.

Missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth R. Glenn and their three children are in Ahwaz, Iran, several hundred miles south of Teheran. A volunteer, Hubert Williams, is stationed in Shiraz, still farther south of the troubled capital city.

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