



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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80-179

W. Va. Tables Resolution
On God's Hearing Prayer

BRIDGEPORT, W.Va. (BP)--West Virginia Baptists tabled a resolution that claimed God does not hear the prayer of a non-Christian during the 10th annual meeting of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists.

A record 176 registered messengers also ratified a previous executive board action to join the state's Baptists with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in a common effort to double the number of Southern Baptist churches in West Virginia to 200 by the end of 1985.

The project, called "Mountain State 200," calls for North Carolina churches and associations to join their West Virginia counterparts with financial and personnel resources. West Virginia staff members were to share 170 target areas with messengers to the North Carolina Baptist annual meeting in Greensboro.

Messengers elected Charles Whitlock, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Fairmont, W.Va., as president. They also adopted a 1981 budget of \$758,062, of which \$367,687 is anticipated income from convention churches. Of the convention income, 25 percent is designated for world missions through the national Cooperative Program, an increase of 1/2 percent over last year.

The tabled resolution asked West Virginia Baptists to "support Dr. Bailey Smith as he has courageously stood for what Baptists have historically believed and that being that everyone must accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah if they are to reach the throne of God." Reaching the "throne of God" is common Baptist phraseology to indicate access to God, implying that he is listening.

The resolution further resolved that "we believe the New Testament teaches that God does not hear the prayer of any non-believer unless it is a prayer of repentance and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

A brief discussion, divided evenly for and against, included one messenger's claim that "if you don't vote for the resolution, you deny that Jesus was the Messiah." Finally, a messenger stated there was primarily a problem of semantics and moved to table the resolution until the next annual meeting.

The convention also adopted resolutions reaffirming its confidence in the Cooperative Program as a method of financing the educational and missions enterprises of Southern Baptists, and reaffirmed its confidence in the SBC's boards, agencies and institutions, "and especially" its confidence in the seminaries. Another resolution urged Congress to restore the \$20,000 income exemption for employees of charitable and religious organizations working overseas.

A resolution passed that had been tabled last year concerning genetic engineering. It stated that guidelines for scientific manipulation of the birth process should give careful consideration to Christian ideals and should contain the "utmost regard to human life."

The 1981 convention will be Nov. 6-7 at First Baptist Church, Fairlea, W.Va.

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New York Convention
Hears SBC President

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GREENWICH, Conn. (BP)--Bailey Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, boosted the Cooperative Program, the method through which the missions and educational work of the SBC are funded, as he addressed messengers of the Baptist Convention of New York Nov. 6-8.

Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., admitted his church has a "lousy" record in giving through the Cooperative Program, but noted they plan to increase contributions by 300 percent during the coming year.

"That is just the beginning," Smith said. "We are going to be the number one church in the Oklahoma convention in giving through the Cooperative Program like we are in everything else."

Smith also commented on the status of the 13.4 million-member denomination and said, "We've got to quit feuding over things that might not be as essential as we thought."

During their meeting in Greenwich Baptist Church, messengers elected Curtis Porter, pastor of Amherst Baptist Church of Tonawanda, N.Y., as president, succeeding Wallace Williams, pastor of Wilton Baptist Church of Wilton, Conn.

They adopted a budget of \$1,586,839, of which \$334,924 will come from the 242 churches and chapels of the convention, which covers all of New York and parts of New Jersey and Connecticut. Messengers increased gifts to convention-wide causes by one percent, to 21 percent, or \$70,334, of the budget.

Messengers also were told William R. Dunning, director of campus ministries, has been promoted to director of the education division, succeeding John Tubbs, who resigned.

The 1981 meeting of the convention will be Nov. 5-7 at the Thruway House in Albany, N.Y.

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Supreme Court Action Leaves
Christmas Programs in Place

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Public schools may continue to observe religious holidays, including Christmas, after the Supreme Court declined to review whether the practice violates the Constitution.

By refusing to review the complaint of a group of Sioux Falls, S.D., parents, the high court put to rest a controversy that began more than two years ago and threatened to result in a landmark legal test of the traditional practice of observing religious holidays in schools.

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The Sioux Falls parents who brought the suit against the local school board for permitting the observances argued throughout the lengthy appeals process that presentation of religious music, drama, literature and symbols violates the "no establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment.

They argued further the school board guidelines favored religion over non-religion and favored Christianity over other religions.

Holidays specified as acceptable for public school observance by the guidelines were Christmas, Easter, Passover, Hannukah, St. Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Thanksgiving and Halloween. These may be observed, the guidelines stated, "if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the culture and religious heritage of the particular holiday."

Attorneys for the school board argued that the designated holidays are being observed in Sioux Falls in a manner that respects the neutrality toward religion prescribed by the Constitution. "It was never the purpose or intent of the school district to authorize or promote a program with religious effect," the board argued in a written legal brief.

Further, to eliminate observance of all holidays with religious content "would lead public schools to assume a position of hostility toward religion," a position also held unconstitutional in previous court decisions, the school board maintained.

The parents first objected to the practice of observing Christmas in public schools in 1977. In response, the superintendent of schools named a special citizens' committee to study the issue and bring a set of guidelines to the school board. The committee consisted of the school district's director of music; clergy from the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant faiths; an attorney and a member of the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

When the panel proposed the new guidelines allowing for the continuation of the observances, the objecting parents took the school board to court. But both the U.S. District Court for South Dakota and the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled for the school board and its guidelines.

By declining to review the lower decisions, the Supreme Court technically stopped short of announcing its approval of the practice. At the same time, however, by turning down the case the high court left standing the lower court rulings.

Justices William J. Brennan Jr. and Thurgood Marshall dissented from the action, indicating they voted to review the case. Four justices must agree, however, before the full court takes a case for argument and decision.

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Shreveport Broadmoor Church
Endows Discipleship Chair

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SHREVEPORT, La. (BP)--Broadmoor Baptist Church will endow a chair of discipleship at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the first fully funded chair at the seminary.

The funding requires a minimum of \$250,000, according to John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor and president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. The church will give \$100,000 corporately, and raise the additional \$150,000 from among its 4,400 members in three years or less, Sullivan said.

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The endowment will create the first chair of discipleship at any Southern Baptist seminary and perhaps any other seminary, according to Landrum Leavell, president of New Orleans Seminary.

"All of us on campus were overwhelmed when word reached us of the action of Broadmoor," Leavell said. He was especially appreciative because, "In these days in which criticism of our seminary is so prevalent in some quarters, it is significant that those who know us best continue to support us and encourage us."

"What we are hoping is that the chair will be a very practical approach in the life of the ministers to discipleship," said Sullivan, whose church has led the state convention in Cooperative Program support for several years. "The students will develop their personal prayer life, devotional Bible study, quiet time and skills in leading people to the Lord. They will also develop the skills to train others in the same discipline."

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Baptist Group Discusses
North American Problems

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
11/11/80

STONE MOUNTAIN, Ga. (BP)--Leaders in the North American Baptist Fellowship explored ways the continent's 25.6 million Baptists can cooperate to combat spiritual and physical hunger.

During a three-day meeting, Baptist World Alliance President Duke K. McCall and BWA General Secretary Gerhard Claas challenged nine Baptist bodies in the BWA affiliate group to work together to organize effective continent-wide efforts to meet the diverse needs of people.

"We must start looking at the edges of our relationship to each other not as insuperable barriers but as the points at which we are welded together and can work together," said McCall, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

"What will it take to win North America to Jesus Christ?" McCall asked. "We can do much more together. Why don't we get together and quit playing? Let's shape the fellowship to meet the spiritual and physical hungers of the world."

Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham, Ala., was reelected as chairman; Ernesto Uriegas, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Getsemani, Mexico City, vice chairman; and Fred B. Rhodes, a retired Southern Baptist from Washington, D.C., treasurer.

The themes of evangelism and hunger dominated the meeting.

"Battles have to be won in the city if the continent is to be won to Christ," said Archie Goldie, secretary for Canadian missions, Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec. "The church has not understood the complexity of the city. We must develop forms of church life indigenous to the city, rather than transport rural churches to the city."

"Where will Baptists be at the turn of the century?" he asked. "If we don't develop a strategy, how do we plant the gospel in a place from which so many of us have fled?"

Goldie and others issued the challenge for strategies for evangelism, church extension and creative efforts to reach the diverse cultural and linguistic groups which reflect the fact that "the world has come to North America."

Three speakers—W. David Sapp of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Nashville Tenn., BWA Associate Secretary Denton Lotz, and McCall—told of the oppressing world hunger with which Christians must deal.

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"The world has more hungry people in 1980 than it had in 1975, and we've been working at it for more than five years," Sapp said.

"We're playing God by trying to end hunger on our own," Sapp continued. "We can only deal with our frustration by partaking of Christ's hope. We must cast our failure and frustration before him and realize we are not gods."

Pointing to an "artificial division between evangelism and hunger," Sapp said: "The church has been struggling since New Testament times with those who want to do evangelism and ignore the hungry and vice versa. We have both unethical evangelists and unevangelistic ethicists."

"That's a fragmented perception," he continued. "We must see persons as Jesus did—as whole persons with common, though varied, needs and a common dependence on God. Evangelism and ministry to hunger are two obedient responses to God."

McCall urged Baptists of all varieties not to take comfort in what they have already done to combat world hunger, no matter how much.

"I'm not proud of what Southern Baptists have done," he said. "It's a pittance compared to what we could do and what the world requires."

Lotz, noting a recent gift of \$30,000 from the BWA to the starving people of Somalia, on the Horn of Africa, said Baptists aid may seem "like a little bird," compared to "government elephants" in the area of relief. "We Baptists can be the dove of peace to give a prophetic view to government elephants in how to give relief. We all need each other."