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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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83-28

Las Vegas Selected  
As SBC Site For 1989

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--In a divided action, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has voted to recommend Las Vegas as the site for the 1989 annual meeting.

The committee, in a 32-20 vote, will recommend to the 1983 SBC in Pittsburgh that the convention go to Las Vegas for the 1989 annual meeting. The decision came after 45 minutes of discussion, which featured the pleas of four state convention executive secretaries that the convention go to the Nevada city.

The discussion also centered on the function and purpose of the annual meeting of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, and ended in a request that the convention arrangements workgroup study site guidelines, including considering whether the convention's main purpose is business or Christian witness.

W. LeRay Fowler, of Houston, chairman of the convention arrangements workgroup, presented the proposal that the convention meet in Las Vegas, noting the decision to recommend the site to the Executive Committee came only after a long discussion and was not a unanimous action.

"Only two cities available for 1989 meet the criteria for a meeting site," he said. The cities, he added, are Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Convention adopted guidelines specify that a convention center have space to seat at least 16,000 persons, adequate exhibit space and 6,500 hotel rooms within walking distance of the meeting hall.

Fowler commented the recommendation was presented in the context of Bold Mission Thrust (the denomination's plan to evangelize every person in the world by 2000 AD) and "for the reason that we could go out there (Las Vegas) to advance the cause of Christ."

Ernest Myers, executive secretary of the Nevada Baptist Convention, told committee members he "would like to have the convention in Las Vegas because we believe the SBC can help the cause of Christ in Nevada."

Myers admitted "there is gaming in Las Vegas and we don't like that. Yet there is a need to witness the love of Jesus Christ in Las Vegas. We hope you will decide to bring the convention to Las Vegas and not be ashamed to do it."

In addition to Myers, executive secretaries Ernest Moseley of Illinois, Jack Johnson of Arizona and Dan Stringer of Florida all urged the selection of Las Vegas.

Moseley said perhaps Southern Baptists "can add Bold Action" to Bold Mission Thrust by taking more than 20,000 Baptists "into a pagan city to show that Southern Baptists will not withdraw from any part of the world."

Johnson, who noted Baptists saw "sin" in New Orleans, where the 1982 annual meeting was held, said "Las Vegas is not really as bad, to me, as New Orleans. Do not turn your back on Las Vegas because you think it has a wicked, sinister atmosphere."

Stringer, who worked on the staff of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention when Las Vegas was part of the ASBC, told committee members he believes having the SBC meet in the city "would be a good witness in a place of shattering need."

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John McCall, from Louisville, Ky., raised the issue of whether the purpose of the convention is business or witness. "I believe witness is incidental, although a very important incidental. We have the convention to conduct the business of the convention," he said.

"I have a very serious problem of going to Las Vegas. We ought to have a Southern Baptist witness in Las Vegas, but we should find some other way to do it. I do not think it appropriate for the convention to meet there," he said.

Rodney Landes, from El Dorado, Ark., said he opposes the action as "a father and a Christian. I have chosen not to go to Las Vegas (on many occasions). I cannot compromise that decision. I feel this is a grave mistake. Our leaders are getting too far ahead of the flock. Perhaps if the convention meets there it will all be chiefs and no indians."

John Sullivan, of Shreveport, La., and first vice president of the SBC, commented that "surely the SBC can stand the test of going to Las Vegas" and not be contaminated by it.

John Christian, of Hopkinsville, Ky., urged "keeping the primary purpose" of the convention in mind, and commented that as far as having a witnessing impact "we didn't have the greatest effect on New Orleans."

Doug Watterson of Shelby, N.C., made reference to a scriptural promise that the "gates of Hell will not prevail against Christians," and said from a "military viewpoint, the best troops are put where the fires are the hottest. If the approbation of 'Sin City' is appropriate for Las Vegas, then that is the place for us to go.

"I favor going because it is the worst place we could go," he said.

Darrell Robinson of Mobile, Ala., told committee members that as far as the convention is concerned, "you cannot separate witness from doing business. Wherever we are we are 'on mission' for Christ. My motivation for wanting to go is that these people really need Jesus."

After the debate, Executive Committee Chairman John Dunaway of Corbin, Ky., took a standing vote and announced the recommendation of Las Vegas carried 32-20.

Moments later, committee members voted without dissenting vote to recommend that the 1990 convention site be New Orleans.

Because of the guidelines and the large size of the convention, only about a dozen cities in the United States are capable of hosting the convention. Because of these factors, Tim Hedquist, convention manager for the Executive Committee, said it is necessary to select sites further in advance.

However, the Executive Committee staff made no recommendation for the 1989 convention, but presented the materials to committee members for decision.

The 1983 convention will be in Pittsburgh. Other sites are Kansas City, Mo., 1984; Dallas, 1985; Atlanta, 1986; St. Louis, 1987, and San Antonio, Texas, 1988.

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Short-Term Jobs Program  
Announced at BSSB

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A short-term jobs program has been announced under the sponsorship of the Baptist Sunday School Board to provide aid for unemployed persons.

Grady C. Cothen, president, said the program was initiated out of concern for people with families faced by bleak prospects for sufficient food and shelter because of long-term unemployment.

The program will be available to unemployed persons in the Nashville area and in cities where the board's 65 bookstores and two conference centers are located.

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"This jobs program is by no means charity," Cothen said. "It is a pay-for-work program. All of the assignments are tasks which will benefit the work of the Sunday School Board identified as areas of need. Since the Sunday School Board is a Christian organization, it seemed reasonable and right for us to do something."

Cothen said applications for work at the Sunday School Board in a three-month period last fall were three times the usual number, giving the personnel department almost 3,000 additional applications on file.

"We decided there was a great need," he said, "so we instituted a short-term employment project to match employment needs with some work needs of the board."

The emergency jobs program was approved by the executive committee of the board of trustees at their regular January meeting. The program stipulates that only persons with applications on file will be considered for the special needs employment program.

Also, preference will be given to those persons who have been without work the longest and are the sole or primary wage earner in the family.

All persons are being hired for a maximum of four weeks at a salary slightly above the minimum wage. Cothen said he expects approximately 150 persons to be hired into the jobs program, with the cost of the program not to exceed \$100,000.

An additional benefit to persons employed under the program should be the gaining of valuable experience in a work area. Cothen said this also could provide the board with a backlog of experienced persons in areas where we might need employees in the future.

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Negative Designation Option  
Withdrawn From CP Study Report

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A plan to allow churches to "exclude certain causes" and still have their gifts considered Cooperative Program contributions has been scuttled less than a month after being suggested.

In late January the Cooperative Program Study Committee issued a lengthy recommendation which included: "That Cooperative Program gifts from churches which by church action elect to exclude certain budgeted causes from their undesignated gifts be considered by the Southern Baptist Convention as Cooperative Program funds..."

But when the report was presented to the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention at its February meeting, that paragraph was withdrawn.

The vast majority of the study remained unchanged including a proposal to increase giving to Southern Baptist churches to \$20 billion and the SBC Cooperative Program receipts to \$1.25 billion per year by 2000 AD; seek to allocate 75 percent of the Cooperative Program funds to the Foreign Mission Board and the Home Mission Board; and lead each Southern Baptist, each church and each state convention to increase giving to missions.

"I don't want people to think at any time that we (the study committee) planned in any way to weaken the report," Chairman James Plietz, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, said, "rather we were concerned to strengthen it."

Joe Ingram, executive secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma and a member of the study group, explained the rationale behind the group's decision to delete. "A part of the plan was to present our findings to the state executive directors for their input," he said.

That input was overwhelmingly negative.

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"State executives who have the responsibility for raising the funds which eventually come to the Southern Baptist Convention did not feel this was in the interest of the unity of the Cooperative Program and that in the long run it would be a destructive force in that designations are already the inherent right of every Baptist congregation," Ingram said.

"The Cooperative Program is a budget," Ingram explained. "Designated gifts are designated. Cooperative Program is Cooperative Program--and never the twain shall meet."

There was no effort by any member of the Executive Committee to restore the paragraph. A vote on the entire report was approved on a standing vote. No one remained seated.

The size of the task for increasing giving to support Bold Mission Thrust was underlined by Randall Lolley, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. He noted that since the creation of the Cooperative Program in 1925 through 1982, the national SBC program to underwrite mission and educational activities has received \$1,046,458,689.

"What we are proposing is that, by the year 2000, the Cooperative Program be receiving more money each year than it has in the first 57 years," he pointed out.

R. Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board, stressed that the proposals are intended, "to be supportive of everything else we are already doing, to fit into everything else we are doing--to provide the fuel for the vehicle (Bold Mission Thrust) we have already constructed."

An inflation factor of six percent was used in forming the projections.

The study report and recommendations will be presented to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Pittsburgh next June where it will be voted on by messengers from many of the 36,000 churches in the SBC.

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Jews Show Concern In Wake  
Of Jerusalem Church Fire

By Elizabeth F. Smith

Baptist Press  
2/23/83

JERUSALEM (BP)--It was an unlikely synagogue service.

A Baptist pastor preached, then accepted a Hebrew pulpit Bible from a local rabbi.

Baptist representative Robert L. Lindsey was the pastor. The inscription inside the Bible's cover, written in English and Hebrew, explained the occasion and the gift:

"This Hebrew Bible is presented to the Baptist congregation of West Jerusalem by your neighbor Har-El congregation of Jerusalem (Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism) as a token of friendship and encouragement after the fire which destroyed your house of prayer.

Authorities say the Oct. 8 church fire was arson. The investigation continues but no arrests have been made.

When the rabbi invited Lindsey to speak at the Friday evening service, he admitted, "I didn't have the nerve to ask you to speak but my people ask." The synagogue is just around the corner from the Baptist property.

"The warmth of the people is so genuine and beautiful," Lindsey said of the Jewish congregation and hundreds of other people who have visited or sent letters, gifts and offers of help in rebuilding.

Local people have expressed concern in a variety of ways. One Jewish teacher said she took an hour with each of her high school English classes to talk to them about the arson and her long-standing friendship with Baptists. "I must educate them for total living and not just teach them an academic subject," she stressed.

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Israelis from all parts of society have contributed money to the congregation, from Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek to workers at a nearby butcher shop. Kollek launched a public fund to help in rebuilding the Baptist chapel by opening special accounts in several Jerusalem banks.

Elementary students, congregations of churches and synagogues, civic clubs, merchants' associations and interfaith groups have sent checks.

Local and foreign architects have volunteered to draw preliminary sketches of the proposed chapel. A prominent gardener has offered to landscape the property. Christian organizations abroad, including the Baptist World Alliance and American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., have expressed interest in the new building program.

Estimates for a new chapel stand at \$1 million. An inflation rate of 130 percent in Israel threatens that estimate.

The congregation built a temporary meeting place on its parking lot. A heavy plastic covering protects the 400-450 worshippers who attend Saturday morning services. Winter rain and snow haven't hampered attendance.

Work on fire-damaged Baptist House, adjacent to the burned chapel, is almost complete. The congregation and the Baptist Convention of Israel use offices and classrooms in the two-story stone building.

The fire apparently was not an isolated incident. Physical assaults on clergymen, theft of liturgical emblems, the daubing of swastikas and anti-Christian slogans and arson attempts against other Christian property have been reported since the fire. City and national officials continue to denounce such acts.

Israel's President Yitzhak Navon has ordered his minister of police to make apprehension of the people who have been daubing swastikas and burning churches the top police priority.

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(Smith is a press representative with the Baptist Convention of Israel.)

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