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WRAPUP

Messengers Reelect Draper,
Okay Budget, Resolution

By Stan Hastey

PITTSBURGH, (BP) More than 13,600 messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention marked a three-day meeting at Civic Arena by reelecting incumbent president James T. Draper Jr., adopting a \$125 million Cooperative Program budget, and staggering through marathon business sessions dealing with a host of church-related and public matters.

Draper, 47-year-old pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, was reelected by acclamation to the traditional second one-year term accorded incumbent presidents. He has received high marks for leadership during his first year of service and appeared in full control of the 14-million-member denomination's 126th session.

Also elected without opposition was first vice president John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La. His reelection broke recent tradition. Chosen second vice president on a second ballot was retired Westinghouse Corporation executive C. Edward Price of Pittsburgh.

Adoption of the record budget occurred without debate and with no questions asked of the SBC executive committee, which brought the recommendation.

In action responding to an executive committee proposal, messengers approved by a 2-1 margin construction of an \$8 million building in Nashville to house executive committee staff and the staffs of six SBC agencies.

Adopted without debate was a Cooperative Program study report from the executive committee calling for a 15-year growth in giving emphasis and a goal of increasing the Cooperative Program to \$2.5 billion by the year 2000.

Messengers also approved more stringent trustee residence requirements. Following spirited debate, an executive committee recommendation was adopted requiring persons recommended as trustees by the committee on boards to have lived in the state from which they are elected at least one year prior to election. In addition, the action requires the committee boards to release its report to Baptist Press at least 45 days before the annual SBC meeting.

Another executive committee recommendation proposing Las Vegas as site for the 1989 annual meeting likewise met stiff resistance before messengers decisively voted to go to the Nevada city in spite of concern about the image of the denomination.

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Opponents argued that Southern Baptists should not give the appearance of supporting the gambling industry. But those favoring Las Vegas said it would encourage the relative handful of Southern Baptists in Nevada and give the denomination a chance to render a positive witness.

Routinely adopted was a separate recommendation to go to New Orleans for the 1990 session.

In a separate meeting, members of the executive committee, who function on behalf of the convention between annual sessions, elected Dallas businessman W. Dewey Presley chairman, Jefferson City, Mo. pastor Nelson Duke vice chairman, and Evansville, Ind. layman Don Gent secretary.

In other denominationally-related actions, messengers left the relationship between the convention and Southern Baptists in Canada with a select 21-member study committee with instructions to report back next year.

The "Canada question" resulted from a longstanding desire on the part of Southern Baptist congregations in western Canada to send messengers to the annual meeting. They are already part of the Northwest Baptist Convention.

In other in-house denominational actions, several miscellaneous motions were referred to appropriate boards, commissions and standing committees.

Included were referrals on ministers and Social Security, to the Annuity Board and a proposed World Hunger Sunday to the denominational calendar committee.

Sent to the executive committee were motions asking for more visible SBC opposition to abortion, requiring a three-fourths majority vote on SBC resolutions, requiring five years' membership in an SBC congregation before an individual is eligible for nomination as trustee to denominational agencies, and studying the possibility of lowering the number of such trustees.

Unlike the past two conventions, the Pittsburgh meeting saw the SBC committee on boards report approved without changes. Although several proposed trustees to denominational agencies were challenged on the floor, all challenges were brushed aside.

As always, convention proceedings were enlivened by debate and action on several controversial resolutions.

Although Draper and resolutions committee chairman Tal Bonham, executive secretary of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, successfully kept several potentially explosive subjects off the floor, dozens of messengers took to microphones to engage in debate.

Among the adopted resolutions were two dealing with intensely emotional issues within the denomination, theological education and the place of women in the church.

Messengers narrowly refused to put the convention on record as opposing the ordination of women to the ministry and adopted a committee statement expressing gratitude for contributions made by women in ministry. The statement called on employers, including Southern Baptist congregations and agencies, to be fair in compensation, benefits and advancements opportunities.

In refusing to go along with an amendment expressing opposition to women's ordination, messengers apparently decided to leave that matter in the hands of local congregations.

Also adopted was a lengthy resolution praising Southern Baptist seminary professors and urging them to keep in balance their academic freedom and doctrinal responsibility. The statement asked trustees of the six SBC seminaries to be responsible for seeing that professors abide by denominational and institutional statements of faith.

Other resolutions dealing with denominational issues urged wider utilization of blacks and other ethnics in places of SBC leadership and asked for additional support from state conventions and associations for ministers terminated by their congregations.

Statements on issues in the political arena included a resolution retreating from last year's endorsement of President Reagan's amendment to the Constitution to return state-written prayers to public school classrooms.

This year's resolution declares confidence in the U.S. Constitution as "adequate and sufficient" to guarantee both free exercise of religion and no establishment.

Another resolution positioned the convention as favoring "mutually verifiable nuclear disarmament." But messengers rejected an amendment endorsing a nuclear freeze.

Other resolutions encouraged deeper regard for the environment, especially by industry, and roundly condemned alcoholic beverages, gambling and cable television pornography.

Besides debating the issues and accepting progress reports from 20 agencies, institutions and auxiliaries messengers heard stirring preaching throughout the three-day meeting. In his presidential address, Draper refrained from using theological code words that have characterized convention rhetoric in recent years.

Instead, he preached a sermon on Baptists' basic beliefs, declaring at the end that "Any theology or supposed belief that does not thrust us into all the world to witness and preach is heresy."

Southwestern Seminary preaching professor Joel Gregory, in five interpretations of the convention theme, "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace," called on Southern Baptists to put aside their differences. He said biblical literalists should have a "lowliness of mind," moderates should be meek and inerrantists should believe a Bible that demands "long-suffering toward others."

James L. Pleitz, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas, admonished Southern Baptists in the convention annual sermon that true orthodoxy is characterized by "an orthodoxy of spirit--which is love."

Charles W. Colson, convicted Watergate conspirator now leading a nationwide ministry for prisoners, closed the convention by calling on Southern Baptists to get the church out of the sanctuaries and fellowship halls into the streets.

Prison reform is a growing issue that requires dealing with the spiritual needs of prisoners, said Colson, who became a believer following his conviction.

At next year's convention in Kansas City, the annual sermon will be preached by Russell H. Dilday, of Fort Worth, Texas. Alternate is Conrad Johnston, of Salem, Va. Music director will once again be William R. Reynolds, of Fort Worth.

Executive Committee
Names Chairman

PITTSBURGH (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee have elected a Dallas layman as chairman and authorized the establishment of a five-person committee to oversee construction of a new \$8 million SBC building in Nashville.

W. Dewey Presley, a Dallas businessman and member of Park Cities Baptist Church, was unopposed for a one-year term as chairman. He has been vice-chairman of the committee.

Nelson Duke, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Mo., was elected vice-chairman and Don Gent, a layman from Evansville, Ind., was elected secretary. Harold Bennett of Nashville was reelected executive secretary-treasurer.

A five-person SBC Building Construction Committee will be appointed by Presley to negotiate and approve a contract for the construction of the new building to house the Executive Committee and six agencies.

Messengers to the convention Tuesday approved \$8 million in the 1984-88 capital needs budget for the construction of the building.

The committee also authorized borrowing up to \$8 million against 1984-88 capital needs funds from First American Bank of Nashville.

In addition to the Executive Committee, the building will house the Southern Baptist Foundation, Christian Life Commission, Education Commission, Historical Commission, Stewardship Commission and Seminary External Education Division.

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Evangelists' Banquet
Becomes a Revival

Baptist Press
6/16/83

By Terry Barone

PITTSBURGH (BP)--What was planned as an ordinary annual banquet for Southern Baptist evangelists turned into a revival session when persons invited off the streets to fill seats professed their faith in Christ.

The conference had guaranteed 700 seats for the banquet and when extra seats went unfilled, several evangelists went into the streets outside the William Penn Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh to invite passers-by to eat with them.

Rick Scarborough of Houston, president of the conference, was scheduled to speak at the banquet, but asked Los Angeles evangelist Arthur Blessitt to take his place. Blessitt is best known for carrying a cross more than 20,000 miles around the world.

At the close of Blessitt's message on the Holy Spirit he asked those at the banquet who did not personally know Jesus Christ and who wanted to be "saved" to raise their hand. After a prayer for those who had done so, everyone prayed and several persons accepted Christ. They included a truck driver from Dallas, a couple from the greater Pittsburgh area and waiters and waitresses serving at the banquet.

In his message, Blessitt told of his conversion experience as a seven-year-old in Louisiana and outlined how he felt the Holy Spirit had led him in his ministry from that time.

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One evangelist said, "This (those who professed faith) is one of the reasons Southern Baptists are in Pittsburgh."

Earlier in the afternoon, applause and amens floated to the rafters amid a perspiration-filled sanctuary as the evangelists responded to loud preaching and singing during their annual conference. The meeting came during the 126th annual meeting of the SBC.

An overflow crowd filled the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Pittsburgh which was not air conditioned.

Both the floor and balcony of the church were filled with fan-waving listeners and closed circuit television was set up in the basement to allow those who wanted to participate to do so.

One speaker, Charles Stanley, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga., and newly-elected president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, encouraged participants to have a quality "devotional time." He added, "The only thing Satan is concerned about is keeping you off your knees."

Stanley suggested a pattern for personal prayer and devotional time which included reviewing the past, reflecting on what God has done, remembering the promises of God and reaching out to request of God.

During the banquet, the evangelists honored their former executive director, Don Womack of Memphis, who was relieved of his duties in 1982.

The conference also recognized four veteran evangelists for more than 120 combined years in evangelism. They were T. W. Wilson of Montreat, N.C.; Lowell Leistner of Memphis, Tenn.; Mike Gilchrist of Shreveport, La.; and Larry Taylor of San Antonio, Texas.

Earlier the conference reelected their president and voted to suspend the Wednesday afternoon session beginning in 1984.

Business was quieter this year after a bitter battle threatened to divide the 300-member conference last year in New Orleans. The controversy grew out of the issue of who should control the conference. In response, the conference ratified a new slate of bylaws transferring major responsibilities from the conference's executive director to its elected officers.

However, members this year voted to suspend the bylaw requiring president to only serve one term, and reelected Scarborough.

In other business, the conference voted to appoint a committee of dues-paying members to review financial records annually beginning with this year.

Other officers elected for 1983-84 were Mike Gilchrist, Shreveport, La., vice president; Larry Taylor, San Antonio, secretary-treasurer; Melvin Wise, Atlanta, parliamentarian; Pat Roper, Greenville, S.C., music director; Jackson Cox, Milledgeville, Ga., assistant music director; and Richard Vaughan, pastor, Fletcher Emmanuel Baptist Church, Lumberton, Texas, pastor-advisor.

Pages Fill Important
Jobs at Convention

PITTSBURGH (BP)--Sixteen Acteen and Pioneer Royal Ambassador pages are key ingredients in the smooth operation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Their duties range from running messages to distributing news stories as they provide the link the convention needs to function well.

And, as they work, they learn important things about how the 14-million member SBC conducts its annual business meeting.

Hard work and flexibility are two major qualities required of each page. The demands of a convention of over 15,000 messengers are staggering.

Learning about convention procedures is an important by-product of the pages' efforts. By rotating work assignments each page gets a balanced view of the SBC.

Acteens is the missions education program of the Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham, for girls in grades 7-12. The girls serving as pages are the national advisory panelists for the Acteens program. Out of the many outstanding Acteens who apply for the advisory panel, only six are chosen.

Pioneer Royal Ambassadors identifies the Brotherhood missions education program for boys in grades 7-12. The 10 pages come as part of a special selection process defined by their state Royal Ambassador directors.

Each boy is required to have at least two service awards representing 300 hours of local missions service and to be in grades 10-12.

This year, dressed in blue blazers with distinctive "official" patches, the Royal Ambassador pages are helping their organization celebrate its 75th anniversary.

The pages are representative of the top echelon," said Russell Griffin of Memphis, National Pioneer Royal Ambassador director. "They have a tremendous influence on the people at the convention."

The 10 Royal Ambassador pages are: Kirk Jackson, Pearland, Texas; Andrew Shull, West Columbia, S.C.; Charles Myers, Rupert, Idaho; Chris Parker, Marietta, Ga.; Scott Proctor, Tulsa, Okla.; Todd Russell, Anniston, Ala.; Chris Cantrell, High Point, N.C.; Russell Kiner, Indianapolis, Ind.; Jeff Brown, Middlesboro, Ky., and Keith Kirkland, Brentwood, Tenn.

The six Acteen pages are: Janie Walker, Austin, Texas; Kimberly Wiese, Nashville, Ill.; Shannon Brawley, West Memphis, Ark.; Leigh Sneed, Raleigh, N.C.; Tracy Webb, Lexington, Ky.; and Lydia Lowe, Evenston, Wyo.