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Association of Conservative Churches Creation Discussed

By Tom Miller

LYNCHBURG, Va. (BP)--A small group of Virginia pastors is studying the possibility of forming a new non-geographical association of "conservative churches."

Their spokesman, Arthur B. Ballard Jr., of Old Forest Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., said they are "not leaving the Southern Baptist Convention; not going independent. We can be dually aligned with the associations we are now in."

A three-hour service of "freedom in autonomy" was held Sept. 26 at Old Forest Road Church. Robert Witty, founder and chancellor of Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Fla., and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Dallas, were principal speakers.

During the service, Ballard read a letter from Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, congratulating the group on their plan to form the new association.

In preliminary remarks Ballard listed five things "we can expect to do" if a new association is formed: "One, we can speak with a united conservative voice; two, we can sponsor a conservative newspaper in Virginia; three, we can speak out on moral issues such as abortion, prayer in schools, pornography, the direction of the hierarchy in the SBC; four, we can use the association's money for evangelization and starting churches in areas where Baptists are weak rather than in associational administrative overhead; five, through revivals and crusades we can reach the lost in Virginia."

Ballard said a study committee, made up of eight pastors and 16 laymen will study why an association is needed, guidelines for a fresh new work, recommend a name for the association, poll local churches as to interest, plan the next meeting, enter into correspondence and report back at a Nov. 21 meeting tentatively set for Old Forest Road Church.

During the "freedom in autonomy" service, Patterson urged a "sweetness of spirit" among conservatives. "So often conservatives have been ugly," he said. "Let your voice be heard but speak in love. You can't do God's business in the devil's way."

He told the estimated 175 persons attending: "Orthodoxy for the sake of orthodoxy isn't worth very much, but on the other hand the failure to be doctrinally orthodox is interdiction to the cause of evangelism and worldwide missions. Where orthodoxy fails, missions and evangelism soon fail."

He also called for a "return of the denomination to the local churches" and warned against what he called a "tranquil centralization of the Southern Baptist Convention."

In a question and answer session, Patterson declined the mantle of national leader of conservatives, and said from the beginning the movement he represents has been "deliberately leaderless."

However, he made his remarks from the pulpit of the church where in the spring of 1981, he and Houston appeals court judge Paul Pressler unveiled a campaign to take control of the denominational machinery through election of presidents sympathetic to their cause and appointments to boards and agencies of the convention.

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Patterson told the participants at the meeting he sees no great possibility of a split in the denomination. "It's absolutely possible, but I would be the most surprised person in the SBC if it occurred. We are going to work this thing through.

"It will take more years of struggle. We've got to work out something that will be representative and fair so we are not forced to support something that is morally unconscionable to us. We will still have to support some things we don't like but not those things which are tragically and deeply wrong at the heart of our faith."

On Sept. 9 Pressler and Russell Kaemmerling, editor of the independent Southern Baptist Advocate, met in Lynchburg with some of the same people who are discussing the new association.

At that earlier meeting, both Pressler and Kaemmerling predicted the election of a president from their camp in Kansas City, Mo., next June, an action they said would "reflect the demise of the stranglehold of liberalism on the convention."

Kaemmerling later told the Religious Herald, a small group of persons present suggested Homer Lindsay Jr., Charles Stanley and Ed Young as acceptable candidates. He could not recall if the Virginians or the visiting Texans called the names.

Lindsay is pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.; Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, and Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston.

Pressler said he expected "God to place the mantle on one of these three just before the Convention as in years past."

Kaemmerling said he and Pressler were in Virginia primarily to bring Pressler's daughter to Randolph-Macon Woman's College where she has enrolled, but "stopped along the way to visit with friends."

In talking with the Herald, Kaemmerling said one of the main agenda items for the inerrancy faction is the removal of James M. Dunn as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. He said the main reason is Dunn's opposition to the constitutional amendment on prayer in the public schools and Dunn's referral to President Reagan as a "demagogue."

"We cannot have an agency head who constantly humiliates the Convention," said Kaemmerling.

The Texan further charged Dunn is an embarrassment to the denomination because of his association with television producer Norman Lear and the organization, People for the American Way.

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August Cooperative Program
Receipts Up 8.18 Percent

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Contributions to the national Cooperative Program from the 34 Southern Baptist state conventions were \$8,368,901 in August.

The amount was 8.18 percent above the August 1982, figure and leaves the yearly total at \$93,305,266--9.07 ahead of the 1982-83 pace. With one month remaining in the SBC fiscal year the \$100 million basic operating budget for the national mission and education programs seems assured of being reached. However, the \$6 million challenge budget will not be fully funded.

August marked the eighth time in the 11 months of the current fiscal year (and the eighth time in the last nine months) national contributions exceeded the \$8 million mark. By comparison, the \$8 million barrier was broken four times in the 1981-82 fiscal year and only once in 1980-81.

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Florida, Georgia and Mississippi continued to be Southern Baptist Convention leaders in both dollar amount given and percentage increase over last year. Most other percentage increase leaders were in northern or western conventions while the dollar leaders were in the South, where the SBC is numerically stronger.

After 11 months, Florida is third in both percentage increase (25.74) and total contributions (\$7,472,815). Georgia is 11th in increase (14.55) and second in total contributions (\$7,747,353) while Mississippi is 10th in increase (12.69) and ninth in contributions (\$4,647,672).

Northern Plains is the increase leader (66.2) and Texas is the total contributions leader (\$16,815,313).

Other percentage leaders are: (2)--New York, 53.3; (4)--Hawaii, 22.22; (5)--Nevada, 21.24; (6)--Maryland, 16.96; (7)--Arizona, 14.67, and (9)--Indiana, 14.4.

Other total contribution leaders are: (4)--North Carolina, \$6,423,777; (5)--Oklahoma, \$6,225,328; (6)--Alabama, \$6,188,939; (7)--Tennessee, \$5,506,086; (8)--South Carolina, \$5,095,813, and (10)--Louisiana, \$4,371,517.

The national agencies, primarily the Foreign Mission Board and the Home Mission Board, have also received \$84,228,872 in designated gifts since October 1982, including \$1,533,667 in August. Designated giving is 6.03 percent ahead of the 1981-82 pace.

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Sunday School Board
Seeks Tax Hearing

By Jim Lowry

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, after consultation with legal counsel, has decided to petition the Missouri Supreme Court for rehearing of a property tax case related to the Kansas City Book Store.

The petition will challenge a Sept. 20 ruling in which the Missouri high court, in a 6-1 decision, said the downtown Baptist Book Store should not be exempt from paying property taxes because it was being operated in a manner similar to other retail book stores.

James W. Clark, executive vice-president of the board, said the ruling would be appealed because it appeared the court was considering the Baptist Book Store in Kansas City separately from the Sunday School Board, when in fact, the store is an outreach arm of the agency.

The board also has been advised, Clark said, that the recent ruling, which instructs the board to pay property taxes to the Jackson County (Kansas City) Missouri, appears to be in conflict with another Missouri court ruling which states a business is taxable only for the part of the business that is considered non-exempt.

The majority opinion ruling against the Sunday School Board also noted that two-thirds of the merchandise sold in the store is to churches and church organizations and 50 percent of the materials in the store is not carried in competing stores.

The primary purpose of the Baptist Book Store is the carrying out of the goal of the Sunday School Board, Clark said, which is to win men to God through Jesus Christ. In that sense, it is an important outreach arm of the board to distribute materials published by the board for religious purposes.

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SBC Evangelists Overturn
Merger With Pastor's Conference

By Patti Stephenson

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ATLANTA (BP)--Members of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists will not disband and merge with the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in 1984.

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Rick Scarborough, president of the 300-member evangelists' association, reported the group will "continue to maintain its own identity," reversing a decision to dissolve made during its meeting at the Southern Baptist Convention in Pittsburgh last June.

The action was taken in a mail ballot of CSBE members.

The evangelists also voted to continue their Wednesday afternoon preaching session at the annual SBC meeting, rather than suspend it as agreed at the last convention, Scarborough said.

In a letter to conference members, Scarborough said the group's chronic financial problems and the resulting strife among members prompted the decision to merge with the Pastors' Conference. At the SBC, he had expressed his opinion that the afternoon preaching session "has outlived its usefulness."

The change-of-heart was influenced by the appeals of "several prominent pastors, including SBC President James T. Draper Jr., that we not disband," Scarborough said. He reported Draper urged the evangelists to "continue to meet the spiritual needs of SBC messengers by sponsoring the Wednesday afternoon preaching session."

Scarborough added the "evidence of God's blessing as seen in the overflow crowds and the souls won at our annual banquet in Pittsburgh" spurred the conference's officers to meet and vote unanimously to ask members to "reconsider a hasty decision."

After canvassing members by mail and receiving only one objection to keeping the conference intact, conference officers have begun plans for activities at the 1984 SBC meeting in Kansas City, Scarborough reported.

"We're planning a breakfast business meeting and our preaching conference will end by 5 p.m. in order to allow messengers to return for the SBC evening session," he said. "Due to the expense, we will not hold the evening banquet, which cost us about \$9,000 last year."

A major consideration affecting the about-face vote was a decision by the Home Mission Board to take over printing and distribution of an annual directory of evangelists, an operation which has been a "financial ball and chain" for the evangelists' conference for several years, Scarborough said.

Last year, members spent more than \$12,500 to print and distribute the directory, almost exhausting conference funds. As a result, "we didn't have the money we needed to pay for our expenses in Pittsburgh," Scarborough noted. "The lifting of this burden from our shoulders will help us become more financially stable," he said.

Conference dues will remain at \$50 for another year to clear the conference's remaining debts and build reserve funds. The decision of whether to lower dues will be discussed at Kansas City, Scarborough said.

Bobby Sunderland, HMB director of direct evangelism, said the HMB's goal in providing 40,000 directories to SBC pastors and state and associational leaders is "to affirm our Southern Baptist evangelists and to provide a much needed resource for our convention, especially as churches plan for nation-wide simultaneous revivals in 1986." The HMB will provide \$35,000 to fund the project.

The directory will list by states the names, photos, addresses and church memberships of evangelists whose names are submitted by state evangelism directors, according to Tom McEachin, HMB associate director of mass evangelism and project coordinator. The evangelists' pastors also will need to submit letters verifying their qualifications as vocational evangelists.

Deadline for receipt of entries for the directory is Nov. 15. Evangelists should contact their state evangelism director for forms if they have not been received. Delivery is scheduled for next spring, McEachin said.

California Church Needs
Sun For Sunday School

By Linda Lawson

EL CAJON, Calif. (BP)--It's hard for members of Primera Iglesia Bautista del Sur here to be grateful when it rains on Sunday mornings.

Rain or other bad weather means Pastor Santiago Morales must try to find places in the crowded church building for the seven Sunday school classes that meet outside in the yard.

When the sun shines, Morales, who came to the church 14 months ago, said the yard looks like a swap meet or flea market on Sunday mornings as classes gather for Bible study.

While lack of space means the church is growing--from 33 to 145 enrolled in Sunday school in 14 months--crowded conditions nevertheless represent a serious obstacle to continued growth.

The church building only has four classrooms and the number of classes has been increased from three to 12 to accommodate the growth. With no more room in the yard, "People look at me funny when I tell them we still need to start new classes," said Morales.

Jake Gurley, California church building consultant, said the El Cajon church is not alone in that lack of space is one of the most common and serious problems facing churches in the state. "California church growth is going to die if someone doesn't do something about building space," he said.

Lack of space has also meant Morales' church has had to make some compromises from the ideal organization, such as having bed babies and toddlers in the same room.

A young man with an intense commitment to reaching Hispanics, Morales said, "Sometimes my eyes get full of tears because I know we are not reaching the people properly, but that's all we have right now."

The positive side, he noted, is that "people come early to get a seat."

Morales said the dedication of the members is the biggest factor in the growth of the congregation.

"We have a vision for growth and we are reaching the people," he said. "They believe God wants to use every person in the room."

The formula for growth that has worked for Morales' church is dedication, cooperation, organization for growth and victory. "This is what has happened with us," he said.

A more memorable formula which Morales cited with a grin is, "Win 'em, wet 'em, work with 'em. We win them for the Lord, wet them in baptism and work with them to grow as disciples."

Describing himself as a dreamer, Morales said, "My prayer is that all the Spanish churches will have the vision of growth to reach the Spanish people for Christ."