



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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86-166

Owen Cooper
Dies Of Cancer

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)—Owen Cooper, 78, the last layman to serve as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, died Saturday, Nov. 8, after a three-week illness with cancer.

Cooper, who headed the SBC 1972-74, was buried, at his own request, in private graveside services in Jackson, Miss., on the day of his death. A memorial service was held Sunday, Nov. 9, at First Baptist Church of Yazoo City, Miss.

A leader in religion, politics, economics and humanitarian causes, Cooper in 1985 was named Layman of the Century by the Mississippi Baptist Convention. At the 1986 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, Cooper was presented the Distinguished Service Award of the SBC Christian Life Commission in recognition of his contributions to moral and social concerns.

Cooper, born April 19, 1908, near Vicksburg, Miss., also had been a member and former chairman of the SBC Executive Committee, vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, president of the Pan-American Union of Baptist Men, president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, president and secretary of the Mississippi Pioneer Missions Committee, member and chairman of the board of trustees of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a trustee of the Southern Baptist Foundation.

He also had been one of the founders of the Baptist Laity Journal, a publication aimed at giving the laity a voice in the denominational controversy. Cooper long had been a champion of the involvement of the laity in church and denominational affairs and had been a speaker at numerous meetings concerning lay involvement.

In missions, Cooper had led missions groups to Montana, California, Ohio, Hawaii and Spain and had helped establish a number of churches in the United States and in Central and South America. At one point, he owned five church buildings in Montana, purchased at a time when the cost was \$10,000 each.

Cooper was chairman of the board of Agricultural Missions Foundation and president of Global Outreach, both groups interested in providing support for the efforts of agricultural missionaries around the world. He also was involved in the Universal Concern in India movement, which was a concept designed to provide monetary support for Indian evangelists.

He was graduated from Mississippi State University with a degree in agriculture; from the University of Mississippi, with a master's degree in economics in political science; and from the Jackson School of Law (now the College of Law of Mississippi College), with a law degree.

In 1939, he became executive director of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation and was instrumental in providing life and health insurance to Mississippi farmers. In 1948, he established the Mississippi Chemical Corp., the first farmer-owned synthetic nitrogen plant in the world. He was president of the corporation until his retirement in 1973 and a member of the board until his death.

He also established the First Mississippi Corp., and a fertilizer complex in India.

In governmental affairs, Cooper was a member of the Commission on Arms Control and Disarmament, a director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, the Central Bank For Cooperatives in Washington, and the National Association of Manufacturers. He also had been Mississippi chairman of the March of Dimes.

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In his church, Cooper had participated in missions activities and helped lead the church to become one of the top givers to the SBC Cooperative Program. He also had been a deacon, Sunday school superintendent and director of church training.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; four daughters, a son, a brother, a sister and nine grandchildren.

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Bisagno Says SBC Needs
Non-aligned Candidate

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
11/10/86

HOUSTON (BP)—The cause of peace in the Southern Baptist Convention would best be served if the two most-visible proponents of both sides of the denominational controversy would "stand down" at next year's annual meeting, John Bisagno says.

Bisagno, pastor of the 18,000-member First Baptist Church of Houston, called for a depoliticized presidency and a unified Pastors' Conference as vital steps toward denominational reconciliation. He presented his proposal in the Nov. 10 issue of his church newsletter and discussed the issue three days earlier in an interview with Baptist Press.

His newsletter column and verbal comments to his congregation on peace in the SBC were prompted by the recent Glorieta Statement made by presidents of the six SBC theological seminaries, the SBC Peace Committee's acceptance of that statement and a related peace proposal presented by moderate-conservatives in the convention.

"The battle is over; it is time for us to put it behind us," said Bisagno, whose church is third-largest in the SBC. "We should drop the issue completely. Both sides should cease and desist from politicking."

He specifically urged SBC President Adrian Rogers and moderate-conservative standard-bearer Winfred Moore to remove themselves from denominational politics. Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., was supported for the presidency by fundamental-conservatives. He won over Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, and former SBC first vice president. Both men are members of the Peace Committee.

"Dr. Moore and Dr. Rogers are both impeccable men, godly men," Bisagno said. "Nevertheless, they ought to stand down, and we should agree to nominate a non-political man, like a Dan Vestal or a Jim Henry." Vestal is pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas, and Henry is pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla. Both are on the Peace Committee, but neither is publicly affiliated with an SBC faction.

"You probably have 25,000 on both sides who gear up and go to the convention, but there are 14 million out there who think the Bible is without error—and I am one of them—who are tired of the fighting," the Houston pastor said. "The frustration I have felt—and all Southern Baptists have felt—is that 99 percent are in a third entity and are displeased. The moderates have not faced the issue of getting too far from the center (in teaching at seminaries), and the right has been too great a source of agitation."

Bisagno also commended a "moderate-side proposal" to de-politicize pre-convention meetings by merging the SBC Pastors' Conference and the SBC Forum into a single meeting with an agenda that would ensure neutrality.

He told Baptist Press he has high regard for persons on all sides of the controversy:

— The fundamental-conservatives have expressed a "valid concern" about teaching in the seminaries, especially regarding the inerrancy of Scripture, he said, adding the negative image of these Baptists has been somewhat shaped by inaccurate media coverage.

"It seems at some point the religious press needs to say it's a fair appraisal that a bunch of power-hungry men did not wake up one morning and say, 'Let's take over the convention. We don't have anything else to do,'" he noted.

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— On the other hand, people on the other side of the issue are not all wrong either, he pointed out: "I do not think Winfred Moore is any less conservative or old-fashioned than Adrian Rogers. I know Richard Jackson (pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church who nominated Moore for the presidency) is not. But they have jumped out of frustration. Ninety-nine percent of us don't know which way to jump."

— He praised the seminary presidents for their Glorieta Statement, a set of commitments and philosophical statements that affirmed and promised to enforce the seminaries' confessional statements, pledged to initiate action to ensure theological balance on the campuses and affirmed that the "66 books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality."

"The presidents have said that what the men (fundamental-conservatives) have been concerned about is a valid concern and that they are going to in essence call for a return to the center of the road, committed to see that all professors teach the Bible is without error," Bisagno said. "The good news is the presidents have acknowledged trouble and will do something about it. These men are fair and just and honest, and they're going to be good to their word."

"The greatest thing to happen in this decade," he said, "would be to agree on this type of person (a non-political, positive leader as president); get the Pastors' Conference together with nothing but preaching with no debate; then, when the time comes for the convention, for Adrian to nominate this type of person and Winfred to second and then unify around evangelism and missions."

Time is vital, he said: "The SBC has lost years of its witness. We've got to regain it as soon as we can."

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Illinois Baptists
Adopt \$6 Million Budget

Baptist Press
11/10/86

URBANA, Ill. (BP)—Messengers to the 80th annual meeting of the Illinois Baptist State Association adopted a 1987 budget of nearly \$6 million Oct. 29-31 at Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in Urbana.

Illinois Baptists will give 43.6 percent (\$1,948,499) of anticipated Cooperative Program receipts of \$4,469,034 to Southern Baptist Convention causes. That represents a tenth of a percent increase over 1986.

Messengers also approved a budget of \$978,196 for their child care, maternity care and adoption ministry, and \$755,507 for the Baptist Student Center, a dormitory facility at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Neither receives Cooperative Program funds.

Messengers reacted with prayerful concern in their opening session at the news that Sharon Sheppard, 17-year-old daughter of former state church music director Carl Sheppard, had just been struck by a car and killed near her home. Her father, for the past year music and education director at Winstanley Baptist Church in Fairview Heights, was at the convention when the news came.

Messengers, who were split evenly last year over whether they would enter into a statewide \$2 million to \$3 million capital fund drive, granted the state board of directors permission to accept special funds and build an activities building at the Baptist Children's Home and complete major renovations at the student center.

That action partially overruled an action earlier in the meeting that forbade the directors from moving forward on those capital projects or others at the state's two camps until they came up with more detailed and complete plans and presented them at a later convention.

Messengers accepted the board's recommendation that the state association staff study the feasibility of a pilot senior adult retirement facility and bring a recommendation back to the board in 1990. The recommendation includes a suggestion that the pilot facility be an 8- to 12-complex unit for persons who could pay to live there and care for themselves.

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The convention rejected a constitutional amendment that would have limited the terms of convention officers to one year instead of two. The amendment also would have made the vice president the president-elect and the assistant recording secretary the recording secretary-elect.

Messengers approved, however, a constitutional amendment to provide that the immediate past president become an ex officio member of the board and administrative committee for a year.

Several resolutions won the approval of messengers, including those against lotteries, child abuse, sexual activity among teen-agers, pornography and smoking.

Other resolutions: honored Ed Claybrook, retiring state special ministries division director; encouraged churches to participate in Planned Growth in Giving; called for ethics in government; urged Christians to participate in the political process by staying informed, voting and offering themselves as candidates; and called for Illinois Baptists to celebrate in 1987 the 200th anniversary of Baptist preaching in Illinois by Elder James Smith, who traveled to Illinois from Lincoln County, Ky., to preach.

Messengers elected Dale Clemens, a former state president and pastor of Meadow Heights Baptist Church of Collinsville, as next year's president. Charles West, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bethalto, was elected vice president; Deloris "Dee" McFarland of the same church was re-elected recording secretary; and Bill Lewis, layman from the host church, was elected assistant recording secretary.

Next year's convention will be Oct. 27-29 at First Baptist Church of Salem, which will be celebrating its 150th anniversary.

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Penn-South Jersey Dedicates Building,
Bids Farewell To Executive Bush

Baptist Press
11/10/86

YORK, Pa. (BP)--Dedication of the state convention office building totally debt free and a farewell to Executive Director Ellis Bush highlighted the 16th meeting of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey.

A seven-member search committee was named to seek a new executive director-treasurer. Bush has been named Bold Mission Thrust promotion coordinator for the Southern Baptist Convention. He has served in Pennsylvania-South Jersey for more than eight years. Bold Mission Thrust is the SBC plan to present the message of Christ to the entire world by the year 2000.

J.N. Evans, a retired staff member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, will be interim executive director-treasurer.

The new state convention office is located in Harrisburg, Pa.

David Waltz, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Williamsport, Pa., was elected to a second term as president.

Cooperative Program gifts were increased one-half percent with 27.5 percent of the \$2,035,517 budget in 1987 going to SBC causes.

Messengers passed a resolution asking the SBC Executive Committee to study the need for simultaneous translations of the SBC annual meeting into languages other than English. Another resolution instructed the state convention executives to write the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, urging materials on abortion be prepared to express the viewpoint of the majority of Southern Baptists. A resolution also commended and affirmed Ellis Bush and his wife.

The convention reaffirmed support of the task team that is studying creation of a Southern Baptist seminary in the Northeast, approving a report by Dwight Moody, chairman of the task team, and a pastor in Pittsburgh.

The 1987 state convention annual meeting will be Nov. 5-7 at First Baptist Church of Wrightstown, N.J.

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Baptists Symbolize Peace
On Former Nazi Airfield

AUGSBURG, West Germany (BP)—On a former Nazi airfield, a Baptist church now stands as a symbol of peace.

And, in one entrance wall of the Augsburg Baptist Church's new facility, there's a stone from a bunker where Nazi Party leader Rudolf Hess took shelter in 1941 prior to flying to Scotland to seek peace. Hess flew solo and parachuted to the ground, but was imprisoned in England until the Nuremberg war crime trials in Germany. He received a life sentence in 1946.

The stone "will become a symbol for peace," said Hans Guderian, pastor of the 240-member church, during dedication ceremonies in late October.

A cross rises above the stone. Around the cross are words made of bronze from Haggai 2:9, "In this place will I give peace."

The \$1.75 million facility is located in a growing area in south Augsburg. The new auditorium will seat 300 people and can be expanded to 600.



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