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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, 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
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hasteley, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

November 21, 1986

86-174

'Very Best Baptists'
Sought By President

By Dan Martin

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptist Convention President Adrian Rogers has issued a call for recommendations of the "very best Baptists" to serve on committees at the 1987 annual meeting.

In an "Open Letter to Southern Baptists" issued through Baptist Press, Rogers said: "The important task of choosing the nominees for the 1987 Committee on Committees, Resolutions Committee, Credentials Committee and Tellers Committee is under way.

"It is my desire to choose the very best Southern Baptists for these positions. This will be accomplished most effectively with your prayerful support and personal recommendations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"We welcome recommendations from every corner of Southern Baptist work."

Under the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention, the president appoints the Committee on Committees, Resolutions Committee and Credentials Committee "in conference with" the two vice presidents and the Tellers Committee "in consultation with" the convention's registration secretary.

First vice president is Jack Stanton of Bolivar, Mo.; second vice president is Ray Roberts of Asheville, N.C.; and registration secretary is Lee Porter of Nashville, Tenn.

Rogers, who was elected to the presidency first in 1979 and then again at the 1986 annual meeting in Atlanta, is pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis.

The appointment process has been at the center of the seven-year controversy in the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination. The president appoints the Committee on Committees, which nominates the Committee on Boards, which, in turn, nominates the persons who will be trustees and committee members of the 20 national agencies of the SBC.

Several efforts have been made in recent years to force the president to nominate the Committee on Committees from a pool of persons suggested by state Baptist convention executives or to select the sitting presidents of state conventions and presidents of state Woman's Missionary Unions as committee members. Each of the efforts has failed.

An effort to substitute state convention and WMU presidents, which was ruled out of order at the 1985 annual meeting, is at the center of a federal court lawsuit that was won by the SBC but is now in a federal appeals court.

Recently, moderate-conservatives challenged Rogers to appoint state presidents and state WMU presidents as the Committee on Committees. The challenge was made by James Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.; Norman Cavender, a layman from Claxton, Ga.; and Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, and the twice unsuccessful moderate-conservative candidate for SBC president.

Rogers told Baptist Press he wrote a letter to the three men "thanking them for their suggestion" and saying it was one of many he has received from "ad-hoc groups across the convention."

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION
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"There has been a number of recommendations and suggestions made about the appointments," Rogers said. "What I plan to do is to work with the convention-elected Peace Committee, but ultimately in the appointments I will follow the dictates of my own heart."

Rogers, who is a member of the SBC Peace Committee that is charged with finding the sources of the controversy in the convention and making recommendations about ways to solve them, has said on several occasions he plans to appoint the "very best" Southern Baptists to the committees.

During a September meeting with editors of Baptist state newspapers, Rogers said: "I do not intend to make appointments that are overtly political. I'm going to try to make appointments from those that I consider to be the best Southern Baptists."

At that meeting he said the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement, especially its section on the Scriptures, will be central for his appointments. He said: "If he doesn't believe that, I wouldn't appoint him. I would make appointments from people who hold that kind of theological perspective, and so obviously, that would exclude some people, but it would not exclude people on a political basis. It would exclude them on a theological basis, and theology is only one issue. I want to appoint people who would be the best Baptists, not only theologically, but cooperatively and intellectually and spiritually."

He added he would not appoint persons to the Committee on Committees who, although believing as he does, would appoint to the Committee on Boards people who believe differently. "I don't see that as political," he said. "I see that as consistent."

In his Open Letter, Rogers asked persons who wish to nominate persons for appointment to the committees to provide him with specific information.

Name, address, home and business telephone numbers, church name and address, and whether the person nominated is a pastor or a layman should be included.

He also asked that recommendations include information on how long the nominee has been in the state and church, the size of the church, the amount the church gave to the Cooperative Program in the last associational year and what percentage of the total church budget that amount represented.

He also asked that the number of baptisms of the church be included, as well as information on other pertinent matters such as the basic convictions of the nominee.

Rogers encouraged persons to submit the recommendations to him in an envelope marked, "SBC Committee Recommendations," and mailed to Bellevue Baptist Church, 70 N. Bellevue Blvd., Memphis, Tenn. 38104.

He asked that the recommendations be submitted by Feb. 1, 1987.

Under SBC rules, the president is required to announce his appointments through Baptist Press at least 45 days in advance of the annual meeting, which for 1987 is scheduled June 16-18 in Cervantes Convention Center in St. Louis.

In the letter, Rogers thanked Southern Baptists in advance for "prayerful and diligent participation in helping to select God's choice servants for the next year."

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Moderate-Conservatives
'Dismayed' By Rejection

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
11/21/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Moderate-conservative Southern Baptist leaders have responded with "sadness and dismay" to what they describe as rejection of their proposals for peace in the beleaguered denomination.

Norman Cavender, Winfred Moore and James Slatton offered a "moderate-side proposal" for Southern Baptist Convention peace in late October. Their action followed the six Southern Baptist seminary presidents' Glorieta Statement, a peace document of philosophical statements and commitments presented to and affirmed by the SBC Peace Committee in Glorieta, N.M.

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Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, is a former SBC first vice president and was the moderate-conservative candidate for convention president the past two years. Cavender, a layman from Claxton, Ga., and Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., presented moderate-conservative concerns to the Peace Committee's subcommittee on denominational politics this summer.

Cavender, Moore and Slatton's peace proposal urges that: Moderate leader Cecil Sherman, who resigned the Peace Committee, be replaced with a "clearly, openly and completely identified moderate leader;" the SBC Forum and Pastors' Conference be united into one non-political meeting; SBC President Adrian Rogers appoint sitting presidents of the Southern Baptist state conventions and state Woman's Missionary Union organizations to the powerful Committee on Committees; fundamental-conservatives "stand down" on political organizing and both sides refrain from partisan politics;

Also, the Southern Baptist Advocate stop attacking SBC institutions and their employees; both SBC factions get together to choose an agreeable candidate for SBC president in 1988, or 1987 if Rogers does not seek re-election; the Peace Committee convene a peace conference to refine the proposal; and fundamentalists respond immediately to the proposal.

"We have set no conditions, asking only for a system of basic fairness to all our views and room for all our consciences," Cavender said of the proposals. "We continue seeking this spirit of fairness."

Slatton told Baptist Press Rogers responded with a letter dated Nov. 10. "Dr. Rogers specifically dealt with only one of the proposals—the one dealing with the appointment of the Committee on Committees—which he rejected," he said. "The other seven were ignored completely. Dr. Rogers made no offers whatever which would dismantle the political polarization of the presidential elections, committee appointments and annual pastors' conferences."

Cavender said Rogers "offered us no alternative plan for correcting the political problems. We fear this rejection means continued strife over politics and appointments."

Slatton added fundamental-conservative leaders Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, and Paul Pressler, a Houston judge, also wrote letters rejecting the proposal. The moderates' proposal was sent to Rogers, Patterson and Pressler, as well as members of the Peace Committee and the SBC Executive Committee and the six seminary presidents.

Noting they feel "both sadness and dismay," Cavender, Moore and Slatton issued a brief joint statement: "We continue to believe that acceptance of the eight proposals by both sides will bring peace to this convention, and we urge Dr. Rogers and the rest of the fundamental-conservative leadership to reconsider their position."

"We are deeply disappointed that Adrian Rogers has rejected our proposals to end the controversy in the SBC," Cavender said. "Now that the seminary presidents have acted to address the concerns of the fundamentalists, we hoped the other side would be willing to solve the problems of convention politics. Our proposals were an effort to eliminate that conflict."

"In the wake of the seminary presidents' actions at Glorieta, we saw new hope," he added. "We saw hope of Baptists joining together again on a middle ground. We saw hope of the Pastors' Conference and the Forum coming together as one family, with room for both sides to participate. But even that offer of reconciliation has been rejected by Dr. Rogers and others in the Pressler/Patterson camp."

Speaking of why his group specifically addressed Rogers, Patterson and Pressler, Slatton told Baptist Press: "The Peace Committee is powerless to solve the problem singlehandedly. Unless the fundamental-conservative leaders are willing to take the steps to dismantle the politics, the takeover and purge will continue. When we address Rogers, Patterson and Pressler, we are talking to the only people on their side of the aisle who have the power to stop the politics."

Slatton went on to defend his group's peace plan: "Words about fairness, statements about depoliticizing will not get the job done. You have to build in an arrangement which, on the face of it, eliminates the possibility of either side owning the machinery of the convention. Our proposals do that."

The key to the moderate's proposal, and ultimately to peace in the convention, is the appointment of the Committee on Committees, Slatton said. The Committee on Committees, appointed by the SBC president, nominates the Committee on Boards, which must be approved by messengers to the SBC annual meeting. The Committee on Boards then makes nominations to fill all vacancies on the trustee boards of all SBC entities, which must be approved at the following annual meeting.

Since 1979, fundamental-conservatives have captured the convention presidency and thus have controlled nominations to convention boards.

"The way that is being done puts all the power of the Southern Baptist Convention in the hands of one man," Slatton said. "That's why our people are showing up at the convention in record numbers to fight over the presidency. That situation was never intended by the framers of the convention's constitution and bylaws.

"Unless the president will voluntarily commit himself to a structure like we propose for giving up singlehanded control of the appointment of committees, the fight continues, and Glorieta will be meaningless."

He added: "The most tantalizing thing about our tragic situation is that it would be so easy to solve. Our proposals, if adopted, would end the struggle overnight and would work to the disadvantage of no one except some little group bent on controlling the denomination.

"Just think about it--a Pastors' Conference without political spokesmen and divisive issues; a presidential candidate nominated by a joint committee with equal representation, chosen by the respective sides; a Committee on Committees which has not been chosen by either party's candidate, but rather nominated by 27 state conventions and 27 state WMU conventions in session. It's a dream, and it's doable."

"The task of genuine peace requires a two-way street. It requires give and take from both sides," Cavender insisted. "Moderates have been willing to give. But fundamentalists still seem willing only to take. As long as that attitude dominates, peace and fairness are impossibilities."

Slatton said he has "no idea" what the chances are that his group's proposals will be accepted. "But Adrian Rogers has an unparalleled opportunity for real statesmanship," he noted. "I'm just hoping and praying he will meet us out there on these proposals, which are a great concession for both sides.

"If these proposals are accepted, everybody wins; if not, everybody loses."

"We retain hope that others in the controversy are willing to participate in a plan to guarantee genuine and just peace among Southern Baptists," Cavender added. "We will keep working for such an outcome."

Contacted by Baptist Press, Moore said he concurs with Slatton and Cavender's emphasis and acknowledged he worked on the joint statement with them.

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Conservatives, Moderates
Lay Down Arms In Florida

By Greg Warner

Baptist Press
11/21/86

PENSACOLA, Fla. (BP)—Groups on both sides of Florida Baptists' theological/political battle have disbanded.

Both the fundamental-conservative steering committee, headed by Homer Lindsay Jr., and Florida Baptists for Cooperation, the moderate-conservative group, met during the recent Florida Baptist State Convention in Pensacola.

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The fundamental-conservative group voted to disband in a late-night meeting Nov. 11, the second day of the state convention. The moderate-conservative group, which had met earlier in the week, reached its decision Nov. 13, the day after the convention closed.

Lindsay, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, cited two factors in his group's decision--the peace plan offered last month by the presidents of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries and the repeated request of the SBC Peace Committee to abstain from political tactics.

"We need to pray for the seminary presidents," Lindsay told the 26 men who gathered at the Pensacola Hilton Hotel. "We are accepting this (statement) as being made from honorable men."

The presidents' plan, dubbed the Glorieta Statement, commits the seminaries to enforce their confessional statements, "foster" balanced teaching, respect the convictions of "all Southern Baptists", pick teachers and speakers from across the SBC theological spectrum, lead out in spiritual growth, and emphasize Baptist doctrine and heritage.

The statement also affirms the supernatural origin of Christianity and biblical miracles; belief in full inspiration of Scripture and that the "66 books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality;" and that there are "legitimate concerns" regarding the seminaries, which are being addressed.

Lindsay praised the statement as an indication the presidents believe the Bible. He said the seminaries now should implement the statement.

"We will accept it at face value," he told the steering committee. "Why shouldn't we?"

Lindsay said the SBC now can get "back to where it should be." When it happens, he said, no seminary students will be led by their professors "to doubt the Word of God. This would be pleasing to God. This is what we want. Nothing else."

Steering committee members, who approved unanimously Lindsay's suggestion to disband, said they would not reorganize unless moderate-conservatives forced them to. "If the situation changes, we can activate ourselves in a week's notice," Lindsay said.

After receiving word of the vote by Lindsay's organization, members of the moderate-conservative group, Florida Baptists for Cooperation, issued a statement of appreciation for Lindsay "in leading his organization of Florida fundamental-conservatives to disband."

"Organizations which segregate and isolate any of God's family are manifestly out of character for those whom God has distinctly declared to be 'one in Christ,'" the statement said. "It was never our desire to promote such a spirit. Perhaps we all are beginning to realize that there are better alternatives to preserving both our heritage and our diversity than overt political activity."

The statement, released Nov. 12, said Florida Baptists for Cooperation would consider disbanding also. David Medley, chairman of the moderate-conservatives, later telephoned the group's steering committee members, who agreed Nov. 13 to dissolve the group.

Medley, pastor of Stetson Baptist Church of DeLand, said the moderate-conservatives would not reorganize unless Lindsay's group "resumes its activities."

Henry Green, pastor of First Baptist Church of Cocoa and a member of the moderate-conservative steering committee, said the seminary presidents' Glorieta Statement had nothing to do with the decision to disband.

Both Green and Medley said they appreciate the initiative of the presidents, however, which Medley said was an "attempt to get us off dead center."

Members of both groups said the decision to quit politicking was not an indication of retreat.

"They will hold onto their principles, and we will hold onto ours," said Green.

"There's no need to compromise or retrench," said Guy Sanders, a member of the fundamental-conservative group and pastor of First Baptist Church of Lake Wales.

Lindsay said the struggle to return the SBC to its conservative roots is not over. "We need to stay in it until it is pushed through to total victory," he said.

Lindsay thanked the steering committee members for their role in the election of Adrian Rogers as SBC president during the annual meeting in Atlanta last June. The group led a campaign to send 500 messengers to the convention to vote for Rogers.

"There's no question that we made a difference in Atlanta," Lindsay said.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The following story replaces an earlier BP story released Nov. 19 titled, "India Hospital Receives First Funding In Months." The earlier story carried an incorrect interpretation of the hospital's relationship to the mission because of incorrect information filtered through a telecommunications strike in India.

Indian Mission Weathers
Funds Freeze; Gets Money

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
11/21/86

NEW DELHI, India (BP)—After weathering a four-month government freeze on foreign support, Baptist work in India has been freed to use \$289,000 for evangelism and health care.

About three-fourths of the money was transferred in mid-November into the treasury of the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in India, known as the Indian Baptist mission, after the government approved two separate requests for the mission to receive operating funds from outside the nation.

Another request, for \$69,000, was made only after the Baptist hospital in Bangalore applied as an institution to receive funds directly from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board instead of through the mission treasury. As late as Nov. 21, the mission was awaiting the arrival of that money from the board, which sent it by special courier to avoid a telecommunications strike in the country. The hospital has been the center of Southern Baptist mission efforts in the southern state of Karnataka since the early 1970s.

Two additional requests for operating funds would carry the mission through March 1987 but have not yet been approved. Also, missionaries were planning to ask the government to allow the mission to receive funds on the basis of regular need, rather than applying beforehand and waiting up to four months for each approval, said missionary Rebekah Naylor.

The problem began in June when missionaries learned the Indian government was putting a freeze on contributions from outside the country. They were told they must apply in the future each time they receive Southern Baptist funds. They were told then to accept no further money from the Foreign Mission Board unless it was first approved by the central government. Approval can take up to four months.

An audit further complicated affairs of the mission, which has faced increasingly complex struggles to keep missionaries on the field with approved visas. The number of missionaries assigned to live permanently on the field has dropped from 23 in 1983 to five at present.

Naylor, the hospital administrator, must apply for visa renewal in December. Visa renewal still is pending for David Travis, an agricultural professor at a national institution, and his wife, Glenda, who applied in June. A newly appointed missionary, pediatrician Cindy Howard, soon will apply for a visa, also. No new visas have been granted for Southern Baptist missionaries to India in six years.

To survive during the recent freeze on funds, the Indian mission curtailed and combined Baptist programs in the country so it could fund evangelism efforts and keep the hospital running. Missionary salaries, deposited in stateside banks by the Foreign Mission Board, were not affected.

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The requests most recently approved were for \$150,000 and \$70,000, Naylor said. Missionaries applied for the former amount as soon as they were notified of the audit. The Foreign Mission Board finance office was forwarding the \$70,000 to the mission treasury when the mission learned it could accept no more outside money.

Located near the southern tip of India, the Bangalore hospital has been the hub around which a convention of more than 250 churches has grown. More than 200 of those have been started during the past three years.

With the newest notice under the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, the mission must apply for funding each time the foreign board deposits money into the mission account. In the past, the mission has used about \$50,000 a month, including funds for the hospital.

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South Carolina Baptists Elect
Layman, Woman As Officers

Baptist Press
11/21/86

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)—A layman, a pastor and a woman were elected officers during the 166th annual session of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, which also saw 2,296 messengers approve a \$21.1 million budget and voice their opinions on teen pregnancy and lotteries.

Flynn T. Harrell, executive assistant to the state attorney general and a member of First Baptist Church of Columbia, was elected president of the 690,000-member convention. Harrell is a former convention staff member and only the ninth layman to be elected to preside over the state's largest religious denomination.

Another former convention staff member, Jimmie E. Harley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Florence, was elected first vice president. Mary Rome Foster, minister of music at First Baptist Church of Camden, was elected second vice president.

Re-elected secretary and assistant secretary, respectively, were William M. Page Jr., retired minister from Mauldin, and Bobby R. Wallace, pastor of Cedar Creek Baptist Church in Bishopville.

About 1,000 of the convention's 1,765 churches and missions sent messengers to hear reports of affiliated agencies, institutions and the 89-member general board, which acts for the convention when it is not in session.

The \$21.1 million budget reflects a 5 percent increase over 1986 in support of colleges, hospitals, benevolent homes and missionary and evangelistic causes in the state. The budget is divided into a \$19 million basic budget, and a \$2 million challenge budget that is utilized when the basic budget is fully funded. The convention raised its contribution to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget one-half percent, to 37.75 percent of the basic budget. Half of the challenge budget will go to the national Cooperative Program.

Messengers approved a resolution recognizing the incidence of teenage pregnancy in South Carolina as a problem of major proportions and affirming "the primacy of the role of the family and the church in the formation of the principles and patterns of life."

Lotteries also were opposed in a resolution that described them as a form of gambling which will bring problems that would cost more than the tax money generated.

Other resolutions, non-binding expressions of opinion:

— Called on pastors and churches "to intensify efforts to arouse our communities to the growing menace of pornography" and encouraged vigorous enforcement of the present statutes which can restrict the dissemination of obscene materials.

— Requested the South Carolina High School League to refrain from scheduling athletic events on Sundays.

— Cited 275 South Carolina Baptist churches served by bivocational pastors and called on members "to provide encouragement and enhancement to bivocational ministers."

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— Encouraged all Baptist associations, pastors and churches "to do all they can, with God's help, to minister individually and collectively to farmers in crisis."

— Went on record "deploring the manner in which the Department of Social Services along with supportive police departments and family court systems are currently handling reports of child abuse."

A later motion was approved which called on the convention's Christian Life and Public Affairs Committee to study the problems of child abuse laws and their enforcement in South Carolina and to report back to a future convention.

The next annual session of South Carolina Baptist Convention is scheduled to meet in Charleston, Nov. 10-11, 1987.

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New York Convention
Creates Foundation

Baptist Press
11/21/86

ABERDEEN, N.J. (BP)—Southern Baptists from New York and parts of New Jersey and Connecticut ratified a charter for their foundation, set a \$2.26 million budget and heard positive reports during the 17th session of the Baptist Convention of New York, held at Calvary Baptist Church in Aberdeen, N.J., Nov. 6-7.

Messengers approved a charter that creates the Baptist Convention of New York Foundation. Roger Knatton, pastor of Lincoln Avenue Baptist Church in Endicott, N.Y., and chairperson of the convention's foundation workgroup, presented the workgroup's report and the charter recommendation.

People from outside the convention were cited for their contributions to the effort to launch the foundation: Glen Marshall, a retired banker from Ellijay, Ga., who along with his wife, Edna, is a Mission Service Corps volunteer in New York, did much of the groundwork for the foundation in cooperation with Donald Folsom of the Georgia Baptist Foundation.

The convention adopted a 1987 budget of \$4,256,312, of which \$482,558 is expected to come from churches within the convention. Other revenue will be provided by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and additional outside sources. Of the amount contributed by New York convention churches, 24 percent, or \$114,122, will support worldwide mission and ministry causes through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program.

The budget reflects a 7 percent increase over the 1986 budget.

The convention theme, "One Vision—One Mission," was highlighted by reports from the convention's four divisions, indicating growth in most endeavors. Baptisms for the year were up nearly 30 percent, to an estimated 1,479. Other convention programs reported similar increases. During the past year, 14 new churches were constituted, and three others were received into association fellowship.

The convention received an initial gift of \$10,000 from William Sanders, an Atlanta optometrist, to set up the R. Quinn Pugh Scholarship Fund for students preparing for ministry. Pugh, executive director of the New York convention, formerly was Sanders' pastor in Atlanta.

Messengers learned the first phase of the convention's capital fund drive was oversubscribed prior to closing on the new convention office building last summer. The second phase of the drive is to raise \$143,000 by June 25, 1987. The facility, named the Centers for Missions and Ministry, will be dedicated in March 1987.

Sam Simpson, pastor of Bronx and Wake Eden Baptist churches in New York City, was elected convention president. He has been first vice president the past two years. Other officers are Joyce Munro, an educator and member of Bridgewater Baptist Church in Bridgewater, N.J., first vice president; Larry Bethune, pastor of Westchester Baptist Church in Pleasantville, N.J., second vice president; Jon Meek, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Aberdeen, N.J., recording secretary; and Mrs. Alton Harpe Jr., member of West Point Baptist Church, West Point, N.Y., assistant recording secretary.

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The convention adopted resolutions regarding prayer for farmers and the farm crisis, an appeal to the United States government to treat all political refugees equally despite their country of origin and a condemnation of apartheid in South Africa.

More than 300 people attended this year's convention. The 1987 annual meeting of the convention will be Nov. 5-6 in Plattsburg, N.Y.

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Wyoming Baptists Approve
Assembly Structure Change

Baptist Press
11/21/86

GREEN RIVER, Wyo. (BP)—Wyoming Southern Baptists changed the way their campground is administered and approved reduced budget contributions during their annual convention Nov. 12-13 at Monroe Avenue Baptist Church in Green River.

Messengers ratified a change in the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention constitution that reorganized the administration of the state assembly, located near Casper. The assembly previously was directed by a convention committee. The constitutional change made the assembly an agency of the convention, with trustees who will work with the state convention staff to administer the facility.

Also approved was a 1987 budget of \$807,182. Wyoming churches are expected to provide \$261,224 of that amount, down from contributions of \$289,275. Most of the balance of the funds will be given by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and Sunday School Board.

"We're faced with declining income," said state Executive Director John Thomason, explaining the reduction of Wyoming churches' share in the budget. "We're an energy-based economy, and we're way below budget this year." He pointed to low crude oil prices and shutdowns of uranium and coal mines as reasons for economic depression in the state, which affects the churches.

Nevertheless, Wyoming Baptists voted a 1 percent increase—raised to 23 percent—in the portion of their budget that goes to support worldwide mission and ministry causes through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget.

Convention officers elected during the meeting are Larry York, pastor of Big Horn Baptist Church in Buffalo, president; Don Hayhurst, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Riverton, first vice president; Ken Hensarling, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Worland, second vice president; Robert Moon, pastor of Lander Valley Baptist Church in Lander, recording secretary; and Nelda Hays, secretary and bookkeeper for the convention, assistant recording secretary.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 11-12 at First Southern Baptist Church in Casper.

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Cimmerman Helps Disabled
And Their Families Cope

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
11/21/86

DALLAS (BP)—When Philip Cimmerman was born nearly four years ago with cerebral palsy, mental retardation and epilepsy, his parents struggled alone, asking God, "Why?"

Today John and Nelda Cimmerman continue their spiritual journey, but now it is alongside other parents like themselves as they wrestle together with questions that defy easy answers and share insights they have learned on their pilgrimage.

Since October 1985, Cimmerman has been minister to disabled persons and their families at Meadowbrook Baptist Church in Irving, Texas. Although the position is part-time, Cimmerman considers himself on call 24-hours-a-day. His ministry is directed to educable mentally retarded persons, the physically handicapped and families of the mentally or physically disabled.

"Most of the people we work with have no spiritual background. A lot of the families tried to go to other churches with their disabled children and were told, 'We don't want you here,'" says Cimmerman. He explains some churches feel uncomfortable around the disabled and their families. They don't know what to say to the parents and consider themselves unprepared to teach the children.

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Goals of the Meadowbrook ministry are to provide physical surroundings compatible to the needs of disabled persons; to provide spiritual training and special programs for the mentally retarded and physically disabled; to provide transportation to church activities; to visit the handicapped in their homes and provide a 24-hour, on-call service to handicapped persons in need; to provide counseling for parents of children with special needs; and to offer a self-help support group for families of the handicapped.

The ministry's goals grew out of Cimmerman's own experiences and the needs he and his wife felt after their son, Philip, was born. Although Cimmerman was a former youth director and seminary student and was a member of Meadowbrook Baptist Church, accepting his son's birth defects did not come easy.

"I think everybody in that situation asks questions. I'm thankful that I had the spiritual resources to find the answers, but it really took time," he says. "It was such a shock. My first response was to try to hold my feelings in, to keep them from my wife, but that just made me more deeply discouraged and depressed.

"It was especially hard because Philip was so susceptible to infection that the doctors wanted him kept in total isolation for the first year, and we couldn't go to church," he adds. In addition to Philip's other problems, he was born prematurely, his lungs were not fully developed and he spent a prolonged time on a heart monitor.

Although members of Meadowbrook ministered as much as they could, the couple had no one to talk to who really understood what it was like to have a child born with serious disabilities. The family support group the Cimmermans lead at Meadowbrook seeks to provide for others what they could not find in their own time of need.

"Mostly, we teach coping skills. There is a lot of anger and frustration the parents feel. Getting that out in the open, talking about it with other people who really understand, makes a difference," says Cimmerman. "These couples look at their friends whose children are making rapid progress. But no matter what they do, their own children make such slow progress. They do all they can, but they know it won't help. Their child will still be retarded."

The Cimmermans help parents deal with the anger many of them feel toward God. Currently, they are leading a study titled, "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People." Seven couples representing several denominations are in the study and support group.

In addition to working with the families of disabled persons, Cimmerman also directs the programs at Meadowbrook for those who are disabled themselves.

Programs for disabled children at Meadowbrook Church have evolved out of perceived needs rather than professional design, Cimmerman explains: "As parents, we often see things differently than a trained professional would. We're not professionals. My only training in working with the disabled has been my experiences as a parent."

Sunday school classes for the disabled are an example of a constantly developing ministry at Meadowbrook. Although classes sometimes have had to be combined, three classes for the disabled are scheduled to meet during the Sunday school hour each week. The most elementary class works on sensory stimulation for those with severe mental or physical disabilities. A second class is for persons whose mental disabilities are on a preschool level, and a third class is for persons functioning on a grade school level or above.

The teaching emphasis is on very basic concepts such as the love of God.

"Only God knows for sure, but probably most of our students will never come to the age of accountability" for their spiritual condition, Cimmerman says. "We just try to introduce them to God and His love. They have such poor self-images. We try to teach them God doesn't make junk, and he doesn't make mistakes. He is in control, and there is a purpose behind things."

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