

(BP)

- - BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committ:
901 Commerce #7:
Nashville, Tennessee 372
(615) 244-23
Wilmer C. Fields, Direc:
Dan Martin, News Edi:
Mary Knox, Feature Edi:

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. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

February 13, 1987

87-21

Southern Baptist Alliance
Formed To Counter 'Threat'

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--A new Southern Baptist organization -- the Southern Baptist Alliance -- has been formed to counter what leaders call a threat to the denomination's "historic principles, freedoms and traditions."

The Alliance was announced Feb. 12 in simultaneous news conferences in Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C., and in Atlanta.

Henry Crouch, pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte and chairperson of the SBA, led the news conference in Charlotte. Two Raleigh pastors, William R. Puckett Jr., of Millbrook Baptist Church and M. Mahan Siler of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, led the Raleigh meeting. Jim Strickland, pastor of Cartersville (Ga.) First Baptist Church, headed up the Atlanta news conference.

"We are not a splinter group," Crouch said. "But we want to be a voice of conscience within the convention. The fundamentalist-conservative takeover of the SBC has left many Southern Baptists disenfranchised ... and we will exist as long as we feel disenfranchised."

Crouch maintained the group is not intended to be a new political organization. "We are moving beyond politics," he said.

In Raleigh, Siler said the group "has no intention of starting a new denomination. This is an effort for persons to remain within the Southern Baptist denomination. ..."

In Atlanta, Strickland, who has been active in the moderate-conservative political effort in the SBC, said the new organization will not support a candidate for presidency of the 14.6-million-member denomination. "We will vote our own consciences," he said.

Strickland was asked if leaders of the moderate faction -- such as James Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., and Norman Cavender, a layman from Claxton, Ga. -- share his views. "They will continue political work and have given their blessing upon us. We are choosing separate ways to accomplish the same thing. We've said it's time for politics to be over. They don't think so," Strickland said.

Strickland added the SBA "could be easily put out of business" if the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the convention itself support women as pastors, continue the support of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and "the disenfranchisement now taking place through the office of the (SBC) president" is stopped.

Crouch also noted there will be no candidate for president. "We are not a political group," he said. "Matters of conscience are our concern. We do not plan to escrow any Cooperative Program funds, but we do intend to fund any agencies or programs which are excluded."

He referred to current discussions concerning severing the relationship between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which has been under fire from SBC conservatives. Crouch also referred to a decision by directors of the Home Mission Board not to provide supplemental salary support for ordained women who serve as pastors.

During the news conferences the officers of the SBC were announced. They include Crouch, Susan Lockwood Wright, pastor of Cornell Avenue Baptist Church in Chicago, vice chairperson; Richard Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C., secretary; and Bruce Morgan, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., treasurer.

--more--

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVE
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

Although organizers say SBA is composed of representatives from "more than 15 states," no information was made available on the number of churches or members participating.

In Raleigh, Puckett said the Alliance's operating budget will be financed through an annual \$25 membership fee for individuals and \$1 per resident member for church membership. He added SBA has "some seed money" and speculated the amount is between \$3,000 and \$5,000.

In materials prepared for release at the news conference, organizers said the SBA "will concentrate on three areas: first, the articulation of positions on issues and events within the SBC; second, the confrontation of agencies and the SBC itself when historic principles and practices are violated; and third, the creation of a channel for the funding of SBC mission efforts and agencies that have been denied or defunded."

During the news conferences, a covenant was read which details seven principles which Alliance leaders say the organization is committed to:

-- "The freedom of the individual, led by God's Spirit within the family of faith, to read and interpret the Scriptures, relying on the historical understanding by the church and on the best methods of modern biblical study.

-- "The freedom of the local church under the authority of Jesus Christ to shape its own life and mission, call its own leadership and ordain whom it pleases as gifted for ministry, male or female.

-- "The larger body of Jesus Christ, expressed in various Christian traditions, and to a cooperation with believers everywhere in giving full expression to the Gospel.

-- "The servant role of leadership within the church, following the model of our Servant Lord, and to full partnership of all of God's people in mission and ministry.

-- "Theological education in local churches, colleges, seminaries characterized by reverence for biblical authority and respect for open inquiry and responsible scholarship.

-- "The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and the calling of God to all peoples to repentance and faith, reconciliation and hope, social and economic justice.

-- "The principle of a free church in a free state and to the opposition to any effort either by the church or state to use the other for its own purposes."

In Charlotte, Crouch said: "All we are interested in is providing a vehicle for expression of our position." He said SBA would not create any new agencies nor generate any curriculum materials for the churches to use at this time.

However, in Atlanta, Strickland intimated the group may publish alternative Sunday school literature "if Southern Baptist literature becomes such that our people feel they cannot use it." He added, "We hope we never have to do that."

In Raleigh, Puckett said SBA is a response "to what we feel is a very direct need within the convention regarding people who feel estranged and disenfranchised and who are looking for community and fellowship with other people who share some of the same goals." SBA was created now, he said, because "it takes time for these things to evolve. People have to experience a certain amount of pain before they realize they need each other."

When asked if formation of the Alliance goes against requests from the SBC Peace Committee to lower tensions within the convention, Puckett said problems on the Peace Committee are coming from "the inflexibility of the other side that is in power and is unwilling to move off of dead center on the insistence that (biblical) inerrancy is the only basis for cooperation."

"We're willing to cooperate with anybody. We're not excluding them (fundamental-conservatives), they're excluding us (moderate-conservatives)," Puckett said.

President, Leaders
Respond To Alliance

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Adrian Rogers says he is "not surprised" by the formation of the Southern Baptist Alliance, and the chairman of the SBC's Peace Committee says he wishes SBA organizers had waited a bit.

The Southern Baptist Alliance was announced in simultaneous news conferences in Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C., and in Atlanta, Feb. 12.

Organizers, saying they represented Southern Baptists in 15 states, said the purpose of the new group is to counter a threat to the denomination's "historic principles, freedoms and traditions" and to provide a channel through which funds can be provided to SBC "mission efforts and agencies which have been denied or defunded."

Of particular interest to SBA organizers is the funding of women pastors who will no longer be given supplemental salary support by the denomination's Home Mission Board and the possibility of funding the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs or terminated seminary faculty members.

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church of Memphis, Tenn., told Baptist Press he "gives them (SBA organizers) every right to express themselves," but disputed their claims they have been disenfranchised in the current convention controversy.

"They spoke of disenfranchisement. I certainly do not feel they have been disenfranchised. No one is disenfranchised who has the right to express himself and to vote. Disenfranchisement means we have those things removed. The moderates do not have those things removed," he said.

Moderate leaders in the current convention controversy have maintained a series of conservative presidents have systematically excluded from appointment anyone who does not hold to a strict position of biblical inerrancy.

Rogers said: "We are not trying to force our views on them. But, as president, I could not help but be loyal to the stated views of our convention in making my appointments."

He added that while he does not believe anyone with a vote is disenfranchised, he thinks that if moderates "find themselves out of step with the majority, then they ought to conform to the wishes of the majority or they should seek a new majority."

Rogers said, that contrary to reports in the secular press, he "is not suggesting that they should or ought to leave the Southern Baptist Convention."

Charles Fuller, the chairman of the SBC Peace Committee, created in 1985 to seek the causes of the controversy and to make recommendations for ways to end the strife, told Baptist Press:

"I could have wished that during the two years the Peace Committee has functioned there might not have been organizational efforts by any group that is theologically positioned, whether it is the Southern Baptist Alliance or the Genesis Commission.

"If, at the end of our report, people are not satisfied, then they might take whatever steps they wish. But the problem is that we have not finished our work and each time this sort of thing arises, it just calls attention to our fragmentation and division."

Leadership of the moderate political cause also reacted to the formation of the Southern Baptist Alliance.

"The impressions left yesterday when the formation of the Southern Baptist Alliance was announced ... were unfortunate but natural results of the current denominational crisis," said Winfred Moore in a statement released by Jim Slatton.

"The allusion in the secular press to a new denomination were the inevitable results of frustration and reaction to the current heavy handedness of fundamentalist leadership," the statement continued.

Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, and Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., have been leaders in the moderate-conservative political effort, and Moore was the moderate presidential candidate in 1985 and 1986.

Moore's statement continued: "Moderate-Conservatives are not about to split from the SBC. We believe too deeply in our cooperative efforts for ministry and education. We will fight to preserve those. Nor, have we chosen, as have the fundamentalists, to act apart from the denomination by starting our own seminaries or by initiating independent mission efforts which compete with our Southern Baptist foreign missions effort.

"We believe the cooperation of all Baptists through the convention is still the desire of the great majority of Baptists. The moderate-conservative effort will strive for that cooperation and we are more prepared and more united in pursuing that cause than we have ever been before."

Formation of the group and the possibility funds will be withheld was commented on by Bob Banks, interim president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Moves to withhold funds from the Home Mission Board hurt missionaries and reflect a narrow perspective, Banks said.

"If churches or individuals withhold funds, they punish 3,700 missionaries, provide less ability to reach this nation for Christ and hurt missions in their state and nation," Banks said, reiterating a position he outlined for Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union leaders last month. Refusing to give to the Annie Armstrong Offering would be to "opt out of a voice and participation in that part (of home missions) which is good, productive and carries forward the Lord's work," he added.

Banks said people who have protested the Home Mission Board's stand on supporting ordained women pastors have raised some valid issues, such as the autonomy of the local church, the role of women in ministry and others. "But there are issues that are larger, and the issue of missions to reach the nation for Christ is larger than this issue itself," he insisted.

He also noted the issue of supporting ordained women pastors to this point has only involved one woman and one church. That church will not lose its Home Mission Board support, since the new HMB policy against support for women pastors only applies to future requests from participation in that part (of home missions) which is good, productive and carries forward the Lord's work," he added.

That policy neither prohibits the appointment of ordained women as missionaries, nor prevents the use of board funds to employ ordained women in other church or associational staff positions, such as student workers or Baptist center directors. It also allows the board to continue to endorse women for chaplaincy.

—30—

(Editor's Note: Persons contributing to coverage of SBA were Dan Martin, Marv Knox, R.G. Puckett, Larry High, Leisa Hammett, and Walker Knight.)

Baptist Missionaries Denied
Permission To Stay In Lebanon

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
2/13/87

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—The U.S. Department of State has refused to exempt Southern Baptist missionaries from its order that Americans leave Lebanon.

Accordingly, missionaries will begin leaving Lebanon the week of Feb. 16, said Isam Ballenger, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board vice president for Europe, Middle East and North Africa.

Gary and Jerree White and their two children are expected to be the first family to leave. White, who was school and mission administrator in Beirut, is from Pineville, La. Mrs. White, the daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries Bill and Vivian Trimble, still in Beirut, was born in Alexandria, La.

—more—

The State Department sees no "compelling humanitarian interest" in allowing Southern Baptist Personnel to remain in the country, said William Wharton, director of citizenship appeals. "Nor (is it) in the national interest," Wharton said Feb. 12 in announcing the decision.

Requests for exemptions for the missionaries, who are assigned primarily to educational, publication and media ministries, were considered on an individual, case-by-case basis, he said.

The State Department order, announced Jan. 28, requires Americans to leave Lebanon by March 4 or lose their passport privileges.

For some Southern Baptist missionaries, the order will halt 20 to 30 years of work in Lebanon, which has been torn by civil war since 1975. Missionary retiree Mabel Summers, 72, still lives in Beirut. She first went to Lebanon soon after Southern Baptists opened work there in 1948.

"It's a hard pill to swallow right now, to lose our place in Lebanon," said Ballenger. "I don't understand why this would happen at this particular time when opportunities are so great. But if this is inevitable, then we have to ask, 'Now what? In what directions do we move now?' Hopefully, as we determine these things, something good will come out of it."

Missionary Nancie Wingo, who has worked at Beirut Baptist School 17 years, said in a telephone interview, "I feel, at times, like it can't be happening."

She said her Lebanese friends and co-workers are "crushed" by the order forcing Americans out of Lebanon. Yet they are hopeful she and other Americans will return. A layman, for example, told her, "You are leaving through a very small window, but you will be able to come back soon through a very wide door."

"The Lebanese live on hope," Wingo commented, "because that's all they've got."

Ballenger said the Southern Baptist missionaries leaving Beirut will be housed temporarily in Cyprus.

Neither the Arab Baptist Publication Center nor the Baptist Center for Mass Communications in East Beirut will close, Ballenger said. Earlier this year, the centers had moved from crowded quarters in the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary to a new annex. About 20 Lebanese workers remain at the centers. Missionaries who have been working with them will continue in advisory capacities from Cyprus.

If the government of Cyprus grants permission, the seminary may move there temporarily, Ballenger said. A record 14 full-time and 11 part-time students have been enrolled during the current school year.

At Beirut Baptist School, a committee of three teachers is carrying on administrative duties formerly handled by Jim Ragland, a 33-year missionary veteran who was ordered out of West Beirut by U.S. officials Jan. 31.

The missionaries will meet with Foreign Mission Board officials to discuss new assignments and receive a listening ear to "work through some of their feelings, anguish, disappointment, frustration," Ballenger said. "They're a strong group, but I don't know how something like this impacts people mentally, emotionally, physically."

Lebanon "has been a kind of light for Christianity in the entire Middle East," Ballenger continued. "Our missionaries wanted to support that -- that freedom to propagate the gospel, freedom to move about, freedom to publish, freedom to teach," a degree of freedom unique in the Middle East.

Prior to the State Department's decision against exemptions, David King, a missionary in Lebanon since 1960, had emphasized in a telephone interview that East Beirut, or Lebanon's "Christian sector," where most of the missionaries work, is reasonably safe.

"Unless our government knows something we don't know ... we do not feel it's necessary for us to leave," King insisted.

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS

901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

SO. BAPT. LIB. & ARCH.
901 COMMERCE SUITE 400
NASHVILLE, TN. 37203

NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION