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Peace Group Considers
Draft; To Meet Again

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—The Southern Baptist Convention's Peace Committee worked on the first draft of its report to the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC during its 14th meeting April 2-3.

The 22-member committee, which was created in 1985 to find the sources of the controversy in the convention and to make recommendations on ways to solve them, sent the draft back to the subcommittee and set what is hoped to be the final meeting, May 4, in Atlanta.

"It was uncertain as to whether we would have to meet again, but it became quite apparent early that another meeting would be necessary before any report could be released to the convention," said Chairman Charles Fuller of Roanoke, Va.

"We settled on receiving the preliminary draft, registering our reaction to it and establishing two rather thorough premises upon which the next draft will be written," he added.

"Most of our time in this meeting was divided three ways: composing a premise for the theological recommendations in the report, composing a premise for the political recommendations and evaluating the structure of the preliminary draft submitted by the drafting subcommittee," Fuller said.

He noted a "lion's share" of the work in formulating the preliminary draft was done by the drafting subcommittee Chairman Bill Poe, an attorney from Charlotte, N.C.

He added Poe and the other five members of the subcommittee "must now work through the next three or four weeks to have a revised and refined draft for the full committee to review May 4."

The subcommittee is composed of Poe, Jerry Vines, Jacksonville, Fla.; Daniel Vestal, Midland, Texas; Albert McClellan, Nashville, Tenn.; Bill Hull, Shreveport, La.; and Ed Young, Houston, Texas. Also meeting with the group is Vice Chairman Charles Pickering of Laurel, Miss.

Despite the additional meeting, Fuller said he hopes the committee will be able to release the report "soon after May 4. We continue our hopes to give Southern Baptists a month to study our report before being asked to act on it June 16 in St. Louis."

Fuller declined to discuss the content of the political and theological premises hammered out during the committee meeting.

"We acknowledge that politics is going to be there," he said. "You can't have a denomination of this magnitude without politics. We're looking at what's been inappropriate in the last seven to nine years and what's appropriate now and from this point on."

On theology, Fuller said the committee is not attempting to "replace or amend the Baptist Faith and Message Statement. It's an adequate statement of what Baptists believe. Ours is an attempt to interpret it.

"We're trying to put down something basic and clear enough for the average Southern Baptist to understand what is being said," Fuller said.

In another matter, Fuller replied to an article on the Peace Committee and its work in the Baptist Laity Journal's March 1987 issue.

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The Baptist Laity Journal, published in Dallas, is, according to its masthead, an "autonomous publication of public opinion for Texas Baptist laity and others interested in the affairs of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Convention." It is circulated without charge to about 11,000 people, primarily Texas Baptist pastors and laypeople.

The publication is edited by J. Neal Rodgers of Dallas, who also is executive director of a new organization, "Laity For ... The Baptist Faith and Message," which has been conducting meetings across Texas decrying the continuing strife in the SBC.

John Baugh, a Houston layman, said the group wants to end the strife, "but we cannot in good conscience continue to sit back and watch the long-planned dismantling of our seminaries, mission boards, agencies and the Cooperative Program."

The group, according to Baugh, a member of Second Baptist Church of Houston, also has called for an end "to immoral practices and political trickery in the Southern Baptist Convention."

The March issue of Baptist Laity Journal was express mailed to all Peace Committee members on the eve of their April 2-3 meeting. The article alleged the work of the Peace Committee "has been impeded by the radical Fundamentalist members who oppose any investigation of the political intrigues which have embroiled our beloved convention for more than nine years."

It also makes allegations the "Fundamentalists" on the Peace Committee are "stonewalling," and participating in a "coverup." The article also is critical of the Peace Committee's decision to seal its minutes for 10 years.

Fuller told Baptist Press the editor of the publication had written a letter to the committee, requesting an answer from the chairman. "Mr. Rodgers is deserving of a letter from the chairman, which he will receive shortly. I feel compelled, however, to say in reply to the March 1987 issue of Baptist Laity Journal that the Peace Committee has identified no attempted 'coverup' or 'stonewalling' designed to keep information from Southern Baptists at large."

Fuller added: "Whatever confidentiality we have exercised has been a good-faith effort to allow and encourage a free, open exchange of discussion and debate within our committee.

"I would never impugn the motives of those who have expressed their views in the Baptist Laity Journal. Doubtless, these are people of earnest convictions who want to see the controversy settled in Southern Baptist life. I do not believe, however, their purpose is served by resorting to words like 'hypocrisy,' 'deception,' 'slander,' when describing their opponents.

"I am certain there are many people who are displeased with what the Peace Committee has accomplished so far, but to describe some members as the 'extremist fringe' who have succeeded in manipulating the other members is to accuse the committee of a failure which I believe is totally unfair."

Fuller also commented on "name-calling" in general in the SBC.

"One of our great disservices to each other has been to recklessly label one another as 'the Liberals' and 'the Fundamentalists.' When we reduce each other to a verbal caricature, we seem relieved of much responsibility to deal with each other as Christians.

"In fact, in recent years, some of us probably have been kinder to the enemies of God than to our own kin in Christ. I think Southern Baptists ought to start turning a deaf ear to anyone in our ranks who attributes his intemperate accusations to just being the way 'hard-ball' is played. Christianity is not a game of ball, nor is it to be played," Fuller said.

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SBC Won't Be Only
Game In St. Louis

By Marv Knox

N-CO
Baptist Press
4/7/87

ST. LOUIS (BP)—Southern Baptists' annual convention won't be the only game in town when 30,000 participants converge on St. Louis June 16-18.

The Cards play the Pirates.

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So while the Southern Baptist Convention presidency is at stake in Cervantes Center, a baseball pennant will be in the making in Busch Stadium. Together the events will attract about 83,000 fans — of baseball and Baptists — to downtown St. Louis.

Merchants will be pleased with the prospect of so many outsiders visiting the Gateway to the West. Those visitors may not be so thrilled. They'll discover they don't all fit comfortably into the city's bustling business district, especially on top of all the workers who have to drive in every day.

Some common concerns:

— Parking. The Busch Stadium gang has the edge. While St. Louis has better-than-average downtown parking for a city its size, the situation faced by messengers to the SBC meeting on the north end of downtown "still will be difficult," says Tim A. Hedquist, convention manager.

Fortunately for the SBC crowd, the convention's local arrangements committee has done a good job of identifying parking places on special parking maps, Hedquist notes. These will be available at the information booth in Cervantes Center on Sunday and Monday, June 14 and 15.

— Shuttles. The SBC scores. Free shuttle buses will run from downtown and Forest Park hotels to Cervantes Center. Others may run from remote parking lots if convention planners can work out the details, Hedquist reports.

— Vehicle routes. Both groups win. Routes to the facilities are well-marked from all interstate highways.

— Food. If it's concessions — hot dogs, soft drinks and nachos — the ballpark's the winner. "Normally Cervantes Center is very good for concessions, but this year we're very, very tight," Hedquist notes. "The space we normally would give to concessions is designated for chairs" so up to 30,000 convention messengers can fit into the center.

As far as other culinary questions are concerned, the convention center is the locale of choice. St. Louis Centre is only two blocks away, and the shopping center is crammed with eating establishments. Add to this the normal urban fare of restaurants and hotel coffee shops, and downtown St. Louis should prove to be a gastronomical delight for convention messengers.

But brown baggers better beware. Coolers and picnic baskets will be impounded, at least for folks trying to get them into Cervantes Center.

— Restrooms. Convention messengers might want to buy a ticket to the ballgame, just to walk eight blocks to the ballpark and walk right in a restroom. That walk could be shorter than the wait in line at Cervantes. Hedquist remembers, "The last time we were there, we completely closed the sewage system in that part of downtown." That was 1980, when only 13,844 messengers showed up; just think what twice that many messengers can do.

— Housing. Obviously, the baseball fans come out on top of this category. Most of them drive home after the evening games. Unfortunately, out-of-town fans and any messengers who don't already have room reservations are in a fix. All downtown hotels have been booked for months.

"We can give messengers the phone numbers of some hotels, but they're pretty far out — about 10 to 15 miles," Hedquist says. "There's no such thing as downtown hotel cancellations, at least until Monday," June 15.

Messengers who bring their homes with them may be in better shape. Recreational vehicle parks within four miles of the convention center have space available. And people who cannot afford hotel rooms but would like to stay with local Southern Baptists may be able to secure beds for the week.

For information about housing accommodations, contact the SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce #750, Nashville, Tenn. 37203, or call (615) 244-2355.

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-- First aid. Since the Cards' outfielder Willie McGee hits more hard foul balls into the stands than, say, SBC President Adrian Rogers, Cervantes Center theoretically is a safer place to visit than Busch Stadium. But just in case something happens at the convention, a first aid facility will be available at the center. It will be located on the west side of the main entry hall, staffed by Missouri Baptist Hospital.

-- Handicap access. Busch Stadium has its sections, but the entire convention center is "very, very good" in terms of handicap accessibility, Hedquist reports. All meeting halls are on the main floor, which is flat. Although registration and exhibit halls are on the second level, elevators are available for handicapped messengers.

-- Admission. Baseball fans can simply buy a ticket and get in the stadium. Messengers to the convention go through a process that is more complicated.

All messengers -- Southern Baptists who come to the convention, hear reports and vote their consciences -- must be elected by their respective churches, bring their completed official messenger registration cards and register on the second floor of Cervantes Center before they can get into the meeting halls. Registration will be open from 3 to 10 p.m. Sunday, June 14, and from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday. It will open at 8 a.m. Tuesday and 8:30 a.m. Wednesday and Thursday.

Very few non-registered people will be able to get into the convention facility. Only messengers, preschool children who are accompanied by their messenger parents, program leaders and the press will be admitted, Hedquist reports. Meeting halls will be open to non-messengers only if the halls are not full, but that is not likely, especially on Tuesday, June 16, first and busiest day of the convention.

Furthermore, those participants will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. "The convention center holds 30,000 max, and there is no flexibility," he explains, noting the facility -- with one main hall and three overflow halls -- legally accommodates only 30,000 people. That's more than 10,000 less than last year, and 15,000 less than the 1985 convention.

Other facilities in St. Louis, such as Kiel Auditorium, could accommodate additional messengers who could participate via closed-circuit television. But logistical problems create a planner's nightmare. For instance, what if a large hall were rented at great cost, and not enough messengers showed up to warrant using it? "We don't know what we're going to do," Hedquist admits. "It's going to be very tough."

-- Children. Baseball fans can take the whole family out to a two- or three-hour game. It's not that simple for messengers who bring their children to the convention, with its 15-hour days of business sessions.

To alleviate some of those problems, preschool child care will be provided for all seven business sessions of the convention -- three Tuesday, two Wednesday and two Thursday -- and the facilities will open 30 minutes before each session. Cost will be \$5 for each session, not to exceed \$25 per child for all seven sessions.

"Parents who want the child care need to get their reservations in; it's about to close," Hedquist notes. Reservations should be sent to SBC Preschool Child Care, c/o Fee Fee Baptist Church, 11330 St. Charles Rock Rd., Bridgeton, Mo. 63044.

Older children in grades 1-6 will not be allowed on the convention floor unless they are registered messengers, he says. Day care will be provided for these children by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, and preregistration is not necessary.

Southern Baptist baseball fans face a difficult decision: Convention Preacher Jerry Vines can put out a good sermon, but the Cards' Ozzie Smith can throw out a fast runner. The lines are shorter at Busch's restrooms, but votes taken at Cervantes can change the future of the SBC. Convention parking's tight, but at least no one will spill beer all over the place.

What to do? Before it comes to a flip of the coin, think of the music. At the ballpark, it's the national anthem and "Take Me Out to the Ballgame;" over at Cervantes, it'll be "Amazing Grace" and maybe even "Peace in the Valley." --30--

Church Crosses Barriers
To Host Japanese Students

By Gary W. Griffith

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(La.)

BATON ROUGE, La. (BP)—Sometimes the only way to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be yourself.

That's what 42 members of First Baptist Church of Baton Rouge, La., discovered when they opened their homes to 40 male high school students from Japan for 12 days this spring.

Ken Sneed, First Baptist minister to students for 10 years, explains: "One student asked his host family, 'Why are you Christians? I don't understand; how can we all be sinners?' Because of his limited understanding of the English language and his (Buddhist) background, they are having trouble answering all of his questions satisfactorily.

"We suggested that the biggest influence is what happens in the home this week. ... The host families don't have to beat the students over the head with a Bible or be great evangelists — they just need to be themselves."

The Japanese sophomore and junior students and three teachers are from Seinan Gakuin (Say-non Gok-ween) High School, a Baptist school for boys in Fukuoka, Japan, founded by Southern Baptists in 1916 and currently operated by the Japan Baptist Convention.

The school facilities include a boys' middle school, a coeducational university and a Baptist seminary, which have a combined enrollment of 7,500, says Charles Fenner, trip coordinator and retired Southern Baptist missionary to Japan and former English teacher at the school for 20 years.

The school's study abroad program was started to improve the students' use of English and allow them to experience life in another culture, Fenner explains.

"Of course the cultural exchange is a good part of it, to let them feel and see mutual understanding between both countries," he says, adding there is an "unpublished purpose — to get the students into a Christian environment for two weeks."

"Very few of the students are Christian. Only about 1 percent of the Japanese population is Christian; the dominant religion is Buddhism." For many students, Seinan High School provides their "very first personal contact with anything Christian."

"We start at zero with them and try to bring them to a point where they can accept Christ. For most of them, they don't reach that while they are in high school, but many of them will later on."

Since the program's inception in 1981, "we've had at least one student who has gone back and become a Christian as a direct result of his time here," Fenner notes. "There may be others."

When the students arrived, Fenner told the host families: "We would like for every student to become a Christian while they are here, but it doesn't work that way.

"You can't run in and say, 'Do these three things and you'll be saved,' because they don't really understand. There needs to be a basic understanding first, and it takes a little longer."

Highlights of the students' trip included a tour of the state capitol in Baton Rouge during which five of the foreigners got stuck in an elevator for 30 minutes; participation in "What It Is," a novelty-games tournament organized each year by the Louisiana State University Baptist Student Union to raise funds for foreign missions; and tours of an elementary school, public and private high schools in Baton Rouge, Louisiana College in Pineville, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans and two public universities.

The foreign students were paired with American students at both high schools they visited. The students attended classes and ate lunch in the school cafeterias.

Heather Long, a First Baptist youth, says hosting the students has been a good experience for her youth group. Not only are the teenagers now more accepting of different ethnic groups, but the foreigners have brought the youth group "closer together. Everyone has wanted to participate," she says.

Sneed reports First Baptist first hosted a student group for a week in 1983, and relationships built during that week have lasted.

"Some host families of the group four years ago still are receiving Christmas presents and Christmas cards and telephone calls from the boys who spent just one week with them," he says. "And the same thing will happen with many of the boys that were here for two weeks."

"I want to keep my student," says Diane Sneed, wife of Ken Sneed, echoing the attitude of most host families. "I want to write his parents and tell them, 'finders, keepers.'

Students recorded in a journal "what they've seen, what they've experienced, what's gone on," Sneed says. "Part of what they had to do was describe or define certain words chosen by their instructor. They picked out for our part of the country 'bayou,' 'gumbo' and 'swamp.' They become aware of our customs and things unique to our state."

Sneed cites the most "unique thing" the students receive is the awareness of the host families' Christian commitment.

"When these boys overcome their teenage perception that being different is bad, they will be open to becoming a Christian even though the majority of Japanese people are Buddhist.

"And I think that our families will be much more conscientious about how they act because they have a guest," Sneed says. "Hopefully, they will learn they are being watched even when there are no foreigners around."

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(Gary Griffith is staff newswriter for the Baptist Message, newsjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.)

Southwestern Seminary Gets
Rare Seal Of King Agrippa

N-10 (SWBTS)
By Scott Collins

Baptist Press
4/7/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—A Herodian seal dated A.D. 44 has been given to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary by a former student and professor.

Jerry Vardaman and his wife, Alfalene, gave the seal, which is declared "definitely unique." It's the only one known of its kind," said independent appraiser Jerome Eisenberg, a dealer of antiquities.

The seal was made for King Agrippa I and found at Machaerus, a Herodian fortress east of the Dead Sea, Vardaman said. The fortress is where Jewish historian Josephus said John the Baptist was beheaded. Vardaman, who led an excavation at Machaerus in the late 1960s, did not uncover the seal but purchased it from a Bedouin boy in 1969.

Vardaman said the seal is made of sard, a substance which has a hardness of seven, compared to a diamond, which is a 10. He said the seal can "cut the blade of a knife."

An etching on the seal depicts Agrippa receiving a scepter from the Roman emperor Caligula. Agrippa holds in his right hand a bowl used for sacrificial offerings.

Vardaman said a well-known coin from the same period bears a similar drawing. A seal depicting a Jewish king is rare because the Jews feared breaking the second commandment, he said.

The seal could be the one used by Agrippa to issue the death warrant of the apostle James, Vardaman said. It could also be one used by an official under Agrippa given the authority to issue state documents.

Vardaman is director of the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University. He was an instructor in Old Testament at Southwestern in Fort Worth, Texas, from 1955-58.

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