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87-85

Messengers To Face  
Host Of SBC Issues

By Dan Martin

ST. LOUIS (BP)—Messengers will face a host of issues when they assemble in St. Louis June 16-18 for the 1987 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

One thing which figured prominently in the last two conventions -- 1985 in Dallas and 1986 in Atlanta -- will be conspicuously absent: huge crowds. The last two conventions have been the largest in the history of the 142-year-old convention, with Dallas drawing 45,519 registered messengers and Atlanta 40,987.

Convention planners are preparing for 25,000 to 28,000 messengers, although some experts predict the totals could go even lower, to around 23,000 or 24,000.

They point to lessened interest in the 1987 annual meeting, smaller facilities and the fact gatherings of the SBC in St. Louis have always featured smaller crowds.

For instance, in 1980, the last time the SBC met in St. Louis, attendance dwindled to 13,844 from the previous year in Houston, when registration was 15,760. In 1971, attendance was 13,716, nearly the same as the previous year in Denver (13,692) which is not a center of Baptist strength. In 1961, attendance in St. Louis was 11,140, down from 13,612 the previous year in Miami Beach, also not a center of Baptist strength.

However, the expected lower attendance probably will be offset by the relatively small size of the Cervantes Convention Center. One planner said St. Louis' convention center is "a wonderful place for a convention of 18,000 to 20,000, but if we go over 30,000 here, we're in real trouble." So, even with the reduced size of the convention, the facilities may feel as crowded as the mammoth meeting halls of Dallas or Atlanta.

Informed observers of the convention say the annual meeting is the object of lessened interest this year. In the previous years, political rallies, activities and rhetoric blazed in advance of the June meetings. This year, there is a marked absence of "drum-beating" sessions by conservatives and moderates to turn out the vote.

While there have been efforts to stimulate interest in the 1987 annual meeting, they have been less than in 1986 and 1985. Some moderate forces have indicated they don't want to fight anymore, and reports are circulating some churches, which in the last two years sent their full complement of messengers, probably will either send only a token messenger or two or will not come at all.

The 1987 annual meeting is the ninth in an announced 10-year effort to turn the convention to a more conservative stance which began in 1979 in Houston.

The conservative campaign has focused on four main planks: elect a conservative president who will appoint a conservative Committee on Committees, which will nominate conservatives to places on the Committee on Boards. The Committee on Boards, in turn, will nominate like-minded people to serve in places of responsibility on the 20 boards of trust of the SBC.

If the report of the 1987 Committee on Boards is accepted, the effort to gain conservative control of the national boards will be successful, as by most counts conservatives will have a voting majority on all but one national entity. Only on the board of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., will moderates still maintain a fractional majority. That, experts say, is because Southern seminary has the largest board of all of the seminaries (60 members) and trustees may serve two five-year terms.

Highlights facing messengers will be:

-- Presidency. SBC President Adrian P. Rogers of Memphis, Tenn., has announced his willingness to be nominated for a new term as president. If he is elected, Rogers will be the first man in nearly 40 years to serve three terms as president.

He served in 1979, but declined a second term. He was elected again in 1986 and has announced his willingness to serve again "if the brethren want me." The last man to serve three terms was R.G. Lee, Rogers' predecessor at Bellevue Baptist Church, who served three consecutive terms, 1949-51. Now, SBC bylaws limit a president to two consecutive terms, although a person may wait at least one year and be elected again.

Expected to be nominated against Rogers is Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, who is not an announced candidate but has said he will allow anyone to nominate him who feels he can make a contribution to the convention. Charles Redmon, pastor of First Baptist Church of Sulphur Springs, Texas, has announced he will nominate Jackson.

-- Peace Committee. The 22-member SBC Peace Committee will make its final report during the 1987 meeting. The group, created in 1985 to seek the sources of the controversy, make findings and recommendations for ways to bring reconciliation, will report Tuesday evening, June 16.

The committee is expected to meet just in advance of the meeting to finalize its report but has not released the substance. Messengers are expected to see the report for the first time at the convention. It is expected to contain about 10 recommendations of items the diverse committee believes will be helpful to the process of peace.

-- Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. An effort was made in 1986 to strip SBC funding from the BJCPA and establish "an exclusive Southern Baptist presence in Washington, D.C." The motion was referred to the SBC Executive Committee for a year of study.

The committee, which will report to the Executive Committee, is expected to recommend retaining ties between the SBC and the BJCPA, but with significant changes in the structure of Southern Baptist representation on the nine-denomination religious liberty/separation of church and state watchdog organization.

-- Bylaw 16. Messengers also will be asked to revise Bylaw 16, under which the Committee on Boards, Commissions and Standing Committees would be renamed the Committee on Nominations and the language of the bylaw would be revised.

-- Representation. Messengers will be asked to approve six state and/or territories for representation on convention boards. Under bylaw revisions adopted in 1986, a "tiered" system was established to give smaller conventions representation.

The new states gaining representation include Alaska, Nevada, New England, New York, Pennsylvania-South Jersey and Utah-Idaho. Three conventions -- Northern Plains, Hawaii, Minnesota-Wisconsin and Wyoming -- still do not have the necessary membership to qualify for the basic tier of representation.

-- Budget. Messengers will be asked to approve a \$140 million Cooperative Program allocation budget, which will fund the work of the 20 national agencies for 1987-88. The budget is up from \$136 million in 1986-87, and includes \$132 million in basic operating budget, \$6.4 million in capital needs and a Phase II of \$1.5 million.

-- Resolutions and Motions. Messengers are expected to introduce a number of resolutions and motions relating to convention stands on various issues and instructions to convention agencies.

Generally, the topics are not known until the convention begins.

With the presidency, nominations, the Peace Committee, bylaws and budgets, resolutions and motions, plus preaching and reports from all of the national agencies, messengers are expected to be kept busy from morning to night during the three days of convention action in St. Louis.

Tennessee High Court  
Views Churches As PACs

By Charlie Warren

NASHVILLE (BP)— The Tennessee Supreme Court has ruled churches that speak out on referenda issues must declare themselves to be political action committees and file disclosure statements.

The 5-0 decision overturned an earlier ruling by the Tennessee Court of Appeals that favored 13 Jackson-area churches accused of operating as a PAC to fight liquor by the drink. Representatives of 10 of the 13 churches subsequently have reaffirmed their decision to appeal the case to the United States Supreme Court.

John Lee Taylor, pastor of West Jackson Baptist Church and spokesman for the 13 churches, read a statement prepared by the group that met May 29.

"We have reviewed carefully one of the cardinal principles on which our democracy was founded — the separation of church and state," the statement declared. "The issue for which we contend continues to be of such consequence to the exercising of our religious faith that we have reaffirmed our decision made earlier to pursue it to the highest court of our country.

"Our legal counsel team has been asked to file our appeal at the earliest possible date," the statement continued. "Our attorneys anticipate the United States Supreme Court's willingness to hear our case.

"We should like to state again in unequivocal terms that we are churches. We are not political action committees. We believe that as churches, we have the constitutional right to exercise our religious faith publicly without interference by the state.

"Morally and doctrinally, we are conscience bound to address issues that may or may not appear on a ballot in an election. Because we confront publicly a moral issue that has become a part of an election process does not transform us from being a church to being a political action committee.

"The ramifications of this issue impact the religious community across America, not just 13 churches in Jackson, Tenn.," the statement concluded. "There will be other moral issues on ballots that churches must confront as a matter of faith and practice without being labeled political action committees across our land. The preservation of the doctrine of the separation of church and state must be preserved."

In its decision, the Tennessee high court wrote, "We think that the sole determinative issue is whether the act (the Tennessee Campaign Financial Disclosure Act) violates the free speech clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. We find it unnecessary to address the other issues to resolve this case."

The justices also noted: "The recent history of campaign financial abuses as well as the growth and possible dominance of special interest political action committees make the state's disclosure requirements necessary to allow the public to have some gauge by which to assess the sources, content and frequency of campaign publicity and activity.

"As enacted, the Campaign Financial Disclosure Act does not and cannot control the quality or content of speech," the court opinion continued. "It does not limit contributions or expenditures made during a campaign; it is neutral in all respects as regards the groups to whom it applies and the types of activities at which it is specifically aimed.

"If any group wished to engage in financing outcome-specific election campaigning, whether involving a candidate election or referendum, the people of the state, including these plaintiffs, have the right to know the extent of such financial involvement during the campaign in order to maintain a balanced and informed view of the campaign," the statement added. "Accordingly, we conclude that the Campaign Financial Disclosure Act of 1980 is constitutional in every respect."

Lee Boothby, the attorney for Americans United for Separation of Church and State who presented oral arguments on behalf of the churches during the April 7 hearing at the Tennessee Supreme Court, noted there is an advantage to losing the state high court decision.

"There is an advantage in the sense that you have more control of the questions that go up if you lose," Boothby said, adding that whoever appeals to the nation's high court gets to present the issues relevant to the appeal.

On Aug. 21, 1986, the Tennessee Court of Appeals, Western Section, ruled 2-1 that the Tennessee campaign Financial Disclosure Act is unconstitutional as applied to referenda elections because it violates the First Amendment right of free speech.

The appeals court ruling reversed a Chancery Court decision that would have required churches that speak out on referenda issues to file financial disclosure statements. However, the appeals court judges ruled such churches are political action committees under the disclosure act.

The case erupted when the 13 churches, nine of which are Southern Baptist, refused to file disclosure forms related to their involvement in opposing an August 1984 local-option liquor election. That referendum was defeated by 40 votes, but a later referendum was successful.

On Aug. 29, 1984, Tennessee Attorney General Michael Cody issued an opinion that churches which had spent at least \$250 in seeking to defeat the liquor-by-the-drink referendum were political action committees and were subject to filing the forms within 48 days after the election.

The churches refused to comply and instead brought suit against the state of Tennessee on the grounds that the Financial Disclosure Act, as interpreted by Cody, violates the freedom of religion guarantee of the First Amendment.

The Tennessee Supreme Court's ruling in effect means that while the case awaits a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, churches that spend more than \$250 addressing referenda issues would be considered political action committees and would be required to file disclosure statements. Churches also would be required to provide the names of any individuals who contributed \$100 or more toward the defeat of a referendum.

The decision comes at a time when Tennessee voters are likely to face local referenda regarding the location of horsetracks which will allow pari-mutuel gambling. Ivy Scarborough, a Jackson attorney who is representing the churches, said church members can still fight the pari-mutuel threat without the churches themselves becoming political action committees.

He said "people of like minds" could establish political action committees to raise funds and work to defeat the issue.

"Contributions could be made by individual members of the churches to the PAC, which in turn could file the necessary reporting documents and include the names of those contributors who made a contribution of \$100 or more," Scarborough said. "This would insulate the churches from having their names directly associated with the PAC but would provide an organization through which funds could be utilized to defeat the measure."

He urged pastors to be aggressive and not be intimidated or inhibited by the Tennessee Supreme Court decision.

"Pastors can readily stand up before their congregations on any Sunday and speak out against the legislation and urge their parishioners to make contributions to political action committees without having any fear of legal repercussions," Scarborough said. "They must not, under any circumstances, allow themselves to be muzzled."

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Baptists' Passion For BMT  
Will Not Die, Bush Insists

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press  
6/3/87

NASHVILLE (BP)—Southern Baptists' zeal for missions and evangelism remains strong, even though it is overshadowed by denominational controversy, Ellis Bush believes.

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Bush is promotion coordinator for Bold Mission Thrust, the Southern Baptist Convention's plan to spread the gospel of Christ around the globe by the turn of the century. He led a recent conference in which state and national leaders worked on BMT promotion plans for 1990-95.

"The passion for Bold Mission Thrust will not die," Bush insists. "We have gone through days in the SBC that controversy would be our obsession. But that is not the case now. It (BMT) is alive and well."

Reports that theological/political controversy within the convention has damaged enthusiasm for BMT are only partially true, he says: "I have heard comments that Bold Mission Thrust enthusiasm and energy has been siphoned by controversy. This may be true and not true. At times, energy of leaders is siphoned by numerous crises or administrative matters. That would be true to some extent whether we had controversy or not.

"At the same time, there has not been any softening or lessening of desire with regard to the Bold Mission Thrust dream. The broad range of leadership -- state leaders, associational directors of missions, home and foreign missions personnel as well as missions-oriented laypeople -- has not allowed controversy to fragment their commitment."

Commitment has remained high for a couple of reasons, Bush notes.

First is the breadth of the BMT vision, he says, which is even greater than its typical description, "to give every person in the world an opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ by the year 2000."

"Actually, the vision of Bold Mission Thrust is even more challenging," he adds, noting the BMT program mandates that "the biblical faith be magnified so that all men, women and children shall understand the claim of Christ on their lives." It also recommends "full emphasis be placed on the Bible in the communication of missions, upon research as a fundamental necessity for missions, upon cooperation as a way of magnifying the missions witness of the church and upon doctrinal integrity as a way of preserving the faith."

Second, commitment is fueled by "the uniqueness of the Baptist denominational system that allows state conventions, associations and churches a freedom of action that is tremendously significant," he says. "It allows leaders to pick up on priorities and discover ways to implement them.

"Bold Mission Thrust operates off of this in that it provides a stimulus to individuals in leadership positions. It causes them to take program initiatives that we (national leaders) would never know about."

Some observers say BMT's unbridled potential for initiative has its downside in that some unrealistic goals can be set. But that does not bother Bush, who says monumental goals are part of the program's genius.

"Bold Mission Thrust -- the term 'bold' itself -- is an inducement to make bold goals and bold plans," he relates. "If you don't set high and worthy goals, you won't be likely to achieve so much as you would without them. The pull of Bold Mission Thrust keeps us from doing business as usual.

"On the other hand, goals can be frustrating to planners," he acknowledges. "Planners go through the dilemma of whether goals are motivators or hard-nosed figures by which their performance will be measured. We may set goals beyond practicality, but the question is this: Would we have done as much without them?"

Bush is responsible for guiding the process through which Southern Baptist national agencies and state conventions develop and coordinate promotion of BMT. He is a bridge builder "between these various centers of planning that will provide a greater unity and momentum in our cooperative work."

BMT leaders' biggest task is to "find ways to capture more adequately the attention of Mr. Average Baptist across the convention," Bush adds. "Baptist laypeople need to understand this mission vision and the importance of their place in it." That "place" includes giving to mission causes, prayer for missions and participating as volunteers in mission work, he notes.

"Bold Mission Thrust must become a commitment that fires the aspirations and energies of all Baptists," he insists. "My hope is to see the commitment continue to grow and the momentum continue to build so that this coming final decade of the 20th century will be Southern Baptists' greatest hour in missions, evangelism and church growth."

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Lottie Moon Total  
Tops \$69 Million

Baptist Press  
6/3/87

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Receipts for the 1986 Southern Baptist Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions topped \$69 million, representing more than 92 percent of the \$75 million goal.

When the financial books closed May 31, Southern Baptists had sent \$69,412,195.09 to help finance foreign missions work in 110 countries around the world.

Receipts for the 1985 offering totaled just over \$66,862,000. The difference represents a 3.81 percent increase in giving, "roughly comparable to inflation," said Carl Johnson, Foreign Mission Board vice president for finance.

To reach the 1987 goal of \$75 million, Southern Baptists will be called on to increase their giving by about 8 percent. The 1987 goal was decreased in early May from the original \$81 million to \$75 million, maintaining the previous year's goal.

As they announced the decision, Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union leaders expressed regret that the goal had to be decreased but cited the need to be realistic.

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Celeste Pennington Resigns  
From Home Mission Board

Baptist Press  
6/3/87

ATLANTA (BP)—Celeste Pennington, editor of book publication services at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, has resigned to pursue a freelance writing career.

Pennington, who has been employed by the agency for 12 years, served first as assistant editor of Missions USA, then assumed the book editorship in 1979. She has been responsible for producing the award-winning annual home mission study books and the 10-book series, *The Human Touch*.

During her tenure at the board, Pennington also wrote "American Montage," a Human Touch series book on language missions work, and "Band-Aid Annie," the 1982 children's home mission study book.

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