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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
Alvin C. Shackelford, 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, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550
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. Hasty, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Baptist Bury Legend:

Porter W. Routh, 1911-87

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists buried a legend Nov. 10, 1987.

Porter W. Routh's family, colleagues and admirers celebrated the life -- and grieved the death -- of a Baptist Christian they called statesman, giant, theologian, friend.

Routh, 76, died Nov. 7 in Nashville following a brief illness. He was executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee from 1951 until his retirement in 1979.

More than 300 family and friends gathered at First Baptist Church of Nashville, Routh's spiritual home for 42 years. Pastor Charles Page told them: "We celebrate the homegoing and coronation of Dr. Porter Routh. ... He has given us the kind of lifestyle that has been an inspiration to us. This is a time of celebration, a time of victory."

Franklin Paschall, pastor emeritus of the church and Routh's neighbor for 32 years, recited Scriptures that reflected his friend's life and faith. He noted one that particularly related to Routh's faithfulness to God and witness of Christ: "... and they are there that testify unto me."

Paschall drew a sketch of Routh as a friend he had been "together" with through three decades. He recounted how they had raised their children together in the same neighborhood, shared the same tailor, worshipped in the same church ("If God ever made a great churchman, it was Porter Routh.") and labored together in the SBC, the Executive Committee ("Porter was a big man -- wherever he was, in any way you take it.") and the Baptist World Alliance.

"We were together in every way," Paschall said. "I loved him, and I shall miss him."

Albert McClellan, Routh's associate at the Executive Committee through the decades, painted a picture of an intense, hardworking man who loved his work, challenges and Baptists.

"The first time I saw Porter, he was hard at work at a Linotype machine," McClellan said, reflecting back 50 years to Routh's days as a reporter for an Oklahoma City newspaper. "I tried to get his attention and could not, his concentration was so strong. I later worked with him for 28 years, and all those years I saw that same intensity and love for his work."

McClellan succeeded Routh as editor of the Baptist Messenger, Oklahoma Baptists' weekly newsjournal, in 1945. "Porter always was a man of not too many words," he said, describing both Routh's habits and the way Routh introduced him to the work of the Messenger. When McClellan traveled to Oklahoma City for an orientation just before he was to take over the newspaper, Routh talked to him for about 30 minutes and then left town for the week, confident his successor had the wherewithal to get the job done.

Later, when the duo was together at the Executive Committee, McClellan said, "The way he conducted staff meetings was to stand at my door and talk about a problem and then leave it in my hands, like he did that first newspaper."

But McClellan also painted a portrait of a man who came to the office at night during his vacations to read his mail and dictate responses. "The man was profoundly interested in his work. It never left his mind, and that was why he did so well at it," he said.

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"For him, a problem never was a problem. It was a challenge," McClellan added, describing how Routh would study an issue and patiently listen as colleagues discussed possible solutions. "Then he would suggest a changed word or two, and everybody would be happy -- at least as happy as you can be in Southern Baptist life."

And Routh was a happy man, too, McClellan said, describing how he will miss his friend's long walking gait, hearty laugh and robust greeting.

He finally noted how Routh was happiest at the grassroots level of Southern Baptist life. "The crowning work of his life, in a sense, was not the Executive Committee nor the Baptist World Alliance, but the Nashville Baptist Association" which elected him moderator for this year.

"Less than a month before he died, when he was sick, when his voice was weak, he stood and presided over that (the association's) annual meeting," McClellan said. "He was faithful to the end. That was my friend, Porter Routh."

Donald Ackland, a fellow churchmember of Routh's who is retired from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, showed a snapshot of Routh among friends. The men and their wives and other First Baptist Church couples frequently shared meals together, and Ackland recounted some of Routh's best travel stories that he often shared with the group and related how Routh would apply lessons of Baptist doctrine to even the funniest tales.

"I will remember him for many things, even how, at the end of the evening he would walk across the room to his wife and say, 'Mrs. Routh, it's time to go home,'" Ackland said. "Just three or four days ago, a friend visited Porter in Baptist Hospital. His words were a bit different, but he managed to say, 'I've had a good life; it's time to go home.'"

Grady Cothen, who was Routh's colleague as president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and later of the Sunday School Board, sculpted an image of Routh the denominational leader.

"Porter Routh was so intense about his work there was not time for anything else," he said. However, Cothen -- whose son is married to one of Routh's daughters -- noted Routh was a strong family man and loving father.

But turning back to Routh's role in the SBC, Cothen said: "He was stubborn, intense. Had he not been so, Southern Baptists would not have made the progress we have made. ... There was a vision beyond here and now. ... Always there was that endless search: Is there a way we can do these things and do them better?"

Routh also was "a great interpreter of Baptist polity," particularly championing the cherished doctrine of the priesthood of every Christian believer, he said. Routh perpetually adopted "cooperation" as his watchword, advocated peace among Baptists and sought consensus through every crisis, he added, citing Routh's zeal for the SBC's Cooperative Program unified budget, missionary enterprise and theological education.

"Porter Routh was devout but not pious; a believer, a Christian, a friend," Cothen said. "Our tears are for ourselves. Southern Baptists may not see his likes again. These are different days. ... But he led us from victory to victory."

In interviews, other colleagues also expressed admiration for their friend.

"Porter W. Routh was one of the greatest Christian statesmen I have ever known," said Harold C. Bennett, Routh's successor at the Executive Committee. "His commitment to the denomination and Southern Baptists was beyond question. I counted him as a close personal friend and a strong prayer supporter.

"He will be missed. Southern Baptists have greatly benefitted because of his ministry over 46 years."

"Above all things, I would say he was a denominational statesman in the truest sense," echoed Duke McCall, Routh's predecessor at the Executive Committee. "He was trying to look down the decades ahead and help Southern Baptists find the course for their future as God leads."

McCall, retired president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., quoted Scripture when recounting his feelings at Routh's death: "'A giant in Israel has fallen.' I link him in our heritage to God-called men of the Bible, for he intended to stand in that lineage."

Darold H. Morgan, president of the SBC Annuity Board, chose the same metaphor: "Dr. Routh was one of those giants among us whose knowledge of Baptist heritage, doctrine and organization was absolutely unprecedented. He epitomized the finest of mission outlook, total integrity and total overview that we need in all relationships. He balanced the mission boards, seminaries and other SBC agencies in a context of harmony, challenge and creative tension.

"His death leaves a void. It pains me to know our present generation does not know the value of that kind of leadership."

Martha Gaddis, his administrative assistant for 11 years, described the sensitive, supportive side of her former boss: "He recognized my strengths before I did, and he challenged me to do more than I ever dreamed I could. When my parents died, he hurt with me; when there were personal health problems, he hurt with me; when I celebrated something in life, he celebrated with me."

As a Southern Baptist leader, "He was an anchor in troubled times," she added. "He was wise when his wisdom was needed. He was a friend to all of the Southern Baptist Convention agencies."

And Kendall Berry, retired executive director of the Southern Baptist Foundation and Routh's friend for three decades, described him as "Mr. Baptist, as far as his denomination was concerned."

"Porter was a stalwart man," Berry added. "He would always stand up for what was right and didn't mind people knowing his position as far as his denomination and Christ were concerned. I don't know of a finer layman that ever lived."

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Son Of T.B. Maston Dies
In Fort Worth Nov. 10

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(CO
N/SWBTS)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Thomas McDonald Maston, son of T.B. and Essie Maston, died Nov. 10 in Fort Worth of cancer at age 61.

T.B. Maston, professor emeritus of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, is best known as a pioneer in Christian ethics and race relations.

"Tom Mc" was born with cerebral palsy. He required assistance in every function. The Mastons dressed him, fed him, cleaned him, put him to bed and got him out of bed every day of his life. Although Tom Mc could not talk, he was able to communicate through two simple symbols meaning yes and no.

Essie Maston has devoted her life to caring for Tom Mc. T.B. Maston has often said his wife had the ability to succeed in almost any profession she chose. She deliberately gave up a teaching career to care for her invalid son.

Frank Page, pastor of Gambrell Street Baptist Church, and Lloyd Elder, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, conducted the funeral service Nov. 12. Elder had developed a special relationship with the Maston family while pastor of Gambrell Street and later as executive vice president of Southwestern Seminary.

Elder's message was based on the account of Jesus raising Lazarus recorded in John 11. The key verse, Elder said, is Jesus' command to "loose him and let him go." When Jesus called Tom Mc from this life, he freed him from bondage to be at home with Christ, Elder said.

Elder described Tom Mc as a person whose cheerfulness was contagious. Despite his physical limitations, Tom Mc did the best he could, Elder said. "Many of us in strong bodies would long to be able to say the same of ourselves."

Tom Mc is survived by his parents and a younger brother, Eugene, who lives in New York.

Kentucky Baptists
Celebrate 150 Years

N- CO
(Ky)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Kentucky Baptists, in a historic 150th anniversary session, chose between three presidential candidates considered to be moderates and passed a record \$19.7 million budget for 1988-89.

In a three-way race for the Kentucky Baptist Convention presidency, J. Howard Cobble, pastor of Severns Valley Baptist Church in Elizabethtown, won over two challengers, Charles Barnes, a Louisville layman, and Bill Tichnor, pastor of First Baptist Church of Princeton.

Cobble garnered 59 percent of the vote in a run-off with Barnes.

Only one nominee was named for the convention's other elected offices. While not every vote of the convention was unanimous, many passed without opposition and few questions. In the executive board meeting the day before the convention opened, no opposition was voiced to any vote taken.

In addition to Cobble, other officers elected at sessions in Louisville's Walnut Street Baptist Church were James H. Whaley of Middletown, retired long-time convention staffer, first vice president, and Delbert L. Butts of Louisville, recently retired executive director of the Kentucky Temperance League, second vice president.

Among resolutions, messengers approved a three-part recommendation of the KBC committee on public affairs that said, "A state-operated lottery in Kentucky will ultimately produce no appreciable revenues and will likely diminish societal and moral values." Newly elected Kentucky Gov. Wallace Wilkinson campaigned on a platform that favored a lottery.

The committee on public affairs' recommendation urged the convention to affirm Citizens Against State Lottery in its efforts to defeat the pro-gambling initiative; encouraged Kentucky Baptist churches to support CASL and express disapproval of a lottery to legislators; and asked state Baptists to support other revenue-raising initiatives instead of a lottery.

The convention ended with a two-and-a-half hour celebration of its past, present and future, taking note of its 150 years of continuous service. Several thousand people attended as churches cancelled Wednesday night services to increase the crowd size. This anniversary observance took place at Louisville's Commonwealth Convention Center.

Messengers approved a 1988-1989 budget of \$19,785,855, the largest goal in KBC history. The budget will be split between statewide and worldwide causes, with 61.875 percent staying in Kentucky and 38.125 going to the Southern Baptist Convention. In line with a goal adopted several years ago to move toward a 40/60 SBC-KBC split of convention proceeds, the 1988-89 budget reflects an increase from the 37.5/62.5 split of 1987-88.

The convention executive board's reports and other matters were streamlined in Louisville to crowd them into five business sessions rather than the normal seven sessions as in other years. The sixth session at Commonwealth Convention Center climaxed the 150th meeting with the anniversary celebration.

Finding messengers could transact all of the business in five sessions, one messenger asked that consideration be given to paring down subsequent three-day sessions to two days. The convention referred the matter for study.

The life of a special committee to study liability, ownership and dissolution provisions of KBC agencies and institutions was extended one more year. The convention agreed that it is not liable for any of its affiliated entities except the Kentucky Baptist Foundation.

Next year's session will be in First Baptist Church of Owensboro, Nov. 15-17.

New Mexico Baptists
Celebrate 75 Years

N- (O)
(N.M.)

HOBBS, N.M. (BP)--The Baptist Convention New Mexico celebrated its 75th anniversary, approved a \$5.2 million budget and honored executive director emeritus Harry P. Stagg in its convention at First Baptist Church of Hobbs Nov. 3-5.

Using as its theme, "Serving Christ Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," the convention focused on its history, which stretches back to 1848, and at the same time looked toward the future.

President Ed Meyers, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roswell, was re-elected. Other officers are King Sanders, pastor of Rodeo Road Baptist Church in Santa Fe, first vice president; Wayne Brazil, pastor at Weed and Pinion Baptist churches in southern New Mexico, second vice president; Betty Wilson, the convention's administrative secretary, recording secretary; and June Tidenberg, secretary for the convention's missions division; assistant recording secretary.

The meeting drew 1,064 participants, including 478 messengers and 586 visitors.

Of the \$5.2 million budget, \$2.48 million will be raised by the churches in the state. The remainder will be received from the Southern Baptist Home Mission and Sunday School boards, as well as other sources.

Of the \$2.48 million, 30 percent will be given to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget, the same percentage contribution as the previous budget.

The convention was preceded by the annual Woman's Missionary Union/Brotherhood conventions, which featured speaker W.E. Thorn; Southern Baptist WMU Executive Director Carolyn Weatherford of Birmingham, Ala.; and Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission President James H. Smith of Memphis, Tenn.

The Baptist Convention of New Mexico was organized at First Baptist Church of Clovis in 1912, following a division between Northern and Southern Baptists in the state. New Mexico became a state that year.

The first evangelical church in New Mexico territory was established by Hiram Walter Read in Albuquerque in 1853. When the convention organized in 1912, there were 7,672 Baptists in the state. Today, resident Baptists in New Mexico number more than 75,000 people.

Executive Director Emeritus Harry P. Stagg, who was executive director of the convention from 1938 to 1968, was honored by the convention by being asked to bring the anniversary sermon, 20 years after his retirement.

Stagg, 89, came to New Mexico to die after he was gassed in World War I. He led the convention through its formative years and in retirement now lives in Albuquerque.

In the convention's memorial service, R.Y. Bradford, executive director of the convention from 1968 to 1974, was remembered by messengers and visitors. Bradford died Oct. 9.

One state convention staff member noted the meeting was "a harmonious convention from beginning to end, not a sour note was sounded."

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Louisiana Baptists Urge
'High Moral Leadership'

N- (O)
(La.)

Baptist Press
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MONROE, La. (BP)--Louisiana Baptists elected a new president by a 52-48 percent margin, adopted a resolution urging high moral leadership in state government and adopted a standstill budget during their 140th convention in Monroe Nov. 9-11.

Calvin Phelps, pastor of First Baptist Church of Winnfield, was elected president by a vote of 480-436 over the only other nominee, Fred Lowery, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bossier City.

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A letter written by Jim Richards of Greenacres Baptist Church in Bastrop was circulated about a week prior to the convention, urging churches to send their legal contingent of messengers to the meeting to support Lowery.

Richards said the letter was "not a political movement" and was something Baptist ministers frequently did before a convention election. But during a press conference Phelps, a native of Jackson, Miss., said, "It (the letter) was not terribly offensive, but it is the kind of thing unprecedented as far as the family spirit of the Louisiana Baptist Convention."

Phelps has been pastor of the 1,200-member congregation in north central Louisiana for 17 years. He is a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He succeeded Robert Magee, pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Ruston, who has served two consecutive one-year terms and was not eligible for re-election.

A resolution urging "high moral leadership in state government" was one of nine adopted by messengers. The resolution responded to the state's reputation of "corruption and dubious dealings in the political realm."

Messengers also approved a resolution for strengthening families through preaching and teaching God's "perfect intentions for marriages and homes as set forth in the Bible ... and a commitment to reach for Christ those who are unreached because of broken marriages and neglected relationships."

The 1988 budget of \$15,604,000 is identical to the current budget with the exception of a 0.25 percent distribution change, from 34.50 to 34.75, going to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget. The change was effected by re-arranging other budget items.

Convention registration of 1,893, which included 1,242 messengers and 654 guests, was the highest in a number of years.

Mark Short, attending his first convention as executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Executive Board, challenged the state's Baptists to have "20/20" vision for the past, present and future: "We need good vision as we look back and thank God for what others have done. We need good vision as we celebrate the present and the diversity among us to strengthen our churches. And a good vision for the future to realize God will not ask us to do anything he has not given us the resources to accomplish. I hope to see 2,000 churches by the year 2000 (up from the present 1,455) with 20,000 being baptized in the near future."

Short assumed the executive director's office June 1, succeeding Robert L. Lee, who retired after more than one-third of a century in the position.

Buddy Roemer, Louisiana's governor-elect, who addressed one session, called for input from the state's citizens: "I want you to stand with us. Call me, write me."

He promised he would "never resort to gimmickry like gambling casinos in New Orleans to shore up the sagging economy."

Other convention officers elected are Everett Geis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Delhi, first vice president; and Carl Voda, an Alexandria layman and member of Horseshoe Drive Baptist Church, second vice president.

Louisiana Baptists' commitment to Mission 90, a program to establish 250 churches and missions by 1990, captured the major focus during all of the sessions. Phelps pledged his commitment to "intensify efforts" toward this goal.

No major doctrinal or theological issues were debated during convention sessions.

The 1988 convention will be Nov. 14-16, at Parkview Baptist Church in Baton Rouge.