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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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November 16, 1987

87-173

'Shrug Off Gloom Talk,'  
Oklahoma Messengers ToldN-CO  
(Okla.)

BETHANY, Okla. (BP)--Messengers to the 82nd annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma were urged to shrug off gloom talk and join a bold battle for the Kingdom of God.

Speaker after speaker challenged messengers to leap into the second decade of Bold Mission Thrust with new vigor. Western Christianity as embodied by Baptists, they said, is not proving it has anything to offer a world shaken by constant threats and shifting values.

In business session, 1,306 messengers approved a \$16.5 million budget for 1988, the same as 1987, and agreed to pass 44 percent of it on to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international causes, also the same as this year.

They re-elected President Rod Masteller, pastor of Putnam City Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, who was unopposed for office. He served the last of Wendell Estep's final term as president when Estep moved from the state, and then was elected on his own last year.

Gene Garrison, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, surprised even Masteller when he strode quickly to the platform to nominate his fellow city pastor, in a show of "unity." Anthony Jordan, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, was poised on the platform to make the same nomination.

The only tension in any session came during the election of first vice president when Johnnie Curtsinger and Ben Loring tied in a standing vote count.

After a call for a ballot vote, about 25 messengers said they did not receive ballots in their packets when they registered. Anthony Jordan, chairman of the tellers committee, distributed extra ballots from the registration desk.

Several messengers protested that distribution, apparently afraid some people would vote who were not registered. Since the ballots could not be withdrawn, Masteller said the only resort was to count on their honesty and admonished anyone not registered not to vote.

When the ballots were counted, Curtsinger, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Tulsa, defeated Loring, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lawton, 451-431.

Curtsinger then nominated Loring for second vice president, saying he would not allow the image to linger that "Oklahoma Baptists are divided 50-50." Loring was elected by acclamation.

The 1988 budget of \$16.5 million is the same as the revised budget adopted by the executive board last year when special action changed the percentage of division between state and national ministries. It does not include a raise for convention employees, who received a 4 percent raise in 1987 and no raise in 1986.

Messengers passed nine resolutions without discussion, including resolves against Baptist agencies endorsing candidates and against an Oklahoma government regulation requiring an architect in building projects of \$40,000 or more.

They also passed resolutions urging judicial reform, urging more intense moral education in church, affirming the autonomy of churches and associations, encouraging churches to participate in the Expanded Annuity Program, commending Woman's Missionary Union as it prepares for its 100th anniversary and urging observance of a "Sanctity of Life" Sunday in January.

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Messengers adopted a resolution that said "Baptist agencies should refrain from organizationally endorsing candidates or attempting to speak for Baptists in elective or appointive politics."

In August, the Southern Baptist Convention's Public Affairs Committee broke 50 years of precedence when it urged the confirmation of Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork.

"In order to carry our conviction and belief in the separation of church and state into public affairs, we have historically avoided public endorsements of candidates by our convention agencies and departments, rather limiting them to providing pertinent information about all candidates," said the fourth of nine resolutions.

In a resolution prompted by associational actions in Muskogee and Memphis, Tenn., messengers affirmed the autonomy of local churches and associations. Both associations disfellowshipped churches; Memphis for calling a woman pastor and Muskogee for having a divorced male pastor.

The resolution called a church "an autonomous body operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in which congregation members are equally responsible." It said these churches have the right "to form associations and conventions" and the churches may "decide who may or may not be seated as messengers at said associations and conventions."

The Christian Life Committee report brought the most interest from local media because it contained a section on AIDS. After exploring medical aspects of the universally fatal disease, the report said: "Christians should stay accurately informed about AIDS, and avoid the pitfall of becoming hysterically afraid of the disease to the point of shunning AIDS patients. Lepers were shunned by society in Jesus' time (also because of fear and misinformation about the transmission of the disease), but Christ recognized their need for spiritual as well as physical healing, and reached out to them in loving ministry."

For the second year, convention planners withdrew the invitation to one of the platform speakers. In 1986, the invitation to Nashville pastor Charles Page was withdrawn after it was learned his congregation had voted to allow women as deacons.

This year, program committee chairman Bob Evans, a professor of religion at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, told messengers the committee had "relieved" a speaker of "the responsibility to speak," after the man was fired by his church.

David Walker, former pastor of First Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas, and a former Oklahoma pastor, had been invited to address the assembly. However, on Oct. 25, the Texas congregation voted 623-614 to dismiss the 34-year-old Walker, citing problems of "leadership style" which had caused divisions in the church.

The 1988 annual meeting will be at Council Road Baptist Church in Bethany, Nov. 14-16.

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Businessman Elected  
In Kansas-Nebraska

N-CO  
(Kan.-Neb.)

Baptist Press  
11/16/87

LINCOLN, Neb. (BP)--Harold Finch, a businessman from Overland Park, Kan., was elected president of the Kansas-Nebraska Baptist Convention during its annual meeting Nov. 9-11. David Sellers, pastor of Northern Heights Baptist Church in Norfolk, Neb., was named vice president.

Messengers to the annual meeting approved a 1988 budget of \$3,166,848, of which \$1,685,004 is anticipated to come from the 300 congregations affiliated with the convention. Of the latter amount, 30 percent will be sent to support the worldwide missions causes of the Southern Baptist Convention, up 1 percent from last year.

Also approved were resolutions opposing abortion, pornography, lotteries and alcohol and other drugs. Messengers resolved on sex education in public schools, urging it be biblically based with parental direction and encouraging homes, churches and schools to promote sexual abstinence outside of marriage.

The 1988 annual meeting will be Nov. 15-16 in Salina, Kan.

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South Carolinians Elect  
'Reconciler' As Leader

N-CD  
(S.C.)

CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP)--South Carolina Baptists elected a new president who shuns all labels except "Christian and reconciler" during their annual meeting Nov. 10-11.

Jimmie E. Harley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Florence, was elected at the 167th annual session of the convention in Charleston.

Harley, who said he wants to be a force for harmony in the convention, defeated Bruce Russell, pastor of Charleston Heights Baptist Church in Charleston. Harley was the convention's first vice president and also had been second vice president. Observers within the South Carolina convention perceive Harley to be most closely affiliated with the moderate faction within the Southern Baptist Convention, while Russell is identified with the conservatives.

Other officers are Mary Rome Foster, minister of music at First Baptist Church of Camden, first vice president; and Troy Gregg, pastor of First Baptist Church of Chesnee, second vice president.

South Carolina Baptists also approved a budget of \$22.1 million for 1988, an increase of \$1 million over the previous budget. The new budget contains a basic portion of \$20.1 million tied to a "Bold Mission Challenge" of \$2 million. All challenge money will be divided equally between South Carolina Baptists and the SBC.

The basic budget directs 61.5 percent of contributions to South Carolina mission needs and 38.5 percent to Southern Baptist Convention causes. The amount earmarked for the SBC is a 0.75 percent increase.

Messengers also voted to enter a three-year partnership with Carioca Baptist Convention in Brazil and will send evangelistic, medical and construction teams to work in an area that includes Rio de Janeiro, a city with 9 million people. The partnership extends from 1989 to 1991. George W. Bullard Jr., director of the missions division of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, will administrate the partnership task force.

South Carolina Baptists adopted resolutions calling for education and compassion concerning AIDS, responsible sex education in the schools, affirming Christian higher education, religious liberty, soul competency and local church autonomy, asking denominational agencies to refrain from endorsing political candidates, opposing aggressive advertising for tobacco and alcohol products, and for eliminating bingo in the state.

The meeting attracted 2,246 messengers. The 1988 South Carolina Baptist Convention will convene Nov. 15-16 in Spartanburg.

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Resolutions Absent  
From D.C. Convention

N-BJC

Baptist Press  
11/16/87

WASHINGTON (BP)--In what appears to have become a tradition, delegates to the District of Columbia Baptist Convention for the third consecutive year avoided considering any resolutions during their annual meeting Nov. 12-13. Instead delegates who met at First Baptist Church of Hyattsville, Md., heard sermons and reports centering on the theme "Launch Out Into the Deep."

Delegates elected Hubert G. Keefer, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Hillcrest Heights, Md., president; Jeanette P. Holt, a member of University Baptist Church in College Park, Md., vice president; and Letha Johnson, a member of Camp Springs Baptist Church in Camp Springs, Md., secretary.

They also adopted a budget of \$1,176,527 -- including almost \$260,000 in support from the Southern Baptist Home Mission and Sunday School boards. The convention is expected to give about 30 percent of its total budget to world mission causes sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Next year's meeting is to be held Nov. 10-11 at First Baptist Church of New Carrollton, Md.

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Wyoming Convention  
Has Revival Time

N-CO  
(Wyo.)

CASPER, Wyo. (BP)--A revival atmosphere in which several people made public decisions highlighted the annual meeting of the Wyoming Baptist Convention, the newest such group in the Southern Baptist Convention.

In business sessions, messengers elected Don Hayhurst, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Roverton, president; Tim Clark, pastor of Westside Baptist Church in Gillette, first vice president; and Lee Feeler, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Cheyenne, second vice president.

Messengers also adopted an \$879,000 budget for 1988, of which \$270,000 will come from the 66 churches and 20 missions affiliated with the convention. Of the gifts from Wyoming congregations, 23.5 percent will be sent to support the worldwide missionary, evangelistic and educational ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention, up 0.5 percent from last year.

Two resolutions were adopted, one encouraging churches to be on guard against the activities of cults practicing Satanism. Several Wyoming churches have been burglarized and vandalized, with suspicion pointing at the satanic cults.

The other resolution encouraged churches to increase gifts to the foreign missions offering because of the devaluation of the dollar overseas and continued depression of the world economy.

The 1988 annual meeting will be Nov. 16-17 in Antelope Baptist Church in Gillette.

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'Disruptive' Efforts  
Decried By Virginians

N-CO  
(Va.)  
By Robert Dilday

Baptist Press  
11/16/87

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)--Rumors of conservative efforts to influence events at the annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia motivated a record number of messengers to attend the meeting Nov. 11-12.

More than 2,500 Virginians, most of them moderates, met on the campus of the College of William and Mary to denounce conservative efforts to "disrupt unity," voice their support of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and ask the Virginia Baptist General Board to study the possibility of establishing a divinity school at one of the state's four Baptist colleges.

For the first time in nearly 15 years, a pastor was elected president of the general association without opposition. Neal T. Jones, pastor of Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, is considered to be a moderate.

By tradition, Virginia Baptists alternate between laypersons and ministers in choosing presidents to serve one-year terms. Although laypersons often are elected by acclamation, there are usually multiple candidates in the years when a minister is elected. However, Jones was the only person nominated for the office.

Michael J. Clingenpeel, pastor of Franklin Baptist Church in Franklin, was named first vice president, and Eva Easley, a member of First Baptist Church in Bluefield, will be second vice president.

Both defeated C.T. Edmondson, pastor of Zoar Baptist Church in Deltaville, who was nominated for both positions.

Interest in the meeting was heightened by a letter reportedly written by a Northern Virginia layman which detailed conservative efforts to "control the convention."

T.C. Pinckney, a Air Force retired general and chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Committee on Nominations in 1987, apparently sent the letter to a pastor he believed was sympathetic to the decade-long attempt to turn the SBC in a more conservative direction. The letter did not include a signature, only Pinckney's typed name.

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Moderates obtained the letter and sent copies of it to approximately 6,000 Virginia Baptist church leaders just prior to the meeting. Stories about it appeared in most of the state's leading newspapers.

The letter attributed to Pinckney, a member of Plymouth Haven Baptist Church in Alexandria, said, "Judging by the attendance last year, with hard work we could get enough conservative delegates (to Williamsburg) to control the convention."

He also asked for assistance in efforts to send resumes of conservatives to churches without pastors, noting that he already had sent resumes to more than 200 Virginia Baptist churches.

"A continuing need is a current file of resumes for conservative pastors," Pinckney wrote. "I welcome any resumes you may send; please just be certain that the pastor is an alert conservative; that is, he is not only conservative in theology but also stands and votes with us on the controversial issues."

He added that suggestions for directors of missions for district associations also would be welcome, since "to place conservatives in such posts would be a great step forward in getting more conservative pastors here in Virginia."

Attached to the letter was a list of pastors, which Pinckney said he kept on his computer, categorized by "my best understanding of the position ... relative to the controversy in our convention."

Responding to the letter, BGAV messengers easily approved a resolution warning that "in recent weeks a strategy has been developed to disrupt our unity in diversity and establish one theological stance."

It expressed "strong disfavor toward any actions which would seek to categorize pastors, staff members, churches or any other entity of Southern Baptist life in Virginia by theological positions and voting stance."

Virginia Baptists also maintained support for the Baptist Joint Committee by approving a line item in their budget designed to assist the Washington-based agency if ties to the SBC are severed.

For several years conservative critics of the religious liberty organization have urged the SBC to end its association with the BJC. This year the SBC Public Affairs Committee, through which the SBC affiliates with the Joint Committee, asked the SBC to sever ties and establish its own religious liberty agency in Washington.

In 1986, the general association approved a plan to escrow \$75,000 from its Cooperative Program budget in the event messengers to the 1987 meeting of the SBC withdrew support from the BJC. When the SBC left its contributions intact, the \$75,000 was forwarded to Nashville for distribution through the Cooperative Program.

BGAV budget committee officials said in an effort to avoid a similar escrowing attempt, they recommended \$3,000 be placed in a line item in the 1987-88 budget to assist the Joint Committee.

The action says if the BJC's funding is "significantly altered," the budget committee may recommend to the Virginia Baptist General Board that it take "appropriate action" to ensure "reasonable financial support" of the agency.

Some messengers expressed concern with this "open-ended" approach, but budget committee member Ted W. Fuson, pastor of Lake Ridge Baptist Church in Woodbridge, said: "We don't assume it's appropriate to take on the entire budget of the Baptist Joint Committee. ... The budget committee doesn't see that as required or necessary and probably highly unlikely since people like you on the general board would vote against it."

The entire \$16 million budget, 62 percent of which will fund Virginia ministries while 38 percent will be sent for missions causes outside of Virginia, passed easily.

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In an additional gesture of support for the BJC, messengers approved a resolution condemning the Public Affairs Committee's recent endorsement of Robert Bork as a nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court and the PAC's "expressed intent to lead the Public Affairs Committee to withdraw from participation in the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs."

A motion referred to the general board asked it to "study the feasibility of establishing a divinity school at one of our Baptist universities or colleges." Although Virginia Baptists support four colleges, the University of Richmond is considered the most likely location for a theological institution.

A second motion approved by messengers asked Executive Director Reginald M. McDonough to send a letter to every Virginian studying at an SBC seminary, affirming their "calling to ministry" and pledging "continued support and our genuine and prayerful concern during this time of denominational crisis."

A third requested the general board's legal counsel to "study the legal rights of Virginia Baptist pastors whose resumes are circulated without their consent."

In addition to the resolutions on the Pinckney letter and the Baptist Joint Committee, three others addressed denominational issues.

A resolution on Southeastern Seminary expressed "grave concern for the actions" that led recently to the announcements of President W. Randall Lolley and Academic Dean Morris Ashcraft that they intend to resign.

Another, noting that Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., has been dismissed from its district association because it had called a woman as pastor, affirmed "the right of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church and every other Baptist church to call whomsoever they determine is the God-appointed person as their pastor."

A resolution on the Religious Herald, newsjournal of the BGAV, noted that "during the present crisis among Southern Baptists, extreme pressure has been brought to bear upon editors of state Baptist papers and members of the Baptist press at large," and affirmed "Julian Pentecost as editor ..., commending him for his strong stand for Baptist principles of freedom and liberty, and for the freedom of the press."

A final business matter changed BGAV bylaws to require the "president and two vice presidents of the General Association, acting as a committee" to make committee appointments.

The bylaws have given BGAV presidents considerable power in selecting committees, although their appointments have been made "in consultation with the vice presidents."

Observers saw the move as a preventive tactic which will keep the president of the BGAV from exercising what some believe has been excessive power wielded by the president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Next year's meeting is scheduled for Nov. 15-16 in Virginia Beach.