



- - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Comm
901 Commerce
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-
Alvin C. Shackelford, Dir.
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. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

September 12, 1988

88-147

N-CO

Alliance spends money
on 'slighted' causes

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Alliance committed money to support members' most cherished concerns following "listening meetings" in Nashville Sept. 8-10.

Southern Baptist Convention moderates repeatedly criticized conservative SBC leaders for ignoring several of the moderates' favorite causes -- women in ministry, peacemaking, homes for the poor, church/state separation and the twin doctrines of the priesthood of the Christian believer and the autonomy of the local church.

The SBA board of directors, meeting moments after the listening sessions ended, allocated more than \$30,000 to support ministries and organizations that manifest those causes: Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, Habitat for Humanity, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and a small church that has hired a woman minister.

The board also created a theological education fund to support "alternative ministerial training" for Southern Baptists. And it agreed to pay for new adult Sunday school lessons, to be published in the moderate newspaper, SBC Today.

It named its ministries budget, which will finance the endeavors, Global Ministries Fund.

But the SBA stopped short of a more permanent financial rift between moderates and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Moderates have criticized actions taken by SBC organizations since conservatives gained dominance on their boards within the past two years.

Issues mentioned at the SBA meeting included the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's prohibition on support for women pastors and divorced and charismatic missionaries, the Foreign Mission Board's dismissal of a missionary for "doctrinal ambiguity," the "defunding" of \$48,400 from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the tightening of policies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary that resulted in resignations of the president, most top administrators and some faculty.

Indeed, the SBA finance committee received at least nine models for changing the way disaffected moderates relate to the convention's \$140 million unified budget, the Cooperative Program.

The three proposals that received the most discussion involved some continued support for the Cooperative Program. However, they also included creation of foundations or trusts to fund causes not financed by the Cooperative Program but deemed vital by moderates.

Other proposals ranged from designated giving to the Cooperative Program to escrowing moderates' gifts until conservative leaders agree to political changes in convention bylaws. Another proposal, mentioned once and not vocally supported, called for the outright formation of a new denomination.

Some change in relationship to the Cooperative Program seems inevitable, according to a straw poll of the meeting's 730 participants. It revealed that at least 90 percent favor some form of change. Only four indicated they do not support a change.

--more--

A proposal for that change will be presented to the SBA board when it meets Nov. 28-29 in Charlotte, N.C., announced Walter S. Coleman Jr., SBA finance committee chairman and business administrator of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.

In the Nashville sessions, participants pleaded for an arrangement that will seem fair and reasonable to members of their churches.

"I've got to sell this thing when I get home," one pastor explained.

The SBA must be careful not to force a "crisis of conscience" upon traditional, mainstream Southern Baptists who might feel they must leave the convention to support the alliance, urged W. Randall Lolley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., and former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Later, the SBA board acted on that sentiment. It unanimously approved a public statement that declares, "While the Southern Baptist Alliance is made up of individual members and member churches, we also invite other churches and individuals to support and contribute to the SBA and its ministries."

--30--

Alliance leader says
'future is uncertain'

By Dan Martin

N-CO
Baptist Press
9/12/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Alliance is not planning a new denomination or ruling out that possibility, the organization's interim executive director said following a three-day "listening session" in Nashville Sept. 8-10.

"The future is uncertain because no one can predict human behavior," said Alan Neely, former missions professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., and interim executive of the fledgling moderate organization.

"I do not know what the moderates are going to do. I do not know what the ultraconservatives and fundamentalists are going to do. I do not know what Southern Baptists in general are going to do.

"But I will pledge that the Alliance will remain active in its support for Baptist principles and Baptist heritage and freedom until what we perceive is designed, concentrated, calculated oppression is relieved or until a new promised land is reached," he said.

Neely, now a professor at Princeton University, said the "listening session" which drew 730 registrants and about 200 other people to Woodmont Baptist Church, did not change the character or the direction of the Alliance, composed of some 36,400 members, including 2,631 individual members and 55 churches representing 38 states.

"It has been stated many times and I sense widespread affirmation (from meeting participants) that it is not the design, overtly or covertly, to divide or to further divide the Southern Baptist Convention. We are simply trying to provide an arena where people who have been selected out ... prevented, prohibited, blackballed by those now in power can have a place to stand and can have some free air to breathe.

"That is all we have ever asked for; all we have ever wanted," said Neely.

He did not, however, rule out the possibility the fledgling organization is an embryonic denomination. "That is always a possibility, and I think it would be foolish to deny that it is a possibility. But it is not our desire, our intent, our design to separate entirely and organically from the SBC.

"I think it needs to be said that the representative spokespersons for the conservative/fundamental coalition have said and are on record as saying that would be glad if we do leave. We have said we do not want and are not planning to leave, but they have said they would be happy if we did," said Neely.

--more--

The leader noted the SBA is "in uncharted waters" and is "a fledgling organization." It is marked by differences of opinion about where to go and how to get there, he added, noting: "One end of the Alliance says we are moving too fast. Others sense we are moving too slow and are going to leave without anything tangible."

The difference of opinion marked the dialogue meeting, touching even the metaphors used by concluding speakers to describe the perceptions of what is happening in the SBC.

Tom Graves, a former professor at Southeastern Seminary who now is pastor of St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., said Alliance members "grieve not a loss in the family, but the death of the family. We now exist in a state of grief ... grief over the loss of our mother denomination."

He said the SBA is like "a child clinging to the dead body of a parent and refusing to let go. Our fingers have dug deep into the body of our old denomination and will not let go."

Graves called on the Alliance to "make a commitment to move forward in good will to one another as we move away (from the past)."

Cecil Sherman, on the other hand, said he would "have to change the metaphor" of the death of the SBC. "The SBC is striving forward mightily while we are small in this place. Our problem is not so much that it is dead, but that we have been put out of the house. To change the words again, I am saying that the game goes on but we do not get to play," he said.

Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and a leader in the moderate political movement since the early 1980s, said the future is not clear. "Are we leaving the SBC or are we only withholding our support for a while? We don't know. If we did it would be clearer."

The Texan urged SBA members to be "patient with themselves and with each other because we are at different places and coming from different places," as the organization tries to lay a course for the future.

He also encouraged the members to "recapture the vision of what God wants us to be about and how we can be about it without trampling in each other's consciences," and suggested after 10 years of denominational warfare the members need renewal and revival.

"War stamps out our beauty and our grace. The need for spiritual refreshing is terribly important. We need to worship as well as strategize because we are damaged spiritual property. When we stand before God, he is not going to ask if I repossessed the SBC and what was the count or if we created an SBA and what was the budget. He is going to ask, 'Did you preach the gospel? Did you help the helpless?'"

The ambivalence about the future was shown in a panel discussion featuring denominational leaders, a former state newspaper editor and a North Carolina pastor.

Two of the leaders, R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and Bobbie Sorrill, associate executive director of the Woman's Missionary Union of the SBC, urged the Alliance to continue in its support of the Cooperative Program and the special mission offerings promoted by the WMU.

Parks urged the SBA to "continue to support what we are doing as a cooperative missions effort," and not to "turn away from what we have been as Southern Baptists."

"The leadership of your Foreign Mission Board is a group of people who have genuine Baptist identity and spiritual integrity. I pledge to you if there is ever any significant change in what we are doing, I will publicly say so. But that has not yet happened," Parks said.

Sorrill reminded the SBA that when, in anger, they cut budgetary support, "they are not hurting boards of trustees, but are cutting off missions work." She urged the participants to consider the missionaries on the field before taking action.

--more--

Jack U. Harwell, retired editor of the Christian Index, newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention, who now is editor of SBC Today, a 12,000-circulation moderate-oriented monthly newspaper based in Decatur, Ga., said opinion is sharply divided and urged members to "move very cautiously before we launch any radical action."

Richard Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church in Wake Forest, N.C., told participants of actions by his 527-member church in regard to "radically reducing" the amount it sends directly to the Cooperative Program.

"We did not want to use the money for a political motive, but considered the issue a matter of how we do missions in our own congregation. We did not think it was good stewardship to give money unthinkingly. For us, it is a matter of integrity ... stewardship," he said.

He admitted moderates "are not being consistent" by discussing new approaches to contributions where once they said every church should give regardless. "We are not being consistent. But we were wrong (15 years ago) and there is no particular virtue in being consistently wrong and violating our integrity by being wrong," he said.

He noted two conclusions: "No Baptist body ought to be required to violate its conscience to be deemed cooperative. Autonomy cannot be taken away, but it can be given away," he said.

--30--

SBA board backs
new Bible lessons

By Marv Knox

N-①
Baptist Press
9/12/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Alliance will offer "alternative" adult Sunday school lessons, beginning in January.

Plans for the new lessons were among a variety of actions approved by directors of the organization of Southern Baptist Convention moderates who met in Nashville Sept. 8-10.

Others included support for alternative theological education, women in ministry, ministers and seminary students who are seeking places of service, a fired foreign missionary and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

The new Sunday school lessons will be carried as a four-page insert in SBC Today, the moderate monthly newspaper.

The project reflects moderate dissatisfaction with Sunday school lessons prepared by the SBC Sunday School Board, said Welton Seal Jr., pastor from North Wilkesboro, N.C., and chair of the SBA literature committee. Moderates perceive the board's lesson materials have accommodated the views of more conservative members of the convention as conservatives have gained a majority of board trustees.

The new lessons, to be written free of charge by moderate scholars, will cost the SBA about \$1,500 per month, Seal said, noting the charge will include \$1,000 paid to SBC Today and about \$500 in editorial and clerical expenses.

"A full track of age-graded materials is not feasible at this time," Seal said, adding the lessons will be based on either the board's Life and Work or Convention Uniform series.

Turning to theological education, the SBA pledged to support the formation of a "house of Baptist studies" at Duke University, a Methodist school in Durham, N.C., and a divinity school at Wake Forest University, a Baptist school in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Moderate support for these avenues of "alternative theological education" stems from concern for ministerial training in the wake of conservative domination of SBC seminary boards, reported Tom Graves, pastor from Charlotte, N.C., and chair of the SBA theological education committee.

--more--

He particularly noted the change at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. Last fall, conservative trustees changed the procedure for hiring faculty, ensuring that only teachers who are biblical inerrantists will be hired. Since then, the president, most top administrators and several faculty members have resigned in protest.

To support the Duke, Wake Forest and other possible avenues of moderate ministerial training, the SBA created a fund for theological education. Its uses could include paying salaries of Baptist professors or providing Baptist students with scholarships, Graves said.

In related actions, the SBA board voted to pledge support "to those persons and institutions who seek to structure alternative ministerial training for Southern Baptists and to those students who desire to learn in a devout, academically rigorous and open atmosphere." It also went on record as deploring "attacks upon seminary faculties and students in Southern Baptist institutions" and promised to support "those who have been attacked" and help Southern Baptist ministerial students with placement and internships.

The SBA board approved a number of actions in support of women ministers. It doubled its monthly contribution to the Southern Baptist Women in Ministry organization, increasing the gift to \$1,200. It also voted to provide \$75 per week to Shalom Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., to supplement the salary of a female associate pastor.

The board also voted to insist upon the use of inclusive language at SBA functions; encourage and create internships, preaching opportunities and speaking engagements for women ministers; develop a gender-neutral ordination certificate; and encourage the completion of a variety of materials, such as a book and brochures on women in the church and a book of women's sermons.

The suggestions were offered by the SBA's women in the church committee, chaired by Libby Bellinger, a chaplain from Waco, Texas.

The board also drafted a resolution of support for Michael E. Willett, a former Southern Baptist foreign missionary fired this summer for "doctrinal ambiguity" regarding his views of Jesus and the miracles.

The resolution said: "We express our deep concern regarding the recent events concerning the dismissal of Dr. Michael E. Willett as a foreign missionary of the (SBC) Foreign Mission Board. We express our support and prayer for Dr. Willett as he seeks new opportunities for service and share his struggle for the freedom of individual interpretation and responsible theological education."

The resolution was adopted after members agreed by consensus to drop portions critical of the Foreign Mission Board.

H. Stephen Shoemaker, Willett's pastor while the former missionary was a seminary student in Louisville, Ky., opposed the full resolution. "I'm not sure all that is in the resolution is fact," he said. "I think this would be an angry gesture. But I have no problem with a statement of personal support for Mike Willett."

"There are a lot of unresolved issues ... ," responded Relma Hargus of Baton Rouge, La. "I think we should say we're not satisfied."

The board achieved consensus when SBA Acting Executive Director Allen Neely promised to deliver both the approved resolution and the full text of the original resolution to FMB President R. Keith Parks.

Another resolution expressed support for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a church-state/religious liberty organization composed of nine denominations, including the SBC.

--more--

The resolution criticized the SBC Public Affairs Committee, a standing committee through which the SBC is represented on the Baptist Joint Committee. It particularly cited the PAC's endorsement of a "political appointee," former Supreme Court nominee Robert H. Bork; its attempt "to lay claim to money" budgeted by the SBC for the Baptist Joint Committee; its proposal to "sever all relationship with" the Baptist Joint Committee through a merger proposal with the SBC Christian Life Commission; and its request for \$75,500 in Cooperative Program budget funds for the 1989-90 fiscal year.

The resolution expressed opposition to the \$75,500 budget request and noted SBA board members "petition and encourage the members of the (SBC) Executive Committee to deny any increase in the operating budget of the Public Affairs Committee." It also asked the Executive Committee to structure the Baptist Joint Committee's budget allocation "in a manner consistent with budget increases for other agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention."

In a related action, the board voted to contribute \$10,000 per year to the Baptist Joint Committee budget.

The SBA also allocated \$500 per month to the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and \$5,000 per year to Habitat for Humanity, enough to build five homes in Third World countries.

It also ratified Neely's proposal to hire David E. Rogers, a Nashville business consultant, to "assist in the day-to-day operation" of the organization for six months at a cost of \$2,000 per month, plus expenses.

Neely noted he has worked full-time on SBA business since May. Neely is a former professor at Southeastern Seminary and is beginning duties on the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, N.J., and he noted he cannot continue to commit the time necessary to carry out SBA office duties.

Under the arrangement, Rogers will coordinate SBA functions and implement strategy, and Neely will continue to act as spokesman, Neely said. A search committee currently is seeking a permanent full-time executive director for the organization.

In another business item, the board stressed the need for placement services for moderate ministers, particularly the "networking" of information and the formation of internships for new ministers.

As of Sept. 8, the SBA had 36,460 members, Neely said. That includes 2,631 individual members and 55 member churches with a combined membership of 33,829. Members live in 38 states, he said.