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November 9, 1988

88-179

Chaney calls for national church-planting strategy

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists "stand today at the doorway of an unprecedented opportunity" that demands a national strategy for starting churches, Charles Chaney told a group of seminary professors.

Chaney, vice president-elect of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's new extension section, declared the denomination is the first in American Protestant history to assemble the numerical strength, diversity and means to reach all of America with the Christian gospel through local churches.

"Whether we will see this nation as one of the great mission fields of the world and boldly plant the church of Jesus Christ in every one of its diverse people groups and in every geographical corner has yet to be seen," he said. "But we have the opportunity."

Addressing a group of about 25 professors meeting in Atlanta, Chaney traced the history of Southern Baptist church planting from 1890 to the present. He lamented that no national strategy has existed for 40 years. "The truth is, we have had a lot of national rhetoric and, on occasion, significant regional strategies," he said.

However, with the adoption of the Bold Mission Thrust evangelization/ministry campaign in 1978, the denomination began to dream from a national perspective again, Chaney said.

Any national strategy for church planting must encourage churches to start other churches, he said. "The responsibility for church planting must rest ultimately with the local church, not the national agency, state convention or local association," he explained.

To be effective, this national strategy must arise from the best in the various local and regional plans now being used, he said: "The Home Mission Board cannot develop a unilateral strategy. Churches, associations and state conventions must be full partners in what we do."

Southern Baptists must plant churches among every ethnic, racial and social group found in America, Chaney said, noting, "One secret of Southern Baptist growth in the South and Southwest, especially in this century, has been the development of churches in every segment of each city, town and village."

One church cannot reach the diverse population in most communities, he said, adding, "The strategy of one church in each town is a strategy of death."

Church planting also must major on direct evangelism rather than transfer growth, Chaney added, claiming, "The key to establishing vibrant, growing churches is to gather them primarily from those who have come to Christ out of pagan and secular America."

This task must be accomplished using full-salaried missionaries, bivocational church planters and lay leaders, he added, warning, "We cannot accumulate enough money to fully support all the church planters needed for all the new churches that must be started."

In the same way, Southern Baptists must use different kinds of buildings for new churches, he said: "The church house is not the church. Churches often move too quickly to a small building with a big debt."

Chaney also suggested developing a national strategy for land acquisition that would include a fund for some high-risk situations at low interest rates.

In addition to starting new churches, Southern Baptists must find a way to reclaim dying churches, Chaney said. "The single most-pressing problem Southern Baptists face today is not how to plant new churches or develop growing churches into more effective churches, but how to aid the 66 percent of our churches that are plateaued and declining," he stressed.

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Annuity Board trustees OK budget,  
hear retirement plan report

Baptist Press  
11/9/88

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist Annuity Board trustees, meeting Oct. 31-Nov. 1 in Dallas, learned about the continued growth of retirement plan contributions, approved the 1989 budget and heard reports of record benefits paid.

The trustees also took action to develop a succession plan following the retirement of President Darold H. Morgan, who will be 65 Aug. 5, 1989.

During July-September, \$40.2 million was contributed to members' retirement accounts, bringing contributions during the first nine months of 1988 to \$114.3 million. For all of 1987, contributions were \$132.2 million.

"We believe the strong growth this year reflects the successful implementation of the expanded features in the Church Annuity Plan," said Harold Richardson, the board's chief financial officer. "The program promotion by the member services division is successfully encouraging Southern Baptist pastors and employees to plan more effectively for retirement."

Earnings on all the board's investments for the first nine months trailed the same period of 1987 by 3.5 percent. But Richardson noted the 1987 figures were taken before the stock market collapse in October. "The equity and bond markets have had to rebound from the large loss and attitudes that followed after Oct. 19," he explained.

Retirement benefits paid through Sept. 30, 1988, totaled \$52.5 million, a 23.8 percent increase over the same period a year ago.

The trustees went into an executive, or closed-door, session to discuss the process of succession for Morgan, who became president and chief executive officer in 1972.

Trustee Chairman B.J. Martin later said the board voted unanimously to ask its administrative policy committee to bring a formal recommendation on the succession process to the January 1989 trustee meeting.

The 1989 budget of \$22.3 million is a net increase of 10 percent over the 1988 budget. The increase primarily is attributed to the cost of rent in the new Annuity Board headquarters building, which is owned by Equitable Real Estate and will be occupied in February 1989. Other operating expenses in 1989 require only minor overall increases, board officials said.

Highlights of increased costs in 1989 include:

-- Building rental increase, which provides 50,000 square feet of additional space in the structure built to Annuity Board specifications.

-- A new unit in member services was created in 1988 to serve larger SBC agencies.

-- The new property and casualty division is included in the proposed budget for administrative control.

The 1989 budget also provides a 4.1 percent increase in salary and related expenses. This is not an across-the-board raise, since the Annuity Board staff utilizes a merit evaluation system, board officials said.

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The Annuity Board's staff is in two buildings, and several approved positions remain unfilled because office space is unavailable.

Morgan told trustees: "If space had been available where we are, the expansion would have been gradual over the past 10 years. Trustees gave approval to the expansion several years back, but the major impact on the budget comes in February 1989."

The entire operating budget of the Annuity Board is funded from earnings on investments. Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget funds are used only for relief ministries and for support of educational and promotional programs in state conventions. Operating expense in 1989 will be below 1 percent of assets, Richardson noted.

The trustees discussed the average 30 percent premium rate increase for the church, seminary and group medical programs effective Jan. 1, 1989. The increase will be implemented to stop losses, which had reached more than \$9 million in the programs at the end of September, board officials reported.

Professional insurance executives serving as board trustees confirmed the staff and consultant reports that the problem exists industrywide.

"The current crisis of premium/claim imbalance, resulting in much higher rates and less benefits, is distinctly unpleasant for all of us," said Morgan. "Our staff had looked at several alternatives, including preferred provider organizations and health maintenance organizations, but the geographic locations of our participants and the high level of benefits required has caused us to reject each one.

"Continued research is being done in this area by our staff and professional consulting firms, and I expect some far-reaching recommendations from these studies in the future."

The board's next meeting is scheduled for Jan. 30-31 in Dallas.

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Illinois Baptists adopt  
budget, elect president

Baptist Press  
11/9/88

ALTON, Ill. (BP)--Illinois Baptists adopted a 1989 budget of \$6,269,905 and elected a new president during their annual meeting Nov. 2-4 at Calvary Baptist Church in Alton.

The Illinois Baptist State Association budget includes a goal for Cooperative Program unified budget gifts from Illinois churches of \$4,662,218, the same as in 1988. Of that amount, \$1,875,767 is earmarked for Southern Baptist Convention ministries, a reduction of \$156,960.

Messengers voted by a 3-2 margin to approve two "preferred" items taken off the top of the budget, and thus exempt \$360,000 from being divided by the state's Cooperative Program ratio. Those items help pay for ministers' retirement and the Illinois Baptist newspaper. Their exemption caused the reduction in funds leaving the state.

The remainder of funds received toward the Cooperative Program goal will be divided by the same ratio as used in 1988 -- 43.6 percent to SBC causes and 56.4 percent to remain in Illinois.

Messengers also approved a plan whereby Cooperative Program gifts above the \$4,662,218 goal will be divided 50 percent to the SBC, 25 percent to Illinois new work and 25 percent to the state convention's general budget.

The Illinois convention's board of directors presented the preferred item plan as the least of three evils. The other options were to adjust the ratio itself to increase the Illinois share and reduce the SBC share, or to slash state convention services to churches.

"This is a very painful process," said board Chairman Dale Clemens as he introduced the recommendation. "We raised (the amount going to the SBC) for six consecutive years, and the churches did not respond accordingly."

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Messenger after messenger came to aisle microphones to express their convictions about the recommendation. Even those who spoke in favor of it as a one-year stopgap measure said they found the preferred item approach distasteful.

Charles West, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bethalto, was elected president. Other officers are Vice President Rodney Osborn, layman, Woodland Baptist Church, Peoria; Recording Secretary Bill Lewis, layman, Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, Urbana; and Assistant Recording Secretary Martha Bingham, layperson, First Baptist Church, Vandalia.

Messengers also approved a plan to generate \$1.5 million for Illinois Baptist work. Funds raised by the convention's New Opportunities in Witnessing program would pay for improvements to two camps, the Baptist student center in Carbondale, construction of a maternity center and endowment of future ministry.

Thirteen resolutions were approved, including one that was likened to a revolution.

A slip of the tongue initiated the reference to a revolution. In calling for a vote on a resolution affirming the ministry of the late leader Martin Luther King Jr., Clemens said: "All in favor of this revolu--resolution. It's a revolution, too, isn't it?" and the crowd broke into laughter.

"When Southern Baptists begin to talk like this, it is a revolution in some regard," Clemens said. He then asked again, "All in favor of this revolution and resolution, let it be know by saying 'aye'." The vote was unanimous.

The resolution regarding the slain civil rights leader affirmed him as "a model of ministry and a man of Christian integrity and purpose."

It described King as "a Baptist minister of the gospel," who "preached, lived, marched and taught of God's redeeming and reconciling love for persons of all persuasions regardless of race, creed or color."

The resolution said King "called us back to one of the fundamentals of this country's constitution that all persons are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights."

Messengers unanimously adopted another resolution that stated opposition to "all forms of racial injustice," including apartheid, an institutional form of segregation based on race. The resolution affirmed messengers' "commitment as Christians to the biblical concept of racial equality before God."

Before the vote on the King resolution was taken, Donald Sharp, pastor of Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chicago, commended the state resolutions and Christian life committee for its work on the two resolutions.

"It certainly helps us to deal with issues that we have to deal with," said Sharp, who is black and whose church predominantly is black. "Many times we find ourselves having to defend (against) certain irresponsible statements."

During the September meeting of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, one CLC member called King a fraud. "We have to be very careful that we don't be caught up in the endorsement of -- quote, 'the reverend,' unquote -- Martin Luther King," said Curtis W. Caine Sr. of Jackson, Miss.

No direct reference to Caine's comments was made during the annual meeting of Illinois Baptists.

New York Baptists  
ratify record budget

UTICA, N.Y. (BP)--New York Baptists rallied around their theme, "Pursuing the Vision; Preparing the People," during the 19th annual session of the Baptist Convention of New York, Nov. 3-4 in Utica.

Messengers adopted a record \$2,538,365 budget, of which the convention's churches -- from New York, northern New Jersey and southwest Fairfield County, Conn. -- are expected to contribute \$590,909. The majority of the balance is to come from the Southern Baptist Home Mission and Sunday School boards.

New Yorkers will support the worldwide ministry causes of the Southern Baptist Convention by providing 25 percent of their churches' contributions, an estimated \$142,048, to the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget. That percentage is a 0.5 percent increase, the third gain in three years.

Roger Knapton, pastor of Lincoln Avenue Baptist Church in Endicott, N.Y., was elected New York convention president.

Other officers are John Edwards, a layman from Brushton, N.Y., first vice president; Nancy Ryals of Glen Ridge, N.J., second vice president; Jon Meek, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Aberdeen, N.J., recording secretary; and Monnie Anderson of Liverpool, N.Y., assistant recording secretary.

The Baptist Convention of New York Foundation also made its first report and noted four scholarships had been awarded this year, with an additional four to be added next year.

Messengers adopted six resolutions.

Two resolutions made requests of the SBC Calendar Committee. The first asked that Race Relations Sunday be moved to the Sunday nearest Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday observance. The second requested that the Day of Prayer for World Peace be moved to Pentecost Sunday, as observed by other Christian groups.

Another resolution dealt with gratitude for people involved in convention arrangements. Resolutions of support were adopted for the SBC Home and Foreign mission boards and urged churches to continue support for mission offerings and the Cooperative Program. The other resolution expressed appreciation for the New York Baptist, the convention's newsjournal, and urged all cooperating churches to subscribe.

The 20th anniversary of the Baptist Convention of New York will be celebrated Nov. 1-2, 1989, in Syracuse, N.Y.

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William Carey trustees  
rescind Noonkester action

By Tim Nicholas

Baptist Press  
11/9/88

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (BP)--William Carey College trustees voted 7-4 Nov. 3 to rescind an earlier action to retire President J. Ralph Noonkester at the end of the current school year, when he reaches his 65th birthday.

The action took place at a special board meeting called by three trustees who opposed the forced retirement. The college, an institution of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, is located in Hattiesburg.

During a closed door session Sept. 29, trustees voted 5-4 not to extend Noonkester's contract past his 65th birthday, but did not give a reason for the action, nor would they say what had been discussed in the 30-minute trustees-only session. Trustees also approved creation of a seven-member search committee to seek a successor to Noonkester.

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The Nov. 3 action, proposed by trustee Joe Dale, a layman from Prentiss, declared that the resolution passed Sept. 29 is "rescinded and ordered expunged from the minutes of this board." A similar motion did away with the presidential search committee.

During discussion on the motions, trustee Chairman Billy McKay, pastor of First Baptist Church of Belzoni, ruled that contract decisions cannot be changed after parties involved have been notified.

However, Dale protested, noting Noonkester does not have a signed contract with the college. Trustees supported Dale and overturned McKay's ruling, 7-4.

Trustees also discussed a "compromise proposal" that apparently had been worked out prior to the Nov. 3 meeting.

Trustee and Mississippi Baptist sources said that proposal, which never was offered as a motion, would have extended Noonkester's contract to Dec. 31, 1989; ensured that he be given "a suitable retirement celebration"; made him president emeritus after his retirement; ensured that a search committee would not be formed until April 1989; pledged the board to "unify in an attempt to solve both the short-term and long-term financial problems"; and allowed Noonkester to "announce this plan to the press if he so desires."

Trustee David Spencer, pastor of First Baptist Church of Long Beach, and Earl Kelly, executive director-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, said the compromise proposal had been ratified by parties on both sides of the issue.

Dale, who had been a central player in the development of the compromise, did not explain why the motion never was made.

The trustees suspended debate to pray about the situation and subsequently voted to reverse the previous action to force Noonkester's retirement. Then they turned down Dale's motion to make the decision unanimous.

In a later action, trustees voted 7-4 to refinance the loan for two of the college's buildings to alleviate financial constraints.

That action would have required approval by the convention's executive board and messengers to the convention annual meeting. However, Noonkester has since announced the school has received \$150,000 in cash and \$350,000 in pledges, all "outright undesignated gifts," so that refinancing is not necessary.

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Struble named president  
of Louisville hospital

Baptist Press  
11/9/88

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Roger Struble of Memphis, Tenn., has been appointed president and chief executive officer of Baptist Hospitals, Inc., an agency of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Struble, who will assume the post Dec. 1, succeeds Ben Brewer, who is retiring after 30 years with Kentucky's largest system of not-for-profit health care. BHI operates acute care hospitals in Paducah, Corbin, Lexington and Louisville.

Prior to his election, Struble spent 16 years with Baptist Memorial Health Care Systems, Inc., in Memphis, which operates the nation's largest private hospital, Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis, plus nine regional hospitals in Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi.

He is a graduate of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton and Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. In Memphis, he has been a deacon at Bellevue Baptist Church and chairman of the board of Evangelical Christian School.

Struble and his wife, Hope, have two sons.

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