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April 20, 1989

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Vestal to permit
SBC nomination

By Mark Baggett & Toby Druin

NASHVILLE (BP)--Offering himself as a "responsible reconciler, a bridge to call our people back together," Daniel Vestal announced April 16 that he will permit his nomination as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in Las Vegas, Nev., June 13.

Vestal made the announcement to Dunwoody (Ga.) Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, where he has been pastor since October 1988, following a 12-year pastorate at First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas.

"After going through a great deal of soul-searching and prayer, I've come to a conviction that this is God's will for me," Vestal said.

He described his decision as a personal conviction and said he is "not anybody's candidate." However, he said he is a "centrist" in the SBC theological/political controversy.

"I am theologically and biblically conservative and have proven that I am committed to the cooperative approach to missions," Vestal said.

He hopes to return to the "time-honored principles of Southern Baptists: the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of believers, the autonomy of the local church, the separation of church and state, and the cooperative approach to missions rather than the independent approach," he said. "Because of our allegiance to those principles, we have thrived. But we are no longer thriving, because we are drifting away from those principles."

Interviewed April 18 in Corsicana, Texas, where he was conducting a revival meeting, Vestal said his decision to allow his nomination is born out of conviction that the SBC is "in danger of losing its viability as a denomination."

"We are languishing," he said. "Cooperative Program (unified budget) giving is down; mission budgets are being cut; seminary budgets have been cut. It's not because of the economy. It's because we have forsaken (the convention's) basic principles."

Southern Baptists also have thrived because of their commitment to freedom, which has eroded during the years of the SBC controversy, he said: "For 10 years, there has been a deliberate intentional campaign to discredit people's convictions which has intimidated them. It has created fear and threatened free expression. The intimidation has been like this: If you don't vote a certain way, you are portrayed as not believing the Bible. If you don't vote a certain way, you are portrayed as supporting liberals."

"Well, no Southern Baptist wants to be accused of not believing the Bible. No Southern Baptist wants to be accused of harboring liberalism. That kind of constant rhetoric threatens the environment of freedom."

"The convention has been under a kind of tight control of those who say if you don't vote a certain way then you don't believe the Bible and you can't be a part of the decision-making process. Well, I am Baptist enough to say that when our freedom is being threatened, I am going to stand up and speak against that. It has to stop; it must cease."

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Vestal, who in February was among several people who spoke at a meeting sponsored by Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, said he welcomed the group's support of his nomination, but insisted he does not belong to Baptists Committed or any group: "I am not owned by anybody. I am owned by Jesus Christ. I welcome the support of others, but I am my own person."

He does not know who will nominate him in Las Vegas, he said, but he has had several offers.

Reaction from his church has been "positive, overwhelming, supportive, affirmative," he said. He has told members that being their pastor will be his first priority, but he has asked them "to let me do some traveling during the next two months."

Vestal plans to "be vocal" before the SBC meeting, June 13-15: "I will speak up and out to groups, churches and individuals. I think a lot of people in this convention want to hear from someone like me, from someone who is both biblically conservative and denominationally involved."

His decision is "not so much to run against Jerry Vines personally," Vestal said. Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., is completing his first year as SBC president and said in February he is willing to be nominated for a second term.

"I served with Jerry Vines on the Peace Committee for two years and love him as a Christian brother and value his friendship and his ministry," said Vestal.

"What I am doing is not a calculated political move, but a matter of conscience and conviction for me because I think this denomination is in serious trouble. I feel we are dangerously close to losing our viability as a denomination for world evangelization."

He will offer "convictions that ring true and harmonize with the convictions of most Southern Baptist people," he said. "That is, being in the middle doctrinally, biblically conservative and cooperative in my approach to world missions. ... where I believe most Southern Baptists are."

Vestal, 44, noted his Southern Baptist roots. He is the son of the late Southern Baptist evangelist Dan Vestal and was an evangelist as a boy and young man himself, preaching more than 300 revivals.

He earned two degrees each from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He was pastor of two churches before moving to First Baptist Church of Midland in 1976. The Midland church has led the SBC in Cooperative Program giving over the past decade and gave more than \$1 million in 1988.

The 3,500-member Dunwoody church gave \$295,036 to the Cooperative Program in 1988 and will give 12 percent of undesignated receipts this year, Vestal said. He has baptized more than 100 people since moving there last October.

Vestal served on the SBC Cooperative Program Study Committee in the early 1980s, the SBC Peace Committee, and he was chairman of the SBC Committee on Boards, now the Committee on Nominations, in 1982.

Those are "very conservative" roots, he said, calling himself a biblical inerrantist.

He has tried to be a "responsible reconciler" in all of his roles, he said. "If God has given me a gift, it is to be able to listen to people of different persuasions and not sacrifice my own convictions, to be a bridge, one to call people together."

If he should be elected SBC president, he said, he would try to be a "reconciler." He added he would favor looking at the powers of the president or at least sharing the president's appointive powers. The SBC controversy has swirled around the election of a president, who appoints the Committee on Committees, which nominates the Committee on Nominations, which recommends people for election to SBC boards, commissions and committees.

"This crisis we have had does not need to happen again," Vestal said. "I would favor an investigation into that by the Executive Committee or by an appointed committee."

His appointments would be "men and women who are Bible-believing Southern Baptists who have proven in their churches and by their personal lives a commitment to and an involvement in the denomination and in cooperative missions."

The constant "harangue" about "liberals" in the SBC has concerned him, he said: "I know many of these men (professors) personally and owe them a great debt myself. I know what kind of men they are, their commitment to Scripture, their commitment to this denomination, their commitment to God.

"They have influenced my life. When I hear this innuendo, these slurs that 'these liberals are in our seminaries,' it grieves me and angers me, because that is not true."

With some 600 professors at the six Southern Baptist seminaries, Vestal noted, "there may have been some need for theological renewal in some instances, maybe even correction, but the way this movement (now in control of the SBC) has tried to make that correction is wrong. It has created a party spirit and more divisiveness in the SBC than perhaps we have ever known, at least more than we have known in our recent past.

"It has taken away our focus on evangelism; it has removed our trust; and now I think it is causing us to lose our viability as a denomination.

"It is no more a theological issue. It is a power or control issue, and Southern Baptists have got to resist it. We have got to stand up and say enough is enough or we are going to destroy this denomination. The hour is late."

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Land testifies
on child care

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
4/20/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--A family tax credit should be the cornerstone of any child-care legislation, a Southern Baptist agency executive told a U.S. senate panel.

Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, appeared before the Senate Finance Committee, which held two days of hearings on child-care welfare programs and tax credit proposals.

Basing his testimony upon a resolution on child care passed at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in 1988, Land said three criteria should be used in evaluating any child-care proposal before Congress:

- Does it emphasize a tax-incentive approach to the problem?
- Does it emphasize state and local, rather than federal, regulation?
- Does it target benefits to people most in need of new assistance?

The proposals being considered by the Finance Committee -- most of which feature some combination of individual tax credits and state block grants -- are preferable to the Act for Better Child Care Services, Land said.

"They will be more efficient in delivering monetary relief and assistance to families," he testified. "They will not require an extensive network of regulation. They will not create a new level in the federal bureaucracy. And they help keep the focus of child care in the family."

Explaining that about 40 percent of child care for children younger than 5 currently is provided by relatives, Land said modifications and expansions of tax incentives could provide an economic base for even more child care to be provided within the family context.

The most meaningful role federal government can play in dealing with the need for child care is to enable American families to care for their own, he said, adding, "Our social policies, and therefore our tax structure, should make the option of home-based child care as realistic as possible."

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Land also told the panel child-care regulation is best conducted by state and local authorities. "These levels of authority, by their proximity and broad responsibility, are best situated both to provide oversight and to be responsive related to child-care needs," he said.

The federal government can play a role in child care that does not require federal regulation, he added. That role, he explained, is one of expanding the availability of child-care services in places where a demonstrated need exists. Federal financial support for that expansion, he continued, should be channeled through existing regulatory systems.

"This expediting, enabling role can be accomplished through a system of state regulation with greater efficiency than with the creation of an addition to the federal bureaucracy," he said.

Congress also should target any new federal child-care program to those families with the greatest need -- families with income levels near or below the poverty level, Land testified.

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Campers to rally,
work in Las Vegas

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4/20/89

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist Campers on Mission will gather in Las Vegas, Nev., for a regional rally and mission projects prior to the denomination's annual meeting June 13-15.

Carl Reagan, Campers on Mission specialist with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said campers will do construction work for at least three churches, assist with "Here's Hope" simultaneous revivals and participate in the one-day witnessing blitz planned by the board June 10.

Campers on Mission is a national organization to promote mission action among Southern Baptist campers of all ages. Although most Southern states have active chapters, few Western states have organized chapters, Reagan said.

The regional Campers on Mission rally scheduled for June 2-4 in Las Vegas will target campers from Nevada, Arizona, Utah and California. The support of campers from other states will help launch these Western chapters, Reagan said.

Campers will work in the Las Vegas area from the time of the rally through June 15, he said. After the convention, the group will caravan to the national Campers on Mission rally in Guthrie, Okla., June 23-25.

RV space reservations for Las Vegas should be made with Shirley Cramer at Sam's Town RV Park, (800) 634-6371, Reagan said. Southern Baptist campers will receive a special rate of \$5 per night.

Information about the ministry projects is available from state Campers on Mission leadership or from the Home Mission Board's volunteer division.

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Korean-American pastors
celebrate Easter in North Korea

By Jim Burton

Baptist Press
4/20/89

PYONGYANG, North Korea (BP)--Fourteen Korean-American Southern Baptist pastors witnessed North Korea's first celebration of Easter in 43 years in this city which was once called the "Jerusalem of the East."

The communist government of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea allowed the Southern Baptist delegation to hold a private worship service at Chang Gwang San Hotel before they attended official services at Bongsoo Church, the only Protestant church building in North Korea.

"From the beginning to the end it was a tear jerker to know that for 43 years they have not celebrated the risen Savior," said Dan Moon, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board consultant for Korean church growth and church-planting and director of ethnic Brotherhood Commission programs.

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The historic visit represents the first time an evangelical delegation has been invited into the communist country of approximately 20 million people.

Don M. Kim, pastor of Berendo Street Baptist Church, Los Angeles, preached the Easter message at the hotel. Won Ki (Jamie) Kim, pastor of Korean Baptist Church, Washington, D.C., presided at the service.

According to Moon, the pastors were joined by about 11 other American and Canadian Koreans who were in Pyongyang on other business.

"After worship everyone exploded into tears," said Moon, whose office is at the Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, Tenn.

The delegation was then bussed to Bongsoo Church which was completed in late 1988. With reporters from the Soviet news agency Tass, the Chinese news agency Xinhua (pronounced Shin-wa), and the North Korean newspaper Roh Dong Press, the Southern Baptist pastors were joined by North Korean citizens and government officials.

Also in attendance was Ik-hwan Moon, a South Korean Presbyterian minister and dissident whose visit was unauthorized by the South Korean government. Ik-hwan Moon was arrested April 13 when he returned to Seoul.

"Most people seemed to be at a distance from us," observed Dan Moon, who speculated that most of the people were invited by the government to attend.

Moon, who led in prayer during the service, said there was evidence of several committed Christians in the congregation and noted seeing one elderly woman who had memorized Scripture and songs.

The service was led by Lee Sung Bong, pastor of the state-sanctioned non-denominational Bongsoo Church, and included the Lord's Supper.

"When I held the cup I trembled," said Moon. "I asked the Lord to cover the whole church and its people with his blood. When I took the bread I could see the reality of the broken body among us."

The Southern Baptist pastors donated a public address system to the new church, then sang "Christ the Lord is Risen Today."

The delegation later met with Ko Gi Jun, general secretary of the Korean Christian Federation, to discuss North Korea's participation in the 1990 Baptist World Alliance Congress to be held in Seoul. In addition, they delivered an invitation from the Lausanne II preparation committee for five North Koreans to participate in the Lausanne II international evangelism congress scheduled for Manila, July 11-20, 1989. The expenses of the North Korean delegation will be paid by the preparation committee.

Moon said the pastors also met with No Chul Soo, a communist official and member of the Peaceful Unification Committee, to discuss reuniting families separated by the division of Korea in 1948.

Pyongyang was the center of the Christian movement in Asia during the late 1800s. In 1884, Samuel Moffatt, a Presbyterian missionary, introduced Christianity to Korea. Six years later, Malcolm Penwick, a Baptist missionary from Toronto, established a mission in Wonson.

The original itinerary included a trip to Wonson, the cradle of the Korean Baptist movement. Government officials did not permit the pastors to travel there.

Other pastors visiting North Korea were: Timothy H. Park, coordinator of Korean Ministries for the Maryland-Deleware Baptist Convention; Daniel D. Lee, First Korean Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.; Paul C. Im, First Korean Baptist Church, Irvine, Calif.; Seung H. Pak, Pilgrim Korean Baptist Church, Alhambra, Calif.

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Tommy Y. Sohn, First Korean Baptist Church, Dallas; Sang Hoon Lee, Central Korean Baptist Church, Cleveland; Yong Soon Nam, Riverside Korean Baptist Church, Riverside, Calif.; Paul Whan, Korean Baptist Church of Valley, Woodland Hills, Calif.; Chang Sun Moon, Tacoma (Wash.) Korean Baptist Church; David Y. Gill, Concord Korean Baptist Church, Martinez, Calif.; and Chang Kun Behk, Seh-Moon Korean Baptist Church, Astoria, N.Y.

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Southern Baptists asked
to join in day of prayer

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
4/20/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists have been asked to participate in the National Day of Prayer, May 4.

Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines and SBC Executive Committee President-Treasurer Harold C. Bennett both called Southern Baptists to prayer.

"The National Day of Prayer comes at a time when our nation faces overwhelming moral problems," said Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla. "We have failed to find solutions to these problems. An appeal to the God of heaven is our best, indeed only, solution.

"I encourage Southern Baptists to participate in the National Day of Prayer with sincere hearts and great confidence in our prayer-answering God."

"I would urge Southern Baptists all across this land to join their countrymen in prayer," Bennett added. "God's guidance is vital -- both for our leaders and for ourselves."

The observance of the National Day of Prayer dates back to 1775, when the Continental Congress first proclaimed a day for "all English colonies on the continent as a day of public humiliation, fasting and prayer."

The annual observance was conducted through the years of the American Revolution and was revived by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. In 1952, during the Korean War, Congress passed a joint resolution calling for a day of prayer to be set aside each year.

Last year, Congress permanently fixed the date, passing legislation declaring the first Thursday in May of each year as the National Day of Prayer.

President George Bush signed a proclamation supporting the prayer day this spring.

"Throughout our nation's history, Americans have been a prayerful people, giving thanks to our Creator for the blessings of liberty and seeking his help and guidance in preserving them," the president said.

He noted the importance of prayer in the birth of the nation and said: "The great faith that led our nation's founding fathers to pursue this bold experiment in self-government has sustained us in uncertain and perilous times; it has given us strength and inspiration to this very day. Like them, we do well to recall our 'firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence,' to give thanks for the freedom and prosperity this nation enjoys and to pray for continued help and guidance from our wise and loving Creator. ...

"I invite the people of this nation to gather together on that day in homes and places of worship to pray, each after his own manner, for unity in the hearts of all mankind."

The Day of Prayer previously gained support from the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, which voted last fall to "encourage Southern Baptists to participate in the National Day of Prayer, which is now officially observed in the United States on the first Thursday in May."

The Executive Committee also called on the convention's Denominational Calendar Committee to consider including the event in its calendar.

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