



- - BAPTIST PRESS

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
Mary 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 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

May 11, 1989

89-77

Interest lagging
for Las Vegas SBC

By Dan Martin

F-CO

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Interest apparently is lagging for the 1989 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, according to an informal survey of convention observers.

"I can't see any enthusiasm from either side for the Las Vegas convention," says one.

If projections are correct, the 1989 annual meeting, scheduled June 13-15 in Las Vegas, (Nev.) Convention Center, will be one of the smallest in a decade.

Registration Secretary Lee Porter and Convention Manager Tim Hedquist, both of Nashville, agree messenger totals for the session probably will not top 18,500 and may even dip as low as 15,000 or 16,000. Conservative leaders predict between 16,000 and 18,000 messengers, while other observers say attendance may sag as low as 12,000 or 13,000.

If the lower figures are correct, the Las Vegas meeting could be the smallest since Pittsburgh in 1983, when 13,740 were present. It surely will be smaller than 1985 in Dallas -- the all-time record -- when 45,519 messengers registered.

During the past decade, convention controversy has swirled around the election of Southern Baptist Convention presidents and their use of appointive powers to change boards of trust of the national agencies of the convention.

With the exception of 1983, the last seven conventions have centered on presidential campaigns. In 1981, 1985 and 1987, incumbent conservative presidents were challenged by moderates; 1984, 1986 and 1988 had wide-open races between moderates and conservatives.

This year, an incumbent conservative president -- Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., -- is challenged by a moderate, or centrist challenger, -- Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta.

Convention watchers say the election of officers appears to be the only substantive issue facing messengers, and neither conservatives nor centrists have been able to generate much enthusiasm to get their supporters to Las Vegas.

They cite five reasons: geography, the site, complacency, tiredness and lack of other issues.

Las Vegas "is a long way away" from centers of Southern Baptist strength, observers say, noting meetings on the West Coast generally are poorly attended, simply because they are a long way away from areas with large numbers of Southern Baptists.

The site is cited as another negative. Many Baptists appear reluctant to go to Las Vegas, with its gambling, glitter, potentially offensive shows and drinking.

"There seems almost a dread of going to Las Vegas," explains one observer. "Many people just do not want to go to Las Vegas, and, apparently, are not going."

Another factor may be what conservative leaders call complacency. "Many conservatives seem to think the effort to correct the theological direction of the convention is over. They have become complacent," a conservative leader says.

--more--

Contrasted to complacency is the tiredness of moderates. Their candidates and issues have been trounced for nearly a decade, and many in the camp say they are tired of fighting and losing.

Some moderates have stopped attending the annual meeting or have affiliated with the Southern Baptist Alliance, which appears to have pulled out of the effort to recapture the SBC.

However, another group of centrists -- Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention -- have vowed to continue to campaign for what they call "traditional Baptist values" in Las Vegas or for as long as they need to recapture the convention.

With the exception of the election of officers, the convention has few other issues. One leader says: "Against the glitz and glitter of Las Vegas -- and it is very gaudy -- the activities inside the convention hall are going to seem gray. Very dull; very gray."

One issue stirred controversy earlier in the year, but it apparently has been defused. That was a recommendation to create a Religious Liberty Commission to represent Southern Baptists in Washington, D.C., on religious liberty and separation of church and state matters.

SBC President Vines in late April requested the convention's Executive Committee -- which had recommended creation of the new agency -- to defer action in Las Vegas.

Vines did not mention the controversial nature of the recommendation but noted he wanted to keep the focus of the convention on missions and evangelism. He also did not suggest what should be done with the recommendation -- whether it should be restudied, reconsidered or perhaps resubmitted to the 1990 annual meeting.

The Executive Committee apparently will honor his wishes and pull the recommendation during its meeting June 12, at least toning down one possible item of controversy, observers note. The action, however, could have other ramifications, such as possibly setting off a floor fight over the budget of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which currently represents Southern Baptist religious liberty concerns.

The Baptist Joint Committee and its executive director, James M. Dunn, have been at the center of an SBC storm for more than five years. The committee has been the subject of three special Executive Committee study committees, as well as at least two efforts to strip it of SBC funding.

Proponents of the new Religious Liberty Commission say creation of the new agency would solve a festering problem by allowing the SBC to continue to participate in the BJCPA while at the same time creating an organization directly responsible to Southern Baptists.

Opponents say it is not needed, would be very expensive and divisive and would take money away from missions at a time when the SBC seems on an economic plateau.

Some observers spin a scenario that holds that when the Religious Liberty Commission proposal is removed, conservatives will stage a challenge to the \$391,000 budget allocation for the Baptist Joint Committee. A similar challenge in 1984 nearly succeeded.

Other convention watchers say opponents of Dunn and the Baptist Joint Committee have been patient across the years and will just wait and see what happens.

Whatever happens likely hinges on who wins the presidential contest, observers say.

Some put the jigsaw pieces together to reflect a victory for Vines. They say enough conservatives will be on hand -- primarily because of a massive door-to-door evangelism project planned in advance of the meeting -- to carry the day for the incumbent.

Others put the pieces together in a vastly different picture: a decisive victory for Vestal. They say lower attendances tend to favor moderates and hope the conservative theology of Vestal will draw conservatives who are tired of the alleged "winner-take-all" tactics of political conservatives.

--more--

"I guess we'll just have to wait and see who shows up," says one observer. "If East Coast and Texas moderates show up, Vestal could win; if conservatives turn out for the evangelistic campaigns or come because they want to finish their decade-long effort, Vines could win."

Most observers agree the 1989 convention -- in contrast to the past four -- seems devoid of issues and lacking in interest and enthusiasm.

"I think it is going to be the dullest convention we have had this decade," says a watcher. "They (the messengers) probably will just come in, routinely go through the motions of adopting a budget, electing trustees, voting on officers and listening to singing and preaching. Then, they'll just go home, glad to be out of Las Vegas."

--30--

Billingsley elected
Utah-Idaho executive

N- CO

Baptist Press
5/11/89

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--C. Clyde Billingsley, director of evangelism for the Florida Baptist Convention, has been elected executive director-treasurer of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

Billingsley, 48, will take office Sept. 1, succeeding Darwin E. Welsh, who announced his resignation as executive during the 1988 annual meeting after nearly two decades of leadership. Welsh will work with Billingsley until the 1989 annual meeting in November and then retire.

George Slaughter, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Mountain Home, Idaho, and convention president, chaired a five-member search committee that nominated Billingsley for the post. The committee considered 10 nominees.

The 19-member Utah-Idaho Baptist executive board elected Billingsley without opposition during a meeting May 5.

Billingsley, a native of Knoxville, Tenn., attended Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and is a graduate of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Following seminary, Billingsley and his wife, Judy, concentrated on vocational evangelism/church-starting in new-work areas for eight years.

After the evangelism work, Billingsley became pastor of First Baptist Church of Carlsbad, N.M. While pastor, Billingsley organized a preaching mission trip to northern Idaho, which led to the establishment of churches in Headquarters, Pierce and Weippe, Idaho.

In 1975, Billingsley was elected as the first full-time missions, stewardship and Brotherhood director of the Utah-Idaho convention. He left the convention in 1977 to accept a similar position with the Northern Plains Baptist Convention.

In 1981, Billingsley became evangelism director for the Northwest Baptist Convention, leaving in 1985 for the Florida position.

He and his wife have two children, Lisa and Charles.

--30--

Church services suspended
as tensions in Panama soar

By Art Toalston

N- FMB

Baptist Press
5/11/89

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--"There's tremendous tension" in the Panama City, Panama area, Southern Baptist missionary Jackie Cooper reported the day after bloody confrontations May 10 between supporters and opponents of embattled ruler Gen. Manuel Noriega.

"People are not sure what's going to happen," said Cooper, who lives about 20 miles from Panama City.

--more--

The tension, along with an 8 p.m. curfew spread by word of mouth but never officially announced, prompted numerous Baptist churches to cancel Wednesday evening services May 10. "A lot of people just didn't want to be out at night," Cooper said.

Seventeen Southern Baptist missionaries are in the country, said Cooper, who is their chairman. They are not in any danger, he said, but they are not making any trips from their homes.

Tensions in Panama, which have swirled around May 7's contested election, have prompted the missionaries to put a partnership with the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia on hold. The four-year partnership began in January. A number of Georgia Baptists were scheduled to work with Panamanian churches during May.

Also, the arrival of a two-year volunteer media specialist, Keith Morris of Abilene, Texas, has been delayed until after May.

Violence erupted May 10 when T-shirted members of Noriega's "Dignity Battalion" clashed with protesters led by opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Endara and his two vice presidential running mates. The three men and others with them were bloodied and one of their bodyguards reportedly was killed.

That night, the Noriega government nullified the election, blaming American interference. Noriega opponents, meanwhile, accused Noriega supporters of stealing, burning and otherwise destroying thousands of vote-tally sheets.

"We've noticed a stepped-up anti-American situation" ever since the American government charged Noriega with drug trafficking more than a year ago, Cooper said. This is reflected in slogans, military checkpoints at various locations and the like, he added.

But, he noted, "It's mostly political." The anti-Americanism is not coming from the Panamanian people in general, he said.

"No missionary has been overly harassed," he added. "We have been stopped, and we've had to present credentials and this kind of thing, but no missionary has been molested in the sense that we've been under any kind of danger up to this point.

"We live in a typical neighborhood. We're surrounded by Panamanians, and they have been so cordial to us in all of this."

Cooper said he hopes Southern Baptists will not allow the turmoil in Panama "to cause them to be less concerned for the Panamanian people. There is no open hostility between Panamanians and North Americans.

"The Panamanian people are just as open and as friendly as they can be. They're decent, hard-working people who want good relationships with everybody. They're not trying to thwart our ministry."

--30--

Church starts will increase
SBC baptisms, Bunch says

By Mark Wingfield

N-HMB

Baptist Press
5/11/89

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists' sagging baptism rates could be increased through church starting, a church extension strategist told the staff of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

David Bunch, associate vice president of the HMB extension section, presented a paper to HMB program leaders that outlined 12 reasons more churches reach more people.

The average Southern Baptist church has baptized about 10 people per year since 1925, he said. Total Southern Baptist baptisms have increased since 1925 because more churches have been started, not because existing churches have baptized more, he added.

--more--

Last year, 36,874 reporting Southern Baptist churches registered 346,320 baptisms. The total number of annual baptisms has been on a roller coaster ride for nearly 10 years. The highest annual total was in 1972, with 445,725 baptisms.

Other reasons Bunch cited for starting new churches are:

-- Population. "More than 100 million Americans are unchurched," he said. "The population is growing faster than the Christian community."

-- Declining churches. "About 60 percent of Southern Baptist churches are either plateaued or declining in membership. This means these churches probably will not develop a way to reach more people. Thus, to reach more people, more churches will have to be established," he said.

-- Ethnic and racial diversity. "People tend to respond to faith expressed in their mother language or racial heritage," he explained. "Establishing churches which allow freedom in culture and language will enlist more people. Southern Baptists need to establish churches that make it possible for everyone to hear the gospel in their own language and from one of their own people."

-- Diverse lifestyles and cultures. "Churches normally target certain styles of people as prospect groups," Bunch said. "This is not to develop exclusive churches, but to develop ministries that are compatible with people's preferences so they will more readily listen to the gospel presentation."

-- Identities. "Churches tend to develop identities," he said. "A church's reputation, identity and motif attract some people and deter others. More churches need to be started in order to have more identities to which people can relate."

-- Geography. "When people are required to travel beyond a comfortable distance, they tend not to voluntarily travel to church. Thus churches need to be placed in proximity to where people live," he said.

-- Leadership. "More churches reach more people because each organizational unit has more enlisted leaders who are concerned about reaching people. As we expand the number of units, we expand the number of leaders."

-- Community. "A church can identify with its community," Bunch said. "Churches need to be established with an identity with the neighborhood in order to provide for the preferences of people."

-- Social needs. "The churches are the only unit in society concerned about the total needs of people, which includes social needs. Churches addressing the spiritual dimension of the social fabric in a community tend to reach more people."

-- Community transition. "Existing churches often do not reach new residents who are of a different culture and style," he said, noting this commonly happens when urban areas overtake formerly rural communities.

-- Moral issues. "People respond to assistance provided in dealing with community moral issues," Bunch said. "Since the nation is becoming an unchurched society, pagan in morality, churches are needed to assist with the moral issues confronting people."

--30--

Baylor's Wimpee concludes
longest chaplaincy tenure

By Toby Druin

F-60
(Texas Std.)

Baptist Press
5/11/89

WACO, Texas (BP)--For more than half a century W.J. Wimpee's life has been entwined with the lives of students and colleagues at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

He came to the university from Kaufman, Texas, to play football in 1936 and except for the five years, 1940-45, most of which were spent at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a year, 1960-61 when he was an exchange professor at Hong Kong Baptist College, Wimpee has had a Baylor address.

--more--

He met his wife, Lillian, at Southwestern Seminary, in Fort Worth, Texas. Their three daughters all are Baylor graduates.

"Baylor has been my vocation and my avocation," said Wimpee, who retires this summer after 44 years on the university staff as professor, fund raiser and the only chaplain the school has had. It's likely that he has served longer as a university chaplain than any person in history.

And even in retirement, his relationship with Baylor will continue. After taking off next fall, Wimpee will be back for the spring semester, teaching a New Testament survey course and maintaining contact with people he has visited over the last 40-odd years for the university's development program.

He will be back at the invitation of Baylor President Herbert Reynolds.

"I asked him if he would teach one course in the fall and spring," said Reynolds. "The students love him, and everyone appreciates him.

"Dr. Wimpee has been deeply committed to Baylor University, its purposes and goals. He could have gone many other places, but he chose to invest his life at this Christian university. He has had a wonderful ministry here and has influenced thousands upon thousands of young people through precept and example.

"He has taught, provided a good example, counseled and given good direction. He is a good colleague and friend to me and others. We want him around as long as possible."

Wimpee was the guest of honor at a retirement celebration at the university April 20. Many friends, colleagues and former students paid tribute to him.

Wimpee enrolled at Baylor in the fall of 1936 and won a football scholarship after his first game as a freshman. He graduated in 1940 with a major in Bible and a minor in English.

He came to Baylor, he said, with \$14, three letter sweaters, some trousers and "one Stein's suit."

"I had been struggling with a call to preach," Wimpee said. "Baylor opened the door, and the spirit on campus led me to go ahead and surrender."

In the fall of 1938 he saw the first of two historic revivals sweep the Baylor campus. He and his roommate, Charles Myers, who was Baptist Student Union president, had covenanted together to pray for a great revival, he said, and invited George W. Truett to preach.

Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, was president of the Baptist World Alliance at the time and "normally you had to wait two or three years to get him," said Wimpee, "but he had a cancellation and was able to come. It was his last revival on campus."

Everybody went to chapel in the fall of 1938, Wimpee said, and Truett preached every morning and evening. The last service on Friday morning lasted until noon, he recalled.

"Nearly everybody in there made a decision," Wimpee said. "I was able to witness to and win all of my teammates to Christ."

C.E. Bryant Jr., director of public relations at Baylor, wrote a story reporting that "three-fourths of the record large student body of 2,250 one-by-one reconsecrated their lives and 590 were converted."

Baylor President Pat Neff reported to the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in Dallas three weeks later that "all except 15" of the university's students embraced "religious faith" after the revival.

Wimpee said that many of those to whom he witnessed on the football team lost their lives in World War II. Their names now adorn memorial lampposts on the campus.

--more--

"I didn't know it then, but now we see that the Lord was preparing us for World War II," he said.

The other great revival followed the war when the students who had been in the armed forces began to return to campus. Wimpee, who had graduated and gone on to earn a master's degree -- later a doctorate -- at Southwestern Seminary, returned to Baylor after a two-year pastorate at Dayton, Texas.

He succeeded Bob Denny, who later became director of the Baptist World Alliance, as BSU director, coming at the invitation of President Neff in August 1945.

The great youth revival movement soon broke out, led by Baylor students fresh from the world's battlefields. "The students who came back gave a seriousness to the tone of their work," said Wimpee. "They wanted to try to build a kind of world where such a terrible thing wouldn't happen again. They were five or six years older and more mature, but the kids out of high school soon caught the same spirit, and soon the youth revival movement broke out."

"Billy Graham has said to me on several occasions that the youth revival movement was a part of the momentum for his movement getting going," said Wimpee. In his travels all over the world since then, he said, countless former students have told him how their lives were affected by those experiences.

Wimpee, who was also on the religion department faculty, became the university's first chaplain and also got involved in fund raising in the early 1950s during the tenure of President W. R. White, and with the chaplaincy role he became director of chapel -- now University Forum -- services.

Wimpee has worked with many benefactors in providing campus facilities. He also has remained a preacher of the gospel over the years. If he has a hobby besides working in his yard, it is working with Central Texas churches. He has served many more than once as interim pastor.

Serving the churches and helping mold and improve the Baylor campus have given him much satisfaction, he said, but being able to influence student lives as chaplain and teacher has been especially gratifying.

"I have been here so long that hardly a day goes by that I don't have a call from parents wanting me to learn about the circumstance of their child and look for an opportunity to encourage or counsel them," he said.

Jim Jeffrey, former national director of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, said Wimpee's influence was crucial to him in the fall of 1947: "Dr. Wimpee was my teacher in New Testament, and I wasn't passing. When he asked me how I was doing in my other classes, I told him I wasn't passing those either.

"He told me if I was willing to work, he would work with me. He gave me extra assignments and spent a lot of extra time with me. It kept me in school.

"I became a Christian after that. But without that Christian good Samaritan act of W.J. Wimpee, I would probably have been back on an oil rig somewhere."

A boy stopped him on campus last fall, Wimpee said, and thanked him for what he had learned in Wimpee's New Testament class. "He said worship had been more meaningful to him since he had taken the course," Wimpee said.

"It has been very satisfying to me to see that lightbulb come on in so many young lives. It makes me not panic as I come to retirement. I feel there are concentric waves of influence, pulses, out there that are going to keep on going on."

Churches urged to minister
outside their membership

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

KONA, Hawaii (BP)--Churches that recite the Great Commission but don't adopt it are dying from atrophy as they fail to use innovation and insight to bring non-Christian lost communities to Jesus, the leader of the Southern Baptist Sunday school program said.

To reach people for Christ and ultimately grow in membership, churches need a "fresh vision," Harry Piland, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Sunday school division, told Baptist state Sunday school directors in Kona, Hawaii, during semi-annual planning meetings May 8-10.

"Churches are literally dying because they have no fresh visions; they don't want any; and they don't know they ought to have any," said Piland.

The biblical Great Commission task of reaching the non-Christian world for Christ "is a task Jesus gave us," he said. "No church has an option on that."

But churches that carry on like their fathers and grandfathers before them "need to adjust the way they do church," Piland noted. "The tragic fact is many churches are simply ministering to and talking to their own members. We are not aware sometimes that the outsider is not even hearing us.

"We gear our church services to our own people when we ought to gear and speak to people who don't care for the church."

Churches must create innovative ministries to reach people in their communities who do not attend or enjoy attending worship services, he said, adding, "Churches must take a comprehensive look at outreach and evangelism."

Sending church members into businesses and residential areas to conduct Bible studies or planning unusual outreach events such as concerts at the church "but not on Sundays" are ways to make the community aware of the church's mission, he said.

"People who don't come to church are not necessarily turned off by the Bible or turned off by Jesus," Piland said. "But they are turned off by church or what they perceive church to be, and we need to change that perception.

"Churches have come to believe that our goal is to come, sing praises, worship, read the Bible, study and fellowship with each other. That is not the goal of the church.

"The church exists for the benefit of the people who aren't even its members. It exists for the reason of bringing other people into the kingdom."

Ernie Adams, manager of Sunday school field service strategy and coordination, said churches are confronted with the challenge of reaching a growing number of non-Christian people in a society that is both diverse in its ethnic make-up and in its lifestyles.

Last summer, the board's research services department identified 900 churches that had reported five consecutive years of Sunday school growth, Adams said. The churches, varying in size, location and age, were sent questionnaires asking what they do to continue growing.

The growing churches were doing the basics, such as regular visitation, training Sunday school leaders, using Sunday School Board literature and conducting additional Bible study meetings, including Vacation Bible School, January Bible Study and Backyard Bible Clubs, research showed.

"They were innovative about scheduling, they believed in training their workers and they did a lot of training and promotion," Adams said. "They also gave a high priority to evangelism, and they see Sunday school as the best means to win the lost.

--more--

"These churches are saying that people can be reached, and that regardless of size or location, churches should grow. They are saying that everyone needs the gospel and that people everywhere respond to loving, caring persons who express genuine interest in them."

Meanwhile, state Sunday school directors discussed ongoing field servicing and various training events.

As the emphasis on increasing Sunday school membership continues with the Challenge 10/90, enrollment campaign, state leaders renewed commitments to lead their states in participation of The Final Four, a plan to increase Sunday school enrollment during the months of June, July, August and September of 1990 through a series of visitation/enrollment rallies.

Sunday school leaders also are studying a new way of counting enrollment that would identify people who are enrolled in Bible study and include them in the Sunday school enrollment even though they may not attend the class on Sunday mornings.

"This enrollment is intended to count people who do not want to come to church but will hear Bible study at some other place and some other time," Piland said. "We need to recognize a church's ongoing attempts to reach these people, and we need to let them report that work."