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September 8, 1989

89-129

Committee to consider
rescinding RLC proposal

By Marv Knox

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Executive Committee will be asked to rescind its proposal to create a Religious Liberty Commission when it convenes Sept. 18-20.

The request will be made during the Executive Committee's fall meeting in Nashville, according to a letter sent by committee President-Treasurer Harold C. Bennett to the committee's 77 members and other Southern Baptist Convention leaders.

The Executive Committee proposed the commission last February "as an alternative to accomplish the program and funding" of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The Baptist Joint Committee is a First Amendment/religious liberty watchdog organization based in Washington comprised of nine Baptist denominations.

Creation of a new Southern Baptist entity requires approval by messengers to two consecutive SBC annual sessions. The first vote was to have been taken last June in Las Vegas, Nev.

But SBC President Jerry Vines asked the Executive Committee to "defer its recommendation" to create the Religious Liberty Commission. Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., made his request in order to keep the focus of the annual meeting "on presenting Christ in Las Vegas," he explained.

Meeting in Las Vegas just prior to the SBC annual session, the Executive Committee concurred. Members amended their original proposal by moving all dates and references to the Las Vegas convention to 1990, when the SBC is to meet in New Orleans.

But now the Executive Committee will consider rescinding the entire proposal, according to Bennett's letter.

"On Aug. 28, 1989, Charles W. Sullivan, immediate past chairman of the Executive Committee, advised me that he plans to request the Executive Committee to adopt such a motion," Bennett wrote. "If the Executive Committee adopts the motion to rescind, Dr. Sullivan desires to make another motion to request the (committee's) program and budget subcommittee to consider several other aspects related to this matter."

Sullivan's motion is scheduled for the opening session of the Executive Committee meeting Sept. 18, the evening before the program and budget subcommittee convenes, Bennett reported.

Sullivan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tenn., declined to comment on why he plans to present the motion and on the content of his possible second motion, which would be directed to the program and budget subcommittee.

"I feel it would be presumptuous for me to assume what the Executive Committee will do," he said. "There is no need of my creating a problem.

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"If they vote to rescind the previous action, then I am prepared to make another motion to be considered, and I will have information available. It is not a viable motion until there is a vote to rescind.

"If the Executive Committee does not vote to rescind the previous action, it would be foolish for me to make any statement or pursue any other idea."

The pending action is but the latest in a series of events revolving around the relationship between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee. Three special study committees have been appointed by the Executive Committee since September 1986. Messengers to SBC annual meetings have turned back motions to defund the BJC.

Detractors have said the Baptist Joint Committee is too liberal, faulting it for not supporting school-prayer and anti-abortion amendments. Defenders have countered that the BJC has upheld the historic Baptist belief in church-state separation, that a school-prayer amendment would violate that principle and that abortion legislation is not part of the BJC's program assignment.

A majority of the Public Affairs Committee, the SBC's 18-member delegation to the 54-member Baptist Joint Committee, has expressed frustration with its ability to be accountable to the SBC for the BJC's budget and activity. It noted the SBC provides a majority of the BJC's funds but has only one-third of its trustees. BJC supporters have contended that the SBC, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, willingly should carry the burden of financial support, especially since some member denominations are smaller than many SBC local associations.

In October 1987, the Public Affairs Committee voted 8-4 to ask the SBC to dissolve institutional and financial ties to the Baptist Joint Committee. Two months later, officers of the PAC and the Christian Life Commission, the SBC's moral-concerns agency, met to consider merging the two organizations.

In January 1988, Christian Life Commission officers backed away from that proposal but asked the Executive Committee to study expansion of the commission's responsibilities if the SBC were to sever ties with the Baptist Joint Committee.

The Executive Committee declined to recommend severance, but it did propose a reduction in the Baptist Joint Committee's SBC budget allocation, from \$448,400 in 1987-88 to \$400,000 in 1988-89. Meanwhile, the Christian Life Commission received an increase of \$65,050 to its allocation and in the current fiscal year has hired the first full-time employee in its Washington office.

The concept of transferring the Public Affairs Committee/Baptist Joint Committee program assignment to the Christian Life Commission has been mentioned at least twice this year.

In February, the program and budget subcommittee approved and later rescinded a proposal calling for the SBC to shift its First Amendment assignment to the Christian Life Commission. It proposed that the 1989-90 Baptist Joint Committee funds be allocated to the CLC, that the CLC maintain the SBC relationship to the BJC and that the new CLC assignment be funded "from the present allocation" to the BJC.

During the SBC annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., Rudolph C. Yakym Jr., a Christian Life Commission member from Mishawaka, Ind., asked the convention to consider expanding the program statement of the CLC rather than create the Religious Liberty Commission.

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Yakym moved that the Executive Committee study the "feasibility and advisability of foregoing its recommendation to establish a Religious Liberty Commission and instead expand the program statement and budget of the Christian Life Commission to include the proposed duties of the Religious Liberty Commission."

The motion was referred to the Executive Committee, and it has been assigned to the program and budget subcommittee.

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(Also contributing to this story were Al Shackelford and Dan Martin.)

'Composite' agency best,
Yakym says of RLC-CLC

By Tammi Ledbetter

N-CO
(Ind.)

Baptist Press
9/8/89

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--A "composite" agency would provide the best alternative for Southern Baptists to deal with church-state relations and moral concerns, Rudy Yakym said.

During the 1989 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, Yakym of Mishawaka, Ind., moved that the SBC Executive Committee study the "feasibility and advisability of foregoing its recommendation to establish a Religious Liberty Commission and instead expand the program statement and budget of the Christian Life Commission to include the proposed duties of the Religious Liberty Commission." (See BP article above "Committee to consider rescinding RLC proposal.")

The SBC currently is represented in Washington by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a religious liberty watchdog organization comprised of nine denominations. The Executive Committee has proposed that the convention consider creating the Religious Liberty Commission to represent Southern Baptists' concerns in the nation's capital. The proposal would dissolve the 18-member Public Affairs Committee, the standing committee through which the SBC relates to the Baptist Joint Committee.

The Christian Life Commission, based in Nashville, is the convention's moral concerns agency. It has opened a Washington office to speak to those concerns in the nation's capital.

Yakym, a Christian Life Commission trustee, said he did not make his motion as one speaking for CLC trustees, but rather as an individual Southern Baptist. His experience as a CLC trustee puts him in a position to see the issues involved more clearly, he added.

After considering the recommendation to form the Religious Liberty Commission, Yakym decided: "It would be wiser to expand the program assignment of the CLC to incorporate the duties and responsibilities of the PAC and the BJCPA and have a purely unified SBC presence in Washington. Obviously, we can operate one agency with a composite task much more economically than we can have two agencies doing starkly similar tasks. It's just better stewardship."

The question of whether to dissolve ties with the Baptist Joint Committee if his motion is accepted is "another debate altogether," Yakym said. "Where we can cooperate jointly on issues with the Baptist Joint Committee, I don't personally have a problem with continuing to work with them, but not on the level that we are now."

The Christian Life Commission has placed a full-time staff member in its Washington office to "do the solid, effective job Southern Baptists want us to do," said CLC Executive Director Richard Land. As funds are available, the CLC plans to expand the staff by adding a person with doctoral-level credentials as associate director in charge of the Washington office.

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The present CLC program assignment includes a mandate to "bring to bear Southern Baptists' statements, convictions and insights in the field of Christian ethics upon policy-making groups and government bodies," Land said.

Yakym sees a conflict among existing SBC representatives speaking for the denomination in Washington. Citing abortion as an example, he said: "No one would dispute that the issue pertains to Christian ethics absolutely. Yet no one would dispute that the issue has a very strong religious liberty thread running right through the middle of it.

"You can't deal in Christian ethics without walking the same road with the religious liberties defender. It's quite conceivable that the two on any given issue may be in conflict."

The present situation also confuses many congressmen and senators, he added: "They don't know to come to the CLC with ethical issues. They don't know to go to the BJCPA for church-state issues." And substituting the Religious Liberty Commission would compound the confusion, he said.

Yakym's motion -- providing one voice for both ethical and church-state issues -- would end "turf battles," he said.

Land, whose agency has worked with both the Baptist Joint Committee and the Public Affairs Committee "on issues which deal with both of our program assignments," pledged to be neutral in discussion of program assignments or relationships between the CLC, BJC and PAC. "That is my responsibility to the convention as the head of an agency," he said.

SBC conservatives have criticized the Baptist Joint Committee for several years and attempted to defund the organization or withdraw from participation.

Conservatives, such as PAC Chairman Albert Lee Smith, a former U.S. congressman and now an insurance executive in Birmingham, Ala., complain that the Baptist Joint Committee has adopted positions contrary to SBC resolutions and is not responsive or accountable to the SBC. "If the group is promoting an agenda diametrically opposed to positions taken by the SBC in resolutions, we are not being good stewards of the money that has been entrusted to us," Smith said.

Prior to joining the CLC, Land was a voting member of the PAC and in 1987 voted with the majority to ask the SBC to dissolve its relationship with the BJC. He said then: "If surrender of accountability is the price of continued jointness, then the price is too high. The only satisfactory accountability is accountability of trustees solely elected" by the SBC.

Land and at least two other PAC members said that if the PAC had been allowed to evaluate the BJC staff, the vote to dissolve ties would not have happened.

Another matter -- the percentage of the BJC budget that is supported by the SBC -- has been disputed by BJC Executive Director James M. Dunn and former PAC Chairman Sam Currin of Raleigh, N.C.

"When you look at the denominational support (for the BJC), the Southern Baptist Convention has given something like 90 percent of the total," Currin has said. He has charged that the PAC is "unable to get an accounting from the Baptist Joint Committee on something as basic as where their money is coming from and how it is being spent."

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Dunn said a detailed list of contributors will be provided to the BJC trustees, but it probably would just include categories of gifts rather than names of churches and individuals. He explained: "I am the designated 'hittee' right now. Critics of those who would offer us support would like to add them to the hit list, and they want to know how much we are getting from Southern Baptist sources so they could delete that much from our Cooperative Program (SBC unified budget) support."

Critics of the status quo, such as Smith, have contended that the SBC, which provides most of the BJC funding, is carrying the weight of other denominations that put funding into their own Washington offices.

Supporters have noted that the strength of the SBC representation lies in the joint approach of cooperating with other Baptist groups. Wrote Presnall Wood, editor of the Baptist Standard in Texas, "... to have a joint presence of 28 million in Washington is a strong reason for Southern Baptists picking up most of the bill."

Dunn told Missouri Baptists' Word and Way: "The 'jointness' of the Joint Committee is a very important value in itself. Being biggest carries with it some responsibilities -- bigness in spirit, not just bigness of budget."

Referring to the proposed Religious Liberty Commission, Dunn said in February: "The track record of the BJCPA accomplishments, the tangible dollar savings to missions causes, the consistent witness to religious liberty cry out against this short-sighted and divisive action."

Of Yakym's proposal, Dunn told the Indiana Baptist: "The CLC already has more than they can possibly say grace over, with all the social, moral and ethical concerns. There's no way adequate attention can be given to the wide range of church-state and religious liberty issues."

The CLC needs more money just to do what it now has to do, he said.

"For the near decade that I've been at the BJCPA, we have had a perfectly good working relationship with all three CLC directors," he said. "They understand their program area, and we understand ours. There's not a day that goes by that we do not talk with staff members or the director of the CLC."

He noted that in its 53-year history, the BJC has "a clear-cut religious liberty assignment and are not lumped in with other denominational lobbies that carry such a large portfolio that there is often confusion."

"It would be a very unfortunate mistake on the part of some to basically do by indirection and control what they've not been able to do five times when they brought this issue before the convention."

Yakym maintained: "We can be a very viable force in Washington all by ourselves. The fact of the matter is that in Southern circles we have an incredibly large component of Southern Baptists, and that's where our main influence really will be."

Yakym called Dunn's arguments "self-serving," noting, "He obviously would not want the SBC to have their own agency, because then they'd cease to have a need to fund the Baptist Joint Committee to the degree we currently do."

Land calls for increased Federal
excise tax on alcoholic beverages

By Louis Moore

N-LO
(CLC)

WASHINGTON (BP)--In order to curb drunk driving and to reduce the nation's budget deficit, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has called upon Congress to increase federal excise taxes on alcoholic beverages.

"Higher prices brought about by an increase in excise taxes on alcoholic beverages would prevent or delay underage, illegal drinking and reduce heavy consumption," Richard D. Land, executive director of the commission, said in a letter to members of the Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee.

"The end result would be a significant reduction in the more than 24,000 fatalities and 500,000 injuries each year from alcohol-related traffic crashes.

"Increased excise taxes on beer, wine and distilled spirits could provide up to \$20.6 billion in new revenue, far beyond the present \$5.7 billion in revenue. Such new revenue could go a long way toward balancing the federal government's expenditure on alcohol-related programs."

Federal excise taxes on beer and wine have not been increased since 1951, costing the government over the years as much as \$100 billion in revenue, he said.

Messengers to both the 1989 and 1987 Southern Baptist Convention annual meetings adopted resolutions that expressed support increased taxes on alcoholic beverages.

Raising the federal excise tax could be the most significant governmental option available for a long-term effect on the problem of impaired driving, said Robert Parham, the CLC's associate director for alcohol concerns.

"The enormous influence of the booze merchants in the halls of Congress makes the effort to establish good safety, healthy and economic policy through higher taxes on alcohol most difficult, he said.

A study by the Center for Science in the Public Interest found that between 1985 and 1988 the alcoholic beverage industry gave more than \$4 million in speaking fees and political action committee contributions to members of Congress, Parham pointed out. Eighty-five percent of the members of the Senate Finance Committee and 93 percent of the members of the House Ways and Means Committee received money from the alcoholic beverage industry. Both committees have jurisdiction over taxation.

"An outpouring of letters and phone calls to the White House and Congress expressing support for higher taxes on beer, wine and distilled spirits is critical to counterbalance the contributions made by the booze industry," Parham said.

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House panel OKs amendment
to child-care legislation

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

Baptist Press
9/8/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. House Ways and Means Committee has approved a measure that would utilize existing tax credit and block grant programs rather than create a new federal program for the provision of child-care services.

The panel voted to amend the Early Childhood Education and Development Act, which was approved by the House Education and Labor Committee in June. The amendment focused primarily on one section of the bill.

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As approved by Education and Labor, that section -- known as Title III -- would provide federal funds for day-care programs for infants, toddlers and children under age 13. Under the legislation, funding would be distributed through the states, which in turn would give funds to eligible child-care providers.

Title III would require the establishment of a National Advisory Committee that would develop national model child-care standards. It also would require states receiving funds to have in effect state child-care standards.

The Ways and Means amendment would replace Title III with an earmarked increase in the Title XX Social Services Block Grant and an expansion of the earned income tax credit.

The amendment would permanently increase funds for Title XX by \$350 million for fiscal year 1991 and \$400 million in the following fiscal years. The additional funds would be earmarked for child care and could not be used to take the place of federal and state funds already being used for that purpose.

States would be required to use at least 80 percent of the funds for child-care services, with the remaining money being used for administration, training and standards enforcement.

The amendment also would require the establishment of state child-care standards that would be applied to all child-care providers receiving federal funds. Those providers also would be required to comply with state and local licensing or regulatory requirements and to meet training requirements.

States would not be mandated to require the training or licensing of individuals who provide child care for family members.

In addition, the amendment would expand the earned income tax credit and adjust the credit for family size. The credit is designed for low-income families with children and is available whether or not families purchase child-care services.

Under the amendment, the maximum credit in 1991 for a family with one child would be \$1,217. The credit would phase out completely when a family's income exceeds \$21,000.

The amendment also would provide a supplemental credit for eligible families with children under age 6.

The House Democratic leadership now is faced with deciding how and when to bring the child-care bill before the full House of Representatives.

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Survey shows Florida Baptists
agree, disagree on abortion

By Greg Warner

N-CO
(Fla.)

Baptist Press
9/8/89

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Florida Baptists generally agree that human life begins at conception, but they are even more convinced aborting some of those unborn lives is justified.

Those are the findings of a scientific survey of Florida Baptists conducted by the Florida Baptist Witness, newsmagazine for the Florida Baptist Convention. And although Baptists in the state can agree that some abortions are justified, they can't agree on who should make that decision -- the pregnant woman or some ne els .

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Florida Baptists concerned about abortion will gather Sept. 8-9 in Orlando, where they are expected to adopt a statement which declares that "human life ... begins at conception" and which calls for more restrictive abortion laws in Florida.

Both those commitments drew support among rank-and-file Florida Baptists, according to the Witness survey. About 82 percent of Baptist laypeople said they agree that human life begins at conception. Almost 79 percent said Florida's abortion laws ought to be based on that idea.

Despite such pro-life support, however, 83 percent said abortion is justified under some circumstances. Florida Baptists are most willing to condone abortions in the cases of rape, incest, to save the life of the mother and to prevent the birth of a severely deformed child.

Where Florida Baptists most often disagree is over a woman's right to decide about abortion. While 43 percent said a woman has the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, 49 percent disagreed.

The survey results seem to indicate that while Florida Baptists are in general agreement about when life begins, they don't agree on how that conviction affects the choices surrounding abortion, such as who should make the decision to abort and what circumstances justify it.

For example, 30 percent of Florida Baptists who believe life begins at conception also believe abortion is a woman's right. And 66 percent of Florida Baptists who believe life begins at conception also believe some abortions are justified.

Nancy Ammerman, a sociologist from Emory University in Atlanta, found much the same sentiment among Southern Baptists leaders she surveyed nationwide in 1985.

"While there is some fairly strong sentiment toward a more restrictive stance on abortion, they are still quite willing to say there are some circumstances in which it is OK and should be legal," said Ammerman, who surveyed almost 1,000 Southern Baptist pastors, deacon chairmen and leaders in Woman's Missionary Union.

Ammerman said recent studies, including the Florida survey, suggest that the belief that life begins at conception may not be the dominant factor in shaping opinions about abortion.

Surveys indicate that is true for the general public, at least in the South. An April poll by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution found that 48 percent of Southerners believe life begins at conception and 27 percent believe life begins sometime after conception but before birth. Yet a majority, 53 percent, of Southerners still favor abortion on demand.

Still, Florida Baptist leaders are hoping they can use the special convention to build a consensus around the issue of when life begins and, in turn, lend support to a movement for more restrictive abortion laws in the state.

Although the life-at-conception idea is not a part of the legislation state lawmakers are expected to consider in their own special session in October, that belief may provide a chance for consensus among Florida Baptists, considering the diversity of views expressed on other aspects of abortion in the Witness survey, observers noted.

In fact, actions taken in previous state conventions -- 1984 and 1985 -- differ with the opinions registered by Florida Baptists in the survey.

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Although a 1984 resolution allowed for abortion only to save the life of the mother, and although a 1985 motion eliminated even that circumstance as justification for abortion, 82.7 percent of Florida Baptists surveyed this summer said abortion is justified to save the mother's life.

Almost two-thirds, or 64.2 percent, said abortion also is permissible if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Neither of these exceptions was allowed in either the 1984 or 1985 convention actions.

And almost half of those surveyed, or 48.5 percent, said abortion is justified if the fetus is severely deformed, diseased or retarded.

Pastors, whose views were polled separately in the survey, were more conservative in their abortion positions than lay church members. On almost every question, pastors took a more restrictive approach to abortion.

This disparity may explain why recent convention actions have been more conservative than Florida Baptist opinion at large, observers noted, since pastors make up a disproportionate number of messengers to state conventions.

As with previous studies, the Witness survey found small groups at either end of the abortion spectrum, with the majority inhabiting the middle ground.

In the Florida study, 11.1 percent of laypeople cited no circumstances that justified abortion. These pro-life supporters likely are among the 19.5 percent who "strongly agree" that life begins at conception and "strongly disagree" that a woman has a right to choose an abortion.

Meanwhile, 11.4 percent identified with the position of abortion on demand, saying abortion is justified when a mother decides it's best or is unable to care for the child.

These two positions represent the hard-line pro-life and pro-choice positions, which showed up in Ammerman's 1985 survey in similar proportions -- 11.6 percent pro-life and 9.0 percent pro-choice.

The remaining 74.2 percent of Florida Baptists opted for some moderating viewpoint, which is comparable to the 79.9 percent in Ammerman's survey who cited rape, incest or a threat to the mother's life as just cause for an abortion.

It is these Florida Baptists who apparently are not satisfied either with a pro-choice position that disregards the human life developing in the womb or with a pro-life position that ignores the difficult choices that accompany a problem pregnancy.

Factors such as age, marital status, educational level and place of residence had little effect on the results of the survey. However, differences in sex and church attendance apparently did influence opinion.

Men are more willing to grant women the right to choose an abortion than women are willing to assume it for themselves. For men, 51.2 percent agree women have a right to an abortion -- 44.1 percent disagree; 4.7 percent undecided. However, the same percentage of women, 51.2 percent, disagree -- 39.8 percent agree; 9.0 percent undecided).

Florida Baptists who attend church more frequently are more likely to hold conservative positions on abortion. Those who attend less than once a week are more willing to grant women a right to an abortion and cite more circumstances under which abortions are justified. Both groups, however, are convinced that some abortions are permissible, the survey shows.

The survey was conducted by the research firm of Einhorn and Lewis Inc. of Daytona Beach, which has conducted several surveys for Florida Baptists and their agencies. The survey, which was taken Aug. 26-27, involved 307 laypeople chosen at random and representative of the variety of sizes and geographic locations among Florida Baptist churches. A separate random sample of 50 pastors also was chosen and those results were reported separately. The survey results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3.65 percent.

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Abortion alternatives needed,
worth funding, Floridians say

By Greg Warner

N- (CQ)
(Fla.)Baptist Press
9/8/89

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Florida Baptists want their state convention to help women with unwanted pregnancies. And they are willing to spend money given to missions to see that it is done.

That's the indication from a survey of Florida Baptists conducted by the Florida Baptist Witness, newsmagazine of the state convention.

Survey respondents were asked to rate six pregnancy-related services as either very important, somewhat important or of little importance. All six services were considered very important by at least two-thirds of people surveyed.

Highest on the list was counseling for unwed pregnant girls and women, which was considered very important by 89.3 percent of respondents.

Adoption services, which were considered very important by 86.0 percent, placed second. A curriculum of Christian education in sexuality, sometimes controversial among Baptists, received a 83.4 percent.

Crisis-pregnancy centers ranked fourth with 73.3 percent. Maternity homes were fifth, 72.6 percent. And post-abortion counseling placed sixth, 68.7 percent.

Most of those services already are offered, at least on a limited basis, by Florida Baptist Family Ministries and its subsidiary, the Florida Baptist Children's Homes. Richard Phillips, executive director of Family Ministries, said the survey indicates the agency "might be headed in the right direction" with its pregnancy-related services.

Survey respondents were asked if the six services would best be provided by local churches or the state convention and its agencies, such as Family Ministries.

About two-thirds said the state convention should provide adoption services, 69.7 percent and maternity homes 67.1 percent. More than half, 57.0 percent wanted the convention to provide crisis-pregnancy centers.

Opinion was more divided over counseling services, however. While 45.9 percent thought counseling for unwed pregnant women would best be handled by state convention agencies, 36.2 preferred it be done by local churches. While 44.0 percent would assign post-abortion counseling to churches, 33.6 percent said local churches could handle that assignment best.

Local churches were the preferred provider for only one of the services -- Christian education in sexuality. While 56.4 percent would give this task to churches, 28.0 percent would assign it to the convention and its agencies.

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Four out of five Florida Baptists surveyed -- 79.5 -- percent said pregnancy-related services are a proper use of money given to support missions, which would include contributions to the Cooperative Program unified budget.

Almost as many, 70.7 percent said they would be willing to encourage their churches to increase gifts to missions to fund these services.

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