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90-159

Georgia Baptists elect Gannon
by narrow margin over Harrell

By William Neal

N-C (Ga.)

SAVANNAH, Ga. (BP)--While avoiding a pattern of debate and controversy, Georgia Baptists met for their 169th annual session in Savannah Nov. 12-14, and elected a new president by a narrow margin.

Truett Gannon, pastor of Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, was elected president, receiving 2,665 votes, 151 more than the only other nominee, William F. Harrell, pastor of Abilene Baptist Church in Martinez, who received 2,514.

The new president called for unity and inclusiveness in his remarks following the election and that tone was echoed in remarks by outgoing president Dwight "Ike" Reighard, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Fayetteville, who said that with two "thoroughbred" candidates nominated, the GBC could not lose, no matter which one won the election.

Gannon, who was perceived as the candidate of GBC moderates, said he hoped to continue the healing process that he felt had begun under outgoing president Reighard. Both Reighard and Harrell have been considered conservative candidates.

In addition to the rhetoric among convention leaders, certain actions were perceived as signs of reconciliation. The committee on nominations, chaired by James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, brought a report that was hailed by many as a return to balance in representing the broad spectrum of diversity among Georgia Baptists.

"I thought it (the committee report) was fair and balanced and in a way conciliatory. I think the committee made an honest effort to bring a report that would bring harmony to the convention. There were no red flags that I saw in the report," said Floyd Roebuck, pastor of First Baptist Church of Rome and a former GBC president.

The convention approved a record \$32.4 million Cooperative Program unified budget that will continue to divide missions gifts 50-50 between state and national causes after allocating funds for retirement programs for Georgia Baptist ministers. The resolutions committee presented a resolution in support of the Cooperative Program, encouraging Georgia Baptist churches to both continue and increase their giving through the Cooperative Program.

Other resolutions opposed a proposed state lottery; called for prayer for American military forces and the country's leaders during the current Middle East crisis; and commended former President Jimmy Carter for "his expression of Christian concern and caring for humanity and for his example as a Georgia Baptist and as a world Baptist."

This year's messenger count of 5,627 was an increase over the last year's count of 4,248 messengers. The highest number of messengers ever recorded was 7,062 at the 1988 convention in Macon.

In addition to Gannon, four vice presidents were elected. They are John Yarbrough, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Cartersville; David Hinson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Cleveland; Rastus Salter, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Warner Robins; and Ben Haygood, pastor of Vineville Baptist Church in Macon.

Gannon has been pastor of the 3,200-member Smoke Rise congregation for almost 15 years. He previously was pastor of First Baptist Church in New Orleans, and several other Georgia Baptist churches. He recently was chairman of trustees for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Next year's meeting will be in the Augusta Civic Center, Nov. 11-13.

Florida Baptists loosen bond
with Stetson, debate cooperation

By Greg Warner & Barbara Denman

N-CO
(Fla)

TAMPA, Fla. (BP)--Florida Baptists loosened their century-old bond with Stetson University last week but held firm to their rejection of alternatives to the Cooperative Program.

Meeting Nov. 12-14 in Tampa, messengers to the 129th annual session of the Florida Baptist State Convention overwhelmingly approved a plan -- offered jointly by Stetson and convention officials -- that gradually eliminates Florida Baptist Convention funding of the DeLand school by the year 2000 in exchange for granting Stetson more autonomy in the election of its trustees.

The proposal was billed as both a way to take the "abrasion" out of the relationship between the convention and the 2,000-student school and a way to free up more money for missions in the state. Stetson currently receives \$921,000 a year -- or 2.5 percent of its budget -- from the state convention.

But while the Stetson proposal was approved with little rancor during the convention's first business session, an unexpected dispute over cooperative mission funding dominated the remainder of the meeting.

Messengers refused to let an advocate of an alternative funding plan serve as a trustee of Florida Baptist Theological College in Graceville, a convention-owned, undergraduate school that receives almost \$1 million annually from the state Cooperative Program.

Although the state committee on nominations had recommended Patrick Anderson of Lakeland be re-elected to a second term as an FBTC trustee, messengers intervened. They first rejected the committee's entire report, then reconsidered, approving the other 75 nominees and asking the committee to submit another nomination for Anderson.

The committee later nominated Brandon pastor Robert Reccord for the post. Although Anderson's name was offered as a substitute from the floor, Reccord was elected 296-211 in the ballot vote.

Anderson, a college professor and former convention vice president, is statewide coordinator for Baptists Committed, a moderate organization. He also led a workshop during the Consultation of Concerned Baptists in Atlanta in August and scheduled five follow-up meetings in Florida.

Despite debate over Anderson's nomination, the 2,076 convention messengers did not address directly the issue of cooperative mission funding. Instead they approved without debate a \$24 million Cooperative Program budget, which represents a 4 percent increase over last year's budget. The budget designates 50.75 percent of receipts for Florida Baptist Convention causes; 46 percent for the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program; and 3.25 percent for funding ministerial annuities through the SBC Annuity Board.

Messengers elected a slate of officers endorsed by conservative leaders in the state: Guy Sanders, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lake Wales and a member of the SBC Executive Committee, was elected president in a runoff; Darrell Orman, pastor of Gardens Baptist Church in Hollywood, was chosen first vice president; and David Emory, a layman from Bayou George near Panama City, was elected second vice president.

Messengers also:

-- Approved a detailed plan from the special Sanctity of Human Life Committee that calls for Florida Baptist churches and agencies to provide alternatives to abortions to women and girls with unwanted pregnancies;

-- Gave authorization for the state board of missions to purchase an unspecified site in South Florida for a new Baptist assembly;

-- Approved three changes to the state board of missions' constitution, four changes to the convention's constitution and six changes to the conventions bylaws; and

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-- Approved seven resolutions, including one that addresses an ongoing dispute in Nassau County by encouraging the local school board "to allow Bible stories to be read as literature" in the classroom.

Next year, the convention will convene Nov. 11-13 in Pensacola.

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Alabama Baptist Convention
elects Lance as president

By Karen Estes Lowry

Baptist Press
11/16/90

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Meeting at Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Nov. 13-14, Alabama Baptists elected Rick Lance, pastor of First Baptist Church of Tuscaloosa, president and passed, without question or opposition, a 1991 budget of \$27,350,000.

Lance, who called himself "unaligned" in terms of political factions, said he believes in the "fundamentals of the faith." He was elected with 54 percent of the 1,681 votes cast. His church was the first church in the Southern Baptist Convention to receive 10 "Golden Eagle" awards for Sunday school growth, and has since received an 11th "Eagle."

Doug Sager, pastor of Roebuck Park Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., received 43 percent of the votes for president and three percent of the ballots were not counted because they had been marked improperly.

Lance said the election did not reflect polarization among Alabama Baptists, noting that Sager was his friend and that he expected their good relationship to continue.

Dewey Corder, pastor of First Baptist Church of Trussville, was elected first vice-president. Fred Lackey, pastor of First Baptist Church of Athens, was elected second vice-president.

The \$27 million budget reflects a 2.7 percent increase over last year's budget, but a 5.7 percent increase over projected receipts for 1990. It makes the convention's share in the Expanded Church Annuity Plan a priority item and provides for 42.4 percent of monies to be forwarded through the Cooperative Program unified budget to Southern Baptist mission causes outside Alabama.

Messengers passed resolutions opposing gambling and the state lottery, in appreciation of the host city and host church, and concerning alcohol advertising.

Another resolution concerning the Cooperative Program was introduced but not acted upon by the resolution committee.

Kenneth W. Bush, chairman of the resolutions committee, explained that the proposed resolution was not acted upon because a similar statement, which already had been passed by the state board of missions, was being presented to messengers for approval as part of the Board's report.

Messengers later approved the statement reaffirming the Cooperative Program "as the chief means through which the churches of the Alabama Baptist State Convention shall support our missionary endeavors and designated giving to Alabama Baptist mission causes and Southern Baptist mission causes according to the by-laws of the Alabama Baptist State Convention...."

Other features of the convention included the launch of "Mission -- 2000," the convention's strategic plan for missions through the end of the century; the presidential address by Charles Carter, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham; and sermons by David Dykes, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gardendale; and Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church, Phoenix, Ariz.

Next year's convention will be Nov. 19-20 at Samford University in Birmingham.

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South Carolina convention
votes to escrow Furman money

By John E. Roberts

*N-CO
S. Carolina*

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--South Carolina Baptist Convention, meeting Nov. 13-14 in Columbia, voted to escrow 1991 money budgeted for Furman University, approved a name change of Baptist College at Charleston to Charleston Southern University, and affirmed the general board's plans to sell the Baptist Building in downtown Columbia to build a new facility two miles away.

The convention also approved a task force recommendation to keep the division of Cooperative Program unified budget mission funds for South Carolina and Southern Baptist Convention causes at the current 60-40 percentage level until churches increase their Cooperative Program support.

The messengers voted for a three-year special mission partnership between South Carolina and New England Baptists beginning in 1991.

The 170th annual convention in Carolina Coliseum set a new attendance record with 5,084 registered messengers.

W. Gregory Horton, a layman from Simpsonville, was elected president. He is only the fifth layman in 50 years to hold the office.

Horton defeated E.C. Watson of Elgin, retired executive assistant on the convention's general board staff.

Following his election, Horton said that although he generally had been perceived as the conservative candidate, he wants to be president of all South Carolina Baptists.

Reminded that one of the president's greatest powers is in his appointments, he said he will use his office to involve more laymen in the denominational process. "I plan to appoint people who have never before been asked to do anything (in the denomination)."

The move to escrow funds for Furman University came as a recommendation of the general board. The action holds the funds in an interest-bearing account for one year to permit dialogue between a committee named by the outgoing convention president and a committee to be named by Furman.

The action is in response to a dramatic step taken by Furman trustees Oct. 15 to name their own successors rather than have trustees elected by the convention. Furman is in the new budget for \$1,828,000.

After the general board recommendation was presented, Michael Hamlet, pastor of First Church of North Spartanburg, made a substitute motion that instead the convention enter "friendly court action" against Furman. His motion was defeated and the messengers then passed the recommendation to escrow.

Approval of a name change for Baptist College at Charleston to be Charleston Southern University also came after a substitute motion from the floor. Laneir Singleton, pastor of Friendship Church in Lyman, moved that the name be Baptist University at Charleston. That name received 1,411 supporting votes by ballot with 1,512 opposed.

The messengers then used ballots again to support "Charleston Southern University" by a vote of 1,637 to 1,272.

Relocation of the general board staff offices will involve sale of the building in downtown Columbia and the purchase of a five-acre site in the northwest part of town. Sale of the present property, plus close to \$3 million in hand or budgeted, is expected to be sufficient for the land purchase and construction of a 60,000-square foot building. This will be almost double the size of the present building.

The construction and relocation are expected to take two years.

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The convention approved four of five recommendations of a Cooperative Program Task Force study chaired by J. Anderson Bass Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Conway. The summary of these will keep the division of Cooperative Program mission funds at the present level of 60 percent for causes in South Carolina and 40 percent for Southern Baptist Convention programs until the churches reach a new level of 10 percent of receipts given to the Cooperative Program.

The churches now give 9.1 percent. This is down from 9.3 percent in 1984.

The convention has been increasing its percentage for SBC causes by 0.5 percent each year with a goal of being 50-50 by the year 2000. The task force showed that this was decreasing support for South Carolina causes as the percentage of church support fell behind.

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Mississippi convention
passes \$21 million budget

By Tim Nicholas

N-EO
(MS)

Baptist Press
11/16/90

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--Mississippi Baptists in annual convention, passed a 1991 budget of nearly \$21 million, re-elected their president for a second term, and agreed on resolutions supporting American armed forces overseas and opposing abortion except to save the life of the mother.

The 1,881 messengers to the Mississippi Baptist Convention, met Nov. 13-14 at First Baptist Church of Jackson. They voted a 1991 Cooperative Program unified budget of \$20,949,962 to go toward missions, Christian higher education, and benevolent work. Of this, 37 percent will go to SBC causes, up 0.5 percent from the 1990 budget.

The convention also passed a resolution encouraging that more dialogue be scheduled during sessions of the SBC and that an existing Baptist statement concerning the Bible "provides adequate guidance for Mississippi Baptists."

The Baptist Faith and Message statement, adopted by the SBC in 1963, quotes passages from the Bible to explain commonly held beliefs of Baptists.

The 1987 Peace Committee report to the SBC included more specific interpretations related to the Bible, which have been incorporated as belief requirements of at least one SBC agency.

Messengers re-elected Eddie Hamilton, pastor of Oak Forest Baptist Church of Jackson, to a second one-year term as president, without opposition. First vice president is Kiely Young, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville. Second vice president is Ed Deuschle, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pontotoc.

In other business, the constitution and bylaws committee entered for next year's consideration a constitutional change which would place the convention board's executive director-treasurer as an ex officio member of all Mississippi Baptist boards and agencies. Mississippi College President Lewis Nobles requested a tabling until any legal ramifications could be considered. That request was voted down.

The 1991 Mississippi Baptist Convention will be Nov. 13-14 at First Baptist Church of Jackson.

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'Extend Christ's Mission' is
theme for New England meeting

By Joyce S. Martin

N-EO
New Eng

Baptist Press
11/16/90

CAPE COD, Mass. (BP)--New England Southern Baptists met at Chatham Baptist Church on Cape Cod, Mass., for their eighth annual meeting Nov. 8-9. With "Extend Christ's Mission" as their theme, 157 messengers from the Baptist Convention of New England's 180 congregations scattered throughout the six New England states registered for the fellowship and business meeting. Attendance at the Thursday evening session reached 300.

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All 1990 officers were re-elected without opposition to second terms. They are: Ron Huffman, pastor of New Colony Baptist Church, Billerica, Mass., president; Ken Hale, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Hanover, N.H., first vice president; and Mary Beth Caffey, Mission Service Corps church development director for Upper New England, Lewiston, Me., second vice president.

Messengers adopted a \$2,104,626 budget, up \$31,449 from the 1990 budget. New England Baptists are expected to contribute \$554,424 of the budget with the balance coming mainly from the Southern Baptist Home Mission and Sunday School boards. The convention will channel 21 percent of receipts through the Cooperative Program unified budget.

An amendment to designate funds to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs was defeated.

The Baptist Convention of New England will hold its 1991 meeting Nov. 7-8 at Island Pond Baptist Church in Homestead, N.H.

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America in 'moral crisis,'
says Richard Land

By Breena Kent Paine

F-60
(WBS) Baptist Press
11/17/90

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"We are at the center and at the beginning of a decade of debate on the issue of the church and the state, the Christian and society, and religious liberty," Richard Land told students and faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during a recent chapel service.

"We face a cultural, moral crisis that if it is not addressed and if we do not begin to try to reinvigorate the spiritual nature of human beings, and if we who are believers do not bring our understanding of the transforming nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ out into the academic and the commercial marketplace and seek to witness in the highways and in the byways and assert our right to be involved in the moral debate that is all around us, then there will be no answer that gives meaning and purpose to life for a people all around us who desperately need to hear the transforming nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ," said the director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"We are in a moral crisis of the first dimension," he continued. "Two percent of the world's population lives in the United States; 65 percent of the world's illicit and mind-altering drugs are consumed within the United States.

"During the next 24 hours, 1,260 high school students will quit school; 2,740 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 will become pregnant; more than 1,000 of those girls will have abortions and kill their babies; 5,472 teenagers in America will attempt suicide in the next 24 hours.

"Each year, about two million American young people between the ages of 13 and 19 attempt suicide. Between 1950 and now, the suicide rate in our nation has doubled for young women, and it has quadrupled for young boys."

In addition, "We have a pornography-fed vortex of violence and sexual crimes against women and children both inside and outside the home," Land said. "Now a 12-year-old American girl has a one in four chance of being sexually molested or raped by the time she is 18, and a 12-year-old boy has a one in 10 chance of being sexually molested or raped by the time he is 18.

"We have had in the last 17 years a 600 percent increase in child abuse in the United States of America.

"The great problems of our time are not economic and political; they are religious and moral," Land said, quoting George Gallup.

"Before we can confidently be in the debate, we not only have to understand the message, we not only have to understand the problems, but we have to address, at least in the culture in which we live, our right to have a say in the public, moral discourse of our nation.

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"There are those who would ... say that separation of church and state and the First Amendment mean that we have no right to be involved in the moral discourse and questions of morality as they apply to our public life, because that would violate the wall of separation between church and state," Land said. "That is a false and twisted and distorted understanding of what our Baptist forbearers meant.

"If we say that we are censored from the debate and that we cannot be involved in the process because our convictions are based on religious convictions, that is persecution of religion; it is censorship of religion; and that is by far the most pervasive censorship being practiced in this country today.

"Only the government can violate the First Amendment," Land explained. "All of the restrictions that are in the First Amendment are on the government, not on churches, not on individual Christians.

"Thomas Jefferson wrote these words which are on the Jefferson memorial: 'Can the liberties of a nation be secure, when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gifts of God?'

"The Declaration of Independence expressed our forbearers' acceptance of and firm belief in the Judeo-Christian concept that God as our Creator has endowed men and women with the right to life, and that this right is unalienable. In other words, it cannot be surrendered or ceased; it can only be acknowledged and accepted by the government.

"One of the greatest myths, persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic, abroad in our land in your lifetime and mine is the ... platitude you can't legislate morality.

"If we didn't have laws against segregation, we'd still have it. If we didn't have laws against slavery, some people would be sorry enough to own slaves.

"The civil magistrate is supposed to punish those who do evil and to reward those who do good. Well, if you don't define good and evil, how can you do that? Are we only going to let nonreligious people define good and evil?" asked Land, who said he feels too many Christians have the attitude of "Well, I think it's wrong, but I wouldn't want to impose my morality on someone else."

"It is true that you can't legislate beliefs. Jesus said that we are supposed to be salt and light. Salt is defensive. Salt retards against decay and degeneration. When we pass laws against immoral behavior that seek to keep people from imposing their racism or their thievery or their rapisciousness or their murderousness on their victims, we are legislating against behaviors. We can legislate against behaviors; we can't legislate against beliefs.

"A total separation of church and state is as debilitating of moral value as a total integration is of personal freedom. ... The constitution provided for a balance, a balance which is now seriously upset.

"As Richard John Newhouse has put it, ... 'Without religious ideals, democracy becomes dangerous,'" Land quoted. "We as believers have the right -- we have the responsibility -- to be involved."

Christians should "unshackle ourselves from an erroneous understanding of separation of church and state that would disqualify us from the contest in the public arena for men's hearts and minds and souls.

"The opportunities are almost limitless. Reach out, grab one, there's enough to go around."