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91-83

Pastors' Conference participants  
 urged to be involved

By Sarah Zimmerman and Pat Cole *NCO*

**ATLANTA (BP)**--America is in desperate need of revival and for Christians to be involved in politics, speakers advised at the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in the Georgia World Congress Center.

The two-day conference, which attracted 18,000 people, primarily pastors, preceded the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention scheduled.

An address by retired Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North stirred the most response. People waved American flags and sang patriotic anthems before and after his address.

North, who is appealing his convictions for Iran-Contra deals, urged Christians to be involved in government.

"It is a tragedy that so many Christians have withdrawn from the political process," North said. "The First Amendment is designed to protect godly people from the government, not the government from godly people."

As he spoke, at least five people outside the meeting hall protested his presence on the program. Jerry Gentry, member of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., said North's speech supports the merger of Christian faith and politics, which he called idolatry.

Richard Lee, pastor of Rehoboth Baptist Church in Atlanta and president of the Pastors' Conference, said North is controversial to many people, "but to the vast majority of us, he's an American patriot."

Lee noted none of the conference speakers, including North, received an honorarium for the program. North typically receives \$20,000 to \$25,000 for a speech, representatives of his speakers bureau said.

Another call for Christians to be involved in government came from author and speaker Tim LaHaye of Washington. He said Christians will lose their freedoms unless they fight to preserve them. He stressed the need for Christian schools as an alternative to public schools, which he called the nation's "greatest source of deception."

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Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Church in Dallas, also sounded a call for Christian involvement in the political process. "Christians are to be involved in the social agenda and political agenda, but they are to be done from a biblio-centric frame of reference."

Christians should heed the will of God rather than the positions of a particular political party, he said.

"Jesus doesn't ride the backs of donkeys or elephants," Evans said. He rides over both of them."

Five former SBC presidents -- W.A. Criswell, Adrian Rogers, Jimmy Draper, Bailey Smith and Jerry Vines -- also spoke during the Pastors' Conference.

Criswell, senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, said great churches cannot be built without great pastors. A pastor, he said, must provide bold and courageous leadership.

"When I hear some effeminate preacher, I want to crawl up behind him surreptitiously and say, 'Boo,' and scare the living daylights out of him, Criswell said.

Too many preachers, he added, "seek a sophistry of cheap, intellectual veneer."

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, reminded the ministers of the evils of immorality.

"We are never told to fight this sin, we are told to flee this sin," Rogers said.

Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, stressed the role of Christian martyrs in advancing God's kingdom. He said total commitment to God has characterized martyrs from Stephen in the New Testament to Lynda Bethea, a Southern Baptist missionary who was killed in March by robbers in Kenya. Her husband, Ralph, was severely injured in the attack.

"Death did not make Lynda Bethea a martyr," he said. "It only revealed her as a martyr. A martyr has already died to self and the things of this world."

Smith, an Atlanta-based evangelist, said there are too many luke-warm churches in the SBC. He noted a denominational study has shown that at least 50 percent of SBC churches have plateaued or are in decline.

Smith blamed the decline on "moderate preaching," "lethargic congregations" and "lethal compromise."

"The problem is some of you have become more dignified than Jesus," he said. "Some of you have been motivated into stagnation."

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Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., urged pastors to allow God's glory to be manifest in their lives.

"It is not enough to read the Bible looking for the text for your sermon," Vines said. "We need to look for transfiguration that we should become less of what we are and more of Jesus Christ."

To be effective in reaching the world for Christ, Southern Baptists need to be open to change, said Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Houston. Change is risky and costly, Young said, but beneficial changes are possible when the plan for change stems from a vision from God.

Chuck Colson of Washington, said churches need to reject the cultural values they have adopted. The author and speaker, who became a Christian while serving a prison sentence for his Watergate crimes, said the church has adopted society's idea of success -- that bigger is better.

Colson also noted too many churches are striving only to please people. "The job of the gospel is not to make people happy," he said. "The job of the gospel is to make people holy."

Darrell Gilyard, pastor of Victory Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, urged pastors not "to overlook those little boys and girls who don't look like they have any promise at all." He pointed out he was abandoned early in life by his parents and during his youth was forced to make his home under a bridge in Florida.

"All over America, there are Darrells out there who seem like nobodys but they (can) become somebodys when the grace of God invades their lives," Gilyard stressed.

During an address on the doctrine of God's holiness, Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas, said doctrine has been emphasized little in churches today.

People who have encountered God's holiness know it has "a harrowing effect, healing efficacy and heavenly employment."

Pastors today need to realize "they get to the throne room of God through the prayer closet," he said.

Bill Stafford, a Chattanooga, Tenn.-based evangelist, urged pastors to "rekindle the fire" they sensed at their calling. "If God has called you to preach, you are in it for the duration," he said. "I am going to die with my preaching boots on."

Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas challenged the pastors to share their faith as fervently as John the Baptist foretold the Messiah's coming.

"We are born and born again to say to the world, 'Behold, the lamb of God.'"

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Graham was elected president of the 1992 Pastors' Conference. Other officers, all elected by acclamation, include Larry Wynn, pastor of Hebron Baptist Church in Dacula, Ga., vice president; and Kenneth Barnett, pastor of South Wadsworth Baptist Church in Denver, secretary-treasurer.

At the conference's final session, Jerry Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., was invited to address the audience briefly. Falwell, an independent Baptist, had not been listed on the printed program.

He said the social problems of America had changed radically since the 1950s when he finished Bible college. At that time, drug abuse, abortion, pornography and New Age religion had not yet made a major impact on society, he said.

If Christians stand firm and do not "flinch," the gospel can be preached to the world and many of the nation's social problems can be overcome by the turn of the century, Falwell predicted.

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SBC Forum  
hears Martin

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
6/4/91

ATLANTA (BP)--In the final meeting of the Southern Baptist Forum, about 200 people heard fired Baptist Press editor Dan Martin give a personal testimony he claimed his critics never asked to hear.

Martin, now pastor of Ledger Baptist Church in Bakersville, N.C., was discharged by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee as Baptist Press news editor in July 1990, along with Al Shackelford, vice president for public relations.

Martin was the keynote speaker at the meeting of Baptist moderates June 3 at Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta.

At this seventh annual meeting of the Forum, participants voted to dissolve the organization and give its assets to the newly formed Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"I am a Baptist by choice, not by birth," Martin said. "I am a product of Baptist missions."

He related how he had become a Christian through the witness of a Baptist home missionary in Brighton, Colo., 29 years ago.

"I was a drunk, I was not far from losing my job and my wife was about to leave me," he said. "My life was a shambles. It's a wonder I didn't end up dead or in the penitentiary."

Because his wife had been raised in a Southern Baptist church, Martin said he finally sought a Baptist church when he reached his breaking point. "I decided there might be some help for me ... so I called the police station to ask if there were a Southern Baptist church in town."

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He found a small mission, where the last day of a revival was under way. That night, Martin said, he walked the aisle to profess faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized.

"I don't remember who the preacher was, but I do remember he was preaching the agape love of God -- that he loves you no matter where you've been or what you've done."

Martin said he went home, poured out all the liquor in his house and began a new life. "Nobody but me and God believed what had happened," he said.

As Martin matured in his newfound faith, he said he felt called to a full-time ministry and enrolled in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He later worked for the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board before becoming news editor at Baptist Press in 1980.

"I am proud I had the opportunity to work for Southern Baptists for 17 years," Martin said. "I'm glad I had an opportunity to repay some of what Southern Baptists have given me."

"I would do it all over again, even if I knew the outcome and the outcome were the same."

"The 200 or so of you gathered here know more about who I am as a spiritual being than the SBC Executive Committee," Martin said at the conclusion of his testimony. "They never asked."

"No member of the Executive Committee ever asked me to preach in his church. No one ever asked me to teach in his church. And to quote Paig Patterson (president of Criswell College), never was I even asked to lead in silent prayer."

Martin said he did give his testimony at a state convention meeting one time where an Executive Committee member was present. "When I got through, all he said was, 'Why didn't you introduce me?'"

"The Southern Baptist Convention has come to an awful state ... when we cannot rejoice in the testimony of a brother or sister who has come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way."

Martin said he could have told the Executive Committee about his commitment to Jesus Christ and about his commitment as a journalist, but they never asked about either.

"They called me, but mostly to accuse," he reported. "One Executive Committee member, who is now an officer, wrote me a letter demanding that I repent of Baptist Press."

Martin told the group he feels like he is now "at the end of a long, painful, difficult divorce."

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"I have come on a symbolic journey" this week, he explained. "I have come on a journey in which I am saying goodbye to the Southern Baptist Convention."

Apparently many other former participants in the Forum had said goodbye to the SBC as well, as attendance at the meeting was down to only about 200. The group had 2,400 people at its first meeting in 1984 and filled large convention halls in subsequent years.

"We are not chagrined about the size of our attendance," Forum steering committee Chairman John Hewett told the group. "It says a lot about the participation of our kind of people in the convention this week."

Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., last month was elected moderator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

After about 15 minutes of discussion, Forum participants voted to accept the recommendation of their steering committee to dissolve the Forum.

The Forum had been incorporated in 1987, primarily because of the need to secure insurance when renting large meeting halls, Hewett explained.

The Forum steering committee proposed a resolution that the corporation be dissolved and its assets be used to pay all outstanding debts with the remainder to be given to Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The transfer of funds would be designated for expenses of the new group's annual convocation, Hewett explained, because that meeting most closely parallels what the Forum was about.

Hewett said the Forum currently has assets of \$6,000 to \$8,000.

Several participants expressed concern about discontinuing the annual meeting prior to the SBC. "I'm from a church that's going to continue to send me to the SBC," one pastor said. "It's going to be mighty lonely if there's not some type of forum (for moderates)."

Ben Loring, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, presented an amendment to the resolution that asks the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship to "provide a vehicle for fellowship and discussion in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Immediately after the resolution was adopted, the steering committee recommendation passed unanimously.

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H w tt speaks Cooperative Baptist  
F llowship mission eadeavors

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (BP)--Eleven issues distinguish mission efforts planned by Cooperative Baptist Fellowship from what is currently being done by the Southern Baptist home and foreign mission boards, John Hewett said.

Hewett, moderator of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, spoke to about 200 p ople attending the final meeting of the SBC Forum prior to the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting.

In May, about 6,000 Southern Baptist moderates gathered in Atlanta to form Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and give approval to alternative plans for missions funding and missions sending.

Hewett read from a document prepared in conjunction with Alan Neely, chairman of the fellowship's missions task force and professor of missions at Princeton Theological Seminary.

He listed these 11 distinctives:

- One sending agency with no distinction between home and foreign missions.
- An administrative structure that is small and simple.
- Work measured by quality, not by number of missionaries sent or number of countries served.
- All ministries regarded as equally important, with no criteria that missionaries divide their work according to any formula.
- Acceptance of qualified individuals who are divorced or ordained f males.
- Missionaries working under the auspices of national conventions.
- Field decisions made in conjunction with nationals and other mission groups working in the area.
- No requirement to sign or affirm a belief statement written by someone else.
- Sending of vocational missionaries only until the time when nationals can assume the work themselves.
- Baptists native to other countries will be sent.
- When personnel changes are necessary, missionaries will be told why and helped to retool and relocate.

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Lack of funds is barrier to  
Family Ministry Task Force      By Terri Lackey

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ATLANTA (BP)--A seven-member Family Ministry Task Force appointed earlier this year by Morris Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, to help cure the ills of the family has run into a glitch.

It has no money.

In a meeting, prior to the SBC, the task force discussed tactics ranging from uplifting to pastors the important needs of families to marching out and witnessing to prostitutes, the underprivileged or people with AIDS. But when it came down to setting its next meeting, no budget was available to provide the group with transportation to a common gathering place.

For two hours the group addressed the needs of the family before it discovered, without a budget, it could do nothing more than alert Southern Baptists to what is presently available.

Failing to distribute resources to those outside the Southern Baptist circumference is what task force member Suzzane Groce said she sees as part of the problem.

"I see our churches as boxes that imprison the good news," said Groce, a member of North Central Baptist Church, in Gainesville, Fla., and a former missionary to Ethiopia.

"We don't seem to get the good news out where the bad news is," she said. "I see our society as bleeding and dying.

"Man, Southern Baptists are just missing it," said Groce, who advocates taking the gospel out to residents of tenement housing, prostitutes, people with AIDS "or anybody who doesn't come to church."

Charles Lowery, pastor of Hoffmantown Baptist Church in Albuquerque, N.M., and chairman of the task force, suggested Southern Baptists "have got to get our families right first so they can minister to those people."

Doug Anderson, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department and consultant to the task force, said, "One of the things Southern Baptists do well is lift high the virtue of a Christian home.

"Southern Baptists have a great deal to offer a world more or less turned off by church. We just have to figure out how to get the message out."

Several task force members questioned Anderson on the role associational leaders take in getting the word to churches about available resources on the family.

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"It's just the individual director of mission's perception of priorities," Anderson said. "New church starts, evangelization, Sunday school growth and missions development are all a part of the DOM's job. They just don't see family ministry."

Anderson said the committee has the power to "call persons in our convention to give in concert a message that we need to focus on the family."

Anderson said to do that committee members "could utilize every speaking engagement to highlight the family."

A second way to uplift the importance of a strong family, Anderson said, is to develop a network of key convention personalities who would speak on the family at every opportunity.

Lowery said he would contact task force members on a second meeting date and place after he approached Chapman to consider a budget for the group.

Other task force members include Kay Moore, a member of First Baptist Church of Nashville and a freelance writer and conference speaker; Charles Page, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N.C.; Tom King, minister of family enrichment/singles at First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas; Ron Mumbower, counselor/family minister at First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss.; and Jay Wolf, newly elected pastor of First Baptist Church of Montgomery, Ala.

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Directors of missions hear of  
controversy; change name

By Tim Nicholas

Baptist Press  
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ATLANTA (BP)--Addresses on the effect of denominational controversy, truth and hope, the death of churches and the revelation of the gospel highlighted the annual Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions June 2 and 3.

Milton Ferguson, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., described the impact of the denominational controversy, while Roy Honeycutt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., stressed the importance of staying faithful to the truth.

Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board lamented the death of Southern Baptist churches. Outgoing conference President Russell Bennett of Louisville's Long Run Baptist Association, emphasized the variety of ways the gospel message is revealed.

In business sessions, the directors of missions elected officers, adopted a budget and changed the name of their organization.

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The new president is Glenn Hickey of Pulaski Baptist Association, Little Rock, Ark. First vice president is Larry Martin, Greater Boston Baptist Association; second vice president, Kenneth Chadwick, Salt Lake Baptist and Rainbow Canyon Baptist Associations, Salt Lake City; secretary, Carver Tensley, Northwest Indiana Baptist Association, Gary, Ind.; treasurer, John Dent, Beaverdam Baptist Association, Seneca, S.C.; and newsletter editor, Kenneth Glass, Galveston, (Texas), Baptist Association.

The group adopted a 1991-92 budget of \$10,400, approved a constitutional change that limits its president to a one-year term and changed the organization's name from the Southern Baptist Associational Directors of Missions Conference to the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions.

"Our Southern Baptist family is a family in trouble," said Ferguson. "The fallout of the last 12 to 15 years is beginning to take its toll emotionally, physically and even intellectually,"

Ferguson said people in state Baptist conventions who work with ministerial concerns report their work has doubled or tripled. He said he had no magic solutions but that he has learned some things.

"We will not be healed, we will not come through this family tragedy if we deny the pain," he said. "It would be foolish to deny that good people are being hurt. Let's ask God to give us the strength and grace to look reality in the eye -- to suffer the pain, acknowledge it and walk through it."

The SBC always has had controversy, Ferguson noted, "but never in its history (has it) resorted to denigration and destruction allegedly to fill the will of God. God won't bless it."

Honeycutt led in two Bible studies, one on truth and the other on hope.

"Let's stay faithful to the truth," Honeycutt said. "We are sadly mistaken if we think we can win the world with the leftover pieces of our lives."

He added, "I finally came to believe that unity in our work does not depend on every part coming together. Perhaps we can be fellow workers if we can see unity in the person of Jesus Christ."

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Campus Ministers hear integrity  
and reconciliation possible By Tom Strode

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ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist campus ministers were told both integrity and reconciliation are possible amidst conflict during their two-day conference preceding the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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"Reconcilers Amidst the Conflicts" was the theme of Association of Southern Baptist Campus Ministers meeting June 3 and 4 at Emory University. Conference registrants totaled 49, a sharp drop from last year.

Walker Knight, publisher of SBC Today, told participants how he has struggled to maintain integrity through about 30 years of service in different areas of Southern Baptist life. SBC Today, founded by Knight and other moderate Southern Baptists in 1983, is to be renamed Baptists Today in August.

The first conflict Knight used as an example was his relationship with administrators during his years as director of editorial services for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. He saw himself as a "change agent," especially in the area of race relations, when he joined the HMB staff in the early 1960s, Knight said.

His editorials and leadership of an HMB publication in calling for SBC churches to open their doors to black people resulted in criticism from state leaders and readers, a decrease in subscriptions and admonishments from administrators, Knight said. He chose to hold on to his editorial freedom while making certain he did not give supervisors other reasons for removing him, Knight said. The HMB's concern was for "another truth ... cooperation," he said.

He told participants an experience since starting SBC Today had shown him the quest for integrity sometimes involves friends.

"After less than two years of this exodus pilgrimage, I was visited by a committee of moderate leaders who had come to tell me that they did not feel like I was taking as forthright a stand against fundamentalism and the fundamentalist leaders as they would like," Knight said. He told them he did not want to produce a publication like the Southern Baptist Journal, a newspaper produced by a conservative, nor did he want to make attacks on individuals, he said.

Knight said he believes "each truth has many sides. I do not say that our fundamentalist protagonists do not have integrity, only that they hold to a different truth than I do."

Noel Leo Erskine, associate professor of theology and ethics at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, said there were three things that kept Martin Luther King Jr., the slain civil rights leader, on the road to reconciliation. He said the same "landmarks" keep such dreams alive today.

He said those truths, nurtured in King by the black church, are: (1) there is a "moral order in the universe," (2) a belief in the participation of God in history and (3) the "worth of the individual."

Also addressing conference participants on conflict were Nancy Ammerman, associate professor of sociology of religion at the Candler School of Theology, and Donald Wells, chairman of the political science department at West Georgia College.

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The attendance was less than half of what it has been in most of the recent meetings. It had averaged about 100 to 120 registrants the last few years, ASBCM President Woody Hammett said. He cited a drop in attendance at the SBC meeting and economic factors for the lower attendance.

Randy Deering, area director for student ministries in Orange County, Calif., was elected 1991-92 president. Other officers are president-elect, Kyle Klemcke, Stephen F. Austin University; vice president/programs, David Kemerling, University of Texas-Austin; vice president/administration, Judy Bailey, University of Richmond; vice president/membership, Alton Harpe, West Point; and vice president/publications, Glenn McCoy, Eastern New Mexico University.

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SBC Ministers' Wives  
elect new officers

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Baptist Press  
6/4/91

ATLANTA (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Ministers' Wives recognized new officers during the group's annual luncheon June 4.

The officers for 1992 are Nancy Sullivan of Jacksonville, Fla., president; Barbara Riley of Plainfield, Ind., vice president; Linda Myers of Hendersonville, Tenn., recording secretary-treasurer; and Joyce Thoinnet of Yukon, Okla., corresponding secretary.

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