



BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

June 7, 1991

91-84

SBC meets in Atlanta
for 134th session

By Roy Jennings

N-CO

ATLANTA (BP)--Messengers to the 134th Southern Baptist Convention adopted an annual budget of \$140,710,282, re-elected a conservative president, took positions on a dozen social and constitutional issues, and heard a plea from President George Bush for voluntary prayer in school, vouchers for child care and parental freedom to choose schools for their children.

On the topic of abortion, President Bush said he opposed federal funding of abortions, except where the life of the mother is endangered.

In a 20-minute address punctuated by frequent applause, President Bush called on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment permitting voluntary prayer in the nation's schools.

"Let's put people first and allow them the freedom to follow their faith," he said. "Putting people first also means making sure government allows people to make their own decisions, and that means giving parents and families the right to choose the kind of child care they want for their kids.

"Just today we are publishing regulations that will provide the first vouchers for child care."

Bush said he wanted to extend the concept choice to include schools.

"Every family should have the freedom to choose a school for a child," he said. "Our efforts for choice in schools seek to put power in parents' hands. We trust them to make the right decisions for their kids. I'm confident that choice will make bad schools better."

The convention, sixth largest in denominational history with 23,564 messengers, also offered inspiration and information in presentations by missionaries, prominent Baptist preachers and 20 agency executives.

Conservative forces demonstrated their control of the convention, electing their candidates to most major offices and defunding completely the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, one of their Washington lobbies that fell into disfavor for a variety of reasons, including opposition to school prayer and criticism of former President Ronald Reagan.

By a vote of 6,872 to 6,101, the messengers denied a \$50,000 allocation next year to the Baptist Joint Committee, which represents Southern Baptists and eight other Baptist bodies.

Only a year ago the messengers switched the religious liberty promotion function from the Baptist Joint Committee to their Christian Life Commission and cut BJC funding by 87 percent.

The messengers re-elected Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, to a second one-year term as president and named Nelson Price, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., first vice president. Neither had opposition.

A conservative candidate, Vander Warner Jr., pastor of Grove Avenue Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., lost a race for second vice president to Ed Harrison Jr., pastor of Dollarway Baptist Church, a very small congregation in Pine Bluff, Ark.

However, Harrison meets conservatives' standards in theology by preaching the inerrant word of God, supporters said.

Conservatives' candidate David W. Atchison of Nashville, Tenn., was elected without opposition to a second one-year term as recording secretary.

Conservatives efforts to replace Lee Porter of Nashville, a 14-year veteran, as registration secretary failed when James W. Richards, a Baton Rouge, La., pastor came up 17 votes short.

Porter, a no-nonsense officer who instituted registration reform while making messengers registration easier and less time consuming, won the office for the 15th year by a vote of 4,523 to 4,506.

The SBC Executive Committee and Resolutions Committee had their own way with the messengers for the most part, pushing through recommendations virtually without change.

Messengers did criticize the Executive Committee for asking them to increase its budget by almost 10 percent while requesting only an average of 2.46 percent increase for agencies. However, the critics did not have the votes to amend the proposal.

In the next series of actions, the messengers promptly OKed 17 other Executive Committee recommendations, including meeting in June 9-11, 1998, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and June 13-15, 2000 in Orlando, Fla.

Fourteen resolutions on such topics as human sexuality, sanctity of human life, endangerment of religious liberties, government support of obscene and offensive art, restrictions on alcohol advertisements, equitable taxation for families, parental choice in education, Operation Desert Storm and use of government funds to encourage immoral sexual behavior received approval with only one minor addition.

The resolution on human sexuality countered a report on sexuality the Presbyterian Church (USA) is to consider June 10 in Baltimore, Md. The SBC resolution calls upon all Christians to uphold the biblical standards of human sexuality against all onslaughts and notes this biblical standard is under attack even within the religious community.

Although Southern Baptists have spoken on the abortion issue in previous years, this year's resolution on the sanctity of human life specifically opposes the testing, approval, distribution and marketing of new drugs and technologies that will make the practice of abortion more convenient and more wide spread.

The resolution supports the current ban on federal funding for any transplantation of tissue from individual abortions for purposes of experimentation and research. It also calls for Southern Baptists to work with fervor compassionately to encourage women with unplanned pregnancies to carry their pregnancies to term.

The resolution on government support of obscene and offensive art asks President Bush to fire John Fohnmayer, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and replace him with someone who will stop funding obscene, morally repugnant and sacrilegious art.

The resolution on parental choice reaffirms the right of parents to educate their children according to their religious convictions, encourages choice in education initiatives that include proper tax incentives for families with the understanding these initiative are fully in keeping with freedom of religion guarantees and prohibitions against any governmental establishment of religion.

The resolution on the use of government funds to encourage immoral sexual behavior criticized a Centers of Disease Control grant of \$25,000 to a gay and lesbian health conference and calls upon President Bush to take decisive action to ensure that such grants are prohibited in the future.

The messengers offered 51 motions on a wide range of topics. Most were referred to agencies and committees. The messengers discussed two of them.

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Addresses by Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Tom Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., and Joel Gregory, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, provided much of the inspiration.

During the annual report of the foreign missions agency, Parks pointed to the doors of opportunity open around the world for a Christian witness and called on Southern Baptists to provide the resources.

Southern Baptists support the work of 3,863 missionaries in 121 countries.

In the annual convention sermon, Elliff spoke of the importance of going to the well of God to let him "restore your soul." Gregory preached a 50th anniversary Baptist Hour sermon as part of a Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission presentation.

SBC President Chapman took several jabs at Southern Baptist moderates in his address on the topic of "Faith Is The Victory."

While imploring Southern Baptists to be people of faith, the Bible, missions and evangelism, and prayer, Chapman indicated moderates were coming up short as people of the Book.

Chapman criticized a Baptist fellowship document which, he said, states the Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching and that Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching and that Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible.

"When you refuse to believe the Bible to be God's perfect word, you have stripped away God's authority," he said. "All you have left is interpretation," Chapman said.

Concerning an inerrant Bible as part of the Southern Baptist heritage, Chapman called the conviction foundational and asked Southern Baptists to teach it in classrooms of educational institutions, preach it in the pulpits and print it in denominational literature.

"Agreement will not always be reached on matters of biblical interpretation," he said, "but agreement must be reached on biblical authority."

While 20 agencies detailed their accomplishments for the messengers in annual reports, the Southern Baptist Education Commission also advised them to go slow on a proposal to set up a Southern Baptist accreditation vehicle.

Bob R. Agee of Shawnee, Okla., member of a special task force studying the accreditation of Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries, said the task force could find no evidence that regional accrediting bodies have prevented these schools from fulfilling their spiritual purpose.

Regional accrediting agencies have allowed Southern Baptist educational institutions to be as Christian and Baptist as school leaders want them to be, despite misunderstanding created by accreditation reviews conducted at some institutions, said Agee, president of Oklahoma Baptist University.

The task force recommended that no accreditation body be formed that would interfere with the relationship between Southern Baptist schools and regional accrediting bodies.

Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission leaders used the convention as an opportunity to present their new president to the messengers.

James D. Williams, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, will take the reins of the agency Sept. 15. Agency trustees elected him Wednesday.

In final business, the messengers chose Lewis Drummond, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, to preach the convention sermon in 1991 and designated James W. Jones, evangelism and Brotherhood director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, as the alternate preacher.

Jack Price of Garland, Texas, was re-elected as convention music director.

The messengers will meet in 1992 on June 9-11 in Indianapolis, Ind.

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Bennett announces retirement
to SBC Executive Committee

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--The retirement of Harold C. Bennett as Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee president and treasurer was accepted effective Oct. 1, 1992, and machinery set in motion to secure his successor during an Executive Committee meeting June 3 on the eve of the opening of the 134th session of the SBC.

Bennett, 66, who has held his present post since 1979, is to continue as a consultant to the Executive Committee until Oct. 1, 1993.

He said he proposed the retirement date to the officers of the Executive Committee June 1 and they "concurred with its appropriateness.

"It is my hope that I have been a faithful servant of the Lord," Bennett said. "I have worked diligently at being helpful, providing complete information and being fair. I know there were times when I failed, but my desire was to be a good minister-leader."

In response, James Jones, a Campbellsville, Ky., pastor, praised Bennett's unique, God-given ability to walk with any individual, regardless of his or her theological persuasion.

"After much prayer and acting on the leadership of the lord, he and he alone has made this decision that it is time for he and Phyllis (Mrs. Bennett) to spend the deserved time together and do some of the things they want to do."

Julian Motley, a Durham, N.C., pastor, was named to chair a 10-member search committee to nominate Bennett's successor.

Other members of the committee are Stan Coffey of Amarillo, Texas; Doyle Collins of Roseburg, Ore.; Ronnie Floyd of Springdale, Ark.; David Hankins of Lake Charles, La.; Gwyna Parker of Taylor, Texas; Guy Sanders of Lake Wales, Fla.; Simon Tsoi of Phoenix, Ariz.; Joe Warwick of Knoxville, Tenn.; and Fred Wolfe of Mobile, Ala.

Named to chair a transition committee charged with planning a retirement celebration honoring Bennett at the 1992 SBC meeting was J.C. Mitchell, a Winter Park, Fla., pastor.

Other members of the committee are Scott Humphrey of Alexandria, Va.; Gayden Jones of Baton Rouge, La.; Wallace Jones of Bridgeton, Mo.; Kenneth Mahanes of Dayton, Ohio; Joe Reynolds of Houston; James Yates of Yazoo City, Miss.; and the three immediate past chairmen of the Executive Committee. They are Sam Pace of Lawton, Okla.; Charles Sullivan of Lenoir City, Tenn.; and David Maddox of Fullerton, Calif.

Bennett, only the fourth man to head the Executive Committee, was executive secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention from 1967 to 1979. Earlier, he served on the staffs of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Baptist Sunday School Board. He was pastor of churches in North Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana and Arkansas.

In other business, the Executive Committee approved without discussion bylaw changes that create two new standing committees.

The Officers Advisory Committee will include the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and chairpersons of the administrative, business and finance, and program and budget subcommittees. They will be available to advise the president-treasurer and will meet at least two weeks before the September and February meetings of the Executive Committee.

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A second new standing committee, the Legal Assistance Committee, will include all attorneys serving on the Executive Committee. It will advise the Officers Advisory Committee and "review annually all legal opinions and legal expenses of the committee and shall seek to obtain the best and most reasonable representation possible" for the Executive Committee.

After extended debate at a meeting in February, the Executive Committee voted to retain current definitions for "cooperating Baptist church" and "in friendly cooperation with" the Southern Baptist Convention.

Churches "in friendly cooperation with" and "cooperating Baptist churches" will continue to be defined as "sympathetic with its (SBC) purposes and work and has during the fiscal year preceding been a bona fide contributor to the Convention's work."

An accreditation study committee established to "study the procedures and impact of the accreditation of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries" will continue its work and report at the Sept. 16-18 meeting of the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee members approved a recommendation that the 1998 SBC meeting be held June 9-11 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Proposed charter amendments for the Home and Foreign mission boards were approved that eliminate local members of the boards of trustees, with all trustees serving as at-large members representing their Baptist state conventions.

In an organizational meeting June 5, the Executive Committee elected new officers.

David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., was elected chairman.

Hankins was unopposed for the office, as was Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., who was elected as vice chairman.

Eldridge Miller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Sallisaw, Okla., was elected recording secretary. He defeated two other candidates -- Stan Coffey, pastor of San Jacinto Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, and Newton Brill, a layman from West Plains, Mo.

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President Bush addresses
Southern Baptist Convention

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--President George Bush urged Southern Baptists June 6 to "hold fast to the Southern Baptist ideal of a free state," protect all faiths in freedom and "hold fast to protect our most essential unit of life, the family."

Speaking to the closing session of the 134th Southern Baptist Convention meeting, Bush praised Southern Baptists for their support of family values while advocating passage of a constitutional amendment on voluntary prayer in public schools, opposing federal funding of abortions, urging passage of crime legislation and supporting federal vouchers for parents to choose schools and child care, including religious schools, for their children.

"In child care, in education, in crime legislation, are we doing all we can to preserve faith and family?" Bush asked. "If not we must do more. Only when we protect and preserve our most cherished ideals and institutions, does government by the people serve the people."

An estimated 23,000 people filled the Georgia World Congress Center almost to capacity for the president's 17-minute speech, which was preceded by a patriotic medley of music, including the theme songs of the military branches of service and the national anthem.

Bush was choked by tears as he thanked Southern Baptists for their prayers during the Persian Gulf War, "which I believe really strengthened our nation."

"To me, prayer has always been important and quite personal," said Bush, recounting how he and his wife, Barbara, prayed at Camp David about the responsibility of "sending someone else's kids to war. Now I no longer worry how I look to others. With prayer, what matters is how it seems to God."

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Less than a minute into his speech, Bush was briefly interrupted by the sounds of fewer than five hecklers who were quickly ejected from the hall as messengers drowned them out with cheers.

One who was ejected said the group opposed the president's lack of a policy on AIDS.

Outside, several other protestors carried signs. Some shouted, "Racist, sexist, anti-gay; Southern Baptists, go away."

Bush's speech was interrupted frequently with applause and cheers, with the loudest coming as he expressed opposition to "federal funding of abortions, except where the life of the mother is endangered."

On school prayer, Bush told the story of Monette Rethford, a fifth grader in Norman, Okla., who, he said, "liked to read her Bible under a shade tree during recess" and frequently was joined by several friends. School officials ruled the activity an unlawful assembly.

"My friends, the day a child's quiet prayer group during recess becomes an unlawful assembly, something's really wrong. In that spirit, today I again call on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment permitting voluntary prayer back into our nation's schools," said Bush.

He also advocated parental choice care and education, including federal vouchers to low-income parents. Before speaking to Southern Baptists, Bush visited the child-care development center operated by Atlanta's Central Presbyterian Church.

Bush said federal regulations to provide the first vouchers for child care were being issued June 6.

"Finally, low-income parents will have the chance to choose where their kids get child care -- including religious settings and with religious instruction," said Bush.

He said America 2000, the president's education initiative to allow parents to choose schools for their children, will "put power in parent's hands. We trust them to make the right decisions for their kids. Some argue choice will make bad schools worse. I am confident that choice will make even the bad schools better."

Just before Bush spoke, messengers adopted a resolution in support of the president's position on choice in education, along with resolutions commending Bush for his leadership in Operation Desert Storm. The previous day they passed resolutions criticizing the president for "lack of initiative" in limiting funding of so-called obscene art by the National Endowment on the Arts and registering outrage at a grant by the Centers for Disease Control for the 13th National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference.

Meanwhile, Bush urged congressional passage of crime bill but charged "leadership has failed to make crime a priority issue.

"We submitted our first crime bill more than two years ago and nothing has happened," said Bush. "Surely the United State Congress can pass a crime bill in what is left of the 100 days (since March 6 when Bush called for passage in 100 days)."

Bush described help provided by members of First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Va., in helping to bring about a reunion of a Kurdish refugee couple who escaped from Iraq more than 10 years ago but had to leave their daughter behind.

The father, Mikhail Dosky, and his daughter, Gilawesh, arrived in the United States Tuesday night, Bush said, "where years of sorrow were washed away with tears of joy. What a testament to the power of faith, hope and love -- all of which God provides in abundance."

Bush said the United States remains one nation under God.

"No nation better reconciles diversity of faith with unity of purpose," he said. "As new challenges confront us, we must draw on that strength and work to build a nation united in its commitment to decency and opportunity; to freedom, family and faith."

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Before he spoke, Bush was introduced by SBC President Morris Chapman, who thanked Bush for his support of Christian and family values.

"Thank you, Mr. President, for your commitment to cherished beliefs we hold in common," Chapman said. "Thank you for giving priority to your personal family and to family values and for your leadership in advocating parental choice in education and child care.

"Thank you, Mr. President, for standing up for the unborn. Thank you for setting an example of spiritual commitment by attending public worship. Thank you for unashamedly calling this nation to prayer in a time of international crisis. Thank you, Mr. President, for encouraging legislation to guarantee the freedom of America's children to pray voluntarily in public schools."

After his speech, Chapman presented Bush with a Bible published by the denomination's Nashville-based Sunday School Board.

Messengers began entering the hall when doors opened at 7 a.m. Everyone entering the hall had to pass through security, with purses and packages subject to search.

An unidentified Alabama woman messenger was detained at security for possession of a pistol for which she had a permit to carry in the state of Alabama.

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Messengers OK resolutions
on variety of topics

By Mark Wingfield

N.C.

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--Before President George Gush spoke to the Southern Baptist Convention June 6, messengers corporately agreed on several things to say to him.

Their message was: support for government tax incentives in education, disapproval of the National Endowment for the Arts and Centers for Disease Control, support for the Persian Gulf War, disapproval of medical research using tissue from induced abortions, concern about the sanctity of human life, support for restrictions on advertising of alcoholic beverages and outrage over threatened religious liberties.

Eight of the 14 resolutions adopted by messengers carried messages to the president and Congress.

Another resolution carried a pointed message to other denominational bodies studying human sexuality issues.

Messengers adopted the full slate of 14 resolutions proposed by the convention's Resolutions Committee. A total of 40 resolutions were submitted to the committee by messengers.

The committee, chaired by David Hankins of Lake Charles, La., reviewed all submissions. Of the 40 submissions, 30 received no action and 10 were worked into the 14 resolutions voted upon by the full body.

Several amendments to resolutions were offered from the floor, but only one passed.

Here is a summary of resolutions adopted by the convention:

-- On Parental Choice in Education.

In a departure from previous SBC statements on the First Amendment, this resolution states it is possible to develop government tax incentives for church schools without violating the ban on an establishment of religion.

The resolution says Southern Baptists have "always affirmed the right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their religious convictions" and notes that some Baptist parents "are concerned that their public school systems are increasingly hostile to Christian convictions."

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It calls for Southern Baptists to encourage tax incentives for parental choice in education within the bounds of the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion.

Albert Lee Smith of Birmingham, Ala., introduced a resolution that was incorporated into the final resolution. During debate on the floor, Smith, who has been chairman of the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee, rose to speak in favor of the resolution.

"God has placed the responsibility of raising children on parents and not the state," he said. "If set up like the GI bill for military veterans, educational choice will not endanger our religious liberties. Let's return the schools to the parents and communities."

-- On Government Support of Obscene and Offensive Art.

This resolution specifically calls on President Bush to fire John Frohnmayer, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and replace him with someone "who will stop funding obscene, morally repugnant and sacrilegious art."

The NEA has been a source of frustration for many evangelical Christians for the past two years. NEA Chairman Frohnmayer has continued to approve federal grants for projects some Christians deem obscene and sacrilegious. For example, one NEA-funded project depicted a cross submerged in urine.

Despite repeated protests, Bush has refused to dismiss Frohnmayer, saying he does not want to censor art. The SBC resolution, however, focuses not on censorship but on the federal funding of objectionable art.

If the president cannot set reasonable standards for federal funding of art, the resolution says, the NEA should be abolished.

-- On the Use of Government Funds to Encourage Immoral Sexual Behavior.

Carrying on the theme of the NEA resolution, this resolution criticizes a Centers for Disease Control grant of \$25,000 to a gay and lesbian health conference.

The resolution cites the CDC grant as part of a trend toward government funding of immoral behavior.

The CDC-funded conference is slated to include seminars such as "Safer Sex for Lesbians" and "SEXCESSful Teen Outreach."

The resolution calls upon President Bush "to take decisive action to ensure that such grants are prohibited in the future by means of an executive order requiring all federal policies to affirm the family and refuse any government funds to groups or programs which encourage sexual immorality in any form."

-- On Sanctity of Human Life.

Although Southern Baptists have spoken to the abortion issue in previous years, this year's resolution focuses on more than calling for legislation against legalized abortion.

It specifically opposes "the testing, approval, distribution and marketing of new drugs and technologies which will make the practice of abortion more convenient and more widespread." The controversial abortion pill, RU-486, is specifically cited.

Further, the resolution supports the current ban on federal funding for "any transplantation of tissue from induced abortions for purposes of experimentation and research."

Nancy Blackmon of Sanford, N.C., offered an amendment to call on all Southern Baptists "to work with equal fervor to compassionately encourage" women with unplanned pregnancies to carry their pregnancies to term. The amendment was adopted.

A proposed amendment to include a statement against euthanasia failed, as did a proposed amendment to remove the phrase "except to save the life of the mother" as a limitation on abortions.

-- On Endangerment of Our Religious Liberties.

This resolution speaks specifically to the 1990 Supreme Court decision Employment Division vs. Smith, which changed the way courts deal with religious liberty cases. Previously, the state was required to show a "compelling interest" in denying such liberties to enforce other laws.

As a result of this 1990 ruling, governments conceivably could enforce equal employment opportunity laws without regard to the religious beliefs of churches acting as employers.

The resolution expresses "outrage" over this ruling and calls on the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission to work toward the adoption of corrective legislation.

-- On Restricting Alcoholic Beverage Advertisements.

This resolution addresses legislation pending in Congress that would require such advertisements to carry warning labels like those currently required on cigarette advertisements.

Citing "irresponsible manipulation" in advertising of alcoholic beverages, the resolution calls on all Southern Baptists to inform their representatives and senators of their support for such restrictive legislation.

-- On Equitable Taxation for Families.

This resolution claims that current U.S. tax laws place a disproportionate burden on families. This contributes to weakening family structures by necessitating mothers to work outside the home, the resolution contends.

Public policy should promote "stable marriages and parental child-rearing," the resolution says.

-- On Operation Desert Storm.

This resolution commends Bush for his leadership in the Persian Gulf War. It says "the cause of freedom, democracy and peace was advanced by the diligent and courageous performance of duty throughout all segments of our armed services."

-- On Human Sexuality.

Although not specifically stated in the text, this resolution was designed to counter a report on sexuality to be voted upon by the Presbyterian Church (USA) the week after the SBC. In drafting the resolution, committee members discussed the Presbyterian document at length and agreed they wanted to send a signal of support to conservative Presbyterians who oppose their church's document.

The SBC resolution calls upon "all Christians to uphold the biblical standard of human sexuality against all onslaughts" and notes that this biblical standard is under attack "even within the religious community."

The Presbyterian document sanctions ordination for homosexuals and sex for responsible teen-agers and the unmarried elderly.

In contrast, the SBC resolution says sex is to be confined to marriage relationships between "a man and a woman." It cites biblical condemnation of premarital sex, adultery, rape, incest, pornography, promiscuity, prostitution and homosexuality.

In drafting the resolution, committee members worked to present a positive view of biblical sex. Members agreed they wanted to uphold a strict biblical standard but did not want to appear to be prudish.

The resolution describes sex as "a divine gift" designed by God "for the enjoyment and fulfillment of men and women" within the bounds of marriage.

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Additional resolutions spoke to prayer for release of hostages, appreciation for the convention's host city, the 175th anniversary of the American Bible Society, the 50th anniversary of the SBC Chaplains Commission and the declaration of the 1990s as the decade of Bible reading.

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Brotherhood trustees elect
Williams as new president

By Mike Day

N-CO
Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--James D. Williams, executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, was elected unanimously as president of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission June 5 by the agency's trustees.

Williams, chosen to succeed retiring president James Smith in a called meeting of the trustees, will assume his duties as the sixth chief administrative officer of the missions education agency Sept. 15.

In accepting the post, Williams thanked commission trustees for their support, acknowledged the contribution of Smith and spoke of his vision for the future.

"I am grateful for the confidence placed in me by the board of trustees," Williams said. "James Smith has provided outstanding leadership to the Brotherhood Commission and led in the development of new and imaginative approaches to missions education and missions involvement.

"I want the Brotherhood Commission to move forward, building strength upon strength, recognizing that until Jesus comes again our Great Commission task is not complete.

"I will take every opportunity to strengthen the Brotherhood Commission's partnership with Woman's Missionary Union, both the Home and Foreign mission boards and with the state convention Brotherhood network as together we help Southern Baptists share the gospel with all of earth's people groups."

The election of the 56-year-old educator and administrator completes the work of the search committee charged with the task of presenting a presidential candidate to the board.

Search committee Chairman Wendell Reed of Salem, Va., introduced Williams to the trustees and made the recommendation for his election as president of the 84-year-old agency.

"We believe we have sought and found God's man for this position," Reed said. "He is a proven administrator, a respected educator and a leader. He is the right man for this job."

Williams comes to his new role with extensive experience in Southern Baptist life. As executive vice president of the Sunday School Board, he was responsible for providing staff assistance to the president, coordinating the work of the executive officer's team in the general administration of the board, establishing guidelines for budget development and supervising the functions of planning, research and communications.

Prior to taking the Sunday School Board position, he served Southern Baptists for 22 years as a teacher and administrator at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His seminary tenure included stints as professor of adult education and dean of advanced studies in the school of religious education. He also served as minister of education in seven Texas churches during his seminary tenure.

The Illinois native's initial ministerial experience came in 1953 as minister of music and education at First Baptist Church of Harrisburg, Ill. He served as minister of education at Ash Creek Baptist Church in Azle, Texas, 1956-59; and First Baptist Church of Hurst, Texas, 1959-62.

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Recognized as a leading religious educator in the Southern Baptist Convention, he has served as guest lecturer and professor at North Texas State University, the Presbyterian School of Religious Education in Richmond, Va., Spurgeons College in London, Hong Kong Baptist Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Williams' publications include "Guiding Adults" and "In The Company of Others" for Convention Press. He has authored numerous curriculum units, teaching guides and articles for professional journals and magazines.

He received his childhood education in his birthplace of Harrisburg, Ill., and earned a bachelor of arts degree from Southern Illinois University. He holds a master's degree and two doctorates in religious education from Southwestern Seminary.

The new commission president is married to the former Jo Clayton of Harrisburg, Ill. They have one daughter, Jami; two sons, Greg and Jeff; and five grandchildren.

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By Mike Day -- 4:15 pm, Wednesday

Messengers elect new
convention officers

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--Messengers to the 134th session of the Southern Baptist Convention elected Morris H. Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, to a second one-year term as president of the 15-million member denomination.

Chapman, 50, was elected without opposition. He was nominated by Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., who characterized Chapman's first term as SBC president as one of compassion, commitment and consecration.

Chapman has been pastor of the Wichita Falls congregation since 1979. Before that, he served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Albuquerque for five years.

He is a native of Kosciusko, Miss. He is a graduate of Mississippi College and holds master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Chapman is married to the former Jodi Francis of Memphis. They have two children.

Messengers also elected Nelson Price, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., as first vice president. He also was elected without opposition.

Ed Harrison Jr., pastor of Dollarway Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, Ark., was elected second vice president. He defeated Vander Warner Jr., pastor of Grove Avenue Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., 2,633 to 1,900.

Lee Porter of Nashville, Tenn., was re-elected to a 15th term as SBC registration secretary. He defeated James W. Richards, a Baton Rouge, La., pastor, 4,523 to 4,506.

David W. Atchison of Nashville was elected unopposed to his second one-year term as convention recording secretary.

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Chapman meet with press
following re-election

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA, (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman said June 4 he will consider the denomination's moderates as Southern Baptists as long as they are members of cooperating SBC churches.

In a news conference following his unopposed election to a second term, as SBC president, Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, said the main issue that has divided conservatives and moderates has been leadership, not membership or fellowship.

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For the 12th straight year, the 15-million member evangelical denomination elected a conservative president. Convention moderates this year did not field a presidential candidate.

Asked if the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a newly formed moderate group, is a denomination, Chapman said the group's legal incorporation indicates "a step in that direction." However, he added, many moderates are uncertain about their future plans.

Chapman would not express an opinion on whether the SBC should change the financial requirements necessary to be considered an SBC church. "That is not an issue before Southern Baptists," he said. "The (SBC) Executive Committee has made its report."

The Executive Committee decided not to recommend changing the financial requirements. Messengers approved the recommendation Tuesday.

Some moderate churches involved in the CBF have begun to channel their denominational support around the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified giving program. Some churches have chosen not to fund SBC entities they perceive as dominated by conservatives. In response, some conservatives have suggested that the SBC tighten the financial requirements for membership in the SBC.

Chapman refused to state his position on the decision by messengers to defund completely the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. "I have an opinion, and I voted it by ballot today," he said.

Messengers voted to discontinue all financial support to the BJC, a religious liberty watchdog organization supported by several Baptist bodies in the United States. The SBC Executive Committee had recommended a \$50,000 allocation for the Washington-based agency.

Chapman said he did not know in advance that messengers would attempt to defund the BJCPA. However, he said, had he considered the possibility that messengers might try to defund the agency, the outcome would not have surprised him. In recent years, SBC conservatives have charged that the BJCPA does not represent them well in Washington.

Asked about the fairness of his committee appointments this year, Chapman said his appointments represented a strong effort to involve people who had not served before on an SBC committee. Last year, Chapman promised to "broaden the tent" of leadership in the SBC. Of the 68 committee appointments, only eight people had served previously on SBC committees, he said.

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Chapman delivers president's
address during convention

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--The 12-year debate among Southern Baptists over the nature of Scripture has been settled for those who believe in the infallibility of the Bible, Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman said.

But, for those who do not accept the Bible's infallibility and inerrancy, "this issue will never be settled," stressed Chapman in his presidential address during the Southern Baptist Convention.

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, said Southern Baptists cannot afford to compromise their convictions about the Bible. Evangelical Christians from all over the nation are "applauding our stand upon the Bible," he added.

Chapman cited the writings of James M. Frost, first corresponding secretary of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville to support the position that an inerrant Bible is part of the Southern Baptist heritage.

"This conviction is foundational in Southern Baptist life," Chapman said, "and can only remain so if we teach it in the classrooms of educational institutions, preach it in the pulpits of our churches and print it in the published pages of our literature.

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"Agreement will not always be reached on matters of biblical interpretation but agreement must be reached on biblical authority. I call upon every denominational employee, every pastor and every person in the pew to join in this endeavor of everlasting consequences."

Some Southern Baptists during the past decade have insisted there are not theological differences among Southern Baptists, he said.

However, he noted, a leader of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a newly formed moderate organization, was quoted two weeks ago in a state Baptist paper as admitting theological differences have existed between moderates and conservatives.

Chapman then pointed to a fellowship document that he quoted as saying that "the Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching" and that "Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible."

Chapman added: "In kindness, but in all candor, I cannot conceive of anyone claiming the Bible has errors and then in the very next sentence cry over human interpretations of the Bible.

"When you refuse to believe the Bible to be God's perfect word, you have stripped away God's authority. All you have left is human interpretation."

In addition to being people of the Bible, Chapman challenged Southern Baptists to be people of faith, missions, evangelism and prayer.

"I can tell you one thing for certain -- and I pray my voice will echo to the farthest corner of the earth -- Southern Baptists will not turn our backs on our missionaries, home or foreign," he said.

More nations, he added, are open to the gospel than in any other time in history.

"The challenge of the hour is to capitalize on the lightning fast changes which are occurring all over the nation," he said.

Regarding home missions, Chapman said he wants Southern Baptists to jump start 1,000 new churches next Easter Sunday and to double their gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions.

Chapman said he believes God is calling Southern Baptists to pray for revival.

"We need a fresh touch from God," he said. "We need to set our hearts ablaze with his glory.

"We need a burning desire in our souls to see souls saved. In this denomination and across the nation, we need to ignite the flames of revival."

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Elliff preaches annual
sermon for convention

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--An Oklahoma pastor used a familiar scripture in the annual Southern Baptist Convention sermon June 5 to encourage Christians who have lost "that vital sense of God's presence."

"What do you do when you can't get back to God?" asked Tom D. Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla.

Then he reminded Southern Baptists that the well-known 23rd Psalm in the Bible says, "He restores my soul."

In support of his conviction, Elliff said, "God designs our lives so we might prosper."

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Urging his listeners not to label him as "one of those name it and claim it, blab it and grab it" personalities who "parade across the television screen as if they were ministers of God," Elliff said there is also something wrong in the idea that if one believes in Jesus, he is going to be miserable for the rest of his life.

"Jesus said, 'I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly,'" Elliff reminded.

Prosperity, however, carries with it a commitment to produce for Christ, he added. Complacency can destroy a Christian's ministry, he warned. "Is your desire to get some place bigger so you can do less?" he asked.

Warning that the greatest danger is carelessness, Elliff paralleled the Christian who has lost the sense of God's presence with a lost sheep which has run away and become "cast" on its back with its feet pointing upward and bound to die soon unless the shepherd finds it.

In restoring the sheep, Elliff said, the shepherd will shear the sheep, "removing all his bragging rights." Similarly, he said, God may deal with his people, removing "everything you loved more than you loved him."

Elliff said that years ago as pastor of a fast-growing church, he was in demand to speak as an expert on church growth.

"Somewhere along the way, I became a 'cast' sheep, he said. "I woke up on a plane to a prayer conference to realize I was going to preach on something I had long since stopped doing."

Elliff said he began to cry out, "God restore my soul."

"God spoke to us and called us to the mission field," said Elliff.

Somewhere along the way, he said, as he balanced a Zulu Bible on one leg and English language Bible on the other, the sweetness of God's presence was restored.

"When your life is hard and your spirit's dry and God's sweet presence has disappeared," he said, "deep down inside your heart a river is flowing, and somewhere out there a holy storm is growing."

"It's one thing to believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God," said Elliff, "but it's another thing to go to the well of God and let Him restore your soul."

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Religious educators meet
before SBC annual meeting

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--The biggest challenge for the rest of the century is not inerrancy, but how to get the gospel to a rapidly changing world that defies traditional church outreach methods, speakers warned at the annual session of the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association June 2 and 3.

"Lost and unchurched people could care less about inerrancy," said Ron Lewis, senior consultant for Church Growth Designs in Nashville. "They could care less about whether you're a Southern Baptist church. They'll go where their needs are being met."

The best way to grow a church today is to reach lost people, Lewis said. "Go out and get a lost person, win him to Christ and then ask him, 'Who are your friends?'"

While Americans have never been so open to the gospel as they are now, said Lewis, churches face a dilemma in that most prospects are between the ages of 22 and 44 and won't commit to traditional church patterns.

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Lewis said part of the problem is that while most of the power and money in Southern Baptist churches are in the hands of members 53 years of age and older, most prospects are of the computer age. They may dress up for work Monday through Friday and then come to church on Sunday night in blue jeans, T-shirts and maybe no socks, he said.

People are simplifying their lives, said Lewis, and churches must learn to do the same thing.

Lewis said other factors churches must accentuate include servanthood, image and networking.

Meanwhile, a Sunday school leader warned that Southern Baptists are losing a generation of young people.

While 14 percent of the U.S. population is 18 to 24 years of age, only three percent of Southern Baptists are in the same age range, said R. Michael Harton, director of the division of Sunday school development for the Virginia Baptist General Board.

He said that while Southern Baptists traditionally have maintained a stronger emphasis on Christian education, there seems to be a trend toward building bigger and bigger worship centers and fewer education facilities.

"We are making our final exit from the industrial society, and the information age is just through the door," said Harton.

"We must remember that change and conflict are two sides of the same coin. We must be constantly pointing to the mission of our organization and build morale in whatever ways are appropriate."

Another speaker, James Fitch, manager of the pastor/staff section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, dealt with characteristics of the baby boomers and difficulties Southern Baptists face in reaching them with traditional methods.

Baby boomers also are searching for love, family, stability and rootedness, Fitch said. The denominational name of the church is less important to them than their needs being met, he added.

Also, he said, they have a deep spiritual concern but don't get in a hurry to make any kind of long-term commitment. He said they watch the electronic church, which is positive because it compels mainline churches to offer their best.

Fitch said some large churches are reaching young people in large numbers through exciting, entertaining worship services, but he warned that "worship by itself can never get the job done. You cannot build a church on a worship service. As religious education directors, we must find a way to get them from worship to Bible study.

In a resolution, the ministers of education applauded the leadership of Lloyd Elder, who earlier this year reached an agreement with trustees to retire as president of the Sunday School Board by Jan. 31, 1992, or 30 days after a successor is elected. Elder would continue in a consultant role and as an employee of the board until April 1, 1993.

William A. Gambrell, minister of education/pastoral care at First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss., was elected president of the association. Other new officers of the association are president-elect, William R. Cromer Jr., professor of religious education, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; vice president, Mavis Allen, senior coordinator, Sunday school program development, Sunday school division, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; eastern vice president, Charles Ballard, associate pastor of education, First Baptist Church, Maryville, Tenn.; central vice president, G. Ned Taylor, minister of education, First Baptist Church of Starkville, Miss.; western vice president, Nelda P. Williams, consultant in the Sunday school division, Baptist General Convention of Dallas; secretary-treasurer, Joe Haynes, growth consultant in the Sunday school growth and administration department, Baptist Sunday School Board; and assistant secretary, Eddie Lee, minister of education/administration, Grace Baptist Church in Evansville, Ind.

Church musicians gather
for annual conference

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist musicians were challenged to be lambs among the wolves of today's society at a two-day conference preceding the 134th annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Allen Walworth, pastor of First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala., advised the more than 300 musicians attending the Southern Baptist Church Music Conference not to "put on wolves clothing just to look out for No. 1 or to be all you can be."

He also exhorted those attending the conference at Wieueca Road Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta not to play king of the mountain or become "ruthless by scratching or clawing your way to the top. Most of the time the wolves make it to the top only to find there is no reward. There is nothing there."

Milburn Price, dean of the school of music at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, spoke to the musicians about issues he said he believes they will face in the 21st century.

The greatest concern, he said, would be proclaiming the gospel in a complex world, citing statistics that indicate there will be 433 cities worldwide in the year 2000 that will have a population of more than one million people. Today, 276 cities fall in that category.

Price said church musicians need to be like Don Quixote to dream the impossible dream and to ask the Lord to "send forth your word through us."

Price said he also is concerned with how musicians deal with technology, particularly synthesizers and computers. He challenged participants to used synthesizers, but not at the expense of the gifts of instrumentalists in the church. He also encouraged musicians to explore the use of computer technology related to music instruction, especially for preschoolers and children.

Other points of concern related to the 21st century that Price mentioned were worship, the task of music education, the diminishing supply of keyboard instrumentalists and the impact of popular culture on music and worship.

A highlight of the 35th annual session of the SBCMC was a hymn sing featuring selections from "The Baptist Hymnal," 1991 edition, led by Mark Blankenship of the church music department, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

The musicians passed a resolution commending the Sunday School Board for the new hymnal, which they said reflect the diversity of Southern Baptists "in matters of worship style, of theological emphasis, of tradition and of musical performance."

The conference presented the W. Hines Sims Award posthumously to Claude H. Rhea Jr., former president of Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach, Fla. He had served as a minister of music in churches in Missouri, Louisiana, Florida, Texas and Alabama. He also was dean of church music at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and vice president and chairman of the division of fine arts at Houston Baptist University.

In other business, Bob Hatfield, minister of music at Dawson Memorial Church in Birmingham, Ala., assumed the presidency of the conference. Blakenship will serve as president-elect.

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Hispanic pastors hold
annual meeting in Atlanta

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
6/7/91

ATLANTA (BP)--After assisting in the May 1990 spiritual conversion of Manuel Noriega, Rudy Hernandez told Hispanic pastors his next prospect is Saddam Hussein.

"If I could get permission to minister to Saddam Hussein, I would," the San Antonio, Texas, evangelist said of the Iraqi leader.

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Hispanic ministers met for three days, beginning June 1 at the Atlanta Baptist Tabernacle prior to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Hernandez said he served as translator for Noriega, a Baptist layman and another Texas evangelist who led the deposed Panamanian dictator to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Hernandez told the group of about 400 Hispanic ministers and their families that once Christians learned of Noriega's conversion, they began sending the panamanian Bibles.

"And he has all of them marked," Hernandez said. "I am surprised about all the texts he has marked."

If God can save Noriega, he can save the more than 25 million Hispanics in the United States that need the gospel, Hernandez said.

But Hernandez, who spoke in Spanish, said to reach Hispanic Americans with the gospel, Hispanic Christians will have to minister in English.

"One half the population of Hispanic origin will have to be reached and won in English," Hernandez said.