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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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92-95

NOTE TO EDITORS: A wrap-up of the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting and other SBC stories from Indianapolis will be posted in Baptist Press Thursday, June 11.

Houston pastor Ed Young
elected SBC president

By Sarah Zimmerman

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Edwin Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston and the candidate endorsed by numerous conservative leaders, is the new president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Young won 62.05 percent -- 9,981 votes -- in the three-way race for the SBC's top post June 9.

For SBC first vice president, Jay Strack was the only candidate nominated. Strack, a member of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, was nominated by Jack Graham, the church's pastor.

Joe Aulds, an evangelist from Ruston, La., was elected second vice president and Lee Porter, registration secretary, and David Atchison, recording secretary, were re-elected to their posts June 10.

In the SBC president's race, Jess Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Chatsworth, Calif., and Nelson Price, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., also were nominated. Moody gathered 21.66 percent or 3,485 votes while Price gained 16.28 percent or 2,619 votes.

All three men were described as theological conservatives but Young was the nominee who was supported by SBC conservative leaders prior to the convention's annual meeting.

Young, 55, has been pastor of Second Baptist Church since 1978 when it had 4,431 members. The church now has more than 18,000 members and led the convention in baptisms in 1990 with 1,007. Last year the church baptized 838 people.

Young was nominated by Joel Gregory, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas. Gregory noted each time Young moved to another church as pastor, he went to a smaller church.

"He is not so much a pastor of big churches as a man who builds churches," Gregory said. He further described Young as a "man of passion" who has a heart for missions and soul-winning.

Comedian Jerry Clower took on a more serious tone when he nominated Moody for president, saying Moody loves people on both sides of the SBC controversy. He also said it would help Southern Baptists' witness to elect a pastor who was not from the South or Southeast.

In traveling across the United States to speak, Clower said he constantly meets laypeople who want to stop the SBC friction which he called a pastor's fight.

"There are 39,000 of ya'll (pastors) but there are 15 million of us and we want it stopped," Clower said.

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Price was nominated by Bob Hamblin of Harrisburg Baptist Church in Tupelo, Miss. Price has been pastor of the Georgia church for more than 26 years.

"The title of one of his 16 books best describes Nelson Price: 'Servants not Celebrities,'" Hamblin said. "He has served his way to this place."

Price was first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention 1991-92 and he currently is a trustee of the Home Mission Board.

Hamblin said Price's church contributes 10 percent of its income to the Cooperative Program, the Southern Baptist fund for national and international missions and ministries.

After the nominations, Chris Whaley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Beverly Hills, Fla., asked how much the churches of the other nominees give to the Cooperative Program.

SBC President Morris Chapman, presiding at the session, said information about each candidate is presented at the discretion of the person making the nomination, therefore information about Cooperative Program giving was not available.

A February story in the "Baptist Standard," newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, reported that Young's church gives 2.35 percent of its total receipts to the Cooperative Program, based on the Uniform Church Letter.

At the time of the presidential election, 17,675 messengers had registered and 91 percent of them cast ballots in that election.

In the second vice presidential election, Aulds received 3,013 votes, or 58.13 percent, in a run-off election with Glen Molette, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pikeville, Ky., who received 2,164 votes. Three other candidates were nominated for the first ballot.

Porter received 3,739 votes, or 61.9 percent, against another registration secretary nominee, Bob Bender, pastor of First Baptist Church in Ada, Okla. Porter has held the post 15 years, is a former Baptist Sunday School Board editor and now is associate pastor of St. Andrew Baptist Church in Panama City, Fla.

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New SBC president calls for
healing through missions By Orville Scott & Terry Barone

Baptist Press
6/10/92

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Edwin Young, newly elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said it's time to "put down the guns and go fishing again."

The road to healing in the SBC controversy is through evangelism and missions, Young said at a news conference shortly after his election on the first day of the convention's June 9-11 meeting in Indianapolis. Young is pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston.

"We need to put a kingdom goal out there and say to all who can rally around that, 'Come on Southern Baptists, we're ready to move forward.'"

Young, 55, said he believes he can be a bridge-builder by appointing persons to serve on key committees, "seeking wisdom and input from everybody," including institutional leaders.

The Laurel, Miss., native said Southern Baptists need to involve more blacks, Hispanics and ethnic language groups in leadership roles. Young's 18,000-member congregation has about 1,500 ethnic members.

Young said he does not believe in ordaining women but does believe in the development and use of all members' spiritual gifts "inside God's Word."

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Another positive healing step, he said, would be to do away with "pejorative labels" such as fundamentalist, moderate and liberal.

"I'm a Southern Baptist, Bible-believing preacher. Let's throw away all those labels."

Young said his church gives between 2 and 3 percent to the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' fund for national and international missions and ministries. The Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, reported in February Young's church gave 2.35 percent of its receipts to the Cooperative Program, based on the Uniform Church Letter.

"We will seek to raise our gifts to missions for all causes," Young said. He said churches can double their gifts to missions by applying "spiritual goals" to personalize missions giving.

Personal involvement in missions is necessary, Young said, noting his church members are involved in numerous evangelistic missions and social ministry projects annually.

"We've got to turn our people loose to be salt, light and leaven in the world and make our ministry valid," he said.

"I'll do whatever I can to lift up Christ around the world," he said.

Concerning family values, Young said Southern Baptists need to have Christian homes that model Christian families. Young introduced his wife Jo Beth and their three sons who are in the ministry.

Young said he feels the press overreacted to what he termed a "simple illustration" by Vice President J. Danforth Quayle about TV's fictional news anchor Murphy Brown. "He [Quayle] has been brutalized by the press," Young said.

He said he feels the Murphy Brown statement was words of love, graciousness and compassion -- "a hard word toward men ... men -- husbands -- need to be responsible."

He said he agrees with the convention's vote earlier not to seat messengers from two churches that have affirmed homosexual relationships and ordination of homosexuals.

"Homosexuality clearly contradicts biblical teachings and I question whether (a church that affirms homosexuality) is a New Testament church." He said he agrees the convention should not accept funds from such churches.

Young shared the platform at the press conference with his opponents, Jess Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Chatsworth, Calif., and Nelson Price, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga.

"We did about as little politicking as has been done in the SBC in a long time," Young said.

All three men challenged Southern Baptists to stop the alienation process in which they said Southern Baptists are destroying each other.

"God has not called us to see through each other," Moody said, "but to see each other through."

SBC acts to bar churches
that approve homosexuality

By Linda Lawson

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention voted overwhelmingly June 9 to declare two North Carolina churches not in cooperation with the SBC and to withdraw fellowship from the congregations. The churches have taken recent actions favorable to homosexuality.

The vote by messengers attending the convention's 135th meeting was termed a "historic event."

Messengers also endorsed with virtually no opposition a constitutional amendment declaring churches approving homosexual behavior "not in friendly cooperation" and, therefore, not eligible to send messengers to annual convention meetings.

The amendment requires approval by SBC messengers again in 1993.

Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh voted in March to bless the "union" of two homosexual males. In April, Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill voted to license a homosexual to the ministry.

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina voted May 20 to oust the two churches. The Raleigh Baptist Association disfellowshipped Pullen church on May 5. Binkley church has not been affiliated with its association.

The recommendation from the SBC Executive Committee declared the actions of the two churches "contrary to the teachings of the Bible on human sexuality and the sanctity of the family and are offensive to Southern Baptists."

"In taking this action," the recommendation continued, "the Southern Baptist Convention also fervently prays that these churches will respond to the teachings of Holy Scripture by rescinding their actions related to avowed homosexuals while continuing to pray for God's saving grace and healing power in the lives of homosexuals and continuing to minister redemptively to homosexuals."

Jim Guenther, general counsel for the Executive Committee, called the action a "historic event. It is the first time in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention when, in the exercise of the convention's autonomy, it has determined it will look to the faith and practice of a church to determine if it is in friendly cooperation."

Guenther said approval of the motion and the constitutional amendment will require a review of the bylaws spelling out how messengers get their credentials.

Executive Committee Chairman David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., said the purpose of the constitutional amendment was to "make explicit in the constitution what has always been implicit."

Messenger David Martin of Cary, N.C., said he lived mid-way between the two North Carolina churches which he termed "Sodom and Gomorrah."

"Let the world know where we stand," he said.

In other matters, messengers approved resolutions of appreciation for three agency executives -- Lewis Drummond, who retires June 30 as president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; Lloyd Elder, who retired in August 1991 as president of the Sunday School Board in Nashville; and R. Keith Parks, who retires in October as president of the Foreign Mission Board.

Messengers also approved for the second year a constitutional amendment requiring all members of SBC committees to be members of cooperating Southern Baptist churches. The action was taken to meet requirements for approval of constitutional amendments.

Messengers instruct HMB
to study Freemasonry

By David Winfrey

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention instructed its Home Mission Board interfaith witness department to study Masons, rejecting a motion to form an ad hoc committee to investigate the secret fraternal group.

"I'm disappointed," said Larry Holly, a messenger and Beaumont, Texas, physician who introduced the motion calling for a committee to study Freemasonry and report back at next year's convention in Houston.

In the June 10 morning business session, messengers were debating that motion when Alvin Rowe III, pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockledge, Fla., moved to amend the motion to instruct the HMB study the matter instead.

Home Mission Board trustees have twice rejected studying Freemasonry when the SBC referred the matter to them for consideration after previous conventions. The June 10 action now officially instructs the board to study Freemasonry.

Without debate on Rowe's amendment, it passed overwhelmingly and the motion also passed by an equally large margin.

"I'm just going to pray and trust the Home Mission Board will deal with it," Holly told Baptist Press, adding he hopes to have some input to the committee. "If their report doesn't deal with it with integrity and honesty, we'll come back and amend their report."

Holly said he spent about \$8,000 in unsolicited donations to publish a 58-page booklet titled "The Southern Baptist Convention and Freemasonry."

In his book, Holly contends the Masonic lodge's true purpose is worship of Satan who, Holly claims, is the god of the lodge.

"Let every Southern Baptist beware, who having bowed his knee to the Masonic altar, has thereby betrayed the Lord," the book states.

Holly also contends Freemasonry demands toleration of other religions counter to Christianity.

Holly said he is not opposed to Masons being church members but believes they should not be allowed in positions of leadership.

After the vote, the grand master of Masons for the state of Oklahoma issued a statement lauding Masonic contributions to charities, communities and personal development.

"Masonry is an important influence for good in Oklahoma," said the statement by Allan D. Large. "We are not in competition with any group, certainly not with any faith, but believe that each person has a moral and ethical responsibility to make the world a better, more nurturing place."

A Baptist VIEWpoll last year found 14 percent of Southern Baptist pastors interviewed were or had been members of a Masonic lodge.

The call for a study was opposed by several messengers. Before debate on Holly's motion, John King, a pastor at Nail's Creek Baptist Church, introduced a counter resolution asking that no committee be appointed "because we have more important things to occupy our time and efforts and monies, and that is winning men to Jesus." King's motion at the time was ruled out of order because it involved the same issue to be debated in Holly's motion.

SBC messengers elect
Committee on Committees

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention messengers elected 68 persons from 34 state Baptist conventions June 9 to serve on the SBC's Committee on Committees.

Messengers to the 1993 SBC meeting in Houston will vote on a slate of names nominated by the committee to fill trustee vacancies on Southern Baptist boards, agencies and commissions.

The committee is made up of two persons from each state convention -- one layperson and one in church-related vocational work. Joe W. Atchison, pastor of First Baptist Church in Rogers, Ark., will chair the group.

Committee members, listed by state, name, residence and church, are (*indicates layperson from each state):

ALABAMA: James Paul Hunter, Hueytown, Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church, Hueytown; *Billy E. Summerlin, Gadsden, Twelfth Street Baptist Church, Gadsden.

ALASKA: Johnny Jackson, Juneau, First Baptist Church, Juneau; *Edward Brooks, Anchorage, Faith Baptist Church, Anchorage.

ARIZONA: George Gomez, Tucson, Drexel Heights Baptist Church Tucson; *Don I. Williams, Phoenix, Valley Heights Baptist Church, Phoenix.

ARKANSAS: Joe W. Atchison, Rogers, First Baptist Church, Rogers; *Jim Pate, Russellville, First Baptist Church, Russellville.

CALIFORNIA: C.M. Cummings, Sacramento, New Testament Baptist Church, North Highlands; *Jim Emerson, Camarillo, First Baptist Church, Camarillo.

COLORADO: Leon B. Hataway, Grand Junction, Fruitvale Baptist Church, Fruitvale; *Richard Hartgraves, Pueblo, First Southern Baptist Church, Pueblo.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA: Charles L. Smith, Alexandria, Virginia, Temple Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.; *Rose Marie French, Temple Hills, Maryland, Kendall Baptist Church, Temple Hills.

FLORIDA: Darrell P. Orman, Hollywood, Gardens Baptist Church, Hollywood; *Joe Simmons, Jupiter, First Baptist Church, Tequesta.

GEORGIA: John Dobbins, Douglas, Eastside Baptist Church, Douglas; *Greg Ricks, Savannah, Calvary Baptist Temple, Savannah.

HAWAII: Ken Newman, Honolulu, Hawaii Kai Baptist Church, Honolulu; *Paul T. Nakanishi, Mililani, Mililani Baptist Church, Mililani Town.

ILLINOIS: Roger Ellsworth, Benton, Immanuel Baptist Church Benton; *Emily Meyer, Zion, First Baptist Church, Zion. Indiana: Donald B. Deel, Vincennes, Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Vincennes; *Sanford Peterson, Indianapolis, Calvary Baptist Church, Greenwood.

KANSAS-NEBRASKA: Michael R. Spradlin, Wichita, Immanuel Baptist Church, Wichita; *Jack Kuss, Overland Park, Blue Valley Baptist Church, Overland Park.

KENTUCKY: Kenneth B. Bolin Jr., Manchester, Manchester Baptist Church; *David M. Holland, Louisville, Farmdale Baptist Church, Louisville.

LOUISIANA: Rick Edmonds, Baton Rouge, Parkview Baptist Church, Baton Rouge; *Traci Lynette Barnett, Eros, Oak Grove Baptist Church, Eros.

MARYLAND-DELAWARE: Curtis Fox Sr., Hurlock, Md., First Baptist Church, Hurlock; *Beverly J. Gason, Baltimore, Colonial Baptist Church, Pikesville.

MICHIGAN: John O. Gilbert, Rochester, Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Rochester; *Gordon MacDougal, Anchorville, First Baptist Church, New Baltimore.

MISSISSIPPI: Joe Strahan, Beaumont, First Baptist Church, Beaumont; *Donald M. Crocker, Laurel, Salem Heights Baptist Church, Laurel.

MISSOURI: Dennis J. McGowan, Raytown, Spring Valley Baptist Church, Raytown; *Linda Joyce Scofield, Ballwin, Craig Road Baptist Church, St. Louis.

NEVADA: Kevin Kent White, Fernley, First Baptist Church, Fernley; *Glenn House, Las Vegas, Green Valley Baptist Church, Henderson.

NEW ENGLAND: Richard E. Drehmer, Northborough, Mass., Rice Memorial Baptist Church, Northborough; *Murray Wheeler Tolland, Conn., River Valley Fellowship, South Windsor, Conn.

NEW MEXICO: Joseph (Joe) Lloyd Bunce, Melrose, First Baptist Church, Melrose; *Chet Stewart, Albuquerque, First Baptist Church, Albuquerque.

NEW YORK: Phillip Swanson, Vernon, Beacon Light Baptist Church, Vernon; *Sidney Brown (Miss), Williamsville, Fillmore Avenue Baptist Church, Buffalo.

NORTH CAROLINA: Don R. Chasteen, Durham, Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Durham; *Gary Lewis, Weaverville, Woodland Hills Baptist Church, Asheville.

NORTHWEST: Harold K. Nielson, Redmond, Wash., First Baptist Church/Rose Hill, Redmond; *John T. Laxton, Spokane, Wash., Pines Baptist Church, Spokane.

OHIO: Kirk Pike, Cincinnati, New Bethel Baptist Church Norwood; *Eldon White, Hamilton, Bethany Baptist Church Middletown.

OKLAHOMA: R. Doug McClure, Hugo, First Baptist Church, Hugo; *Richard C. Freeman, Tulsa, Eastwood Baptist Church, Tulsa.

PENNSYLVANIA-SOUTH JERSEY: James Nelson, Peach Bottom, Wightsdalle Baptist Church, Peach Bottom; *Carl Brown, Fogelsville, Allentown Baptist Church, Allentown.

SOUTH CAROLINA: Robert W. Claytor, Inman, Rock Hill Baptist Church, Inman; *Warren D. Arthur IV, Hartsville, Lakeview Baptist Church, Hartsville.

TENNESSEE: James R. Stroud, Knoxville, Third Creek Baptist Church, Knoxville; *Don Hill, Kingsport, Galvary Baptist Church, Kingsport.

TEXAS: John A. Brady, Houston, Woodforest Baptist Church, Houston; *Wanda Thompson, Morton, First Baptist Church, Morton.

UTAH-IDAHO: Warren Osburn, West Valley City, Utah, First Baptist Church of Granger, West Valley City; *Greg Gothard, Tooele, Utah, First Baptist Church, Tooele.

VIRGINIA: John Marks, Fredericksburg, Stafford Baptist Church, Stafford; *Leon J. Jernigan Jr., Williamsburg, Deer Park Baptist Church, Newport News.

WEST VIRGINIA: Kenny Stidham, Ripley, West Ripley Baptist Church, Ripley; *Brenda Morrison, Martinsburg, Covenant Baptist Church, Shepherdstown.

Challenge to Pressler's
nomination falls short

By Mark Baggett

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--A challenge to Paul Pressler's nomination as a trustee of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board failed June 9 at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Messengers rejected an attempt during the opening day of the convention to substitute another Texan for Pressler, of Houston, to serve as a trustee of the mission board. The hand vote failed, apparently by about a 4-1 vote.

It was the only attempt to substitute a person on the nominating committee report and followed earlier news stories that some SBC leaders had requested Pressler to consider withdrawing the nomination.

Pressler, a Texas appeals court judge and one of the leaders of the "conservative resurgence" in the SBC, concluded two terms on the SBC Executive Committee at last year's annual meeting.

"I am extremely gratified to have been nominated," Pressler said. "For anyone who has been vilified in the Baptist press and by the state Baptist papers as much as I have, it is gratifying to receive a vote estimated (at) 4-to-1. I'm extremely grateful to the messengers."

Cleeta John Rogers, a lawyer and messenger from Trinity Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., moved to replace Pressler with his brother, Eugene Rogers, a deacon at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

In response to a conference call in May from conservative leaders Pressler defended the nomination, citing his involvement in foreign missions. He said he has preached in 20 foreign countries, including the Soviet Union, and will leave later this month on a missions trip, affiliated with the FMB, to Romania.

Executive Committee vice chairman Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., and one of those who participated in the conference call, said, "While we expressed our concerns to him, we trusted the leadership of the Lord in his making the decision We were just trying to be counsel but we left it in his hands."

Pressler noted that renominations had been "appreciably reduced" during the last 13 years.

"Just check the record," Pressler said. "As close as I can figure, there have been less than a 0.6 percent renomination rate during the last 13 years. That's much lower than the rate in the SBC before 1979 or in the state conventions."

Some conservative leaders had been quoted as saying Pressler's nomination gave the perception of too much control in the hands of a few persons. However, the leaders indicated they would support his nomination if he remained a nominee, Pressler said.

To respond to Rogers' challenge, Committee on Nominations member Stan Coffey, pastor of San Jacinto Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, defended Pressler as "precisely the man we need on our Foreign Mission Board at the present time."

"This is a man who sacrificed so much of himself in bringing Southern Baptists back to their historic roots," Coffey said.

Committee on Nominations chairman Bobby Boyles of Moore, Okla., said the committee tried to avoid political appointments and to represent the diversity of Southern Baptists.

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Rogers told Baptist Press he acted independently. "I think the direction of the leadership of the convention under Paul Pressler has been divisive," Rogers said. "To elect him to the Foreign Mission Board would extend that divisiveness into foreign missions, which would be disastrous for our mission work.

"I don't want to judge Pressler but there has been too much bad spirit in the convention the last few years and I pray he will not permit a mean spirit to be expressed in foreign missions. The close vote showed a lot of similar interest."

A messenger, raising a point of personal privilege, criticized the committee's slate for failing to include Hispanics or other ethnic Southern Baptists. SBC President Morris Chapman ruled the messenger's point was not in order.

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Bennett credited with fairness
during time of SBC transition

By Art Toalston

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INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--"I love Southern Baptists. I love Jesus Christ," Harold C. Bennett said when he stepped into the role of president-treasurer of the convention's Executive Committee in 1979.

Those loves remained strong during Bennett's 13-year tenure -- but they were put to the test by a sweeping transition within the Southern Baptist Convention toward deeper conservatism in its biblical base and its stance on such issues as abortion and prayer in public schools.

Bennett is to retire Oct. 1 but remain with the Executive Committee until Dec. 31 to assist president-treasurer-elect Morris Chapman, who begins work with the SBC coordinating body June 15. He was honored with resolution of appreciation from the Executive Committee June 8 and a reception at the Southern Baptist Convention June 9.

Throughout the years of change, marked by controversy across the SBC and more than a decade of divided votes in annual convention presidential elections, Bennett kept a steady course. "My commitment," he says, "has been to be fair and to work with all of our constituency."

James T. Draper Jr., SBC president from 1982-84 and current president of the Sunday School Board, said Bennett "worked very well with the conservative leadership as well as the moderate leadership in this time of transition. I think he's given us stability in these 13 years."

During his two terms as SBC president, Draper said he received good counsel from Bennett. "But he wouldn't force it on me. He always made suggestions for me to consider.

"I felt he wanted me to succeed," Draper said. "I think he viewed that as part of his job. I think most people will tell you he's fair, (he's) a very strong, positive, consistent leader and he's good at what he does."

As president-treasurer, Bennett is the Executive Committee's chief staff assistant in its role of coordinating SBC affairs between annual convention sessions (those not specifically assigned to other SBC agencies); distributing and accounting for Southern Baptists' giving through the \$140-million Cooperative Program for national and international ministries; and spearheading SBC public relations.

Bennett and the 21-member Executive Committee staff he directs also provide staff support and background materials needed by other SBC committees as well as making the vast array of arrangements necessary for each year's convention meeting.

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"He is a master of detail," said Ernest Mosley, Executive Committee executive vice president and former executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association. Bennett traces his fondness for detail to a year he worked as an FBI clerk in Washington after high school. He first worked in the print shop then the photo lab, "where we did lots of photographing of evidence sent in from crime scenes all over the country. It was exacting work. In fact, everything the FBI did was precise. Looking back, I see how this experience tilted me toward a love of details and statistics."

Apart from SBC controversy and details, Bennett is buoyed by positive memories from his work in one of the convention's key leadership posts. "There are so many highlights," he reflected, topped by Southern Baptists' progress in Bold Mission Thrust and an \$8 million, seven-story office building in Nashville housing the Executive Committee and six other SBC commissions or organizations.

"I really feel there has been good progress" in Bold Mission Thrust, the effort launched in 1976 to stir Southern Baptists toward a key role in sharing the gospel worldwide by the year 2000. Without BMT, and coordination provided by the Executive Committee, Bennett believes "we would have slipped back instead of going forward."

Southern Baptist churches across the country have increased by 9 percent during BMT and church-type missions by 181 percent, Bennett recounted. SBC membership is up by 18 percent and Sunday school enrollment by 10 percent. The SBC Cooperative Program has almost doubled. The number of foreign missionaries has increased 48 percent, home missionaries by 98 percent.

"The report of Bold Mission Thrust for the period 1976-1991," Bennett said, "is cause for thanksgiving to God for his blessings."

Bennett also has a deeply personal stake in Bold Mission Thrust: His daughter Cynthia and her husband, Paul Howard, are new Southern Baptist missionaries to the African country of Swaziland. Bennett and his wife, Phyllis, also have two older married sons, Jeff, a Florida businessman, and Scott, a professor of music (organ) and German at Union University in Tennessee.

The SBC office building, on land donated by the Sunday School Board, opened in 1983. The building was financed by SBC capital funds from 1984-88 and the sale of the 20-year-old building in Nashville that previously housed several SBC entities. Bennett led the SBC in opting for a new facility when studies found it could be built with about the same amount of funding required for an eight-year lease.

Tenants of the new building, in addition to the Executive Committee, are the Christian Life, Historical, Stewardship and Education commissions, Southern Baptist Foundation and Seminary External Education Division.

When Bennett assumed the Executive Committee president-treasurer's job in 1979, he was "experientially equipped for the job," Mosley recounted. Bennett had been executive secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention since 1967; director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas' missions division, 1965-67, and a member of First Baptist Church of Dallas; secretary of the Home Mission Board's metropolitan missions department, 1962-65; and superintendent of new work for the Sunday School Board's Sunday school department, 1960-62.

He was pastor of Beech Street Baptist Church in Texarkana, Ark., 1955-60; assistant pastor of First Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., 1953-55; chaplain at Kentucky State Reformatory and Kentucky Woman's Prison while studying toward a master of divinity degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, 1951-53; and pastor of Glen Royal Baptist Church in Wake Forest, N.C., while a student at Wake Forest University and Duke Divinity School.

He sensed a call to the ministry during 1943-45 service as a stateside-based Navy pilot. Stationed at Corpus Christi, Texas, at the time, he was alone in his room writing a letter to his mother when he felt an "inner, compelling, overwhelming call. It surprised me, for I'd never thought of myself as a minister."

Describing the work of a pastor as "God's greatest and highest calling," Bennett said, "I really felt I would be a pastor all my life, because God had called me in a very special way to the ministry and I assumed all along that meant the pastorate." But, he said, he chose to measure his ministry opportunities by a Bible passage he first heard as a boy in Asheville, N.C., Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

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Southern Baptist Messianic
Fellowship becomes official

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
6/10/92

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--A small group of Southern Baptists with a large vision for establishing culturally Jewish congregations throughout the United States adopted a constitution and bylaws and voted to incorporate into an official organization June 8.

The Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship also elected a new slate of officers and projected plans to grow into an umbrella organization within the Southern Baptist Convention to facilitate ministries to Jewish people.

The fellowship will escalate plans to form "Messianic congregations" and maintain a clearinghouse for information and exchange of methods and approaches to bring Jews to faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Jerry Young, a Jewish Southern Baptist from Henderson, Texas, was elected president at the group's third annual meeting prior to the annual sessions of the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis. Young succeeds Jimmy Hendricks, a non-Jewish Southern Baptist home missionary pastor who works in Jewish ministries in Reisterstown, Md.

The fellowship cooperates with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board through the board's interfaith witness and language missions departments, which now work with Jewish ministries on the same basis they do with other ethnic and interfaith groups.

Hendricks, president during the group's first two years, said its initial work has resulted in heightened awareness among Southern Baptists of the need for Jewish ministries, particularly culturally Jewish congregations.

He said Southern Baptists are beginning to accept the idea of that type of congregation, which allows Christian Jews to celebrate and maintain their identity and transmit their heritage to their children.

Many modern-day Christians wonder if a person can be culturally Jewish and be a legitimate Christian, Hendricks said. "That wasn't the original issue (in the first century Christian church)," he said. "The question then was, 'Can you be anything else (but culturally Jewish) and be a legitimate Christian.'"

Hendricks, in his president's address, pointed out Jesus attended the Jewish festivals of his day and that it was no coincidence events such as his crucifixion, his resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit coincided with Jewish festivals.

"The Lord honored those festivals by giving them ultimate and greater meaning" for Messianic Jews "to celebrate in a big way," he said.

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Christians, whose faith is built on Judaism, should not expect Jewish converts to give up their "Jewishness" but help them retain it and celebrate it in the context of Jesus Christ as Messiah, Hendricks said.

Messianic Jews have more than 130 congregations in the United States, including about 7 congregations and 10 smaller fellowship groups among Southern Baptists.

They vary in worship style. Some observe the traditional Sabbath while some worship on Sunday. Some observe all the Old Testament festivals; others choose only a few, such as the Passover. Some pray in Hebrew and sing distinctive Jewish music.

"We're small right now," said Young, as he assumed the presidency of the fellowship, which has about 130 members and drew about 30 participants to its meeting at Pleasant Heights Baptist Church in Indianapolis.

But Young, pastor emeritus of Congregation of Messiah Jesus in Houston, and a Messianic church planter, predicts the effort will grow into a major thrust among Southern Baptists.

Bill Gordon, a regional director in the HMB's interfaith witness department, one of several speakers at meeting, urged participants to learn how to witness for their faith among Jews as they would other special cultural or religious groups.

"The gospel of Jesus Christ does not change but the way we present it has to be geared for the people we're trying to reach. Take people where they are and put the gospel in terms they can understand."

Other new officers besides Young are vice president, Mike Copen, a Jewish messianic evangelist and pastor from Springfield, Ill.; treasurer, Oswald Harman of Highlands, Texas, a member of Baytown Messianic Fellowship, Baytown, Texas; and secretary, Tom Cox, a member of Whitehall Baptist Church, Columbus, Ohio.

Membership in the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship is open to Jews and non-Jews in cooperating Southern Baptist churches or Southern Baptist Messianic congregations. Interested persons may contact the organization at 25 E. Chestnuthill Lane, Reisterstown, Md. 21136-3304.