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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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TENNESSEE--Draper names Warren chief operating officer; photo.
GEORGIA--John Yarbrough wins GBC presidency by 34 votes.
GEORGIA--Ga. messengers acknowledge sin of racism, seek reconciliation.
KENTUCKY--Kentucky Baptists steer middle-of-the-road course.
KENTUCKY--Larry and Joyce Martin returning to Kentucky.
VIRGINIA--Panel says Va. Baptists need new method of cooperation.
GAZA--Southern Baptist surgeon: Gospel worth risk in Gaza; photo.
CROATIA--Gospel worth risk of war, says missionary to Croatia; photo.
MONTANA--Clyde Billingsley to move to Montana.
DALLAS--West Texas pastor shot, killed while counseling.
MASSACHUSETTS--Education consortium to examine direction for its Northeast efforts.

Draper names Warren
chief operating officer

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
11/18/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Baptist Sunday School Board President James T. Draper Jr. announced Nov. 18 he will recommend to trustees the creation of the position of chief operating officer among actions to strengthen the board's financial operations for 1995 and beyond.

Draper said he is creating the position and taking other steps to improve budget management in light of 1993-94 financial results in which the board generated record revenues of \$224.6 million but operated at a loss of \$8.2 million.

The 1993-94 revenue total of \$224.6 million represents an 8 percent increase over 1992-93 revenues of \$208 million. The negative \$8.2 million in funds provided from operations compares to a negative \$2.1 million in 1992-93. Board reserves totaled \$49.5 million at year end.

Ted Warren will assume the chief operating officer's post immediately on an interim basis, pending trustee approval in February 1995. Warren has been chief financial officer and vice president of the business services group since February 1994.

Warren, 47, will have responsibility for daily operations of the board and will report to the president. Draper said the new structure will "enable me to focus more on development of strategies, formulation of policies and strengthening of convention relationships." Vice presidents Gene Mims and Charles Wilson and executive director for corporate affairs Mike Arrington will report to Warren. Warren will continue to direct the business services group while a search is begun for a replacement.

"While the board is in the enviable position of having resources to absorb this kind of loss for the short term, we are taking immediate steps to change the way we do business and improve results for 1994-95," Draper said.

He acknowledged, "We had anticipated operating at a deficit for the year due to investments in areas such as literature improvements, remodeling and relocating of Baptist Book Stores and development of new products."

He said his proposed actions received the endorsement of the trustee officers and committee chairmen and vice chairmen during a Nov. 15 meeting in Nashville.

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Trustee chairman Kirk Humphreys, a layman from Oklahoma City, described the year-end financial results as a "compelling event that demands action. I believe the steps Dr. Draper has initiated are appropriate and needed. The trustee leadership has unanimously expressed support for his actions and his leadership as president of the Baptist Sunday School Board."

In other actions, Draper said responsibility for trade publishing (Broadman & Holman) and the retail division (Baptist Book Stores and direct marketing) which have reported to one vice president will be divided so that each can receive closer attention. Broadman & Holman will continue to report to Charles Wilson.

The 65-store Baptist Book Store chain and the board's direct marketing operation will report to a newly created vice presidential position and a search will be initiated for the best person to fill the post, Draper said. "This has grown to almost a \$90 million dollar business that warrants its own vice president," he said.

For 1993-94, BSSB revenues increased in all three strategic business units. Church Growth Group revenue totaled \$116.2 million, an increase of \$8.5 million or 7.9 percent. Retail revenue of \$88.6 million represented an increase of \$8.4 million or 10.5 percent. Broadman & Holman revenue totaled \$23.6 million, an increase of \$3.1 million or 14.9 percent.

Among revenue gains, undated materials produced by the discipleship and family development division generated \$11.8 million in revenues, a 62 percent increase over 1992-93 revenues of \$7.3 million.

"We have made progress in producing excellent products, generating revenue and meeting customer needs," Draper said. "These and other corrective actions will enable us to get costs under control and improve budget management."

In addition to leadership changes, Draper said a 30-day review of the 1994-95 budget is in process "to assure that our revenue and funds provided from operations goals are realistic and attainable. We are committed to greatly improved results for this year."

Also, he said a review will be conducted over the next several months of the board's strategic three-year plan.

"Decisions will be made and actions taken based on the need to balance customer focus, the annual operating budget and long-term strategic goals," Draper said.

In the area of financial reporting, improvements will be instituted in financial and operating information systems to provide better financial information earlier to managers, he noted. "Managers will be expected to adjust spending more quickly when there is a revenue shortfall."

In addition, he said a cost reduction and control program is being instituted board-wide.

Draper praised employees for "positive developments taking place that represent a foundation on which we can build our future."

He cited the "Experiencing God" products which have sold more than 1 million copies since the introduction of the discipleship course in 1990.

"The dollars generated are important for our business, but even more important are the lives transformed by those who have utilized the materials we provide," Draper said.

Also, he noted, "new, relocated and remodeled Baptist Book Stores are setting the pace for growth in sales and customers served." In 1993-94 two new stores were opened, three were remodeled in their current locations and five relocated into high-traffic areas.

Unit sales of Sunday school literature for the October-November-December quarter totaled 9.7 million, a 2.3 percent decline from the same quarter a year earlier. Unit sales of adult Life and Work materials, for which major improvements were introduced, registered a 2.2 percent increase in unit sales.

"These results represent a slowing of the decline in unit sales and validate the need for continuous improvement," Draper said. "Our ultimate goal is to turn the decline around."

In Broadman & Holman, he cited a "record sales month in September with preliminary October totals indicating exceptional growth."

"We have made great progress. We must now take the additional steps needed to improve financial results while continuing to identify and meet the needs of our customers," Draper said.

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(BP) photo of Ted Warren mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press. Biographical information about Warren is posted in the SBCNet News Room. Filename is Warren.txt.

John Yarbrough wins GBC
presidency by 34 votes

By James Dotson

Baptist Press
11/18/94

MACON, Ga. (BP)--In one of the closest elections in recent history, John Yarbrough was elected president of the Georgia Baptist Convention Nov. 15 by a margin of 34 votes. Despite the close vote on the key race, however, there was at least the appearance of harmony, with minimal debate from the floor.

Also during its Nov. 14-16 annual session at the Macon Coliseum, the convention:

-- rebuffed an attempt to increase the percentage of Cooperative Program dollars staying in Georgia to 70 percent and passed a record CP budget of \$34,623,000.

-- approved with no debate a report clarifying what it takes to be a "cooperating" church within the Georgia Baptist Convention.

-- approved a historic resolution of acknowledgment of and repentance for the sin of racism within the Southern Baptist Convention both past and present.

-- elected without debate 160 Georgia Baptists to positions of leadership on convention-related boards and committees.

Attendance at the convention was below most forecasts, with 5,386 messengers registered by 9:30 a.m. Nov. 16.

In the presidential election, Yarbrough, pastor of First Baptist Church, Perry, received 2,566 votes while the other candidate, Jim Ramsey, received 2,532 votes. Ramsey, pastor of First Baptist Church, Albany, was endorsed by Georgia Baptists, Inc., an organization of moderates in Georgia, while Yarbrough had the backing of the group Conservative Georgia Baptists.

In the election for the four vice presidential spots, the vote was split between nominees of the two groups, with the location of the convention possibly being one of the influencing factors. All four vice presidents were from churches in middle Georgia.

Tim McCoy, pastor of Ingleside Baptist Church, Macon, was elected first vice president with 2,610 votes; second vice president, Bob Patterson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Warm Springs, who delivered the doctrinal sermon the morning of the election, 2,453 votes; third vice president, Napp Granade, pastor of Shirley Hills Baptist Church, Warner Robins, and former chairman of the GBC executive committee, 2,420 votes; and fourth vice president, Mike Everson, associate pastor of Second Baptist Church, Warner Robins, 2,395 votes. McCoy and Everson were endorsed by Conservative Georgia Baptists while Granade and Patterson were endorsed by Georgia Baptists, Inc.

Other nominees were Neal Wall, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Macon; Wynk Hicks, a member of Clarkesville Baptist Church and former president of Woman's Missionary Union of Georgia; Everett Bennett, a lay member of Briarlake Baptist Church, Decatur; and Dewey Boyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tunnel Hill; and Rodney Autrey, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, Jackson.

Recording secretary Hilton C. Garrett of Augusta was re-elected by acclamation.

After the election, Yarbrough quipped about being called "Landslide Yarbrough" after the close vote, acknowledging that about half of the messengers did not vote for him. But in a news conference he pledged to "be a president for all Georgia Baptists."

Speaking of Ramsey, who is current chairman of the GBC executive committee, Yarbrough said, "We are friends and will continue to work together for the cause of Christ." The new president's goal is "to emphasize evangelism in everything we do."

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He likened the relationship among Georgia Baptists to that of a family. "Because we have differences need not mean we have division," he said. "Some people don't understand Baptists," he told a group of reporters. "They think we ought to all think the same way, and do the same thing; Baptists just aren't that way.

"That's one of the reasons many of us enjoy being Baptists. Total agreement on every issue has never been what we have to have to love one another. It's our commonness to Christ."

Outgoing President Larry Wynn was not eligible for re-election after two one-year terms, but throughout the convention received accolades for his leadership.

In a news conference, Wynn said it was a unified spirit that he had hoped to achieve during his presidency, as well as a focus on missions, evangelism and prayer.

"My goal has been to stand on my convictions but to do so with consideration and compassion," he said.

The 1995 budget retains a formula that divides Cooperative Program receipts evenly between state and national causes. Forty-five percent will go to state causes and 45 to the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program, while 10 percent goes to a "Shared Responsibilities" category that benefits both state and national interests. The overall budget represents an increase of 2.74 percent over 1994.

The motion to change the percentage of Cooperative Program distributions in Georgia was made by J.G. Bryson, a messenger from Tabernacle Baptist Church, Carrollton. He moved that 70 percent of the receipts stay in Georgia, with 30 percent going to SBC causes, on grounds that Georgia missions causes should be the focus of Georgia Baptist missions giving. His motion was defeated on a show of hands vote by a wide margin. The GBC currently gives the largest percentage of CP gifts to SBC causes of any state convention.

J. Robert White, GBC executive director-treasurer, noted during the executive committee report Cooperative Program receipts for the first six months of 1994 are 3.88 percent above same period last year, and state missions offering receipts through October were 8.13 percent higher than last year.

Approved with little discussion was the report of the Committee To Study Harmony and Cooperation, the result of one of last year's convention actions. The report clarifies what it takes to be considered a cooperating church within the convention based on affiliation with a local association and/or financial contributions to Georgia Baptist causes.

At last year's convention, an internal guideline of the GBC Committee on Nominations held nominees should be from churches that gave a minimum of 7 percent of their receipts to the Cooperative Program, a move which prompted the appointment and subsequent study of the special committee. The group, which included representatives of varying viewpoints in Georgia Baptist life, was unanimous in its recommendation and there was little opposition in the convention vote.

Their report called for the Committee on Nominations to "carry out its assigned task using the current policies and constitutional guidelines of the convention and that no additional guidelines be adopted by the committee" in selecting nominees. It further asked that nominations "seek to reflect the diversity of this convention."

Next year's convention will be Nov. 13-15 at the Albany Civic Center.

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Ga. messengers acknowledge sin
of racism, seek reconciliation

By John D. Pierce

Baptist Press
11/18/94

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Messengers to the annual meeting of the Georgia Baptist Convention adopted a resolution recognizing "an increasing racial polarization" and encouraging a "ministry of reconciliation."

Admitting pro-slavery sentiments contributed to the formation of the denomination and confessing to both intentional and unintentional exclusion of blacks from worship, the resolution called on Georgia Baptists to "ask forgiveness of God and of our black brothers and sisters."

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The resolution was drafted by Bryant Wright, pastor of Johnson Ferry Church, Marietta, and presented along with the signatures of fellow pastors Dwight Reighard of Fayetteville, James Merritt of Snellville and Timothy Owings of Augusta's First Baptist Church, where the Southern Baptist Convention was founded.

Wright sought the additional signatures in order to show wide support for the resolution. However, the impetus for this public statement came from Wright's own personal conviction about, and recent efforts at, better race relations. While working with local ministers in preparation for the Billy Graham crusade in Atlanta, Wright sensed what he described as "an intense racial polarization that goes back to our (SBC) heritage."

"We can't apologize for our forefathers," stated the pastor, "but we can acknowledge that so much of our heritage has been in sin and ask forgiveness for any racism in our spirit right now as well."

Wright's congregation in affluent east Cobb County has established a sister relationship with Providence Missionary Baptist Church, an inner-city congregation in Atlanta. The African American congregation is led by pastor Gerald Durley who also heads Concerned Black Clergy, an influential civil rights group in the city. A sermon by Wright seeking forgiveness for past and present racism helped to bring the congregations together.

He attributed the honesty of admitting the racist history as an important step toward partnering with Providence. "There was a bonding between us (the two congregations) when we put it all out in the open," Wright said of the confessional sermon.

Wright said he decided to bring the call for reconciliation to fellow Georgia Baptists for approval in hope the resolution would enable ministers and congregations to more effectively cross racial lines to minister during the 1996 Olympics. Following its adoption, Wright said he was hopeful the resolution would be well received.

J. Robert White, executive director-treasurer of the GBC, addressed the New Era Baptist Convention, meeting in Atlanta on Wednesday evening, Nov. 16, just hours after the resolution was adopted in the closing session of the Nov. 14-16 GBC meeting in Macon. He said he was pleased not only by the approval of the resolution, but of the timing which allowed him to share the document with both the New Era Convention and the General Missionary Convention the next day, both being movements of the historically black National Baptist Convention.

White stated his pleasure with the resolution immediately following its adoption. "This resolution says very well what I wanted to say," said White prior to bringing greetings to the New Era Convention Nov. 16 and preaching to the Augusta meeting Nov. 17. "The fact that it has been approved by the GBC gives it great credibility and integrity," he added.

The responses from black church leaders at both meetings were warm and receptive, including extended applause at the reading of the resolution which confessed both personal and corporate sins and called for forgiveness and reconciliation. White, moved by the warm reception, called the events "a wonderful experience," saying, "I can't describe the emotional experience I felt last night and today."

Hezekiah Benton is president of the New Era Convention and Cameron Alexander heads the General Missionary Convention. White said of both leaders, "They could not have been warmer."

White's personal commitment to racial healing has roots in his childhood experiences in Montgomery, Ala., where his father served as pastor of First Baptist Church during the height of civil rights activities. At an executive committee meeting last March, the GBC leader shared some painful memories of cross-burnings and threats aimed at his family during those turbulent years. The committee affirmed his efforts in building close relationships with leaders of predominately black churches and denominations.

White, Wright and other leaders insist that the resolution on racial reconciliation will require positive attitudes and actions from many Baptists of both racial backgrounds in order for the document to have a real impact on relationships and ministries. Wright said he sees the resolution as a step toward healing and cooperation and is hopeful that "we can all put down the hammer of racism and move forward together in service for the cause of Christ."

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Kentucky Baptists steer
middle-of-the-road course

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
11/18/94

FRANKFORT, Ky. (BP)--Kentucky Baptists charted a middle-of-the-road course at their annual meeting Nov. 15-16, electing a centrist candidate as president and rallying around a massive partnership missions project with Russian Baptists.

The 2,235 messengers to the Kentucky Baptist Convention in Frankfort applauded appeals for Christian unity but soundly defeated a proposal to form a special committee to increase harmony among people of diverse theological and political views.

Billy Compton, 46, pastor of First Baptist Church, Mount Washington, was elected president in a runoff ballot with Bill Hancock, pastor of Highview Baptist Church, Louisville. Earlier balloting had eliminated a third candidate, Bob DeFoor, pastor of Harrodsburg (Ky.) Baptist Church.

All three candidates had announced plans to run for the office prior to the annual meeting.

Compton staked out a middle-of-the-road course between DeFoor, a moderate, and Hancock, a conservative. DeFoor is a former board member for the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and has advocated keeping the KBC from experiencing the kind of conservative movement seen in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979. Hancock is a prominent conservative pastor who served as chairman of the SBC Foreign Mission Board from 1990-92, difficult years leading up to the resignation of former FMB President Keith Parks.

On the final ballot, Compton received 59.2 percent of the vote, compared to 40.8 percent for Hancock. On the first ballot, Compton received 31.3 percent of the vote, Hancock received 39 percent and DeFoor received 29.7 percent. Presidents must be elected on a majority vote rather than a plurality.

The total number of votes Hancock received was virtually unchanged from the first ballot to the runoff. Compton apparently kept his votes from the first round plus virtually all the votes of those who had supported DeFoor earlier.

Two moderate pastors had mailed a letter statewide prior to the convention endorsing DeFoor and associating Hancock with the conservative movement that has gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979. Their letter linked Hancock to a group of national conservative strategists who have met periodically to encourage conservative advances in the state conventions.

Hancock denied that link, although his candidacy was supported by the conservative wing of the convention.

The two vice presidential posts also went to unaligned candidates. M.A. Winchester, a medical doctor from Whitley City, was elected first vice president. Tyre Denney, pastor of Alton (Ky.) Baptist Church, Ky., was elected second vice president.

Just hours before the presidential election, outgoing President Bob Browning preached a sermon appealing for Christian unity in the convention. He spoke from John 17, which records Jesus' prayer that his followers would remain united.

It is unity -- "our ability to work toward accomplishing common goals in spite of our differences" -- which provides Christians with their greatest opportunity to witness to others, Browning said.

Despite political pulls from both the right and left in recent years that at times has threatened to divide Kentucky Baptists, messengers voted not to form a special committee to foster harmony.

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"This is an attempt to reconcile our body. We need this," said Eugene Siler of Williamsburg who made the motion to form a "harmony committee."

Quentin Lockwood, a retired missionary and pastor from Ashland, spoke against the motion, citing the "harmonious, beautiful" convention currently in session as evidence harmony already exists. Further, he cited the work of the SBC Peace Committee from the mid-1980s to say such committees seldom accomplish their goals.

Third, he said, "If we cannot heed the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, what makes us think we will pay any attention to what a committee brings before us?"

Messengers defeated the motion to create a harmony committee by a 2-1 margin.

In other action, messengers:

- approved a "statement of relationship" between the Kentucky Baptist Convention and Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College in Mayfield, Ky. The statement simply recognizes appreciation for the work of the private college which is owned by 15 associations in Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri and Tennessee.

- approved a new Father's Day offering to benefit Oneida Baptist Institute, one of the convention's five schools. The offering will be named for Barkley Moore, Oneida's longtime president who died last January.

- gave the Kentucky Baptist Foundation full agency status, moving it from a quasi-agency status still under the control of the convention's executive board.

- approved a Cooperative Program budget goal for 1995-96 of \$18.75 million, a 5 percent increase over the current year. The same percentages as the previous year will be used for undesignated receipts, 63 percent remaining in the state and 37 percent being forwarded to worldwide causes through the SBC's national Cooperative Program.

- admitted a record number of 15 new congregations, including five African American congregations. This set a record both for the total number of churches admitted and for the total number of African American churches admitted in a single year.

- celebrated the Kentucky Baptist Convention's current partnership with Russian Baptists. A major portion of one session was devoted to this issue, with several missionaries and Russian officials in attendance. The presentation also featured the Good News musicians from Moscow.

- adopted no resolutions, except for two perfunctory items on appreciation and on support for the 1995 "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now" campaign.

The 1995 annual meeting will be Nov. 14-15 in Owensboro.

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Larry and Joyce Martin
returning to Kentucky

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
11/18/94

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Larry and Joyce Martin are returning to their home state of Kentucky, where he will be director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's missions division and she will be a staff writer with the Western Recorder.

Larry Martin has been vice president for ministry with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board since 1992. He was elected to his new post Nov. 14 by the Kentucky Baptist Convention's executive board and will begin work in Louisville Jan. 1.

Joyce Martin, former editor of The New England Baptist, was appointed to her new post by Recorder Editor Marv Knox and will begin work soon after the first of the year.

Before moving to Atlanta in 1992, the Martins served as home missionaries in Boston and Detroit.

From 1983 to 1992, Larry Martin was executive director of Greater Boston Baptist Association, where he gained notoriety for creative ministries and phenomenal success in the use of volunteer workers from around the nation. The Boston association remains a nationally recognized model for using volunteer workers in home missions.

From 1976 to 1983, he was director of missions with Greater Detroit Baptist Association. Before that he served four Kentucky Baptist churches as pastor.

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He earned the bachelor of arts degree in history from Georgetown College in 1967, the master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1971 and the doctor of ministry degree from Southern in 1978.

In his new role with the KBC, Martin will oversee the convention's work in missions, evangelism, student ministry, Brotherhood and partnership missions.

In her new work with the Recorder, Joyce Martin, 47, will provide general news and feature coverage in addition to assisting with production and editing of several monthly newspapers the Recorder publishes in partnership with smaller state Baptist conventions.

She earned the bachelor of arts degree in history from Georgetown College in 1968 and the master of arts in Christian education degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1971.

She served as editor and associate editor of The New England Baptist from 1987-92. While living in Boston, she also was an adjunct professor in Christian education at the Northeast Baptist School of Ministry and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

She previously served as minister of Christian education at churches in Massachusetts and Michigan. She served as a trustee of Southern Seminary from 1982-83.

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Panel says Va. Baptists need
new method of cooperation

By Robert Dilday

Baptist Press
11/18/94

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Baptist General Association of Virginia must devise a new method of cooperation for carrying out mission and ministry endeavors, say members of a panel seeking to ease tension among differing theological factions in the state.

In a final report released Nov. 15, the year-old Council on Cooperation said changing sociological realities and differing perspectives among Virginia Baptists about their relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention require "a new paradigm for cooperation."

To achieve it, the council suggests a task force be charged "with the specific task of fleshing out this new model."

Ron Crawford, who completed a term as BGAV president Nov. 16, named the 15-member council last November in response to growing tension among theological factions. Moderates -- who have maintained solid control at the state association's annual meetings -- have led the state to adopt a variety of giving plans which permit churches to direct funds away from the SBC and its conservative leadership.

In response, the state's conservatives are contributing less to BGAV ministries and more to the SBC.

The council -- composed of equal numbers of moderate, conservative and nonaligned pastors -- was directed to "explore ways to enhance cooperation, trust and mutual respect in Virginia Baptist life."

"We ... must continue toward finding a new wineskin elastic enough to accommodate our fermenting differences yet strong enough to channel our combined spiritual and material resources into God-honoring mission endeavors," say council members in their final report.

A task force -- which the council suggests be appointed by newly elected BGAV President Margaret Wayland -- would "focus on a new model which would allow us to specify how we could remain engaged with one another in some areas while disengaging in other areas."

The council also suggests creation of "'affinity groups' across the state to enlarge the circle of communication among Virginia Baptists."

"This would allow moderates, conservatives and unaligned to relate and communicate in hopefully positive ways."

The report urges the restructuring process be approached "first and foremost from a spiritual foundation."

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It encourages churches to "select times to pray and fast for the BGAV, its leaders and those charged with the responsibility of making recommendations for change. ... We believe that with prayer and godly understanding, greater days are ahead for the BGAV family, knowing we can do together more than we can ever do alone."

Since the council was created by the president -- not the state association -- the recommendations were given to Crawford, who subsequently forwarded them to Wayland, the new president. Wayland said Nov. 17 she is still considering her response to the proposal.

Meanwhile, Crawford echoed the council's sentiments in a presidential address Nov. 15 at the annual BGAV meeting in Salem, Va.

Theological tensions among Virginia Baptists will never ease until they have made peace with diversity, he said. "People will be true to their convictions. Let us accept that and move on to shape a system of cooperation that respects individual convictions and yet affirms God's will and purpose in our individual lives."

Crawford urged Virginia Baptists to abandon theological warfare and aim to "prepare ourselves as an association of churches to work together and minister in the 21st century."

"The future of Virginia Baptists rests not on our willingness to protect our turf, but on our ability to funnel our energy into redemptive structural change," he said.

"Instead of extracting blood from one another, let us build a system of cooperation that recognizes our differences and respects theological diversity. ... Let us seize the moment and begin a measured and careful transformation of the system of our cooperation. Let us move forward not because we are angry that someone stole our candy, but because it is the only way to preserve our Virginia Baptist heritage for future generations."

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Southern Baptist surgeon:
Gospel worth risk in Gaza

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
11/18/94

GAZA (BP)--Imagine you arrived at work and had to follow a trail of fresh blood from the parking lot into your office.

Until recently that was how too many days started for Dean T. Fitzgerald Jr., Southern Baptist representative in Gaza who works as a surgeon at Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City. Fitzgerald and his wife, Dona, have lived in that sliver of land beside Israel since 1978.

As the Palestinian people have fought for rights and for better lives, violence has routinely grabbed the world's headlines. It has been a land where hatred seems as much a part of the land as the dusty sand that predominates. Conditions improved in the latter half of 1994 after Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed a self-rule pact on May 4.

But Fitzgerald recalls nights and days of white-knuckles tension when his quick surgeon's stitches guided by Christian compassion hung onto life for many who would have died otherwise.

Between 1987 and May 1994 the Palestinians carried out the "Intifada," an active resistance to Israel's occupation of Gaza. Often for weeks at a time curfews kept the Fitzgeralds mostly indoors; strikes closed shops and businesses. Anyone on the streets illegally risked being attacked by bands of roaming Palestinians.

Rock-throwing clashes or shoot-outs between the Palestinians and Israeli troops was a deadly business: One three-month period of violence in 1988 left more than 100 dead, hundreds injured and thousands imprisoned. During those years virtually every wall space in the country became a bulletin board for Arabic language slogans urging Intifada allegiance, announcements of strikes or threats of what would happen to non-compliers.

Being in Gaza, period, was enough to guarantee a life ever on the edge of danger, but as a surgeon Fitzgerald virtually tip-toed on the knife edge between life and death as he ministered to those caught up in the periodic outbreaks of fighting.

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In a nine-month period between 1988 and 1989, he and other doctors at Ahli Arab Hospital treated more than 600 patients wounded by plastic bullets fired by Israeli soldiers. More than half the victims were under the age of 18.

During the strikes he could not drive his car to the hospital; an ambulance was dispatched to pick him up. Even that was no guarantee of safety; sometimes rock throwers attacked ambulances. Fitzgerald managed to avoid such attacks, but found them "unsettling."

He had other close calls with masked gunmen -- experiences he prefers not to share. Such gunmen killed some of his Palestinian friends and co-workers.

Even arriving at the hospital after Palestinian-Israeli clashes was traumatic. "Sometimes it was controlled chaos, sometimes uncontrolled," he recalled. Trails of blood led down the driveway, up the hospital steps and towards the operating room. Horns screeched as cars brought in more victims.

"Relatives would beat their heads on the wall, throw dirt in the air and tear their clothes as they grieved over someone who'd just died," he said. He had to get Palestinians to try to calm family members down as he, a foreigner conspicuous in a sea of Palestinians, tried to ease into the hospital.

"There were always a lot of people not seriously injured. They had a wound from a plastic bullet that had hit them, but it was not anything important. Then lots of people had been beaten or tear gassed. Sometimes they just needed to be reassured. If there were 100 casualties, usually 15 to 20 had to be operated on right away. It varied," he said.

Fresh clothes had to be found quickly for tear gas victims -- the gas stays in clothes. "Some people threw tear gas canisters back at the army. When they came in you could hardly get close enough to treat them," he said.

Fitzgerald became so expert at treating plastic bullet wounds that he and another doctor wrote an article for a medical journal about the subject. Plastic bullets were less life-threatening than the usual bullets emitted from a weapon such as an AK-47, he said.

But they can be deadly. "If you're going to be shot, you want to be shot by a plastic bullet. Lots of people were shot in the abdomen and had tears in their bowels. Even with plastic bullets, if they're shot into the great vessels, it's bad. We lost some of those," Fitzgerald said with a sad shake of his head at the memory.

"Personally, there were times I thought, man, I'm out of here. This is just too much," he said, "but for me personally, my Christian faith helped me maintain my sanity. I felt like I was doing the Lord's work. I'm sure it was hard on Jesus when people pulled on him and wanted him to do something for them. Sometimes I could imagine how he felt. I would remember that Jesus healed the people before trying to talk to them."

Dona Fitzgerald, who once worked as a nurse at hospitals in Oklahoma and Tennessee, also helped him. "Fortunately Dona and I were not down at the same time so we could keep each other going," he said.

"I think that's where faith comes in on a long-term deal," she said. "Long-term service takes faith and confidence and knowing why you're here."

Both the Fitzgeralds are Oklahomans; he's from Tulsa and she's from Bartlesville. They were appointed by Southern Baptists in 1966 and served in Jordan before transferring to Gaza in 1978. Their four children are grown.

Now that conditions have improved in Gaza, they no longer have to sneak over to Bible studies at Gaza Baptist Church. When emergencies allow, they teach and work in church.

Christian witness is never easy in a Muslim land. But Baptists have ministered in Gaza for 40 years through medical ministries and nurses' training.

They have stayed amid war and rumor of war, because they believe the Christian gospel is worth the risk.

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Gospel worth risk of war,
says missionary to Croatia

By Mike Creswell

ZAGREB, Croatia (BP)--When war comes, what do you do?

Southern Baptist missionary Nela Williams faced that question in 1991.

Zagreb, where she lives, is the capital of Croatia, a province in the old Yugoslavia carved with bloody strokes into a new country.

Bombed-out houses, artillery cannons and a grim no-man's land lie just an hour's drive away. In 1991 the war came much closer as the city was subjected to a series of air raids. Buildings sprouted sandbags and fear ruled the day.

A widow since Jim, her beloved husband, died in an auto accident in 1980, Nela sent her three children to safety in the United States. But she stayed behind, hunkered down in bomb shelters with friends, family and other Croatians and prepared for the worst.

She stayed for several reasons. A Croatian by birth, Nela was born and raised in Zagreb. Her family is there. Her grandfather, Vinko Vacek, left Croatia at the turn of the century and settled in Detroit, Mich. Nela's mother was born there, one of six children.

One day when Vacek was on the way to buy bread, he heard the gospel being preached on the street. He listened and believed; his life was changed. Years later he would tell of going out looking for bread but finding the bread of life. Feeling a call to share his new faith with his countrymen, he returned to what was then Yugoslavia with his family.

In those pre-communist days, the country was still a kingdom. Vacek traveled all over the country by bicycle, sharing the gospel. He died in his 50s before World War II broke out, but he had established Baptist churches as well as the Baptist Union of Yugoslavia.

Nela's father, Josip Horak, is retired and lives a quiet life in Zagreb these days. But he worked for years as bivocational pastor and president of the Baptist union. He also was vice president of the Baptist World Alliance.

So Zagreb is home for Nela, rich in Baptist heritage. But it's doubtful war would have driven her out anyway. Her personal theology is based on weaving events around her into a personal ministry.

"So many ministries begin as 'by the way' opportunities that just come to me. I'm always just trying to be sensitive to what the Lord wants me to do about them," she says simply.

If war was the event for this month, it was just an opportunity to share the gospel with neighbors who shared the bomb shelter with her. She passed out Bibles and tracts and told them how her faith gave her assurance. She arranged for medicines to be distributed to refugees through Zagreb Baptist Church's extensive refugee ministry program. Special funds are sent by a member of First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va., through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for the medicines.

When Zagreb was virtually deluged by thousands of refugees from the war zones, it seemed only natural she should let several of them share her house for months until they found other places to live.

There were few direct hits on Zagreb during the war. Soon the hotter action swung towards Sarajevo and other areas, although battles and shootings have occurred sporadically nearby.

But the Baptist seminary where she once taught Greek -- using a textbook she wrote herself -- wound up in what is now Serbia, off-limits to her. As the threat of war receded, she began to weave a new ministry out of events and opportunities that presented themselves.

These days she is happy to have Jan, her youngest son who turns 16 in December, at home with her. Her two older children attend school in the United States: Kresimir is a senior at Samford University. Tanya, now married, is preparing for graduate school at Emory University.

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Billingsley, a Knoxville, Tenn., native, has a long history of involvement with pioneer Southern Baptist work in the West. He was director of missions, stewardship and Brotherhood work for the Utah-Idaho convention from 1975-77 and held the same position for the Northern Plains Baptist Convention, based in Rapid City, S.D., from 1977-81. He was director of evangelism for the Northwest Baptist Convention, 1981-85. For four years before returning to Utah-Idaho, he was director of evangelism for the Florida Baptist Convention.

Billingsley is a graduate of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who earned the master of divinity degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, in 1966. He and his wife, Judy, also a Southwestern graduate, have a grown son and daughter.

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West Texas pastor shot,
killed while counseling

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
11/18/94

DALLAS (BP)--Marion Eugene "Gene" Stevens, longtime pastor of Southside Baptist Church, Monahans, Texas, was fatally shot Nov. 15 while reportedly counseling a couple with marital problems.

Stevens, 68, was pronounced dead at the scene, killed by a shotgun blast to his head, according to Ward County authorities.

Carleton Russell Reed Sr., 74, of Monahans was arrested, charged with murder and held in lieu of \$500,000 bond.

Dennis Ball, a deacon at Southside Baptist Church, told the Odessa American Stevens had gone to counsel Reed and his wife, Virginia, for marital problems earlier in the morning of Nov. 15. Virginia Reed is a member of Southside Baptist Church.

It was later in the day when Stevens returned to the Reeds' home to continue counseling the couple that the pastor was shot and killed, Ball told the newspaper.

Stevens was pastor of Southside Baptist Church 24 years. A native of Hammond, Ind., he served as pastor of several churches in his home state, as well as in Illinois, Iowa, Utah and New Mexico.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth, of Monahans; daughters Sharon Stevenson and Lora Lee Shirley of Monahans, Martha Blair of Bronte, Texas, and Norma Crawford of Katy, Texas; 14 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

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Education consortium to examine
direction for its Northeast efforts

Baptist Press
11/18/94

NORTHBOROUGH, Mass. (BP)--Leaders of the Northeast Baptist Education Consortium have appointed a study committee to visit the consortium's partner agencies and state conventions in 1995 to better determine NeBEC's direction as the new century approaches.

Ken Lyle, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New England, also was elected president of the consortium during an Oct. 6 meeting.

Also, NeBEC voted to disband the consortium's administrative committee and assign those duties to the executive committee, employ an administrative assistant and form a public relations/communications committee.

A new NeBEC brochure has been developed, and copies are available by writing Lyle at 5 Oak Ave., Northborough, MA 01532 or faxing (508) 393-6016.

Other officers of the consortium, elected at the October meeting, are Mark Lawson, a Liverpool, N.Y., pastor, vice president; R. Quinn Pugh, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New York, secretary/treasurer; Ray Roach, a Tolland, Conn., pastor, resource development committee chairman; David Flumbaum of Joppa, Md., program development committee chairman; and David Waltz, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, public relations/communications committee chairman.

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The living room of Nela's simple two-story house is packed with theological books, neatly arranged on shelves and tucked into every nook and corner. Tattered, well-used Bibles lie within easy reach on the coffee table.

Any one of her current ministry directions would keep a normal full-time person busy. One current project is editing a new translation of a study Bible in the Croatian language. Already Genesis, Exodus, Mark and Matthew have been finished; the rest will take a year or more to complete.

As Baptist Sunday school superintendent for Croatian Baptists, Nela also directs training conferences for Baptist lay teachers. In Croatia that's a complex subject. Since Catholic doctrine is taught in mandatory religion classes of public schools, Nela arranges for each of the city's 15 schools to give credit to Baptist students for Sunday school classes at their churches. But Sunday school teachers are required to be trained in giving lessons.

"I like the work of coordinating, getting people together, the training," she says with her typically broad smile. "I like the term 'bridge builder' because that's exactly what I feel like I'm doing."

One recent project has been arranging for housing and language study for two new Southern Baptist foreign missionary couples in Zagreb. Richard Bell is a veterinarian who worked in Ohio and Texas and who served as a volunteer on a cattle project in Croatia. He and his wife, Beverly, have three children. Jeff and Brigitte Ritchey will work in theological education and discipleship training. Jeff is a Texan and Brigitte was born in Zimbabwe, where her foreign missionary parents served.

Late fall of 1994 found Nela teaching a four-week class for new Christians at Zagreb Baptist Church, where she is a member. She also leads a MasterLife group at the church. She is pleased with the first six who have completed the program. "They have just blossomed," she said.

As the Yugoslav war rages on, it continues to push new waves of refugees into Zagreb. In late 1994, many have come from northern Bosnia. Nela spends time each week visiting the refugees to offer help and comfort. Her heart goes out to the difficult circumstances which tear apart refugee families.

"What I hear is mostly about the separation of families," she said. Often the father of a family remains in Bosnia to guard the house but he sends his wife and children to safety in Croatia. Some have been divided like this for more than two years.

"They want to keep their house but if they leave, someone else will move in," she said. "The children need an education, but they can't just give up their house and they can't sell it," she said.

She tells of physicians and dentists who once had comfortable, productive lives but now live as refugees, unable to practice and dependent on government handouts. "They get so depressed and sad they can't think well," she said.

Nela Williams knows personally about divided families and the horrors of war. But she believes the gospel is worth the risk.

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(BP) photo (vertical) relating to this story mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Clyde Billingsley
to move to Montana

Baptist Press
11/18/94

BILLINGS, Mont. (BP)--Utah-Idaho Baptist leader C. Clyde Billingsley is moving east, but not by much.

Billingsley, 54, has accepted the position of executive director-treasurer of the Montana Southern Baptist Fellowship, moving from the same post he has held with the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention since 1989. He was elected by the fellowship's executive board Oct. 24. The fellowship encompasses 130 churches and missions.

He will succeed James Nelson, who has led the Montana fellowship since 1985 and is retiring Dec. 31.

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NeBEC began as the Northeast Task Team for Theological Education (NETTTE) when concerned Southern Baptists in the Northeast determined to provide contextualized ministry training as a missions strategy.

Five Southern Baptist state conventions (Maryland/Delaware, District of Columbia, Pennsylvania/South Jersey, New York, and New England), the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board, and the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries pledged their support in a partnership. The D.C. convention is no longer a NeBEC partner.

In 1987, Doran McCarty, then-director of the doctor of ministry program at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in California, became NETTTE's coordinator.

Two years later, agreement among the partners determined NETTTE would work with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to sponsor accredited master's degree work in Boston and Pittsburgh, with investigation of other sites. Another major objective of NETTTE was the offering of non-degree ministry training through its program of alternative theological education.

In 1993, NETTTE became NeBEC.

At the October meeting, McCarty, who now is retiring as executive director of the SBC Seminary Extension office in Nashville, Tenn., and his wife, Gloria, were honored for his work as NeBEC coordinator.

"His contribution through NeBEC is immense!" said Lyle of McCarty, whose retirement date is Dec. 31. "Doran's vision, philosophy and energy are indelibly woven into the strategy and the doing of missions in the northeastern United States."

In other business, NeBEC contracted with Mary Layman of Franklin, Mass., on resource development; Dan Nicholas of Montpelier, Vt., on public relations and communications; and Carl Baldwin of York, Penn., on financial matters.

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Dan Nicholas contributed to this story.