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Religious equality amendment  
introduced; CLC endorses it

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--A constitutional amendment intended to protect religious expression was introduced in the House of Representatives Nov. 15 after nearly a year of debate on the proposal among members of Congress and representatives of religious liberty organizations.

Rep. Henry Hyde, R.-Ill., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, introduced the amendment. The text of House Joint Resolution 121 says:

"Neither the United States nor any State shall deny benefits to or otherwise discriminate against any private person or group on account of religious expression, belief, or identity; nor shall the prohibition on laws respecting an establishment of religion be construed to require such discrimination."

Hyde plans to have a hearing on H.J. Res. 121 in early December, a committee spokesperson said.

Church-state organizations in the capital were divided, as expected, over the proposal.

The Christian Life Commission, the religious liberty agency for Southern Baptists, joined the Christian Legal Society and National Association of Evangelicals in immediately endorsing Hyde's amendment, which is designed to protect public school students as well as other Americans.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and Americans United for Separation of Church and State voiced their opposition.

"The Hyde amendment is so simple even a lawyer can understand it," said Michael Whitehead, the CLC's general counsel. "To support this amendment is to support equal treatment of religion by government. To oppose this amendment is, in effect, to support discrimination."

BJC General Counsel Brent Walker called the proposal "radical surgery on the First Amendment."

"We should never try to amend the Constitution, particularly the First Amendment, unless there is a compelling need for it," Walker said in a prepared statement. "There is none here. The First Amendment and an array of supporting laws ... provide vigorous protection for our religious freedom."

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, and Whitehead said confusing court decisions for several decades have made such an amendment necessary.

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"This amendment would not revoke any part of the First Amendment," McFarland said in a written statement. "It only corrects court misinterpretation of it. We want religious people free to exercise and express their faith without help or hindrance by government."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United, blasted the resolution.

"The Hyde proposal is not a 'religious equality amendment;' it's a religious tyranny amendment," Lynn said in a written statement. "This radical rewrite of the Constitution's religious liberty protections would hurt, not help, religious freedom.

"Congressman Hyde and his allies want to slap a clerical collar on Uncle Sam."

The ACLU, People for the American Way, Americans United and the BJC will cry, "like Chicken Little, that the constitutional sky is falling," Whitehead said. "Most Americans will not fall for this false alarm, especially after they look at the text. They will tell Chicken Little to calm down and look at what really hit her. This amendment is nothing to be afraid of, if you really oppose discrimination. If you support religious discrimination, then you might have good cause to fear this amendment."

The groups also were divided on the amendment's impact on educational choice and other government funding issues.

"Current law does not allow, but the new amendment would permit and sometimes require, government funding of religious activities," Walker said. "Thus, if the government funds the educational and charitable activities of secular organizations, it would also fund the sacred missions of churches and other pervasively sectarian groups. This is wrong."

The amendment will not mandate teacher-led prayer or educational voucher programs, Whitehead said.

"It will, however, permit such programs and will make clear that inclusion of religious private school students is not unconstitutional," Whitehead said. "Indeed, providing benefits to private school students but excluding religious school students would be illegal discrimination. Still, the wisdom of vouchers or any other government benefit program is a public policy matter that would be ultimately decided by local voters, and the wisdom of participation in such programs would ultimately be decided by religious patrons and religious schools."

At its annual meeting in June, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution endorsing a constitutional amendment protecting prayer and other forms of religious exercise by private individuals, including students, and prohibiting discrimination against such expression in public.

At least two Baptist state conventions meeting in early November passed resolutions opposing a religious equality amendment. Messengers to both the Texas and Virginia conventions expressed their concerns before Hyde's language was introduced.

Unlike at least two other proposed amendments which had been released publicly, Hyde's language had been kept largely under wraps. His amendment's introduction followed about 12 months of discussion on the issue after the Republicans took control of Congress in the 1994 elections and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, R.-Ga., promised a vote on such an amendment by July 4 of this year.

Religious liberty organizations and members of Congress struggled to find agreeable language. They also debated whether an amendment was needed or a statute was satisfactory. A series of hearings on the need for such an amendment was held in both the House and Senate.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said in late October he still did not know if he supported an amendment.

The preamble of Hyde's amendment is: "Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States in order to secure the unalienable right of the people to acknowledge, worship, and serve their Creator, according to the dictates of conscience."

In order for an amendment to become part of the Constitution, two-thirds of each house of Congress must vote for it. The amendment then has seven years in which to be ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states.

**N.C. Baptists split officers,  
OK record budget, partnerships**      **By R.G. Puckett**

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--Officers were elected by razor-thin margins at the 165th annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Nov. 13-15 in Winston-Salem.

A record budget of \$29.75 million, with three plans of giving to missions causes, gained approval from 5,100 messengers, along with missions partnerships with two countries in southern Africa.

No nominee for the top three offices won with as much as 51 percent of the votes cast.

Gregory T. Mathis, pastor of Creek Baptist Church, Hendersonville, defeated J. Dewey Hobbs of Winston-Salem, retired director of Baptist Hospital's school of pastoral care, for the presidency by 96 votes, or 50.94 percent of the 4,880 cast.

For first vice president, Ann Smith of Greensboro, immediate past president of North Carolina Woman's Missionary Union, defeated Eugene Ridley, pastor of Long Leaf Baptist Church, Wilmington, by only 10 votes, 2,014 to 2,004, for 50.02 percent.

For second vice president, Kenneth Ridings, pastor of Grassy Branch Baptist Church, Asheville, won over Ray N. Howell III, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lexington, by 42 votes, or 50.45 percent.

Lawrence Coleman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Laurinburg, was elected recording secretary over Benjamin Gault, director of missions in the New South River Baptist Association, with a 54.03 percent margin of the 3,595 votes cast. Evelyn Benfield, a retired missionary in Winston-Salem, was elected assistant recording secretary by acclamation.

Mathis, Ridley and Ridings were supported by Conservative Carolina Baptists although there was no formal endorsement of the candidates. Mathis said he was an unaligned candidate and Ridley has consistently rejected the endorsement of any political group in the state. Winston-Salem pastor C. Mark Corts, a former state convention president and CCB leader, led the campaign for the three candidates, including a letter sent out in the summer.

Hobbs, Smith, Howell, Coleman and Benfield were all publicly endorsed by Friends of Missions, a 10-year-old organization which has sought to keep the Southern Baptist Convention controversy out of the state.

Gault was not identified with either group.

Many messengers were stunned by the close votes and the narrow victories for Mathis and Ridings. Some commented Friends of Missions had taken too much for granted while Corts and others had worked long and hard in the campaign.

Messengers approved a five-year partnership, starting in January 1996, with the Republic of South Africa and Swaziland. The convention is in the fifth year of a partnership with New York Baptists and there is one more year in the Ukrainian partnership.

North Carolina Baptists have a 20-year-history of partnerships with Baptists in other parts of the nation and world, including Togo, Sao Paulo, European Baptist Convention, Poland, Prague, Ukraine, West Virginia, New York and New England.

Messengers overwhelmingly adopted a record budget of \$29.75 million for the state convention in 1996 which provides three plans of giving for the churches.

Despite opposition to Plans B and C, the motion to delete them was defeated at least by an 80-20 margin, according to those on the platform. A messenger challenged the ruling and requested another vote but President Alfred Ayscue, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Mount Airy, said there was no question about the division. The motion was made by Gary Gregg, minister of education at Chapel Grove Baptist Church, Gastonia. Subsequent speakers debated the amendment for several minutes before the motion was defeated.

Plan A of the budget provides for a 68/32 percent division of all undesignated Cooperative Program gifts between the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. Churches may exclude up to three items in the budget and still have their gifts considered Cooperative Program funds. Through September, more than \$1 million had been excluded from the SBC under Plan A.

In Plans B and C, 68 percent of funds remains in North Carolina (as in Plan A) with 10 percent of the remaining 32 percent sent to the SBC (Plan B) and 10 percent sent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (Plan C). The plans differ only at this point and both include allocations for special missions and theological education at universities affiliated with the state convention.

In presenting the proposed budget, Jack Glasgow, pastor of Zebulun Baptist Church and convention second vice president, noted 495 of the 3,033 churches contributing to the Cooperative Program used the optional budget plans in some form during the first nine months of this year.

"Recent numbers support the view that optional budgeting is working," he said. Receipts thus far in 1995 are at a record high and state convention leadership attributes the strong giving pattern to the options given to local congregations.

"Dollars represented through optional budgeting total \$2,913,474 through Sept. 30," Glasgow said. "But the best news is that giving is up overall. Increased giving for the past two years under our optional budget planning has made more money available for doing the kingdom work, the mission work of North Carolina Baptists."

In all three plans, 68 percent of undesignated gifts are used by the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. That amount includes 5.44 percent for ministerial and non-ministerial Expanded Annuity programs, an amount of \$1,617,000.

A challenge goal of \$250,000 was added to the basic budget with any funds received over the \$29.75 million divided according to the percentage established for the three items in the challenge goal: financial aid for North Carolina Baptist students in North Carolina colleges/universities, 40 percent; Baptist Retirement Homes, 40 percent; and Ministers Emergency Reserve, 20 percent.

The North Carolina Missions Offering has a goal of \$2,020,044 in 1996. The significant change in the offering is that every item included will be directly related to North Carolina mission projects, including Baptist Men (allocated \$440,491) and Woman's Missionary Union (allocated \$601,053). Mission ministries has been allocated \$628,500 and Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute has an allocation of \$75,000 in addition to the \$400,000 within the basic budget.

The allocation to the Christian Action League has been removed from the NCMO but \$24,000 will be given to CAL from other BSC funds.

The 1996 convention will be Nov. 11-13 in the Greensboro Coliseum.

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Texas conservatives meet  
after losses at BGCT

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

SAN ANTONIO (BP)--Southern Baptist Conservatives of Texas met the evening of Nov. 13 after losing several key votes during the first day of the Baptist General Convention of Texas' annual meeting, Nov. 13-14 in San Antonio.

Organizers estimated about 400 people attended the SBT session at the Plaza hotel near the San Antonio Convention Center.

The losses included the BGCT presidency and messengers' approval of a 2.5 percent shift in Cooperative Program funding, or \$1.5 million, from Southern Baptist Convention causes to Texas Baptist initiatives to start 1,400 new churches and provide \$350,000 in funds for theological education programs in colleges affiliated with the BGCT.

Gary Miller, pastor of Fort Worth's Sagamore Hill Baptist Church, who lost the presidential race to Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas, in a 3,842 to 2,414 vote, told the group the CP vote should spark concern among BGCT leaders.

Miller said he estimated the CP vote at 60 percent for, 40 percent against, compared to the official BGCT estimate of a two-to-one margin of passage.

"If my church had a 60/40 split on a budget vote," Miller said, "we would go back to the drawing board and find out where we missed God." Miller was quoted in a news release by John Yeats, newsletter editor of the conservative organization and pastor of South Park Baptist Church, Grand Prairie.

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"It is unbelievable that we amassed as many votes as we did, when we were faced with the public relations full-court press funded with the CP money our churches gave to the BGCT," Miller added. "In time, victory will come. We're going to go home and do the main thing of leading people to Jesus."

Yeats, in an interview, said BGCT promotion of its proposed CP shift included two statewide mailings, a 20-page, full-color piece about the proposed budget a month before the annual meeting and a black-and-white question-and-answer piece less than two weeks before the San Antonio sessions; an additional full-color flyer during messenger registration; and a multimedia presentation of the budget at the convention Nov. 13.

Miles Seaborn, president of Southern Baptists of Texas and pastor of Fort Worth's Birchman Baptist Church, told the group, "Many have come to me and said, 'When do we form a new convention?' We aren't going to start a new convention. Many of the BGCT's largest CP supporters were supportive of us this year. We must build a greater, stronger network of smaller church leaders."

Seaborn added, "I love my brother and the Lord, but I do not have to fund my brother's folly. It is imperative we educate people with the truth and help them understand the value in redirecting their funds away from moderate causes."

Seaborn and other SBT officers are appointing a study committee to design what Yeats described as "a prudent plan for action."

Yeats also wrote that BGCT officers have appointed a committee "to study their next move for the next convention. Dr. Charles Davenport's BGCT motion to ask for a committee to study 'maximum efficiency and effectiveness of the BGCT cooperative efforts' is considered by the SBT officers as the vehicle for next year's convention battle."

Wade, the new BGCT president, issued a response Nov. 16 to the Southern Baptists of Texas concerns, saying, "The convention did a good job of informing our people about the budget, trying to answer questions that were being raised. They did exactly what's always appropriate when trying to explain a matter as important as the budget, giving full information to the people. They should not be criticized for that."

"It is our hope that we can work together on things where we can work together," Wade said, "and lower the rhetoric on things about which we have differences. The things that unite us are far more important than any perceived problems that people seem to have. I stand ready to talk with anyone and work with anyone to try to help us work together in the future. This state needs us, and it needs all of us. Hopefully we can find ways to do that."

Among other concerns from the BGCT annual meeting aired at the conservatives' meeting, Yeats said, are:

-- "the refusal of the BGCT to directly establish a policy to not seat messengers from churches who choose to ordain non-repentant homosexuals as pastors or deacons;"

-- "the refusal to instruct Texas Baptist hospitals to embrace pro-life policies;" and

-- a resolution opposing a religious equality amendment to the U.S. Constitution now being considered by Congress. Yeats described the proposed amendment as one that would "protect citizens from government policies or overzealous judges who in past years exerted their power to sterilize the public arena of religious ideas."

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Compiled by Art Toalston.

Bisagno to urge increase  
in Lottie Moon giving

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Gearing up a campaign to promote foreign missions among Southern Baptists, John R. Bisagno will challenge Texas pastors in November to lead their congregations to give more to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

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Bisagno, named earlier this year an ambassador to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, will speak to pastors and leaders of the Dallas, Tarrant and Austin Baptist associations in appearances starting Nov. 27. Bisagno is senior pastor of the 22,000-member First Baptist Church in Houston.

"There are tremendous open doors overseas right now, and (Southern Baptists) are receiving a tremendous blessing of God where we are going through those doors," Bisagno said.

"But to be able to even hold our own, let alone do any expansion on the field and prepare for the 3,000 missionary candidates currently in the pipeline, we've got to get this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering up from the \$85 million range to \$100 million."

The current "candidate pipeline" includes more than 3,300 Southern Baptists who have started the career missionary appointment process. Besides them, about 2,000 others are considered prospects for career service.

Bisagno will urge Texas Baptist pastors to do their part in helping Southern Baptists exceed their 1995 Lottie Moon goal of \$100 million. Last year Southern Baptists gave about \$86 million to the offering.

"Texas Baptists have affirmed their commitment to starting new churches in Texas. We're confident they're going to continue their faithful partnership in helping us start churches and spread the gospel overseas," said FMB President Jerry Rankin.

Since August Bisagno has been working with Rankin to help promote foreign missions. He also encourages fellow pastors to give higher priority to missions involvement and support.

Bisagno's speaking schedule includes:

- an 11:30 a.m. luncheon, Nov. 27, Lakeside Baptist Church, 9150 Garland in Dallas, during the executive board meeting of the Dallas Baptist Association;
- a noon luncheon, Nov. 28, Travis Avenue Baptist Church, 3041 Travis Avenue in Fort Worth, during a meeting of Tarrant Baptist Association pastors; and
- an 8 a.m. breakfast, Nov. 29, Austin Baptist Association office, 1016 E. 38 1/2 St. in Austin, during the association's executive board meeting.

Bisagno has led his church to the forefront of missions commitment over the past 25 years. Its annual gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering exceed \$200,000, and from its own membership it has sent 87 career missionaries and more than 900 volunteers to foreign fields.

Among Foreign Mission Board missionaries from Bisagno's church are Yvette Aarons, assigned to Trinidad and Tobago as the board's first deaf missionary, and Charles and Phyllis Hardie, Southern Baptist missionaries to Siberia.

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Indiana Baptists hike  
budget by 10 percent

By Joni B. Hannigan & Tammi Ledbetter

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

GARY, Ind. (BP)--Messengers to the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana annual meeting approved a 10 percent increase in the operating budget for next year, bringing the total to \$3,298,732.

In session Nov. 14-15 at Tree of Life Baptist Church, Gary, Ind., messengers also endorsed a three-year partnership mission agreement with Croatian Baptists and passed resolutions dealing with gambling, abortion and gratitude for armed services veterans.

Tree of Life pastor Cato Brooks Sr. welcomed SCBI messengers and guests, saying, "How blessed we are to be here at this historic occasion," referring to the joint worship of Southern Baptists from across the state with a predominantly African American congregation. "It gives rise to hope for our nation."

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Steve Marcum, pastor of Graceland Baptist Church, New Albany, was re-elected convention president by acclamation. John Rogers, pastor of Eastlake Baptist Church, Crown Point, was elected first vice president over Evansville pastor Don Moore of First Southern Baptist Church. Ross Terry, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Lafayette, was re-elected second vice president by acclamation.

Registration at the convention reached a total of 257 messengers representing 106 churches. An additional 199 visitors registered to bring the total attendance to 456.

Participants heard reports on the various ministries within the state convention and around the SBC, preaching by Ronnie Floyd of Springdale, Ark., Gray Allison of Memphis, Tenn., and James Heard of Griffith, Ind.

The nearly \$3.3 million 1996 budget relies upon \$2,155,608 in Cooperative Program gifts from the state's churches. After setting aside priority items involving pastor annuities, 32.25 percent of the receipts from will be sent to Southern Baptist causes at home and abroad, the same percentage as in 1995.

Messengers approved a partnership missions agreement between SCBI and the Foreign Mission Board with the Baptist Union of Croatia and Central Europe Mission.

"The purpose of this partnership is to proclaim the gospel to all people in Croatia, to accelerate the planting and development of churches, and to meet human need where possible through agreed upon strategies and projects," the agreement reads.

Indiana Baptists have been invited to send four groups of volunteers to Croatia each year beginning next spring.

Lloyd Hendrickson of Indianapolis, serving as an assistant to the executive director, will coordinate planning for the partnership and presented the recommendation which messengers approved without dissent. "There's a danger in these partnerships and that is that people come back fired up and filled with the Spirit," he told those gathered. "Don't send them unless you are ready to deal with the power of the Holy Spirit."

In the opening session of the convention, messengers refused an attempt to limit state funding of new mission works to those that have sponsoring churches. David Bethel, pastor of Chapelwood Baptist Church, Indianapolis, moved that no monies be expended by or channeled through the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana to aid a mission or work that does not have a sponsoring mother Southern Baptist church within or outside of Indiana.

"I believe it's the biblical pattern for churches to start missions," Bethel said, calling it a privilege and responsibility. He referred to the practice of churches, not denominations, starting new works as "very baptistic," adding "it's good for the churches to be honoring to our principles as Southern Baptists."

SCBI missions director Carrol Fowler was asked to respond, having served in that capacity for five years. Fowler said he had addressed the problem of unsponsored work in several ways, including the development of key churches throughout the state that commit to a particular number of new works.

Fowler spoke of having weighed the value of securing a church to sponsor new work "in name only" as opposed to having no sponsor at all. He concluded even a sponsoring church that offers no financial support can be involved through prayer for the new work or mission.

"There is a time when churches need to be extended a hand before they have a sponsoring church," Fowler said. He called for participation by "healthy, dedicated, caring sponsors," but opposed the motion, saying, "State conventions don't start churches. Associations don't start churches. Churches don't start churches. God starts churches. I am for having sponsoring churches, but against the motion because it's legislative."

Mission pastor Sid Bennett of Fort Wayne also spoke against the motion, saying it ties the hands of missions work.

B thel described his intention as an effort to start new work in a proper way. "It will not insure that every mission that's started will in fact last and prosper. It is not in opposition to starting a mission, not tying hands. Let's start missions, but let's start them with sponsoring Southern Baptist churches," he said.

Discussion ended with a call for a vote on the motion. No more than 20 messengers favored the motion, and the overwhelming majority, estimated at more than 120, voted against it.

Resolutions approved by messengers included opposition to any further expansion of legalized gambling in Indiana without a statewide referendum, an appeal to elected officials to refuse Medicaid funding for abortion except to save the life of the mother and gratitude for veterans of the armed services.

Next year's convention will be Nov. 11-13 at Chapelwood Baptist Church, Indianapolis.

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Colo. Baptists mark 40th year  
by targeting 500 churches

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. (BP)--Colorado Baptists, celebrating their 40th anniversary, have adopted a goal of 500 congregations by the year 2000 -- up from the current total of 304.

Also marking the occasion during the Colorado Baptist General Convention's Oct. 24-25 annual meeting, a Colorado Baptist commemorative coin was given to 273 messengers in attendance as "an offering to the churches." Featured speaker for the Tuesday evening anniversary celebration was Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Meeting at Bookcliff Baptist Church, Grand Junction, messengers adopted a racial reconciliation resolution, stating, "... we affirm the Bible teaching that every human life is sacred, ... we lament and repudiate historic acts of racism, ... we hereby commit ourselves to eradicate racism in all its forms from Colorado Southern Baptist life and ministry." The resolution also noted an initial racial reconciliation resolution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in June in Atlanta.

In other action, a 1996-98 partnership with the Mississippi Baptist Convention was approved, as was Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary's plan for opening a regional campus in Denver in the fall of 1996. Golden Gate, located in Mill Valley, Calif., is Southern Baptists' only institution in the West.

Messengers voted after a debate to raise \$1 million needed to upgrade the convention's Ponderosa Conference Center near Colorado Springs, rather than place the facility up for sale. A \$6.2 million offer from a Colorado Springs-based nonprofit organization had been made but then withdrawn prior to the convention. The offer had equaled an appraisal of the center's property and water rights.

Convention President Joe Chambers, pastor of Lochwood Baptist Church, Denver, told messengers, "In the past, whenever this issue came up, it was because we were in desperate financial straits. That's not the case this time. Giving is fantastic and our monetary situation is sound."

Jerry Johnson, pastor of Central Baptist Church, Aurora, however, stated, "This convention is \$2 million in debt, and right now 10 percent of our budget is going to pay that debt. It's going to take another \$1 million to upgrade Ponderosa. ... If we sell Ponderosa for \$6.2 million, that leaves us with a fund of \$4.2 million that pays interest of around \$300,000 annually. That's money we can use for giving to the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board and missions right here in Colorado."

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A 1996 budget of \$2,690,000 was adopted, including anticipated Cooperative Program giving of \$1,404,000 from Colorado Baptist churches. Southern Baptist Convention national and international missions and ministries will receive 28.5 percent of the CP gifts. The 1995 budget, adopted when messengers met at Ken Caryl Baptist Church, Littleton, is \$2,550,000, including \$1,350,000 in anticipated Cooperative Program giving, with the same 28.5 percent designated for SBC causes.

In another finance-related matter, Baptist Foundation director Bob Davis told messengers the convention organization has completed a financial audit and "we're ready to move forward. We're on a strong foundation. An audit means they look for every penny, and they found them."

David C. Cooper, pastor of University Hills Baptist Church, Denver, was elected convention president; James Vaughan, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Cortez, first vice president; and Douglas Trevithick, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Fort Morgan, second vice president. Rona Davis, a member of Riverside Baptist Church, Denver, was re-elected recording secretary.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 12-13 at Circle Drive Baptist Church, Colorado Springs.

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AIDS victim Matthew Allen, 13,  
persevered with courage, humor

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

DALLAS (BP)--Life was a short -- often painful -- but courageous journey for Matthew Allen, grandson of former Southern Baptist president and longtime Texas Baptist pastor Jimmy Allen.

The victim of someone else's mistakes, Matthew lived his brief life in the shadow of death but brought sunshine into the lives of those around him. Against a background of radiant fall colors he loved so much, the brave 13-year-old was memorialized at the Dallas Horticulture Center by family, friends and grieving classmates from Lakewood Elementary School.

Matt died Nov. 10, his body no longer able to fight the AIDS that he acquired from his mother, Lydia, who was infected through a blood transfusion administered minutes before Matt was born. She died three years ago, and Matt's younger brother, Bryan, died from the disease more than 10 years ago. Bryan's House, a Dallas shelter for AIDS-infected children, was named for him and now serves as many as 80 children a week.

At Matt's Nov. 15 memorial service, his father, Scott Allen, had special thanks for his son's Lakewood Elementary School teachers and classmates who formed a chorus and sang two of Matt's favorites, "Somewhere Out There" from "An American Tail" and "Circle of Life" from "The Lion King."

"You gave him what no one else could give him," Allen told the weeping students. "That was a chance to belong."

Earlier, Matt was memorialized for the ages through "Burden of a Secret," a book by his grandfather, Jimmy Allen. In the book, the former president of the Southern Baptist Convention and the SBC Radio and Television Commission, chronicles the family's rejection by fearful churches and church members.

He recalled the church where Scott Allen worked asked for his resignation when he told them about his family's AIDS.

Jimmy Allen said he believes the stress the family endured caused Lydia to move out of the house before her death. He says it also led to the death prematurely of her father, Luke Williams, who was minister of education at First Baptist Church, San Antonio, while Jimmy Allen was pastor there from 1968-80.

Matt's pediatrician for most of his life, Janet Squires, was among the speakers at his memorial service who mentioned his unquenchable humor.

He had the greatest smile and he showed it often," Squires said. "He would save up his jokes and give them out as gifts."

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Barbara Otto, his best friend's mother, recalled when Zack and Matt were in first grade, the teacher handed out what appeared to be an unusually difficult test. Matt gazed upward and said, "Take me home, Lord. I'll never get through this."

Matt's first-grade teacher, Lois Lamb, recalled he said he wanted to be a teacher.

"It didn't take his growing up for him to be a teacher," Lamb said, describing how he impressed students and teachers with his determination to stay in school and his interest in others despite his own problems.

Three years ago, he and his father disclosed his illness, the first and only disclosure of an HIV-infected student in a Dallas school.

He was so knowledgeable about AIDS and its treatment that teachers credited him with helping ease fellow students' fears.

Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission where Scott Allen once served, said, "Most of us in this room, even the very young, will remember this life until the day we die.

"It was not the length of his journey, but the way he made the journey."

Strickland noted Matt grew a garden in the valley of the shadow of death, in a place where gardens are not supposed to grow.

"He taught us about the incredible resources we have ... he taught us about courage ... he taught us about caring and kindness.

"He was a caregiver ... he cared about me ... he never forgot 'please and thank you' ..."

"Matthew has gone on. He is being embraced by Bryan and Lydia and Luke. He has heard the eternal, 'Well done.'"

Squires recalled all the treatments, the poking and swallowing Matt endured in battling AIDS.

But Matthew found a way to overcome the deadly disease.

"Now he has won," Strickland said. "The AIDS is dead. Matthew lives."

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Housing complex to receive  
San Antonio Baptist ministry

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
11/16/95

SAN ANTONIO (BP)--Many residents of Victoria Courts haven't known a lot of victori s in their lives, but San Antonio Baptists are determined to change that. They have targeted the low-income, inner-city housing complex as a place where "love in action" can make a real difference.

Several of San Antonio Baptist Association's priorities in its three-year "Love In Action: Making a Difference" initiative come together at Victoria Courts.

About 160 leaders from many of the 190 congregations in San Antonio Baptist Association attended a two-day prayer retreat several months ago where they adopted three-y ar priorities for sharing the gospel, starting new churches, meeting human needs in the community, strengthening families, helping plateaued and declining churches, discipleship and prayer/spiritual awakening.

In the Victoria Courts ministry, R.B. Cooper, an associate minister at First Baptist Church, San Antonio, coordinated a community needs assessment of the housing complex. The assessment is a survey tool that allows community residents to name and prioritize their own needs. Then it gives churches and agencies the opportunity to respond directly to them.

Activities for children emerged as one glaring need, and San Antonio Baptists are filling that void. Each Saturday, three local churches work on a rotating basis leading "Victory Times," an effort to provide r creation for childr n at Victoria Courts. Clowns, puppets and other vehicles are used to communicate Christian teachings in a fun way.

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For the past three summers, Baptist Student Ministry volunteers from various colleges and universities have worked with the city's parks and recreation department and the San Antonio Housing Authority to provide recreational opportunities for children and youth in Victoria Courts and other low-income areas.

Local Baptists also are providing after-school tutoring and recreation for students from Burnett Elementary School. And they have a day camp scheduled during the school's three-week break in March 1996, led by student volunteers from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark.

Baptist agencies in San Antonio are partnering with the association of churches to provide community ministries in Victoria Courts and similar areas. Baptist Memorial Hospital System is launching classes to teach low-income women how to develop healthy lifestyles. Officials at Baptist Children's Home at San Antonio have indicated their desire to help any children who could use their services and Buckner Baptist Benevolences has planned parenting classes and support groups for parents.

Buckner South Texas Center also is working with San Antonio Baptist Association and Woman's Missionary Union to begin Christian Women's Job Corps, a comprehensive program to help needy women gain job skills and life skills within a Christian context. Meg Cooper is the volunteer director for the program.

San Antonio's Christian Women's Job Corps is one of four national pilot projects sponsored by WMU, missions auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention. The first class of 10 women, some of whom are from Victoria Courts, will begin in January at Riverside Baptist Church.

The women will learn employment survival skills to help them stay competitive in the job market. And through a mentoring program involving women from San Antonio Baptist churches, they will be provided a support network to help them grow spiritually, intellectually and socially.

Through "Operation Lydia," WMU also is providing leadership for the starting of an on-site Bible study in Victoria Courts that could eventually grow into a church. Based on the New Testament example of Lydia of Phillipi, the program is an outreach tool designed especially for women.

In the past year, churches in San Antonio Baptist Association have started about two dozen "congregational expressions," so named because they may develop into churches or may remain as Bible studies, according to Lewis Lee, associational director of missions. About half of them were started in multihousing complexes, mostly low-income, inner-city housing.

Currently, there are 45 multihousing ministries operating throughout San Antonio under the direction of local Baptist churches.

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