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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**BJC changes bylaws  
to trim SBC members**

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By Dan Martin

WASHINGTON (ABP) — The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs Oct. 1 changed its bylaws to trim the official delegation from the Southern Baptist Convention from 18 to 11 members.

At the same time, during their annual meeting, the trustees seated representatives from another Southern Baptist group created to support the work of the Washington-based religious liberty organization.

The bylaw change cuts the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee delegation while adding a new "national member body," the Religious Liberty Council, an umbrella organization representing state conventions, churches and the Southern Baptist Alliance.

The action was in response to the 1990 annual meeting of the SBC, in which messengers adopted an operating budget which cut the BJC's allocation from \$391,796 in 1989 to \$50,000 in 1990-91.

Documentation provided directors of the BJC at the Oct. 1 meeting noted the SBC "slashed its contribution ... by more than 87 percent. As a result, the vast majority of our Southern Baptist funding will now come from state conventions and other Southern Baptist organizations.

"Obviously," the document states, "we want to be responsive to these Southern Baptist entities that will now be providing the lion's share of this agency's funding."

The bylaw change will go into effect March 4, 1991, at the conclusion of the BJC's Executive Committee meeting.

The change was opposed by the Executive Committee of the SBC in its Sept. 17-19 meeting. The BJC Executive Committee also determined that if the bylaw was adopted, the seven eliminated seats will be the slots given to agency executives and the convention president.

The bylaw also expands the BJC board to 60 members.

Because the current membership is limited to 54 members, only five of the representatives from the Religious Liberty Council were seated for the Oct. 1 meeting. When the bylaw change goes into effect, the RLC will be entitled to nine members.

The Joint Committee voted 32-12 to seat representatives from the Religious Liberty Council by secret ballot after an effort by the Public Affairs Committee to have the issue decided by a roll call vote was defeated.

The application for membership on the joint committee was submitted by RLC Chair Grady Cothen, retired president of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

In his letter, Cothen said the nominating committee which selected representatives to be seated "was composed of the popularly elected presidents of the several state conventions that are already supporting the BJC, as well as the president of the Southern Baptist Alliance."

Seated as new members were James Ralph Scales, president-emeritus of Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C.; James Wood, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas; Robert Wayne, pastor of Lynn Haven Baptist Church, Vinton, Va.; Douglas Watterson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tenn.; and Jeannette Holt, associate executive director of the Southern Baptist Alliance, Washington.

Two members have been nominated by the RLC. Greg Clements, pastor of First Baptist Church, Hampton, S.C. although present, was not seated. Sarah Frances Anders, chairperson of the department of sociology at Louisiana College, Pineville, La., did not attend the meeting.

In the discussion on the bylaw change, BJC Chairman John Binder, executive director of the North American Baptist Convention, Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., said: "Most of us would rather not have to deal with this bylaw change.

"But there are new realities and these include the SBC decision to reduce the funding from \$391,000 to \$50,000.

"This is painful to us, but there is hope and encouragement because another of the realities is that there are other groups working to support the Baptist Joint Committee. They want to be represented.

"There are no easy answers; they are all difficult," he added.

J. T. Williams, a Public Affairs Committee member and land developer from Stockbridge, Ga., argued that the bylaw change "after only one year cut (in the SBC budget allocation) is premature."

Robert Tiller, director of governmental relations for the American Baptist Churches, USA, noted it is "important that representation has some relationship to contributions," and noted he hopes some way can be found "to restore the lost seats by reversing the decision on funding (by the SBC)."

Several PAC members, including SBC President Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas; Larry Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board; and Tom Pratt, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Brighton, Colo., questioned the bylaw phrase which refers to "national member bodies" of the BJC and whether RLC is a "national member body" since all the other members bodies are denominations in the United States.

Chapman later introduced a motion calling for the BJC to study and define the meaning of "national member body."

Initially, his motion called for defining the term to mean "only those officially elected" by the denominations affiliated with the BJC. In the adopted version, he called only for the study to define the term.

After Binder announced the vote on the bylaw change would be by secret ballot, Albert Lee Smith, an insurance executive from Birmingham, Ala., and chairman of the PAC, called for a roll call vote.

Again, members supported Binder's ruling and voted 36-13 to adopt the bylaw change.

If the decision by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee stands, when the bylaw goes into effect the seven posts held by the chief executives of seven SBC agencies will be eliminated.

Ex-officio posts are held by Harold C. Bennett, president, Executive Committee; Lloyd Elder, president, Baptist School Board; Lewis, Home Mission Board;

R. Keith Parks, president, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board; Paul Powell, president, Southern Baptist Annuity Board; and the SBC convention president.

Landrum P. Leavell, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, currently has an at-large seat, which will be eliminated.

Members also added another "national member body," the National Missionary Baptist Convention, a new predominantly black Baptist convention of about 1.5 million members.

S. M. Wright, pastor of People's Baptist Church in Dallas and vice president of the board of the new convention, was seated as the new member.

In other business, the BJC adopted a 1990-91 budget of \$666,794, down from the \$729,772 1989-90 budget.

The new budget counts on \$138,705 in contributions from the nine supporting denominations. It also counts on "other conventions and entities (including state conventions, SBC and others)" for \$207,900, and "contributions" for \$214,100.

The income projection includes contributions from five Baptist state conventions, Virginia, Texas, North Carolina, Tennessee and Maryland.

Expenses in 1990-91 are expected to be \$665,794, including \$432,650 for staff salaries, housing, retirement and insurance.

Current officers were re-elected. They are Binder, chair; Leavell, first vice chair; Tai Shigaki, an American Baptist layperson from St. Paul, Minn., second vice chair; and Charles G. Adams, pastor in Detroit and representative of American Baptists, secretary.

**Chesser elected;  
Tupitza retires**ABP  
10/3/90

WASHINGTON (ABP) — Larry G. Chesser, city editor of the Log Cabin Democrat in Conway, Ark., has been elected director of information services for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Chesser, 42, a former staffer of the BJC, was elected during the Oct. 1 meeting of the BJC in Washington.

He will assume a post vacated by Kathy Palen, who resigned in August to attend Yale Divinity School.

He also will assume some responsibilities of Victor Tupitza, 64, who announced his retirement as director of denominational relations during the Oct 1. meeting.

Chesser, a native of Arkansas, was information associate and correspondent for the Washington Bureau of Baptist Press from 1980-85. Since 1985, he has been news editor and city editor of the daily newspaper in central Arkansas.

Previously, he was news director at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.; in real estate and sports reporter and editor in Conway and for the Arkansas Democrat in Little Rock.

He is an ordained Baptist minister and graduate of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., and Southern Seminary.

In his new responsibilities, to begin about Dec. 1, Chesser will be responsible for news and information services for the BJC, as well as being editor of Report from the Capital, the committee's monthly newsmagazine.

Tupitza, who has been with the BJC since 1979, will continue to work with the committee on special projects.

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(More to come)

**ASSOCIATED BAPTIST PRESS****Dunn reports BJC  
still in business**

90-2 (Continued)

10/3/90

by Richard Schramm  
and Dan Martin

WASHINGTON (ABP) — The Baptist Joint Committee is in business and will stay in business, James M. Dunn said.

Dunn, executive director of the religious liberty watchdog organization in Washington, told about 150 participants at the Religious Liberty Conference the beleaguered BJC "is alive and well, and will continue to be here and functioning."

"Simple math shows" the BJC needed to replace \$450,000 in funding for the 1990-91 budget year, which started Oct. 1, Dunn said.

He noted the SBC, June 12 had "slashed" the allocation to the BJC from \$391,796 to \$50,000.

"At this point, on the basis of pledges, proposals, projections, prayers, hopes, dreams and some good wishes, we anticipate \$420,000," he said.

Dunn's comments came during the concluding session of the 22nd National Religious Liberty Conference, which focused on "Freedom's Spiritual Roots: Baptists and the Bill of Rights."

The gathering was addressed by congressmen, journalists, educators and legal experts, who explored the Bill of Rights—the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution—and the role of Baptists in their creation.

First Amendment freedoms of religion were hailed as "a beacon for all the world," Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-Md), an active Baptist layman.

"How proud we all can be that our belief in freedom is compelling to those who live far away" in the emerging democracies of eastern Europe, he said.

While church state separation is essential, Hoyer added, "our moral and spiritual values should not separate from our public work."

Another congressman, William Gray III, Democratic whip in the House of Representatives, as well as senior minister at Bright Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia, affirmed separation of church and state "but not the divorce of religious ethics from public policy."

"To stay out of politics is an alignment with the forces of evil," he said.

ABC TV news reporter and commentator Sam Donaldson highlighted a panel considering religious and press freedoms.

Calling himself "an extremist when it comes to the First Amendment, Donaldson said the problem with "trying to make exceptions to the First Amendment is who decides" what the exceptions are.

Another panelist, Gustav Niebuhr, religion writer for the Wall Street Journal, maintained that with the new directions emerging in the country in the expression of religion, "the greatest story in America at the end of the century" probably will be contained in religion coverage.

He also noted the proliferation of "readers seething with personal anger," and noted: "There is no shortage of passion for any given issue. There are many not aware that anyone else is passionate; (there are many) who feel they have the Truth, with a capital 'T'...who can't break outside their own particular focus."

A third panelist, Stan Hastey, a journalist who now is executive director of the Southern Baptist Alliance, criticized the recent firing of two editors of the SBC's news service, Baptist Press, and called the firings a violation of the fundamental right of the press.

"Southern Baptist journalists who report facts and interpret them, do so at the risk of their jobs," he charged.

Dan Martin, one of the fired editors, told participants that as a Baptist and a journalist he believes in "freedom of expression, pulpit, press, free will."

Another speaker, William Lee Miller, professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, credited Baptists of Virginia with persuading James Madison about the Bill of Rights by pressing for "written minority rights against majority tyrannies."

Attorney William Bentley Ball, of Harrisburg, Pa., a specialist in religious liberty cases, credited "the Baptist conscience and its resistance to the state" as a major factor in the development of the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment.

A. R. Dick Howard, professor at the University of Virginia, added that the Free Exercise clause was necessary "for a complete guarantee of religious freedom."

Two preachers also addressed the gathering.

Landrum P. Leavell III, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, stressed the importance of the priesthood of the believers in Baptist life by noting it is "an unchanging biblical principle whose preservation led to martyrdom, persecution and death. It could be called our most distinctive belief."

In the closing sermon, Gardner Taylor, recently retired minister of Concord Avenue Baptist Church in Brooklyn, called Christians "the trustees of the defining experience of what religious freedom is all about." He criticized "the most orthodox (who) are most likely to be the least tolerant."

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(Schramm is director of the American Baptist News Service; Martin is interim news director of Associated Baptist Press.)

### Midwestern VP accepts, then declines BTSR presidency

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RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) — Citing an "inability to find peace in the decision," M. Vernon Davis has withdrawn his earlier acceptance of the presidency of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Davis, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., had agreed in mid-September to become BTSR's first president after a unanimous call from the fledgling institution's presidential search committee and full board of trustees. Davis was interviewed for the position Aug. 29 and accepted the trustees' invitation to become president two weeks later.

But in a letter dated Sept. 27 sent to the trustees, Davis wrote: "In making my positive response...I anticipated that a sense of joy and freedom would be mine as I began to shift gears and think toward our shared future there. To my surprise this has not come. The decision to go to Richmond did not make the decision to leave Midwestern easier."

Davis expressed regret for "the embarrassment this may bring you" and said he is "sorry for the problems my decision creates at this crucial time" in BTSR's development, adding, "Nothing has come to my mind to dim the vision of promise for the new seminary or lessen my desire that it come to fulfillment."

Responding to Davis's decision, BTSR Board of Trustees Chair Mary M. Strauss of Hagerstown, Md., issued the following statement: "We are disappointed at Dr. Davis's decision. There is no question that these are difficult times in the Southern Baptist Convention and to break away from institutional connections is at best always painful. Our search committee had worked long and hard; we had bypassed a number of excellent candidates in reaching a consensus.

"However, the acceptance or rejection of any one person of this position does not preclude the success of our venture. I still feel that we will find the right person who one day will say with great pride that he or she was the first president of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond."

Creation of BTSR was authorized in March 1989 at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Alliance, the school's sponsoring body.

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(Stan Haste, director of the Southern Baptist Alliance contributed to this story.)

## SBA directors recommend distance from SBC

ABP  
10/3/90

WASHINGTON (ABP) — The Southern Baptist Alliance board of directors, Sept. 27-28, recommended action to distance the organization from the Southern Baptist Convention and open doors for ministry relationships outside the SBC.

The directors voted unanimously to strike from their constitution a reference to "the continuance of our ministry and mission within the Southern Baptist Convention" and replace the phrase with, "to the expression of our ministry and mission through cooperative relationships with other Baptist bodies and the larger Christian community."

In addition, the directors voted to "affirm procedure and progress toward cooperative ventures in ministry and mission" with the 1.5 million American Baptist Churches, USA and to set up a task force to invite leaders of the predominantly black Progressive National Baptist Convention to discuss possible joint ventures with the SBA.

Both the constitutional change and affirmation of relationships outside the SBC will come as recommendations to the SBA delegates during their next annual convocation, March 14-16, 1991, at Grace Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. The directors also pledged to recommend a new name for the organization, which would remove reference to Southern Baptists. Other recommendations for the March convocation, voted by the directors, is a \$60,000 challenge offering above and beyond their 1991 global missions offering basic goal of \$55,000, to place a Southern Baptist couple on a mission field outside the United States through the appointment process of the American Baptist Churches.

In other action, the directors adopted a resolution reaffirming the Alliance's commitment to the equality of women and men in society and church.

Stan Hastey, SBA executive director said his office has been "deluged with telephone calls" since the Atlanta consultation of "concerned Baptists," Aug. 23-25. Some Alliance members "invest great hope in the fellowship as a new movement (and that) in time the Alliance should flow into the larger stream."

"The question Daniel Vestal (the defeated candidate for the 1990 SBC president who called the Atlanta meeting) will have to face most frequently is 'are you becoming a new denomination?'" predicted Hastey. "Despite all the disclaimers, there is no escaping the fact that what happened in Atlanta may be a precursor to a constitutional convention.

"It appears to me," he said, "the kind of schism we have avoided so long is now inevitable."

Hastey said any movement emanating from the Atlanta meeting should seek to build coalitions with existing Baptist groups and not isolate itself as a splinter group.

"While I will invest all the energy I have left over from Alliance tasks in the process—if what we are doing is forming a new body—I am personally not interested in investing the rest of my life in something that will do nothing but be a better SBC.

"I personally am not going to invest my life in starting another white, regional body in the south. If Baptists wish to talk about getting together instead of splitting farther—if that is what God is about in our time—we must be a part of it," concluded Hastey.

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(Bob Allen, editor, The Baptist True Union, Md. and Del., contributed this story.)

## Texas Baptists committee reacts to Baylor charter change

ABP  
10/3/90

DALLAS, (ABP) — The administrative Committee of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board on Oct. 2 voted to recommend to the board a formal study of recent action by Baylor University Board of Trustees that put distance between the school and BGCT control.

The committee will recommend to the executive board a "formal study of legal, relational and financial aspects of the Baylor charter action" to determine options available to the Texas convention. The committee authorized up to \$30,000 from contingency funds for the study.

Baylor trustees had voted 30-7 on Sept. 21 to change the charter and remove the school from direct control of the BGCT. Previously, Baylor University, located in Waco, Texas, has been governed by a 48-member board of trustees elected by the BGCT. Under the revised charter, sole governance of the university will be granted to a 24-member board of regents, one-fourth of whom will be chosen by trustees elected by the BGCT, with the remainder selected by the regents themselves.

Baylor President Herbert H. Reynolds said the action was in response to a perceived threat of a "fundamentalist" takeover and distrust created by 12 years of controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention.

At the called meeting, the administrative committee also voted to escrow Cooperative Program funds due to be sent to Baylor until a convention study of the funding matter is completed.

The committee stipulated in its motion that escrowing the funds "is not intended to be judgmental or punitive toward Baylor" and that study of the funding matter should be completed as soon as possible.

The committee also voted that the proposed 1991 BGCT Cooperative Program budget be presented as previously approved by the Executive Board to the annual meeting of the BGCT in Houston, Nov. 13-14, subject to revision following the convention study of the funding. Baylor would receive \$6,048,219 from Texas Baptists.

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(Orville Scott, director of news and information for the BGCT contributed to the story.)

**Chester Swor  
dies at 83**

ABP  
10/3/90

JACKSON, Ms. (ABP) — Chester Swor, 83, an internationally known lecturer and counselor, died Sept. 28 at Mississippi Baptist Medical Center. He entered the hospital July 26 as the result of a tear in the wall of his aorta. Death was caused by cardiac arrest.

He was born at Lyman, Miss., and was a graduate of Mississippi College, a Baptist school in Clinton, Miss. Earlier in his career, Swor was dean of men and assistant professor of English at Mississippi College. For many years he was engaged in religious lecture work and counseling, primarily on college campuses. This continued almost until his final illness.

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