

(ABP) — ASSOCIATED BAPTIST PRESS

October 17, 1990

ABP 90-4

NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the first issue of Associated Baptist Press this week. We plan to transmit a second issue Friday, Oct. 19. It will include coverage of the called board meetings in South Carolina and Texas, as well as of the trustee meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Furman trustees create
self-perpetuating board**

ABP
10/17/90

GREENVILLE, S.C. (ABP) — Furman University trustees voted Oct. 15 in a called meeting to amend the university's charter to give the board sole power to elect trustees.

Furman, in Greenville, S.C., becomes the second major Baptist university in a month to vote to create a self-perpetuating board and take authority to name board members away from a state convention.

Baylor University in Waco, Texas, the nation's largest Baptist university, voted Sept. 21 to amend its charter to create a board of regents which will have "sole governance" over the institution.

A third Baptist school, Stetson University in DeLand, Fla. also has moved to put distance between itself and the Florida Baptist Convention, but the action was announced in July as an agreement between the school and Florida Baptist Convention administrators.

Both Furman and Baylor officials cited the fear of a fundamental-conservative takeover of the school, similar to what has happened in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Also, both of the schools may face legal battles with state convention leaders.

The Stetson agreement did not mention the possibility of an SBC-style takeover, but the action would make it more difficult for fundamental-conservatives to take control of the institution. The agreement allows the convention to make input into trustee selection, but reserves the right to elect trustees to the board.

Furman trustees were called to special session on the day before their regularly scheduled meeting to deal with the charter amendment.

Trustees voted 18-6 to amend the charter, which required only a simple majority. Only one of the 25 trustees was absent.

A fact sheet handed out by the school's public information office said trustees have power to amend the charter without approval of the state convention.

"Since 1900, when the state legislature passed a general law governing all non-profit corporations, Furman has been recognized as a non-profit corporation.

"Among its provisions, the law gives to the members of a corporation — in Furman's case, the board of trustees — the power to amend its own charter. The law specifically mandated that a corporation 'may have its charter amended by a majority vote of its members'."

Soon after the vote to amend the charter, trustees by a two-thirds vote amended the university bylaws to conform to the amended charter.

News media were not told there was a called meeting, but were told only there would be a news conference at 3:30 p.m.

Board Chair Minor Mickel of Greenville told the news conference: "The Furman University board of trustees believes it is in the best interests of the university to take the board out of the disputes that might develop within the Southern Baptist denomination.

"This action will enable the state Baptist convention and Furman to pursue their mutual interests with minimum controversy," she said.

John E. Johns, Furman president, said: "This amendment to the charter clears up any doubt about who governs the university. It gives us the stability we need to plan Furman's future effectively.

"But I also want to underscore the fact that our relationship with South Carolina Baptists has not changed. I want to assure everyone that this action will not affect Furman's day-to-day operation in any way. Our social regulations and our admissions policies will remain the same."

Furman was founded in 1826, and its trustees have always been elected by the South Carolina Baptist Convention. All of the trustees have been required to be members of cooperating South Carolina Baptist churches.

Johns said the board has not set qualifications for new trustees but it is likely that non-South Carolina Baptists will be considered.

The 2,500-student university operates on an annual budget of \$43.4 million, of which \$1.6 million — or four percent of the total budget — comes from the South Carolina convention.

The fact sheet distributed by the Furman office of public information noted "there has been little discord in the South Carolina Baptist Convention to this point," but added, "the struggle within the SBC has adversely affected many of its agencies and institutions."

"The board felt it was necessary to remove Furman's governing body from the arena of denominational politics and protect the university from any possible political conflict that might arise in the future."

Ray Rust, executive director of the South Carolina convention, who was present for the called meeting, said he believes the action "will come as a shock and as a tremendous disappointment to the vast majority of the 700,000 South Carolina Baptists who as a cooperating body have supported Furman since 1826."

In a statement released through the public relations office of the state convention, Rust continued:

"It is difficult from two perspectives to understand the reasons for such action.

"First, unlike the situation with Southern Baptist institutions on a national level, there appears to be no imminent threat to any South Carolina Baptist convention institution from any group attempting to 'take over.' ...

"Second, we believe this unilateral action ... is without legal basis. The charter of Furman University, as amended on May 21, 1956, provides that the 'charter shall not be amended, altered or added to without the approval of the State Baptist Convention.'

"This charter contains the provisions of trustee election by the 'Baptist Denomination in South Carolina'."

Rust noted that "multiplied millions of dollars" in South Carolina convention budget funds "have been channeled to Furman University since 1914 when we began keeping such records."

He said the school, "its administration, faculty, staff and students are a part of the South Carolina Baptist Convention family. All of us are concerned for the integrity of our ... institutions.

"Our hope is that this matter can be resolved in a proper, legal and Christian manner that will serve to strengthen our witness to this state."

The trustee action insisting it has the unilateral right to change the charter and Rust's assertion it is "without legal basis" may put the school and the convention on a legal collision course.

State convention leaders appear ready to fight Furman's action. An emergency meeting of the Executive Committee of the General Board has been called for Oct. 18.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: ABP plans to provide coverage of the emergency meeting in a release Oct. 19].

The only member of the Furman board of trustees absent from the Oct. 15 called meeting was George T. Gregory Jr., the chief justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court. Gregory is a member of First Baptist Church of Chester, S.C.

Whether there are legal implications, observers say the action will be the major topic of debate at the upcoming South Carolina convention, scheduled Nov. 13-14 in Columbia.

—30—

(This ABP story was compiled by News Director Dan Martin from information provided by Vince Moore of the Furman News Service; Ben McDade, South Carolina Baptist Convention public relations office; John Roberts, editor of the (S.C.) Baptist Courier; and Greg Warner, associate editor of the Florida Baptist Witness.)

They will serve until the May convocation along with Moderator Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, who was elected during the August meeting.

Vestal received approval from panel members of seven working committees, including administrative, convocation, funding, purpose and policy, workshop strategy, communications and nominating. Co-chairs were named to head each.

At the recommendation of the nominating committee, 14 new members were elected, bringing total membership of the steering committee to 70, the number authorized by participants in the August gathering. Overall, the committee is composed of 37 clergy and 33 laity. Forty-six are men, 24 women.

In another action, the nominating committee was authorized to "construct a strategy of continuity" in proposing next spring's convocation, with the rationale that an undetermined number of present members of the committee should be recommended to continue serving so as to ensure organizational stability during the formative stage of the Fellowship.

Addressing the steering committee's task of spreading the Fellowship's message, communications committee Co-chair Alfred Ayscue of Mount Airy, N.C., told the panel, "We have a story to tell and we must tell it often and well ... the story of renewal and revival among traditional Baptists; a story of fresh hope and new vision; a story of Baptists energized by a new appreciation for our freedom; a story, not of a tent that can be entered only with a creedal pass, but of an umbrella that shelters free Baptists with acceptance and a ... spirit of trust; a story of Baptists on mission because they are part of a fellowship whose heartbeat is a commitment to world missions; a story of Baptists in fellowship where theological diversity, gender and race dissolve into one higher purpose to glorify Jesus Christ"

Committee members then agreed to accept an offer from the independent newspaper SBC TODAY of a free page in each issue leading up to the May convocation. Communications committee member Relma Hargus, a newspaper reporter from Baton Rouge, La., was designated editor of the page.

Vestal also asked the committee to produce as soon as possible a brochure describing the Fellowship and its development to date.

In other matters, the steering committee asked BCMP Inc. to amend its by-laws so as to make its board of directors a self-perpetuating body in the interest of securing tax-exempt status more promptly; agreed to accept an offer from Atlanta layperson Bob Eubanks for free space in a Marietta, Ga., office building; and authorized Vestal to open a checking account and employ part-time interim staff in consultation with the administrative committee.

Members also voted to hold their next meeting Jan. 17-19, 1991, in Dallas and scheduled a third meeting March 7-9, 1991, at a site to be chosen.

—30—

(This story was written by Stan Hasteley, executive director of the Southern Baptist Alliance and member of the interim steering committee at the request of ABP and SBC TODAY. Additional material was supplied by Carol Mobley of Dunwoody Baptist Church, Atlanta.)

Agreement, disagreement mark debate at Samford

ABP
10/17/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) — Spokespersons from the opposing sides in the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention found some common ground during a debate at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., Oct. 11, but also reopened old wounds.

Two fundamental-conservative leaders and two moderate-conservatives debated "The Southern Baptist Convention: Hope for Reconciliation" before about 750 students and area Baptists in the event sponsored by Samford's Student Government Association.

The debaters, often quoting Scripture, did agree on some basic Christian tenets, such as the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ and Christ's role in human salvation.

But when the talk turned to politics in the SBC and to interpretation of specific passages of Scripture, they illustrated the distance between the two camps of Southern Baptists.

Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge and one of the architects of the fundamental-conservative movement, laid down the terms which moderate-conservatives must meet before fundamental-conservatives will consider reconciliation.

— more —

Fellowship okays funding plans; sets convocationABP
10/17/90

ATLANTA (ABP) — An interim steering committee of the new "Fellowship" of Southern Baptists organized this summer in Atlanta has approved mission funding tracks for churches that choose to bypass the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and announced plans for a national convocation next spring.

Meeting in Atlanta Oct. 11-13, the provisional panel also elected officers, organized working committees, expanded its membership and established communications strategies.

Acting on the issue of most apparent concern to the 3,000 participants at the August organizational meeting of the yet-unnamed Fellowship, the interim steering committee agreed to a two-track funding plan, both of which delete any funding for the SBC Executive Committee, Baptist Press news service, Christian Life Commission, Public Affairs Committee and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Jimmy R. Allen of Fort Worth, Texas, co-chair of the funding committee, explained the five organizations eliminated from the funding plans are those "most flagrantly violating Baptist principles at the point of religious liberty, freedom of information and priesthood of the believer."

One of the tracks, a "venture" plan, specifies that 25 percent of the monies received will be set aside for new mission initiatives of the Fellowship and a "safety net" to provide emergency assistance to SBC employees discharged or otherwise forced out of their jobs by fundamental-conservative boards of trustees. An additional 1.58 percent will be set aside for administrative expenses of the Fellowship and of Baptist Cooperative Missions Program Inc., a separate unit established during the August gathering to receive and disburse mission funds from churches and individuals.

Under the venture plan, each of the other SBC agencies and institutions will receive a share of the remaining funds based on a formula adopted in June at the annual SBC meeting.

Churches choosing the second track, called the "regular" plan, will send their missions gifts through BCMP Inc. according to the SBC formula with the noted exceptions.

Both plans provide funding for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Associated Baptist Press and the Baptist World Alliance.

Additionally, churches choosing to use BCMP Inc. as a simple bypass mechanism may continue to send mission monies to all SBC agencies and institutions under terms of the convention-adopted formula. Or they may tailor-make their own mission giving plan and use BCMP Inc. as a receiving and disbursing agent.

BCMP Inc. President Grady Cothen told members of the steering committee funds have begun "to trickle in," with many more churches and individuals expected to begin using the funding alternative as a result of the committee's actions. Most Southern Baptist congregations are now in the process of formulating their 1991 budgets. Both Cothen and BCMP Inc. founder Duke K. McCall expressed optimism that significant amounts of mission dollars from churches disillusioned with the direction of the convention soon will begin to flow through the new mechanism.

Following Cothen's report, committee member John Cothran, a lay member of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., presented a \$12,742 check to BCMP Inc., the first installment in what he estimated will be total contributions of some \$28,000 by the end of the year. The Greenville congregation voted in June to place in escrow mission funds that otherwise would have been channeled through the SBC Executive Committee.

Steering committee members also approved a spring convocation to be held May 9-11, 1991, in Atlanta. The specific site for the event will be chosen by a convocation committee co-chaired by Asheville, N.C. pastor John H. Hewett, and Oeita Bottorff of Houston. In addition, Dallas was chosen as host city for the 1992 convocation.

Next spring's event is considered crucial to development of the Fellowship and will feature worship, plenary business sessions and topical workshops.

Approved unanimously as additional steering committee officers were two laypersons, Vice Moderator Patricia S. Ayres of an Austin, Texas, and Secretary Bill Owen of Ardmore, Okla.

"If they (moderate-conservatives) would admit that we have been sincere in our concerns, if they would admit there was validity in them and if they would work together with us to rectify problems where they exist," then the convention would be unified, Pressler said.

David Montoya, a self-described former "foot-soldier" in the fundamental-conservative camp, charged the rulers of the denomination are using the SBC Peace Committee report adopted by the SBC in 1987 as a creed to threaten the jobs of Baptist employees and predicted fundamental-conservatives will increase their use of it. The report was recently established as a guideline under which Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., will hire and promote faculty members.

"I hope the Southern Seminary faculty will not sign the Peace Committee creed," he said.

At one point in the debate, Pressler, also vice chairman of the SBC Executive Committee, said, "I don't know what a creed is," and Montoya responded, "A creed is a confession of faith that carries a penalty or a condemnation."

In other discussion, Pressler said the "battle is over" in the national convention. "Southern Baptists are united in believing that the Bible is God's Word."

Montoya disagreed the "battle is over," predicting it will move to the state conventions, to the associations and ultimately into local churches. "They (fundamental-conservatives) will not be satisfied until they're in control of what Baptists believe," he said.

Representatives of the two sides differed throughout the debate on assessing their numerical strength. Fundamental-conservatives claimed that 95 percent of Baptists are in agreement with them, while moderate-conservatives said at least 45 to 48 percent of Baptists disagree with the ruling party.

Pressler repeated his claim that if anyone had listened to fundamental-conservatives 12 years ago, there would not be a problem today. He said the fundamental-conservatives had just used a political system that was already in place to accomplish their desired results.

Pressler claimed that "the greatest days of the SBC are ahead because we're dealing with the problems." He said moderate-conservatives created the convention and fundamental-conservatives are "correcting it."

Both sides expressed concern about the SBC's unified giving plan, the Cooperative Program, and each accused the other of having given approval to donors diverting funds to make a political point.

Moderate-conservative Randall Fields, a San Antonio, Texas, attorney and president of the Alumni Association at Baylor University, concluded, "The SBC must not become a police force enforcing a particular doctrinal stance. We must get back to being a cooperative force in the world."

Also participating in the discussion as a representative of fundamental-conservatives was Wayne Dorsett, pastor of Central Park Baptist Church in Birmingham. Dorsett's wife, Joy, is a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

—30—

(This ABP story was compiled by News Director Dan Martin from information provided by Elaine Witt, religion writer at the Birmingham Post-Herald; Karen Estes Lowry, editorial assistant at the Alabama Baptist; ABP board member Catherine Allen of Birmingham, and Mary Wimberly, news and information staff, Samford University.)