

(ABP) — ASSOCIATED BAPTIST PRESS

November 21, 1990

ABP 90-9

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Executive Committee officers
elect two vice presidents**

By Dan Martin

ABP
11/21/90

NASHVILLE (ABP) — Two new vice presidents have been elected by the officers of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

Letters were sent Nov. 16 to the 77-member committee notifying them the six officers had elected Mark Coppenger, executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana as vice president for public relations, and Richard (Bucky) Rosenbaum Jr., manager of the conference center marketing section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, as vice president for business and finance.

Although Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the Executive Committee, declined to comment to Associated Baptist Press, word of the elections broke Nov. 20 when Coppenger told the Executive Board of SCBI he was resigning effective Dec. 31 to accept the SBC post.

Bennett told ABP: "No announcement will be made at this point in time. There will be no announcement until there has been sufficient time for the recommendation process."

When asked when an announcement will be made, Bennett replied, "I can't answer that."

Coppenger confirmed to ABP that he had resigned from the Indiana position effective Dec. 31, but deferred comment on announcement of the SBC job to Bennett. He told the Indianapolis Star that he expects the announcement to be made Tuesday, Nov. 27.

In addition to Coppenger and Rosenbaum, sources close to the Executive Committee said a vice president for Baptist Press, the denomination's news service, will be recommended later.

Sources identified the choice as Albert R. Moeller Jr., editor of the Christian Index, newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Moeller, when contacted by ABP, declined to answer whether he has been interviewed for the job. His public statement: "I don't want to make any comment on the deliberations of the Executive Committee. I hope they find the person they need to provide leadership at BP. As for me, I intend to remain editor of the Christian Index."

In background material sent to Executive Committee members, it was noted that under bylaws revised in September, the Executive Committee, by two-thirds vote, may authorize the six officers "to employ such other person or persons as they deem appropriate to serve until the next full Executive Committee meeting."

The Executive Committee authorized the officers to employ personnel at the September meeting.

The revised bylaws also note that members of the Executive Committee will be "informed in writing" of the election of "interim" personnel by the officers and will be given "sufficient time to respond to the proposed employment before such interim employment is made."

One Executive Committee member, who received the packet of information from Bennett Nov. 21, the day after Coppenger resigned in Indiana, said the elections "appear a done deal. I guess they consider letting us know a day after the guy has resigned his present job 'sufficient time.'"

The vice president for business and finance position became vacant Jan. 15, 1990, when Tim A. Hedquist resigned to become administrator at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

The other two jobs were vacated July 17, 1990, when the Executive Committee, in called session, fired Al Shackelford, vice president for public relations, and Dan Martin, news editor for Baptist Press.

In materials mailed Nov. 16 to Executive Committee members, Bennett noted that the position of vice president for public relations previously included responsibility for both public relations and Baptist Press.

— more —

"For more than a year, the Public Relations Advisory Committee and the Public Relations Workgroup have been studying the possibility of separating Baptist Press and public relations and establishing a national program of public relations.

"The president/treasurer recommends that these two areas of responsibility ... be separated. The officers of the Executive Committee concur with this recommendation," he wrote.

Under the revised position description, the vice president for public relations also will become "co-manager of convention operations," along with the vice president for business and finance.

Previously, the vice president for business and finance had been manager of the annual meeting of the SBC.

According to the documents, Coppenger was interviewed by the six officers and Bennett Nov. 8. They note Rosenbaum was interviewed Oct. 22, and the decision to elect him was reaffirmed when officers met Nov. 8-9.

The officers of the Executive Committee are Sam Pace, Lawton, Okla., chair; Paul Pressler, Houston, vice chair; and Fred Wolfe, Mobile, Ala., secretary.

The chairs of the standing committees are Charles Sullivan, Lenoir City, Tenn., administrative and convention arrangements; Ronnie Floyd, Springdale, Ark., business and finance; and James Jones, Campbellsville, Ky., program and budget.

The material mailed to committee members notes Coppenger will begin his new duties Jan. 1, 1991, and Rosenbaum will start Dec. 15, 1990.

Coppenger said that since rumors were circulating, he felt he should announce the election to the Indiana Executive Board "before they heard it through the back door."

He was asked about other rumors which indicate he is being brought to the Executive Committee post in order to be in place to become president when Bennett, 66, announces his retirement from the position he has held since 1979.

"I don't think in my life I have ever gone to something as a stepping stone to something else," Coppenger told ABP. "When I have responded to (God's) call, I have responded to that specific call; I have gone to the position I am called to and that is it."

Observers see Coppenger emerging as a key leader in the fundamental-conservative takeover of America's largest Protestant denomination.

He has been outspoken in his support of moves to purge moderate-conservatives from key posts in the denomination, including deleting the Indiana campus of the Boyce Bible School, an arm of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Coppenger was outspoken in his criticism of liberalism. He has served in a number of influential positions, including chair of the SBC Resolutions Committee.

Coppenger, 42, has been executive director of SCBI since September 1988. Previously, he was pastor of First Baptist Church, El Dorado, Ark., 1983-88 and assistant/associate professor of philosophy at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill., 1975-81.

He is a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., with a bachelor of arts in philosophy; Vanderbilt University, Nashville, with a doctorate in philosophy; and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, with a master of divinity degree.

It is noted on his biographical sketch that he has written "numerous articles for publication in church and denominational press and scholarly journals" He also was interim editor of the Indiana Baptist for about nine months, immediately following his election as SCBI executive.

Coppenger also is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. He and his wife, the former Sharon South, have three children.

Rosenbaum, 36, is a native of Columbia, S.C. In addition to being manager of the conference center marketing section, he also is coordination specialist in the office of church programs and service and coordinator of the church program training center.

He has been an employee of the SSB since 1980. Previously, he worked for a bookstore, a publisher, a printing company and was assistant director for public relations at Carson Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn.

Rosenbaum is a graduate of Carson Newman College and currently is enrolled in a master's degree program at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., through seminary external education. He and his wife, the former Joann Burnette, have five children.

Gregory likely
Criswell successor

By Helen Parmley

ABP 90-9
11/21/90

(ABP is using this copyrighted story with permission of the Dallas Morning News)

DALLAS (ABP) -- Joel Gregory, 42, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, is expected to be named co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas on Sunday night, Nov. 25.

If elected by the congregation, Gregory would become the successor to W.A. Criswell, 80, who has been pastor of the downtown church for 46 years.

Church officials would neither confirm nor deny that a vote will be taken Sunday on Gregory's call.

Gregory said late Tuesday that the church committee that has conducted a national search for Criswell's successor has "talked to me intermittently for months. Nothing definite has been decided."

Dick Clements, the chairman of the search committee, agreed, saying, "The decision has not been made."

However, neither man would directly confirm or deny that the search committee had chosen to submit Gregory's name to the congregation for approval.

A high-level Baptist official who asked not to be named said the Fort Worth pastor is the choice of the search committee.

With 27,000 members, First Baptist is the largest congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Criswell has said he wants to devote his full attention to Criswell College, the First Baptist-owned educational facility that bears his name. The Dallas school, which he founded in 1970, is accredited to train Christian ministers, teachers and counselors.

Gregory was elected to two one-year terms as president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in 1987 and 1988.

He stood uncommitted in the Southern Baptist Convention's 12-year battle between moderates and fundamentalists until this year, when he publicly aligned himself with the fundamentalists.

An inerrantist who believes the Bible is scientifically, historically and theologically correct, Gregory was the keynote speaker at the National Conference on Biblical Inerrance in Ridgecrest, N.C., in 1987.

A native of Fort Worth, Gregory holds a bachelor's degree and a doctorate from Baylor University and a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

He was assistant professor of preaching at the seminary for three years before serving six pastorates in Texas.

Gregory has been pastor of the Travis Avenue church since 1985.

He was recently named permanent preacher of the Baptist Hour, Southern Baptists' longest-running radio program, which will celebrate its 50th year in January.

Gregory and his wife, Mary, have two sons.