

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

To: Southern Baptist Press Association
Subject: Alliance Convocation

Editors: Don McGregor will fax this Associated Baptist Press story to ABP's standard outlets in the next day or two. I'm putting it up for you to capture electronically.

Southern Baptist Alliance
Strengthens Ties with American Baptists

By Robert H. Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP)--Southern Baptist Alliance members have strengthened relations with American Baptists and eliminated a reference to the Southern Baptist Convention in their statement of purpose.

The action was taken during the group's March 14-16 annual convocation at Grace Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. It was the fifth national meeting of the organization of moderate-conservative Southern Baptists since its founding in 1987.

The approximately 500 members registered for the three-day meeting appeared ready to abandon confrontation with fundamental-conservative leaders now dominant in the SBC and seek a new, though still unspecified, future.

Additional ties with the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. (ABC), estranged from the Southern Baptist Convention since 1945, was one widely-discussed option. SBA Executive Director Stan Hastey said he expects a married couple or two single persons financially supported by the Alliance to be appointed as missionaries by the American Baptist board of international ministries as soon as next year.

Discussions with American Baptist leaders concerning Sunday school curriculum are continuing and Alliance representatives meet regularly with a task force created by the ABC to monitor changes in the SBC, said SBA President Richard E. Groves of Winston-Salem, N.C.

A recommendation from the SBA board of directors that members at the convocation "affirm cooperative ventures in ministry and missions" with the ABC was approved without dissent, as was a move to eliminate a constitutional provision dedicating the Alliance to "the continuance of our ministry and mission within the Southern Baptist Convention."

The phrase was replaced by one which commits the group to "the expression of our ministry and mission through cooperative relationships with other Baptist bodies and the larger Christian community."

"This is an historic moment," said Dudley Wilson of

Beaumont, Texas, a member of the SBA board of directors. "From our wanderings we have partially arrived We are further along the way and able to celebrate."

Lynda Weaver-Williams of Richmond said, "We are no longer divided from our American Baptist brothers and sisters. We are one in Jesus Christ We have come here to the former capital of the Confederacy to announce that the Civil War after all is over."

Yet a reluctance to sever all ties with the SBC was apparent. Despite their constitutional change, members accepted a committee recommendation that they retain the word "Southern" in their name.

"One thing we have going for us is name recognition," reported Betty Winstead McGary of Beaumont on behalf of a committee requested to study a name change. It seems unwise to introduce a new name during the current "chaotic" time in SBC life, she said.

The lure of the Baptist Fellowship, another moderate-conservative organization within the SBC formed last August, also proved hard to resist. The interim steering committee of the Fellowship, which plans a national convocation in May, recently named a committee to initiate dialogue with the SBA. Groves reported plans to appoint a committee of Alliance members to respond.

Hastey told SBA members in his annual address that much of the action undertaken by the Fellowship "has been shaped by Alliance people assigned to the responsible workgroups of the interim steering committee."

"Our participation in this proces has been vigorous," he said, noting that "some two dozen" Alliance members serve on the Fellowship's 70-member steering committee.

Hastey described the Alliance's role, like John the Baptist's, as that of "forerunner," embodying a willingness "to decrease for the sake of the increase of others."

However, Hastey insisted that "the need for the Alliance as a self-standing group remains ...," dispelling hints that the SBA might disband soon.

Convocation participants heard several reports indicating the SBA is fleshing out its "self-standing" position by strengthening efforts in missions and education.

In addition to cooperating with American Baptists in missionary appointments, the Alliance has developed a partnership with the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba. The group consists of about a dozen congregations recently excluded from

the larger Baptist Convention of Western Cuba.

The Alliance assists three Cuban churches through its 1991 budget of \$300,000 as well as through its Global Mission Offering. Earlier this year a group of SBA-affiliated pastors visited the congregations on a preaching tour. Representatives of the Cuban fellowship, including President Francisco Rodes Gonzalez of Matanzas City, spoke during the March convocation.

Robert Fulbright, chair of the SBA publications committee, updated participants on plans for SBA-created Sunday school curriculum. Adult Bible study materials are being edited for December 1991-April 1992, said Fulbright, minister of Christian education at Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis, Mo.

He said negotiations are underway for the materials to be published by Smyth & Helwys, a Greenville, S.C., publishing house established last year by moderate-conservative Southern Baptists.

Convocation participants enthusiastically welcomed Thomas H. Graves, introduced as the recently-elected president of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Graves told the SBA audience classes will begin this September with seven faculty members. (See separate story.) The Alliance authorized the seminary in 1987 and remains a sponsoring body. However, it does not own or govern the school, housed at Northminster Baptist Church in Richmond. The seminary's board of trustees is self-perpetuating.

In other action, the Alliance:

* Re-elected Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, to a second one-year term as president. Also re-elected were McGary, interim minister of education at Calder Baptist Church in Beaumont, as vice president, and William H. Puckett Jr., a Raleigh, N.C., travel agent, as secretary.

Also, 13 persons were elected and three re-elected to the 40-member board of directors. About one-third of the board's members rotate off each year. (Editors: See list at end of story.)

* Heard a report from finance committee chair Brooks Wicker of Tallahassee, Fla., that the Alliance had 69,353 members and 126 affiliated churches at the end of February. Of its members, 42,434, or 61 percent, live in North Carolina or Virginia, while 85, or 65 percent, of its churches are located either in those two states or Maryland.

* Referred two motions to panels for further study. One requests the SBA church-ministry relations committee to consider the feasibility of establishing an alternative to the Southern Baptist Annuity Board.

A second asks the board of directors to create a task force to be charged with starting new churches committed to "the spirit of the SBA covenant," the organization's statement of faith.

* Learned that about \$19,000 had been contributed toward the \$55,000 goal of its 1991 Global Mission Offering. The offering assists churches and social ministries in the United States and Cuba, as well as the Richmond seminary and the International Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

* Participated in a closing worship service that featured communion, liturgical dancing and a sermon by Linda Jordan, pastor of Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Other speakers during the three-day meeting included Nancy Tatom Ammerman, associate professor of the sociology of religion at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta; J. Samuel Escobar, professor of missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia; and John W. Kinney, dean of the School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond.

The Alliance's next convocation will be during March 1992 at Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.

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 Editors: The following list was distributed to participants at the Alliance convocation. I'm including it for your convenience. The dates in parentheses following the directors' names is when that person's term ends. No church or city for state directors and no state for at-large directors was provided, so you're on your own there.

Also, a breakdown by state of membership and number of churches affiliated with the Alliance was provided. Contact me if you'd like a faxed copy.

SBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alabama	Ed Culpepper (1992), Madonna Roberts (1994)
Florida	Donna Poyner (1994), John Nichol (1994)
Georgia	Nancy Ammerman (1993), James Strickland (1994)
Louisiana	David Farmer (1993), Priscilla Asbury (1994)
Mississippi	Theima Pearson (1992), Tom Sims (1993)
Missouri	Sharon Anders (1992), Dan Day (1994)
Northeast	Romelle Jones (1993), Katie Sill (1994)
North Carolina	Larry Crawford (1994), Donna Steely (1994)
South Carolina	Ann Quattlebaum (1992), Bill Harris (1994)
Texas	Billie Wilks (1992), Millard Eiland (1994)
Virginia	Rob James (1992), Betsy West (1994)
At Large	1992: Morris Ashcraft, Sid Beeland, Janet Blackman, Walker Knight, Steve Shoemaker, Morris Vickers, Brooks Wicker

1993: Gina Bishop, Paula Dempsey, Bob
Fulbright, Barbara McClain, Lee Gallman, Don
Retzer, Dudley Wilson

1994: Lu Treadwell, John E. Roberts, Bill
Carpenter, Mahan Siler

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Richmond Seminary
Elects First Faculty

By Robert H. Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP)--Trustees of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond elected the school's first two faculty members during a board meeting March 16.

G. Thomas Halbrooks of Wake Forest, N.C., and Linda McKinnish Bridges of Richmond, Va., will join President Thomas H. Graves in staffing the seminary, established by the Southern Baptist Alliance two years ago.

Graves, who was elected the seminary's first permanent president earlier this year, also announced his appointment of two adjunctive professors, Jerome F. Creach of Richmond and Chevis F. Horne of Martinsville, Va.

With the addition of two more adjunctive personnel to be named later, as well as the school's president, who will teach philosophy of religion, the Richmond seminary will open classes this September with seven faculty members, said Graves.

Graves was pastor of St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., at the time of his election as president Jan. 7. Earlier, he had been professor of philosophy of religion at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Halbrooks, who has been professor of church history at Southeastern Seminary, will serve the Richmond seminary as dean of the faculty and professor of church history, a tenured position.

Bridges, a former adjunctive professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will be assistant professor of New Testament. Trustees placed her on a track which could lead to tenure.

Creach, a doctoral student at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, will teach Old Testament, while Horne, a visiting professor of preaching at Southeastern Seminary, will teach preaching.

The seminary was authorized by the Southern Baptist Alliance during its 1989 convocation. Although the Alliance remains a sponsoring body, it does not own or govern the school.

which is housed at Northminster Baptist Church in Richmond. The 16-member board of trustees is self-perpetuating.

Frank Goare, director for development and admissions, said he expects "anywhere from 25 to 40 students to enroll in the first class this fall."

"While our seminary is not properly described as 'the Southern Baptist Alliance seminary,' it was the Alliance that ... made this institution possible," Graves told participants at the SBA annual convocation in Richmond March 15.

Graves, whom convocation participants said "embodied" the fulfillment of their dream to establish a new theological institution, was enthusiastically welcomed during the Friday evening session of the annual meeting.

Many potential Southern Baptist divinity students are "opting out" of theological education because of the effect on Southern Baptist Convention seminaries of the 12-year-old theological and political conflict in the denomination, Graves said.

"The fact is, we're losing an entire generation of students," he said. "They're not going anywhere. We need a new institution for the students ... and we need to create a new world for their churches."

Graves said creating a new institution "will not mean transplanting old ideas to a new location." A "fresh approach" is needed, he maintained. "This can be the most creative time among Southern Baptists in 50 years."

The Richmond seminary's mission statement describes the school as "unmistakably Baptist" while being "racially and gender inclusive with an ecumenical commitment and a global perspective."

Halbrooks is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., Southern Seminary and Emory University in Atlanta. He has taught at Southern Seminary and Mercer University in Atlanta, and is a former pastor.

Bridges, a graduate of Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., and Southern Seminary, has taught at Union Seminary in Richmond and Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Va. She is a former Southern Baptist missionary to Taiwan and has served churches as minister of youth and music.

Creach, currently completing doctoral studies in Old Testament at Union, holds degrees from Southern Seminary and Gardner-Webb College in Boiling Springs, N.C. He is a former Kentucky pastor.

Horne, a graduate of Wake Forest University and Southern Seminary, was pastor of First Baptist Church of Martinsville from 1947 79. He had served the congregation as associate pastor from 1939 47. Since retiring in 1979, he has been adjunctive professor of preaching at Southeastern Seminary.