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June 17, 1993

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * SBC OKs Mason study, gay ban, disowns Clinton's views
- * SBC rejects Clinton views but won't expel his church
- * Southern Baptists speak out on gays, abortion, Clinton
- * Relationship between WMU, SBC not contested at convention

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SBC OKs Mason study, gay ban,
disowns Clinton's views

By Marv Knox

HOUSTON (ABP) --Southern Baptists continued to stake out the borders of their convention during their 1993 annual meeting.

Their territory still includes Masons, but it excludes churches which condone homosexuality. And despite some opposition, it still includes Bill Clinton's home church, but a new proposal would exclude churches that ordain women.

Such issues of inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness provided a focal point for 17,886 messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention, which met in Houston June 15-17.

Freemasonry dominated most of the territorial attention prior to the Houston meeting. The topic arose at the convention last year, when messengers to the 1992 annual meeting directed the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department to study the Masonic Order.

The board offered a compromise that included both praise and criticism. Its report commended Masons for their "charitable endeavors," such as hospitals, alcohol- and drug-abuse prevention, and homes for the aged. It acknowledged that "notable past Southern Baptist leaders" were Masons. And it also recognized many Masonic teachings "could be considered compatible with, and even supportive of, Christian faith and practice."

But the report also concluded that "many tenets and teachings of Freemasonry are not compatible with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine." Cited were such examples as "offensive" titles, terms and rituals; "pagan and/or occultic" writings; universalistic teachings; and racist practices.

The board's final recommendation noted some Masonic teachings are compatible with "Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine," while others are not. It cited the SBC's "deep convictions regarding the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church" as reason for allowing Masonic membership to "be a matter of personal conscience." And it urged Southern Baptists "to prayerfully and carefully evaluate Freemasonry in light of the Lordship of Christ, the teachings of the Scripture and the findings of this report, as led by the Holy Spirit of God."

Messengers approved the recommendation by about a five-to-one margin after defeating an amendment that would have omitted the references to priesthood of the believer and church autonomy and would have called Freemasonry "a mixture of paganism and Christianity ... condemned by God."

The issue of homosexuality also first arose last year. At that time, messengers approved the first reading of a constitutional change declaring churches that "affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior" to be "not in cooperation" with the convention. The change -- which received its second ratification this year, a step necessary for amending the SBC constitution -- has the effect of ex-communicating churches, since it declares them ineligible to send messengers to the SBC annual meetings.

Messengers applauded in approval when Ray Fuller, an SBC Executive Committee member who presented the recommendation, told them, "Without a specific, unprecedented move of this nature, we continue to be supportive of churches who reject us." He called the action "an expulsion of love" and added, "They have pulled away from what we as Southern Baptists hold dear to our hearts."

Homosexuality also provided the reason President Clinton and his church became part of the debate regarding who can be included in the SBC.

Citing Clinton's views on homosexuality, Bo Hammock, pastor of Providence Village Baptist Church in Butler, Fla., presented a motion asking that the SBC "unseat" messengers from Clinton's home congregation, Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark.

"We have a Southern Baptist who is doing more to promote and encourage homosexuality than anyone in the history of the United States," Hammock claimed. The action against the church is warranted, he said, "because, due to their lack of action, they are by their silence supporting Bill Clinton's endorsement of the homosexual lifestyle."

The motion was referred to the convention's order of business committee, which noted the church had not acted to condone homosexuality. The committee successfully recommended no action be taken against the church.

However, messengers resoundingly took action to speak against Clinton's own positions on homosexuality and abortion. With only sparse opposition, they approved a resolution designed to "separate" the SBC from his policies on the volatile issues and to "urge him to affirm biblical morality" in public office.

The resolution urged Southern Baptists to pray for Clinton and to try to influence him to reverse his policies.

"The intent of this resolution is to separate ourselves as a body from the president's policies on the critical moral issues we believe to be in contradiction to the word of God and what we believe is best for America," said Ronnie Floyd, a member of the resolutions committee from Springdale, Ark. "If we do not give a clarion call, we will jeopardize the future survival of our nation."

A proposed amendment would have called on the president to "repent" of his positions. But James Merritt, the resolutions committee chairman from Snellville, Ga., countered: "The issue is not the person of the president, not the position of the president. It is the policies he is trying to put in place." The amendment subsequently failed.

Still, Clinton's views drew the passion of messengers. Seventeen of 36 resolutions presented to the resolutions committee on the opening day of the meeting criticized the president, and the resolutions committee already had announced it would propose a statement on the issue.

The issue of disfellowshipping churches that ordain women, however, arose unannounced.

Michael Barley, pastor of Franklin Street Baptist Church in Louisville,

Ky., offered the proposal as an amendment to the same article of the SBC constitution that had been altered to exclude churches that condone homosexuality.

But while the homosexual restriction currently applies to two North Carolina churches, a female-ordination restriction would eliminate at least 131 congregations, according to statistics gathered by Southern Baptist Women in Ministry.

The issue was referred to the SBC Executive Committee, which prepares many of the convention's items for business. The committee could take up the proposal in either its September 1993 or February 1994 meetings. By convention policy, it must report its action to the SBC annual meeting in June 1994, which would provide the convention with another territorial stake for next year's meeting.

Yet another territorial issue could surface next year as the result of a reconciliation plan formulated by denominational statesmen Lloyd Elder and Herschel Hobbs. Their plan, spelled out in the 16-page research report "Calling the Family Back Together," is an attempt to bring back into SBC participation those who have been excluded during more than a decade of denominational controversy.

Elder, a former president of the SBC Sunday School Board, and Hobbs, a former SBC president, presented the concept to leaders of Baptist state conventions during convention week in Houston.

They declined to present their plan to messengers this year for fear it would be defeated without what they believe to be an adequate hearing. Instead, the plan will be discussed, fleshed out and presented to Southern Baptists by an ad hoc committee of state convention leaders, who will meet in late June to begin their preparation for next year's SBC meeting.

Among other points of interest at this year's meeting were:

-- Jerry Rankin. Meeting during convention week, trustees of the SBC Foreign Mission Board elected Rankin, a 23-year veteran of foreign missions, as the board's new president.

Rankin, the board's area director for Southern Asia and the Pacific, faced opposition from some trustees because of his favorable views on speaking in tongues. But after three hours of discussion, FMB trustees elected him president on a 59-14 vote, which they later voted to make unanimous.

Messengers got an introduction to the new missions leader June 16, at the start of an evening session devoted to Southern Baptist missionary endeavors across the nation and around the world.

-- Officers. Messengers re-elected four out of five convention officers for 1993-94 terms.

President Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston, was re-elected by acclamation. So were the two secretaries -- registration secretary Lee Porter, associate pastor of St. Andrew Baptist Church in Panama City, Fla., and recording secretary David Atchison, a layperson and member of Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville.

First vice president Jay Strack, an evangelist from Dallas, withstood a challenge from two other nominees -- William Palmer, a retired Baptist academy president from Morristown, Tenn., and Rodney Osborn, a physician from Peoria, Ill.

The newcomer is Second Vice President Bobby Welch, pastor of First Baptist Church of Daytona Beach, Fla. He was challenged by Randy Huckabee, a pastor from Warner Robbins, Ga.

-- Ed Young. In his presidential address, Young echoed the sentiments he expressed in a convention sermon he delivered 13 years ago, urging Baptists to get off "side streets" and back on the main avenue of serving God.

Young chided Baptists and other evangelical Christians for getting off on the side streets of homiletics, politics and inattention to evangelism and missions. He cited how those diversions have led Christians to fail to make a difference in the decline of the nation. He offered one ultimate solution: "When the message of evangelism becomes the main thing again, the Southern Baptist Convention will no longer be on side streets."

-- Extravaganzas. Influenced by President Young and his church's flair for exciting presentations, the annual meeting featured two evenings of dramatic shows highlighting major portions of the convention's work. The Tuesday night production focused on the Christian education ministry of the Sunday School Board, and the Wednesday evening gala emphasized the ministries of the Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board.

Organizers estimated the productions featured more than \$1 million worth of donated talent and props, including production pieces previously used in pageants produced by First and Second Baptist churches in Houston.

-- Resolutions. In addition to the resolution regarding President Clinton, messengers approved eight other statements prepared by the SBC resolutions committee.

They affirmed the "finality of Jesus Christ as sole and sufficient savior"; called homosexuality a sin and opposed "all effort to provide government endorsement, sanction, recognition, acceptance or civil-rights advantage on the basis of homosexuality"; opposed expansion of abortion rights and privileges; promoted "racial and ethnic reconciliation"; supported "full and free accommodation of prayer and religious expression in public school policies"; urged Southern Baptists to increase their support for the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget; expressed appreciation to the people who made the annual meeting possible; and reaffirmed the SBC's historic opposition to the United States' diplomatic ties to the Vatican.

-- Motions. Of 32 motions presented to the convention for consideration, four focused on President Clinton. In addition to the one requesting that messengers from his home church be unseated, another asked for a press release to disavow SBC sanction for his views on homosexuality and abortion. Two others asked the SBC to disfellowship both Clinton and Vice President Al Gore. They were ruled out of order, because people are members of local congregations, but not the convention itself.

The lion's share of the motions, a total of 20, were referred to the appropriate SBC agencies for consideration during the coming year. They ranged from a request that agencies divest themselves of stock from companies that have policies which conflict with the Bible; to a request to put a cap on the severance packages of convention employees; to a plea to change convention bylaws to allow state conventions, rather than convention officers, to name members to the SBC committee on committees.

-- Budget. Messengers approved a 1993-94 Cooperative Program allocation budget of \$138,234,735, which will provide major funding for the convention's agencies and institutions.

The budget is almost \$2 million, or 1.4 percent, less than the current budget. The change was stipulated by convention policy, which ties new budgets to receipts for the most recently completed fiscal year.

-- Trustees. For only the second time in recent history, messengers did not challenge the nomination of people to fill vacancies on the trustee boards of SBC organizations. Messengers approved 268 nominees to fill positions on the convention's boards, commissions and committees. They also approved 68 nominations for the 1994 nominating committee, which will propose next year's slate of nominees.

-- WMU. Numerous convention observers had predicted messengers might propose some form of sanctions against the Woman's Missionary Union.

Earlier this year, WMU ratified plans which stipulated the organization would work with other evangelical Christians for the cause of Christian missions. And although the policy didn't mention it specifically, many Baptists felt it prepared the way for WMU to provide support for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization of moderate Southern Baptists who have been disaffected by the rightward shift of the SBC.

Subsequently, the Executive Committee and the two mission boards approved a statement asking WMU to work exclusively with the SBC. Although somewhat expected, an effort to ask convention messengers to adopt a similar statement did not materialize.

-- Crossover. Crossover Houston, the fifth evangelistic endeavor held immediately prior to the SBC annual meeting, produced 1,253 professions of faith in Christ.

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SBC rejects Clinton views
but won't expel his church

By Bob Allen

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Southern Baptists directed a measured rebuke at President Bill Clinton's social agenda by passing a resolution distancing the denomination from Clinton's gay-rights and abortion policies, while rejecting an effort to unseat messengers from the president's home church.

Messengers to the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention, June 15-17 at Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center, adopted a resolution to "separate" the convention from a litany of public policies advocated by the Clinton administration.

The resolution also urged Clinton "to affirm biblical morality in exercising his public office" and called on Southern Baptists to "use their influence with the president to urge him to stand for biblical morality and reverse his stands."

The SBC resolutions committee used temperate language in drafting the statement on Clinton. Among the 18 separate anti-Clinton resolutions proposed by messengers, were expressions of "resentment" and "outrage" at Clinton's "anti-Christian stand" and calls for "public reprimand" and a request for Clinton to withdraw from affiliation with the SBC.

"I think we used great moderation and great care," said James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga., and resolutions committee chairman. In fact, Merritt said, the committee anticipated the resolution might be criticized for going too easy on Clinton, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark.

Although the resolution was titled "On William Jefferson Clinton," committee member Ronnie Floyd told messengers it was intended as a repudiation of Clinton's policies and "not a personal attack."

"The intent of this resolution is to separate ourselves as a body from the president's policies on the critical moral issues we believe to be in contradiction to the word of God and what is best for America." said Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark. "If we do not give a clarion call (on these issues), we will jeopardize the future survival of our nation."

Merritt said the resolutions committee felt compelled to address Clinton's views because "as a fellow Southern Baptist we have a special responsibility to speak the truth in love to him." Also, he said, the

statement was needed to "let the public know his positions are not where we have stated in the past where we are as a denomination."

"We are a leading light in the evangelical world," Merritt said. "It is incumbent on us ... to spell out exactly where we stand on the burning issues of our day."

While the resolution's main intent is to specify the convention's convictions, Merritt said, he would be pleased if it caused Clinton to evaluate his positions. "We are like the father waiting for the Prodigal Son to return home," he said. "We're willing to meet him halfway."

The resolution was not without criticism. One messenger -- Don Wilkey from First Baptist Church of Onalaska, Texas -- said mentioning Clinton by name in the resolution sets "a dangerous precedent" which "smacks of partisan politics."

"We've already made the WMU mad and the Masons mad. I don't want to go back to put out fires because we've made the Democrats mad in our county," he said.

After messengers adopted the resolution overwhelmingly, SBC President Ed Young paused proceedings to offer a prayer asking "godly wisdom" for President Clinton and for the nation's "revival and renewal." That act, Merritt later told reporters "should say a lot to the general public and to the media about where our heart is."

Meanwhile, the convention refused to grant one messenger's desire to withdraw fellowship from Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., for failing to discipline Clinton, a member at the church since 1980.

Bo Hammock, pastor of Providence Village Baptist Church, Lake Butler, Fla., argued the church's members, "due to their lack of action ... are by their silence supporting Bill Clinton's endorsement of the homosexual lifestyle."

The motion was referred to the SBC's credentials committee, which viewed it as a test case of a new article in the convention's constitution which declares churches which "act to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior" not "in cooperation" with the SBC.

The article, which became part of the constitution after it received a second affirmative vote earlier in this year's convention, was framed during a controversy over one Southern Baptist church's 1991 "blessing" of a union between two gays and another's licensing of a homosexual to the ministry. Unlike those churches, the credentials committee ruled, Immanuel took no formal church action to give evidence of support for homosexual lifestyles but provided "ample evidence to the contrary."

Also, the committee ruled, the SBC has a right only to find churches -- not individuals -- in violation of its constitution.

Using those criteria, the committee ruled Immanuel Baptist is "in friendly cooperation with the SBC and sympathetic to its purposes and work." The committee recommended the church's 10 messengers "be considered duly seated," a motion upheld by messengers when no one questioned the committee's report.

The church's pastor, Rex Horne, welcomed the committee's ruling as "only proper," but expressed "embarrassment and anger" at messengers being asked to defend their church's reputation. "If Immanuel Baptist Church can be called to give an account, any church in the Southern Baptist Convention can," he said.

The 4,418-member church has led Arkansas Baptists in Cooperative Program giving for 30 years. Last year it gave \$411,485, or 19.9 percent of a \$2 million budget, to convention causes and was 13th in the SBC in gifts to the CP, the SBC budget.

"I preach that the Bible teaches homosexuality is a sin," Horne said. He

also affirms an "infallible Bible." He said he has shared his views on homosexuality and abortion with Clinton both before and since his election as president, and that the president has received them graciously.

"My concern is what this body is going to do about stopping some of this that is just a witch hunt," Horne said. Currently, he said, a single disgruntled messenger may attempt to "stop anybody you don't like" from attending the SBC annual meeting.

Hammock, pastor of a 383-member congregation which gave \$5,841 to convention causes last year, offered the motion criticizing Immanuel's failure to take "biblical action" to correct Clinton's views on homosexuality.

"Last year the Southern Baptist Convention took a biblical and historical stance against the sin of homosexuality," Hammock said. "It is time for us to take another stand. We have a Southern Baptist who is doing more to promote and encourage homosexuality than anyone in the history of the United States."

"His church has not taken biblical action as is described in I Cor. 5:1-13," Hammock said. "Therefore, I believe it is our responsibility to take action."

Credentials committee members disagreed, however, saying Hammock's church has a right to determine for itself what the Bible teaches about discipline of church members but not to impose those views on another Baptist church.

Two other motions aimed at withdrawing the convention's fellowship from Clinton individually were ruled out of order, citing Baptist polity which places responsibility for discipline of individual members with the local church.

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Southern Baptists speak out
on gays, abortion, Clinton

By Lacy Thompson

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Messengers to the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention flexed their moral muscle June 15-17, adopting strong statements on several key social issues.

Messengers approved resolutions against homosexuals in the military, President Clinton's social policies, diplomatic ties to the Vatican, the Freedom of Choice Act and other abortion legislation, and in favor of racial and ethnic reconciliation and religious expression in public schools.

Though resolutions are not binding on individual Southern Baptists and their churches, the statements are important in staking out accepted positions on issues and in making known Southern Baptist views.

For the most part, the resolutions were adopted as presented by the convention's Resolutions Committee with little discussion. In a few instances, messengers agreed to wording changes, none of which drastically changed the proposed statements.

On the issue of homosexuals in the military, Southern Baptists adopted a statement that affirms homosexuality as "immoral, contrary to the Bible and contrary to traditional Judeo-Christian moral standards."

The resolution lists several reasons for opposing homosexuals in the military, including the fact that is "detrimental to morale, unit cohesion, good order, discipline and mission accomplishment" and would endanger the

life and health of military personnel by increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and tainted blood.

The resolution acknowledges the biblical promise "that all persons, including homosexuals, can receive abundant, new and eternal life by repenting of their sin and trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

But it also affirms Southern Baptist opposition to any government endorsement or sanctioning of homosexuality and to the proposed lifting of the ban on homosexuals in the military. In addition, the statement decries acts of hatred or violence by or against homosexuals and voices pride and support of the U.S. military and its chaplains.

In discussion of the resolution, Fred Brown of Texas sought to add wording that made it clear homosexuals are loved by God and Southern Baptists. "I am afraid that someone in a homosexual lifestyle is going to hear what's going on here and they're not going to hear it the way we want them to hear it," he said. Brown said he wants homosexuals to know they can come to a Southern Baptist church and find people who love them.

Merritt said the committee felt the reference to the biblical promise of eternal life to all persons captured that spirit. Messengers agreed, defeating Brown's amendment.

In addressing the issue of abortion legislation, Southern Baptists stated strong opposition to the Freedom of Choice Act, which would "result in a national abortion-on-demand law prohibiting states from regulating and restricting abortions in any meaningful way."

The statement notes that about 1.6 million abortions are performed each year in the United States, while expressing once again the view that life begins at conception and that the Bible prohibits the practice of abortion.

Southern Baptists voiced strong opposition to several abortion-related developments, including efforts to introduce abortion pills into the United States, moves to deny pro-life advocates free-speech rights during "responsible non-violent protests outside abortion clinics," and health-care reform provisions that would use public monies to fund abortions.

In addition, the resolution states Southern Baptist opposition to the use of "electively aborted fetal tissue" in scientific experiments and to repeal of the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding of abortion.

The issues of abortion and homosexual rights were cited as specific reasons for a separate resolution against the policies of President Clinton, who is a Southern Baptist. Although titled "On William Jefferson Clinton," the resolution was not directed at Clinton personally but at his policies, resolutions committee members said.

In addition to abortion and homosexuality, Southern Baptists also addressed the timely issue of racial and ethnic reconciliation.

Their approved resolution reaffirms Southern Baptists' "intention to love our neighbors as ourselves, denouncing in strongest terms every expression of racial and ethnic prejudice, discrimination and hatred."

The statement calls on national and world leaders to work to end genocide wherever it is found and urges federal, state and local governments to enforce civil-rights laws "when such laws are in accordance with the Word of God" and prosecute persons who violate such laws. Messengers added the conditional phrase about the Word of God when a messenger cited the possibility of homosexuals being granted civil-rights protection in the future.

The resolution also calls on Southern Baptists to "redouble their efforts in their own communities to reach across racial and ethnic boundaries to establish both wholesome friendships and mutually beneficial ministry relationships."

On the issue of religious expression in public schools, Southern

Baptists decried rulings and actions they said have eroded the right of students to express their beliefs. They specifically noted the decision prohibiting outside prayers at school commencement ceremonies.

The statement urges Southern Baptists and school officials "to work aggressively for full and free accommodation of prayer and religious expression in public school policies, including public school-related events."

Southern Baptists also stated their opposition to diplomatic relations with the Vatican once again. Diplomatic ties with the Roman Catholic Holy See were established in 1984 and have been continued under Clinton.

In their resolution, Southern Baptists insist such ties are a violation of the First Amendment and they call on national leaders to end the relationship. At the same time, Southern Baptists assure Roman Catholics they are not acting out of bigotry against them and remain willing to work with Catholics on moral, social and public-policy issues of mutual agreement.

On another front, Southern Baptists approved resolutions affirming their Cooperative Program and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

The Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified giving plan, now averages \$1 million a day in gifts and supports more than 8,000 home and foreign missionaries, the resolution notes.

In the statement, Southern Baptists commit themselves to continuing and increasing support for cooperative missions "so that all people might hear the gospel." They also commit to consider increasing gifts through the Cooperative Program.

In discussion, one messenger offered comments that the resolution may be seen as divisive by some. Although he did not refer to them by name, the messenger's comments seemed to be directed at the current tension between the convention and the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"I wish to shatter what I think is a cherished belief of this convention that it is better to be divided by truth than be united in error," said Larry Bishop of Oklahoma, quoting convention speaker Adrian Rogers. "How can we be united in error when we are united in Christ. That is one I cannot comprehend."

Time ran out before Bishop could conclude his remarks, at which point Merritt emphasized the inclusive nature of the resolution. "We're saying, 'Come one. Come all. Let's support the Cooperative Program.'"

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Relationship between WMU, SBC
not contested at convention

By Ken Camp

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Fireworks surrounding the relationship between the Southern Baptist Convention and Woman's Missionary Union failed to materialize at the annual SBC meeting in Houston.

In January, the WMU Executive Board adopted far-reaching recommendations expanding WMU's base to provide missions resources for other evangelical groups, allowing WMU to accept direct contributions and engage in direct missions projects, and providing prayer support and missions resources for other Southern Baptist groups involved in missions.

The changes angered many SBC conservatives who said WMU was opening a door to work with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization of Southern Baptist moderates.

The SBC Executive Committee adopted a resolution Feb. 23 urging WMU to affirm its "singular cooperation," "undivided commitment" and "exclusive relationship" with the SBC and its mission boards. The same resolution later was approved by the trustees of the Home and Foreign Mission boards.

But no resolution regarding WMU was reported out of the SBC Resolutions Committee, and messengers soundly defeated an attempt to deny the auxiliary a representative on the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance.

During the SBC Executive Committee report, Phillip Senn of Troy, Tenn., opposed a recommendation to amend convention bylaw 19 providing for representatives from several Baptist entities on the BWA General Council. Senn moved to amend the committee's recommendation by striking any reference to the WMU president.

Kenneth Barnett of Lakewood, Colo., a member of the SBC Executive Committee, was applauded by messengers when he spoke against Senn's amendment.

"The Woman's Missionary Union has always worked with the Baptist World Alliance," Barnett said. "They have served with distinction in the past, and as long as they serve with that distinction, I see no reason why WMU ought to be left off."

Dellanna O'Brien, executive director of WMU, told the convention that WMU's "purposes have never changed," but the auxiliary is "moving beyond meetings to ministries, moving beyond promises of commitment to practical actions, even moving beyond our own organizations to support the missions effort of others."

Following her report, two messengers questioned O'Brien about plans for WMU to formalize a relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"Have you in the past, or will you in the future, encourage the WMU to support missions offerings for the CBF?" asked Wiley Drake of Buena Park, Calif. O'Brien responded that WMU had not, and had no plans to do so in the future.

Harry Godfrey of Bristol, Va., asked about the extent of WMU involvement with CBF, to which O'Brien replied, "We would provide missions education materials concerning the cause of Christ around the world."

However, at a meeting earlier in the week, Karen Benson, manager of the WMU communications group, had noted that CBF to date has not asked WMU to publish any materials.

Benson told about 300 people attending a meeting on "WMU in the News" that the missions auxiliary would continue its historic stance of promoting only traditional denominational offerings while affirming the right of other groups to choose other funding options.

"If you identify yourself as a Southern Baptist, and you are involved in, care about or support missions, WMU wants to be there to help you," she said.

At their pre-SBC meeting, members of the WMU Executive Board took no action in response to the SBC Executive Committee resolution regarding a change in WMU's exclusive relationship with the two Southern Baptist missionary-sending agencies.

The board did approve a special fund to accept contributions for WMU-sponsored volunteer missions projects.

WMU has known "uncertain days" in the recent past, but the missions auxiliary remains focused on the future, according to National WMU President Carolyn Miller of Huntsville, Ala.

"Since January, we have received so many letters, notes and phone calls from people all over the nation, telling us of your prayers," Miller told the opening session of the 105th annual meeting of WMU, prior to the SBC.

"Although we have experienced a difficult year thus far, we have a real

peace about our decisions, and about what the future holds for WMU. We have a true sense that our decisions were Spirit-led and God-breathed. That leaves us nothing but excited about our future."

During the WMU morning session on June 14, Dan Vestal, pastor of Tallwood Baptist Church, Houston, delivered 15 boxes filled with more than 50,000 tributes to WMU.

In April, Vestal launched the petition campaign in support of WMU. He was joined in the effort by James Flammig, pastor of First Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.; Dick Maples, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and pastor of First Baptist Church, Bryan, Texas; Quinn Pugh, executive director of the New York Baptist Convention; and Ellen Teague, president of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

"Please continue," Vestal told the WMU meeting, "for the sake of the gospel and the cause of Jesus Christ, to lead Southern Baptists -- all Southern Baptists -- in the cause of missions involvement and missions support into the next century and the next millennium."

WMU annual meeting participants re-elected by acclamation Miller as president and Martha Wennerberg of Defuniak Springs, Fla., as recording secretary.

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-- Linda Lawson, Philip Poole and Brenda Sanders contributed to this report.

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