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Committee drafts guidelines  
for challenging churches

By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention have adopted guidelines they hope will keep some disciplinary action against SBC churches from becoming front-page news.

The guidelines were approved by the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 21 for use by the SBC credentials committee, which handles challenges to the seating of messengers at the yearly Southern Baptist Convention meetings.

An attempt to keep messengers from Bill Clinton's home church from participating in the three-day convention last June made headlines in secular papers nationwide, playing up the conflict between Clinton and SBC leaders over such moral issues as abortion and homosexuality.

Although the attempt to expel messengers from Clinton's church eventually failed, the very public process exposed the church to "ungrounded, unsubstantiated attacks" in pursuit of "personal, secular, political agendas," complained Rex Horne, pastor of the church, Immanuel Baptist in Little Rock, Ark.

The credentials committee ultimately decided that Immanuel Baptist was not responsible for the actions and opinions of its most prominent member, and the church's messengers were seated. However, the SBC did pass a resolution denouncing Clinton's views on homosexuality and abortion -- one of about 20 anti-Clinton resolutions proposed during the three-day June convention.

The Executive Committee, meeting Sept. 20-21 in Nashville, Tenn., adopted guidelines designed to make it somewhat harder to get a hearing for future challenges and to keep some of the deliberations of the credentials committee private.

The Executive Committee also voted not to expel churches that ordain women, delayed a showdown with the SBC Annuity Board over abortion-related investments, and authorized a far-reaching study of the denomination's agency structure.

Executive Committee meetings, often the scene of rancorous battles

between moderates and conservatives in the 1980s, have turned quiet in recent years as conservatives have solidified their control of the committee and the denomination.

The September committee session was no exception, as members easily approved 35 recommendations -- all unanimously -- and completed their three-day agenda a day early.

The credentials guidelines, which were adopted by the Executive Committee unanimously without discussion, will be recommended to the credentials committee, which is appointed each year by the SBC president.

The process:

-- Messengers will be asked to notify the credentials committee ahead of time, even before the convention starts, that they plan to make a challenge.

-- The SBC president may rule some would-be challenges out of order, even before they go to the committee, if he decides they lack merit.

-- The committee will meet with the challenger, presumably in private, to preview the evidence and see how it stacks up against Article III of the SBC constitution, which governs messenger qualifications.

-- The committee can either dismiss the challenge as unfounded, and report that action to the convention, or convene a hearing in which both sides argue their case.

-- The challenge will be evaluated by the two requirements of Article III -- that the church be "in friendly cooperation" with the SBC and have taken no action to "affirm, approve or endorse" homosexual behavior. The challenge can proceed only if a church has not supported the SBC financially or if the church -- not individual members or messengers -- has specifically acted to affirm homosexual behavior.

-- After hearing the evidence, the committee may deliberate in private.

-- The committee's decision will be reported to the convention, which can either accept or reject it.

As was the case last June, when Clinton's church was challenged, the only congregational action -- other than lack of financial support -- that can disqualify a church from the SBC is homosexual endorsement. Messengers added that restriction in 1992 in order to expel two North Carolina churches, instituting the first moral test for SBC membership in the convention's 148-year history.

But other moral restrictions are coming, predicted some members of the administrative subcommittee, which handled the credentials guidelines. Some subcommittee members complained Article III is too narrow and that other issues, such as abortion, perhaps should be considered.

But members of the Executive Committee turned back an attempt to amend Article III to make ordination of women a test of fellowship in the SBC.

A motion proposed at the June convention, and referred to the committee, would have made women's ordination grounds for a church's expulsion from the SBC. But the Executive Committee quickly dismissed the proposal without discussion.

"We really didn't even discuss this in the (bylaws) workgroup," committee chairman Fred Wolfe of Mobile, Ala., told committee members.

"While we don't believe in ordaining women, most of us on this committee, we felt like it was a local-church matter," said Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile. The restriction against churches that affirm homosexuality is different, Wolfe said, because "homosexuality is a moral issue."

The recommendation to dismiss the motion was approved unanimously.

The Executive Committee delayed action on a dispute with the Annuity Board, the SBC's pension and insurance provider, over investments that benefit abortion supporters.

Last February the committee asked the Annuity Board to get rid of any stockholdings in companies that contribute to organizations that provide or advocate abortions, such as Planned Parenthood.

The agency's trustees declined the request in August, saying such a policy would so limit the Annuity Board's investment options that the agency might illegally jeopardize the pension funds of its clients. The Annuity Board also noted SBC bylaws prohibit the Executive Committee from controlling the actions of SBC agencies.

The Annuity Board's own policy prohibits investment in companies "whose products, services or activities are publicly recognized as being incompatible with the moral and ethical posture of the Annuity Board" -- a posture said to include opposition to abortion.

In light of that policy, the Executive Committee voted Sept. 21 to "reserve further comment" until the Annuity Board addresses a more sweeping request -- this one referred from the Southern Baptist Convention in June -- that the agency divest itself of stocks in companies "whose business endeavors conflict with the teachings, commands and spirit of the Holy Bible."

Another request from the Executive Committee to an SBC agency -- this one the Historical Commission -- was honored, however.

In June the committee asked the Historical Commission to delete a reference to the rival Cooperative Baptist Fellowship from a pamphlet called "Who Are Southern Baptists?" The pamphlet identified the Fellowship, an organization of moderate Southern Baptists, as an alternative channel of mission support used by some Southern Baptists.

The Historical Commission revised the pamphlet -- an action the Executive Committee voted to affirm Sept. 21.

The relationships between the Executive Committee and the other 20 SBC agencies is likely to get more attention as a result of a far-reaching study approved by the committee Sept. 21. A seven-member study group, which includes four Executive Committee members, will examine each agency's program statement, the SBC-approved document that defines and governs each agency's work.

Committee members were told the study will seek to make the work of the SBC and its agencies more cost-efficient. Some SBC leaders would like to see some of the smaller agencies combined or brought under Executive Committee control.

Members of the study group are Mark Brister of Shreveport, La. (chairman), Ronnie Floyd of Springdale, Ark., William Hall of San Clemente, Calif., Greg Horton of Simpsonville, S.C., Albert Mohler of Louisville, Ky., Robert Sorrell of Memphis, Tenn., and Rex Terry of Fort Smith, Ark. Floyd, Hall, Sorrell and Terry are Executive Committee members.

The Executive Committee rejected several proposed changes to SBC bylaws which were referred to the committee from the SBC meeting in June, including four which had been rejected in similar form in recent years:

-- A proposal to shift the responsibility for naming the annual Committee on Committees from the SBC president to the various state and regional Baptist conventions was rejected. The president's power to appoint the important committee has been used in recent years to elect agency trustees that would steer the SBC on a more conservative course.

-- A requirement that those serving on the Executive Committee be members of churches that contribute at least 10 percent of their budgets to the Cooperative Program was likewise rejected. The churches represented by current Executive Committee members give 7.3 percent, well below the SBC-wide average of 9.3 percent.

-- Also rejected was a requirement that the SBC parliamentarian be a

member of a Southern Baptist church. Since 1986 Barry McCarty, a Church of Christ minister and Bible college president from Cincinnati, has served as chief SBC parliamentarian at a total cost to the convention of \$91,320.

-- A limit on severance benefits for Executive Committee employees was rejected. Instead committee members pledged "to strive to provide appropriate stewardship leadership in this area." The committee's gifts to retiring executive Harold Bennett in 1992 drew criticism from some.

In other action, the Executive Committee released \$300,000 in capital funds to the Christian Life Commission for purchase of an office building in Washington, D.C. The funds, which were the source of a bitter legal dispute between the CLC and the Baptist Joint Committee, were promised to the CLC last June by the committee.

Also during their September meeting, Executive Committee members heard from SBC president Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston. Young reported on his Sept. 16 meeting with President Clinton.

Young urged Southern Baptist churches to participate in a 40-day campaign of prayer for Clinton, following a plan outlined in a booklet published by the SBC Brotherhood Commission.

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#### Committee grapples with Cooperative Program decline

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- From start to finish, the Sept. 20-21 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee was replete with calls for renewed support of the Cooperative Program, the central budget that supports the work of the SBC's agencies.

Southern Baptist leaders are trying to jump start a denominational budget that is headed for its second straight year in decline.

During its September meeting, when the Executive Committee traditionally hears requests for increased funding from the 18 agencies its budget supports, committee members gave much of their attention to finding new ways to promote the Cooperative Program and inspire increased giving.

But committee members stopped short of tying their own elections to a minimum Cooperative Program contribution from their churches -- the third time in four years they have defeated such a motion.

The churches to which Executive Committee members belong give an average of 7.23 percent of their undesignated budget funds to the Cooperative Program, 2 percent below the national average.

A motion introduced to the Southern Baptist Convention in June -- and referred to the Executive Committee for action -- would have required that members of the committee come from churches that give at least 10 percent to the denomination's central budget.

In voting down the proposal, Executive Committee members noted that "individuals and not churches are eligible for election" to the committee, that individual church members may not feel the same way about the Cooperative Program as do the majority of church members, that churches give to the CP on a voluntary basis, and that CP giving is not a basis for SBC membership according to the constitution.

Churches qualify for SBC membership by contributing "to the convention's work," the constitution says, and that includes CP gifts as well as funds earmarked for specific SBC causes.

In a separate action, the Executive Committee voted to publish a record of such designated gifts in the SBC Annual. Again acting on a motion referred

from the June SBC meeting, the change will recognize churches that bypass their own state convention by sending their contributions directly to the Executive Committee. Such funds are counted as contributions "to the convention's work" but not to the Cooperative Program.

One of the most fervent pleas for increased giving during the September meeting came from Morris Chapman, the committee's president and the SBC's top executive.

Chapman reported that year-to-date gifts to the Cooperative Program are 1.36 percent below the previous year and 1.88 percent below budget.

"Somebody must give the leadership," urged Chapman. "We are at a crossroads of determining as a denomination whether we are going to hang together to reach the world for Christ."

Chapman said historic changes in the SBC, based on "unequivocal biblical convictions," have set the denomination on "a new but historically rooted direction. But if those strong convictions lead us to an independent mentality and away from a cooperative spirit in financially supporting missions, we will ultimately fail...."

Emphasizing that "one of our great strengths has been the desire and ability to do together what we cannot do separately," Chapman reminded committee members that "God honors a faithful steward."

The Executive Committee reinforced its own verbal commitment to the Cooperative Program. In declining to set a minimum percentage for committee members, the group noted it already has "endorsed the Cooperative Program as a God-inspired channel of missions support and encouraged all churches to prayerfully consider increasing missions support through the Cooperative Program."

Although Cooperative Program funds are in decline, the need for those funds is not. During the meeting, the SBC agencies that rely on the Cooperative Program asked for a total of \$145 million to support their work in 1994-95. That would be a 5 percent increase over the current year.

The Executive Committee will use those requests to develop the 1994-95 budget, which will be considered at the committee's February meeting.

Among the ideas under consideration to promote the Cooperative Program is a regular news program about the work of the SBC, designed to be shown on cable TV. The Executive Committee approved a feasibility study for the project, which would focus on "timely, factual accounts of agencies' successes using Cooperative Program funds."

Committee chairman Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., said he would lead his church to increase its CP giving by half a percent a year until it reaches 10 percent. He said the church now gives about 5 percent to the CP.

As the Executive Committee meeting closed with prayer, Wolfe issued one final plea: "Let's pray specifically that there will be a turnabout in the Cooperative Program."

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-- By Greg Warner and Trennis Henderson

Baptists launch prayer plan  
for Bill Clinton, Al Gore

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore haven't had a prayer with most Southern Baptists -- until now.

A "Pray for the President" daily prayer guide has been printed by the

thousands after one Baptist official became alarmed at how many Baptists were bad-mouthing their fellow Christians in the White House.

"I travel a good bit and all I was hearing from Baptist men was how bad Clinton is," said Jim Furgerson, director of the adult division of the Southern Baptist Convention's Brotherhood Commission based in Memphis, Tenn.

"I didn't vote for Clinton, but I'm an American, he's our president, and my Bible requires of me that I pray for our leaders. The Bible doesn't say to cut him to pieces."

Although both Clinton and Gore are Southern Baptists, they have alienated conservative SBC leaders because they advocate gay rights and take a pro-choice position on abortion.

The booklet is a 40-page prayer guide. Each page has a Scripture reference and a specific topic to pray about -- for instance, that Clinton be a good "model of Christian leadership" or that he maintain hope, self-control and faithfulness to Christ.

The book specifies many of the same topics to keep in mind for Gore.

Each page also has a blank line on which to write down a current news event to pray about. The books are being sold by the Brotherhood Commission for \$3.50 for a pack of 10.

Top SBC leaders who visited Clinton and Gore Sept. 16 gave him a copy of the booklet.

The president was pleased to learn of the prayer plan, said SBC president Ed Young of Houston, who made the visit with Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, and two others.

Young, who told the Executive Committee about his visit with the president, said he found a spiritual sensitivity in Clinton. "There is a heart there -- a spiritual cross-pull -- in the life of our president. Who knows what the Lord will do?"

Young called for SBC churches to launch a 40-day prayer campaign for Clinton and Gore beginning Jan. 1.

Not all Baptists are thrilled about the prayer plan, however. Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, said it leaves the impression that conservative Southern Baptists are using prayer as a political weapon after losing "public-policy access" to the White House.

"Southern Baptists felt no special need to pray for Reagan and Bush," Parham said. "But those presidents weren't considered enemies of fundamentalism."

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-- By Ray Waddle

SBC move from Atlanta to Denver  
delayed by lack of contract

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Members of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee would like to reward Colorado and punish Atlanta for their opposing positions on homosexuality. But the attempt to move the 1999 Southern Baptist Convention from Atlanta to Denver will be delayed by a technicality.

Atlanta is the site selected for the 1999 annual convention, which typically draws 20,000 or more people to the host city for the three-day June meeting. But the Atlanta city council has barred city-funded travel to Colorado because that state's constitution won't allow civil-rights protections for homosexuals.

Some Southern Baptists leaders say Colorado was right and Atlanta was wrong. A motion to move the 1999 SBC meeting from Atlanta to Denver was introduced in June by Kenneth Barnett, then a member of the SBC Executive Committee from Colorado.

Although the Executive Committee seemed inclined to make the move during their Sept. 21-22 meeting, they encountered a problem with the 1995 SBC meeting, also set for Atlanta.

The meeting was slated for Atlanta in order to commemorate the 1845 founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in nearby Augusta, Ga. Plans for the sesquicentennial celebration are well underway. But to date no contract has been signed for convention facilities in Atlanta for 1995. Such contracts typically are not finalized until about 18 months before a convention, committee members were told.

Until the ink is dry on the 1995 contract, committee members are reluctant to withdraw the 1999 meeting from Atlanta, fearing reprisals. They voted to defer on Barnett's request "in order to allow adequate time to secure a signed contract."

Meanwhile, leaders of the United Methodist Church voted in June to hold their denomination's 1996 general conference in Denver in spite of -- not because of -- Colorado's anti-gay legislation.

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-- By Greg Warner

Coalition of Hope  
aims at state support

By Robert Dilday

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Coalition of Hope -- a group which says it wants to end division in the Southern Baptist Convention by focusing on missions -- is urging the formation of state-level organizations related to their national movement.

The Coalition of Hope's coordinating workgroup met with state Baptist convention leaders Sept. 20, seeking support for its effort to "call Southern Baptists ... to new levels of missions commitment and accountability in response to God's fresh call to world evangelism."

Rodney Osborn, the workgroup's covener, asked about a dozen state convention executive directors and presidents to facilitate the creation of state-level workgroups which would send representatives to a national convocation this spring.

That convocation, Osborn said, would hammer out details to guide what he called a "modern missionary movement" that could restore harmony in the denomination, wracked by theological disputes for more than a decade.

The Coalition of Hope is an outgrowth of a research project headed by Lloyd Elder, retired president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

In May Elder called for Southern Baptists to bring an end to their controversy by mandating sweeping constitutional changes that "would involve the whole family in missionary governance, and call on our people to renew their zeal in missions support."

Elder's proposals would involve state conventions in the nomination of half the persons to serve on SBC boards, commissions and committees. The SBC president now directs the process through the appointment of a nominating committee.

In June Elder was joined in his campaign by Herschel Hobbs, a former SBC president and Southern Baptist elder statesman. The pair held a three-hour dialogue with state convention leaders June 14 prior to the SBC meeting in Houston. That meeting resulted in formation of the coordinating workgroup headed by Osborn, a Peoria, Ill., physician who is immediate past president of the organization of state convention presidents.

Osborn told state leaders Sept. 20 he hopes local workgroups will examine the level of support among churches in their states for the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified giving plan, and suggest ways to remodel the denomination to increase contributions to it.

Support for the Cooperative Program has declined in recent years, due in part, say some observers, to the continuing denominational unrest.

But at least two state executive directors expressed reservations with the workgroup's request. Reginald McDonough of Virginia and Roy Smith of North Carolina said such a study would be perceived as an attempt to embarrass conservative Southern Baptist leaders, some of whose churches give only a small percentage of their mission gifts through the Cooperative Program.

"It would be hard to get a group together" if some state leaders believed its aim is to criticize SBC leaders, he said.

Osborn and other workgroup leaders denied they are attempting to discredit conservative leaders. They sought to distance themselves from the original report distributed by Elder, a moderate who left the Sunday School Board in a dispute with conservative trustees.

"This group is beyond any one report or individual. This is not Elder's committee," said Osborn, adding it was up to the press to "dispel that myth."

Earlier, Quinn Pugh, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New York and a coordinating workgroup member, said: "Some have no doubt assumed we are against something or someone. We oppose no one. We are here to respond to the fresh call of God."

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### Bills threaten advocacy role of non-profit organizations

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Two proposals circulating on Capitol Hill could undermine the public-policy advocacy of non-profit groups, including Baptists.

The Baptist Joint Committee joined with several non-profit organizations to oppose the provisions -- one of which affects postal rates for non-profit groups that solicit funds and engage in some lobbying activities. Baptist state papers apparently would not be affected as long as they refrain from fund raising or lobbying.

The proposal, offered by Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Ark., would amend the Treasury, Postal and General Government Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2403) that has been approved by both chambers and is expected to be considered Sept. 23 by a Senate-House conference committee.

The Stevens amendment, which was not in the House or Senate bills, would disallow the use of third-class postal rates for solicitation of contributions that eventually would be used (even indirectly) to influence government.

Several groups, including the BJC, American Cancer Society, Girl Scouts of the USA and Goodwill Industries of America, opposed this

amendment. Those groups would have to use the more expensive first-class rate for fund-raising letters.

Any groups that engage in fund raising and occasionally contact legislators to support or oppose legislation would be affected. The measure also requires additional accounting procedures.

The BJC signed on to a letter sent by Independent Sector, a coalition of 825 voluntary organizations, to congressional leaders.

The letter states: "All public charities would be affected, but it is likely that many small groups simply would discontinue their appropriate advisory effort because they would not have the financial resources to carry out the additional record keeping.

"Congress has, on a number of occasions, considered the question of appropriate lobbying limits of public charities and has, in each case, concluded that modest but reasonable amounts of advocacy by those groups should be encouraged, not discouraged."

Another proposal would impose a 30 percent tax on lobbying expenditures of tax-exempt organizations; it also expands the definition of lobbying to include contacts with regulatory agencies. It was among miscellaneous revenue-raising measures suggested by the House Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures.

The BJC and other groups joined in an Independent Sector letter opposing the proposal. "Most exempt organizations will reduce or forego lobbying rather than pay a 30 percent tax. ... Lobbying by non-profit organizations is an important element of the vital political discourse on which participatory democracy depends. It should not be discouraged, further limited, or taxed."

Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel, predicted neither proposals would be adopted. However, he added, "it is important for non-profit organizations to speak quickly and forcefully against them. Both measures would be ruinous."

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-- By Pam Parry

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