

Associated Baptist Press

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North Carolina Baptists vote to allow Fellowship funding

By Greg Warner

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) – North Carolina Baptists changed their budget structure Nov. 12 to allow churches to channel funds through their state convention to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Also at their annual meeting, Baptists in the state re-elected their officers – but not without opposition -- and voted to provide more money to Baptist colleges in the state which now must compete with a new college to be established at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest.

Budget chairman Boyce Wilson said the new budget will change little other than to "recognize what has taken place" in recent years.

Already 265 of the state's 3,557 churches have decided to reduce contributions from the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention by choosing an "option budget" that funds the SBC and moderate-backed ministries – but not the Fellowship.

A new \$29.4 million North Carolina budget eliminates the optional section and instead asks churches to choose from three funding plans -- one that supports the SBC, one that supports the SBC and some out-of- state mission ministries, and a third that funds the Fellowship and the out-of-state causes but includes nothing for the SBC.

All three plans earmark 68 percent of contributions to support traditional state convention ministries.

It was the third option – Plan C – that was the focus of debate during the Nov. 11-12 annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in Winston-Salem.

Bill Horton of Asheville argued the plan violates the convention's constitution -- which says the state convention will cooperate with the SBC -- by eliminating funding for the Cooperative Program, the SBC's traditional funding channel.

Horton, a member of the SBC Executive Committee, which controls the Cooperative Program budget, called the proposal "provocative and divisive" and a product of "dictatorial leadership" in the state convention.

"Plan C will only widen the alarming breach" between the SBC and North Carolina convention, Horton charged.

However, budget chairman Wilson, a layman from Winston- Salem, said, "This does not reflect -- absolutely not -- any change in relationship between the Baptist State Convention and the national convention," in introducing the report.

"North Carolina Baptists do not have to be a clone of the Southern Baptist Convention," argued Fred Werhan

of Candler during debate.

James Lankford of Tabor City made a motion to delete Plan C, which he said is inconsistent with the state convention's purpose of supporting the SBC. "This is not a referendum on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," he said. "This is intended to draw us closer together."

The amendment failed by an estimated 3-2 margin.

The discussion grew testy as time ran out on the business session. While some messengers tried to offer other amendments, most of the 4,051 messengers called for a vote on the budget.

Ted Stone of Durham, who had planned to ask messengers to delete all but the traditional Plan A, protested. By cutting off debate, he said, "We have said 'no' to a whole lot of good, cooperative Baptists in North Carolina. We're saying, 'We don't care what you think.'"

The budget was approved by an estimated 2-1 margin.

If a church does not choose one of the three funding plans, its gifts will automatically be assigned to the traditional Plan A. Those that choose Plan C – the Fellowship plan – will not qualify for membership in the Southern Baptist Convention unless they make some other contribution to SBC causes, messengers were told.

More churches from North Carolina contribute directly to the Fellowship than from any other state -- 274. The state convention's leaders believe allowing those churches to channel their Fellowship gifts through state offices will make those churches more likely to support the state convention budget as well.

The Fellowship will receive 10 percent of all funds contributed to Plan C. Likewise the SBC gets 10 percent of contributions to Plan B. Other mission causes receive 22 percent of both plans -- mission partnerships in the Ukraine and New York, theological scholarships, International Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and Associated Baptist Press.

The Southern Baptist Convention will receive 32 percent of the traditional Plan A.

The three-option approach is similar to one already in place in Virginia. Meanwhile, Texas Baptists voted recently to count church contributions to the Fellowship and other Baptist causes as Cooperative Program funds.

The Fellowship issue surfaced again in the presidential election.

Alfred Ayscue, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Mt. Airy and a Fellowship leader, was challenged by two conservative candidates, despite a tradition of re-electing presidents to a second term without opposition.

Ayscue got 61 percent of the vote against Ted Stone (21 percent) and Lynn Buzzard, professor of constitutional law at Campbell University (19 percent).

One messenger, David Martin of Cary, challenged Ayscue's fitness for office. Martin told messengers Ayscue could not preside fairly because he told a May meeting of Fellowship supporters to stop funding the SBC.

In response, Ayscue said the newspaper account of the May meeting left the inaccurate impression "I was telling churches to do that." Rather, he said, he was explaining options for funding.

Ayscue, a member of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council, said he did not tell churches what to do. "I never have and never will. And that's all I'm going to say about the matter."

After his re-election, Ayscue told reporters he was challenged for the presidency "because there are people in our convention who are committed to the (conservative) course of the SBC and want to make participation in the Southern Baptist Convention a test of loyalty in the state convention."

"I don't think our people are willing to be placed in that position," he said.

In his presidential address, Ayscue defended the rights of all churches to support the SBC or the Fellowship. "Those are the decisions of local congregations, not to be interfered with by this or any other convention," he said.

Messengers later passed a resolution affirming the autonomy of the local church and the principle of voluntary cooperation, citing "The Baptist Faith and Message" and other Baptist documents.

And messengers turned back an attempt to amend a long-range planning report to pledge loyalty to the Southern Baptist Convention.

The document quoted, in abbreviated form, the purpose of the state convention "to assist the churches in their divinely appointed mission." Mark Cortis of Winston-Salem offered an amendment to add the rest of the original purpose statement, which pledges cooperation with the SBC.

"We don't need to hide our purpose," agreed M.O. Owens, retired pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church in

Gastonia. "We are Southern Baptists, most of us at least."

But such an addition implies loyalty to the SBC is more important than the local church's mission, countered Larry Coleman of Laurinburg. "I don't need any state telling my church to be loyal to anything but its divinely appointed mission."

Corts' amendment failed by an estimated 3-2 margin.

Messengers agreed to create a fund to subsidize the state's seven Baptist colleges with at least as much money as now goes from North Carolina to the six SBC seminaries through the national Cooperative Program -- about \$1.9 million. It was left to the convention's General Board to determine where the money will come from for the new fund.

Those colleges complained that a new college-level program at Southeastern Seminary will be subsidized by SBC Cooperative Program funds, lowering tuition and placing the seven colleges at a disadvantage for recruiting students.

The SBC Cooperative Program allocates about \$6,000 per year for each seminary student, while the seven Baptist colleges in North Carolina receive about \$350 per student from the state convention, messengers were told.

Messengers re-elected their other officers without opposition -- Kathryn Hamrick, Boiling Springs, first vice president; Jack Glasgow, Zebulon, second vice president; Marian Grant, Raleigh, recording secretary; and Earnest Upchurch, Raleigh, assistant recording secretary.

A second resolution urged passage of legislation outlawing advertising of alcoholic beverages on radio and television, while praising Dean Smith, basketball coach at the University of North Carolina, for opposing beer advertisements at Atlantic Coast Conference games.

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Seminary's new college prompts promise of funding for others

By Greg Warner

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- A plan to start a college at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary has placed North Carolina Baptists on the defensive.

Messengers to the annual Baptist State Convention of North Carolina agreed Nov. 12 to find more money for their own colleges, which their leaders say are being forced into an unfair competition for students by Southeastern's plan.

Baptists in the state voted to create a fund to subsidize the state's seven Baptist colleges with at least as much money as now goes from North Carolina to the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries through the national Cooperative Program -- about \$1.9 million.

It is not clear where the money will come from, but the plan could require a cut in the state convention's funding of the SBC's Cooperative Program.

The issue of college funding surfaced during the final session of the Nov. 11-12 meeting in Winston-Salem. The convention's Council on Christian Higher Education, representing the seven Baptist colleges in the state, complained about the new college being founded at Southeastern Seminary to attract undergraduate students entering the ministry.

The Southern Baptist Convention subsidizes Southeastern's students through Cooperative Program funding -- about \$6,000 per student per year -- said Norman Wiggins, president of Campbell University in Buies Creek. The seven colleges receive no funding from the SBC and only about \$350 per student per year from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, he said.

That inequity keeps Southeastern's tuition artificially low and puts the seven colleges at a financial disadvantage in recruiting students, Wiggins said.

Those colleges already share \$5.8 million in funding from the state convention, while Cooperative Program funds from North Carolina provide about \$1.9 million to the SBC seminaries -- \$244,000 to Southeastern.

State executive Roy Smith told reporters he took Wiggins' request to be for money over and above current funding from the state convention.

Steve Hardy of Burlington argued against Wiggins' proposal, which he said would be too expensive and would siphon money away from the SBC portion of the state budget.

Wiggins' motion was softened from an earlier version that called for the state convention to divert all North Carolina funds targeted for the six SBC seminaries. In the motion's final form, it was left to the General Board to decide where the money will come from.

The motion passed easily.

Traditionally state conventions have funded colleges, while the SBC has funded seminaries. In recent years, however, as conservatives have gained control of the seminaries, some of the colleges -- including two in North Carolina -- have moved to start seminaries or graduate theology schools, competing with the SBC seminaries.

At least two SBC seminaries have since started college-level programs -- Southeastern and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Others already have them.

Tension between Southeastern and the state Baptist colleges is nothing new. Many North Carolina Baptists have been agitated about Southeastern since conservatives gained control of the seminary in 1988 and have been similarly displeased with Patterson's leadership. And some conservatives complain the Baptist colleges are too liberal and educate too few ministerial students. Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern, did not attend the final convention session and declined to comment on the Wiggins plan before learning more about the details.

North Carolina Baptists are affiliated with Campbell University, Chowan College, Gardner-Webb University, Mars Hill College, Meredith College, Wake Forest University and Wingate College. Gardner-Webb already has a divinity school and Wake Forest is starting a seminary.

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