

Associated Baptist Press

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In this issue:

- Andy Stanley plans to start new church
- Virginia conservatives vote 'no' to new convention, 'yes' to executive
- Alabama school board labels evolution a 'theory'
- Speaker urges moderates to look beyond past battles
- Illinois Baptist executive awakening from coma

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Andy Stanley plans to start new church

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Andy Stanley, former preacher at the First Baptist Church of Atlanta's satellite congregation in Dunwoody, will start a new church in the city's northern suburbs, according to a news report Nov. 10.

Stanley, the son of First Baptist pastor Charles Stanley, resigned from the church in August over concern about his father's leadership of the 13,000-member congregation during a pending divorce.

He told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution he decided to start a new congregation after considering job offers from other churches.

"It was tempting to think about just walking away from all this mess and to have an office and a staff and a congregation and a building and a new start in a new city -- and a salary," Stanley said, "because I haven't had a paycheck since Sept. 15 and who knows when I'll get one. But as I weighed the advantages and disadvantages, we want to stay."

The new church will be geared to people who feel disenfranchised by traditional churches, he said.

The new church has been incorporated as Northpoint Community Church, but that could change, Stanley said. It will probably not start until late 1996 and will be affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We'll probably be a nomadic church for a long time," Stanley said.

Stanley, 37, told the Atlanta paper that his resignation was "tough" on his relationship with his father but "we've moved on beyond that. Both of us are committed to our relationship."

He also said he has a "great relationship" with his mother, who first filed for divorce in 1993. The case is scheduled for trial in Cobb County Nov. 27.

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-- By ABP staff

Virginia conservatives vote 'no' to new convention, 'yes' to executive

By Michael Clingenpeel

NORFOLK, Va. (ABP) -- After lengthy discussion, Virginia Baptist conservatives backed away from forming their own state convention, but will continue studying that option after hiring a full-time executive director.

At their Nov. 7 annual meeting in Norfolk, the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia debated and defeated a motion to "declare ourselves to be a separate state convention effective today."

The three-year-old organization is for Virginia Baptists disenchanted with the moderate-controlled Baptist General Association of Virginia and loyal to the conservative leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Had the motion passed it would have forced the SBC for the first time to decide how to relate to competing conventions in one state. It also would have caused many conservative churches to consider leaving the BGAV.

The movement to form a separate state convention during the annual meeting was no surprise. Since the conservative group formed in 1993 there has been speculation they would break with the state convention. Last December the group's executive committee appointed a committee to study whether to form a separate state convention. In April the committee reported that the SBCV "should work on strengthening its existing ministries" in an effort to "increase its impact for Christ in Virginia."

In September the SBCV's executive committee voted to recommend to their annual meeting that the group employ a full-time executive director "in recognition of the eventual formation of a separate state convention."

Robert Jackson, director of missions for the New River Baptist Association and Virginia representative to the SBC Executive Committee, who chaired the study committee, said the committee decided to recommend against forming a separate state convention now because of "very real and significant differences of opinion" among Virginia Baptist conservatives over the issue.

Other issues are "a lack of clarity" about how the SBC "would relate to a separate convention within the borders of an existing state convention" and that a new state organization could cause "needless disruption in many church fellowships and even in the SBC itself," Jackson continued.

Before the vote on the committee's report, however, the group debated for more than an hour a substitute motion by Terry Harper, the SBCV's first vice president, that the SBCV employ a full-time executive director and form a state convention "effective today."

"We started on a good track and we need to keep going," said the Colonial Heights, Va., pastor. Accusing the BGAV of failing to take stands on abortion, homosexuality and the infallibility of God's word, and of strengthening ties with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship while decreasing ties with the SBC, Harper added, "I'm not in for going where they're headed. I'm for saying goodbye, God bless you and go forward."

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a national organization of moderates opposed to the conservative direction of the SBC.

"I agree with everything you said but the timing," countered Tommy Taylor, pastor of London Bridge Baptist Church in Virginia Beach and a former president of the SBCV. "Dual alignment is where we need to be right now. Dual alignment with the SBCV and BGAV does not hinder my church from being what we want to be."

Taylor argued conservatives needed to delay forming a separate state group until they have better organization, stronger financial backing, greater unity among conservatives in Virginia, and until conservative momentum in the SBC spills over into Virginia.

The motion to form a separate convention failed by a vote of 150 to 60. But the group unanimously voted to employ a full-time executive director "in recognition of the possible formation" of a separate state convention. They also narrowly adopted a motion to "enter into serious dialogue with the SBC Executive Committee about steps necessary to become a recognized separate state convention."

During the session, attended by approximately 250 pastors and laity, the group's interim executive director,

Howard Baldwin, announced the SBCV is "on track and growing." Since 1993 the group has grown from 13 to 79 churches and from \$34,888 to \$157,282 in receipts, he said.

A budget of \$221,000 was adopted for 1996. The budget allocates 65 percent for SBCV expenses and 35 percent for the SBC Cooperative Program.

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Alabama school board labels evolution a 'theory'

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP) -- Alabama's state school board voted Nov. 9 to add a message to new biology textbooks saying evolution is a theory, not a fact.

The 250-word insert informs students that the textbook discusses evolution, a "controversial theory some scientists present as a scientific explanation for the origin of living things."

"No one was present when life first appeared on Earth. Therefore, any statement about life's origins should be considered as theory, not fact," it continues.

The insert ends: "Study hard and keep an open mind. Someday you may contribute to the theories of how living things appeared on Earth."

The school board approved the change 6-1 with one abstention. Gov. Bob James, a Republican, supported the measure, saying he believes the Bible's account of God creating life.

Backers for the measure included the Eagle Forum and other conservative groups who contend current textbooks present evolution as indisputable, Associated Press reported. Opponents said the wording had more to do with people's religious beliefs than with science.

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-- By ABP staff

Speaker urges moderates to look beyond past battles

NORMAN, Okla. (ABP) -- Some moderates have become obsessed with losing the Southern Baptist Convention because they idolized it, speaker Ken Chafin told a Nov. 3-4 gathering in Norman, Okla.

After a decade of political infighting, moderates should now turn to channeling their energies in positive ways, Kenneth Chafin, a retired seminary professor and pastor from Louisville, Ky., told the general assembly of the Cooperating Baptist Fellowship of Oklahoma.

The key to facing the future for moderates is "to discover why God brought us to this place," Chafin said. "Who can imagine what would happen if we let go of the past and embraced the future?"

Chafin said moderates should not forget their past but should refuse "to be held captive by our past." He urged moderates "not to be trapped in yesterdays, but to somehow find Christ and a new future."

In business at the meeting at First Baptist Church in Norman, the Oklahoma Fellowship presented its first Baptist Heritage Award to the late Joe Ingram. Ingram was executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma from 1971 to 1986.

The group also elected Bill Johnson, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Ardmore, as its moderator.

The state Fellowship group is affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national organization of moderate Southern Baptists who disapprove of the convention's conservative leaders.

Another speaker, Diana Garland, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., highlighted the Bible's call to justice for all people. That includes "speaking out on behalf of those who need justice," she said.

One-fourth of America's children live in poverty, Garland said. One way to pursue justice is to "create communities of justice, islands of justice, where churches provide Bible studies, recreation, tutoring and adult friendship" for impoverished children and their families, she said. "We can say, 'Look, here is the way it's supposed to be.'"

"Our focus on justice must be rooted in kindness," Garland added. "Statistics are people with the tears washed off. We need to see and share their tears."

Theologian Bill Hendricks said part of the Baptist debate over the years has been over freedom to determine the nature of truth.

Some people believe truth is "personal and relational," found in a relationship with Jesus Christ, he said. Others believe truth is "propositional," contained in a series of doctrinal propositions, or statements.

Truth, however, is more than personal experience and ponderous doctrine, said Hendricks, who soon will start a Baptist studies program at Texas Christian University's Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

"Truth is something you do," he stressed. "And unless you do for those who cannot do for themselves, for those who are down-hearted and discouraged, you're not worth freedom."

Kentucky Baptist editor Marv Knox emphasized the need for truth-telling in the denominational press.

"Truth -- accurate information about what's happening, what's about to happen, what might happen and why -- fuels the engine of democracy," Knox said. "In a democratic denomination, integrity depends on truth-telling."

Knox said over the years, Southern Baptist leaders generally allowed their journalists to report freely on denominational affairs. However, "with few exceptions, the Southern Baptist news operation was a company store," he said. "And when politics overtook the company and politicians tended the store, freedom and truth-telling were taken off the shelf."

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-- By Bob Allen and Marv Knox

Illinois Baptist executive awakening from coma

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (ABP) -- Illinois Baptist leader Gene Wilson appeared to be awakening from a coma of more than two months, according to recent reports.

Wilson, 52, executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association, collapsed and slipped into a coma Aug. 30. Doctors said he suffered from a massive brain hemorrhage.

The Illinois Baptist newspaper reported that after a shunt was implanted to drain fluid in the brain Oct. 12, Wilson began to show signs of improvement. He grew more responsive -- opening his eyes, reacting to pain and nodding yes or no in response to questions.

Surgeons performed another operation Nov. 9 to relieve more pressure from fluid trapped between the brain surface and skull. Early reports indicated he grew even more responsive.

Wilson's wife, Virginia, told a state staff member that as she spoke to Wilson and leaned over him, he raised

his head and kissed her. Also, after a nurse moved his arm, he involuntarily slapped her. The nurse laughed, and Wilson responded by breaking out in laughter, according to Bill Webb, Illinois Baptist editor.

Despite encouraging signs, doctors warn that Wilson's condition remains very delicate and serious. They describe his case as extremely complex.

Wilson's wife attributes his improvement to the prayers of friends in Illinois and around the country. "The Lord has supernaturally taken care of him every step of the way," she told the Illinois Baptist. "It's going to be exciting to see all the miracles God has performed in this."

Wilson's illness dominated discussion at the Nov. 1-3 meeting of the state convention. Rather than filling the executive director's time on the program with a substitute speaker, the crowd used the time to join hands and pray for Wilson. State convention president Roger Ellsworth gave messengers daily updates on Wilson's condition.

One messenger made a motion to provide full salary to Wilson throughout his illness, but withdrew it when informed of insurance and legal difficulties. Later word mentioned an independent effort to raise support for Wilson during his illness in addition to the partial salary and benefits he is entitled to on disability.

Another messenger commended staff and officers of the state convention for planning the meeting in Wilson's absence. Messengers were also encouraged to participate in the Harvest Prayer Network, an effort launched by Wilson shortly before his illness.

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-- By Bob Allen

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