

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Texas Baptists reduce SBC funds, elect moderates, avoid gay issue**

By Greg Warner

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- Texas Baptists adopted a \$42.7 million budget Nov. 13 that will send less money to the national Southern Baptist Convention and keep more for starting churches and training ministers in Texas.

It is the second year in a row that Texas Baptists -- going against the wishes of national Southern Baptist Convention leaders -- have changed their budget to give the conservative-dominated SBC less control over Texas Baptist contributions.

Also during the Nov. 13-14 meeting, the 6,700 convention messengers elected a slate of moderate officers -- led by president Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington -- voiced opposition to a religious equality amendment proposed for the U.S. Constitution, and delayed action on a motion to disfellowship churches that condone homosexuality.

Last year the Baptist General Convention of Texas gave its 5,500 churches more freedom to decide which worldwide mission causes to support, including ministries not run by the SBC.

This year messengers to the annual BGCT meeting in San Antonio voted by an estimated two-to-one margin to increase the portion of Cooperative Program contributions that stays in Texas by 2.5 percent -- from 64.5 percent to 67 percent. That is expected to reduce by about \$1.5 million the Texas money available for the SBC's national and international mission work.

But Texas Baptist leaders say the money is more urgently needed in the Lone Star state, which once was a bastion of Baptist strength but is rapidly becoming a mission field in itself because of population changes.

Edward Schmeltkopf, chairman of the study committee that proposed the change, told messengers that half of Texas' 18 million people are "unchurched." Texas now has more non-Christians than 42 other states and more than 94 nations, he said.

Texas Baptists need to start 300 new churches a year just to keep pace with population changes, said BGCT president Jerold McBride, pastor of First Baptist Church of San Angelo. The BGCT -- still the largest state convention in terms of churches, members and mission contributions -- has a goal of starting 1,400 new congregations by the year 2000.

Cooperative Program contributions from Baptist churches are usually channeled through state conventions, which keep a portion for mission work in their states and send a portion to the coffers of the Southern Baptist Convention to fund its national and international agencies.

The budget also includes new funds to promote theological education in Texas Baptist universities. Although Texas hosts Southern Baptists' largest seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, more options are needed, said Abilene pastor George Gaston, chairman of the study group that brought the proposal.

"There is more work to be done than existing ministry programs can provide," he said. Spending the proposed \$350,000 on theological education, he said, "does not take dollars away from missions" but is a missions investment.

Messengers turned back two attempts to amend the budget. One proposal, to restore the division of funds between state and national causes to 1995 levels, was defeated on a show-of-hands vote by a margin estimated at two to one.

Brownwood pastor John Avant, who made the motion, urged messengers to rely on God, not on a new funding formula, to provide more money for missions. "Let's not try political solutions when God has all the resources we need."

The other proposed amendment -- defeated 64 percent to 36 percent on a ballot vote -- also would have restored 1995 funding levels but would have raised the \$1.5 million for starting churches by cutting budget funds from Baylor University, the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, the Baptist Joint Committee, and the BGCT's new theological education program.

The targeted programs duplicate ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention, said John Crosby of First Baptist Church of Little River, who made the motion. By reducing funds to SBC causes, Crosby argued, "we're saying we don't trust the Southern Baptist Convention. It's a matter of trust. ... They ought to be the ones to set the priorities."

Incoming president Wade, in a later press conference, agreed with Crosby that trust was an issue in the budget vote. "It's pretty obvious," he said, that trust is lacking in the relationship between Texas Baptists and SBC leaders.

"It's clear Texas Baptists will not be intimidated by anyone," Wade told reporters. He noted that Baptists who object to the conservative direction of the SBC have been excluded from meaningful participation in convention life.

"Cooperation won't happen for long if you don't have mutual appreciation," said Wade, who was endorsed for president by the moderate Texas Baptists Committed organization.

"Texas Baptists don't want to distance ourselves from the Southern Baptist Convention," he said. "We are committed to Southern Baptist missions and agencies. But when you get pushed aside ... you begin to wonder if they want you."

In his president's address, McBride warned against falling "victim to the fiction that cooperation necessitates coercion or control."

Texas is not the only state where Baptists have asserted more control over how they fund missions.

Oklahoma Baptists likewise are reducing the SBC portion of their Cooperative Program budget. Baptists in Virginia and North Carolina have put alternative budgets in place that, as in Texas, allow churches to choose to

support the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or other options. And Mississippi Baptists are withholding money for missions that normally would have returned to the state through a joint funding agreement with the Home Mission Board -- an approach considered but rejected in Texas.

Wade said such changes signal a shift in the traditional way Baptists cooperate to do missions. "It's a sea change in the sense that churches and state conventions are claiming their autonomy," he said.

"The church I pastor is not a franchise operation of the local [Baptist] association or the Southern Baptist Convention," said Wade, who has led the 7,700-member Arlington church since 1976.

Schmeltekopf said Texas leaders asked the SBC Home Mission Board for an additional \$600,000 to start new churches but were offered only \$101,605, necessitating the budget change. HMB officials have said Texas Baptists already receive a fair share of national mission funds.

Also a recently approved SBC restructuring plan calls for larger state conventions to assume more responsibility for mission funding within their borders, Schmeltekopf noted. "The conclusion reached by our committee was that the Home Mission Board does not plan to increase significantly its funding for home missions work in Texas," he said.

In the presidential election, Wade defeated conservative candidate Gary Miller, pastor of Sagamore Hill Baptist Church, 61 percent to 39 percent (3,842-2,414). Wade was nominated by Russell Dilday, interim dean of Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, who said Wade is a "biblical conservative without being cranky about it."

Also elected were moderate candidates Ophelia Humphrey of Amarillo, who garnered 67 percent of the vote in defeating Malakoff pastor Casey Perry for first vice president, and San Antonio layman Noah Rodriguez, who got 75 percent of the vote in defeating Amarillo pastor Dee Slocum.

Both Wade and Humphrey are moderate Baptist leaders, having served on the Coordinating Council of the Cooperative Baptist Convention.

Texas Baptists delayed action on a motion to exclude from the state convention any church with homosexuals serving as deacons or pastors. The constitutional amendment, offered by Lubbock layman Don Workman, was referred to the BGCT Executive Board after spirited debate.

The motion apparently was in response to University Baptist Church of Austin, which was recently expelled from its local association for allowing a homosexual to serve as deacon. In an attempt to avoid a constitutional showdown, the church did not send messengers to the state convention.

Houston pastor Roger Prescott, arguing for referral, said Workman's motion was a threat to local church autonomy, "a fundamental, bedrock Baptist issue."

Roger Deerinwater of Archer City argued against delaying action. "When we refer this to some committee ... we are saying to this country we can't decide if homosexuality is a sin or worthy of disqualifying someone as pastor or deacon." All Texas Baptists are against homosexuality, he added. "This is not an issue that even needs to be discussed. As a matter of fact, this is disgusting."

President McBride said the issue is not homosexuality. "If you believe the Bible, you are against that. We are discussing how you handle this."

The motion was referred on a show-of-hands vote.

Messengers passed a resolution opposing the religious equality amendment currently being debated in Congress. The proposed amendment, the resolution said, has the "potential effect of destroying the establishment clause of the First Amendment" to the Constitution.

Two resolutions affirmed Presnall Wood, retiring after 18 years as editor of The Baptist Standard of Texas, and Woman's Missionary Union, a mission-support organization which has been criticized recently by SBC leaders.

In other resolutions, Texas Baptists pledged to fight racism, to promote family nurture, to oppose gambling and to campaign against substance abuse.

## **Women in Ministry group ponders moving offices**

By Russ Dilday and Bob Allen

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- Baptist Women in Ministry, based in Louisville, Ky., since its founding in 1983, will move its offices to Kansas City, Kan., if members approve the change next June.

Members of the group's executive board, meeting Nov. 9-11 in Little Rock, Ark., "affirmed and accepted" an invitation to relocate the offices to the campus of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Since only 13 of 24 members were present, the board did not take a formal vote on the move, but will ask for approval by Women in Ministry's full membership at the group's next annual meeting.

The move would poise the organization to reach out to progressive Baptist groups more open to allowing women to serve as pastors and in other non-traditional religious roles than the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention, leaders say.

Last summer the organization voted to change its name from Southern Baptist Women in Ministry by deleting the word "Southern." Most of the 400 women and men who belong to Baptist Women in Ministry are Southern Baptists and the group hopes to continue to encourage and support women ministers in SBC churches. But leaders acknowledge Women in Ministry's pro-women agenda does not have the support it once had from denominational leaders since conservatives wrested control of the convention from moderates during the 1980s.

Central Seminary claims affiliation with both the 1.5 million-member American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of moderate Southern Baptists who oppose conservative reforms instituted by leaders of the 15 million-member SBC.

Locating in Kansas City would give Women in Ministry a higher profile among American Baptists and the Fellowship, said Kathy Manis Findley, pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Little Rock and the organization's president. The group also plans to reach out to the Alliance of Baptists, another progressive splinter group from the SBC; the Progressive National Baptist Convention, a historically African-American group; and "any other groups who desire a partnership mission of empowering Baptist women to fulfill their calling from God," she said.

A denominational report in 1994 said there were 254 female pastors in American Baptist churches, Findley said. While Baptist Women in Ministry counts 1,150 ordained women in Southern Baptist churches, only about 20 are senior pastors, she said. Most serve as chaplains, counselors or in church-staff or agency positions.

Central Seminary initiated the invitation, offering Women in Ministry rent-free use of a four-office suite totaling 1,100 square feet and to underwrite operational costs for the organization up to \$2,000 a year through designated revenue sources.

"Central Seminary's board, administrative cabinet, faculty, staff and student body are highly supportive of BWM's relocation to America's heartland," said Thomas Clifton, president of Central Seminary. "Central sees the partnering possibility with BWM as a much-needed and significant opportunity to affirm, recruit and support women in positions of ministry leadership throughout the U.S. and within Baptist life."

Findley said it is uncertain when the offices would move. She will appoint a committee to work out logistics, she said. Currently the office operates with only a small part-time staff that will have turned over from normal attrition by time for the relocation, she said.

Baptist Women in Ministry currently has offices at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville. The organization owes "a tremendous debt of gratitude" to Crescent Hill, said Eileen Campbell-Reed, recording secretary. "They have been most gracious to us over the years and we can't possibly express our gratitude to them enough for what they have done in housing us."

Findley hinted that part of the rationale for moving the offices stems from recent changes at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Once the school was a haven for women in ministry, but now its administration openly discourages women from serving as pastors.

Seminary President Albert Mohler, who as a seminary student in 1984 protested an SBC resolution against women in ministry, now says he believes God does not call women to preach. He turned down a prospective faculty member last summer who supported women's ordination and fired a female social work dean for publicly criticizing his decision.

Findley said she recently spoke to the campus Baptist Women in Ministry organization. "The atmosphere at Southern is terrible. There is a cloud of oppression," she told board members.

One current faculty member at Central, Molly Marshall, was a popular role model for women in ministry when she taught theology at Southern Seminary before Mohler asked her to resign two years ago.

The board meeting followed a two-day "re-visioning" retreat attended by both members and non-members of the executive board. During the session the group drafted a statement describing the organization's mission.

The statement affirms women "who are answering God's call to do ministry in traditional and non-traditional ways, professional and lay." The statement also seeks to "encourage women to develop God-given gifts in practicing ministry" and advocates "the empowerment of women in the church and the world."

Findley described the document as unofficial and "in process." A formal mission statement "might" be voted on "at some future time," she said.

Campbell-Reed, minister of Christian education and youth at Heritage Baptist Church in Cartersville, Ga., said the statement "was very articulate about who we have been and will be and it clarified our purpose and our commitments."

Findley said the retreat participants sought to "dream new dreams, re-vision our future, redefine our mission and ministry and to set in motion the means by which we become an inclusive organization of Baptists."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story updates information in the Nov. 2 ABP story, "Book by SBC leader describes churches' failure to respond to AIDS."

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## **Former SBC leader's grandson dies after struggle with AIDS**

DALLAS (ABP) -- Matthew Allen, grandson of former Southern Baptist Convention leader Jimmy Allen, died Nov. 10 after a lifelong battle with AIDS. He was 13.

Jimmy Allen, who formerly led the SBC's Radio and Television Commission and was SBC president in 1978-79, detailed his family's struggle with AIDS in a new book, "Burden of a Secret: A Story of Truth and Mercy in the Face of AIDS."

Matt contracted the HIV virus that causes AIDS from a tainted blood transfusion given to his mother hours before his birth. Before Matt's mother, Lydia, discovered she had the virus, she had another son, Bryan, who died in infancy in 1986. Lydia died from AIDS in 1992.

Matt's father, Scott, wasn't infected, but was fired as minister of education at First Christian Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., when he told his pastor about his family. Matt was kicked out of the church's day-care center and the family sent looking for a new church.

They moved to Dallas and a string of churches refused to accept Matt in their Sunday schools because of fear and prejudice about AIDS.

Jimmy Allen said he wrote the book because a decade after his family's crisis began, churches are still shunning people with AIDS.

Besides his father and grandfather, Matt is survived by his paternal grandmother, Wanda Allen of Big Canoe, Ga., and his maternal grandmother, Joyce Williams of San Antonio, Texas.

The family suggests that memorial donations be directed to the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, in care of the AIDS Clinical Research Fund, P.O. Box 910888, Dallas, TX 75391-0888.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Supreme Court to hear challenge to indecent programming law**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court will review a 1992 federal law restricting "indecent" programming on cable television, which opponents contend violates the First Amendment.

The high court announced Nov. 13 it will review a federal appeals court ruling upholding the statute. The law authorizes cable operators to reject indecent programming on leased access channels as well as on channels set aside for public, educational and governmental use.

It also requires cable operators who elect to carry indecent programming to do so on segregated channels that can be unblocked only at the written request of a subscriber.

Critics say that requirement violates free speech protections in the First Amendment.

In upholding the statute, however, a divided U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia said the law is constitutional. The 7-4 appeals court decision reversed an earlier ruling by a three-judge panel of that court.

The law defines as "indecent" programming that "describes or depicts sexual or excretory activities or organs in a patently offensive manner as measured by contemporary community standards."

Obscenity is not protected by the constitution, but programming can be indecent without being obscene, the appeals court noted. Therefore, indecent programming may be restricted only in a manner consistent with the First Amendment, the court ruled.

The appeals court said the law's requirement that indecent programming be blocked until requested by a subscriber is government action, but does not violate the First Amendment.

The requirement serves a compelling interest by the state to protect children from indecent programming while placing only a minimal burden on adults who wish to view the programming, the court said.

The court also upheld the law because it leaves decisions about restricting indecent programming to cable operators, not the government. Had the law permitted government officials to ban certain programming, the government would be "hard put" to defend its constitutionality, the appeals court said.

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## House drops restrictions on non-profits from resolution

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives dropped a provision in a temporary spending measure Nov. 10 that would have restricted lobbying by non-profit groups.

The provision, sponsored by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., would have denied federal funds to organizations with revenues larger than \$3 million that are engaged in lobbying or political advocacy.

The House dropped the provision after the Senate, through amendments offered by Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., and Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, watered down the language and sent it back to the House.

The provision was attached to a temporary spending measure proposed to fund the federal government after Nov. 14. President Clinton vetoed the spending resolution, leaving the administration and lawmakers scrambling to avert a government shutdown.

However, opponents fear the House proposal will resurface during the appropriations process. They said the definition of "political advocacy" in the measure is too broad and could include actions such as "Letters to the Editor" in a newspaper.

Members of Congress and leaders of organizations including the YMCA, American Lung Association and Mothers Against Drunk Driving held a news conference Nov. 7 calling the measure unnecessary and burdensome. They said it would "silence America" and would hurt the most vulnerable citizens.

"It is critical that charitable organizations be able to speak freely about matters of public policy on behalf of the people they serve, many of whom are this nation's most vulnerable citizens," said Jennifer Howse, president of the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation.

The Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious liberty watchdog group, joined hundreds of charities which argued the measure would have "a chilling impact on the democratic process as well as the rights of individuals and organizations to participate in public policy debates."

Groups are already prohibited from using the federal funds for lobbying and no evidence has shown the present law has been broken, opponents said.

The charities claimed the language of the provision would require burdensome paperwork showing what they do with private funds to prove their compliance.

But proponents said the measure would merely stop taxpayers from footing the bill for lobbying efforts and ensure money given to the charities goes to the needs of communities.

"If they feel that it is more important to put political advocacy in front of real service to real communities and real people, they need to rethink their status as a federal grantee," said a spokesman for Rep. Robert Ehrlich, R-Md.

Ehrlich stated: "Our legislation is designed to end the abuses which typically occur at the national level. It will protect locally based organizations which spend their precious funds on service-oriented activities rather than advocacy."

The Christian Coalition and Family Research Council supported the Istook measure.

Charities insisted it would undermine their ability to help the homeless, children and the poor at a time when vulnerable citizens' need has never been greater.

"Never have so few been called on to do so much, for so many, with so little," said Ned Hales, counsel for the NAACP

## **Abortion measure sent to committee for hearing**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate recently voted 90-7 to send a House bill banning so-called "partial-birth" abortions to a committee for hearings.

Opponents of the House bill said hearings would lead to more informed debate by allowing senators to hear from credible witnesses about the controversial procedure and why it is used.

The House approved the ban Nov. 1 by a vote of 288-139 after debating the measure under a closed rule that barred members from offering amendments to exempt doctors who use the procedure to protect a mother's life or health.

Under the House bill, doctors who perform the procedure could serve up to two years in prison if convicted. Opponents of the bill said the procedure is used only rarely and that it saves women's lives, but supporters said it is grotesque and often used electively.

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., made the motion for the hearings. A committee staffer said he expects hearings early in December.

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-- By Pam Parry

## **Presbyterian school trustees approve property sale to BTSR**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Trustees of a Presbyterian school in Richmond, Va., voted Nov. 9 to sell property to the four-year-old Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Earlier, trustees of the Baptist seminary offered \$1.9 million to the Presbyterian School of Christian Education to purchase the Baptist school's first permanent facility. The Baptists have rented space from the Presbyterian school since 1991.

The sale is expected to close in July 1996.

The agreement calls for BTSR to purchase PSCE's largest building, additional land for future expansion and half ownership of Lingle Hall, the current student center and dining hall.

The 33,000-square-foot Watts Hall will be renovated for use as offices, classrooms and dorm rooms. It will become the first permanent home for BTSR, which opened in September 1991.

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-- By ABP staff

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CORRECTION: In the Nov. 10 ABP story, "Alabama school board labels evolution a 'theory'," the correct spelling of Alabama's governor's name in the fifth paragraph is Fob James.