

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Alabama Baptists reject plan to give Samford more freedom**

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP) -- Alabama Baptists rejected a "new paradigm" proposed for relating to Samford University, which opted last year to choose its own trustees. Previously, trustees were elected by the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Messengers at this year's state convention, held Nov. 14-15 in Montgomery, voted 876-694 against a study committee proposal to allow trustees of the Birmingham school to choose their own successors and let the state convention decide year-to-year whether to include funds for the university in the state convention budget.

Under the plan, other convention agencies could have chosen either to adopt the Samford model or continue to accept trustees elected by the convention.

During a 90-minute debate, some messengers protested the September 1994 vote by Samford trustees to move to a self-perpetuating board. Others criticized the recommendation for offering the alternative relationship to other agencies, voicing fear that it might cause the state convention to "lose" other institutions.

A dramatic turn in debate came when the state convention's attorney, James Guenther of Nashville, Tenn., responded to a question about the legality of the action by Samford trustees. Guenther gave messengers a legal opinion that Samford had violated its own bylaws and those of the state convention, and probably would not be able to defend the action in a lawsuit.

Guenther said the committee rejected legal remedies because "there is no such thing as a friendly lawsuit." Litigation would "leave scars" and cause "irreparable" damage, he said.

Earlier, the state convention's State Board of Missions approved the study committee plan, which also was endorsed by both state convention president Fred Lackey and Executive Secretary Troy Morrison.

After the vote, however, Morrison said it was better for the plan to be defeated than to pass by a narrow margin. A new committee will be appointed to seek non-binding mediation between the state convention and Samford trustees.

Samford trustees voted in September 1994 to move to a self-perpetuating board to prevent so-called "fundamentalists" from taking over the school by stacking the board with conservative trustees. Some speakers during debate said the move indicated that the university does not trust Alabama Baptists.

That drew a response from Samford President Thomas Corts. He told the Alabama Baptist newspaper he was disappointed with "charged words and unthoughtful opinions" during debate. "I trust Alabama Baptists," Corts said, but leaving the school's future in the hands of the convention's political climate "is too risky for us to tolerate."

Harry Brock, a Samford trustee, said the board will not change its position on trustee selection. "The reason for this decision is still alive. It applies as much today as it did before," he said.

While voting down the study committee recommendation, which most observers viewed as favorable to Samford, messengers rejected other sanctions aimed at the university. Messengers overwhelmingly defeated a motion to sue the school's trustees to force them to return to the old method of trustee election. Another motion, to remove funds for the school from the state convention budget, failed 737-582.

In another dispute involving another Alabama Baptist school, messengers voted without discussion to give trustees at the University of Mobile full responsibility for financial monitoring and management of the school.

The recommendation, which passed overwhelmingly, was brought by a special committee seeking to resolve a dispute between leaders of the state convention and the university's trustees.

Controversy erupted in 1993 when the university established a branch campus in Nicaragua without prior approval by the state convention, allegedly using state convention funds that were intended for the Mobile campus.

A 1994 agreement called for the return of all disputed funds to the Mobile campus, periodic audits of the Nicaragua campus and a commitment by the university to send the Latin American branch only funds raised or designated for that purpose.

A subcommittee of the state convention's Executive Committee recently complained that Mobile officials were failing to live up to the terms of the 1994 agreement. The university continued to spend money from the general budget in Latin America and did not provide the subcommittee with requested financial reports, the group said.

A reconciliation committee appointed by convention president Fred Lackey, however, found that University of Mobile trustees were "honorable people" who can be trusted to handle continued implementation of the 1994 agreement.

In other business, messengers approved a plan to build a \$6 million annex to the state convention's offices in Montgomery, approved a missions partnership with Baptists in Spain and passed resolutions against homosexuality, tobacco and gambling.

They adopted a record \$31.9 million budget that will be divided 57.7 percent for the state convention and 42.3 percent for ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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-- By Bob Allen

## **Church with woman pastor survives messenger challenge**

MODESTO, Calif. (ABP) -- For the second year in a row, California Southern Baptists rejected an attempt to disfellowship a church with a woman pastor.

Returning to the issue later in the convention, however, messengers to the Nov. 14-15 annual meeting of the California Southern Baptist Convention backed off from endorsing women preachers, eventually passing a strongly worded resolution against the practice.

After last year's unsuccessful challenge to messengers from Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco, state convention leaders asked that any similar challenges at this year's convention in Modesto be brought

first to the credentials committee.

Before the convention, the committee met with with Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of the church, and Wiley Drake, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Buena Park, who brought both a verbal and written challenge to the seating of Nineteenth Avenue messengers.

After deliberation, the credentials committee recommended the seating of "850 unchallenged messengers and 196 visitors" along with others who would register during the convention.

Drake charged the committee with "deception" for not reporting that a challenge had been lodged.

The committee's chairman, Ron Harvey, minister of singles at Immanuel Baptist Church of Highland, objected to the charge.

"The committee on credentials is not deceptive. As your brother in Christ, I beg to differ with you," Harvey said. "The individuals challenged, Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church of San Francisco ... answered the challenge, and we do not feel there is a challenge," Harvey said.

Later in the meeting, the California Southern Baptist Executive Board reported on a study on the issue of women pastors mandated by last year's convention.

The committee adopted a 130-word statement that affirmed all Christians -- male and female -- are called to ministry. The committee reported it could find no support in the Bible for women to serve as pastors, but noted that churches are entitled to act without outside interference.

"We believe in the autonomy of the local church," said Harry Lewis Executive Board chairman. "Each church has the right to determine who its own pastor is."

Messengers voted to endorse the Executive Board's report after lengthy debate.

Late in the convention, messengers returned to the issue once more, narrowly adopting a non-binding resolution concluding that "any church which has a woman as senior pastor is in violation" of the state convention's articles of membership and "cannot be considered a cooperating Southern Baptist church."

In other business, Dan Nelson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Camarillo proposed amending the state convention's constitution to offer membership only to churches that agree with the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement, a 1963 document outlining consensus Baptist beliefs.

Nelson told The California Southern Baptist his new amendment "is not about women pastors." Another amendment slated for consideration in 1996, however, does address that issue among several others.

Kenneth Stinson, a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Livingston, proposed an amendment requiring that a cooperating church is "to have, or is seeking, a senior pastor, who meets the qualifications of church leaders set forth in I Timothy 3."

That New Testament scripture passage requires that an "overseer" be "the husband of one wife," according to most English translations.

Many Baptists believe the passage means that only men qualify as pastors. Others, however, argue that the text speaks to fidelity, not gender, and that a literal interpretation would also exclude never-married males as pastors, which most Baptists accept.

Pennington-Russell told Associated Baptist Press she was grateful for the way the credentials committee handled the challenge and noted overall improvement in her church's reception at the annual meeting.

"There was some relationship that hasn't been there in the past, so I'm glad for that," she said.

"I'm still under no illusion," she added. "The majority of California Baptists don't necessarily affirm a woman pastor, but my sense is fewer people are willing to make it a test of fellowship than in the beginning

## **Tennessee Baptists reject efforts to distance state from Fellowship**

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (ABP) -- Tennessee Baptists turned back two efforts to distance their state convention from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group not sanctioned by leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Messengers to the Tennessee Baptist Convention, meeting Nov. 14-15 in Chattanooga, upheld the nomination to the state's executive board of a retired pastor challenged because of ties to the Fellowship. They also passed a resolution affirming Woman's Missionary Union, an SBC auxiliary criticized recently for cooperating with the Fellowship.

Messengers voted narrowly to elect Howard Olive, retired pastor of Monta Vista Baptist Church in Maryville, to a seat on the executive board, rejecting a substitute candidate proposed as an amendment to a nominating committee report.

Olive recently accepted a part-time job with the Fellowship, a group which formed in 1991 to protest conservative control of the 15 million-member SBC and offer moderate alternatives to denominational programs.

Olive, who retired in January from a 30-year pastorate at the Maryville church, will serve as a "field representative" for the Fellowship. In the assignment, Olive will seek to promote the organization in Tennessee through meeting with groups, preaching in churches and counseling pastors sympathetic to the Fellowship.

By passing a resolution affirming Woman's Missionary Union, Tennessee Baptists subtly defended a decision by leaders of the auxiliary to produce missions education materials for the Fellowship.

Leading criticism of that decision was Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board. Rankin wrote pastors and WMU leaders in local churches in August saying that publishing the materials would undermine SBC missions support and signaled a departure from the WMU's historic "exclusive" relationship to the SBC.

WMU leaders defended the decision, saying they were interested in promoting missions among all Southern Baptists, including those which send money to the Fellowship.

In a report to the convention, Tennessee WMU Executive Director Katharine Bryan alluded to the dispute. "Our people are weary of being diverted from the missions task and want to get on with doing missions," she said. "We don't want to be seen or heard, but to minister."

Ken Hubbard, pastor of First Baptist Church in Smyrna, was elected president of the 1.1 million-member Tennessee Baptist Convention.

In other business, the Tennessee convention approved a \$26.9 million budget, which divides funds received through the Cooperative Program unified giving plan 62.5 percent for the state convention and 37.5 percent for the SBC.

Messengers passed a motion urging the executive board to increase the SBC's Cooperative Program share by one-half percent next year and each subsequent year until a 60-40 split is achieved in 2000.

They also adopted a "Vision 2000" long-range plan, outlining ministry priorities for the state convention.

The plan does not radically alter current ministries, but will sharpen focus on six key values: revival and spiritual awakening, evangelism and missions, education, ministry, fellowship and stewardship, said Gary Coltharp, chairman of a committee which drafted the plan during a two-year study.

## Kentuckians act on camps, uphold state newspaper

By Mark Wingfield

OWENSBORO, Ky. (ABP) -- Kentucky Baptists voted to remove their two assemblies from direct control of the state convention's Executive Board and rebuffed a challenge to the state Baptist newspaper, the Western Recorder.

Meeting in the West Kentucky city of Owensboro, messengers to the Kentucky Baptist Convention's annual meeting elected Bill Tichenor president from a three-candidate field.

Tichenor, pastor of First Baptist Church of Princeton, Ky., won the presidency over Bill Patterson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Henderson, Ky., and Tyre Denney, pastor of Alton Baptist Church in Lawrenceburg, Ky. None of the candidates publicly identified with either conservative or moderate political movements in the state.

Also elected were Ralph McConnell of Hopkinsville, Ky., as first vice president and Ronnie Sivells of Princeton as second vice president.

Debate over the convention's two assemblies, Cedarmore in North Central Kentucky and Jonathan Creek in West Kentucky, had been brewing for several years. Both camps have been managed by the KBC Executive Board on behalf of the convention.

Due to declining attendance and revenues at Cedarmore and a projected \$5 million in needed repairs, the Executive Board voted last December to dispose of the assembly and hold KBC camps and seminars at other locations, including Baptist college campuses. Jonathan Creek was not to be impacted by the change.

Numerous individuals, churches and associations reacted negatively to the news and began a campaign to keep the Executive Board from disposing of Cedarmore. The argument most frequently offered was based on past experiences at Cedarmore that individuals said have made the assembly a sacred place.

On the opening day of the state convention, Steve Stewart, youth minister at First Baptist Church of Bowling Green, Ky., made a motion calling for the KBC to "maintain ownership of Cedarmore and Jonathan Creek, but that they become separate entities with their own boards."

After little debate, messengers voted 739-249 to approve the motion.

The motion set no timetable for implementing the new arrangement. Also, what financial impact the new arrangement will have on the Executive Board and on the KBC's Cooperative Program budget is not clear.

At the same convention session, Ray Werline, pastor of Cuba Baptist Church in Mayfield, Ky., offered a motion to defund the Western Recorder. Werline, a frequent advocate of linking the Kentucky Baptist Convention to the conservative-led Southern Baptist Convention, charged the Recorder should narrow its editorial policy to require more favorable reporting and editorializing on the SBC.

The motion ultimately was defeated on a show-of-hands vote by an estimated four-to-one margin.

The Western Recorder, a KBC agency, receives about \$300,000 annually from the convention. That contribution represents 31.3 percent of the paper's annual budget.

Werline claimed the Recorder "generally" editorializes and reports on the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in a "positive manner" while "generally" editorializing and reporting on Southern Baptist Convention agencies and institutions in a "negative manner."

Werline said the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are splinter groups that attempt to detract from the SBC and therefore should not be the subject of articles or editorials in the Recorder. "One purpose of the Recorder should be to further the interests of the Southern Baptist Convention, its agencies and institutions," he said.

Werline further charged that editorials in the Recorder have "personally attacked some of our good and godly men" who lead these SBC agencies. Although not mentioning him by name, Werline referred to Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

Lynn Traylor, minister of youth at First Baptist Church of Sonora, spoke against Werline's motion.

"There are times when we read things in our paper that make us upset," Traylor admitted. But the Recorder provides a forum for all Kentucky Baptists to express their opinions, he added. "Those of us who fill the pulpit realize we would not like to have our hands tied," he continued.

Bill Thurman, a Lexington, Ky., attorney and chairman of the newspaper's board, called Werline's motion an attempt at "economic censorship."

"The board of directors of the Western Recorder feels strongly that the editorial and news policy in place, which calls for the exercise of 'responsible freedom' by the editor and staff in choosing topics and articles for inclusion in the Western Recorder, is the best way to ensure that information relevant to all Kentucky Baptists is part of the paper," he said. "I was pleased that the convention also seemed to agree with that policy."

Recorder Editor Marv Knox expressed appreciation for the convention's affirmative vote. "The vast majority of messengers indicated they did not want to punish their Recorder for keeping them abreast of issues which shape our common life together," he said.

Knox also disputed Werline's characterization of the newspaper's content. "While we do indeed cover the Fellowship, the SBC and convention controversy, that coverage represents a very limited amount of our copy. We include it because we believe we have a moral imperative to do so. We would be negligent if we failed to report actions and events that impact Kentucky Baptists, their churches and their state convention."

The claim that the Recorder's news coverage "generally" supports the Fellowship and criticizes the SBC "simply does not enjoy the support of fact," Knox said. "News reports neither criticize nor support. They tell the facts and leave value judgments to readers. Despite all the controversy of the past five years, our news coverage has not been criticized for factual inaccuracies or misrepresenting the truth."

Knox acknowledged that some of his editorials have been critical of specific SBC actions, "particularly the new management of Southern Seminary."

"This is a perspective that represents a significant number of Southern Baptists -- people whose voices have been silenced elsewhere in Baptist life," he continued. "Being a faithful Baptist doesn't mean walking in lockstep with partisan authority figures. Being a faithful Baptist means honestly expressing beliefs and opinions, and allowing others to do the same."

In other action, KBC messengers:

-- Defeated a motion that would have required the Executive Board's business and finance committee to compare a small shortfall in contributions to last year's state Cooperative Program budget with the amount of money being channeled by some churches to alternative ventures such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

-- Passed seven resolutions, including resolutions stating support for Woman's Missionary Union, the Cooperative Program and Western Recorder Editor Marv Knox, as well as one stating opposition to casino gambling and another noting the roots of both Arminianism and Calvinism in Baptist heritage.

-- Adopted a 1996-97 Cooperative Program operating budget goal of \$18.75 million, with plans to send 37 percent of undesignated receipts to the Southern Baptist Convention and retain 63 percent for use in Kentucky.

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## **Georgia Baptists re-elect president in quiet meeting**

By James Dotson

ALBANY, Ga. (ABP) --The Georgia Baptist Convention, meeting in Albany Nov. 11-15 with the lowest number of registered messengers since 1983, re-elected its president by acclamation and adopted a record budget of \$36.27 million.

The convention also cut back the number of days in its annual meeting from three to two and voted to enter home missions partnerships with the Chicago Baptist Association and the Alaska Baptist Convention.

The meeting was generally free of controversy or even debate from the 2,839 registered messengers, with the exception of several attempted substitutions of names on the convention's committee on nominations report. In three challenges to nominees for at-large positions on the GBC executive committee, one was successful on a show-of-ballots, while the other two were defeated by close margins.

Those proposing the alternative nominees stated a desire to achieve improved geographical representation, although the challenged nominees were all considered aligned with the conservative movement in the convention.

John Yarbrough, pastor of First Baptist Church of Perry, was re-elected to a second one-year term as president. He expressed a commitment to helping keep disagreements from eroding trust among fellow Georgia Baptists. "We may not always agree with each other but we ought to always love each other," Yarbrough said the day after his re-election.

Elected as one of four vice presidents was Mildred McWhorter, a retired home missionary who now lives near Franklin, Ga. McWhorter was elected fourth vice president.

Three pastors were elected to the other vice presidential posts: Bill Weeks of Dudley, first vice president; Michael Catt of Albany, second vice president; and Tommy Fountain of Columbus, third vice president.

All of the vice presidents except McWhorter were the recommended nominees of a group of conservatives in the state. McWhorter, although personally unaligned in convention politics, was one of four nominees endorsed by a group of moderates in Georgia.

The budget of \$36.27 million designates 45 percent to the national Cooperative Program budget, 45 percent to state convention causes, and 10 percent to priority items in Georgia. The budget represents a 4.8 percent increase over the previous year.

The 1996 GBC annual meeting will mark the first time the convention will meet on a two-day schedule, beginning Monday evening and concluding on Tuesday evening. The convention this year and past years has begun at the same time but concluded after a Wednesday morning session.

Resolutions expressed support of state legislation aimed at making it harder for minors to buy lottery tickets and urged state officials to prohibit offensive outdoor advertising for adult entertainment establishments.

One item related to the committee on nominations report that never made it to the floor was a planned rejection of two of the nominees for Mercer University who were not Baptists.

Each year Mercer submits a list of suggested nominees to the committee on nominations, with three names submitted for every open post. The committee traditionally, and in accordance with Mercer's charter and the convention's constitution and bylaws, has allowed non-Baptists to be elected to some of the positions at Mercer's request. This year, however, all of the suggested nominees Mercer initially submitted for three of the ten open board positions were non-Baptists.

"This committee simply had a conviction that non-Baptists should not lead Baptist institutions," said committee chairman Allen Hughes. "Just because the committee had done it before does not mean it is right."

Mercer submitted a second list of names for each of the three positions in question, one of which included a Baptist, Hughes said. That name was accepted. The other suggested nominees were all non-Baptists, however, and the Committee on Nominations consequently refused again to fill the posts.

Mercer had been prepared to challenge the omission on the convention floor. However, a compromise was reached through the intervention of Yarbrough and GBC Executive Director Robert White. The two non-Baptists were included by the nominating committee on the slate of nominees, along with a statement about the committee's "reservation."

Jim Bruner, special assistant to the president at Mercer, defended the school's long-standing practice. "It's important that our alumni have a voice on the board of trustees, as well as some key non-Baptists who give major support to our university," he said. "At least 70 percent or more of our trustees are Baptists, and our full intention is that Baptists remain in the majority."

## Maryland-Delaware Baptists restructure, speak to moral issues

TOWSON, Md. (ABP) -- Baptists in Maryland and Delaware, gathered for their annual meeting, passed resolutions on a variety of social issues, reorganized their joint convention and heard about a campaign to raise money for starting and strengthening churches.

A total of 504 messengers attended the Nov. 13-14 meeting of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware in Towson, near Baltimore.

With the issue of casino gambling soon to come before the Maryland state legislature for a vote, Baptist messengers voiced their opposition to the legalization of gambling. The resolution also stated that the state convention will "pray and work for a just and equitable economic system."

A resolution on homosexuality described homosexual behavior as a "violation and perversion of divine standards." While stating that homosexuality "is not a normal lifestyle and is an abomination in the eyes of God," the resolution held up the love of God and salvation for homosexuals.

A resolution on the sanctity of human life resolution was the only one to receive any substantive discussion. The resolution affirmed the belief that "all human life is sacred and should be protected, from conception and to the grave, and should not be destroyed." One messenger moved for a rape exception to be included, but the amendment failed.

Other resolutions affirmed Southern Baptists' "True Love Waits" sexual abstinence program and the family as the prime institution of society.

Messengers also voted to study human sperm banks. In making the motion, Marvin Hunter said, "There are some things we don't talk about. ... But what we need to do is study the issue." The motion passed without discussion.

The plan to overhaul the structure of the convention's General Mission Board gained approval without questions or discussion. The board, which oversees all convention programs and acts for the convention between annual meetings, will now consist of seven standing committees and two task groups.

The role of starting churches, previously assigned to the Baptist Mission Foundation, will be assumed by the mission board. The foundation will be restricted to managing the investment of trust funds.

All convention officers were elected without opposition.

Messengers reelected Dallas Bumgarner, pastor of Elvaton Church in Glen Burnie, as president. During the installation, Walter Agnor, a former convention president, asked, "How could a conservative be elected president of a mostly moderate state?" He answered that the Maryland/Delaware convention is out front of the Southern Baptist Convention in building trust between groups.

Charles Lawson, a layman from Linthicum Heights, was chosen first vice president and Upperco pastor Curtis Fox was elected second vice president.

Messengers also learned about a new convention campaign to start and strengthen churches. Organizers hope to raise between \$2.5 million and \$5 million for the project.

In other business, messengers approved a \$4.8 million budget for 1996. This will be split 41 percent for Southern Baptist Convention causes and 59 percent for the state convention, after a priority item for annuities is subtracted. The division of funds remains unchanged from 1995.

## Oklahoma Baptists approve funding cut to SBC

EDMOND, Okla. (ABP) -- Oklahoma Baptists overwhelmingly approved a budget that cuts funding to the Southern Baptist Convention in their annual convention Nov. 13-15.

Leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma recommended the two-point reduction in the percentage of the state's unified budget that is forwarded to the national organization. The new budget will send 40 percent of a \$17.9 million Cooperative Program budget to the SBC.

Only a handful of messengers voted against the cut, which leaders say is necessary to provide more funds for state convention ministries.

Critics of the plan said it takes money away from foreign missions, the largest recipient of SBC funds. Reed Lynn, a member of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, urged Oklahoma churches to increase their giving so that the national convention's foreign and home missions work doesn't suffer.

In other business at the convention meeting in Edmond, Oklahoma Baptists elected three top officers to a customary second term. Charles Graves, pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, is the convention president; Wade Burleson, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, first vice president, and Lloyd Campbell II, pastor of First Baptist Church in Sentinel, second vice president.

They passed resolutions expressing concern about a Texas lawsuit that could jeopardize gift annuities managed by the Oklahoma Baptist Foundation, commending agencies that responded to the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City and opposing casino gambling.

The convention deferred until next year discussion on a constitutional change, proposed by Billy Bissell, pastor of Boston Avenue Baptist Church in Muskogee. If approved next year, the change will require the state convention to reject funds from churches that are not in good standing in their associations or do not substantially support the work of the convention.

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-- By Dave Parker and Bob Allen

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**CORRECTION:** In the Nov. 16 ABP story, "North Carolina elects conservative president," please replace the first four paragraphs with the following:

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- Moderate Baptists, who have controlled the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in recent years, suffered a stunning defeat Nov. 14 as conservatives narrowly elected a president of the 1.2 million-member convention.

Conservative candidate Greg Mathis, 40, pastor of Mud Creek Baptist Church in Hendersonville, edged moderate Dewey Hobbs by 96 votes.

Hobbs, 70, is a long-time leader in the state convention and former head of chaplains at North Carolina Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem.

Total attendance for the Nov. 13-15 convention reached 5,100 -- a thousand more than last year's crowd and the largest state convention meeting since 1991. More than 2,000 messengers registered on the second day of the convention in Winston-Salem, the day for officer elections, prompting charges that conservatives mounted a get-out-the-vote campaign.

**CORRECTION:** In the Nov. 16 story "Louisiana Baptists elect conservative..." please change the last sentence of the second paragraph to read: "In the last five open elections, the president has won by a margin of fewer than 200 votes."

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