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Texas Baptists approve changes over protests of conservatives

By Greg Warner

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Texas Baptists, who constitute the nation's largest state Baptist group, have approved historic changes sure to distance the group even further from the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention.

Gathering in Austin for its annual meeting Nov. 10-11, the 2.7 million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas affirmed its "autonomy" and authorized Texas Baptists to appoint missionaries, offer new options for theological education, publish their own Sunday school literature, and create mission partnerships with SBC and non-SBC groups, including the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Critics immediately denounced the changes as hostile to the Southern Baptist Convention, the national body which represents more than 14 million congregants and which has steered a decidedly conservative course in recent years. A group of Texas conservatives, upset with the changes, later inched closer to forming an alternative state convention more in line with the SBC.

The changes are contained in the long-awaited report of a special Effectiveness/Efficiency Committee. The report drew criticism from SBC leaders as soon as it was released last summer and from conservative messengers at the Austin convention.

The report is "accusatory and contains a hidden agenda distancing the state convention from the national convention," charged conservative John Hatch, a pastor from Lake Jackson whose motion to delete the plan failed early in the BGCT meeting.

After lengthy debate and several attempted amendments, messengers later approved all 16 of the recommendations from the E/E Committee, which was created two years ago to evaluate the BGCT's programs and relationships.

Also approved were 10 changes to the convention's constitution, bylaws and articles of incorporation, including one amendment that will link participation in the BGCT to churches' financial support of the state convention rather than church size. However, those changes, which require a two-thirds majority, must be approved again at next year's meeting.

Texas Baptists also showed their independence from national SBC leaders by electing as their president Russell Dilday, a former SBC seminary president fired by conservative trustees.

"I've had both the experience of being fired and of being elected, and I enjoy being elected a lot better," joked the popular Dilday, whose 1994 firing from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary ignited a firestorm of protest from Texas Baptists and others. But Dilday, who now teaches at Baylor University and its seminary, said he does not see his election as "vindication" for the firing.

Backed by the state's strong moderate organization, Dilday garnered 71 percent of the vote over conservative candidate Ted Tedder, a San Antonio layman who drew 29 percent. Moderates have dominated the elections in Texas since controversy erupted among Southern Baptists almost two decades ago.

In a post-election press conference, Dilday said the sweeping changes approved by the Texas convention do not indicate "we are leaving" the Southern Baptist fold or becoming competitive with the national convention. "There's no competition between lighthouses."

Instead, he said, the changes show Texans' determination to set their own agenda and mission.

Outgoing Texas president Charles Wade appealed to Southern Baptist leaders "not to chide Texas Baptists for our determination to give our churches and their leaders freedom to make the decisions they believe are best for them in reaching out to do missions work in the world."

"Southern Baptists will have our support if they will focus on missions and evangelism, but they will drive more and more Texas Baptists away if they focus on requiring conformity as a condition for cooperation," said Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington.

The recommendations of the E/E Committee cover a range of BGCT programs and relationships. Among the highlights:

- The BGCT affirms its status as "an autonomous body" that will cooperate with organizations that "complement its mission and its statement of purpose."

- The BGCT will appoint staff missionaries to "multicultural" groups in Texas and lay missionaries to other countries. The convention also committed to hire staff members that reflect the ethnic makeup of Texas.

Some messengers objected to the multicultural goals. Claiming "homogeneity" has been the source of Southern Baptists' strength, Herb Clark of Cleburne said that multiculturalism in other denominations has produced "pulpits filled with homosexuals." Others said sending missionaries makes the BGCT competitive with SBC mission boards.

- The BGCT will create mission partnerships with not only SBC missionary-sending boards but non-SBC agencies, specifically the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance, an international group of Baptist bodies. The BGCT also will explore membership in the BWA.

Opponents said linking with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship would force the BGCT to condone doctrinal error on issues such as homosexuality, ignorance of Scripture, creationism and the Virgin Birth -- charges that CBF supporters denied.

- The BGCT will begin a program of theological education for lay people and consider creating a Bible college with the help of the state's Baptist colleges.

- The BGCT will publish Bible study and training material with a Texas focus and a clear commitment to Baptist principles.

Sharon Morris, a Texas trustee of the SBC Sunday School Board, said Texas-based literature is not necessary. "No one is more qualified to publish Sunday school material" than the Sunday School Board, she said, and its material is "relevant to every state convention."

Both sides agreed the Effectiveness/Efficiency Committee's proposals are historic, but for different reasons.

"The whole thrust of every vote was to separate from the Southern Baptist Convention," complained Miles Seaborn, president of the conservative group Southern Baptists of Texas. In a late-night meeting after the first day of voting, the group talked over plans to start a new state convention aligned with the SBC. A decision could be reached in December, Seaborn, retired pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth, told the 400 people present.

Already conservatives in Virginia have set up a new convention after repeatedly losing votes in the moderate-dominated Baptist General Association of Virginia.

More than 5,000 messengers attended the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which adopted a 1998 budget of \$47.6 million.

In addition to Dilday, messengers elected two other officers supported by moderates -- Jaclanel McFarland, a Houston attorney, as first vice president and Ed Hogan, pastor of Jersey Village Baptist Church in Houston, as second vice president. Both were elected by acclamation without opposition.

Seven resolutions were adopted, including statements promoting bivocational ministry, a Religious Freedom Restoration Act for Texas, concern for victims of religious persecution, and protection of missionaries from the interference of foreign governments.

A motion, offered from the floor and approved by 85 percent of messengers, condemned partial-birth abortion.

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Conservatives may start new convention in Texas

By Marv Knox

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Conservatives "have in place all the machinery we need to begin an elementary convention in the state of Texas," Miles Seaborn told a gathering of about 400 unhappy members of the group called Southern Baptists of Texas.

They met late at night after a long day in which they lost vote after vote on the leadership and direction of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

But SBT president Seaborn, whose organization has tried to steer the Baptist General Convention of Texas into sync with the rightward-shifted Southern Baptist Convention, stopped short of saying the group would split from the Texas convention. "It seems to us God is saying, 'Take a step in that direction,'" Seaborn acknowledged.

However, the most prominent voice in the room urged the group to continue its quest to gain control of the BGCT. Paul Pressler called for Southern Baptists of Texas to remain in the BGCT at least long enough to head off a proposal that would require churches to contribute to the Texas convention in order to send more than two messengers to its annual meeting.

"I am not willing to give up every Texas institution until we lose the bylaw amendment" on the messenger requirement, said Pressler, a retired Houston judge who masterminded the conservatives' domination of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s.

Pressler noted a BGCT constitutional change requires a two-thirds favorable vote at two successive BGCT annual meetings. Messengers to the Austin meeting approved the first reading of that amendment, 73 percent to 27 percent, the next morning.

"We will work to get messengers next year in Houston" to derail the vote on second reading, Pressler pledged.

But leaders of Southern Baptists of Texas have been preparing for another scenario, said Seaborn, retired pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth. "The officers have prayed, planned and laid out contingency

plans," Seaborn reported. He noted leaders of the group have consulted with Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, a pro-SBC split from the Virginia Baptist Convention.

Seaborn blamed the growing division in Texas on new proposals presented by the Effectiveness/Efficiency Committee and approved by Texas Baptists, despite opposition from conservatives.

"The whole thrust of every vote was to separate from the Southern Baptist Convention," he said of the Effectiveness/Efficiency recommendations.

The SBT board of directors, comprised of 20 pastors and 10 laypeople, strongly leans toward starting a new convention, Seaborn said. "Eighty-five percent of the board says it's time to set in motion another convention in Texas."

"It's not out of spite, not out of hate, not out of maliciousness," he insisted. "We're doing it because we in Texas have to do the Great Commission," Jesus' command to spread the gospel to the whole world.

"There's going to be tremendous opposition," Seaborn added. "But I believe God will sustain us."

After the meeting, Seaborn said SBT's board would make decisions about the organization's future, probably in December.

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Conservatives retain presidency in North Carolina convention

By Bob Allen

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- North Carolina Baptists maintained a balance of power in their state convention by choosing a conservative president to serve alongside a moderate-led general board.

In other business at the state convention's Nov. 10-12 annual meeting in Winston-Salem, a total of 5,184 messengers elected a top administrator, altered relationships with two institutions and protested the sale of beer at Wake Forest University. They also continued to study declining circulation of the state's Baptist newspaper and rejected a change in the way churches are represented at the annual convention.

Messengers at the 167th annual session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina elected Mac Brunson as president of the 1.2 million-member convention. Brunson, 40, is senior pastor of Green Street Baptist Church in High Point.

Brunson's election marks the third straight year conservatives have won the presidency in North Carolina, a former moderate stronghold. Brunson defeated moderate candidate Jack Causey, pastor of First Baptist Church in Statesville, by a vote of 2,624 to 2,296.

In a nominating speech, Charles Page, pastor of First Baptist Church in Charlotte, said Brunson's election would continue a "balance" between conservatives and moderates on the state convention's general board. Several speakers lauded initiatives by outgoing president Greg Mathis, a conservative, and general board president Michael Queen, a moderate, to improve relations between the two factions.

In a news conference, Brunson endorsed the bipartisan spirit, a stark contrast to intense polarization surrounding Mathis' narrow election two years ago. "What you are seeing is the movement of God in bringing his people together," Brunson said.

Brunson pledged to follow Mathis' example in balancing appointments between moderates and conservatives. "I am not just president of 53 percent of North Carolina Baptists now," Brunson said. "I'm president of all North Carolina Baptists and I intend to represent all of them to the best of my ability."

Conservatives also elected one of two convention vice presidents. Mike Cummings, a conservative, won the first vice presidency by defeating moderate Charlotte Cook 2,133 to 1,950. The moderate candidate for second vice president, David Crocker, edged conservative leader Allan Blume 2,051 to 2,018.

In other business, North Carolina Baptists:

-- Elected Tennessee pastor James Royston as executive director-treasurer, the state convention's top executive post. He succeeds Roy Smith, who retires in December.

Royston, 49, a former pastor and director of missions in North Carolina, has been pastor of Colonial Heights Baptist Church in Kingsport, Tenn., since 1991.

Royston told messengers he would "cater" to the state's 3,600 Baptist congregations, partner with associations and build on "strategic alliances" with institutions. Royston endorsed reconciliation efforts in the state and pledged to "be open and fair with every Baptist in this state."

In a news conference, Royston said he is "very conservative in my personal viewpoint" but seeks to be "open and as flexible as I can in accepting others in their opinions."

-- Approved a motion to consider ending the convention's fraternal relationship with Wake Forest University unless the school suspends the sale of alcohol on the campus in Winston-Salem.

The motion, made by Ray Davis, pastor of Green Meadows Baptist Church in Mocksville, directs the state convention's general board to instruct its council on Christian higher education to study the fraternal relationship with Wake Forest, express displeasure with the sale of alcoholic beverages on campus, and report findings and recommendations next year "if the sale of alcohol is not suspended."

Students 21 and older can purchase beer at the university's student union. While founded as a Baptist school, Baptist students are now a minority at Wake Forest.

The convention severed formal ties with the university in 1986 but continues to promote Wake Forest through a fraternal relationship. Davis said the Bible teaches that Christians should abstain from using alcohol.

"Alcohol is the No. 1 cause of hurt in our country, and I do not think we should take Cooperative Program money to promote [Wake Forest] if they are going to continue to sell alcohol on campus," Davis said.

-- Altered historic relationships with Meredith College and Baptist Hospital. The convention approved a fraternal relationship with Meredith, a women's college in Raleigh. Earlier, the school's trustees changed its charter to allow them to elect their own successors without convention approval. An agreement with Baptist Hospital will permit that board to choose half of its trustees, allowing the board more flexibility in negotiating partnerships and seeking grants.

-- Asked directors of the Biblical Recorder to submit a written plan to address the newspaper's declining circulation. Last year, the convention commissioned a study into causes of declining readership. Circulation dropped 28 percent between 1987 and 1996. Other Baptist papers reported similar declines, according to the study.

The paper's moderate stance was cited as one of several factors in the decline but did not appear to be the determining factor, said Ed Beddingfield, chairman of the study commission. Based on a comparison with other Baptist papers, a paper's perspective on Southern Baptists' conservative-moderate controversy is not "a reliable predictor of a circulation decline," the report said. "Whether the paper takes either side or no side, some people are going to be displeased and circulation will be affected," according to the report.

Messengers overwhelmingly rejected an effort to amend the convention's budget to place \$375,000 earmarked for the paper in escrow pending completion of the new study and another amendment which sought to cut \$25,000 in new money for the paper next year.

-- Rejected a proposed constitutional amendment which would have based representation at the annual meeting on percentages of a church's budget it gives to the state convention. The current representation formula bases the number of messengers allotted to a church on the dollar amount it gives to the convention or the church's size.

The change would have penalized large churches which send only token support to the state convention but, due to their size, qualify for the maximum 10 messengers. Opponents to the amendment called it "political," saying it targeted conservatives.

While a majority of messengers supported the change -- 62 percent for, 38 percent against -- changing the constitution requires a two-thirds vote, so the recommendation failed.

-- Adopted a \$31 million budget which earmarks 68 percent for North Carolina ministries and allows churches three options for disbursement of the remaining 32 percent. Churches may select whether part of their missions gifts are sent to the Southern Baptist Convention, to selected SBC agencies or to moderate alternative ministries including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Messengers approved a study of adding a fourth giving track that would split funds 50-50 between the state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. While churches now may designate how their gifts are divided, designated funds are not credited as part of the Cooperative Program unified budget.

Mark Cortis, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem and a longtime conservative leader, asked the executive committee to study a new giving plan. His motion's intent, he said, was to "give more options and to assist the state convention."

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Georgia Baptists affirm Mercer plan but look for 'good faith' from trustees

By William Neal

MARIETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- The Georgia Baptist Convention, meeting Nov. 10-11, re-elected Frank Cox as president, adopted its largest Cooperative Program budget ever -- \$42.2 million -- and affirmed a nine-point report that seeks to bring healing and reconciliation between the convention and its flagship school, Mercer University.

The recommendation concerning the Mercer relationship had been adopted in September by the GBC Executive Committee and the Executive Committee of Mercer trustees. It calls for more direct convention involvement in the selection of some Mercer trustees and stipulates that the next president of Mercer should be a Baptist who can affirm the theology of the SBC's Baptist Faith and Message statement.

While controversy has surrounded the GBC-Mercer relationship for many years, it escalated last year with the publication of President Kirby Godsey's book, *When We Talk About God ... Let's Be Honest*. Some of Godsey's theological views have been labeled as heresy by a special committee that was formed by the Executive Committee to interview Godsey concerning his beliefs.

Some critics have called for Godsey's immediate resignation or dismissal. The nine points adopted by the Executive Committee and the convention stopped short of that demand.

However, a further resolution adopted by messengers stated that if the full board of Mercer trustees, meeting Dec. 4, fails to adopt the agreement and show good faith in accepting the conciliatory compromise, then the convention will begin the process of cutting funds to the university.

The Georgia convention also adopted resolutions that recognized Shorter College, a Georgia Baptist school, on its 125th anniversary; called for the state General Assembly to amend the Georgia lottery law to prohibit the state from running any casino gambling game or any other game that does not constitute a lottery; opposed all efforts to legalize parimutuel betting and casino gambling; expressed appreciation to the state legislature for banning partial-birth abortion in Georgia; and expressed support for Christians around the world without religious freedom who are being persecuted for their faith.

The convention's 1998 budget represents a 5.8 percent increase over 1997. Southern Baptist Convention causes will get 43.9 percent of the budget. Georgia Baptist causes get the same amount. The other 12 percent of the budget goes for a category of expenses that support both Georgia Baptist and Southern Baptist causes.

Frank Cox, pastor of North Metro First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, faced no opposition for the presidency. Nor did the four pastors nominated for vice presidents.

The new vice presidents are Jim Austin of Blackshear Place Baptist Church in Flowery Branch; Lee Mabry, Fortified Hills Church in Smyrna; John Bryan, Curtis Baptist Church in Augusta; and Rusty Newman of Union Baptist Church in Winder.

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Arkansas Baptists narrowly defeat Ouachita reconciliation guidelines

By Trennis Henderson and Russ Dilday

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- Following a yearlong debate over Ouachita Baptist University's trustee selection process, Arkansas Baptists narrowly defeated proposed charter and bylaw changes which would have implemented a reconciliation agreement between the state convention and the Arkadelphia school.

Debate over the issue began in October 1996 when Ouachita's trustees voted to resume responsibility for naming their own successors after a dispute with a state convention nominating committee over proposed trustees. Last year's convention overwhelmingly adopted a reconciliation plan calling for future nominees to be by consensus.

Implementing the reconciliation agreement, however, meant charter and bylaw changes which require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This year's convention voted for the proposals by a vote of 999 to 528 -- 1.3 percent short of the needed 66.7 percent majority.

In an interview following the annual meeting, ABSC executive director Emil Turner said: "The historic relationship between Arkansas Baptists and Ouachita Baptist University has been set aside by the outcome of the votes on the amendments. However, this does not mean that we do not and cannot have a relationship with Ouachita.

"Right now and in the immediate future, our relationship consists of the convention's vote to fund Ouachita through our budget process and to elect Ouachita's trustees for this year."

While "the future components of that relationship are not yet clear," Turner emphasized that "my desire is for our convention to continue to be related to this institution."

Ouachita President Ben Elrod said: "We have no desire to be alienated from the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, and the events of the past week will not deter us from our mission of serving the Baptist churches of our state and region."

"The fact that the convention failed to amend its constitution and bylaws by a two-thirds majority does not suggest, in our minds, a refusal on the part of the convention to retain its relationship with Ouachita," Elrod added.

Interest in the Ouachita issue produced a record number of messengers for this year's Arkansas Baptist State Convention held Nov. 4-5 at Park Hill Baptist Church in North Little Rock. A total of 1,831 messengers registered during the two-day meeting, a 14 percent increase over the previous record of 1,610 messengers set in 1989.

In other actions, messengers elected Greg Kirksey, pastor of First Baptist Church of Benton, as convention president. He was elected by a vote of 780-761 over 1997 Pastors' Conference president Ben Rowell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Rogers.

Messengers also approved an executive board staff restructuring proposal; approved a record Cooperative Program budget; adopted resolutions concerning the Baptist World Alliance, ministry to the poor, and abortion; and launched the celebration of the state convention's 1998 sesquicentennial.

Among major issues during the convention:

-- A restructured executive board staff was approved, culminating a two-year study. The plan, adopted without opposition, changes the staff structure from 12 departments to seven ministry teams effective Jan. 1, 1998. Turner said the proposal "enables us to move into the next century with greater impact on the churches and on lost people in Arkansas."

-- A 1998 Cooperative Program budget goal of \$17,682,975 was adopted, which includes an allocation of \$2,539,893 for Ouachita. Other major allocations include \$7,386,179 for Southern Baptist Convention causes and \$5,879,932 for executive board programs. The SBC portion of the budget is 41.77 percent, the same percentage as recent years.

-- A resolution affirming the ministry of the Baptist World Alliance was approved, in response to the SBC Executive Committee's recent decision to study the SBC's relationship to BWA. Affirming that the purpose of BWA "is to draw Baptists together from all across the globe in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ," the resolution calls on the SBC Executive Committee to "give recognition to the work of the Baptist World Alliance and determine to continue our significant role in the work of our sister organization."

-- A resolution opposing abortion, including partial-birth abortion, was passed so that "those in this state and around the world might know where we stand in accordance with the sanctity of human life."

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Louisiana Baptists elect consensus 'peace' candidate

ALEXANDRIA, La. (ABP) -- In a move described as "unprecedented," Louisiana Baptists elected Bob Anderson of Baton Rouge as president of their state convention after his nomination was approved by two warring factions and a "peace" group.

The action was a departure from the fiercely contested presidential elections of recent years and comes after months of dialogue between leaders of both sides of the conflict in the state convention.

"Think about a peace-driven convention," Anderson challenged messengers to the annual Louisiana Baptist Convention meeting Nov. 10-11. "We're going to have to [achieve peace] by reaching out to one another, emphasizing that the Jesus in you loves the Jesus in me."

"We must stop labeling one another and start finding ways to love one another," he said. To accomplish that, he added, Louisiana Baptists must unite behind a goal of "win(ning) our state for Christ" and exhibit "a compassionate courage" that says "'I'm sorry if I have caused you any pain.'"

Anderson, the retired pastor of Parkview Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, is founder and president of Antioch Affection Ministries, a ministry aimed at helping ministers and churches in conflict.

Anderson was endorsed by two groups -- Louisiana Baptists Speaking the Truth in Love and Friends of Louisiana College. The two groups, which have squared off in many convention battles in recent years, both pledged their support for Anderson at an August announcement of his candidacy.

The process of arriving at a consensus nominee began soon after last year's convention, messengers were told. Leaders of both groups called a meeting in hopes of achieving peace. At one point, frustrated by a lack of progress, the leaders were about to abandon hope of reaching a consensus. But, in what one participant described as "an absolute miracle," the peace group and both factions united behind Anderson.

As evidence that the newfound peace is yet fragile, messengers at the state convention were divided on votes for nominees for Louisiana College's board of trustees and the first vice president of the state convention.

Thomas Calhoun, a Mansfield businessman, was elected first vice president, defeating R. E. Clark, pastor of South Lake Charles Baptist Church, by only six votes, 773-767.

In the election for second vice president, Jerry Price, pastor of Greenacres Baptist Church in Bastrop, was elected by acclamation after Roger Sullivan, pastor of East Leesville Baptist Church, withdrew his nomination.

Sullivan's withdrawal followed questions about whether he could be elected as a convention officer and maintain his post as a trustee of Louisiana College. A recent amendment to the bylaws of the state convention states that "a person shall not serve in more than one elected or appointed position at a time."

Also during the meeting, messengers approved a \$19 million Cooperative Program budget for the state convention for 1998. The budget total represents a 5.6 percent increase from 1997. As it has for many years, the state convention budget calls for 35 percent of receipts to be sent to the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program.

Messengers approved a host of resolutions without debate during the annual meeting. Among them were resolutions:

- Supporting the Covenant Marriage Act passed recently by the Louisiana legislature;
- Affirming opposition to all abortions, particularly partial-birth abortion;
- Calling on state government to address the problem of alcohol abuse and underage drinking;
- Voicing opposition to prenatal genetic testing and cloning of human embryos for the purpose of experimentation;
- Affirming churches that currently have prevention and ministry programs regarding HIV/AIDS and calling on other churches to begin such programs using resources which "call for repentance" of certain at-risk behaviors;
- Calling on Congress to create an Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom and Christian Persecution in the United States;
- Applauding legislators who voted against the expansion of gambling in the most recent legislative session;
- Supporting the "spirit and the intent" of the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was struck down by the Supreme Court this summer; and
- Calling on churches to establish moral-concerns committees.

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South Carolina Baptists focus on missions, ministries

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- In their 177th annual meeting, South Carolina Baptists elected David Gallamore, pastor of Rock Springs Baptist Church in Easley, as president, approved a record budget for 1998, and launched a missions partnership with Baptists in Romania beginning in 1998.

About 1,700 messengers attended the two-day meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, the oldest of the 37 state Baptist conventions, representing 730,000 members in almost 1,900 churches.

Messengers approved a budget of \$25.75 million, \$1.42 million more than the 1997 budget.

Messengers approved a resolution stating their continued opposition to legalized gambling. The resolution was amended to call on South Carolina Baptists to "support any future attempts to make video poker payoffs illegal" and to encourage church members who are involved "in any way" in the gambling industry to "divest themselves of those interests."

For many messengers, the highlight of the 1997 annual meeting came during the Tuesday night session, in which local ministries and volunteers were recognized for "carrying the light of Christ" around the state, nation and world.

Thirty-five different ministry groups were recognized, with representatives from several groups speaking about the impact their particular ministry has had on those to whom they ministered and on themselves personally. Among the types of ministry celebrated: equestrian ministry, literacy missions, resort area ministry, Sunday school work, ministry to internationals, deaf ministry, and ethnic churches.

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