

Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner
Associate Editor: Bob Allen
Phone: (904) 262-6626
Fax: (904) 262-7745

November 14, 1997

(97-99)

In this issue:

- **Kentucky Baptists reject change in representation**
- **Correction**
- **Maryland/Delaware Baptists speak out on moral issues**
- **Budget, officers highlight meeting of Virginia Baptists**
- **High court declines to halt lawsuit against diocese**

Kentucky Baptists reject change in representation

By Mark Wingfield

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- A constitutional change in the way churches gain representation to Kentucky Baptist Convention annual meetings failed to get the two-thirds majority vote needed for adoption Nov. 12.

A slim majority of messengers favored changing the KBC's constitution to count contributions to the Cooperative Program "and/or other convention work" in determining representation at the state convention. However, the 298-to-271 vote was well shy of the two-thirds majority required.

Impetus for the change came from moderates who want to continue full participation in the KBC but don't want to continue sending undesignated offerings to the Southern Baptist Convention. That led Bob Fox, pastor of West Point Baptist Church in Centertown, Ky., to propose a motion at last year's annual meeting to substitute the words "convention's work" for "Cooperative Program" in the constitution requirement for financial support.

The KBC's committee on constitution and bylaws, which is charged with reviewing any proposed constitutional changes, offered a compromise wording that retained the words "Cooperative Program" while adding the reference to "convention work."

Committee members and KBC President Floyd Price, an ex officio member of the committee, argued that this compromise would benefit both moderates and conservatives. Not only would it have allowed moderates to give to the KBC without giving to the SBC, it would have allowed conservatives to give more money designated directly to the SBC without the KBC taking a percentage out.

The Cooperative Program is the KBC's unified funding plan, which also feeds national Cooperative Program funding of SBC missions agencies, seminaries and other entities. Of undesignated money given by Kentucky Baptist churches to the Cooperative Program, 65 percent stays with Kentucky Baptist causes and 35 percent is sent to the SBC Executive Committee.

In the election of officers, KBC messengers chose three veteran Kentucky Baptist pastors who have served lengthy tenures in their current churches.

Gayle Toole was elected president in a race with Richard Oldham. Toole is pastor of Edgewood Baptist Church in Nicholasville. Oldham is pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Bowling Green.

Toole received 642 votes (58 percent) to Oldham's 463 (42 percent).

Although not identified with Kentucky Baptist moderates and not running as a moderate candidate, Toole had been endorsed by leaders of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship. He was widely considered to have drawn support from moderates and centrists in the convention.

Toole's nomination had been announced months in advance by retired Lexington pastor Ted Sisk, and until the week of the convention he was the only publicly identified candidate.

Oldham was nominated by Mike Routt, pastor of Rose Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Ashland and a leader of Southern Baptist conservatives in Kentucky. One day earlier, Routt had been elected president of the Kentucky Baptist Pastors' Conference after preaching a sermon in which he outlined five points of liberalism to identify those who disagree with the conservative turn of the national convention.

Other officers elected include Charles Midkiff, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville for 20 years, first vice president; and Don Mantooth, pastor of First Baptist Church of Morehead for 15 years, second vice president.

In other business, KBC messengers expressed opposition to gambling and partial-birth abortions as well as support for Louisiana's new covenant marriage law and federal legislation intended to combat religious persecution worldwide.

The gambling and abortion issues were addressed through resolutions; the marriage and persecution issues were addressed by adopting motions from the floor requesting convention officials to write letters to specific elected officials.

The resolution on gambling originated with the KBC's public affairs committee. It asks "all citizens of the commonwealth, all members of the Kentucky General Assembly and the governor ... to protect our state from any expansion of gambling, including video lottery terminals, and to restrict the operations of all types of gambling currently provided in the commonwealth."

The resolution on partial-birth abortions was presented by Rick Reeder of Mayfield. It was adopted with a small amount of opposition. A similar resolution was adopted at last year's annual meeting.

This year's resolution notes that messengers "reaffirmed the sanctity of life and registered opposition to abortion on demand in general (except where the life of the mother is clearly endangered) and partial-birth abortion in particular."

The motion on covenant marriage originated with Steve Treats of Paducah. He explained that the state of Louisiana recently adopted a two-track option for marriage licenses, with one being called "covenant marriage." Couples who choose the covenant marriage option agree to stricter terms regarding the possibility of ever getting a divorce and the means by which a divorce may be attained.

Treats' motion asked that the KBC president write a letter to elected officials expressing support for adoption of a similar covenant marriage law in Kentucky.

Messengers also approved without discussion an agreement on future relationships between the KBC and Baptist Healthcare System.

In March 1996, BHS trustees notified the KBC that the hospital chain was exercising its right to end the covenant agreement between the KBC and BHS. The primary effect of that decision was to ensure that BHS in the future would elect all its own trustees. Under the covenant, the KBC has elected 75 percent of the 24-member BHS board.

Although the KBC no longer will elect trustees for the hospital system, system trustees have agreed that at least 75 percent of the board will always be Baptists. The board also has outlined provisions for what would happen to the system's assets in the event BHS were sold or dissolved.

Although BHS was founded and funded in its early years by the KBC, in recent years the system has become virtually self-supporting financially, receiving only \$5,000 per year from the KBC.

At the time the BHS board voted to end its covenant agreement with the KBC, the reasons given were to better position the system to confront "rapid changes taking place in health care" and "to protect its work from being undermined by the kinds of struggles taking place in other Baptist institutions."

The latter was explained to be a reference to the successful efforts of conservatives in the national Southern Baptist Convention to gain control of SBC agencies and institutions and change their directions and philosophies. Although successful on the national level, such a movement has not occurred among the agencies and institutions of the KBC.

-30-

Correction: In the ABP issue dated Nov. 7, please make the following corrections to the story headlined "Seminary official admits misstating growth claims": The dates cited in both the fifth and sixth paragraphs should be 1985, not 1995.

Maryland/Delaware Baptists speak out on moral issues

By Ron Chaney

SOLOMON'S ISLAND, Md. (ABP) -- The Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware espoused conservative stands on a number of social issues, as resolutions overshadowed other business at the group's annual meeting Nov. 10-11 in Solomons Island, Md.

Most of 20 convention resolutions addressed moral issues. Messengers spoke against homosexual behavior, same-sex marriages, domestic-partner benefits, pornography, partial-birth abortion, gambling, condom distribution in schools and the teaching of evolution.

One resolution drew considerable debate, as two attempts to amend a statement on appreciation for pastors were defeated.

Robert Wilson, pastor of Viers Mill Baptist Church in Silver Spring, objected to wording "pastors are God's men." He offered an amendment to include women.

Rick Humphreys, pastor of Faith Southern Baptist Church in Elkton, expressed his disgust with "political correctness."

"I want to be biblically correct," he said. "The resolution says it all."

Another amendment, presented by Phil Logan, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Huntingtown, sought to broaden the resolution by having it address all ministerial staff, instead of just pastors.

Ken Cademartori, pastor of Mason-Dixon Baptist Church in New Freedom, Pa., objected to the amendment, stating: "We are changing the intent. Keep it as it is."

Both amendments failed and the resolution passed as it came from the committee.

In other resolutions, the convention weighed in on the Disney boycott debate by declaring support for the action of the Southern Baptist Convention in June.

The convention also gave support to the True Love Waits sexual-abstinence program and to the display of the Ten Commandments in public places, including courthouses and government offices.

Messengers expressed dismay that the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and called on the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission to work on a solution.

Noting the passing of Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic nun who ministered in Calcutta, India, the convention pledged to show "love and compassion toward those who are poor and needy."

Noting that in many countries Christians face persecution, the convention offered prayer support for those Christians. In a later session messengers prayed.

Earlier in the session messengers voted to change the way resolutions are handled. Last year, many messengers were frustrated by a rule adopted the year before preventing messengers from introducing resolutions on the convention floor.

A new bylaw, which will take effect next year, requires that resolutions be submitted 45 days in advance of the annual meeting but allows an exception when there is a "justifiable" reason for not meeting the 45-day rule.

Resolutions will then be referred to the resolutions committee, which must give full consensus before presenting them to the body.

The new bylaw makes clear that resolutions express the "overwhelming" majority of messengers by requiring "an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the messengers present and voting."

In other business, the convention elected an entire slate of officers by acclamation. Gary Glanville, pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Reisterstown, received a traditional second term as president.

John Gaugher, pastor of First Baptist Church in Perryville, and Dan Spiker, pastor of First Baptist Church in Brunswick, were elected as first and second vice presidents, respectively.

A \$5,368,876 budget passed by messengers projects Cooperative Program receipts of \$3.25 million. This amount will be split 51 percent for the BCM/D and 49 percent for national Southern Baptist causes after the preferred annuity item has been deducted. The formula for determining the division of funds remains unchanged. The 1998 budget represents an increase of 5.5 percent over 1997.

-30-

Budget, officers highlight meeting of Virginia Baptists

By Robert Dilday

ROANOKE, Va. (ABP) -- A 1998 budget of \$15.2 million and the election of new officers highlighted a quiet meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia Nov. 11-12.

Also approved by the 1,900 messengers meeting in the Roanoke Civic Center were closer ties to the Baptist World Alliance and resolutions offering prayer for Virginia's recently elected state officials and rejecting an "indiscriminate attitude toward abortion."

Absent from the meeting were representatives from about 150 churches which last year formed a second Baptist state convention in Virginia. The Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia separated from the BGAV in 1996, charging the older convention is theologically liberal and is loosening its ties to the national Southern Baptist Convention.

About 1,460 congregations with some 540,000 members now affiliate with the 174-year-old BGAV.

BGAV officials acknowledged the schism has meant fewer funds to support state, national and international ministries, and has mandated cuts in the convention's employed staff. But the financial loss is less than expected, they said.

While the new SBCV has collected over \$1 million -- more than half of it forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention -- contributions to the BGAV are only about \$300,000 less than last year, said Nat Kellum, BGAV treasurer.

And, said BGAV officials, a plan adopted last month called "Mission Virginia," which will expand ministries in the state, will energize BGAV churches to move beyond recent denominational disputes.

"How do we face the future?" BGAV executive director Reginald McDonough asked messengers at the annual meeting. "... Do we do it by dropping our heads or looking for scapegoats?"

"I don't think so. I believe we do it by projecting a positive, aggressive, exciting plan of ministry that calls us to a higher plane of service. That's why I am so excited about Mission Virginia ..."

"I believe God has laid before us an exciting mission. And he will not call us to a mission that is beyond our resources. ... It's time we put our confusion, frustration and anger behind us and press on toward the high calling our God has laid before us."

The \$15.2 million budget for 1998 is \$300,000 less than the current budget. Unchanged are three channels for churches to support national and international ministries.

The three funding options are: World Mission 1, which funds ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention; World Mission 2, which is a combination of SBC and other ministries; and World Mission 3, which funds the ministries of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Virginia ministries are funded by 62 percent of WM 1 contributions. In WM 2 and WM 3, Virginia ministries receive 68 percent of contributions.

Churches also may craft their own plans of distribution.

Elected as BGAV president was Waynesboro pastor Bill Wilson, who defeated Cecil Chambers, a Richmond pastor, 570 to 251. Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Waynesboro, was endorsed by the state's powerful network of moderate Baptists.

Chambers, pastor of Branch's Baptist Church in Richmond, also identified himself as a moderate.

Other officers are Joe Lewis, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Petersburg, first vice president, and Jim Pardue, pastor of Bon Air Baptist Church in Richmond, second vice president. Fred Anderson, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, was elected to a 15th term as secretary.

Recommendations from a special committee studying BGAV ties with the Baptist World Alliance encouraged increased funding for the organization -- a suggestion reflected in the 1998 budget. Messengers also added BWA Sunday to the list of observances endorsed by the BGAV.

Support for the BWA -- a fellowship of about 180 Baptist organizations worldwide -- comes at a time when the Southern Baptist Convention is reevaluating its ties to the group.

In September, the SBC's Executive Committee named a study committee in response to what it said were "perceived changes in the mission, focus and doctrinal positions of the BWA." A closed door meeting last month between SBC and BWA officials was described as "candid," "frank" and "honest." Additional meetings are scheduled during 1998.

In resolutions, the BGAV committed to "pray for all those entrusted with the governance and leadership of this Commonwealth." Virginia elected Republicans as governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general earlier this month in one of two off-year elections held in the country.

Messengers also "reaffirmed" a statement on abortion first passed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1976. The resolution:

-- Claims the "practice of abortion for selfish, non-therapeutic reasons wantonly destroys fetal life, dulls our society's moral sensitivity and leads to a cheapening of all human life."

-- Reaffirms "the biblical sacredness and dignity of all human life, including fetal life."

-- Rejects "any indiscriminate attitude toward abortion as contrary to the biblical view."

-- Affirms "our conviction about the limited role of government in dealing with matters relating to abortion."

-- Supports "the right of expectant mothers to the full range of medical services and personal counseling for the preservation of life and health."

Homosexuality also drew BGAV attention, sparked by a nearby meeting of Honesty, a two-year-old support group for gay and lesbian Baptists. About 16 people attended the meeting at a Baptist church not far from the Roanoke Civic Center following an evening session of the BGAV.

"This group has no relation to the BGAV or its agencies," said McDonough in response to a question during a BGAV business session. "We believe our churches ought to minister to and evangelize all people ... but we do not think homosexual behavior is compatible with the Christian mission."

McDonough also cited a 1993 BGAV resolution which affirms "the biblical teaching that homosexual behavior is sinful and unacceptable to Christians."

Next year's BGAV meeting is set for Nov. 10-11 in Virginia Beach.

High court declines to halt lawsuit against diocese

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to halt a lawsuit alleging the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn negligently supervised and retained a priest who later pleaded guilty to the sexual abuse of minors.

Without comment Nov. 10, the high court let stand a New York appeals court's ruling that dismissed portions of the lawsuit but allowed plaintiffs to proceed with claims that the diocese was negligent in retaining and supervising the priest.

The New York court dismissed claims that the diocese could be held liable for the priest's hiring, noting that the priest was ordained in Venezuela.

Ordination to the priesthood confers a religious, not legal, status, the court said.

"Imposing liability for conferring that status would create serious concerns of excessive entanglement in religious affairs in violation of the First Amendment," the New York court said.

While the diocese could not be held liable for negligent hiring, the court said, it may be held liable for retaining or supervising the priest if it "acquired actual or constructive knowledge" of his "propensity to abuse children."

Holding the diocese liable under such circumstances, the court said, would not violate the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion and separation of church and state.

"Religious entities have some duty to prevent injuries inflicted by persons in their employ whom they have reason to believe will engage in injurious conduct," the court said.

In its petition to the Supreme Court, the diocese argued the case should be accepted to resolve a split among federal and state courts over whether the First Amendment bars secular courts from finding a religious entity liable for negligently supervising its clergy.

A Baptist church-state specialist said the case is a reminder that religious organizations are increasingly targets of lawsuits.

"This case bears another warning to exercise care in supervising church employees, including ministers," said Brent Walker, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee. "The day when parishioners are reluctant to sue churches is long gone."

-30-

END