

DEC 22 1997

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

# Associated Baptist Press

December 18, 1997

(97-109)

## *In this issue:*

- **Kentucky conservatives form new organization**
- **Association of Baptist schools taps Agee as executive director**
- **Baptist minister elected as Americans United president**
- **Texas evangelist sponsoring 'Wounded Heroes' retreats**

## **Kentucky conservatives form new organization**

By Mark Wingfield

ASHLAND, Ky. (ABP) -- Conservative Baptists recently formed an organization to promote the Southern Baptist Convention's interests in Kentucky, including funding for the SBC's budget and support for its Kentucky-based seminary.

The group, called Southern Baptists of Kentucky, is not interested in "breaking off" from the Kentucky Baptist Convention, said Mike Routt, the group's president. "We're not angry at anybody," he said. "We just feel very strongly about what we're doing."

Routt, pastor of Rose Hill Baptist Church in Ashland, Ky., said the group's purpose is to "pave the way" for an anticipated change in the state's political climate over the next few years as conservative students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville graduate and move into Kentucky pulpits traditionally held by moderates.

Routt described the shift at the seminary, once a moderate school but now staunchly conservative, as "pretty dramatic." Conservatives expect to find many allies in future alumni. "What we're doing is through our publications and organization working side-by-side with these graduates," Routt said.

Kentucky Baptist churches traditionally have relied heavily upon Southern Seminary to provide a pool of both student pastors and full-time pastors after graduation. Helping Kentucky churches adapt to the new type of student being produced by Southern Seminary, while at the same time supporting the new conservative direction of the SBC, will be a major emphasis of Southern Baptists of Kentucky, Routt said.

Routt declined to identify individual participants in the organizational meeting of Southern Baptists of Kentucky. He did say Mohler was not present, but a seminary student and one unnamed seminary professor did attend.

The Lexington Herald-Leader identified that professor as Hershael York, former pastor of Ashland Avenue Baptist Church in Lexington, who last summer was hired as a preaching professor at Southern Seminary.

The 42 people attending the organizational meeting represented about 40 churches, Routt said. In addition to Routt, two other officers were elected: Terry Sammons, pastor of New Heights Baptist Church in Louisville, vice president; and Paul Blizard, pastor of Reidland Baptist Church in Paducah, secretary-treasurer.

Participants in the Dec. 9 meeting -- a by-invitation-only event held at an undisclosed location in Elizabethtown -- voted on four major recommendations, Routt said:

-- Naming the group Southern Baptists of Kentucky.

-- Adopting a purpose statement which says the organization exists "to preach the gospel, help churches fulfill the Great Commission, maintain doctrinal heritage and integrity and promote the work of the Cooperative Program.

-- Affirmed launching of a new newspaper to "positively promote the unique relationship between the Kentucky Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, tell the story of the good things that are occurring across the Southern Baptist Convention, highlight the exciting ministries taking place through the Cooperative Program and detail the wonderful news about the ministry of our flagship seminary, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary."

-- Agreed to conduct "evangelistic rallies" across the state annually to focus on "prayer for our denomination, state convention and sister churches." At these rallies, which Routt said could number as many as 10 in 1998, "pulpit guests will be invited to preach in order to challenge and encourage sister churches in the fulfilling of the Great Commission."

KBC President Gayle Toole, who was unaware of the group's formation until faxed a copy of a news release Dec. 16, said he was saddened by the news.

"I wish it was not going on," said Toole, pastor of Edgewood Baptist Church in Nicholasville and a self-described centrist in Baptist politics. "I'd really like for all of us to stay together and work out all our problems. If he's got a problem of some kind, I wish we could all sit down and talk about it."

Jim Hawkins, the KBC's interim executive secretary-treasurer, said it would be inappropriate for him to comment on the news, which he received by fax the same day media were notified. Newly elected Executive Secretary-Treasurer Bill Mackey does not begin his work until Feb. 1.

In an interview with the Kentucky Baptist newspaper Western Recorder, Routt further explained the organization's purpose: "We just feel there needs to be an organization in the state that will help to encourage the state convention to maintain the unique relationship it's had through the years with the Southern Baptist Convention. We're concerned there is a drift in that relationship."

Routt said he and others were concerned in 1996 when the KBC voted to reduce by 2 percent the amount of Cooperative Program receipts passed on from the KBC to the SBC. And that concern was further heightened by a recommendation at the 1997 state meeting to add criteria other than Cooperative Program giving to the way churches gain representation to KBC annual meetings.

The newspaper, which Routt said probably will be published quarterly, will be governed by a board of directors. Routt declined to name the members of that board, but said they would meet in January to determine a name for the publication and other details.

Those present at the Elizabethtown meeting pledged \$10,000 toward launching the publication, Routt said. Where further funding will come from is uncertain, he added, but said he hopes the publication can be mailed to every Kentucky Baptist pastor.

Asked whether Southern Baptists of Kentucky will run or support candidates for KBC elected offices, Routt replied: "Our organization will of course support those persons who are going to be nominated who support the unique relationship between the KBC and the SBC, who support and endorse the work of the Cooperative Program and are supportive of the ministry of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In those cases, yes."

Routt said Southern Baptists of Kentucky should not be seen as the opposite equivalent of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group supportive of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"I don't know where on the spectrum you would put us, because there are a lot of centrists in our state who identify with us with regard to their concerns about the drifting of relationship between the KBC and the SBC. You couldn't put us at the opposite end of the spectrum because our organization is going to be pretty inclusive."

Bob DeFoor, moderator of the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and pastor of Harrodsburg Baptist Church, took exception with that description and predicted formation of the new group actually will help the Fellowship's cause.

"I think it will help us because I think it will help Kentucky Baptists see the intentions of Southern Baptist leadership to take over the state of Kentucky, to do here what they've done in the SBC," DeFoor explained. "I don't see it as somebody to fight with. Nothing's really changed. They've been meeting and doing their thing all along."

-30-

## **Association of Baptist schools taps Agee as executive director**

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) -- Retiring Oklahoma Baptist University President Bob Agee has been named executive director of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, the association's board of directors has announced.

Agee's election came at a Dec. 9 meeting held in New Orleans in conjunction with a meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Agee, will retire Aug. 31 as president of the university in Shawnee, Okla., a post he has held since 1982. After assuming the helm of the association, Agee will become OBU's president emeritus with responsibilities in fund-raising and assisting the university in the transition of leadership.

The Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools is comprised of 65 Baptist-related seminaries, colleges, universities, Bible colleges and academies. Staff support for the association was formerly given by employees of the Southern Baptist Education Commission, an agency dissolved in a recent restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The association's former executive director, Steve Carleton, resigned June 30 to direct a private foundation in Oklahoma City. A search committee chaired by Howell Todd, president of Mississippi College, recommended Agee to the 15-member operating board.

Agee, who earlier this year suffered a second bout with leukemia, said chemotherapy treatments have been effective in improving his health.

Nevertheless, Agee said the treatment and recovery process "prompted me to take a long hard look at my life and work priorities." The ASBCS position "will allow me to give leadership to a vital faith-related educational enterprise with a global missions/education impact that also will allow me to give a higher priority to my family," he said.

During the board meeting, members agreed to locate ASBCS headquarters in Jackson, Tenn., where Agee and his wife, Nelle, have purchased a home.

The board also asked Tim Fields, president of Fields Communications and Publishing in Nashville, to continue as interim executive director and managing editor of The Southern Baptist Educator until June 1.

Fields will then assume the position of director of communications for ASBCS, responsible for communications, publications and technical support including an Internet web site and an electronic placement registry.

-30-

-- By ABP staff