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**SBC membership drops,  
according to official count**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist churches lost 162,158 members last year, according to statistics compiled by the denomination. It marked the first membership decline in 72 years for the nation's largest non-Catholic faith group.

According to the 1998 Annual Church Profile, which is compiled by LifeWay Christian Resources, membership in churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention is 15,729,356. That is down just over 1 percent compared to the previous year's count of 15,891,514.

The number of SBC churches also dropped slightly to 40,870, a net loss of 17.

Increases did occur, however, in other statistics including weekly worship attendance (up 3.33 percent, to nearly 5.4 million), total receipts (exceeding \$7.4 billion, up more than 5 percent) and mission expenditures (\$953 million, up nearly 2 percent).

Baptisms topped 400,000 for only the second time in 15 years, with 407,264, but lagged 1 percent behind the previous year's total of 412,027.

Along with 4,763 fewer baptisms, the method by which a person initially joins a Baptist church, the number of "other additions," including transfers, declined by more than 23,257 (4.75 percent).

No records are kept on the number of people who leave Southern Baptist church rolls through death, transfer to another church or simply dropping out.

The membership decline is the denomination's first since 1926.

## **Midwestern trustees expand master plan, increase budget**

By Rob Marus

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Trustees at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary took a leap of faith -- or two -- during their spring meeting April 12-13 in Kansas City, Mo.

Revising an earlier vote, board members approved the addition of an administrative-and-academic building to existing plans for a gymnasium and assembly hall in the first phase of a new seminary-campus master plan. They also approved a \$12 million capital campaign for the phase, quadruple the \$3 million first-phase goal they approved last October.

"We have tackled something too big for us either collectively or singularly," trustee Kent Cochran, a member of First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo., said of the new capital goal. "Clearly, whatever is done, God will get the credit."

Midwestern capital resources director Bill Foil said on-campus commitments for the campaign so far total \$105,718. Trustee campaign chairman Reagan Bradford of Edmond, Okla., said trustees have pledged \$144,000 toward their goal of \$200,000 for the project.

The board also approved an operating budget of \$4,585,185 for fiscal year 2000, an increase of \$242,468 over Midwestern's 1999 budget.

Seminary vice president for business affairs Mike Whitehead said there is no reason to expect a decline next year in seminary funding through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget.

Whitehead said seminary staff and trustees have faith that nothing will come of a recently publicized prediction by Baptist General Convention of Texas president Russell Dilday that Texas Baptists may vote to de-fund Midwestern and other selected SBC agencies in the near future. Dilday said he thinks the majority of Texas Baptists disagree with recent developments at those agencies, such as the influence of neo-Calvinism at Midwestern since Mark Coppenger became the school's president in 1995.

With 2.5 million members, the BGCT is by far the largest Baptist state convention affiliated with the SBC and contributes the largest share of any group to the Cooperative Program.

Whitehead said he doesn't expect the seminary to lose any funds next year. "It was the recommendation of the staff that we not anticipate any decline in Cooperative Program giving," he told the board. "Our source is not the state of Texas or any other state convention -- our source is God and his provision through the Cooperative Program."

Trustees also heard a report addressing concerns about the seminary's relationship with Minnesota-Wisconsin Southern Baptists. Noting that the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention has entered into a theological education partnership with Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., an institution of the Baptist General Conference, Coppenger said Midwestern is charged with training ministers for the Midwest/Great Plains region.

"We're going to help the Minnesota-Wisconsin convention realize they ought to be working with us instead of Bethel," Coppenger said during his president's report to the board. The 136,000-member Baptist General Conference is a small group of churches, concentrated in the Upper Midwest and composed mainly of Baptists of Swedish descent.

Though Coppenger did not speak on the record about his specific concerns with Bethel seminary during the board meeting, he told a reporter in a brief telephone interview that Midwestern has received requests from Baptist pastors in Minnesota and Wisconsin who would rather study at Midwestern.

"As we understand it, the [Minnesota-Wisconsin] convention has subsidized or contributed to that study effort at Bethel, and we hope they would consider subsidizing those who want to do work at Midwestern."

Coppenger also said he believes Midwestern's official positions favoring biblical inerrancy and opposing female pastors would attract many students from the Minnesota-Wisconsin convention. He noted that Bethel has offered some classes on Southern Baptist history that were taught by a faculty member from the Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. Logsdon is one of a new crop of seminaries that has sprung up among Southern Baptists since the early 1990s, when fundamental-conservatives cemented control of the trustee boards at the six SBC seminaries.

"We would say that we think the six SBC seminaries, most clearly and to the point, do an excellent job of teaching [Baptist history] too, and we would like for students to be linked with them."

But William Tinsley, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin convention, said he was surprised by Coppenger's comments. "I have said to Mark before that if they have any concerns or ideas, to tell me about it. I haven't heard anything," he said.

"Our primary goal is to try to keep students in Minnesota-Wisconsin to train indigenous leaders for the future," Tinsley said. "In the past, whenever we have had pastors who were called to go off to seminary, they rarely came back."

Tinsley also said he had not heard of any pastors in the MWBC who were disgruntled with the Bethel Seminary partnership. "As long as we believe Bethel will provide conservative, evangelical seminary training, we want to work with them."

Tinsley said money the two-state convention provides to Bethel is not diverted from SBC seminaries. "We provide 80 percent of the difference between Bethel tuition and Southern Baptist tuition," he said. "We did that to try to make it affordable."

Tinsley said the convention was already helping to subsidize scholarships for students at Southern Baptist seminaries by participating in the Cooperative Program unified budget.

In other business, trustees approved a change in the seminary's charter naming the Southern Baptist Convention as the "sole member" of Midwestern's corporation. The action was taken at the request of the SBC Executive Committee. Whitehead explained the action to the board: "This proposed change is intended to prevent any agency from 'stealing' itself -- from having the board just pull itself away from SBC control," he said. "Baylor is the most famous example of this. Most of us in Southern Baptist life didn't think that was even legal, much less ethical."

During the academic-affairs committee report, trustees approved two new faculty members plus a faculty member/director for the seminary's Nehemiah Project church-planting initiative. The project is a joint effort with the North American Mission Board to place full-time church planting leaders on campus at each of the six SBC seminaries.

Carrol Fowler will lead the program for Midwestern. A 1973 Midwestern graduate, he currently serves as a missions and church planting director for the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana. He has extensive experience planting churches in Indiana, Arkansas, Kansas and Michigan.

The two new faculty members approved were Thorvald Madsen II and Lee Hinson. Madsen will serve as assistant professor of New Testament, ethics and philosophy. He comes from the staff of Northwest Church, a Baptist General Conference church in Fresno, Calif., where he was minister of adult education. He received his B.A. degree from Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill., his M.A. from Western Kentucky University, his M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., and his Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He also did graduate work at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Hinson will be assistant professor of church music. He comes from LifeWay Christian Resources, where he is the small church/associational music consultant. He received his B.M.E. degree from Baylor University, his M.M. from East Texas State University, his M.A. in religious education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a doctorate in musical arts from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

In other actions, board members:

-- Approved a tuition increase of \$5 per credit hour for Southern Baptist students and \$10 per credit hour for other students. Registrar Stephen Prescott said even with the increase, Midwestern's tuition rate is still the lowest of any of the six SBC seminaries.

-- Received a report that all Association of Theological Schools notations against the seminary had been lifted.

-- Elected by acclamation new board officers: Carl Weiser, pastor of Hyland Heights Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., as chairman; Robert Collins, pastor of Plaza Heights Baptist Church in Blue Springs, Mo., as vice-chairman; Anthony Mattia, pastor of Trinity Southern Baptist Church in Wamego, Kan., as second vice-chairman; Gwen Newman of Winder, Ga., as secretary; and Joseph Bunce, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bloomfield, N.M., as an at-large member of the board's executive committee.

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## **Southeastern trustees delay vote on requested governance change**

By Jimmy Allen

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- Trustees at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary could find it much more difficult to ever cut the school's direct ties to the Southern Baptist Convention.

The trustees are considering an amendment to the seminary's articles of incorporation that would in all practicality prevent future boards of trustees from voting to perpetuate themselves. They are expected to vote on the proposal in the fall.

No SBC-owned agency or institution has ever severed ties with the convention, according to Bill Sumners, director of the Southern Baptist Historical Collection of Libraries and Archives. But several Baptist institutions have done so with their respective state conventions after conservatives began winning key posts.

That's the reason for this proposal, said August Boto, the SBC's vice president for convention policy. Among the Baptist institutions that have withdrawn from state conventions are Wake Forest University and Meredith College in North Carolina, as well as Baylor University in Texas and Samford University in Alabama.

"We don't want to wake up, or our grandchildren wake up, and [learn that] in a late-night meeting [the seminary's board voted] to have its trustees self-perpetuating," said Boto, who proposed the amendment to Southeastern's trustees during the board's spring meeting April 12-13 in Wake Forest, N.C.

The proposed amendment states the SBC would be the sole member of the Southeastern corporation, meaning any change in its governance would have to be approved at the convention. That would prevent the board of trustees from becoming self-perpetuating without approval by the convention messengers.

All six SBC seminaries are being asked to approve a similar amendment. In addition, four other SBC institutions have already approved the amendment and those changes were ratified at past conventions: the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board, LifeWay Christian Resources and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

In addition, the amendment has been approved for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Boto said.

Three others are expected to be approved at the convention in June, he said. They are Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Southern Baptist Annuity Board.

Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Seminary and president of the SBC, said he and other seminary presidents were opposed to the amendment at first. He said his hesitation was based on "an old Baptist fear of centralization." When someone preaches religious liberty, their initial reaction to this type of amendment is that people are "trying to get their steely hands around our necks," he said.

Leaders at all but one of the seminaries now favor the amendment, Patterson said. The lone holdout is the leadership at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Another concern expressed by seminary leaders is the possibility of a renegade convention voting to remove trustees en masse, Boto said. To alleviate that concern, a yearlong process for removal of trustees has been included, he said.

Southeastern's trustees hesitated to approve the proposal at this meeting because of timing. They didn't have time to study the details before the meeting, and their bylaws require trustees have 30 days notice of any proposed bylaw change. Patterson said the trustees would not have violated the bylaws by acting, because they were notified an amendment would be presented. They just didn't have the details.

Arthur Madill, a trustee from Wingate, N.C., said Southeastern's trustees have made history the past 10 years and they don't need someone two time zones away making their decisions.

"This board has always worked better when it had time to work through the material," Madill said.

Kent Humphreys of Oklahoma made a motion for the chair, Dwight Smith of Mississippi, and Patterson to appoint a committee of trustees and faculty to study the amendment and make a recommendation at the fall meeting. The vote was unanimous.

If the vote had been on the amendment instead, Smith said a majority of the 24 trustees attending probably would have voted in favor.

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-- Jimmy Allen is assistant editor of the Biblical Recorder newspaper in Raleigh, N.C.

## **Golden Gate trustees adopt plan to enter next century deficit-free**

By Mark Wyatt

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (ABP) -- Trustees of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary have approved budget guidelines they expect to help the institution begin the next century with a third consecutive year of deficit-free operations.

Meeting April 13 at the seminary's main campus in Mill Valley, Calif., trustees also heard a report on plans to offer one of the seminary's degree programs in Germany and elected new officers for the coming year.

Seminary officials said higher-than-expected revenue from tuition and other sources, combined with a built-in expense contingency and carefully managed spending, should enable the institution to finish the current fiscal year without a deficit. Jim Stephenson, vice president for business affairs, also cited "generous Cooperative Program gifts from the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention," which he said provided more than \$3.2 million dollars for seminary operations this year.

However, trustees approved a budget total for the coming year that is smaller than the current spending plan. Preliminary plans call for a balanced 1999-2000 budget totaling \$7,573,800. That figure is \$181,500 less

than the institution's current budget. The reduction is due largely to decreasing revenue from earlier sales of surplus seminary property.

Under the proposed budget, student tuition costs would increase 3 percent and Golden Gate Seminary employees would receive a 3 percent cost-of-living salary increase.

Before voting on the new spending plan, trustees encouraged seminary administrators to achieve a balanced budget for fiscal year 1999-2000 without cutting student services. One issue raising concern among some students and trustees involves the possible elimination of the dean-of-students' position. Seminary administrators reportedly are considering doing away with that post to help balance the budget. Under one scenario, responsibility for services now provided by the dean of students would be transferred to other departments.

Currently, Professor Mike Thompson is serving as acting dean of students. Kon Yang, former dean of students, recently moved to Vancouver, Wash. where he now teaches as a resident professor at Golden Gate Seminary's Pacific Northwest Campus.

Bruce Aubrey, a trustee from Liverpool, New York, said members of the student-relations committee he chairs were "uncomfortable with the thought" of cutting the position.

"I want to know if I vote for this (budget proposal) am I voting for the funds but not voting to eliminate the dean of students?" Aubrey asked.

"If we vote the budget we have set the parameters," responded David George, a trustee from Arlington, Texas. "I don't think we're eliminating the dean of students, but unless something happens it's likely somebody's going to be eliminated."

George said specific decisions on how to balance the budget would be left to seminary administrators.

President Bill Crews said he was not prepared to give a final answer on the question of whether any positions will be cut. He indicated a number of areas likely would be affected by the need to trim the preliminary spending plan.

"I don't enjoy the prospect of finding \$380,000 that has to be reduced, but we have to do something," Crews asserted. "I don't have a solution today but we will find a solution," he added, assuring trustees that final budget figures for the coming year would be in line with the amount they approved.

Trustees heard greetings from two leaders of the Bibelseminar Bonn (Bonn Bible Seminary), a conservative evangelical seminary seeking a partnership with Golden Gate Seminary "to be part of shaping leaders for the future."

Heinrich Loewen, director of Bibelseminar Bonn, told trustees his school considered many different seminaries in the United States before selecting Golden Gate for the strategic partnership.

"We have in our churches many fathers with gray hair and a lot of experience. They can tell us how to survive in time of persecution because they did well in this area. But they cannot tell us and teach us how to train leaders for the next century. We need your experience," Loewen said.

Friedhelm Jung, Bibelseminar Bonn academic director, said the teaching faculties at European universities and seminaries are too liberal for most Baptists in Europe.

"We don't want to send our students to liberal faculties, so we are very happy to cooperate with you because we know your theology is biblical and evangelical in the right sense of the word," Jung told trustees.

Under the partnership, professors from Golden Gate Seminary initially would teach master's-level courses at the German seminary. A Golden Gate Seminary official emphasized that the institution is awaiting approval from two accrediting agencies before launching the venture with the German seminary. That approval could come later this year.

Trustees elected John Funk, a businessman and member of Calvary Baptist Church in West Hills, Calif., to serve as trustee chairman during the coming year. Funk succeeds Sam Porter, director of men's ministries for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

James McCullen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Mountain View, Mo., was elected trustee vice-chair and Marie Aldridge, a businesswoman and member of Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., was elected trustee secretary.

In other actions trustees:

-- Granted a one-half year sabbatical leave beginning in Jan. 2000 to Thomas Wolf, professor of missions. Wolf reportedly will use the leave to work toward completion of a Ph.D. degree as required under a three-year extension of his teaching contract reported to trustees by President Crews.

-- Authorized the seminary president to appoint a long-range planning committee.

-- Tabled for two years consideration of a motion by Colorado trustee Mel McClellan concerning at-large trustee representation from state conventions that host the seminary's regional campuses.

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## **Golden Gate Seminary trustees affirm amended 'Baptist Faith and Message'**

By Mark Wyatt

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (ABP) -- Trustees of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary reaffirmed both support for the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement and the institution's allegiance to the Southern Baptist Convention during their regular spring meeting April 13 in Mill Valley, Calif.

Trustees approved several revisions to key governing documents that strengthen the institution's Southern Baptist identity. One such change to the seminary constitution affirms that the "cardinal beliefs on which the Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary is founded and in harmony with which it will operate are expressed in 'The Baptist Faith and Message' approved by the Southern Baptist Convention ... ."

Seminary President Bill Crews said the change eliminates a reference to 1963, the year the SBC adopted the version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" that went unchanged until the convention added an article on the family in 1998. Crews said removing the date would prevent the need for future revision of seminary documents in the event that other changes are made to the "Baptist Faith and Message."

Originally adopted in 1925, the "Baptist Faith and Message" is a statement of doctrinal beliefs generally held by Baptists. Although it is not considered an official creed, it has served for decades as information to the churches and guidelines to agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention.

With the change to its constitution, Golden Gate followed suit of a sister seminary in requiring current and future faculty members to endorse the controversial family amendment added last summer that says, among other things, that wives must submit graciously to their husbands.

When Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary adopted that policy last fall, two professors left, saying they did not believe the statement was biblical.

Crews told Golden Gate trustees the seminary's faculty members have "indicated intention to continue their commitment" to the "Baptist Faith and Message." He said that came in response to his directive that any faculty member who could not abide by the current version of the statement should "bring appropriate closure" to their service at Golden Gate Seminary.

Crews said all faculty members "responded affirmatively that they will continue to teach in accord with and not contrary to" the statement.

"That gives us the assurance that they will continue to do that. It has been a very good process for us, and we are grateful for it," Crews declared.

Another action by trustees ensures that Golden Gate Seminary will remain firmly under control of the Southern Baptist Convention. Trustees ratified the seminary's "restated articles of incorporation" under California law, naming the Southern Baptist Convention as the sole member of the corporation.

The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention had requested that seminary trustees affirm the denomination's authority in this manner. Among other things, the action guarantees the SBC authority to determine the qualification of trustees, elect and remove trustees, and approve or override trustee actions.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

## **ABP directors direct staff to move forward with hiring**

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Convinced of the potential of their new FaithWorks magazine yet concerned it is not selling as quickly as hoped, directors of Associated Baptist Press voted April 10 to step up plans to hire a staff member for development and marketing.

Directors of the 9-year-old independent news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., authorized staff to offer the job immediately, prompted by a budget shortfall for the current year.

During the first three months of this year, income lagged more than \$100,000 behind the pace needed to reach an ambitious \$818,000 spending plan approved by directors last fall.

Some of the deficit resulted from slower-than-anticipated sales of subscriptions to FaithWorks, a Christian lifestyle magazine launched last summer.

"We've not sold as many magazines as we projected," Greg Warner, ABP's executive director, told board members. Currently the magazine has about 1,600 subscribers, evenly divided between individuals and bulk orders.

"The main struggle right now for FaithWorks is marketing," Warner said.

Due to the extra burden on staff from producing the magazine, coupled with the unexpected loss of a contract marketing director late last year, ABP is about three months behind in marketing the magazine and its overall fund-raising efforts, Warner said.

On the upside, Warner said the magazine is getting rave reviews in its attempt to appeal to a new, younger crowd, while ABP's news service continues to serve a traditional Baptist audience.

"We've maintained a traditional constituent base through the Baptist state papers, and we've inaugurated a new constituency with FaithWorks," Warner said.

Warner told ABP directors that adding the magazine has been taxing for the staff. Warner is serving as editor of the magazine. Philip Poole joined the staff in January as executive director, taking over day-to-day administration. Lindsay Bergstrom, former assistant editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, joined the staff as the magazine's art director.

Franceen Cornelius, an 8-year ABP employee, was promoted from administrative assistant to a new position, development and financial associate. Bob Allen, who joined ABP in 1993, received a new title, editor of the news service. An editorial-assistant position approved last year has not been filled.

Despite the financial burden of adding staff, ABP directors said they were confident fund-raising goals for this year are realistic and encouraged the staff to move forward with filling both the development-marketing director and editorial-assistant vacancies.

"What we decided was our future and not just balancing the budget," said board chairman Dan Hobbs, a university administrator from Norman, Okla.

Also at the meeting, held April 9-11 in Jacksonville, ABP directors presented a special award to Texas journalist Dan Martin for his role in the founding of the independent Baptist news service and its Founders Award for financial support to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The 1990 firings of Martin as editor of Baptist Press and his boss Al Shackleford by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee prompted the formation of ABP, an independent news service with a self-perpetuating board of directors. Martin served as ABP's first editor on a contract basis before the board hired its current executive editor, Greg Warner, in 1991.

"For 45 years, Baptist Press was the news service of Southern Baptists," Martin said. "We sought to report the news honestly."

Today, he continued, ABP's staff members "proudly wear the mantle of the credible news service of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Shackleford, the Executive Committee's former vice president for Baptist Press, and Craig Communications, which set up the news operation and hired Martin, were honored previously.

The Atlanta-based Fellowship began funding ABP in 1993, becoming the news service's single largest contributing organization.

"For CBF, partnering [with ABP] never meant favoritism" in reporting, said Cynthia Wise, chairwoman of the Fellowship's Baptist Principles Ministry Group. She said the Fellowship continues to support "a news service that is committed to telling the truth and trusting the people."

Russell Dilday, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary who now teaches at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, gave the event's keynote address.

Dilday, who is currently president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said ABP is "more than communicating -- a medium; this is ministry."

"This group is committed to being the best and committed to quality and committed to the Lord Jesus and committed to what is true," Dilday said. "We're calling on ABP, as Baptists all around the country, to be true."

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## **State conventions move closer to 'Impact Northeast' strategy**

By Robert O'Brien

COLUMBIA, Md. (ABP) -- An initiative by several Baptist state conventions to evangelize in the Northeast has moved a step closer to reality.

Representatives of 11 state Baptist conventions voted unanimously to proceed with the partnership at a recent meeting at offices of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware in Columbia, Md.

Participants endorsed Bill Causey, retired executive director of Mississippi Baptists, as coordinator for the new "Impact Northeast" project. They also authorized Causey to name a coordinating council to help implement the ambitious state-led initiative.

Causey, who will continue to live in Clinton, Miss., chose executive directors of six state Baptist conventions to serve on the council. They are Bill Pinson of Texas, Jim Futral of Mississippi, Reginald McDonough of Virginia, David Waltz of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, Ken Lyle of New England and Charles Barnes of Maryland/Delaware.

Representatives from Alabama, Tennessee, District of Columbia, North Carolina and New York also attended the March 29 meeting. Other states may join the initiative later, Causey said.

Leaders said Impact Northeast will concentrate on four priorities set at an earlier meeting: (1) new church starts, (2) reaching college and university students including internationals, (3) leadership training and (4) church growth.

Larger state conventions from the South will focus resources and volunteers in partnership with Baptists in the smaller Northeast conventions, Impact Northeast leaders said.

The Virginia and Mississippi conventions have already appropriated more than \$100,000 each for use by Impact Northeast.

But leaders of the Northeast bodies emphasized they want to give as well as receive.

"Northeast Baptists want to share freely with Baptists of the South," said Barnes, whose convention will provide an office and clerical support for Impact Northeast. "We have crossed racial and ethnic lines. We know how it feels to be a small minority in an overwhelming majority. We understand urbanization as do few people in the South."

The Southern Baptist North American Mission Board has traditionally played a major role in Southern Baptist missions in the Northeast. More recently, additional support has come through one-on-one partnerships between older, established state Baptist conventions and weaker conventions in the Northeast.

But the Northeast project is a state-led initiative. State leaders emphasized it will not compete with NAMB and is not motivated by any ill will against the Southern Baptist missions agency. Instead, they said, the new program would seek to fill in the gaps and provide resources in areas that are beyond NAMB's focus.

State leaders said they want to "create new missions networks, expand opportunities for missions service and enhance existing mission resources" to reach millions of Americans who have not accepted Jesus Christ.

Two NAMB representatives attended the meeting as observers and expressed their willingness to cooperate wherever possible. Additionally, Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham, Ala., will transfer a staff member, Associate Executive Director Bobbie Patterson, to the office of WMU of Virginia in Richmond on special assignment to work with Impact Northeast.

Causey summed up a recurring theme of the meeting:

"This is not a state-to-state partnership in the traditional sense," he said, "but a new regional paradigm aimed at marshalling cooperative resources to bring as many people as possible to Jesus Christ."

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