



# Associated Baptist Press

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## 'Baptist Faith and Message' study tops editors' ranking of top stories

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Baptist editors chose the naming of a committee to potentially rewrite the "Baptist Faith and Message" the top news story in 1999.

The Southern Baptist Convention voted in June to establish a blue-ribbon committee to study and possibly revise the doctrinal statement approved in 1963. Chaired by former SBC president Adrian Rogers, the committee is expected to report at the 2000 convention in Orlando, Fla.

In an informal survey, editors at Baptist state newspapers voted possible changes to the "Baptist Faith and Message" the year's top story.

While technically not a creed, the statement is widely regarded as the most complete statement of Southern Baptist beliefs. It is used in hiring of denominational and church employees.

A 1998 amendment that added an article on the family to the statement topped a similar ranking of top stories last year.

The collapse of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona came in second in the editors' ranking of top stories of 1999.

State officials in August ordered the Foundation to stop selling securities after an investigation raised questions about solicitation of investors and accounting practices. Some 13,000 investors waited to see how much of their money they would recover in a restructuring plan that included bankruptcy. Some had invested their life savings. Estimates of losses ranged from \$100 million to \$400 million. Authorities continue to investigate whether the non-profit religious corporation engaged in fraud. If so, it could be the largest charities scam in United States history, according to news reports.

Two stories of random violence tied for third in the editors' ranking. School shootings, including the April 20 massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., and the Sept. 15 shootings at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, received the same number of points in the ranking.

Other top stories of the year included:

5. Votes distancing the Baptist General Convention of Texas from the Southern Baptist Convention. Texas Baptists voted in November to endorse the 1963 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message," in effect rejecting the 1998 family amendment, and began a process to potentially open membership in the state group to churches outside of Texas. The actions continued a trend from recent years, where reforms by the conservative-led SBC have been resisted by moderate leaders in the SBC's largest state affiliate.

6. Charges of religious bigotry leveled at Southern Baptists after distribution of prayer guides targeting Jews and Hindus for evangelism. The pamphlets, produced by the SBC's International Mission Board, were timed to focus Southern Baptists' prayers with major religious holidays of the two faiths. Jewish and Hindu leaders called the efforts insulting. Southern Baptist leaders defended the pamphlets, saying the Bible commands Christians to witness to people of other faiths.

7. The firing of a Missouri seminary president over alleged misappropriation of anger. Trustees at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary fired Mark Coppenger in a closed-door meeting Sept. 13, stating he was no longer able to effectively lead the school.

8. (Tie) Religious persecution around the world. The Jan. 23 murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and two sons by Hindu extremists in India vividly illustrated the danger believers face in parts of the world hostile to a Christian witness. In October, the U.S. State Department issued a report listing China, Iraq, Iran, Myanmar and Sudan as severe violators of religious freedom.

8. (Tie) Church-state disputes, including posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, school vouchers and banning prayers at high school football games. Various issues gained attention in courts, Congress and statehouses around the country.

10. The Georgia Baptist Convention voted in November to expel two churches for violating constitutional language added last year to bar churches that endorse or affirm homosexual behavior. Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., and Virginia-Highland Baptist Church in Atlanta, are thought to be the first churches removed for doctrinal reasons in the state convention's 177-year history.

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### **Baptist state paper editors' ranking of top 10 stories of 1999:**

1. Committee named to study and possibly revise the "Baptist Faith and Message."
2. Collapse of Baptist Foundation of Arizona.
3. (Tie) Columbine and other school shootings.
3. (Tie) Sept. 15 shootings at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.
5. Texas Baptists affirm 1963 version of Baptist Faith and Message, open door to possibly accepting non-Texas churches for membership.
6. Reaction to prayer guides targeting Jews, Hindus.
7. Firing of Mark Coppenger as president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.
8. (Tie) Religious persecution around the world: including Jan. 23 murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and sons in India and State Department report detailing worst-offending governments.
8. (Tie) Church-state disputes, including posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, school vouchers and banning prayers at high school football games.
10. Georgia Baptists oust two churches for affirming gays.

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## Editors rank CBF founding top Baptist story of the 1990s

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Baptist editors chose the 1991 organization of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as the decade's top story.

After losing control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s, moderates turned to developing alternatives to denominational programs. In an informal survey by the news service Associated Baptist Press, editors of Baptist state newspapers ranked the rise of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as the top story of the 1990s.

Today, about 1,500 churches support the Fellowship, which has an annual budget of \$15.5 million. In addition to an Atlanta staff led by former Texas pastor Daniel Vestal, the Fellowship supports 126 career missionaries and enlists a yearly average of 3,600 volunteer missionaries in the United States and around the world. It also provides supplemental funding for a number of independent partner organizations that offer theological education, publishing and other church services.

The Fellowship has declined to declare itself a separate convention, however. Most churches that give money to the Fellowship also continue to support the SBC.

Other top stories in the editors' ranking include:

2. Russell Dilday's firing as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1994. Dilday's firing by conservative trustees of the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, helped galvanize moderate sentiment, particularly in Texas, where he later served as president of the state convention.

3. Restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention. The "Covenant for a New Century," approved in 1995 and implemented over two years, reduced the number of convention entities from 19 to 12. The centerpiece of the restructuring was creation of the North American Mission Board in Alpharetta, Ga., a new domestic-missions arm replacing three agencies in the old structure. Officials predicted the reorganization would save \$34 million in the first five years.

4. The 1990 firing of two editors at Baptist Press, the SBC's official news service. The SBC Executive Committee, in a called executive session, fired editor Dan Martin and his boss, Al Shackelford, without stating a cause. Among reaction to the firing was establishment of an independent Baptist news service, Associated Baptist Press.

5. The SBC severed historic ties with the Baptist Joint Committee in 1991, a religious liberty coalition of several Baptist groups, in 1991. The SBC transferred the denomination's assignment for religious liberty to its moral-concerns agency, the Christian Life Commission, later renamed the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

6. The "True Love Waits" sexual-abstinence campaign, coordinated for Southern Baptists by LifeWay Christian Resources.

7. Actions distancing the Baptist General Convention of Texas from conservative positions embraced by the Southern Baptist Convention. Despite gains by conservatives in the SBC, moderates retained control in Texas and took a series of steps to strengthen their autonomy. They set up several options for distribution of missions gifts through the Cooperative Program unified budget, which formerly had been split between state and SBC causes. They approved the concept of producing Texas-specific literature for Sunday school. Most recently, 1999, they endorsed the 1963 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message," distancing the state's Baptists from both a recent family amendment and expected further revisions of Southern Baptists' doctrinal statement next year.

8. A 1998 amendment to the "Baptist Faith and Message," adding a statement on the family to the

SBC's official statement of faith. While many hailed the statement, others took exception to one declaration that wives should submit to their husbands.

9. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, adopted by Congress in 1993, sought to restore certain religious freedoms struck down in a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court. The high court declared parts of the law unconstitutional in 1997. A coalition of religious liberty and civil liberties groups continues to work for passage of laws to bolster religious freedom.

10. The naming at last summer's Southern Baptist Convention of a committee to study, and possibly revise, the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement. The committee, chaired by former SBC president Adrian Rogers, is expected to report at the 2000 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

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### **Baptist state paper editors' ranking of top 10 stories of the decade:**

1. Cooperative Baptist Fellowship organizes (1991)
2. Firing of Southwestern Seminary President Russell Dilday (1994)
3. Restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention (1995)
4. SBC Executive Committee fires Baptist Press editors Al Shackleford and Dan Martin without stated cause (1990)
5. SBC severs ties with Baptist Joint Committee (1991), religious-liberty assignment transferred to Christian Life Commission
6. "True Love Waits" sexual abstinence campaign (1993)
7. Texas convention distances itself from conservative led SBC (1996-1999)
8. Amendment of 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" to include article on the Family (1998)
9. Passage of Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1993) and Supreme Court declaring it unconstitutional (1997)
10. Committee named to study and possibly rewrite the "Baptist Faith and Message" (1999)

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CORRECTION: In the Dec. 14 ABP story "20th century witnesses decline of postmillennialism," please delete the reference to Charles Haddon Spurgeon from the 5th paragraph. Spurgeon's views on the millennium are disputed, but he should not have been cited as an example to illustrate the otherwise-accurate statement that postmillennialism was a strongly held view at the dawn of the 20th century. ABP regrets the error.

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