



Nashville, Tennessee  
**Associated  
Baptist Press**

Editor: **Bob Allen**  
Executive editor: **Greg Warner**  
Phone: **800.340.6626**  
Fax: **904.262.7745**  
E-mail: **bob@abpnews.com**

November 2, 2000

(00-100)

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

- Billy Graham readies for Florida crusade**
- Texas Baptists open convention for full participation by non-Texans**
- Pastor urges Texas Baptists to leave behind 'Great Commotion'**
- Mississippi Baptists affirm Bible as 'final authority'**
- Churches adapt attractions to teach kids about God**
- Conservatives tighten grip on Missouri Baptist Convention**
- Arkansas Baptists uphold 1963 faith state**
- Clinton, Gore church appearance sparks IRS complaint by watchdog**

**Billy Graham readies  
for Florida crusade**

By Barbara Denman and Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Billy Graham said despite lingering health problems he is able to preach at this week's crusade in Jacksonville, Fla., and that it is unlikely to be his last.

Speaking to reporters Oct. 31, two days before the start of the famous evangelist's first-ever Northeast Florida crusade, Graham said he was suffering from a muscular problem with his jaw that made it painful for him to speak. He said the condition is being treated with medication.

"I am happy to report that I feel better than I did in Nashville and am looking forward to many more months and possibly years of crusade ministry, God willing," he said. "I'm sure that we will have two or three crusades next year. At least I think so; that's in the Lord's hands. But physically, I think I can do it."

Following his Middle Tennessee crusade last June, Graham was hospitalized for three months at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., where he was treated for fluid on the brain. He was unable to attend an international conference in Amsterdam this summer because of his health.

Graham who suffers from Parkinson's Disease, is accompanied in Florida by his son Franklin, who reportedly is prepared to fill in for his father if needed.

The 81-year-old evangelist compared himself to the apostle Paul, who despite personal weakness said he found strength in his reliance on God.

Graham, who preached his first sermon more than 60 years ago not far from Jacksonville while a student at Bible college, has never before held a crusade specifically in Jacksonville. With a population of one million, it is the largest city in North America where the Graham organization has never held a crusade. He said he knows the area well, however, because he has been in the area many times to visit the Mayo clinic.

Graham told reporters the number one goal of his ministry is to "glorify Christ."

Second, he said, is for his evangelistic team to be used to represent churches in the area to "proclaim the gospel of Christ in great simplicity and with the power of the Holy Spirit."

His third priority, he said, is "to unify a city, especially around racial lines."

Graham said he has worked to bring African Americans, Latinos and Caucasians together by going into cities divided by racial violence. Rather than talking about the race problem directly, Graham said he "talked about the gospel," which he said binds all people together.

Graham recalled a conversation with Martin Luther King when he offered to go with the civil-rights leader into the streets. But King told him to "just keep preaching non-segregation," as they called integration at the time. King said that Graham would lose credibility with many if he took to the streets, but he could have more influence with a greater number of people from behind the pulpit.

While Graham planned to appear at the Nov. 2-5 crusade at Alltel Stadium, two people who had planned to be on the program with him had to cancel due to poor health. Legendary country music artists Johnny and June Carter Cash were reportedly too ill to perform on the crusade's second night and canceled their appearance on the advice of doctors.

-30-

-- Some information from this article was obtained from a Florida Times-Union article by Paul Pinkham.

## **Texas Baptists open convention for full participation by non-Texans**

By Mark Wingfield and Ferrell Foster

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (ABP) -- Churches outside Texas that affiliate with the Baptist General Convention of Texas now will be allowed to serve on convention committees and boards.

Messengers to the BGCT annual session approved the change Oct. 30 in Corpus Christi. With only scattered opposition, messengers gave the required second affirmation to a constitutional amendment that removes geographical limitations on nominees for convention committees and boards.

The Texas convention has not previously limited churches outside the state from joining the convention and already counts about a half dozen congregations from other states among its cooperating churches. Those churches generally are in border communities.

Speculation has escalated over the past year, however, that the BGCT could become a refuge for moderate Baptist churches nationwide as some state Baptist conventions align more closely with the conservative direction of the Southern Baptist Convention. Critics of the BGCT have charged the Texas convention is transforming itself into a new national convention.

Texas Baptist leaders, however, have said they have no intention of actively recruiting churches from outside the state. If churches from other states desire to seek affiliation with the BGCT, they will be welcome as they always have been, the convention leaders have said.

"We're not bent on forming a new denomination," said BGCT President Clyde Glazener. "Every time the SBC does something, it seems that Texas has to make some kind of move to ensure Texas people will still be free. Consequently, we do keep finding ourselves doing things that would generate a full-service convention. That didn't start out as our intention."

The constitutional article amended by messengers this year previously read: "The personnel of these boards shall be active members of cooperating Baptist churches in the State of Texas." It now says trustees of BGCT agencies are to be "active members of cooperating Baptist General Convention of Texas churches."

Messengers approved the change by a margin that was "very clearly" more than the required two-thirds majority, announced Clyde Glazener, BGCT president.

Phil Lineberger, pastor of Williams Trace Baptist Church in Sugar Land, said he brought the motion "so churches outside Texas affected by the rising tide of creedalism" in Southern Baptist life would have a place to be involved.

"I do not want us to recruit" but to provide a friendly home for those who seek it," Lineberger said.

-30-

## **Pastor urges Texas Baptists to leave behind 'Great Commotion'**

By Dan Martin

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (ABP) -- Texas Baptists "must leave behind the Great Commotion for the Great Commission," Jim Denison said in the annual convention sermon at the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Denison, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, said Texas Baptists must take two simple but life-transforming steps: "First, love the lost with all your heart. . Second, preach Jesus with all your strength."

Texas Baptists "exist to take the gospel of God's love into our fallen, dark, dying, decaying, immoral world. Not wait for them to find us -- to find them. To go to them with the incredible good news that God loves us," Denison insisted.

The BGCT annual session in Corpus Christi was held "in the midst of the greatest conflict and commotion we have ever known as Texas Baptists," he acknowledged.

Denison said there are an estimated 10 million unchurched persons in Texas, "and we Baptists have not been famous in recent years for loving them."

A survey of residents who live near the North Dallas church where he is pastor discovered that people associate the words "pushy," "self-serving," "cliquish," "discriminates," "fundamentalists" and "hateful" with Baptists, Denison said.

"You and I must determine to love the lost people we know, today, with all our hearts. Only then can we prove to them that God loves them," he added.

"Today, we Texas Baptists say to our world: 'We love you and Jesus loves you. We are committed to fellowship, to friendship, to unity for the sake of the gospel. We love you, and more importantly, Jesus loves you,'" he stressed.

To critics, Denison said, Texas Baptists say: "We believe that the Scripture is the word of God, his truth for the world. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, his hope for the world. We believe that the Great Commission is his purpose for the church, his mission for the world. And we are ready to get on with it."

-30-

## **Mississippi Baptists affirm Bible as 'final authority'**

By William Perkins

JACKSON, Miss. (ABP) -- Rather than endorse either the newly revised "Baptist Faith and Message" or an earlier version adopted in 1963, Mississippi Baptists in their annual convention voted to "affirm the Word of God as our final authority for faith and practice."

Several resolutions affirming both versions of the Southern Baptist Convention's official faith statement were proposed by messengers during the Oct. 30-Nov. 1 Mississippi Baptist Convention in Jackson. The convention's resolutions committee, however, noted that the state convention has never voted on any version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" and traditionally has viewed such decisions as a matter for the local church.

Some moderates have opposed changes to the document approved by the SBC in June as being too conservative. Defenders of the revisions, however, say they were needed to keep liberals from infiltrating Baptist schools and agencies. Differences over the "Baptist Faith and Message" were cited often in a highly publicized funding dispute between the SBC and its largest state affiliate, the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In other business, the Mississippi convention re-elected president Kermit McGregor to a second term by acclamation. McGregor, pastor of First Baptist Church in Mendenhall, urged messengers in his presidential address to avoid the strife and infighting that has affected many other Southern Baptist groups.

"We are priests, in the pulpit and in the pews," he said. "Lest we forget, his name is Jesus."

Mississippi Baptists also approved a record \$30 million budget that funds the Southern Baptist Convention (35 percent), Mississippi Baptist agencies and institutions (25 percent) and work of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Executive Board (37 percent). Just under 3 percent funds matching grants for ministers' retirement with the SBC Annuity Board.

-30-

-- This story was adapted from reporting posted on the Mississippi Baptist Convention Web site.

## **Churches adapt attractions to teach kids about God**

By ABP staff

HOUSTON (ABP) -- In an attempt to reach the MTV generation, churches are adapting amusement attractions to preach the gospel, according to a recent story in the Houston Chronicle.

Second Baptist Church in Houston recently dedicated its \$595,000 Soul Train City and the Hangar areas for children and teens, featuring Disney-style, almost life-size animatronic figures.

"Kids today are very visual, very up to date, very modern and with it," Gary Moore, minister of music for the 30,000-member congregation told the newspaper in a copyrighted article Oct. 20. "We have to go where they are to bring them where they need to be."

The church hired Wacky World, an "edutainment" company in Tampa, Fla., that formerly supplied animation and attractions for movie studios, theme parks and restaurants.

Two years ago, the firm designed a "Toon Town" children's sanctuary for First Baptist Church in Springdale, Ark., featuring a baptistery built inside a fire truck. When a child is baptized, a bell rings and he or she is sprayed with confetti, said Bruce Barry, president and CEO of Wacky World. "It's a pretty big deal to get baptized in Springdale, Ark.," Barry told the Chronicle.

Springdale pastor Ronnie Floyd told the paper the new attractions have resulted in increased attendance among children. While a few children prefer the fire-truck baptistery, most are baptized in the main sanctuary, he said.

-30-

## **Conservatives tighten grip on Missouri Baptist Convention**

By Bob Allen

OSAGE BEACH, Mo. (ABP) -- Conservatives tightened their grip on the 1,950-church Missouri Baptist Convention Oct. 30-Nov. 1, sweeping officer elections for the third consecutive year and winning other contested votes.

A record registration of 3,408 at Tan-Tar-A Resort on the Lake of the Ozarks in Osage Beach shattered last year's previous high of 2,439 in Liberty. Pre-convention campaigns by the conservative Project 1000 movement and the moderate Mainstream Missouri Baptists helped boost attendance.

Candidates backed by conservatives won all four convention offices. Bob Collins, pastor of Plaza Heights Baptist Church in Blue Springs, won the presidency, defeating Harlan Spurgeon, a former missionary backed by moderates, 61 percent to 39 percent. Other conservative-backed candidates winning contested elections were Bob Curtis, pastor of Ballwin Baptist Church, first vice president; Charlie Burnett, pastor of Harmony Heights Baptist Church in Joplin, second vice president; and John Martin, associate pastor of Hallsville Baptist Church as recording secretary.

Conservatives also succeeded in replacing committee nominations for the state's Christian Life Commission with a more conservative slate.

A conservative-dominated resolutions committee brought resolutions passed by the convention including affirmation of the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" passed by the Southern Baptist Convention and support for SBC seminaries and other entities.

Other resolutions supported capital punishment, highlighted the importance of "life issues" in the upcoming general election and condemned use of the so-called "abortion pill" RU-486. Another resolution expressed sympathy to the family of Gov. Mel Carnahan, a lifelong Southern Baptist and Democrat who died recently in a plane crash while campaigning for the U.S. Senate.

A Cooperative Program budget of \$19 million passed after failed attempts to amend it. One motion would have increased the percentage of funds going to the Southern Baptist Convention 1 percent from the proposed 35.75 percent. Another would have designated funds from budget overages to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City.

A motion to escrow \$397,000 in funding for the Baptist Home, a care facility for senior adults, was defeated. The home's trustees earlier voted to make their board self-perpetuating, meaning the state convention would no longer elect the agency's trustees.

Attendance dropped off rapidly after a business-packed Tuesday. While 3,264 people voted in the president's election Tuesday, only 1,380 and 1,367 voted, respectively, for second vice president and recording secretary the following day.

-30-

-- This story was compiled from reports posted on the Internet by the Missouri Baptist Convention communications office.

## **Arkansas Baptists uphold 1963 faith statement**

By Charlie Warren

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- A proposal to make the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" statement the doctrinal guideline for Arkansas Baptists fell short of a required two-thirds vote at the Oct. 31-Nov. 1 state convention in Little Rock.

As a result, an earlier version of the statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 will remain the state convention's doctrinal guideline. That is at least for another two years, which is how long it takes to amend the constitution.

By a slim margin, the convention also adopted a resolution supporting Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program unified budget and denouncing the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The resolution calls on Arkansas Baptists to "resist" the Atlanta-based CBF, which it says "distracts Arkansas Baptists from our joint commitment to the Cooperative Program."

The "Baptist Faith and Message" vote came as a proposal from a charter-and-bylaws committee, which recommended updating the convention's Articles of Incorporation to reflect revisions to the faith statement approved last summer.

Some messengers said confusion over parliamentary procedure made it unclear what messengers were voting on. While a majority voted for the proposal (53 percent for, 47 percent against), it fell more than 100 votes short of a required two-thirds majority.

In an effort to minimize controversy about the statement, which is touted by conservatives but unpopular with moderates, the committee proposal included a phrase affirming "the autonomy of the local church and the priesthood of the believer."

"We understand and recognize that there are substantive changes between the 1963 and 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message' statements," committee chairman Sam Roberts told messengers. "The articles of incorporation of the [Arkansas Baptist State Convention] provide protections and safeguards that prevent any statement of faith from becoming an official creed carrying a mandatory authority."

Despite a plea by Roberts to "lay aside the politics that have characterized Southern Baptists for far too long and support this amendment," Maurice Clark, a messenger from First Baptist Church of Centerton, offered an amendment to delete the phrase about church autonomy and priesthood. His amendment failed.

Randy Hyde, pastor of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church in Little Rock, spoke against the committee's proposal. "Despite the words of the chairman of the committee," Hyde said. "I fear the statement will become creedal in the life not only of the SBC at large but also Arkansas Baptists."

Glenn Hickey, retired former associational missionary for the Pulaski Baptist Association, also spoke against the change. "Anything that threatens local-church autonomy is not truly Baptist," he said. "A preamble does not repair a faulty document. Anything that fails to honor the Lordship of Jesus Christ over churches and over Scripture is not truly Baptist. ... If Christ is not the criterion [for interpreting Scripture], who is? Would it be your pastor? Catholics have a pope. Do you want your pastor to start being infallible and interpret Scripture for you?"

After the question was called for, parliamentarian Tommy Hinson noted that a call for the question requires a two-thirds majority vote. The vote on the question was done by the raising of ballots. That's when parliamentary confusion occurred. The chair ruled that the call for the question had passed, but that point was not made clear to messengers.

Then messengers voted by ballot on the committee's proposal, even though some may have thought they were voting again on the call for the question. Nevertheless, the proposal failed.

In other business, Arkansas Baptists re-elected Ben Rowell, pastor of First Baptist Church in Rogers, as president. Mike Seabaugh, pastor of First Baptist Church of Camden, was elected first vice president and Rudy Davis, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Helena, was elected second vice president.

The convention approved an \$18.6 million Cooperative Program budget with 41.77 percent designated for SBC causes.

-30-

## **Clinton, Gore church appearance sparks IRS complaint by watchdog**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A church-state watchdog group sometimes accused of being partisan and biased against the Religious Right has filed a complaint with the Internal Revenue Service about President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore visiting churches in days leading up to the Nov. 7 elections.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State has asked the IRS to investigate whether two African-American churches violated a ban on church politicking in federal tax law.

The Washington-based group claims that the Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., and the Greater Grace Temple of the Apostolic Faith in Detroit engaged in partisan activity Oct. 29 by encouraging support for Democratic candidates.

At the Baptist church, Clinton appeared to endorse Sen. Chuck Robb, D-Va., and Gore, according to an AU press release. According to news reports, Clinton said from the church's pulpit, "When I'm gone, I hope that Chuck Robb will be left behind."

The president also voiced support for Gore, saying: "I shouldn't have to tell you who to vote for -- you already know who I'm for. This is not rocket science."

In his letter to the IRS, AU Executive Director Barry Lynn said it is likely that an appearance by Clinton would have required "a significant degree of coordination between the church, the Robb campaign, the Gore campaign and the White House."

"I believe this amounts to church endorsement of the Robb and Gore campaigns," Lynn said.

At the Detroit church, AU says that Bishop Charles Ellis III made partisan remarks while introducing Gore as a speaker.

Ellis described the election as a "no-brainer." He also chastised former President George Bush for nominating Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, whom he said has "done more damage to the cause of African Americans than all the justices that have come before him."

Ellis concluded with a reference to Bush's son, GOP presidential candidate George W. Bush. "The branch does not fall far from the tree," he said.

In a telephone interview with Associated Baptist Press, Ellis denied that his introduction of Gore was an endorsement. "I think it's insulting for anybody to classify religious people -- African Americans in particular -- that anybody can instruct them on how to vote," he said. "Our forefathers and mothers have sacrificed their lives and have given blood sweat and tears for the right to vote."

The Baptist church in Virginia had not issued any statements on the matter before this story was released.

Americans United has filed several complaints to the IRS about possible tax violations by churches during election seasons. In a fact sheet released several months ago, AU stated that of the 28 houses of worship and religious ministries that the organization has reported to the IRS, eight arose from entities that endorsed Democratic candidates and 10 arose from endorsements of GOP candidates. Seven were related to churches handing out Christian Coalition voter guides. Three dealt with independent or other candidates.

-30-

**END**

---