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Arkansas Baptists denounce 'Harry Potter' book series
November 14, 2001 - Volume: 01-94

By Charlie Warren

RUSSELLVILLE, Ark. (ABP) -- Arkansas Baptists passed a resolution denouncing Harry Potter, saying the popular children's book series promotes pagan beliefs and practices.

Meeting Nov. 6-7 in Russellville, the Arkansas Baptist State Convention approved the resolution, which states in part, "We will firmly denounce and speak out against any books or materials that promote witchcraft, sorcery and the casting of spells and the making of charms and specifically the Harry Potter book series and subsequent materials."

The resolution says further the state's Southern Baptists "will notify businesses that promote and sell the Harry Potter book series and subsequent materials of the material's anti-Christian theme."

The Harry Potter books, written by British author J.K. Rowling, have drawn praise for encouraging children to read but have sparked concerns among some conservative Christians because they deal with themes of sorcery and the occult. Other Christians defend the books as harmless fantasy.

In other business, Arkansas Baptists elected conservatives to three convention offices and took the first of two votes to establish the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" as the convention's doctrinal guide.

Jim Lagrone, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Bryant, was elected president unopposed. He pledged to work to unify Baptists in Arkansas and "walk together." He was nominated jointly by Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church of Little Rock, and Stephen Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Russellville.

Royce Sweatman, associational missionary of the North Arkansas Baptist Association, was elected first vice-president with 52 percent of the votes in a close race with Mike Seabaugh, pastor of First Baptist Church of Camden. Wallace Edgar, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Texarkana, was elected second vice president unopposed.

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Bryan Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church of Van Buren, made the motion to change the convention's articles of incorporation to make the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" statement the doctrinal guideline for Arkansas Baptists.

Changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" from an earlier version adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 have been criticized by some as going too far in affirming biblical authority by removing a sentence acknowledging that Scripture is interpreted by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Critics say that elevates the Bible above Christ. Supporters say the change was needed, because liberals used the Christ criterion as a loophole to infiltrate Baptist seminaries in the 1960s and 1970s.

Speaking to his motion, Smith said the 2000 statement "is not a creed intended to coerce or dictate one's own personal theology nor is it a veiled attempt to force this state convention into lock-step with the SBC as some have charged."

He said the faith statement affirms the priesthood of the believer and the autonomy of the local church and "makes it very clear that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who has been clearly revealed in the inerrant Word of God. It does not make Southern Baptists worshippers of the Bible."

Dan Grant, a messenger of First Baptist Church of Arkadelphia and a former president of Ouachita Baptist University, urged messengers to vote against the motion. "I cannot understand why the writer of the 2000 statement deleted the sentence, 'The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ,'" Grant said. "I'm very concerned about pressure from outside our state convention to fall in line with those at the top of the hierarchy."

Constitutional revisions require a two-thirds majority vote at two consecutive conventions. A similar motion last year failed to garner a two-thirds vote. This year, 69.5 percent of the messengers approved the constitutional change, with a vote of 805 to 353. The second vote will come at next year's convention.

The convention also approved mission partnerships with North and South Dakota Baptists and with Baptists in Seattle, which is a North American Mission Board "strategic-focus city." Messengers also approved a \$19 million Cooperative Program budget of which 41.77 percent will go to Southern Baptist Convention causes.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this article.

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Virginia Baptists elect new executive director

November 14, 2001 - Volume: 01-94

By Michael Clingenpeel and Robert Dilday

WOODBIDGE, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia Baptists elected a new executive director and honored the man he will succeed during a two-day meeting marked more by celebration than business.

Messengers to the Baptist General Association of Virginia's annual meeting Nov. 8-9 in Woodbridge, Va., elected John Upton Jr. to lead the organization of about 1,400 congregations. He will assume his new position on March 1, when Reginald McDonough retires after 15 years as executive director.

About 1,000 messengers registered for the meeting, which was held in the Washington suburbs for the first time since 1982.

Messengers also approved the report of a committee studying the BGAV's relationship with national ministry partners and adopted a \$15.2 million budget for 2002.

Upton, 48, was elected executive director of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board Oct. 9, but the BGAV's bylaws require that the board's executive director also serve in that capacity for the state association.

The native Virginian has been group leader of the board's mission mobilization group since 1995. Earlier he was a pastor and a missionary to Taiwan.

McDonough and his family were honored several times during the BGAV meeting. A portrait to be hung in the chapel of the Virginia Baptist Resource Center in Richmond was unveiled and keys to a new automobile were presented to him. On Thursday night, a video highlighted his 15 years of ministry among Virginia Baptists.

The report of the BGAV's national ministry partners study committee was adopted with little opposition, although Tom McCann of Martinsville, Va., who chaired the committee, moderated a vigorous discussion in a breakout session. The panel was formed at last year's BGAV meeting to "recommend the best possible uses in 2002 and beyond of the BGAV resources and cooperative endeavor we share with national ministry partners."

The final report essentially leaves intact the BGAV's relationships with entities of the Southern Baptist Convention, with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and with other ministry partners. However, the report recommends several changes:

-- That the BGAV partner directly with Baptists in other countries, while continuing its ties to mission-sending organizations like the CBF and the SBC International Mission Board.

-- That if a missionary to be appointed jointly by the SBC's North American Mission Board and the BGAV meets the BGAV's doctrinal criteria but not the NAMB's, the BGAV will use funding from the BGAV budget to employ the missionary.

-- That the BGAV seek formal representation on the board of directors of the Baptist Center for Ethics, which already receives funding in the BGAV budget.

-- That the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Falls Church, Va., be included in the BGAV budget. Messengers later adopted a budget for 2002 that allocates funds for the three-year-old school started by Baptists in the Washington area.

-- That funds be increased for Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

-- That the Virginia Baptist Mission Board's referral service, which helps churches find staff ministers, require clients of the service to "pledge to do their best to keep their churches in the BGAV."

-- That a staff member be authorized to serve ministers requesting alternative annuity, insurance and protection plans for ministers, while retaining the current relationship with the SBC's Annuity Board.

-- That the BGAV ask the Baptist World Alliance to reconsider its membership requirements. Currently those requirements limit membership to national associations of churches, effectively omitting both the BGAV and the CBF from joining the BWA.

Messengers also agreed to the national ministry partners study committee's request that it remain in place to study and monitor the BGAV's national relationships.

Another study committee, this one examining the BGAV's relationship with ministry partners in Virginia, presented its report but asked for a vote to be delayed until next year's meeting in Virginia Beach.

The proposal would dramatically alter the funding relationship with entities such as the Virginia Baptist Home, the Virginia Baptist Children's Home and Family Services and the six schools and colleges affiliated with the BGAV. It would significantly reduce their base support in the budget, while encouraging the agencies to seek financial support from a special fund for specific projects and direct solicitation from churches.

Bill Wilson of Farmville, Va., who chaired the study committee, said Virginia Baptists need a "year of dialogue" before committing themselves to

the plan.

The 2002 budget, which goes into effect on Dec. 1, is \$200,000 more than the current funding plan. As in previous years, it retains some funds for ministries in the state, while offering churches three channels for national and world ministry causes. Congregations also may craft their own plan of giving.

Churches in the World Mission 1 track (which supports causes of the Southern Baptist Convention) send 66 percent of their gifts to Virginia ministries and 34 percent to the SBC. Congregations in the World Mission 3 track (which funds causes of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship) send 72 percent of their gifts to Virginia ministries and 28 percent to the CBF. The World Mission 2 track funds SBC, CBF and other causes; 72 percent supports Virginia ministries and 28 percent causes outside the state.

Messengers elected Reginald Warren, pastor of Sycamore Baptist Church in Franklin, Va., as BGAV president for the coming year. Also elected were Beth Fogg, a member of Second Baptist Church in Richmond, as first vice president; Aubrey Rosser, an attorney and member of First Baptist Church in Altavista, Va.; as second vice president; and Fred Anderson, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, as clerk.

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Baptists invited to enter global preaching contest
November 14, 2001 - Volume: 01-94

By ABP staff

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. (ABP) -- Baptist preachers everywhere may enter a new worldwide Baptist Heritage Preaching Contest designed to encourage preachers to include Baptist heritage and principles in their preaching ministries.

Any Baptist man or woman, currently preaching in some capacity, may participate in the contest sponsored the Baptist History and Heritage Society and Belmont University.

Authors will receive cash awards for the top three sermons, and the first place winner will receive a trip to the United States to preach the sermon.

Winners will be announced April 1. Awards will be presented at the annual meeting of the Baptist History and Heritage Society June 20-22.

Sermons will be judged on the basis of biblical accuracy, attention to traditional historical/heritage issues, originality, timeliness of topic, quality of construction, and ability to motivate/inform about heritage issues.

All submissions should be mailed to the Baptist History and Heritage Society, P.O. Box 728, Brentwood, TN 37024-0728, and received by Feb. 1, 2002.

The following requirements apply:

- (1) Each sermon submitted must be 2,500 words or less.
- (2) Each sermon must focus on some aspect(s) of Baptist heritage and principles.
- (3) All quotations must be documented.
- (4) All sermons must be received by Feb. 1, 2002 both as a double-spaced printed copy and on a computer diskette.
- (5) Each sermon must be submitted in English.
- (6) Each sermon must be the original work of the person submitting it, and it must be unpublished.
- (7) All sermons will become the property of Belmont University and the

Baptist History and Heritage Society.



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North Carolina association dismisses member church over baptism policy

November 14, 2001 - Volume: 01-94

By Steve DeVane and Tony Cartledge

ELKIN, North Carolina (ABP) -- An association of Baptist churches in North Carolina has dismissed a member congregation for accepting members who have not been baptized by immersion.

Meanwhile, a church across the state decided to leave its association voluntarily over differences with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Johnny Enloe, director of missions for Elkin Baptist Association, said the association voted 70-16 to dismiss First Baptist Church of Elkin. The vote came at the association's meeting Oct. 25 at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Elkin.

William Johnson, pastor of Elkin First Baptist Church, declined to comment.

The dismissal came after the association voted at its spring meeting to change its constitution to say that association churches must receive as members only people who have been immersed.

The association's steering committee recommended that First Baptist Church be dismissed for being out of compliance with the change.

The association and the church have discussed the issue for about a year and a half, Enloe said. During that time, the association asked the church to change its policy of accepting members who had not been baptized by immersion.

Enloe said he tried to stay neutral in the issue.

"The association had worked with them," he said. "The association did everything they could to keep this from happening."

In a letter to the association, the church indicated it would rather be dismissed than voluntarily withdraw from the association, Enloe said. The church indicated that it would abide by the association's decision.

There was no discussion of the issue at the meeting Oct. 25, he said.

"I think it had gone on for so long that people knew what they wanted to do and knew what the Scripture said," Enloe said.

First Baptist was the association's second largest financial contributor, he

said.

"I'm sure it may affect the association, but some other churches have indicated that they will increase their giving," he said. "It will affect us some for sure, but the people feel they've done what is right according to the Scripture."

Also in North Carolina, Lamberth Memorial Baptist Church in Roxboro voted to withdraw from the Beulah Baptist Association shortly after a surprise motion to align the association more closely with the Southern Baptist Convention narrowly failed.

The church has faced criticism within the association because it supports the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and because pastor Jeff Raymond's wife, LeJeanna, is ordained and serves as associate pastor.

John Heskett, pastor of Ca-Vel Baptist Church in Roxboro, presented a motion at the association's Oct. 15-16 annual meeting to amend its constitution so that the statement "The churches shall be cooperating missionary Baptist churches in faith and practice" would be changed to read "Southern Baptist" instead of "missionary Baptist." It also would have added a section stating, "The association affirms the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God and it is the sole authority for faith and practice," and adopting the "Baptist Faith and Message" 2000 as the doctrinal statement of the association.

In a vote taken Oct. 16 at Roxboro Baptist Church, messengers favored the motion by a margin of 78 to 41, just two votes short of the two-thirds required to change the constitution.

Heskett said Baptist associations have historically adopted confessions of faith, and he thought it would be appropriate for the Beulah association to have a doctrinal guideline. The statement about the Bible being inerrant and authoritative was included to make it clear that the Bible, not the confession of faith, is the final authority for believers, he said.

Heskett said clearer identification with the SBC would be a good move for the association. "I don't see how a state convention or association can be dually aligned," he said.

Prior to the annual meeting, Heskett's wife, Lorene, had mailed a package of information critical of the CBF to all pastors in the association. Heskett said she had been asked by the association's WMU executive council to talk about differences between the SBC and the CBF at a WMU leadership conference on Aug. 15.

Support for her comments was overwhelming, she said. After several pastors asked for copies and invited her to speak in their churches, she decided to send a copy of her presentation to all pastors in the association. The mailing included articles from Baptist Press, a copy of the program from the 2001

Baptist Women in Ministry worship service held prior to the national CBF meeting, and information for ordering materials cited in Heskett's speech.

"As I studied the material, in my conscience before God, I could not be silent," Heskett said.

Raymond, pastor of Lamberth Memorial, said the decision to withdraw had been discussed for some time. Church members had decided to wait until after the association's annual meeting to make a decision, he said. In a church conference shortly after the association meeting, the church voted to withdraw, with only one dissenting vote. That person "preferred to be kicked out than to withdraw," Raymond said.

"When we pulled out it was not a vote against the Beulah Association," Raymond said, "but an acknowledgment that the association has moved away from what we believe are traditional Baptist values.

"Our presence was hindering the association because other churches were concerning themselves with us. By withdrawing, it frees us up to do what we want to do, and it frees the association to do what it wants to do."

Raymond acknowledged that the decision was difficult because of Lamberth Memorial's close ties with other churches in the association. "There were a lot of tears," he said, "but we felt God leading us to do what we did."

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