



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Second Missouri convention slated to launch in April

By Bill Webb

SEDALIA, Mo. (ABP) -- About 350 Missouri Baptists representing more than 100 churches met Jan. 17 in Sedalia to lay groundwork for a new state convention.

They agreed to formally launch what is tentatively being called the Baptist Convention of Missouri either April 18-19 or 19-20 at Fee Fee Baptist Church in suburban St. Louis.

Saying they had grown weary of factional strife in the Missouri Baptist Convention, speakers said the time had come to consider something new.

Plans call for the new convention to relate to the Southern Baptist Convention and commit to the welfare of all nine Missouri Baptist agencies, with particular attention to support of five entities defunded by messengers to the MBC annual meeting last October.

Those five include The Baptist Home, Missouri Baptist College, Windermere Baptist Conference Center, the Missouri Baptist Foundation and Word and Way, whose decisions to elect their own trustees drew the ire of a strong majority of messengers last fall.

A second state convention in Missouri would bring to three the number of states with separate organizations relating to the SBC. Conservatives formed breakaway conventions in Virginia and Texas, both moderate strongholds. The alternative Missouri convention would be the first for moderates in a state controlled by conservatives.

Speakers described what they view as a growing exclusiveness in MBC life and criticized recent actions to seek legal opinions in an effort that could result in lawsuits against one or more of the five institutions.

Other grievances include the state convention's decision to escrow Cooperative Program and missions offering funds budgeted for those agencies in 2002 and the unseating of messengers from Second Baptist Church in Liberty, both during the annual meeting.

The Sedalia meeting, which included five breakout discussion sessions, featured presentations by host pastor Drew Hill and his brother, Jim Hill. Jim Hill resigned as MBC executive director last year, saying he opposed defunding the institutions and would not be a part of proposed legal action against them.

Hill said the 104 churches represented at the Jan. 17 meeting gave more than \$4 million to the Cooperative Program in 2000. Should all those churches follow through and become part of a new convention, their aggregate membership would be 109,927.

A convention that size would be larger than 21 of the 41 existing Baptist state conventions, Hill said.

Hill said he had been in touch with Morris Chapman, chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Convention, and that Chapman would advise the new convention on setting up appropriately to send funds to the SBC.

But Hill cautioned, "The only reason Baptists should form a new convention in Missouri is if they believe it is the will of God."

Three other speakers who described themselves as lifelong Missouri Baptists gave testimonies under the title "Why I would consider becoming a part of a new Baptist state convention."

Randy Fullerton, pastor of Fee Fee Church in Bridgeton, lamented the rancor at the MBC annual meeting. "The world looked at us last fall," he said, and couldn't see any difference between messengers and themselves.

"I don't recognize the Missouri Baptist Convention anymore," Fullerton said. "That's why we must begin a new convention."

H.K. Neely, vice president for denominational relations at Southwest Baptist University, said he was not representing the college but spoke as a product of Southern Baptist life and a long-term Missouri Baptist.

Neely called for a convention (1) "that is willing to represent all Missouri Baptists;" (2) "that understands the nature of Baptist cooperation;" (3) "that recognizes the nature of Baptist confessions of faith;" (4) "that understands the relationship between conventions and agencies;" and (5) "just to do the work."

"If we are going to do this thing, let's do it and do it well," he said. "Every friend I have talked with I have asked for \$1,000." He challenged each person present to do the same by sending a check designated toward expenses for starting a new convention to First Baptist Church of Sedalia.

Bill Miller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Farmington, said he was concerned that if a church sends funds to the MBC with instructions that the money is to go to all the budgeted entities with nothing escrowed, those funds are classified as "designated" gifts and are not counted as part of the Cooperative Program unified budget.

"When Cooperative Program giving is not called Cooperative Program giving by the entity that receives it, then that spells the beginning of the end of the Cooperative Program," he said.

Miller also expressed concern that the MBC nominating committee rejected a respected member of his church up for re-election to a Missouri Baptist board position.

Questions surfaced regarding the new convention's proposed relationship with the SBC and whether Cooperative Baptist Fellowship churches would be included.

"As far as cooperating with the SBC, we're not all on the same page," Drew Hill acknowledged. Citing a respect for local church autonomy, he said, "There are many, many Missouri Baptist churches that are committed deeply to the SBC."

"In order for a new convention to really honor our heritage and history, two kinds of people in our churches are going to have to be willing to come together," he said. "Churches who have gone through the process of pulling from the SBC would have to be respectful of the others" and vice-versa.

"What matters is the kingdom," he said. "What matters is reaching our state."

Fullerton added, "We're Southern Baptist. That's who we are."

"There is not a better way to support missions right now," Miller added.

Jim Hill predicted some churches that relate to CBF would be interested in the new convention and others would not. He and others said they did not necessarily feel that churches should be excluded from participation in a new convention on the basis of where they send their money.

Concluding speaker Jimmy Albright, pastor of Wyatt Park Baptist Church in St. Joseph, said he believed a new convention could engender a "sense of excitement, wonder and awe" among Missouri Baptists.

"I say to you this afternoon, we can do this, and it's worth something to Jesus Christ."

## Texas convention considers endorsing its own chaplains

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas may soon endorse chaplains on its own, rather than depending on the Southern Baptist Convention.

The state convention has opened a new office of chaplaincy relations and hired Bobby Smith, a hospital chaplain from Galveston, to run it.

"The director of the office of chaplaincy relations will work at developing the network of Texas Baptist chaplains, building relationships with them, offering training and relational opportunities for them," said E. B. Brooks, coordinator of the BGCT Church Missions and Evangelism Section. "It is also our intent to provide endorsement for chaplains."

About 400 Baptist chaplains serve in Texas. Most are endorsed by the SBC North American Mission Board.

Texas Baptists began considering becoming an endorsing body, however, after NAMB indicated that new and renewing chaplaincy applicants must affirm doctrines in the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message."

Texas Baptist leaders have criticized changes enacted in the faith statement by the SBC in June 2000. The state convention is on record as affirming an earlier version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the SBC in 1963.

A special committee that studied the BGCT's ties to missionary-sending agencies last year said that the state convention "historically" has supported the process followed by the NAMB Chaplains Commission, believing that endorsement is a role best suited to a national entity rather than a state convention.

"However, the outcry of chaplains in Texas and other areas, and the retroactive change in prerequisites for service, may lead the BGCT to re-examine its position and reconsider ecclesiastical endorsement and support of chaplains," the committee report concluded.

BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade authorized a nine-member study group of hospital, military and criminal justice chaplains to report and make recommendations to the convention's executive board regarding an expanded BGCT role in relation to chaplains.

The BGCT executive board approved the creation of the chaplaincy relations office as part of an organizational restructuring last year. An administrative committee is scheduled to consider a recommendation to set up an endorsing process in late January.

The next step would be approval by the BGCT executive board Feb. 26 of a proposal that the convention seek Department of Defense recognition as an endorsing organization for chaplains. Once a denominational entity receives U.S. Armed Forces Chaplaincy Board approval as an endorsing agency, hospitals and other agencies typically recognize the validity of the endorsement.

Texas Baptist chaplains have voiced concerns about policies adopted by NAMB trustees, particularly the statement in the November 2000 endorsement manual calling affirmation of "the 'Baptist Faith and Message' as currently adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention essential for endorsement."

The BGCT chaplain study group asked NAMB to rephrase its policy to allow affirmation of a statement of faith adopted by an applicant's local Southern Baptist church, an association of churches or a state Baptist convention.

But Don Yeager, chairman of the SBC Chaplains Commission, stated in a letter to Wade that the board's "current policies are consistent with the expressed wishes and intent" of the SBC.

"Therefore, we, the trustees of the Chaplains Commission, affirm and are committed to upholding the current policy of requiring applicants and chaplains seeking re-endorsement to affirm the current 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" he wrote.

Smith, director of the new office of chaplaincy relations, has served as a Baptist chaplain at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston since 1997. He is a former pastor and minister of education.

Smith is a graduate of Howard Payne University in Brownwood and holds master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He and his wife, Vicky, have two children.

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## **Casa Lydia offers hope to female drug addicts**

By Ken Camp

NEW YORK (ABP) -- When Marta Serrano counsels women in the South Bronx that faith in Christ can help them overcome addiction to drugs, she speaks from experience.

Just 18 months ago, Serrano showed up at Casa Lydia, a drug rehab ministry sponsored by Baptist churches in New York.

"I met Jesus Christ here. I didn't know anything about him when I came," Serrano recalled. "I was all tied up, taking all kinds of drugs -- heroin, crack, whatever -- and I had run a prostitution house."

Serrano said she first met the people at Casa Lydia through a girl who used to do drugs with her. "She had changed, and there was something about her that I wanted," Serrano said.

Turning to Casa Lydia for help with her own problems, Serrano found a loving acceptance she had never known before. "I felt something here. I was hugged. And I felt a peace in my heart I had never felt before," she said.

After completing her own nine-month rehab program, Serrano decided to continue working at Casa Lydia, helping other women.

"Now I'm a new person, totally free from drugs," Serrano said. "God has given back what addiction took away. My family came looking for me. Now, they want to be with me. They like having me around."

Ana Ayala directs Casa Lydia, a 12-bed residential rehab facility for women ages 18-60.

"Fifteen years ago, I was a narco-trafficker, an alcoholic and a prostitute on the streets of Queens," Ayala said. But the Christian witness of a Baptist minister led her to faith in Christ. "It's been 15 years since I was washed in the blood of Jesus and five years since I became director of Casa Lydia."

In five years, 28 women have graduated from the program. One is a schoolteacher, another is a truck driver, several have been reunited with family, and a few, like Serrano, continue to work with the ministry.

The program has drawn women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds -- including a recent arrival from West Africa -- but is based in Spanish. Many of the residents are undocumented aliens.

The approach is simple. Casa Lydia introduces structure, routine and discipline into fragmented and undisciplined lives. "We wake up at a certain time, go to bed at a certain time and eat at a certain time," Ayala said. "And we study the Word of God."

Spiritual disciplines are the major part of the Casa Lydia curriculum. Residents learn to read the Bible daily, and every Thursday is devoted to fasting and prayer. Any drug use -- including tobacco and alcohol -- is strictly prohibited. Residents are allowed to leave the facility only for off-campus parenting classes.

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