



# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen  
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626  
Fax: 904.262.7745  
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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### Mississippi vote banning CBFers from leadership ruled 'null and void'

By ABP staff

JACKSON, Miss. (ABP) -- Mississippi Baptists overwhelmingly voted in support of a motion to exclude people active in the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship from leadership in their state convention, but a parliamentary ruling later nullified the action.

The motion was instead referred to a constitution and bylaws committee for study and a report next year.

The motion asked that "the Mississippi Baptist Convention not allow anyone to be employed, elected or appointed to positions with the MBC if that person is currently serving in an employed, elected or appointed position with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

The maker of the motion, Ralph Henson, pastor of Arrowood Baptist Church in Meridian, said CBF leaders had a conflict of interest if elected or hired by the MBC. That, he said, is because the moderate organization "has encouraged churches to divert funds from the Cooperative Program," the unified budget that funds the Mississippi and Southern Baptist conventions simultaneously.

An estimated 75 percent to 80 percent of messengers voted in favor of the motion. But in a later business session, Kermit McGregor, pastor of First Baptist Church in Mendenhall, made a point of order saying that voting on the motion immediately violated the convention's constitution.

"We have no option but to rule this motion null and void," agreed presiding officer Bill Hardin, the convention's first vice president. Despite protests from the floor, about 90 percent of messengers present voted to uphold the ruling.

Speaking after the vote, Dick Allison, a member of the CBF's national Coordinating Council, lamented "that the [state] convention we love and support has singled out our kind of Baptists as people who would not be allowed in leadership roles."

The rest of the Oct. 29-30 convention was more harmonious. A resolution affirmed women in ministry but referred to "the biblical and historical position of male pastors."

Despite rumors prior to the convention that a Mississippi church that recently called a woman as pastor might be denied voting privileges, two messengers from Rivercrest Baptist Church in Jackson, where Carla Street is pastor, were seated without a challenge.

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-- Jim Newton contributed to this story.

## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **Gardner-Webb names interim president**

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. -- Retired Averett University President Frank Campbell has been named interim president at Gardner-Webb University.

Trustees of the Baptist-affiliated school in North Carolina unanimously elected Campbell Oct. 31. He takes over for Christopher White, who resigned effective Oct. 25 amid controversy over his decision two years earlier to recalculate the grade point average of a star basketball player, making the student eligible to play.

Campbell retired recently after 17 years as president of Averett, a Baptist-affiliated university in Danville, Va. (ABP)

### **Shorter faculty stand behind school's trustees**

ROME, Ga. -- Shorter College faculty members voted to show support for a decision by the school's board of trustees to amend bylaws on how trustees are selected.

Under a new bylaw approved by trustees May 31, the university and the Georgia Baptist Convention would develop a list of potential trustees. The school would decide which candidates are qualified, and the state convention would choose nominees from that list.

Trustees said they made the change to comply with requirements for accreditation. Georgia Baptist Convention officials oppose the change.

Sixty-eight full-time faculty members teach at the college. Of those voting, all but one reportedly supported the change.

"It's important for the trustees to know the faculty supports the action," President Ed Schrader said, according to the Rome News-Tribune. "The faculty is saying thank you to the board for taking a stand for academic integrity and long-term health of the college." (ABP)

### **Retired Texas pastor Browning Ware dies**

AUSTIN, Texas -- Browning Worth Ware, pastor emeritus at First Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, died Oct. 29.

Ware, a graduate of Baylor University with a doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, also served Texas churches as pastor in Satin, Denton, Hubbard, Cleburne and Beaumont. He retired from First Baptist Church in Austin in 1996. (ABP)

### **Magazine reports discovery of burial box of Jesus' brother**

WASHINGTON -- The editor of Biblical Archaeology Review hailed discovery of a stone box that purportedly once contained the bones of Jesus' brother as perhaps "the most important find in the history of New Testament archaeology."

Or it might be a hoax, some scholars warn.

The magazine announced Oct. 22 the find of a small limestone box inscribed in Aramaic, "James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus." The container is called an ossuary. They were used in ancient times to bury remains a second time after they decomposed in burial caves like the tomb described in biblical accounts of the burial and resurrection of Christ.

If authentic, it would be the earliest known documentation of Jesus outside of the Bible.

Review scholars dated the box to approximately 63 A.D., about the time tradition says James, founder of the New Testament church in Jerusalem and described in Galatians 1:19 as "the Lord's brother," died by stoning.

While James, John and Jesus all were common names of the era, they said it is unlikely that all three would have occurred together unless they in fact refer to the biblical characters. While mentioning the deceased's father was common in such inscriptions, naming the brother was rare, implying he was an individual of importance.

One problem, however, is the fact that the box was reportedly looted from a cave and held in a private collection. Without examining the surroundings where it was found, skeptics say it is impossible to verify whether the relic is authentic.

Most of what is known of Jesus is through Scripture. He was mentioned briefly by non-Christian historians of the time, but before now archaeologists had never found any physical evidence to corroborate those writings.

The James ossuary is one of few ancient artifacts mentioning figures from the New Testament. One is the ossuary of Caiphas, the high priest whom the Bible says turned Jesus over to the Romans, which was uncovered in 1990. An inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate was discovered about 40 years ago. (ABP)

### **Ministers pessimistic about growth of Christianity**

PHOENIX -- The majority of Protestant pastors believe the influence of non-Christian religions and "New Age" spirituality will increase in the next 10 years, while the influence of Christians will decline or stay the same, according to a survey by Ellison Research.

More than four-fifths of ministers polled (82 percent) said they expected the influence of non-Christian religions to increase in the United States in the next decade. A majority (55 percent) said they believe "New Age" spirituality will gain ground.

Thirty-five percent said they thought the number of Christians would increase, while another 35 percent thought the number would decrease. Three in 10 said it would stay the same.

More pastors expect the proportion of Americans who are believing Christians to decrease (37 percent) than to increase (34 percent). Forty-four percent expect the proportion of Americans attending church to decrease, compared to 33 percent who expect it to grow.

About one in four (26 percent) expect the influence of Christianity to increase in Americans' daily lives, while 41 percent said it would decrease. Forty-four percent believe overall freedom of religion in the U.S. will decrease in the coming decade. Ten percent think it will increase and 46 percent expect it to stay the same.

The Phoenix-based marketing research company based findings on a national survey of 567 Protestant ministers who are actively leading churches. The sampling margin of error is 4.1 percent. (ABP)

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