



Associated Baptist Press

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Virginia Baptists endorse new missions vision

By Robert Dilday

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia Baptists voted overwhelmingly to move forward with a major revamping of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

More than 1,500 messengers to the BGAV annual meeting, held Nov. 8-9, in Virginia Beach, authorized the Virginia Baptist Mission Board to begin implementing a sweeping plan labeled "Kingdom Advance."

Kingdom Advance calls for reorganizing BGAV ministries around priorities of identifying and equipping leaders, aiding churches, evangelism and "glocal" missions, a term coined to describe new strategies that blur traditional lines between local and global missions.

"Kingdom Advance is about all our churches and organizations coming together and making our small voices into one big voice to minister in Christ's name," said BGAV Executive Director John Upton, who has been a driving force in developing the new ministry agenda.

Muting that voice slightly, however, are financial realities from a stagnant economy and loss of some contributing churches to a competing state convention.

Messengers approved a \$15 million budget for next year, plus an over-and-above \$500,000 "challenge" goal to fund Kingdom Advance initiatives.

This year's BGAV budget is \$15.2 million, but budget committee chairman Walter Harrow said cuts for next year actually total \$500,000. Several costs, including health insurance for employees, were added to the budget that in the past had been paid for with earnings from investment funds, which have lost value in the last year.

As in previous years, the 2003 BGAV budget offers churches a variety of "giving tracks," as well as the option of crafting their own giving plan.

Two tracks -- one earmarking 34 percent of receipts to the Southern Baptist Convention and another that forwards 28 percent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- are unchanged.

But the "World Missions 2" track, the one favored by a majority of BGAV churches, was modified to include new funds for Kingdom Advance initiatives. That leaves 12.5 percent less in that particular track that will go to the SBC International and North American Mission boards and the Annuity Board next year.

That change drew criticism in a breakout discussion from a messenger who said such reduction of funds to the SBC was driving churches to seek affiliation with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, a group formed in 1996 that is solely aligned with the SBC.

During a business session the next day, however, the budget passed overwhelmingly and without discussion.

The implementation of Kingdom Advance could also affect how the BGAV continues to relate to Baptist agencies in Virginia, such as colleges. A study committee said that if a historic "partner" feels it no longer aligns with the BGAV's mission, it might opt to enter into a "covenant" agreement to maintain historical ties while severing financial ties.

In other business, BGAV messengers elected as president Beth Fogg, a homemaker from Richmond whose father held the position in 1976.

Fogg is a member of Second Baptist Church in Richmond. Her father, William Cumbie, who nominated her for president, is retired executive director of the Mount Vernon Baptist Association in northern Virginia. Cumbie was president of the BGAV in 1976.

Also elected unopposed were Don Davidson, pastor of Mount Hermon Baptist Church in Danville, as first vice president, and Karl Heilman, pastor of Sandston Baptist Church in Sandston, as second vice president. Following the BGAV's current unwritten practice, Davidson will likely be nominated for president next year.

All three officers were endorsed by Virginia Baptists Committed, a moderate advocacy group critical of the Southern Baptist Convention. Davidson, however, is a vocal supporter of the SBC, and his church supports the BGAV through the World Mission 1 track, which channels all national and international contributions to the SBC. Observers said his election signals the BGAV's commitment to inclusiveness.

Messengers also elected Fred Anderson of Richmond, executive director of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, to his 21st term as clerk.

In addition, they elected Eddie Stratton as treasurer of the BGAV, filling the spot left vacant by the death of Nat Kellum last year. Stratton was employed as treasurer and business manager of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board last year and had been serving as interim treasurer of the BGAV.

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Illinois Baptists nix funding for associate executive job

By Michael Leathers

O'FALLON, Ill. (ABP) -- Messengers to the Illinois Baptist State Association nixed funding for a key leadership position established by the state board of directors in September.

Messengers to the IBSA's Nov. 6-7 meeting in O'Fallon, Ill., voted by about 55 percent to cut \$103,000 from next year's budget for a newly created position of associate executive director.

Ken Spires, a director of missions from Carlinville, Ill., said adding a new layer of management was ill-timed, with deficit spending and flat contributions from the state's Southern Baptist churches and missions.

"We're creating a top-heavy organization," said Spires, who offered the motion to amend the budget as proposed by the board of directors.

Next year's budget anticipates \$5.9 million in income, essentially the same amount as this year. Just less than 58 cents of each dollar received from churches through the Cooperative Program unified budget stays in Illinois. The rest is forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention.

Despite the budget crunch, IBSA leaders defended the need for the new management position. Having a second-in-command would allow the association's next executive director more freedom to travel and build relationships with pastors, said Kevin Kerr, chairman of a search committee for a new executive director.

Kerr said in an interview that he didn't believe striking the job would slow down an ongoing process to find a replacement for former Executive Director Bob Wiley, who left in October 2001.

Kerr said the committee had narrowed its search from a field of 70 applicants down to two finalists. He said eliminating the number-two post shouldn't be a deal breaker for either candidate, because both knew the position wasn't approved. Kerr said the committee could be ready to recommend a new executive by January.

The associate-executive position could be resurrected next year. Late in the annual meeting, messengers approved a motion by former vice president Pat Pajak to refer the need for the job to an ad hoc committee to study and report back at next year's annual meeting.

Eliminating funding for the job this year, however, appears to leave the future of one current high-ranking employee in limbo. Observers had speculated that Glenn Akins, currently interim executive director, would be recommended for the new post. His previous job was eliminated in a staff restructuring approved by the board of directors Sept. 10.

While discussion of Spire's budget amendment deleting the job dealt only with finances, some have criticized Akins for administrative decisions during the interim period that led to staff departures including the editor of the state Baptist newspaper this summer and a group manager in September.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this report.

Southern Baptists respond to wave of killer tornadoes

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (ABP) -- Southern Baptists in five states worked to respond to severe thunderstorms that spawned deadly tornadoes Nov. 10.

Disaster-relief volunteers in Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Ohio and Mississippi mobilized early to minister to victims in their states, according to officials at the North American Mission Board, which coordinates disaster relief for the Southern Baptist Convention and affiliated state conventions.

Pastor David Lowery was nearing the end of his Sunday-evening service at First Baptist Church in Carbon Hill, Ala., when sirens sounded a tornado warning. The following day the church became home base for disaster-relief operations by Alabama Baptists.

About a third of Carbon Hill, 70 miles northwest of Birmingham, was destroyed, and seven of its 2,100 citizens died in the storm.

A feeding unit from Tuscaloosa Baptist Association was being set up Nov. 11 in Carbon Hill. Cleanup teams from three other associations pitched in. Other disaster-relief teams were dispatched to Centre and Cullman, Ala.

Tennessee cleanup operations were taking place Nov. 11 in six counties and at Union University in Jackson. The Baptist-affiliated university suffered heavy damage on campus, and several students lost their homes, but no one was hurt.

Chainsaw teams and a feeding unit from the Georgia Baptist Convention were activated Nov. 11 and sent to the area of Jasper, Ga. The operation was based at Cool Springs Baptist Church in nearby Tate.

Mississippi Baptists activated a feeding unit and three chainsaw teams Monday afternoon to head for Columbus. A Baptist feeding team and chainsaw unit were put on alert in Ohio, where the governor declared the northwest part of the state a disaster area.

The nationwide death toll climbed to 36 the day after one of the deadliest outbreaks of tornadoes in years. Tennessee was hit hardest, with 17 deaths. Twelve were killed in Alabama, five in Ohio and one each in Mississippi and Pennsylvania.

The American Weather Service said the storm front spawned at least 66 tornadoes, with some generating wind speeds of between 158 and 206 miles an hour. Many twisters stayed on the ground for 15 to 20 miles at a time.

Southern Baptists first began coordinating disaster relief after Hurricane Beulah hit the Rio Grande Valley in 1967. Baptist relief efforts at the time were unorganized and sporadic, prompting leaders of the SBC Home Mission Board and Baptist state conventions to take the lead in organizing Southern Baptists to respond to disasters.

To date, Southern Baptists have built 335 mobile units for feeding, recovery, childcare, command and other purposes. They have responded to many natural disasters in their own states, and respond cooperatively to calls from other states.

According to the SBC North American Mission Board, which took over disaster relief in a denominational restructuring five years ago, the program's philosophy is summed up in the phrase of offering "a cup of cold water in Jesus' name." Information on the NAMB Web site says disaster relief follows the example of Jesus feeding the 5,000 and Christ's teaching in the parable of the Good Shepherd and in Matthew 25:32-46.

Southern Baptist relief efforts are coordinated primarily through the American Red Cross, which reported on its Web site Nov. 11 that it was rushing relief to stunned residents across the region.

"We know the damage is widespread and devastating to the many communities affected by this disaster," said Terry Sicilia, executive vice president of disaster services for the Red Cross. Sicilia pledged that volunteers would "continue to work day and night to help people in the wake of these tragic storms."

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-- By ABP staff. Jennifer Davis Rash contributed to this report.

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