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SBC resolves families need help, decries gay unions

By Marv Knox

Editor

PHOENIX-Southern Baptists punctuated key themes of their annual gathering with statements affirming “kingdom families” and condemning homosexual unions.

Those topics highlighted a slate of eight resolutions approved by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 18 in Phoenix.

Messengers also condemned abortion, declared the recent war in Iraq “just,” affirmed religious liberty, denounced anti-Semitism, called for a response to the global AIDS crisis and thanked the local hosts.

They zipped through the resolutions, pausing only briefly to defeat two amendments made by Wiley Drake, a perennial fixture at SBC microphones, known for offering a spate of motions and resolutions.

A key focal point of the Phoenix meeting actually occurred the evening before the convention started, when the annual Pastors' Conference turned its final session into a Kingdom Family Rally.

The rally capped three years of preparation by the SBC's Council on Family

Life. The council unveiled principles called "The Seven Pillars of a Kingdom Family."

That emphasis telegraphed the SBC's first resolution, "On Kingdom Families." It cited divorce, attempts to redefine the family, infidelity and abandonment as factors undermining the "biblical model of the family."

Even the church is not immune, the resolution conceded, noting, "a disproportionately large number of children reared in evangelical churches are growing up to leave the 'faith of their fathers.'"

Through the resolution, messengers agreed to "renew our commitment to build kingdom families by the recovery of the biblical understanding of family and the acknowledgement of the permanence and responsibilities of the marriage covenant."

The resolution also urged parents to "assume their responsibility as the primary protectors and instructors of their children" and called on churches to strengthen families and marriages, as well as to minister to single-parent families.

The resolution denouncing "same-sex marriage" tied in closely with a new initiative, announced by Jimmy Draper, president of the SBC's LifeWay Christian Resources. The convention created the Task Force on Ministry to Homosexuals. It will encourage churches to provide ministries to help people leave the homosexual lifestyle.

The "same-sex marriage" resolution cited recent advances made by advocates of homosexual rights-Vermont legalization of "civil unions" for same-sex couples, a California law giving registered partners the same rights as married couples, courts in Massachusetts and New Jersey considering legalization of same-sex unions, and the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which requires that marriages enacted in one state be recognized nationally.

These initiatives will result in more homosexual couples demanding their “marriages” be recognized in other states, the resolution predicted. Advocates of such unions also will challenge state laws and the Federal Defense of Marriage Act, which declare marriage only exists between one man and one woman, it warned.

“Jesus states that marriage is a sacred, lifelong bond between one man and one woman,” and the Bible calls the homosexual lifestyle “sinful and dangerous both to the individuals involved and to society at large,” the resolution said.

“Legal and biblical marriage can only occur between one man and one woman,” messengers affirmed. They went on record opposing “all efforts by any court or state legislature to validate or legalize same-sex marriage or other equivalent unions.”

The resolution also called on churches to “guard our religious liberty to recognize and perform marriages as defined by Scripture.” It urged Southern Baptists to “demonstrate our love for those practicing homosexuality by sharing with them the forgiving and transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The other resolutions:

Condemned abortion.

“Scripture reveals that all human life is created in the image of God and therefore sacred to our Creator,” the resolution stated. “The Bible affirms that the unborn baby is a person bearing the image of God from the moment of conception” and “commands the people of God to plead for the protection for the innocent and justice for the fatherless.”

The resolution criticized 1970s-era SBC leaders and resolutions because they “endorsed and furthered the 'pro-choice' abortion-rights agenda.”

Messengers went on record stating the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision “was based on a fundamentally flawed understanding of the U.S. Constitution, human embryology and the basic principles of human rights.”

The resolution pledged Southern Baptists' prayers, love and advocacy for people abused by abortion and its aftermath. It called on churches to “remain vigilant in the protection of human life.” It also urged Southern Baptists to adopt unwanted children, support women in crisis pregnancies and encourage government officials to “protect the lives of women and children.”

The resolution affirmed Congress for passing the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 and applauded President Bush's promise to sign the bill. It also pledged Southern Baptists would work for repeal of Roe vs. Wade and “for the day when the act of abortion will not only be illegal, but also unthinkable.”

- Affirmed the recent war that resulted in the “liberation of Iraq.”

“We believe Operation Iraqi Freedom was a warranted action based upon historic principles of just war,” the resolution said. It affirmed President Bush, Congress and the U.S. military for successfully executing the war.

The resolution exhorted Southern Baptists to pray for people who lost loved ones in the war, for troops and diplomatic leaders charged with rebuilding Iraq, and for peace and justice in Iraq.

- Declared “absolute religious liberty” to be a basic human right that should be affirmed globally.

The religious liberty resolution portrayed Southern Baptists, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, as a maligned minority.

“Southern Baptists have been subject to intense criticism for our insistence

that a faith which engenders or encourages religious persecution or interferes with the free exercise of religion is not consistent with the revelation of God," the resolution said.

"Southern Baptists and other evangelical Christians have in recent months been increasingly portrayed by the media and by international government sources as intolerant and even dangerous because of our commitment to Christ as the only way of salvation."

Such characterizations misrepresent the history of Baptists, who have been "determined advocates of freedom, especially religious liberty," the resolution said.

It cited "a growing movement" that labels Christian preaching a "hate crime" and called on media, government and others "to recognize that Baptists have been and continue to be ardent advocates of religious freedom."

☒ Denounced "all forms of anti-Semitism as contrary to the teachings of our Messiah and an assault on the revelation of Holy Scripture."

The anti-Semitism resolution noted Southern Baptists "deplore all forms of hatred or bigotry toward any person or people group" and pointed out the Bible describes God's love for the Jewish people, "through whom God has blessed the world with his word and his Messiah, our Lord Jesus."

Anti-Semitism is increasing globally, including recent commissions and conferences sponsored by the United Nations, it said, adding anti-Semitism in some European countries has reached a level not experienced since World War II.

"We affirm to Jewish people around the world that we stand with them against any harassment that violates our historic commitments to religious liberty and human dignity," the resolution said. "And ... we call on

governmental and religious leaders across the world to stand against all forms of bigotry, hatred or persecution.”

- ☒ Supported humanitarian efforts to combat the AIDS crisis around the globe and urged prayer for and ministry to AIDS victims.

The resolution noted the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Africa and affirmed emergency relief, such as \$15 billion allocated by President Bush and Congress to combat the disease in Africa during the next five years.

It pointed out AIDS has been combated most effectively by an abstinence-based strategy that calls for sexual relations to take place only within marriage.

AIDS victims are “a neighbor our Lord Jesus has commanded us to love as we love ourselves,” the resolution noted. It called on Southern Baptists to pray for AIDS victims and act on their behalf and urged churches to “model the reconciliation and mercy of the kingdom of God by showing compassion to those suffering with AIDS.”

- ☒ Thanked all the people whom God used “to bring about a convention characterized by grace, evangelism, worship, encouragement, unity and purpose.”

This year, a new convention bylaw required messengers to submit proposed resolutions in advance of the annual meeting. Resolutions Committee Chairman Mike Hamlet, pastor of First Baptist Church of North Spartanburg, S.C., declared the procedure a success.

But Drake, whose amendments to the Iraq and religious liberty resolutions lost overwhelmingly, proposed a motion to suspend the submit-in-advance bylaw. Convention parliamentarians ruled his motion out of order, noting the bylaw could not be suspended.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.