

Little good news for Baptist World Alliance in state convention meetings_120604

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By Greg Warner

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FALLS CHURCH, Va. (ABP)- If the Baptist World Alliance, which lost its largest member and funder earlier this year, hoped to recoup some of that funding from state Baptist conventions, the organization got little encouragement during the recent round of convention meetings.

Proposals that could have resulted in more funding for the Baptist World Alliance were defeated in the Alabama and Kentucky Baptist conventions. Meanwhile, the South Carolina Baptist Convention, which already blocked any state funding for the BWA, asked its Woman's Missionary Union to reconsider its relationship to the worldwide fellowship.

On the bright side, however, two moderate state conventions that already forward funds to the BWA-in Texas and Virginia-acted to increase that support.

Last June, the Southern Baptist Convention withdrew its membership and

final \$300,000 in funding from the Baptist World Alliance, an international umbrella organization representing 211 Baptist bodies. Southern Baptist leaders said BWA harbors theological liberalism, a charge denied by BWA and many of its member groups worldwide.

Since coming under fire from the SBC, the Baptist World Alliance has had some success generating new money from other sources, such as the national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Baptist General Association of Virginia voted during its Nov. 9-10 meeting to seek BWA membership, perhaps under new rules that permit associate membership for individuals and organizations. And messengers increased BWA funding from \$90,000 a year to about \$150,000, with half of the increase coming from funds earmarked for the SBC International Mission Board.

The departure of the Southern Baptist Convention means the BGAV gives more money to BWA than any of the 211 member bodies worldwide. The BWA, with its headquarters in Falls Church, Va., has long had close ties with the Virginia association, even though the BGAV has not had membership in the group.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas, meanwhile, formalized its financial support of BWA by making the organization a permanent part of one of its funding plans for world missions.

Churches that choose the "BGCT World Missions Initiatives" plan will contribute 5 percent of their mission gifts to BWA.

Based on October 2004 year-to-date annualized figures, 5 percent of the BGCT worldwide initiatives would amount to about \$38,000, said David Nabors, treasurer and chief financial officer.

Elsewhere, however, state Baptist conventions have been reluctant to get

involved in the controversy over the Baptist World Alliance.

Messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention defeated an amendment to their \$41.5 million budget to siphon \$30,000 earmarked for the SBC Executive Committee and send it to the BWA. The motion failed on a show-of-hands vote.

At the Kentucky Baptist Convention, messengers narrowly defeated a proposal from the convention's mission board to establish a study committee to examine how the convention "may relate to the Baptist World Alliance." An opponent noted a study was not necessary because the Southern Baptist Convention had already studied the issue and determined to withdraw BWA funding.

In South Carolina, convention messengers adopted a resolution asking the national Woman's Missionary Union, as well as the convention's WMU affiliate, to "consider their relationship with the Baptist World Alliance and its Women's Department." The resolution affirmed South Carolina's WMU for its "longstanding decision not to forward or channel any financial or other support" to the BWA's Women's Department, which promotes leadership development, empowerment, prayer and evangelism among women worldwide.

Spokeswoman Wendy Ryan said the BWA was not counting heavily on new funding from state Baptist conventions, so the actions in Kentucky and Alabama are not a major setback. The BWA expects its new membership policy to increase funding and involvement of individuals and groups around the world, not just in the United States.

But Ryan said it's too early to tell if the BWA will be able to replace the money-\$425,000 until recent years-historically contributed by the Southern Baptist Convention. Those payments ran out only last month.

"The jury is still out on that," she said. "We have to wait a while longer."

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