

HOPE ministry helps fill Christmas stockings for needy Round Rock children_122004

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/10/04

HOPE ministry helps fill Christmas stockings for needy Round Rock children

By Miranda Bradley

Texas Baptist Children's Home

ROUND ROCK—More than 50 children waited impatiently in a line outside the Chisholm Trail Apartments community center, eager to catch a glimpse of Santa and the toys he had just for them.

At Seaman's Center, the world comes to Santa_122004

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/10/04

At Seaman's Center, the world comes to Santa

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

FREEPORT—The Seaman's Center might be able to teach Santa a thing or two.

'Noose of conformity' tightens in Baptist life, observers assert_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

'Noose of conformity' tightens in Baptist life, observers assert

By Greg Warner

(ABP) — Those who look for denominational trends are disturbed by several recent actions they say are tightening “the noose of conformity” in Baptist life.

In a smattering of actions across the Baptist map, several state conventions are narrowing the requirements for membership or the parameters of acceptable theology.

In Florida, Baptists enacted guidelines to enforce the “theological integrity” of member churches. In Missouri, the state's largest Baptist convention took the first steps toward excluding all churches that don't support the Southern Baptist Convention wholeheartedly.

In the North Carolina convention, traditionally considered a moderate stronghold, a move to restrict church mission funding to SBC causes alone is gaining support. And Kentucky Baptists elected as their president a professor from the flagship SBC seminary over the pastor of the flagship moderate church.

Several other state conventions are flirting with adopting the conservative revision of the “Baptist Faith and Message” as their primary or sole doctrinal statement. And in Tennessee, where Baptists have studiously avoided theological controversy, Baptists will investigate the biblical views taught in their three affiliated Baptist colleges.

Some of the changes are subtle and others are piecemeal. But to some observers, the trend is obvious — and ominous.

“The results of this year's state convention meetings certainly must be discouraging for Baptists who thought they could avoid SBC fundamentalism by investing themselves and their energies in the states,” said Marv Knox, editor of the Baptist Standard of Texas.

“From affirmations of the 'conservative resurgence,' to demands for loyalty to the SBC's creed, to professor-presidents, to rebukes of whatever the SBC condemns, the noose of conformity is tightening,” Knox told Associated Baptist Press. “The 2004 meetings illustrate an important truth: SBC fundamentalists won't rest until they control a convention in every state.”

Moderate Baptists, who were pushed out of leadership in the national Southern Baptist Convention during a two-decade fight with conservatives, have long feared the battle would shift to state conventions, independent organizations that participate voluntarily — and with differing degrees of enthusiasm — in the national convention.

Some state conventions have remained a refuge for moderates, such as Virginia and Texas, prompting conservatives to set up alternative conventions of their own in those two states. Other state conventions, such as Florida and Missouri have become increasingly hostile to moderates.

“This is the next turn of the screw,” said Bruce Prescott, executive director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists and a leader in the Mainstream Baptist Network, which has fought the rising influence of conservatives in the state conventions. “The fundamentalists have done everything they can do at the national level, so now they are doing it state by state.”

The tightening of standards is “a good thing,” countered Gregory Wills, who teaches church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. For much of the last century, Baptist associations and conventions have shied away from enforcing standards of faith and practice, the conservative professor said. “What that has meant is you don't always know what denominational fellowship and union means.”

“The right of association includes the right to determine membership,” said Wills, who has written about church discipline. Denying conventions that right “would force them to accept churches whose belief and practice they consider to be inimical to Christ and his gospel,” he said.

Church historian Bill Leonard, dean of the moderate Divinity School at Wake Forest University, agreed, adding no one should be surprised by the tightening standards.

“I'm an old-timey Baptist about this,” Leonard said. “Baptist organizations

have every right to shape their policies as they choose. â If the majority decides to change those rules and set limits on membership, then the people who stay choose to live in those boundaries.”

The surprising factor, Leonard said, is that dissenting Baptists have put up with the restrictive changes for so long without leaving the SBC.

After conservatives solidified control of the Southern Baptist Convention and its agencies in the 1990s, they moved cautiously on the state level. But in recent years, state leaders sympathetic to the national SBC direction have gotten bolder.

The most dramatic change — although it would not take effect for a year — came in Missouri. The conservative-oriented Missouri Baptist Convention agreed to vote next year on four constitutional changes that would limit membership to churches which are identified as “Southern Baptist” and which are affiliated solely with the Missouri Baptist Convention.

If approved, the changes would exclude congregations that support the alternative state convention established by moderates, the Baptist General Convention of Missouri. Likewise, congregations that support the state and national Cooperative Baptist Fellowship would not be allowed to participate.

No congregation could be a Missouri Baptist Convention church without cooperating with the Southern Baptist Convention, a move that departs from Baptist tradition.

The convention would have the right to examine churches' contributions to determine whether those congregations support other national or state conventions or other bodies that act like national or state conventions, such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Meanwhile, the Florida Baptist Convention tightened its bylaws to enforce

the “theological integrity” of member churches and associations. The change requires each Florida Baptist church to adhere to the 2000 “Baptist Faith and Message” doctrinal statement “or any other declaration of faith which parallels the tenets of our historic Baptist faith.”

“Any church or association which undertakes questionable theology, faith, practice or polity shall be subject to having fellowship withdrawn by the Florida Baptist State Convention,” the bylaw amendment reads.

Another revision requires member churches to file a standardized statistical report each year and contribute at least \$250 to the Cooperative Program. A church that violates either requirement for three consecutive years can be expelled.

And at the Tennessee Baptist Convention, messengers asked a committee to investigate what is taught at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Belmont University in Nashville and Union University in Jackson. A current Carson-Newman student alleged some of that college's professors — particularly in the religion and science departments — teach that the Bible has errors and contradictions.

In North Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas, messengers considered but declined restrictive measures.

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina considered a motion to abolish its alternative giving plans that allow churches to pick which mission organizations to fund. The motion would have deleted money for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Baptist World Alliance and other moderate causes. Messengers voted to keep the convention's four giving plans intact, but observers say a similar action is likely to pass in the future.

The Mississippi Baptist Convention avoided an effort to make the “Baptist Faith and Message” — revised in 2000 to incorporate more conservative

views — the convention's doctrinal statement. Instead, messengers voted to make the 2000 statement “a guide for understanding and teaching Baptist doctrine.”

In Alabama, a motion was introduced that would have called for each Alabama Baptist agency to stipulate the Alabama Baptist State Convention as its “sole member,” an action already taken by Southern Baptist agencies to prevent trustees from breaking away from the SBC. The motion was ruled out of order, since convention bylaws say charter changes can come only from those trustees.

In a role reversal in Texas, it was the moderate-controlled Baptist General Convention of Texas that considered, then rejected, an amendment to limit Executive Board representation to churches affiliated solely with the BGCT. The action was aimed at churches dually aligned with the BGCT and the conservative Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Prescott, the Mainstream leader from Oklahoma, said the state-level actions by conservatives have been long expected. “Those who have denied it would happen now just don't want to hear about it,” he said. “It's just a matter of how long it will take people to get fed up.”

Prescott said he didn't expect Baptists to tolerate the new restrictions as long as they have. But rather than flocking to alternative groups like Mainstream Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, he said, most Baptists have simply chosen to be less involved in denominational life.

He said the restrictive trend is a departure from historical Baptist practice, which has favored congregational autonomy.

But Wills, director of Southern Seminary's Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention, said that deference toward congregational freedom has occurred mostly in the 20th century. “The right for an association or convention to expel churches” has only been questioned at

times in the 20th century," he said.

Local Baptist associations used to enforce doctrinal parameters in the 19th century but are less inclined to now, he said. More recently state and national conventions have taken over that role "by default," he said.

Wills said the constitutional change in the Florida convention requiring theological integrity is appropriate. But he is "uncertain" about the membership changes proposed in Missouri, which require affiliation with the SBC but prohibit affiliation with the CBF. "I don't think that has any precedent," he said. "It has some merit, but it may be wrong."

Wake Forest's Leonard agreed the practice of setting parameters "permeates Baptist life" through the years. The result is fragmentation has been an undeniable part of the Baptist legacy.

Those parameters can be theological or even political, as in the birth of the SBC. The Southern Baptist Convention got its start when Baptists in the North decided slave owners could not be missionaries, causing Baptists in the South to split, Leonard said.

Then and now, "churches have to decide how far they can go with those groups in participating in a certain kind of regimentation," Leonard said.

Baptists have always been more apt to fragment than split, he said. In recent years, for instance, "small pieces" of the old denominational system have splintered off — such as the colleges that have broken away from state convention control and the new non-SBC seminaries that have emerged, he said. "These are ways in which the system has responded."

"Everybody is disengaging from the denominational system," he concluded. "Even people sympathetic [to the conservative direction of the SBC] are not paying attention to their system anymore."

But rank-and-file Southern Baptists remain reluctant to break away from the Southern Baptist Convention, Leonard acknowledged. What would it take for that to happen?

“Each community has to decide when their community â€¦ ceases to be Baptist,” Leonard said.

But is there a point where a convention clearly crosses the line?

“If they started baptizing infants or they start having real bishops instead of de facto ones, then they cease to be Baptist.”

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.

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December 10, 2004

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Congress includes anti-abortion provision in its omnibus spending package_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

Congress includes anti-abortion provision in its omnibus spending package

By Robert Marus

ABP Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON (ABP)-Shortly before leaving town for their Thanksgiving break, members of Congress slipped into a spending bill a provision that supporters say limits "discrimination" against anti-abortion hospitals but

that opponents say will circumvent state laws intended to guarantee access to abortion services.

Around the State_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

Around the State

Four bivocational pastors and their wives were honored during the 18th annual Bivocational Ministers and Spouses Conference. **Carlton** and **Dianna Bailey** of Mount Calvary Church of Marysee in Hull were selected as 2004 Exemplary Bivocational Pastor and Wife. **Kevin Shipp** of Avondale Church in Sweetwater is was named 2004 Exemplary Bivocation Minister of Music. He also is the church's education and children's minister. Two couples were honored for their youth ministry efforts. **Sammy** and **Japana Roberts** of Arlington Christian Bible Fellowship in Arlington, and **Benji** and **Kathy Cole** of Lone Willow Church in Cleburne were both named 2004 Exemplary Bivocational Youth Ministers.

♦ **Jack Longbotham**, retired professor of education at Hardin-Simmons University, and this wife, Elizabeth, have completed a children's book, "The Adventures of Buffalo Bill and Cody." The volume completes a trilogy of children's books which seek to foster an appreciation for the buffalo. The Longbothams have buffalo on their ranch. The book is bound in HSU colors and is available in the university bookstore.



Converse Hispanic Church in Converse recently incorporated as a bilingual congregation thanks to Trinity Church in San Antonio. The San Antonio congregation had sponsored the Hispanic mission 20 years, and gifted them the land and facilities there so that church could become a self-supporting body without incurring significant debt. Trinity Pastor Charlie Johnson (left) signed over the deed of trust to Converse Pastor Jesse Aguilar. The congregation also honored retired pastor Jimmy Garcia, founding pastor of the mission.

♦ The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor newspaper, The Bells, and the yearbook, The Bluebonnet, received national recognition at the Baptist Press Excellence in Journalism conference held in Nashville, Tenn. The Bells won first place overall in its division, and the Bluebonnet received third place overall in the yearbook category. Individual newspaper awards

went to **Natalie Kaspar**, first for in-depth writing, second for column writing and third for front page design; **Leslie Helms**, first for infographics and second for photo spread; **Amanda Dickinson**, second for feature writing; and a group of four reporters, third for in-depth writing. Winners of individual yearbook awards were **Christi Snow**, first for student life copy; **Sara Hillis**, first and second for portrait spread design; **Tiffany Turk**, first for creative/artistic photo, second for sports/club design and third for photo spread; and **Jacob Sais**, third for personality spread.

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 12: Jesus reminds his disciples to do what is right_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 12

Jesus reminds his disciples to do what is right

Matthew 5:17-48

By Todd Still

Truett Seminary, Waco

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 19: Make God the focus of giving, prayers, fasting_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 19

Make God the focus of giving, prayers, fasting

Matthew 6:1-18

By Todd Still

Truett Seminary, Waco

Baptist Briefs_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

Baptist Briefs

Baylor dean named Belmont VP. Todd Lake, dean for university life at Baylor University, has been named vice president for spiritual development at Belmont University in Nashville. Lake came to Baylor in 1999 from Wingate University as dean of chapel and minister to the university community. Under Lake's direction, Baylor's university ministries office began Baylor's resident chaplain program, which allows Truett Seminary students to live and minister in 10 residence halls. Other initiatives launched during his tenure include discipline-specific mission trips and service-learning opportunities, sports chaplaincy, graduate and law school Christian fellowships and partnerships with various university departments for chapel speakers. Lake received his bachelor's degree in German studies magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1982. He studied at Princeton Seminary before earning his master of divinity degree in 1988 from Southern Seminary. In 1997, he earned his doctorate in systematic theology with a minor in church history at Boston College.

CBF task force changes name. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's ecumenical task force has changed its name to the task force on ecumenism and justice. "We wanted to acknowledge that we, as a task force, were not an ecumenical body because we are composed only of Baptists. But we are Baptists uniting to do the work of ecumenism, justice and interfaith dialogue," said task force member Chris Skidmore, who works as associate director of the Kentucky Council of Churches. The task force plans to develop an ecumenism resource kit for pastors and churches.

The kit will include a bibliography of literature about ecumenism and "Building Bridges," a brochure describing the Fellowship's position on ecumenism. Initial versions of the kit will focus on relationships between Christian groups.

National WMU acknowledges Virginia WMU's autonomy. Rather than responding directly to the "declaration of the dignity of women" statement adopted by Virginia Woman's Missionary Union, national WMU Executive Director Wanda Lee simply noted national WMU and Virginia WMU are autonomous organizations. The Virginia WMU declaration alleges discrimination "against women in the work of Christian ministry" and takes particular aim at the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, which asserts only men are biblically qualified to be pastors." Just as every state Baptist convention is an autonomous body, so is each state WMU organization, particularly as they deal with issues in their state," Lee said. "We respect the autonomy of both bodies and their right to speak for themselves."

Baptist University of the Americas seeks BWA associate membership_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

Baptist University of the Americas seeks BWA associate membership

SAN ANTONIO-Baptist University of the Americas has applied for associate membership in the Baptist World Alliance.

At its July meeting in Seoul, South Korea, the Baptist World Alliance General Council amended the international organization's constitution to allow associate membership.

The new membership category was created “to involve Baptist churches and organized Baptist groups in the global ministry of the Baptist World Alliance through prayer, the sharing of resources and participation in the meetings, congresses and conferences of the Baptist World Alliance,” the amendment stated.

Little good news for Baptist World Alliance in state convention meetings_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

Little good news for Baptist World Alliance in state convention meetings

By Greg Warner

Associated Baptist Press

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.

Hispanic & Anglo churches pool resources, expand ministries_120604

December 10, 2004

Posted: 12/03/04

Hispanic & Anglo churches pool resources, expand ministries

By George Henson

Staff Writer

DALLAS—Members of Cockrell Hill and Hampton Place Baptist churches in Dallas believe in the power of synergy. Merging their congregations has provided a wealth of assets that exceeds what the two churches held apart from each another.