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GREENSBORO, N.C. (ABP)—Messengers changed the face of the [Baptist State Convention of North Carolina](#), loosening ties to its five colleges and retirement home and cutting funding to Woman's Missionary Union.

During their annual meeting in Greensboro, messengers adopted a 2008-09 budget that includes nothing for WMU, accepted the recommendations of a study committee whose chairman said "Baptist Retirement Homes will no longer be a ministry of the convention," and approved the first of two steps required to relinquish trustee selection of its five colleges.

Only 2,784 messengers, or delegates, attended the annual meeting, even though convention officials expected 4,500 to vote on several significant measures. It was the lowest attendance since 1985.

The final session on Wednesday morning seldom draws a crowd. In fact there were just 120 people in seats when opening music started, but by the time the budget debate began there were closer to 1,200—probably double last year's final-session attendance. Many observers concluded they were there for the two major issues—the budget and the committee report on the retirement homes.

Messengers approved a \$39 million budget for 2008—a 3 percent

increase—and \$39.3 million for 2009. But the budget total was irrelevant to the discussion because debate focused instead on allocations for the [North Carolina Missions Offering](#), which included nothing for WMU.

WMU, an autonomous auxiliary that has worked voluntarily among North Carolina Baptist churches since 1888, has been the single largest recipient of funds through the mission offering. However, many North Carolina Baptists were peeved over recent WMU decisions that put their personnel policies at odds with convention policies.

Prior to the annual session, WMU voted to vacate offices it has shared with Baptist State Convention staff since 1947 and give up convention-funded logistical support of \$400,000 annually. Its leadership considered this fall, then rejected, initiating a separate offering for its own support, in favor of remaining part of the mission offering.

While WMU was budgeted to receive \$865,000 of a \$2.5 million offering goal in 2007, convention leaders dropped the 2008 goal to \$2 million, with nothing for WMU—even though WMU traditionally has taken the lead in promoting the offering among the churches.

In a rare move during debate at the annual meeting, Roy Smith, former executive director of the convention, offered an amendment that the 2008 mission offering be increased to \$2.5 million with \$500,000 designated for WMU.

Donice Harrod, a messenger from First Baptist Church in Wilmington, said she and thousands of other women have supported the mission offering in North Carolina Baptist churches.

She asked that WMU remain in the mission offering budget at least two more years, because without it, “Our financial base is being taken away from us.”

David MacEachern, pastor of Bat Cave Baptist Church in Bat Cave, said the rift between the convention and WMU was avoidable and that WMU “messed up by not going through the bylaws of this convention.”

The budget was approved with the cut for WMU.

Meanwhile, the proposal from the colleges, brought by the Council on Christian Higher Education, offered to give up funding from North Carolina Baptists in exchange for electing their own trustees.

The schools involved are Chowan University in Murfreesboro, Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, Mars Hill College in Mars Hill, and Wingate University in Wingate. Wake Forest University and Meredith College split from the convention years ago.

Discussion centered on the schools’ assets and Baptist identity. Messengers who spoke against the proposal said North Carolina Baptists were giving away many millions of dollars in assets and warned the schools would shed their commitment to be Baptist once the convention loses the power to elect trustees.

Jesse Croom, president of the Council on Christian Higher Education, assured messengers that being “Christian and Baptist is at the heart and core” of the North Carolina Baptist schools.

Campbell University President Jerry Wallace, designated spokesman for the four educational institutions, assured messengers that the schools’ presidents “wholeheartedly support” the proposal and “pledge continued fidelity to our Christian heritage and to the Baptist churches of North Carolina.”

Allan Blume, president of the convention’s board of directors, reminded messengers that the convention has never owned the institutions but “have a trustee relationship in which they own the institutions.”

Ultimately messengers responded to Wallace, who asked, "Please support us on this." They approved the first of two required steps to release control of trustee elections for the four universities and one college. It must be approved again next year.

The bulk of the increase in the convention's \$39 million budget goes to church planting, which rises from \$865,000 in 2007 to \$1.3 million in 2008. Slight changes were made in the convention's four giving plans, which divide funding between the state convention and national mission causes.

Three of the plans will increase the portion retained by the state convention by one-half percent. Two of the plans increase the portion for the Southern Baptist Convention by one-half percent, while one decreases SBC funding by the same percentage. Another plan decreases by one-half percent the portion going to moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in favor of the state convention.

Messengers accepted the recommendations of the Baptist Retirement Homes study committee, which includes a provision for the retirement agency "to officially sever its relationship with the convention" and then seek to establish a new relationship.

Study committee chair Joanne Mitchell, told messengers it appears Baptist Retirement Homes "will no longer be a ministry of the convention because the convention will no longer have a voice in choosing the leadership."

No one was present from the agency to participate in the discussion. The study committee report recommended that the convention not sue the retirement homes to reverse any decisions. The convention will explore other ministry options for senior adults.

North Carolina Baptists also elected Rick Speas, pastor of Old Town Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, as their new president; voted to extend their partnership with Hawaii and Pacific Rim churches through 2009; and heard

about the final push to finish 700 houses in hurricane-ravaged Gulfport, Miss., before Dec. 31.

Based on reporting by Norman Jameson, editor of the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina.

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