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Arkansas Baptist State Convention

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ARKANSAS BAPTIST



news magazine

Tennessee



1997

Arkansas Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting

In an eventful two-day annual meeting Nov. 4-5 at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock, state convention messengers:

- Set an enrollment record of 1,831 messengers.
- Launched the 1998 sesquicentennial celebration.
- Failed to implement charter and bylaw changes to maintain a reconciliation agreement with Ouachita Baptist University.
- Elected Greg Kirksey, pastor of First Church, Benton, as state convention president.
- Approved Executive Board staff restructuring.
- Adopted a \$17.68 million Cooperative Program budget for 1998.

Ouachita reconciliation vote prompts record attendance

A RECORD NUMBER of messengers gathered at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock Nov. 4-5 for the 1997 Arkansas Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

A total of 1,831 messengers registered during the convention, a 13.7 percent increase over the previous record of 1,610 ABSC messengers set in 1989 and an increase of nearly 18 percent over the 1,533 who attended last year's convention.

The record attendance was prompted by interest in a convention-wide vote on proposed amendments to the convention's charter and bylaws. Those amendments sought to provide bylaws guidelines for a reconciliation agreement between the state convention and Ouachita Baptist University approved last year.

The amendments, which needed a two-thirds majority to pass, narrowly failed by a vote of 999-528. The vote fell 1.3 percent short of the required 66.7 percent mark.

Messengers also elected Greg Kirksey, pastor of First Church in Benton, as ABSC president over Ben Rowell, pastor of First Church in Rogers, in a close 780-761 vote.

Host church pastor Cary Heard noted that he joined many who "look forward to this time of worship and praise. I looked up the meaning of convention, and it does mean 'to come together.' God will allow us, in His leadership, to come together."

That fellowship was threatened with a challenge to the seating of messengers from Highland Drive Church in Jonesboro. The congregation was recently reprimanded by Mt. Zion Association for its practice of accepting members by "alien immersion."

Credentials Committee chairman L.H. McCollough, pastor of Highway Church in North Little Rock, reported that following a meeting with Highland Drive pastor Johnny Hutchison and "the person who delivered the challenge" and studying "the documents that have been made available to us...we find that there's no obvious violation by practice or intent on the part of the church and so our committee unanimously recommends that the Highland Drive Baptist Church remains seated as part of this convention." The committee's recommendation was overwhelmingly approved on a voice vote with few dissenting votes.

Participants focused on the 1997 convention theme of "Build the Church." Highlighting that need, ABSC executive director Emil Turner told listeners that "it is important to remember why we need to build the church - so lost people will be saved. We don't build for budgets or preachers, but for souls."

Larry Loggins, pastor of Friendship Church in Clinton, said during a "Build the Church" theme interpretation testimony that when he led his church to pray for a citywide revival, the congregation began to grow numerically and spiritually. "If we're not careful, we build on ourselves...but laypeople are the key. Get them involved. When we take our hands off and get them involved, things will happen."

In other convention business, Bill Melton, pastor of First Church in Gentry, sought to offer a substitute nomination to replace the nomination of ABSC president Rex Home as a trustee of Ouachita. Home ruled Melton's motion out of order because his nominee, Pat Robinson, pastor of Lakeview Church in Cave Springs, is a member of the ABSC Executive Board, making him ineligible to serve on another convention board.

Participants also heard a report from the convention's 150th Anniversary Celebration Committee. Chairman Eddie McCord urged Baptists to attend sesquicentennial activities Sept. 21, 1998, at Tulip, the site of the formation of the ABSC.

"A clear vision has guided us in the past," McCord remarked. "Let us reflect on it and renew our commitment to God...Else what do we have to pass on to future generations?"

ARKANSAS BAPTIST

news magazine



Cover Story

'97 ABSC

A record number of messengers gathered at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock Nov. 4-5 for the 1997 Arkansas Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

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Reconciliation plan rejected

Bylaw amendments fall 1.3 percent short of two-thirds majority

Trennis Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

FOLLOWING a yearlong debate over Ouachita Baptist University's trustee selection process, Arkansas Baptist messengers narrowly defeated proposed charter and bylaw changes which would have implemented a reconciliation agreement between the state convention and Ouachita.

Although the reconciliation proposal gained initial messenger approval last year, necessary charter and bylaw changes require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. The proposals were affirmed by a vote of 999 to 528 but fell 1.3 percent short of gaining the needed 66.7 percent majority.

Prior to the vote on the charter and bylaw language, former ABSC president Ronnie Rogers introduced an amendment which would have eliminated guidelines calling for consensus between OBU trustees and the ABSC Nominating Committee. His proposal sought to instruct the Nominating Committee to give "thoughtful consideration" to the recommendations of Arkansas Baptist agencies.

"I believe this is an 11th hour word from our Lord Jesus," noted Rogers, pastor of Lakeside Church, Hot Springs. Describing his plan as "God's way of escape from our impending and inevitable split," Rogers added, "A vote for or against the bylaws, without this amendment in place, will result in the convention and the Cooperative Program being irreparably divided and damaged."

Responding to Rogers' concerns, Larry Pillow remarked, "I share Ronnie's concern for the unity of the convention. I'd like for us to all leave here, regardless of the vote, committed to the cause of Christ, still equally yoked together.

"I am for unity," emphasized Pillow, pastor of Second Church, Conway. Speaking in favor of the original motion and against Rogers' amendment, he added, "Unity is not reflected or damaged in the vote. Unity is reflected or damaged in our reaction to the vote. It is the reaction to last year's vote that has been most disruptive."

Following further debate concerning the amendment, messengers defeated Rogers' proposal by a vote of 956 to 559.

During debate on the original motion, former Williams Baptist College president Jimmy Millikin voiced opposition to implementing the reconciliation plan.



Jimmy Millikin (center left), former president of Williams Baptist College, speaks against bylaw changes to implement a reconciliation plan with Ouachita Baptist University. Don Moore (right), former state convention executive director, speaks in favor of the proposal.



Millikin, a professor at Mid-America Seminary and interim pastor of First Church, West Memphis, said the proposal "takes us one step removed from the grassroots control of our institution." Insisting that "I just trust the grassroots Baptists to control our institutions," he asked, "If any other of our agencies were to make this request, would we be as willing and excited in voting to give them this particular privilege?"

Speaking in favor of the proposal, former ABSC executive director Don Moore told messengers, "I have a desire to help in this situation. I want us to work together." Emphasizing that "I think it's really essential that we go on with the recommendation," he added, "The issue is whether or not we want the convention to still have input" into Ouachita's trustee selection process.

Desire for cooperation

In an interview following the annual meeting, ABSC executive director Emil Turner said, "The historic relationship between Arkansas Baptists and Ouachita Baptist University has been set aside by the outcome of the votes on the amendments. However, that does not mean that we do not and cannot have a relationship with Ouachita."

Noting that "the charter Ouachita filed with the Secretary of State in October of 1996 is now in effect," Turner added, "We will continue to pray and work for a continued relationship with Ouachita. I hope that during the next year, some new relationship can be forged.

"Right now and in the immediate future, our relationship consists of the convention's vote to fund Ouachita

through our budget process and to elect Ouachita's trustees for this year."

Although "the future components of that relationship are not yet clear," Turner emphasized that "my desire is for our convention to continue to be related to this institution."

In a memo to Ouachita students and faculty following the vote, OBU president Ben Elrod wrote, "We have no desire to be alienated from the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, and the events of the past week will not deter us from our mission of serving the Baptist churches of our state and region.

"The fact that the convention failed to amend its constitution and bylaws by a two-thirds majority does not suggest, in our minds, a refusal on the part of the convention to retain its relationship with Ouachita," Elrod added.

Citing messenger approval of the ABSC Nominating Committee's trustee nominees for OBU and approval of a 1998 convention budget which includes a \$2.5 million allocation for Ouachita, Elrod said such actions "convince us that the convention desires to proceed in good faith as we do."

Noting that "the only constitutional basis we have is to operate under our charter which calls for the trustees to fill any vacated positions," Elrod told the Newsmagazine, "Our desire was to operate under the agreement which brought the Nominating Committee and Ouachita representatives together in the process. Although this vote failed to officially embrace that relationship, a lot of cooperation and consultation can be done without constitution and bylaw changes."

PERSPECTIVE

A Pastor's Heart



Emil Turner

ABCS Executive Director

WHAT WAS the most frequently heard comment at our recent convention? "I am praying for you." I have never heard those words more frequently or with greater sincerity. They weren't just said to me, rather, I heard these words said to people from all different perspectives and positions. I believe that this convention was the object of more prayer than any in recent history.

Where do we go from here? There are two answers. First, we go into a new relationship with our oldest institution. The historic relationship is changed. A

new relationship can be forged if it is forged carefully and honestly. Arkansas Baptists can do that. But we must do it prayerfully.

Secondly, we move into a new structure for our work. Our restructuring decision will enable us to be effective into the next century. Already our teams are preparing for this new approach. I believe this will be the most significant decision of the convention. More people will come to Christ, more churches will be started, more lives impacted, and more churches will be strengthened because of our commitment to a new structure.

■ Have you read *How to Make More than a Million Dollars* by Terry Toler? (Success Dynamics, 1997). This book is a great encouragement. You will learn how to get more from life than you ever dreamed. The chapter entitled "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Debt" is worth the price of the book. Good stuff.

Executive director's schedule:
Nov. 23 (a.m.) FBC, Mayflower
Nov. 25 ABCS Operating Committee
Nov. 30 (a.m.) West Side, Warren

This summer at our tent revival in Dixonville, she came walking up the dirt road to our meeting. And as she entered the tent, she began telling us how she had prayed all day about who she should witness to and invite to the revival. And she said, "God just kept telling me to go in that kitchen and bake a pan of biscuits. And so I finally did." She took the pan of biscuits to her brother. On this particular night, no one else from her family came to the revival with her.

But I believe God will take this small act of kindness and her faithfulness to go to church when no one else from her family will go, and God will use it to reach her brother or someone else from her family.

Here's what I've learned from Ms. Maudie - God only asks us to be faithful and to share whatever we have with others, whether dimes and quarters or a pan of biscuits.

Diana Edmondson Lewis, a North American Mission Board missionary, works with the Arkansas Baptist missions department and Central Association. A member of First Church, Benton, she and her husband, John, a chaplain, have one child, Caleb. She has been the director of Dixonville Baptist Center for seven years.

Woman's Viewpoint



Diana Lewis

First Church, Benton

IHAVE KNOWN Ms. Maudie for seven years now. And even though I am the missionary in the little community of Dixonville, Ark., where she lives, it's Ms. Maudie who is the hero in my eyes. Ms. Maudie has known more than her share of heartache for one person's lifetime. She has lost her husband and three of her children to death through disease or accidents. She has known sickness for herself, suffering several strokes the last few years. She has seen family members stray and get into trouble. But Ms. Maudie remains a person great in faith. Every week she comes to Bible study at our little Baptist center. And every week she brings her offering of dimes and quarters, even though I know she won't have enough money to buy her food and medicines this month.

quotes

"God wants you to be different, dedicated and discerning, so He can give you freedom, fellowship and favor."

— Steven Arnold, pastor
 St. Mark Church, Little Rock

"God is still on His throne, His kingdom is not tottering and He will be glorified."

— Greg Kirksey, president
 Arkansas Baptist State Convention

"We need a vision of the true character of the God of the Bible."

— David Miller,
 1997 ABCS convention preacher

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Cooperation transcends differences

NUMEROUS WORDS of wisdom were shared during sermons and Bible studies throughout last week's state convention annual meeting. Perhaps none was more insightful and significant, however, than a comment voiced during the debate over proposed charter and bylaw changes designed to maintain last year's reconciliation agreement between the state convention and Ouachita Baptist University.

The memorable words came from Larry Pillow, pastor of Second Church, Conway, who emphasized that "unity is not reflected or damaged in the vote. Unity is reflected or damaged in our reaction to the vote."

Pillow's insights came in response to concerns expressed by former state convention president Ronnie Rogers who warned messengers that "regardless of how the vote goes and who wins, a significant portion of Arkansas Baptists will be disaffected and disenfranchised and our Arkansas Baptist Convention will be permanently fractured." Rogers went on to suggest that "a vote for or against the bylaws...will result in the convention and the Cooperative Program being irreparably divided and damaged."

I respectfully disagree with that assessment. While the vote related to Ouachita's trustee selection process was clearly a milestone in Arkansas Baptist life, I don't

**Straight
from the
Editor**



Trennis Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

believe the majority of Arkansas Baptists will allow one vote on one issue to negatively impact their future involvement in cooperative ministry efforts through the state convention.

Quite to the contrary, I anticipate that many Arkansas Baptist leaders will seek to strengthen their cooperative efforts as a symbol of their commitment to the ongoing ministries made possible here in Arkansas and around the world.

For the 999 messengers whose collective votes fell 1.3 percent short of the needed two-thirds majority to implement the reconciliation agreement, human nature certainly would call for resentment or even retaliation. Rather than fear the worst, however, I choose to expect the best. I sincerely believe that the vast majority of messengers on both sides of the issue will strive to work

together for the benefit of God's Kingdom in all we do as Arkansas Baptists. To do otherwise would be to fall far short of Christ's example.

On the positive side, Rogers did take the initiative to introduce a proposed substitute amendment which he described as "God's way of escape from our impending and inevitable split." Although fellow messengers decisively rejected his proposal, I am confident it was presented in good faith as a sincere attempt to find common ground amid a challenging dilemma.

ABSC executive director Emil Turner and OBU president Ben Elrod — the two state convention leaders most directly affected by last week's votes — have both expressed a desire that the convention and Ouachita continue to find effective ways to cooperate together. Ouachita's trustee board, the ABSC Executive Board and the state convention structure study committee will each have opportunities in the coming months to take an active role in seeking creative ways to strengthen that vital relationship. All Arkansas Baptists should faithfully pray for and encourage these leaders in that task.

Whatever the future holds, it is essential that Arkansas Baptists remember: "Unity is not reflected or damaged in the vote. Unity is reflected or damaged in our reaction to the vote."

Turner warns that believers can still miss revival

WILL YOU EXPERIENCE an awakening?" asked Emil Turner during his Tuesday evening address to Arkansas Baptist State Convention participants.

Turner, ABSC executive director, preached from Numbers 11. Describing the context of the passage, he noted that "Moses is weary from the complaints of the people he leads and God says He's going to do something new...give him 70 helpers."

Turner noted that when Moses and Joshua learned that two of the 70 had begun prophesying among the Israelites, Joshua asked Moses to stop them.

"I believe in this passage Joshua has missed the revival," Turner said. "God has sent His Spirit in a fresh way and a divine wind blew across 70 men. Revival came, 70 men prophesied and Joshua said, 'Make them quit. Stop it. It's not right.' Joshua missed the revival."

Turner warned listeners that believers can be in the right, yet miss revival. "Joshua is a man known for the Word. You can know Scripture and still miss the revival. Joshua was a man known for service. You can be a servant and still miss the revival."

"We may be in the early days of revival in our country, but that doesn't mean every church and every member will experience it," he predicted. "The question is, 'Will you experience an awakening, a revival?'"

"You can miss it," he said. "Joshua missed it. Let's look at what causes you to miss it?"

■ **Traditionalism.** "How many years of tradition do you have in your church?" Turner asked. "The movement of God in your

church and your life always begins with something new. The Sunday School movement came from something new. The great hymns came out of a new wave of music.

"When God revives a nation, He brings new things," he said. "Jesus said He 'brings a message of new wine that could not be put in an old wineskin.' Traditionalism will cost us revival."

■ **Legalism.** "I don't blame Joshua for being upset," he said. "Joshua's got a case of legalism. You don't get holy making sure somebody else is. You get holy making sure you are. A spirit of legalism will keep you from experiencing revival. The law kills, but the spirit brings life. The sovereignty of God decides revival in your church. Legalism will cost you revival."

■ **Exclusivism.** "Joshua had an exclusive approach to the faith," Turner explained. "We need to be more careful with whom we assign leadership," Joshua said. Joshua thought they weren't qualified to lead. I believe that if anything keeps our churches in Arkansas from revival, it's the idea of exclusivism. We are unwilling to share responsibility and leadership. We have this exclusive approach to ministry that costs us revival."

■ **Humanism.** Joshua "thought Moses started that revival," Turner noted. "But Moses couldn't stop it. It was divine. A Baptist humanist says, 'It's those we elect that bring revival,' but it's God's sovereignty that decides revival."

"I've seen revival happen when one man set aside tradition to do something never done before," Turner concluded, "setting aside traditionalism, legalism, exclusivism and humanism. May it be so in all of our churches."

ABSC approves Executive Board staff restructuring

CULMINATING an in-depth, two-year study, Arkansas Baptist messengers quietly approved an extensive Executive Board staff restructuring proposal Nov. 4. The plan changes the Executive Board staff structure from 12 departments to seven ministry teams effective Jan. 1, 1998.

The study was authorized by the state convention Executive Board in 1995. It involved the work of a 13-member steering committee chaired by Tim Reddin, director of missions for Central Association, plus three nine-member study committees.

According to Executive Board president Chuck McAlister, pastor of Second Church, Hot Springs, who presented the proposal to messengers, the plan is designed to help statewide ministries "remain evangelistically centered, oriented on reaching lost people and starting more churches throughout the state of Arkansas."

Noting that "this has been a long process and an important process," executive director Emil Turner said the proposal "enables us to move into the next century with greater impact on the churches and on lost people in Arkansas."

The proposal's mission statement specifies that "the Executive Board programs of the ABSC exist to assist individual churches and associations to accomplish their biblical mission." The plan also includes 29 core values that focus on such issues as the Bible, the local church, church growth and integrity.

The new structure will feature a ministry planning team coordinating efforts among seven ministry teams that include: executive & administrative, evangelism & church growth, leadership & worship, missions ministries, missions support, collegiate ministry and family ministry.

A related recommendation from the structure study committee focused on the convention's five statewide institutions and agencies. Seeking to "position our agencies and institutions to be ready for the 21st century," the report emphasized the desire to "reach more lost people and start more churches in Arkansas and around the world."

General recommendations included calling for the state convention Nominating Committee to "nominate trustees who will support the agencies and institutions with their time, talent and resources."

The study committee also was granted a one-year extension of its assignment "to study the will of the convention as expressed by vote in the 1997 annual meeting" related to Ouachita Baptist University's trustee selection process. The committee is expected to present a recommendation next year concerning trustee relationships related to all five state Baptist entities.

Messengers also approved a 1998 Cooperative Program budget goal of \$17,682,975. The budget vote was moved from its traditional slot on Tuesday to Wednesday morning so that messengers could first vote on proposed bylaw changes related to the OBÜ trustee issue. Although the bylaw changes narrowly failed to gain the two-thirds vote needed for implementation, messengers adopted the budget proposal without debate.

In addition to \$2,539,893 for OBU, major budget items include \$7,386,179 for Southern Baptist Convention causes, \$5,879,932 for ABSC Executive Board programs, \$764,981 for Williams Baptist College, \$467,517 for the Children's Homes and Family Ministries, \$273,690 for the Foundation and \$233,684 for the Newsmagazine.

In other Executive Board proposals, messengers approved a "Celebrate Jesus 2000" evangelistic emphasis and seven "Build the Church" priority projects for 1998 as part of the state convention's five-year "Arkansas Awakening" emphasis.

Arnold assures crowd: 'God is able to deliver us'

Colleen Backus

Assistant Editor, Arkansas Baptist

DECLARING THAT "if you want me to feel at home, say 'amen!'" Steven Arnold spoke from the familiar passage of Daniel 3 during the final session of last week's state convention annual meeting. Arnold, pastor of St. Mark Baptist Church, a predominantly African-American congregation in Little Rock, highlighted the passage where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego assured King Nebuchadnezzar that "our God is able to deliver us."

"They were on fire for God - I'm a firm believer that it is God's desire that those of us in the Spirit be on fire for Him.

"These Hebrew boys were on fire for God," he declared. "Though they were in a foreign land, they were still on fire... They were facing a fatal situation - not parole, but a fiery furnace. They were still on fire for God. Many times, as a result of our troubles and trials, we lose the fire for God.

"They were also surrounded by fearful people," Arnold noted. "Only three decided to stand and not bow.... Their faith overcame their fears and allowed them to take a stand for God.

"They were different!" Arnold emphasized. "As I look at them, I'm in awe of their courage.... How different are you? Are you blending with the world? God has called us to be different. We should have a different walk, a different talk.



"They were also dedicated," he stated. "They were dedicated to the cause of a true and living God. Many of us are dedicated to everything and everybody except the Lord.

"They were discerning," Arnold explained. "Discernment is the ability to distinguish between that which is of God and that which is not of God.... King Nebuchadnezzar gave them a second chance, but the boys understood it the first time and still refused to bow.

"You've got to be mindful when you're different, dedicated and discerning," he declared. "You are in a prime position to be delivered.... These three men were bound and falling down into the midst of a burning fiery furnace - I don't care how you look at it, it don't look good.

"Then the king was astonished. Did not he cast three men in the midst of the fire? He sure did. I see four men - loose and walking around! What happened? Deliverance!

"God's got a lot of ways of delivering us," Arnold pointed out. "God gave them freedom, fellowship and lastly, He gave them favor," he emphasized. "And when you look at the favor of God, you can't help but think about the mercy, grace, provision and power of God.

"When they got out of the fire, they didn't even smell like smoke," Arnold said. "When you leave this place, He wants you to be different, dedicated and discerning, so He can give you freedom, fellowship and favor."

Greg Kirksey elected ABSC president

Trennis Henderson

Editor, Arkansas Baptist

GREG KIRKSEY, pastor of First Church, Benton, is the new president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention. He was elected last week by a 19-vote margin over Ben Rowell, pastor of First Church, Rogers.

Kirksey, a former ABSC first vice president, was nominated by Don Phillips, pastor of Calvary Church in Camden, who noted that "Greg has a heart that wants to please Jesus." He said Kirksey would "put out a hand of Christ-like love on both sides on all the issues that tug and tear at us to take our eyes off of Jesus."

Rowell, who served this year as president of the Arkansas Baptist Pastors' Conference, was nominated by Jim Lagrone, pastor of First Southern Church in Bryant. Describing Rowell as a leader "whose arms go across both aisles," Lagrone added that he "has a passion and a love for people."

Kirksey, who was elected by a vote of 780 to 761, urged convention messengers to "pray for me that I will hear God's voice, because I assure you as best I understand His voice, His will be the one I obey."

In other elections, Del Medlin was re-elected ABSC first vice president over Orman Simmons by a vote of 756-418. Medlin is pastor of First Church, Cabot, and Simmons, a physician, is a member of First Church, Little Rock.

Jeff Cheatham, director of missions for Arkansas River Valley Association, was elected second vice president by a vote of 743-443 against Bill Hatfield, pastor of First Church, Dierks.

During an interview following his election, Kirksey told the *Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine* his initial response "was the overwhelming sense of responsibility that had just suddenly become mine."

Acknowledging that the failure to approve charter and bylaw changes to implement a reconciliation plan between the state convention and Ouachita Baptist University compounded his sense of



State convention officers for 1997-98 are (left to right) second vice president Jeff Cheatham of Russellville, president Greg Kirksey of Benton and first vice president Del Medlin of Cabot.

responsibility, Kirksey said one of his primary concerns is "how we can link arms and go forward as a family of believers. I'm here to try to help keep us together."

"I realize we are somewhat polarized" as a state convention, he added, "and yet I still believe we need to see ourselves as teammates. I would hope God would use me in some way to represent all Arkansas Baptists for the glory of God."

Citing his narrow presidential victory with 50.6 percent of the votes, Kirksey noted, "I wasn't surprised it was close because Ben Rowell is a quality Christian man. He's got great Christian character

and a sweet spirit. I told him, no matter win or lose, I plan on us being on the same team."

Looking toward the future, the new president said, "I think it's imperative that we seek to reestablish trust. So much of how Baptists minister together depends upon trust. One way to build trust is talking to one another rather than talking about one another."

Kirksey said he plans to "talk a lot about prayer, a lot about praise and a lot about overcoming adversity" during the coming year. Describing prayer as "the

key to the spiritual revival that we need," he noted, "I think the way you build a church is through prayer."

"We're trying to solve too many problems in our own strength and we're getting nowhere doing it," he pointed out. "We've got to start depending on the Lord. That's what the New Testament church did in the midst of their adversity."

Citing his desire to "be a positive president," Kirksey affirmed that "God is still on His throne, His kingdom is not tottering and He will be glorified. I want us to focus not on the negative, but on the positive."

Kirksey, who is a graduate of Ouachita and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has served as president of the ABSC Executive Board as well as president of the *Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine* board of directors. He was named the 1996 "Distinguished Baptist Minister" by Williams Baptist College. Prior to becoming pastor of First Church, Benton, in 1990, he was pastor of Hillside Church in Camden.

Medlin, also a graduate of Ouachita and Southwestern Seminary, has served as pastor of First Church, Cabot, since 1985. He served last year as chairman of the ABSC Resolutions Committee.

Cheatham is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. He has served as president of the board for the Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries as well as a member of the ABSC Executive Board. He was named Director of Missions of the Year in 1993.



'You Follow Me'

Rex M. Home Jr.

President, Arkansas Baptist State Convention

HAVE THOUGHT AND PRAYED much about what would be appropriate to preach to you tonight and after first preaching it to myself and looking within God's Word and seeing that which touches my own heart and my own life, I found myself brought to a passage of Scripture from the 21st chapter of John.

I read a quotation from a man named Gilbert Arland and he said, "When an archer misses the mark, he turns and looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bulls-eye is never the fault of the target. To improve your aim, improve yourself." The passage that I will bring to you tonight and preach from is about Simon Peter.

Peter said, "I will never deny you. Though all should be offended, I will not... I will die for your sake. Though all men forsake you, you can count on me." And yet, was it not Peter who three times denies his Lord just in the space of a brief moment of time. Jesus had already told him that He would pray for him. He had already sent him a message after His resurrection that He was alive. But now comes a personal time, a private interview, not before an ecclesiastical court in the city, but here beside the sea, sharing a meal.

The lessons of Peter are the lessons I must learn and perhaps they are the lessons you must learn. As Jesus spoke with Peter that day, He asked him about loving Him and the threefold question reminds us of the threefold denial that Peter had already made. "Simon Peter, do you love me?" He asked him that question three times. In asking the question, I think there was something Peter was learning.



Claim superiority over no one

Jesus asked the question, "Do you *agapao* me, do you love me with a self-sacrificing kind of love? Do you love me with a selfless love?" Peter kept speaking in the *phileo*. Finally Jesus, the third time asked, "Peter, do you *phileo*, love me with the love of friendship? Do you love me with affection?" At this point, the Bible states Peter was grieved. The word grieved is the same word that Jesus used of Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane where He prayed that the cup might pass from Him. Jesus said, "I am exceedingly sorrowful unto death." It is the same word. It means to be distressed, to be extremely sad and Peter was grieved and sad that Jesus asked him. His heart was that he wanted to *agapao* Jesus. He wanted to love him with a selfless, self-sacrificing type of love.

What was Peter learning? I think he was learning to claim superiority over no one. I am learning that lesson. Have you learned that lesson? Claim superiority over no one. "Peter, do you love me more than anyone?" Peter's personal experience had claimed his personal pride and now he was very careful and he was deliberate in how he answered the Lord. "Lord, I want to. Lord I desire to. Lord you know all things and you know that I love you." When I think about that, I see that I myself must claim superiority over no one. It causes me to say I need to learn to live and to love and to respect my fellow man, my brothers and my sisters, even if they are Baptists!

There are many things I love about being Baptist. I like the fact that we have always emphasized soul competency. I believe very strongly in the priesthood of the believer. I believe in the autonomy of the local church and because of that when you confess a faith and a love for the Lord Jesus Christ then surely I can extend my hand to you as a brother and sister. Because we know that our faith is in Him, we are people who are proud of our heritage, proud of the present

and look forward to the future together. Because of that, when I come to the point of saying no to superiority over anyone else then I recognize that call for me, Rex Home. Maybe it is the call for you. It is not to be a sovereign but a servant. It causes me, no matter what others may say or think, that what I am trying to achieve is not to be labeled in one way or another way, not to be viewed as a conservative or a moderate. I want to be viewed as a Christian and Christlike. That's what I want to achieve in my life. Because of that, I recognize that we are joined together in loving Christ and loving His commission and in serving one another. As we look upon our lives, I can see that there is a great difference between compromise and cooperation. The

convention itself is nothing more than a collection of cooperating churches. We voluntarily give our tithes and offerings. We voluntarily give to the Cooperative Program. Our churches are changing and we are reaching people who didn't grow up like us.

Our articles in our own convention say that "While independent and sovereign in its own sphere, this Convention shall never exercise any authority whatever over any church, nor shall it in any way interfere with the constitution of any church, or with the exercise of its functions as the only ecclesiastical body, but will cheerfully recognize and uphold the absolute independence of the churches." That's reason, dear friend, that whatever you and your church, under the Lordship of Christ, determine to do about whatever you do, that is your business with the Lord. I'm not a member of that church; I do not lead that

church. My responsibility to you is that I pray for you that God will prosper you and your church in however you as that only recognized ecclesiastical body determine to do your work.

Thomas Jefferson said a long time ago, "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans - we are all federalists." To paraphrase Jefferson, I would say, "Our churches and our people are alike and they are all different. We are no one's superiors and we are no one's inferiors. We are believers, we are Baptists, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We claim superiority over no one."

Care for everyone

When Jesus talked to Peter and He asked him about his love, Jesus gave a simple command: Feed my lambs (my small ones). Some scholars interpret that to mean the idea of new converts. Feed my new converts. Twice He said feed my sheep. The third time, the word that he used is a word that means to nourish, to provide food. The second word is an altogether different word that gives us the concept of shepherding. So what he says is to nourish and to shepherd - provide nourishment for and to shepherd the people. Shepherd the flock of God that He has given you the oversight of.

While we claim superiority over no one, we are called to care for everyone. Everyone! The Shepherd knew that he was in charge of caring for all the sheep. Jesus taught that familiar parable in Luke 15 and said to the people, "What man of you having 100 sheep that if one is lost does not leave the ninety and nine and go after that which is lost." Ninety nine is a wonderful number... but the shepherd never lost sight of each one as an individual. In our search for the many, we sometimes lose sight of the one and we are to care for everyone. Even on this Tuesday evening of the convention there are no doubt people, maybe seated next to you or in front of you or behind you, who are really hurting. Someone with great problems and great concerns and difficulties and trials and not sure what the future holds and we are to care for everyone. In a church we are to care for those

folks whether they are good members or sorry members. Those prospects, whether they are good or unlikely prospects. Those who are like you and me and those who are not like us, we are to care for them. Everyone needs to be cared for and everyone needs to be loved.

I heard the testimony of a friend who had been my friend for 25 years or more and I had never heard parts of his testimony. He said his father died when he was two years of age, his mother was physically challenged and had never worked and never drove. At age nine he moved to Arkansas with a man he had known for only two days before this man became his stepfather. His teenage years were filled with agony and disappointment and, by most definitions, abuse.

At age 19 he came to faith in Jesus Christ. He said at that time he did not know Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. For all he knew they might have been a rock group. He said, "I grew up being lost. I did not know there was a God who cared for me and I did not believe there was anybody, human or divine, that cared about me one bit." At age 21 he entered Ouachita as a freshman. God has used him, blessed him and now I closed with a closing quotation. He said, "As we debate our mutual roles and responsibilities, my desire is that we will always remember those who are lost, those who have never had the privilege to sing, 'Jesus loves me this I know'; those who never heard, 'God so loved the world'; those whose lives have been so marred with sin they don't believe anyone really cares." That's my friend I thought I cared about. I thought I knew, but I did not know these things about Del Medlin, pastor of First Baptist Church of Cabot. I need to be more sensitive about caring for others. We claim no superiority over anyone, we care for everyone and then there is a final point.

Called to follow only One

The Lord has been dealing with Peter. Can't you identify with Peter? "Peter, feed my sheep" and then He goes on and tells Peter how He is going to die and says to Peter, "Follow me, follow me." As all of this is taking place, Jesus, in a very real sense, has restored Peter, has commissioned him again, has encouraged him. "Follow the same way that I will go," He told Peter. So what does Peter do? He looked around and saw John. What about him? You know that is where we live. What about that church? The same Jesus who dealt with Peter lovingly but very directly, I am sure will deal with each and every one of us along the way and certainly will judge us equitably in the life that is to come. Jesus said to him, "What is that to you? You follow me." In fact, sometimes we find that when we quit worrying about those in the church or outside the church, we here the words of Jesus echo across time to our hearts, "What is that to you, Rex Home? You follow me." Then I understand that I am to claim superiority over no one, I am to care for everyone and I am called to follow only One and that is the Lord Jesus. We have no bishops, we have no popes, we have no sovereigns but we follow the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He is the Lord Jesus Christ who saves us, who calls us to serve Him and who continues to draw us in His will and in His way.

Tomorrow around noon we will make our way back to our own communities and to our own churches. Our convention will conclude, our votes will have been cast, the voice of the convention will have been heard. I will be through with the duties that I have had as president. We will go back to folks that have needs, back where people are lost, dying and in despair and I would pray that we might be able to do that with joy. I so believe in the sovereign power of God and His will. I believe God is working things out. I believe that there can be joy in this journey that we are upon. I think we can have some fun. I think we can enjoy one another. I think we can be family. I think that we can get along even at times that we might disagree.

I am a dying man among dying men. We are headed back toward our final destination and there is not much time. Let's use it wisely. I commit to you of claiming no superiority. With God as my witness, to care for everyone and to know that I am called ultimately to follow just One. Friends, let's work together, let's love one another. Not only *phileo* but let's...*agape*, remembering the One who first loved us.

Bible studies emphasize Sunday School, marriage

Colleen Backus

Assistant Editor, Arkansas Baptist

SEMINARY PRESIDENTS Ken Hemphill and Chuck Kelley presented Bible studies during last week's Arkansas Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

Hemphill, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, told participants that Southern Baptists need to "rebuild the wall" by revitalizing Sunday School. Speaking from Nehemiah, he offered seven principles for "rebuilding the wall."

■ We must be willing to listen to God. "Nehemiah was comfortable in his ignorance," Hemphill stated. "We need to have our comfort rattled - we've been plateaued for 10 years."

■ "We must be willing to bear the burden for the lost. Nehemiah went before the king with a sad face to draw attention to the plight of Jerusalem."

■ Nehemiah had to share a vision with the people, Hemphill noted, adding that many "churches are paralyzed because of lack of budget and resources to take the visions further."

■ We have to develop a strategy to accomplish the vision. "Vision is wishful thinking without strategy," he noted. "Sunday School has lost its strategy and purpose - the primary purpose of Sunday School is to fulfill the Great Commission."

■ Nehemiah endured and made it happen. "No matter what your dream, somebody won't like it and will tell you about it," he said. "Pastors need encouragement."

■ Nehemiah kept the focus on the great and awesome God. "If you point the people to God, they will follow you," he noted.

■ Nehemiah led in celebration and praise. "We don't do enough praise and thanksgiving," Hemphill asserted. "You cannot celebrate enough or thank your people enough."

Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, cautioned messengers that "assumptions will get us into trouble." A particularly dangerous assumption, Kelley noted, is that "because I am a preacher, my marriage will work."

"It doesn't mean your family will work," he insisted. "You must cultivate family with as much diligence as the church. He has given you. That family is an indicator of what you're going to do in your ministry."

"Love that is not expressed is love that is not experienced," Kelley said. "You must love your spouse....Men, I'm not asking how you feel about your wife; I'm asking how she feels."

"In so many of the marriages I see, the love is still there, but they stop saying what's in the heart. When they stop saying it, the spouse stops experiencing the love."

"The assumption is that we will rub each other the wrong way, but love has the ability to cover over the sin that would divide us," he stated. "You must bury some of your desires to have a good marriage. Have you been to the cross for your spouse? Are you willing to put your needs on the altar?"

"Make the healthiest congregation you serve the congregation of your family," he concluded.



Hemphill



Kelley

'The Holiness of God'

David Miller

Evangelist, Heber Springs

I AM OVERWHELMED by my inability to comprehend the impeccability and absolute moral perfection of our Lord. I am further overwhelmed by my inability to articulate what little I have comprehended about His moral perfection. After the manner of a mortal man, I wish to expound this grand text. First, I want you to see the historical circumstances — it was "in the year that King Uzziah died." Second, I want you to see the holy confrontation — "Isaiah saw the Lord." Third, I want you to see the heartfelt calling — "whom shall I send and who will go for us?"

Historical circumstances

Let me remind you that Uzziah had been a good king. Much of the hopes of the nation had rested in him. Uzziah had been a leper in the latter years of his life. A stark contrast is apparent in this text: Earthly kings die but King Jesus lives on! Isaiah had been a statesman and a prophet under the administration of Uzziah. The death of a king is often a dark and dangerous time in the life of a nation. The ministry of Isaiah would be crucial in these days. Consequently, the Lord appeared to Isaiah and gave him this vision in order to strengthen his hand and encourage him in the Word. And, what a vision it was!

Isaiah did not see God the Father. He saw God the Son. John 1:18 says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" Isaiah saw Adonai. He saw a preincarnate vision of the second person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Holy confrontation

I wish to discuss this confrontation under two headings. I want you to see the true character of God and the terrible condition of Isaiah. In my opinion, there is no greater need in the church today than to be confronted with the true character of our Lord Jesus Christ. The revisionists have reconstructed a god in our day that the Bible knows nothing about. Have you heard what they're saying? Kenneth Copeland says that God's hand span is nine inches for God measured out the heavens with a span. He extrapolates that the Lord of heaven must be about six feet, two inches tall and weighs about 220 pounds, and that the Lord's driving ambition since the fall of Adam has been to reproduce Himself in man on earth. Fredrick Price says that our Lord was born again on the cross of a demonic nature so that He could go to hell and be incarcerated and serve time on our behalf but after three days He began to conceptualize deity and he spoke the force

of faith and was born again, this time of a divine nature and came forth. Kenneth says, "I am so much like Jesus that God told me, 'Kenneth, you could have died on the cross, you are so much like Jesus.'" I tell you today, beloved, we are outside the perimeters of the historic Christian religion. We need a vision of the true character of the God of the Bible.

Now there are two categories of items in this text relating to the character of our Lord. There are those items relating to His power — He is the Lord of hosts. Then there are those items relating to His purity. He is the Lord of holiness. There are five items in this text relating to the power of God:

First, we see His remarkable transcendence. Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up." The transcendence of God does not mean that He is a God afar off — not a God close at hand. It does mean, however, that He is a big God! He transcends all human comprehension. He transcends all of time and space. He is the God of remarkable transcendence.

Second, we see the resplendent temple of God. Isaiah saw God in His temple. I would remind you that God told Solomon that "the heaven of heavens could not contain Him." Yet, this transcendent God has been pleased to dwell among men on earth. For those of us who are regenerate, this transcendent God has been pleased to dwell in me. About half the scholars say that Isaiah saw his vision of the Lord in the earthly temple. All of the other scholars all agree with me that Isaiah saw this vision in the heavenly temple!

Third, notice the royal throne of God. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne. Why shouldn't He be sitting on a throne — He is, after all, King Jesus! He is not going to rule — He does reign. He is the Lord! He is on the throne! He is sitting in a veritable position of providential government over the affairs of His creation.

Fourth, this text speaks of the regal train of God. This text says, "His train filled the temple." You are aware that oriental kings wore long, flowing robes. The train was that part of the robe which flowed behind and dragged along the ground. It was a mark of distinction and nobility. It was the glory of the king to have a long, flowing robe. Hallelujah, what a Savior is He!

Fifth, I want you to see the resounding terror of God. This text says, "The post of the doors moved at the voice of him that cried." We are told that the voice of the Lord is as the sound of many waters."

Now let me share with you two items regarding Him in His purity — He is the Lord of holiness. Two things in this text speak of the holiness of God. First, we have the song of the angels. I thought about referring to this as the "seraphic antiphony," but I wasn't

completely sure what all that meant so I decided to stick with the song of the angels. Did you hear what they sang? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." You are aware that in antiquity, repetition was used for emphasis and to establish a matter. Or, could it be that the angels themselves are Trinitarian in their views about God? Could it be that one cries, "Holy art thou, Father," and another, "Holy is the Son," and yet another, "Holy is the Spirit"? When I go home to heaven I'll check it out and let you know for sure!

The second item regarding the holiness of God has to do with the sanctifying altar. My friend, Dr. Herschel York, preaching professor at Southern Seminary, points out that almost every time when the Bible speaks at length regarding the holiness of God, it does so in connection with the doctrine of redemption. Beloved, on our best day as the children of God, when we come into the presence of a holy God, we are going to be thankful all the more for the sanctifying altar which has cleansed our souls from sin. This is the true character of the Lord.

Now let me speak for a moment regarding the terrible condition of Isaiah. Two things. One, his plight and two, his purging. Did you hear his response, "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." I have wondered what might have happened if some of the leading lights of our day had seen this vision. I just imagine the Toronto and Pensacola crowds would have broken into uncontrollable laughter or perhaps have gotten down on all fours to bark like dogs. If our friend in Tulsa had this vision, I can hear him shouting, "Hot dog, I will raise more than \$8 million!" Benny Hinn would have slain the angels in the spirit and healed a bunch of folks whether they needed to be healed or not! Not so with Isaiah. Isaiah has been confronted with the holy, transcendent God. He is smitten with a profound sense not only of reverential awe but with a sense of



his terrible condition.

I want to remind you today, dear friends, that when we come into the close presence of a Holy God, acumen, academics nor accreditations are going to mean much....Power, nor prestige nor pedigrees, is going to bail us out. Woe is me. May God be pleased to grant us that vision.

But did you hear what the text says: "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." I tell you I cannot possibly conceive of us coming into the most intimate presence of this Holy Lord (irreverently)." Oh no, beloved, it is going to be "woe is me" and we are going to be falling before Him in humble gratitude at His sanctified altar.

Heartfelt Calling

"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I send me." In my opinion, two things are requisite if a man would go for God. He must have some comprehension of the true character of God, and he ought to have heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?"

Today, we ask the candidate if he believes in Jesus, does he believe the Bible, will he turn in his ordination papers if he ever quits giving to the CP; and if he nods affirmatively, we ordain him and send him out to pastor a church. Now I certainly am not suggesting a man must be an accomplished theologian before we ordain him, but I am suggesting that he ought to have some basic comprehension of the basic attributes of the God he represents.

I would tell you that just because someone has attended a seminar on "church-related vocations" is not a call to preach. God said to Jeremiah "before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee and before thou came forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and I ordained thee a prophet from conception." A man ought to have a conviction that he has been called of God. In my opinion the fellow in North Carolina whose salary we paid for a time as an adjunct professor at one of our seminaries who performed a marriage ceremony for two homosexuals in a Southern Baptist church must have heard a jackass braying and thought it was a call to preach! He ought to go back and find out more about the true character of the God of the Bible.

"I dreamed I went to a city called heaven, so bright and so fair. When I entered the gates of that city, my friends all welcomed me there. They led me from mansion to mansion, and, oh, the sights that I saw. But I said I want to see Jesus, He's the one who died for all. Then I bowed on my knees and cried holy, holy, holy! I clapped my hands and sang glory, glory to the Lord, glory to Him!"

Resolutions support BWA, oppose abortion

MESSENGERS to the Arkansas Baptist State Convention approved four resolutions during a regular business session Wednesday morning. Three of the resolutions were presented to the convention by resolutions committee chairman Kenneth Startup. A fourth was submitted from the floor by a messenger.

Messengers approved resolutions expressing appreciation for the planning and production of the meeting, affirming the work of the Baptist World Alliance and recognizing the need to aid the poor. The fourth resolution expressed opposition to abortion.

The four resolutions represented a departure from a previous convention precedent of adopting a large slate of resolutions. In 1996, ABSC messengers adopted eight resolutions and the prior year they adopted 10.

Startup recognized in his report that "you've noticed that far fewer resolutions have been presented this year than in recent years. This was a deliberate decision on the part of the committee - a decision largely based on the simple reality that we received only three proposed resolutions." He added that "two of the three were generated from within our committee."

The four resolutions approved by messengers include:

Appreciation

WHEREAS, this year's annual meeting has been guided prayerfully, fairly and effectively by our President, Dr. Rex Horne, Jr. with the support and assistance of Dr. Emil Turner, Executive Director, and the other dedicated staff and leaders of the Convention; and **WHEREAS**, the 1997 convention program has encouraged us to value more fully and to participate more faithfully in the ministry of our churches, we especially recognize and commend Dr. Cary Heard and the other leaders and laity of this good church, Park Hill Baptist, in their ministry and service to the assembled messengers; and **WHEREAS**, the one-hundred and forty-fourth session has been ably organized by the Program Committee.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the messengers to the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, meeting at Park Hill Baptist Church, North Little Rock, Arkansas, November 4-5, 1997, express our deep appreciation to our President, Executive Director, Convention Officers, host pastor and church, and Program Committee for their diligent and sacrificial service in the successful preparation and guidance of the one-hundred and forty-fourth session of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

Baptist World Alliance

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Baptist World Alliance is to draw Baptists together from all across the globe in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ; and **WHEREAS**, the Baptist World Alliance confronts such international needs as human rights, racism and hunger; and **WHEREAS**, the Baptist World Alliance promotes evangelism, education, doctrine, ethics, worship and our Baptist heritage; and **WHEREAS**, the Baptist World Alliance provides significant opportunities for fellowship of all Baptists; and **WHEREAS**, the historic role of the Southern Baptist Convention in the ministry of the Baptist World Alliance runs deep; and **WHEREAS**, the Baptist World Alliance performs its ministries on a meager budget and depends on the support of Southern Baptists.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the messengers to the Arkansas Baptist State Convention...express our strong support of the Baptist World Alliance, and covenant our prayers for its ministry. **THEREFORE**, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we encourage the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to give recognition to the work of the Baptist World Alliance and determine to continue our significant role in the work of our sister organization.

Aiding the poor

WHEREAS, our society faces drastic and imminent changes in the government-sponsored welfare system; and **WHEREAS**, our Lord commanded us to open our hearts and hands to those in need.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the messengers to the Arkansas Baptist State Convention...as individuals, local Arkansas Baptist churches, and a Convention, will strive to reflect more fully the love and grace of Christ by providing greater assistance to the homeless, widows, orphans, the infirmed, migrant workers and others enduring physical privation.

Following the adoption of the initial three resolutions, Ralph Stone, pastor of Myron Church in Ash Flat, moved that a fourth resolution opposing abortion be adopted.

Reading from the floor, Stone asked messengers to approve his resolution that read: "Due to a lack of resolutions on partial-birth abortions...I recommend that this convention go on record to continue its absolute opposition to partial-birth abortion and abortion, especially that those in this state and around the world might know where we stand in accordance with the sanctity of human life." Messengers adopted the resolution without opposition.

Doctrinal distinctives

Baptist Faith and Message is focus of '97 Pastors' Conference



PARTICIPANTS at the 1997 Arkansas Baptist Pastors' Conference focused on the conference theme, "Heralding the Baptist Faith and Message" during its Nov. 3 meeting held in conjunction with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention. The Baptist Faith and Message, adopted in 1963 by the Southern Baptist Convention, is a statement of basic Southern Baptist beliefs.

James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, defended Baptists' belief in Scripture during the afternoon session in a sermon titled, "The Sword of the Lord." Speaking from Hebrews 4, he said the passage contains "three wonderful truths" about the Bible.

"It is divine in origin," he affirmed. "Because the Bible is the Word of God, we can draw some conclusions about it," he explained, noting that it is "inspired, inerrant, infallible and immutable."

"It is dynamic in its operation," Merritt continued. "This book is a living book because it is about a living Lord."

Third, he said, "It is definite in its objective." Merritt said the Bible "explores the soul, examines the spirit, exposes the sinner and expels the sin."

Preaching the closing message of the Pastors' Conference, Merritt highlighted keys to "Confronting a Christless Culture." Preaching from II Timothy 3 about "perilous times," he noted that "we keep getting told year after year after year that things are going to get better...and yet things just keep getting worse."

"Ours is a culture that can be described in two words—chaos and crisis," he said. "The nasty '90s are now reaping the bitter fruit of the seeds that were sown in the sinful '60s of spiritual liberalism and secular humanism and social liberalism."

Citing Robert Bork's description of President Clinton as "the very model of the modern liberal," Merritt declared, "We have a president who has rented out the White House to the highest financial bidder, who has sold out the White House to the lowest moral bidder and America

has shrugged her shoulders for the past five years and said, 'Who cares?'"

"I've got news for you tonight, God cares," he insisted. "God help a president of the United States who doesn't even have the moral gumption to sign a law banning partial-birth abortion."

Emphasizing that "the last days will be very dangerously different and dangerously difficult," Merritt said the apostle Paul warned of "perilous times that will shock you."

Amid such challenges, Merritt said, "We do not confront a Christless culture helplessly or hopelessly....Here's the good news—the only equipment we have to confront a Christless culture is the Word of God. The better news is that is the only equipment we need....We need to be lighthouses standing firm against the storms of criticism and liberalism and humanism and relativism."

Evangelism needed

Although Southern Baptists "have the largest missions force in the history of Christianity," Chuck Kelley acknowledged that "all is not well in the world of Southern Baptist evangelism."

Citing statistics reflecting minimal baptismal growth during the past 40 years, Kelley said, "Southern Baptists believe evangelism is one of the most important jobs in the church—for someone else to do."

Kelley, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, voiced concern that Southern Baptists "have a smaller and smaller number of people saying less and less about Jesus."

Noting that Southern Baptists "are a harvest-oriented denomination living in the midst of an unseeded generation," he remarked, "When you don't put seed in the ground, you can't expect to reap a harvest."

Preaching from Matthew 4:19 where Christ declared, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," Kelley said, "If more of us don't start doing evangelism, we will never experience growth and harvest in our communities again.

Elected as president of the 1996 Pastors' Conference is Barry King (center), pastor of Tumbling Shoals Church in Heber Springs. He is joined by secretary Greg Dills (left), pastor of First Church in Lepanto, and vice president Larry Thomas, pastor of First Church in Atkins.

"Jesus said the result of following Him is fishing for men," the seminary president explained. "Here's the implication: If you are following Christ, you are fishing for souls. If you are not fishing for souls, you are not following Christ."

Affirming Christ's assurance that He will "make you fishers of men," Kelley said, "This verse is not as much a command to witness as it is a covenant between Jesus and His disciples....The issue is not who am I; the issue is who is Jesus.

"When the seed gets in the ground, there will be a harvest," he concluded. "The challenge we are facing is: How many of us will sow the seed?"

Robert Pitman, pastor of Kirby Woods Church in Memphis, Tenn., spoke from Matthew 26, explaining that "singing" is crucial to maintaining "The Joy of the Pastorale." Pointing to the passage, he noted that "all of the suffering of the cross...is fixing to happen to Jesus, yet He is not trembling. He is singing."

Emphasizing first that "Jesus sings," Pitman said, "I know what it means when a man sings. It means that he is uncompromising in his conviction that God is worthy of being praised. That's what singing is. It blesses me and encourages me to know that Jesus sings.

"Jesus gives others a song to sing," Pitman added. "Jesus never sings a solo. He always gives others a song to sing.

"Not everybody sings with Jesus," Pitman acknowledged. "Lost people do not sing with Jesus. While they were observing the Passover, Jesus exposed Judas as the one that would betray Him. Judas was lost. Lost people don't have a song to sing.

"If you have lost your song, He'll give it back to you," Pitman promised. "That's the joy of the pastorale. I can't do a lot

about deacons, Sunday School teachers or business meetings, but I don't have to go through it without a song."

State convention executive director Emil Turner was among Arkansans who spoke during the one-day conference. He emphasized in a message about "The Church," that to win a lost world, congregations must "be passionate."

Speaking from Acts 11, Turner noted that "God gave the church the responsibility of carrying the message of Christ." He said the church in Antioch "sent people to win a lost world. It's the full-orb church. What makes a church a full-orb church? There must be passion."

Turner insisted the church must be passionate about three things:

■ "It must love the Lord Jesus Christ," he said. "He must be their first love and there are three ways to know He is — your church will love His ways, His word and His work."

■ "There must be a passion for one another," he added. "If we're going to be all that we are going to be, we must love the church."

■ "There ought to be a passion for the lost," Turner said. "We talk about loving the sinner and hating the sin. We must never love the sin, but we must never let the sin keep us from loving the sinner. We have to love people if we are going to see people saved."

Jim Richards, director of missions for Northwest Arkansas Association, reviewed the authority given the church in the ordinances of "Baptism and the Lord's Supper."

Preaching from Matthew 21, Richards

urged the teaching of biblical doctrine, noting that there are Baptists "who don't know what they are or why they are what they are. We need to settle what we believe based on the Scriptures."

He said Baptists need to explore "three issues" surrounding the church ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

First, he asked, "Is the authority individual or congregational? When converts were made, His disciples baptized them. I consider that a congregation."

Noting that "Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the upper room," Richards said, "All indicators point to the church being the custodian of the Supper."

Next, he asked, "Is the authority internal or external? It's not enough for us to observe the symbolism, but to know what the symbolism is," he said. "When we see baptism, it is our testimony of what our precious Lord has done for us. My answer is that it is external."

The third question Richards posed was, "Is the authority eternal or temporal? In my mind it is settled. Jesus, in building His church, promised perpetuity to it."

Word of God final

He said that in receiving baptisms from other churches, Baptists must look at Article 6 of the Baptist Faith and Message, but added that "our final rule of faith and practice is the final Word of God."

Preaching about "God's Purpose of Grace," Bill Brown, pastor of First Church in Morrilton, told pastors that the saved are predestined to be saved "and kept by what Christ did on the cross."

"As great a subject as this is, I am also

aware of the difficulty that has shrouded this subject," he told conference participants during the morning session.

Comparing the difficulty of the topic to the story of "The Three Bears," Brown suggested that Daddy Bear was a hyper-Calvinist, Mama Bear was an Arminian and Baby Bear was a "middle-of-the-road Calvinist." He added that Goldilocks, "a Southern Baptist," tried the bears' soup, chairs and beds, finding Baby Bear's "just right."

Foremost in the doctrine of grace, Brown said, is to acknowledge the "sovereignty of God." he pointed out that "our Baptist fathers" not only believed in the sovereignty of God, but also in the depravity of man, "that man is a sinner."

Because of man's depraved condition, "the Bible says so clearly by grace are you saved," he explained. "The Bible teaches us that those people that God the Father gave the Son will come...and He's going to keep us by His grace."

"When grace reigns, men will stand in line to say 'I'm sorry' first," Brown concluded. "That's why I'm a two-point Calvinist: It's either predestination or prostration."

During an afternoon business session, participants elected Barry King, pastor of Tumbling Shoals Church in Heber Springs, as president of the 1998 conference in a contested vote with Gary Akers, pastor of Central Church in Pine Bluff.

Larry Thomas, pastor of First Church in Atkins, was elected vice president and Greg Dills, pastor of First Church in Lepanto, was elected treasurer, both by acclamation.

Brown, Thomas answer 'Why I Am a Baptist'

ASTORS' CONFERENCE participants heard two Arkansas Baptist pastors explain "Why I Am a Baptist." Brown, pastor of Levy Church in North Little Rock, and Larry Thomas, pastor of First Church in Atkins, both shared testimonies that included Baptist theology and cooperation with other churches that share the Baptist faith.

Brown noted the Baptist Southern Baptist because of the distinctive of baptism.

■ Theology. "I am a Baptist because of the emphasis on baptism as the only way of salvation and the authority of the Bible as the only authority of the Christian church."

■ Unity. "I am so proud of the unity of the Baptist church. I am a Baptist because of the unity of the Baptist church. I am a Baptist because of the unity of the Baptist church."

■ Attraction. "I am a Baptist because of the attraction of the Word of God."

"Let us remember what the main thing is. 'May we love God with all of our hearts, strength — love the lost and love one another each one of us.'"

Larry Thomas also emphasized reasons which include:

■ Evangelization. "Baptists are soul winners. Thank God for pastors who win souls for Christ," he said.

■ Indocctrination, such as the teaching of grace and the security of the soul. He highlighted the S...

Hemphill: 'How can I plug into the power of God?'

ASKING "how can I plug into the power of God?" Ken Hemphill, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted during a Tuesday afternoon message, "I know that there is electricity in the wall, there is power flowing; if I were a lamp I would plug in, but I don't know how. How do I get promises out of the Word and into my life?"

"John 14 gives practical advice on how to plug in," he said. "Jesus is preparing His disciples for His own departure. They are concerned about where He's going, how they are going to get there, what is going to happen to the cause."

"Jesus makes an audacious promise — 'because I go to the Father — ask in my name and He will give you another helper — the Spirit of truth.... You shall know I'm with the Father, because I am in you and you are in me.'"

"Jesus gave them the realistic picture" of what would happen, Hemphill noted. "On that great day of Pentecost, more believers were added than in all of Jesus' ministry — 3,000 in one day and more added daily."

"Everyone's needs were being met," he pointed out, "not just the church collectively, but personally. The most convincing proof of the resurrection is the New Testament church — how else do you explain the survival of the frightened band of believers, persecuted by the government?"

"There is supernatural strength in the

audacious promise of Christ — 'I will send a helper,'" Hemphill emphasized. "We need to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit; we need to surrender, obey and serve."

"We keep trying everything before we pray," he said. "Prayer is the ultimate place of surrender." There are three things involved in this kind of prayer, Hemphill noted.

■ "In His name prayer proceeds from

faith in Christ, rightly related to Him in a growing trust relationship."

■ "In His name prayer should always give expression to our unity with His mission."

■ "In His name prayer always seeks to set forward Christ Himself."

"Spiritual revival may be essential for the survival of our nation," he declared. "If we are going to build churches, we are to surrender, obey and serve."

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Agencies focus annual reports on service to Baptists

ARKANSAS BAPTISTS' three statewide agencies — the Arkansas Baptist Foundation, Children's Homes and Family Ministries and Newsmagazine — shared reports during the convention that reflected growth and service.

Foundation president David Moore thanked messengers for their Cooperative Program support. "Our founders never dreamed that we would be generating 13 dollars (of money used for ministries) for every dollar of Cooperative Program support."

Moore also noted that Foundation assets have grown to more than \$54 million. He emphasized that through investments for Baptist ministries in the state, "we have a part in most of the areas of Baptist life."

Moore urged participants to use services provided by the Foundation for donors and church staff members, including free wills and trusts, legal and financial needs, conferences and seminars on estate planning.

Moore recognized the ministries of two Foundation donors, presenting plaques of recognition to the widows of O.L. Bayless and Jim Barber.

Presenting Francis Bayless with a plaque, he recognized the work of her husband, "one of the original incorporators in 1949," and noted that Bayless assigned trusteeship of his estate to the Foundation prior to his death.

Recognizing the ministry of Jim

Barber, a donor and Foundation board member who recently died of cancer, Moore presented a plaque to Barber's wife, Carolyn, in honor of her late husband's service to the Foundation, local church missions giving and financial support of ABSB agencies.

During the report of the *Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine*, editor Trennis Henderson told the story of "Super Christian," a fictional character "in an Arkansas Baptist church similar to yours."

"He was called Super Christian because he was always doing stuff — good stuff, helpful stuff, even Christian stuff," Henderson said. He explained that much of the "stuff" Super Christian did — including participation in a foreign missions appointment service, a Christian Leadership Institute and an Iowa mission trip, he read about in the *Newsmagazine*.

Urging Arkansas Baptists to subscribe, he said, "When it comes to providing timely, inexpensive information about ministry opportunities through the pages of the *Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine*, some churches don't ever bother to make that investment in the lives of their people."

"Is Super Christian a member of your church?" Henderson asked. "Would you like him to be? There are lots of elements involved in someone being a 'super Christian' and the *Newsmagazine* is only one small part — but it is one part. It is the ministry God has given us to seek to help

inform, inspire and involve all Arkansas Baptists to be all that God has called us to be."

Following Henderson's report, *Newsmagazine* board president Lyndon Finney presented Henderson with a plaque honoring him for five years of service as editor of the state Baptist paper.

"We looked for a person to be 'Super Editor' of the *Newsmagazine*," Finney noted, "and found Trennis to be him."

David Perry, executive director of the Arkansas Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries, told participants that the agency is an advocate for "hundreds of struggling children" in Arkansas.

Perry recounted the ordeal of Britain's Derek Redmond, who was slated to run in a 400-meter race during the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain.

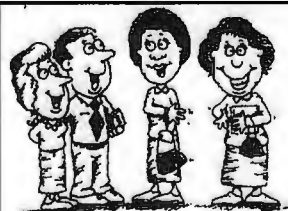
"Everyone was watching the runners as they headed to the finish line," Perry said, "except for Jim Redmond, who watched as his son tore a hamstring."

Perry said as he watched the event on television, "I could see his father, Jim Redmond, saying, 'That's my son.' Who watched that day could report seeing that large man helping his son across the finish line?"

"Throughout Arkansas, hundreds of desperate children are struggling," he said. "Their hindrances are far different, but we've seen them and we've said, 'That's my son. That's my daughter,' and we've picked them up from the track floor."

Arkansas Baptists "have given food, shelter, support for caseworkers and money," he said. "We've seen kids grow emotionally, physically and spiritually and 45 of these children have run to the mercy seat and accepted Christ."

Perry ended his report by introducing Children's Home resident Tabby Harvey, who Perry described as "one of those who have run to the mercy seat." Harvey concluded the report with the solo, "Running to the Mercy Seat."



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'97 ABSC

Music helps add inspiration to convention

CONGREGATIONAL SINGING, mass choirs, brass ensembles, keyboard and vocal ensembles and trumpet soloist Mark Powers, a member of First Church of Cabot, added both inspiration and worship to the 1997 Arkansas Baptist annual meeting.

Rob Hewell, director of the Arkansas Baptist church music ministries department, served as worship coordinator for the annual meeting. Focal Point, a ladies' ensemble from First Church of Hot Springs, were guest musicians for the opening session.

A mini-concert by the Arkansas Master Singers instrumentalists opened the Tuesday afternoon session. Glen Ennes, associate director of the ABSC music ministries department, directed the instrumentalists in playing such favorite hymns as "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," "I'll Fly Away" and "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder."

The instrumentalists joined with the Arkansas Master Singers Women's Chorus to introduce the new hymn, "Jesus Christ Is Lord." The hymn was composed by John Dresbach of Jonesboro with words by J. Paul Williams of Little Rock in honor of the 150th anniversary of the ABSC to be observed next year.

Holly Horne, daughter of ABSC president Rex Horne, provided a memorable moment during the Tuesday evening session when she sang "Playing Games at the Foot of the Cross," immediately preceding her father's presidential address.

Immanuel Church's orchestra and sanctuary choir, under the director of Lynn Madden, opened the evening session with a mini-concert. Other special music included the Williams Baptist College choir directed by Bob Magee and the Arkansas Master Singers directed by Hewell.

Those assisting Hewell in directing congregational singing were Barry Bates of First Church in Marion, Daniel Humble of First Church in Brinkley and Doug Sanders of First Church in Monticello. Lynn Burton of Beech Street First Church in Texarkana was convention organist and Steven Cole of Central Church in Pine Bluff was pianist.

"All of the music at the convention confirmed for me that God has given the opportunity to sing and play, we do it enthusiastically," Hewell declared.

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Kelley: Baptist survival hinges on witnessing

CHUCK KELLEY, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was the featured speaker during the opening session of last week's state convention annual meeting, emphasizing that the survival of Baptists hinges on their personal evangelistic witness.

Using 1 Corinthians 2 as his text, Kelley noted that "70 percent of all Southern Baptist churches are plateaued or declining. Our growth rate as a denom-

ination is .01 percent. We have a problem with fruit.

"I want to cut to the bottom line," he said. "Our survival, our ability to accomplish the Great Commission, relies on one central issue: We have to increase the number of people who are telling people about Jesus."

Kelley noted that the answer to that need is "to mobilize our congregations to tell people about Jesus Christ. Most of

us believe that 'Others are better at it than I.' That is not the testimony of Scripture. We're going to look at the example of Paul the apostle."

Pointing to the text, he asked, "How did Paul feel when he went door to door in Corinth? Weak, fearful — so afraid he was trembling," he answered. "I don't know where we get the idea that people who share Jesus with other people are brave. The true definition of boldness is not the absence of fear, but the presence of obedience. You and I, if we wait until we feel bold, will never speak of Jesus."

Kelley emphasized that witnessing can be "a demonstration of power. God is not into spiritual body building. He does not give us spiritual power to make us feel good or look good. He releases spiritual power when we follow His will.

"The Bible tells us the Holy Spirit comes into the lives of believers...and brings spiritual power and puts a witnessing muscle in the soul of the believer," he said. "But you and I will never know the power of that muscle if we don't use it.

"Being a witness is like being a glove on the hand of God. It is giving God your life and letting Him reveal Himself to others through your life and your mouth.

"Every believer a witness," Kelley insisted. "It's a message that must be built in our lives. The most critical question facing Arkansas Baptists is 'Where will you leave your glove? On the sideline?' Paul gave the glove of his life to be put on the hand of God's power. You give God your glove and God will change a world."

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Ministers' wives: Seek God's agenda

Millie Gill

Executive Assistant, Arkansas Baptist

NOTING THAT "a wise minister's wife will have a hearing heart, knowing who is God and who is not," Karla Worley told ministers' wives that in order to receive a hearing heart they first must fall on their faces in prayer, seeking God's perspective and vision.

Worley, a minister's wife, mother, writer and musician from Franklin, Tenn., spoke on the topic, "It's About Time... Straight Talk to Ministers' Wives Who Do Too Much," during the ministers' wives conference Nov. 3 at Park Hill Church in North Little Rock. "Rather than keeping a 'to do list' as you and I are prone to do," she noted, "we need to erase our lists and daily present to God a blank piece of paper saying, 'Lord, here is my life and I want you to do with it is what you want to do.'"

"When you do this, He will rearrange your calendar and you will not be playing to the world's audience but rather you will be following His agenda, becoming His vehicle for reaching people so they might behold Him and have eternal life."

Emphasizing the importance of doing those things God would have them do, Worley shared that in January of 1996 she developed severe chest pains, was rushed to a hospital and hooked to heart monitors only to later find out she was having an anxiety attack because of her trying to care for three children and her husband, serve as a Sunday School teacher, choir member, Woman's Missionary Union director and a Parent-Teachers Association volunteer, as well as doing her work as a writer and speaker.

She explained to the Arkansas Baptist wives that they also would soon suffer chest pains if they didn't learn to stop chasing after those things the world would have them do. "There is no reason for you to continually be doing the

Christian broad jump for the world," she said. "Be wise and listen to the voice of your shepherd, doing those things He would have you do. You don't have to measure up to Him because He loves you just as you are."

President Nancy Greer of Parkway Place Church in Little Rock moderated the conference. A breakfast hosted by Nita Moore of Little Rock preceded the meeting.



New ministers' wives officers are (left to right) 1999 retreat chairman Betty Williamson, secretary Janet Bushey and president Holly Elliff. Not pictured is vice president Jonya Davis.

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Religious educators examine perspectives for future

POSING THE QUESTION, "What is our common ground?" Rob Hewell, director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention's church music ministries department, addressed members of the Arkansas Baptist Religious Educators Association. Indeed, his audience was diverse with ministers of music, ministers of education and other church staff members convening for the Nov. 3 ABREA meeting. Hewell spoke on the theme, "Equal Footing: Perspectives in Ministry" and served as the facilitator for round-table discussions.

Hewell pointed out that although the settings, job descriptions and skills of participants varied, they had three common points of unity:

- Unity in Christ.
- Needs of the people in our church, community and world.

■ Missions to proclaim the gospel and build the family of God.

"When are we serving?" Hewell asked further. "The 21st century is already in the process of arriving - Jan. 1, 2000, is 788 days away.

"Where are we serving?" he continued. "We are in transition from a church society to an unchurched society.... We are living on a mission field."

Hewell shared three suggestions for an effective ministry perspective:

■ Become lifelong, multi-disciplinary learners. "Our learning needs to be web-like, learning smarter and applying what we are learning now," he explained. A personal learning network and ability to



New ABREA officers are second vice president Edward Ellis of Clinton, secretary/treasurer Peggy Pearson of Little Rock, president Barry Bates of Marion and first vice president Jeff Jones of Monticello.

focus on what needs to be learned is also essential, he pointed out.

■ Be intentional about transition. "We need to change our mindset and assumptions," he said. "Our plans tend to focus on insiders; maybe we should focus on people outside the structure."

■ Get a handle on how the past, present and future relate to one another. "The accelerating pace of change has pressed the past and future even closer together," Hewell emphasized. "That makes the present more critical than ever. The time to be thinking about where the church is going to be in five, 10 or 20 years is right now."

In other matters, the group voted to appoint a constitution and bylaws committee to design a vision statement and align it with the findings of a recent study committee. A new name for the organization also will be considered. The head of the ABREA study committee, Ron Selby, agreed to chair the new committee.

As a change of pace, the organization invited Christian comedian Chonda Pierce to headline the evening banquet and invited non-ABREA members to attend. Pierce, who has appeared on the Grand Ole Opry, Billy Graham crusades and other performances, put the audience at ease with her warm Southern style of humor with funny childhood memories of growing up as a preacher's daughter.



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College reports address trustee selection, growth

DURING THE REPORTS of Arkansas Baptists' two educational institutions, the president of Ouachita Baptist University cited the controversy surrounding OBU's trustee selection process while the president of Williams Baptist College focused on the college's recent growth.

During his Tuesday morning report, OBU president Ben Elrod read an excerpt from his report in the 1997 Book of Reports to clarify the university's stand on cooperation with the state convention. His comments came one day prior to a vote on proposed charter and bylaw changes to implement a reconciliation plan adopted by messengers a year ago.

"In November of 1996," he said, "Ouachita Baptist University renewed its commitment to provide Arkansas Baptists with quality higher education with a distinctively Christian emphasis. The messengers to the annual meeting of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention affirmed this commitment by choosing decisively to join the university in restoring the historical relationship between Ouachita and the churches of the convention."

Elrod reminded messengers that last year's messengers "adopted the recommendation...that provides for the formal adoption of the process by which Ouachita trustees were elected for over 80 years, a system involving trust and communication between Ouachita and the Arkansas Baptist State Convention."

Elrod explained that OBU trustees "elected to return to the trustee selection process authorized by the convention in Ouachita's original charter only to remove the university from the distasteful political struggle developing within Arkansas Baptist ranks."

Noting that the trustees had "expressed their desire to restore the method pre-

ferred since 1914 by both the leaders of the convention and Ouachita," he added that it is "my hope that the good will...will be sustained and that we will put this period of transition behind us."

Elrod urged messengers to "please consider voting to adopt the amendment which will be offered tomorrow, without change of any kind, vote this afternoon to accept the report of the Nominating Committee concerning the trustees of Ouachita without any change, and vote against any attempt to change or send back to committee the budget of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention."

Turning to the remainder of his report, Elrod introduced several young faculty and staff members, highlighting their service to churches and the university. "These are just a few of the outstanding people that I have helped bring to OBU," he said. "If you have questions about what Ouachita will look like 20 years from now, this is what it will look like."

Swaim reports growth

Williams president Jerol Swaim told messengers Tuesday evening that "it is exciting to be a part of the great work of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention."

"These are exciting days at the college," he reported, affirming that "we live in a time when there is an emphasis on growth and size."

"Many of you have given your lives serving in what may be called a small church in 1996," he said. "Fifty-three

percent of ABSC churches averaged 50 or less in Sunday School. Altogether they averaged 28 in Sunday School. Twenty-three percent, or 603 churches, averaged between 51 and 100 in Sunday School.

"This means that more than 1,000 of the 1,300 churches, or 76 percent of our churches, averaged less than 100," he explained. "Our world would say, 'What value are these churches?'"

"They baptized 5,000 last year," he answered. "I want to encourage the small. Regardless of size, the Lord can and does work in our midst."

Noting that "these are good times at the college," Swaim said, "We graduated our largest class, 71, in May. The Lord blessed us in an awesome way this fall as we saw our total enrollment increase by 25 percent...to a total of 705, with 542 enrolled at the campus in Walnut Ridge. Most significant to me is that the freshman class increased by over 20 percent."

Following the growth, Swaim noted the need "for additional campus housing," highlighting North Central Association for its part in the construction of a residence hall and announcing the construction of a new dormitory.

He also told of spiritual gains at the school, including a campus revival meeting and the continuing strength of the campus chapter of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and the commissioning of alumna Shannon Betts, the first missionary commissioned by the new North American Mission Board.

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Family Bible Courage to continue

By Randy Maxwell, pastor,
Mount Olive Church, Crossett

Basic passage:
Nehemiah 4

Focal passage:
Nehemiah 4:6-9, 15-23

Central truth:

When we serve the Lord, He will provide the courage for us to stay true to the task

The cowardly lion in "The Wizard of Oz" joined the band of travelers in order to get courage. Yet the fact of the matter was, he had courage all along. He just needed a cause he believed in badly enough to exhibit it. When Dorothy was in danger, the lion and the others rose to the occasion to rescue her.

Church leaders also need courage. Certainly our cause is great enough to demand the most courageous of efforts. Let us not forget that the enemy is still Satan, and at risk are souls destined to spend eternity either in heaven or hell. Our efforts in their behalf may be the deciding factor of whether they are lost or saved.

In a remarkably short time, the wall around Jerusalem was built up to half of its intended height with no serious gaps. This was accomplished so quickly partially because the lower part of the structure was easiest to build. But the most important reason for the progress is stated in verse 6: "The people worked with all their

heart." These Israelites who had returned home from exile refused to be intimidated, distracted or defeated.

As progress was made in the wall, suddenly rebuilding the wall was no longer such a foolish idea. As a result, their enemies began to plot to kill the workers. When the word leaked out to the Jews, they prayed asking God for help as they posted a guard to be ready for an attack at any time. But they did not stop building.

Nehemiah's ability as a leader became evident very clearly. He secured support and financial undergirding of the king and made his plans before appealing to others in Jerusalem. He efficiently organized them into groups working on different sections of the wall. Thus the work went on in spite of the threat of violence.

Likewise God has a work for each one of us today. I can assure you that the enemy will do everything he can to discourage us as well. With God's help we, too, can stay true to the task.

Life and Work I'd like an answer, please

By Marilyn Dusek, member,
First Church, Benton

Basic passage:
Psalm 66:16-20; Luke 1:5-17;
II Corinthians 12:7-10;
James 1:2-8

Focal passage:
Psalm 66:18-20; Luke 1:5-7, 13; II Corinthians 12:7-9;
James 1:2-7

Central truth:

Christians should trust God even when their prayers seem unanswered.

When I make phone calls, I frequently reach an answering machine or voice mail. The recorded voice informs me (very cheerfully) that the person I am attempting to reach "will be glad to call me back soon." I have learned that "soon" is a relative term; it may mean two hours, two days, or never. I am left puzzling the situation: Did the message get lost? Does the person choose not to talk to me? Is the person busy?

In talking to God, I have received some similar signals which have confused me. It is comforting to know that others, all through the Bible, have been in the very same predicament of understanding God's answer to their prayers.

Though God has lovingly answered his prayer, the psalmist is aware that God is capable of not answering (v. 18). We too must realize that when we decide something is more important to us than God, it becomes our object of worship. By this choice (sin), we cut ourselves off from God so that our prayers cannot be answered.

"Wait" is another answer from God that is hard to hear. Zechariah dared to pray for the impossible, a child after the childbearing years had passed. God answered in His own timing and gave Zechariah and Elizabeth more than they ever dreamed for themselves (v. 17).

Sometimes we don't hear God's answer because we have a preconceived idea of what it will be. Paul was not healed physically, but he did receive a spirit of inner wholeness. God gave him a gift that was sufficient in all things.

When God's answer seems unclear to us, James tells us to ask God for discernment and wisdom. This wisdom is not something we can achieve on our own; it is a gift from God.

"I'd like an answer, please, God," I said, but I did not hear Him say, "Wait." "I am hurting, God," I said, but I did not hear Him say, "Trust me and grow stronger." Years later, I heard His answer and thanked Him for an outcome that was better than any I could have imagined.

Explore the Bible Faithful to His promises

By Ken Shaddox, pastor,
First Church, Fordyce

Basic passage:
Genesis 21:1-25:18

Focal passage:
Genesis 21:1-7; 22:8-8, 15-18

Central truth:

The promises of God can be trusted despite times when our faith is tested.

Promises! We make them all the time. Sometimes we fulfill our promises and at other times we relinquish that which we have sincerely promised to God, ourselves or another. God has pledged much to His people throughout the ages. His promises are distinct in that He is faithful to do what He has said He would do.

In Genesis 21 we find the fulfillment of a promise that God made to Abraham and Sarah. Previously, God told Abraham, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah, your wife, will have a son" (Gen. 18:10). Childlessness in that day was viewed as a curse. Throughout her many years, Sarah had not been able to bear a child. In fact, Sarah's first reaction to the announcement that she would become a mother was one of laughter and disbelief. Yet, the promise of God was fulfilled as Sarah bore a son named Isaac (Gen. 21:4). We need to mark it down for life - God's word is sure.

Fulfilled promises are a source of great joy. Sarah understood that the birth of Isaac was a

miraculous event (Gen. 21:6-7). Her laughter was contagious. Where do you find your joy? Surely as God's people reflect upon the events and experiences of our lives, there is a certain place for rejoicing in what God has brought to fruition.

A time of testing once again came to Abraham in Genesis 22. A surprising request from the Lord concerning his son, Isaac, is presented in the opening verses of the chapter. Three simple imperatives found in verse 2 inform the reader of this request. "Take," "go" and "sacrifice him." Everything the Lord asked at this point seemed to go against the earlier promises that were made concerning Abraham being the father of a great nation and having countless descendants (Gen. 12:2-3; 15:4-5). Abraham's faith and trust in the promises of God were severely tested and yet as he traveled to Mount Moriah in obedience, the patriarch's faith was once again proven to be genuine. Your steadfast obedience to God is one way of expressing your love and devotion to Him. Trust His promises completely.

For sale — Children's chairs, \$3.00 each. Children's tables, \$8.00 each. Call 501-753-5108.

For sale — 27 green choir robes/beige stools. Excellent condition. Call First Baptist Church, Junction City, 870-924-4991.

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Seeking — Brush Creek Baptist Church is looking for a full-time music/youth minister. If you are interested or have a recommendation, call the church at 501-248-7213 or send resume to: Brush Creek Baptist Church, 1385 Brush Creek Rd., Springdale, AR 72762, ATTN: Howard Ferguson.

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Accepting resumes — The Pastor Search Committee of Colonial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, is accepting resumes at this time. Colonial is a neighborhood church in southeast Memphis with approximately 400 in Sunday School attendance. Mail resumes to: Colonial Baptist Church, 1503 Colonial Road, Memphis, TN 38117.

Seeking — Memorial Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri, is seeking a full-time minister of education. Qualifications include five years experience as a full-time minister of education and a masters of religious education. Resumes may be mailed to Dr. Bob Webb, Memorial Baptist Church, 1634 Paris Rd., Columbia, MO 65201.

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Missions: From Arkansas to Europe

ARKANSAS BAPTIST missions work in-state and overseas was the focus of back-to-back reports shared by the leadership of the European partnership and Arkansas Baptist State Convention missions department.

Partnership coordinator Harry Black told participants that the missions partnership between Arkansas Baptists and the European Baptist Convention means "our vision is greater than Arkansas as we globally attempt to accomplish the Great Commission."

Black said the partnership has resulted in more than 700 volunteer missionaries from Arkansas, working over a four-year period, "seeing 1,200 people coming to know Christ. We are seeing doors of opportunity open."

The partnership report was followed by

the state missions report, which highlighted the ministries of the Arkansas Baptist Brotherhood and state missions departments.

Noting that "the Father has entrusted us with abilities for what we are supposed to do," missions department director Jimmy Barrentine introduced department personnel and the ministries for which they are responsible. Focusing on gifts, each area leader held up a gift bag symbolizing gifts and talents each area has to give to Arkansas.

Emphasizing the need for added support of state missions through the Dixie Jackson Offering, Barrentine urged participants to give, noting that "it has nothing to do with supporting the denomination, but seeing lost people brought to Christ."

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Why is it so hard to talk about giving in the church today? Is it because the church has had no shortage of Elmer Gantry's – fraudulent "preachers" who fleeced the flock? Or perhaps some of us are plagued with the clenched fist, holding tightly to our possessions.

In this lesson, Malachi becomes the man of the hour. He was the prophet who gave God's word to His people when they were drifting away.

Malachi reminds his readers that the Lord is changeless in the midst of change. We can depend on Him. Indeed, if He were as changeable as we are, He might have wiped out His chosen people when they continued to turn away from Him.

Yet God cries out to His disobedient people, "Return to Me." To these people who turned with every whim, God promises, "Return to Me, and I will return to you." But the people weren't listening. They put on innocent faces and added, "What do you mean? Just what do you want us to do?" Yet they knew or should have known.

Rob God? The very idea seems unthinkable. How could anyone rob from God when He is all-powerful and all-knowing? Thus the Lord answered, "in tithes and offerings." As a result, the whole nation was under a curse. The curse brought a plague of locusts to devour the crops, while drought made the grapevines drop their fruit before it could mature and ripen.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Test me in this and see if I won't pour out so many blessings that you will not have room for it all." God's promise could easily be tested. If the people would act honestly with God, the next harvest would provide the proof. The "floodgates of Heaven" would pour forth enough rain to mature the grapes and other fruits. The harvest would be abundant, and the nine-tenths kept by the honest men would prove to be much more than the ten-tenths kept by robbers.

It does pay to serve God; it does pay to obey His Word; it does pay to do what is right.

What if the laws and rulers of the nation are in opposition to the rule of God? This issue is addressed in Acts as the congregation of believers prays. They began by acknowledging the greatness of God. They do not ask God to change their anti-Christian society, but they do petition God for boldness to speak and act on God's behalf despite the antagonism of their rulers.

Paul's words to Timothy inform him that it is not presumptuous to ask God to guide rulers to see with God's vision. Through God's eyes, the walls that divide people disappear and life becomes peaceful and respectful. (These verses do not tell me to pray just for the leaders for whom I voted.)

When I am asked to stand before a group to pray, what are the guidelines for leading in prayer? 1) I can acknowledge and thank God for His greatness and love. 2) I can ask for God's specific blessing for the group. 3) I can ask that we (and our leaders) see with God's vision.

of Rehoboth to dwell in Beersheba. A long time before, at this same place, an oath and a covenant was made between Abraham and Abimelech (21:23-34). Here in Beersheba the Lord spoke to Isaac once again. God first identified Himself by saying, "I am the God of your father Abraham." This designates the consistent nature and character of God. The same God who had guided Abraham was now confronting Isaac.

How did Isaac respond to this divine revelation? The Bible indicates something of Isaac's activities following this encounter with God. We find that the patriarch "built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord." Isaac's first response was one of worship. Our lives are lived best when we consciously remember that worship is essential. I believe it's significant that it was only after worship that Isaac then "pitched a tent" and "dug a well." What are your priorities in life? The specific order of worship, home and work, seen in this passage, serves as a fresh challenge to keep us from living aimlessly.

Family Bible Reward of the faithful

By Randy Maxwell, pastor,
Mount Olive Church, Crossett

Basic passage:

Malachi 2:17-3:18

Focal passage:

Malachi 3:6-18

Central truth:

God has promised tremendous blessings for those who will trust Him in their stewardship.

Life and Work You want me to lead in prayer?

By Marilyn Dusek, member,
First Church, Benton

Basic passage:

1 Kings 8:22-30; Acts 4:23-31;

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Focal passage:

1 Kings 8:22-24; Acts 4:23-30;

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Central truth:

God wants Christians to pray aloud in group situations.

Explore the Bible God's continued presence

By Ken Shedd, pastor,
First Church, Fordyce

Basic passage:

Genesis 25:19-26:35

Focal passage:

Genesis 26:1-6, 23-25

Central truth:

Isaac responded in trust and worship to God's faithfulness.

The child sat at the piano as 60 pairs of eyes stared at him. He began the musical piece that was so easy to play in the privacy of his home, but the joints in his fingers seemed frozen.

The Sunday School class member approached me in the hallway of the church and begged, "Please don't ever call on me to pray aloud in front of everyone." This adult knew how to pray privately for healing for his mother, for traveling safety on the weekend outing and for God's guidance about a new job opportunity. But he did not know how to pray in a group without stammering and hunting for the right words.

The prayer of King Solomon is an example for us as he prayed at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. Talking to God in front of the Hebrew people, Solomon declared his awareness 1) that God is great, 2) that God keeps His promises, and 3) that God loves His people. Solomon was a ruler who led his nation to come before God.

Isaac's life story is the focus of Genesis 26. A negative situation introduces this chapter. "Now there was a famine in the land" (Gen. 26:1). Famines were a constant danger in the ancient near east. Frequently, when famine would come, citizens of Canaan would flee to the land of Egypt. Abraham, Isaac's father, had journeyed to Egypt at one point in his life (Gen. 12:10). Yet Isaac did not go down into Egypt but stopped along the southern border of Canaan at Gerar. Here, Isaac would go no further.

As the narrative continues we come to understand it was at this time that God chose to renew His covenant and formally restate a blessing (Gen. 26:3). As God had been in covenant with Abraham, He now speaks to Isaac, "I will be with you and will bless you." The present day child of God is not without promise. The Lord's abiding presence serves to provide assurance and direction to the believer (Heb. 13:5b).

In verse 23 we are told that for some reason Isaac moved from the security and the comfort

