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Pastors of First Baptist Shelby

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Gene Watterson runs for Baptist presidency

By Joe DePriest
Star Staff Writer

Dr. Gene Watterson, pastor of Shelby's First Baptist Church for 20 years, will run for president of the North Carolina State Baptist Convention.

The election will be held next month in Greensboro.

Watterson is currently completing two consecutive terms as first vice president of the state convention. He has been an eloquent spokesman for the mainstream Baptist viewpoint during the ongoing controversy with fundamentalists within the denomination.

Commenting on that controversy, he said "Spiritual revival always brings healing, humility and wholeness. Political sagacity, no matter how well-intentioned, always brings

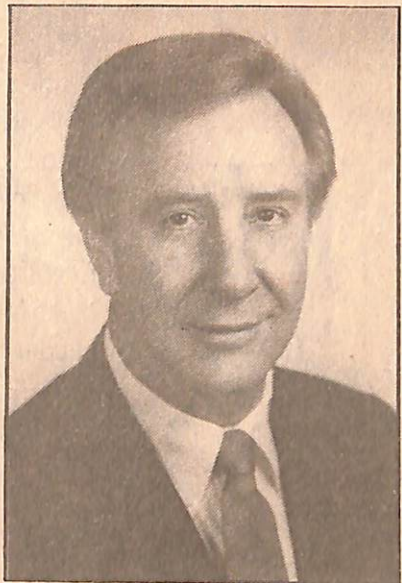
division. Our convention has labored with and been weakened by political controversy. It will be healed only with spiritual revival."

Watterson's announcement made public what had been private speculation for the past several months.

He said he reached the decision to allow his name to be nominated for the presidency "at the urging of friends all across the state of North Carolina and after much personal prayer, consultation with family, the deacons and membership of the First Baptist Church."

To date, only one other person has announced for the presidency — the Rev. Gene Ridley, pastor of Longleaf Baptist Church in Wilmington.

Seeking the office of first vice



Dr. Gene Watterson says he will run for the presidency of the North Carolina State Baptist Convention.

president are Dr. Randall Lolley, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Raleigh and George

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Watterson

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McCotter, a Baptist layman from Lillington.

Dr. Bruce Whitaker, a Cleveland County native and retired president of Chowan College in Murfreesboro, is running for second vice president. Bea McRea, a lay person from Fayetteville, is also seeking the post.

Watterson said he felt the office of president is a representative role and that the person filling the position should know and articulate Baptist convictions and principles.

A native of Birmingham, Ala., he is a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Before coming to Shelby, he was a pastor in Florida for 10 years and in Virginia for seven years.

Watterson has served in various denominational posts, both on the state and national levels. For eight years, he served as a member of the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. During that time, he

chaired the Program Budget, Audit, Bylaw and Institutions committees. In addition, he was vice chairman of the study committee on the cooperative program of the Southern Baptist Convention and a member of the Mission Service Corps Committee. Watterson has been a two-term member of the N.C. Baptist General Board and Executive Committee. During those terms, he was president of the Council on Christian Higher Education.

If elected president of the state convention, Watterson said he would emphasize unity among the factions by calling the total Baptist membership to a "serious and devout commitment" to Christ through personal and cooperative prayer.

"Prayer is the basis of unity," said Watterson, "and it is in the return to personal repentance and dependence on God that reconciliation of the various factions will occur."

Evangelism and church growth would be another emphasis under his leadership, said Watterson.