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Monday, November 11, 1991

SHELBY, NORTH CAROLINA

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Watterson era ends for Baptist Convention

From staff, wire reports

This week's meeting in Asheville of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina will revolve around alignments with the same two camps that have split the Southern Baptist leadership nationwide.

The two sides have struggled over scripture. Conservatives believe the Bible is without error and should be taken literally, while moderates believe it is subject to interpretation.

The Rev. Gene Watterson, pastor of Shelby's First Baptist Church and outgoing president of the state convention, will address convention delegates tonight. Although tonight is to be a "night of inspiration" for "messengers" — voting delegates from each Southern Bap-

tist church in North Carolina — many believe both conservative and moderate delegates will begin lobbying for or against proposed bylaw changes tonight.

Watterson, who will also this week be leaving the general board of the convention after 21 years, is a member of the moderate faction of the convention.

The moderates, whom their opponents label as theological liberals, are backing the Rev. E. Glen Holt of Fayetteville for president to succeed Watterson, Dorothy Allred of Gastonia for first vice president, and C. Edwin Vick of Raleigh for second vice president.

The conservatives, called fundamentalists by many moderates, are hoping Asheville pastor Billy H.

Cline will win the presidency. The Rev. Ted G. Stone of Durham is their candidate for first vice president. The Rev. Henry C. Cook Jr. of Statesville is running for second vice president.

"I feel there is more polarization and less of a pliable middle ground than ever before," said the Rev. Randall Lolley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Greensboro, the first vice president of the state convention and a moderate leader.

One of the first orders of business may show the slant the votes will take for the rest of the convention, which started today and ends Wednesday.

Delegates will be asked to change the bylaw regarding appointive powers of the president.

Key appointments are now made by the president and two vice presidents, with the approval of the 100-member General Board.

Conservatives are generally backing a change that would give the president the simple power to appoint people to committees and boards that control the convention and its institutions, which include Baptist Hospital, Meredith College, Mars Hill College and Gardner-Webb College.

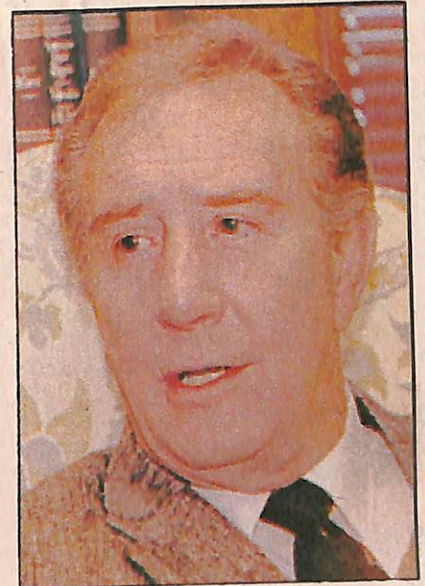
If that bylaw is changed, moderates believe, the gates will be opened to the kinds of purges that have taken place nationally. National moderate leaders and teachers have been forced out of positions of authority or fired. They have been replaced by

conservatives.

Several other probable motions also would support or oppose national actions taken by conservative leaders. The motions are expected to ask support for a newly formed moderate seminary; a seminary in Switzerland which the conservative leaders took money away from; and for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs which the conservatives also took money away from.

The Rev. Robert F. Sims, editor of the Conservative Carolina Baptist, said there's no predicting the outcome when South Baptists get together to make decisions.

"Things take on a life of their own, the convention does," he said.



Lisa Fratturo/The Shelby Star

The Rev. Gene Watterson of Shelby ends his term as president of the N.C. Baptist Convention.