CONNECT 2013: The 178th Annual Meeting of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware

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(these are BFCS-related excerpts from the *BaptistLife* article)

NEWARK, Del.—The 178th meeting of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, Nov. 10-12, was held at Ogletown Baptist Church. Messengers re-elected Robert Anderson, senior pastor of Colonial Baptist Church, as BCM/D president.

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Messengers approved a combined BCM/D and Skycroft budget of $8,088,057. **They voted to release Baptist Family & Children's Services as a BCM/D agency**, approved the intent to sell property in St. Mary's County and approved adding content to the Constitution and By-Laws regarding the convention's definition of marriage as delineated in Scripture and the convention's stance on the use of convention property for use in solemnizing any same-sex marriage. Messengers also approved a resolution to encourage churches to affirm that children are a gift from God, to protect them from abuse and to help those who have been abused.

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Tuesday Session—Business

Messengers voted to release Baptist Family and Children's Services (BFCS) from their status as a BCM/D agency and they voted to make the necessary change in the constitution, Article V11 Section 6. General Mission Board President Kerry Hinton said the agency has been working to get their individual 501 3C status for several years.

"We are a non-profit, and like most non-profits, we are suffering financially," Sandy Wehunt, BFCS board president, said. "When you have a parent organization, it is assumed the parent can provide all of the funding." Wehunt asked messengers to acknowledge the request and "join us to move ahead as God has called us to do."

Harold Phillips, senior pastor of Pleasant View Baptist Church, Port Deposit, expressed concerns, citing troubled times with families and the home. "Why do we want to relinquish this very valuable ministry we have had for 90 years?" Phillips asked how Bob Gerstmyer, former BFCS director would respond. Gerstmyer replied that the convention has given approximately $22,000 a year for the past 15 to 20 years. While a generous amount, that still represents less than one percent of the annual operations budget. "I have mixed feelings about this. I am a Maryland/Delaware convention advocate and have been since 1969 when I began my ministry. From that perspective, it's sad to see that happen. On the other hand, I understand why the agency is proceeding in this matter, and I would be supportive."

Wehunt said the agency will still remain Baptist and anticipates functioning similar to CentrePoint Counseling. "We see this as a door opening and an opportunity to serve God in a more effective way."

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Reports

Baptist Family & Children's Services' Interim Director Debbie Marini thanked churches for their support and shared her passion for families and the agency's commitment to grow as a Christian organization dealing with the attack on families. Marini said the work of BFCS is often like a fire company, running in to try to save people while everyone else is running out. "It's messy. It's dangerous. And sometimes the house burns down, and there's nothing

we can do. “We recognize change can raise questions. God is the same yesterday, today and forever,” Marini said.“ James 1:27 says to care for widows and orphans. We are building the kingdom of God,” she said.

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Brian Sandifer, senior pastor, Potomac Heights Baptist Church, reported for the **Resolution Committee**. Messengers approved a resolution on the church and the abuse of children. The resolution refers to Psalm 127:3-5, that it is clear in its affirmation that children are a gift from God, that Jesus demonstrated His love for children; that sexual abuse remains an ever-increasing criminal offense and tragically, that instances of sexual abuse have been perpetrated within Southern Baptist congregations and churches of other denominations and other Christian ministries.

The resolution declares that messengers stand with Jesus in loving and protecting children and urges all Maryland/Delaware Baptists to employ every preventative tool at their disposal, including background checks, to discourage the existence of environments in which the exploitation of children can take place; to remind Maryland/Delaware Baptists of their legal and moral responsibility to report any accusations of child abuse to authorities; to cooperate fully with law enforcement officials in exposing and bringing to justice all perpetrators, and to encourage pastors and church leaders to develop and implement sound policies and procedures to protect children.

The resolution also urges all Maryland/Delaware Baptist churches, associations and the convention and to pray for children who are victims of abuse, to stand for their protection, to support safe and healthy children’s ministries and communities and to provide supportive professional counseling and other resources that will assist in their recovery.