

Southern Baptists Kick Off Meeting With Family Rally

The Southern Baptist Convention opens today, following a pre-convention "Kingdom Family Rally" at the Phoenix Civic Plaza.

An SBC Council on Family Life outlined a strategy Monday night that chairman Tom Elliff claims will "virtually divorce-proof" families. Baptists attending the session signed pledge cards to kick off a campaign aimed at strengthening families and reducing divorce. A series of regional rallies begins this fall.

"Tonight is an historic moment for our Southern Baptist Convention," said Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., officially introducing "The Seven Pillars of a Kingdom Family," the latest SBC family statement.

Several speakers addressed the rally in person, on videotape and through remote satellite television hookups.

Dennis Rainey of Family Life Today called the family initiative "the most important battle Southern Baptists have waged since you struggled over the inerrancy of Scripture and you won the battle for the Bible. If we lose the family, we will lose the church."

"For the past generation, the past 40 years, Protestant evangelicals have allowed a cult to position itself as the 'family friendly' denomination in America," Rainey said, referring to the Mormon Church. "Ladies and gentlemen, that is wrong. You as a Southern Baptist, by taking this stand here tonight, are setting a course for this denomination that I predict will change the very courses of your churches for the generations that follow."

Focus on the Family founder James Dobson spoke to the rally via satellite. "I know of no other denomination that has devoted itself so energetically to the crisis in

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the home,” Dobson said. “We simply cannot let the institution of the family be destroyed by the postmodernism that swirls around us.”

SBC agency heads took turns to comment on each of the seven pillars, along with testimonies from individuals.

“America needs to hear from Southern Baptists, and they need to see Southern Baptists living in the family that honors God’s authority,” Morris Chapman said in introducing the first pillar on Honoring God’s Authority. Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, announced the family initiative three years ago and appointed Elliff, a former SBC president, to lead the family council.

Other pillars are Respecting Human Life, Exercising Moral Purity, Serving My Church, Using Time Wisely, Practicing Biblical Stewardship and Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ

“I want to encourage you to join me,” Elliff told church leaders and families attending the rally. “Roll up your sleeves, do what you can do to help rescue the families in your churches, this nation and to make a difference in your family in your home.”

Elliff earlier appeared to back off from a statement implying that biblical principles for a Christian marriage include that mothers should stay at home.

“Particular attention should be given to the specific roles established in the Scripture for the husband and the wife in the areas of provision and management,” Elliff wrote in the June issue of *Facts and Trends*. “The husband should be vocationally focused and able to provide for his family. The wife should not be burdened with the necessity of working outside the home for the marriage to proceed.”

The BCE’s Robert Parham said last week that statement confirmed what he said five years ago. Asked by a reporter in 1998 what a new family statement in the *Baptist Faith and Message* meant, Parham said Southern Baptist leaders “hope to make June Cleaver the biblical model for motherhood, despite numerous biblical

references to women who worked outside the home.”

In a story in Monday’s Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, however, Elliff said he wasn’t suggesting that wives should never work outside the home.

“What I was trying to say,” Elliff said, “is that too many times a prospective husband says, ‘I want you to marry me and support me until I figure out who I am.’”

Elliff added that while no Bible verse says wives must stay home and husbands go to work, he believes one parent needs to be home to take care of children. And in most cases, he said, it should be the wife.

“Generally speaking, there is a kind of nurture mothers give to children that is different from what their fathers can give,” he said. “Men and women are different. Thank God for that.”

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