Gaston preacher wanted a conservative

By Denise Johnson
Gazette Staff Reporter

The defeat of a conservative candidate for president of the North Carolina Baptist Convention could have severe repercussions nationally, retired Gastonia minister M.O. Owens said Wednesday.

State Baptists on Tuesday in Fayetteville re-elected moderate minister Leon Smith of Goldsboro as president of the convention.

Smith was challenged by the Rev. Joe Brown, pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist Church of Charlotte. Smith won with 61 percent of the vote to Brown’s 39 percent.

Currently, the national leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention is conservative, led by the Rev. Jerry Vines. But North Carolina is the second largest state in Southern Baptist membership, churches and donations to the convention.

Owens said the moderate bent of North Carolina’s organization may affect the national leadership.

“If churches don’t give to our unified budget, which includes home and foreign missions, colleges, seminaries and hospitals, it may affect them,” Owens said.

“It doesn’t take many dollars to make one of these missions hurt.”

At the convention, Owens, former pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church, pushed for a proposal declaring baptism by immersion as the sole acceptable method for Southern Baptists. His proposal was thrown out because of an error in parliamentary procedure, so no vote was taken on it.

“They ruled me out of order, which I think is a bunch of malarkey,” he said, charging liberals took the action to throw their weight around.

According to Owens, baptism by sprinkling is not reconcilable with the Baptist faith.

“Liberals don’t believe that the Bible is the word of God but is the word of man,” he said. “Immersion is a symbol for us. It represents the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Immersion is not the only issue that concerns Owens, but it is the most concrete.

The Rev. Ned Mathews, pastor of Parkwood Baptist, could not be reached for comment Wednesday. Mathews last year challenged Smith for presidency of the convention.
Minister is 94

Tumble thwarts birthday plans

BY SUE ANNE PRESSLEY
Gazette Staff Reporter

The Rev. M.O. Owens Sr. had a different setting for his Bible reading and study Sunday — a room at Gaston Memorial Hospital. He took the circumstances surrounding his arrival there in stride. "Feet slipped out from under me," he said with a rueful smile. "Hit my head on a bed."

That fall Thursday thwarted plans for his Friday birthday party. He was 94 years-old Jan. 13. That fact, too, fails to impress him. "Took me a long time to get here — 94 years," he said with a grin.

But those years have not diluted his sharpness, his memory or his belief in his principles. There is no rambunctious preaching in his manner, just gentle, scholarly firmness.

"I took care of myself," he said. "Didn't smoke, chew or drink. Didn't curse either."

Seventy years of his life were spent with a Bible in hand, preaching the Gospel. "I'm an orthodox Baptist," he said. "I preached all that was in the Bible. I read it all and I taught it all. There wasn't any of it you could overlook."

M.O. Owens Jr. followed in his father's footsteps; he is now the minister of Parkwood Baptist Church on Garrison Boulevard. The elder Owens lives with his son and daughter-in-law on Churchill Drive. "When M.O. Jr. said he wanted to preach, I told him it was the best thing in the world to do," said Owens, "but I also told him it was the hardest — a full-time job."

"Things have changed now," he said. "People give more attention to other people than they give God."

There are more things now to tempt people. Jesus said, 'Go,' meaning go and preach the Gospel. But people haven't gone as he said go. They've gone after power and economic wealth."

Over the years, Owens kept a finger on the pages of the Bible, but he also kept a finger on the pulse of the times. "Other than what happened to the church, World War I caused the most trouble," he said with a shake of the head. "It disturbed the whole world. After that, people began to covet and develop power. We haven't been at peace since — don't know if we ever will be."

"There's a tension in the times," he said. "The world will destroy itself, I guess. People keep yielding to selfish sins. They forget that God always forgives us if we confess our sins."

He paused a minute, gathering his strength. "I always tried to do right. I'll go to heaven soon, I reckon."

Gastonia Gazette
Goldsboro: News-Argus
Greensboro Daily News

JAN 16 1978