

File: Church Baptist

FIRST BAPTIST

CHURCH of ATLANTA

First Baptist Of Atlanta To Move To North DeKalb

By LISA TELLS

Dr. Fred Powell, head of the relocation project for the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, said the vote to move the church to north DeKalb was passed with "overwhelming acceptance" by the 11,000-member congregation.

The 140-year-old church, which has been located in Atlanta's Midtown since 1930, has been searching for a new site since March. The move is because of a lack of space, said Dr. Powell.

"Ninety-nine percent of the reason is because of it (lack of space)," he said. "Plus, we are situated south of our congregation. Eighty-two percent of our congregation lives in the northern quadrant."

Dr. Powell said several interested buyers have looked into purchasing the church's property at 754 Peachtree St., all of which he

said were "promising." The church's 17 acres, estimated at \$60 million, is listed with Portman-Barry Investments, Inc. First Baptist officials hope to sell 4.5 acres of the property within three years, enabling them to pay off the \$20 million loan.

Dr. Powell said the move will be initiated and completed within three to five years. Church officials are expected to take out a \$20 million bank loan to purchase 50 acres owned by Avon Products, Inc. located on North Peachtree Road off of I-285. Dr. Powell said Avon will lease back the property and will use it for up to three years.

Dr. Powell said the church's move has "no implications" for the city of Atlanta.

"We'll still be First Baptist of Atlanta, no matter where we go," he said.

Members OK First Baptist's Move to Suburbs

By Gustav Niebuhr
And Gayle White
Staff Writers

Members of First Baptist Church voted overwhelmingly on Sunday night to move Georgia's largest Baptist church from Midtown to a site in northern DeKalb County.

Encouraging a vote in favor of purchasing the DeKalb site, the church's senior minister, the Rev. Charles Stanley, told the congregation Sunday morning. "It's not just to buy property, it's to learn to be obedient to God." He added: "Wise men will obey him, foolish people will do their own thing."

The vote gives First Baptist officials authority to take out a \$20 million bank loan to acquire a 50-acre tract in a mixed commercial-residential area just off I-285 at North Peachtree Road in Dunwoody. The property is owned by Avon Products Inc., a New York-based cosmetics firm that maintains its regional office and distribution site there.

In presentations at the two Sunday morning services, the Rev. Stanley said the land is valued at \$22.5 million, but Avon would sell the tract for \$20 million. In effect, he said, that means the church would get \$2.5 million worth of land free.

As part of the sale, the Rev. Stanley said, Avon would sign a three-year lease with First Baptist. This would require the company to pay rent equal to interest on the loan, as well as paying the loan closing costs, property insurance and maintenance costs, he said.

During that three-year period, First Baptist would seek out a buyer for 4.5 acres of its 17-acre Midtown property. Money from that sale would pay off the \$20 million bank loan for the Avon land, allowing the church to take full possession of the land debt-free.

"We are acquiring tomorrow's property at today's price. We are selling today's property at tomor-

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row's price. This is the work of God," the Rev. Stanley said.

The Rev. Stanley said during a question-and-answer session Sunday night that the church is prepared to sell all of its Midtown property at any time.

"We have people negotiating to buy this property," he said. "The reason we haven't sold it is that we want the highest possible value."

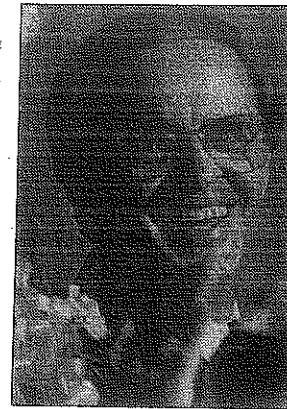
He declined to put a price tag on the land, but said an estimate of \$60 million made by real estate authorities several months ago is "from the newspaper. We think we can do better than that."

After the question-and-answer session at the evening service, which lasted more than an hour, the Rev. Stanley called for a vote. Those favoring the site were asked to stand. Only a few scattered visitors, who were not permitted to vote, remained seated. When the pastor asked those opposed to raise their hands, no hands were visible.

The Rev. Stanley then asked the congregation to close the service by singing a hymn that begins, "To God be the glory, great things he hath done."

Questions and suggestions during the session ranged from the details of the financial arrangements to the design and carpet color of the new sanctuary.

Responding to questions, the Rev. Stanley assured First Baptist members that transportation needs of downtown college students and



The Rev. Charles Stanley told members of First Baptist Church plans to move the church were 'the work of God.'

the elderly would be kept in mind, and church officials pointed out a MARTA bus runs from the Doraville station to the new site. The church will also consider its own shuttle service, officials said.

First Baptist has been seeking a new site since March, when the 11,000-member congregation, acting at the Rev. Stanley's request, granted a special Relocation Committee the authority to find the church new land in the suburbs. Since 1930, the church has been housed in an imposing, traditional brick structure at 754 Peachtree St. N.E.

In a related matter, the Rev. Stanley also said the committee, headed by senior associate pastor, the Rev. Fred Powell, is negotiating

with Avon to purchase an additional 32-acre tract that abuts the western boundary of the 50-acre parcel.

The Rev. Stanley declined to provide details of the negotiations, saying they were at a "very sensitive stage." However, he did say the 32-acre tract could be used for a future Bible college, seminary, Christian school or retirement home. In Georgia Baptist circles, there has long been speculation that the Rev. Stanley would like to found a college or seminary that would train conservative students for the ministry.

The Rev. Stanley confirmed Sunday night church officials are considering a school, a Bible college or a seminary, but said no decision has been made.

He told the congregation Sunday night if the church fails to obtain the additional acreage, the original Avon parcel will meet the church's needs.

"If we miss the second site, we just miss it," he said. "But that's something for you to pray diligently about over the next few weeks, and I mean diligent prayer."

During both morning services, the Rev. Stanley devoted his normal half-hour sermon time to narrating a sophisticated slide presentation on the Avon property. Standing in a spotlight in the darkened sanctuary, the Rev. Stanley described the qualities of the land, discussed architects' renderings of a new church building, and even detailed driving times to the site — clocked at 20 minutes apiece — from various metro Atlanta neighborhoods.