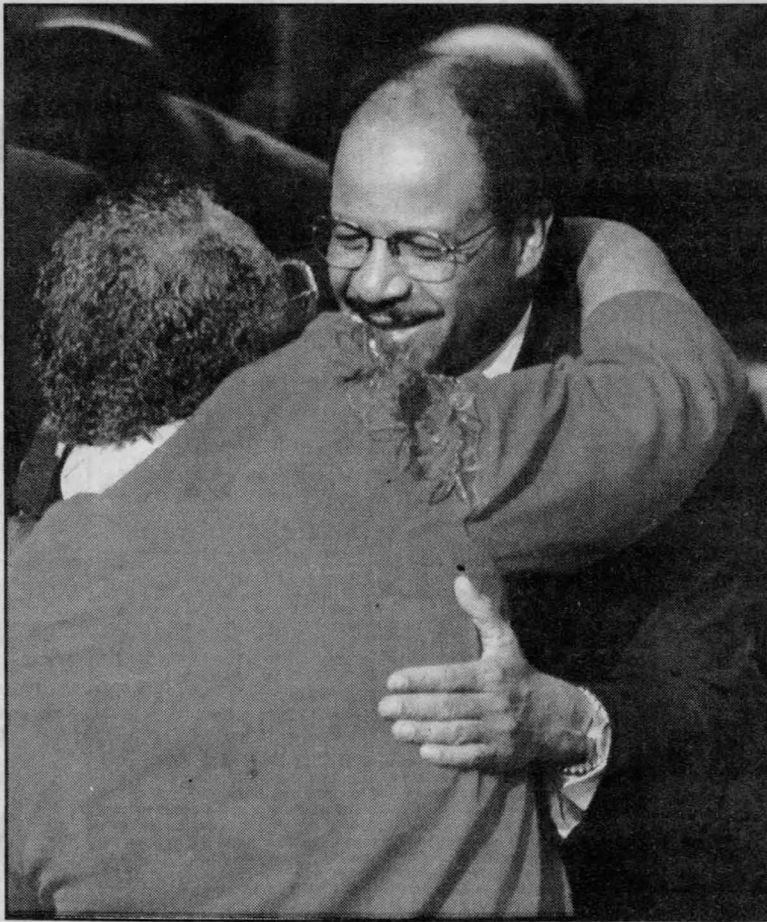


## NEWS



Associated Press

**Baptist leader's resignation demanded**

The Rev. Henry J. Lyons hugs a woman during the annual meeting of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc. in Denver. Hours after members of the nation's largest black church backed its embattled president in a surprise vote Tuesday, 80 prominent pastors demanded that Lyons resign immediately or be expelled from office for allegedly mishandling church funds.

Ny 9/2/97 X

# Baptists support embattled chief; foes want ouster

DENVER (AP) — Leaders of the nation's largest black church have forgiven their beleaguered president, rejecting efforts to force the Rev. Henry Lyons to resign and dropping an investigation into allegations he spent church funds on luxury items for a female aide.

Late Monday, on the eve of the church's annual meeting, the 200-member board of directors and 1,000 church leaders approved a motion to drop "the whole matter," said the Rev. E.V. Hill, head of the 18-member Ethics Commission that investigated claims against Lyons.

There were no dissenting votes.

Earlier, amid cheers and scattered boos, the board said it had found no misappropriation of church funds or any other reason for the pastor from St. Petersburg, Fla., to step down as the head of the 8.5-million member National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.

"We had what we believe was a moving of God," Hill said after the votes. "He asked for forgiveness. That's why we're called Christians. We're great forgivers."

Still, the commission recommended that the church hire a full-time executive officer and not allow new bank accounts without approval from its executive board.

And Lyons' opponents still hope to oust him during the meeting.

The Rev. John Barfield of Philipian Baptist Church in Philadelphia, a spokesman for the 350-church Coalition for a Better Convention, promised a "heated floor fight" not only to remove Lyons, but to appoint a Reform Commission for the denomination.

"I'm just about numb. Anger happened a long time ago," Barfield said. "I just can't believe our convention is faced with this kind of cloud hanging over it."

The mechanism for overriding the directors is unclear.

Stressing a theme of forgiveness in song and sermon at the opening of the board's closed-door meeting, one pastor evoked media harassment of Princess Diana in calling for support of Lyons.

"Don't let us destroy him. Don't let us kill him," the pastor said in a prayer that could be heard but not seen by reporters. "Don't let white America tell us how to do your will."

The board met to consider allegations that Lyons used church money to buy expensive jewelry, a Mercedes-Benz and a \$700,000 home with a female church employee. The board had already given Lyons a vote of confidence, in July.

Lyons, 55, was elected three years ago on a reform slate.

## Baptist leader gets prison term

LARGO, Fla. (AP) — The Rev. Henry Lyons sobbed and begged for mercy at his sentencing for racketeering and theft, and got absolutely nowhere.

W  
S  
4/1/0  
"It's time to pay the piper, Dr. Lyons," Circuit Judge Susan Schaeffer said Wednesday before sentencing the man who once headed one of the nation's most influential black denominations to 5½ years in prison. The judge also ordered him to pay nearly \$2.5 million in restitution.

Lyons, the former president of the National Baptist Convention USA, was led from the Pinellas County courtroom to immediately begin serving his prison term.

## Former church head Lyons ordered to pay \$5.2 million

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — The Rev. Henry Lyons, once the powerful leader of one of the nation's largest black church groups, was ordered to pay \$5.2 million in restitution today for bank fraud and tax-evasion.

The 57-year-old minister, already serving 5½ years in state prison for bilking companies and stealing from charities, also was sentenced to four years and three months. But the federal sentence will be served concurrently with the state sentence, U.S. District Judge Henry Lee Adams Jr. said.

"I do ask for mercy today," Lyons told the judge before sentencing. "I'm 57. I don't have a lot of time to right all the wrong I have done. Time is not on my side. I need to do at least 100 good deeds for every bad deed."

Lyons pleaded guilty March 17 to five counts growing out of his business dealings as head of the Baptist group.

He admitted failing to pay taxes on \$1.3 million in income, defrauding a bank and making false statements to a financial institution and to federal housing officials. In return, federal prosecutors dropped 49 other charges, including extortion, conspiracy and money laundering.

Lyons was sentenced in state court after he was convicted in February of racketeering and grand theft for bilking nearly \$4 million from corporations seeking business with the convention and stealing nearly \$250,000 donated by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith for burned black churches in the South.

Lyons said he agonizes "over my handling of ADL, the crime that has been committed there. That simply won't go away. It tugs at me."

Lyons began his state sentence April 1 at Lowell Correctional Institution about nine miles north of Ocala.

Salem's History

October 1, 1975 -

Historic Preservation of Salem Bapt. Church  
@ 21st + Park Sts.

2nd Baptist Church on East Clark between  
5<sup>th</sup> + 6<sup>th</sup> - Rev. M.R. Crown, Pastor.

