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SBC Cooperative Program gifts  
down for Dec.; designated up

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program gifts for the month of December were down from a year ago, but designated gifts continued to climb, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee.

For December 1995, CP gifts totaled \$11,292,845 compared to the same month in 1994 of \$12,218,783, a difference of \$925,938 or 7.58 percent. Executive Committee finance officials said the drop likely was due to delays in receiving gifts from state conventions during the holidays.

For the year-to-date, CP first quarter gifts totaled \$32,974,184 compared to the same period a year ago of \$34,494,918, a difference of \$1,520,733 or 4.41 percent. The SBC fiscal year is October through September.

Designated gifts continued to climb as December gifts totaled \$3,510,249 compared to \$3,309,045, for an increase of \$201,204 or 6.08 percent. For the year-to-date, designated gifts total \$8,343,108 compared to last year of \$7,067,706, an increase of \$1,275,401 or 18.05 percent.

For the SBC Cooperative Program Allocation Budget, which requires \$11,802,427 each month, the gifts for December were 4.32 percent below budget (\$509,581) and for the year-to-date, the total of \$32,974,184 is 6.87 percent below the required budget of \$35,407,281.

The SBC Cooperative Program total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 1995-96 Program Allocation Budget.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

**Former Clemson president  
to lead Mars Hill College**

MARS HILL, N.C. (BP)--A. Max Lennon, 55, former president of Clemson University, has been elected president of Mars Hill College by the school's trustees, effective March 1, 1996.

Lennon, currently president and chief executive officer of Eastern Foods, Inc., in Atlanta, was elected during a special trustee meeting Dec. 20. He will succeed Fred B. Bentley, who has held the post 30 years. The new president will be only the college's fourth in the last 100 years.

The 1,050-student college, based in Mars Hill, N.C., is affiliated with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

A 1960 graduate of Mars Hill Junior College, Lennon has many personal ties to the college. His mother and all seven of his siblings -- three older brothers and four older sisters -- attended the school. Several nieces and nephews also attended.

He met his wife, Ruth Ann, a Mars Hill native, during his first semester at the college. She also attended the college. Ruth Ann is the great-granddaughter of Edward Carter, who donated the land on which the college was founded in 1856 and served on the original board of trustees.

"My mom attended Mars Hill College in 1918 and was so impressed with her experience that it was a requirement for all her children to attend the college, and we all did," Lennon said. "My mom used to pray every day that one of her children would be called into full-time Christian work. Receiving this call to serve Mars Hill College is perhaps the answer to her prayer. That, coupled with my Mars Hill College experience, meeting my wife there and our efforts to seek God's will in our lives, are ample reasons to return to the college. This is a wonderful opportunity to provide leadership for this college and boldly proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ."

Lennon was president of Clemson University from 1986-94. Previously he was vice president for agricultural administration and executive dean at Ohio State University; dean of the college of agriculture at the University of Missouri; and a faculty member and associate dean at Texas Tech University's college of agricultural sciences.

In addition to his Mars Hill A.A. degree, Lennon's extensive educational background includes B.S. and Ph.D. degrees from North Carolina State University.

The new president also has a solid business background. After completing his undergraduate education, he owned and operated a diversified crop and livestock farm in his hometown of Evergreen, N.C. Early in his professional career, he worked for Central Soya Company in Indiana as director of swine feeds research. And he is currently president of Eastern Foods, Inc., which markets sauces and dressings under the brand "Naturally Fresh."

The new president is a member of First Baptist Church, Peachtree City, Ga., where he is a Sunday school teacher and member of the strategic planning committee.

"Max Lennon is a giant of a man who brings vision, experience and new energy to Mars Hill College," said Bentley, who will become president emeritus and will continue his work at the college in a fund-raising capacity through June 1997. "This is the right man to take the college into the 21st century."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Mars Hill College's public relations office, (704) 689-1298.

**Families seek moral absolutes  
through church-wide study**

**By Charles Willis**

HENDERSONVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Making morally right decisions today involves a world of too much gray and too little black and white, a Southern Baptist wife and mother of three children lamented recently.

But Tammy Hayes has been encouraged by the commitment her church, First Baptist of Hendersonville, Tenn., has made to lay a strong foundation of moral absolutes for all generations of the congregation.

This fall approximately 1,700 people from first grade through senior adults participated in a study of "Right from Wrong," a series of resources for adults, youth and children developed by lecturer and author Josh McDowell and published by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

The resources were generated from a study by McDowell revealing many people who have made professions of faith and personal commitments to Jesus Christ are participating in immoral and illegal behavior.

He demonstrated the need for teaching the biblical, moral absolutes for decision-making during an event to begin the study at the Hendersonville church.

"Is it wrong to lie?" McDowell asked a young person in the congregation.

"Yes," she replied.

"Why?" he countered.

"I don't know," she confessed.

The church's minister to adults, Brad Thompson, said the entire church staff was impressed by the message of McDowell's book on the topic, and pastor Glenn Weekley had decided to preach a sermon series on the Ten Commandments. Scheduling the study to go along with the sermons seemed a good choice.

"The case for our inability to make moral decisions is very compelling," Thompson said. "We wanted as a church to help the next generation and ourselves to make moral decisions."

Thompson said he likes McDowell's point that right moral choices often have negative short-term consequences, but people should take the long view rather than looking for an easy fix.

"When you teach children, high schoolers, youth and adults to make right choices, down the road it will make your church and your community stronger," Thompson said.

While children, youth and their parents readily embraced the study, he observed, senior adults were "a little resistant." But he said they determined, after trying the materials, to stretch the study to last a full quarter. After all, he said, senior adults are role models and influencers, too.

Ray Bowles, one of the senior adults, agreed he had some initial concerns, since in today's mobile society not all grandparents see their grandchildren often. But he later concluded the study is "an opportunity to take those principles we grew up with and have reinforced for us the importance of telling the plain old truth."

"Sometimes our beliefs have eroded and been watered down," he continued. "It has been refreshing to have them brought back to me again. It gives us something transferable and concrete."

The Hayes family -- Tammy, Jonathan, and their sons Craft, 10, Chas, 8, and Caleb, 5 -- has found the study of "Right from Wrong" the center of discussions around the Sunday dinner table and at other times throughout the week.

Craft said the study has helped him remember to make right choices "all through the week," while younger brother Chas confessed he has become "more honest at school" since beginning the study. Caleb, the youngest, seems to have focused most on God's protection and the need to think about what he says to his friends.

Calling the materials "a godsend," Tammy Hayes said she sees "so many people who honestly don't know right from wrong, and they are sitting in the pews of our churches."

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"We are role models," she said of the people who attend First Baptist Church. "Teachers, friends and parents of their friends influence our children."

Jonathan Hayes, who has taught an adult class the "Right from Wrong" curriculum, said he sees the study as a means "to pass our values to the next generation.

"You are sensitized to some things you do," he continued. "We rationalize a lot in our lives from how we prepare our income taxes to what to do when we've been given too much change at a store.

"The best thing for our family is that we're talking about it. The tough part for most adults is to submit to God."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press and is posted in the SBCNet News Room. A sidebar document, R-W.TXT, with statistics from McDowell's book also is posted in the SBCNet News Room.

#### ANALYSIS

Improper deacon ministry  
may stunt church growth

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press  
1/2/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--In more than a handful of Baptist churches, the "board of deacons" seems to rule the roost at business meetings -- no longer waiting tables, instead exercising great authority in the midst of congregational rule.

"What this means is that all the recommendations of the church have to come back through (the deacons) before they go to the congregation," says Robert Sheffield, deacon ministry consultant at the Baptist Sunday School Board. "They basically are the financial managers of the church. Out of 40,000 churches, it's hard to know how many are still operating like that, but there are thousands."

Ironically, this managerial model insures the church will not grow, says Gary L. McIntosh, an associate professor at the Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, Calif. Rather than developing a "culture of service" and meeting the needs of people, the church's strategies become "technical, intellectual, and sterile: they do not appeal to the heart of the issue -- sacrificial service," McIntosh writes in his book, "The Exodus Principle," published by the BSSB's Broadman & Holman publishing arm in 1995.

On the other hand, McIntosh notes the deacon model found in Acts 6 is based on service. When these seven original deacons accepted their ministry, four church goals were met: Conflict was settled, the apostles were freed to focus on prayer and preaching, those in need were served and many were saved (Acts 6:7).

And the core of church growth is spiritual, not technical, says McIntosh. "All experience shows that even a superbly organized and planned ministry will eventually fail without the active care, love and service of people toward others."

Which is why there is no such thing as a rapidly growing congregation that is solely committee-led or deacon-led, says Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina and for 19 years a local church pastor. "When we made a move in our churches from the servanthood motif of the deacon to the concept of a board, we made a move that was in total violation of the New Testament principle," Patterson says.

Adds William Bell Jr., dean of Dallas Baptist University's college of Christian faith: "There is absolutely nothing in the New Testament to indicate that the deacons were ever to have anything other than a servant capacity. The deacons were to serve the elders or pastors. They were to have no ruling function whatsoever."

Patterson cites deacon bodies at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., and Second Baptist Church, Houston, as evidence that a New Testament perspective of deacons can be an asset, not a problem.

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"These deacons lead in spiritual ministries, particularly in evangelism. They have virtually nothing to do with the business of the church, except as they function as individual church members," Patterson explains.

Edmond Whittaker, deacon chairman at First Baptist, Jacksonville, says, "Deacons (in this church) are not nominated on the basis of their being prime businessmen; they are nominated based on their spiritual walk. We only meet when we have something to meet for. And when we do, we get down on our knees and pray."

The selection of deacons for their business acumen or popularity is a "perversion" of the early church's model, DBU's Bell says. "It is an honor to be a deacon ... but it isn't something which is given to all worthy and mature Christians just in recognition of their service. We don't have honorary Sunday school teachers. We don't have honorary janitors. We don't have honorary choir members.

"If a need exists, then let's appoint some people to meet it; if a need doesn't exist, then don't appoint them. I am thoroughly convinced that most Baptist churches have way too many deacons," Bell says.

The Sunday School Board's Sheffield suggests the Southern Baptist "board of deacons" is a tradition developed outside of scriptural truth. "We as Southern Baptists sometimes lapse into our traditions without checking them by Scripture. The Scriptures are to inform our traditions, not our traditions interpreting Scripture for us."

Patterson concurs, "What may have happened in Baptist life is that we went to seed on concepts such as democracy, church autonomy, priesthood of the believers - - all of which are concepts that are absolutely biblical. I fear that what we have created in our Baptist churches is a fierce individualism that is so autonomous that it is autonomous from the Holy Spirit."

James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Snellville, Ga., says the drift to a corporate-style "board of deacons" can be traced to a lack of biblical expository teaching in the church. "Many in the church have gotten away from New Testament concerns such as evangelism. There has been a compromise with culture and a de-emphasis of biblical holiness."

The current state of deacon affairs is a clear sign that "we have too much of the world in the church and not enough of the church in the world," Merritt claims.

Congregation members have to step up to the plate and be open to accept more responsibilities in the church, says Sheffield. He notes this will free the deacons from being the church's clearinghouse for business matters.

"We all are actually servants of the Lord to and through the church, not servants of the church first. If we don't get the vertical relationship straight, we're gonna have trouble with the horizontal relationships," he says.

There is a way for errant deacons to get back on track, according to Bell. "Instead of having retreats, trying to figure out what exactly they're supposed to be doing -- they really ought to just go to the pastor and say, 'How can we help?'"

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#### ANALYSIS

Shift in deacons' role  
took place last century

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press  
1/2/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The late Herschel Hobbs, in "What Baptists Believe," wrote, "The original function of the deacons was to 'serve tables' (Acts 6:2). It was to relieve the apostles from this work that they might give themselves 'continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word' (Acts 6.4)."

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Hobbs added, "There is no specific Scripture passage in which the present-day authoritative function is found . . . ."

Baptist historian and pastor Thomas Armitage, in his two-volume work, "A History of the Baptists," wrote the "calling of the seven" in Acts 6 was not to an official ecclesiastical order. "In modern parlance they were 'laymen' before their election and they remained so after. . . . One set of ministers was not created to help another to do the same work, but duties that were not ministerial or pastoral were separated from those that were and given into other hands."

Armitage cited Paul and Barnabas' delivery of the gift to the "elders" (not the deacons) among the Jerusalem believers as evidence that "even in matters relating to the relief of the poor, (deacons) were not supreme." Armitage also noted in Paul's letter to Titus, written around 66 A.D., he makes no mention of the deacons, but says much to the "elders."

It was about 1,800 years later, when J.M. Pendleton released his "Church Manual" (1867), that the role of deacons in Southern Baptist life apparently changed dramatically. Pendleton called for deacons to be heavily involved in the business affairs of the church.

Yet Pendleton, leader of the Landmark Movement, was only looking back to "The Deaconship," authored by R.B.C. Howell in 1846. Howell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., wrote deacons were to serve as "the financial officers of the church." This may be first mention in Baptist history of deacons as "a board of officers, or the executive board of the church, for her temporal department."

"The deacons, therefore, were originally not preachers, nor merely conservators for the poor, but had the administration of the property of the church, which they conducted, as the divinely authorized agents . . . ," Howell wrote.

Moving into the modern era, Southern Baptists were taught the model for deacons was an executive board, says Robert Sheffield, deacon ministry consultant at the Baptist Sunday School Board. He cites P.E. Burrough's book, "Honoring the Deaconship," used in training unions across the Southern Baptist Convention from the 1920s through the 1950s, as a study book for educating new deacons. The book teaches deacons must share with the pastor "some measure of authority."

The 1929 BSSB publication further states: "In the division of labor and the assignment of a place to the deacon, a fairly clear line was drawn as to the relation of the deacon to the church. . . . On one side is the deacon, standing next to the pastor, and entrusted with the care of the material interests of the church. . . . He is to direct and safeguard the financial side of its ministry."

Hobbs, in an article last year in the Texas Baptist Standard, said, "Unfortunately we have come to use the term 'Board of Deacons.' It is a short step from that to the idea that this group is a 'Board of Directors,' at times acting without the leadership of the bishop or the authority of the congregation."

He insisted such an outcome would be damaging to the spirit and cooperative work of any church body. "If a church chooses to follow such a pattern, it should recognize that it is by tradition -- not by New Testament authority," Hobbs said.

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