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Texas, N.C., Utah-Idaho lead Easter offering categories By David Winfrey Baptist Press 2/5/96

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Texas, North Carolina and Utah-Idaho lead three categories of state convention giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, according to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's planning and finance section.  
Texas Baptists gave the most to the annual home missions offering with \$5,581,016. North Carolina (\$4.3 million), Georgia (\$3.6 million), Alabama (\$3.5 million) and Tennessee (\$2.8 million) round out the top five in that category.  
North Carolina had the largest dollar increase in giving during 1995 compared to the previous year. North Carolina Baptists gave nearly \$230,000 more than in 1994. Rounding out the top five in that category were Tennessee (up \$211,605), Georgia (up \$202,626), Mississippi (up \$167,915) and Alabama (up \$137,560).  
Utah-Idaho Baptists' contribution of \$47,795 was a 29 percent increase, the greatest percentage increase from 1994 to 1995. State conventions rounding out the top five in that category were New England (up 13 percent), Northwest (12 percent), Indiana (10 percent) and Iowa (9 percent).  
Nationally a record \$38.9 million was contributed to the offering, which supports Southern Baptist missionaries throughout America and its territories. The offering was up 4.6 percent from 1994 contributions.

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This computer wouldn't take yes for an answer Baptist Press 2/5/96

SPRINGFIELD, S.C. (BP)--The computer just didn't want to take yes for an answer.  
First Baptist Church, Springfield, S.C., averages 119 in Sunday school; its total budget is \$115,000. But its members contributed \$19,000 to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.  
"Our church secretary filled out the uniform church profile this year by computer disk," said pastor Ken Creekmore. "When she typed in the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering amount, the disk kept questioning the accuracy of the amount because it was out of line for a church our size."

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It was not the first time the congregation had surpassed the Lottie Moon goal, which in 1995 was \$12,000 to support the work of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board

Creekmore said the church makes use of various promotional techniques to motivate its people, but "the truth is, the best idea we have is our belief that it is just a good idea to support foreign missions."

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Cal Guy warns: Church faces  
crossroads in reaching world

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press  
2/5/96

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Calling for a new paradigm in missions giving, Cal Guy said the evangelical church is at a crossroads in reaching the world for Christ.

"There has never been a time in the history of the world when reports of people saved and congregations established were as thick and furious and encouraging as they are now," said Guy, visiting professor of missions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, at the Wake Forest, N.C., campus Jan. 31.

Christians must redouble their efforts to be about the Father's business at this critical juncture, Guy said, adding, "I have no right to simply enjoy God's grace without sharing it."

But, Guy said, "Our giving is not keeping up with our volunteering." Noting there are upwards of 3,000 candidates in the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board pipeline prepared to go around the world in the name of Christ, he stated: "Unless giving increases, they're not all going to be able to go."

He estimated that within the next five years there will be more missionaries from non-English speaking countries than from the United States. "These people seem to be more obedient than we are," he added.

Guy, who taught missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, 36 years, denied his statements were simply an insincere cheerleader's "rah-rah," noting, "God is at work in a brand new way."

Yet Guy said he is not confident evangelicals in the United States are up to the task. "I have such a fear that we will throw it away because we are going to keep on doing business as usual," said Guy, who many suggest has taught more missionaries than anyone else in Baptist life during his tenure at Southwestern.

Guy told the Southeastern audience while Southern Baptist foreign missions efforts are being guided by "the best leadership team" the Foreign Mission Board has ever had, a lack of commitment to missions giving within the church threatens to betray the current opportunity to reach the world for Christ.

"Slogans don't win the world; sacrifice does," Guy said, suggesting the church needs sacrificial giving, not catchy phrases. "We've had all the sloganeering we need; it's time to either put up or shut up."

Guy disputed the mind-set that says a church should give a maximum of 10 percent of its budget to missions, calling the assertion "garbage."

"I don't think there's a dime's worth of Bible truth in that at all," he continued. "The dollar that goes into the local church's collection plate does not belong to that church, those deacons or that pastor -- that's God's dollar."

For instance, he said he and his late wife, Terry, gave an amount equal to what the couple spent on their family's Christmas gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions each year.

As pastor of a rural Texas church for 19 years, Guy said he led the church to give 45 to 55 percent of its budget to mission causes. Yet he added as the church grew bigger, it began to cut its missions offering. He scolded such decisions saying, "That's gone on all over Baptist life: The bigger we get, the more selfish we get."

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Calling church family life centers "tax-exempt country clubs," Guy said in too many instances these recreation buildings simply provide a place for church members to play while "the world goes to hell."

Continuing to focus on what he sees as distractions from the church's purpose, Guy said, "We buy these expensive buses to take our old folks to Branson, Mo. -- that really wins the world, doesn't it?"

Salvation comes as an undeserved second chance, he said. God does not send anybody to hell; it is their choice, he added.

"It is powerless and compromised to fail to preach the biblical doctrine that man without Christ is lost and headed for hell," Guy said, noting a failure of the church to act would be "a betrayal of the lost."

There is a world ready to hear the gospel, Guy concluded, saying no one is exempt from the responsibility. "We dare not be the watchman who doesn't give the warning."

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**Ministry to migrants gets  
speedy start at rural church** By Joyce Sweeney Martin

**Baptist Press  
2/5/96**

WAYNESBORO, Ky. (BP)--Until last fall, ministry to non-Anglos was merely something to read about in a missions magazine for most members of Pleasant View Baptist Church in rural Lincoln County, Ky.

But thanks to a Baptist woman who is "conscientious in ministering to people," the church has a growing, vibrant ministry with Mexicans living in the area, according to pastor Vola Brown.

In less than two months, the church started a Sunday school class and adapted its worship services to meet the needs of the Mexicans. They have begun conversational English classes and have formed a Spanish mission committee. And, most importantly, they have baptized 16 new believers into the fellowship of the church, Brown recounted.

It's an amazing string of events which God has put together, said Woman's Missionary Union director Geneva Faw.

It all began when Annette Story spotted some Mexicans on her way to work. She had heard they had moved into the community at the beginning of the school year to work in a local mill. Her first instinct, she said, was to find a way for her Baptist Women on Mission group to help them.

Story proposed the Baptist Women invite the Mexicans to a traditional American Thanksgiving dinner at the church the Saturday after Thanksgiving -- an idea "God gave me," she said. The women agreed, and on the evening of Nov. 17, 17 Mexicans showed up. Everyone enjoyed the evening so much that the women invited their new friends back for Sunday school and worship the next day.

Between the time the Saturday night event ended and Sunday school the next morning, Story enlisted someone to teach the Sunday school class with the aid of Candido Lopez, a Mexican-American church member and local businessman. Twenty-seven Mexicans showed up for Sunday school and worship.

Since that time, the Mexicans have attended every church service but one, Story said.

By the first of December, Pleasant View already had developed a routine: a Sunday school class in Spanish taught by Pleasant View members with Lopez as lead teacher and translator; a joint Sunday morning worship service; a Sunday evening worship which includes the Mexicans worshipping with the Anglos until time for the sermon, when pastor Brown and layperson Dave Rollins rotate preaching to them, with Lopez translating.

And by the first of December, programs to meet needs already were shaping up as well. Three women of the church -- Vicky Faw, Dwila Engle and Karen Hatter -- had started a weekly conversational English class which drew 11 students to the first session.

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The church formally voted to begin a Spanish mission team to help meet the physical and spiritual needs of the Mexicans.

For a Christmas meal, Anglos helped five of the Mexicans prepare a traditional Mexican dinner which included refried beans and chicken tamales steamed in corn shucks. Twenty-one Mexicans came to the dinner and then viewed the "Jesus" film in Spanish. Church members provided Christmas gifts as well.

At every turn, God has led in the ministry, Brown said. The need for a translator was met when Lopez came to the Thanksgiving dinner and saw the opportunity for ministry.

In addition, Elvia Hatter, a Mexican-American fluent in English and Spanish, came from California to visit her in-laws the same day as the Thanksgiving dinner. She stayed for three weeks and was a "tremendous help," Faw said.

"I don't think she just happened to arrive on that particular Saturday," Brown said. "I believe God's hand was and is on this."

And, on the night five of the Mexicans were baptized, the scheduled speaker was Wanda Dobbins, a Spanish-speaking missionary to Chile who spoke in both English and Spanish. After the baptism, she talked with the new believers in Spanish.

For Story, the last two months have been exciting. Years ago, when she first read about churches with ministries to migrant workers, she thought, "We can't do that."

"But now we can," she said.

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Failure to uphold God's standard,  
fuels moral abyss, Brister says      By Lee Weeks

Baptist Press  
2/5/96

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--God's pleasure -- not society's measure -- must be the standard by which Christians live their lives, Mark Brister said Feb. 1 at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Brister, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., said the world's low standards for ethical living have created a moral abyss that makes truth relative to the whims of public opinion.

And unfortunately, Brister said, in too many cases the church has failed to uphold God's standard for truth.

"We have lost the standard of the truth of the Word of God," Brister said. "We have moved away from virtues to what are called values." He said values shift from day to day as they have no connection to any "moral tether."

In a day when criticism is as popular as talking about the weather, believers now more than ever must be sure to live out their convictions, Brister said on the school's Wake Forest, N.C., campus.

"The integrity of a life surrendered and committed to the Lord Jesus Christ is the best weapon that you have -- consistently, faithfully loving the Lord Jesus Christ," said Brister, who served as chairman of the Program and Structure Study Committee, which recommended the plan for the restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention approved by messengers to the 1995 convention in Atlanta.

"The life that you live, the gospel that you share in the week, is a message that is also lived out in your home before your wife, before your children, before those who are close to you. It's absolutely essential that who you are in your public ministry is also who you are in your (private) life."

Too often Christians waffle on their beliefs, Brister said, because their churches aren't standing on the Word of God.

Too many pastors are leading their churches according to what's popular -- not the Word of God -- for the sake of harmony, he said.

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"We are continuing to move the standards by what everyone else is doing," he said. "We preach against that socially and morally but we have done the same thing in ministry. God says you better make sure that the standard of your life is the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Do not let the standard of measure in your life become others' displeasure, or you will wind up spending your ministry lowering levels of dissatisfaction in your churches, putting out grass fires instead of winning people to Jesus and reaching a lost world for Jesus Christ."

Happiness and joy, Brister said, may only be found when Christians are living according to God's standard.

"It pleases God when our prayer life lives and we have active, vibrant, communication with our Heavenly Father," he said. "Don't ever fall out of love with Jesus. Maintain that close intimate personal relationship."

Brister said the Bible promises believers won't be disappointed when they live according to God's will.

"God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness to the man who pleases him," Brister said.

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Law prof warns of IRS action  
for church political activity

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press  
2/5/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--While churches and religious leaders have been involved in political issues for hundreds of years, such involvement in 1996 could jeopardize a church's tax-exempt status if U.S. Internal Revenue Service guidelines are ignored.

Bill Townsend, assistant dean at the Mississippi College School of Law in Jackson, acknowledged during a Jan. 29-31 legal issues seminar at the Baptist Sunday School Board that societal issues compel Christians to be involved in political processes. But, he told pastors and other church staff persons, to protect the church's federal tax-exempt status, "do not use tax-exempt funds to lobby or to conduct a political campaign."

Two prohibitions from IRS apply to church status, he continued: "Absolutely no involvement in political campaigns and no substantial involvement in legislative lobbying."

Southern Baptist polity plays a significant role in whether one speaks for a church or for themselves as a private citizen, he observed, in contrast to denominations with a hierarchy. Using church stationery to send a letter of political endorsement, for example, violates both denominational polity and IRS codes.

In general, lobbying includes any effort to influence legislation by attempting to affect the opinions of the general public or any segment of the public, or communications with members to directly encourage them to lobby or to encourage them to encourage others to lobby.

Flagrant violations are most likely to attract the unfavorable attention of the IRS, he said, in contrast to a church staff person who writes an occasional letter about a political issue.

In the matter of campaigning prohibitions, tax-exempt organizations have "an absolute bar" against their participation or intervention in a campaign for or against any candidate for any public office, Townsend said.

"You can do everything possible to divorce yourself from an organization in making a political statement, but everyone knows who you are and what you do," he said, and "sometimes issues are closely linked with candidates."

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Voter report cards, sometimes distributed to church members, can be clearly designed to move persons toward a candidate or group of candidates. To avoid problems with such material, he suggested, list all the candidates, include a range of issues and evaluate whether the cards are directed toward the general public rather than only to church members.

Individuals, he said, are free to fully participate in campaigning and lobbying. Churches may encourage members to participate as citizens in the political and legislative process.

"The rules are in place and should be carefully considered before committing one's church to a path that could jeopardize its exemption," he concluded.

"Legal Issues and the Church" was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's pastor-staff leadership department.

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Crews recounts lessons  
from prodigal son's father

By Cameron Crabtree

Baptist Press  
2/5/96

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Christlike passion for people is the missing ingredient in many churches across America, according to seminary President William O. Crews.

"The bottom line is that God loves the folks out there, and your ministry will never be what it should until you see the world through his eyes," Crews told students at the opening chapel service at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary's Mill Valley, Calif., campus Jan. 31. "We must be careful of getting so caught up in what we're doing in our churches that we forget the people around us," he warned.

Crews noted when he became president of the seminary 10 years ago, he began speaking in churches all across the United States. "There are a lot of churches in this country that are surrounded by people," he observed. "Yet, many of these churches are dying and dead. The missing ingredient is the kind of passion for people that Jesus had."

Pointing to the New Testament story of the prodigal son and waiting father, Crews urged the students to "put our focus on the folks out there -- down the hill (from the seminary campus), around the corner, across the bay. ... They're successful, happy -- many of them are pretty content with their lifestyles. But Jesus called them lost and he wants them to come home."

Lessons learned from the New Testament story include:

-- Respect people for the choices they make. "The father had to respect his son's choice and let him go," Crews said. "Those of us who are parents know there comes a time when you can't make choices for your children anymore and you have to hope and pray."

-- Provide the kind of love that leads them back home. "It was not a sickness of the far country that turned the prodigal's heart," Crews observed. "It was the thought of the father's house ... it was the thought of his father's love that provided the avenue to come home."

-- Welcome them with open arms. "God doesn't have to be begged to take us back. The proper response, then, for us is to welcome them back home."

-- Let God clean them up. "The father didn't insist he get cleaned up before coming home, as we too often insist," Crews said. "Over the years I have noticed that God always does a better job of getting folks cleaned up and dressed up than we could ever do."

-- Celebrate their homecoming. "It is the ultimate heart of God to see folks come home," Crews said. "But sometimes we find ourselves like the older brother, who played it safe, went along with the rules and who stayed off by himself because he couldn't rejoice when the brother came home."

"If we're not careful, in the midst of pursuing godly things, we will miss out on God's celebration for the folks who come home. The party will go on and the question is, 'Will you be part of the party?'"

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