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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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March 13, 1996

96-44

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Lottie Moon forecast shows
third straight record year

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
3/13/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Projections show Southern Baptists last year gave a record \$89.1 million to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, establishing a three-year trend upward.

Calculations from early indicators predict an increase for the 1995 offering of \$3.17 million, or 3.69 percent, from last year's \$85.9 million. Those increases would be the largest in percentage and dollar amount since 1988. Increases in 1993 and 1994 were 2.37 percent and 3.66 percent, respectively.

"We are elated and praise God for the faithful support of Southern Baptists in giving almost \$90 million to the offering," said Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin. "The increase over a record offering last year reflects they are committed to fulfilling the Great Commission cooperatively through the Foreign Mission Board."

The Great Commission is Jesus Christ's command to believers to preach the gospel to every people group.

"After suffering decreases in 1990 and 1992, it is very gratifying to see three years of continued increases," said Carl Johnson, the board's vice president of finance.

The projected figure would provide \$3.73 million for capital spending needs such as new construction and vehicles. The previous two offerings provided \$2.57 million (1995) and \$1.92 million (1994).

About \$85.4 million would go to the board's 1996 overseas operating budget, which primarily provides missionary support.

Southern Baptists had set a challenge goal of \$100 million for 1995.

Board trustees approved a 1996 budget that earmarked \$90 million for the board's worldwide program and \$10 million for their "White Harvest" effort in former communist countries of Eastern Europe.

Southern Baptists would have had to increase their giving by 16 percent from 1994 to reach that goal. Their last double-digit percentage increase in Lottie Moon giving came in 1988, at 12.7 percent.

"Although we were disappointed that we did not get closer to the \$100 million goal, the anticipated receipts will enable us to meet basic budget projections for a growing number of missionaries who reported unprecedented church growth last year," Rankin said.

"We will still be able to meet basic support needs in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union this year, although we had hoped to have additional funds available for this 'White Harvest' of opportunity in that part of the world," he added.

Southern Baptists actually close the books on the 1994 offering May 31. The annual March projection, historically reliable as an estimate, is based partly on information from the 14 largest state Baptist conventions. This year, 13 are showing increases in receipts.

The offering, generally collected in churches during December, was expected to fund nearly half (47 percent) of the board's 1996 basic budget of \$192.6 million. The rest is to come from Southern Baptists' unified giving plan, the Cooperative Program, and other income, such as investments and hunger and relief receipts.

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Former dean Bruce Corley
to return to Southwestern

By Brian Smith

Baptist Press
3/13/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Bruce Corley, dean of Southwestern Seminary's school of theology from 1990-95, was elected by the board of trustees March 13 to return to the faculty as professor of New Testament, effective June 1. The decision came during the board's annual spring meeting, March 11-13 on the school's Fort Worth, Texas, campus.

Corley resigned as dean March 21, 1995, to accept a position as professor of Christian scriptures at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.

"My family and I believe this to be God's will for us in the best stewardship of our lives in ministry," Corley said in a prepared statement.

"I am supportive of the future direction of Southwestern under the leadership of President Ken Hemphill and am encouraged by the constructive steps taken by both the trustees and the faculty to move forward into the 21st century, and I express my regret for past misunderstandings with hopes to move forward together," he said.

Hemphill said Corley's return to Southwestern "sends a very positive message about our trustees. I have found them to be very fair in their judgments and desirous of doing only that which they believe to be in the best interest of Southwestern.

"They listened to Bruce's testimony about how God has worked in his life during these past two years and his apology for personal statements that might have been injurious," Hemphill added. "After evaluating his theological stance and credentials, they approved him based on those standards."

Corley said he reaffirmed his commitment "to conservative theology and practice in the Southern Baptist Convention, especially at Southwestern where the Bible is honored as the Word of God and the world mission task is focused upon the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unsaved."

Trustee Miles Seaborn Jr., pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth, said Corley indicated "he was supportive of the direction of the conservative theology and the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as the seminary. I felt like that was important."

Trustee chairman Ralph Pulley, a Dallas attorney, said Corley's return "strongly strengthens" Southwestern's faculty.

"Dr. Corley is a respected theologian who has the great respect of the seminary family -- that includes the trustees, president, administration, the faculty, the students and the support people. We're delighted to have him."

Roy Fish, distinguished professor of evangelism, said Corley "will make a great contribution to our New Testament department. We will be a stronger seminary because he is one of us again."

Hemphill said Corley was invited to return to Southwestern because he was "the best qualified person for the particular faculty need we now have."

A graduate of Southwestern, Corley received the master of divinity degree in 1967 and the doctor of theology degree in 1975. He began teaching at the seminary in 1976.

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"Our trustees," said Tommy Lea, current dean of the school of theology, "have shown great wisdom and openness to the future in electing him to serve again at Southwestern."

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Alabama Baptists to help
rebuild burned churches

By Carrie L. Brown

Baptist Press
3/13/96

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--Among those helping rebuild three black churches in Alabama's Greene County that burned in December and January will be several Alabama Baptist associations and the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

Billy Nutt, director of associational and cooperative missions for the Alabama Baptist State Convention, said Alabama Baptists will be giving money to the churches and assisting in the rebuilding process.

Authorities have labeled as suspicious the fires that destroyed the Mount Zoar, Little Zion and Mount Zion churches, all in Greene County.

Another black church, New Liberty Baptist in the Tyler community of Dallas County, burned in late February. A white fireman was charged March 6 with arson in the New Liberty burning.

State fire marshal John Robison said there was no indication the New Liberty fire was connected to the fires in Greene County, none of which have been classified as arson.

According to the Alabama-based Klanwatch organization, an arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center, there have been at least 28 suspicious fires at predominantly black churches in Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Louisiana, Texas and Alabama since 1989. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms has been investigating 17 suspicious fires in six states, but so far no evidence of any widespread conspiracy has been found.

Although none of the churches burned were Southern Baptist churches, the Alabama Baptist State Convention is working to help the damaged churches.

Nutt said the three churches that were burned in Greene County, as well as three other churches that were vandalized within the last several months, have been offered assistance. An offer of help also will be extended to the New Liberty congregation.

Nutt said several churches out of state also have inquired about helping the burned churches.

In addition to providing funds, Nutt said several Baptist construction teams will be available to help in the rebuilding of the churches.

State and local officials met with the pastors of the burned churches in Greene County in mid-March to discuss assistance efforts.

Tommy Puckett, state brotherhood director, Ronald Davis, an associate in the convention's associational and cooperative missions department, and Jerry Wilkins, director of missions for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association, are coordinating ABSC efforts.

According to Wilkins, a fund has been established at the Citizens Federal Savings Bank in Eutaw. The fund is being overseen by local ministers. About \$25,000 has been collected so far. Ministers estimate \$160,000 to \$260,000 will be needed to rebuild the churches.

Wilkins said the response from churches around the state comes "from a genuine hurt that this was happening to our brothers and sisters in Christ."

"Even though they're not Southern Baptists, they're still fellow Christians and fellow Baptists," he said.

Wilkins said some of the concern also may come out of the Southern Baptist Convention's commitment to better race relations. "Alabama Baptists are committed to showing that we meant what we said at the last convention," Wilkins said.

Wilkins said the Tuscaloosa association put \$3,000 into the fund initially, and contributions are beginning to come in from local churches.

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"We have also had contributions made from churches outside our association and from individuals outside the Baptist church," he said.

Wilkins said churches also can send volunteers to work at the appropriate time. On March 16 volunteers will begin clearing away debris from the sites of Little Zion and Mount Zoar churches. For more information on the volunteer effort, contact the Brotherhood department of the ABSC at 1-800-264-1225.

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Brown is a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist newsjournal.

Reclaim Christianity's thrust,
Baptist men's leaders urged

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
3/13/96

ATLANTA (BP)--The men of local churches must call a "strategic retreat" as Christ did in Matthew 13 to reclaim and revitalize the mission of evangelical Christianity, according to Crawford Loritts of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Loritts addressed more than 200 Southern Baptist men's ministries leaders and pastors attending the Southeast Regional Legacy Builders rally at Atlanta's Rehoboth Baptist Church March 8-9.

Many churches, Loritts said, become "monuments" that turn inward with a "dastardly tendency" to defend and protect what they have, but Christians are called ultimately to a movement to reach a broken world with the gospel message, not to an institution.

"The church has lost its urgency" in relation to its calling, he said, likening some to a homeowner who "buys new furniture when he needs to fix the foundation."

That foundation is a clear understanding of the Christian's calling, command and commission.

The rally's theme, "Men Building a Christian Legacy Through the Local Church," was reflected by other speakers and conference leaders, including host pastor Richard G. Lee and a Promise Keepers vice president, Glenn Wagner.

Promise Keepers is intended to serve only as an entry point for men interested in ministry through the local church, not as an end in itself, Wagner said.

"Promise Keepers is committed to the local church and its ministry," Wagner said. "That's why we exist, and all that we've sought to design has been to that end."

He explained Promise Keepers is the "entry point" at the top of a "funnel" that draws men into deeper involvement in events and programs within churches. Other men, he said, may feel more comfortable entering directly into church-based programs such as Brotherhood Men's Ministries and should be allowed to do so.

Wagner called Promise Keeper rallies a "mountaintop experience" that can help churches jump-start their local men's ministries, but added, "every mountaintop experience wears off."

"You can't live in a mountaintop experience your whole life, but we can, in our churches, take that experience where a man comes face to face with almighty God and makes promises and commitments, and we can help him bring that into the reality of life, (helping him) stay true to the promises he's made," Wagner said. "That's where the pastor and the men of the local church need to find their effective ministry."

The local church strategy for involving men beyond Promise Keepers should begin with special men's events that serve as "non-threatening entry points," such as a home repair project, a father-son softball tournament or a hunter's banquet. A men's breakfast -- but not a prayer breakfast, which Wagner called "too intimidating" for some -- would also be appropriate.

The process should continue through training seminars designed to address specific issues in men's lives, such as career support and parenting, and then progress to larger "men's congregational gatherings" such as retreats, Wagner said. As relationships deepen, participants would then be ready for smaller accountability groups, he said.

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The Atlanta rally, to be duplicated later this month in St. Louis, guided conferees in using new Brotherhood Commission materials as a resource in developing men's ministries in their own churches.

The Midwest Regional Legacy Builders rally is scheduled March 29-30 at First Baptist Church, Ferguson, in suburban St. Louis. For information, call (573) 635-7931, ext. 440, or (901) 272-2461.

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Videotapes played key role
in churches' pastor search

By Jerry Pierce

Baptist Press
3/13/96

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--WANTED: Visionary pastor able to balance leadership with foot washing. Must have spotless reputation, impeccable character and strong preaching ability. Please send videotaped sermon with resume and references.

The above want ad is fictitious, but it might be a telling sketch of the clergyman many pastor search committees seek these days -- and the methods they'll use to find him.

Increasingly, churches request a videotaped sermon before ever interviewing an applicant. And when the interview occurs, personal questions -- tough, even embarrassing questions -- often are posed.

During its pastor search last year, the search committee of First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., conducted background checks and asked deeply personal questions of each applicant it interviewed.

But before getting there, the search committee watched hours of videotaped sermons.

Jim Splawn, search committee chairman, said he and the other eight members spent several months evaluating the resumes of more than 100 applicants before requesting video from those they deemed qualified.

After diligently reviewing the videotapes and hearing some candidates preach in person, the committee compiled a short list and began interviewing.

"It gave you a pretty quick reference point for the style of the church service," Splawn said of the video sermons. "It gave you a feel for the pastor's delivery style. And it gave you an idea of the size of the congregation."

The Huntsville congregation has about 3,800 members, Splawn said, and they sought someone with large-church experience.

By using video, the committee also cut travel expenses and avoided interfering with other church services.

On behalf of fellow church members, Splawn said the committee felt obligated to investigate each candidate thoroughly.

"We ask those kinds of tough questions of people in the business world. Are we not going to be as demanding when hiring a pastor?"

"All you have to do is read the newspaper," Splawn said, alluding to the media's coverage of church-related scandals in recent years. "It can shake your faith. These are important issues that need to be raised."

While Splawn's search committee was viewing videotaped sermons, Forrest Streeter and fellow search committee members were preparing to do the same at 370-member Trinity Baptist Church in Madison, Ala., a bedroom community of Huntsville.

After gathering recommendations, they evaluated about 40 resumes, made a short list, then requested video from candidates.

Using video saved time and money, Streeter said, but "if you try videotaping a service where video isn't usually used, people suddenly want to know why. In fact, we had one candidate from an older congregation who told us, 'A video might cause some problems. Please don't.'"

In a few cases, the Trinity search committee relied on audiotapes or heard the candidates preach in person.

Streeter said the committee was seeking a strong preacher and leader, yet someone with a humble spirit.

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"What you were seeking years ago was somebody who could preach well and be sort of elevated above the congregation," Streeter said. "Today, in a lot of the churches, the congregation wants somebody who's a leader but also a warm person who sits down and chats."

The search committee even gave the final four candidates a compatibility test commonly used with engaged couples, Streeter said.

"We found that to be very helpful," he said, citing the need for someone with strong interpersonal skills.

The committee didn't do background investigations "because everyone we considered came highly recommended from people we respect," although Streeter said he understands why other churches would.

"It's a risky thing if you don't know the person. Very risky," he said.

Splawn, however, said his committee came away with renewed confidence in the integrity of most church leaders.

"It was an encouragement to see competent, faithful work being led by so many pastors," he said.

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Their counsel helps churches
as they seek out new pastors

By Jerry Pierce

Baptist Press
3/13/96

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--When Clyde Cain sits down with a newly formed pastor search committee, he typically looks across a table at five eager people who bring little or no experience to their assigned task.

Cain, director of the office of ministerial services for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, assists both pastor search committees and prospective pastors as they seek God's leading.

"Usually, when a search committee forms, most of the committee members are first-timers," Cain said. "We are constantly trying to help them get started in the right direction and then continuing from there."

Cain begins by giving each search committee a packet he developed, titled "On Calling A Pastor." It includes 12 brochures covering such tasks as evaluating a sermon, calling an interim pastor and establishing a pastor-church covenant.

"We enter into a covenant relationship with a pastor, not a contract," Cain said. "My recommendation is that the church have an installation service during which they make a strong statement of commitment to each other and to the pastor in the following of his leadership."

Much earlier, after a search committee has spent adequate time in prayer and is ready to interview candidates, Cain recommends they tactfully but thoroughly search the heart -- and background -- of each prospect.

"My first recommendation is to feel free to ask anything you want. My second is, don't let a bad experience (with a former pastor) let you overreact. Sometimes a bad experience will cloud your judgment But they do need to be aggressive on gathering information and checking references."

Leonard L. Dupree, director of the department of church-minister relations for Georgia Southern Baptists, said churches need time to grieve after a beloved pastor retires or moves on -- or after a bad experience.

The longer the former pastor served, the slower the church should proceed in replacing him, Dupree said. If a pastor has served in the same church for 10 years, he recommends the congregation wait at least one year before calling another.

"I think the interim is a good time for the church to re-evaluate its vision, its mission statement. I think there are issues and problems that can be resolved more effectively during this time."

Congregations tend to be more participatory between pastors, he said.

A church's first priority, however, should be prayerfully seeking the right interim pastor, Dupree said. Once they find him, they should move prayerfully and patiently. Rushing the process is the most common mistake search committees make, he said.

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"When the entire church, not just the search committee, is involved in earnest prayer, it begins to undergird -- by God's Spirit -- everything the search committee is doing," Dupree said. "When that happens, the search committee is more patient, more deliberate. There's a feeling of freedom to check out references properly."

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Leading migrants to freedom
is former border guard's aim By Joyce Sweeney Martin

Baptist Press
3/13/96

CERULEAN, Ky. (BP)--When Stan Smith speaks Spanish these days, it's not to detain Mexican illegals at the border; it's to tell Mexican migrant workers about freedom in Jesus.

As a border guard with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Smith spent 30 years apprehending and prosecuting Mexicans trying to cross illegally into Texas. He often took illegal border-crossers before a judge and then to jail. During the latter part of his career, he piloted a surveillance plane which patrolled the Texas-Mexico border.

"It was my job, just like that of any lawman" to uphold and enforce the law, he said.

During those years, Smith was aware of the material poverty which gripped many Mexicans, but he was unaware of their spiritual poverty because they all seemed to know "who (the historical) Jesus is," he explained.

Besides, Smith was not a Christian himself. Although his wife was a believer and often shared her faith with him, he was "not interested." But after the couple retired and moved to northeastern Tennessee, that changed. One afternoon while reading Proverbs 3:5-6, he saw his need for Christ in the passage which says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

The next Sunday, Smith made his profession of faith in Christ public in a local church.

That decision "changed my life completely," Smith said. "Christ changed how I lived, acted and talked."

And when the Smiths moved to western Kentucky a few years later, further changes occurred.

The Smiths joined Bainbridge Grove Baptist Church in Cerulean at about the same time Kentucky farmers began bringing in Mexican migrants to work during tobacco-cutting season.

When the church's pastor, Harold Cayce, learned Smith could speak Spanish, he enlisted him to help the church initiate a migrant ministry in the summer of 1993. The neighboring Christian County Baptist Association office building was used each Sunday afternoon for Bible study, a meal and conversational English classes. The first year, Smith cooked the meal and led the Bible studies each week while volunteers from Christian County churches led conversational English classes.

In addition, Smith and members of the Bainbridge Grove church made weekly visits to the workers to assist with such things as phone calls back home and any other needs the men might have.

"Smith could talk with the telephone operator and get the calls through," eliminating the need for the migrants to bring "buckets of quarters" for the phone calls, Cayce said.

That summer, more than 20 Mexicans came to the services each week; four made professions of faith in Christ.

Each summer since, the ministry has grown. Trigg County Spanish teacher Cheryl Woody joined the ministry to teach English and help with translation. Last year, a Thursday night fellowship was added at the Princeton motel where the migrants stay. And area churches helped provide meals, care packets, food and clothing.

In 1995, 80 migrants were involved and 16 made professions of faith, Cayce reported.

The professions of faith are made when the men "learn who Jesus really is," Smith said. And that brings "joy beyond comprehension" to the former border guard.

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Although the migrant workers go back home to Mexico for the winter months, they are not forgotten in western Kentucky.

Bainbridge Grove has been warming up for their return in 1996. In January, Smith began a Wednesday night Spanish class to help 12 fellow church members be able to speak directly with the migrant workers. And the church is making plans for simultaneous English and Spanish Sunday school and worship services should the farmers bring the migrants to Kentucky for the entire six-month tobacco season in future years.

The rewards touch both Kentucky and the world, Smith said. "If just one man goes back home to Mexico and wins one more to Christ, then our job up here has been done."

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Brazilian youth disarmed
in Baptist gun trading

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
3/13/96

RECIFE, Brazil (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionaries and Brazilian Baptists in Recife have jumped headlong into the business of gun trading.

But the guns are toy weapons, and the target of the operation is the children of Recife.

Late last fall Yclea Cervino, who directs the Foreign Mission Board-funded Friendship House in Recife, read in her local newspaper how increasing numbers of youths in the community were dying in robberies and drug trafficking.

So she announced a campaign to disarm the future generation.

Her plan? Let children trade their toy weapons -- guns, swords and Uzis -- for dolls, toy cars and balls. So after sending children home with information on the dangers of arms misuse, staff members invited children to surrender their "heat."

They did -- in droves. Valfrido de Paula, 6, was one of the first participants. He gave up his machine gun. "I prefer a ball," he said.

More than 600 toy weapons flooded into the center, said Foreign Mission Board missionary Clara Lynn Williams.

Williams is project director of the Friendship House ministry. Organized by Foreign Mission Board missionaries Martha Hairston and Edith Vaughn in 1954, the ministry receives about \$150,000 a year from the board's hunger funds. Its aims are to train workers and serve the community physically, morally and spiritually, basing its ministry on the Bible.

A local television station taped and aired activities on the first day of the gun trading, as children came in one by one to conduct their business. A newspaper used its front page to display a color picture of a child smiling broadly at a soccer ball he had been given, while holding a plastic machine gun he traded. A leading television station used its clout to air a story over national news.

On the campaign's last day, staff blocked off the street in front of Friendship House. Leaders thanked God for the children and their willingness to stand against violence. They symbolically burned a pile of toy "arms" in a large trash can. They donated remaining ones to the local cancer hospital for recycling.

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