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Cooperative Program records
celebrated in several states

By Art Toalston

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Commitment to the Cooperative Program has yielded celebration in Georgia and other states where Southern Baptists set records last year.

"Baptists of Georgia have set a record in their commitment to work through the Southern Baptist Convention," said John Yarbrough, president of the Georgia Baptist Convention, as he presented a \$5,653,079 check Jan. 18 for SBC national and international missions and ministries funded through the Cooperative Program.

"With joy, we continue to celebrate with our Southern Baptist family in reaching the world for Jesus Christ," said Yarbrough, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Perry, Ga.

Georgia Baptists gave \$35,059,996 to fund state convention and SBC causes last year -- the first time since 1987 the overall Georgia budget has been met and exceeded. The 1995 total was 4.73 percent above 1994's total.

Counting all SBC missions giving by Georgia Baptists -- such as the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions -- more than \$27 million was given to SBC causes in 1995.

"All Southern Baptists rejoice in this tremendous year that Georgia Baptists have been given by the Lord," responded Morris H. Chapman, SBC Executive Committee president, who received the check from Yarbrough at the SBC Building in Nashville, Tenn. "We also celebrate with other state conventions where God is similarly blessing.

"Their desire to share their gifts in the worldwide mission endeavors of the Southern Baptist Convention is cause for celebration indeed," Chapman said.

Among other states where Baptists set Cooperative Program records were Florida, Texas, Tennessee, Missouri and Nevada.

In the SBC at large, the convention ended its 1994-95 fiscal year Sept. 30 with a record \$145,739,489 in Cooperative Program gifts, surpassing by nearly \$3 million the record total for the previous year, or a 2.01 percent increase.

In Florida, a total of \$24,958,433.06 was given through Southern Baptists' unified giving channel in 1995, surpassing last year's record giving by 1.83 percent and the convention's basic budget by \$893,000.

John Sullivan, executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, attributed the record giving to "trust and confidence. Our churches believe in what is happening in Florida and the Southern Baptist Convention as we seek to evangelize the lost.

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"In Florida, we have consistently 'stockpiled' our work around evangelism without apology -- church starting with intentionality and assisting established churches to get off the plateau," Sullivan said.

The record giving in Florida comes after five years of sluggish financial growth. Cooperative Program receipts there had increased \$1 million annually from 1979-90 and then dropped \$800,000, going from \$24.1 million in 1990 to \$23.9 million in 1991. The following years showed minimal growth.

Florida officials interpreted the 1995 banner giving year as an indication the slump is over. "The Cooperative Program is the strongest it's been in five years," said Stephens Baumgardner, director of the state convention's business services division.

Cooperative giving by Texas Baptist churches last year totaled \$63,705,447, eclipsing the annual goal for the first time in a decade, said Roger Hall, treasurer for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In Missouri, Baptists gave \$15,235,692 to Cooperative Program causes, surpassing the CP budget goal (\$15.2 million for the year) for the first time since 1981. The record was a 1.78 percent increase over 1994 CP giving in the state.

In Tennessee, Baptists gave \$26,893,421 through the Cooperative Program, surpassing the state goal for the first time since 1984. The record was a 2.62 percent increase over 1994 and marked the fourth consecutive year of increases in CP giving.

In Nevada, Cooperative Program giving surpassed the \$613,000 goal by more than \$25,000 and was 6.38 percent over 1994's total.

J. Robert White, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention, commended the state's Baptists in a letter in the convention newsjournal, The Christian Index: "The bountiful blessings that you are sending to Georgia and around the world through these generous gifts will change the world for Jesus Christ. ... We give God the praise and glory for the many wonderful things being accomplished in Georgia and around the world. ... We dedicate your gifts to Him and His Kingdom."

Sullivan gave key credit for the increased giving in Florida to pastors and congregations. "Pastors -- not convention employees -- lead churches," he said. "When our pastors lead our people to give through the Cooperative Program it is because of a mission heart, not the support of a denominational delivery system."

He added, "The folks in the pews are to be commended for following pastoral leadership; desiring to do Great Commission kingdom work; being generous with their resources beyond local needs; and realizing the Great Commission is to go into all the world, all the time at the same time."

Missouri's record year "reflects the goodwill of our churches toward the work we are doing here in the state and around the world," said Larry Thomas, director of church services for the state convention.

Bill Miller, pastor of First Baptist Church, Farmington, Mo., said the congregation is a Cooperative Program stalwart because the CP is its "main missions link."

"The people just know, the people just understand that is our way of supporting missions -- and they get behind it," Miller said.

Doyle Sager, president of the Missouri convention and pastor of First Baptist Church, Sedalia, said the '95 giving record bodes well for winning the lost to Christ. "Everybody finds it easier to dream when you have something to work with," he said.

"Each gift from every participating church," noted James Porch, executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, "made this record giving possible."

"Our giving," David Meacham, executive director-treasurer of the Nevada convention, told the state's Baptists, "helps circles of Christ's love to radiate outward" to all 50 states and to more than 130 countries where nearly 4,200 Southern Baptist missionaries are stationed.

In 1995, the Florida Baptist Convention decreased its percentage of Cooperative Program support to the SBC to 41 percent in 1995 from 42.2 percent in 1994. Action taken by messengers during the 1995 Florida Baptist State Convention in November sought to compensate for that decrease by sharing a portion of any overage of Cooperative Program with the SBC.

"Florida Baptists do not need to be stingy in a day of God's generosity," Sullivan said. "Florida Baptists need to deal with Southern Baptist Convention needs as well as our own."

Texas churches topped the \$63,545,448 cooperative giving goal in 1995 by .25 percent, said Hall. Texas Baptists last exceeded the cooperative giving goal in 1985 with contributions of \$58,397,270 toward a basic budget of \$57 million.

"Texas Baptists have joined hands and hearts behind the Texas 2000 plan to reach every unchurched Texan with the gospel (about 10 million people) by the end of the decade," said BGCT Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr. "Such committed missions giving will help achieve the goal of 1,400 new churches, reach Texas for Christ and build an even stronger missions base for reaching the world."

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Herb Hollinger, Barbara Denman, Orville Scott, Tim Palmer and Mike McCullough contributed to this story. (BP) photo of Yarbrough presenting CP check to Chapman available from (BP) central office in Nashville, Tenn.

SBC's Jim Henry discusses
restructuring, race relations

By John Loudat

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)--"I don't know how it works, but it does," said Jim Henry of the convention he leads, as he took a few minutes to address New Mexico Baptist pastors and their wives Jan. 15.

In addition to updating the church leaders on the state of the Southern Baptist Convention, Henry commented on fellow Southern Baptist Bill Clinton's stand on the abortion issue.

The Baptist Convention of New Mexico hosted the meal, held at Hoffmantown Baptist Church, Albuquerque, immediately prior to the state evangelism conference.

Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., in his second year as SBC president, began by calling attention to the convention's diversity, "with Newt on one side and the president on the other." Nevertheless, he said, many good things are happening among Southern Baptists.

The process of getting ready for the SBC restructuring, Henry said, "is moving well," adding the Implementation Task Force appointed by the SBC Executive Committee last September is a very fair one.

Henry said he has received only a handful of letters protesting the restructuring since the convention approved it during last summer's sesquicentennial in Atlanta. He said he believes people are now just wanting to see how it will work out. A vote on a change in the SBC bylaws to complete the approval process is slated for the SBC annual meeting in June in New Orleans.

Henry said he has received the most positive response from the racial reconciliation resolution approved at the 1995 annual meeting. While admitting not all Southern Baptists were in favor of it and racism is not dead in the SBC and America, he said he has received much positive feedback from both whites and blacks.

Henry said he and SBC Second Vice President Gary Frost, an African American pastor from Youngstown, Ohio, will ask the SBC's interagency council for recommendations for "some tangible things we can do that will say we mean business." He said if racial reconciliation does not happen at the church level, it won't happen in America.

Henry, whose church leads the SBC in giving to the Cooperative Program, congratulated New Mexico Baptists for their CP giving, which set an all-time record in 1995.

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Henry said he has always thought churches ought to give at least a tithe to missions. He said his church has "even in the tough financial times, like during building programs" and God has always blessed.

He expressed delight in hearing about more and more churches increasing the percentage they give to CP. "The Cooperative Program may be a sacred cow, but she gives golden milk," he emphasized.

Henry called "significant" the fact that four of Southern Baptists' six seminaries experienced growth last year, at a time when several new seminaries were started across the country.

Pastors across the convention have been telling him of growth in the number of baptisms in their churches beyond anything they have ever seen. He suggested, "Everything is coming together," citing the increased prayer of people and the sovereign work of God.

Henry said he was grateful for the opportunity to represent Southern Baptists at Israeli Prime Minister Rabin's funeral recently. He expressed his conviction that the tragedy may open up more doors to the gospel, since the government's restrictive security agency had been discredited.

The SBC president invited everyone to the 1996 convention in New Orleans. While he did not anticipate anything "wild," he said one can never know what to expect with Southern Baptists, but he is hoping for a harmonious meeting.

Because of the start of the opening session of the evangelism conference, little time was left for questions. He did have time to answer a question concerning whether he has had the opportunity to dialogue with President Bill Clinton about his stand on abortion.

While expressing reluctance to share details about a "private conversation," Henry said he felt he could say a few things.

Henry said President Clinton "listened very intently" to him as Henry expressed his concerns.

Henry said the president "blew me away," when he quoted word for word, from memory, the resolution on abortion Southern Baptists approved in the early 1970s. "The guy's got a mind like a razor blade," Henry said.

Henry did assure the pastors and wives that Clinton told him, "I'm still struggling. I'm reading. I haven't come to any final conclusions. I'm still looking." Henry said he was encouraged that Clinton was not through thinking about the issue.

Henry also fielded a question about a reference he had made earlier in the evening about a new members class that anyone wishing to join his church in Orlando must complete before they become members.

Henry had said the class was necessary since so many people were wanting to join the church from other denominations. In fact, he said, only 25 percent of those who attended the class the previous Sunday had any Southern Baptist background. The class, he said, helps guarantee that new members will know the church's basic convictions.

Henry explained each of the six sessions lasts one hour and can be completed by watching a video or attending the class, which operates on a continual cycle.

He added candidates for baptism can be baptized before taking the class.

While 80 percent of those who want to join the church eventually complete the class, most who don't, he said, are Baptists.

Henry said a person's church letter is not requested until he or she finishes the class.

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WMU executive board reduces
funding from Home Mission Board By Teresa Dickens

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TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)--Woman's Missionary Union will assume the financial responsibility for its work with language groups, relinquishing approximately \$195,000 in revenue from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

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WMU's executive board, meeting Jan. 13-17 at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly in Talladega, Ala., approved the recommendation from its finance committee that WMU fulfill a 1993 agreement with the HMB which called for WMU to reduce the funding it received from the HMB by the year 2000.

In 1993, WMU received approximately \$378,000 from the HMB for its work among ethnic and African American congregations. WMU has reduced that amount annually since. The WMU board's latest action assimilates all costs related to the two areas of work.

During his report to the WMU executive board Jan. 15, HMB President Larry Lewis expressed appreciation for the board's action, saying the move would "free up additional money for work on the field."

WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien described the board's decision as a "step forward" in WMU's language work, saying it was an acknowledgement of "our responsibility to develop quality programming and materials that meet the needs of Southern Baptists' language congregations."

"We are grateful for the partnership we have had with the Home Mission Board in the establishment of WMU work among the various language groups," O'Brien said. "While finances no longer dictate our working together, it is our desire that we continue to cooperate in these efforts. Joint planning and mutual support between WMU and the Home Mission Board will ensure our ongoing cooperation for the cause of missions."

The funding decision ends a financial relationship that began between the two Southern Baptist entities in 1971. That was the year the HMB transferred its WMU work with Hispanics to the SBC auxiliary, based in Birmingham, Ala. The transfer included one employee and the publication, Nuestra Tarea.

Today, WMU's work among language groups is facilitated by six employees and includes the publication of magazines in Spanish, Korean, Chinese and basic English, as well as numerous WMU products in those languages and several other languages. WMU also has ongoing work with the deaf.

In addition, WMU organized the National WMU Ethnic Advisory Council in 1994 to ensure its efforts met actual needs. The council, made up of WMU leaders within the respective language groups, helps identify needs and develop curriculum and products to meet those needs. Council members also serve as conference leaders at national, regional and state training events.

In other business, the board:

- approved the creation of a consultation committee. The body, made up of state WMU executive directors and WMU executive board members (state WMU presidents), will serve in an advisory role to the WMU executive director and WMU national president on matters affecting WMU as a whole.

The first consultation committee includes three state executive directors -- Alberta Gilpin, Missouri; Beverly Miller, Alabama; and Betty Lynn Cadle, Minnesota-Wisconsin -- and four executive board members -- Janet Lindstrom, Colorado; Wanda Lee, Georgia; Peggy Hicks, Kentucky; and Donna Miller, Illinois.

- approved the guidelines for the Jessica Powell Loftis Scholarship Fund for Acteens. The endowed fund was established in 1994 to support Acteens projects and scholarships.

- approved the 1997-98 WMU Coed Dated Plan and the 1997-98 Associational Dated Plan. The dated plans provide guidelines for development of curriculum (coed plan only), activities and products.

- approved the redesign of the Individual Achievement Plan for Girls in Action, including the name WorldVentures, for implementation in September 1997.

- approved violence as WMU's national social issue for 1998-99.

- endorsed WMU's participation in Reconciliation '97, an international conference promoting reconciliation and unity among Christians. The conference, sponsored by HMB, will be held Sept. 1-7, 1997, in Birmingham and Coventry, England.

-- received an update on "Project HELP: Child Advocacy," WMU's 1996-97 social issue. The board learned that the international aspect of the project will focus on a children's ministry in Taiwan coordinated by missionaries serving with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. The stateside aspect of the project encourages identifying needs and volunteerism.

Along with business, the executive board heard a variety of staff presentations, along with reports from the presidents and respective staff members of the Brotherhood Commission, HMB and FMB. Each session of the meeting also featured testimonies from a home or foreign missionary.

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**WMU awards \$66,000 in grants
for women's missions work**

By Teresa Dickens

**Baptist Press
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TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union's executive board awarded \$66,000 in Second Century Fund grants during its annual meeting Jan. 13-17 at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly in Talladega, Ala.

The grants, assigned to both home and foreign fields, will fund a variety of projects designed to educate and involve women in missions.

The Second Century Fund is a permanent endowment created by WMU during its 1988 centennial year as a gift to future generations of women in missions. All contributions are invested permanently, along with 10 percent of each year's earnings on the principal, which stands at over \$1.17 million. The remaining interest is given each year in grants. Since 1988, WMU has awarded \$481,523 in grants.

Twenty of the 30 grants awarded this year went to projects in the United States. The funded projects will provide training and/or materials for WMU leaders within the state convention or fellowships of Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, the Dakotas, Hawaii (including Samoa and Guam), Kansas-Nebraska, Michigan, Minnesota-Wisconsin, Montana, New England, Nevada, New York, Northwest, Ohio, Utah-Idaho and Wyoming.

Other stateside project grants went to California for its Hispanic leadership training team and a Girls in Action project among children in inner-city Los Angeles; to Colorado for developing age-level WMU organizations in two associations; and to Hmong WMU leaders in Michigan and Minnesota-Wisconsin for leadership training and materials.

The six overseas grants will help sponsor leadership training events in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Panama, Canada and Brazil. A seventh grant will go to European Baptist Convention for the development of women's work and WMU in seven English-speaking churches started over the past four years in Eastern Europe.

Grants also were awarded to the Baptist Nursing Fellowship for a health-care project in Russia; the Baptist World Alliance's women's department for the development of a children's leaders network; and the MK Re-entry Retreat, an annual event sponsored by state WMU organizations, the national WMU and the Foreign Mission Board, for missionary kids who are entering college in the United States for the first time.

For information on how to make gifts to the Second Century Fund or to obtain a grant application, write: Second Century Fund, Woman's Missionary Union Foundation, P.O. Box 11346, Birmingham, AL 35202-1346.

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**Christian musicians point
to Sunday school impact**

By Tim Ellsworth

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--Sunday school is a way of life for most Southern Baptists, and memories of childhood Sunday school experiences are undoubtedly common in Southern Baptist circles.

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It's that way for the guys from Geoff Moore & the Distance, too, and the most recent release from their Home Run album, "Tell Me Again," captures the essence of the importance of Sunday school.

"Sometimes we forget where we learned the fundamentals of the faith," Moore said. "It's hard for us to put a finger on it, but most of us learned the fundamentals through faithful Sunday school teachers. That became the foundation of biblical truth in my life."

"Tell Me Again" offers a chapter out of Moore's childhood in Flint, Mich., where Daisy Keen was his Sunday school teacher. Co-written by Moore and Steven Curtis Chapman, the song expresses Moore's desire not to forget the lessons he learned at a young age under the teaching of Sunday school teachers like Keen. But the song is representative of the experiences of most of the members of the Distance.

Keyboardist Geof Barkley grew up in a Southern Baptist church in Shreveport, La., and remembers his teacher, Mrs. Brock, and "her big beehive hairdo. She's still teaching, and when I go home I usually go to her Sunday school class there," Barkley said.

All of the band's members are quick to point out the importance of Sunday school in their own lives and in the lives of Christians in general.

"It helps to dig and discuss and learn how to apply things to life," said Chuck Connor, the band's drummer. Connor also grew up as a Southern Baptist. His father served as associate pastor of First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Fla., and as pastor of First Baptist Church, Deerfield, Fla. His mother works at the Home Mission Board.

Connor pointed out Sunday school also offered the opportunity for service. "It gives people a way to get their hands dirty," Connor said.

"It's important to be in a situation where you can interact in a group with your peers," said Roscoe Meek, the electrical and acoustic guitarist for the Distance who also has Southern Baptist roots in Shreveport. "Those are the people you can spill your guts to."

Moore is also appreciative of the Sunday school experience for the sake of his two boys, Josh and Justin. "That's what church really is to them," Moore said. "It teaches them not only a love for the faith but also a love for the church."

But the song has a sad side to it. Hoping to share the song with Keen, Moore contacted her family, only to discover she had died two days before the album came out. Her funeral was held on the day of the album's release.

"It became almost a memorial tribute," Moore said.

Keen would undoubtedly have been proud of the young man she taught years ago. Because of the impact she and others like her have made, so many people, along with Geoff Moore & the Distance, can echo the song's sentiments:

"So tell me again of the old, old stories.

Tell me again of the faithful who walked,

in the lions' den and the fiery furnace,

of Noah and rainbows and donkeys that talked.

I don't want to forget, so please, tell me again."

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