

October 14, 1974

Southern Baptists Record Of Giving--Up, Up & Away

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By James Lee Young
Feature Editor, Baptist Press

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists are attempting to raise their batting average in giving to missions and other needs within the 12.3-million member denomination.

October 1974 saw the culmination of a three-year push in educating church members concerning the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program (unified budget). Stress for October, designated Cooperative Program Month across the convention, was laid on commitment to an increase of support by churches. "Operation One," as the emphasis was billed, called on churches to increase Cooperative Program giving by at least one per cent.

Some churches give up to 50 per cent of their income for Baptist state and SBC-wide causes, but the average is around 10 per cent.

The year 1975-76 marks the 50th anniversary of the Cooperative Program of the 129-year-old denomination, a system devised in 1925 for a joint effort in funding missions and other worthy causes among Southern Baptists.

The Foreign Mission Board normally receives as much as 50 per cent of these undesignated monies distributed to national agencies of the convention, with the Home Mission Board receiving 18.75 per cent, according to the latest figures.

The first total recorded gifts by churches were in 1925 and amounted to \$1,513,640. Membership then was 1,013,160. Per capita giving for the year was \$1.49.

By 1926, when the Cooperative Program was born at a meeting in Memphis, Tenn., convention membership had doubled. That year Southern Baptists gave \$4,128,188 in (national and state) Cooperative Program gifts for a per capita figure of \$1.17. Membership was 3,649,330 in 1925 and total gifts for all causes for the year were \$39,627,009 for a per capita total gifts figure of \$10.86.

In 1928 the per capita figure for the Cooperative Program went down six cents, with the Cooperative Program total for '28 dropping \$24,504, yet total gifts were up--\$301,000.

All figures dropped steadily from 1929 until in 1933 the Cooperative Program total hit a low of \$1,903,615 and a per capita figure of 46 cents. Total gifts for that year were low also: \$23,289,361 and a per capita amount of \$5.58.

The '30s, however, were a depression era and dollars and cents values have changed drastically across the years.

In 1933, for example, personal income per household in the United States was \$2,550 while in 1950 it was \$3,780. Per capita income in the nation in 1933 was \$700 contrasted with \$900 per annum in 1950.

By 1940, giving denomination-wide was up to a record \$40,359,038 for total gifts (to all Baptist causes). Church members that year totaled 5,104,327 and they gave \$3,415,124 to the Cooperative Program. The per capita figure for total gifts was \$7.91 while the Cooperative Program per capita amount was 67 cents.

As Southern Baptists approach the 50th anniversary of the Cooperative Program, 1973 has seen state and national Cooperative Program gifts reach a year-end total of \$100,647,475 and a per capita amount of \$12. The denomination, 12.3 million strong according to '73 statistics, gave total gifts for all causes amounting to over \$1.2 billion or \$98.01 per capita--all-time records in the Baptists' giving.

A tally of giving reported by the various Baptist state conventions since 1925 reveals that Cooperative Program gifts had reached \$1,144,367,781 (not including 1974), while the total gifts for all causes 1925-73, was \$15,021,881,303. Total gifts from 1885-1924 were \$528,550,512, while the total gifts from 1885-1973 were \$15,550,431,815.

Administrative costs for the Cooperative Program at the SBC level have been kept at a minimum. The "convention operating budget" receives less than one per cent of the SBC Cooperative Program funds. This allocation provides for the budget of the Nashville-based SBC Executive Committee, the expenses of the annual SBC meeting and an allocation to the Baptist World Alliance.

As the denomination swings into observance of the Cooperative Program 50th anniversary, 1974 is already another record year in Southern Baptist giving. But totals for the calendar year won't be available until next spring.

The call to conventionwide commitment in giving comes at a time when the SBC has already approved a \$150 million goal on the state level for the Cooperative Program--to coincide with the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976--for state and national causes.

It is anticipated that a projected \$51 million of the goal will go to SBC level agency budgets, while the rest (about 65 per cent) will remain in the 33 Baptist state conventions. Reaching the \$150 million goal will require an even greater commitment from the more than 34,000 churches in giving. It's an opportunity for Southern Baptists to leap ahead in giving as they have never done before.

In view of the annual two per cent rate of membership increase over the past several years, and the steady increase in giving since 1940, the Bicentennial goal of \$150 million for state and SBC Cooperative Program is a good possibility.

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War Peace and the
Gospel in Israel

10/14/74

By Larry Jerden
for Baptist Press

Even in the midst of war, a spiritual awakening seems to be sweeping Baptist churches in Israel.

"We had 26 baptisms in Galilee last year, probably over 30 in the country, and 42 the year before," said Southern Baptist Ray Register of Nazareth.

"During a meeting in a blackout at the village of Turan during the last war, we had several persons saved, and the pastor rededicated his life," said Register, now on furlough in Raleigh, N.C.

In fact, "We have had a real revival ever since 1967, with baptisms among adults and young people," the missionary noted.

The spirit of revival among the Baptist churches, coupled with other trends, has led some Baptists in Israel to express greater hope that Israelis and Arabs as well as Jews, Christians and Muslims, will some day be able to live together in peace and harmony.

The image of Israel as a besieged island in a sea of enemies may be mellowing somewhat.

Milton Murphey, who as director of the Baptist Village at Petah Tiqva works with both Jews and Arabs, said the younger Jews are seeing the needs of the Arabs and are more open to the problems faced by the Arabs than the older Jews. He said change is taking place, and younger Jews want more of Israel's leaders to be native-born instead of immigrants.

Many of the Israeli Arabs have a measure of economic success, he said, which gives them middle-class status. This does not mean that a higher income level has made them forget those in occupied territory.

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All seem to want peace and are caught along with the Jews in a confusion of cultures and religions.

R gister based his guard'd optimism on his experience during a year as a special student at Jerusalem's Hebrew University. He said he had numerous opportunities to interpret the feelings of his Nazareth Arab friends to Jewish students from Russia, South America and the U.S.

"To my delight I found an unusual openness to the dilemma of Israeli Arabs, both among the student body and the faculty," he said. "I sensed their feeling of hopelessness of ever living at peace with their Arab neighbors."

"But when we minister to both sides, we see both sides," he reflected. "Many of our church members and pastors in Galilee are refugees."

Murphey said that talk among Jews is "not so much Zionism right now as it is talk about survival of the nation of Israel. Involved in this survival is the idea of human freedoms which have often been denied the people of Israel. I think you'll find more idealism than Zionism," although "there is still a 'strong Zionististic feeling.'"

Register said Jews identify Christianity with the Catholicism of the Inquisition and the Lutheranism of Nazi Germany. They identify the words "mission" and "missionary" with those who give candy to children to entice them to convert from Judaism, he said.

"The Jews who bombed the Baptist house in Jerusalem were not Israelis," remembered Register, "they were radical New York Jews. When the Israelis saw it, they were horrified, they came and cried."

While the 26 baptisms recorded in Galilee in a two-month period last year were all Arabs, as are most all other recorded baptisms, there are some Jews finding Jesus, according to R gister.

"Many Jews in the U.S. and Europe are being saved," Register said. "They feel they have found themselves as Jews and are going home to Israel to tell others. In accepting Christ, they feel they have become real Jews and call themselves 'Messianic believers.'"

Most Baptist mission work in Israel, however, is aimed at the Arabs, and it is the Arabs who are most responsive. The spirit of revival is strongest in the Galilean area around Nazareth, observers say.

The Nazareth Baptist church in Nazareth, on the grounds of the Baptist school there, has about 200 per Sunday in Sunday School and church, with services in Arabic with English translation. About 50-60 return for evening Bible study and the schedule includes "Girls of Light" and a women's organization.

The church also attempts to evangelize the surrounding countryside with teams going out to the villages with the gospel. And it contributes to worldwide evangelism with annual gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions.

The co-ed Nazareth Baptist school has more than 600 students in its 14 classes, two kindergartens and 12 grades. Most are Greek Orthodox, some Roman Catholics, some Greek Catholics, some Moslems, and a few Anglicans and others.

The Nazareth Baptist school is considered the best private school in the country. And its students make the highest scores among area students on the government college entrance tests.

Southern Baptists have been working in Israel, or Palestine as it was then called, since 1921. There are 39 millionaries assigned to Israel, with work in Ashkelong, Haifa, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Nazareth and Petah Tiqva.

The Baptist Village at Petah Tiqva, with its camp, conference center and farm, is being expanded to become a focal point for Baptist life in Israel.

Missions work in Israel is difficult, and at last report the seven churches that are a part of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel have only 241 members. That figure may be low in the light of the reported revival in progress, missionaries say.

Missions in Israel is a slow, difficult field. But hopeless?

"No," said one missionary, "I would not give my life here if it were hopeless." (BP)

**Baptist State Conventions
Seldom Short on Energy**

By W. C. Fields
Director, Baptist Press

The annual Baptist state convention meetings are a combination revival, corporate stockholders meeting, pep rally, inquest, fraternity clambake and family homecoming.

Together they outweigh even the mammoth national gathering of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) each June. In many ways they are the most important organizational meetings of the Baptist year.

The 33 Southern Baptist state bodies are prodigies of activity. They are centers of perpetual ecclesiastical motion and the most important energy generators that have yet been created by 34,665 Southern Baptist churches.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas looms largest in the book of numbers. The Alaska Baptist Convention covers the most territory. The South Carolina Baptist Convention is the oldest (153 years). The Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey and the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, at three years of age, are the youngest.

Each has a mood and style all its own.

The Alaska convention meets in August, to get ahead of the freeze-up. Five conventions meet the last days of October--Missouri, New York, Ohio, Texas and Pennsylvania-South Jersey.

Hawaii, Illinois and North Carolina meet the first week in November. Twenty-two state groups meet the second week in November. That is enough concentrated activity in one week to set off the seismographs all around the earthquake belt.

The Alabama, Arkansas and Florida conventions close out the Baptist show-and-tell season the third week in November.

One piece of business that is on all agendas this fall is the 50th anniversary in 1975 of the Cooperative Program, the remarkable plan of financial support through which they all work together in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Baptist state conventions existed nearly a quarter of a century before the organization of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845.

The South Carolina convention was the first, established in 1821. Georgia came along next in June, 1822. Alabama and Virginia followed in 1823.

The 1830's were a decade unmatched in growth of new conventions until the 1940's. Five new state conventions appeared in each decade. The Missouri and North Carolina conventions were established in 1830, Maryland and Mississippi in 1836 and Kentucky in 1837.

Since 1940, 14 state units affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention have been organized. The 33 state or regional conventions now cover and have cooperating churches in all 50 states. With 12.3 million members, they make up the nation's largest Protestant-evangelical denomination.

A major factor in keeping these state organizations dynamic is autonomy, their freedom and flexibility to adapt to their own unique conditions and to move out at their own pace.

Their future? The meetings this fall will give a clue. But growth continues to be a major emphasis--in evangelism, missions and education, with emphasis on lay involvement. Budget goals up for convention action this fall will be higher than ever, but inflation is expected to keep a lid on much desirable program expansion.

As provincialism generally has declined, especially in the South, the Baptist state conventions likewise have broadened their outlook and their emotional ties. Many Baptist church members, however, have little awareness of religious developments beyond their local church.

The most hopeful sign of change in this regard is the fact that church members gave over \$100 million last year through the Cooperative Program to state and SBC causes. "Messengers" to state conventions this fall will be acting on a recommendation to raise this amount to \$150 million by 1976.

In the South and Southeast there are Baptist churches all over the place. A year ago Texas reported 3,853 churches with membership now over two million. North Carolina reported 3,451 churches and Georgia had 2,928 churches, with each state having a little over one million Southern Baptists. Twenty-five states, however, have less than 75 SBC churches each.

The best record in baptisms per capita is in the newer areas for Southern Baptist work. Total SBC baptisms last year were 413,990.

Texas has the most church property (\$750 million), followed by North Carolina (\$489 million) and Georgia (\$463 million). Total church property in the SBC a year ago was \$5,022,607,547.

These three states also led in total church offerings last year: \$184 million in Texas, \$107 million in North Carolina and \$97 million in Georgia. The SBC total for the same period was \$1,136,238,734.

Florida leads all the state conventions with 46.2 per cent of its Cooperative Program receipts going to Southern Baptist Convention causes. Georgia is second with 43.9 per cent and Maryland is third with 38.5 per cent. The average for 33 state conventions is 33.6 per cent.

Oklahoma was the first state convention added to the SBC in the Twentieth Century, being organized in 1906. Illinois followed in 1907.

Six of the eight Great Lakes states now have separate Baptist state conventions affiliated with the SBC. Five of these have been organized within the past 20 years. The Minnesota-Wisconsin fellowship of Southern Baptists is growing and aiming for status as a convention.

The District of Columbia Convention is considered a "state" convention even though the District is politically not a state. It is the successor to a city Baptist association established in 1877. It is the only "state" convention that has dual affiliation with both the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches.

The Baptist Convention of New Mexico was organized in 1912, the same year political statehood was achieved.

The first Southern Baptist church in California was constituted in 1936. A convention was formed in 1940. Recognition of this growing work provoked a prolonged debate at the SBC meetings in 1941 and '42. A minority report of a committee prevailed at the 1942 meeting, however, and the California churches were recognized as cooperating churches of the SBC. SBC churches in the area have flourished. A year ago the convention reported 903 Southern Baptist churches with 279,000 members.

The Arizona convention once included territory from Canada to the Mexican border, including Colorado. Later the Colorado convention included all of five states and a part of a sixth.

All the 33 state conventions have an executive staff headed by an administrator usually called "executive secretary." Each convention likewise has a Baptist state paper. Twenty-three of these papers are weeklies, six are monthlies and four are bi-weekly.

The papers range in circulation from 2,500 to the Texas Baptist Standard's 375,000. Five papers have over 100,000 circulation: Texas, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi and North Carolina. The combined circulation for all 33 is 1,750,000.

In the formation of the first Baptist state convention--South Carolina--the founders stated their purpose was to form a "bond of union, a center of intelligence, and a means of vigorous, united exertion in the cause of God, for the promotion of truth and righteousness."

With a variety of agendas, formats and circumstances, over the next few weeks the Baptist state conventions will be working vigorously at that kind of purpose.

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CORRECTION -- In Baptist Press mailing dated 10/11/74, story titled "John Freeman, Prominent Southern Baptist Leader, Dies," graph 4, line 1, change "spanning 76 years. . ." to read "spanning 60 years. . ." Thanks.

--Baptist Press