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By John J. Hurt

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist papers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

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# -- BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Exceed One Million

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In addition to increases in church membership, reports from overseas Southern Baptist mission organizations indicate that baptisms and the number of churches also increased substantially. While church membership was up more than 10 percent, baptisms increased more than 15 percent, and number of churches about 6 percent.

These figures compare favorably with the 1976 increases of 4.6 percent in baptisms, 1.2 percent in membership, and 5.7 percent in number of churches.

"This is a most encouraging increase in baptisms," said Winston Crawley, director of the overseas division of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. "In fact, it is an outstanding gain," he added. "However, growth in the number of churches seems to be holding fairly steady and needs to increase if we're to move in the direction of a 10-fold increase by the end of the century."

Crawley noted that reports indicate that the number of baptisms and church membership in some countries seem to have dropped in 1977, but cautioned that this may be due to incomplete or inaccurate reports.

"In many countries keeping accurate church records is not part of their culture," he explained. "In those cases, approximate numbers are sometimes reported."

Areas where Baptist growth has been particularly significant include countries in Africa, parts of the Middle East, and East Asia.

Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Togo all reported increases of at least 25 percent. In Kenya, baptisms more than doubled, jumping from 2,844 in 1976 to 6,938 in 1977. Crawley attributed increases in these African countries to a "religious change that seems to be sweeping the entire continent." Many people who previously held to tribal religions are moving to urban areas and embracing other religions, he said. Large numbers of these are becoming Christians.

Although the actual number of baptisms is small in Middle East countries, increases are proportionately substantial. Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and Libya all reported increases in excess of 175 percent, and Turkey reported an 80 percent increase.

Other countries which reported significant increases in baptisms include Taiwan and Singapore in East and Southeast Asia; Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Mexico, Panama and Ecuador in Latin America; and Austria and Belgium in Europe.

Other year-end figures include total income for the Foreign Mission Board of nearly \$63 million, an increase of 7.96 percent over 1976.

Hungarian Ambassador  
Visits Home Mission Board

ATLANTA (BP)--Ferenc Esztergalyos, ambassador of the Hungarian People's Republic, visited the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to discuss the board's work with Hungarian Baptists.

Esztergalyos talked with Oscar Romo, director of the department of language missions, and with Alexander Haraszti, general secretary of the Hungarian Baptist Union of North America.

During the discussion, Esztergalyos urged Romo to accept an invitation to visit Hungarian Baptist churches later this year.

"We had a very interesting discussion concerning the job of the Home Mission Board," the ambassador said. "I was very glad to learn of your work with ethnic groups and in particular with Hungarians. Not only are you doing religious work, but you are helping to preserve the cultural heritage of Hungarians."

Esztergalyos, who has been Hungary's ambassador to the United States for three years, was in Atlanta on other business when he visited the HMB at the invitation of Romo and Haraszti.

"I try to travel as much in the country as possible. I believe it is the task of an ambassador to learn about the country. I try to learn about the culture here and to speak about my own country. The knowledge (of Hungary) is not very large," he said.

He said he seeks direct contact "to fight against the ghosts--sometimes they are not ghosts--of misunderstanding between countries. Sometime it is tougher to tear it (misunderstanding) down.

"I believe the task of an ambassador is to help people come together," he added.

Esztergalyos said he believes the trip evangelist Billy Graham made to Hungary "was very good for both sides."

However, he noted he is not involved in religious work because "it is not the task of an ambassador to devote himself to any kind of religious work."

Romo, asked about his invitation to visit Hungary, said details of the visit have not been worked out and that he must receive approval from the HMB directors to make such a trip.

Texans Seek to Double  
Mission Gifts by 1982

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DALLAS (BP)--On the heels of substantial increases in membership and financial giving last year, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) aims to double mission gifts in five years to help reach the world with the gospel of Christ.

"By achieving the goal, our churches would give more than \$50 million for worldwide mission causes," said James H. Landes, BGCT executive director.

Also, the 2.1-million-member BGCT is involved with 10 million other Southern Baptists in a "Bold Mission" thrust to secure 5,000 short-term volunteer missionaries by 1982.

The volunteer Missions Service Corps will supplement the work of Southern Baptist career missionaries which now number about 5,000 in more than 90 countries.

During 1977, the 4,000 churches increased their mission giving by about \$2.5 million through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program (unified budget) to \$26.2 million. Total gifts by members through the churches was \$300 million.

Under the 5-year plan, the Southern Baptist churches in Texas are challenged to give about \$200 million for world missions through 1982. Gifts of all Southern Baptist churches during the period would be about \$1.2 billion.

Last year, Texas Baptist churches reported about 2,000 fewer baptisms (52,600) than the previous year, but total membership in the churches rose by about 25,000 to 2,124,800

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Overseas Conventions  
Send Missionaries, Too

By Irma Duke

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Christians in the United States didn't wait until everyone in America was converted before trying to spread the gospel overseas, and overseas Christians aren't waiting either.

A number of the overseas conventions with which Southern Baptists are related now have their own home or foreign missionary sending organizations and some have both.

Brazil, for example, is one of Southern Baptists' oldest and biggest mission fields, with 267 missionaries serving there today. Yet Brazilian Baptists have their own Foreign Mission Board, started in 1907, just 25 years after the first Southern Baptist related church was organized. Today this board has 49 missionaries in eight countries.

In addition, Brazilian Baptists support more than 160 active home missionaries working in evangelism, church planting, education, radio and benevolent ministries.

Another South American country, Argentina, began sending financial aid for Baptist work in Chile in 1908, the year the Argentine Baptist Convention was organized. Its first foreign missionary arrived in Paraguay in 1919. Argentine Baptists today have some 30 home missionaries.

Many other national conventions, associations and local churches sponsor their own missionaries overseas, even though Southern Baptists are still sending missionaries to them.

Overseas Baptists support their mission outreach in a variety of ways, including budget allocations and special offerings. The China Baptist Convention in Taiwan (Republic of China) allocates one-third of its budget for overseas missions and one-fourth for home missions, and it has been supporting missionaries only since 1957.

The Baptist Women's Union of Japan has a world missions offering. The goal for its 1976 World Baptist Week of Prayer offering was \$58,620 and \$34,000 of that went to the work of Japan Baptist foreign missionaries in Brazil. Another \$10,300 went for other foreign fields. Nearly \$4,000 was sent to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va., for use in world missions work.

In some cases, missionary support is shared by two conventions. The Jamaican missionaries who serve in Grenada, the Hecford Sharpes, are receiving all personal financial support from the Jamaican Convention while the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board supports the programs with which the couple is related, according to Elaine (Mrs. Manget) Herrin, Southern Baptist missionary press representative in Grenada.

Winston Crawley, overseas division director for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, points out that the sending of missionaries is based on two major factors--spiritual need and the nature of the Christian experience itself which makes a person want to share the gospel.

"We rejoice at this sign of growing strength in young conventions overseas," he says, but adds that Southern Baptists cannot afford to relax in their worldwide mission efforts. The fact that overseas conventions are sending their own missionaries is a sign of maturing and strength but it is not a sign that their countries are fully evangelized, he emphasizes.

"We still need to help in such countries," he explains, "because of their spiritual need and because of our obligation as Christians."

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