



December 12, 1978

78-202

Multi-program Leaders
Carry Many Loads

By Charles Willis

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Mike McCrocklin of Iowa, Jackson Walls of West Virginia and Katsuro Taura of Hawaii labor under common circumstances, despite different locations and varied tasks. Each is responsible for at least eight Southern Baptist program areas in his state.

McCrocklin, church development director for the Iowa Baptist Fellowship, is responsible for Sunday School, church training, music, recreation, architecture, library and administration, family and student ministries, and evangelism work. He also edits the state Baptist newspaper, "The Iowa Southern Baptist."

Walls, director of religious education for the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, oversees eight program areas and the state newspaper, "The West Virginia Southern Baptist." Since his associate works in church recreation, music, training and administration, Walls personally handles "only" Sunday School, church architecture, church library and family ministry programs, along with the newspaper.

Taura, director of cooperative church development for the Hawaii Baptist Convention, is responsible for the same eight church program areas that Walls covers, and he is stewardship secretary for Hawaii.

How can one person do the work needed for so many program areas?

"It's impossible," laughs McCrocklin, who has been on the job for a year. "I depend on lay leadership and volunteer state program leaders. We see our greatest needs in the areas of Sunday School, church music, church training and church administration. Other programs are cared for through one special event a year and as the need arises."

Walls schedules his time to work on the state paper at the first of each month. His major emphasis is education and he spends more than half his time in Sunday School work.

Taura's technique is to major on certain programs.

"I depend heavily on the Sunday School Board consultants to help us," he says. "We sponsor one event a year in some programs such as music or architecture. My major emphasis is still in Sunday School work, and another major area is church administration."

With so many claims on their time, the three men note that travel takes them away from home a lot. McCrocklin was gone 180 nights last year. That doesn't include a multitude of one day trips within the state. Walls is away from home about 35 percent of the time, and Taura travels about three months out of the year.

"I have so many national meetings," says McCrocklin. "I spent five weeks at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center this summer. In fact, the only weeks I didn't belong there were during Woman's Missionary Union and foreign missions conferences."

McCrocklin, who has a wife and three young daughters, recalls times when he has had to leave on a trip and "my wife and I would literally weep. We have a good marriage, and we know that a lot of this travel is necessary for the Lord's work to be done in Iowa."

Attempts to make up for absences include "quality time at home and the highest long-distance telephone bill, except for the White House," McCrocklin muses. "I call home every day that I am away. My wife is my best friend--always has been since I first met her."

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Walls, whose family is grown, is more fortunate. Though his wife works, she can travel with him on weekends and is free to take off from work when she needs to accompany him.

"Travel isn't a problem until he's been gone for four or five nights," Mrs. Walls observed. "Then I'm ready for him to come home. I think it's easier for me than it would be for someone with children in the home."

Taura, whose children are beginning to leave home for college, describes his family as "very supportive. Travel used to be harder when the children were younger."

"I long and yearn for the day when I can have one program," says McCrocklin. "We're trying to provide what the people want...you learn to take short cuts, which isn't necessarily good, but it's a prerequisite...If you think time is frustrating, you ought to try working without a budget!"

Walls notes that "I bow to the current pressure. The hardest thing I have to do is advance planning."

But he adds, "I enjoy the diversity of my work. I don't know if I would function well 'in a box.' I think I have the best job in the SBC; a state staff in a developing state is ideal. You're with the beginning of something--it's diverse--you're plowing new ground."

Taura confides that he envies his counterparts who are responsible for only one program.

"I wish I could concentrate on something and put effort into it the whole time," he says, but hastens to add, "I really feel that as long as I'm helping the churches and seeing response from the pastors and volunteers, I'm accomplishing. The Lord sends blessings along through responses by the people. These things give me a lift."

"The only salvation I have as I carry a lot of programs is that I am person oriented," Taura reflects. "If I were not, I'd give up the work."

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Gifts, Economy Measures, Assure
Swiss Seminary To Remain Open

By John M. Wilkes

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--A projected operating deficit of 200,000 Swiss francs (\$116,000) has been reduced by contributions to the Baptist Theological Seminary from unions, churches and individuals.

Combined with severe staff reductions and other economy measures, this means the seminary will end the current year with a balanced budget and is assured of remaining open.

"The response has been nothing short of astounding," seminary President Isam E. Ballenger told the school's new executive board at its initial meeting Dec. 8. Ballenger is a Southern Baptist missionary.

He said gifts have totaled more than 100,000 Swiss francs since it was announced last March that the seminary could not continue with financing only from sources outside Europe.

The executive board was jointly named by the European Baptist Federation Council and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to administer seminary affairs in a reorganization plan last September. Among its actions were:

--Choosing Gerhard Claas of Hamburg, Germany, as chairman-convenor, and Andrew Macrae of Glasgow, Scotland, as recording secretary. Claas is secretary-treasurer of the European Baptist Federation. Macrae is secretary and superintendent of the Baptist Union of Scotland.

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--Confirming Ballenger as president, in a resolution which noted his double burden as seminary president and as the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's field representative in Europe and expressed a desire that he continue as president.

The executive board also expressed "full support for the entire present faculty," set up a remuneration study, considered a faculty promotion scheme, and approved a sabbatical leave schedule.

The board also met with a delegation of the faculty and student representatives for discussion of responsibilities set out by the new administrative guidelines.

Steps were taken toward creation of a non-profit seminary foundation for protection of funds and of donors.

Support pledges for 1979 include 47,500 Swiss Francs from European Baptist unions, 27,000 Swiss Francs from churches and church institutions, and 10,000 Swiss Francs from individuals.

"In order to avoid any further deficit in the coming year, we are counting on people to keep up their generous support," Claas said.

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Evangelism Leaders
Analyze Baptism Decline

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press
12/12/78

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--For the third consecutive year, statistical projections indicate a baptism decline in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Also, the rate of church membership growth in the Southern Baptist Convention showed the smallest increase in the past several decades.

The statistics, prepared by the research services department of the Baptist Sunday School Board, were detailed during the annual meeting of the evangelism directors of 34 state conventions affiliated with the SBC.

The baptism and church membership projections were based on analysis of 17,361 Uniform Church Letters, the document Southern Baptist churches use to report such data as baptisms, church membership, giving, and enrollment and participation in church organizations. Final figures from the more than 35,000 churches will be available in February, according to Martin Bradley, manager of the board's research services. Bradley estimated that the figures will be accurate within one percentage point.

Traditionally, baptism and church membership statistics have been indicators of denominational health and growth. According to the projections, Southern Baptists will baptize 336,356 persons in the 1978 church year. That is a 2.7 percent decrease from 1977, the lowest in 27 years for the denomination, when 345,690 baptisms were reported, representing in 11 percent decline from the previous year.

In 1975, when the decline began, Southern Baptists reported 421,809 baptisms, and then 384,496 in 1976. The only baptism figure lower than 1977 and 1978 came in 1949, when Southern Baptists baptized 310,226 converts.

The projections indicate 13,200,948 Southern Baptists, an increase of only .9 percent over the 13,083,199 reported in 1977.

"We actually are gaining church membership," said Bradley, "But, our rate of growth is declining. Last year, we had a growth rate of 1.2 percent. For the past 15 years our growth rate has gradually dropped. The rate of growth this year may be the smallest we have recorded. We know it will be among the smallest in several decades."

In addition to baptisms, declines were also projected for ongoing enrollments in most church program organizations, but Southern Baptist churches will record increases in giving, showing a 9.9 percent gain in total receipts and a 10 percent jump in mission expenditures.

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C. B. Hogue, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's evangelism section, said, "What is happening to us is that we give more and more but do less and less. The average Southern Baptist, it appears, is interested in missions, but would rather give dollars than himself. We have talked boldly, but we have worked weakly."

Hogue warned the evangelism directors that the continued decline in baptisms and the membership slowdown "may be a prelude to decline...it has happened to others."

Hogue added that Southern Baptists may have become "smug" over the fact that they belong to the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

"I know of no other group in history that has baptized 1,000 persons a day (besides Southern Baptists), but when we are confronted with the unchurched in our land, it does not leave room for us to be self satisfied. We have been proud to be known as the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, but we apparently have forgotten the responsibility that goes with that reputation," he said.

Harry Williams, evangelism director for Southern Baptist General Convention of California, noted that personal evangelism has been the most effective means of winning converts and added, "Had we not begun a major emphasis on personal witnessing--one-on-one evangelism--in the early 1970s, we'd be in much worse shape than we're in now."

J. W. Hutchens, evangelism director for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, said, "Our churches believe in witnessing but in many cases have been reluctant to follow through."

Tal Bonham, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, said, "The main reason for the decline in baptisms is that our people are just not witnessing as they ought to. We will never win the world to Christ through mass evangelism. One-on-one sharing is the only way."

Bonham added he believes the decline can be directly traced to weakness in or lack of pastoral leadership in the area of evangelism.

Joe Ford, director of the evangelism development division at the Home Mission Board, said he believes the decline has bottomed out. "I believe we will show an increase next year."

Statistically, if Southern Baptists decline for another year in baptisms, it will be only the third time in this century that Southern Baptists have showed such a decline four years in a row. The first time a four-year decline occurred was in early days of the century and the second time was during the days of World War II.

"I believe the basic problem has been with theology rather than with methodology," Ford added. "We have a weak theology about evangelism, the lostness of man and the reconciliation of God. The weakness is most often reflected in the role of the pastor today. He has so many demands on his time that it is easy for him to justify his own lack of witness and his failure to train the people."

Ford added that the SBC has become a "spectator's denomination," which has tended to substitute talk for action and "has been more concerned with who we are and less with who God is."

Hogue told the evangelism leaders that the continued declines in baptisms should serve as "flags of warning about what can happen to us...I believe it (the decline) shows us that it is time to stop our talking and begin to do. We must realize that growth is not self-perpetuating. Just because we have grown in the past, we seem to think that we will go on and on.

"But, now we must go outside...into the world of lost people," he declared.

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DEC. 18 1978