

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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79-37

**Robbers Blow Up Safe,
Steal Hospital Funds**

MBEYA, Tanzania (BP)--Armed robbers blew open a safe and stole several thousand shillings from Baptist Hospital, Mbeya, Tanzania.

Explosives used to open the safe did extensive damage to the hospital administrator's office, according to Evelyn (Mrs. Douglas M.) Knapp, Southern Baptist missionary press representative for Tanzania.

The missionary doctor living nearest the hospital was awakened by the explosion, said Mrs. Knapp, but the robbers were gone when he arrived.

The robbery should not create a financial crisis for the hospital, said Davis L. Saunders, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area secretary for Eastern and Southern Africa. Although he had not received word of the exact amount, he said the figure was probably equivalent to several hundred dollars at an exchange rate of approximately seven shillings to the dollar.

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**Baptists Urged To Oppose
Restrictive Pension Laws**

DALLAS (BP)--Now is the time for Baptists to support a 1976 Southern Baptist Convention resolution opposing the federal pension law's rule that would prohibit church agencies from participating in church pension plans, according to Darold H. Morgan, president of the SBC Annuity Board.

Morgan urges Southern Baptists to support congressional legislation to amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) of 1974.

The Annuity Board president chairs the Church Alliance for Clarification of ERISA, an organization of members of more than 25 religious denominations supporting the legislation introduced in the U. S. House of Representatives by U. S. Rep. Barber Conable, R.-N. Y.

The House bills are HR 1576, 1577 and 1578. Similar legislation is expected to be introduced in the U. S. Senate by Herman Talmadge, D.-Ga., and Lloyd Bentsen, D.-Tex.

Gary Nash, Annuity Board general counsel, says the legislation would remedy "several technical defects in ERISA."

"It would amend the law's definition of 'church plan' to recognize traditional church retirement plans which cover church and agency employees," he says.

The legislation also would let ERISA recognize unique differences among denominational structures.

Current ERISA regulations penalize church workers and also have deprived some denominational employees of pension benefits, Nash says.

This is contrary to the stated intent of ERISA, he explains. The legislation is designed to correct these inequities.

Nash points out that ERISA threatens to fragment denominational pension plans and, if not amended, undermine how churches have functioned successfully for years.

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Enforcement of current ERISA rules also could cause problems as ministers and employees move from one SBC job category to another, he says.

"Letters supporting the Church Alliance legislation should be addressed to your senators and representatives," Nash says.

Morgan said more information on ERISA is available from the Annuity Board in Dallas and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, D. C.

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Dallas Church Still Heads Top 10

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--First Baptist Church, Dallas, still ranks as the largest congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention, according to 1979 rankings of the top 10 SBC churches, but two new churches have joined the top 10 and others have changed position.

The Dallas church, according to statistics through 1978, has 20,045 members, up from the 18,869 recorded when Baptist Press last released top 10 rankings in 1977 (based on 1976 statistics).

But, First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., which led the Southern Baptist Convention in baptisms in 1978 with 1,012, moved up from fourth to second, rising from 9,935 to 12,217 members in two years.

It replaced Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., which recorded 11,407 members previously but dropped to 10,015 members in the latest statistics on the SBC Uniform Church Letter. Although Bellevue has averaged over 1,000 additions each year, it dropped back to fifth place because it cleaned its roll of members which it could no longer locate, a church spokesman said.

All the churches in the top 10 (and three not in that group) exceed 7,000 in membership and 10 others top 6,000, but statistical breakdowns show that most churches in the 13.2-million-member SBC have under 300 in membership.

Statistics compiled from 34,989 churches which reported out of 35,404 in the nation's largest Protestant denomination show that 21,525 churches (61.5 percent) have 299 or less in their membership. Other breakdowns reveal 10,967 churches (31.3 percent) in the 300 to 999 range; 2,314 (6.6 percent) in the 1,000 to 2,999 range; 160 (.47 percent) in the 3,000 to 5,999 range; and 23 (.066 percent) in the 6,000 and up range.

First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., with 8,819 members, and North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, with 8,099, moved into the top 10 for the first time in 8th and 9th places respectively.

Two former top 10 churches--Travis Avenue Church, Fort Worth, Texas, with 7,441, and First Church, Wichita Falls, Texas, with 7,206--dropped to 11th and 13th respectively, although they both showed net increases. The 12th place church, First Church, Atlanta, Ga., with 7,399 members, is the only other Southern Baptist church exceeding 7,000 members.

The top 10 rankings for 1979 (based on 1978 statistics) are:

1979 Top 10 Rankings SBC Churches by Membership		
	<u>1979 (a)</u>	<u>1977 (b)</u>
1. First, Dallas, Tex.	20,045	18,869
2. First Southern, Del City, Okla.	12,217	9,935
3. First, Houston, Tex.	11,133	9,049
4. First, Lubbock, Tex.	10,595	10,445
5. Bellevue, Memphis, Tenn.	10,015 (c)	11,407
6. First, San Antonio, Tex.	9,404	8,961

1979 Top 10 Rankings (continued)

	<u>1979 (a)</u>	<u>1977 (b)</u>
7. First, Amarillo, Tex.	9,347	9,244
8. First, Jacksonville, Fla.	8,819	6,918
9. North Phoenix (Ariz.)	8,809	6,657
10. Dauphin Way, Mobile, Ala.	7,572	7,276

(a) 1978 statistics

(b) 1976 statistics

(c) cleaned rolls

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Research a Necessity
In Growing Churches

By Linda Lawson

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The importance of good research in growing a church is a point Steve Blad seems to never tire of emphasizing.

"If you want to reach a group of people you have to do research about what those people are thinking," Blad told participants in a seminar on the role of the Sunday School in church growth.

Blad, growth consultant in the Alabama Baptist Sunday School department, cited a Princeton University research study which indicated that 50 percent of unchurched persons would respond positively to a Christian witness or invitation to church, if asked in the right way.

"We've got to figure out how to ask them," he said.

For example, he said a recent Louis Harris study showed that a cross section of 1,990 American men, ages 18-49, ranked as the most important values in their lives, health, love, peace of mind and family life. Religion placed tenth on a list of 11 items.

Blad said if he knew these were the values of unchurched men in the community of a church he was leading, he would build programming and promotion efforts to appeal to those needs.

"We reach who we provide for," he said. "We can target ministries to meet what is discovered through research."

Blad said research data is in easy reach of any church in the forms of census statistics, analyses of church records, Home Mission Board Data Paks and studies conducted by local government, school systems and businesses.

At 27, Blad learned how to use research techniques before he became interested in church growth, during four years of college debating. Then while attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he worked in a telephone computer center.

"Everything I'd ever done had to do with church growth, I just didn't know it," he said.

In addition to research about unchurched people, Blad said churches need to study themselves--when they have grown and why, seasonal fluctuations in attendance and percentages of church members enrolled in Sunday School.

He noted that a direct relationship nearly always exists between the percentage of church members enrolled in Sunday School and the ratio of baptisms to church members.

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For example, in 1960 in Alabama, 72 percent of all Baptist church members were enrolled in Sunday School and the ratio of baptisms to church members was 1 to 25. By 1970, only 63 percent of church members were enrolled in Sunday School and the baptism ratio had risen to 1 to 28. And in 1977, the percentage of church members enrolled in Sunday School had dropped again to 56 percent and the baptism ratio had risen further to 1 to 43.

Blad bemoans the fact that churches make serious mistakes due to inadequate research. A church that hasn't studied population trends, for example, may not know how to plan staff or building expansions. He cited a church that built a gymnasium without the knowledge that a majority of the community's population was over 50 years of age.

A church where leaders know the seasonal fluctuations in attendance can plan activities and programs more effectively, Blad said. He also noted that research can help a church change or adapt a program to meet community needs.

"On the basis of research, businesses know where they're going; churches often don't," he said.

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\$1 Million Gift
By Palm Beach Atlantic

Baptist Press
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WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (BP)--A \$1 million gift has been given by an anonymous donor to Palm Beach Atlantic College, a Baptist liberal arts college.

The gift, to be given over five years, by a Florida Baptist layman, will be used for endowment and for property acquisition.

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Harris Roped Into His
Record Missions Effort

Baptist Press

MIAMI, Fla. (BP)--Clarence Harris is a candidate for the "Guinness Book of Records." It's something the 21-year-old junior biology major at the University of Miami sort of got roped into.

Feb. 24 he ran a 10-mile "rope-athon" to raise \$10,000 in 56 minutes to support students in summer mission projects in five states, England, Korea and Bangladesh.

"There is no rope-athon entry in the Guinness book," said the native of Rochester, N.Y., who two years ago raised \$3,000 for missions in a regular 26-mile marathon run. "We're making arrangements to get recognition."

So far as he knows, no one ever has attempted to run any long distance while jumping rope. To get in shape for the event, which began at the Baptist Student Center on campus, Harris skipped rope in sprints against his friends, beating them all, badly.

"He's faster with the rope than we are without one," conceded Bell Weatherford, associate director of the Baptist Campus Ministry.

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