



BAPTIST PRESS

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79-75

**300 Families At Sagemont
Church Raise \$1 Million**

By Debbie Stewart

HOUSTON, Texas (BP)--Sagemont Baptist Church raised more than a million dollars between March 18 and April 29 because 300 families gave their total income for those 40 days to a building fund.

John D. Morgan, pastor of the Houston church, told the congregation at 10 p.m. on April 29 in an extended Sunday service, that they had contributed \$1,077,469 in 40 days toward their new sanctuary. The pastor said the sum is primarily cash but that some other commitments such as stock will be converted to cash.

Sagemont members, including the pastor and his family, pulled out all stops for 40 days. They gave salaries, painted fences and cut expenses by eating vegetable soup together at the church to come up with the money because "we pay cash for everything." The "cash only" policy applies to the church itself, and many of its families, the pastor said.

A man made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized because of the witness of Sagemont men who painted his home to make extra money for the building fund. The man at first could not believe they would work like that for their church.

Sagemont's effort didn't happen overnight.

The stamina to give the church "as much as we could earn with our talents and energies in 40 days" was developed during the past two years. Morgan said the Sagemont experience can happen anywhere a church becomes as important to people as their boats, hunting leases, vacations and second cars."

Sagemont Baptist Church began as a mission 12 years ago with 16 members led by Morgan. He was a mission starter paid \$125 monthly from the Mary Hill Davis state missions offering of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Sagemont, which now has 3,000 members, gave \$4,640 to the state missions offering last year, and \$11,673 to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions this spring.

Offerings of Sagemont members during the 40 days first provided contributions of 37 percent of normal budget to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program budget and other missions, then to staff salaries and utilities, and the balance to the sanctuary building fund. Offerings in visitors' envelopes followed Sagemont's custom of going to state, home, or foreign missions of the denomination.

Most of the 300 families and individuals who gave all their income during the 40 days have become free of major debts after completing "Financial Freedom Seminars" led by their pastor.

About 500 more families were involved in raising a million dollars in 40 days through their prayers. "These are members still in the process of recovering from debt. They have told me they expect the Lord will use them on paying the balance of the sanctuary costs," Morgan said.

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Sagemont's new sanctuary is expected to cost \$2½ million. It will accommodate a growing and a giving church. The church presently has two Sunday schools, two worship services, and four children's services on Sunday mornings because of limited space.

Members' contributions included checks of \$10,000 and more, and a town home. The average gift of individual or family income for the 40 days was between two and five thousand dollars but also included such gifts as \$20 raised by young boys who mowed lawns and a penny taped to a peppermint and put in the offering plate by a six-year-old.

Like other men and women of the church, Morgan and his wife Beth took on extra jobs during the 40 days to boost their gift of income to the church. Like most parents who gave their total income, the Morgans delayed such purchases as blue jeans for their boys. Mrs. Morgan worked as an interior decorator, although she usually is a full-time homemaker and church leader.

The 40 day period was selected because "several places in Scripture, the Lord chose 40 days in which to accomplish a certain work," Morgan said. The Sagemont pastor secured 300 families to volunteer their incomes, comparing his "army" with the army of Gideon in the Old Testament.

Morgan has told the congregation for several years that "when the Lord is ready, Sagemont will give 40 days of the total income that the Lord blesses us with back to him."

The pastor became convinced several years ago that people free of major debt can give more to their church, and want to give more through a church whose offerings help missions instead of pay great interest on debt.

In the Financial Freedom Seminars, Morgan advised his people to sell depreciating items they could live without, such as boats, second cars and televisions. A few families paid off their homes.

"As our people gave the Lord their desire to be free of debt, they received raises, bonuses, and income tax returns," Morgan said. "They used the extra income to pay debts instead of make new purchases.

Some families had garage sales together and applied profits to pay bills.

Several hundred families were prepared when the church decided that the time had come this spring to give a million dollars to start the new sanctuary. Most of the families who gave their total incomes paid bills a month in advance of the 40 days. "They set aside enough to live on during the 40 days, spent only what was necessary, and loved it," Morgan said. "I don't know of anybody who lost a pound because they gave their money to the church."

The congregation seemed to thrive on the "warm fellowship" generated in the intensive effort of raising a million dollars. About 200 families bought groceries cooperatively to save money during the 40 days. They bought enough to feed a family of five with fruits and vegetables for seven dollars a week. Some members plan to continue buying groceries in groups of 10 to 12 families.

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Flooding Damages
Tennessee Churches

By Bobbie Durham

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Baptist families and churches were among those suffering damage in the wake of heavy rains and flooding in several counties of Middle Tennessee which President Jimmy Carter has designated a disaster area.

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Churches in the Nashville area were among the hardest hit, according to reports on the flooding which forced over 1,600 middle Tennessee families out of their homes.

The disaster relief team of the Tennessee Baptist Convention joined relief efforts in cooperation with Miracle Baptist Church, LaVergne, Tenn., serving meals to area families forced out by flood waters, according to Archie King, state Brotherhood director. The church was not damaged but Pastor Carl Scarlett's home had some water damage.

Concord Baptist Church in southeast Nashville reported over \$150,000 in damage as flood waters from Mill Creek reached 40 inches inside the church's auditorium. All of the furnishings and personal items in Pastor Reggie Peltier's home, located across the street from the church, were also inundated.

"We lost every thing in the church and in the pastorium," deacon Melvin Cartwright told the Baptist and Reflector, state Baptist paper. "We don't know where the water came from or where it went when it left, but the damage is unbelievable," he said. The congregation has no flood insurance.

The water hit the church sometime in the early morning hours, May 4. The church's piano was turned over and many pews were turned upside down and covered with other pews by the force of the water. All of the air conditioning and heating systems were covered. The organ was also ruined.

At Peltier's home, 18 inches of water were measured in the living room. His car was covered, and a new camper which washed away was found the next day about one-third of a mile from the church smashed into a row of trees. A propane tank floated across the yard and lodged in the gate connecting to the front yard. Another propane tank was unrecovered.

Peltier and his wife were awakened shortly after midnight when their tow dogs, who drowned when they were trapped under the house, began barking. Water was already coming in the house at that time. About 2:00 a.m. the couple was taken from their home by church member, Tom De Jarnatt, who brought his motorboat to the house. After De Jarnatt carried the Peltiers to safety, he returned to the area and rescued about 10 other people from homes near the church.

Another church member, Jesse King, said it was the worst flood in 63 years. He recalled in the early 1920s when the creek flooded and got into the building. The sanctuary was built in 1845.

At First Baptist Church, Antioch, Tenn., flood waters from Mill Creek rose to nearly four feet in the auditorium, destroying the piano, organ, song books, and numerous other items. O. L. Taylor, pastor, said that the waters then traveled to the educational plant destroying all of the nursery and children's equipment and furnishings.

Members of the church began arriving the next morning to carry out some of the furnishings. "We are drying off what we can save, but there isn't much," Taylor said.

Forest Hills Baptist Church, in south Nashville, had no flood waters in the facilities, but a Presbyterian church near Forest Hills suffered extensive damage.

Charles Livengood, director of missions in Alpha Association, reported that waters from Beaver Dam Creek lacked a foot of reaching Cross Roads Baptist Church near Linden. Both Perry and Hickman Counties in that association were hard hit, but no Baptist churches suffered damage.

Baptist Work Reported
Continuing in China

LONDON (BP)--The Baptist Missionary Society has received news of Christian work in China, according to European Baptist Press Service.

In a letter, addressed simply to "The BMS, London," a lay leader in Sian, recently wrote that the church is well and truly alive, although there is no public worship and Bibles are in desperately short supply.

The letter was intended for four former pastors in China, Cranston Bell, Arthur Elder, Ernest Madge and George Young. Madge, former overseas secretary for the BMS after serving in India and then in China for 16 years, read the letter to the society's general committee.

The letter begins: "Greetings to you all and your wives. It is good to be able to write a letter. I wish to know all about you.

"How is your health? How are your families? What jobs are you doing?

"I and my family are well.

"As to the Sian situation--no church, no church building, no public worship. Only in our homes do we worship, with 30 more people present.

"Last year at Christmas, 200 people assembled for worship. We have no Bibles because the Cultural Revolution burned them."

There follows a brief note about a number of friends, and the letter ends:

"All the believers in the Lord are well. There are many but there is no public worship."

After hearing the letter, the committee spent time in prayer for China, and made plans to approach the Baptist World Alliance to ask that the society might be represented if a delegation is sent to China in accordance with a recent BWA request to Chinese officials.

Sian is a district of Shensi where the BMS worked for 58 years.