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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Summer Attendance Increases
At Baptist Conference Centers

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Summer attendance at Southern Baptists' two national conference centers showed a slight increase over 1979, despite a nationwide slowdown in travel.

More than 58,000 persons participated in a variety of week long training and inspirational sessions at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Centers.

Summer conferences for church staff members and lay persons included Sunday school, church training, Woman's Missionary Union, home and foreign missions, church music, Bible preaching and recreation. A variety of conferences and camps for youth and college students also were held.

The summer total of 58,044 represents an increase of 1,552 over the 1979 total of 56,492.

An all-time high attendance for one week at Glorieta was set in August when 3,410 college students participated in the annual student conference.

Six Sunday school leadership conferences, three at each center, registered an 11.2 percent gain over 1979 with a total of 15,236 persons participating, compared to 13,489 last year.

"With the energy crisis and the inflationary economy we had a lot of fears last January about what the summer might bring," said Bill Cox, supervisor of the conference center program and promotion section at the Sunday School Board, which owns and operates Glorieta and Ridgecrest.

"Our fears were largely put to rest when reservations opened Feb. 1 and several weeks were filled on that day. It's evident that Southern Baptists have placed a high priority on training and spiritual experiences in connection with their summer plans," Cox said.

Cox's opinion is confirmed by two church staff members who took groups to the conference centers this summer.

Bob Edd Shotwell, minister of education at Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, took 140 persons on three chartered buses to Glorieta for a Sunday school week.

The church paid the transportation costs for the 750-mile trip out of budgeted funds, but each participant paid his own conference, housing and food expenses. A church-sponsored trip to Glorieta is conducted every other summer.

"Those who attend gain training and gain from being associated with people from other churches," Shotwell said. "The fellowship of the trip also is valuable."

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Bob Moulton, minister of music at First Baptist Church, Columbia, Tenn., took four volunteer leaders of children's and youth choirs to the church music leadership conference.

The church paid about 75 percent of the total cost from funds budgeted for leadership training.

"We see this as an investment in our leadership," Moulton said. "The leaders of our choirs can get their best training at a conference like this."

Attendance prospects appear bright for the fall and winter seasons, which opened Labor Day weekend. More than 4,000 single adults attended simultaneous Labor Day weekend conferences at each conference center.

More than 7,000 senior adults are registered for eight weeks of chautauquas in October and November.

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Money Discovered Missing
At Sunday School Board

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Approximately \$10,000 was discovered missing Aug. 28, when a safe was opened at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Cash on hand is used for day-to-day operations of the board. Regular deliveries to and from Nashville banks are handled by an independent money carrier to assure that only necessary cash is on hand.

Nashville police are investigating to determine how the money was taken. A board spokesman said additional security measures are being studied.

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August Sees
Big CP Push

Baptist Press
9/3/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists gave over a million dollars more to their education and missions enterprises through the national Cooperative Program in August than they did in August 1979.

That 20 percent increase pushed August undesignated gifts to \$6,356,628, raising the year to date total to \$65,847,384. Undesignated gifts through the first 11 months of the fiscal year are \$7,526,979, or 12.9 percent, ahead of the same period last year.

If the 12.9 percent increase holds for the final month, September's undesignated offerings will be approximately \$6.6 million. That would be enough to meet the 1980 operating and capital needs budgets and edge into the \$12 million challenge budget by \$1.45 million.

Designated gifts for August were \$1,177,897, a 46.5 percent increase over August 1979. Total designated gifts for the year are \$62,108,689, up 15.2 percent over last year.

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With one month remaining in the fiscal year, designated and undesignated receipts together total \$127,956,072. That is an increase of \$15,726,153, or 14 percent, over last year.

Undesignated gifts through the national Cooperative Program represent approximately one-third of the Cooperative Program gifts from 35,600 Southern Baptist churches to support their national and world missions ministries. The other two-thirds supports missions at the state convention level. State and national Cooperative Program gifts represent approximately 8.3 percent of the offerings received in Southern Baptist churches.

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Baptist Agency Protests
IRS Scientology Action

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
9/3/80

WASHINGTON (BP)--Charging that the head of the Internal Revenue Service violated the First Amendment's religion guarantees, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has joined a legal brief challenging the denial of tax exempt status to the controversial Church of Scientology.

The Joint Committee filed a brief jointly with the National Council of Churches to protest the removal of tax exemption for the sect during tax years 1970-72, a removal based on an "unprecedented assertion" that a religious organization's tax exempt status depends on following what IRS Commissioner Jerome Kurtz called "accepted public policy."

Nevertheless, the brief filed with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Sacramento, Calif., also emphasized that the Baptist Joint Committee and the National Council of Churches are unwilling to concede that "in a theological sense" the Church of Scientology is actually a "church" or "religion." They entered the case, the brief explained, because IRS had stipulated throughout the case's history that Scientology is a church in the legal sense.

The brief also pointed out that while the National Council and Baptist Joint Committee "wish to make clear that they do not condone the alleged illegal acts which are among the issues," they are also convinced "that there is no connection between such acts and the tax exemption."

Constitutional issues in the case are of "supreme importance" to churches and religious organizations in the U.S., the brief continued. "If the commissioner is allowed to inject into tax exemption proceedings a requirement so vague and ungovernable as one that an applicant must demonstrate compliance with 'public policy,' all religious applicants will be at the mercy of the service's unfettered discretion in obtaining tax exempt status."

The two mainline groups filed the brief, they explained, "lest they be at some future date confronted with similar disclosure demands as the result of the government's application of the undefined and anomalous 'public policy' test to them in some way now unforeseen and unforeseeable."

The unusual effort in the brief to put distance between their interests and those of the Church of Scientology resulted not only from an unwillingness to grant the sect's claim to be a church but because of the highly publicized trials and convictions earlier this year of criminal offenses of nine of the church's top officials.

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In addition, the church has been involved in widely publicized efforts to discredit its opponents through "public relations" campaigns that have included smear tactics.

But nothing in the internal revenue code authorized IRS to establish the "public policy" criterion to grant or remove tax exempt status, the brief argued. That standard amounts to "an attempt to arrogate unto (IRS) supervisory and investigatory powers never intended by Congress."

The "public policy" standard excessively entangles government in religious affairs, the argument continued, in that "the state claims the right to intrude into matters of private religious conscience and to pass upon their overall compliance with some vague notion of public morality."

"The fact that this case involves a controversial and unorthodox religious group," the brief went on, "only adds to the suspicion that the power claimed is not and will not be asserted against mainline religious bodies but against the unpopular minority who lack the imprimatur of conventional religious respectability."

"Freedom of religion cannot be conditioned upon government appraisal and approval of a church's activities," the argument concluded. "If it were, it would cease to be freedom at all, and we would be left only with those churches of which the government approves."

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Ben E. Loring To Direct
R-TV Counseling Service

Baptist Press
9/3/80

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Ben E. Loring Jr., director of program planning for the Texas Baptist General Convention's Christian Life Commission for seven years, will become vice president of counseling services for the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission Sept. 15.

Loring, 34, will try to involve local churches in the commission's mail counseling program so they can minister to those in their area who have been touched by a Baptist-produced radio or television program.

J.P. Allen, former director of counseling services, retired in April 1979. A four-person staff currently responds to the 800 to 1,500 letters of inquiry the commission receives each month.

While Loring was with the Texas General Convention's Christian Life Commission, he helped reshape and expand a family ministry program to a full-time emphasis, helped develop the convention's involvement in world hunger and developed working relationships between the Texas Christian Life Commission and associations and local churches.

He was for several years minister of evangelism for First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, where he directed lay witness training and led city youth crusades. In cooperation with the Texas convention's evangelism department, he has led more than 250 evangelistic crusades in Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and New York.

A native of Dallas, he graduated from Baylor University and earned a doctor of ministries degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. His father, Ben E. Loring, is pastor of Richland Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Radio and Television Commission.

New House of God
Won't Be a Church

ABOMEY, Benin (BP)—The Dutton Bonnells are building a house in Abomey, Benin, they hope will be a testimony to their faith and their God as the whole community watches.

Several months ago, when a ban against foreigners buying or selling land was lifted, house rents doubled and then tripled. The Bonnells, Southern Baptist missionaries from Florida, began a concentrated search for land to build on.

After many delays, when it seemed that every possibility had been exhausted, they found a lot at a bargain price. The property faced one of Abomey's two main roads and had water and electrical lines running just in front of it.

The missionaries soon learned why it was so cheap. There were two huge fetish trees only a few feet from the property. Sacrifices were often made there and the trees are said to house the spirits of all the former kings of Abomey. Some local people suggested that no Beninese would dare live on that sacred ground.

The most appealing feature of the land, the Bonnells say, is the beauty of those giant kapok trees. They purposely drew up house plans so they could see the trees from almost every window.

It was soon discovered one of the troublesome trees had termites and was likely to fall, but city authorities were reluctant to do anything about it. Then, one Sunday, the top half of the tree fell, injuring a pregnant woman. That night a man on a motorbike was killed instantly when he ran into fallen limbs alongside the road.

Although the Bonnells were nowhere near the land when the accidents happened, tales quickly began to circulate. The chief of police sent for Bonnell, suggesting that he clear away the debris. The landowner lived just across the road from the Bonnell's new property, but he had been conspicuously absent.

The chief indicated he could not get involved because the tree was sacred. The mayor and another official gave the Bonnells permission to finish cutting down the tree, which was absolutely essential before building could begin. But the officials themselves would not come anywhere near.

It was difficult to find anyone who would cut the tree at any price. The remaining trunk had a large hole commonly believed to be the trysting place at night for sorcerers. The woodcutter hired had a frustrating time because those who passed warned him of the danger he was placing himself in for his part in the tree's defamation.

The tree, almost down, still caused havoc. One evening some Beninese friends told the Bonnells that owls, which are believed to be sorcerers incarnated, were resting on the stump at night to guard the spirits remaining there.

"All of this sounds rather farfetched," say the Bonnells, "but believe us, that is only a small part of the story. Do keep us in your constant prayers in the days to come that this house can be constructed without any mishaps so that it can be a testimony to the power of our God."