



## **BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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No Magic Formula  
For Church Growth

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--There is no magic formula for growing a church, say five ministers of education in rapidly growing Southern Baptist churches.

Doyle Braden, David Cunningham, Jack Naish, Russell Oldham and Laverne Plett agreed that pastoral leadership, members' commitment to outreach and the priority of the Sunday School have been the key factors in their numerical increases.

Other significant factors include adding new Sunday School classes and departments, providing parking and meeting facilities, maintaining a broadcast ministry and having a staff that has been at the church a good while.

At First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., where 5,000 new people have enrolled in Sunday School since 1977, Cunningham called the pastor "the single most important factor" in church growth. He said the pastor must demonstrate by his presence his conviction that the Sunday School is important.

"If the pastor wants his Sunday School to grow, he should be out on the front steps of the church 30 minutes before Sunday School time, shaking hands with people and letting them know that he's glad they are there," said Cunningham. "Occasionally, he's going to have to teach a class and get involved firsthand to see what is happening in the learning experience in a Sunday School program."

Braden, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, which has experienced an average annual gain in Sunday School enrollment of 11 percent every year for the 11 years since John Bisagno came as pastor, said the pastor must be knowledgeable about education programs and lead visitation.

"If the pastor doesn't lead visitation, it's probably not going to take place," said Braden. Also, he noted the pastor should be an information center about any changes that have taken place in the Sunday School ministry.

"When our pastor says something about 8.5 by '85 (SBC goal to increase the denomination's Sunday School enrollment to 8.5 million by 1985) from the pulpit and we then begin talking about it with our Sunday School leadership, they understand that what we're saying is important," he said.

Plett, minister of education at North Phoenix Baptist Church, Phoenix, Ariz., said pastor Richard Jackson's commitment to the basics of Sunday School growth has been the primary factor in the increase in Sunday School average attendance from 500 to 3,200 in 14 years.

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Plett also noted a direct relationship between Jackson's commitment to evangelistic outreach through the Sunday School and the fact that 400 to 500 persons participate in visitation each Monday night.

"We have not done any evangelism program other than what could be worked through the Sunday School," said Plett. "We believe very firmly that when you start another organization you take energies away from the organization that was supposed to do it in the first place."

Naish, minister of education at Wieuca Road Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga., said Sunday School leaders and members must understand that reaching people is their primary purpose. In 1980 more than 1,600 persons were enrolled in Sunday School at Wieuca Road.

"We're not teaching the Bible to teach the Bible," said Naish. "Good quality Bible teaching is nothing unless it teaches people that our role is redemption, our role is reaching people."

Naish also believes that failure to add new classes and departments as growth takes place can actually "put a lid on the growth."

"Our ministry is based on the concept that we are to reach people to win and develop people so we can reach more people," he said. "To do that we need smaller classes and more units because we need this personal touch."

Growing churches continually need additional leaders. Cunningham runs a continuous potential workers training program at First, Orlando, with 80-100 persons being trained each year.

The fact that the three senior staff members of First Baptist Church, Clarksville, Tenn., have a combined tenure of 40 years has been a vital force in the 30 percent increase in Sunday School attendance since 1977, according to Russell Oldham, minister of education.

The increase in attendance from 700 to more than 1,000 has occurred in a city not experiencing rapid population growth.

"Growth takes time," said Oldham, who has been at the church 11 years. "The longer you spend with your people, the more you realize there are spiritual needs you can fulfill with them and they can fulfill with you. I'm a strong believer in letting things happen over a period of time. If you're not putting out brushfires all the time, you can do your ministry."

While growth is exciting, it also creates inconvenience—crowded classrooms, inadequate parking and constantly changing groups when new people join. The ministers agreed that space must be monitored continuously.

"We are firmly convinced that when a department fills up the space they have, they are not going to grow any more," said Plett. North Phoenix is now finalizing plans to begin two Sunday Schools because "we've got some areas that are full and overflowing."

Lack of space was one reason for a slight decline in 1974 at Wieuca, according to Naish. However, he is quick to emphasize that growth is not automatic with a new building. "Space will only provide opportunities for growth," he said.

Cunningham, whose church is currently seeking land for expansion, said a visible location is vital for growth.

All five churches maintain some form of broadcast ministry, and the ministers said many persons visit the worship services after seeing or hearing the broadcasts.

Also, Oldham noted that the Clarksville church includes during the Sunday morning offertory a special prayer for needs of persons in the community. Names are called into the church on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings.

"People have become aware of this partially through our monthly radio broadcast. They hear who we are praying for and it makes a difference. We feel we're ministering to a city," said Oldham.

While some Southern Baptist churches have been criticized for giving too much attention to numbers, Braden believes much can be learned from compiling and studying statistics.

For example, "We know that we enroll one of every 10 people who visit our church. And every time we enroll three people in Sunday School, we average baptizing one person. That becomes a real good clue to being able to understand what's happening," he said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Sunday School Board bureau of Baptist Press.

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Educators Hear Challenge For  
More Prayer, Worship Emphasis

By Rex Hammock

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CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP)--British theologian Barrington White challenged Baptist educators to start a new emphasis on the importance of prayer and worship.

White, addressing the annual meeting of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools, also predicted the world's religious future "does not lie with the minority of large (churches practicing) crude nationalistic fundamentalism, but lies with those who can live and proclaim truth."

Principal of St. Regent's Park College, a Baptist school affiliated with Oxford University, White called on college presidents to put a new emphasis on their personal prayer lives and to consider a new structure in campus chapel worship services.

"There should be less emphasis on visiting speakers addressing the congregation and more emphasis on the congregation addressing God," he explained, saying that is what worship is supposed to be.

White delivered the "H.I. Hester Lectures" during the three-day meeting of the association, which consists of presidents and academic deans from the 72 Southern Baptist related seminaries, colleges and schools.

Also addressing the association was member Duke K. McCall, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

McCall, current president of the Baptist World Alliance, said his travels among Baptists around the globe have given him a new appreciation for "the Baptist educational task."

For instance, Baptists in the U.S.S.R. "have a mystical reverence for education but with a misunderstanding of what education will do," he reported.

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"They assume the religious man, when educated, can answer all the questions of life." The educational tasks facing the world's Baptists are not that easy, McCall said.

Dan Grant, president of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., told the presidents and deans "the most important thing in the faculty hiring process (at Baptist schools) is seeing that a potential professor is a committed Christian."

"(Baptist colleges) should recruit only faculty members with strong scholarly commitment matched by strong Christian commitment. And then (presidents) should get out of the way and let (education) happen," said Grant.

Describing the "unique mission" of Christian education, Grant explained that Baptist colleges should "do all the good things done in secular schools, but in the context of the Lordship of Christ."

During a business session, the association elected officers for 1982. They are: president, William Hinton, president of Houston Baptist University; vice president, Joseph DuBose, president of Baptist Bible Institute; secretary-treasurer, H.I. Hester, retired Baptist educator; and assistant treasurer, Milton Ferguson, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In a related meeting, members of the Southern Baptist Adult Education Association elected Aubrey L. Hawkins president. Hawkins is director of the education division of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

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Cooperative Program  
Increases in June

Baptist Press  
7/2/81

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Undesignated gifts for missions and education through the national Southern Baptist Cooperative Program increased 9.5 percent in June, the ninth month of the fiscal year.

The June increase, \$560,615 over June 1980, raised contributions to \$60,874,257, or 13.2 percent over the same period last year.

Designated contributions increased 27.4 percent in June, to \$6,619,483. That raised designated contributions to date to \$66,615,574, up 12.7 percent.

Designated and undesignated contributions through the first three-quarters of the fiscal year total \$127,489,831, up \$14.5 million, or 12.89 percent over the same period last year.

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Historical Commission  
Director's Mother Dies

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7/2/81

SUMTER, S.C. (BP)--Mrs. Mabel Beatrice McKenzie May, mother of SBC Historical Commission Executive Director Lynn E. May Jr., died July 1 in a Sumter, S.C., nursing home after a prolonged illness. She was 78.

Mrs. May, a retired school teacher, is survived by two sons; Lynn Edward Jr., Nashville, Tenn., and James Robert, Albuquerque, N.M.; one daughter, Marilynn (Mrs. John) Dent, Walhalla, S.C.; four brothers, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

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Families Take Refuge  
In Rural Life Center

BANSALAN, Philippines (BP)--Six Baptist families in the Bansalan area of Mindanao in the Philippines have taken refuge in the Mindanao Baptist Rural Life Center in wake of an ambush by the National Peoples Army, which killed nine people and injured several others.

Authorities recommended that all of the 20 to 30 other families living near the center also evacuate their homes.

Activities at the adjoining Mt. Carmel Baptist Assembly encampment were expected to be canceled for a few weeks to provide housing for Baptist families in camp facilities. The organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in the Philippines has released \$1,000 in emergency relief funds to provide food and other necessities for the families.

The Rural Life Center teaches people in rural Mindanao agricultural and animal husbandry techniques to increase their farm production and help them better provide for their families.

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Plane Crash Greet  
Missionary's Knock

Baptist Press  
7/2/81

WINSLOW, Ariz. (BP)--Louis Gomez, a Southern Baptist home missionary from Gallup, N.M., got an unexpected answer when he knocked on the door of the Pete Martinez home in Winslow recently.

A light plane crashed into the opposite side of the house, but didn't make it as far as the front door to let Gomez in.

Gomez was in Winslow to conduct a week-long Spanish revival.

Home missionary Allison Holman reports that the pilot was uninjured and the co-pilot had only slight injuries but he added, "Brother Gomez came back to our house and took another blood pressure capsule."

Because of prospects reached through the revival, Spanish services have begun at the Indian Baptist Bible Institute, Winslow, on a trial basis on Wednesdays. Gomez comes to Winslow on Wednesday mornings, visits all day and leads services in the evenings.

"We feel the future for the work is bright," Holman says.

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