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Researcher Says SBC Will Lose
Cities Without Blacks, Ethnic

By Jim Newton

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Interpreting preliminary 1980 census data, the director of research for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board predicted Southern Baptist church growth will continue to fall behind population growth in the South and in the cities unless Baptists focus more on reaching blacks and ethnics with the gospel.

"We will totally lose the cities if we don't become sensitive to the social and racial trends revealed in the census data," said Orrin D. Morris.

Morris spoke twice during "Mission in Context," a "once-a-decade" meeting of Baptist mission leaders at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center. He was joined on the program by two officials of the U.S. Census Bureau, who praised what Southern Baptists are doing to teach SBC planners how to use census reports.

Morris made a dozen predictions on the implications for Southern Baptist plans for the next 10 years, based on 1980 census data.

Reaching the large cities of the South with the gospel will present the more formidable challenge to Southern Baptists, he observed, adding there will be little hope for growth in SBC work in southern cities apart from aggressively starting new churches among blacks, Hispanics and other racial groups.

Citing "an obsession with bigness" among Baptists, Morris warned against the tendency of churches in the largest cities to become very large. As communities go through transition, smaller churches disband, merge or relocate while larger churches seem to "survive" better.

Using Houston as an example, Morris pointed out that the number of SBC churches in Harris County increased by only two from 1970 to 1980, from 245 to 247 churches, although the population increased by more than 667,000. The average Baptist church size in Houston is over 700 resident members per church, he said.

Because Baptists believe "bigger is better," he said they tend to favor helping larger congregations get bigger, with little or no concern for helping small churches in racially changing areas, he added.

The problem is compounded by "media exposure of superchurch pastors" pouring millions of dollars into mass media technology instead of starting new churches to reach more people, Morris said.

He also predicted there will be two large periods of "white flight" before the turn of the century, the first in the mid-1980s and again in the late 1990s. This will leave the largest

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pools of unchurched persons, mostly blacks and Hispanics, in the cities.

Morris predicted the national mood will continue to be generally conservative through most of the 1980s, encouraging favorable attitudes toward organized religion in general and Southern Baptists in particular.

Population in the South will continue to mushroom, he said. Florida and Texas will account for one-half the population growth in the South in the next 10 years. Florida will become the fourth largest state by 1990 and Texas will become the second largest state, surpassing New York, by the late 1990s.

Nevertheless, the most rapid Southern Baptist growth will be in the Northeast, and the poorest rate of Baptist growth will be in the South, he said.

"It is not very likely that Baptists in Texas, Florida or Georgia will keep up with the population growth," Morris observed.

Backing his predictions with trends in the 1980 census, Morris pointed out Baptist church membership could not keep up with the population growth in 21 states, most of them in the South, between 1970-1980. Population in the South increased by 20 percent between 1970 and 1980, but Baptist membership increased only 15.4 percent, he said.

"These data cause Southern Baptist leaders great concern, especially as we review the goals of Bold Mission Thrust," Morris said. More than 90 percent of the resident members and 87 percent of the churches are in the South, yet it is in the South where Baptists are having the greatest difficulty keeping up with the population, he said.

In addition to the two data interpretation presentations by Morris, nearly 900 Baptist mission leaders attending the conference were trained in how to use and interpret the 1980 census data when it becomes available.

The Home Mission Board research division provided conference participants with a 72-page manual and a 102-page workbook offering detailed, step-by-step suggestions on how to find and interpret 29 different "indicators" revealed by the census data. Conference participants divided into 30 small workshop groups for the training period.

An official of the U.S. Census Bureau in Washington, Les Solomon, said the two manuals were "by far the best example of use of census data that had been developed by an agency" outside the census bureau.

Frank Ambrose of Charlotte, N.C., regional information service specialist for the southeast regional offices of the census bureau, said the 12 regional census bureau offices have trained workers willing to conduct free training workshops for association and state Baptist leaders in how to find, use and interpret census data.

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Look To Human Need,
Not Statistics, Cothen Warns

By Linda Lawson

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Following an all-day examination of hard data from the 1980 census report, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board President Grady C. Cothen told Baptist mission leaders they must look not only at numbers, but at people in need and in spiritual poverty.

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Statistics are only numerical illustrations of human misery, Cothen noted. "When we are talking about families that break up, we are not talking about psychological trends. We are talking about human beings suffering spiritual misery because they've got their lives all mixed up."

Cothen cited a long list of statistics showing increasingly relaxed attitudes among Americans toward parental responsibility, premarital sex and unmarried couples living together. "It is now normal to think of marriage as not permanent," he said.

In a world where it is common for a person to sacrifice his family for his own selfish desires, Cothen exhorted Baptists to preach the gospel with words, actions and "transformed lives."

"Only Christ can help men and women want to be pure and knit families back together again. Only Christ can keep the Southern Baptist Convention on the right track," Cothen emphasized.

In the conference's opening address, seminary president William A. Pinson said sharing the gospel with the entire world will require Southern Baptists to struggle with controversy and to sacrifice time, money and comfort.

Cothen and Pinson, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., addressed more than 900 associational directors of missions and state denominational leaders during sessions of "Mission in Context." The four-day conference on the theme, "Thinking Nationally - Acting Locally," is sponsored by the Home Mission Board, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

"Mission and controversy have gone hand in hand from the beginning," Pinson told Baptist leaders. "When Christians have been willing to follow the biblical mandate to proclaim Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation," controversy has always followed. Both other religious groups and secular nonbelievers have objected in protest, Pinson said.

"To fail to share the gospel means we don't believe what the Bible says about the condition of the human race, we don't care about people, or we are too cowardly to endure the controversy that goes with mission efforts," he added.

Pinson said "mission thrusts will be throttled" until Southern Baptists understand the Bible teaches a person to "earn all he can, live simply and save all he can and then give all he can to see the gospel go on to the whole world."

He called for extensive training in the biblical concepts of stewardship and missions and urged churches to give more to missions and use less money for day-to-day operations.

"The proper ratio probably ought to be 85 percent for missions and 15 percent for home," he said. Pinson called for Southern Baptists to form a 13.6 million member prayer chain for tens of thousands of professional and volunteer missionaries. "With a world that is lost, we don't even have bait yet," he charged, "we haven't even begun to fish. There will never be a real mission thrust until we also become known as a praying people."

James Nelson, director of the Home Mission Board associational missions division, told conference participants that the purpose of "Mission in Context" is to equip associational leaders to assist churches to affirm their mandate to mission, understand their context for mission in the light of the 1980 census, and develop and implement plans to accomplish their mission.

Board Unscathed
By Minor Fire

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A minor fire Sept. 17 in an asphalt heating unit on the roof of the operations building of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board was extinguished promptly by the fire department with no damage to the building and no injuries.

Propane gas used to heat the asphalt ignited waste asphalt on the top of the heating unit causing heavy black smoke to billow into the sky. Several emergency vehicles arrived within minutes.

A spokesman for Diversified Technologies, the company applying an asphalt layer to the roof at the board, said an employee used a fire extinguisher to try to put out the fire but was unsuccessful. One car was scratched as the fire was being extinguished.

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Sunday Not For Business,
Says Chick-fil-A Founder

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JONESBORO, Ga. (BP)--Any hankerin' for a Chick-fil-A sandwich better come Monday through Saturday.

Sunday cravings cannot be satisfied because the fast-food chain's president is Truett Cathy, a Southern Baptist who refuses to open that day.

Business writer Jim Thompson of the Louisville Courier-Journal said the Georgia-based chain of over 200 restaurants is probably the largest fast-food operation in the United States closed on Sunday, a day many competitors find almost as profitable as Friday or Saturday.

"If a poll were taken and everybody were honest, you'd find more stores of all kinds would choose to be open only six days," Cathy told Thompson. "Penney's, for example, was not open on Sunday as long as J.C. Penney (the founder) was alive."

Cathy said many merchants ask him how he can be open only six days when many mall contracts demand that stores be open seven.

"I just scratch out that part," he said. "If they want my shop, fine. If not, there are others who do."

Cathy teaches a teen-age Sunday School class at First Baptist Church, Jonesboro, Ga., where he is a popular member.

"He's a fantastic businessman and Christian," said church secretary Pam Kirkland. "His family is his top priority. He is very successful in business, but business isn't always first in his life."

Cathy, who founded Chick-fil-A, occasionally leads the Monday devotional periods for his staff at company headquarters in Hapeville, a small town near Atlanta. Outside speakers, ranging from popular athletes to ministers, often are brought in.

"We feel the spiritual development of the individual is important, as well as the company," said Cathy.

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Grateful Voltaic Father
Gives Only Gift--His Son

By Mary Jane Welch

TENKODOGO, Upper Volta (BP)--The father was so thrilled that Southern Baptist missionary Larry Cox had saved his son's life he offered Cox the only payment he had--the boy.

Cox surprised them both by accepting.

"But I would ask you to do one thing for me," Cox told the father. "I would ask you to take care of my son for me and to raise him, and I will help you and try to provide some guidance for you in how I think we ought to raise this son."

Gaining a son wasn't what Cox had in mind when he took six-year-old Dion to the hospital in Tenkodogo, Upper Volta. As director of a development project of Southern Baptist missionaries and Tennessee Baptist volunteers in the remote Sandwabo area of Upper Volta, Cox often finds himself giving someone a ride to or from Tenkodogo, where he lives. Because the only nurse in Sandwabo has no medicine, people often must seek treatment by one of the two doctors in Tenkodogo.

When his father brought Dion to Cox, the Mississippi-born missionary first thought the boy was dead. Then he realized the boy wasn't dead, but soon would be without help.

He took the feverish boy straight to the hospital, where the doctor diagnosed bronchial pneumonia and began a series of penicillin injections. Within days the boy was better.

The Coxes kept Dion at their home, continuing the treatment for 10 days until he was able to return home.

Three weeks later Dion and his father came to see Cox, and the father told Cox how much he loved him, a feeling rarely expressed by the Voltaic people. Cox explained that he had helped the boy because that was how God wanted him to treat people. Then the father said he had no money to repay Cox, but in gratitude wanted to give him his son.

Cox's immediate reaction was that he couldn't accept the boy, but he remembered that West Africans consider it very rude to refuse a gift.

"I suppose the Lord led me to do this, because I would not have thought of it," says Cox. "I said, 'Fine, I accept your son.'" Then he outlined his conditions.

Pleased, the father began asking what he should do differently as he raised his son, giving Cox his first chance to tell the family about Jesus.

Every Sunday since then, Dion and his older brother have been in church. Their lives and family have changed. Even the spirit in the compound where they live is different, says Cox. The father is not yet a Christian, but Cox believes this change will be coming soon.