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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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81-181

Pension Bill Introduced To  
Correct Current Inequities

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--A bill providing more equitable treatment of participants in Baptist and other denominational pension plans has been introduced in the House of Representatives.

The bill, H. R. 5067, would amend the Employee Retirement Income Security ACT (ERISA) to allow church plan participants more equitable means of making "catch up" payments in later years to compensate for inadequate or nonexistent deposits in earlier years. Also, it would provide lower paid church employees more opportunity to participate regularly in tax sheltered church retirement programs.

"It represents a large step toward assuring our ministers and lay employees of adequate retirement allowances," said Rep. Barber B. Conable, R-N.Y., who joined House majority leader James C. Wright Jr., D-Texas, in sponsoring the measure.

Current law places two limits on the amount that can be deposited into tax sheltered pension plans. One is based on a percentage of income multiplied by the number of years in the current job. The other is the lesser of 25 percent of income or \$25,000 (adjusted by cost of living). The lower figure produced by these two limits becomes the amount which can be contributed without income tax consequences.

Specifically, the bill would allow church plan participants seeking to "catch up" the same options for overriding the 25 percent/\$25,000 limit that current law permits teachers, hospital workers and employees of home health service agencies who made small or no pension contributions during the early stages of their careers.

The proposed bill is being pushed by the Church Alliance for Clarification of ERISA, a coalition representing 27 denominational pension boards headed by Darold H. Morgan, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Annuity Board.

Morgan, who has spearheaded efforts to have Congress clarify the meaning of the massive ERISA for church pension plans, told Baptist Press that another key feature in the new bill eliminates the "inequity between congregational and hierarchical and congregational polities.

"What we're seeking is equity and fairness," Morgan declared. He said the measure would eliminate inequity "by allowing all churches to be treated fairly" and "by putting pastors and denominational employees where teachers and hospital employees are."

'Today Show' Recognizes Oldest  
Southern Baptist Missionary

NEW YORK (BP)--Lelah C. Morgan, Southern Baptists' oldest retired foreign missionary, got a nationally televised birthday greeting Nov. 18.

Willard Scott, ebullient weatherman on "The Today Show," the NBC morning news telecast, congratulated Morgan on her 103rd birthday that day, and noted her 27 years of missionary service in China (1905-1932).

Scott often recognizes special events, anniversaries and birthdays during his weather forecast. He received information about Morgan from friends of her family.

A Georgia native, Morgan lives with her daughter, Constance Morgan, in Columbia, S.C. Reached at home, the daughter said her mother is "up and about, but not too energetic. She spends her extra time in prayer. That's her interest."

After retiring from overseas service in 1932, Morgan and her late husband, Edgar L., spent another 20 years leading Bible conferences and prayer retreats in the United States. He died in 1965. She has continued a ministry of prayer and correspondence in her home.

Her son, E. Carter Morgan, is a missionary in the Philippines.

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Black Baptists Lead Miami  
Association in Baptisms

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MIAMI (BP)--Although there are only six black Baptist churches in Miami Baptist Association, black Baptists ranked first, third and fourth in baptisms among the association's congregations.

This indicates Southern Baptists are "moving toward a multi-colored, multi-lingual denomination in which all can benefit," said Dotson Mills, associational director of missions.

Glendale Baptist Church led the association in baptisms with 100, a 33 percent increase from last year. Joe Coats is pastor at Glendale.

University Baptist, a predominantly Anglo congregation, ranked second with 90 baptisms, followed by New Way Baptist Church with 83. Bible Baptist was listed fourth with 83. Bible Baptist was listed fourth with 80 baptisms, and First Baptist Church of Perrine, also predominantly Anglo, reported 77.

Miami Baptist Association's 80 churches and 40 missions reported 1,597 total baptisms for 1981.

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Music Takes Senior Adults  
From Boredom To Stardom

By Charles Willis

TULSA, Okla. (BP)--More than 100 senior adults, most of whom had never been in a choir before, have been thrust into the limelight as recording "stars."

The Heart Throbs, a 105-voice senior adult choir from Immanuel Baptist Church, recently made a demonstration record of the "Kingdom Within," a senior adult musical written by Bob Oldenburg and Lanny Allen.

The musical and recording will be released in February 1982, by Broadman Press.

The story that brought the choir to the attention of Southern Baptists' music recording publishers began in November 1978 when one of the church's senior adults asked John Sawyer, minister of music, to look over some sheet music.

Sawyer, new to the church and eager to please, looked over the music and subsequently announced to Sunday School Adult 6 and 7 departments that the musical would be performed. Promising that musical experience was not required since speaking parts were included, he asked for interested persons to report for a choir practice.

"The first choir rehearsal, we had 78 people show up," he recalled. "I almost fainted because I had purchased 30 copies of the musical, and expected fewer than that to be interested." Fewer than a dozen of those 78 had ever been in a choir."

The first rehearsal, Sawyer recalled, was a "fiasco" in terms of music, but everyone had so much fun, he decided to forge ahead. On the last Sunday in February 1979, the choir performed the musical by memory.

Heady with their success, the senior adults became eager performers, ready to sing for anyone who would listen. Sawyer arranged with a minister of music friend in Arkansas for the choir to perform for a senior adult luncheon in an Arkansas church.

Since that first "tour" experience, the choir has gone on five major tours by chartered bus, performing in Dallas, Houston and New Orleans churches, at the Southern Baptist Church Music Conference in St. Louis and at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center. Their next trip will be by chartered airplane to sing in churches in the Orlando, Fla., area. Funds for all trips have been raised by the choir members themselves, some of whom had never traveled, stayed in a motel or flown in an airplane, before joining The Heart Throbs.

In contrast to many senior adults whom Sawyer has seen "existing for holidays to see the grandchildren, a lot of these people's lives have been completely consumed by the choir," he observed. "It is such a vital part of their lives; many are proud of the fact that for the first time in years they feel useful."

Another benefit of their involvement in the choir is that "they have taken an intense interest in the total church music program," Sawyer said. "They want to help, if nothing but taking roll in children's choirs."

Pointing to the fact that many ministers of music seem hesitant to start such a venture, Sawyer offers The Heart Throbs as an encouraging example.

"This is not an old folks' choir," he declared. "We don't gather to sing funeral dirges; they have a lot of pride in how they sound. There is a tremendous amount of energy expended in these performances."

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

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Seminary Telecourses  
Get Foundation Grant

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Seminary professors soon will begin using modern communications tools to take theological education into new areas of the country.

Funding for the project to develop six telecourses on the seminary level will come from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations of Coral Gables, Fla., the first time the six seminaries have received a joint grant.

The foundation has given \$216,000 to the six seminaries, to be received in three annual increments of \$72,000 each. The funds actually will be spent by the Seminary External Education Division, a jointly-sponsored arm of the seminaries, based in Nashville, Tenn.

W. Randall Lolley, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and chairman of the seminaries' presidents council, submitted the proposal to the foundation on behalf of all the seminaries. "It will help us deal with the challenge of how to use our teachers more effectively in off-campus graduate programs," he added.

The grant was awarded, in part, on the strength of a pilot project last spring, in which Larry McSwain, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, taught a course from Louisville, Ky., to classes meeting simultaneously in New York City and Atlanta.

The format--which also will be used in the new telecourses--featured a taped presentation by the professor at the beginning of each session, a telephone conference call linking all three locations, and individualized discussions by each class.

According to Raymond M. Rigdon, executive director of the Seminary External Education Division, production costs to develop two new courses per year will use most of the grant funds. He said eight 30-minute videotapes will be required for each class.

He added that during the next three years, the plans are to introduce the seminary level courses in at least nine locations across the United States."

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Participation Increased  
At Hawaiian Convention

HONOLULU (BP)--A change in time and format increased lay participation in the Hawaii Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Edmond Walker, executive director-treasurer, said the meeting was changed to include Saturday, and interest seminars on various aspects of the work were conducted by people who in past years would have brought messages.

The meeting drew an estimated 400 participants, up from some 300 last year.

During the convention, Hawaii messengers re-elected Bob Duffer, pastor of Kihel Baptist Church on the island of Maui, as president. Duffer is the first president who has not resided on the main island of Oahu.

Also elected were O. W. Efurd, pastor of Mililani Baptist Church, first vice president, and W. C. Garland, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Pearl Harbor, second vice president.

Messengers adopted a budget of \$937,756, of which \$318,000 will come from the 61 congregations affiliated with the convention. The budget will share 25 percent--\$79,500 --with worldwide missions causes through the Southern Baptist Convention unified budget, the same percentage as last year.

Three new congregations--two Korean and one English-speaking--were admitted to fellowship, indicating growth in ethnic and language missions, Walker said.

The 1982 meeting will be at Olivet Baptist Church in Honolulu, Nov. 11 - 13.