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SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

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Newspaper Stirs Renewed
Baptist Peace Commitment

WB
By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a nuclear age when peace is imperative, Southern Baptists are showing signs of a renewed commitment to peacemaking.

Through sermons from Baptist pulpits to editorials in Baptist publications to resolutions from Baptist meetings, growing numbers within America's largest Protestant denomination are declaring that peace is not only a requirement for survival but also a central part of their biblical heritage.

Another important indication of increased Baptist peace emphasis is the favorable response by Baptists throughout the world to the emergence of a quarterly news publication focusing on peacemaking.

The Baptist Peacemaker, begun a year ago as a ministry of Deer Park Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., has received hundreds of letters with written and financial support. Operating only on contributions, the publication's mailing list jumped from just over 6,200 to 23,000 between the first and third issues.

Coordinating editors C. Carman Sharp and E. Glenn Hinson are pleased but not surprised by the enthusiastic reception many Southern Baptists are giving the newspaper.

"The Baptist Peacemaker has spoken to the concerns, to the hopes and to the dreams of many people," said Sharp, pastor of Deer Park. "People are indicating that they have been waiting for something like this."

"We're tapping into something that is a very deep concern," agreed Hinson, a church history professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, who indicated the concern is global.

The Baptist Peacemaker offers its readers sermons prayers, worship outlines, articles and practical helps on peacemaking. The first four issues contained lead articles by Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, R-Ore.; Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the SBC's Woman's Missionary Union; and former U.S. ambassador to Russia, George F. Keenan.

Sharp said the Louisville group hopes to expand its peace ministry in several ways, ranging from more frequent publication of the newspaper to local and state peace convocations around the country.

Hinson admits that targeting a sympathetic audience partially accounts for the positive response to the Baptist Peacemaker, but he contends there is a current revival of peace concern among Baptists which "is in line with what has happened in Baptist history."

"In times of danger, Southern Baptists have emphasized peacemaking as a good thing," he said. "But in time of war, we've joined the fray with a 'my country, right or wrong' approach. Then, after a war, we've recovered some of the Christian perspective about establishing a stable peace."

Today, Hinson added, "We are doing more to implement peace than any generation of Baptists." He cited an activism seen in peace emphasis in local congregations and efforts to influence the peace process in the political arena as evidence Baptists are going beyond issuing statements.

Sharp predicted that as more Southern Baptists become informed on peace issues, more will become involved.

"We simply need to awaken people to what the Bible teaches about peace and awaken people to what would happen in an all-out atomic war," he said, adding it would be extremely difficult to support war-making from a biblical perspective.

The Baptist Peacemaker began as the idea of a Deer Park member, Robert Broome, who believed that Baptists needed a national peace newspaper. With some money left over from a 1979 peace convocation hosted by the church, Broome and others pushed that belief into reality. As letters poured in, it became evident that many other Baptists wanted that reality to grow.

As one Baptist--former U.S. Sen. Ralph W. Yarborough of Texas--put it in a letter to the editors: "Giant oaks from little acorns grow. This world, this nation, needs yours to grow fast."

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Missionaries' Daughter
Dies in Auto Accident

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska (BP)--Sarah McClendon Demby, 25, daughter of Home Mission Board missionary associates Lewis and Alma McClendon, was killed Jan. 13 when her car collided head-on with a snow plow on the Alaska-Canada Highway near Watson Lake in the Yukon Territory, Canada.

Mrs. Demby and her husband, Richard, who was following in another vehicle, were enroute to Portland, Ore., where he was to enroll in the satellite seminary program of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

Poor visibility in heavy snow is listed as the cause of the accident.

The Dembys had been houseparents at the Alaska Baptist Family Service Center in Anchorage before their departure. In addition, as members of First Baptist Church, Palmer, they had been leaders of the church's Sutton Baptist Mission.

Mrs. Demby's father is director of missions of the Tongass Baptist Association in southeast Alaska. Her mother is president of Alaska Woman's Missionary Union and was attending a WMU meeting in Birmingham, Ala., at the time of her daughter's death.

Judy Rice, WMU director for Alaska, noted Mrs. Demby's extensive involvement in missions, both as a "missionary kid," and as an adult. "Sarah will be greatly missed in Alaska," Rice said. She also reported that Richard Demby has now completed the trip to Portland and will enroll in the seminary program as he and his wife had planned.

The family requested that all memorial gifts be sent to the 2000 Club, which supports Alaska missions, in care of the Alaska Baptist Convention, Star Route A, Box 1791, Anchorage, Alaska 99507.

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Bill to Exempt Ministers
From Jury Duty Opposed

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Baptist Press
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COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)-- A proposed bill in the South Carolina legislature which would automatically exempt ministers from jury service is being opposed by South Carolina Baptists.

The South Carolina Baptist Convention's Christian Life and Public Affairs Committee prepared a statement opposing the bill, currently in the South Carolina Senate's Judiciary Committee, and has written a letter to J. Woodrow Lewis, chief justice of the state's supreme court.

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"The committee believes it would be contradictory to encourage lay persons to be responsible citizens, while asking for ministers to be relieved of citizenship responsibilities," said E.C. Watson, assistant to the state convention's executive secretary-treasurer.

The committee, he added, does not believe the withdrawal of ministers from jury duty should be encouraged unless it "seriously conflicts with pastoral responsibilities."

Watson added the committee believes ministers should serve on juries because their "expertise and training" enhances the judicial process.

The senate bill became an issue for the Baptist committee after it was reported last summer that two pastors in Union, S.C., were required to serve on juries in magistrate court cases involving members of their own congregations.

In light of the two cases, the committee noted it intends to make the legislative committee "aware of the fact that some abuse has occurred" and ask corrective action of those abuses, but not the automatic exemption of ministers from jury service.

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RB

Liberian Baptists Find Renewal
New Outlook In Coup's Aftermath

By Mary Jane Welch

Baptist Press
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MONROVIA, Liberia (BP)-- After an April 1980 coup that shook the convention from the top down, Liberian Baptists are recovering and beginning to count some gains.

William R. Tolbert Jr. was president of both the nation and the Baptist convention. On the eve of the convention's centennial celebration, Tolbert was assassinated. His wife, Victoria, who was national Woman's Missionary Union president, was arrested. Other Baptist leaders involved in government were dead, jailed or jobless.

The shock of the coup sent Liberian Baptists reeling, but today denominational leaders say the takeover caused a re-examination of values which brought new life into the tradition-bound convention. As they've counted their losses--both personal and financial--Liberian Baptists have discovered where their strengths lie and where they should put increased emphasis.

Woman's Missionary Union has emerged as a strongpoint.

"Without WMU, the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention would be like a broken chair on one leg," says Imogene Collins, who was national WMU vice president, but was named interim president shortly after the coup.

"The women continued meeting while the men were afraid to meet," she adds, commenting women believed it was up to them to hold the convention together and push the men back into service. Soldiers came to the women's meetings and marched up and down the aisles, but left when they learned the gatherings weren't political.

The women even held their regular World Day of Prayer and raised \$1,000 to send to the Baptist World Alliance.

In addition to the WMU, Liberian Baptists found strong support in the Liberia Baptist Theological Seminary.

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"The eyes of everybody in the convention are on the seminary because they realize that the Baptist leadership for the present and the future is coming from here," says Bradley Brown, a Southern Baptist missionary from Georgia who is president of the seminary and was president of the training school which preceded it.

As they re-evaluated their priorities and viewed the future, leaders chose to emphasize evangelism. They found the seminary was already working to provide young pastors trained for such an outreach.

Brown, chairman of the convention's evangelism committee, challenged Baptists to set a goal of organizing at least 200 new churches within the next five years, a challenge he says the Liberians are taking seriously.

One who does so is Samuel Hill, who became executive secretary of the convention after the coup.

Hill points out the convention has done a good job of starting churches in the major cities, but many interior regions remain untouched. "The harvest is ripe and I feel that we will need to expand. We need to go deeper into the interior part of this country," he says.

The leader believes that seeing God bring them through difficult times has made Liberian Baptists more serious about their faith. "We are striving toward an event (and) that is going out and trying to evangelize our people."

Hill is a descendant of the tribal Liberians who compose most of the country's population. Until the coup, the Liberian government was dominated by the small group of people who were descended from the freed American slaves who founded the west African nation in 1822.

The new generation of Liberian leaders at the seminary is typified by J. Samuel Reeves, who went against family advice and turned down a university scholarship to enter the ministry. When he became pastor of Mt. Galilee Baptist Church in Careysburg, average attendance was five to 10. Within four months after he assumed the pastorate, attendance jumped to 80 to 100.

Reeves praises the coup, saying it caused many people to find the right direction in their lives. As pastor and an Army chaplain, he says he has talked to many who told him the coup made them re-examine their Christian lives. He says the coup taught him that no human is too great to fall; only God is great and the Christian's life must be God-centered.

Even though the convention is eager to carry out an aggressive program of evangelism, Hill sees a problem: There are no funds to send out evangelists.

During the coup, many of the convention's wealthier members, with government and business connections, were lost, causing the convention to suffer financially. Now, increases emphasis on stewardship offers some hope, but giving is limited because most of the members have small incomes.

The financial problems cause difficulties for graduating seminary students. While the Liberian tradition has been for pastors to make a living at other jobs, most of the graduating men and women want to pursue full-time Christian vocations. But the churches, like the convention, lack the funds to support the graduates.

Seminary trustees, led by Abraham James, a Monrovia lawyer and university professor, are trying to work through the convention to have the students assigned to work full-time in the churches, especially in rural areas. But progress is slow and will be until the convention can generate more funds.

Despite the problems, Liberian churches are beginning to feel the impact of the new ideas of the students. Christian stewardship and morality are being taught as they weren't before. Churches which were dying are coming back to life and new churches are being born.

Through prayer and the passing of time, God is reviving Liberian Baptists, says Peter Amos George, president of the Liberian Bar Association and interim pastor of Providence Baptist Church.

"We have an ultimatum from God stating that we must go out and preach this gospel teaching to all nations," George says. "So that is what we are doing and as long as we are doing it in the faith and in his name, I am sure the future is beautiful."

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(BP) photos will be mailed to Baptist state newspaper editors by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

Texas Baptists Exceed
Budget By \$4.9 Million

DB
Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)-- Texas Baptists have surpassed their 1981 Cooperative Program budget of \$37.4 million by \$4.9 million.

Cooperative Program gifts, boosted by record contributions of \$4,247,113 in December, soared to \$42,372,660 for the year.

By state convention action, the \$4.9 million over the budget will be distributed according to the same formula as the basic budget: 35.5 percent, or about \$1.8 million, to worldwide Southern Baptist Convention causes and 64.5 percent, or about \$3.2 million, for Texas causes.

For the fourth year in a row, First Baptist Church of Midland, set the mission giving pace, contributing \$668,283, or almost \$120,000 more than its 1980 total of \$550,213.

The SBC's largest congregation, First Baptist Church of Dallas, ranked tenth in Texas with gifts of \$196,925.

The Baptist Standard, Texas Baptists' official newsweekly, reported in its Sept. 16, 1981, issue that Pastor W.A. Criswell, said the 20,000-member church plans to give \$1 million for missions "starting right now." The church had just completed the sale of some downtown property adjoining its plant and was preparing to retire an \$8 million debt.

Criswell said in January: "My statement in September was misunderstood. Although our business deal was concluded in the fall, our new budget, including Cooperative Program gifts, did not start until January 1982. Our church adopted a \$7.5 million budget for 1982, which includes Cooperative Program contributions which should total \$1 million by the end of the year."

First church, Midland, has no immediate projections of contributing \$1 million to the Cooperative Program. "We do not figure Cooperative Program gifts by the total dollar amount, but by the percentage of our total receipts, so I never know what the exact amount will be," said Pastor Dan Vestal.

He added: "Right now our 1982 budget calls for 30 percent of our undesignated receipts going to the Cooperative Program and 10 percent to direct missions for a total of 40 percent. Our immediate goal is to increase our total mission giving to 50 percent of our budget -- 30 percent going to the Cooperative Program and 20 percent to direct missions. This will be a major undertaking for our church and one that we are giving a great deal of thought and prayer to."

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