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Editors Cut Issues, Pages
To Keep Newspapers Solvent

By Norman Jameson

NASHVILLE, Tenn.(BP)--Cleavers in hand, Southern Baptist newspaper editors are hacking issues, cutting pages, slashing travel and, of course, raising rates, to stay solvent through the budget year.

An unexpected loss of postal subsidy for second class non-profit mailers Jan. 10 immediately doubled everyone's rate and made postage the biggest single budget item for Baptist state newspapers. Congress cut \$82 million from a stop-gap funding appropriation in December, forcing second class non-profit mailers to leap to rates they had not planned on until 1987.

Don McGregor, editor of the Mississippi Baptist Record, and president of the Southern Baptist Press Association when the increases were announced, said: "The present administration of the federal government not only failed to keep faith with us on a long-standing agreement, but also refused to give any thought to it. I am aware that this is of no consequence to the administration, but...I will not hesitate to put the blame where it belongs."

The increase hit just after churches and state conventions had voted budgets, leaving editors who could not immediately raise subscription rates in a "desperate" situation. Postage costs for the Texas Baptist Standard, circulation 380,000, went from \$9,065 a week to \$22,098. The South Carolina Baptist Courier had probably the largest percentage increase, 217 percent, raising its weekly bill from \$1,780 to \$5,660.

Responses to a Baptist Press survey to which 23 of 34 Baptist state newspapers responded, indicate only newspapers with computerized subscription lists, who could raise rates the next month, or who anticipated a major increase in their budget planning, are able to continue operations as usual.

Nine newspapers will cut their number of annual issues and two others will "if necessary." The North Carolina Biblical Recorder, sixth in circulation with 116,000, slashed its annual issues to 36. Colorado cut three to 45, Georgia cut two to 48, South Carolina cut five to 45, California cut four, Virginia cut four to 44. Arizona cut 12, to 36, in 1980, anticipating a return to 48, a move postponed by the postal increases.

Newspapers like the Illinois Baptist, Ohio Baptist Messenger, Penn-Jersey Baptist and Northwest Baptist Witness, completely budgeted through their state's Cooperative Program and sent to every family, are hardest hit because they cannot alter budgets for nearly a year, except through emergency allocation. Other newspapers, long proud of receiving only minimal support through state Cooperative Program funds, now must ask for more.

Illinois cut issues from 49 to a maximum of 44, minimum 24, and asked churches to chop their mailing lists one-third, dropping total circulation from 48,000 to 30,000. Convention officers, encouraged by churches sending contributions to keep from having to trim their mailing lists, are considering a return to a church budget plan in 1984.

Ohio editor Theo Sommerkamp wanted to preserve circulation. Trimming pages helps little because 88 to 90 percent of his mailing cost is per piece. The Northwest Baptist Witness and South Carolina will cut pages. Mississippi cut pages earlier because of newsprint costs. Some others who cut issues will add pages.

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"Cutting issues is the only thing that will do any good," he said. "I feel like I'm sitting on a limb and a man is revving up a power saw behind me."

Some editors, particularly Kentucky's C.R. Daley, feared death to some publications as a direct result of the postal increase. He and others have been pleasantly surprised that subscriptions held up.

"At this point we are much more optimistic than we were in January," said Daley. "Kentucky Baptist churches also have been cooperative and loyal to the Western Recorder. We have lost several hundred subscribers due to the subscription increases but nothing like the number we expected to lose."

Oklahoma's Baptist Messenger actually increased 5,000 circulation. Texas lost 11,500; Georgia's Christian Index lost 4,000 but had anticipated a 5,000 to 10,000 loss; Tennessee's Baptist and Reflector lost about 1,500; North Carolina lost 5,000, which editor Marse Grant blamed primarily on the staggering economy in his state; and Arkansas lost 2,500.

"I'm not hanging crepe yet, but the real crunch will come this summer when churches begin to realize that the amount of money they have in their budgets for the Baptist and Reflector is running out," said Tennessee's Al Shackelford. "At that time, a church will have to decide whether to put more funds in that item--or to pare down and drop their subscription list."

More editors pre-sort their newspapers to gain a cheaper mailing rate. The Baptist New Mexican, circulation 16,200, carries 166 mail bags to the post office. North Carolina saves \$1,000 per issue by pre-sorting; Missouri saves \$500, and Georgia \$1,500.

Georgia editor Jack Harwell, Maryland's Larry High and Colorado's Jim Young cut travel. Young halved his complimentary list. Daley cut his complimentaries almost completely and discontinued bulk mailings free to hospitals and other institutions.

Georgia will set its own type. Maryland takes camera-ready proofs to its printer, including pictures already screened. Arizona went to a new format, Virginia pulled its composition in-house.

Beyond cost cutting, editors are looking to increase revenue. First and most obvious is to raise subscription rates, which now average \$4.50 through church budget every-member plans, up from \$3.37 in December. South Carolina is lowest at \$3 but will increase to \$3.50 Oct. 1. California, at \$5.88 for church budget plan, is highest.

Daley wants to increase church use of the newspaper's back page as a vehicle for their church news. Georgia has raised advertising rates and will solicit more advertising.

A postal regulation limiting advertising space in non-profit publications to 10 percent without penalty, no longer bears much restrictive punch. After the rate increases, non-profits now pay more per piece than do for-profit publications. Non-profits pay significantly less per pound, but since they are generally smaller and on lighter paper, per issue costs vary little.

Baptist state newspapers, with combined circulation of approximately 1.8 million, could be an attractive advertising outlet.

For-profit mailers pay six cents more per pound and one-tenth cent less per piece to mail their product than non-profits pay. Shackelford figured that at those rates, he would have added only \$141 to his \$5,223 postage bill to mail his last issue as a profit publication. And that would have freed him from the 10 percent advertising restriction.

The additional \$141 would have been made up with the sale of only 10.4 additional inches of advertising copy.

Finally, the state Baptist editors say their newspapers are alive, if hurting, and they have found churches stand behind them in a way that renews their confidence in their publications as the primary communication tool of their state Baptist conventions.

Middle Class Baptists
May Miss Many Youth

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Cultural expectations arising from Southern Baptists' move from rural roots to a more affluent middle class eliminate some youth from ministry programs, says seminary professor Dan Boling.

"Many of the programs we sponsor are out of the economic reach of many of our youth already," said Boling, professor of religious education and counseling at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary at a youth ministry conference in Nashville. "With economic conditions like they are, more and more youth won't be able to go to youth meetings."

"Our purpose was spiritual growth in the past, but today we tend to have fun with a little spiritual growth stuck in," Boling said. "Anybody can have a fun retreat, but we're concerned about the whole person."

Ministering to youth may involve more counseling in the future, Boling said, because of the combined pressures of the economy, cultural expectations and absentee parents.

Understanding family fragmentation is a key to meeting needs of youth, Boling noted. Families do not spend time together or even eat meals together.

"Youth want a sense of security and they like to have strong parents," Boling said. "Most youth have confidence in their family in times of trouble."

More youth are involved in church programs who have absentee parents and parents with parttime custody. Boling said it is hard for these teens to identify positively when the model home is always projected as two parents and children.

"The one-parent family tends to suffer from low self-esteem," he said. "They know they have failed and don't need to be reminded of it. Divorced persons and their children are treated badly in churches, often in subtle ways and they sense it."

"For instance, 'broken homes' is a negative term applied to one-parent families. Many two-parent homes also are broken homes."

Youth from one-parent homes may face problems as they marry and have families because their parent model is one who left a situation (marriage) when it became difficult. Consequently, the youth may tend to break out at the first conflict instead of staying committed to marriage.

Other youth ministries can fill needs created by changes in society, said Boling: "Church programs can attract youth by picking up some school programs cut by loss of funds, such as music or athletics. Youth programs can offer stability where it is needed."

"There is a de-focus on youth in society today, after approximately 30 years of being youth oriented. Youth in the 80s are receiving less societal recognition and feel less special, which leads to low self-esteem."

These concerns combine with the prospect of a smaller youth population in the future, to make the work of youth minister important in reaching out to a larger share of available youth.

"A lot of youth are not being reached," Boling charged. "The next generation in some churches is going to be in trouble because there will be a shortage of young adults trained in the beliefs of the denomination."

For Southern Baptists the need to reach youth is urgent in light of the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust goals to reach the world by 2000. The youth in today's churches are the young adults and church leaders of tomorrow who hold the success or failure of Bold Mission Thrust. They will be the ones who must finance the goals established by today's leaders, said Boling.

High Court Strikes Down
Church Solicitation Rule

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--A sharply-divided U.S. Supreme Court struck down a provision in Minnesota's charitable solicitations law which exempted from registration and reporting requirements only those religious organizations that received more than half of their contributions from their own members.

The 5-4 court majority held that the law's application only to religious organizations which solicit more than half their income from non-members violated the First Amendment's ban on establishment of religion.

Justice William J. Brennan Jr., writing for the court, declared that the principle effect of the law's "fifty percent rule" is "to impose the registration and reporting requirements of the act on some religious organizations but not on others."

The 50 percent rule, Brennan concluded, "sets up the sort of official denominational preference that the framers of the First Amendment forbade."

The court majority declared that laws granting denominational preferences can only be justified by a "compelling governmental interest." While acknowledging that Minnesota has a "significant interest in protecting its citizens from abusive practices in the solicitation of funds for charity," the justices said the state failed to demonstrate that the 50 percent rule is "closely fitted" to a "compelling governmental interest."

The controversial provision was challenged by four members of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church soon after it was added to Minnesota's charitable solicitations law in 1978. Before the legislature added the 50 percent rule, all religious organizations were exempted from the act's coverage.

A U.S. district court agreed with the Unification Church, holding that application of the law to any religious group violated the First Amendment. Last year, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with the district court that the 50 percent rule is unconstitutional but disagreed that no part of the act could be applied to religious organizations.

In affirming the court of appeals decision, the Supreme Court noted that its ruling did not grant the Unification Church a blanket exemption from the act, suggesting that exemption could be denied on grounds other than the 50 percent rule.

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Traditional Commissioning Service
Inaugrates Southern's Honeycutt

By Marv Knox

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary inaugurated Roy Lee Honeycutt as its eighth president April 21 with an old-fashioned "laying on of hands" commissioning.

Honeycutt, 55, reaffirmed the seminary's "heritage of excellence and quality" in training men and women for ministry in local churches. He pledged to be "the kind of president you want and the kind of president God wants to have here during all the days of my tenure."

About 1,400 persons witnessed the inauguration, a highlight of which was Honeycutt's commissioning. As he knelt at the altar, trustees, faculty, staff and representatives of the student body filed by to lay hands upon his head and whisper prayers of affirmation.

The new president said Southern is a "seminary of heritage and of hope--our theme for all the years of the 1980s and '90s."

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Sharing his desires for the future, Honeycutt said that when his presidency ends, he hopes he will be able to look back and see that Southern has been "a community of learning, and a community of faith."

"I know we are a school and not a church," he said. "But if we are not a churchly school, we have abandoned our tradition and calling."

He also promised to strive for the complete integration of the "total seminary experience" for the entire seminary community.

He revealed his dream of raising \$50 million for the seminary during the next 15 years. He said this would endow enough professorships to perpetually ensure strong teaching in all seminary disciplines and implement specialized centers of Christian preaching, overall ministry, family ministry, evangelism and world missions.

During the ceremony, Honeycutt received charges from representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention, alumni, trustees and SBC churches. He also received a resolution of support from the seminary faculty.

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Southwestern Receives
Carter Foundation Grant

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) -- The Amon G. Carter Foundation of Fort Worth has given \$750,000 to the library under construction at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The grant, the largest foundation gift in seminary history, will be used for the \$6.6 million library scheduled for completion in August. The library is part of Southwestern's \$25 million Vision/85 capital needs and endowment fund raising project.

The Carter Foundation was established by the late Amon G. Carter, Fort Worth newspaper publisher and philanthropist. The foundation previously gave \$200,000 to the seminary for construction of its Recreation/Aerobics Center.

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Boy, 14, Charged
In Michael's Death

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LITTLETON, Colo. (BP)--Jason Rocha, 14, has been charged with first degree murder in the playground shooting death of Scott Michael April 7.

Michael, 13, a member of Ken Caryl Baptist Church, was dead on the scene when rescue units arrived at the junior high school.

Rocha's \$25,000 bond was revoked when he was charged April 20. He is in the custody of Jefferson County Sheriff's office, and will be tried as an adult. No motive for the slaying has been established.

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