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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

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

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
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NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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83-4

Texas Church Gets Million Dollar Gift

By Craig Bird

DALLAS (BP)--An elderly Texas couple has given \$1 million to Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas to help finance the church's "Together With Vision" building program.

Pastor Bruce McIver told the congregation 18 months ago that an anonymous challenge gift of \$1 million had been pledged if the church would match it. The church accepted the challenge, pledged another \$1.5 million, "and started giving immediately even though they didn't know when the gift would actually be made," McIver said.

In October the church received \$250,000 from the couple and on Dec. 19, Mr. and Mrs. Dean Stanley came forward at the end of the morning service and handed McIver a check for \$750,000 and a note: "God has been so good to us. We just want to help this church reach out to people."

The couple and their children wanted to remain anonymous until the sale of the family pharmaceutical business had been completed.

The offer shocked McIver since the couple had been attending Wilshire for only six months when the building campaign was announced. "They weren't very well known at the church and Mrs. Stanley wasn't even a member at the time," he said. "I baptized her about a year ago."

Stanley, 73, had been a Baptist most of his adult life but had not been very active. But after surviving open heart surgery he realized, "the Lord brought me through this and I realize I've never done much for God so we felt this was something we could do."

McIver's initial response was to "say all the wrong things."

"I asked them if they were sure they wanted to give a million dollars and then I asked if they didn't want some more time to think about it and pray about it. Finally I told them they would have to excuse me--I hadn't had much experience with people trying to give away that much money," he said. "I have never heard of this size gift coming to a church without any cultivation of the donor by the pastor or somebody."

When Wilshire launched the pay-as-you-go project to increase its Sunday School class space from 1,000 to 1,500 by adding a third floor to the educational building and to remodel three buildings in the church complex, McIver envisioned a 10-year program.

Instead the church will occupy the new \$1.2 million floor this month and has \$400,000 in the bank to help pay for the rest of the project.

Sometimes church budgets suffer after receiving such a substantial gift when members decide their contributions aren't vital anymore. But for Wilshire 1982 was, "the best year we have even had in all areas," McIver said.

By Dec. 31 the church has already surpassed the 1981 Lottie Moon Offering for foreign missions of \$35,000 by \$5,000 with another four weeks to go. The general budget was also oversubscribed. In December alone the general offering was \$167,000 and the church's monthly Cooperative Program (the SBC's unified giving plan) was in excess of \$25,000.

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"I don't know why Wilshire has been so blessed," McIver has reminded his congregation several times. "I just know that this (the million dollar gift) makes us more responsible than ever before to be good stewards of what God has given us and to be more grateful and more humble."

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High Court To Tackle State
Laws Limiting Fund Raising

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court will decide if states may impose limits on fees charged by professional fund raisers to charitable groups or if the charities may exceed a percentage limitation in their own efforts to raise money from the public.

In an action announced Jan. 10, the high court agreed to accept an appeal by the secretary of state of Maryland to review a decision by the state's highest court striking down a law limiting such payments and expenditures to 25 percent of the total amount raised.

Laws in at least 21 states are expected to be affected by the high court ruling.

In its brief asking the court to review the case the state of Maryland argued that its interest in the percentage regulation is to protect the contributing public and charitable beneficiaries from fraud and the charities themselves from "the unscrupulous practices of professional fund raisers."

Maryland's law, the brief continued, is flexible, allowing for exemptions in special cases, particularly where charities demonstrate that their fund-raising abilities would be crippled by the limitation. Further, the argument stated, the Maryland law "is being administered in a careful fashion with attention being paid to the First Amendment rights of advocacy groups."

Failure to reverse the lower ruling, the state declared, "would seriously hinder any reasonable regulation of excessive fees" charged by professional fund raisers.

On the other side, attorneys for the Indiana-based Joseph H. Munson Co. disagreed, arguing that the Maryland law violated the free speech and freedom of association provisions of the First Amendment. The fund-raising company, which for several years has organized entertainment events and done fund raising for several Maryland chapters of the Fraternal Order of Police, filed suit against the state in 1978.

After a trial court ruling upholding the law's validity was affirmed by a state appeals panel, Munson Co. attorneys successfully sought review in Maryland's highest court. That panel in turn struck down the law.

Both sides made repeated references in their legal briefs to a 1980 Supreme Court decision that local municipalities may not forbid charitable organizations from soliciting funds door-to-door. That 8-1 ruling struck down an ordinance in Schaumburg, Ill., requiring charitable groups to obtain permits to solicit and to prove to town officials that 75 percent of the money raised went directly to charity.

Like the decision in Schaumburg, that in the Maryland case will have a direct impact on church-related, as well as secular charities.

Because of an unusually crowded schedule for oral arguments already agreed to for the remainder of its current term, the high court justices will not hear the Maryland case until sometime after the beginning of its 1983-84 term. For that reason, no decision can be forthcoming until late 1983 at the earliest. (82-766, Secretary of State of Maryland v. Joseph H. Munson Co.)

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Future Brighter
For Nevada Church

By Polly House

NORTH LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Last fall the future of the Community College Baptist Church looked bleak. Because of a city building code, the small church was in danger of being closed down unless several expensive repairs were made.

After news of the church's plight was reported in Baptist Press however support came in from all over the country, said Liz Collins, wife of pastor Cal Collins.

"A church from Louisiana, which asked to remain anonymous, came out and finished up the work that needed to be done on the parsonage. They did all the immediate work that needed to be done on the church," she said. "We had to put in lights and bars on the doors, all safety equipment. They paid for that and did the work and even brought their own tools.

"They stayed four or five days. It was just wonderful what they did." Collins said.

Part of the work done by the Louisiana church was the installation of sidewalks. "We got those in Sept. 20. Because of that, the city automatically gave us an extension for the parking lot. Now we don't have to have the parking lot finished until April. We have all the money for that except for about \$900 (the total cost will be approximately \$5000)." Collins said she and her husband felt sure they would get that in time.

Six men from Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas spent four days of their vacation at the church painting the parsonage and all the trim on the church. Collins said they weren't members of Community Chapel church but belonged to another church in town.

Community College had been a chapel but became a church Jan. 2. "That was really exciting for us," Collins said. "We believe the Lord is in this. He wants this church here. "When my husband and I came here we didn't have any members--just the two of us. To see what the Lord has done is so exciting. We now have 25 members and run about 40 in Sunday School," she said.

The church's day care center is "just holding its own," Collins said. "We haven't really pushed, but we still have between 25-30 children. So, it's doing all right." The day care center provides major portion of the operating budget for the church as well as serving as an outreach tool.

Collins is optimistic about the future. "The only thing we have to do is finish the parking lot. The city gave us the extension when they saw all the work we had gotten done. We didn't even have to ask for it. We know that we're going to get the parking lot too."

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Strings On \$2 Million Gift
Provide Unexpected Benefits

By Tim Nicholas

PHEBA, Miss. (BP)--A \$2 million windfall has proved an educational experience for a small rural church in Mississippi, directly funding a Christian school and indirectly spurring numerical growth and increasing mission giving.

In 1975, Hebron Baptist Church in Pheba (with an annual budget of \$8,000) inherited more than \$2 million from the 2,500 acre Mississippi Delta estate of Mrs. W.A. Adair, who had grown up in the church and is buried in the church's cemetery.

Simple interest on the money provides more than \$200,000 annually but the will made several stipulations. It specified the money was for the "preservation" of the church and could be used to supplement the pastor's salary, brick the church building and keep up the cemetery.

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Groups and individuals from all over the world requested some of the inheritance. As if that weren't enough of a problem, R.C. Bryan, who became pastor in 1978, said people in the area started saying, "It sure is sad that lady left all this money to a little bitty church that can't use it."

Bryan confronted the estate trustees about using the proceeds for missions but they and the judge interpreted missions as outside the intent of the will.

The trustees did raise the pastor's supplement from \$300 to \$500 and allowed the church to add six classrooms, brick the entire structure and add a steeple and a baptistry.

Meanwhile, Bryan began discussing the development of a Christian education program even though "we didn't think we'd ever be able to use the trust money."

The church began the school as a ministry of the church in 1980 with 23 students. Today it has 75 students, kindergarten through twelfth grade.

After the church operated the school a year the trust officials and the judge agreed the school was an integral ministry of the church.

Now the Hebron Christian School building is nearly complete. Built at a cost of \$651,000 (church members have volunteered the finishing work), the modern facility was paid for out of the corpus which is now being paid back with interest earned. Also, trustees agreed to help the school with \$66,000 each year until it could begin to pay its own way.

Student tuition averages about \$50 per month and every teacher is state certified and all but two have master's degrees. The school is waiting the minimum three years for accreditation.

Bryan believes it's a parent's responsibility to educate a child, not the government's. "We have been tricked into believing you can separate education and religion," he said.

He said 25-30 minutes of Bible teaching every Sunday isn't enough to help children as they go "out into reality. They don't know the Book of Life" he said. In Hebron Christian School all subjects are based on the presumption that the Bible is God's word, from science to history to math.

"We started with the independent, fundamental approach," said Bryan. "Only Christian parents could have their children in the school but now we have an open door policy." No one is turned away on the basis of religion or race but the school will not lower academic or disciplinary standards. Several students have made professions of faith since beginning at the school, Bryan said.

When the church inherited the money, Sunday School attendance ran as low as 10. In 1978 it averaged 30-35. Today the church averages 125-135 each week.

"When we made the plan to grow, we just started winning people to Jesus, sharing testimonies--that's the key to growth," said Bryan, who was won to Christ as an adult by his wife.

The church uses Evangelism Explosion material developed by James Kennedy of Florida. In addition to teacher visitation on Saturdays, trainers take trainees to witness in homes on Thursday evenings. The 17-week course teaches witnessing techniques along with scripture memorization.

The church gives 10 percent of its budget to the Cooperative Program and asks for "faith promise" commitments over and above tithes to fund missionaries directly, usually independent ones. Bryan called the current situation of the Hebron Baptist Church a miracle. Strictures on the trust give the members "the feeling of a need to give to missions," he says. "The Lord knew it might be detrimental to the congregation to have this money free to spend as it pleased."

A typical Sunday morning offering six years ago was \$111.16. A recent Sunday brought in \$1,989.40. A condition that could have caused apathy has actually made the church more vibrant.

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Robison, Cullen Davis
Smash \$1 Million In Art

By Helen Parmley

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist evangelist James Robison and Fort Worth millionaire industrialist Cullen Davis smashed more than \$1 million worth of jade, ivory and gold art objects in October because, they said, the objects represented false gods.

Davis had donated the rare pieces to Robison's ministry based in Euless, Texas, the evangelist said, and the artwork had been taken to Dallas to be sold at an auction. The proceeds from the sale were to pay bills for Robison's ministry, he said.

But while reading the Bible as an aide was driving him to see the pieces, Robison said, his eyes focused on Deuteronomy 7:25 which says: "The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire. Thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein; for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God."

"It was so clear to me that the Lord didn't want me to receive them (the art objects)," said Robison, who described the articles as relating to Eastern religions. He said one jade pagoda carving, more than four feet tall, was valued at more than \$500,000.

"It was not biblical, and as far as I was concerned it represented a false religion," Robison said.

Robison and an aide loaded the objects into a truck and drove to Davis' mansion. Robison said that when he showed Davis the Bible verse and told him he could not receive the collection, Davis replied: "If you can't have it, I can't have it. We're going to destroy them. I don't want to do anything that does not please the Lord."

Davis went into his mansion, Robison recalled, and returned with hammers. The men smashed the collection in Davis' driveway.

Davis was known as flamboyant, partying millionaire before he met Robison several years ago and had a born-again religious experience. He avoids publicity about the experience and, Robison said, Davis refuses to speak publicly about the smashing of the objects.

Davis could not be reached for comment.

"I spoke to him and he told me he doesn't want attention about this," Robison said. "He said he knows why he did it. Those were objects he had collected all his life, and when he thought they might be displeasing to the Lord, he destroyed them."

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(Parmley is religion editor of the Dallas Morning News.)