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June 14, 1983

83-90

Pentecost Sunday Effort
First Reports Encouraging

By Charlene Shucker

ATLANTA (BP)--Early reports indicate Pentecost Sunday--the new work commitment day for Southern Baptists--will exceed 2,000 churches committed to starting missions in the next 12 months.

William G. Tanner, board president, said "I've talked with pastors on the field and missionaries and church extension workers. I've come to believe we have set a new standard for Southern Baptist mission commitments."

It has been a knotty task gathering information and collating results from numerous churches, associations and state conventions. As of the first week in June, three weeks after the May 22 emphasis, 1,076 new work commitments had been reported to the HMB church extension division.

The goal of Pentecost Sunday was 3,000 new-church commitments.

"Getting reports has been difficult," Tanner said, "but that's the nature of Southern Baptist life. We are trying to get the data we need to give an accurate count of the commitments, but it may take some time."

Church extension director Jack Redford sees the present figure as a positive sign. "That's more churches than Southern Baptists start in a year and more figures are coming in daily," he said.

For the past several years, Southern Baptists have averaged about 435 new churches annually, Redford pointed out. "Already we've more than doubled the number of past years," he added.

The Southern Baptist Convention has set a goal of 50,000 churches by A.D.2000, an addition of 14,000 churches. At present growth rates, reaching that figure would be impossible.

To encourage SBC churches to begin missions, the church extension division set a goal of 3,000 commitments. The figure is less than 10 percent of the total SBC churches.

Individual state conventions also set goals, based on a percentage of the total. Ironically, Alaska, the largest and most remote state in the union, was the first convention to report meeting its church starting goal of 20 new missions during the next year.

Alaska church extensions director Cameron Byler, said, "We're having such rapid population growth that this is the only way to reach the people. There is such a good spirit in the Convention now, they are just open to new churches."

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The same mood was evident in many areas, Tanner agreed. "I'm hearing exciting things. Its a great event when so many churches are uniting for a single activity. We've had reports from churches as large as that of the president of the Convention, and from churches as small as a few hundred members. I'm very hopeful and very optimistic," he said.

First Baptist Church of Richfield, Utah, typifies the enthusiasm for Pentecost Sunday which spread from coast-to-coast, by letter, word-of-mouth and news reports.

Situated in the middle of the state, Richfield is surrounded by snow-capped mountains, just 150 miles from Salt Lake City. In the heart of Mormon country, the church of less than 100 members started as a mission in 1957, faltered, then thrived under the leadership of home missionaries Medford and Dorothy Hutson. The church was constituted in 1973.

On Pentecost Sunday, there was no one happier than Hutson as he addressed his congregation. It was the culmination of 20 years of effort.

"A year ago, I first heard of Pentecost Sunday," Hutson reminded the church. "I asked you to pray and see what we could do to start a mission. Then in February of this year, I called the Home Mission Board. We pledged to begin two missions," Hutson said.

"But May 22 was designated not by us but by God. Today, we have the privilege of starting more new missions."

The church voted to begin three new missions and continue to support two started in February.

"It's the kind of commitment that makes worthwhile all the effort of Pentecost Sunday," said the HMB's Redford. "Next year, we hope other churches will follow Richfield's example."

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Full Power Affiliate
For ACTS Launched

Baptist Press
6/14/83

GREENVILLE, N.C. (BP)--The nation's first full-power television station affiliated with American Christian Television System, (ACTS) was launched during an official signing ceremony at Memorial Baptist Church June 8.

Ownership of a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) construction permit for a new UHF television station in Greenville was transferred to ACTS of Eastern North Carolina, Inc., during an hour-long service of hymn singing, prayers, and speeches at the church where the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina was founded in 1830.

ACTS of Eastern North Carolina is a non-profit organization operated by 14 trustees who will oversee operation of the station.

All of the trustees are residents of eastern North Carolina. The station is not related to the state Baptist convention although the trustees are Baptist pastors and laymen.

More than 350 people watched as officials of EL-COM, Inc., a Jacksonville, N.C., corporation, signed over the right to build a station in Greenville to the ACTS affiliate.

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An FCC construction permit entitles the holder to begin building the physical plant and transmitting tower for a new station.

Tommy J. Payne, trustee chairman of ACTS of Eastern North Carolina, said plans call for the station to begin broadcasting next spring. The construction process will cost \$3.5 million with an annual operating cost of about \$900,000, he said.

Payne, a former trustee chairman of the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, said funds for the station's construction and operation will be raised through interested individuals and the 500 Southern Baptist churches in the area served by the station.

The ACTS affiliate station, channel 14, will broadcast from the Atlantic coast to eastern Wake County, a distance of almost 100 miles. The station construction permit allows for a five million watt transmitting tower--the maximum power allowed by the FCC.

Payne said the station will broadcast programming from ACTS along with other programming from local sources and other satellites. Spacenet 1 satellite, which will carry ACTS programming, is scheduled to be launched in the spring of 1984.

ACTS is a non-profit corporation created by the Radio and Television Commission. The RTVC will be the primary programmers for the network and is the world's largest producer of public service religious programs.

Jimmy R. Allen, RTVC president, told the Greenville gathering the start-up date of spring 1984 for ACTS is still on schedule. As primary program supplier for ACTS, he said the RTVC is now working on 29 series for the network.

Allen also said attempts to begin high-power stations like the one in Greenville are under way in 25 cities across the nation, including Dallas, San Francisco and Houston. He said plans call for having 25 high-power station affiliates and 100 low-power stations for the ACTS network. The programs also will be part of broadcasting by 1,500 cable companies, Allen said.

Payne said the Greenville station will carry "positive life style programs, human interest, music, news, Bible study, children's programs, sports and mission activities. All programs will interweave positive Christian values."

No on-air solicitations for money will be made, Payne added.

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'83 Lottie Moon
Offering Lowered

By Beth Wildes

Baptist Press
6/14/83

PITTSBURGH (BP)--Woman's Missionary Union's Executive Board voted to lower the 1983 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions national goal from \$66 million to \$60 million during its June meeting.

The vote came less than two weeks after the books closed on the 1982 offering which fell short of its \$58 million goal by almost \$4 million.

"This is a matter Southern Baptists need to be concerned about," said Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of WMU, SBC.

"It's a matter of fiscal concern for the Foreign Mission Board since they budgeted the entire 1983 goal."

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The offering provides about half of the FMB's yearly budget. National goals are set by the WMU Executive Board in consultation with FMB staff.

Weatherford noted that 83.2 percent of the 1982 goal was reached. This marked a 6.48 percent increase over the amount given in 1981, the smallest percentage increase since 1974.

"This is a sad time for our board," Weatherford said. "The only other time in recent history that the goal was changed in 1975, and that was because Southern Baptists' gifts to foreign missions through the offering surpassed the 1975 goal."

In other action, the board voted to expand the number of national staff positions to 132, which will mean a net gain of five new employees. The expansion comes in connection with a major reorganization that will go into effect June 27.

The board also voted to change its by-laws to increase the number of standing committees from one to five.

"The board's reorganization will make work more efficient and will involve board members more directly in the work of WMU," said Weatherford. Formerly, only nine board members served on one standing committee. Under the reorganization, all board members will serve on at least one committee.

According to Weatherford, the by-laws change divides the finance and personnel committee into two committees, with three members each.

Mauriece Johnston, president of Texas WMU, will chair the finance committee. Rachel Howard, president of Georgia WMU, will chair the personnel committee.

In addition, the board created three committees which correspond with the administrative reorganization at the national headquarters. Ruth Harris, president of Michigan WMU, will chair the mission service committee; Jarene Robison, president of Oklahoma WMU, will be chairman of the missions education committee and Barbara Bray, president of the Missouri WMU will chair the missions coordination committee.

Weatherford also announced that Evelyn Blount, national enlargement plan director for WMU, SEC, will assume the position of program development specialist Oct. 1. Blount has directed the national enlargement plan since it was launched in March 1981. The plan, which will end Sept. 30, resulted in new WMU organizations in 2,311 churches.

The board also voted to grant \$2,500 for WMU enlargement in Europe. Funds will allow Virginia Wood of Frankfurt, Germany, president of the WMU of the European Baptist Convention, to travel to approximately 12 English-speaking churches in Europe to work with pastors in starting new WMU organizations. The funds also will provide free printed materials.

The board voted to adopt the 1983-84 budget, which is a 2.8 percent increase over an equivalent budget last year. The 1983-84 budget is \$7,509,820.

In other action, the board approved extended enrichment funds for 11 WMU staff members. The five-year-old program allows qualified staff members to pursue outside study or travel that will help them or enhance their jobs.

Soviet Baptist Groups
Reconciled, Claas Says

PITTSBURGH (BP)--Two major Baptist groups in the Soviet Union have taken an important first step toward reconciliation, the general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, (BWA) announced.

Gerhard Claas of Washington, D.C., just back from a meeting in Moscow, said 20 representatives of the Autonomous Brethren accepted an invitation to meet with BWA and European Baptist Federation officials and with 10 members of the presidium of the All-Union Council. The council is the government-recognized organization for five evangelical denominations, including Baptists.

The Autonomous Brethren, who also call themselves the Separatist Brethren because they have chosen to leave dissident Baptist ranks and register with the government, knelt together and were reconciled around the communion table, Claas reported.

One representative of the dissidents, whose former chief Georgi Vins now lives in the United States, participated in the meeting as an observer, he said.

Claas cautioned there is still "a long way to go, but this is a very important first step--a great step forward."

Nobody knows the exact number of evangelicals or Baptists in the Soviet Union today, Claas explained, because it was 20 years ago that official registration occurred and the government refuses to acknowledge that evangelicals have continued to grow.

But some estimates range upward to 4.5 million evangelicals, about 2.5 million of these Baptists, he said.

The All-Union Council is officially listed with about a half million members.

Claas said about 10,000 to 15,000 Soviet citizens are believed to be members of the 64 churches which decided sometime back to withdraw from Vins' Church Council of Evangelical Baptists and register. About an equal number apparently are still in the council which Vins formerly headed.

Claas said Vins' former church is among the 64 who now have registered with the government.

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Beth Wildes Resigns
WMU PR Position

Baptist Press
6/14/83

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Beth Wildes, public information director for Woman's Missionary Union, auxiliary to Southern Baptist Convention, has resigned effective June 17.

Wildes will do free-lance editorial work for Oxmoor House Books in Birmingham.

Wildes came to WMU in 1977 as editorial assistant for Contempo magazine. She became public information director in 1980.

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