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1984 Statistics Show
Lackluster SBC Year

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Although gains outnumbered losses for Southern Baptists in the final statistical report for 1984, it appears the denomination generally marched in place following four years of significant increases.

Gains were recorded by Southern Baptists in the number of churches, total membership, Sunday school enrollment, church music enrollment, Brotherhood enrollment, mission expenditures and total receipts. Losses were in baptisms, church training enrollment and Woman's Missionary Union enrollment.

These figures are based on uniform church letters received by the research services department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. Projections related to Southern Baptist programs were released in December based on the first 26,000 letters received from churches.

In the five program areas and in the number of churches, losses and gains varied less than one percentage point from the previous year. Baptisms, however, suffering the second consecutive loss, were down by more than 22,000, or 5.7 percent, from last year.

Church membership for the denomination reached a new total of 14,349,657 with a gain of 164,203, which is the smallest increase since 1978. Mission expenditures and total receipts increased respectively by 7.3 and 8.8 percent.

Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, expressed regret about the decrease in baptisms, but said he remains optimistic because of the contact he has had with Southern Baptist churches.

"I have discovered a renewed interest in Christ and in the preaching of the Gospel in churches where I have visited," Bennett said. "I believe the launch of Good News America, the denomination's plan for simultaneous revivals in 1986, will give Southern Baptists a new all-time high in baptisms. Good News America will again center our attention on reaching individual persons for Jesus Christ and church membership."

Several of the increases in the programs included in the 10 key reporting areas were the smallest in several years, which could affect the desires of the denomination for dramatic increases in sharing the Gospel around the world.

The number of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention increased in 1984 to a new total of 36,740. This increase of 0.6 percent, or 209, is the smallest numerical gain since 1979. The church membership increase of 164,203, or 1.2 percent, is the same percentage gain as was predicted.

In Sunday school, the denomination's largest program, the ongoing enrollment was up by 0.5 percent, or 41,894, to reach another record total enrollment at 7,857,337. The actual total was 0.1 percent higher than the projected gain.

This year's baptism total of 372,028, has fallen from 411,554 baptisms in 1982. The most baptisms ever recorded in the nation's largest prot stant denomination was 445,725 in 1972. The drop in baptisms also is reflected in the number of churches reporting a baptism in 1984, when the total dropped by 0.7 percent to 29,850. This means approximately one-sixth of all churches in the denomination did not have at least one baptism.

Church training enrollment was down by 0.7 percent, or 14,483, in 1984, making the new total 1,972,907. This loss, which comes on the heels of four consecutive gains, is 0.1 percent more than the projected decrease.

The enrollment in WMU activities in 1984 lost 0.5 percent, or 5,724, making the new total 1,169,630. This was 0.2 percent less than the projected loss.

The church music program increase, the 19th consecutive gain, was the smallest numerical gain since 1977. The 0.6 percent, or 10,621, increase brings the church music enrollment to 1,667,385. The gain is 0.4 percent less than the predicted gain.

Brotherhood enrollment in 1984 increased by 0.5 percent, or 3,034, to a new total of 568,383. This is 0.4 percent less than the projected total.

Mission expenditures in 1984 increased by 7.3 percent over the previous year to \$568,059,173. This total is one-half of a percentage point more than was projected.

Total receipts for the denomination last year rose by 8.8 percent to a total of \$3,665,735,085. The actual gain was about one percent higher than predicted.

Summary of the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention Statistics:

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>Gain or Loss</u>	<u>Percent Gain or Loss</u>
Churches	36,740	36,531	209	0.6
Baptisms	372,028	394,606	-22,578	-5.7
Total Membership	14,349,657	14,185,454	164,203	1.2
Sunday School Ongoing Enrollment	7,857,337	7,815,443	41,894	0.5
Church Training Enrollment	1,972,907	1,987,390	-14,483	-0.7
Ongoing Music Ministry Enrollment	1,667,385	1,656,764	10,621	0.6
Woman's Missionary Union Ongoing Enrollment	1,169,630	1,175,354	-5,724	-0.5
Brotherhood Ongoing Enrollment	568,383	565,349	3,034	0.5
Total Mission Expenditures	568,059,173	529,283,289	38,775,884	7.3
Total Receipts	\$3,665,735,085	\$3,370,450,615	\$295,284,470	8.8

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Child's 'Mite'
Helps Hungry

By Orvill Scott

Baptist Press
2/11/85

ANDREWS, Texas (BP)—Seven-year-old Candace Porter of Andrews, Texas, has given the "widow's mite"—\$30.07 for the starving people in Africa.

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As the Bible tells in Luke 21:2-4, Christ saw a poor widow giving a small coin and observed that hers was the greatest gift because it was all she had.

Candace, whose parents, Dennie and Cindy, are Sunday school teachers at First Baptist Church, Andrews, had saved up nickels and dimes since she was four. Candace and her mother had been deeply moved by the televised scenes of starving Africans.

"I felt bad because they were starving," said Candace. "Sometimes I would see it and cry, and my brothers would tease me, and I couldn't hear them because I was crying too loud."

So she sent all of her savings, "plus 50 cents from the tooth fairy," said her mother. "She did it all on her own. We didn't know she was doing it 'till later."

In a letter "To the starving people of Africa," Candace wrote, "I wish you didn't have to starve like that. We're warm at night, and you all are freezing. I wish we were freezing and you were warm, but I guess that isn't true. I hope that someday you will be like us. We all love you."

Candace signed her name and the names of her parents and two brothers.

Roger Hall, treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said all of Candace's gift will be used directly by Southern Baptist foreign missionaries to help alleviate hunger.

"Like the widow's mite," said Hall, "Candace's unselfish example will live forever, blessing the lives of countless people."

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Patterson Discusses
'Conservative Resurgence'

By Robert H. Dilday

Baptist Press
2/11/85

ATLANTA (BP)—A leader in the movement to turn the Southern Baptist Convention toward a more conservative stance told a group of Georgia Baptist pastors the convention's annual meeting in June will determine if a "conservative resurgence" will continue or whether there will be "a reversal back to...a liberal position."

"There is no debate, among those who are honest enough to face the issue, but that there has been a shift in Southern Baptist theological opinion," Paige Patterson, associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, told about 60 people at First Baptist Church in Lilburn, Ga.

The meeting was a regular session of the Lawrenceville Baptist Association Pastors' Conference.

"What we have is a theological direction that leads us to a denial of certain aspects of Scripture," he added, warning eventually the tendency would destroy evangelism in the 14.3 million-member SBC.

During a question-and-answer period, Patterson was asked why Russell Kaemmerling, editor of the Southern Baptist Advocate, published in Dallas to support the aims of the fundamentalists, refuses to reveal the names of the tabloid's board members.

"I personally have tried to get them to go ahead and reveal it," Patterson said.

He indicated Kaemmerling, who is Patterson's brother-in-law, probably is trying to protect the board from "persecution as long as he can," and that the editor is resisting pressure from so-called "moderates" in the convention.

"Chances are he (Kaemmerling) will not be made to do it," Patterson said. "It's a mistake to approach Russ Kaemmerling that way."

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Patterson insisted the issue in the conflict is theological, not political, although he admitted, "I don't deny at all that there is a political side to it. One of the reasons there's all the concern is that the group that presently holds power is scared to death they're about to lose it."

"The point to which we have come is a movement to the left," he said. "That is undebateable. If it is debateable, why won't someone debate it with us in public?"

Patterson claimed he had offered to meet in a public forum with Roy L. Honeycutt, Russell H. Dilday Jr. and W. Randall Lolley, the presidents, respectively, of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., but they had refused. All three men have been outspoken in their opposition to Patterson's goals.

"I'm willing to lay the evidence on the table," he said. "Why aren't they?"

Patterson also criticized the "top-heavy bureaucracy" in the convention which he said was becoming more hierarchial in structure.

He cited proof the "evolving of certain titles for denominational servants."

"We used to have 'associational missionaries,'" he said. "But in some associations they may soon become the director of missions, and in other associations it has gone even farther, and he is now the executive director of the association."

Asked what he and those who share his concern will do if SBC President Charles F. Stanley of Atlanta, who is widely supported by fundamentalists in the convention, is defeated, Patterson said he hoped "conservatives" would pray for the new president, but "would see the seriousness of the problem and decide whether or not we want our churches in the tradition of George Truett and R.G. Lee...and come back at subsequent convention and finish the business."

"I very well understand the possibility of much more serious things happening," he added.

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(Dilday is associate editor of The Christian Index, newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention.)

Hopeful Signs Seen
For SBC By Songer

By Bob Allen

Baptist Press
2/11/85

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—Though a struggle for control of Southern Baptist boards and agencies projects a question mark over the denomination's future, there are "harbingers of hope" on the horizon, according to biblical scholar Harold S. Songer.

Songer, vice-president for academic affairs and professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., made his remarks to a group of associational directors of missions attending a continuing theological education conference at the seminary. He told the group gains toward establishing a moderate view of biblical interpretation among Southern Baptists at the grassroots level will not "be erased by the stacking of trustees in agencies."

Songer's "harbingers" were:

—The rise of multiple translations of the Bible now in use by lay people—who a generation ago relied solely on the King James Version—signals "a frank recognition there may be more than one meaning assigned to a Scripture passage," Songer said.

That trend implies "a move toward diversity, and not rigidity," he continued. Yet, he observed, there is no debate among the Baptists the Bible is authoritative or "that we stop reading the Bible and begin reading the Baptist Faith and Message."

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--"Another element of hope is a stable exegetical pattern in the Broadman Bible Commentary," Songer asserts. He believes it is a unifying factor Southern Baptists have never before had. Written by the top Baptist scholars of its time, the chief weakness of the commentary is "it is not sufficiently used," Songer said.

--The success of the January Bible Study, which with minimal publicity at the "worst time of the year," drew more than one million Baptist laypeople in 1984, is "incredible", Songer indicated. Material for the studies, Songer said, is written by main line Baptist teachers.

--The religion departments in Baptist colleges are exposing 160,000 students a year in all walks of life to "an approach to the Bible which is productive and sane." Students attending Baptist colleges must take religion classes, and those students, the majority of which will be laypeople, are "a bulwark against a hyper-conservative takeover," he said.

--Individuals in the SBC, such as seminary presidents Roy L. Honeycutt and Russell Dilday, are "willing to stand up and be counted on the side of tolerance, diversity and openness in the Southern Baptist Convention" at the risk of their own futures, Songer said. He called it another encouraging sign.

Songer believes the single most encouraging "harbinger" is Southern Baptists' continuing devotion to the Bible. "Baptists see themselves as the people of the Book, and they see the Book as different from other books," Songer said. While some disagree on how the Bible is to be interpreted, all agree "in the bulwark assumption that God speaks through his Word," Songer said.

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Seminary Reports 117 Percent
Increase In Gifts

Baptist Press
2/11/85

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., reported an increase of nearly one million dollars in gifts during 1984, according to W. Robert Spinks, assistant to the president for financial development.

According to figures just released, gifts to the Southern Baptists Convention seminary rose to \$1,809,050 for 1984 from \$883,649 in 1983, a whopping 117 percent. The number of donors increased by 68 percent.

Spinks attributes the major jump to "hard work by the staff, development council and alumni, as well as an unparalleled generosity of many people. One of the major contributors was the Charles A. Cannon Charitable Trusts of Concord, N.C.," he said. "We had a \$500,000 challenge grant from Cannon, and we've been working diligently to meet that goal."

While the gifts were to a variety of causes, much of the money will be used in the renovation of the seminary gymnasium, now being converted into a student center. Also, a large amount will go for student aid, according to Spinks.

All reported gifts are in addition to the seminary's allotment from the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program which is expected to total \$3.8 million for the 1984-85 year, 70 percent of the school's budget.

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