



BAPTIST PRESS

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86-19

Prayer, Fasting Urged
For SBC Peace Committee

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)--A special time of prayer and fasting for the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee has been called for by the peace group's chairman, Charles Fuller.

"I would like to call upon all Southern Baptists to enter into a special time of prayer and fasting, from Sunday afternoon, Feb. 23, to noon Monday, Feb. 24, seeking the wisdom and power of God for the Peace Committee and claiming great hope for our denomination's future," he said.

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., made his request during a meeting of the Southern Baptist Press Association, which is composed of editors and staff members of the 37 state Baptist newspapers.

The 22-member Peace Committee was created during the 1985 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, and charged with the responsibility of determining the sources of the controversy which has rocked the 14.4-million-member denomination since 1979, and to offer possible ways the differences can be reconciled.

"The Peace Committee recognizes the need for God's leadership and for his intervention in the task we have been given. I would like to ask that we especially pray for God's wisdom and power to rest on the Peace Committee meeting Feb. 24 and 25 in Atlanta," Fuller said.

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Peace Effort 'Really
Matters,' Fuller Says

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press
2/14/86

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)--The peace effort underway in the Southern Baptist Convention "really matters," according to Peace Committee Chairman Charles Fuller.

"I am convinced what we are doing in this peace effort is worth it all because it is something that matters, really matters," Fuller told the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Press Association, made up of editors and staffers of the 37 state Baptist newspapers and representatives of Baptist Press.

"I love the people called Southern Baptists," he said. "I cherish my legacy as a Southern Baptist. I am convinced God still wants to use Southern Baptists. Hence, when I hear skeptical and cynical voices rhetorically asking, 'You don't really believe there is hope for reconciliation and restoration in our convention, do you?' I am even more determined to 'stay by the stuff.'"

Fuller told of the "potential for a breakthrough in our pursuit of reconciliation. We have not yet reached a breakthrough, but we may very well be approaching some significant areas where all sides can come together and honor our diversity while not dishonoring our convictions."

He did not comment on what such a breakthrough may be but said some of the progress during the Jan. 20-21 meeting of the Peace Committee "was attributable more to the emerging dynamic of the group than to the planned agenda."

Fuller told the editors, "I would be remiss if I did not express, in my behalf and in behalf of the 22 members of the committee, our genuine appreciation for every contribution you and your publications have attempted to make toward a needed and honest reconciliation in current Southern Baptist life."

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He also said: "I realize my two press releases, calling upon Southern Baptists to abide by the convention's action to 'exercise restraint, to refrain from divisive action and comments and to reflect Christian love...' were perceived by some not only as a call for quiet but as a subtle or inadvertent restriction of the press.

"Regardless how those releases have been perceived, they were never intended to quell the rightful duty of any media. I am quite aware that you, who have been called of God to the ministry of Christian journalism, have both a professional and spiritual accountability to fulfill," he said.

"My appeals have been to responsible Southern Baptists in general, without any hidden agenda concerning the press or any particular theological postures. In my opinion, the key is not resentful silence but responsible speech, not a muzzled tongue but a charitable spirit."

The chairman said he would "depoliticize the entire committee" if he had his way, or even recommend a convention-wide moratorium on denominational politics. "Such is next to impossible, however, if we respect the Baptist view on personal liberty. We acknowledge the fact that Southern Baptist politics have been an ongoing reality for years, but our need is to reject the bad-spirited politics among us and seek a more wholesome version to the political process."

Fuller said within the SBC the "question is not whether we are theologically diverse, but how diverse can we be and maintain a legitimate denominational fellowship and a trustworthy base upon which to combine our support for mutual ministries."

"At this point the parameters are flexible, but they are not limitless," he added. "The nature of our theological relationships is such that we cannot settle it 'once and for all.' Of necessity, we will periodically pass through the painful assignment of renewing our understanding and re-establishing our oneness."

He said he believes Southern Baptists "are generally quite conservative," adding, "there are those who are fundamental-conservatives and those who are moderate-conservatives." He noted there are those who fit the classic theological liberal designation, as well.

He said many Southern Baptists hold a position of "inerrancy but I do not personally believe it is a position all must take in order to remain Southern Baptists." However, he said to him "one hardly could claim to be faithful to the heritage of Southern Baptists...unless he or she held the Scriptures in the highest reverence, never dealing with them as less than God's written and revealed word."

Fuller also said, "Creedalism is not an answer for us, nor is indulgence."

The chairman said each Christian is "competent to interpret the Scriptures, giving account directly to God...(but) if that Christian is going to represent other believers in enterprises they mutually undertake, there has to be some accountability to them as well."

"In brief, if one is to serve Southern Baptists, as a denomination, there is some accountability to all Southern Baptists, though not to every individual who is a Southern Baptist, without being defensive about it or heavy handed about it."

Fuller said as Southern Baptists "work through this critical time we must not presume the futility of the effort...jeopardize our investment in world evangelization...circumvent our denominational process...discredit the witness of Jesus by resorting to subterfuge...act precipitously when the destiny of Southern Baptists is at stake...shrink from the courage and the creativity which will be demanded in making two or three very hard decisions which we will have to make to honor our diversity while not dishonoring our convictions."

There are five things Southern Baptists "must rediscover and re-establish," he said, listing a restored sense of trust, a refreshed sense of humility, a recovered sense of mission, a renewed sense of cooperation and a real sense of hope."

During a question-and-answer session with editors, Fuller talked of a controversy which developed during a visit to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., by a four-member subcommittee.

During the visit, the three members of the subcommittee met with an organized group of "conservative" students at their motel room, causing other members of the seminary community to become "quite upset."

Fuller said he has talked with Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., and chairman of the subcommittee, about the meeting, who said the leader of the student group asked to meet with the Peace Committee subcommittee.

Fuller said he also has talked with two of the students, one of whom apologized "because he did not realize the committee could not talk with anyone" at Southeastern seminary except the president, chief academic officer and chairman of the trustees. "I told him it was not a matter they (the committee) could not meet with anyone else, but that they represented an organized group. That is what made the approach different," Fuller said.

Fuller later told Baptist Press the Peace Committee had announced the "subcommittees would meet with seminary and agency officials and did not set specific guidelines for any other approach. Therefore, the subcommittee made a judgment. Opinions about their judgment may vary, but the fact is there were not specific guidelines (concerning meeting with other groups)."

He added: "We did say if an individual on one of the campuses or at an agency sought a conversation, the committee should talk. I know Jim Henry enough to know his spirit is one of openness and that would prompt him to meet with anyone. I cannot imagine the committee would have done anything that would be damaging to their visit.

"I do not believe they set out to violate the guidelines because there was nothing to violate. The question is one of their judgment, and I am confident they made their decision on the basis of the assignment to go and learn all they could. We did not go to take a stance of accusation but to go and to learn."

Fuller added the visits made by the subcommittees "have been quite positive in the main. I am grateful there have been so few problems related to those dialogue-visits, and what few problems have been reported, I am certain have been inadvertent. I have every confidence in the spirit of our subcommittees as well as every confidence in the attitude of our seminary and agency leadership as they attempt to be part of the reconciliation process."

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CP Surpasses \$12 Million
For First Time In January

Baptist Press
2/14/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Monthly contributions to the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program exceeded \$12 million for the first time this January, announced Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee.

The Cooperative Program received \$12,772,933 in January, Bennett said. That amount is almost \$2 million--or 18.13 percent--more than the offering for the same month last year. That month previously was the second highest Cooperative Program month in history.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified system of financing SBC mission, education and ministry programs worldwide. The program's funds are sent by local churches to state Baptist conventions. The state conventions retain a portion of the funds for their own ministries and pass along a portion to the Executive Committee, which disburses the funds to about 20 agencies and institutions.

The \$12.77 million figure is the amount sent to the Executive Committee.

For the first four months of fiscal 1985-86, Cooperative Program receipts are up 8 percent over the same period in 1984-85, Bennett noted. The four-month total is \$41,864,163, compared to \$38,761,536.

That 8 percent increase surpassed the current U.S. inflation rate of 3.8 percent.

Bennett cited two reasons for for the gain:

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"The increase in Cooperative Program receipts is a direct result of commitment on the part of Southern Baptists and is attributable to Planned Growth in Giving," he said.

Planned Growth in Giving is an SBC campaign to encourage systematic increases in giving to local churches and the Cooperative Program during the remainder of the century. Of the early influence of the campaign, Bennett noted, "Southern Baptists have adopted a lifestyle to grow in stewardship.

"Great commendation also must be expressed to the state conventions and their actions last fall in annual meetings," he added, noting 27 of 37 state bodies voted to increase their giving to the Cooperative Program. "This is attributable to the state executive directors and other state leaders because of their commitment to share the whole gospel with the whole world."

The January Cooperative Program total included about \$600,000 in December contributions which were late in being forwarded to the Executive Committee, noted Tim Hedquist, the committee's vice president for business and finance. Nevertheless, January receipts topped \$12 million on their own, he pointed out.

The previous single-month high was \$10,991,903, set in August of 1985.

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(Editor's Note: Individual state totals are available from the (BP) central office.)

Reality Demands Change To Reach
Bold Mission Thrust, Says Parks

By Anita Bowden

Baptist Press
2/14/86

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Southern Baptists must be willing to face a new and changing reality and make necessary adjustments in their mission efforts if Bold Mission Thrust is to be accomplished, warned Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks, president of the convention's Foreign Mission Board.

Speaking during the board's trustees meeting Feb. 10-12, Parks expressed "serious doubt that we are now on a course that will accomplish" the convention's Bold Mission Thrust goal of helping present the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone by the year 2000.

He challenged trustees, staff and missionaries to examine their maps of reality, quoting from M. Scott Peck's book, "The Road Less Traveled." In the book, Peck says one's view of reality is like a map. He suggests most people have grown tired by middle age and no longer are interested in new information which could cause them to revise their maps.

Again referring to Peck's book, Parks wondered aloud if the reason he and others are sometimes reluctant to revise their maps is laziness—"laziness based on fear of what would happen if we grappled with the situation as it really is."

These concepts disturb him, Parks said. "I have to ask myself, our staff and this board if that's where we are in transforming the vision of Bold Mission Thrust into reality. Have we tended to keep our maps of reality as they were in 1976, and were they accurate then? Have we deluded ourselves to believing that, in fact, we were on the road to accomplishing the overarching objective of Bold Mission Thrust?"

"I do not have a blueprint for transforming that vision into reality," he acknowledged. But he offered several points to consider in reaching that reality.

First, prayer for God's presence, power and answer to the problem. Then, a definition of Bold Mission Thrust by which Southern Baptists will know if they have accomplished their goal. Once that definition is in hand, "we will need to stand at the year 2000 and look this direction. How can we get from here to there?" he asked.

Some things which may need to be changed are the board's organization, its budget, the structure of its missions on the field and the way Southern Baptists work with Baptists and other Christians around the world, Parks suggested. The last step is to determine the appropriate role for the board.

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"This is where a fear generated by an unrecognized laziness may be blocking my vision," Parks acknowledged. "We are all busy. Yet there continues to stir on an emerging map of a new reality that some of that 'busyness' is not strategic. There appear to be other more serious matters that need to grab the attention of missionaries, staff, board and Southern Baptists.

"If, in fact, the vision of Bold Mission Thrust is transformed into reality, much of the burden, responsibility and privilege will be borne by this board and this staff and these missionaries. May God give us the faith and the love for a lost world that casts out the laziness created by fear."

In another report to the board, Isam Ballenger, director for Europe and the Middle East, explored some of the reasons the board works with registered churches in east European nations. He said the board has been criticized for not working with unregistered or "underground" churches but insisted that the board remains concerned for and interested in these groups as well.

"We seek to obey the laws of the various countries, believing that this approach will offer us more possibilities in the long run," he said. "We desire to assist all Baptists where possible. I think we must say that God is using both groups, and neither group is of such perfection as to condemn the other."

Ballenger acknowledged that leaders of certain socialist countries allow measures of freedom for Christians with a definite degree of self-interest. In turn, Baptists welcome every opportunity for evangelistic visits, training pastors, building churches and importing Bibles.

Even for those living in communist countries, the choice is not easy. Ballenger recalled sitting with a Romanian pastor and denominational leader as he and his wife wept over the dilemma. If they did not cooperate with the government, they would get no permits to build, to renovate, to carry on without harrassment. If they cooperated, others would call them agents of the government or compromisers.

Yet Baptist work in east Europe continues through all the channels that are open, Ballenger said. And the board will "with love and understanding" stand by those who must decide what allegiance belongs to their government and what to God.

During the board meeting, trustees approved a resolution of appreciation for Jim Philpot, missionary to Mexico who was killed last October, and pledged prayer support for his family. They also approved revisions to the board's program statement, which will be presented to the convention's Executive Committee and ultimately to the convention for approval.

The finance office announced a reorganization which created three departments where there had been one. New department directors are John R. Moyer, overseas accounting; Donald L. Listrom, missionary benefits; and Brian J. Goodman, financial accounting. Also named were Carl D. Monfalcone, assistant to the vice president; Martha I. Robertson, assistant treasurer, and Gary L. Stevens, controller.

Moyer, a former journeyman to Surinam, had been assistant to the vice president for finance. Listrom, a board employee for 31 years, had been controller. Goodman had been director of financial reporting. Monfalcone had been assistant treasurer, and Robertson and Stevens had been managers of the accounting sections.

Lewis Myers, director of Cooperative Services International, announced the selection of his associate, Jack Shelby, missionary to Thailand. From a base in Hong Kong, Shelby will work with Myers in assisting Christians in China and other countries where missionary presence is not possible. He and his wife, Ava, are natives of Harrisburg, Ill. They have been missionaries to Malaysia, India and Thailand since 1968.

Selwyn Vickers of Huntsville, Ala., was named the first black to participate in the board's medical-dental receptor program. A senior medical student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., Vickers will serve an eight-week rotation beginning in March at the Baptist Medical Centre in Ogbomosho, Nigeria. The medical-dental receptor program gives medical and dental school seniors, especially those interested in medical missions, an opportunity to work for short periods in Baptist mission hospitals overseas.



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NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION