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86-119

National CP Holds Steady,
Thanks To State Conventions

N-CO

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Contributions to Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program budget continue to outpace inflation, thanks to support from state Baptist conventions.

July receipts for the Southern Baptist Convention's national unified budget totalled \$9,272,097, an increase of 6.18 percent over the same period last year, announced Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee.

"Our increase has to be attributed to state conventions," Bennett said. "Churches are not increasing their gifts to the state conventions in the proportion those conventions are forwarding increases to the national Cooperative Program."

Bennett praised the work of state leaders, particularly executive directors and stewardship promotion directors, who are leading their conventions to grow in national giving. This comes at a time when several state conventions—whose economies are tied to agribusiness and the petrochemical industry—are feeling financial pressure close to home.

"The state convention leadership is doing a great deal of work outside the spotlight, but it is paying off," he said. For the first 10 months of the current fiscal year, Southern Baptists have contributed more than \$103.6 million to the national Cooperative Program, an increase of 6.97 percent over the same period last year. The national goal for the year is \$130 million.

Bennett expressed "concern and optimism" about the long-term health of the Cooperative Program.

"I am concerned that Southern Baptists will remain committed to world missions through the Cooperative Program. If they do not, we will face a decline," he said.

But Planned Growth in Giving—the convention's new 15-year campaign to promote systematic increases in giving on the part of Southern Baptists to their churches and on the part of churches to the Cooperative Program—has provided Bennett with a source for optimism.

Planned Growth in Giving should lead to stewardship growth in established churches, providing funds which will help those congregations establish new churches "wherever needed in the United States," he said, adding the new churches then will contribute to increased mission work.

A national Planned Growth in Giving seminar will be held in Nashville, Tenn., Sept. 24-25. "The seminar is primarily designed for denominational leadership and will serve as a follow-up to the 1985 national seminars and the first year of church experiences with Planned Growth in Giving," said Cecil A. Ray, national director of the campaign.

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F-CO

Texas, Missouri Baptists
Fight Economic Battles

By Ken Camp and Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press
8/21/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Crises in the agricultur and petroleum industries have created a vexing problem for Southern Baptists—how to minister to friends, neighbors and fellow church members who have been strangled financially.

The problem has been acute the past couple of years. The price of oil has scraped the bottom of the barrel. Family farms have been plowed under in record numbers.

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Two states epitomize the plight. Texans are trying to fight off the double-whammy effects, since their state's economy has been dependent on both farming and oil. Missourians have lost more family farms than their peers in any other state.

But Baptists in both states have not given up. Instead, they have crafted approaches to their situations which may become models for ministry in broad-scale economic crisis.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas has responded by forming an economic crisis task force to handle problems created by the agribusiness recession and a collapse in oil prices.

Created in March as the more-narrowly focused farm crisis task force, the group included the state convention's area/associational missions coordinator as its chairman as well as the director of the state missions commission and representatives from the Texas Christian Life Commission, the church ministries section of the convention and the convention's church stewardship department.

"The purpose of the task force is to gather and disseminate pertinent information about the Texas economic crisis and to discuss appropriate responses for individual churches, associations and the state convention to take in ministering to those who are hurting," said Ken Coffee, task force chairman.

Listening was the single agenda item when the task force met for its first meeting with a rural West Texas pastor, a director of missions and representatives from the Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas A & M University in College Station and the department of rural-urban ministries at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. In that four-hour meeting, participants attempted to identify the various facets of the economic crisis in Texas and to talk about appropriate ways to minister.

After noting the effects on the state economy of a collapse in oil prices, the task force agreed by common consent its recommendations should address the larger economic crisis and not be limited solely to agricultural issues.

Renamed the economic crisis task force, the group met again in May to discuss recommendations by members. The task force agreed to promote and coordinate Texas Baptist participation in interdenominational events related to the economic crisis, including the annual Town and Country Church Conference and a series of one-day workshops sponsored by the Texas Conference of Churches and to recommend Texas Baptist participation in sponsorship of the Farm Crisis Hotline.

The task force also made plans to produce a resource packet that would be made available upon request for pastors ministering in parts of the state particularly hurt by the recession. The group agreed the packet should include a briefing paper on the Texas economic crisis, meeting models for churches wishing to hold special events related to ministering in tough economic times and tracts on stewardship and money management. Also to be included was information about videotapes related specifically to the farm crisis.

In mid-July, the task force met to finalize its plans on the resource packet. The group agreed to distribute the briefing paper on the economic crisis in a statewide pastor mailing and to make the complete packet available upon request from the state convention after Aug. 15.

In Missouri, one telling statistic particularly is bleak. Between 1980 and 1985, the Farmers Home Administration repossessed 325 Missouri family farms totalling 79,369 acres.

Both of those figures led the nation, so Missouri Baptists felt it was up to them to lead the way among Baptist conventions responding to the farm crisis. The Missouri Baptist Convention executive board voted in July 1985 for the convention's missions department to create programs that would develop public awareness and provide training for religious leaders "to be supportive of people in their religious and emotional needs who are facing economic or vocational crisis."

The initial response to that action was production of a 30-minute documentary, "Come Before Winter: Missouri Baptists Relate to the Farm Crisis." The program has aired on 17 television stations in Missouri and surrounding states since its debut last October, reported Don Evans, associate director of the convention's missions department and producer of the "awareness video."

Additionally, Evans noted, Missouri Baptists have printed about 224 copies of the video to distribute nationally, and he has shown it more than 50 times this year.

The purpose of the video is to "enable and equip others to reach out in ministry," Evans said. "Our ministry concept is where there are hurting people, there is a real need for ministry. The convention has made an effort to multiply its ministry by equipping pastors and directors of missions to meet the needs of rural farm families and churches they are a part of."

The video, jointly funded by Missouri Baptists' state missions offering and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, features interviews with pastors, farm implement dealers, bankers, teachers and, of course, Missouri farmers.

According to Quentin Lockwood, director of the Home Mission Board's rural-urban missions department, "'Come Before Winter' creates an awareness of the crisis not only financially, but the crisis in the lives of the people and the needs of the church to minister to spiritual and emotional needs.

"It shows these are real people caught up in a crunch beyond themselves. These are good people, many of them brothers and sisters in Christ, who are hurting, and the rest of the family needs to be supportive."

The awareness video "has been a good tool to give to people to help create interest," Lockwood added. "It's something that didn't exist until Don (Evans) put it together."

Along with "Come Before Winter," the Missouri Baptist Convention also has produced six educational videos dealing with such specifics as counseling, stress, family tensions, bankruptcy and changing careers.

"We have developed the education videos to equip leaders, pastors and persons involved with rural families to better understand them and get a handle on how to minister to one another," Evans explained. He said the videos and farm crisis conferences sponsored by the convention help convention staff members become enablers and equippers.

"Rural people have been so much a part of Missouri Baptist life," he emphasized. "The people who had been the pillars of our rural churches have found themselves on the opposite end, in need rather than the givers."

As Evans prepared to complete another awareness video, this one dealing with what happens to farm families when they leave the farm, he added, "Our role is to make available tools for churches to use. It remains up to the local church to avail itself of the tools and to reach out in ministry."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is the third of a three-part series on Southern Baptists and the American farm crisis. It is adapted from the July-August issue of MissionsUSA, published by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Baptists Can Help
Farmers In Crisis

F - HMB
By Sherri Anthony Brown

Baptist Press
8/21/86

ATLANTA (BP)—The American farm crisis is such an interwoven tangle of problems—from overproduction to tax inequities—that solutions seem almost impossible. But Southern Baptists, coming face-to-face with the crisis, are finding some remedies and a few elements of hope.

Suggested responses include:

--Let the hurting family talk. People who live in farming communities can be available to listen. Sometimes farmers need to air their feelings, frustrations and humiliations.

"The guilt can be incredible," admits Mary Fickess, farm wife in Missouri. "My mother went into the hospital recently. We thought it was a heart attack, but the doctor said it was pain caused by stress. I can't help thinking, 'What if she is worrying about me?'"

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--Provide food and clothing for families. "I may not take something for myself, but I don't mind taking things for my children," says one Iowa farm wife. When neighbors bring hand-me-down clothes for her children, she accepts them. But she also likes to do something in return. "Even if you're flat broke you've got something to give," she says.

Some suggestions--trade babysitting hours with other mothers ("Husbands and wives need to get away with each other so they can remember why they love each other"); pass around outgrown children's clothes.

--Offer feeding ministries. Many churches and associations are using food pantries to assist farm families in emergency situations. Hunger funds from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board have been used to buy seed for family gardens.

"We're trying to help them be self-sufficient," says Don Evans, Southern Baptist rural-urban missions director in Missouri.

--Lobby for gleaning ministries. Some legislators have proposed tax breaks for farmers who allow gleaning of fields. The 1985 Farm Bill permits gleaning but provides no incentives. If gleaning legislation passed, farmers and U.S. hungry would benefit, since gleaning by churches would increase stocks in local food banks.

--Sponsor local farm-market outlets. In Knoxville, Tenn., Broadway Baptist Church opened its parking lot to farmers for a twice-weekly market. Direct sale to consumers raises farmers' incomes. The church helped promote the markets.

--Help resettle farmers. Once a farmer sells or loses a farm, he must find other income. Gary Farley, associate director of rural-urban missions for the Home Mission Board, suggests churches and/or associations of churches set up a network of potential employers in other cities. A church also can help set up families with temporary housing. Often this is done in cooperation with churches in metropolitan areas where jobs are more plentiful.

Farley also notes farmers may lose their farms but find farm-management jobs opening up in other areas. "Someone has to farm the land now moving into ownership by the lending agencies," he says. Churches can help farmers job-search.

--Sponsor "adjustment" events. First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City sponsored a weekend for farmers. Seminars told about the changing marketplace, banking practices and career opportunities and presented ideas on agricultural directions in the next decade. The weekend was free to all farmers and their pastors.

"It was a chance for non-farmers to demonstrate their concern for farmers," explains pastor Gene Garrison. "We're in this together, whether we live on a farm or not."

--Help churches be places of love and support. One bankrupt farmer was asked to step down as church treasurer--a humiliating experience for him. Many farmers fear they will be rejected when they lose their farm. "Church should be a place you feel loved no matter what," says one farmer's wife.

--Be armed with knowledge. Letters to state and national representatives and senators can help determine the direction of farm legislation. Yet it may be difficult to decide a position on so complex a topic.

During mission education meetings of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union and Brotherhood Commission, county cooperative extension agents can supply local background on the crisis. Check at county courthouses to arrange meetings.

Another source for speakers is local agricultural colleges which often have instructors willing to explain the farm crisis and its effects.

Missouri's Don Evans has produced six videotapes on the farm crisis--an education/awareness tape on the farm crisis, a tape on self-esteem for farmers in crisis, a tape on marriage/family relationships, a tape for pastors relating to farmers, a tape on finding the benefits of stressors and a tape giving the perspective of the lending agent.

For individual study, here is a list of several books which may be helpful.

"Breaking the Land" by Pete Daniel, University of Illinois Press, \$22.50, is a historical review of the farm crisis.

"The Family Farm: Can It Be Saved?" by Shantilal P. Bhagat, Brethren Press, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120, about \$3, is an analysis of American agriculture and gives helpful ideas for actions churches may take in response to the crisis.

"Gaining Ground" by J. Tevere MacFadyen, Ballantine Books, \$3.50, explores solutions for the family farm crisis that are drawn from interviews with family farmers.

"The Gift of God" by Wendell Berry, North Point Press, San Francisco, \$9.50, is a tribute to farming values.

--Sponsor rallies. Giving farm folks a chance to get together can be therapeutic.

--Pray for yourself, for understanding, guidance, and for God's strength and courage for all those whose lives are being disrupted by the crisis.

--Give to the Home Mission Board's farm relief fund. The farm relief fund aids Southern Baptist farm families who need emergency food supplies. "Many of our farmers can't put food on their tables," says Evans.

To give to aid farmers, send a check to the Home Mission Board, designated for "farm relief," to Accounting Department, Home Mission Board, 1350 Spring St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Crosby's Quiet Witness
Heard Even In Death

By Greg Warner

Baptist Press
8/21/86

VALRICO, Fla. (BP)--"Alicia, where's your mama?" her father asks. "She's up in heaven with Jesus," the 4-year-old replies on cue. Father and daughter have repeated the ritual questioning many times since Brenda Crosby was murdered last December, two weeks before Christmas.

"I won't let anyone tell Alicia her mama's dead," Roger Crosby says firmly. "She's alive, and that's the way it's going to be. I won't allow anything else."

Alicia and Roddy, her 11-year-old brother, "are doing all right" coping with their mother's violent death, reports their father who has "kept busy," working and running the family's modest Valrico, Fla., home.

Faith in God's sovereignty has sustained the family during the past eight months, he says. That faith also explains why he had only passing interest in the recent trial of the accused murderer, 23-year-old Jeffrey Wilkes of nearby Brandon.

"I'm not vengeful," Crosby says. "That's not my department. That's God's business."

Brenda Crosby, 31, worked as a maid in several homes and businesses in Brandon. When she didn't come home from work on time Dec. 13, her husband knew something was wrong. "She had a schedule she would always keep, and she was punctual," he remembers. He soon learned his wife never had arrived at the fourth home on her schedule, nor the third. She had been to the second home, where Wilkes lived with his parents.

Crosby called the Hillsborough County Sheriff's office at about 8:30 p.m., and deputies began looking for his wife and her car. He also called his pastor, Mike Holland of First Baptist Church of Sydney, who led church members in a search of their own.

Even before the woman's body was found, her husband prepared for the worst. He recalled she had told him a week earlier how Wilkes, alone with her in the house, had taunted her with a gun after shooting at birds in the Wilkes family's backyard.

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When he recalled that conversation while waiting for news about his wife, "I knew right then he killed her," Crosby says.

"I talked to Roddy some to prepare his heart," he says. "I told him, 'In all probability your mother is dead. Do you think your mother is in heaven? Are the promises (of God) still valid?'"

While the search continued, Crosby gave Holland instructions for the funeral. "I told him, 'I don't want you to brag on Brenda, but preach Christ and his crucifixion,'" he says.

At 10:30 p.m. church members found Brenda's car abandoned in the parking lot of a local K-Mart store. Her body, partially covered with a blanket, was on the floor of the car. She had been shot twice, in the head and hand.

Wilkes first denied any involvement, then told sheriff's deputies he shot the woman by accident. He said he tried to conceal her death because he had a previous police record. Wilkes later pleaded not guilty to a charge of first-degree murder. He since has been found guilty of that charge, according to the state attorney's office. Sentencing will be in September.

Holland says he often marveled at the spiritual confidence of the Crosby couple, who had been Christians only three years. Ironically it was another death—of Roger Crosby's father in 1982—that led to their conversion.

"I have never known anyone who grew spiritually quite as fast as Roger and Brenda," he says. "They grabbed onto some of the deeper things. Roger and I see now the Lord was preparing both of them."

Knowing his wife is with God, Crosby says, "has taken the sting out of death." The trial of Wilkes was almost anticlimactic for Roger.

"He's in God's hands," the young father says. "He may even save him."

At Crosby's request, Holland called the Wilkes family soon after their son was arrested. Crosby also asked that a chaplain visit Jeffrey Wilkes in jail. "I don't hate him," he says. "There's no difference between him and me except I've been shown grace. This just showed me how wicked I could be, except for God's grace. How can I look down on a man who shares my sinful nature?"

Asked what he would tell Jeffrey Wilkes if they ever met, Crosby answers: "That Christ died for sinners. If you have the Son, you have life."

He is convinced his wife's death was not in vain, even though life without her is a difficult adjustment.

A vibration analyst at a phosphate mine, he says co-workers who used to tease him about his faith are more willing to talk about Christ now. He also is convinced her death contributed to his son's Christian conversion several months ago.

Others have been touched by the tragedy. Students from Brandon High School gave the Crosbys 16 bags of groceries, but Roger Crosby sent most to needy families. Many people sent Christmas gifts and money—including \$200 from the Wilkes family.

Instead of sending flowers, Crosby asked mourners to send money to his church's Lottie Moon Offering for Foreign Missions. The church's \$250 goal quickly was passed, and more than \$700 collected.

More importantly, Holland says, Brenda Crosby's death "has helped unite some hearts" in the church, which was suffering some division. While she was alive, Holland says, her contribution to the church was as a quiet but tireless worker, cleaning the church and performing other behind-the-scenes tasks. "She just went about her business serving the Lord," Holland says. Only in death was her testimony more powerful.

"I don't know how the Lord could take such a silent witness and make a louder noise."