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Farm, Petroleum Crises  
 Crunch Baptist Budgets

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Farm failures and plummeting petroleum prices have wreaked havoc on Baptist budgets this year.

An informal survey revealed most, if not all, of the 37 Southern Baptist state conventions are operating below their projected budgets. Although monthly receipts are running ahead of last year, they are not sufficient to sustain the depth and breadth of statewide ministries leaders had hoped to conduct.

Observers from across the country have pointed to the American farm crisis as one reason for tight budgets in the state conventions. When farmers lose their crops to drought and their farms to the banks, entire communities suffer. Ditto for the petrochemical industry; everyone from independent drillers to multinational corporations have been ravaged by bottom-of-the-barrel oil prices. Without business from these industries, service industries also falter.

The strength of farming and petroleum production has been located where Baptists have been most numerous, primarily the South and Southwest. So when communities built around farming and/or petroleum suffer, their churches hurt. The chain reaction is direct: Residents of these communities have less to give to their churches, churches have less to pass along to state conventions, budgets are pared to bare essentials.

Executive directors of Baptist state conventions from across the country described their plights this summer:

The Baptist General Convention of Texas suffered a \$1 million shortfall in June, the worst monthly deficit since the Great Depression, reported William M. Pinson Jr. Although July receipts exceeded monthly budget requirements by \$16,319, or 0.3 percent, Texas Baptists still were more than \$400,000 below budget for the year.

Pinson cited the collapse of oil and gas prices and a general depression in agribusiness as the reason for Texas Baptists' financial troubles. The state convention staff is cutting its expenditures to match receipts, he said, noting, "We will monitor the situation and prioritize our expenditures. If giving goes down, we will tighten up; if it goes up, we will ease up a bit, but we are committed to living within our income."

Mississippi Baptists, \$500,000 behind after July, face a similar problem, Earl Kelly said: "All of the economy seems to be dipping. We have farmers in the Delta who are in critical condition. But it's more than just the farm situation. Sections of the state that depend on oil are in disarray.

"Each year when we develop a budget, we develop it with the possibility this could happen, and we prioritize our goals," he added. "After the end of the first three months, we project what's happening and keep our expenditures in bounds with receipts. We cut out our dreaming and do our bread-and-butter program."

In Louisiana, another state with agriculture and petroleum ties, Baptists were almost \$820,000, or 8.47 percent, behind on their budget at the end of July. Robert L. Lee explained Louisiana's unemployment rate, one of the highest in the country and brought on by the petrochemical crisis, has been devastating.

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"We are ahead of the budget last year, but we did not make our budget last year because the problem of the economy was coming on," Lee said. "We have made a serious effort to adjust each expense budget as much as we could without injuring the ongoing work. We have tapped to a substantial degree our contingent reserve monies, and we do not have fully ordered game plans if we find there is a further decline this year. We will order our programs according to our resources."

The situation is not as bad in states that are not dependent upon petrochemical revenue.

"We have had an extremely terrible drought. It has really taken its toll," said Ray P. Rust of South Carolina. "It's been uncomfortable,...and it's been tragic for a lot of people."

"But it is too early for us in the state convention office to ascertain how this has impacted world mission support through the Cooperative Program," Rust added. "That impact will be easier to ascertain in a matter of two to three months."

South Carolina Baptists' giving to the state convention is 4.9 percent ahead of last year, but it is about \$224,000 short of this year's basic budget, he reported, noting: "But that doesn't represent a crisis. That's makeable as we look to the end of the year."

"At this point, it's critical," John P. Baker said of the financial situation in Northern Plains Baptist Convention, which includes Montana and the Dakotas. "At the middle of the year, our receipts were \$25,000 under our little budget. For us, this is a great amount." That amount is 7.4 percent of Northern Plains Baptists' contribution to their budget, which is supplemented by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"The churches are seriously affected by this," he added. "It was worse last year when we had a drought. This year it looks a little better,...but it's still going to be bad."

Several factors have intensified the Northern Plains farm crisis, Baker explained. Last year it was drought. This year, wheat production still is low, and the price farmers get is low. "Farms that have been in the same family for a hundred years are being auctioned off," he lamented. "You can go into any little bitty community and see notices for six farm auctions."

To compensate for budget shortfalls, Northern Plains Baptist leaders "have reduced greatly the number of meetings we go out to. We don't do anything we don't have to."

The problem does not seem to be as great in states with more urban populations and/or diversified economies.

"With a population of over 11 million, we are not as affected (by the farm crisis) as other Southern states," said Dan C. Stringer of Florida. "We have a small rural population compared to our urban population. So for us, the farm situation is not the major problem."

Northern and western portions of Florida have suffered agricultural problems due to citrus crop freezes in recent years, "but statewide, the state is not as dependent upon agriculture as it would have been two or three decades ago," Stringer reported.

Although agricultural difficulties have affected Florida somewhat, "we cannot determine how much," he said.

In California, the problem also has not been as drastic as in the South and Midwest, reported C.B. Hogue. "We don't have as many family farms as most of the Southern states," he explained, noting most of the state's huge fruit and vegetable farms are run by corporations.

"But when agriculture is affected in any way, the communities that service the agricultural industry are affected," he added, noting the state convention undoubtedly has been hit by problems in agriculture.

California's economic advantages include low overall unemployment, a strong technological industry in large megalopolitan areas and U.S. government defense spending in the state. Only Bakersfield and other isolated areas of the Los Angeles Basin have been affected by the petroleum price slump, he noted.

"Our giving is up over last year; we had a very bad year in 1985," Hogue said. "We're not going to reach our budget this year, but it's much better than last year. We're optimistic."

Across the Southern Baptist Convention, leaders are searching for that optimism and trying to make progress.

"We're trying not to put a hold on new churches; new work is a priority with us," said Mississippi's Kelly. Added Baker of the Northern Plains: "We're doing like everybody else—tightening our belts and praying for rain."

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Tennessee Appeals Court  
Reverses PAC Decision

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JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)—The Tennessee Court of Appeals' western section has reversed a chancery court decision that had declared churches which speak out on referenda issues must file financial disclosure statements.

On a 2-1 vote, the three-member Court of Appeals ruled the Tennessee Campaign Financial Disclosure Act is unconstitutional as applied to referenda elections because it violates the First Amendment right of free speech.

However, the appeals court judges did rule such churches are "political campaign committees"—political action committees—under the disclosure act.

The Aug. 21 memorandum issued by the appeals court was in response to a May 21 hearing on an appeal by 13 Jackson, Tenn., area churches.

The 13 churches—nine of which are Southern Baptist—had declined to file disclosure forms related to their involvement in opposing an August 1984 local option liquor election. The referendum was defeated by 40 votes, 6,514 to 6,474.

On Aug. 29, 1984, Tennessee Attorney General Michael Cody issued an opinion that churches which had spent at least \$250 in seeking to defeat the liquor-by-the-drink referendum were "political action committees" and were subject to filing the financial forms within 48 days after the election.

The churches refused to comply and instead brought suit against the State of Tennessee on the grounds the Financial Disclosure Act as interpreted by the attorney general violates the freedom of religion guarantee of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The lawsuit was tried Aug. 7, 1985, in the Chancery Court of Madison County in Jackson. On Oct. 30, 1985, Chancellor Joe C. Morris ruled since the disclosure act does not specifically mention churches or church groups, they are not exempted from the act.

The churches filed an appeal with the State Court of Appeals which reversed the Chancery Court ruling Aug. 21.

In the majority written opinion, justices noted the "Campaign Disclosure Act contains definite infringements upon free speech."

The majority opinion said, "Since the risk of corruption is not present in a popular vote on a public issue such as a liquor-by-the-drink referendum, we find that the state has not proved a compelling interest which is necessary to survive the exacting scrutiny required for state-imposed restrictions on freedom of speech."

A dissenting opinion noted the majority's statement that risk of corruption is not present in a liquor-by-the-drink referendum fails to recognize "that from time immemorial the liquor industry has been subject to some of the most stringent rules and regulations of any industry in our society. Various controls have been adapted and maintained in the face of constitutional challenges because of the evils inherent in the industry....Any referendum dealing with the sale of liquor is fraught with the peril of special interests who would surreptitiously infiltrate legitimate financing sources."

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Although the original class-action lawsuit and the appeal were based on the churches' responsibility to speak out on moral issues, the Court of Appeals' Aug. 21 ruling dealt with all political action committees on referenda elections, removing the requirement to file reports of receipts and expenditures.

However, if a church helps finance a political candidate, it would be required to file disclosure forms, said Michael Tabor, a Jackson attorney who represented the churches in the legal battle.

The ruling would apply to all referenda elections, including those related to a state lottery, pari-mutuel gambling and a state income tax, as well as liquor option elections, Cody said.

The Tennessee attorney general said the Court of Appeals' ruling would be appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Lee Boothby, a lawyer for Americans United for Separation of Church and State who assisted in the trial and the appeal, called the ruling "a landmark decision."

Boothby said, "It is the first decision to my knowledge anywhere in the country allowing churches to speak out on moral issues when a state law seems on its face to prohibit it."

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Chinese Woman Unfolds  
Story Of Seeds Planted

By Eric Miller

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)—Whoever thought the spiritual seeds planted in China by Southern Baptists would someday scatter seeds in America? But they have.

An example is Joyce Wang Fan, the daughter of a renowned Chinese evangelist, Leland Wang, who was led to Christ by a Southern Baptist missionary. Fan, 67, now living in Houston, grew up in China and then went to college in the United States. She became a founding professor at Houston Baptist University, where she taught chemistry from 1963 to 1983.

She reached down to students in the depths of hopelessness and in the midst of crises and led them to Christ. Some had given up hope of ever going to medical school, and she pushed them onward. Some of her students are doctors now.

One of those students, Peter, was a "nasty, cynical, practically atheist non-Christian." He was cynical because his father had died and he had to take care of a widow and pay his way through college. Peter would say, "Why has God dealt with me so if there is a God?"

He was failing chemistry and was on academic probation for two years. She persuaded Peter to repeat the chemistry course three times, and he finally made an A.

"He came to me one time when I was going through some very difficult times," she recalls. "My son got into a car wreck and had major surgery. He came in and said, 'I want to have what you have.'" She witnessed to him and "his life just completely changed."

As a Christian, he made the dean's list, began teaching Sunday school and was accepted by two medical schools. He became a doctor and married a doctor.

Years later at Fan's retirement party at the university, he "left a beautiful letter that said, 'I'm indebted to you for your kindness to me and your encouragement, but the greatest thing you've ever done for me is to lead me to Jesus Christ,'" she reports.

Another student, Jonathan, needed to take a medical college admission test for the third time. As testing dates approached, Fan sent each student a letter of encouragement to calm him down and let him know she was praying for him, Christian or not.

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After a pre-med adviser told him he could not improve his score any, Jonathan decided not to retake the test. "There's no hope that you're ever going to go to medical school," the adviser had said. "Then your letter came," Jonathan told Fan. "I read it five times." He took the test, made a high score, went to medical school and became a doctor.

The seeds of her witness began 70 years ago in China when her parents were engaged to be married. A missionary conducted a revival in a Christian girls' college, and her mother became a Christian. Her father, a non-Christian at the time, was urged by his fiancée to attend church, but he resisted. The Sunday after they were married, he attended church for the first time and "was very moved by the closing hymn, 'Nearer My God to Thee,'" Fan says. But he did not accept Christ.

Next, he began to study English with a missionary. Seeing a good chance to witness, the missionary used the Bible as the textbook. This led Wang to Christ and then into the ministry. Wang's conversion led to the conversion of his parents, in-laws and brothers. He got on an evangelism circuit, speaking to thousands and seeing hundreds become Christians. Chinese preachers and evangelists still tell her they were led to Christ by her father. Wang was a co-founder of the Chinese Missionary Union, which sent missionaries to other countries.

Describing her own conversion, Fan says, "I used to think, 'Since my father is such a good preacher, when he goes to heaven, he'll surely take me along.' But I found out that I have to deal with it on an individual basis." She came to realize she was included in the "whosoever will" phrase of John 3:16. She accepted Christ as a young teen-ager.

Fan has traveled to colleges and given her testimony to international students. She will spend three months in China in the spring of 1987, teaching English to medical doctors.

"Friends," she told participants at Foreign Missions Week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, "when you sent a missionary across the ocean, you sent a voice.

"This evening, you hear the echo of that voice coming back to you, testifying as Paul has said in the Bible, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth.'"

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Charles Culpepper Sr. Dies;  
Founder Of Taiwan Seminary

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SAN ANTONIO, Texas (BP)—Retired Southern Baptist missionary Charles L. Culpepper Sr., known as the "stackpole" of Taiwan mission work in his day, died of congestive heart failure in San Antonio Aug. 21. He was 91.

The Texas native, who spoke in churches as recently as July, began a 42-year missionary career with his wife, Ola, in 1923. They served first in China, where he participated in the historic Shandong Revival, preached and started churches in the countryside, served as president of two China seminaries and spent seven months under house arrest by Japanese forces early in World War II.

He left mainland China in 1950 and began the Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary two years later, when there was only one Chinese Baptist preacher in all of Taiwan. Culpepper was seminary president for 12 years. He retired in 1965. Two of the Culpeppers' three children followed them to Asia as missionaries (the other died as a small child).

Born in Shiner, Texas, Culpepper earned the bachelor of arts degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and the master and doctor of theology degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. He was pastor of several Texas churches before missionary appointment. He married the former Ola Lane of Center Point, Texas, in 1919.

Survivors include his wife; two children, Charles L. Culpepper Jr. of San Antonio, recently retired as a missionary to Taiwan, and Mary (Mrs. William L.) Walker, missionary to Japan; seven grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

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

