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87-7

Cooperative Program Levels Off In December

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptists' national Cooperative Program reached an even keel at the end of the first quarter of its fiscal year, reported Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the convention's Executive Committee.

The Cooperative Program is the Southern Baptist Convention's voluntary, unified method of financing mission, evangelistic and educational endeavors around the globe. Southern Baptists — passing their individual gifts through more than 36,000 churches and 37 state Baptist conventions — contributed \$10,376,194 to the national Cooperative Program in December, Bennett said.

That amount is an increase of 11.80 percent, or almost \$1.1 million, over December of 1985. It is the best December total in Cooperative Program history.

The 1986-87 Cooperative Program, which began Oct. 1, is targeted to raise \$136 million for SBC world-wide causes.

Only three months into its fiscal year, the program has experienced a roller coaster ride. October was the program's best first month, and its \$10.9 million in receipts was 21 percent higher than the previous October's. But November's total, almost \$9.7 million, was 10.2 percent behind the total for November 1985. However, December's income brought the three-month total to \$30,985,922 and a more balanced 6.51 percent ahead of the first quarter last year.

Looking at the Cooperative Program picture for the entire quarter, Bennett was upbeat: "I'm pleased with the Cooperative Program receipts for December, which are above average. And the year-to-date figures reveal we are beginning to level off. A first quarter increase of 6.51 percent is what I had anticipated, and it speaks well of Southern Baptists. The Cooperative Program continues to outpace the cost of living."

Southern Baptists continue to make gains, despite financial difficulties in states whose economy is based on the agricultural and/or petrochemical industries, Bennett noted. He attributed some of the success to Planned Growth in Giving, the SBC's spiritual and financial growth campaign.

As an example, he cited a conversation with a pastor from a city whose economy has been hit both by the farm crisis and falling petroleum prices. "He told me Planned Growth in Giving has produced spiritual maturity among people in the church," Bennett recounted. "Consequently, that church is coming out ahead, despite economic trauma."

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Husband Of Slain Missionary
Preaches In North Carolina

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
1/19/87

SHELBY, N.C. (BP)—Back in the United States for a short rest, Southern Baptist missionary George Senter preached Jan. 11. It was his first public statement in the United States since the murder of his wife, Libby, and daughter, Rachel, in Liberia last November.

"I hope I'll be able to carry on through," he told the congregation at Zion Baptist Church in Shelby, N.C., his wife's home church. "I'm aware that when I talk of Libby and Rachel I never know what I'm going to do. If I have trouble and I blubber, well, you blubber with me, OK?" He went on to deliver a clear, eloquent message as his 15-year-old son, Philip, and his wife's father, Bill Tarlton, listened.

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Benjamin M. Morris, a former Liberian Baptist seminary student befriended by the Senter family, has been charged in the stabbing deaths of the missionary and her daughter. A trial has been set for February.

"I've been called a hero of the faith and a lot of other things like that, which I really don't like," Senter said, referring to his much-publicized personal expression of forgiveness toward the accused killer. "I don't feel like a hero of the faith in any way. I feel like a mouse. But I feel like I've been held up by God's people praying for me."

When Senter learned of the deaths, one of his first thoughts was, "What a waste; what a waste! Two fine Christian young people, talented, beautiful, with abilities and loving and caring -- gone. Soon my prayer became to God, 'Don't let it be a waste, God. Use their deaths.' And he has."

The hope of eternity replaced his despair, Senter said, when he realized that his wife and daughter were with God. Rachel, 10, had accepted Christ as her personal savior at a Southern Baptist girls' camp in Tennessee in 1985. "The only really important thing in life is our personal relationship with God," he said. "That's the only thing that lasts."

He also felt anger, Senter admitted -- anger at the killer and anger at God. "At one point I got a view of God standing up there with his arms folded while Libby and Rachel were literally fighting for their lives," he said. "As I thought about that I got very angry at God. 'God, where are you? What kind of a God are you, anyway, that you would allow people like this to suffer like that?' But that's kind of a dead-end street to start thinking that way. ... God was gracious, and he didn't allow me to wallow in this kind of anger."

Thoughts of Job's sufferings in the Old Testament helped Senter reaffirm that God may permit evil to exist in the world but never wills it. His anger at Morris continued, however, until their face-to-face encounter at the police station.

"They asked me if I wanted to see him, and I said yes," Senter recounted. "I knew I had to see him sometime. I didn't really know how I would react when I saw him, but at that point I believe very definitely I was held up by your prayer and the prayers of many others. ... As he came into the room there wasn't that feeling of hate and bitterness. Not at all. Actually the old friendship feeling came back. I can't explain that."

Senter told Morris that God loved him and could forgive him and that he would forgive him too, at one point actually embracing the Liberian. "And I meant it," Senter said. "That was a freeing experience for me. And I believe because of that experience it has been easier for me to accept all that has happened."

Morris, who had been silent and uncooperative with the police up to that point, broke into tears and later confessed to the killings.

Much good has come from the tragedy, Senter concluded: a tremendous outpouring of love from Liberians ("Not just the Baptist people, but the whole community where we live came to our support and rallied behind us") and a national and international Christian testimony and unleashing of prayer. Many people have come to Christ as a result, the missionary said. Others have been strengthened in their faith, and still others are giving more to missions.

"I just stand in awe of God's greatness. I don't understand him. He's beyond me. I don't understand his ways. I don't even try at this point. I have a bigger view of God than I've ever had before in my life," he said.

Senter plans to return to his mission work in Liberia in January.

Baptist Men's Teleconference
Unites Men In Prayer Effort

By Jim Burton

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Carrie Blackaby celebrated her 16th birthday last Dec. 10, two days before she learned she has cancer.

Her father, Henry Blackaby, director of missions for Capilano Southern Baptist Association in Vancouver, British Columbia, recently made an appeal to Baptist men across the United States and Canada to pray for Carrie, who wants to be a foreign missionary.

"She made a commitment to be a foreign missionary this summer," said Blackaby. "She made a commitment to lead her friends in school to the Lord.

"This month we'll baptize five from her 11th grade that she influenced for the Lord," he said during a live teleconference on the Baptist Telecommunication Network. "She started a Bible study in her school with 20 coming. She is a committed girl."

Blackaby made his appeal during the Jan. 10 Baptist Men's Teleconference hosted by James H. Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. Blackaby and Joe Lennon of Warrenton, N.C., were Smith's guests. The theme was "Baptist Men in Mission Involvement Through Prayer."

Following the teleconference, Smith said Blackaby's request for prayer gave the teleconference a personal appeal that reinforced the theme.

"Our making a commitment to something doesn't mean there is an immunity from our having some kind of physical devastation," said Smith. "In my own personal life I've never made a definite commitment to something I felt God was calling me to that short way down the road I didn't face some kind of a test.

"I think that is where she is. I think God is going to take that experience with Carrie ... both in her life and even in connection with of those who heard (the teleconference)."

Vancouver hosted the World's Fair last summer, and Blackaby coordinated Southern Baptist ministries there.

During the teleconference Blackaby said Expo 86 originally was to have no religious presence on site. But through prayer Canadian Southern Baptists began to see obstacles removed.

Blackaby reported members of Capilano Association first made a commitment to pray and then 10,000 Southern Baptists from throughout the world joined in the prayer effort. The results were sometimes dramatic.

"We literally saw before our very eyes the activity of God," said Blackaby.

Canadian Southern Baptists became the catalyst to the evangelical community and brought five Baptist denominations together for two worship services at Expo 86, he added. In addition, 58 separate locations including shopping centers and malls were open for ministry by music, drama and puppet groups.

Blackaby said the association had wanted to expand its ethnic work, and Expo 86 opened those doors. The day after his staff prayed about starting new ethnic work, a letter arrived from a foreign mission couple on leave saying God was leading them to Vancouver to help with such an effort.

The profound effect of prayer connected to Expo ministries still is being felt in the association. "I don't think there is a church or mission in our association that doesn't have an active prayer ministry," said Blackaby.

Lennon, prayer support coordinator for North Carolina Baptist Men, also is familiar with active church prayer ministries. He is working toward starting a men's prayer unit in every Southern Baptist church in North Carolina.

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During the teleconference, Lennon said the purpose of the Baptist men's prayer units is "to encourage and inspire men to come to grips with their relationship with the heavenly Father."

The power of prayer has been evident in many phases of Baptist men's work in North Carolina, he reported. Recently in Asheville, N.C., Baptist men conducted simultaneous lay-led revivals in seven churches. Over 800 homes were visited and 58 persons prayed to receive Christ. Lennon also cited the work of agricultural missions as another example of answer to prayer.

The teleconference was the first such event for Baptist Men. Next year the theme will be "Baptist Men in Missions Involvement Through Daily Living."

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Players' Lives Tell Score
For Carson-Newman's Sparks

Baptist Press
1/19/87

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. (BP)—Winning a national football championship represents an achievement most coaches and players only dream about. Rarer still is the duplication of that feat. But three out of the last four years, Ken Sparks' Carson-Newman Eagles have brought the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics football trophy home to Jefferson City.

Since becoming head football coach at Carson-Newman College in 1980, Sparks has lead his teams to four appearances in the NAIA playoffs and three NAIA championships. The Eagles claimed their most recent title by defeating Cameron University of Oklahoma 17-0 in the 1986 Champion Bowl. The Tennessee Baptist school's two previous championships came in 1983 and 1984.

Sparks' teams also have won four South Atlantic Conference titles in the past five years. With a seven-year record of 59-22-1, Sparks has the best winning percentage in the history of C-N football.

While his Eagles have enjoyed great success on the field, Sparks is eager to talk about other reasons he enjoys coaching at Carson-Newman: "I don't know of any other place where you have more opportunities to influence young people. It is important that we be educated to do the best we can spiritually, physically and intellectually. The great thing about C-N is that it is a balanced institution."

The college has had "a major impact" on Sparks' own life. A Knoxville, Tenn., native, he first came to Carson-Newman as a transfer student in 1964. "I was a new Christian," Sparks recalls. "My pastor told me I needed to be someplace I could grow. Carson-Newman was exactly what I needed." A wide receiver on the football team, Sparks remembers benefiting from contact with Christian teachers and coaches like offensive line coach Dal Shealy.

Sparks received his degree from C-N in 1968. Two stints as a high school coach followed, along with a job as an assistant coach at Tennessee Tech University, where he also earned a master's degree.

In 1972, Sparks came back to C-N as offensive coordinator under Shealy, who then was head coach. "He was a strong influence on me as a Christian and as a football coach," Sparks notes. The offense Sparks helped develop was ranked in the top five in the nation for 1972. The Eagles also made their first trip ever to the NAIA Champion Bowl, where they lost a thriller to East Texas, 21-18.

Sparks left C-N in 1977 to become head football coach at Farragut High School in Knoxville. While at Farragut, Sparks took his team to the semi-finals of the state AAA playoffs and earned several coach-of-the-year honors.

Upon his return in 1980 as head football coach and athletic director, Sparks began the work of turning the 1980s into the decade of the Eagles in the NAIA. His success led reporters at the press conference following C-N's latest Champion Bowl victory to ask Sparks if he believed the Eagles had established a football dynasty.

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"I don't believe in dynasties," Sparks responded. "They're for the media. I believe in things happening inside. I'm thankful to the Lord — not for the scoreboard, but for what's happening inside some of our guys."

What Sparks had in mind seemed to be reflected in senior defensive tackle Don Bramlett's words to the media. "It's a great feeling to be part of a national championship team," said Bramlett, who had just been voted the game's outstanding defensive player. "But the greatest day in my life was the day I gave my life to Jesus Christ. We just play to honor the Lord. That's what our team is based on."

Sparks notes other team leaders like Mike Davis and Reggie Mays had expressed similar thoughts following the Eagles two earlier playoff wins. "That tells me they have their priorities in the right order," Sparks insists.

"Ken Sparks has a unique approach to football," observes Ken Smith, a minister from Tallahassee, Fla., a close observer of the team. "All of the Carson-Newman coaches have a human quality. Their concerns for their players go beyond football."

"Now all major colleges are getting concerned about their players," says Smith, who is chaplain of the Florida State University team. "They are realizing that things like crack and cocaine are moral problems. But what many others are beginning to do now, Ken Sparks has done for years."

A drug-testing program instituted at C-N this fall was indicative of Sparks' personal interest in his players. The testing was not required by the NAIA or any other governing body. "It was strictly our doing," Sparks says. "I raised the money to get it done. I felt it was something we owed these kids."

Understanding the severity of the problem of drugs in athletics and all of society, Sparks was apprehensive about learning the results. "I was preparing myself for some pretty serious counseling," he remembers.

When an official from the testing agency arrived with the results, he entered Sparks' office and closed the door. "He said, 'I want to tell you something I've never been able to tell any athletic director,'" Sparks recalls. "'You are the first team we've ever tested that was completely clean.'"

The season which followed brought Sparks even more good news about his team. The Eagles won their last 10 games to finish with a record of 12-1 and an NAIA title. Sparks was named Coach of the Year by the South Atlantic Conference, the third time he received that award. In 1984 he was NAIA Coach of the Year.

Sparks lives in Jefferson City with his daughter Chanda, 17, and his son Chad, 19. Chanda is a senior at Jefferson County High School, where she was elected senior class president and homecoming queen. Chad is a freshman at C-N and plays on the football team.

A member of Manley Baptist Church in Morristown, Tenn., Sparks teaches a Sunday school class for young marrieds there. He also is active in local, state and national Fellowship of Christian Athletes organizations.

With 14 of this year's 22 starters returning next year, Sparks' Eagles would seem to be poised to make another run at the NAIA championship in 1987. However, Sparks' interest in his players' futures goes beyond the next football season.

"I'm anxious to see what has gone on inside these players," Sparks says. "I want to see where they'll be five years from now. I'm excited about what they're going to do on their jobs and what contributions they're going to make to their churches. I think that's the bottom line, and that's the evaluator we should use, not a scoreboard."

Criswell College Vice President
Named Assistant To Texas Governor

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)--Richard Land, vice president for academic affairs at Criswell College in Dallas, has been named administrative assistant to Texas Governor-elect Bill Clements.

Land will serve as Clement's adviser on church-state issues, right-to-life concerns, anti-pornography and anti-drug abuse programs and "traditional family values" issues.

"I hope to assist the governor in any way he sees fit in accomplishing his legislative priorities, which include many programs described as 'traditional family values' issues," Land told Baptist Press. "I hope to facilitate better understanding of what these issues are and what people's concerns are."

Land has applied for a leave of absence from Criswell College, where he has served since 1975. If the leave is granted, Land will have no formal ongoing relationship with the school and will receive no remuneration from Criswell College while serving the governor, but he will be able to return to his post at the end of Clement's term in office.

Clements will be sworn into office Jan. 20, and Land will assume his new position in Austin Feb. 15.

"This is a new arena for me, but I feel a tremendous sense of peace that this is God's will for my life at the present time," said Land.

"We look forward to Richard's being the governor's liaison on moral concerns and to working with him. He has a good understanding of a number of critical moral issues, including the matter of gambling, which will be a major moral concern in this legislative session," said Phil Stickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, social action and moral concerns agency of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"We are elated for Dr. Land and honored that the governor would look in the direction of our school," said Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College. "We believe he has selected one of the genuinely profound intellects of our era. We will miss him, but we wish him Godspeed in the way."

Land, 40, is a graduate of Princeton University in Princeton, N.J. He earned a master's degree in theology from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a doctor's degree from Oxford University in England.

In addition to his administrative role at Criswell College, Land also has been professor of theology and church history.

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New Group Not Fully Aware
Of FMB's Work, Parks Says

By Carol Garrett

Baptist Press
1/19/87

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Leaders of the Genesis Commission, an independent foreign missionary organization, are not fully aware of the scope and program of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board work, board President R. Keith Parks said Jan. 12.

His comments came in response to questions following a Foreign Mission Board presentation to Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union leaders during their executive board meeting Jan. 11-14.

Parks said he believes the Genesis Commission leaders "got excited about witnessing and starting churches" without fully understanding the extent of work already being done by the board.

He added he does not believe announcement of the Genesis Commission was "orchestrated" to follow the recent announcement of proposed name and structural changes for the board.

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Foreign Mission Board and Genesis Commission plan for leaders to meet and discuss the purpose and work of both organizations, Parks said.

One concern of board leaders is how the Genesis Commission will affect work currently being done by the board representatives in Mexico, he said. Genesis Commission leaders have proposed Mexico as their first field of work.

Almost 185,000 baptisms on Southern Baptist foreign mission fields last year give evidence of the effectiveness of Foreign Mission Board work, Parks told the WMU leaders.

"That means every three minutes last year someone was being baptized on your foreign mission fields, related to your foreign missions work," he said.

Foreign missions baptisms were up from 435 a day in 1985 to 507 a day in 1986.

Last year, 411 new Southern Baptist missionaries were sent out through the board, the second-largest number of missionaries ever sent in a year. The board also sent out more than 6,000 volunteers to work on foreign fields.

Although recent statistics are encouraging, Parks said the board must adapt the way it is doing missions if Southern Baptists are to fulfill Christ's Great Commission to spread the Christian gospel around the world.

Adapting means planning a "global" strategy for foreign missions, including countries where the board is not allowed to send missionaries, he said.

Out of about 250 nations, the board plans to have missionaries in 125 before the year 2000. About half of the remaining nations do not allow missionaries. The trend is to add two more countries a year to those not permitting missionaries, Parks said.

"If that trend continues, by the year 2000 there will be 100 nations of the world that will not give visas to career missionaries," he said.

That plan is "not in any way minimizing the significant, central importance of the missionaries," he added.

Parks warned that if the board does not adapt to a changing world, "we will become one of the greatest denominational dinosaurs that will be recorded in the history books."

Necessary changes in board structure and operation must be accompanied by the prayers of Southern Baptists, he insisted.

He challenged the WMU leaders to become catalysts in their churches and states for concerted prayer for foreign missions.

"Until and unless Southern Baptists are burdened in praying for a lost world, nothing of significance will happen," he said. "To put it the other way, if we as Southern Baptists were committed to extraordinary prayer interceding for a lost world, things would begin to happen that would have no explanation except that God was at work."

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Homemade Camper Keeps
Gospel Moving In Tanzania

By Evelyn Knapp

Baptist Press
1/19/87

MWANZA, Tanzania (BP)—Before they went to Tanzania, Don and Mary Alice Dolifka heard the standard challenge to new missionaries to be self-starters, innovative and imaginative in presenting Christ on their mission field.

Obviously, they listened.

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Faced with 200-mile round-trips over rutted, muddy and sometimes washed-out roads to reach many of the churches they served, and ferry charges of up to \$65 each time they crossed Lake Victoria, the couple recognized the need for a new approach to the situation.

If they could find a way to stay out for days at a time without having to return home, many miles of bumpy roads and hundreds of dollars in tolls could be eliminated. What they needed was a camper that didn't need electrical or water hookups and was mechanically stout enough to survive Tanzanian roads.

Their car, provided by the Tanzania Baptist Mission, was sold so the Dolifkas could purchase a 2 1/2-ton flatbed truck. Then a 20-foot-long, 8-foot-high steel sea container, which had brought their furniture and supplies from the United States, was cut down and bolted to the truck.

The container already was Fiberglas-lined so only the back wall had to be added on. Still, the couple worked every spare moment for two weeks on the shell. When they finished, the container had been transformed into a roomy camper with a shower, toilet, stove, refrigerator and beds for four people. There is an 80-gallon watertank and enough storage space to supply them on week-long trips to minister to the 4.5 million-member Sukuma tribe.

In one typical week they taught Theological Education by Extension in five churches, held an area-wide associational meeting and preached the Sunday services in a sixth church.

Whenever they roll into a new village, the camper attracts a great deal of attention. But after repeated trips, it is accepted and even taken for granted.

Work among the Sukumas, the largest tribe in the eastern African nation, was slow for several years. Jack and Dot Hull, from Texas and Missouri who now work in Moshi, Tanzania, started the work in 1971, traveling around Lake Victoria working with 20 churches.

The Dolifkas — he from Colorado and she from Texas — shared in the early, foundation-laying years and resigned themselves to the fact God had called them to an unresponsive area. But after a few key Sukuma leaders became Christians following contact with Hull, growth became explosive. Missionaries Jim and Molly Houser from Texas and Roger and Carol Brubeck of Missouri joined the Dolifkas. Soon they were training and sending out national pastors two-by-two into unreached villages — and those national pastors were establishing new churches.

Reports of large numbers of conversions and baptisms began coming in. One church, Mwajambo, reported baptizing 154 people in one service. In the past 12 years, more than 10,000 people have been baptized in the greater Mwanza area in northeastern Tanzania.

Obviously the Dolifkas' "camping as we teach and preach" approach is not the only reason. But it is another example of how flexibility can allow more hours for evangelism efforts and save money on operating expenses that can be applied to outreach.

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(Evelyn Knapp is a Southern Baptist missionary and press representative in Tanzania. Don Dolifka is from Colorado, and Mary Alice is from Texas.)

Chifundo ('Mercy') Winning
Battle With Hunger, Disease

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press
1/19/87

LILONGWE, Malawi (BP)—Her faith and her 5-month-old daughter were all the woman had left when Marlyn Upton met her.

Three earlier babies had been stillborn and a fourth had died after seven months because the mother was unable to nurse. After the birth of a fifth sickly child, the husband kicked both of them out, sending them to her brother.

She had named the girl Chifundo, which means "mercy," but physical evidence of God's mercy was slight. The baby cried constantly during the Woman's Missionary Union meeting, screaming even louder when the mother offered her a bottle.

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Upton, a Southern Baptist missionary from Missouri, was horrified to see that the nipple on the bottle was rotten. Later she learned the mother received powdered milk from a government clinic, but supplies had run out. For over a week she had been feeding Chifundo water and a thin porridge of cooked cornmeal and water.

The next week Upton conducted another WMU meeting at a village 15 miles away and was "thrilled to find Chifundo and her mother there because we'd brought a new bottle, powdered formula and boiled water to give her." Chifundo greedily latched onto the bottle, and 8-year-old Malinda Upton spent the weekend caring for the infant.

Upton's offer to take the baby for a checkup to a doctor in Lilongwe, 60 miles away, was turned aside, but the mother said they could take her the following week.

The next weekend, at yet a third church, the mother willingly "loaned" her baby to Upton. The examination showed the baby weighed barely over 8 pounds and was suffering from malaria, bronchitis, ear infection, conjunctivitis, scabies and worms, in addition to being severely malnourished. Later in the week she developed thrush.

On Sunday the Uptons Southern Baptist missionaries in Malawi since 1971, took Chifundo back to her mother, at worship services at a fourth church. Although obviously missing her daughter, the woman quickly agreed at the end of the day to let the baby return with the Uptons for another week. Chifundo gained almost 3 pounds that stay before returning to live with her mother.

Marlyn Upton kept the mother supplied with formula until the government clinic got a new supply of powdered milk. Five months later, Upton reported, Chifundo weighed 16 pounds and was grinningly displaying two teeth.

"The father had taken his wife and daughter back so we praise the Lord for the healing he has brought to their home as well as for the healing of Chifundo's body," Upton said.

"We thank God for giving us the opportunity of ministering to the physical needs of this precious baby. We are praying Chifundo will continue to grow, that her mother will continue to be a faithful witness and that her father will accept Christ as savior."

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Artists Research Details
For Biblical Accuracy

By Frank Wm. White

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—For many Southern Baptists, vivid mental images of scenes from the Bible are based on teaching pictures and illustrations from childhood Sunday school classes.

Making those pictures as historically and biblically accurate as possible is a primary goal of the art department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

For the last six years, art department personnel have stepped up efforts at researching details to ensure the accuracy of their work. That quest has led to visits to museums in London, Berlin and throughout the United States as well as trips to historic sites in the Holy Land.

Artist-designers call the photo and slide collection developed from those trips the "million dollar file." Its 19,000-plus photos would cost more than \$1 million to purchase, says Jerry Ross, art department director.

A 10-volume cross-reference index describes the artifacts illustrated in the photos. With the index, the collection becomes a valuable tool for illustrators depicting scenes from the Bible. An additional 15 volumes of research material document historical data to aid artists in their work.

"This may be the only collection of research that provides a Bible commentary from an illustration standpoint," notes Jean Bowman, master artist designer, who has compiled the research materials.

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Commentators generally do not deal with what people looked like, what they wore or what buildings or places looked like, she points out. But artists need that information.

The research has been more involved than expected, Ross explains. "We realized after it took three years to complete research for six Bible stories that this was a long-term project."

Paula Savage, master artist designer who is responsible for art for Biblical Illustrator magazine, likens the project to unraveling a mystery. "Once you get started on it, you find more things to investigate," she says. One museum visit will provide answers to some questions but those questions lead to others, she explains.

In addition to research by the art department, artists rely on other resources. "We don't just draw what we think. We rely on what the research shows," says Bill Latta, supervisor of the youth-adult curriculum design section.

"Some of the research is giving images different from those we grew up with," Ross says. That creates a struggle over how to portray different stories. "Do you follow tradition or the research?" he asks.

Things like the length or color of Jesus' robe and the length of his hair have been developed as definite images based on tradition. For example, in the dusty desert of the Holy Land, research indicates Jesus likely did not wear a robe that dragged the ground.

"People have taken the concept of the risen Christ in a flowing white robe and applied that to his whole life," Ross notes.

Credibility is the key reason for the research, Latta points out, stressing, "The art needs to be consistent with the biblical text and historical facts."

Latta singles out one teaching picture with a Roman battering ram in an Old Testament setting, long before Roman times. "Few people would notice that, but we need to be as accurate and consistent as possible," he says.

Teaching pictures also must meet the editorial needs, says Doris Adams, former supervisor of the preschool-children's curriculum design section, which includes production of teaching pictures for preschool and children's materials.

The plan for how a teaching picture is to support a particular story must be considered when planning the artwork, she explains: "We go over the sketches in detail. There are so many elements to think of. The attention to artist's detail is costly."

But, Latta says, the details are important because the visual images developed in childhood do matter.

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