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87-9

Overseas Baptisms Up 17 Percent;  
Fuel Hope To Meet Mission Goals

By Art Toalston

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Year-end statistics offer new hope that Bold Mission Thrust goals may not be impossible dreams: Baptisms by overseas Baptists related to Southern Baptist missions climbed 17.1 percent during 1986.

The 185,689 baptisms surpass the previous record of 158,626 in 1985. The total also more than doubled the number baptized in 1975, the year before Bold Mission Thrust — the denomination's special evangelistic emphasis — began.

An annual growth rate of nearly 10 percent was envisioned in overseas baptisms and churches when Bold Mission Thrust goals for the year 2000 were adopted during the 1976 Southern Baptist Convention.

But the goals have not been met. In baptisms, the average increase had been about 7 percent; to meet Bold Mission Thrust goals, yearly growth of 11 percent will be needed until the year 2000. Thus the 1986 increase in baptisms gives fresh hope.

Overseas Baptists reached record levels in other categories of work during 1986 and, in most cases, posted healthy increases.

The number of churches, 16,699, is 6.8 percent above the 1985 total. Counting churches, mission congregations and preaching points, 35,233 locations were reported, up 6.9 percent over 1985. Overall membership, at just over 2 million, increased by 1.5 percent.

The growing numbers reflect far more than the efforts of Southern Baptist missionaries, reminded Charles Bryan, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board senior vice president for overseas operations.

"There are dedicated laypeople in those churches, dedicated pastors in those pulpits and dedicated leaders in those conventions," he said.

Congregations overseas averaged one baptism for every 11 members, compared to one baptism for every 12 members in 1985. Among Southern Baptists, the average is one baptism for every 41 church members.

An average of 20 new Baptist churches were organized every week, up from 16 in 1985 and eight per week five years ago.

The primary role of missionaries, Bryan said, is to "enhance, assist, bring added vitality to" the work of overseas Baptists. A measure of their effectiveness as encouragers and co-workers is the ratio of baptisms per missionary, 51.6 to 1, up from 44 to 1 in 1985 and 36 to 1 five years ago.

"They're doing the right thing," Bryan said of the missionaries. Those with assignments in evangelism as well as other fields of work are "dedicated to the priorities that the Foreign Mission Board has established in ... bringing people into a right relationship with the Lord and then bringing those people into churches for continuing outreach of the gospel."

Brazilian Baptists accounted for nearly 30 percent of all overseas baptisms. Their 1986 total, topping 55,000, was 29 percent above 1985.

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Second in baptisms were Tanzanian Baptists, whose 22,000-plus total marked a 75 percent increase over 1985. In Nigeria, just over 22,000 were baptized; in the Philippines, some 11,300. Korean baptisms numbered 9,000, up 24 percent over 1985. In Kenya, some 7,800 were baptized, 1,000 over the year before. Also, the number of Kenyan Baptist churches increased 40 percent, to 846, and church membership was up nearly 50 percent, to 47,000-plus people.

Baptist churches in India grew to nearly 600, from 400 in 1985, and healthy increases were recorded there in baptisms, church membership and preaching points. Baptisms in Burkina Faso spiraled from 141 in 1985 to some 1,300 in 1986. Momentum in the West African country has been attributed in part to various human needs projects and evangelistic endeavors by three dozen missionaries and numerous volunteers in recent years.

Partnership efforts between Southern Baptist volunteers and overseas Baptists in numerous countries, including Brazil, Tanzania and Kenya, have had "a measurable impact upon the number of decisions and baptisms and the growth in church membership," Bryan noted.

During the year Southern Baptist missionary work was launched in 46 capital cities or other cities with populations of 100,000 or more.

The missionary force grew to 3,756, or 4 percent over 1985 and well on target toward a goal of 5,000 by the end of the century. Work was initiated in Canada, Madagascar and St. Martin in the Caribbean, while work ended in Brunei in Southeast Asia.

The number of pastors among overseas Baptists increased by 9 percent, to some 14,500. Still, there are not enough pastors for every church and mission congregation. In many cases, however, laypeople handle church leadership roles.

The increase in pastors reflects sizable gains in seminary enrollment from 1983 through 1985, up more than 50 percent, and in theological education by extension, up more than 40 percent during the same period. In overall enrollment in both types of training, overseas Baptists remain ahead of Bold Mission Thrust challenges.

But seminary enrollment slowed to a 4 percent growth during 1986, while theological education by extension dropped by 4 percent. Bryan fears "the saturation point" is approaching in funding, facilities and teachers in overseas theological education.

Despite economic turmoil in many countries, total giving by overseas Baptists increased to an equivalent of \$86.4 million, 5.3 percent over 1985.

In publishing work, the number of books printed for overseas Baptists nearly doubled, to 4.5 million during 1986. A new translation of the New Testament in Spanish and the widening use of MasterLife and other discipleship materials account for much of the increase. Also, 18.5 million tracts were printed, up from 11.7 million in 1985.

Media missionaries and national co-workers produced more than 50,000 radio broadcasts, up from some 35,000 in 1985, for a potential audience of 166 million people. They also produced 2,150 TV programs, almost triple the 762 of 1985, for a potential audience of 57 million viewers.

Healthcare missionaries and national co-workers cared for about 137,000 inpatients and more than 1.3 million outpatients.

Community centers ministered to some 142,000 adults and children, and children's homes cared for more than 3,800 residents.

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Board Suggests Church  
Bus Safety Improvements

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press  
1/22/87

WASHINGTON (BP)—The National Transportation Safety Board has approved a letter that is to be mailed to various denominations and church groups throughout the nation in an attempt to improve church bus safety.

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The letter is a result of the board's investigation since 1974 of 10 major accidents involving church-operated activity buses resulting in 42 fatalities and 259 injuries. Three of those accidents occurred during 1985 and accounted for 13 fatalities and 88 injuries.

Board Chairman Jim Burnett said the suggestions for church bus safety improvement grew directly from the board's findings during investigations of those accidents. The board hopes churches can learn from the accidents and their causes so that the potential for future tragedies can be reduced, he added.

"A close look at these accidents reveals that some might have been prevented by simple, relatively inexpensive measures, such as inflating soft tires or providing drivers with more training and experience," Burnett said. "There are measures that churches, even with limited financial and administrative resources, can take to improve their margin of safety."

The board's major concern, Burnett said, is bus maintenance. Poor mechanical condition — especially brakes and tires — was a recurring factor in church bus accidents investigated by the board. Two of the 1985 accidents involved such problems:

— In July 1985, a 45-passenger bus carrying 54 passengers skidded and overturned on wet pavement near Ackerly, Texas, killing four persons and injuring 37. Inadequate tire tread contributed to the cause of the accident.

— In September 1985, a bus carrying 41 passengers to Eureka Springs, Ark., went out of control on a steep two-lane highway and overturned about 150 feet from the highway. The accident, in which the driver and four passengers were killed and 20 others were critically injured, was caused, in part, by the driver's decision to continue the trip through a mountainous area although he knew his brakes were deficient.

The board has suggested churches establish preventive maintenance programs, focusing especially on brakes and tires. To be successful, such a program must have the commitment of church leaders, according to the board's letter.

The first step in establishing a maintenance program is to develop a regular maintenance schedule. Assistance in developing such a schedule can be obtained from the bus's manufacturer or a local school system that operates buses.

"Some private groups assume that they do not need to keep the same level of maintenance as the public schools do because they will not be using their buses as frequently," Burnett said. "However, because churches often purchase used buses, maintenance should be at least comparable to that performed by public school systems. Older buses are more likely to break down or have other failures which might affect safety."

The board also warned that a state vehicle inspection is not always a true measure of a bus's condition. Although an inspection is a good starting point for determining the bus's mechanical condition, according to the letter, a church should not rely solely on that inspection to assure a bus is functioning safely.

Another suggestion involves requiring bus operators to be properly licensed and qualified. In addition to being familiar with the particular bus he will be operating, a driver always should make a pre-trip inspection of the bus to ensure that all critical systems function properly.

The board also offered a caution about purchasing buses. School buses manufactured after April 1977, the board reported, must meet federal standards for crashworthiness and occupant protection — including improved seatbacks and strengthened body joints.

"The board recognizes that many churches have limited resources and that they may not have the finances and/or the technical knowledge required for a sophisticated and complex bus operation," Burnett said. "However, a church bus ministry should never be compromised by unsafe operations."

Additional information about church bus safety may be obtained from the National Transportation Safety Board, Washington, D.C. 20594.

Clowning Offers Ticket  
To Unusual Ministry

By Terri Lackey

LAKE YALE, Fla. (BP)—Many times a wide smile, a big red nose, a giant hat and funny blue hair is just the ticket to break the ice in ministry.

It was certainly so with Claudia Boyd, Southern Baptist missionary to Colombia, who gave an emotional testimony during a recreation seminar at Lake Yale, Fla., about her ministry in a Colombian hospital following the disastrous volcanic eruption and landslide in 1985.

Boyd said she volunteered to help in the hospital, but when she first walked in, "there was a lot of blood and it smelled like rotten meat, and I had to turn around and walk out. I said, 'Lord, give me a way, give me a way to go back.' So the next morning, I went back as a clown."

Boyd said she was given the job of diverting the attention of the small children as doctors amputated their limbs.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life," she reports. "At that point, I realized that God had called me to be a clown."

Boyd admitted her Spanish language skills were not so great: "At that time, after three weeks of language school, I knew how to say God, good-bye and one, two, three. So I decided to be a mime clown."

Boyd told of going to the hospital in her regular clothes a few months later and running into a young amputee in an elevator for whom she had clowned.

Boyd asked the boy if he remembered the clown in the hospital who had "the big red nose and the big red smile and funny blue hair."

"When he came to the realization that I was that clown, he jumped up into my arms, kissing me all over the face saying, 'You are my clown, you are my clown.' At that point, I realized everyone in the elevator was either silent or crying," Boyd said.

When the elevator doors opened, people would not let her get out. "They wanted to know who I was, where I came from and why I was a clown. They love clowns in Latin America, and the door was wide open," she recalled.

She said she told the people she was a clown "because Southern Baptist people in the United States care so much about the Colombian people that they have sent people like me to share the love of God."

Boyd said she had learned about clowning through the church recreation department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and Rec Lab, the program in which she was participating. For several years the church recreation department has offered clowning classes at Rec Labs and other conferences, demonstrating clowning techniques and how to apply clown makeup.

A national clowning seminar will be held at the board March 23-27.

'Current Developments'  
Encourage Conservatives

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)—"Current developments in the Southern Baptist Convention" are encouraging to Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson, the two fundamental-conservative leaders say in a statement prepared for the SBC Peace Committee.

In a 3-page, 11-point statement, Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge, and Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, said they would "like to express our appreciation for current developments in the Southern Baptist Convention and to make certain recommendations for peace and harmony within the convention ... ."

The "Statement of Appreciation and Affirmation" was made in response to a request by the SBC Peace Committee's political activities subcommittee and subsequently sent to Baptist Press, the state Baptist newspapers and secular religion writers across the nation.

Pressler said the statement is "the first formal statement we have ever made, and we issued it in order to set forth where the two of us believe the convention is at the present time."

Patterson added: "I guess we grew a little weary of somebody else saying what we thought and said. I am not sure anybody is all that concerned about what Paul and I are thinking, but since we were getting cited here, there and yonder, I thought we ought to say it outright."

Peace Committee Chairman Charles Fuller, of Roanoke, Va., said the report "was distributed at our last meeting (Jan. 8-9), but was not discussed. We were seeking to find out just what the various factions are willing to do and what they think about the current situation. Neither Judge Pressler nor Dr. Patterson were volunteering the statement. We asked them for it in an effort to gather the information that will help us write a report with substance to it."

Patterson told Baptist Press he and Pressler "are encouraged by many of the things that we hear being said, but, having experienced over a long period of time the sometimes vacuous nature of talk, are still waiting to see the implementation of the promises."

In their statement, Pressler and Patterson noted their support for the "Glorieta Statement" of the six SBC seminary presidents. The statement, issued in October commits the seminaries to seven specific actions, including enforcement of the doctrinal statements and fair treatment of all views of Scripture.

It also says the presidents believe the Bible "is not errant in any area of reality."

The Pressler-Patterson statement also expresses "strong support" for the SBC unified giving plan, the Cooperative Program; pledges they will "work towards a harmonious convention in St. Louis;" calls upon "those in our institutions and agencies to treat all Southern Baptists with love and concern," and calls on the Baptist news media "to be fair."

It also calls on "all Southern Baptists to work together constructively to correct the problems" in the convention; disavows "harsh rhetoric, unfounded accusations of disloyalty to our ... heritage and misrepresentation of the positions of other Baptists," and calls on all Southern Baptists "to discuss the issues openly and honestly without rancor or bitterness and without propagandizing through the press."

It says again the basic position frequently expressed by Pressler and Patterson: "For conservatives the issue in the convention has always been whether or not the Bible contains error or is truly the perfect revelation of God, 'truth without any mixture of error' and 'not errant in any area of reality.'

"We call on all Southern Baptists involved in the controversy to address the issue and all of our seminary professors and other denominational employees to address forthrightly and honestly this issue in such a way that there are no ambiguous phrases or hidden meanings."

It adds: "Our problems are real. They were not faced adequately in the Elliott Controversy in the early 1960s or in the Broadman Bible commentary controversy of the early 1970s.

"We are grateful that increasing numbers of Southern Baptists are now recognizing that these problems can no longer be disregarded and that we must have our institutions operate from the predicate that the Bible is 'truth without any mixture of error' and 'not errant in any area of reality.' We call upon all Southern Baptists to work together constructively to correct the problems created by those who deny this basic belief.

"Failure to acknowledge or deal with these problems will only insure that the controversy will not abate. As these problems are acknowledged and dealt with and as the Glorieta Statement is implemented, the controversy will abate."

It adds: "We praise God for what is happening in the Southern Baptist Convention. The purpose of our involvement has been to strengthen our theological moorings in such a way that we will be better equipped to reach individuals for a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

"To this end we dedicate ourselves, and we urge full cooperation by all Southern Baptists to this end.

"As problems are resolved, unity will return and we will see the accomplishment of the purposes for which we were created, namely missions and evangelism based upon thorough biblical training and the equipping of the saints for the ministry to which they are called."

In their statement, Pressler and Patterson note they "greet with enthusiasm the statement of the seminary presidents in Glorieta and appreciate their recognition that there is 'legitimate concern' about the seminaries and that the teaching of inerrancy has not been given 'a fair shake' in the schools."

"We support them in their pledge to work to rectify these problems and stand ready to be of assistance in implementing this declaration. We regret that for many years these facts were denied, but we are grateful that they have now been acknowledged."

In the section affirming support for the Cooperative Program, Pressler and Patterson note they are "distressed that some of those in Southern Baptist life who have raised the loudest hue and cry against a societal approach have now seemingly embraced it by actions such as the Virginia Convention designating funds for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs."

The statement refers to action taken at the annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia which specified Cooperative Program funds up to \$75,000 would be sent directly to the BJCPA, in the event that organization is defunded by the SBC in 1987.

The statement also says efforts to oppose incumbent officers for re-election have "been harmful and polarizing. Never has opposition to incumbent officers who are eligible for re-election ... come from conservatives. We pledge ourselves to continue to work toward peaceful conventions and urge all others to unite behind those who are eligible for re-election and to support the reports and recommendations of the committees which have been duly constituted and accepted by our convention," it says.

He also notes the writers "are grateful that we have a system ... wherein our people can correct the course of our cooperative endeavors when the direction of our efforts need correction." It also notes gratefulness at being a denomination "which recognizes the priesthood of all believers and allows oversight of all denominational institutions by the people ... ."

The writers say they "reject any plans that would deny our Southern Baptist people the full right to participate in giving loving direction to the institutions ... through methods established by the constitution and by-laws ... ."

In reference to terminology Pressler and Patterson say they "reject the harmful and misleading phraseology of 'fundamentalist-conservative' and 'moderate conservative,'" and urges they "should be replaced by the more accurate and less volatile 'conservative' and 'moderate.'"

It also says for "conservatives" political activity "has always been burdensome. Conservatives long for the day when the concerns have been addressed, the problems rectified and the controversy has indeed abated."