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87-186

Cooperative Program
Takes November Dip

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program unified budget took a dip in November, thanks to the Thanksgiving holidays.

The denomination-wide Cooperative Program received \$9,505,026 in November, down 1.73 percent from November 1986's receipts of \$9,672,612, reported Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee disburses the budget to 19 Southern Baptist agencies and institutions that conduct missionary, evangelistic and educational ministries around the globe. Money is donated from individual Southern Baptists to their churches, which channel a portion on to state Baptist conventions, which in turn channel a portion on to the Executive Committee for distribution.

Two factors caused the shortfall, said Tim A. Hedquist, Executive Committee vice president for business and finance. First, Thanksgiving fell four days before the end of the month, so many state convention workers who process Cooperative Program checks and send them to the Executive Committee were off work at a time when end-of-the-month checks normally would be handled. Second, the November's final Sunday fell one day before the end of the month, and church receipts for that day did not have time to be forwarded to the Executive Committee by the final day of the month.

Those factors caused some state conventions to delay getting their final November Cooperative Program checks to the Executive Committee until after the monthly books closed Nov. 30, Hedquist explained: "There were several states whose money we did not receive (until early December). The total probably was a little over \$1 million. But that's not unusual, considering the way the holiday fell."

The one-month shortfall does not indicate the 1987-88 Cooperative Program is in trouble, he added: "I don't think this (monthly shortfall) means anything. Obviously, if December is low, we'll be behind. However, we're expecting to catch up during the next few months. Besides, you can't see a definite trend in giving until after the first four months of the fiscal year."

Bennett predicted the momentary lull will be short-lived: "I am not disappointed, because the state conventions expressed strong support for world missions through the Cooperative Program during their annual meetings this fall. I have observed more and more church leaders expressing interest in the Cooperative Program. This is a good sign."

The Cooperative Program goal for the current October-through-September fiscal year is \$140 million. At the end of two months, the convention-wide budget had received slightly more than \$20.5 million, about \$100,000 or 0.48 percent behind the total for the same period last year.

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Virginia General Board
Looks At Divinity School

N-CO
(Va.)

By Robert Dilday

Baptist Press
12/8/87

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Virginia Baptist General Board has named a committee to study the possibility of establishing a divinity school at a Virginia Baptist college or university.

The action was taken in response to a motion passed by the Baptist General Association of Virginia during its annual meeting Nov. 10-11, asking the board to consider the feasibility of supporting such an institution.

Recent changes at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., which some Virginians fear might diminish the quality of theological education there, and changes at the other five Southern Baptist Convention seminaries apparently sparked the motion.

A similar proposal is being examined by the Southern Baptist Alliance, a coalition of moderate Southern Baptists.

The Virginia board approved nominations of Chairman Neal T. Jones and Randal T. Almarode, chairman of its education committee, to a five-member panel that will present a preliminary report to the board in April and a final report next October.

Instructions to the study committee also asked it to focus on four questions: Are any of the colleges or universities interested in such a program? What financial commitments would be required to operate such a program? What would be the source of the funding? How would such a divinity school differ from the six existing Southern Baptist seminaries?

Before agreeing to the proposal, some board members expressed concern that the cost of supporting another Virginia Baptist institution is beyond the association's financial means.

"We have all the institutions our resources can handle," said Robert D. Lynch, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gate City. "We need to be very careful in reacting to something that might be very costly."

James H. Motley, pastor of New Bethesda Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, added, "We're all aware of the fact we're not adequately funding the educational institutions we already have."

But James R. Chandler, pastor of First Baptist Church of Collinsville, said while he did not favor the "establishment of another divinity school, we need to study the possibility anyway."

Other members noted the assumption the study committee's recommendation will favor the establishment of a divinity school is far from certain.

A substitute motion, which would have put the board on record opposing a new theological institution, was ruled out of order. Jones said the state association had mandated a study, and the board must follow its instructions.

Four colleges are affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia: Averett College in Danville, Bluefield College in Bluefield, Virginia Intermont College in Bristol and the University of Richmond.

Although religion courses are maintained as part of the curriculum at all four schools, none of them has a graduate program in religion. The University of Richmond, the oldest, largest and most affluent of the schools, is thought to be the most likely site for a theological institution.

Study committee Chairman Michael Clingenpeel, pastor of Franklin Baptist Church in Franklin, met briefly with committee members, who agreed to hold the committee's first meeting Dec. 14.

When asked what effect the study by the Southern Baptist Alliance might have on his committee, Clingenpeel said: "We're aware other groups are looking at the possibility of starting a divinity school. I assume we'll review what other groups are doing."

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Group Seeks City's Change
Through 'Faith In Action'

F-10 (NOBTS)
By Breena Kent Paine

Baptist Press
12/8/87

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A group of men hope to change the reputation of New Orleans by permeating the city's "seedbed" of evil with the gospel.

Public housing projects, often seen as the source of crime in New Orleans, are the target of Faith in Action, an organization with a strategy to "win the city to Christ."

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"New Orleans has a bad reputation around the nation with many people. We'd like to see the whole image of the city changed," said Marshall Truehill, Faith in Action president and a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. "We'd like to see New Orleans come under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

"Working in the projects, we can make an impact on the whole city, because the housing projects are the seedbed of most of the society illnesses of New Orleans."

Members of the Faith in Action team work in seven housing projects. All but two have studied at New Orleans Seminary.

Faith in Action has been effective because "almost all of us grew up in the housing projects, and those who didn't live close to them," said Truehill. The people to whom they minister know them personally, and they do not have to cross cultural barriers.

Another advantage is the team not only meets the people's spiritual needs, but it also meets their physical needs as well.

Faith in Action's strategy to lead the city to Christ is called "Project New Orleans." It includes nine major areas of need -- beautification, crime prevention, drug abuse prevention/counseling, education, family services, personal financial planning, public relations with the outer community, recreation and skills development/job services.

"We initially had 10 areas," said Truehill. "Number 10 was evangelism. But we took it out of the flow chart, because we want it to permeate through each area.

"Our bottom line is to see (people) have a life-changing experience. We can meet all of the society's needs that can be met, but if we don't lead them to the Lord, then there's no change."

Using Jesus' ministry as an example, Truehill explained: "The Lord wants to save the whole man -- both the body and the soul. We don't feel it's an 'either-or' situation; it's a 'both-and.'"

Unfortunately, the media has discouraged many would-be helpers in the projects by publicizing the crime and not the progress. "You hear about all the bad things but seldom hear the good things," he said.

However, most who profess their Christianity openly in these communities are well-accepted, said Michael Howard, a student at New Orleans Seminary and Faith in Action worker in the St. Bernard projects. "In the black community, the person representing God is held in high regard," he said. "If they go against him, they go against God. If you're easily identified as a Christian, you won't be bothered by anybody. They'll listen ... as long as you want to stand there and tell them."

Howard, who grew up in the project where he ministers, began a Bible study in his mother's home in November 1986.

Four people attended the meeting. "From there, the Bible study started growing," he said. "One or two people came to Christ just about every Bible study. Then there was follow-up."

Now, about 87 are on roll, "and we have over 100 contacts," he said. The Bible study has evolved into Jesus is Lord Baptist Church, which meets in the tenant council office of the St. Bernard projects.

"When we started our first worship service, things didn't turn out just right. They had elected a new president of the tenant council; they locked the doors and we couldn't get in," said Howard. However, his sister said the group could meet in her apartment.

"My sister was praying for my niece to get back into church," said Howard. His niece joined that day. "You can see the difference that you make with people," he expressed.

One day, Howard was playing football with 12 teenage boys in the neighborhood. "I stopped the game and started talking about Jesus and all (he) could do for them," he related.

The boys, ranging in age from 13 to 17, "sat on the side of a curb to stop and hear what I had to say," he said. "And after talking to them about the Lord for about an hour or so, I asked them, did they want to accept him, and all 12 said they did.

"We don't go in just with a Bible study, we go in to present Christ -- to see people's lives changed."

And with the changes in people's lives come changes in the community. And Faith in Action believes changes in these projects may be the hope of New Orleans' future.

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(BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Seminary

Experts Urge Small Churches
To Focus On People's Gifts

N-CO
(SBTS)
By Pat Cole

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The direction of small churches should be shaped more by the "gifts of people" than highly structured programs, an authority on small churches emphasized.

Douglas Walrath, director of the small-church leadership program at Bangor (Maine) Theological Seminary, said limited resources often make popular models of church administration impractical in small churches. Such churches should base their ministries on the gifts of the individual church members, he said.

Walrath and his wife, Sherry, the leadership program's coordinator of research, addressed a small-church conference in November at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. The three-day conference, jointly sponsored by the seminary's Dehoney Center for the Study of the Local Church and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, was designed for pastors and other leaders of Baptist churches with fewer than 300 members.

The Walraths are members of a 64-member Presbyterian church near their home in Strong, Maine.

Noting many churches have borrowed from the business world the concept of "management by objective," Walrath suggested small churches practice instead "management by discipleship." Small churches lend themselves to nurturing disciples because "discipleship is made in relationships."

"You discover the potential (of a small congregation) with people," he said. "You don't discover it in programs. You discover it by discipling the people, praying with them and supporting them."

Some people incorrectly assume a church that is "institutionally viable" is also "spiritually viable," he said. On the other hand, "when a congregation is spiritually viable, it finds ways to become institutionally and organizationally viable."

Mrs. Walrath noted most people in small churches are happy with the relationships they find there. Yet some people continue to "think there is a problem" because small churches are unable to conduct the same variety of programs as a larger congregation.

Society's "bigger is better" mentality often causes members of small churches to feel inadequate, she said.

Walrath agreed. Such feelings of inadequacy, he said, surface only when "we take on the values of the secular world."

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Rural U.S. Offers Potential
For Churches, Expert Says

N-CO
(SBTS)
By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Despite the dwindling number of family farms, "a lot of room" remains for church growth and new churches in small-town and rural America, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board specialist on rural ministries reported.

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"There's a false notion that rural America is being depopulated," said Gary Farley, associate director of the board's rural-urban missions department. More people are living in rural America now than at any other time in history, he noted.

Farley was a keynote speaker at a small-church conference in November at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. The conference, jointly sponsored by the seminary's Dehoney Center for the Study of the Local Church and the board, was designed for pastors and other leaders of churches with fewer than 300 members.

"We need to win the cities," Farley declared, echoing a frequent missions emphasis, "but there are 61.4 million people living in rural areas or in small towns."

The family farm crisis has forced many rural people out of agriculture, Farley acknowledged, but he said many former farmers have taken up new residences in small towns or in the fringe areas outside small towns.

He also addressed some of the changing economic and population trends which he believes will significantly impact rural America and its churches in coming years.

Noting the family farm has "been in a crisis" for much of the 20th century, Farley predicted family farms will continue to be replaced by corporate farms. Some farmers, he said, will contract to grow crops for corporations, and others will seek new occupations.

"A lot of people will change their way of living and a lot of churches that have been farm churches will become factory worker churches or weekender churches," he said.

Farley also foresees a reorganization of communities, noting regional trade centers will become the economic focal points in some parts of rural America.

Many small towns, he explained, will begin to function as suburbs of the regional trade centers, while some rural communities will begin to be defined as neighborhoods.

Farley believes an interest in rural revitalization by the federal government will prompt developers to invest more in rural America. Retirement communities will spring up along lakes and other recreational attractions in rural areas, he added.

Large manufacturing plants will locate in small towns strategically located near interstate highways, causing unprecedented population growth, he said. New automobile plants near Spring Hill, Tenn.; Smyrna, Tenn.; and Georgetown, Ky., are examples of this pattern, he noted.

As a result of such trends, "there will be more churches and more diversity," said Farley. "We're going to have to do church differently."

Rural and small-town churches present exciting opportunities for ministry, he stressed. Ministers in those areas "can plant their lives and have significant impact on people because of the relationships that exist there."

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F-10
(SWBTS)

Ron Ragan Answers God's
Call To Higher Office

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
12/8/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Ron Ragan knows the importance of a name.

Since Ronald Reagan of California was elected president of the United States in 1980, Ron Ragan of Texas hasn't even been able to order pizza under his real name. Clerks don't believe him.

Ragan also knows the importance of a name because of his business. His job has been to get attention for others' names; he's been vice president and general manager of the McCann-Erickson advertising agency in Dallas.

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And although Ragan can't give up his own attention-getting name, he has given up his successful career of dealing with the names of others. His goal now is to tell others about the world's most important name, Jesus Christ.

Ragan, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is preparing to become a missionary to Africa. He will direct the Baptist media center in Nairobi, Kenya, under appointment by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Although Ragan's secular experience had taken him to Kenya for a few years, he had no plans to return there as a missionary. "When I got on that airplane to leave Kenya, I thought I'd never be back. My goals at that time were very success oriented," he said.

While working with Caterpillar Tractor Co. in Kenya, Ragan and his wife, Lynda, met several Southern Baptist missionaries. Through that contact, Ragan began to ponder the impact he could make in Christian service.

"God dealt with me over a long period," Ragan recalled. "I began to struggle with the idea that God had given me a certain amount of talent and that the time had come for me to repay that with a full-time ministry."

Zeb Moss was one missionary acquaintance who never gave up on Ragan. So after moving to Dallas, Ragan called one night to talk with Moss in Nairobi. As he had in every conversation previously, Moss closed by asking Ragan, "Have you ever thought about missions?"

In the days that followed, Ragan made himself face that question. "In prayer, God really dealt with me," he said. Finally, he and his wife agreed foreign missions definitely was God's plan for them.

They also felt strongly about returning to Africa for media work. So they contacted the Foreign Mission Board. They began the application process even though no media positions were open in Africa.

Against the advice of the board, Ragan quit his job, sold his house and moved to Fort Worth, Texas, to begin seminary training, even though he and his wife had not yet been approved as missionary candidates and no position was open for them.

Once at seminary, they continued to struggle with their desire to go to Africa and the lack of an opening there. "I felt God was calling me to Kenya, and I closed my mind to anyplace else in the world," he said.

Finally the Ragans decided to let God place them wherever he desired. "We made a conscious decision to open our consideration to anyplace else," he said. Ragan then called Jim Riddell, their Foreign Mission Board candidate consultant, with that news.

Riddell also had news for the Ragans. A position had just become available in Nairobi for a director of the Baptist media center.

Ragan believes his mission is urgent. The Nairobi media center produces support materials on radio and television and processes slides for missionaries on the field. These tools allow missionaries to multiply their efforts in spreading the gospel, Ragan said.

This new work will not be a step down from Ragan's previous occupation, he said: "I've been training to use mass communications to influence people. I'm still going to do that. But I'm going to do it for the Lord Jesus.

"I see foreign missions as a challenge 10 times greater than anything I did in the business world."

But he's not afraid of failure, because he has the best message any communicator can have. "When you're starting out with a product as beautiful as Jesus, you can't fail," he said.