



- - BAPTIST PRESS

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February 9, 1988

88-22

SBC Membership Reflects
Smallest Gain Since 1936

N-SSB
By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist growth virtually ground to a halt in 1986-87 when denominational programs reported small changes and some conventionwide statistical areas had gains or totals smaller than have been seen in decades.

The denomination's missions organizations, Woman's Missionary Union and Brotherhood, are the brightest spots, with increases of 1.4 and 0.7 percent, respectively, over the previous year's totals. The Southern Baptist Convention fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to the following Sept. 30; the new statistics reflect the year ending Sept. 30, 1987.

Church membership, which has shown annual increases since 1926, recorded a gain of 109,203, or 0.7 percent, to reach a new total of 14,727,770, as compared to the 1986 total of 14,618,567.

The increase in church membership, however, is the lowest number by which Southern Baptists have grown since 1936, when the denomination gained almost 93,000 new members.

The number of churches in the convention increased by 170, or 0.5 percent, to a new total of 37,286. Except for 1985-86's smaller increase because of the loss of 40 Southern Baptist-affiliated churches in Canada, the 1986-87 total was the smallest increase in nine years.

Baptisms in Southern Baptist churches, down by 6.8 percent, or 24,629, totaled 338,495. Except for the baptisms total of 336,050 in 1977-78, the new baptisms total is the lowest for the convention since 1949. The all-time high for baptisms in the SBC was 445,725 in 1972.

The 1985-86 baptism total registered an increase over the previous total, but it had been preceded by three consecutive decreases. More than 7,000 churches did not report a baptism on their Uniform Church Letter survey forms for the 1986-87 church year.

The denomination's church music enrollment reflected the 22nd consecutive increase, with a gain of 0.8 percent, or 14,202, to a new total of 1,738,294. It followed an increase of 2.8 percent, or more than 46,000 participants.

The enrollment increase for Woman's Missionary Union of 1.4 percent, or 16,512, is the second consecutive increase, bringing that program's ongoing enrollment to 1,197,479. WMU enrollment has gone up more than 30,000 in the last two years.

Brotherhood, with an increase of 3,783, or 0.7 percent, reached a new total of 572,987. This increase follows an 0.8 percent loss.

Sunday school, the denomination's largest program, registered a change of 0.0 percent, with a small actual loss in ongoing enrollment of 1,867, bringing the total enrollment to 7,942,106. It marks the second consecutive loss for the denomination's Bible study program, after posting annual gains from 1980 through 1985.

Enrollment in church training also registered a change of 0.0 percent, because of a small actual loss of 408, bringing the total enrollment to 1,953,937. This follows three years of small declines, which were preceded by four consecutive increases.

According to Martin Bradley, director of the research services department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board: "Reporting procedures used by one state convention for church training resulted in inflated figures for 1986. Had this not occurred, the change for church training enrollment in the SBC in 1987 would likely have been positive."

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Total receipts in Southern Baptist churches increased by 4.3 percent, or \$176,109,005, to a new total of \$4,293,683,245. The increase in total dollars given in Southern Baptist churches is 1.7 percentage points less than the previous year's gain of 6.0 percent.

Mission expenditures, which are included as part of total receipts, went up by 4.3 percent, or \$27,313,943, to a new high of \$662,691,289. The increase is almost one-half of a percentage point more than the previous gain of 4.0 percent.

Information included in the annual statistical report for the denomination is provided by the research services department of the Sunday School Board from data collected on Uniform Church Letters submitted by 36,674 churches.

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(BP) chart mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

SOUTHERN BAPTIST STATISTICAL SUMMARY, 1987

	1986 Total	1987 % Change	1987 Numerical Change	1987 Total
Churches	37,116	0.5	170	37,286
Baptisms	363,124	-6.8	-24,629	338,495
Church Membership	14,618,567	0.7	109,203	14,727,770
Ongoing Sunday School Enrollment	7,943,973	-0.0	-1,867	7,942,106
Church Training Enrollment	1,954,345	-0.0	-408	1,953,937
Ongoing Church Music Enrollment	1,724,092	0.8	14,202	1,738,294
Ongoing WMU Enrollment	1,180,967	1.4	16,512	1,197,479
Ongoing Brotherhood Enrollment	569,204	0.7	3,783	572,987
Mission Expenditures	\$635,377,346	4.3	\$27,313,943	\$662,691,289
Total Receipts	\$4,117,574,240	4.3	\$176,109,005	\$4,293,683,245

Foreign Board Providing
Flood Relief In Brazil

N-FMB

Baptist Press
2/9/88

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--About 600 families who were left homeless by a flood in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state will receive food and supplies from Southern Baptist missionaries.

The Foreign Mission Board sent about \$60,000 in hunger and general relief funds Feb. 8 to missionary Gregory Deering, who is coordinating relief efforts, said Bill Damon, associate area director for Brazil. With the \$60,000, missionaries will buy and distribute a one-month supply of food, as well as blankets, mattresses, cleaning supplies and health kits to ward off diseases.

They also will be looking for ways to comfort the people and present the gospel of Christ.

Five days of heavy rains in early February caused floods and mud slides that killed at least 85, injured 200 and left 4,800 homeless, according to wire reports. Forty buildings collapsed in Petropolis, a mountain resort north of Rio de Janeiro city.

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Maurice Swinford Elected
Illinois Executive Director

N-III.

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--Maurice Swinford has been named the seventh executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association.

Swinford, who has been Illinois church development division director for nearly 10 years, was elected unanimously Feb. 8 during a special called meeting of the Illinois association's board of directors.

"He is one of our own," said search committee Chairman Charles Dampeer of Herrin in describing the committee's unanimous recommendation.

Swinford, 59, became executive director immediately, but the board will formally install him March 8 when it meets in Springfield for a semi-annual meeting.

The new leader succeeds Ernest E. Mosley, who resigned March 31, 1987, to become executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

In accepting his new position, Swinford said he had deep appreciation for the association's past, is "challenged by her present" and "optimistic about her future."

"A good wife brings out the best in her husband, would you agree? A good husband is one who brings the best out of his wife," he said. "A good leader, I believe, is the kind of person who brings the best out of the people with whom he works."

He pledged to work hard with the board of directors and with the state association's staff. "I want to be the kind of leader that will bring the best out of us all," he said.

The new executive director is a graduate of Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, his hometown, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He has been pastor of seven churches in 31 years, the last one First Baptist Church of Herrin from 1968 to 1978.

Swinford was a member of the SBC Christian Life Commission for six years, a member of the Illinois association's board for 13 years, the state association's president two years and its vice president two years. He is a former president of the Illinois Baptist pastors' conference.

He and his wife, Charlotte, are the parents of three adult daughters.

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First Subcommittee Meeting
Addresses New Baptist Hymnal

By Charles Willis

N-SSB

Baptist Press
2/9/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The three-year process to develop a new "Baptist Hymnal" began at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board Feb. 4-5. Subcommittee members considered page format and hymn score style to be recommended to the full hymnal committee in September.

Concerns and requests expressed in letters from Southern Baptist church leaders and laypeople were reviewed as a part of the process to deal with indices, paper, binding and organization of materials.

The 11-member design/organization subcommittee deliberated over such matters as author and composer information to be printed with each hymn and placement of that information on the page. A clean look and ease in locating material of interest to congregational users of the hymnal was a desire expressed repeatedly. Practical and aesthetic factors such as paper, color, weight and style of binding the hymnal also consumed much of the time.

Jean Pilcher, minister of music at First Baptist Church of Little Rock, Ark., and chairman of the subcommittee, described the two-day session as "positive and really healthy where we disagreed. We either talked through our disagreement or gave ourselves two or three options that, after study, we'll prioritize."

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Pilcher said she was impressed with "the divergence of background and workplace and the great amount of unity. It says of our denomination that we have a great deal in common. I appreciated the approach of each individual. None approached the task flippantly."

Three other subcommittee members, who also are members of the full committee that will meet for the first time Sept. 22-23, spoke of their responses to the work ahead.

John Booth, minister of music at Robert Gray Baptist Church in Longview, Wash., told of individuals who have said they are counting on him to get specific hymns included in the new volume.

"It will almost be a test of fellowship if I don't help get them in there," he laughed. "There are persons with expectations, realistic and unrealistic, for the hymnal. But we do want to meet the entire denomination's needs."

Booth also commented on the meeting's atmosphere, noting "the warmth I feel among the committee persons, an initial bond. The committee (assignment) unified us."

John Glover, minister of music at First Baptist Church of Atlanta, said he is "impressed with the process we go through as Southern Baptists in getting this accomplished. Most of the other new hymnbooks would not have the grassroots input we are having. The process will culminate, I believe, in an instrument of worship that will meet Southern Baptists' needs second to none."

"It's exciting to be in on the beginning of something we'll use in our churches into the 21st century," observed Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas. "Hymns have been such a great influence on my life that anything I can do to help Baptists sing, I want to do."

Until the full committee meets, the design/organization subcommittee members will do independent study on topical index headings.

Although it was the first subcommittee to meet, other subcommittees already are at work. Members of the theology/doctrine, music and new materials subcommittees are working independently and conducting business by mail. Theology/doctrine subcommittee members meet April 7-8, the music subcommittee meets April 22-23 and the new materials subcommittee will meet in connection with the full committee meeting in September.

Other subcommittee meetings during 1988 include hymns recommendation, May 5-6 and Sept. 24 following the full committee meeting, and worship aids, Aug. 18-19. All subcommittees will meet individually during the two-day full committee meeting.

The hymnal is scheduled for release in 1991 during PraiSing II, a celebration event to be held in Nashville March 11-14.

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CORRECTION: Please change the 8th graf of the 2/3/88 Baptist Press story titled "Controversy Causes Decline In Evangelism, Scholar Says," to read:

Henry, who was a member of the 1984 SBC Resolutions Committee, is a member of Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Seminary Trustees Approve
Response To Peace Committee

By David R. Wilkinson

N-20
(SBTS)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's trustee executive committee has approved unanimously a recommendation affirming the seminary president's commitment to implement Recommendation V of the Southern Baptist Convention's Peace Committee report.

The recommendation came from an ad hoc committee appointed last fall to study the trustees' response to Recommendation V of the Peace Committee report approved by the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis last June. That recommendation was addressed specifically to the convention's six seminaries.

The trustee recommendation, passed during the group's February meeting, noted seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt has pledged "his diligent efforts implement the contents of Recommendation V with regard to the employment and future service of administrative staff and faculty."

Honeycutt, it added, has expressed his intention "to commend persons whose commitments are consistent with specifications defined within Recommendation V ... and who manifest the spirit of cooperation within the diversity among Southern Baptists as recognized and affirmed by Recommendation V."

The recommendation pointed out Honeycutt's stated commitment "to stand by" the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963, the six seminary presidents' "Glorieta Statement" expressing their commitment to work toward reconciliation in the denomination and the Abstract of Principles, the seminary's governing declaration of faith.

The executive committee also authorized Honeycutt "to proceed to determine the positions of the executive staff and faculty members with regard to Recommendation V of the Peace Committee Report" and to present a progress report at the executive committee's meeting in April.

Recommendation V of the Peace Committee report recommended "that trustees determine the theological positions" of seminary administrators and faculty members "in order to guide them in renewing their determination to stand by" the Baptist Faith and Message Statement, the Glorieta Statement and the seminaries' respective institutional declarations of faith "as the guidelines by which they will teach their students."

The recommendation added: "The Bible is a book of redemption, not a book of science, psychology, sociology or economics. But, where the Bible speaks, the Bible speaks truth in all realms of reality and to all fields of knowledge. The Bible, when properly interpreted, is authoritative to all of life."

Honeycutt and trustee Chairman Perry Webb, recently retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Baton Rouge, La., will join trustees and chief administrators of other SBC boards, agencies and institutions at a meeting with the Peace Committee in Atlanta in May to follow up on implementation of the committee's recommendations.

In other actions, the trustee executive committee:

-- Elected A. Moncrief Jordan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Tenn., to serve on the board of trustees until the SBC meets in San Antonio in June. Jordan will fill a vacancy created by Tennessee trustee John Lee Taylor, who moved to another state.

-- Approved a 1988 fall retreat for trustees and their spouses to be held in conjunction with the executive committee meeting in October. The retreat, to consist of seminars and recreational activities, will follow trustee-faculty retreats held in 1986 and 1987.

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Handicapped Pastor
Accepts No Excuses

By Ken Camp

F-Texas

Baptist Press
2/9/88

WACO, Texas (BP)--It's no wonder Robert Gilbert won't accept the excuses of people who try to tell him why they can't serve God.

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After enduring three decades of crippling psoriatic arthritis, more than 50 hospital stays, open-heart surgery and the loss of nearly all of his sight, Gilbert still is ministering as pastor of Carver Park Baptist Church in Waco, Texas.

"'Can't' is not in my vocabulary. If you're saved, all things are possible through Christ," he said. "There's no excuse for a person saying he can't do something.

"It doesn't matter what the challenge is. As long as I have life and breath, the Lord has fixed a way for me to do it. People say, 'You can't even dress yourself. You can't comb your own hair. You can't get around by yourself.' But the Lord has given me a family. He has given me a wife and children who care for my personal hygiene needs and help me get around. He says, 'I will provide for your every need.'"

The Waco native was bothered by arthritis even as a child, but the disease did not take its present crippling form until he turned 19. Today, arthritis has fused every joint in his body, leaving him bound to a wheelchair, and the accompanying psoriasis leaves his skin uncomfortably dry and scaly.

Gilbert adopted a "no excuses" philosophy early in life, and in spite of advancing arthritis, he completed his studies at Paul Quinn College and Baylor University in Waco. In 1967, he became Baylor's first black graduate, and soon afterward, he became the first black teacher at a previously all-white junior high school in Waco.

He felt led into the ministry in 1966 and accepted his first rural pastorate two years later. When he accepted the call to Carver Park in 1978, the church was averaging 60 people in attendance. Today, about 300 members worship together there every week.

Although he requires assistance wherever he goes, Gilbert performs all of his duties as a pastor including visiting the sick, the elderly and the bereaved.

"When I visit in the hospitals, sometimes the people there think I'm being brought in as a patient," he said, laughing. "Everywhere I go, I feel that the people in the hospitals and nursing homes gain strength and are inspired to go on and not give up when they see me. I know that the more I give of myself, the more strength the Lord gives me."

Gilbert shared that philosophy in a recently completed book, "No Excuses Accepted," written with Nancy Barcus and published in January by Broadman Press. The Waco school board voted in January to place copies of the book in every school library in the Waco Independent School District.

Gilbert preaches a no excuses theology at Carver Park Church that reaches into every area of Christian discipleship, from evangelism to social justice.

"Some people try to tell me, 'I can't go witness.' I say there is no excuse for not witnessing, he noted. "I go out in my wheelchair on the streets preaching and visiting. There are about half a dozen senior adults who go with me, and we even go into the bars and taverns to witness.

"When we live in a country that has the wealth ours does, there is no excuse for anyone to be hungry. There is no excuse for people not having adequate housing. There is no excuse for our children not receiving a proper education. There is no excuse for blacks and whites not getting together as brothers and sisters and learning to love one another."

In spite of his positive no excuses attitude, Gilbert admits it is easy for him to surrender to depression. However, he finds inspiration in the example of two biblical figures.

"I identify with Job and Paul very closely," he said. "Job was afflicted physically and was reprimanded by friends who blamed him for his own situation. Still, Job remained faithful. I try to maintain the kind of trust in God that Job had.

"Paul had a thorn in the flesh. He prayed three times for it to be removed, but his prayer was not answered as he would have liked. Still, he found God's grace was sufficient.

"God has encircled me with his love. He has never left me alone."