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N-BJC

Postal Rate Increases
To Affect State Papers

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)--A new across-the-board postal rate increase could dramatically affect non-profit publications, including state Baptist newspapers.

The rate increase, which is to take effect April 3, was recommended by the Postal Rate Commission and unanimously approved by the U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors.

Although the Postal Rate Commission's rate increase report indicated second-class non-profit rates would go up 18 percent, editors of Baptist newspapers said the actual increases will be greater.

Presnall H. Wood, editor of the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said the rate change will increase his publication's mailing costs by 24 percent, pushing those costs to \$22,000 each week. Wood -- whose publication has the largest circulation of any state newspaper in the Southern Baptist Convention -- said this most recent increase contributes to an overall mailing cost increase of almost 100 percent in less than two years.

For Jack E. Brymer Sr., editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, newsjournal of the Florida Baptist Convention, the rate change will mean a 28 percent increase, or an additional \$61,100 annually.

Brymer said he has been unable to get any answers from the Postal Board of Governors as to why the increase for his publication is 10 percent higher than the figure that had been publicized.

Although his publication's actual mailing costs are much lower than those of the other two newspapers, Michael B. McCullough, editor of The Nevada Baptist, newsjournal of the Nevada Baptist Convention, estimated the postal rate increase will double the amount of Cooperative Program budget funds needed to help offset the cost of printing and mailing his publication.

"Since I have been editor, I have tried hard to reduce the cost of printing and thereby lower the percentage of Cooperative Program funds we use," McCullough said. "But the increase in postal rates has been a long, gradual climb, and this new change is going to kick in hard."

Both Brymer and Wood predicted the postal rate increase will force them to raise their subscription rates, which in turn will cost them readers. Brymer said he most likely will ask his publication's governing commission to approve a subscription increase in July. Wood said he plans to wait until the beginning of 1989 to implement higher charges.

"This is another example of insensitivity to the needs of second-class non-profit publications," Wood said. "It's not just Baptist publications but all other religious publications, as well as the publications of charitable, philanthropic and other organizations."

N-CO

Witness, Give,
Professors Urge

By Marv Knox

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Christians should dedicate their words, deeds and resources to Jesus' causes, according to a pair of seminary professors.

Delos Miles and Morris Ashcraft, both of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, spoke to about 500 Southern Baptist ministers at the denomination's Witnessing-Giving Life seminar at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. Witnessing-Giving Life will be the 1991-95 emphasis for Planned Growth in Giving, the denomination's 15-year stewardship/enrichment campaign.

"Our witnessing context requires a balance among holy living, good works and words fitly spoken," said Miles, professor of evangelism at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. "We Christians are to be Christ's witnesses by lifestyle and lips; by who we are and what we do and say; by the way we live, labor, laugh and love."

A witness is a person who "points people ... to Jesus Christ," he said. "The biblical target of Christian witnessing is ... especially that part of humankind which is in rebellion against God."

Christians must tell others about Christ with both words and actions, Miles insisted: "Jesus preached what he practiced. He said what he did. If there is any such thing as one method of witnessing, ... that method is for our words to take on living flesh and blood."

Christians today have a vital imperative, he added, noting, "The Christian faith is always just one generation from extinction."

A comprehensive approach to witnessing involves fellowship, service and proclamation, Miles said: "We dare not ... major on telling the gospel, minor on doing it or make an elective out of being good news. Nor should we reverse the order and major on being, minor on doing and make an elective out of telling."

Turning to the other half of the seminar theme, Ashcraft, professor of theology and dean of Southeastern's faculty, examined the biblical basis for giving, or stewardship.

"Giving is bestowing or transferring property to another without a return or expectation of it," he said. "Christian stewardship can be practiced only by one who is a personal eyewitness to the saving power of Christ. Transferring money from one's bank account to a 'Christian' cause is not Christian stewardship unless it is a witness to that person's commitment to Jesus Christ."

Improper motives often distort giving, he said. Consequently, what passes for Christian giving can be bribery, extortion, a bargain or trade, a business transaction or advertising.

However, giving from a pure motive "is one of the noblest expressions we human beings have," Ashcraft said. "Giving is close to the meaning of life. We live by giving. A gift is a sacrament which blesses both the receiver and the giver."

Christian giving has several characteristics, he added. It is motivated by commitment to Christ, a response to human need, responsible, voluntary, cheerful, proportionate to the giver's commitment and imagination, systematic and regular, and generous.

Finally, Christian giving can deflate the power of greed, he said: "No force at work today is more destructive than greed. Crimes of all type emerge from it. No one is immune to the disease of greed. Christian giving may spare us ... the ravages of greed."

Seminar participants also confronted the witnessing-giving lifestyle in four sermons presented during the late-March meeting.

"Our perspective of the Christian life must be one of growth and maturity," said John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La. That growth should involve a "divine conversation," obedience to God and "illumination of discrimination," he noted.

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"There must be that divine conversation ... that rings as clear in our minds as anything in our lives," Sullivan said. Of obedience, he added: "The demand of obedience is to venture beyond the comfortable, to take the risk. There are certain risks you and I cannot afford not to take. People are depending on us."

Discrimination, or discernment, is needed because "every time God does something good, Satan tries to destroy it," he said. "Christians must discern between good and evil. ... If you do not discern between good and evil, it (evil) eventually will destroy you."

Christians should participate in "God's supernatural economy," urged C. Mark Corts, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.

"We must acknowledge we're here to demonstrate his presence. We're here to declare his moral character in a world that has very little moral substance and understanding," he said.

Christians also should "display his rule" and "distribute his blessings," Corts added. "God wants to demonstrate his grace and glory by using you as a channel for his blessings to the whole world."

Unfortunately, Christians are prone to ignore that grace and glory, especially when they focus on themselves, said Harold Branch, who retired March 27 as pastor of St. John's Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, Texas.

"It doesn't take much attainment for us to forget about God; just a little fulfillment, just a short stretch of security," Branch said. Nevertheless, "God wants to give evidence through us to convince the world that God is for real."

That divine desire creates a Christian mandate, said Robert Hamblin, vice president for evangelism of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"We need a lifestyle of witnessing," he said, noting such a lifestyle is bold, more concerned about Christ than individual burdens and conducted with proper behavior.

"How do you have this bold witness?" he asked. "You go allowed of God. You go in his authority and do exactly as he tells you to."

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New SBA President
Says Group Has 'Nots'

By Tim Nicholas

N-CO
(Miss.)

Baptist Press
3/28/88

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Alliance is not planning a split from the Southern Baptist Convention, is not fielding an SBC presidential candidate, and is not planning to begin a new seminary, according to the organization's new president.

The possibility of a split in the Southern Baptist Convention is "a minor issue with the Southern Baptist Alliance now," said John Thomason, the Mississippian elected in mid-March as president of the national organization for Baptist moderates.

Thomason, pastor of Northminster Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss., told the Baptist Record, newsjournal of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, in an interview: "We are far more concerned with being an advocate for disenfranchised groups and to get the word out about the Baptist heritage of freedom which we feel is being squandered."

The new president noted the Alliance does not plan to field a candidate at the next SBC meeting -- June 14-16 in San Antonio, Texas. "We are not supporting candidates, not drawing swords, we are simply trying to reaffirm the basic principles of our Baptist heritage," said Thomason.

He said, "The SBA will become more attractive and viable if a fundamentalist is elected (in San Antonio)." However, Thomason believes "the SBA will remain as a necessity regardless of who wins. My feeling about the peace report is that we were crying 'peace, peace' when there was no peace. If moderates win in San Antonio, we will be crying 'victory, victory' when there is no victory."

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Any victory "will take years because of the damage done. We need a clarion voice. (Our) message needs to be proclaimed regardless of who is elected."

As for a moderate seminary, said Thomason, "The initial press reports that the SBA was thinking of starting a seminary were greatly exaggerated. A seminary is a multi-million dollar enterprise. We have a budget of less than \$200,000."

Asked how he would describe the mood of the SBA meeting in Macon, Ga., Thomason said it was "one of gratitude and celebration. There is such a sense of relief and joy at being at a Baptist gathering where there are no axes to grind and no one to regard with suspicion. It feels like a family reunion of kindred spirits."

He added he felt an absence of elitism. "Yes, we are a remnant when you look at our numerical makeup -- a tiny group in a vast body of Baptists, but we do not sense a self-congratulatory pride that we have the only truth about the Baptist heritage.

"Our job is to raise the awareness of our fellow Baptists that that principle is being undermined. We are not some gnostsect; we feel we represent the mainstream of Baptists."

Thomason said he wanted the SBA "to get beyond the image of being a small narrow group in the Eastern Seaboard closely tied to the crisis at Southeastern (Baptist Theological) Seminary. What we want to do this next year is to reach out to the average traditional loyal conservative Baptist. We feel when they hear and understand the SBA message they will want to identify with it."

Thomason said he would want Southern Baptists to apply the old principles in new ways. "Women in ministry is a logical application of this principle."

That idea, said Thomason, "is simply one part of a larger message about freedom. God is free to call whomever he wants to call. It is not an issue of freedom of the individual or the local church -- it's the freedom of God."

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Gallup Encourages Discussion
And Exploration, Not Alarm

By Jim Lowry

N-SSB
Baptist Press
3/28/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist statistical stall in 1987 is not a cause for alarm, but should be fully discussed and explored, pollster George Gallup claimed.

In the last church year, which ended Sept. 30, 1987, some denominational programs reported small changes and had gains or totals smaller than have been seen in decades, according to statistics compiled by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's research services department.

For example, membership and baptisms, two long-time standards of progress for Southern Baptists, had the lowest totals for 52 and 38 years, respectively. Sunday school and church training, the two largest church programs, stood still for the year, with virtually no enrollment changes.

"Southern Baptist statistics appear to represent a leveling out rather than a reversal or sudden turnaround," Gallup said when asked to evaluate the denomination's most recent statistical results. "Compared to other mainline denominations in the United States, Southern Baptists have defied trends nationally for years.

"For instance, in a 1987 question about the importance of religion, 53 percent of the general populace said religion was 'very important' in their lives. This is compared to the Southern Baptist response of 74 percent to the same question," explained Gallup, who for years has tracked the religious habits and preferences of Americans.

The modest downward reports in the denomination's key program areas really represent a flattening out of what had been moving up for years, Gallup said, noting, "There is no clear evidence of a sharp decline, according to key barometers."

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Gallup said an almost constant 9 percent of Americans have continued to classify themselves as Southern Baptists in the past 10 years. Nationally, about 20 percent of the general populace identify themselves as Baptists, without distinction for different denominations.

Another constant for Southern Baptists that is ahead of the norm for the general populace in religion is the church membership rate of Southern Baptists, which was 80 percent in 1986, compared to 68 percent nationally.

Also of significance for the denomination is that 79 percent of people who identify themselves as Southern Baptists are classified as 'churched,' compared to a national percentage of 67 percent. Churched is defined by the Gallup organization as someone who is a church member or has attended a church within the last seven days.

Even though Southern Baptists are somewhat ahead of national percentages in religion, Gallup said, they still are faced with a nation of people "searching for moral certainties found in the Bible."

"Americans need instruction badly in Bible study, prayer techniques and how to share the gospel," Gallup continued. "The primary area neglected is in how to help people understand and build on their religious experiences.

"Many have had a spiritual experience but don't know what to make of it. Churches emphasize the day I found Christ, not the day after.

"People are trying to be Christian without the Bible. Christianity is not lived because it is not known, and it is not known because it is not taught. Christians have not grown in their level of commitment because their Christianity is not lived."

Actions can be taken, Gallup said, that will begin to answer the needs of people through homes, schools and churches.

"A good way to reach American people is through the churches, because churches touch 60 percent of the populace," Gallup explained. Another trend that Gallup identified as having an enormous potential to influence the shape of religion of the future is the development of small prayer and fellowship groups.

"This is a growing trend in the country," he said. "A lot of problems can be dealt with in small groups outside the church where individuals read the Bible, pray, share their faith and become empowered for service.

"There also is a trend now away from major denominations to smaller, independent churches, which may reflect some disenchantment with other churches. And some persons just switch denominations or go to other religious groups."

The slowed increases in Baptist progress "are not necessarily the beginning of a slide," he concluded. "Because, I think in many ways, the populace is ready for the evangelistic message."

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Reminders Of WMU Preserved For
100 Years, Thanks To Alabama Woman

By Susan Todd

F-10
(WMU)

Baptist Press
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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Lucille Parker had a secret and kept it from her Baptist Women's group for more than two months.

When questioned by the women in the group at First Baptist Church of Childersburg, Ala., all Parker would say was, "It won't ever happen again in any of our lives."

She knew the futuristic impact her secret would have if it came true.

On March 3, Parker's secret did come true, and her friends learned about it in the church's weekly newsletter. It read, "Congratulations to Mrs. Lucille Parker, who is one of ... the winners in The Birmingham (Ala.) News Centennial contest."

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The Birmingham News, 100 years old March 14, conducted a contest taking suggestions for items to be placed in a time capsule. The items were to have significance to the Birmingham area and its people in 1988.

When the contest was advertised in January, Parker and members of her Baptist Women group already were busily at work making a Woman's Missionary Union centennial quilt for their church.

Parker had chosen to construct the square featuring an appliqued gavel surrounded by the words "May 14, 1888, Richmond, Virginia." As she worked on her square, she was reminded that Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union and the local newspaper both are 100 years old in 1988.

The longer she thought about it, the stronger she felt that something WMU-related should be sealed in the newspaper's time capsule. After all, she said, the two organizations share a mutual anniversary year, and the WMU national headquarters is located in Birmingham.

Parker entered the contest submitting the cover page from Royal Service, the Baptist Women's magazine published by WMU, which gave directions for the square she was making. She also sent a page from the magazine detailing WMU's 100-year history.

Correspondence between Parker and The Birmingham News staff began.

Because the judges asked that entry ideas be kept a secret until final decisions were made, Parker could not share her idea.

But that changed March 5. She attended her Baptist Women's meeting in the morning, wanting to share her excitement, but abiding by the judges' request to keep it a secret. After the meeting, Parker went to her mailbox and found the letter from Victor Hansen II, The Birmingham News president and publisher. He informed her the judges had chosen her quilt square as one of 12 items which would be placed in the time capsule.

So Parker immediately began work on a duplicate square. Mildred Rogers and Joann Gober, both members of Baptist Women in the Childersburg church, helped her make the quilt square for the time capsule.

Parker was invited to join Hansen and the other winners March 22 for breakfast and for the ceremony to seal the capsule.

Participating in the ceremony, Parker had one more item to include in the capsule. As they prepared to seal the items for 100 years, she asked that a copy of the May 1988 commemorative issue of Royal Service be included. Her request was granted.

In 100 years, when the time capsule is opened, the first two items that will be uncovered are Parker's WMU centennial quilt square and a copy of May 1988 Royal Service.

Lynn Edge, coordinator for The Birmingham News reader participation centennial activities, said Parker's suggestion became important to the judges because it represented a "religious aspect of the city of Birmingham" and because of its significance as another 100-year-old organization.

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham Ala.