



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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April 22, 1988

88-66

WMU national leaders issue
Urgent appeal for prayer

By Karen Benson

N-CO
(WMU)

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The national leaders of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union have issued an urgent appeal to the 1.2 million WMU members to pray all day April 27 for the home and foreign missions offerings.

Their appeal is the direct result of recent reports showing funds collected to date for the 1987 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions and for the 1988 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions are falling far short of the goals.

The goal for the 1987 Christmas offering is \$75 million. With less than two months to go, only \$64.8 million has been received.

The 1988 Easter offering goal is \$37.5 million. Although the 1988 campaign is only a few weeks old, early reports indicate \$2.5 million, or 6.89 percent, of the goal has been given.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal initially had been set at \$81 million, but the WMU executive board (which sets the goal) voted in April 1986 to lower the goal when it became apparent that Southern Baptists would not meet the 1986 goal of \$75 million.

Contributions to the 1986 Christmas offering totaled \$69,412,195.09. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal has not been met or surpassed since 1981.

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Concern over the decline is heightened this year, WMU's centennial year. WMU promotes both offerings in the local churches.

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Letters also were sent to associational WMU centennial chairmen, state WMU centennial chairmen and members of the national centennial committee. Telegrams were sent to state WMU presidents and executive directors.

"I am distressed over the report I received from the mission boards last week," Weatherford wrote. "Therefore, I am sending an urgent appeal to key WMU leaders, asking for your help and calling WMU to prayer and an extra effort at sacrificial giving.

The Lottie Moon offering, is in desperate need of a boost, Weatherford wrote, adding: "With less than two months left before books close on the 1987 offering (May 31), there is a possibility that we will not only fail to reach the goal of \$75 million, but that we will give less than we gave in 1986. It has been more than 50 years since that happened."

Since the letters were mailed, the Foreign Mission Board has issued an updated report on contributions. As of April 18, more than \$64.8 million has been received -- \$2.5 million behind receipts this date last year, \$4.5 million below the total 1986 receipts, and \$10 million below the 1987 goal.

It is too early to make realistic projections about the 1988 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, Weatherford said, pointing out the home missions offering is only a few weeks old, while the foreign mission offering is more than 10 months old.

The Home Mission Board also has issued updated reports, but they show wide fluctuations in the early weeks of the offering campaign. For instance, as of April 8, contributions were running almost 34 percent behind contributions last year, but by April 15, receipts were almost 14 percent ahead of last year.

Home Mission Board and WMU officials caution, however, that the early stages of the campaign and the wide variations in weekly reports make it difficult to second guess the outcome. Their concern over this year's offering comes from the track record of the offering during the past six years, coupled with the lack of a strong showing in the early weeks of this year's campaign.

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The drop in contributions will directly affect missions work domestically and abroad, Weatherford and McCullough noted.

"We would be heartsick if the offerings decrease during our centennial celebration," they added.

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'KGB atmosphere' hampers
Communicators, Harwell says

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
4/22/88

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--"A KGB atmosphere created by the SBC holy war" hampers the work of Baptist communicators today, a former Baptist state newspaper editor contends.

Jack U. Harwell, retired editor of the Christian Index in Atlanta, sounded a pessimistic warning in a panel discussion during the annual meeting of the Baptist Public Relations Association in Louisville, Ky.

Joining Harwell on the panel were Albert McClellan, retired associate executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee in Nashville, and Stan Hastey, director of information services for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington.

McClellan noted the growth of Baptist communications, observing in 1940 there was only one professionally trained Baptist state paper editor out of 18 and no trained public relations professionals.

McClellan observed state editors during the 1940s and 1950s generally were essayists. "We were preachers with paper pulpits," he said.

From that humble beginning the number of Baptist communicators and the quality of communications have grown at an enormous pace, McClellan and Harwell agreed.

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Harwell aired a critical view, however, regarding Baptist state newspapers. "At the state paper level we are more ministerial than we were 10 years ago before the controversy."

The soon-to-be editor of SBC Today, an autonomous, independent newsjournal, noted 10 years ago there were a large number of professionally-trained journalists as editors. When the controversy began more pastors became editors, he said.

"The papers today are much more ministerial journals reflecting the natural caution of a preacher than they are newspaper journals reflecting the natural courage of a journalist," Harwell said.

Harwell observed Baptist communications efforts over the last 10 years have become "reactionary rather than proactive."

This especially has been true in the "so-called moderate camp of our convention," he said. "The moderates are never willing to be monolithic, therefore they are constantly reacting to the latest charge or accusation."

Harwell also noted Baptist communications during the last 10 years has developed a "cookie cutter syndrome." Everyone has gotten to be alike in what we do, he observed, blaming it on the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention.

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It also will challenge Baptist communicators to strive harder to keep communications channels open and will force some to negotiate that principle with administrators who would like to do just the opposite, he added.

Both Harwell and Hastey cited attempts to gain control of the media, particularly Baptist Press. "There has been a planned systematic crusade by Southern Baptist extremists to capture and control our communications network," Harwell said.

Hastey concurred: "What the critics of Baptist Press want is not balance. They want a press that parrots the prevailing party line."

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Vose said Lotz will be nominated as general secretary-treasurer for the remainder of the 1985-90 quinquennium when the General Council meets July 10-16 in Nassau, the Bahamas.

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Lotz is a native of Flushing, N.Y. He is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Harvard Divinity School. He earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Hamburg in West Germany.

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To join nation in prayer

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Reagan has been joined by Southern Baptist Convention President Adrian P. Rogers, who asked his fellow Southern Baptists to join in the prayer effort. "I am vitally interested and deeply enthusiastic about the National Day of Prayer," he said. "I encourage Southern Baptists everywhere to participate.

"It has well been said, 'We can do more than pray after we have prayed, but we can do nothing worthwhile until we have prayed.'"

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Southern Baptist members of the committee's board of reference are W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas and SBC president 1968-70; James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas, and SBC president 1982-84; Lewis A. Drummond, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.; Ron Dunn, president of Lifestyle Ministries in Irving, Texas; Billy Graham, international evangelist, Montreat, N.C.

Also C.B. Hogue, executive director-treasurer of the Southern Baptist General Convention of California, Fresno; M.G. (Pat) Robertson, founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network, Virginia Beach, Va.; Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., SBC president since 1986 and also 1979-80; Charles F. Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, and SBC president 1984-86; and Jack R. Taylor, president of Dimensions in Christian Living, Fort Worth, Texas.

The practice of observing a National Day of Prayer began in 1776, President Reagan has noted, citing its intermittent observation through the years. The practice was resumed in 1952, when Congress adopted a resolution calling on the president to set aside a day each year for national prayer, he said.

"Members of Congress who spoke for the resolution made clear that they felt the nation continued to face the very same challenges that preoccupied our founders: the survival of freedom in a world frequently hostile to human ideals and the struggle for faith in an age that openly doubted or vehemently denied the existence of the Almighty," he said.

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A bill that would set aside the first Thursday in May of each year as the National Day of Prayer currently is pending in Congress.

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Jimmy Carter calls Christians
To sacrifice for world peace

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Religions and religious leaders have failed to bring about peace through the political process in recent years, Carter said. He cited himself, Southern Baptist leaders and Pope John Paul II as religious leaders who have failed to bring about peace.

Carter chided fellow Southern Baptists for engaging in self-destructive warfare rather than working for social justice. About 300 people of various faiths attended the conference sponsored by Emory University at the Carter Presidential Center.

Carter warned he sees two differing philosophies developing among American Christians about peace and human rights.

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Such nationalism leads Christians to believe they are "absolutely secure, blessed by God because he recognizes our superiority," while those less fortunate are cursed by God, he said.

This attitude "helps us to justify our inactivity or our deliberate lack of consciousness about their plight by saying, 'This is what God wants,'" Carter said.

On the other hand are people who emphasize Jesus' ministry to the poor, deprived and forgotten, he added, identifying himself with this group.

"Many people who are devout Christians believe a major thrust of the ministry of Christ was to restore the outcast," he said. "Jesus worked with lepers and prostitutes. To me, this is a major part of the Christian faith. But it's not a comfortable part."

People in the first group consider those concerned with social ministries to be "not very good Christians" or "secular humanists," he said.

Carter recalled a visit he received in the Oval Office from "the newly elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention." He did not identify the SBC president.

"I shook hands with him and his wife, and he immediately said, 'Why are you a secular humanist?'" Carter said. "I didn't know what he meant."

"There have got to be some understandings of these differences that divide one group within a particular narrowly focused religious belief from another," he added. Such divisions "sap away a tremendous portion of our mobility and our time and our ability and our money and our influence."

When this happens, Christians divert attention away from the "propagation of what our religious beliefs should be" and toward internal warfare, Carter said.

"Our religious faith through the political world has resulted not in peace, but in war," he said. "We have a responsibility to see what's wrong and to use our influence individually and through prayer and supplication to bring about some resolution."

Politicians have done more for peace and human rights than religious leaders, he charged: "The last bastion of racial segregation is in our churches. It should be just the opposite."

Politicians are forced to deal with peace issues because "in the political arena there is a constant competition to evolve a better way to feed the hungry, house the homeless and alleviate human suffering," Carter said.

"That competition doesn't exist in most of our churches. There's too much a sense of self-congratulation and seeking out people who are just like us to the exclusion of those who differ with us."

Carter said he discovered he could individually influence the world for Christ as a politician in a secular government. "No matter what we do as a chosen profession, I think we can embed our deep religious beliefs in our daily actions," he added.

World peace remains elusive because human nature is selfish, Carter said, noting even people with the best intentions often postpone their good deeds until they have more money, more time or more influence.

"Theoretically we speak about altruism, humanitarianism and love. But actually putting it into practice is inconvenient," he said. "Most of us who are exalted in our lives as Christians are very proud. We consider ourselves to be above the hurly-burly and sometimes sordid atmosphere of humanity."

Christians "do very little" to promote peace, Carter said: "We talk about it, but I think it's good for all of us to ask, 'What have I done to promote peace? What have I done to promote an end to suffering?' The answer is, 'Almost nothing.'"

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