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May 13, 1988

88-81

CP struggles
To keep pace

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' conventionwide budget struggled in April, its year-to-date total slightly ahead of last year's pace but below the rate of inflation.

April contributions to the Cooperative Program brought its seven-month total to \$78,043,346, said Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

The Cooperative Program is the convention's budget that finances missionary, evangelistic and educational ministries around the world. It is supported by individual Southern Baptists who make contributions to their churches; funds are channeled through the churches and 37 state Baptist conventions and on to SBC agencies and institutions.

April contributions to the national budget were \$9,980,441, Bennett announced. That amount is 4.54 percent below the total for April 1987. The \$78 million year-to-date total is 2.59 percent ahead of the seven-month total for the 1986-87 Cooperative Program.

"I'm disappointed in the month's record," Bennett said. "But I am gratified by the year-to-date total, although that amount is not up to the Consumer Price Index."

A bright spot for the Cooperative Program was the May 10-11 "Celebration of Cooperation" conference conducted by Texas Baptists, he noted. The meeting involved pastors, denominational workers and Texas Baptist agency executives in an intense look at the Cooperative Program and Baptists' cooperative way of conducting missions.

"They are kicking off a year's celebration," Bennett said of Texas Baptists. "I hope Southern Baptists across the nation will do a similar type of emphasis on the Cooperative Program -- exploring what it is, what it does, how it works, the needs it meets."

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'Bumped' trustee
Won't fight status

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
5/13/88

NATIONAL CITY, Calif. (BP)--The only person to be "bumped" this year from renomination to a second term as a Southern Baptist Convention trustee said he is shocked and saddened but will not contest the action.

The SBC Committee on Nominations chose not to propose C. Frank Jordan, pastor of Highland Avenue Baptist Church in National City, Calif., for a second full term on the board of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Jordan, a 1961 Southeastern alumnus, has been an outspoken critic of trustee Chairman Robert D. Crowley, his friend of 50 years. He also has criticized trustee actions last fall that led to the resignation of President W. Randall Lolley.

The SBC nominating committee selected about 240 Southern Baptists to fill trustee vacancies for 22 of the convention's boards, commissions, seminaries and committees. Of those, 109 were current trustees who are eligible for renomination. Messengers to the SBC annual meeting will vote on the nominations when they convene in San Antonio, Texas, June 14-16.

Jordan initially contacted Baptist Press contesting the SBC news service's report on the nominating committee. He had not heard he was not being renominated until the news story was released.

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"I don't know what's happened, and I haven't seen the news release on my 'bump' yet," he said. "I talked with the seminary, ... and they read me some of it. There are some things in there that are wrong, or I'm in the dark on some things."

Specifically, Jordan contested an explanation by nominating committee Chairman Joseph T. Knott III of Raleigh, N.C., who said the decision not to renominate Jordan was "done by state representatives."

"I don't believe I was dropped because of actions on the local or state level," Jordan said. "I was renominated out here. I got a call (in February) from the person who was on the committee. ... The fellow said they were going to turn my name in to the full committee."

"I'm just about 100 percent sure this thing happened back there with Crowley and the people he's in with."

William Hann, one of two Californians on the nominating committee, told Baptist Press he and his colleague, Robert K. Jackson of Placentia, did not renominate Jordan because of his public dispute with Crowley, pastor of Montrose Baptist Church in Rockville, Md., who was elected Southeastern Seminary trustee chairman last fall.

"The reason we didn't renominate him was because of the remark he made," said Hann, pastor of Mid-Cities Baptist Church in Westminster, Calif. "He called the chairman a liar, and we felt we needed cooler heads on the board."

Jordan countered: "When I went on the board six years ago, there was no prerequisite that we had to agree with the chairman or anybody else. We had a closed session in our fall meeting where people spoke bluntly. That was part of it."

Jordan also asked: "I wonder where Bill Hann got this information (about Jordan calling Crowley a liar). Nobody out here knew about that. It came from somebody out East."

Hann told Baptist Press the decision was made with the best interest of Southeastern Seminary in mind: "We really were a part of no coalition. We sat down and talked about it. We said, 'Let's try and help that board.' The man we named is Ed Bailey, a layman from Yorba Linda, who is trained in arbitration. We felt like he would be able to help that board and bring some reconciliation there. He's not going to be a part of any group, but he can arbitrate from both sides."

Both Jordan and Crowley told Baptist Press they have been friends for 50 years. They grew up on the same block in Washington, D.C., three blocks from the nation's capitol. Both attended Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church.

At the fall Southeastern trustee meeting, Crowley led the new conservative trustees to change some seminary policies. Primarily, they removed all of the faculty's power in the faculty-selection process and set guidelines to ensure that only biblical inerrantists will fill future faculty vacancies.

Subsequently, Lolley resigned the presidency, and trustees this spring elected Lewis A. Drummond, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., to succeed him.

The Jordan/Crowley dispute surfaced a year ago this spring, when the two disagreed over the "secret" nature of a meeting of trustees. This fall, the East Coast press quoted Jordan as calling Crowley a liar for denying that conservative trustees had picked Lolley's successor, even before he resigned.

Dispute continued during and after the March trustee meeting this year. At the meeting, Jordan issued a two-part "statement of protest" concerning the trustees' instruction committee, which leads the faculty-selection process. Later, he wrote a critical letter to Crowley about a confrontation Crowley had with professor Delos Miles following the meeting.

"The chairman and I just don't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things," Jordan told Baptist Press. "I believe he felt if he couldn't beat me, he'd get rid of me."

Crowley told Baptist Press he was not involved in the decision not to renominate Jordan: "I had no knowledge that he was not going to be renominated. I had absolutely nothing to do with this action.

"Frank and I grew up on the same block when we were kids. We went to the same church. I certainly would not do such a thing to an old friend like this.

"I want to continue our friendship. I have no animosity toward him. We are on opposite sides of this issue, but I have nothing but good feelings for Frank."

"I have no hard feelings," responded Jordan. "Bob and I have been going through things like this for 50 years. We fuss and then sit down and eat a meal together. If people had left us alone, we would have gotten back together."

Jordan added he grew sad and got physically sick when he learned of the bump. "There's no recourse," he said. "They (nominating committee members) hear these things. I guess they don't have time to call a fellow up and say, 'What's your story?' They took what the press or someone on the other side said and did not even talk to me."

His bump was not based on theology, Jordan insisted: "We have a man nominated for a second term who is a rank modernist ... and they know that. I'm as much an inerrantist as any of them, although I don't like the term. I'm just a scapegoat."

He is disappointed he will not be able to serve his alma mater directly, Jordan said. He also fears the decision not to renominate him will brand him for further service to California Southern Baptists, he added.

But he has no animosity, he concluded: "I'm not going to cause a stink (at the SBC annual meeting). Some of my friends may; I have not asked anybody to. I'm not sure I'm going to San Antonio."

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Texas Baptists stress unity
At celebration of cooperation

Baptist Press
5/13/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Cooperation, unity and fellowship are signs to a divided and hate-filled world of the reign of God that has come about through Jesus Christ, speakers said at the first Celebration of Cooperation Conference May 9-11 in Fort Worth, Texas.

The conference, held in conjunction with a year of special emphasis on cooperative missions and the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program missions-support budget, drew about 600 pastors, laypeople and leaders of Texas Baptist institutions and agencies.

Baptists stand at a crossroads where they must affirm and renew their cooperation or lose their great missions heritage, said Daniel Vestal of Midland, Texas.

Calling mutual trust "foundational to our pattern of cooperation," he called on "those involved in organized political processes ... to stop and let Baptist people vote their consciences."

Vestal, pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, which led Texas Baptists with almost \$1 million given for missions through the Cooperative Program last year, urged Baptists not to take for granted their system of missions support.

"The largest missions force in the history of Christianity is not accidental," he said. "Our patterns of cooperation were not arrived at, quickly. They were forged out of crises and problems."

But the patterns of cooperation that characterize Southern Baptist life are in danger of being perverted and distorted from a spiritual process to a political process, he said.

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The political process "destroys trust and respect which are the bases of our pattern of cooperation and violates the Baptist way of decision making," said Vestal. "It pits one Baptist group against another Baptist group and creates winners and losers ... ins and outs. "I do not believe our pattern of cooperation can stand much more polarization. (But) I am not ready to give up on our patterns of cooperation."

Other threats to cooperative missions, said Vestal, are apathy and indifference and the vast numbers of Baptist laypeople who are the denomination's greatest resource but are uninvolved in cooperative missions.

"It is my personal experience that when Baptists begin to pray and go, they give," he added.

Robert B. Sloan, associate professor of religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said fellowship and cooperation are signs of obedience to the gospel.

"Christian cooperation and fellowship are a means whereby the trust of the gospel is vindicated," he said.

Texas Baptist convention President Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, called on Texas Baptists to move from celebration to action in their cooperative missions enterprises.

Gregory encouraged Baptists to look to the example of geese, who fly in a "V" because that configuration increases their flight capabilities by 71 percent over what they would be if each bird flew alone. Baptists need "the life that comes from flying together," he said.

Texas Baptist Executive Director William M. Pinson, Jr., said the Celebration of Cooperation Conference was a celebration of how Texas and Southern Baptists labor together with God.

The meeting was designed to "investigate how the Cooperative Program works and how it can be improved; how we can better tell the story of the Cooperative Program; how we can increase the resources through the Cooperative Program to evangelize and educate, to congregationalize and minister.

"We have come to dedicate ourselves anew to one of the ties that binds us together. What we do here can touch the world for God and good," he said.

James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, reminded participants, "In a day when headlines deal with immorality of ministers, there is a need to be very conscious of our stewardship."

Giving is not the end or essence of stewardship, said Draper, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention. "Even though my money reaches the four corners of the world through the Cooperative Program, my giving does not divest me of responsibility," he said. "We also have a stewardship of the gospel. There is emphasis upon our responsibilities as custodians and proclaimers of the gospel."

Baptist Standard Editor Presnall Wood cited contemporary challenges to the Cooperative Program. Threats from without, he said, include the unstable economy, materialism, appeals for financial aid and the local church losing its true purpose.

Challenges within the Southern Baptist Convention which threaten the Cooperative Program include lack of education concerning missions support, negative designation of church gifts, proliferation of financial appeals, hurtful comparisons, erosion of trust and a dangerous assumption, said Wood.

"Too many people make a dangerous assumption that the Cooperative Program will always be here," he warned.

D.L. Lowrie, director of the Texas Baptist state missions commission, said Baptists need to affirm their diversity. "Churches are different, but that ought not be a barrier to cooperation," he said. "Don't judge one another, but in our diversity, let's grab hands and join in the task."

Lowrie warned against the hindrances of spiritual immaturity and carnality and urged participants to understand and acknowledge their limitations.

In a world where 3 billion people do not know Christ, said Lowrie: "Your church and my church need to stand together before God tonight and acknowledge together our limitations. Churches need to learn to measure themselves, not against the size of other churches, but against the size of the field."

John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., said Baptists are at the crossroad. "Either we're going to get the gospel to the ends of the earth, or we're just going to have the title and not the testimony," he said.

Sullivan said he cannot count the Cooperative Program dollars that went into educating and equipping him for the ministry at a Baptist school and seminary.

He warned that Baptists "have forgotten what God has given us, what happened back there in 1925" (when the Cooperative Program began).

Landrum Leavell, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, said today's situation parallels the time when the Cooperative Program was born, with a depressed economy and a denomination under attack: "Today, there are a lot of folks involved in empire building, but not a lot in kingdom building. When we become more concerned about any agenda but winning people to Jesus, it's lights out for that denomination."

Increasing numbers of churches are keeping larger percentages of money at home, he noted.

"It took nearly 100 years for us to see the wisdom of doing things together," Leavell said. "There's not a church in our denomination that can do things alone, but together we can do it."

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Feeding stations reopen
In Ethiopia after 2 months

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
5/13/88

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia--Three Southern Baptist feeding operations in the Ethiopian central highlands, closed in March by the government, reopened in early May. In an adjacent district, feeding at another outpost is in jeopardy because of newly imposed restrictions on airlifts.

Through the reopened stations, mission personnel and national workers are offering monthly rations of food to 65,000 Ethiopians. Ed Mason, a volunteer mission worker from Tallahassee, Fla., who acts as a liaison between Southern Baptist mission personnel and Ethiopian officials, said he expects others to reopen during the next week.

If so, that would bring to more than 100,000 the number of Ethiopians Southern Baptists are feeding every month. Ethiopian officials have asked Southern Baptists to feed about twice that many, as the severest stage of a new famine takes hold this summer.

Upcountry Ethiopians are facing starvation again because their crops were parched by a drought that started a year ago, just as they began to recover from the famine of 1984-85. The only way for relief food to reach them is by transport truck to two major warehouses, then by air from the warehouses to five remote outposts that also offer medical services. Two new, less-remote feeding stations with no facilities for medical services are supplied by road from one of the warehouses.

Two months ago, Ethiopian officials asked Southern Baptists to stop most of their feeding in the Merhabete District, so they could verify names of people receiving aid, said Mason, who has guided Southern Baptist famine relief efforts in Ethiopia from the start.

While feeding was stopped, Southern Baptists in the Merhabete stations stockpiled food rations and supplies. They also continued offering medical services with a doctor and three nurses, all Southern Baptist volunteers. One nurse is Mary Saunders of Richmond, Va., a former missionary who was an early volunteer in the relief effort and has returned three times.

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The Polish biplanes that have supplied food rations to the four remote centers in Merhabete are less satisfactory flying in the higher altitudes of an adjacent region, the Menz-Gishe District where Southern Baptists' Rabel center is located. A feeding operation there gives monthly rations to about 30,000 people.

Smaller and lighter aircraft have supplied Rabel, but since April 8 government flight inspectors have refused to approve flight plans for those aircraft. The Ethiopian team working there under Southern Baptist supervision has only a half-month's supply of rations left.

Polish officials have told Mason they will supply aircraft or crew members necessary to continue Southern Baptist feeding operations in Ethiopia. Since Ethiopian officials are allowing the Polish planes to fly, Polish pilots have been test flying into the Menz-Gishe area to see if they might be able to supply the Rabel center, in addition to the centers in Merhabete.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: More information has come to light relative to the 5/10/88 Baptist Press story titled "Both sides at fault, Bisagno says of SBC."

When the story was being written, Bisagno declined to answer a BP question regarding the possibility of his presidential candidacy. However, when BP learned he had answered a similar question in an impromptu interview in the "First Love" program on the ACTS network, Bisagno was contacted again for comment, he agreed, and the following material may be inserted as graph 5 (following the graph that begins: Bisagno chided both ...), at the end of the story or as a boxed sidebar:

Bisagno has been a part of efforts to bring together SBC presidential candidates and other leaders in convention politics, seeking a possible consensus candidate and other means of reconciliation. In addition, his name has been one listed among SBC observers who have speculated upon the possibility of such a consensus choice.

Bisagno declined to make direct comments on either the possibility of his candidacy or meetings of SBC leaders.

Of the possibility of his candidacy, he said: "My great desire is that one person alone be nominated and elected who meets the qualifications that I outlined in my statement. I would be delighted to nominate such a person, and the very last thing in the world I want to do or have the time to do is be president of anything but First Baptist Church, Houston. But I do feel that after 10 years of division, in a scenario in which one person might be nominated and elected as a major step toward unity, that no Southern Baptist man, woman, boy or girl could fail to respond to such a call."

Of the possible of "peace meetings," he added: "Any attempt to unify this denomination around the integrity of Scripture is a noble effort and should be pursued. Unfortunately, it appears that the preponderance of meetings that have continued since St. Louis (in 1987) have been meetings which would only perpetuate the way we've been going. The meetings that attempt to unify are a refreshing and welcomed effort."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Process underway for
Hymn recommendation

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
5/13/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The 200 hymns most frequently sung in Southern Baptist churches will be recommended for inclusion in the new Baptist hymnal to be published in 1991.

The first meeting of the hymnal's hymns recommendation subcommittee in early May began with a study of responses to a random-sample survey in which music Southern Baptist directors ranked hymns from the "Baptist Hymnal," 1975 edition, by frequency of use in their churches.

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Music directors from a scientifically valid sampling of 348 Southern Baptist churches responded to the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's research services department, representing congregations ranging in size from fewer than 99 members to more than 2,000 members. Fifty-four percent of the respondents represented churches of fewer than 300 members.

Subcommittee members reviewed the top 200 hymns from "Amazing Grace" No. 1 in frequency of use through "The Star-Spangled Banner," No. 200. They voted hymn-by-hymn to recommend them for inclusion in the new hymnal.

The nine most frequently sung hymns after "Amazing Grace" are "To God Be the Glory," "Victory in Jesus," "Just As I Am," "Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine," "Standing on the Promises," "Living for Jesus," "There Is Power in the Blood," "At the Cross" and "At Calvary."

In contrast, some of the least-sung hymns of the 512 in the current hymn book, according to the survey, are "Fill Thou My Life, O Lord My God," "So Let Our Lips and Lives Express," "Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs," "We Bless the Name of Christ, the Lord" and "Day of Judgment! Day of Wonders!"

Recommendations from review of the 1975 edition, as well as approval of new materials, will be final only by a vote of the 78-member hymnal committee when it meets in plenary sessions Sept. 22-23, 1988, and in April 1989.

In a time-consuming process, subcommittee members also considered individually the least frequently sung hymns from the 1975 edition, recommending that more than 100 not be included in the new book because of archaic texts and musical styles and that an additional group of more than 100 be considered for retention unless more attractive and meaningful hymns are secured through new materials.

Wesley Forbis, editor-in-chief of the new hymnal, said he believes "decisions based on the expressed desires of Southern Baptists and frequency of use shows the subcommittee's commitment to meet needs, regardless of personal musical preferences or friendships."

Larry Black, minister of music at First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss., said there "was a period when the choir became the focal point" but that "Baptists are returning to an emphasis on the congregation. I see that being reflected in the decisions here. I think that's exciting."

Michael Hawn, professor of church music at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N. C., expressed "confidence that this process will produce a hymnal not only of theological and musical integrity, but also with a fresh spirit of warmth."

Subcommittee members also reviewed hymns from the "Baptist Hymnal," 1956 edition, that were not included in the 1975 edition, recommending that more than two dozen of those be considered for inclusion. Among them are "Give of Your Best to the Master," "Now the Day Is Over" and "When I Can Read My Title Clear."

Hymns from the 1940 "Broadman Hymnal," which were not included in the "Baptist Hymnal," 1956 edition, will be reviewed individually along with other material prior to a planned Aug. 4 teleconference to complete recommendations before the September hymnal committee meeting.

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

Witnesses advise caution
In changing non-profit tax

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
5/13/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--Congress should move cautiously in drafting legislation that would toughen taxation of some activities of organizations generally exempt from federal taxes, witnesses told congressmen.

Both the U.S. Treasury Department and a national coalition that encourages the work of tax-exempt organizations gave that advice to the House Oversight Subcommittee during a day-long hearing.

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Testimony from a long list of witnesses focused on a series of "discussion options" developed by the House panel for altering what is known as unrelated business income tax. Under current law, the levy is placed on any trade or business that is carried on regularly by a tax-exempt organization and is not substantially related to the organization's tax-exempt purposes.

The Oversight Subcommittee, which has examined the issue for almost a year, is expected to propose legislation revising the unrelated business income tax.

"It would be premature to make far-reaching changes to the law at this time," testified O. Donaldson Chapoton, Treasury assistant secretary for tax policy.

Once the various proposals under discussion are incorporated into a legislative package, "it will be important to assess the overall administrative impact of such legislation on tax-exempt organizations in order to determine whether the benefits of the legislation justify the imposition of such burdens," he said.

While endorsing a number of the discussion options, Chapoton rejected two major changes proposed by the subcommittee.

The first proposal would replace the current "substantially related" test -- used in determining whether income from business activity by a non-profit organization should be tax exempt -- with a "directly related" standard.

"Such a change would generate considerable uncertainty and confusion without necessarily changing the substance, or the administrability, of the standard in any way," Chapoton said.

The second option would require a determination of whether each income-producing activity standing alone is tax exempt. Chapoton said that option, which would "represent a significant change in the substance of current law," likely would tax such activities as the operation of dormitories, dining halls and hospital pharmacies.

Brian O'Connell, president of Independent Sector, agreed with Chapoton's assessment of the two proposals. O'Connell's organization is a non-profit coalition of 650 corporate, foundation and voluntary organization members with national interest in philanthropy and voluntary action.

Except for possibly communicating a "vague sense that any change would imply a tightening," the substitution of "directly related" as a new standard would do nothing except confuse the issue, O'Connell said. He also rejected the option of requiring each income-producing activity to stand alone as tax exempt since, he said, many charitable activities are such only because of the context in which they occur.

O'Connell also voiced concern over options that could affect organizations' program and fund-raising activities: "The proposals would go far beyond activities normally thought of as involving the business activities of non-profits. They would -- at least as suggested by the brief descriptions now available (from the subcommittee) -- result in tax on many activities that are part of the organizations' services and programs or are part of their efforts to raise charitable contributions."

O'Connell cited examples of activities that likely would be taxed if the subcommittee's proposals should become law. Those examples included:

-- Virtually any activity involving the collection of transportation costs from participants, such as a church-sponsored bus trip for young people to a lake.

-- Food sales to the public in conjunction with a program activity, such as refreshments at a school sports event.

-- Fund-raising events, unless goods or services sold were donated or all services provided free.

The drafters of the options probably did not intend such broad-ranging impact on areas so central to charitable operations and fund raising, O'Connell said. "Nonetheless," he added, "to avoid such unintended sweeping effects, proposals aimed at particular abuses should be drafted in a narrow, targeted fashion and with a sensitivity to legitimate fund-raising and program practices."

First program in new series
Scheduled on ABC-TV

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Chicago Bears running back Walter Payton is host of a special program on the problems of America's teens to be broadcast on the ABC television network June 5.

The program, "Someone is Listening: Teens From Crisis to Caring," is the first in a series of four specials being produced for ABC by member groups of Interfaith Broadcasting Corp., of which the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission is a member. Payton, a star with the Chicago Bears for 13 years, is active in causes in behalf of children and teenagers during the off season.

"Someone Is Listening" examines the concerns and confusion of today's teens, and describes steps that church and community organizations are taking to give hope and direction to them. The program explores three critical areas of teenage concerns -- suicide, sexuality and social abuse, including drugs, alcohol and gangs.

The program, to be scheduled on ABC-TV at 1 p.m. EDST, June 5, is the first in a series based on the theme, "Promise of the Future." Viewers should check local listings for date and time in each community. The show was produced by the communication commission of the National Council of Churches. The Radio-TV Commission is producing another program in the series to be carried early in 1989.

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Illegal aliens find amnesty
With God and with Uncle Sam

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
5/13/88

GALLUP, N.M. (BP)--At least five former illegal aliens in Gallup, N.M., have found peace with God in the past year through their efforts to find amnesty with the U.S. government.

Southern Baptist Home missionary Luis Gomez, pastor of El Buen Pastor Baptist Church, led the five to faith in Christ as a result of his volunteer work with the recent program of U.S. amnesty for illegals. At least a dozen others now are attending Baptist church services for the first time.

When the amnesty period closed at midnight May 4, Gomez had processed 300 applications. Most of those applicants now are enrolled in English courses at the church and have heard the gospel, Gomez said. He is certain more of them will accept Christ, in time.

Congress passed the Immigration Control and Reform Act in 1986, granting legal resident status to all aliens who could prove they had lived in the United States continuously since 1982.

Gomez had prayed for the amnesty law for three years before it was passed by Congress, he said. He saw it as a way to meet human needs and share the gospel.

Five conversions out of 300 prospects is a bountiful harvest for Baptists in western New Mexico, Gomez said. Most illegals in Gallup are Catholics by birth and are not open to an evangelical witness.

Before the amnesty period began, about 40 percent of Gomez's church members were illegals. "I saw an opportunity not only to help our church people but everybody else in the community," he said. "It was a great happening to us."

The local Catholic church also processed amnesty applications but charged the Hispanic laborers for part of the work, Gomez said. At El Buen Pastor, Gomez almost single-handedly took down each applicant's information, translated documents from Spanish to English, typed the forms and submitted them -- all at no charge.

"If I had charged what a lawyer would charge, I would have made \$240,000," he said. Many of the aliens already had to borrow the \$195 application fee and could not have received permanent residency if required to pay legal fees.

Gomez worked 12-hour days throughout the one-year amnesty period, processing applications while carrying on his normal church duties. Just before the program began, he held an informational meeting at the church. From there, news of his work spread by word of mouth.

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Gomez felt an urgency about the amnesty offer because he is a naturalized U.S. citizen himself. "To get amnesty is to open a totally new life for them -- a life of freedom from anxiety, freedom from uncertainty, freedom from hiding," he said. "This is a new world for them."

He uses that hope to illustrate for aliens the change Christ can make in life: "As Jesus comes to give you life, you can come to him and identify yourself as a new person. You can come out in the open and face people."

One of those who accepted Christ as a result of the program is a 60-year-old man Gomez described as a religious skeptic. "He was sick and old. He didn't have any hope," Gomez said.

Because the man had been unable to work, he anticipated difficulty in documenting his required residency in the United States. But Gomez was able to help him gather ample documentation to receive his temporary resident card. "He was so grateful to God," Gomez said. "He's a very happy man now."

Another woman Gomez helped lives next door to the church but had been one of the church's strongest adversaries. When the Catholic church refused to help her, the woman humbly came to Gomez for help.

Although the woman has not made a profession of faith in Christ yet, she is attending the English classes at the church. "For her to come inside this building was already a great gain," Gomez said.

The entire amnesty program and its results in Gallup are "a beautiful thing," he said. "I don't cease to praise God for this."

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