



- - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75C
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

July 29, 1988

88-121

Effects of drought trickle down
to farmers, Baptists and churches

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (BP)--America's summertime drought is rippling across fields of withering corn and stunted hay, putting the heat on as many as two-thirds of Southern Baptists' 37,000 churches.

Gary Farley, associate director of rural-urban missions for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, estimated Southern Baptists have that many churches in rural areas of less than 10,000 population. Because the economy in most of these communities is dependent on agriculture, they will take the brunt of the drought's impact, he said.

Southern Baptist leaders in the Midwest and South say they cannot yet assess the emotional and financial impact the lack of rain will have on Baptist farmers and rural churches. For now, they are praying fervently for rain and pouring out tears of compassion for farmers who have lost an entire year's work.

In some areas, such as Arkansas, Oklahoma and Georgia, rain has finally begun to fall, easing the burden of farmers whose crops are not already lost. But across the corn belt and northern plains, no relief is in sight.

The United States Agriculture Department estimated the drought could cost the nation \$5 billion to \$10 billion in crop loss this year. The department already has approved emergency programs for 2,100 counties in 44 states.

Baptists in metropolitan areas may feel the effects only in the supermarket, as fruit and meat prices rise this fall. Many ranchers are being forced to sell their herds early because they cannot water or feed them. This will create a surplus of meat at first but will mean a severe shortage later, experts have predicted.

However, Baptists in rural areas already have begun to see their incomes dry up as the drought drags on. Farmers are losing portions and even entire plantings of some crops. Their failure to make a profit begins a domino effect that means a loss in income for local merchants and churches, said Don Evans of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

About 75 percent of Missouri's 1,925 Southern Baptist churches are in rural areas, Evans said. He anticipates many churches will have to reduce missions giving, and some may not be able to pay their pastors' salaries.

Domestic hunger relief funds from the Home Mission Board already have been used to assist families of farmers, farm laborers and workers along the Mississippi River, reported Don Anders of the Missouri Baptist Convention. River workers have been hit by the drought as their boats have run ashore due to low water.

Among farmers, the drought is the final blow in a long series of misfortunes, Farley said. An escalating farm crisis due to low crop prices and large debts already has driven thousands of family farms out of business.

Farmers who have survived or recovered from that crisis now are being hit by poor crop production as their farms go for weeks and months at a time without rain. "A lot of people are looking at an awfully bleak future because of this," Farley said.

--more--

In addition to the Home Mission Board and rural-urban consultants in state conventions, the interdenominational Fellowship of Christian Farmers is providing encouragement for farm families in need.

Tom Herlong, president of the 2,500-member fellowship, said the crisis a farmer goes through in a drought is like any other spiritual or emotional crisis. It drains the person's emotional energy and tests even the strongest's faith.

Both Farley and Herlong urge Christians to be sensitive to families affected by the drought.

"It's important to help a person know his self-worth," Herlong said. "A lot of times people are hesitant to say anything to farm families because they don't know what to say. If you know a farm family, let them know you're praying for them, show them some small act of kindness."

Farley added that praying, giving money for hunger relief and influencing public policy are all important responses to the drought. However, he concurred with Herlong that interpersonal relationships are vital, too.

"Sometimes you just need to stand around and cry with people," Farley said.

--30--

Stock market, members boost
Annuity's 2nd-quarter income

Baptist Press
7/29/88

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist Annuity Board trustees learned of gains in the board's retirement plans and a need for higher insurance premiums during their meeting July 25-26 in Little Rock, Ark.

"The net earnings for the six-month period ended June 30, 1988, totaled \$136,285,527. This amount ranks second only to the first six months of 1986," reported board Treasurer Harold D. Richardson.

Board President Darold H. Morgan reported total assets had grown to more than \$2.27 billion as of June 30, a 7.02 percent increase over last year. Members contributed more than 10 percent more -- almost \$74.08 million -- to their retirement accounts during the first half of 1988 than they did during the same period of 1987.

Retirement benefit payments also increased, due in part to the announcement of an upcoming reduction in the actuarial funding factor for retirement annuities from 9 percent to 8.5 percent. The reduction is effective Aug. 1.

Rising medical care costs prompted increasingly higher claims in the seminarian, church, and group medical insurance programs.

Continued losses each month in the board's medical plans had to result in significant premium increases, Morgan said: "The crisis is nationwide and industrywide. I regret that we must both increase premium charges and take other measures to stop the losses."

The seminarian plan will see a 30 percent increase in August, while church and group plan premiums will rise 20 to 25 percent in January, 1989. Outside consultants had recommended twice the recommended premium increases. Morgan said other cost-containment decisions will be made in the next several weeks.

Trustees also approved several changes in divisional and departmental titles:

- The communications division has become the public relations division.
- The special services department is now the special ministries department.

--more--

- The marketing division will be known as the member services division.
- The data processing division was changed to the management information systems division.
- The actuarial services department will be called the actuarial and benefit services department.

The board's next meeting will be Oct. 31-Nov. 1 in Dallas.

--30--

Senate panel OKs
child care bill

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
7/29/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--A major childcare proposal has cleared another legislative hurdle, receiving approval by a U.S. Senate committee.

The Act for Better Child Care Services -- known as the ABC bill -- was approved without dissent by the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee July 27 after the bill's sponsor and one of its harshest critics agreed to work toward a compromise before the bill reaches the Senate floor.

The bill, which was approved by the House Subcommittee on Human Resources in late June, would authorize the distribution of \$2.5 billion in fiscal 1989 -- and additional funds in the subsequent four fiscal years -- to states for childcare services for children up to age 15.

Under the proposal, states would be required to use 75 percent of the funds to provide parents with grants or vouchers for the purchase of childcare services from licensed providers. States would be able to use up to 15 percent of the funds in areas such as resource and referral services, salary upgrading, training and up to 10 percent for administrative costs.

The bill would target assistance to families whose incomes do not exceed 100 percent of the state median income -- \$32,777 nationwide for a family of four -- with a priority for children from low-income families.

In a surprise move, Sens. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., and Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, pledged to seek a compromise on the legislation prior to taking it before the full Senate.

"We're not arguing any longer about whether we ought to have child care," said Dodd, Senate sponsor of the ABC bill. "And apparently we're not talking about money, since the vice president has a \$2.2 billion proposal."

Vice President George Bush proposed a plan July 24 that would give low-income families a \$1,000-per-child tax credit for use in helping cover childcare costs.

The question, Dodd said, is how to target those funds so as to assure availability, affordability and quality of child care.

Hatch, who persistently has criticized the ABC bill and has introduced his own childcare proposal, agreed "there is a need for federal support for child care" but said he does not believe Dodd's bill is the answer.

He said the measure, which could "commit Congress to untold billions in future years," fails to address current problems through a "top-down approach" that pre-empts state and local priorities with federal regulations.

But Hatch -- who said he would withhold opposition to the legislation during the committee vote if Dodd and other panel members would agree to work toward a compromise -- said, "I want to get it (childcare legislation) out of politics and do what's best for families."

Dodd pledged to make a "solid, good-faith effort to do something." Following the committee's session, Dodd said floor action on the measure is not expected until after Labor Day.

--more--

One of the bill's most controversial provisions relates to childcare centers operated by religious institutions. About one-third of all daycare services in the nation are provided by church-related facilities.

Under the bill's current language -- which has been amended since originally introduced -- childcare centers sponsored by religious institutions could qualify for ABC funds if they avoid religious instruction, worship or other sectarian activities. Church-related facilities could not use federal funds to build new facilities and could not discriminate on the basis of religion against children whose care is subsidized with federal funds.

But the new language would allow church-related childcare providers to exercise religious preference in hiring employees and, in some cases, to use federal funds to repair or renovate facilities.

Those provisions have drawn criticism from a variety of religious and church-state organizations, including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

In a joint letter, the two agencies asked members of the Senate and House of Representatives to work toward a bill that "maintains state as opposed to federal regulation, includes adequate safeguards to ensure the separation of church and state, stresses tax incentives, establishes new federal programs only after clearly demonstrated need and targets those programs for the benefit of lower income families."

"We urge you to explore a legislative compromise that would enable our nation to take positive steps toward meeting childcare needs without discouraging parents from staying at home with their children and without creating a constitutionally suspect program of federally subsidized church child care."

--30--

Kentucky's Clear Creek
elects Bill Whittaker

Baptist Press
7/29/88

PINEVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Kentucky native Bill D. Whittaker has been elected president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College in Pineville, Ky.

Trustees of the Kentucky Baptist Convention school unanimously elected Whittaker during a called board meeting July 19. He will move to Pineville Aug. 23 and begin his duties by the beginning of the school's fall term.

Whittaker, 45, is pastor of Downtown Baptist Church in Orlando, Fla., but the majority of his ministry has been in Kentucky. He is a native of Bowling Green, Ky., and has been pastor of churches in Bowling Green, Sturgis and Murray, Ky. He was Kentucky Baptist Convention president in 1980-81.

He spent one term as a Southern Baptist foreign missionary to the Philippines and was pastor of International Baptist Church in Manila.

Whittaker is a graduate of Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He and his wife, Rebecca, have three children, John Mark, Karen Marie and Mary Kaye.

Whittaker will succeed Leon Simpson, who resigned earlier this year and has joined the church training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

--30--

History agency hires
1st full-time archivist

NASHVILLE (BP)--Bill Sumners has been named the first full-time archivist to manage the compilation, preservation and use of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives' collection.

Sumners has worked in Nashville for both the Southern Baptist Historical Commission, which holds the archives, and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board since 1983. The commission currently contracts with the board for Sumners' part-time services.

The commission, which owns and operates the historical library and archives, was designated in 1981 as the central depository for the Southern Baptist Convention. The commission relocated the library and archives into its own facilities in 1985 and since has sought to support a full-time archivist.

Sumners will begin his full-time duties at the commission Oct. 1. He is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and the University of Texas at Arlington.

He has been assistant archivist at Auburn University; director of the Shelby (Ala.) County Library; assistant curator of the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, Texas; and research associate at the University of Texas at Arlington.

Sumners is a native of Vincent, Ala. He and his wife, Donna, have three children.

--30--

Arkansas pastor elected
Indiana executive director

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press
7/29/88

INDIANAPOLIS (BP)--Mark Coppenger, 40, pastor of First Baptist Church of El Dorado, Ark., has been elected executive director-treasurer of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, effective Sept. 1.

Coppenger's unanimous election by the 33-member SCBI executive board comes after 18 months of turmoil in executive leadership of the state convention.

Two key leaders -- R.V. Haygood, executive director-treasurer, and Glen Ray, missions director, both resigned March 20, 1987, in a dispute over the use of hunger funds in the state.

Two other men -- Church Growth and Ministries Director Lew Reynolds and Indiana Baptist Editor David Simpson -- were named to be "co-advisers" following the Haygood-Ray resignations. Reynolds, however, resigned Dec. 31, 1987, and Simpson left the state March 10.

Don Moore, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Evansville, Ind., and chairman of both the executive board and the search committee which selected Coppenger, told Baptist Press: "We have waited a long time looking for what we felt was the Lord's will and the Lord's person. I think for the most part that (the turmoil) is behind us. Time has been an aid to us, and we believe Mark Coppenger is a healer."

Moore added he is very happy to see a new executive come to Indiana, because as chairman of the executive board he "went to Indianapolis from one to three times every week since March 20" to oversee the ongoing work of the SBCI staff.

The executive committee of the executive board was the search committee. Moore said a small screening committee was selected which presented "10 or 12 recommendations" to the whole search committee. The search committee interviewed in person two people, including Coppenger, who was then recommended to the entire executive board.

--more--

The board spent more than an hour with Coppenger and his wife, Sharon South Coppenger, July 25, hearing testimonies and in a wide-ranging question-and-answer session. Mrs. Coppenger is daughter of the late Rheubin South, who was executive director-treasurer of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

Coppenger said the questions were "thoughtful ... probing and showed real maturity. There did not seem to be any particular strain to them, but they covered the activities, interests and focuses of various groups."

The new executive described himself as a biblical inerrantist who "would want my staff to be (inerrantists)." However, he added he "can work with folks who are not (inerrantists)."

He said that while he recently has been named to the board of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., he has "not been very active politically. I haven't been a big player, yet I have in recent years expressed myself."

The controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, he said, is "between those who see peril in incipient liberalism or neo-orthodoxy and those who do not. I am of the opinion that we need to take action, and what is underway in the elections of (SBC) presidents in the last nine years is an important thing. I was appointed to the board of Southern Seminary as a result of those elections, and I think there is important work yet to be done."

Coppenger, born in Lebanon, Tenn., graduated from Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., and earned a doctorate in philosophy from Vanderbilt University, Nashville. He taught at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill., from 1975 to 1981, when he "felt drawn to church work" and entered Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, where he received a master of divinity degree in 1983.

He accepted the pastorate of First Baptist Church, El Dorado, following graduation from Southwestern Seminary. It is his only full-time pastorate.

Coppenger and his wife have three sons, Caleb, Jedidiah and Chesed.