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88-191

Researcher projects SBC baptisms
to rise 2.8 percent for 1988

By Joe Westbury

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Southern Baptist baptisms for 1988 will increase slightly, if projections by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board are on target.

The year-end forecast, announced during the annual conference for Southern Baptist state evangelism directors, predicts baptisms will increase 2.8 percent over 1987 baptisms, to 348,000 conversions to faith in Christ.

The projections continue the denomination's roller coaster ride for baptisms into the latter half of the decade. Baptisms ended a five-year decline in 1985, were up in 1986, and down in 1987.

The projections are based on information supplied by the evangelism directors. The 2.8 percent increase will result in a gain of about 9,700 baptisms from the 338,495 posted in 1987, said Gordon Lawrence, associate director for the HMB program research department.

The data is only slightly more optimistic than that expected to be released by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board early next year. The Sunday School Board bases its report on partial analysis of actual reports from the denomination's 37,286 churches, Lawrence noted.

The 1980s generally have been a decade of decline for Southern Baptist baptisms, he said. But the denomination appears to be on the upswing between its cycle of increases and declines, he noted.

"Every six or seven years since 1959, Southern Baptist baptisms have entered a period of increases or declines. If the trend for the past 30 years holds constant, we are now ready for an increase for about the next six years," he said.

Lawrence cautioned the directors to be sure their states do not neglect evangelism among youth -- the target group showing the greatest percent of decline since the 1970s.

Between 1972 and 1987, the number of youth age 12 to 17 declined 3.3 percent, but baptisms plummeted more than twice that amount, 7.1 percent.

"We cannot blame our overall drop in baptisms to a lack of youth; we're simply not reaching youth now as we did previously," he warned.

Baptisms for that age group dropped from 297,437 in 1972 to 183,789 last year. However, adult baptisms hold steady and continue at 154,706, he explained.

HMB President Larry L. Lewis applauded the 1988 projection and credited the increase to a sense of renewed commitment to evangelism among pastors.

"Within the next three years, I think our baptisms will be up above 400,000 again, and by the year 2000, I believe we will consistently win and baptize 500,000 people annually," he said.

Southern Baptists have not baptized more than 400,000 individuals since 1980, when 429,742 baptisms were recorded. The denomination's highest number of baptisms was 445,725, recorded in 1972.

Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines, who attended the meeting, said the projection shows the denomination "is moving in the right direction."

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"My emphasis this year is to call Southern Baptists to a recommitment to soul winning. I hope this is the beginning of a resurgence of winning people to Christ and baptizing them into the fellowship of our churches," he said in an interview.

Most state evangelism directors at the meeting credited the projected increase to a denomination-wide emphasis on witness training events.

"One of our associations in which every church participated in a lay evangelism school has doubled its baptisms for the year," said Nathan Pillow, evangelism director for Arizona Baptists. "This is the best year for lay evangelism events since 1977."

J.W. Hutchens of North Carolina credited the increase to training events tied to the Year of the Laity. His state's Eastern Baptist Association increased baptisms by 50 percent due to a renewed emphasis on personal evangelism, he noted.

That sentiment was echoed by other directors from across the nation.

Carlos McLeod, evangelism director for Texas Baptists, said any sustained increase "will not come as a result of Southern Baptists doing business as usual."

"You won't win the nation to Jesus at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning. We must take Christ to the people who need to hear the gospel message," he said.

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SBA allocates 1st budget,
offers 'models' for giving

By Marv Knox

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Alliance approved a \$626,590 budget, proposed six "models" for mission support and elected Stan Hastey as its first executive director during an SBA board meeting Nov. 28-29 in Charlotte, N.C.

The SBA is a two-year-old organization of 40,000 Southern Baptist moderates. They have vowed to remain in the Southern Baptist Convention but have charged current SBC leadership with rejecting principles and causes they hold dear.

The 1989 SBA budget includes the \$95,100 Global Ministry Fund; \$250,000 for theological education; and \$281,490 for operating expenses.

The Global Ministry Fund includes 10 components: the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary chapter of the American Association of University Professors, \$5,000; Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, \$7,200; Habitat for Humanity, \$5,000; the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, \$10,000; and two mission churches in Georgia and Kentucky, \$21,900.

Also a missionary counseling service based in Winston-Salem, N.C., \$2,000; Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, \$6,000; an adult Sunday school literature supplement published in SBC Today newspaper, \$18,000; and an SBA ministry to "those who have been fired, dismissed or otherwise lost their jobs due to the (SBC) controversy," \$20,000.

The board defeated a proposal to build a home/support station for missionaries Joyce and Fred Wall in Haiti. Opponents to the project cited three major objections: First, the Walls did not meet SBC Foreign Mission Board criteria and were not appointed by the board, and SBA members expressed a desire to support FMB-approved but unfunded projects. Second, Wall had sought curriculum from fundamentalist leader Jerry Falwell's Liberty University to train local pastors. And third, members expressed concern about appearing to start their own foreign mission board by going outside the SBC structure in foreign mission work.

The missions committee also declined to recommend two other proposals: First was a community organization in Charlotte that provides humanitarian service but is not Christian-centered. Second was a request for pastoral aid for an English-speaking congregation in Tokyo whose financial support from the Foreign Mission Board is being cut.

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In a matter related to the mission actions, the SBA voted to empower members Alan Neely of Princeton, N.J., and Anne Neil of Wake Forest, N.C., to meet with Foreign Mission Board leaders to discover mission projects the SBA could fund and to discuss missions philosophy, such as cutting aid to English-language pastors and requiring 70 percent of SBC foreign missionaries to spend most of their time on evangelism and starting churches.

The SBA also approved guidelines for funding mission projects. Priority will be given to projects that reflect the SBA covenant and that "could not be adequately carried out without our help." Project sponsors must be charitable, educational or religious organizations and meet appropriate tax codes; show financial accountability; provide the SBA with a copy of their governing documents; and reciprocate with "hands-on" ministry. They also will be "encouraged, where appropriate, to seek funding through the SBC or SBC agencies."

The SBA theological education committee expressed the need for a new ministerial training program in the Southeast, since Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., members said, now is controlled by the conservative wing of the SBC.

The budget's \$250,000 allocated for theological education will help finance a divinity school in Richmond, Va., jointly supported by the SBA; four American Baptist seminaries -- Andover-Newton, Colgate-Rochester, Eastern and Virginia Union; and Union Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian school in Richmond.

SBA officials are meeting with leaders from the five schools to work out an arrangement for strengthening Virginia Union, a predominantly black school in Richmond, to take in Southern Baptist ministerial students. As outlined, the three other American Baptist schools would provide two professors per year to Virginia Union on a rotating basis, and the SBA would finance support for three more professors, probably from the Southeastern Seminary faculty. Union Theological would offer its consortium relationship with Virginia Union, through which students can take courses at both schools; its library; dormitory and apartment space; and a dining hall.

The SBA's first-year cost is expected to be about \$200,000. Board members approved a proposal to spend about \$49,000 in designated funds to hire a development specialist to raise money for the project.

Four other theological education possibilities appeared on the agenda. The board encouraged Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem in its consideration of a divinity school that eventually could enroll about 250 students. It urged continued contact between Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C., and the SBA to foster ministry training through a director of Baptist studies at the school; pledged "to keep in touch" with Averett College in Danville, Va., as it considers a ministerial program; and heard about property for a school near Charlotte.

Undesignated receipts, excluding membership fees, given to the SBA will be split three ways. The operating budget will receive 50 percent; the Global Ministry Fund will get 45 percent; and 5 percent will go to theological education.

The SBA's models for mission support are described in a document titled "Supporting the Cooperative Program," which was ratified by the SBA board. The Cooperative Program is the SBC's unified missions and ministries budget. SBA members and other moderates have criticized the budget, citing "taxation without representation" because people with their theological/political views no longer are appointed to boards.

During an SBA "listening session" in September, members proposed various funding devices, most of which called on churches to channel their SBC contributions through the SBA, so the SBA could designate funds to organizations it favors and away from those it does not favor.

But the SBA models for giving place the responsibility for designation on the churches. The models are: maintaining current commitment, with 100 percent of a church's mission gifts going to the Cooperative Program without restrictions; designating all Cooperative Program contributions to stay in the church's own state convention; escrowing Cooperative Program funds, using the interest to support mission causes identified by the church; fully supporting state convention causes but designating the portion that goes to the SBC; splitting contributions between state, SBC and SBA causes; and contributing completely to the SBA and its Global Ministry Fund.

New Executive Director Hastey, 44, is chief of the Washington bureau of Baptist Press and is associate executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, where he has worked for 15 years. The son of retired SBC foreign missionaries, he is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The SBA office will relocate from Charlotte to Washington when Hastey's tenure begins Jan. 1. However, the SBA placement service will continue to function out of Charlotte.

In other actions, the SBA:

-- Authorized the executive director "to continue conversations with ABC leadership, as well as with other (moderate Southern) Baptist groups." SBA leaders said the SBA and American Baptists have not discussed a merger but primarily have discussed theological education.

-- Created a committee to "investigate and bring recommendations ... regarding chaplaincy endorsement."

-- Instructed the SBA executive committee to create a committee to investigate establishing the Southern Baptist Alliance Foundation to receive and disburse funds and to comply with Internal Revenue Service codes.

-- Rescinded a measure to split profits from the sale of its book "Being Baptist Means Freedom" with SBC Today and approved using those profits to finance publication of a book being produced under the auspices of the SBA committee on women in the church.

-- Accepted "with deep regret" the resignation of President John Thomason, who recently resigned as pastor Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., citing personal and family reasons. The board affirmed First Vice President Anne Neil as acting president.

-- Set its next meeting dates for Feb. 28 and March 1, to coincide with the annual SBA convocation in Greenville, S.C., March 1-3.

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SBC officers, state executives
discuss variety of concerns

By Linda Lawson

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NASHVILLE (BP)--A Dec. 1 dialogue session between the top three officers of the Southern Baptist Convention and 30 executive directors of state conventions on issues of mutual concern was termed a positive step, participants agreed.

SBC President Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.; First Vice President Darrell Robinson, pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church of Mobile, Ala.; and Second Vice President Rudy Hernandez, pastor of Metro Park Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas, attended the two-hour session at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board at the invitation of the executive directors. A similar session was held in 1986.

"We wanted to hear from Dr. Vines and the two vice presidents about the state of the denomination and how they are willing to move into the task of putting us back together after 10 years of controversy," said Ernest Myers, executive director of the Nevada Baptist Convention and chairman of the organization of executive directors.

Issues discussed included declines in Cooperative Program unified budget giving, budget cuts in many state conventions and SBC agencies, presidential appointments and trustees of institutions and agencies.

The session was covered by Baptist Press under background rules, which allow no direct quotations and no attribution of statements. The three SBC officers and the three officers of the executive directors organization spoke with Baptist Press after the meeting.

"I felt it was important to come and have dialogue with these men who are on the cutting edge of Baptist work at the state level," said Vines.

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Concerning Cooperative Program giving, Vines said he plans to "study and receive input to determine where the increases and decreases are coming from." He cited his church, which he said is increasing its 1989 Cooperative Program gifts by 20 percent over 1988.

The No. 1 goal of his presidency is "to set a tone and create an atmosphere for healing to occur," he said.

Jack Johnson, executive director of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention and secretary of the organization of executive directors, called the meeting "very positive.

"There is no question that these men (SBC officers) are very sincere in promoting a healing process. However, I think reconciliation is going to take a long time," he said.

"I want to be a peacemaker," said Hernandez. "This meeting was important for them (executive directors) to get our heartbeat."

"We had a healthy meeting with the kind of honest, open communication necessary for meaningful cooperation," said Robinson. "I believe this will be a year of reconciliation. I don't think we as officers are dominated by any person or group."

James Griffith, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Convention and vice chairman of the executive directors' organization, said: "Anytime we can get together and talk and pray, it is valuable. This has increased our understanding of the challenges we have and our need to meet the challenges.

"All of the executive directors realize the importance of working together to further the missions and evangelism causes of Southern Baptists."

Myers expressed optimism: "Reconciliation can begin if a variety of factors are considered. I sensed an openness on the part of the officers toward working with state leadership."

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State evangelism directors
elect national officers

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--J.W. Hutchens, evangelism director for North Carolina Baptists, was elected president of the Southern Baptist Fellowship of State Evangelism Directors during the group's annual meeting in Kansas City, Mo.

George Russ, area director of evangelism for the New York City area, was named vice president, while Dan Agee, evangelism director for Virginia Baptists, was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

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