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**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Budget enjoys
June rebound

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program ministry budget rebounded again in June, pushing almost 12 percent ahead of receipts for the same month last year.

The Cooperative Program supports Southern Baptist missionary, evangelistic, educational and church-starting efforts worldwide. It is funded by contributions from individual Southern Baptists, who give to their churches. A portion of church budgets are forwarded to state Baptist conventions, and a portion of their budgets are sent to national and international causes.

The conventionwide budget received \$11,485,504 in June, reported Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the convention's Executive Committee. That amount is an increase of \$1,217,384 over receipts for June 1988, or a gain of 11.86 percent.

June receipts pushed the year-to-date total to \$103,701,109 at the end of nine months of the current fiscal year, Bennett said.

That is a gain of \$3,435,831, or 3.43 percent, over the first three quarters of last year, he noted. The current U.S. inflation rate is 5.4 percent.

"I am very gratified at the increase in last month's receipts over receipts for the previous month and over receipts for June 1988," Bennett said. "I am still optimistic that the Cooperative Program receipts will go beyond the basic budget by a positive percent."

To reach its \$145.6 million overall goal, Cooperative Program monthly receipts must average \$13,966,297 for the final three months of the fiscal year. To reach its \$137.61 million basic operating goal, the budget must take in \$11,302,964 each month.

Since November, Cooperative Program receipts have alternated between months in which they were lower than the same month the year before and months in which they were higher. However, the budget's strong months -- particularly January and April, the second- and third-best months in Cooperative Program history -- have kept the year-to-date pace ahead of 1987-88.

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High court to review
equal access dispute

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
7/7/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear a challenge to the 1984 Equal Access Act -- a law that gives high school religious clubs the same right to meet on school property as other non-academic, extracurricular groups.

In a one-line order issued on the final day of its 1988-89 term, the high court indicated it will review Board of Education of Westside Community Schools v. Mergens.

The dispute arose in 1985 when the principal of Westside High School in Omaha, Neb., and the local superintendent of schools refused to grant permission to a group of students to form the "Christian Bible Club" and meet on campus. The students took the school board to court, claiming school officials had violated the Equal Access Act, as well their constitutional rights of free exercise of religion and freedom of speech.

The Equal Access Act prohibits any public secondary school that receives federal funding and has a "limited open forum" from denying equal access to or otherwise discriminating against students who wish to conduct a meeting based on the "religious, political, philosophical or other content of the speech at such meetings." A limited open forum, according to the law, exists when non-curriculum-related student groups are provided an opportunity to meet on school grounds before or after the school day.

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A federal district judge -- ruling against Bridget Mergens and her fellow students -- upheld the school board's position that no limited forum had been created at Westside High, despite the fact 10 other non-curriculum-related student groups met at the school.

But the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the school board's claim that all non-religious clubs -- including a chess club and two service clubs -- were curriculum related. Instead, the appeals panel held Congress intended the term "non-curriculum-related" to be interpreted to include any clubs only peripherally related to the curriculum.

In their latest appeal, Westside school officials asked the nation's highest court to resolve whether the Equal Access Act violates the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion.

"The confusion over the constitutionality of the student religious clubs has spawned much litigation, endless public controversy, bred disrespect for political and legal institutions which interpret the Constitution in diametrically opposite ways and has diverted school officials' attention from more pressing educational issues," wrote Allen E. Daubman, an Omaha attorney representing the school board.

But attorneys for Mergens and other Westside students said the law does not result in an establishment of religion.

"High school students are capable of distinguishing between equal treatment of student speech and state-mandated or state-endorsed religious speech," said attorney Douglas W. Davis of Virginia Beach, Va.

The Supreme Court last considered the equal access issue in 1986 when it reinstated a district court's decision that members of a student religious group in Williamsport, Pa., possessed a constitutionally protected right of free speech to conduct their meetings.

But in that case, the court's decision hinged on the lack of legal standing of the school board member who challenged the lower court ruling rather than on the actual merits of the case.

A number of religious and educational groups have expressed hope the high court will settle the constitutional questions surrounding equal access when it considers Westside v. Mergens next term.

"We're glad that the court is to hear this case," said James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. "Religious speech is entitled to the same freedom as other forms of expression. We believe the Supreme Court will uphold the Equal Access Act."

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Texas Baptists minister,
recover from summer storms

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
7/7/89

DALLAS (BP)--From the bayous of Southeast Texas to the streets of south Dallas County, Texas Baptists assisted disaster victims in the wake of two separate early summer storm systems.

Golden Triangle Baptist Association and neighboring areas continued to feel the effects of Tropical Storm Allison more than a week after it made landfall.

Using food supplied by the American Red Cross, about 20 Texas Baptist men worked from an associational disaster relief unit set up at First Baptist Church of Beaumont to prepare meals for flood victims.

Under the direction of on-site director John Lilly of University Baptist Church of Clear Lake in Houston and unit director Burt Walker of First Baptist Church of Beaumont, volunteers served 600 meals July 3 and 850 meals July 4.

When airboats became available to deliver food to areas that could not be reached by vans and mobile canteens, the Red Cross asked the Texas Baptist disaster relief workers to prepare 1,300 meals for July 5; 1,350 July 6; 1,750 July 7; and 2,000 July 8.

Several southeast Texas Baptist churches reported flood damage resulting from Allison's torrential rains.

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Central Baptist Church in Kirbyville sustained serious damage due to flooding, as did the parsonage of nearby Call Junction Baptist Church, said B.C. McCoy, director of missions for the Sabine Neches Baptist Area.

In Trinity River Baptist Association, the educational building at First Baptist Church of Sour Lake was flooded, said Pastor Lyle Skeels. No other churches in the association were known to have been damaged, said Duane Kelley, director of missions.

In neighboring San Jacinto Baptist Association, River Road Baptist Church in Channelview and San Jacinto Southern Baptist Church in Baytown were thought to have some damage, said Director of Missions Lee Walker.

As rains continued and the waterways of east Texas overflowed and drained southward, local disaster relief workers anticipated an emergency situation in the Beaumont area for at least another week.

Meanwhile, a large section of north Texas was busy cleaning up from 90 mile-per-hour winds and violent thunderstorms that swept through the area July 2, leaving up to 100,000 homes in the Dallas-Fort Worth area without electricity. In Dallas County, about 9,000 homes still were without power two days later.

A 12-foot steeple was blown off the roof of Elam Baptist Church in suburban Pleasant Grove, said Pastor Raymond Strickland. A compressor also was blown nearly off the church's educational building, the roofs of all facilities were severely damaged and a storage room at the church parsonage was destroyed.

At least six families in his church sustained extensive damage to their homes, and many others had varying degrees of damage, Strickland said. However, no injuries were reported among the church membership.

A number of churches had tree damage and found themselves in need of minor roof repairs.

Members of the Baptist Men and High School Baptist Young Men organizations from throughout Dallas Baptist Association planned a work day for July 8 to help clear away fallen trees and other debris from the homes of elderly residents in south Dallas County, said Milfred Minatrea, regional Texas Baptist Men director and associational director of weekday ministries.

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Educators challenged to present
biblical perspective aggressively

By Tim Fields

Baptist Press
7/7/89

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--The world is in the midst of an upheaval of scientific learning and Southern Baptist educators need to be more aggressive in presenting the biblical perspective to their students, presidents and deans from Southern Baptist educational institutions were told during their annual meeting in Alexandria, La.

"We are seeing the beginning of a groundswell of change in the understanding of the universe about us like never before," said Bill R. Williams, president of Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Ariz., and outgoing president of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools.

"There will be such a shaking of the awareness of the landscape of thought that we need to step forward with the Christian perspective as never before to give a biblical perspective to all that's happening."

Youth and even elementary children will be presented with new scientific theories of the universe such as the "theory of chaos," which can be a tool to interpret reality better than ever before, and the all-encompassing "theory of everything," Williams said.

Southern Baptist pastors, theologians and educators can deal positively with these changes in scientific theories and learning from a biblical perspective "or we can step away from it," he warned: "These concepts will emerge in a way that, if we don't have a carefully thought-out response, could seem to be in conflict with some of our comfortable cocoons of interpretation about the universe, reality and the associated theological implications.

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"What concerns me is our credibility as Christians. Will we step up to interpreting and aggressively being on the leading edge of these new awarenesses and providing for our young people interpretations that, in fact, will help them to see the awe and majesty and magnitude of what God is doing both in the physical universe and in his redemptive activities? I think that's the position that we need to take and it is a great opportunity. The next century will be colored by these theories which will be emerging in the next 10 years."

Williams also challenged the educational administrators to continue their participation in exchange programs that they now have with educational institutions in countries such as China and the Soviet Union: "We can now build bridges to these countries where we haven't been allowed to go before. This is dramatically positive, and Southern Baptist mission activities in these countries essentially is in our hands."

"These exchange programs will probably unfold as the missions model of the future, and we get to be a part of that privilege of involvement."

The educators must continue placing a high priority on integrating faith and discipline on their campuses, Williams added, noting that in every class he teaches "in some natural flow of presentation, I give my personal testimony about Jesus Christ."

The presentation of the gospel is the distinctive of Baptist educational institutions, he said insisting, "This is what we need to be about."

Arthur L. Walker Jr., executive director of the Southern Baptist Education Commission and executive secretary of the educators' association, told the educators to have hope in spite of the pressures of college administration.

"I challenge each of you to view your difficulties as your challenge to clamor over the sheer cliffs of obstacles; to soar in the defiance of the laws of gravity even when there is no undergirding of resources, personnel or understanding; and keep on with your efforts, even if the marathon of fund raising or seeking support seems unending," he urged.

Facing the third millennium of Christianity poses new challenges for Baptist educational institutions, he said.

During the next few years, half of all new jobs will require some form of post-secondary education, and many experts fear American workers will not have the skills needed to perform these jobs, he said.

"An even greater challenge of strength and training of church-related college personnel is the moral condition faced in today's society," he said. "Some say the 'First World Church' will be a minor player in shaping future societies and cultures."

The world also will be faced with multiple challenges to Christianity, Walker said: "Those colleges related to Christian churches are being called upon to find new ways to emphasize and encourage Christian faith. This is the major focus of the current faith and discipline emphasis conducted by the Education Commission and the Association of Baptist Colleges and Schools."

Walker outlined five strategies for meeting new challenges to Christian education:

- Recognize that all education includes reasoned ethical behavior.
- Acknowledge that no courses even in the sciences can be taught without ethical emphases.
- Emphasize that teachers should not be hired solely on the basis of academic achievement but upon a commitment to the ideals of Christian higher education.
- Encourage faculty and students in personal spiritual values and purpose.
- Respect the autonomy of the individual and of each institution.

During the meeting, members of the association which represents 71 Southern Baptist educational institutions, elected J. Cordell Maddox, president of Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., president; Thomas E. Corts, president of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., vice president and G. Willis Bennett, provost of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., secretary.

Texas CLC director affirms ruling,
voices concern about divisiveness

By Ken Camp.

DALLAS (BP)--While voicing concern that abortion could become an overriding issue in statewide elections and a divisive subject among fellow Baptists, Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, expressed support for the July 3 U.S. Supreme Court decision granting states greater power to restrict abortions.

On the last day of its 1988-89 term, a divided Supreme Court ruled on Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, upholding the constitutionality of a Missouri anti-abortion law. While the court stopped short of overturning the landmark 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, the ruling did grant the states greater control over abortion.

"We affirm the basic direction of the decision," said Strickland. "Abortion has all too often been used as a birth control strategy since 1973, and this decision will hopefully move in the direction of eliminating such abortions."

Although he expressed basic support for the decision, Strickland also noted concern about the impact of the abortion issue on future statewide races: "Abortion is an extremely polarizing issue. As abortion regulation is placed in the hands of state legislatures, my concern is that abortion will become the overriding issue of every legislative race and election for statewide office.

"Abortion is a very important issue, but not the only issue. We should choose candidates on the basis of several important issues, not just one important issue."

Strickland went on to point out the potential for divisiveness among Southern Baptists.

"As we move toward the next legislative session, intensity on the abortion issue will build," he said. "It is easy to envision Baptists who are really not very far apart on the abortion issue stigmatizing each other because they do not agree exactly.

"Most Baptists do not favor abortion, but we do not agree under which limited circumstances abortion should be allowed. We must develop a healthy tolerance for differences of opinion."

While saying that "God calls us to be pro-life," Strickland stressed that the term should be interpreted as comprehensively as possible.

"Pro-life means protection for the rights of both the unborn and the born," he said. "As we rightly legislate to protect the life of the fetus, we must also -- if we are really pro-life -- push for legislation which considers the mother, helps abused and neglected children, enhances the lives of poor children and competently educates all children."

The Webster case is just the beginning of a change in abortion law, Strickland noted. Three other cases to be heard by the Supreme Court during its next term will challenge more directly the constitutionality of Roe v. Wade. State legislatures will have to respond to Supreme Court decisions in these and other cases.

"We are faced with an opportunity to enhance responsible legislation on abortion," Strickland said. "I hope we can do so in a spirit of fair play, in mutual respect and in the fullest sense of what it means to be pro-life."

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The logo consists of the letters 'BP' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, enclosed within a black rectangular box. The letters are slightly shadowed to give a three-dimensional appearance.

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