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90-131

Texas Baptist leaders call meetings
to respond to Baylor charter change

N-CC (WMS)

DALLAS (BP)--Top elected leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas have called meetings of the convention's administrative committee for Oct. 2 and the 193-member executive board for mid-October in response to Baylor University's amending its charter.

Texas Baptist leaders met in Dallas to discuss how to respond to Baylor's action. The Baylor board of trustees on Sept. 21 voted to establish a board of regents "with sole responsibility for governance of Baylor" and elected 16 people to the new body.

Previously, Baylor's charter provided for school governance by a 48-member board of trustees, elected by the BGCT.

Elected officials who met to discuss the Baylor action were Phil Lineberger, pastor of Richardson Heights Baptist Church in Richardson and president of the BGCT; Robert Parker, pastor of Park Place Baptist Church in Houston and chairman of the BGCT executive board; and George Gaston, pastor of Willow Meadows Baptist Church in Houston and chairman of the BGCT administrative committee.

Mindful of a long cooperative relationship between Baylor and the BGCT, the convention leaders moved to secure legal research and counsel to clarify the convention's position in relation to Baylor. They also agreed to initiate communication between convention leaders and the Baylor trustees and administration concerning the matter.

The 15-member BGCT administrative committee normally meets four times a year to discuss and prepare convention business for presentation to the executive board. The executive board conducts business of the 2.5 million-member BGCT and its institutions between annual convention sessions.

Institutions of the BGCT include eight universities, two academies, seven hospitals, and four children's homes and four homes for the aging in multiple locations.

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Former WMU national leaders
endorsed WMU board action

By Susan Todd

N(WMU) CO

Baptist Press
9/28/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The five living former national leaders of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union have endorsed and affirmed recent action taken by the national WMU executive board.

The WMU executive board met in Richmond, Va., Sept. 21-22 in a called board meeting to discuss the impact of the convention controversy on Southern Baptist missions efforts.

The board adopted a statement affirming the denomination's traditional channels of missions giving -- the Cooperative Program, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions -- while affirming as well the "right of individuals, churches and state conventions to choose other plans for cooperative missions giving."

The statement also included messages directed to home and foreign missionaries, to the WMU membership and to WMU critics.

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"I rejoiced but was not surprised in learning of the open meetings, free discussions and unanimous vote," said Helen Fling, national WMU president from 1963 to 1969.

"During many eras of drastic change and crisis periods, WMU has always responded by re-examining its purposes and reaffirming God's call -- then redesigning its structure, program, materials and methods as needed," Fling said.

Christine Gregory, national WMU president from 1975 to 1981 agreed: "I think the timing is excellent, because we've gotten far enough away from this year's convention to look to the future rather than the present or the past," she said. "You can't just sit placidly by and let the whole mission program go down."

"I think (the statement) shows thoughtfulness, and it shows the commitment of the WMU national leadership," said Dorothy Sample, national WMU president from 1981 to 1986. "We love the denomination. We love the missions program. I feel sure that all these women just really want to find the best answers to continue doing what we've been doing all these years for missions."

WMU's two former top executives also responded to the action. Alma Hunt, who led WMU from 1948 to 1974, applauded the decisions.

"The statement is not one I ever dreamed WMU would have to make," Hunt said. "However, in the circumstances in which WMU works today, I think the statement is commendable. I affirm our national and state leaders for their continuing commitment to encouraging all churches to share in the financial support of missions and to experience the revitalization it brings both to churches and missionaries."

Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, WMU executive director from 1974 to 1989, referred to the portion of the statement that said, "We regret that our silence over the years might have been construed as consent or even support of the controversy."

"I think WMU history shows that the women haven't spoken out indiscriminantly," she said. "They've spoken out when missions was hindered or hurt, following the examples of our foremothers."

"I'm in total agreement with what the WMU executive board has said, because it has come to the point that they really did have to speak out because missions has been hurt and will continue to be hurt."

Each of the women specifically expressed appreciation to the WMU executive board for addressing home and foreign missionaries in the statement.

The statement includes the following message directed to the missionaries: "We want you to know that we will continue to love you and to support you. We will be your staying force when you fear all others might abandon you. We affirm you individually and collectively. We are here for you now, and we will be there for you in the future."

Southern Baptist missionaries have needed affirmation, several of the former leaders said.

"The missionaries desperately needed that word," Crumpler said. "I'm so grateful that the executive board has spoken out to assure them that they have the support."

Most of all, the leaders were grateful to WMU for recognizing alternate cooperative missions funding plans.

"For 65 years WMU has been unwavering in its promotion of the Cooperative Program," Hunt said. "Not until a growing number of churches appealed to WMU or otherwise expressed their need for an alternate plan did the national organization face the necessity of responding."

"I'm really, really grateful that WMU has affirmed the right of individuals, churches and state conventions to choose other plans for cooperative missions giving," Crumpler said. "I think in light of the circumstances in the denomination, it was time for WMU to say something."

"I see this as a way to get money flowing again into the mission program," Sample said. "I appreciated that the WMU national leadership affirmed the right of churches and individuals to give cooperatively in other ways."

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Kuwait church meeting and feeding hungry, reports say

By Mary E. Speidel

N. EMB

Baptist Press
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Lay leaders at the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait City have begun conducting worship services again and feeding the hungry, according to reports.

Several Philippine evacuees from Kuwait have reported to pastor Jerry Zanstra that five Philippine lay leaders are conducting worship services at the church. Iraqi soldiers are attending services and are not disrupting worship, the evacuees said. Zanstra and his family were in the United States for the summer when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Other reports said Iraqi soldiers had asked a Catholic priest in Kuwait City if services could be conducted. A Catholic cathedral is located about two blocks from the evangelical church.

Reports from inside Kuwait indicate evangelical church members also are feeding hungry Asians.

"The church is busy ministering to the Asians who are going hungry," said one source Sept. 22. The food distribution reportedly began Sept. 17. "Food is available but (the cost) is two to three times higher," the report said.

Zanstra said he has not heard about the feeding project, but was not surprised such a ministry has begun. "It's just an extension of the ministry they were trained to do and have done in the past," Zanstra said of the lay leaders, who are members of the church board. Each summer they conduct services while he is away, Zanstra said.

Before Iraqi troops stormed into Kuwait City Aug. 2, the church had an "extensive ministry" to Filipinos who work as domestics there, Zanstra said. The church provided food, shelter and employment assistance to runaway and abused household workers.

Such workers were employed as servants and depended upon their employers for food, said Zanstra. Since many of their employers probably have fled the country, Zanstra explained, the Filipinos now have no resources. Since the invasion, "I'm sure the need (for the ministry) is even greater," he said.

About 500 Filipinos were a part of the English-language congregation at the evangelical church, he said. They also met for Friday worship services conducted in Tagalog, a Philippine language; about 250 people attended.

The English-language congregation is about one-third Philippine, one-third Indian and one-third a mixture of other expatriates, Zanstra said. Before the invasion, about 10,000 people gathered for evangelical services held in numerous languages each Sunday and Friday, the Muslim holy day, he said.

One of the Filipinos who fled Kuwait had reported earlier to Baptist Press that the church had been turned into an Iraqi military compound. The refugee, Flora Labuguen, a nurse who worked at a Kuwait hospital for nearly six years, fled the country Aug. 26. She arrived with about 250 other Philippine refugees at the Amman Baptist School in Jordan Sept. 9. The Baptist school was providing food and shelter for refugees at the time.

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Agee diagnosed with
treatable form of leukemia

F-CA
(ORLA)

SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--Doctors treating Bob R. Agee at Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City have determined that the Oklahoma Baptist University president has a rare, but treatable, form of leukemia.

Specialists have told the president, who has been hospitalized for the past week, that the disease is incurable, but not immediately life-threatening. With treatment Agee, 51, will be able to resume his responsibilities at the university, provided he reduces his travel schedule and the number of off-campus engagements.

"The good news from the doctor is that I should be able to undergo the treatments over an extended period of time while resuming normal responsibilities at the university," Agee said. "The treatment schedule and the higher threat of secondary infections will necessitate that I greatly curtail many of my extracurricular activities. The doctor sees no reason why I should not be able to function as chief executive officer under a modified travel schedule and with some reduction of outside engagements."

Doctors will define the specifics of Agee's treatment schedule over the next few weeks. He is expected to be released Sept. 29. Agee, who has been OBU president since 1982, may be back in his office on a limited schedule in about two weeks.

C. Pat Taylor, vice president for academic affairs and chairman of the president's six-member administrative council, will be responsible for coordinating the university's planning and management processes in conjunction with the other council members until Agee returns to a normal schedule.

"Nelle, our daughters and I will greatly appreciate your prayers," Agee said. "We are going to work with the assumption that God has much for me to do and that he's going to use medical science and his healing power to grant us years of life and life for our years. My intent is to turn this period of life into something for God's glory and honor."

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SBC loses 235 churches
per year, study says

By Mark Wingfield

N-NMB

Baptist Press
9/28/90

ATLANTA (BP)--An average of 235 Southern Baptist churches die each year, with dwindling attendance and financial support the most common causes of death, a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board study reveals.

The findings were reported by Orrin Morris, director of the HMB's research division. To conduct the study, Morris and his staff looked at statistics reported on the SBC Uniform Church Letter for the past 19 years. A more intensive study was made of the 764 churches dropped from SBC rolls in 1985, 1986 and 1987.

Currently, the SBC has more than 37,700 churches nationwide. The count of "dropped" churches includes a small percentage of congregations that still exist but no longer affiliate with the SBC.

Between 1971 and 1989, there were 4,496 churches dropped from the convention's rolls. The largest number was recorded in 1974, when 289 churches were removed. The low was in 1988 with 198 drops.

"Many dropped churches were small and financially weak," Morris said. "Most had shown no gain in members or attendance for several years. Most were located in the Old South. But this is about as far as one can generalize the situation."

Texas, the state with the largest number of Southern Baptist churches, recorded the largest numerical loss of churches during the 19-year period. The Lone Star state dropped 686 churches.

Texas and eight other states accounted for 60 percent of all dropped churches, Morris said. The other states -- most of which are among Southern Baptist strongholds -- are Georgia (361), North Carolina (341), Tennessee (275), Alabama (234), California (233), Missouri (219), Kentucky (217) and Florida (203).

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Morris classified the churches which died into eight major categories: (1) churches in transitional communities; (2) churches that split; (3) churches that failed to evangelize; (4) churches that never developed financial stewardship; (5) churches with weak lay leadership; (6) churches with weak pastoral leadership; (7) churches started by weak sponsors; (8) churches appealing only to a narrow population niche that suddenly moved away.

The detailed study of churches dropped between 1985 and 1987 showed three common evidences at the time of death.

First, most dropped churches had few members. One-half of those studied had fewer than 50 resident members. Another 25 percent reported fewer than 100 resident members.

Second, most dropped churches had few people attending. More than 75 percent reported fewer than 50 people attending Sunday school.

Third, most dropped churches were older churches. One-half were at least 25 years old when dropped. However, 20 percent listed an organization date of 1980 or later.

Because of the HMB's emphasis on church starting, Morris took a closer look at those 156 young churches that died.

He discovered most of the young churches which died were in states with a longer history of Southern Baptist work. Older state conventions dropped 103 churches, compared to the 53 dropped in newer conventions.

Few of the dropped young churches were economically viable, Morris said. Only 25 percent had total incomes of \$50,000 or more.

"This implies that many of these churches had dedicated supporters, but too few to pay the bills. The church died either when outside support was phased down or when some supporting members moved on," he said.

Further, only 9 percent of the dropped young churches were showing even a slight increase in membership or attendance over the previous year.

"The study of young churches reveals many were constituted before they had gained sufficient strength to become self-supporting," Morris concluded. "There are many reasons for this, ranging from poor support by the mother church to the eagerness of the infant congregation to be free from accountability to the mother church."

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Chart available upon request from the Home Mission Board

350 churches constitute annually
but 25 percent die in 15 years

By Mark Wingfield

N-NMB

Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists constitute as many as 350 new churches each year but lose one-fourth of those churches within 15 years, according to a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board study.

The Church Lifecycle Study was conducted by Clay Price and Phillip Jones of the HMB's research division. To conduct the study, the research division staff tracked all new SBC churches organized between 1972 and 1987.

The study focused on 5,095 churches that both constituted and reported on the SBC Uniform Church Letter during those years. Churches are constituted when they move from mission status to become self-supporting.

The number of churches constituted each year remained fairly constant during those years, the study says. On average, 325 to 350 churches are constituted each year.

Of the 5,095 churches studied, 750 were dropped from convention rolls during the study period, for an overall loss rate of 14.7 percent.

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Price and Jones relate the number of drops to the age of the churches. About 10 percent of churches are dropped within the first seven years of existence; 15 percent are lost within 10 years; 20 percent within 13 years; and 25 percent within 15 years.

The study also found that while the majority of SBC churches are located in rural areas of less than 2,500 people, the majority of new churches are located in urban areas.

"Although the majority of SBC churches are now started in urban areas, urban areas are still under-represented in new church starts," Price and Jones report. While 74 percent of the U.S. population is classified as urban, only 59 percent of new churches have been started in urban areas.

The typical new church begins small and stays small, the study says. According to median statistics, a typical Southern Baptist church starts with 56 members and grows to 134 after 10 years.

"Small, new churches should recognize they are typical and affirm the strengths they possess," Price and Jones suggest. "Large numerical gain is not the current norm in the lifecycle of new SBC churches. The small church is the rule; the superchurch is the exception."

However, new churches could see these statistics as motivation to aim for higher goals, the two researchers say. "The statistics in this report are not deterministic. Churches have the choice to set new directions for their existence."

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Schlegels honored
for creative service

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
9/28/90

F-CP
(S.C.)

HILTON HEAD, S.C. (BP)--Sam and Betty Anne Schlegel of St. Augustine, Fla., received the 1990 Ken Prickett award for creative, experimental and innovative ministries.

Bill Lee, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's special ministries department, presented the award Sept. 26 during the National Resort Ministries Conference at First Baptist Church of Hilton Head, S.C.

The Schlegels have pioneered ministries to people in the boating community since 1981. They began their ministry as Mission Service Corp volunteers, leading to appointment as home missionaries in 1984. However, their appointed positions have been on inactive status since June 1 this year due to 1989 HMB budget cuts.

The annual award is given in memory of Ken Prickett, who was a home missionary and member of the HMB special ministries department staff.

"We're known for coloring outside the lines, but it's not hard to be creative when you're part of a creative family," Sam Schlegel said, referring to the 200 people in resort ministries attending the conference.

The Schlegels' work focuses on the waterfront, including ministry to seamen, people in the boating business and tourists. They have been active supporters of Campers on Mission and ministries among motorcycle riders and truckers.

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Conference center attendance
registers increase in 1990

N-CP

Baptist Press
9/28/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--The inauguration of Sunday school fast track conferences and increased participation in Southern Baptist Home Mission Board conferences pushed 1990 conference center attendance figures up by 1,705 over last year, statistics reveal.

Combined summer conference center attendance at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers was 54,870 compared to 53,165 in 1989, according to statistics compiled by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's conference center section.

Attendance at Ridgecrest increased 1,433 over 1989, and Glorieta was up by 272. These figures include a Centrifuge attendance of 10,575 at the two conference centers.

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Offering designated to the Cooperative Program unified budget given by summer conference participants totaled \$56,495.

Two fast-track Sunday school sessions at Ridgecrest in the space of a normal week produced higher enrollment and allowed more leaders to be trained in 1990, according to Keith Kline, field service projects coordinator in the Sunday school division.

Total Sunday school conference attendance at both Glorieta and Ridgecrest was 15,542 in 1990, up 1,486 from 1989. These figures do not reflect Centrifuge registration.

Enrollment in the first fast-track was 2,139, "about what we would normally have had that week," Kline said. Enrollment for the second half of the week was 1,655, allowing training for people who otherwise could not have secured reservations, he noted.

As an added bonus, a total of 1,036 registered for the second fast track were Sunday school leaders rather than youth or children, Kline said.

"People liked the fast track because of the reduced cost, less time and intensive training," he said, adding that two fast tracks have been planned for Ridgecrest in 1991 after which the project will be evaluated.

Home Mission Board conference attendance showed a significant increase over last year, according to statistics. Attendance at both HMB conferences was 4,113 in 1990, up 1,288 over 1989.

Jericho missions festivals held for the second year at Glorieta and Ridgecrest drew 3,217 participants, down slightly from 3,246 in 1989. Jericho is sponsored by the Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

Attendance at Bible preaching-administration, discipleship training, WMU, church music and student conferences decreased from 1989, statistics revealed.

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Hilton Head church receives
resort ministries award

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-NMB Baptist Press
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HILTON HEAD, S.C. (BP)--First Baptist Church of Hilton Head, S.C., was named "Resort Missions Church of the Year" as the National Resort Ministries Conference began its sessions at the church.

Bill Lee, director of special ministries with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, presented the award to pastor Felix Haynes Sept. 23.

The 550-member church is involved in an array of ministries on the popular resort island, including puppets, clowns, spring break programs, evangelism during professional sporting events, lifeguard cookouts, mothers' morning out and music and drama teams.

This summer the church began a coffee house ministry to provide wholesome entertainment and an avenue for evangelism in a shopping center.

Such ministries allow the church to "present our message where people are gathered and who aren't going to come to church house," Haynes said. "God's calling us to be something fresh and vital and different."

Resort ministries must be challenging and innovative without changing the Christian message, Haynes noted during the opening session of the resort ministries conference. About 150 missionaries and laypeople attended the week-long conference.

George Bullard, director of missions for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, reported more than 200 professions of faith were made through resort missions in South Carolina this summer.

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Baptists be helping
flood victims in Mexico

F-10 (Mexico)

CHIHUAHUA, Mexico (BP)--Mexican Baptists and Southern Baptist representatives in Mexico are helping flood victims in Chihuahua find higher ground.

In just a few hours on the night of Sept. 22, heavy rains swept through the city, killing about 45 people, destroying houses, overflowing dams and overturning cars, according to local news reports. Up to 200 people are missing and 5,000 families have suffered losses, reports said. By Sept. 24, about 40 percent of the city did not have safe drinking water because of damage to aqueducts and contamination of water supplies.

Southern Baptist representatives and Mexican Baptists are working out of local churches to provide water, food and supplies to flood victims in the city's hardest-hit areas. Baptists are supplying tanks of drinking water and collecting food and clothing for distribution. In Colonia Villa, where damage was especially severe, Baptists are preparing and serving meals for hungry residents.

The relief project, coordinated by Southern Baptist representative Jimmie Spann from Grapeland, Texas, is being financed by the Mexican Baptist convention's disaster relief fund.

Along with providing physical relief, Baptist volunteers are sharing their Christian faith with flood victims. An outdoor worship service was planned for Sept. 30 near Horeb Baptist Church on the city's north side.

People who live near that church had to flee to their roofs because of rapidly rising waters Sept. 22, according to Southern Baptist representative Lisa Barron. Barron and her husband, Ronnie, agricultural workers, are members of the church. They are from Nashville, Tenn.

As flood waters raged through the neighborhood, Baptists helped hoist neighbors up to the rooftops. They watched in horror as people they couldn't reach were pulled away by the current. The force of the water shattered a neighbor's 6-foot-high block fence and swept away everything inside the house. The church building was not damaged.

Southern Baptist representatives Josue and Lee Ann Valerio, student workers from Edinburg and Denton, Texas, were caught in the flood while driving home with their three children. When their truck stalled about a block from home, Valerio waded home through knee-deep current, carrying two of their children. He returned with a neighbor in another truck to rescue his wife and their infant daughter.

In a low-lying area of Chihuahua, a Baptist family living across the street from Jezreel Baptist Church took refuge in an upstairs room while water filled their house. Meanwhile, water broke through the back of a house next-door to the church. The water knocked down the walls and swept away everything inside.

In another house near the church, a 2-year-old child was torn from his grandmother's grasp and carried away by the current. The child has not been found.

The two-story, unfinished church building sustained no major damage.

In the storm, two brothers from another local Baptist church were trapped on a public bus. Raging waters flipped the bus and quickly filled it to chest-high level. The brothers broke open a window and helped others escape. During the stampede to get out, the bus driver and a child were killed.

Much of the flood damage occurred in low-lying areas alongside creeks or in dry riverbeds where poor residents lived in cardboard and clay housing, according to news reports. But flood waters also caused damage in higher areas where more affluent residents live.

Local news sources said some residents have not returned to their homes because they are afraid structural damage will cause further loss. Because of fear and false information, caravans of people reportedly are fleeing the areas at the base of the Sierra Madre Mountains. They are carrying their possessions to higher ground.

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But Mexican Baptists are helping flood victims find higher ground in a spiritual sense, according to the Southern Baptist representative in Chihuahua. "The faithful, consistent testimonies are bearing new fruit among those around them," said the representative. "God's grace in the midst of their own pain and loss is evidence of higher ground."

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Lee Ann Valerio, a Southern Baptist representative in Mexico, provided this story.

Camp attendance, giving,
decisions increase for 1990

N-10

Baptist Press
9/28/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Total registration, mission collections and spiritual decisions at Centrifuge and Crosspoint camps this summer pushed significantly ahead of last year's numbers, statistics reveal.

Centrifuge and Crosspoint campers collected \$167,477 for missions in 1990, 36 percent or \$60,447 more than in 1989, according to Joe Palmer, special services coordinator in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department which facilitates the camps.

"Part of the reason we collected so much more money this year is because our attendance was up," Palmer said. "But also our kids are getting a missions mindset. Missions is becoming very real to them."

Registration for the combined conferences was 37,752 in 1990 as compared to 31,328 in 1989, according to statistics compiled in the church recreation department. A total of 4,351 spiritual decisions was registered, up from 3,877 last year.

Crosspoint is a Christian sports camp for girls and boys, grades four through eight. Centrifuge is a Christian camp for teens, 7th through 12th grades.

An offering of \$165,235 was collected at 80 Centrifuge camps held in locations across the United States and in Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Switzerland and the Honduras, Palmer said.

The money, to be distributed through the Foreign Mission Board, will go for various mission needs in the Philippines, West Africa, Albania, Middle America, Canada, Hungary and Ecuador. Some of the needs, which cannot be met through regular channels of Cooperative Program or Lottie Moon Offering giving, include: evangelistic film translation, radio broadcasts, evangelism and discipleship training materials for students, church building funds and portable chapels.

The \$2,212 collected at nine Crosspoint camps will go to mission programs for inner-city children in New Orleans, Palmer said. The money will be distributed by the Home Mission Board. This is only the second year money for missions had been collected at Crosspoint camps, Palmer said.

Total registration at Centrifuge camps was 36,197. Weeklong camps were held at 10 locations, including three colleges, two beachside camps, three traveling teams, and Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist conference centers.

A total of 775 professions of faith was made during the 80 Centrifuge weeks; 338 church vocations; and 3,082 rededications and other decisions, according to statistics.

At Crosspoint camps where total attendance was 1,555, 65 young people accepted Christ, 87 rededicated their lives and four made other types of decisions, Palmer said.

The camps were held in North Carolina, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana and Georgia.

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Home Mission Board
begins recycling program

By Kelly Capers

F-NMB

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ATLANTA (BP)--In the first four months of a new recycling program, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board employees saved almost 150 trees, 2,100 gallons of fuel and 41 cubic yards of landfill space, president Larry Lewis said.

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"The Home Mission Board should be a leader in our concern regarding environmental problems and disposal of waste," said Lewis. "These are pertinent issues and will become even more so in the future."

The program concentrates on the disposal of white paper, computer paper and aluminum cans. Special collection bins are provided on every floor of the HMB's Atlanta headquarters. A private firm, contracted to analyze the HMB facility and set up a workable system, is responsible for maintaining the bins and taking away the collected goods.

Lewis said he hopes other SBC agencies will begin similar programs. "We must find more ways to be good stewards of God's precious gift, our planet," he said.

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(Capers is editorial assistant in the Home Mission Board's news and information office.)

Missionaries use own time, money
to house Fulani wife, children

By Craig Bird

N-FMB

Baptist Press
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BAMAKO, Mali (BP)--Suntura Jiallo sold all of her cattle so she and her husband could buy a plot of land and build a house outside of Bamako, the capital of Mali.

But a few years later her husband suddenly announced Suntura was no longer his wife and arbitrarily divided their common property. He -- and his mistress -- would keep the house and the land. Suntura would get the five children. No counteroffers were considered.

Homelessness can send people in strange directions. Suntura, a member of the Fulani tribe (and therefore, almost by definition, a Muslim resistant to the gospel) approached the Baptist Community Center seeking help.

The Southern Baptist mission organization of Mali had no budget to help hungry families without a place to stay. But missionaries don't let corporate funds limit their private vision; they commonly spend their own money and spare time helping people, although it never shows up in end-of-year statistics.

Southern Baptist missionaries became involved. They pointed Suntura toward legal help, and the court ruled that the house and property belonged to her since she had paid for it. Incensed, her husband stole the roof, exposing the interior and the mud walls, which dissolve in rain.

Meanwhile, he appealed the court case and won a verdict in his favor. Suntura's appeal of his appeal bogged down. She and her children were living on the property, jammed into a 9-by-9-foot kitchen outbuilding -- the only shelter her husband hadn't decapitated. (The missionaries had replaced the roof after the initial court ruling but removed it when the husband won round two.)

To help out, the Baptist center employed Suntura's 15-year-old son. Missionaries' private contributions paid for medical care when a 16-year-old daughter developed leprosy, and helped provide food and clothing for the family.

For a year the legal situation stagnated. Finally missionaries approached the judge and explained that while Baptists did not want to take sides, they wanted to provide decent housing for a woman and five children.

Two weeks later the judge issued the binding verdict: the land, and the remnants of the house, belonged to Suntura. The missionaries and the family promptly cleared away the mud piles of the former residence and began making mud bricks for a five-room, 32-by-57-foot dwelling.

They dried up their "informal fund" buying material for an aluminum roof and tied up their spare hours installing it. When payday rolled around they bought steel windows and doors. The concrete to finish the floors and other small items had to wait for more paydays and more donations from missionaries.

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By the time the house was completed, Bamako missionaries and short-term volunteers had contributed more than \$2,000. And their hours of labor had attracted plenty of attention in the neighborhood -- some folks were jealous, but most said it was a good thing for whites to help blacks.

So Suntura, 16-year-old Patrice (now cured of leprosy), 15-year-old Gilbert, 5-year-old Jacqueline, 4-year-old Abraham and 2-year-old Aminata ("little light") have a home now. Plus an income, since the house was built with five rooms to allow Suntura to rent to boarders.

But more importantly, Suntura has begun attending a home Bible study led by missionaries Tom and Diane Pace -- who were among those who helped her. She is a serious student, eager to learn about the Jesus her Baptist friends talk about. She also has offered to let missionaries use her house as a meeting place to start a church in the neighborhood.

"We're confident she'll be saved," said Norman Coad, a former missionary who also was active in the project. "She's hungry for the gospel. Of course she's Fulani, and the Fulani are supposed to be highly resistant to the gospel. But then, everyone is resistant until you learn how to present the message."

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