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Cooperative Program
grows 2.46 percent

N-10

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists contributed a record \$140.7 million to their convention-wide budget during the 1989-90 fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30.

The Cooperative Program budget helps support 18 Southern Baptist convention organizations that conduct evangelistic, missionary and educational ministries around the world.

The program received \$140,710,282 in 1989-90, an increase of \$3,377,759 over the 1988-89 budget, reported Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, which disperses the money. That gain is a 2.46 percent increase. It means a decrease in spending power, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The bureau has determined the cost of living rose 5.6 percent in the United States for the 12-month period that ended Aug. 31.

The Cooperative Program's receipts topped its 1989-90 basic operating goal by \$5,922,739, Bennett noted.

Of the overage, \$2,431,880 was spent to retire the debt on the SBC Building in Nashville, Bennett said. The building, which houses eight SBC organization, was completed in early 1985.

The balance of the overage was divided between the 18 recipients of the budget in the same proportion as they received basic operations allocations, he added.

"I am absolutely delighted by the 2.4 percent increase over the budget a year ago," Bennett said, noting estimates indicated the gain would be about 2 percent.

"Southern Baptists are continuing to be concerned about supporting world missions through the Cooperative Program and will give strong support to it."

The Cooperative Program has become a focal point in the SBC's 12-year old controversy.

Some moderates, who say they have been excluded from meaningful participation in the convention by conservatives in control of its agencies, have begun designating or escrowing their national contributions to the program. Some of them have organized a national mechanism, the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., to disperse money to SBC agencies without channeling it through the Executive Committee.

Some conservatives, meanwhile, have accused the moderates of sabotaging the convention's missions-funding mechanism. They have condemned escrowing or designating funds and called for increased Cooperative Program giving.

"The effect of the financial skirmish has not been determined," Bennett said. Designated receipts -- two missions offerings as well as designated gifts and other special contributions -- were up only 3.9 percent, he noted.

"We have not been impacted as yet by any withholding or designations to any degree," he said. "A quarter from now, we may see a trend. It will have to be after the Baptists state conventions (in November) before we see appreciable changes occurring."

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The goal for the current Cooperative Program basic operating budget is \$137,332,523. Any average will be divided 50-50 between a "program advance" component, which distributes funds proportionately to the 18 recipients, and a "capital needs" component, which will go toward meeting \$22 million in building fund commitments the convention has made to some agencies.

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FMB eyes Korea tax puzzle,
votes to sell properties

By Michael Chute

N-FMB

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SEOUL, South Korea (BP)--Southern Baptist mission leaders are working on two fronts to try to solve a \$1.6 million Korean tax puzzle.

Under a new government ruling, that's what it would cost the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board annually in taxes unless it sells about two-thirds of its property in South Korea that the nation's government now classifies as "excess" property.

The board, through its missionary organization in South Korea, has been seeking a way for some time to sell property it no longer considers vital to its work in the country. It had hoped to take at least part of the proceeds, along with sale of unneeded property in several other countries, and use the money to help meet missionary housing and other property needs worldwide.

But the Korean government agency that regulates religious activity in the country says proceeds from such property sales must be reinvested in Korean property.

Sam James, director for the Foreign Mission Board's work in East Asia, said he sees some hope for a solution. Government officials have told him and Korean mission leaders that they will work with them to try to determine ways the funds could be used in line with the Korea Baptist Mission's charter.

As a first step toward seeking a solution, Foreign Mission Board trustees at their October meeting in Richmond, Va., authorized the mission organization in South Korea to sell three missionary properties containing multiple missionary residences, two in Seoul and one in Taejon. The land, purchased in the 1950s and 1960s at costs ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000, now has an estimated combined value of more than \$16 million. Proceeds from the sale would be applied against operating or capital expenditures of the Korean mission in accordance with Korean legal restrictions, the actions stipulated.

The board also authorized sale of a Taiwan residence property, bought in 1962 for \$4,400 and valued today at \$1 million. Proceeds would be applied against operating expenses of the Taiwan Baptist Mission in accordance with Taiwan legal restrictions, the action said.

In South Korea, as in a number of other countries, the Southern Baptist mission organization bought large lots in the 1950s and 1960s for single-family residences when property was relatively inexpensive. When missionaries completed work in an area and moved away, the property was sold. As property values escalated in South Korea, the mission organization received considerably more funds for the land than it originally had paid.

For the past 30 years, the government's Ministry of Culture has insisted that funds received from the sale of property must be used to purchase more property. Much of this property was needed as the work and the number of missionaries in the country grew. But through this process, the Southern Baptist mission organization has become the largest foreign, non-profit property owner in the country. James said it is the only mission organization that still holds title to a large number of properties.

Implementing the law that went into effect this year, the Korean Ministry of Construction said that the Korea Baptist Mission, to avoid a heavy tax liability, must dispose of a large portion of its property. The construction minister calculated "excessive" property as any land around a structure more than four times larger than the square footage of the residence's ground floor.

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South Korea's new tax law is aimed at keeping major corporations from buying land as speculative investments. The government maintains that speculation buying in the past has forced potential Korean homeowners out of the market.

Published reports say just 6 percent of the corporations operating in South Korea control nearly 80 percent of all property in the country. Government officials believe putting speculative land back on the market will lower property values.

"The law was not intended to correct non-profit corporations, but it's impossible to allow the law without applying it to everyone," James said. "They've made a very rigid application of the law to all entities in Korea, profit and non-profit."

A tax accounting firm hired by the mission organization says the Foreign Mission Board would need to sell approximately 57,000 square yards of land in five major Korean cities -- Seoul, Taejon, Pusan, Taeju and Incheon -- where the government has applied the law. Korean government officials indicate that in the next few years the law will extend to other areas of the country.

Korean mission property consists of missionary residences and mission offices, property owned by the Korea Baptist Convention but in the mission's name, and some vacant lots planned for future missionary housing.

If not sold, that portion deemed now to be "excess" land would require payment of an annual tax bill of \$1.6 million, far more than the entire east Asia mission operating budget could afford, James noted. He said the excess property must be sold by March 1992 to avoid the tax, which would be applied retroactively to the date the new law was passed in March 1990.

The developments in South Korea come at a time when the Foreign Mission Board has been taking a close look at its properties in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and some other countries. Some of these properties, because of their strategic location, have escalated rapidly in value in recent years -- more for the land than for the structures on them. Board officials feel the functions served by these properties could be met equally well by purchase of less expensive properties in other locations.

Any gains realized from such sales would go into a global fund from which priority needs could be met. But this has not proved to be a simple matter because of the combination of high taxes on the sales and the cost of repatriating the funds to the United States. In some cases, such repatriation is not even possible.

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Chaplains find physical
hardships, spiritual renewal

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-DMB

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ATLANTA (BP)--Along with scorpions and viper bites, Southern Baptist chaplains report professions of faith and baptisms during Operation Desert Shield.

Letters received by the chaplaincy division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board reveal both physical hardships and spiritual renewal. As of Oct. 11, more than 70 Southern Baptist chaplains from every branch of the military were stationed in the Middle East.

Due to military security, names and locations of chaplains are omitted from this story.

One chaplain reported nine professions of faith. Without rivers, lakes or swimming pools, the chaplain used a decontamination tank for a baptistry. The tank's rubberized liner on a metal frame is designed to decontaminate people and equipment after chemical warfare.

Another chaplain wrote that "soldiers are anxious to hear from God. I've even done a baptism in the desert; it may be the first in this Moslem land."

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That chaplain is with the most forwardly deployed ground unit. He says he conducts "platoon-size" worship services, and it takes four days to cover his 13 ministry points because the troops are so dispersed.

Another chaplain reported eight professions of faith and asked for 25 copies of the Survival Kit for New Christians workbook for adults and 600 evangelistic tracts. The HMB chaplaincy division will send the material to him.

"Worship services have been fantastic," another chaplain wrote. Attendance at the morning worship service he leads has grown from 11 to 52, and the evening attendance has grown from 12 to 42. Daily Bible study attendance has grown from six to 43 with nine choir members. He reported seven professions of faith.

The chaplains told of hardships such as desert heat and biting wind. One chaplain reported that the tent city is up and showers are installed. "I know because I helped the troops with both projects," he wrote. "You can't be a real chaplain unless you're out there sweating with others and helping carry their burdens."

He added: "Although there are hardships for everyone, this has been an active and exciting time spiritually."

"There is something very special about worship at night with a platoon of hardened infantry scouts on the side of a sandy hill with nothing but a red lens light and God's word," one chaplain noted. "Every day I thank God for this experience, even if I've got to put up with those pesky flies and camel dung beetles."

The chaplains' prayer requests include safety for troops, protection for their families, peace and a quick return to the United States. One chaplain requested prayer for "Muslims who need the true Messiah and his grace."

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Sociologist predicts shift
away from local congregations

By Pat Cole

F-10
(SBTS)

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Christians will increasingly look beyond their local congregations to fulfill their spiritual yearnings, predicted a sociologist of American religion.

Robert Wuthnow, professor of sociology at Princeton (N.J.) University, told a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary conference that "a variety of options" will confront Christians in the 21st Century.

Wuthnow addressed a conference on "The Church as Community: Being the People of God" at the Louisville, Ky., seminary. The conference was sponsored by the seminary's Dehoney Center for the Study of the Local Church and funded with a grant from Pew Charitable Trust in Philadelphia.

"Religious knowledge can be sought in the college classroom, or if not there, in the pages of any of the hundreds of religious magazines and books available through the mail or a local religious book store," he said. "Emotional support can be sought at the counseling center and through twelve-step groups. For inspiration, put some religious music on the CD-player. For an angry prophetic voice, turn on religious television."

While the church may remain the primary place of community for "a core of active laity," others will treat the church as only a "referral service," said Wuthnow, noting that in recent years churches have tended to be larger, more program oriented and less personal.

Intimate fellowship is more likely to be found in smaller groups such as singles and young married ministries, choirs and other special interest groups, he said.

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"The church as a whole has been strengthened by these groups, and, thus far, managed fairly well to serve as a kind of a clearinghouse for them," said Wuthnow. He added, however, that the groups may not always benefit congregations: "Increasingly, people start house churches that have no official denominational connection, seek spiritual direction at centers operated separately from local churches, and pray the Lord's Prayer at twelve-step groups to their 'higher power.'"

The training of children, he said, will be "the greatest gap" left by these alternative forms of religious community: "It is little wonder, therefore, that those concerned most about the survival of the church have turned much of their attention toward the family and toward other agencies of socialization such as schools and television. Should the congregation be replaced by the shopping mall and the soap opera, we might well fear for the survival of both the church and our culture itself."

Another speaker, theologian Langdon Gilkey, stressed the church must be devoted to the biblical gospel, its ethical mission and personal piety.

Churches must make the biblical message relevant to the modern world, said Gilkey, Shailer Matthews professor of theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School. The church, he said, should engage in a "reflective effort to understand our biblical truth and its past interpretations in relation to the major viewpoints and 'truths' by which we in modern, scientific, psychological and political culture live out our lives."

"Any church that ignores this task does not save its biblical message, for it has no way of bringing that message into the world which we actually inhabit," he observed.

Gilkey commended churches involved in the struggle for social justice. Yet, sin affects both social structures and the personal lives of people within them, he said, adding that sin takes on such forms as "sexual abuse and irresponsibility, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence -- leading to broken homes, lost individuals and deserted and maimed children."

In response to these problems, the church should function as a "refuge from the deadly storm, a community that recognizes, accepts and takes these crises into itself," he said.

Within faith communities, there is also a need for spirituality if "the church is to live again," said Gilkey, noting that he had been exposed to little emphasis on spiritual development during his formative years. Disciplines such as meditation, Bible study and silence are needed to "help inwardness grow," he said.

Gilkey said many who left Christianity for other religions have told him their conversions were due to the lack of spiritual emphasis in Christian churches.

Spirituality also can aid the church in its prophetic role, emphasized Miroslav Volf, professor of systematic theology on the Evangelical Theological faculty in Osijek, Yugoslavia.

Volf said the "community of Christian prophets" needs a renewal of "orthopathy," which he defined as "the experience of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit that makes them love both God and God's world."

Spiritual devotion does more than inspire and motivate prophets, he said: "It aids them also in understanding how one can bring the word of God and the situation into an effective interface."