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December 4, 1990

90-165

November CP produces
1990-91 increase for SBC

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program unified budget receipts for November pushed total receipts for the first two months of the 1990-91 budget year to \$23,123,282, a gain of 2.07 percent over the same period of 1989-90.

October receipts had fallen 4.20 percent below the same month last year, but an 8.6 percent increase in November produced the growth balance.

In response to this report, SBC Executive Committee president and treasurer Harold C. Bennett said that he was "very pleased with the increase in Cooperative Program receipts in November as opposed to (the decrease) in October."

Bennett also said he was "gratified at the number of state conventions that adopted recommendations in support of world missions through the Cooperative Program."

The total 1990-91 Cooperative Program basic operating budget of \$137,332,523 requires average monthly receipts of \$11,444,377.

Receipts above the basic operating budget will be distributed on a 50-50 basis to program advance and capital needs.

Program advance dollars will be distributed to budgeted entities according to each entities' percentage of the basic operating budget.

The 1990-91 Cooperative Program capital needs budget provides for a percentage formula for the distribution of funds available for capital needs.

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Write Saddam Hussein,
Baptist leader urges

N-FMB

Baptist Press
12/4/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Churches should "mount an intensive campaign of petitionary letters to Saddam Hussein," says Southern Baptist mission leader R. Keith Parks.

The letters should inform Saddam that American Christians are praying for peace and a just solution to the Persian Gulf crisis, Parks recommended, and should ask the Iraqi leader to release all foreign hostages being held in Iraq and Kuwait.

He also asked churches to "identify families of hostages in your area, and to make contact with them in order to tell them of your prayers and to offer spiritual support."

Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, asked for the writing campaign in a Dec. 3 appeal to more than 700 churches, Christian agencies and leaders already committed to world prayer. He enclosed a suggested letter to Saddam and encouraged churches to duplicate it for distribution to other area congregations of all denominations.

The suggested letter tells Saddam that the senders, "being a people of faith, good will and peace, and because of the imminent possibility of violent conflict in the Middle East," are praying for peace.

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"We therefore urgently appeal to you, in the interest of peace for all mankind, to order the immediate release of all expatriates -- fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters -- that they may be reunited with loved ones and the cause of peace can be advanced.

"We sincerely feel that the releasing of these persons on your part would be seen not only as a significant gesture of good will throughout the world, but also as a major step toward securing the peace which we all desire," the letter concluded.

Southern Baptist worker Maurice Graham of Shelbyville, Tenn., remains with a handful of Americans still at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait. Graham's wife, Laurie, and their two sons were permitted to leave Kuwait in September. Hundreds of other Americans and other foreigners still are being held in Iraq and Kuwait.

Earlier Parks urged Baptists worldwide to make Dec. 9 a day of prayer for the Middle East because the mounting threat of war is "beyond human solution." Dec. 9 is the concluding day this year in Southern Baptists' Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions. The Middle East is this year's focus for foreign mission studies in Southern Baptist churches.

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SBC baptisms projected
to increase 7.7 percent

By Mark Wingfield

F-HMB

Baptist Press
12/4/90

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (BP)--Baptisms in Southern Baptist churches for 1990 are projected to be up nearly 8 percent over the previous year -- the largest percentage increase in a decade.

Clay Price of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's research division presented that projection to state evangelism directors during their annual meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The total number of baptisms projected for the year is 378,000, a 7.7 percent increase over the 351,107 baptisms recorded in 1989.

Official statistics on baptisms will be reported by the Southern Sunday School Board early in 1991. Price's estimate is based upon preliminary data provided by state evangelism directors.

The increase in baptisms appears to be a uniform phenomenon across the nation, Price reported.

Southern Baptists recorded their highest number of baptisms in 1972, when 445,725 people were baptized. The annual total has bounced up and down since then. The highest percentage increase during that time was 16.5 percent in 1980.

The highest percentage increase this century was in 1920, when baptisms increased 41 percent.

Evangelism leaders cited several reasons for this year's increase.

One contributing factor was a six-week period of "Here's Hope" simultaneous revivals last spring, said Richard Harris, HMB director of mass evangelism.

"There's a significant correlation between baptisms being up and the Here's Hope emphasis," Harris said. "Every year of simultaneous revivals since 1950 there has been a marked increase in baptisms -- except in 1969."

Southern Baptists previously had simultaneous revivals in 1950, 1951, 1954, 1959, 1964, 1969 and 1986. After the 1986 simultaneous revivals, called "Good News America," baptisms increased 3.4 percent, stopping a five-year pattern of decline.

"The Here's Hope emphasis caused Southern Baptists to refocus their attention on the priority of direct evangelism," Harris said. "When you have Southern Baptists week by week going out to evangelize, it's going to have an impact."

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Early research by the HMB projected that Here's Hope revivals resulted in 104,000 professions of faith and 77,700 baptisms.

HMB President Larry Lewis and evangelism section vice president Darrell Robinson agreed that the Here's Hope revivals played a major part in the baptism increase. However, both men said they believe the increase represents a movement larger than the six weeks of simultaneous revivals.

"This is more than something programmatic," Robinson said. "I think this is an indication of a movement of the Spirit in our churches.

"We're seeing our churches more strongly sensitized to reaching people and the spiritual needs of people."

Lewis agreed: "There's a new emphasis in our churches on reaching people for Christ and on training people to share their faith. We've had a revival of the promotion of soul winning, when for several years we hadn't even used the term."

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Islam is American reality,
interfaith leader says

By Mark Wingfield

F-AMB

Baptist Press
12/4/90

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (BP)--Islam is an American reality Southern Baptists must prepare to address, an interfaith witness leader said.

Maurice Smith, associate director of interfaith witness with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, spoke about "The Muslim Challenge in America" to state evangelism directors during their annual meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Islam is one of two major religious movements projected by the interfaith witness department to have the greatest impact on America in the 1990s. The other is New Age movements.

Islam is currently the fastest growing religious system in America. Worldwide, one in every seven people is a Muslim.

Smith said America has more Muslims than Episcopalians or Presbyterians. More Muslims live in America than Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses combined.

"The religion of Islam is now an American reality," Smith said. "All the Muslims are not in the Middle East.

"This has particular importance for Southern Baptists because Muslims now live in many of our communities and share their faith with the same people we know."

Smith estimates 4.75 million Muslims live in the United States. However, other estimates range from 3 to 6 million.

He identified five categories of Muslims in America: visitors, immigrants, Americans who have converted to Islam, black Americans and independent or unorthodox Muslims. The largest number of mosques (Muslim places of worship) are located near university campuses, he said.

Islam, which literally translated means "submission," is the religion of people who claim to be totally submitted or dedicated to Allah, the Arabic term for God. Muslims are followers of Islam.

Islam began in the sixth century in what is now Saudi Arabia with the work of Mohammed, who said God spoke to him through the angel Gabriel and dictated a series of messages which represented the will of God for all people. After Mohammed's death, these messages were collected into the Koran.

Humanly speaking, the chance of Muslims converting to Christianity is small, Smith explained, primarily due to their intense commitment to their faith.

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Muslims in America -- especially immigrants -- never had thought of converting to Christianity, Smith said, because their faith is so integrally related to their socialization.

American converts to Islam, on the other hand, usually already have rejected Christianity to embrace Islam, he explained.

Muslims can be converted to Christianity, Smith said, but presenting the Christian message effectively to Muslims will require patience and sensitivity.

"The things Baptists do best are least effective in witnessing to Muslims," he warned. "I believe in what we're doing, but I'm convinced people in other religious groups aren't hearing us.

"They're talking on AM and we're talking on FM."

Baptist staples such as preaching, singing, meeting and eating don't attract Muslims, Smith said.

"Muslims resent Christian preaching and often dislike Christian missionaries," he said, noting that Muslims have no professional missionaries because every member is expected to be a missionary.

Further, Muslims often are confused and offended by Christian worship styles, he explained. "They view our demeanor as irreverent and worldly and don't understand our mixing of the sexes in classes and in worship."

Baptists attempting to introduce Muslims into Christian worship would do well to begin with some basic information, he suggested. The culture shock will be less if Baptists take Muslim friends to the church facility when no one is there and explain what things are and how worship takes place.

How Baptists approach Muslims in witnessing encounters can make a difference in the reception, Smith said.

"We need to recover a sense that we are witnesses by virtue of our transformed nature," he said. "We should not witness because we fear if we don't God is going to back us into a corner and make us wish we had."

A witness springing from an overflowing love of God will be better received by Muslims than a confrontational approach, he said.

"Muslims are taught they have to share their faith because of their obedience to Allah. They are really off balance when they meet someone who witnesses out of the joy of knowing Jesus."

The current conflict in the Persian Gulf has intensified Americans' interest in Islam, Smith said. However, Baptists should not confuse the political conflict with the differences between Islam and Christianity, he urged.

"Remember that the conflict in the Middle East is not between Islam and Christianity."

Twelve cities in North America have the largest concentration of Muslims, Smith said. Those cities are Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Montreal, New York City, Philadelphia, San Diego, San Francisco, Toronto and Washington.

Old principles, new techniques
needed for '90s, leaders say By Jim Newton & Mark Wingfield

F-AMB

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (BP)--Reaching people with the gospel in the 1990s will require mixing time-honored principles with innovative methods before the time is too late, Morris Chapman and Larry Lewis said.

Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Lewis, president of the SBC Home Mission Board, spoke to state evangelism directors and state mission directors during their annual meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz.

"I believe the harvest is passing in America," Chapman told the group. "I believe God is writing across the sky in boxcar letters: Get right."

Delivering this message to America will require new techniques, Chapman declared, because of rapid changes in society.

"The profile of America is changing," he said. "The Bible Belt is disappearing."

To meet the challenge, "the cry of our hearts needs to be to have a passion for souls," he said. "We need to be personal soul winners."

In an earlier address, Lewis cited six principles Baptists must not forsake in developing new and innovative methods for reaching people in the '90s.

First, Baptists must proclaim the gospel with celebrative worship that includes exciting music and dynamic preaching "from a red-hot pulpit where God's word is expounded," Lewis said.

He called for pastors to be prophets, confronting immorality, sin and corruption in society. "Too many times, the pulpit is silent because the pastor does not want to offend anyone."

Second, Baptists must emphasize quality programming that includes in-depth Bible study, discipleship training, and missions education, he said.

Pointing to the tremendous growth of such mega-churches as the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, Korea, Lewis said Baptists need to seriously consider the house-church and cell-group approach.

Third, Lewis said Baptist churches need to make evangelism and personal soul winning the responsibility of every member, not just the pastor and staff.

Fourth, Baptists need to focus on "Christ-centered, Bible-based redemptive ministries" which meet the needs of people in the community. "I believe the best way to reach people is to minister to their needs by asking, 'Where do you hurt and how can we help?'"

Fifth, Baptists need to emphasize growth by extension as well as growth by expansion. "The best way for a church to grow is by starting missions wherever the people are," Lewis said.

Unfortunately, most SBC churches tend to depend more on biological growth (baptizing children of church members) and transfer growth (gaining members from other SBC churches) than they do on evangelistic growth, ministry growth, and extension growth, Lewis observed.

He warned against inner city churches in transitional communities of moving to the suburbs and leaving the inner core without a Baptist witness. Instead, churches must focus on starting new missions to reach racially and ethnically changing communities, he suggested.

Finally, Lewis said, Baptists must depend upon the power of God through prayer if they are to reach people in the 1990s. "We can't do it in our own strength, but only through the power of God."

Openness to change required
for 21st century, speaker says

By Mark Wingfield

F-HMB

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (BP)--The kind of openness to change that made Southern Baptists boom in the early 19th century will be necessary for growth in the 21st century.

That's the assessment of Paul Pearson, a Presbyterian and dean of the school of world missions at Fuller Theological Seminary. Pearson spoke to Southern Baptist state directors of missions during their annual meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz.

"As societies change throughout history, God raises up new forms of the church," he said. "Southern Baptists above all should know this.

"If there was a creative new form of the church in early 19th century America, it was the Methodists and the Baptists on the American frontier."

Pearson cited new forms of selecting and training leadership, new forms of proclaiming the gospel and new forms of evangelism as things Baptists did to break the mold of more traditional churches. These changes resulted in rapid evangelization, he suggested.

As on the American frontier, current changes in society call for the church to rethink how it presents the gospel, Pearson suggested.

"Our task as Christians is not simply to repeat tradition but to ask how we can best communicate the gospel to our generation," he said.

"The kind of people to whom our traditional churches appeal is decreasing."

Pearson cited music, worship style, preaching and seminary education as examples of areas where change must be considered.

Preaching, he said, should be taught as a means of communicating the gospel in ways people will understand. Instead, most seminaries teach students how to preach a "proper" sermon, he said.

Music is one area where changes in society are most readily seen, he said, citing the trend of younger adults to sing praise choruses rather than hymns.

Pearson, who said he is more than 60 years old, offered this advice to those of his generation: "We don't realize how radical the hymns of Wesley and Watts once were. They are tradition to us, but they were radical in their time.

"We need to be as open to new forms of music and worship as our forefathers were a century and a half ago when Baptists and Methodists introduced new forms of church on the American frontier."

Pearson cited a number of trends churches must grapple with in anticipation of the 21st century:

1. Absence of denominational loyalties.

"The old denominational loyalties are weak for those inside the church and even weaker for those outside the church," he said. "Denominational labels of a half century ago are increasingly irrelevant to the people we're trying to reach."

Even if accepting this change distresses those who maintain denominational loyalties, churches should adapt for the sake of the lost, he warned. "Our goal is not to pin this or that label on people. Our goal is to communicate the gospel."

2. Lessons from the success of the charismatic movement.

While not a charismatic himself, Pearson said he believes the evangelical church should learn a few lessons from the success of that movement.

Namely, he cited the need for relating God's power to the everyday crises of life.

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Charismatics have "shown us God is not an absentee landlord but that he's alive and working today," Pearson declared.

3. Missiological renewal.

"Theological renewal in itself is not enough," Pearson said. "We also need missiological renewal."

He suggested pastors should look at their communities with the eyes of a missiologist and attempt to turn the church's focus outward rather than inward.

4. Internationalization.

During the 20th century, the focus of evangelical Christianity has spread beyond North America and Europe, Pearson said.

At the beginning of the century, only 5 percent of evangelical Christians lived in "third world" countries, he said, compared to the 50 percent of Christians now living in Asia and Latin America.

Because of this shift, North American Christians can learn from Christians in other countries and are being increasingly called upon to form partnerships with them.

"We need to create churches where people begin to think beyond the local to the worldwide," Pearson said. "We need to create a context in which Christian missions becomes a natural and reasonable option."