



February 5, 1991

91-18

Baptisms gain tops
1990 SBC statistics

By Linda Lawson

N-10

NASHVILLE (BP)--The largest increase in baptisms in a decade topped 1990 Southern Baptist Convention statistics in 10 key reporting areas.

A total of 385,031 baptisms were reported through the Uniform Church Letter in 1990, compared to 351,107 in 1989, for a 9.7 percent increase of 33,924. During 1990, Southern Baptists conducted "Here's Hope" simultaneous revivals throughout the nation.

Two numerical milestones were reached in 1990 as church membership surpassed 15 million and ongoing Sunday school enrollment topped 8 million.

Church membership reached 15,044,413, registering a 0.9 percent gain of 130,875, the largest increase since 1986.

Ongoing Sunday school enrollment climbed by 73,483 or 0.9 percent to 8,009,498, for the second consecutive gain.

Other areas in which increases were reported included number of churches, music ministry enrollment, mission expenditures and total tithes, offerings and special gifts.

Discipleship training and Brotherhood enrollment/participation registered larger totals than 1989, but figures cannot be compared due to changes in reporting procedures.

Only one program, ongoing Woman's Missionary Union enrollment, registered a decrease. WMU enrollment declined 0.4 percent or 4,476, for a new total of 1,197,987. This was the second consecutive decrease for WMU enrollment.

Ongoing music ministry enrollment increased for the 25th consecutive year. The 1990 total of 1,837,428 represents an increase of 47,560 or 2.7 percent.

The number of churches increased by 189 or 0.5 percent to 37,974. The gain was the smallest since 1987 and the third time in 11 years the increase has dropped below 200.

Total tithes, offerings and special gifts reached \$4,567,834,980, a 6 percent increase of \$258,496,000 over 1989.

Mission expenditures totaled \$718,476,262, an increase of 0.8 percent or \$5,554,472.

Discipleship training enrollment/participation for 1990 was 2,206,252 in the first year of operation under a new records system. The total for 1989 under the previous system was 2,026,141.

Brotherhood enrollment/participation for 1990 also was reported under a new system with a total of 593,844. The 1989 total was 530,723.

The statistics are based on 37,172 Uniform Church Letters processed by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's corporate planning and research department.

Southern Baptist Statistical Summary, 1989-1990

1989-90 Change

	1989	1990	Numerical	Percent
Churches	37,785	37,974	189	0.5
Baptisms	351,107	385,031	33,924	9.7
Church Membership	14,913,538	15,044,413	130,875	0.9
Ongoing Sunday School Enrollment	7,936,015	8,009,498	73,483	0.9
Discipleship Training Enrollment/Participation	*	2,206,252		
Ongoing Music Ministry Enrollment	1,789,868	1,837,428	47,560	2.7
Ongoing WMU Enrollment	1,202,463	1,197,987	-4,476	-0.4
Brotherhood Enrollment/Participation	*	593,844		
Mission Expenditures	\$712,921,790	\$718,476,262	\$5,554,472	0.8
Total Tithes, Offerings, and Special Gifts	\$4,309,338,980	\$4,567,834,980	\$258,496,000	6.0

* Not comparable with 1990

Cyprus bomb explodes near Baptist evacuees' lodging

By Mike Creswell

N^YEMS

Baptist Press
2/5/91

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Nobody was injured Feb. 2 when a bomb exploded across the street from an apartment building in Cyprus where several Southern Baptist workers are staying during their wartime evacuation from other Middle Eastern countries.

A powerful explosion about 8 p.m. blew out windows on the first two floors of the apartment building in Larnaca, including the office of a Cypriot travel agent. A Barclays Bank building across the street was the apparent target but sustained little damage, Southern Baptist personnel in Larnaca reported.

The bomb was placed in a concrete planter on the sidewalk outside the British bank. Normally a busy intersection near the beach in downtown Larnaca, the area was deserted because of rain and the evening hour. The blast site is near the Cyprus tourism office and the city police station.

No one has claimed credit for the blast, but authorities identified it as one of several terrorist attacks against American and British interests in the Middle East, Europe and Latin America over the Feb. 2-3 weekend. It was the first such attack in Cyprus since the Persian Gulf War started.

Southern Baptist worker Sissy Rogerson is staying on an upper floor of the apartment building with her three children. She said smoke billowed up from downstairs after the powerful explosion ripped through the night. From a balcony, she could see debris blown out on the street and shattered glass covering the sidewalk.

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"I was in shock when it happened," she said. She feared at first that the attack was directed at her building, but soon learned the bank had been the apparent target.

Mrs. Rogerson, of Georgetown, S.C., left Israel with her three children before the Gulf War broke out. Her husband, Sonny, also of Georgetown, was scheduled to arrive from Israel Feb. 4 to join them.

Southern Baptist volunteers Randy and Angela White of Dallas also are staying in the building but were keeping the children of another Southern Baptist couple in a nearby apartment building when the bomb exploded.

The Whites also left Israel before the war began. White said his first thought when he heard the explosion was, "Oh, no! They really missed with a Scud missile!" -- referring to the missiles Iraq has launched at Israel which often have missed their targets.

"It kind of worries us," White admitted. "But then again, this is the Middle East."

"Several of us had been by there just an hour before the thing went off. It was a strange feeling," added Southern Baptist worker John Dorr, a media specialist based in Larnaca.

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Brotherhood leaders pledge \$21,000
for military magazine

By Jim Burton

N-CV
BKW/D

Baptist Press
2/5/91

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The development of a Southern Baptist military magazine designed to meet the spiritual and personal needs of military personnel received overwhelming endorsement from state Brotherhood leadership.

During their annual meeting with the Brotherhood Commission staff, David Langford, director of North Carolina Baptist Men, read the following statement from state Brotherhood leaders: "We affirm the concept. It is right. God has opened the window of opportunity at this time."

In a demonstration of their support, state Brotherhood leaders pledged \$21,000 to produce a pilot issue.

"In 25 years I've never felt anything that feels as right as this in Brotherhood work," said Ben Connell, South Carolina Brotherhood director.

This is the first time that state Brotherhood leaders have taken this kind of action, said James H. Smith, Brotherhood Commission president.

"This was strictly a spontaneous initiation on their part," said Smith. "It is evident that they sense that here is an area of need. This has done more to help our partnership relationship with them than anything that has happened in the years I've been here."

The research and development of this magazine could not happen without the state Brotherhood leadership's support, Smith said.

"When we were putting this year's budget together last spring who would have thought that we would have troops in the Middle East?" asked Smith. "The initiation of an idea that was born within the confines of our own staff was what it took to bring this thing into focus before the state leadership. Their response was very gratifying."

The need for this publication will go beyond the current war in the Middle East, said Smith.

"I think the need for this publication will be on going," he said.

The Brotherhood Commission launched a 10-year marketplace ministry emphasis in 1990. Marketplace ministry is an effort to teach lay people that their occupation is a ministry skill and that their place of business is a mission field.

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"We believe one of the greatest untapped marketplaces is the military," said Douglas Beggs, Brotherhood Commission adult division director.

The Brotherhood Commission's adult division began working on a formal magazine development proposal in December. On Jan. 14, an advisory group of military chaplains, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and Woman's Missionary Union representatives met and affirmed the need for a publication for military personnel.

The magazine will be previewed at the Southern Baptist Convention which meets June 4-6 in Atlanta. Based upon the response there and the results of additional surveys, the commission should make a final decision by June 15 on a permanent monthly publication, Smith said.

State Brotherhood leaders also heard reports on World Changers, a new co-ed missions education program for youth piloted last summer by the Brotherhood Commission.

World Changers targets an estimated 750,000 Southern Baptist youth not enrolled in missions education, said Mike Day, church and denominational relations director. Youth meet 11 times to prepare for a national mission action project.

State Brotherhood leaders expressed concern over the impact of World Changers on Acteens, a Woman's Missionary Union program, and High School Baptist Young Men, sponsored by the Brotherhood Commission.

"I do not believe that Acteens or High School Baptist Young Men are designed for the average high school youth in Southern Baptist churches," said Russell Griffin, Brotherhood Commission children and youth division director.

Both Acteens and High School Baptist Young Men are intense programs that require extraordinary commitment, he added.

"World Changers will direct more high schoolers into Acteens and High School Baptist Young Men," Griffin said, noting that many youth will experience missions for the first time with World Changers.

There is a growing understanding of the need for missions education among Southern Baptist youth ministers, said Andy Morris, World Changers director.

"The success of World Changers is based upon that need because we are meeting it in the local church," he said.

"We are raising a generation of missions illiterate kids. They don't know about the Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board or the Cooperative Program (unified budget)," continued Morris.

Talks are continuing with WMU about the impact of World Changers on both agencies, said Griffin and Day.

State Brotherhood leaders voted to affirm WMU and Brotherhood also working together to create an annual co-ed planning piece for children.

In other reports, state Brotherhood leaders learned that about half of HMB's volunteer church building list has state Brotherhood or National Fellowship of Baptist Men's coordinators, said Elmer Goble, HMB Christian Service Corps associate director.

Goble said HMB has received about 50 requests for assignments from people who attended NFBM's triennial meeting last October.

High School Baptist Young Men's national Challenger project is a missions bicycle tour of New England, June 22-30. Beginning in Worcester, Mass., the tour will go through southern New Hampshire and Maine before ending in Boston. Participants will do missions projects along the way, said Hal Hill, High School Baptist Young Men's director.

The 1991 Missions Speak Out winner will receive a \$1,000 scholarship, up from \$500 in previous years, reported Hill. Missions Speak Out is a national competition endorsed by comedian Jerry Clower. High School Baptist Young Men make speeches about what missions means to them. Besides the scholarship, the winner will receive funds for an overseas mission trip. Brotherhood Commission trustees provide the financial support for the project.

An All-Star Camp staff will meet in Arizona this summer. States with established Royal Ambassador Camps will send one veteran college staff member to Arizona to work the week of Aug. 3-9. Hill said the Arizona Baptist Convention requested the camp staffers to strengthen their own RA camp.

Pioneer Intensive Care was introduced to state leaders. Initiated and piloted by North Carolina Baptist Men, PIC is a mission project emphasis for Pioneer Royal Ambassador chapters. Projects are from ideas in Mission Activities for Men and Boys, Pioneer magazine and Royal Ambassador Leadership magazine, said Hill.

"We are giving chapters a goal of completing seven mission projects during a school year," said Hill. "When they do, they will receive state recognition and will be able to purchase a PIC t-shirt."

Kenny Rains, Brotherhood Commission director of associational relations and World Mission Conferences, introduced the first Associational Brotherhood Packet that replaces the annual Associational Brotherhood Planbook.

"The packet is a more manageable process of helping associational Brotherhood leaders in the promotion and involvement of dated national Brotherhood program emphases," said Rains.

The annual packet is to be used with Leading Associational Brotherhood, the primary strategy piece for implementing non-dated associational Brotherhood.

In addition, Rains announced the formation of an associational Brotherhood strategy committee. Those serving with Rains are: Laddie Adams, Oklahoma; David Turner, Minnesota/Wisconsin; Reggie Quimby, Alabama; and Jim Furgerson and Karl Bozeman, Brotherhood Commission staff.

Rains presented two annual World Missions Conference Awards in recognition of outstanding WMC participation. The Bernard King Award for main line states went to Lloyd Jackson, Virginia Brotherhood director. Elmer Whitten, new Brotherhood director for the Northwest Baptist Convention, received the Ella Keller Award for new work states for Harold Hitt, former Brotherhood director.

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Guerrillas threaten Baptist
radio station in Guatemala

By Mary E. Speidel

N. T. M. S.

Baptist Press
2/5/91

LAS CASAS, Guatemala (BP)--Leftist guerrillas threatened to burn a Baptist radio station and other buildings in Las Casas, Guatemala, during a public rally in late January.

After seizing control of Las Casas, rebels representing the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) threatened to burn Radio K'ekchi' and several other buildings, said a Southern Baptist missionary in Coban, about 60 miles southwest of Las Casas. The URNG is a coalition of several guerrilla groups.

Guerrillas burned an electrical power installation on the outskirts of Las Casas and later forced several hundred people to attend a public rally supporting their causes, according to reports from the area. The rebels controlled the town, located in a remote area of north-central Guatemala, for about half a day. Government troops reportedly restored order in the area.

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"Nothing has happened to the radio station and nothing in the town itself was attacked or destroyed," said the missionary, who received several eyewitness reports from K'ekchi' Baptist leaders in the area. No Southern Baptist missionaries currently live in Las Casas.

However, Radio K'ekchi remains off the air because of a power outage caused by the burning of the electrical facility. Electricity is expected to be out for several more weeks, the missionary said.

Radio K'ekchi' is a communications center for the region, where some 400,000 K'ekchi' Indians live. The shortwave station, begun in March 1988, broadcasts a mixture of spiritual and community programming in the K'ekchi' language.

In other rebel activity in early January, guerrillas blew up a tower providing phone service to the area and part of an oil pipeline near Las Casas. Rebels also commandeered two buses on a road between Las Casas and the town's airstrip, temporarily closing the road.

Because of the recent violence in the area, K'ekchi' Baptists have moved all evening church activities to daylight hours, said the missionary in Coban. The procedure is nothing new for Baptists in the area. "(Guerrilla-related) trouble just comes and goes, depending on the area they are in, and the brethren adapt as best they can and just go on," he said.

Another missionary asked Southern Baptists to pray for K'ekchi' Baptists as they travel over the region's rugged terrain spreading the gospel. "It's very dangerous on normal days because of the terrain, but when you add the guerrilla activity to it, they really need our prayers," he said. He also urged prayer for missionaries working in the area.

Just a week after the threat against Radio K'ekchi', Guatemalan President Jorge Serrano Elias accused guerrillas of trying to assassinate him as he was traveling by helicopter in the region. Serrano was flying above La Libertad, about 375 miles north of Guatemala City, when his helicopter was fired upon from the ground. The pilot was forced to land after the aircraft was hit by rifle bullets, according to reports.

In a news conference, Serrano said he thanked God that he and three other government officials were not injured in the assassination attempt. Serrano, an evangelical, made political history in early January when he was elected president of Guatemala, a predominantly Roman Catholic country.

Several hours before the attack, the president had announced the government would set guidelines in June for peace talks with rebels. More than 100,000 people have died and 30,000 have disappeared in the 30 years of government-guerrilla conflict, the longest-lasting in Central America.

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Abandoned church building
renews ministry in Benin

By Donald D. Martin

NJMS

Baptist Press
2/5/91

COTONOU, Benin (BP)--Most churches are known for reaching out to the lost, but one of the newest churches in Benin is known because it was itself lost.

For more than 10 years a church building stood abandoned in the middle of the southern village of Doguia in the west African nation. Villagers came to the empty shell every day, but paid little attention to it. Rather, they drew water from the church well, their only source of fresh water.

"It looked like an abandoned warehouse," said Southern Baptist missionary Asa Greear. "We found it with its windows and doors wide open. No one in the village owned it, so no one used it."

Greear, of Ashland, Ky., learned of the abandoned church last May while visiting Bible correspondence students. Greear's Beninese co-worker, Raphael Kouton, said he had heard of a church building in a village not far from where they were. He said Southern Baptist missionaries had built it in the mid-1970s, but he did not know whether it was still there.

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Less than an hour later, the two men stood in an echoing church building that could easily hold 200 people. A few days later, Greear and his wife, Lydia, also from Ashland, returned to the village.

"We were so surprised," she said. "Our first thoughts were, 'How are we going to open this up? Why aren't people worshipping the Lord in this place?'"

Dogua villagers said government officials confiscated the church in 1976 following Benin's adoption of a Marxist-Leninist political system. Officials turned the church into a school, but closed the school a few years later.

A week later, Greear and three Beninese Baptists received permission from village officials to hold worship services in the building. About 50 of the village's 450 people arrived for the first service in 14 years. The empty building had no pews, so Greear asked the group to find something to sit on.

"They all left and returned in about an hour carrying 30 benches with 'Mission Baptiste' engraved on them," Greear said.

By the end of the service more than 150 people sat in the church listening to Greear and Beninese Baptists tell of God's gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Forty-six people made public professions of faith in Jesus.

Since then the Baptists have held weekly services there, and about 80 new Christians meet weekly in a new members' class.

The government, which abandoned its Marxist-Leninist ideology in 1989, has returned legal ownership of the church property to the missionaries.

In December, the new congregation publicly dedicated the well, which missionaries helped repair and modernize. Greear said the dedication calmed fears that Baptists would restrict use of the well.

"We told them the well is for the village; it's theirs," Mrs. Greear said. "At the well dedication more than 150 people came. They heard a message that God loves them and wants to offer them living water."

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

Liberian couple keeps
faith during civil war

By Lori Zonner & Pat Cole

N-10
SBTS

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Enduring captivity, beatings and a life-threatening journey to safety, Lincoln Brownell escaped the Liberian civil war holding fast to the faith he proclaimed as a Baptist seminary professor.

That same faith, in fact, now compels him to return to his native country.

"You see so many people die," said Brownell, professor of Old and New Testament at Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary in Monrovia. "You don't give up on life as a Christian, but you realize you can die anytime. You come to a point where you are afraid of the process of dying, but you are not afraid of the point of death. You see God protecting you through each stage."

Brownell and his wife, Chinco, arrived at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., last October. Brownell, a 1986 graduate of Southern, has been studying at the seminary as a visiting scholar and plans to pursue a doctoral degree in Christian education. Chinco, who was a third-year medical school student in Liberia, hopes to complete her medical degree in the United States.

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Liberia has been besieged by civil war since late 1989, when the forces of Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson began their attempt to overthrow the government of President Samuel Doe. Doe was killed in September, and the country now is headed by an interim government. Currently, an uneasy cease fire is being held in place by the multi-nation West African Peacekeeping Force.

On Labor Day, rebel forces captured the seminary and held Brownell prisoner for two weeks. During the first two days of captivity, he was stripped, beaten and placed with mutilated bodies. Chinco was away visiting relatives during the attack on the seminary, and the couple lost contact with each other for about eight weeks. Finally, Lincoln learned Chinco's whereabouts from a former schoolmate.

Damage to the seminary was limited to minor structural damage and some food and personal items that were taken. The library and all its books were left intact, Brownwell noted. "That is a miracle in itself," he said. "God was good to the seminary."

The seminary began to feel the pressure of the civil war last spring, Brownell said: "In April, we realized the seminary was not a healthy atmosphere for students. A lot of them were worried about their families. They were at seminary, but their hearts and minds were back in the villages and towns." The seminary's location between two military bases heightened their anxiety, he added.

The seminary, which had about 90 students and 12 faculty members, closed in June. Yet the Brownells remained to care for many displaced persons who came to the school and an adjacent Baptist youth camp seeking help. "There were a lot of people sick, people needing food," he said.

Once the Brownells began their journey out of the country, they survived an ambush and 50 military checkpoints before crossing the border to the Ivory Coast. "The bridge to the Ivory Coast was like crossing the Jordan River," he said.

With help from friends at the seminary and other Baptists in the Louisville area, the Brownells were able to obtain the needed visas and funding to come to the United States. Eventually, Brownell hopes to resume teaching at the Liberian seminary where he joined the faculty shortly after graduating from Southern.

"I see the (Liberian) seminary coming back in the next three years," he said. "I see it being reshaped. People are going to know that it cost a lot to be in the ministry."

Meanwhile, Brownell is encouraged by reports that some former students at the Liberian seminary are involved in ministries among refugees and that a group of seminary graduates helped re-open the 170-year-old Providence Baptist Church in Monrovia, the oldest church in Liberia. As they await their return to Liberia, he and Chinco are also "trying to find every possible means to encourage people to pray for peace in Liberia."

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Lori Zonner is a writer for The Towers, campus newspaper of Southern Seminary.
(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southern Seminary

'Crossover Japan' to be
convention-wide effort

By Marty Croll

N - FMB

Baptist Press
2/5/91

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--As men and women in Japan open their minds to the gospel, the Southern Baptist Convention is calling on its people to help gather in the harvest.

The Japan Baptist Convention has asked the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to send volunteers to work with some 40 churches in a special evangelistic crusade May 20-June 3. SBC President Morris Chapman is urging churches throughout the United States to send pastors and lay people to help.

Called "Crossover Japan," the crusade would be the first in a series of "Cross Overseas" projects emphasizing participation from all parts of the Southern Baptist Convention in a yearly crusade overseas. It would parallel the "Cross Over America" campaign Chapman has launched in conjunction with the denomination's Home Mission Board.

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Chapman said he hopes Southern Baptists can stage one major evangelistic crusade in the United States every year. He and the Home Mission Board have dubbed this year's project "Crossover Atlanta" and have planned it in conjunction with the denomination's annual convention. "Crossover Japan" will be its foreign counterpart.

"There's response to the gospel from Japanese people here better than we've had in years," said Max Love, administrator for the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Japan. "I don't know exactly the reason for it. It could be a disillusionment with materialism. It could be the people are looking for something deeper and more fulfilling."

The world has watched as Japan used a hard-working and imaginative labor force to forge itself into a world power. But as the Japanese have become prosperous, their attention has drifted from the eastern faiths of their forefathers. Many believe what remains is a spiritual vacuum -- a very dangerous one. In the vacuum, even cults are finding acceptance.

"The gross materialism and preoccupation with the good life is beginning to produce great fatigue among the Japanese people," said Sam James, who oversees Southern Baptist mission work in Japan and other nations of east Asia. "There is a renewed interest in spiritual things. There are churches in Japan that are growing at an unprecedented rate."

So far, applications from prospective participants in "Crossover Japan" have only trickled in. Organizers list as possible reasons the uncertainty concerning the Persian Gulf War and lack of money resulting from the U.S. economic recession.

Another guess is that the word on Japan simply has not gotten out. If people knew the urgency, they would respond, James believes. "Southern Baptists ought to be privileged to be a part of a campaign like this," he said. "Now is the time to enter Japan. If we could see a movement toward Christ by Japan, it could influence the world."

Japanese Baptists have restructured their convention to start new churches and missionaries are ready to help, so excitement for the campaign in Japan, at least, is running high. "Japanese churches are eager. They're calling and asking, 'Who's coming to my church?'" said Bill Peacock, who is coordinating the enlistment of volunteers for the Foreign Mission Board.

International Service Corps volunteer W.H. "Dub" Jackson, a former missionary to Japan, is working with the Japanese to coordinate crusade arrangements there. "Japan has everything materially, but not Christ," Jackson said. "Without Christ there is no joy, no hope and no real living. We pray that Southern Baptists will come together in prayer and with personnel for a truly God-honoring victory in Japan."

To enlist a broad spectrum of volunteers, Chapman appointed two enlistment chairmen in the United States. They are former Foreign Mission Board trustee chairman Mark Cortis, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Bo Baker, a retired Texas pastor and evangelist.

Chapman sees "Crossover Japan" as an opportunity for Southern Baptists to concentrate on missions and evangelism. "It has long been our way to see lost souls saved," he said. "My first objective in 'Crossover Japan' is to see Southern Baptists act on their burden for lost souls, and increase our witnessing efforts around the world."

Partnership evangelism projects linking state Baptist conventions and churches with Baptists overseas have been successful in recent years, he added -- so successful, in fact, that Chapman wanted a similar arrangement involving the entire convention.

"I believe our fellowship as Southern Baptists can be greatly enhanced through the enlistment of Southern Baptist partnership mission efforts across the convention," he said.

"I pray that God will use me to help all Southern Baptists be reminded there are many ways we can fellowship and participate together," he added. "There has been much discussion of our differences, and while I recognize these to be real, there are many strong ties Southern Baptists have in missions and evangelism."

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Co-educational missions program to be implemented by Brotherhood" dated 2/1/91, please change the words Sunday School Brotherhood Commission in the first paragraph to read Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Southwestern Seminary graduate
coming of age at 100 years

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
2/5/91

MELBOURNE, Ark. (BP)--W.O. Taylor is old enough to be the father of many of the residents at the retirement home where he is a regular speaker.

But even at 100 years old, Taylor has no intentions of sticking around after his sermon.

William Oscar Taylor, W.O. to his friends, has never been able to think of himself as "getting old."

Maybe that explains why the Arkansas native who is probably the oldest minister in the Southern Baptist Convention and a 1924 graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, celebrated his 100th birthday last fall by preaching a sermon at his home church -- First Baptist of Melbourne, Ark.

"One of the reasons I have been able to live so long is that I had an ulcerated stomach," Taylor said with a laugh. "It bothered me for years and years, so I had to learn how to relax and not worry about things. That has been a contributing factor." Probably another factor in Taylor's longevity is his insatiable curiosity about life and people.

"He has a very inquiring mind," said Billy Joe Tatum, one of Taylor's eight children, all of whom are alive and well. "He is really quite a rare person. He is never depressed, never lonely. And his health is great. His only problem is his hearing," she said, explaining that her father's hearing loss is almost complete.

Taylor drove himself around in his own car until his 95th birthday and he continues to feel a strong sense of personal responsibility. His little house in the woods near Melbourne is next to his daughter's, but he cooks and cares for himself. He continues to speak at churches and retirement homes, is an avid reader, and carries on a correspondence with several people.

He also keeps up with the events in the Southern Baptist Convention and has some strong personal opinions about the controversy which has plagued the denomination.

"I'm very much disturbed by it," said Taylor, who still serves as a messenger from his church to both the SBC and the Arkansas Baptist State Convention. "I am a big supporter of the Cooperative Program. In 1925, I drove all over the country to promote it in churches, so it hurts me when something comes up that might destroy it."

Saved at age 14, Taylor said God prepared him all his life to be an associational missionary. A big part of that preparation included a formal education. He qualified as a teacher at Arkansas Teacher's College (now University of Central Arkansas), and is also a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University. The latter school awarded him an honorary doctor of divinity degree.

Taylor earned a master of theology degree from Southwestern in 1924, studying with such well-known Southern Baptist leaders as L.R. Scarborough, a Southwestern professor and the seminary's second president.

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"We had to pinch pennies," Taylor said, recalling his days at Southwestern with his young family. "Two or three times I was ready to give up, but somehow we would always get the money we needed. God always took care of us."

His training at Southwestern and his experience as pastor of several small churches during his seminary career prepared Taylor for what has now been almost eight decades in Christian ministry. During that time he has been pastor of several churches in Arkansas and Texas, founded three church camps, organized more than a dozen churches and served as an associational missionary.

He continues to support Baptist educational institutions like Southwestern and Ouachita through financial gifts and his own personal testimony.

"All of the money he doesn't spend on food and basic necessities, he gives to church and Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries," said his daughter. "Education is very important to him."

Also important to Taylor is his family, which, along with his eight children, includes 18 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. And though he is still very much alive, he has already given his family a legacy of love.

"He has taught us the importance of kindness, of accepting other people even when we don't agree with them," said Tatum. But most importantly, she said her father taught his family "to show the love of Jesus Christ to others."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

Seminary's sacred harp singing
keeps spiritual tradition alive

By Matthew Brady

F-10
SWBTS

Baptist Press
2/5/91

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--As the old, simple hymns echoed through the hallway of Cowden Hall on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, tears welled up in the singers' eyes.

Some had grown up with the music, others had married into it or heard about it from grandparents, but all of them have grown to love the endangered species known as Sacred Harp singing.

Ray Barnett is typical of today's Sacred Harp singer. He heard about the music a few years ago at a Sacred Harp convention in Henderson, Texas.

"It was so hauntingly beautiful, tears came to my eyes and I thought, 'Boy, this is for me,'" said Barnett, who is from Richardson, Texas.

Since that time a few years ago, Barnett has learned the basics of the music and attends all the singings he can, including a recent Sacred Harp Singing at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

According to William Reynolds, professor of church music at Southwestern and host of the school's singing, Sacred Harp takes its name from an 1844 collection of sacred music using four notes of different shapes for easier teaching and learning.

From its inception, Sacred Harp singing has been associated with the South. Today it is enjoying popularity throughout the country, Reynolds said.

Southwestern's sixth annual singing was also the seminary's largest yet.

From mid-morning to early afternoon singers filled the seminary's music building with the four-part a cappella harmonies that distinguish Sacred Harp singing.

Sitting in four sections, the singers formed a square with basses facing sopranos and tenors facing altos. The more experienced participants took turns standing in the middle, selecting the hymns and directing the tempo.

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L.V. and Nancy Gato drove from Sulphur Springs, Texas, to attend the singing. Mrs. Gato said she grew up with the music and directed her first Sacred Harp class when she was 6 years old.

Others in attendance were relatively new to the experience.

Gary Rogan of Boyd, Texas, said he and his wife were introduced to Sacred Harp singing about 10 years ago. "It's enjoyable," he said. "It's a different type of music from what we sing in church."

Emmie Morris and her husband adopted Sacred Harp singing to keep alive the tradition at Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church outside of Henderson. She said the church nearly voted not to have an annual singing because not enough people knew how to sing the songs. She and her husband organized a six-week singing school and now the tradition at Zion Hill is alive and well.

And like the response in Henderson, Reynolds said Sacred Harp is enjoying a resurgence in popularity across the country. From New England to Berkeley, Calif., people are learning and singing Sacred Harp, he said.

One of the largest groups, located in Chicago, is comprised of mostly young, professional single adults who think "Sacred Harp is just great," Reynolds said. "It's a musical thing for a lot of them," he said.

But Sacred Harp's new-found popularity has not taken away from its spiritual roots, according to Reynolds.

"When they sing Amazing Grace, the tears still come to their eyes," he said.

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