



February 20, 1991

91-25

Executive Committee elects
three vice presidents

By Pam Parry

NCO

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention unanimously affirmed the election of three vice presidents in its regular February meeting.

The committee elected Richard (Bucky) P. Rosenbaum Jr. as vice president for business and finance, Mark T. Coppenger, vice president for public relations, and Herbert V. Hollinger, vice president for Baptist Press. The elections filled three of four staff vacancies.

The three men were elected individually by secret ballot.

Two of the elections were retroactive. At the September meeting of the Executive Committee, a bylaw change was approved to allow the six committee officers to fill staff vacancies on an interim basis between gatherings of the full committee. The change permitted officers to act on the behalf of the Executive Committee to consider personnel recommendations.

Personnel selections normally are based on the recommendation of the president/treasurer to the administrative and convention arrangements subcommittee, with final approval by the entire Executive Committee. That standard procedure will be followed unless the committee feels it necessary to fill a vacancy between meetings by empowering its officers to act under the bylaw amendment.

The officers elected the three vice presidents with the understanding that the full Executive Committee would vote on the personnel selections at the February meeting.

Rosenbaum, 36, who has worked in a variety of capacities at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board for the past 10 years, was elected effective Dec. 15, 1990. He fills the position vacated by Tim Hedquist, who left to join the staff of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

At the SSB, Rosenbaum has been manager of the conference center marketing section, coordination specialist in the office of church programs and services and coordinator of the church program training center. He also has management experience with a number of secular companies and was assistant director of public relations at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., from which he graduated.

A native of South Carolina, Rosenbaum is enrolled in a master's program at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., through seminary external education.

Coppenger, who previously was executive director-treasurer of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, assumed his duties on an interim basis Jan. 1, pending the final approval of the full committee. Coppenger's new position is a change from the past organizational structure. Al Shackelford, terminated by the Executive Committee on July 17, 1990, was vice president for public relations and director of Baptist Press.

The new organizational structure separates the duties of public relations and Baptist Press. Coppenger's role will be public relations, while Hollinger, editor of The California Southern Baptist newsmagazine, will direct Baptist Press.

Prior to going to Indiana in 1988, Coppenger was pastor of First Baptist Church, Eldorado, Ark. Previously, he was assistant/associate professor of philosophy at Wheaton (Ill.) College.

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Coppenger, 42, is a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark. The native Tennessean also earned the master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and the doctor of philosophy degree from Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

Hollinger, 50, will assume his responsibilities March 1. Prior to becoming the editor in California, Hollinger was editor of the Northwest Baptist Witness, newsjournal of the Northwest Baptist Convention, where he also was director of the convention's communications division. In addition to his journalistic experience, the Idaho native has been a pastor in Washington and California.

Hollinger holds a bachelor of science degree, with a major in business administration and a minor in journalism, from the University of Idaho. He also earned the master of divinity degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

When opportunities were provided in the plenary session for questions regarding each of the three employees, there was none. However, committee member James M. Morton Jr. of California told the body that Hollinger "is a man of real integrity and courage."

President/treasurer Harold C. Bennett presented each of the candidates prior to their election. In his presentation of Hollinger, Bennett pointed out that the Southern Baptist Press Association adopted a resolution commending Hollinger's selection. The resolution, passed by the press association at its annual meeting Feb. 11-14, noted the need for "positive leadership to deal with the loss of credibility sustained in the dismissal of the former staff" and commended Hollinger's selection as such a leader. The resolution continued that the press association "pledges to work cooperatively with, and in support of, Herb Hollinger in the task of providing Baptists a full, free, flow of responsible, balanced, and accurate information about their denomination."

Hollinger informally addressed members of the Southern Baptist Press Association at a breakfast meeting just hours prior to his official election. He told the group -- if elected -- he would uphold the same standards and principles of journalism which he used as editor of The California Southern Baptist. He said he has not and will not change or deviate from those high standards, adding he doesn't "belong to anybody." He noted that he shared these feelings with the Executive Committee officers, and they assured him that they wanted a professional journalist to run Baptist Press.

Hollinger told the press association he hopes to restore Baptist Press as the finest news agency in religious circles. Pointing out he did not seek this job, Hollinger said he allowed his election because he cared about the future of Baptist Press.

While there was no discussion or questions asked of the vice presidents during the plenary sessions of the full Executive Committee, questions were raised concerning two of Hollinger's editorials during the meeting of the administrative and convention arrangements subcommittee, which recommended the three men to the full body. Hollinger responded to questions concerning the editorials. After a discussion delineating the differences between editorials and news stories, the subcommittee voted to recommend Hollinger with one dissenting vote.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Respond to spiritual hunger, Chapman urges Southern Baptists" dated 2/19/91, please make the following correction in the 11th paragraph:

Chapman, who was elected president of the denomination in 1990, said his ...

Thanks,
Baptist Press

New churches overseas
up by 13 percent in 1990

By Mary E. Speidel

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Overseas Baptists related to Southern Baptist missions achieved one of the highest gains ever in new churches in 1990 while baptisms dipped below a record set in 1989.

Overseas churches related to Southern Baptist foreign mission work increased from 21,239 in 1989 to 24,122 in 1990, reflecting a 13.6 percent net gain of 2,883 churches. Some of these gains are due to increased attention to reporting from the mission field, said Jim Slack of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's research and planning office. Slack prepares the board's annual statistical report on foreign missions.

The 1990 increase in new churches meets the 12 percent gain required annually to reach Bold Mission Thrust goals, Slack said. Bold Mission Thrust is a plan adopted by Southern Baptists in 1976 for spreading the gospel to every person in the world by the year 2000 and for achieving a tenfold expansion of overseas Baptist work.

The 1990 statistics indicate that "significant" church growth is occurring on the Southern Baptist foreign mission field, Slack added. During the past three years, the total number of churches has jumped from 17,769 in 1987 to 24,122 in 1990. In 1990, national Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries started a total of 1,550 new churches, up from the 1989 total of 1,059. Of the 120 countries reporting, 65 countries, about 54 percent, started new churches during 1990.

Starting new Baptist churches overseas is a primary concern of the Foreign Mission Board, Slack said. "We're not exclusively interested in new work, but it is our primary interest because that's what we're about -- evangelism that results in churches," he said.

In addition to starting new work, overseas Baptist churches baptized 208,381 new Christians, the second highest total in the history of Southern Baptist foreign missions. That number is down from the 1989 record of 227,437 baptisms.

Even with a drop in 1990 baptism totals, baptism statistics show "we're much, much stronger overseas," said Slack, comparing overseas results with stateside baptisms. The number of 1990 baptisms reflects a ratio of one baptism for every 12.8 members compared to 1 to 39.1 among Southern Baptist churches in the United States.

Overseas Baptist church membership grew by about 9 percent, from 2.5 million in 1989 to about 2.7 million in 1990.

In other report highlights, a record number of 11,650 Southern Baptist volunteers participated in overseas projects. A total of 17 state Baptist conventions were linked with overseas Baptists in partnership projects.

Bold Mission Thrust calls for sending 10,000 Southern Baptist volunteers yearly to work in short-term overseas projects by the year 2000. That goal has been achieved every year since 1988, according to Foreign Mission Board officials.

While the 1990 statistics indicate a need for improvement in some areas, the overall report shows a "very healthy and growing missionary movement," said Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks. The most encouraging area of the report was the number of new church gains, Parks said.

"I would want to underline all of this by saying we're well aware that this is a spiritual effort," Parks said. "Only the Lord's spirit moving among us brings people to Christ and brings churches into being."

Parks added that he believes the next two to three years will be the "determining years" of Bold Mission Thrust. "I am praying that all of Southern Baptists' energies, resources and spiritual concern can be focused without distraction ... so that we could create the atmosphere and momentum that would push us over the Bold Mission Thrust goals," he said.

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Southern Baptist personnel in 1990 began working with 23 new people groups and entered 176 new cities where no Baptist work existed previously. By year's end, 60 nonresidential missionaries in 14 countries were targeting more than 40 different people groups with a population of 247 million. Nonresidential missionaries seek to evangelize unreached people groups in restricted regions, working from bases outside those regions.

In 1990, Southern Baptists appointed 414 new missionaries with a net increase of 83 for the year. That figure was up from 1989, when appointments were 310 with a net loss of 87.

The year ended with 3,863 overseas personnel serving in 121 countries, up from 3,780 at the end of 1989. The 414 new personnel included 195 career missionaries, 21 missionary associates, 178 International Service Corps personnel and 20 people who were reappointed or re-employed.

While the 1990 statistics showed positive results in some areas, Slack said the report also indicated need for improvements. Slack said he was concerned about a 14 percent drop in Sunday school enrollment, down from about 1.9 million in 1989 to 1.6 million in 1990.

The overseas Sunday school, which encompasses all forms of Bible study, is not getting the attention it once did on the mission field, Slack said. "If we can't recover that emphasis, we will have serious losses in baptisms, members and preaching points and new churches started," he predicted.

Slack also said he was concerned about the low number of mission congregations and preaching points that matured into churches in 1990. Only 7.3 percent of the 21,000 preaching points in 1989 became churches in 1990. At this rate, it takes an average of 13.2 years for a preaching point to mature into a church. A more realistic and healthy annual level of maturity would be 25 percent, Slack said.

"We're concerned that there's not been enough attention shifted from existing work to new work," Slack said. Overseas Baptist churches "need to be more deliberate about giving more attention to preaching points," he said.

Slack also noted concern about a 17 percent drop in enrollment in seminary extension programs, from 15,796 in 1989 to 13,105 in 1990. Slack said the decline is serious since the extension programs generally train more leaders who serve in new work settings.

That drop compares to a slight increase in 1990 enrollment in theological seminaries, Bible schools and institutes. That figure, 12,586, is up from the 1989 total of 12,439. Leaders who train in resident seminary programs generally serve in existing churches, Slack said.

In the overall report, Slack noted that the same seven countries led in major areas such as new church starts, baptisms, church membership and Sunday school enrollment as in previous years -- Nigeria, Brazil, India, Kenya, South Korea, the Philippines and Mexico.

These statistics show the need for cultivating growth in other countries, Slack said. "We want other countries to get the attention, the time and the missionary resources they deserve in order to experience the same kind of growth," he said.

In human needs programs, Southern Baptists spent nearly \$7.5 million for overseas hunger and relief projects in 1990, up from the 1989 total of \$5.2 million. The money supported 286 projects in 62 countries including Vietnam, Cambodia, parts of the Soviet Union and Romania.

Medical missionaries and workers treated about 1.5 million patients overseas. A total of 48 Baptist-related centers published more than 3.8 million books, 7.8 million periodicals and 21 million tracts. Radio and television broadcasts on 421 stations brought in some 71,000 contacts from persons interested in the gospel.

In discipleship, 33,000 people were enrolled in training programs in 1990, compared to 19,000 in 1989. Mexico reported the highest number of people involved in discipleship, with 10,000, followed by Venezuela with about 2,800. Discipleship programs used overseas included MasterLife, Survival Kit, Bible Way Correspondence Course and NewLife.

Solicitations of churches
preceded Cooperative Program

By Linda Lawson

NCO

NASHVILLE (BP)--Almost weekly visits from solicitors for seminaries, colleges, hospitals and other denominational causes characterized Southern Baptist church life before the establishment of the Cooperative Program unified budget in 1925.

"The preachers hardly had time to preach. Solicitors were there almost every Sunday," recalled James L. Sullivan, retired president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. "But it was difficult to channel any of this to the building of the denomination."

Sullivan and Albert McClellan, retired associate executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee, described the influence of Southern Baptists' program of unified giving during the annual Cooperative Program luncheon Feb. 19 in Nashville. Sponsored by the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission, the luncheon was hosted by the Sunday School Board which does not receive Cooperative Program funds but has supported the Cooperative Program through its literature and programs.

The board's greatest contribution to the Cooperative Program has been "keeping the Bible free to teach its own message without imposing ideas foreign to its meaning," McClellan said.

Several board employees noted other ways the board supports the Cooperative Program.

The board in its 100-year history has given almost \$20 million to the SBC operating budget through the Cooperative Program and to other agencies and institutions. More than \$55 million has been funneled to state conventions, said James Williams, executive vice president.

In 1990 Southern Baptists gave \$56,498 in Sunday morning offerings at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist conference centers, money that is distributed through the Cooperative Program, said Robert Turner, assistant vice president for church programs and services.

Vacation Bible School materials produced by the board have always urged workers to funnel VBS offerings through the Cooperative Program. More than \$35 million has been given through VBS mission offerings since 1936, Willie Beaty, VBS consultant, said.

Linda Thompson, church curriculum specialist in the direct sales department, said she realizes as she visits Southern Baptist churches "that our literature is supporting the cooperative ministries of churches all across the convention."

Through a contract with the Stewardship Commission, the board distributed 900,000 pieces of stewardship materials to churches in 1990 and supplied more than 83 million offering envelopes through the Baptist Book Store Envelope Service. More than 50 Broadman books and numerous audiovisual products supporting the Cooperative Program have been published by the board.

Sharing personal experiences, SSB President Lloyd Elder said he learned to value the Cooperative Program before he became a Christian.

"I grew up in a family and a church that believed in the Cooperative Program. Since I held them in high regard as a youngster, I held the Cooperative Program in high regard," said Elder.

He noted that churches in Alaska where he made his profession of faith and first served as a pastor were partially funded by the Cooperative Program. He also attended Baptist colleges and a Southern Baptist seminary which received Cooperative Program money.

"Trained leadership rooted in the word of God is one of the best missionary forces we have," said Elder. "The Cooperative Program gives us the opportunity to emphasize the lordship of Christ. The Cooperative Program is one of the best expressions of the convention way of doing missions."

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Elder called for a recommitment to the Cooperative Program.

"I believe the Cooperative Program has given us a living link among the generations -- what we are today, what we have been in the past and what we will be in the future," said Elder.

Sullivan, who was chief executive of the board from 1953-1975, said the Cooperative Program has been both a source of financial stability and denominational unity.

"Without a unified budget we could never have a unified denomination," said Sullivan.

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Plane crash survivor
returns to China

By Donald D. Martin

CGO
N-100

Baptist Press
2/20/91

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Southern Baptist teacher Erin Thomas plans to step back into her English class in Meixian, China, five months to the day after crawling from the smoking fuselage of a crash-landed Chinese airliner.

Thomas left the United States Feb. 18 and plans to return to her teaching post at Jia Ying University in Meixian five days before classes begin March 2.

The Harrah, Okla., teacher became the focus of international media attention and Southern Baptists' prayers when the Chinese Boeing 737 she was aboard was hijacked Oct. 2 and crash-landed in Guangzhou, China.

The fiery crash killed 132 people, including Thomas' Southern Baptist colleague and friend, Mary Anna Gilbert, 23, of Alexander City, Ala. The two, who were returning to their campus from a short holiday trip inside China, had been teaching in the country only one month.

Thomas, 30, has recovered from the injuries she suffered during the crash. She sustained a dislocated shoulder and several broken bones and developed pneumonia when she inhaled smoke from the burning plane. She also suffered second- and third-degree burns on her right leg. A cast from an earlier broken ankle protected her left leg from burns.

She said she has full mobility of her right leg after two skin grafts, although the repaired skin is still tight.

From the beginning of her ordeal, Thomas knew she would return to China, she said. Yet some people seemed surprised when she told them of her plans to return.

"Some have asked if I'm afraid of flying or returning to China," she said. "I guess I just don't think like that. I've flown six times since the crash and it hasn't bothered me too much. And I always knew I was going back."

She admits, however, to a small flutter of anxiety during plane landings.

"The landing is not my favorite part," she said. "For a second, when the wheels go down and I hear them lock, it comes back. I get a little antsy and I think back to hitting the runway -- that's when everything started to happen."

But Thomas is ready to put the crash behind her.

"I was getting calls all the time from radio and newspapers," she said. "I got tired of talking about the crash." She did, however, enjoy speaking at several churches because she could focus on her reasons for going to China, instead of recounting the tragedy.

"I wanted people to understand that what I did in China, and earlier ... in Japan, was not beyond them," she said. "There are people in every church that can do what I'm doing."

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Thomas, a graduate of Central State University in Edmond, Okla., taught English as a Southern Baptist worker in Kobe, Japan, from 1987-89. She taught for two years at the Britton Christian Academy in Oklahoma City prior to going to China through Cooperative Service International, the Southern Baptist service organization.

"I'm ready to get back," she said. "Back in August when I left for China, I knew God had called me to do this. I can't explain why (the crash) happened, but I don't believe God has changed his call to me."

In recent weeks she has gone through the familiar process of packing to live overseas. "I started putting things in one corner of my room to pack for China," she said. "I had a better idea of what I need to bring, but I started to run out of time."

She also did not have time to answer the nearly 6,000 cards and letters she received from concerned people in the United States and China.

"It was just overwhelming to see such a response. People wrote to say they were praying for me and to tell me how sorry they were to hear about Mary Anna. It was so neat that so many people showed such interest."

Thomas will complete her two-year commitment to teach in China and return to the United States in the summer of 1992. She expects to teach conversational English to freshmen in Meixian.

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