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91-98

Cooperative Program gifts
take big plunge in June

By Herb Hollinger

N.C.O.

NASHVILLE (BP)--Cooperative Program unified gifts received by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee for the month of June dropped more than 17 percent compared to the same month last year.

The June gifts were 17.42 percent, or \$2,094,134, under the comparable June figure for 1990, according to Harold C. Bennett, Executive Committee president/treasurer. The \$9,927,427 channeled through the SBC Cooperative Program in June 1991 dropped the year-to-date total to 0.59 percent below last year.

SBC fiscal year is from Oct. 1 through Sept. 30. After nine months of the 1990-91 fiscal year, Cooperative Program gifts were at \$105,642,489 compared to \$106,264,906 for the nine month period in 1989-90. The required basic budget monthly figure is \$11,444,377 and for the nine months period, \$102,999,393.

Cooperative Program monthly figures for the year appear like a roller coaster on a chart. Just last month the CP gifts were up more than six percent over a year ago and the total gifts for the fiscal year were nearly two percent above the comparable 1990 figures.

Designated gifts also lagged behind a year ago for the month. At \$9,829,844, the designated gifts fell \$3,834,610 below last June or 28.06 percent. Adding both CP and designated gifts, the shortfall for the month compared to last year was 23.08 percent or \$5,928,745.

Year-to-date designated gifts were nearly the same at this nine month period compared to last year: \$116,913,821 to \$116,852,503 for a 0.05 percent gain. Total CP and designated gifts for the fiscal year thus far are \$222,556,310 compared to \$223,117,410 in 1989-90.

Designated contributions include the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, world hunger and other special gifts.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting ministry and missions through state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international ministries.

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Baylor may open facilities
to house convention messengers

By Toby Druin

N.C.O. (Texas)

Baptist Press
7/1/91

WACO, Texas (BP)--If necessary, Baylor University will open all of its facilities to house messengers to the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, scheduled Nov. 11-12 in the university's Ferrell Special Events Center, according to a university spokesman.

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Mike Bishop, vice president for communications, said Baylor, whose relationship with the convention will be the major topic of discussion at the convention, will work with Waco Baptist Association and state convention officials to see every messenger and any interested Texas Baptist has a place to stay if he or she wants to attend the annual meeting.

Within a few hours -- a few minutes in most cases -- after more than 2,000 rooms were made available for reservations June 20 by Waco-area motels and hotels all had been snapped up. In some cases persons stepped to the reservations desks at 12:01 a.m. June 20 and using checks, cash and credit cards from other persons attempted to reserve all of the rooms the hotel or motel was setting aside for the convention.

"Fundamentalists" had engineered the effort to deny Texas Baptists the right to express themselves on the Baylor issue and warned other state conventions to expect similar ploys as conservatives move to take over state conventions in the same manner they have gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention, said Bishop.

Baylor officials and trustees cited the fear of a conservative takeover last September when the trustees voted to change the university charter to end governance of the school by convention-elected trustees. The convention's future relationship with the university will be determined at the convention on the Baylor campus in November.

The room-reservations effort by the conservatives would underscore the reality of the threat and would "backfire," Bishop said.

"We think it is the greatest thing they have done," he told the Baptist Standard, the Texas Baptist paper. "It gives final evidence that they do intend to take over the state convention, and they would seek to take over Baylor University if that hadn't already been thwarted.

"People who have seen Baylor as over-reacting to the threat of a fundamentalist takeover now see Baylor as having acted very prudently."

Waco-area hotel and motel managers and reservations clerks for the most part were tight-lipped about who had secured the reservations. Conservatives did not get all of them. Some churches who take no positions in the denominational or Baylor controversy are known to have secured reservations, although one pastor told the Standard his secretary had called for two hours in the early morning of June 20 before getting rooms for their church's messengers. Texas churches can send up to 25 messengers to the annual meeting. The 1990 convention drew a record 7,540 messengers, but the 1991 meeting may eclipse that.

Carter Jones of the Brazos Inn in Waco told the Standard his facility had set aside 50 rooms for the convention and that all had been reserved within 45 minutes after they were made available at 7 a.m. June 20.

The reservations were made by several people, Jones said. Some requested 20 or more rooms and were turned down, although one was given "13 or 14" and three received more than half of the 50-room block.

The Dallas Times Herald reported June 27 the room-reservation effort had been mounted by "fundamentalists," and quoted Larry May, manager of the Quality Inn in Hillsboro, 30 miles north of Waco, as saying a credit card belonging to Paul Martin, a Houston attorney and former Baylor trustee, had been used to reserve 50 rooms. May said he was told the rooms were not to be released; they would be paid for even if no one stayed in them.

Martin would not comment on the matter to the Times Herald reporter and would not return a phone call from the Baptist Standard. His secretary said he would have no comment.

Hal Boone, a current Baylor trustee who voted against the charter change last fall and who has been openly critical of the action, also reportedly reserved rooms but told the Standard he had no comment other than he and his wife had a room reservation.

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James Bolton, a member of First Baptist Church of Dallas, and who was replaced on the Baylor board last fall, told the Standard he had reserved rooms for messengers at the Hillsboro Quality Inn, but was not sure of the number. "It's about 25," he said.

Bolton, who is vice chairman of the trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, told the Times Herald he was not a part of a "fundamentalist" plot to reserve the rooms, but that if "fundamentalists" have reserved the rooms, it is because they are concerned about being fairly represented.

"This is the Baptist way," Bolton told the Dallas paper. "The only controversy is because (the moderates) didn't think of it first."

Bolton told the Standard he had not been a part of any organized effort and the "Baptist way" he was referring to was messengers going to the convention and voting their convictions.

"You can't vote if you don't go to the convention," he said, explaining why he had reserved the rooms.

"I don't know what Texas Baptists will decide to do" about the Baylor issue, Bolton said, "but I think it is very healthy that they are interested in what is going on."

Neither the Baylor Alumni Association nor the Texas chapter of Baptists Committed has reserved any of the rooms for the convention, said spokespersons for those organizations.

Ray Burchette, executive director of the alumni association, said no one with any authorization from his office had reserved any rooms.

David Currie, coordinator for Baptists Committed, a moderate organization, said his phone "has been ringing off the wall" with calls from people wanting rooms, but he insisted his organization had reserved none "either through the organization or through individual members -- none whatsoever."

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WMU conference marked
by several 'firsts'

By Karen Benson

CO
N(WMU)

Baptist Press
7/1/91

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--June 22-28 was a week of "firsts" for Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union during its annual WMU Conference at Ridgecrest N.C. Baptist Conference Center:

-- The Ridgecrest meeting was the first to be presided over by national WMU President Carolyn Miller following her election to the post June 3 in Atlanta.

-- The week marked the first time a conference had been offered in four languages at either Glorieta or Ridgecrest conference centers -- in English, Spanish, Korean and sign language.

-- And members of the first Baptist Young Women Enterprisers Abroad team were commissioned for their Sept. 2-10 Bible distribution and witnessing project in the Soviet Union.

More than 1,800 people participated in the week of training and general interest conferences, Bible studies, worship services, missions vespers and concerts -- all centered around the WMU emphasis of "Called and Accountable" for the upcoming 1991-92 church year.

During the week, conferees gave \$4,058.32 in a special offering for the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified plan of giving to support its missions, evangelistic and educational programs domestically and abroad.

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In her first major address, Miller called upon the participants to "turn this world upside down!"

"We in our togetherness -- WMU and God -- can make things happen!" Miller said. "We women can be changers of our own destiny -- the destiny of our own organization, and the destiny of our own world."

But that won't happen unless women and men are willing to go out into the world and "see for ourselves" the needs, she said. "It's not an ideal world, but no matter what the cost, we in WMU can change the world!"

More than 2.5 billion people never have heard the gospel message, Miller said. "The church is sleeping in all this light, while the world is sleeping in darkness. We need to take the light into the darkest parts of the world."

In the process, there will be "many rivers we have to cross, and many mountains we have to climb," she said, citing apathy as "one of the highest mountains" to conquer.

"So, people, aim at the impossible!" Miller challenged. "I come to you today with a renewed urgency about our task in missions. Our vision must remain clear. We must take on a more meaningful commitment like never before."

"WMU has not organized for the sake of organization -- but so that our combined efforts would make a difference in this world," she said. "You have only to dream the impossible."

Hearing Miller's message in their own languages were 24 Koreans, 54 Hispanics and 11 deaf people, according to Doris Diaz, WMU's language specialist, a native of Guatemala.

Every general session was translated simultaneously from English into the three languages. Additionally, training and general interest conferences were led in Korean, Spanish and sign language by Korean, Hispanic and deaf leaders, she said.

"The Korean conferences were led by three Korean women, the Spanish conferences were led by three Hispanics, and the conferences for the deaf were led by Sue Hill of Arlington, Texas, who is deaf, herself," Diaz said.

Other ethnic groups represented at WMU Week included 50 blacks, three Vietnamese and four Chinese, she said.

"This is beautiful!" Diaz said of the language opportunities, which WMU began advertising to the ethnic groups about two years ago. Some state WMU offices helped encourage ethnic participants by offering scholarships to the conference, Diaz said.

A culminating event was an "Ethnic Celebration" in which 120 ethnics gathered for singing, games and fellowship. During that festivity, Judi Bishop, language consultant for Texas WMU who was assisting with deaf interpretation for the general sessions, even translated from Spanish into sign language, Diaz said.

Already, ethnic groups are making preparations for next summer's WMU conference, Diaz said. For example, "The Koreans already have requested larger rooms, and they've already begun making housing reservations for next year," Diaz said.

In an impromptu commissioning service, WMU leaders commissioned six Baptist Young Women who were attending the conference at Ridgecrest and who will be among 28 BYWs participating in the first BYW Enterprisers Abroad project this fall.

Baptist Young Women is the missions organization in Southern Baptist churches and on college campuses for women ages 18-34. BYW Enterprisers Abroad is a program of hands-on mission action and personal witnessing outside the United States for BYW members who have completed a required intensive training program.

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During the commissioning, national WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien asked the congregation to help "hold the ropes" for the team by committing to pray for the team between now and the departure date, and then to pray daily for the team while they are abroad. Each person who committed to pray was given a small piece of rope to place in his or her Bible as a reminder.

The six BYWs commissioned are: Ellen McMillan, a BYW president from Fort Smith, Ark.; Jimmie Chappell, WMU associate for Acteens and BYW at the Georgia WMU office in Atlanta; Deborah Brunt, an author and speaker from Corinth, Miss.; Ele Clay, editor of Contempo magazine for WMU, SBC, in Birmingham, Ala.; Andrea Mullins, Baptist Women specialist for WMU, SBC; and Karen Benson, communications group manager for WMU, SBC. Clay and Mullins are the leaders of the BYW Enterprisers Abroad trip.

The BYWs will be joined by about 25 Baptist Young Men for the Bible distribution and witnessing project. The team will travel to Moscow, where they will split into two groups -- one group going to Yalta, a small resort town on the Black Sea in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic; the other group traveling to Frunze, a major city in the Kirghiz S.S.R., which shares a border with China.

In both cities, the teams will distribute Russian language Bibles, lead in worship services, go door-to-door sharing a personal witness, and help with a variety of other activities.

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CLC asks BJCPA to clarify position
on abortion as religious liberty

By Tom Strode

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N-CLC

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has asked the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs to clarify its position on whether abortion is a religious liberty.

The request was made as the Christian Life Commission continues to consider the position it will take on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1991, H.R. 2797, which was reintroduced June 26. The purpose of the bill, first introduced in 1990, is to provide a remedy to the Supreme Court's decision last year in Oregon Employment Decision v. Smith. The Baptist Joint Committee is one of the leaders in the coalition supporting the bill.

In Smith, the court ruled the government does not have to prove it has a "compelling" interest to restrict religious practice. The bill is intended to return the understanding of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to its status before Smith, when religious freedom was protected unless there was a "compelling state interest" that overrode it.

In a June 28 letter released to Baptist Press and state Baptist newspaper editors, CLC Executive Director Richard D. Land told BJCPA Executive Director James Dunn the commission was committed to a legislative solution to what he described as an "abhorrent" opinion by the Supreme Court. The CLC has not taken a position yet on RFRA, Land said.

Land asked the BJCPA "to state for the record whether abortion is a practice which should prevail as a Free Exercise of religion claim."

He requested Dunn send letters to Rep. Stephen Solarz, D.-N.Y., and Sen. Joseph Biden, D.-Del., the main sponsors of the legislation, saying "government has a compelling interest in protecting pre-born life, which should override claims of a religious right to abortion."

Land also asked Dunn to commit to Southern Baptists that during his tenure the BJCPA "will never advocate, especially in the courts or in Congress, the view that abortion claims should prevail as religious liberty claims." Dunn was asked to clarify if the BJCPA considers legislation restricting abortion a "violation" of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

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Land's letter quoted past statements made by Dunn and James E. Wood, Dunn's predecessor at the BJCPA, in which they indicated abortion should be protected by the Free Exercise Clause and anti-abortion legislation is a form of government interference in religion.

A spokesman for the BJCPA said July 1 Dunn had responded by mail to Land but would not release his letter before the CLC executive director received it.

"We deeply cherish religious liberty as an invaluable part of our Baptist heritage," the CLC's Land told Baptist Press. "It is an integral part of our faith. We also deeply cherish the right of unborn babies to life. That is also an integral part of our faith.

"We cannot place a higher value on one conviction than the other. We refuse to sacrifice the lives of unborn babies on the altar of religious liberty. To do so would be to make religious liberty an idol, and that would be blasphemous.

"That is why our requests of the Joint Committee and other groups are the absolute minimum necessary to activate our support."

In the letter the CLC was asking other organizations and individuals concerned about both religious freedom and pro-life issues to write similar letters to Rep. Solarz and Sen. Biden, Land said.

"This correspondence and supporting legal scholarship should help to alleviate the concern that one purpose of RFRA is to advance abortion claims," Land said in the letter.

Whether RFRA will make it easier to claim abortion as a religious liberty has been a concern of several groups during recent months. The National Right to Life Committee has led the way in opposing RFRA unless it includes an amendment excluding such a claim.

In his letter, Land said the CLC believes "RFRA need not have this effect." The letters requested by the CLC "can strengthen the legislative history and will permit the Christian Life Commission to more enthusiastically support the legislation in its current form," Land said in the letter.

The Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution in its June meeting supporting a legislative remedy to the Smith decision that would not be used "to advance abortion rights."

In addition to the BJCPA, groups in the coalition supporting RFRA include the National Association of Evangelicals, American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way Action Fund, Traditional Values Coalition and Home School Legal Defense Association.

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Lewis says church planting
is not his single issue

By Sarah Zimmerman

N-NMB

Baptist Press
7/1/91

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--It doesn't take a professional to diagnose Larry Lewis as obsessed with church starting.

The Home Mission Board president constantly wears a button promoting a church-starting campaign. His office wall is decorated with a map depicting 22,000 places where churches are needed.

But he says he is not really a one-issue man.

"It's not fair to say I'm more interested in starting churches than evangelism. It's not fair to say I'm more interested in starting churches than ministry," Lewis said during a home missions conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"It is fair to say that the only effective, fruitful way to evangelize this nation is to minister to its needs through New Testament churches."

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The Home Mission Board's goal is to start 15,000 churches by the end of the year 2000. The 15,000 Campaign is part of the Bold Mission Thrust goal to have 50,000 Southern Baptist churches in the United States and its territories by the end of the century. In addition, Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman challenged Southern Baptists to start 1,000 churches on Easter Sunday next year.

Although Lewis is a primary promoter of the goal, he said, "We must not confuse our goal with our purpose. What fires us, what fuels us, is not the goal but to realize we are under the mandate of God to reach every person for Christ.

"Our real goal is to congregationalize and evangelize this nation. I believe God's plan is to sow this nation down with Bible teaching, soul-winning, ministering churches."

Reaching goals set for the year 2000 requires immediate action, Lewis said. "We dare not wait until 2000 to get excited about this goal. Jesus said the fields are already white for harvest."

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Southern Baptist churches
thrive in declining city

By Sarah Zimmerman

F. H. M. S.

Baptist Press
7/1/91

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--In 1979, a national newsmagazine cited Dayton, Ohio, as the fastest declining city in the United States.

Twelve years later, unemployment still rages and the economy still falters, but Southern Baptist work flourishes. Greater Dayton Baptist Association will start its 100th church in August.

Joe Baker, associational director of missions, said he saw potential for growth when he realized 600,000 people in the city of more than one million were unchurched.

"So what if the city is not growing? Thousands of people need to know Jesus," Baker said during the opening session of a home missions conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

In studying the city, associational leaders discovered 33 places where churches were needed.

"We found people who were hungry, hurting, drug addicts, prostitutes, homeless, alcoholics, blacks, singles, blue collar and white collar," Baker said.

"Jesus died for the lost and the least, but most of our churches were not targeting these groups."

A church planter, Peter Miller, was hired in 1990 to help reach the unchurched community. Some of the resulting new churches include Korean, Chinese, Spanish, black and Japanese congregations.

Five churches already have begun this year in Dayton. Four more are planned to begin by September, and three more are slated to begin in December.

Baptisms also are increasing in the city. The association recorded 13 percent more baptisms in 1990 than in 1989.

Baker said the associational growth despite the city's decline came with willingness to follow God's leadership. "We just prayed that if God would open the door, we'd go through it."

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