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September 16, 1991

91-139

Fellowship receives more than
\$2.6 million in eight months

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship reports more than \$2.6 million in receipts the first eight months of this year, according to a financial statement distributed during the fellowship's coordinating council meeting in Atlanta Sept. 12-14.

The financial statement shows \$2,653,365 in receipts from Jan. 1 to Aug. 31.

Though the fellowship represents moderate Southern Baptists who are dissatisfied with conservative control of the Southern Baptist Convention, 77.7 percent of the fellowship's receipts are channeled to SBC agencies.

Jim Lacy, co-chairman of the finance committee and member of First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas, said 328 churches have contributed to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Contributing churches can designate money to select SBC agencies, to a combination of SBC agencies and additional groups or to projects not linked to Southern Baptist agencies.

According to the financial statement, the Foreign Mission Board, including gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, received \$859,797 or 32.4 percent of the total. The Home Mission Board and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering received \$299,222 or 11.27 percent.

The six Southern Baptist seminaries received \$281,124 or 10.59 percent, other SBC agencies received \$100,609 or 3.79 percent and state conventions received \$521,113 or 19.63 percent.

State conventions receive money from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship when churches designate a portion of their contributions to their state conventions. Some participating churches contribute directly to their state conventions; others send money to the fellowship and designate a percentage to be sent to their state convention.

Among other efforts supported financially by the fellowship are independent mission projects, world hunger relief, Associated Baptist Press and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Operating costs for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., were \$91,424 or 3.4 percent of the \$2.6 million receipts.

In addition to receiving the financial report, the fellowship's coordinating council and the board of directors of the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., voted to merge the two organizations.

The Baptist Cooperative Missions Program was incorporated in August last year to provide a way for churches and individuals to support select Southern Baptist causes. From its inception to Dec. 31, 1990, the program received \$258,215.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship organized in May this year and endorsed the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program as its funding apparatus. With the merger, Baptist Cooperative Missions will no longer function. The 82-member coordinating council of the fellowship will be the governing board of the merged corporation.

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In other business, James Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., and chairman of the fellowship's coordinator search committee, said Nov. 1 is the committee's deadline for receiving resumes for the post. Upon recommendation from the search committee, the coordinator must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the coordinating council.

The coordinating council's next meeting will be Jan. 9-11 in Dallas. The 1992 general assembly will be April 30 to May 2 in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Thomas refuses to commit
himself on abortion issue By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
9/16/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--Clarence Thomas survived the first four days of hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee without committing himself on the abortion issue and appeared likely to be approved as the new associate justice on the United States Supreme Court. The 14-member committee began hearings Sept. 10 on President Bush's nominee to replace retiring justice Thurgood Marshall. At the end of four days, the hearings seemed to be going in Thomas' favor, and his most fervent supporter in the Senate saw no reason for him not to be promoted from the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

"It is inconceivable to me that any member of the committee could find a basis for voting against Clarence Thomas on what he has said this week," said Sen. John Danforth, R.-Mo., who noted none of the committee members announced opposition to him before the hearings. "I think that it was a very strong performance by him under grueling circumstances."

Thomas' testimony before the committee was scheduled to conclude Monday, Sept. 16. Outside witnesses were expected to appear at the hearings during most, if not all, of the rest of the week.

The nomination of the 43-year-old black judge was opposed by several groups, including the NAACP and three predominately black denominations, based on his variant approach from the current civil rights movement. Two other issues, abortion and natural law, however, received the most ardent attention from the committee.

It was quickly evident some of the eight Democratic committee members, especially Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D.-Ohio., and Sen. Patrick Leahy, D.-Vt., were most interested in discovering the judge's views on the right to abortion the Court found in the Roe v. Wade decision. It also seemed clear Thomas was not willing to disclose any opinion on the issue.

When first asked about a woman's right to an abortion by Sen. Joseph Biden, D.-Del., and chairman of the committee, Thomas said, "I do not think that at this time I could maintain my impartiality as a member of the judiciary and comment on that specific case." His responses to other questions on abortion followed this pattern.

Near the end of a lengthy series of questions on abortion, Leahy asked Thomas to declare if he had decided about the issue without disclosing his opinion. The federal judge said he had not made "a decision one way or the other." Leahy said he had problems with such a response, considering speeches and articles in which Thomas had mentioned the right to life.

By early afternoon of the third day, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah, said Thomas already had been asked more than 70 questions about abortion. David Souter, who was approved to the Court the year before by the committee, was asked only 36 times about abortion, Hatch said.

Groups supporting abortion rights complained Thomas was "stonewalling." Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which had withheld a position until the hearings, announced its opposition to Thomas on the second day. Groups supporting Thomas complained he was being held to a different standard than previous nominees.

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Thomas agreed there is a right to privacy in the Constitution, the reasoning the Court used in Roe v. Wade in legalizing a right to abortion.

The committee, led by Biden, questioned Thomas extensively on natural law, a view basically asserting all persons have rights that are derived from outside any man-made document.

Thomas, whose writings and speeches frequently had mentioned natural law, said his interest in this area began with dealing with the coexistence of slavery alongside the Declaration of Independence. While natural law was the background for the Declaration, Thomas said, "I don't think that there is a direct role for natural law in constitutional adjudication.

"My job is to uphold the Constitution of the United States, not personal philosophy or political theories," he said.

Some observers called his response to natural law questions a "confirmation conversion" from previous statements, but Thomas and some of his supporters pointed to his February 1990 testimony before the committee upon his nomination to the federal bench. The judge said he would apply the Constitution, not natural law, to cases before the Court.

On church-state issues, Thomas' responses seemed somewhat noncommittal. He indicated he had no problem with the Court's three-part Lemon test for determining establishment of religion cases, although he said the Court had "applied it with some difficulty."

Thomas expressed concern over the Court's opinion in last year's Oregon Employment Division v. Smith, which overturned the compelling state interest test in free exercise of religion cases but did not say for sure he favored a return to the compelling state interest approach.

Thomas' wife, son, mother and sister sat near him during the hearings, as did Danforth and other advisers. Thomas served on Danforth's staff twice, once in the Missouri attorney general's office and once on his Senate staff.

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Georgia associate editor
accepts student post

Baptist Press
9/16/91

ATLANTA (BP)--William T. Neal III, associate editor of The Christian Index in Georgia, has been elected director of the department of student work for the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Neal, 43, will begin work in the new post Oct. 15 following his election by the GBC executive committee Sept. 10.

A native of Columbus, Ga., Neal will succeed D. Eugene Briscoe who was killed in an automobile accident in July after 18 years as student work director. Neal has a diverse background in both student work and journalism, and has been associate editor of The Index since 1987.

An ordained minister, Neal is married to the former Judith Rutledge of Columbus. The couple has one daughter, Mary Elizabeth.

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California names new
editor, 3 other staff

Baptist Press
9/16/91

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--Mark A. Wyatt, director of public relations for the California Southern Baptist Convention, has been named editor and general manager of The California Southern Baptist, newsjournal of the California Southern Baptist Convention convention.

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Wyatt was elected by the CSBC executive board, which also filled three other staff vacancies in its regular September meeting.

Wyatt had been interim editor since former editor Herb Hollinger resigned to become vice president for Baptist Press Mar. 1.

Since 1984 Wyatt has been director of public relations for the California convention. Previously he worked as a radio announcer and television news reporter and anchor in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Kentucky. He also was pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church, Salem, Ind., from 1981-1982.

Wyatt, 39, earned a bachelor of fine arts degree at Valdosta (Ga.) State College, Georgia, and a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Wyatt is married to the former Barbara Jean Vernay of Nashville, Ga. The couple has three children.

Michael Terry Barone was named new director of the office of public relations. He holds a B.S. degree from Baylor University and master of journalism degree from North Texas State University.

Since 1979 Barone has been information consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. His previous experience includes: public relations associate at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1975-1977; reporter for the Waco Tribune-Herald 1977-1978; and director of public information for Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center, 1978-1979.

Barone is married to the former Linda Gayle Waldrop and they have one daughter.

James M. Akins, for the past five years pastor of Bell Road Baptist Church in Auburn, Calif., was elected director of the office of evangelism. He succeeds interim evangelism director Harry Williams, who retired Aug. 30.

Akins earned a B.A. degree from Wayland Baptist University and a master of divinity degree from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., and completed his doctor of ministry degree in 1979 from Luther Rice Seminary.

Akins held student pastorates while attending school in Texas and Missouri from 1964-1970. He held three Missouri pastorates before going to California in 1986: Southview Baptist, Raytown, 1970-1973; First Baptist, Platte City, 1973-1975, and Birchwood Baptist, Independence, 1975-1986.

He is married to the former Kay Owen, and they have a son and daughter, both of whom are married.

Daryl J. Watts was elected director of the new youth ministries department. He comes to his new position from San Jose, Calif., where he has been associate pastor of English ministries at Korean Baptist Church since 1988.

Watts is a B.A. in religion graduate of Baylor University and earned the M.Div. degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif. He was a newscaster for KEAR-FM, San Francisco from 1979-1982 and was recreation director at Hannibal-Lagrange College Centrifuge staff for the church recreation department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

He also has been an independent youth evangelist and camp pastor for the west coast traveling centrifuge staff of the SSB. And for six years Watts was youth consultant for San Francisco-Peninsula Association.

Watts other work experience includes magician, puppeteer, fireman, lifeguard and musician.

He is married to the former Teresa D. Wilson and they have an infant son.

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Jess Moody hopes to stir
up evangelism interest

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
9/16/91

CHATSWORTH, Calif. (BP)--Jess Moody says he doesn't plan to "lift a finger" to win election as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. But the California pastor hopes to stir up renewed interest in evangelism in the process.

Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Chatsworth, told The California Southern Baptist, newsjournal of the California Southern Baptist Convention, he has gotten plenty of response since it was reported he would "reluctantly" agree to be nominated in what he called a bid to bring peace to the SBC.

"From around the state there have come a few calls from people who have said, 'My goodness, this is great, we need this,' " Moody said. "But I don't think anything is going to gel until it heats up," probably before year's end.

Moody said he's outgrown the "egomaniacal preacher" stage and has no desire for personal glory. His interest, Moody says, is in harmony and evangelism.

"I'm like an old uncle trying to get the family to stop fighting, shake hands, forget it, and get back to work for the sake of the family business," said Moody.

"Our business is ministry and missions," Moody said.

Moody said critics who accuse him of political activity have it wrong. Quoting from one of his books, Moody said, "You can't fish and fight at the same time. You have to either put down your net or your gun.

"I've only got one desire, to see the largest army of Protestant Christians in the U.S. making their army unite and getting back into the real war. We've got a major battle with the secularization of the U.S."

Moody cited another reason he doesn't plan to actively campaign for the SBC presidency. "I'm fighting a major battle in getting into new \$15 million church campus," he said of efforts to secure occupancy and use permits for new buildings at the Chatsworth church.

Moody said he doesn't plan to answer every criticism of his announced candidacy, but said he is not trying to derail the conservative stronghold in the SBC.

"I'm very proud of the fundamentalists for keeping true to the word of God, and I'm very proud of the moderates for keeping true to Baptist polity," Moody said.

"Without each other, they're going to go to an extreme -- either in a legalistic way, or only talking about polity.

"You must have balance between polity and evangelism," Moody said. "Polity keeps you together; evangelism makes you grow."

Moody has called for moderate Southern Baptists to dismantle organizations some predict will lead to a formal split in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"I don't believe in divorce," Moody explained. "As these two groups are walking apart, I'd like to see both of them look over their shoulders and ask if they really want this to happen. I don't think they really do want it to happen."

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Southern Baptist volunteers
witness miracles in Soviet Union

By Karen Benson

Baptist Press
9/16/91

MOSCOW (BP)--If you don't believe in miracles, you might not want to read any further.

Because what happened to a group of Southern Baptist volunteers in the Soviet Union Sept. 2-10 falls nothing short of miraculous.

Consider, for starters:

-- Several open-air worship services in the middle of Red Square, translated into Russian by Soviet tour agency guides, at least one of whom became a Christian during the week.

-- A gospel music concert and preaching by Billy Kim (known as the "Billy Graham" of South Korea) in the Kremlin's Palace of Congress where the USSR Parliament meets. At the conclusion of the program, more than half of the attenders raised their hands indicating they had prayed to receive Christ.

-- Soviet soldiers helping to unload boxes of 6,500 Russian language New Testaments inside the Kremlin walls to be distributed to Soviet concert-goers that night.

-- New Testaments distributed and a worship service held in a Moscow alcoholic treatment asylum, where an estimated 150 men received Christ.

-- New Testaments handed out at a crowded subway station entrance in Moscow, where many of the people who took the Bibles stopped immediately, just steps from where they received them, to open the New Testaments and begin reading. As the volunteers boarded the buses for their next stop, a glance back at the station showed a sea of people standing still, with open Russian language New Testaments, reading -- most for the very first time.

With experiences like those, it didn't take long for the volunteers to realize they were in the Soviet Union not only during what may be the most historic time politically in that nation's history, but what may also be the most historic time spiritually, as well.

There were 59 Southern Baptists from 17 states who paid their own way to the Soviet Union to respond to appeals from Soviet Christians to help share the gospel message and to help distribute Russian language New Testaments.

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Included in the group of pastors and laity was a team of 26 Baptist Young Women Enterprisers Abroad, ages 18-34, who had spent more than 50 hours each in training and preparation for the mission project. The project was the first BYW Enterprisers Abroad trip, sponsored by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

Once there, they joined another group of Southern Baptists led by Johnnie Godwin of the Baptist Sunday School Board's Holman Bible Division, who also were part of the Bible distribution project.

Other Southern Baptist agencies involved in the Bible distribution and ministry effort are the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Foreign Mission Board and Home Mission Board.

The team left for Moscow Sept. 2, just days after the failed coup attempt to oust Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his government. While the team was in Moscow, the historic decision was made to dissolve the Soviet Union, to recognize Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as sovereign nations, and to declare all remaining republics sovereign states.

The group's eight days in the Soviet Union took them to Moscow in the heart of the vast Russian Republic, to Yalta in the Crimean area of the Ukrainian Republic, and to Frunze (just renamed Bishkek) in what is now known as the Kyrgystan Republic, which shares a border with China.

Before the eight days were up, more than 20,000 New Testaments had been distributed personally by the group, with another 50,000 earmarked for church members to distribute throughout Moscow, the Crimea and Kyrgystan (formerly known as Kirghizia).

The revolutionary message the volunteers took was a simple one: Jesus Christ is Lord and wants to offer each person eternal life. The message they took spoke to the three deepest passions of the Soviet people -- the desire for freedom, the love of peace and the need for obtaining the most basic necessities of life.

Team members repeatedly had opportunities to tell of the real freedom found in Jesus Christ, about a permanent peace found in Christ, and about spiritual food from God that feeds the soul like no physical food can do.

For example, the team held several impromptu worship services in the middle of Red Square in the heart of Moscow, flanked by the Kremlin on one side, the spires St. Basil's Cathedral on another, the huge GUM department store on another, and Lenin's Tomb just yards away.

During the first such service the first day, team members lugged heavy boxes of Russian language New Testaments to the center of Red Square to use as a mini platform before being passed out after the service.

The group began singing "Victory in Jesus" as they stacked the boxes on the square. Immediately, a crowd began to form, encircling the group, expanding constantly as others came to see what was happening.

Team member Dan Brown, pastor of Mt. Garfield Baptist Church in Palisade, Colo., stood on the boxes of Bibles and began to share his testimony, through the help of Russian travel agency guide Chmyga Ludmilla, who had been assigned to the group. As she translated for him, the crowd remained quiet, straining to hear every word, since there were no microphones or other forms of sound magnification.

As Ludmilla interpreted, Brown told the crowd: "We come in peace, friendship and love. We're glad you're here today, but we're even more glad to be here ourselves. As you know, in the United States, we've had religious freedom for many years, but that doesn't mean everyone knows God.

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"By the time I was a teen-ager, I had quit going to church. God and church meant nothing to me. It was not until I graduated from college and went through a time of personal struggle and fear, that I discovered the need for Christ in my life. Two weeks later, I went and bought the first Bible I ever had.

"I started to read it, and there discovered something -- that I was separated from God. His face was turned from me. Because I am a sinner, I had fallen short of God's standards. I learned in the Bible that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God ... But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

"Then, I learned I could not earn eternal life by myself. It is a free gift from God, once we agree to accept it. The gift comes through admitting that we are sinners and being willing to turn from that. Our biggest sin is not believing in Jesus Christ. But when we receive him by faith, he becomes real and comes into our lives.

"When I did that, just asking by faith for him to come into my life, that's when I became 'born again.' Now, I have come to love the church and to love God. He became real for me. Now, I want to serve him all my life. That's why I'm here. Because I want you to know that you, too, can have Christ in your life and have peace and eternal life."

As he finished, BYW members Jamie Lynn from Tecumseh, Mich., and Korena Huneycutt of Mount Pleasant, N.C., began singing a duet, "When We Walk With the Lord."

Allen Harrod of Orange Park, Fla., also brought a message, in which he shared how American Baptists have been praying for them.

"It is possible that God brought you here today so that you can know about Jesus," Harrod said. "The Holy Spirit must touch your life. The Holy Spirit is like the wind, that raises your coat or blows your hair. You do not see the wind, but you feel the wind. You do not see Jesus, but he touches our hearts. He raises our minds ...

"Jesus Christ made me free. He gave me heaven for a home. And he gave me eternal life, as he can do for you right now. Jesus died on the cross. Jesus died for everyone. For Americans. For Russians. For all Soviets. For everyone. You are free to choose to accept Jesus Christ into your life. He will change your life as he has changed our lives."

Harrod invited those in the crowd who had made a decision to go to one of the team members to share their decision with them. He also invited the crowd to accept the free New Testaments that the team members would hand out.

By then, the crowd numbered in the hundreds, with many of them approaching the Baptist team members to indicate they had accepted Christ. One Russian man who spoke English fairly well approached Brown, who led him to Christ right there amidst the crowd in Red Square.

Within just 15-20 minutes, the team had given away all of the New Testaments they had brought to the square, with people constantly still coming asking for more. Several followed the team to the buses parked below the square, where more boxes of Bibles were stored in luggage compartments.

That scene was repeated several days later, when two separate worship services were held at opposite ends of Red Square, with one group of volunteers leading in a worship service at one end, and a group of BYW Enterprisers Abroad holding another worship service at the other end.

BYW leader Andrea Mullins sang "Jesus Loves You" in a clear, soprano voice and brought a message, as did Deborah Brunt from Corinth, Miss., both of which were translated by Russian travel agency guide Levitina Alla.

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Throughout the week, the team members experienced frustration -- even grief -- for never having enough Bibles to meet the needs of the Soviet people. The hardest part of the trip, many said later, were the images of deeply disappointed faces and outstretched hands still reaching for Bibles, after the last one had been given away.

"It's such a burden," said Lamont Brown, layman from First Baptist Church, Denton, Texas, and a coordinator for the trip. "Because if you come here with 1,000 Bibles, you need 2,000. If you come with 10,000, you need 20,000. If you come with 2 million, you need 4 million. If you come with 20 million, you need 40 million."

Even if Southern Baptists could put 30 million Bibles in the hands of the Soviet citizens, he said, "that's still such a small percentage of the 290 million people who live here."

Other similar scenes were repeated during the eight days in Moscow, Yalta and Bishkek. For example, the volunteers:

-- Ministered in a Moscow orphanage and boarding school, where 150 children live and attend school. Volunteers Jeff and Dorothy Howard of Mabelvale, Ark., treated the children to a puppet show, and Barry Foster, pastor from Denham Springs, La., led them in a rousing version of "Father Abraham." The volunteers also sang several other songs for the children, and listened as they, in turn, sang Russian folk songs and gospel songs prepared especially for the group.

-- Passed out New Testaments along the crowded Arbat Street in Moscow, a pedestrian street lined on both sides for many blocks with booths where vendors sell Russian folk art items. When they ran out of Bibles there, team members started passing out Russian language gospel tracts, and red, white and blue stickers with the words "Jesus Loves You" printed in Russian.

-- Ministered in a Moscow psychiatric hospital, giving out hugs, holding hands and sharing Christ's love with patients there, who seemed starved for attention and affection.

-- Gave out Russian language literature and Bibles in Yalta along the expansive boardwalk which runs along the Black Sea in this resort area of the Crimea.

-- Sang hymns simultaneously in English and Russian with a group of pastors from the Crimean region along the streets of Yalta.

-- Encouraged national Baptists in Bishkek by participating in worship services, a baptismal service, and even a wedding ceremony with them.

-- Handed out Russian language Christian literature, tracts and New Testaments and witnessed to passengers on the Aeroflot flights within the Soviet Union, with several passengers being led to Christ.

In short, the Southern Baptist volunteers blitzed the Soviet Union at every stop with the message of Christ.

"There is no doubt in my mind we are here for a purpose," Lamont Brown told the group during a farewell dinner Sept. 9. "If we've ever seen the Lord turn back captivity, we've seen it right here in Eastern Europe."

But the next question becomes, "Where do we go from here?" Brown said. "I'm afraid what happened in Uzbekistan (which closed its doors to Christian missionaries) will happen in Kirghizia and other republics where Islam is the religion of the republic. In Uzbekistan, the country was closed to missionaries with just the passing of one law.

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"We have been given a window of opportunity," Brown said, "and it sometimes seems to be a very limited opportunity. I do know we have an opportunity right now -- and we'd better get with the program! These people's hearts are ripe right now! The Spirit is dealing with their hearts right now. The person who puts something in their hands now is the one who will reach them. We need to be sure it's us putting the message of Christ in their hands," he said.

"We have big work to do. We must pray hard. Dream big dreams. And the Lord will go with us. We really don't have much time. If I ever saw a place that is white unto the harvest, it's right here. There is not a better mission investment today than the Soviet Union!"

"Echoed Harrod in the group's closing prayer: "Lord, if you don't bring us back, bring somebody!"

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Brotherhood Commission

Customized, local-angle sidebar stories are being prepared for the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

We are trying to have these stories ready no later than Monday morning, Sept. 16, if not before. Mike Day also is sending photos to accompany the local-angle sidebars.

EDITORS' NOTE: Following is part one of a three-part series on worship from the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Worship must include
practice, participation

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
9/16/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--"Our generation desperately needs to recover the art of worship," Southern Baptist statesman Herschel Hobbs wrote in his 1990 book, "My Favorite Illustrations."

Worship is an art, Hobbs wrote, "because it requires regular practice and participation to be experienced at its best."

Recent studies indicate many Southern Baptists are not experiencing worship at its best. In fact, most are not taking time on their own to consistently worship God at all.

Only one-third of those responding to the 1990 Southern Baptist Constituency Study indicated they have a private worship or devotional period on a daily basis. Twelve percent indicated they never take time for a personal worship period.

A general sampling of the American public is even more discouraging. According to studies conducted by Barna Research Group, a marketing research company based in Glendale, Calif., the number of Americans who consider religion an important part of their daily lives is dwindling, from 56 percent in 1986 to 53 percent in 1989. Company president George Barna predicts that number will drop below 50 percent by the year 2000.

"The fact is that most young adults have no concept of worship," Barna wrote in his book, "The Frog in the Kettle: What Christians Need to Know About Life in the Year 2000." He also quoted a study that showed baby boomers (people born between 1946-64) who are lay leaders in their churches "have only a vague notion of what real worship is about, and that what their churches do in the realm of worship has little to do with their commitment to a church."

Several SBC leaders are committed to change that. As part of "Let's All Go to Church," a conventionwide emphasis on worship and church growth that runs through 1995, dozens of workshops and seminars on worship are being held across the country.

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"Most people just don't know what you mean when you say the word, 'worship,'" said James White, leadership consultant for preaching and worship in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church administration department and coordinator of "Let's All Go to Church" conferences. "They don't understand what it is or how to do it."

The English word 'worship' comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word, 'weorthscipe,' which literally means attributing worth to something, White explained. "The very meaning of the word in our English language is attributing worth, honor and glory to God. It is the act of response of the created to the Creator. I think when you are engaged in authentic worship you are fulfilling what is perhaps your highest calling as a created being."

All Christians should worship God on a personal level, as well as in congregational settings, White said. Authentic worship, he added, may involve more than a daily devotion or "quiet time."

"As I understand it, personal worship involves some sense of coming before God for the sole purpose of praising him, for a time of adoration and thanksgiving for who he is and what he has done. Bible study disciplines us, admonishes and encourages us, but we musn't leave out the dynamic of praise," he said.

An increasing societal emphasis on the individual and self-fulfillment is one reason worship is often crowded out of daily devotion times, said Ron Brown, editor of "Open Windows," adult daily devotional guide published by the board.

"The purpose of worship is to focus on God, but our society today is very person-centered and individualistic. So, I do think there is a danger that our devotion times can become focused entirely on our needs and how God can meet them rather than on expressing praise to him," Brown explained.

Overemphasizing methodology can be another stumbling block to personal worship.

"Many folks struggle with whether they are doing it right," Brown said. "They believe there has to be a certain structure for personal worship and find it difficult to be open and honest with God, even privately.

"That may say something about our theology of God -- that we really don't have a good understanding of his compassionate nature. If we haven't recognized God's grace and love, then we will have trouble responding appropriately to it."

While the Bible is filled with examples of individuals worshiping God, White said, the act itself could involve a variety of elements, White said.

"For some it may involve quiet solitude, taking time to focus on who God is, his majesty and power. For others it may involve music and singing.

"When I was in college I found a chapel on campus that was open 24 hours a day. I used to go in there by myself late at night or early in the morning and have a time of meditation."

According to Avery Willis, manager of the board's adult discipleship training section, parents have a responsibility for instilling in their children the importance of personal worship habits.

"I had the benefit of growing up in a family that had daily family devotions," Willis, the son of a Baptist preacher, recalled. "It was a time for us to gather together as a family and worship God. My dad was an excellent preacher, but I learned a lot more during the family worship time than I did from his preaching."

Christians shouldn't be discouraged if they don't always "feel" like worshiping God, Willis said.

"Everybody has to deal with those dry periods," he explained, "but we have to focus on who we are doing it for. We have to know that we are here to meet God, and whether I do that emotionally or not, I am going to do it in reality."

That individuals develop personal worship habits on their own is paramount not only to their spiritual health, but to the vitality of corporate worship as well, he added.

"If people don't worship individually, they are not going to do much worshipping collectively. Worship has to start with the individual."

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EDITORS' NOTE: Following is part two of a three-part series on worship from the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Values of family worship
go beyond learning Scripture

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
9/16/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Families studying the Bible together around the breakfast nook or the dinner table gain benefits even beyond learning Scripture verses and how to pray.

"Family worship is one way of relaying values from parents to children. Children then refine their parents' values by doing as children do only so well -- holding parents accountable for what they say their values are," said Harry Lucenay, pastor of First Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas.

Another advantage of worship at home is the intimacy families feel from just being together and communicating, said Lucenay, author of the new Convention Press book, "Families Planning for Bible Study and Worship."

"Family worship gives time together for the family. It communicates common values and opens communication guidelines," he said.

In a study conducted by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's corporate planning and research department, 56 percent of 1,198 Southern Baptists answering a poll said they never study the Bible at home with their families. The remaining 44 percent said they read the Bible or observe a devotional period with their families on a daily, monthly or varying basis.

Karen and Keith Hennick, members of Westvale Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ark., are among Southern Baptist families who, with their children Chris, 11, and Nick, 9, study the Bible each morning.

Karen Hennick said the family has their routine down to a science. Consistency helps her family continue daily morning Bible study "without really thinking about it anymore.

"Keith gets up every morning at 6 and spends 15 minutes by himself in study. Then he gets the rest of us up at 6:15, and we have 30 minutes to get dressed and get our beds made. Then we sit down for 30 minutes of Bible study."

Trial and error acted as the catalyst for the Hennicks in learning mornings are best for them to gather for study. Studying the Bible at night brought interruptions, frustration and eventually abandonment.

"There are several verses in the Bible about finding God early in the morning," said Hennick, who acknowledged she is not a morning person. "Whether we want to or not, we need to be getting up early in the morning. Hopefully that will instill in the boys the value of not being lazy."

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Another reason the Hennicks study the Bible daily is to show their children God is present in their home as well as in the church building.

"A lot of families who do not study the Bible together have children with ideas that God is just in the church building," she said. "We want our boys to know God is with you all hours of the day, not just in church on Sundays and Wednesdays."

James White, leadership consultant for the Sunday School Board's church administration department, agreed.

"We kind of reduce religion and Christianity to the four walls of the church," White said. "When you bring worship into the home, you are essentially breaking Christ out from the church and making him a relevant part of your 24-hour day."

Otis Andrews, a clinical chaplain and family counselor for the Macon (Ga.) Baptist Association, said scheduling a Bible study time when all family members can be present is difficult. So is finding devotionals that meet the needs of children of different ages as well as the parents.

"A problem is finding a common point of interest," said Andrews. "It's hard to get an older child to participate on a level where the smaller one is. And if parents gear Bible study toward the children, then it's not substantial for the parents."

The key to a Bible study all family members can enjoy is brevity, Lucenay said.

"Most of my devotional times with my family last less than five minutes. We get a value concept to them, and then we talk informally at dinner about it," said Lucenay, whose children are 8, 14 and 16.

Three- to six-year old children like to have a short devotional read to them, while 7 to 8 year olds like to read the devotional themselves. Nine to 12-year-olds like to act out portions of the Bible study, and teens "work better with ethical issues they are trying to solve."

Home Bible study also offers stability to the family unit as well as time for family sharing, Andrews said.

"I think if families feel like they are sharing a common experience together, then Bible study can be very meaningful to them," he added. Families don't spend time together anymore, and when they do they are usually watching television or fussing about the groceries or something."

"I think it (home Bible study) can offer families a kind of stability if it is done consistently as they go through changing situations in their personal lives and family development," Andrews added.

Consistency is only one element needed to make a home Bible study work, Lucenay said.

"I work with a bunch of families who have a home Bible study," Lucenay said. "I have found that a good attitude, a sense of flexibility, some creativity and consistency make all the difference in the world."

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EDITORS' NOTE: Following is part three of a three-part series on worship from the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Substance, not style, most important
in effective corporate worship

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
9/16/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--The quality of corporate worship in Southern Baptist churches is at a "crisis" point, according to a consultant for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

True worship both exalts God and reaches people, and worship services in many Southern Baptist churches are failing at both, said James White, leadership consultant for preaching and worship for the board's church administration department.

"(Our worship services) are often man-centered or personality-centered," White said. "In fact, we often call them 'preaching services.' Preaching is a part of the worship service, but it is not worship in and of itself. We've reduced worship to nothing more than a glorified speaking engagement that we all come and hear."

This "spectator sport" mentality among churchgoers is stifling worship services in many congregations, White said.

"We sit passively in our pews waiting to be fed like a baby at feeding time. We don't have any sense of worship as response to God. Any sense of encountering God ... is absent," he said.

As part of the Southern Baptist Convention "Let's All Go to Church" emphasis which runs through 1995, White and leaders from the board's church music department are leading conferences on worship and church growth across the United States. The conferences are designed to increase awareness about the meaning of authentic worship and the importance of worship planning.

White said he is concerned too many SBC churches are failing to reach the unchurched through worship services.

"The passage in 1 Corinthians 14 that talks about having your services be sensitive to non-church people is an alien concept to most Southern Baptist churches," he stated. "We are ingrown and our focus has turned inward."

Growing churches in the coming decade, White said, will be those that design their worship services to meet the unique needs of the unchurched. He cited Saddleback Valley Community Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Mission Viejo, Calif., as an example, noting the church's four weekly "seeker" services which target people with little or no church background.

"We use the language of the people and try to communicate to them where they are," Rick Muchow, associate pastor/worship at Saddleback, said of the seeker services. "We use contemporary music relevant to the culture, and we don't use religious terms because we want our services to be understandable to the unchurched."

The services also allow anonymity to guests and offer practical "application-oriented" preaching, Muchow said.

Saddleback's worship style is being emulated by other Southern Baptist churches, White said. "Saddleback Praises!", a guide to congregation-centered worship services as conducted at the California church, was released in July by the board's Genevox Music Group. Compiled by Muchow and Saddleback pastor Rick Warren, the product includes four actual worship services complete with a director/accompanist book for 24 worship and praise songs, listening and accompaniment cassettes.

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But Muchow and White agree Saddleback's worship style won't work everywhere. Different worship styles, from contemporary to the more traditional, or from informal to liturgical, are necessary to reach different groups of people, they said.

In fact, diversity in worship styles has long been considered a strong point of the Southern Baptist denomination, White added. That diversity was evident in the findings of the 1990 Southern Baptist Constituency Study. Of the 1,377 people responding to the survey, 35 percent viewed the worship services of their church as informal and 18 percent as formal. The rest viewed their services as falling somewhere in between or offered no response.

"None of us should set parameters for worship as long as Jesus is being uplifted and his gospel is being proclaimed," said Richard Lee, senior pastor of the Rehoboth Baptist Church in Atlanta, and author of the Broadman Press book, "Lord, Send Revival."

Rehoboth Church, named one of the fastest growing evangelical churches in America in 1990, has a somewhat more traditional worship format than Saddleback. A recognition of the importance of worship, Lee said, was a key factor in that growth rate.

"Buses, budgets and buildings may have worked to draw people in the past, but they won't work in today's society," he said. "There must be an emphasis on worship and it needs to be innovative, not repetitive."

Louie L. Bailey, minister of music at the more formal Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., believes worship services must also be holistic.

"Worship is bringing our whole selves to God, offering all that we have and all that we are to God," Bailey explained. The Crescent Hill staff tries to include in each worship service all of the elements modeled in Isaiah 6, he added, identifying them as praise, confession, thanksgiving, supplication and response.

Thematic worship also is emphasized at the church, Bailey said, adding worship services refer to the liturgical calendar and include the recitation of written prayers and litanies.

"Compared to many Baptist churches we probably are more formal in our style of worship," Bailey explained. "But the word 'liturgical' sends out red flags. We tend to be formal in our structure, but we still try to communicate warmth in our service."

Whatever their worship style or format, White said churches cannot overemphasize the importance of authentic worship to their spiritual health.

"Worship is the ultimate act for the follower of God," he said. "It is the lifeblood of our spirituality."

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