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EDITORS' NOTE: Today's Baptist Press releases:

TENNESSEE -- Baptists face challenge of Mississippi River area, with graphic.
ALASKA -- Alaska Baptists celebrate giving but highlight need for pastors.
NEW MEXICO -- Don't ignore healthy families, minister tells church leaders.
CHICAGO -- Midwest Baptist leaders make Cooperative Program appeal.
NEW MEXICO -- Churches must focus on mission to avoid splits, pastor says.
ALABAMA -- King James retains tenacious loyalty.

Baptists face challenges
of Mississippi River area

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
8/11/92

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Communities along the Mississippi River have been plagued for decades by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, addiction, poor health care and dilapidated housing.

"What a great place for the church," said home missionary Nathan Porter during an Aug. 7-8 conference on challenges, strategies and barriers to Southern Baptists in the region.

Directors of missions from Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana have designated 127 counties and parishes on or near the banks of the Mississippi needing intensive ministry and evangelism.

A government study of that area in 1990 found what many describe as "Third-World" living conditions:

- One-third of the families live in substandard or dilapidated housing.
- Almost half the adults did not graduate high school.
- 15 counties have infant mortality rates worse than Chile, Cuba and Malaysia.

"We have been lulled into believing the poor exist only on foreign soil," said Herb Brisbane, black church growth specialist with the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Speaker after speaker exhorted the group of more than 400 to take God's love as a transforming power to a domestic mission field of "people who have been left behind."

"God is tired of our inactivity," Brisbane said. "We must build bridges of hope and change because there is no condition beyond alteration when Jesus is involved."

Gary Farley, director town and country missions for the Home Mission Board, agreed. When people become Christians, he said, they change their values and often improve their way of life.

"The spirit of God changes people," he said. "The exciting thing about ministry is you can show people they are gifted."

The concept of an American mission field was common as conference leaders declared Baptists should not just go to church but break outside their four walls and be the church.

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"We're letting people right under the shadow of our church die lost," declared Tommy Tutor, pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Clarksdale, Miss.

"Stop doing your ministry somewhere else only. Do your ministry at home," he said. "It could be a means of turning our nation around and back to God."

Speakers also stressed the need to couple ministry with evangelism, claiming needy people won't listen to talk about God's forgiveness unless they personally experience Christian love.

"It's hard to win a man to faith in Christ who has hunger pains in his stomach," Tutor stated.

"Every person along that Delta has a right to know who Jesus is," said Elmin Howell, coordinator of the Rio Grande River Ministry along the Texas-Mexico border.

The Mississippi River project is modeled after the Rio Grande program, which was started 25 years ago and has resulted in the starting of 543 churches.

Despite the overwhelming needs in the Mississippi region, officials are still optimistic about the opportunities.

"This is Baptist turf," said Tommy Goode, associate director of church and community ministries for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

The region already has 2,375 Southern Baptist churches. Goode claims most Southern Baptists already have a desire to help others, they just need to be shown how to get started. The Arkansas state convention hopes to have 775 churches and 25 associations involved in this ministry by 1995, he said.

Missions directors in the region will now develop ministry projects and solicit volunteers, Goode said. Missions USA Video Magazine has produced a special edition about the area's needs that it will send to each association.

Jere Phillips, director of missions for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, said the biggest challenge now is to get word out and have programs ready for the large number of volunteers he expects.

"If we can expose the need, the volunteers will be there," he said. "We've never not done a project for lack of volunteers."

River ministries could energize stagnating churches that have gotten into a "survival mode," said John McBride, executive director of the Shelby Baptist Association, which includes the city of Memphis.

"This conference has been a godsend," McBride said, adding he's glad to see attention drawn to the needs in the area. "It has renewed a hunger and thirst to do som thing about it."

People wanting more information about the Mississippi River Ministry may contact a state director of missions for one of the seven states involved or conference coordinator Tommy Goode at the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, (501) 376-4791, Ext. 5249.

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(BP) graphic of the Mississippi River Ministry region is available from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

(Editors in the states involved may want to include the number of conference attendees from their state: Illinois, 22; Missouri, 54; Kentucky, 3; Tennessee, 169; Mississippi, 54; Louisiana, 27; Arkansas, 56.)

**Alaska Baptists celebrate giving
but highlight need for pastors**

By Art Toalston

KENAI, Alaska (BP)--Record-setting offering totals were celebrated when the Alaska Baptist Convention met Aug. 4-5 in this small peninsula town south of Anchorage.

However, a need for pastors was underscored by Bill G. Duncan, the convention's executive director.

Alaska Baptists set new marks for special offerings during the past year, Duncan reported to a record 192 messengers from the convention's 61 churches, 24 missions and 15 preaching points encompassing some 22,300 members.

Records were \$129,777.27 for the Lottie Moon Offering for Foreign Missions, up 13.6 percent over the previous year; \$65,844.26 for the Annie Armstrong Offering for Home Missions, up 24.5 percent; and \$49,975.46 for the Valeria Sherard Offering for State Missions, up 5.4 percent. Alaska's gifts for foreign and home missions were among the top increases among state Baptist conventions, Duncan said.

In Cooperative Program giving, Duncan noted Alaska Baptists are ahead of last year's pace by 10 percent. The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified channel of support for home and foreign missions.

In pastors, however, the state has recorded a 64 percent turnover the past two years, Duncan said, adding nine churches currently are without pastors

"Even though our churches are small numerically," Duncan commented, "they are all-important to what we are about as Alaska Baptists. They are a part of the fellowship that's as great as any other state in the Southern Baptist Convention."

Elected as new convention president was Walter Davidson, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Anchorage. Davidson and two other pastors were nominated for the post, Michael Procter of Glacier Valley Baptist Church in Juneau and Johnny McCoy of First Baptist Church of North Pole. Davidson won a runoff with Procter, who subsequently was elected first vice president, with McCoy elected second vice president.

A budget of \$1,676,922 was adopted for 1993, with \$575,054 budgeted for national and international missions through the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' united fund for outreach and ministry.

First Baptist Church of Kenai hosted the meeting. Next year's convention will meet Aug. 3-4 at First Baptist Church in North Pole.

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**Don't ignore healthy families,
minister tells church leaders**

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
8/11/92

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--A recent day on the job for Jim Hightower included counseling family members struggling with co-dependency, child molestation, career uncertainty, depression and marital discord.

"I have really been reminded how 'people-intensive' working in the local church can be," the minister of pastoral care at First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala., said. Hightower left his consultant's job at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in June to return to full-time counseling work on the local church level.

Although he enjoys helpin^g dysfunctional families, Hightower said counselors and churches must not ignore the needs of healthy families.

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"There are a lot of families in our churches that are healthy or could become healthy with very little help. But we in the church tend to focus on (helping) unhealthy families" solve their problems, he said.

Healthy families are not perfect, Hightower said. In fact, one of the characteristics of a healthy family is that members admit problems and are willing to seek outside help.

"One of the ideas that I've been trying to foster at my church is that seeking me out for conversion is a sign of health, not weakness," he explained. "I am never going to see the sickest people at our church, because seeking help requires a certain degree of health."

So, what is a "healthy" family?

While Hightower said there is no exact definition, he gave several characteristics of healthy families at an Aug. 10 seminar during the Bible-Preaching-Administration Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

First, Hightower said, healthy families communicate and listen to one another, recognizing the importance of "accepting a whole range of feelings and emotions."

Second, members of a healthy family respect one another.

"How do we show respect to our children?" he asked. "One way is by setting appropriate limits for them and then recognizing when a child is old enough to begin setting his or her own limits."

Another way to show respect to children is to give them privacy, both physically and emotionally, he said.

Hightower said healthy families also affirm and support one another, develop trust, play together, eat together, share responsibilities, value service to others and have a shared religious core.

When compiling the list of characteristics of healthy families, Hightower admitted feeling a little depressed since his family fell short in many areas.

"But I think the issue is that (healthy families) are moving toward these goals, not that we have arrived.

"Developing families that have a great deal of health takes intentionality and a lot of hard work, but it's not impossible."

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Midwest Baptist leaders make
Cooperative Program appeal

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
8/11/92

CHICAGO (BP)--Baptist leaders in six Midwest states have appealed to Southern Baptist churches in the region to share at least 10 percent of their offerings through the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' channel of support for home and foreign missions.

"The Cooperative Program is the lifeblood of these conventions," said O. Wyndell Jones, executive director-treasurer of the Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship.

Without the CP, Jones said, "We would just really be struggling."

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The appeal for Midwest churches to boost Cooperative Program giving was adopted during a meeting of the North Central States Steering Committee of executive directors and missions and development directors for state Baptist conventions of Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota-Wisconsin.

In five of the six states, Cooperative Program giving to SBC missions and ministry during the current Oct. 1-Sept. 30 fiscal year already has been on the rise. Minnesota-Wisconsin's giving is up 13.77 percent; Ohio, up 10.22 percent; Iowa, up 9.92 percent; Indiana, up 6.29 percent; and Illinois, up 5.33 percent. Michigan, meanwhile, has experienced a 17.79 percent decline in year-to-date CP giving.

About 25 percent of the U.S. population lives in the region, Jones noted.

In Iowa, he said, about 65 percent of the state convention's budget is provided by Cooperative Program and Southern Baptists' gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions channeled through the Home Mission Board. Baptist work in Iowa encompasses 85 churches, missions and preaching points with 11,000-plus members.

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Churches must focus on mission
to avoid splits, pastor says

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press
8/11/92

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Looking for a way to split your church? Michael Dean has some suggestions.

Dean, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, shared five ways to split a church with pastors and other church leaders attending an Aug. 10 seminar at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center. Using the New Testament church at Corinth as his model, he said those interested in destroying church unity should:

1. Remain immature.
2. Tear others down with gossip and criticism.
3. Form cliques that exclude others.
4. Make a big deal about petty issues.
5. Forget the church's main reason for existence -- sharing Jesus Christ with a lost world.

No, Dean isn't serious about breaking up churches but he does want to call the problem of disunity to the attention of church members. He is currently preaching a sermon series at Travis Avenue about contemporary problems or "hot potatoes" Christians face today. One of the most troubling, he said, is disunity.

"Unfortunately, our churches are struggling today," he said, adding he doesn't believe the root of the problem is the Southern Baptist Convention controversy or disputes over doctrinal integrity. Instead, he puts most of the blame on an "overcrowded nursery," or spiritual immaturity in the church.

"Immaturity is something somebody is supposed to grow out of, not live in professionally," Dean told Bible-Preaching-Administration Conference participants attending his Bible study on 1 Corinthians. Too many Christians, he said, are remaining spiritual babies because of retarded spiritual growth, a weak scriptural diet, unhealthy personal relationships and repeated moral failure.

So, how can these spiritual babies get out of the "nursery"?

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First, Dean said, they must acknowledge the desire to grow spiritually. Second, they must spend more time reading God's Word. They also need to "surrender to the hourly control of the Holy Spirit," repent of pettiness and quarrelsome attitudes and "fall in love with Jesus," he said.

Churches as a whole, Dean said, need to refocus and "rally around our mission" of bringing others to Christ.

"One of the best ways to unify a church is to make sure our mission is central to everything we do," he said.

The Bible-Preaching-Administration Conference is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church administration department.

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King James retains
tenacious loyalty

By Mark Baggett

Baptist Press
8/11/92

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Rumors of the death of the King James version of the Bible appear to be greatly exaggerated.

Despite slipping in sales over the last decade, it maintains a strong second place to the New International Version (NIV) and inspires a fierce loyalty among those who believe its Elizabethan English has the majesty and grandeur of the Word of God.

According to "The Story of English" (1986), the King James was the work of a committee, uses a mere 8,000 words (in contrast to its contemporary, Shakespeare, whose vocabulary was some 30,000 words) and was based as much on the five previous English versions as it was on Latin and Greek. Even though it has had a sweeping influence on English prose, to say nothing of theology, there is evidence its translators were less dogmatic about their work than their defenders today.

"Why should we be in bondage to them (words and syllables)," asked the translators in their preface, "if we may be free, use precisely when we may use another no less fit, as commodiously?"

As recently as this past June, however, at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Indianapolis, a messenger from Ohio proposed that the King James version be used for all Scripture reading at SBC meetings. The resolutions committee took no action on the motion by Steve Wilson, pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Rossmoyne, Ohio, but Wilson remains convinced Southern Baptists need a standard version.

"For years we have had confrontations over the Word of God," he said. "If we are claiming that the Word of God is inspired, we are obligated to produce it. We should recommend the King James version as a superior version.

"If there are disagreements over versions, only one can be right or neither. You have to have a standard somewhere.

"If I am in the pulpit proclaiming, 'Thus saith the Lord,' I have to have the Lord's word in front of me. I'm not going to trust my own memory."

The issue of which Bible to use from the pulpit at Southern Baptist churches is one that cuts across political lines, although conservative pastors are perhaps more likely to use the King James version. In an informal poll of 40 pastors in Alabama, conservative and moderate alike, the King James ran a poor third in terms of preference to the NIV and New American Standard Bibles.

Henry Cox, pastor of First Baptist Church in Bay Minette, Ala., gives a typical response.

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"To this day, I still read the King James Bible from the pulpit because most of our members still use the King James Bible," Cox said. "But I recommend to members that they invest in a more contemporary version, such as Today's English Version or the NIV and that they use others such as the Amplified Bible for study helps. I encourage Sunday school teachers to read several versions."

Like many if not most Southern Baptists, Cox grew up reading the King James Version.

"I have a deep love for the King James," he said. "That was the only version I used growing up. It sounds like you're not really reading the Bible without the 'Thee's' and 'Thou's' of the King James.

"Early in my schooling, I realized that the King James is a translation and when in seminary I looked at the Hebrew and Greek texts I understood what a tremendous challenge it was for the translators. Those scholars seemed to capture the various shades of meaning and syntax and usage so well. It's amazing to me how accurate the King James version is.

"Yet I know that in the last 20-30 years some of the newer versions are even more accurate because archeological discoveries have turned up manuscripts that were older than the manuscripts used by King James translators.

"This is not to say the King James is wrong but I have tried to point out that newer versions have done better in giving us the true meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew language by using some newly discovered manuscripts that are not biblical but that date from the time of the original Greek and Hebrew."

Cox said he doesn't hesitate to use the newer translations but is "dubious" about paraphrases of the Bible and draws the line between translations and paraphrases. "If we were to order pew Bibles for the church," Cox said, "the church council would probably recommend Today's English Version or the NIV."

But Wilson believes the popularity of the newer versions is "hype."

"I've got 15 Bibles," he says, "and I attribute that to big marketing behind the newer versions. The NIV has been popular for a relatively short time whereas the King James has lasted over 400 years. I don't see how the last 30 or 40 years would make the King James less reliable."

One objection to the standard use of the King James version is that non-Christians, bred on the contemporary medium of television, cannot understand the Elizabethan prose.

"My answer to that is that there were heathen peoples throughout history who didn't speak Greek and Hebrew and yet they were converted," Wilson said. "We are using the language that God intended for us to use when we use the King James version. He saw fit in 1611 to put his word into that Bible."

But Cox doesn't think the translation determines the effectiveness of the witness.

"If you are just putting Scripture in someone's hands, it's not going to be as effective anyway," he said. "If you are quoting Scripture and explaining it to them, you are going to paraphrase. The message of the gospel is what is at the heart of the gospel."

Wilson, who said he intends to make a similar motion next year "to find out what the pulse of the convention is," scoffs at the notion that the Bible should be easy to understand.

"I don't have a problem with someone using different words to describe matters of common sense. But God intends for us to meditate on his Word and to allow him to interpret it for us, so that it will never happen that we substitute our own interpretation for his. The Bible is not some easy-to-use microwave oven for our convenience."