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92-206

SALT LAKE CITY -- SBC baptism total this year expected to show decrease.
VIRGINIA -- Mission board continues move toward leadership changes.
ATLANTA -- Positive financial report highlights HMB meeting.
NASHVILLE -- 1 in 5 youth recount violence in their home.
WASHINGTON -- BWA official endorses military effort to guard Somalia aid.
DALLAS -- Texas Baptists launch plan to aid Somalia refugees.
ATLANTA -- Rumors linking Procter and Gamble with church of Satan resurface.
TENNESSEE -- Brotherhood official 'amazed' at openness in Central Asia.
MISSISSIPPI -- Book about SBC's Owen Cooper headed for national market.
NASHVILLE -- Discipleship needed as ongoing emphasis.

SBC baptism total this year
expected to show decrease By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
12/10/92

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--After four years of increases, baptisms in Southern Baptist churches are expected to be down 5 percent for the 1991-92 church year.

The report, based on information from state conventions, was presented during the winter meeting of state evangelism directors.

Clay Price, director of the Home Mission Board program research department, estimated baptisms in 1992 will total 377,000, down from 396,668 in 1991. Though the estimate is less than the 1991 total, it is the third-highest total in the last nine years, Price said.

The convention reported its highest number of baptisms in 1972 with 445,725. The average number of annual baptisms from 1950 to 1991 is 383,036.

Darrell Robinson, HMB vice president for evangelism, said he was disappointed in the report because he hoped to see more than 400,000 baptisms this year.

"We could call on a variety of factors for the decrease, but it would only be guessing," Robinson said. He challenged Southern Baptists to pray for revival and spiritual awakening.

"When revival is present, evangelism follows. With an awakening of the Holy Spirit, soul-winning takes place," Robinson said.

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Mission board continues move
toward leadership changes

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
12/10/92

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees continued moving toward a change of leadership, heard reports from the board's interim president and search committee chairman and agreed to employ a consulting firm to study the board's structure.

In a quiet Dec. 7-9 meeting, trustees also heard reports on missions opportunities ranging from Somalia to the former Soviet Union, appointed 35 new foreign missionaries and heard a guest evangelist from North Carolina urge them to "plow on" in their task of world missions.

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Evangelist Paul Tsika, apparently referring to the controversy that has beset the Southern Baptist Convention and the Foreign Mission Board, urged trustees to focus on the board's evangelistic goals.

"Forget what is behind and pay attention to the goal in the future," he said. "I'm an avowed fundamentalist, but I don't go for the issue but for the propagation of the gospel. The church is battling without discernment. We should focus on fighting to establish the gospel."

Don Kammerdiener, addressing his first trustee meeting as interim president, presented an "interim agenda" as the board seeks a new president to replace R. Keith Parks. Trustees concluded Kammerdiener's report with standing applause.

Parks, who retired Oct. 31 because of disagreements with the board's direction, sat quietly in the audience as Kammerdiener spoke and the board conducted its business Dec. 9. He also attended the board's Dec. 8 missionary appointment service. Parks, who will become missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Feb. 1, told Baptist Press he attended because "I'm a Southern Baptist interested in world missions."

A search committee, appointed eight months ago to find a new president, will hold a prayer retreat Jan. 7-9 and a regularly scheduled meeting Jan. 22 to continue to sift through some 70 names, according to committee chairman Joel Gregory. Reports indicate Kammerdiener, a board missionary and administrator for 30 years, is among those under consideration.

Kammerdiener focused his interim agenda on relationships between staff, trustees and missionaries; a philosophy of honest communications; an effort to "find the right balance" between career and volunteer missionaries; the role of trustees; and a continued worldwide missions thrust.

Noting that all who serve are "interim" because they have "only a brief and passing opportunity" in life, Kammerdiener urged staff, trustees and missionaries to "seize the moment ... to be faithful and effective" in their work. "When I work for the Foreign Mission Board you may be certain that as far as I'm concerned ... (it's) the best mission board in the world."

He committed himself: 1) to affirm missionaries, staff and trustees in public and in private and urged them to work as a team; 2) to assume trustee votes on principles and policies represent true feelings, not a "hidden agenda," and that staff should act according to them; and 3) to make the board a more "user-friendly" agency, especially with large churches that have not related closely to the board in the past.

Kammerdiener challenged each trustee to "become a denominational missions leader" who will support the board and its work through communications, action, prayer and financial support.

On communications, Kammerdiener said the board is committed to telling the truth. "As a board we have nothing to fear from the truth. It's better for Baptists and others to understand the truth, even if it's not a pleasant truth, than it is to be ignorant. ... Our credibility ... depends on our ability and willingness to tell the truth."

He expressed gratitude for the role of the board's professional communicators, but urged all trustees and staff to see themselves as communicators in the broad sense.

"Every one of us is a communicator of truth as we perceive it ...," he said. "We must not water down our messages with rumors, half-truths or private attacks on individuals or groups within the missions family."

Trustees dealt with a variety of other matters:

The board action to hire a consulting firm began the process of studying the board's organization related to its purpose.

Trustee Lawson Swearingen of Louisiana, speaking to the recommendation, said the action was "not intended to criticize anything" (about the board's present organization) but to help the board determine "where we are, where we want to go and how to get there."

Board chairman John Jackson of California said he, three other trustees and four staff members will attend the meeting of the Woman's Missionary Union executive board in Birmingham Jan. 9 and at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly in Talledega, Ala., Jan. 10-13. A 17-member committee studying how the women's auxiliary will relate to all Southern Baptists, including the new Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, will bring recommendations at the meeting.

The other trustees attending will be Karen Gilbert and Phyllis Randall, both from Virginia, and Bill Blanchard of Tennessee. Staff representatives include Kammerdiener; Wendy Norvelle, director of the international services department; Minette Drumwright, director of the international prayer strategy office; and a fourth staff member to be named.

The mission board, in turn, has invited WMU representatives to attend its Feb. 8-10 meeting in Richmond.

The board also honored retiring Americas vice president Betty Law and took note Joe Bruce, current area director for Middle America and Canada, will be interim vice president after Law steps down Jan. 15. A search committee will seek a successor.

Board members applauded reports from John Faulkner, area director for eastern and southern Africa, and Sam James, vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Faulkner, who lives in Nairobi, Kenya, told of Southern Baptist efforts to minister amidst the starvation and chaos in Somalia, where U.S. troops have been sent to restore order.

James, just returned from a tour of Europe, told of missions advances amidst the pain and struggle in Europe. He said he was impressed with the quality and dedication of the missionaries and the sacrificial spirit of Baptists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

He said missionaries seem to be recovering from grief caused by disruptions there related to the Southern Baptist controversy and that many European leaders are responding favorably to Southern Baptists.

But he underscored the need to deal carefully with Europe because of tenuous relationships and culturally delicate situations. "We have to go in humbleness, particularly in Eastern Europe where they have suffered so much."

In an unrelated action, the board's trustee Strategy Committee asked staff to "issue a call" that would produce a "massive wave of candidates" to work in Eastern Europe "in light of unparalleled opportunity, overwhelming needs and multiplying requests"

Meanwhile, a strategy subcommittee of trustees and staff studying the use of volunteers agreed that the board's overall objective is positioning career missionaries to start churches. Acknowledging the positive contribution volunteers make, a spokesman for the group said nonetheless that members "are in total agreement we're not moving toward becoming a volunteer organization that in any way eclipses anything we've done in the past."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed Dec. 10 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Positive financial report
highlights HMB meeting

By Martin King

Baptist Press
12/10/92

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's executive committee received a positive financial report during its final meeting of the year.

"Thank the Lord for Southern Baptist faithfulness," said board chairman Ron Phillips, a Chattanooga, Tenn., pastor, following the Dec. 8 report.

Bob Banks, HMB executive vice president, attributed the positive financial report to the strength of the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions which was 5 percent above projections after the first week of December, favorable returns on investments and a one-time return from the sale of several investments.

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The executive committee also filled five vacant staff positions. Elected to serve as director of marketing was John Head, presently director of development for the athletic program at Georgia State University in Atlanta. David Porter of Little Rock, Ark., was elected as associate director of marketing.

Timothy Norton, currently associate director of marketing, was elected associate director of church growth and associational evangelism.

Phillip Jones, currently director of the HMB's planning and services research department, was promoted to director of the research division. Reba Driver was promoted from associate director of loan administration for the board's church loans division to director of loan administration.

The executive committee also approved appointment of 27 missions personnel and \$1.2 million in church loans for 24 churches, including sites for three new churches. The committee endorsed 57 new chaplains, bringing the Southern Baptist chaplaincy total to more than 2,300.

HMB President Larry Lewis updated executive committee members on several items including development of construction plans for the agency's new headquarters building which is on schedule. Lewis also called Southern Baptists to prayer for relief efforts in Somalia, particularly for U.S. military personnel and Southern Baptist chaplains serving there.

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1 in 5 youth recount
violence in their homes

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
12/10/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Violent behavior at home had been observed by approximately 22 percent of youth surveyed during 1992 Summer Youth Celebrations, the manager of the youth section in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's discipleship and family development division told state convention leaders meeting in Nashville Dec. 6-9.

Teens who had observed violent behavior in their homes said it most often involved their fathers, with brothers rated a close second, Clyde Hall said. Youth respondents to the survey were attending celebrations at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers and several state convention conference centers.

In other results, 10 percent of teens indicated they had been physically attacked by a person in authority and approximately 30 percent said they have carried weapons. Four percent said they had been raped.

"These are primarily youth who are involved in Southern Baptist churches," Hall emphasized.

In the past five years, the section has surveyed youth conference participants on topics such as the Baptist Faith and Message, discipleship training tasks, personal needs and, during 1992 winter celebrations, social issues such as alcohol, drugs, sexuality and suicide.

By age 13, 59 percent said they had been offered and had experimented with alcohol; 27 percent, drugs; and 58 percent, cigarettes. One out of every five of the youth respondents indicated he or she already had engaged in sexual intercourse. Of that group, 41 percent said they currently were sexually active.

Nineteen percent said they personally had considered suicide while most reported knowing two to three persons who had thought about taking their own lives.

In the area of spiritual growth, 35 percent of youth surveyed said they needed to spend more time in prayer and quiet time with God. Thirty-three percent acknowledged the need to be more committed to the Lord and 25 percent said they needed to study the Bible more.

Hall said one major intent of the surveys is to "make every piece of material we produce and every program we conduct as relevant to the needs of youth and youth leaders as we possibly can."

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He pointed to a 1992 product, "Trauma Center Plus," as one example. The packet includes 12 file folders on topics such as abortion, AIDS, alcohol and drugs and dating. Each folder includes resource material on the issue and suggested outlines for four sessions of a group study on the topic.

Also, a 13-week Bible study, "Help! Peer Pressure," will be released in January 1993. The study addresses topics such as parties, prejudice and substance abuse.

Hall said he shares survey findings widely with professional and lay workers with youth to help them "bring their programs and messages in line with where people are hurting. So many times our youth and adults are hurting in one area, but the message is targeted somewhere else."

Even when confronted with these survey results and other information, Hall said some church leaders maintain "their youth aren't like that. While our numbers may be lower, the youth in our churches are struggling with the same concerns as society at large."

Joe Richardson, personnel counselor in the board's human resources department who regularly counsels youth attending youth celebrations, agreed with Hall's assessment.

During one 1991 celebration, Richardson talked with 63 youth about problems in their lives including one parent's murder and the other's suicide, alcoholism, mental problems, homosexuality, stealing, sexual abuse and eating disorders.

When youth leaders are confronted with these situations, Richardson said responses range from "disbelief to unwillingness to get involved to shock to a willingness not only to get involved but to aggressively meet the need."

For churches to deal effectively with abuse, addictions, violence and other issues, Richardson said leaders must first acknowledge that problems in society also are problems of youth in their churches.

Second, leaders must "talk openly about real problems people have to open the way for youth to talk about the problems they are having."

Third, Richardson urged, listen. Fourth, create an atmosphere of trust -- not trust based on secrecy -- but trust in which a leader can say to a teen, "Whatever you tell me, I'll handle with your best interest in mind."

When church leaders work with teens to get help in dealing with critical problems in their lives, those leaders are pointing youth to God, Richardson said.

"Jesus took care of the earthly needs of people," Richardson said. "The earthly needs of many people today are horrendous. We've got to step in and help people find solutions and healing and hope."

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BWA official endorses military effort to guard Somalian aid

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
12/10/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Baptist World Alliance official has endorsed the decision to send troops to Somalia.

"I believe we should be supportive of military deployment, under the auspices of the United Nations to provide for increased security for the humanitarian program," said Paul Montacute, director of Baptist World Aid.

Montacute said that "while a number of organizations have been able to get food into the country, the lack of security has severely hindered food distribution."

He cited as an example a CARE food convoy which was attacked Nov. 12 while moving from Mogadishu to Baidoa. Four people were killed and five transport personnel hired by CARE were injured.

Emphasizing the need to work under the auspices of the United Nations, Montacute also gave support to Bread For the World, a Christian anti-hunger organization in the United States, in its call for the United Nations to immediately launch a broadly participative diplomatic initiative to end the Somali civil war.

Montacute reported that BWAid recently sent \$85,000 in relief money to Somalia, upping its overall total to \$115,000.

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Of the \$85,000, \$25,000 has been sent to the Canadian Baptist Federation's Sharing Way program, with feeding programs in northeast Kenya at the Ifo, Daghahaley and Hagedera refugee camps.

The other funds will be used to pay for an already purchased vehicle being used to transport food and to assist CARE, a worldwide humanitarian agency of which BWA was a founding member. BWAid often works through CARE in areas of the world with no Baptist community.

It is estimated CARE has been feeding an estimated 1 million people a day in the Mogadishu area.

Donations for Somalian relief may be sent to Baptist World Aid, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101.

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Texas Baptists launch plan
to aid Somalian refugees

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
12/10/92

DALLAS (BP)--Weeks before the Pentagon announced plans to deploy more than 28,000 troops into Somalia as part of the United Nations-sanctioned "Operation Restore Hope," the Texas Baptist Men missions organization was laying the groundwork for its own small-scale version.

And while the first amphibious forces established a Somalian beachhead under the bright glare of television camera lights, TBM volunteers worked quietly in Dallas and Abilene, Texas, preparing for their own relief mission to refugees of the war-ravaged, famine-stricken, east African nation.

Within the next month, TBM plans to send at least two volunteers -- along with a water purifier, well-digging equipment and two self-contained field kitchens -- to Somalian refugee camps in Kenya.

The well digger is the creation of John Hunter, president of Salta Pipe Company and a deacon at First Baptist Church of Abilene, Texas. The water purifier and kitchens were purchased with contributions to the Texas Baptist disaster relief fund.

All of the equipment is expected to be crated for transport to east Africa sometime before Christmas; the volunteers will follow within a few weeks.

Working in cooperation with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the Texas Baptists will be sent initially to Nairobi and then move to the Somalia/Kenya/Ethiopia border where some 500,000 Somalis occupy squalid tent cities.

According to the Foreign Mission Board, the volunteers likely will be stationed in one of three refugee camps with a population of about 40,000 each. At least 8,000 of the registered refugees are children, nursing mothers or pregnant women.

The Texans will work with Canadian Baptist volunteers and Doctors Without Borders, a French medical relief organization. They also will train national Kenya Baptists in field kitchen operations, well digging and water purification.

Baptist volunteers ministering to international refugees in a distant location soon after the arrival of United Nations-mandated troops closely parallels Southern Baptists' "Operation Desert Showers" relief ministry in the wake of "Operation Desert Storm."

That relief effort, which began with the donation of 10,000 blankets by Texas Baptists to Kurdish refugees in Turkey, eventually resulted in medical missions teams working in both southern Turkey and northern Iraq and in mass food service ministries among Kurds in Iran.

Bob Dixon, executive director of Texas Baptist Men, declines to speculate whether the ministries among Somalian refugees will escalate in a similar way, but he is ruling out nothing.

"Based on past experiences, we could anticipate a need for medical volunteers in the future," he said.

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Rumors linking Procter and Gamble
with church of Satan resurface

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--False information linking Procter and Gamble with the occult has been distributed with unauthorized copies of a Home Mission Board brochure, said Gary Leazer, director of the HMB interfaith witness department.

"The Home Mission Board is not responsible for this flier," Leazer said. He became aware of the publication when he received a copy of the flier from Procter and Gamble.

The copyrighted belief bulletin about the occult has been printed on one side of a flier, with a "notice" about Procter and Gamble on the other side, Leazer said.

The flier claims that the president of Procter and Gamble appeared on the Phil Donahue show in March and said a large portion of the company's profits benefit the church of Satan.

"No officer of Procter and Gamble has ever appeared on the Donahue show for any reason, and there is absolutely no connection between our company and this church of Satan," Joseph Suarez, legal counsel for Procter and Gamble wrote in a November letter to Leazer.

In addition to calling for a boycott of Procter and Gamble products, the notice claims that a symbol used by Procter and Gamble can form the number 666.

Last year the company won a \$75,000 judgment against a couple who made similar accusations, Leazer said.

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Brotherhood official 'amazed'
at openness in Central Asia

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
12/10/92

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--A Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission official has returned to the United States "amazed" at the level of openness to the gospel in Central Asia -- and concerned that it may not last very long.

"I think time is very short in this part of the world," said Douglas Beggs, vice president of the agency's office of program services. "This is historically a Muslim area, and they intend to reclaim it. That's something to think about during our season of prayer and giving for foreign missions."

Beggs led training sessions over several days for Baptist pastors and believers in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and presented the gospel in schools there and in the city of Fergana. He was joined by William C. "Nick" Garland, pastor of First Baptist Church in Broken Arrow, Okla., and Mel Skinner, a career residential missionary assigned to Moscow by the Foreign Mission Board.

"We were the first outsiders to come in and do training in large, open public meetings," Beggs said. More than 200 Baptist pastors and believers were present the first night in Tashkent.

A new atmosphere was evident even before he arrived at his destination.

"No one checked anything I brought in, and we had a copier, toner, tracts, teaching guides and the like. At this point there are apparently no restrictions on religious literature coming into these countries -- and that's quite a change."

According to Beggs, the new openness found in former Soviet republics like Uzbekistan also has allowed entry for Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Moonies and the New Age movement -- giving urgency to his training topics, which included understanding and witnessing to cults. However, the resurgence of Islam looms largest during the years just ahead.

"The Muslims are pouring millions into the rebuilding of their mosques and they are setting up an educational system to teach their youth and children the principles of the Koran," Beggs said. "These are their roots, and they have been denied (their heritage) for more than a century under the czars and, then, under communism. Kirghikistan, which is next door, has already come under the control of the Shiites."

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Even so, public school students in both Tashkent and Fergana responded with intense curiosity when the gospel message was presented. Getting into the schools was not a problem.

"In Fergana, both of the schools we visited were English-speaking institutes, equivalent to our colleges in terms of grade level," Beggs said. "Many times these were fourth-generation English students who had never heard an English-speaking person, except on tape. They'd never had a dialogue with an English-speaking person or had to deal with a dialect. That was the draw to let us into the school."

Occasionally, a question along the lines of "Why do they call New York 'The Big Apple'?" would follow the gospel presentation, but inquiries of a spiritual nature were the rule.

"They were concerned about evolution versus creation. They wanted to know how the Bible was written. They wanted to talk about world peace," Beggs said.

"We told them there would be no peace, and there is no hope for the world but Jesus Christ. Sin is the reason why we cannot get along and the only answer to that is to know Jesus Christ as personal Savior."

The men also visited a factory in Tashkent and spoke to the workers there for more than an hour.

"They were very gracious and very hospitable. And though 90 percent were Muslim, they took our New Testaments and our tracts," Beggs said. "We were very pleased with the reception and the openness and the hunger ... they are really searching for the truth."

"I think the time for us to work in Central Asia is very short."

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Book about SBC's Owen Cooper
headed for national market

By Don McGregor

Baptist Press
12/10/92

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--"The Thought Occurred to Me" is a book about Owen Cooper, who was never appointed by a mission board but, otherwise, was a Southern Baptist missionary in every sense of the word. Providing his own sustenance through secular agriculture-related pursuits, he spent much of his considerable ability and energy carrying out missions endeavors.

His field was the world.

Cooper was the last layman to serve as Southern Baptist Convention president. Elected 20 years ago in Philadelphia, he presided over SBC sessions in 1973 and 1974 in Portland, Oregon, and Dallas.

During those years he was the one who conceived the original idea for Bold Mission Thrust and was the driving force behind the initiation of the worldwide Southern Baptist missions emphasis.

He was chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and a member of the committee 21 years, longer than anyone else has ever been. He also was president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, chairman of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, moderator of his Baptist association and chairman of trustees for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He was founder and president of the Pan American Union of Baptist Men, vice president of the Baptist World Alliance and secretary of the BWA Men's Department.

In 1985 he was named layman of the century among Mississippi Baptists. He died the next year as he had lived -- trying to get others to help themselves and, in turn, help those about them. From his deathbed he inspired the beginning of construction of a major four-lane highway program in Mississippi. It is under way at this time.

Cooper was born April 19, 1908, in Warren County, Miss., to a family engaged in agriculture. He was a graduate of Mississippi State University, had a master's degree in economics from the University of Mississippi and was a graduate of the Jackson School of Law, which is now the School of Law of Mississippi College, a Baptist-related college in Clinton.

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Mrs. Cooper, who has been described as his best friend and who accompanied him on most of his world travels, was Elizabeth Thompson of Madison, Ga., mother to five children who now live from coast to coast.

At the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis last June, on the 20th anniversary of his election as SBC president, Mrs. Cooper presented a copy of "The Thought Occurred to Me" to then-convention President Morris H. Chapman.

To do that had been a dream of hers, and she accomplished it.

In November, the Baptist Book Store in Jackson, Miss., became the book's national distribution center to get it into circulation in Baptist Book Stores across the South.

Also in November, the Jackson store sent copies to Baptist state papers for possible review.

Despite his driving interest in missions, his last secretary, Martha Grayson, recalled, "He had few really close friends. He didn't have time to get close to a lot of people because he was always moving on to something else."

She added, "Many people were in awe of him -- scared to approach him -- they couldn't get close enough to him to know about his sense of humor."

Sue Tatum, his longtime assistant, recounted that he answered his own phone when he was in his office.

Because Mississippi Chemical, the company he led, is in the fertilizer business, Cooper felt fertilizer would help the people of India to be better fed. But they needed their own fertilizer plant. In spearheading the establishment of a plant there, he began to realize the spiritual needs of the Indian people.

Missionaries could not get visas unless they could prove they had a helpful vocation such as being a physician.

Cooper effected an organization called Universal Concern to employ Indian evangelists to serve as church planters.

Another of his innovations, Books for the World, ships mission books each year to Third-World countries. Sent free of charge, the books are worth \$18 million.

In business, Cooper was noted for those he brought in to work with him. He always declared he was not an industrialist but an idea man who hired industrialists. If 10 percent of his cornucopia of ideas worked out, that was enough to keep the wheels in motion for a lot of people.

Two of those who went to work for him -- in sales and administration -- were Jerry Clower and Gene Triggs. Clower noted he never would have been a success in show business if it hadn't been for the understanding and backing of Cooper, who kept him on the payroll until he was well on the way. He "retired" from Mississippi Chemical in 1991.

Triggs, still a vice president of Mississippi Chemical, has served as chairman of the Foreign Mission Board and president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. He now is moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship chapter in Mississippi.

Cooper would have liked to be governor of Mississippi but he gave up that ambition to help provide a better life for black people in Mississippi. He and another Mississippi businessman, Leroy Percy of Greenville, joined two black businessmen, Aaron Henry of Clarksdale and Charles Young of Meridian, in resuscitating a bankrupt Head Start program in the state. Both Henry and Young are now members of the Mississippi Legislature.

Cooper was trustee chairman at New Orleans Seminary when the institution moved to its present location. The seminary has almost completed funding for the Owen Cooper Chair of Global Missions. The Cooper School of Missions and Biblical Studies is under way at William Carey College in Mississippi. A chair is named for Cooper at the Mississippi College School of Law.

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McGregor, former editor of the Mississippi Baptist Record, is the author of "The Thought Occurred to Me."

Discipleship needed
as ongoing emphasis

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist discipleship training leaders were challenged to find ways to help churches and individuals make discipleship an ongoing emphasis in their lives during annual planning meetings Dec. 6-9 at the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Upcoming products on money management, help for parents in working with their children who are new Christians and guidance for a fresh encounter with God were previewed during sessions with state convention leaders and personnel in the board's discipleship and family development division.

BSSB President James T. Draper Jr. said an increased emphasis on short-term training on Sunday nights has caused discipleship training in too many churches to become event-oriented, creating the pressure that each event has to be bigger and better than the last. "We've got to find ways to give more emphasis to the ongoing program," Draper said.

Todd Nelson, youth specialist in the discipleship and family youth-children-preschool department, said in his earlier years as a youth minister he planned short-term discipleship training, moving from one hot topic to the next.

"I began to understand the need for a total discipleship youth program in my church," Nelson said. "My kids did not know who they were as Southern Baptists."

After attending a 1991 DiscipleLife Strategy Conference, Nelson said he realized he had built his ministry around himself. He shifted the focus by introducing Sunday night DiscipleLife celebrations that are "youth-led, adult-facilitated."

Avery Willis, director of the discipleship and family adult department, announced the board will introduce in early 1993 a video training series, "Master Your Money." The series was produced by Walk Thru the Bible Ministries of Atlanta and a customized BSSB product is being developed.

Division director Roy Edgemon called the series "a money management plan for the family and how the family can support the work of the kingdom. This video advocates tithing. If we teach anything different from tithing, we are not being biblical, in my opinion."

Statistics compiled from the denomination's Uniform Church Letter indicate 11 percent of Southern Baptists give nothing to their churches while 21 percent give \$101 to \$500 per year and only 13 percent give more than \$2,000 per year, Willis reported.

A workbook for parents to use with younger children who have become Christians, "Now That I'm a Christian" by Bill Young, will be released in June 1993.

Noting that in 1991, 47,000 first- second- and third-graders made professions of faith in Southern Baptist churches, Young said the workbook is designed to "help solidify a decision that has already been made." The workbook includes five-day-a-week activities for six weeks.

Young, who recently retired as manager of the preschool-children's section, was named 1992 Friend of Discipleship Training. The award has been given annually for 15 years for contributions to the furtherance of discipleship training.

A new Lay Institute for Equipping Course, "A Fresh Encounter with God" by Henry Blackaby and Claude King, will be released in mid-1993, according to Willis.

"This has the potential of being the most revolutionary, revival-producing course we have had," he said.

Mary Betts, Watchmen National Prayer Alert coordinator, said 2,020 churches are participating in the plan by committing to pray one hour per week at a designated time before "passing the watch" to the next church. "This means 12 churches are praying every hour of every day," she said. The plan has been continued for 1993.

Plans were overviewed for other upcoming products and emphases and leaders asked to give input.

"We need your thinking and your praying," Draper said. "And we need your complaints. Don't talk about us. Talk to us. You are the key resource people. We're working very diligently to be the best we can be."