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**SBC losing 1 church
for every 2 starts**

By David Winfrey

**Baptist Press
12/22/92**

ATLANTA (BP)--For every two churches started in the Southern Baptist Conv ntion, another disbands, reverts to mission status or for some other reason ceases to be a church, according to a study by the Home Mission Board.

"We have to start 2.2 churches to achieve a net gain of one," said Richie Stanley, author of the study and HMB associate director of planning and services research.

The finding is significant to Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust goal of 50,000 churches and church-type missions by the year 2000, said Larry Lewis, HMB president.

"If we could close that back door, we could take a giant step toward reaching our goal," he said.

The study found Southern Baptists averaged 430 church starts annually during the last 19 years. At the same time, an average 233 churches were removed from association rolls each year for a net annual gain of 197.

"We have to take two steps forward because we're taking one step back," Stanley said.

For insight into what happens to these churches, Stanley studied the 223 churches removed in 1989 from the SBC list of churches, as kept by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Associational directors of missions reported 132 ceased to exist as churches. Another 62 still existed, but as non-Southern Baptist churches. Twenty-two were misreported, directors of missions claimed. No responses were received in seven cases.

Of those that ceased being a church, 106 disbanded, 18 reverted to mission status and eight merged with other congregations.

Dwindling membership was cited by directors of missions as the greatest cause for churches that disbanded, reverted or merged, the report states.

Problems with the pastor, lack of lay leadership and financial difficulties were each cited by directors of missions in at least 30 percent of the cases.

While some rural areas may no longer have the population to support several churches, Lewis said he fears many of the disbanded churches were in urban areas "where the community has changed but the congregation has not changed to effectively minister to and reach the community."

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Churches willing to integrate their congregation or support multiple congregations in one building could continue to be viable, he said. Of the 62 congregations that remained churches but withdrew from the convention, the church initiated the withdrawal in 50 cases and the association initiated action in 12 cases.

In some cases, directors of missions reported churches were dropped from the association's roll because the church failed to turn in a Uniform Church Letter, didn't send representatives to association meetings or failed to contribute to missions through the Cooperative Program.

Lewis said he disagrees with associations that decide to drop churches from their rolls.

"The decision to drop a church should be made by the church members themselves," he said. "They should not be dropped because they fail to turn in a Uniform Church Letter or did not turn in a contribution."

Directors of missions responded in at least half the cases that nothing else could have been done to prevent the congregation from disbanding or leaving the Southern Baptist Convention.

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A graphic profiling the 223 churches dropped from associational rolls in 1988-89 has been mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

Churches use various methods
to declare sanctity of life

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
12/22/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--The pain of one woman's abortion pierced the hearts of at least one Southern Baptist congregation on last January's Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.

Sharon Yeats, the pastor's wife, did a dramatic reading of a poem called "The Unmother" during the morning service of South Park Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Texas. The poem, written by a church member after interviewing a woman who had undergone an abortion, included the following excerpt:

"There was no funeral for this being that was not born;

"An unwed unmom is my chosen plight.

"There is no place to go and mourn.

"No plot to put flowers for this quiet sin.

"Only an aching deep inside to know what might have been."

John Yeats, South Park's pastor, said, "The worst preacher in the world could have preached after that. I'll tell you what, it broke people's hearts."

The dramatic reading was just one of many ways Southern Baptist churches observed Sanctity of Human Life Sunday in 1992. When the 1993 observance is held Jan. 17, it can be expected churches again will find creative methods of communicating the message that God values all life, born and unborn, young and old, healthy and infirm.

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday has been observed the third Sunday in January on the denominational calendar since 1986. The Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, which was announced on Jan. 22, will reach its 20th anniversary in 1993.

South Park Baptist Church, which is located in Dallas County, also portrayed the sanctity of life message in ways other than the dramatic reading.

Yeats preached a sanctity of life sermon based on Psalm 94. He recalled telling the congregation after the message, "We can sound real authoritarian and calloused about this abortion issue, but we've got to understand we've got to love people, even women who have had abortions.

"We w r real careful to sit them down and say there are some practical things we can do," Yeats said. "I think there's a balance we need to have ... we need to be people of compassion."

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The church's young people also established a "cemetery of the innoc nts" on the front lawn of the property. It contained 100 small cr ss s, one for each child aborted daily in Dallas County, Yeats said. It served as a profound symbol to the 300 to 400 students who walk across the front lawn daily to South Park's neighbor institutions, the largest junior high and high school in the district, he said.

"As a church, we're making the statement that a child is a child no matter what stage of development it is in," Yeats said, "and we believe that abortion is not the appropriate response."

Covenant Baptist Church of Columbia, Md., used the same concept to express the message to its community.

Covenant's Project TLC (Tiny Little Crosses) consisted of 700 crosses planted in the front lawn of the church property for 30 days. The total represented the number of abortions done in Maryland each week, said Covenant pastor Walter Collett.

In the morning service, Collett preached on the sanctity of life. He also interviewed the director of Project Rescue, a state activist pro-life group.

Covenant's Interceding for Life Ministry led a "very meaningful" evening service, Collett said. It presented a video of its pro-life efforts during the last year and distributed information on how Christians could be involved in h lping women in crisis pregnancies and in saving unborn babies.

Tusculum Baptist Church in Greeneville, Tenn., led a community-wide effort.

Tusculum's pastor, David Carr, called 15 to 20 pastors of like-minded churches and organized the community's first life chain. Local and national life chains have become popular pro-life activities in recent years. A life chain involves adults and children lining a major thoroughfare while holding signs saying "Abortion Kills Children" and "Jesus Forgives and Heals."

The life chain was organized in about a week, and the local newspaper estimated 150 people participated, Carr said.

The conditions were not ideal. The temperature was barely above 30 degrees, Carr said.

He recalled one of the children who participated said, "You know, I hope that it's really cold today, because that will show the people that we're really interested."

"I said afterward, 'I think they got their wish,'" Carr said.

The life chain was a "positive, nonconfrontational" method to say "there are alternatives to abortion and that abortion kills children," Carr said.

The life chain was used to promote the ministries to women in crisis pregnancies provided by the Greeneville alternative home of the Tennessee Baptist Children's Home and an interdenominational abortion alternatives home.

Southern Baptist agencies provide resources for Southern Baptist churches to use in presenting the sanctity of human life message.

The Christian Life Commission offers sermon outlines for pastors as well as literature for churches. The CLC also has a new video, "The Sanctity of Human Life," which examines such issues as abortion and euthanasia and shares what Southern Baptists are doing to affirm life.

The Baptist Sunday School Board produces curriculum for youth through adults for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.

The Home Mission Board provides resources and training for the establishment of evangelistic crisis pregnancy centers through its Alternatives to Abortion Ministries.

Japan Baptist Union repents
of WWII actions to neighbors

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Japan Baptist Union has adopted a statement of repentance of its cooperation with the Japanese government's World War II activities, "especially the colonial oppressions and the invasions carried out by the government."

"With deep pain, we repent and confess our sins to God and we ask all people who were victimized by our faults to forgive our sins," said the union's "manifesto of repentance," approved at the body's 35th annual meeting last August. The manifesto was received in mid-December at the Baptist World Alliance's headquarters in Washington.

The union, one of four Japanese Baptist bodies in the BWA, encompasses 57 churches with more than 4,800 members.

"It is with great joy that we received your manifesto of repentance," wrote Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary, to Shigeru Iwamura, president of the union, and Ryujiro Nakamura, general secretary.

Lotz said his letter of response, on behalf of Baptists worldwide, was "a sign of our prayers and thanksgiving for you and this very serious manifesto of repentance."

Narrowing in on the 10 years, as members of the United Church of Japan (Kyodan), the Baptist union repented of its negligence "in not facing our sins in which we cooperated in these wars," especially since Japan invaded Asian countries before the government forced the union to join the Kyodan.

"We confess that we hold common responsibility for these wars," the statement said, "and did not confess honestly and sufficiently that Jesus Christ is our only Lord at that time in which our nation was forced to worship the Japanese 'Tenno' (Shinto god) as a God.

"At that time we flattered and compromised ourselves with wrong instructions and policies of our nation and also distorted the truth of the Gospel."

Describing themselves as "self righteous and arrogant toward people of Asian countries," the union said "when Christian brothers and sisters tried to practice their faith, we would not help them, but even excluded them."

"We are afraid we continue to have these weaknesses even to this day."

The union pledged to be more vigilant about its country's future actions, conscious it has been given "a mission by our Lord, to watch that we commit ourselves to being the 'light of the world' and 'the salt of the earth,' in which we fully exercise our faith and freedom of conscience."

Commending "their courageous step," Lotz told the union its repentance statement "will be an encouragement to all Baptists and Christians that we are called to be light and salt in the nations in which we live."

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Timothy George addresses
Southeastern graduates

By Sheri Paris

Baptist Press
12/22/92

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., tapped the words of Moses in his Dec. 19 commencement address at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I want to say to you in the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 6, remember, lest you forget," George said, exhorting graduates of the Wake Forest, N.C., seminary to remember their Baptist heritage and their forefathers' commitment "to pass on to the rising generation the rudiments of the Christian faith."

George summoned the gathering in Binkley Chapel to "keep faith with the Word of God." He remarked that many words, including inspired, inerrant, infallible and authoritative, are used to describe the confidence Baptists place in the Bible. However, "I think that we can put it in a way that any 10-year-old can understand: What the Bible says, God says."

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George appealed to the graduates to remember to "magnify the Lord Jesus Christ in all that you do." He declared, "... there is no dichotomy between the written Word of God and the living Word of God. Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Scriptures."

George noted two of the most influential institutions in American culture, Harvard University and the University of Chicago, began with the purpose of teaching the truth as revealed by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. "Does this stifle academic freedom? No more so than the emancipation proclamation stifled the freedom of the slaves.

"Christian freedom is not only freedom from, it is also freedom to," George said. "It is freedom to read any book, study any theory, pursue any line of inquiry within the context of a common commitment that acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Lord of biology as well as theology; which affirms the priority of the Ten Commandments over the theories of John Dewey; which confesses that all things were created by Jesus Christ and for Jesus Christ."

George implored the graduates to remember "God has left you in this world because he has something for you to do, to reach out to a world that is hurting." Any minister who sees only good in the world, he said, has "never looked into the eyes of a hungry child, or felt the sting of racism, or been moved by the genocidal slaughter of the unborn, or agonized over 1.5 billion people on our planet who have never heard the name of Jesus for the first time."

In his closing charge, George reminded the graduates, "when you walk out of this building today, you dare not walk out on your own -- because you cannot make it on your own, but you walk out of here in the power and strength of God who has promised to go with you all the way. Remember that, lest you forget."

George, who holds a master of divinity and Ph.D. from Harvard, became the founding dean of Beeson Divinity School in 1988. His books include "Theology of the Reformers" and "Faithful Witness, the Life and Witness of William Carey." He currently is working on the New American Commentary on Galatians.

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Paris is a Southeastern Seminary writer.

College student missions
deadline approaching

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--College students seeking domestic summer mission work through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board should apply by March 10.

In 1992, 1,496 college students worked in various mission projects, 100 more than the previous year, said Van Simmons, associate director of the HMB's short-term volunteer department.

Despite the increase, however, about 100 requests for summer student missionaries were not filled, he said.

This year, the board is seeking to fill even more requests for student summer missionaries to assist in evangelism, ministry and church planting, he said. "We have not been able to enlist enough students in recent years to fill all the requests from the field."

Without enough students, many missionaries and new churches will lack the assistance they need, he said. "There will be churches and associations that will not be able to have evangelism projects. There will be churches that won't get started."

Student summer missionaries must be Baptist, must have completed their freshman year of college and must be willing to serve for 10 weeks during the summer. Students assigned by the board receive \$60 per week, round-trip transportation and limited insurance.

Those interested in student missions work should contact their state convention's student department or missions department or the Home Mission Board's volunteer division at 1-800-HMB-VOLS.

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**HMB chaplaincy directors elected
chairpersons of national groups By Sarah Zimmerman**

ATLANTA (BP)--Two directors in the Hom Mission Board chaplaincy division were elected to one-year terms as chairpersons of national chaplaincy advocacy groups in December.

Huey Perry, director of the chaplaincy division, was elected chairperson of the Endorsers Conference for Veterans Affairs Chaplaincy. The organization represents more than 90 denominations that endorse chaplains to serve in Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and medical centers.

Lew Burnett, director of military chaplaincy, was elected chairperson of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces which represents more than 220 religious groups that endorse military chaplains.

Both groups stress the importance of chaplaincy to government departments which employ chaplains. The groups also help set standards for selecting and endorsing chaplains.

Both men previously have served as vice chairpersons of the organizations.