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92-6

Home missions gifts  
fall below 1990 total

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--Gifts to the 1991 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions fell below the 1990 offering total by less than 1 percent.

The unaudited report shows the 1991 Easter offering gifts totaled \$35.52 million, compared to \$35.67 million in 1990, for a 0.44 percent decrease. The 1991 offering reached 86.64 percent of the \$41 million goal.

"We are deeply concerned about this but we must not let this be discouraging," said Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board president.

"We need to see this slight decrease in long-range perspective and realize that last year we received an increase of 8.14 percent through the Annie Armstrong offering," Lewis noted.

The 1990 offering was \$2.69 million more than the previous year, the largest dollar-amount increase on record.

Percentage increases in gifts to the annual offering have varied sharply since 1985. For example, in 1987, gifts were 8.76 more than the previous year. In 1988, the increase was 2.02 percent, followed by a 6.93 percent increase in 1989.

This was the fourth year in the Home Mission Board's history that gifts to the offering did not exceed the previous year's total. The other years were 1950 when the total was down 1 percent, 1958, down 3.8 percent; and 1970, down 1.6 percent.

Gifts from the Annie Armstrong Easter offering provide 47 percent of the 1992 HMB budget, while gifts channeled through the Cooperative Program provide 37 percent.

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Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
to fund missionaries in Europe

By Scott Collins

Baptist Press  
1/13/92

DALLAS (BP)--An offer to fund Southern Baptist missionaries in Europe who resign from the Foreign Mission Board has been made by the coordinating council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The offer came Jan. 11 when the council, meeting at a hotel near the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, approved a motion by Fort Worth, Texas, pastor Cecil Sherman. The CBF represents churches and individuals aligned with the moderate movement of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Sherman's motion states that the coordinating council "offer employment to missionaries of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in the European sector who fit the criteria of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's statement of missions." The motion passed unanimously.

CBF moderator John Hewett, a North Carolina pastor, denied the council's actions constituted a new denomination. Instead, he said the decision to fund missionaries should be compared to parachurch organizations who support mission work.

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"We are a fellowship of churches and individuals," Hewett said. "Our intention is to make sure the good work of our missionaries continues. We will do what we have to do."

Hewett and other members of the council said the action was necessary because of the decision by FMB trustees not to fund the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

The decision to defund the Ruschlikon seminary prompted the early retirements of the FMB's vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Isam Ballenger, and area director for Europe, Keith Parker.

"The Foreign Mission Board trustees have taken a grave step away from missions as we have known," Hewett said. "We are moving into that gap."

Former SBC president Jimmy Allen, co-chairman of the coordinating council's global missions ministry group, said the CBF will fund missionaries and programs of work "within the philosophy of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

That philosophy was outlined by Allen's committee in a "purpose and strategy statement" unanimously approved by the CBF council just before the vote to fund missionaries.

According to the statement, the fellowship's missions purpose is to "lead people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to carry out the Great Commission through inclusive global mission in which all Baptists can participate."

Asked about the expense of funding missionaries in Europe who might ask to align with the CBF, Allen said no dollar amount had been determined. Likewise, he said no timetable for employing the missionaries has been set.

"We believe that churches and individuals in the fellowship will respond to this challenge," Allen said.

The global missions ministry group will serve as a clearinghouse for requests from Southern Baptist missionaries who choose to leave the FMB for the CBF.

In discussion about the motion Sherman, who has been nominated to become CBF executive director, said in light of FMB actions toward the seminary at Ruschlikon, "The only thing that makes sense is a strong response to the Foreign Mission Board."

Sherman told coordinating council members the time has come to stop marking off the playing field and "get on with the game."

"We have to have the nerve, the faith to go to Isam Ballenger and Keith Parker and say 'We'll pick up your paychecks and benefits,'" Sherman said.

Sherman said the decision to fund missionaries will "galvanize us. Some (Southern Baptists) will come with us and some won't, but we will be focused outward.

"I am trying to seize the moment with the people we know are good people," Sherman said. "It's time we get past being just a debating society. It's time we take some children to raise."

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Homosexual pair challenge  
same-sex marriage ban

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
1/13/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--Two District of Columbia men are preparing to take their fight to marry each other to a federal appeals court, and they plan to use the separation of church and state as a weapon.

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Craig Dean and Patrick Gill, who have lived together as a homosexual couple for nearly five years, announced Jan. 6 they will appeal a District of Columbia Superior Court ruling blocking their attempt to be granted a marriage license. The men charged the judge's ruling is a violation of the First Amendment's protection against government establishment of religion.

"The judge says that 'The 10 Commandments are as relevant today as they were at Mount Sinai. ... Thus, if homosexual marriage were anathema to Christian religious dogma ... it would still be so,'" Dean, 28, said at a press conference. "I ask you, whatever happened to the separation of church and state?"

Gill, 24, said Associate Judge Shellie Bowers based his opinion "in part upon a finding that 'the Church' has never officially recognized same-sex marriages. Well I have news for the court. Our pastor is here, and our church does recognize homosexual marriages. I ask the court, just whose church is 'the Church?'"

Dean and Gill are members of the Metropolitan Community Church, which approves of homosexual relationships.

"We will fight for the separation of church and state, and we will fight for the notion that all persons have the same rights and the same protections, no matter who they love," Gill said.

The judge's references to the Bible and the church are not a violation of church-state separation but part of a "discussion of the cultural origins of the concept of marriage," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Judge Bowers quoted from two Old Testament and two New Testament passages in a section of the 26-page opinion dealing with his request for both sides in Dean and Gill v. District of Columbia to provide information on the "societal concept of 'marriage' down through the centuries."

"As these passages from the Bible demonstrate, societal recognition that it takes a man and a woman to form a marital relationship is older than Christianity itself," Bowers said.

He also referred to previous cases and dictionary definitions in support of his opinion marriage historically requires two persons of the opposite sex.

"I find it encouraging to see a court recognize the existence of fundamental moral absolutes and the natural order of things," Whitehead said. "The court noted that, by its nature, marriage involves a union of male and female. That is true in the Bible, just as it is true in the biology textbook. Marriage started with Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.

"The term 'same-sex' marriage is as logically impossible as the term 'square circle,' unless we start making the word marriage mean whatever we want it to mean," Whitehead said.

"When she passed into the looking glass, Alice found that words meant whatever one says they mean. Fortunately, Judge Shellie Bowers has prevented Washington from becoming Wonderland."

Neither the District of Columbia's Marriage and Divorce Act nor the Human Rights Act, both passed in 1977, legalized homosexual marriages, the court also ruled.

The Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, should be applied to marriage, Dean said. They submitted a sworn affidavit from the author of the act saying it applies to all laws in the district, Dean said.

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Homosexual marriages are illegal in all 50 states. Dean and Gill, who plan to appeal to the D.C. Court of Appeals, say they are willing to take their fight to the United States Supreme Court.

"We don't believe our love is any different" than couples in opposite-sex marriages, Dean said. Dean and Gill kissed at the start of the press conference and held hands while they read their statements.

"The right to marry is one many lesbians and gay men would like to have," said Urvashi Vaid, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

Candace Shultis, the minister who agreed to marry the men before they applied for and were refused a marriage license in November 1990, said the decision was "a social-justice issue" for her. "We believe the moral principle of the Bible is love," said Shultis, who is associate pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington. She is a lesbian, Shultis indicated.

The American Civil Liberties Union may file a friend-of-the-court brief on the side of the men, said local ACLU director Mary Jane DeFrank. "We will definitely be looking into the separation of church and state," she said.

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Overseas Christians  
escalate China church aid By Michael Chute & Lounette Templeton

Baptist Press  
1/13/92

HONG KONG (BP)--Contact and cooperation between Christians in Hong Kong and China steadily are increasing, and the Chinese government has reiterated it won't interfere in Hong Kong's religious affairs after taking political control in 1997.

Ren Wuzhi, director of China's religious affairs bureau, assured a Hong Kong Christian Council delegation visiting Beijing his bureau and mainland religious organizations would not meddle in Hong Kong affairs after 1997. Freedoms that Hong Kong's religious community currently enjoys will continue, Ren also promised.

But Ren reminded the 19-member delegation that expatriate religious groups working with mainland churches must observe three governing principles: non-affiliation, non-intervention and mutual respect.

The comments follow months of escalating contact between China's Christian community and groups from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macao and the United States. Contributions to churches in China have escalated since the uncertainty following the government's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. Now overseas Chinese Protestants are helping fund Christian development in China, especially among churches in Guangdong, the southern province near Hong Kong.

More than 1,000 people attended the latest church opening in Guangzhou, Guangdong's capital, Nov. 24. About 70 Hong Kong Christians helped reopen the Guang Xiao Church, the eighth church opened in Guangzhou since the end of the Cultural Revolution. The church total in Guangdong now stands at 235.

Chinese authorities confiscated the Guang Xiao church in the early 1960s, turning it into a factory. Five years ago the government returned the three-story building to the local Christian council, which used it for offices.

Restoring the building as a church was costly but made possible with "some help from outside the country," Guangdong Christian Council Vice President Fan Xiu Yuan told the congregation. Senior pastor Huang Mei Jing said Christians "here and abroad showed their concern" by praying and giving to rebuild the church. "But this is only the beginning."

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Fan related that Christian councils in China -- not individual churches -- are equipped to accept donations. For instance, the Guangdong Christian Council has set up separate funds for church workers' welfare, church development, theological education and community service.

"We already have received 5 million yuan (about \$1 million) for the church workers' welfare fund" from the Hong Kong Christian Council, Fan added. A Hong Kong man recently pledged \$14,000 to Christian work in Guangdong, he said.

Besides Hong Kong donations, the Guangdong Christian Council has received funds from Germany, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, England, Canada and the United States, Fan said.

The local Christian council is renovating another church building in Shamian, a former international settlement in Guangzhou. Also, Chinese Christians are negotiating with the government for return of a former Lutheran seminary.

"The international character of Christianity as well as Guangdong province's geographical and historical background enable local churches to have more frequent exposure and exchange with Christians from abroad," said a statement issued by the council. "They show genuine concern for the development of churches and social welfare of Guangdong province and provide a considerable amount of help."

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Christmas worshipers  
swarm China churches

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press  
1/13/92

GUANGZHOU, China (BP)--Despite uncertainty about government warnings to tone down Christmas festivities, crowds of faithful Christians jammed churches in China last month to celebrate Christmas.

Just before Christmas, authorities in the southern city of Guangzhou instructed church leaders to discourage nonbelievers from attending special services out of curiosity. A document designed to scale down festivities warned residents not to celebrate Christmas outside churches and tourist hotels.

Still, huge Chinese characters on the front of Dong Shan Church in Guangzhou read: "Let everything under heaven rejoice, the Savior is born."

"The sign proclaiming the birth of Jesus was visible from the street for everyone who passed by to see," said Charlie Wilson, a Southern Baptist worker visiting Christian friends in China during the holidays. "The message of Christmas was there to be heard for anyone who cared to go into the church."

About 2,000 people attended a Christmas Eve celebration at Dong Shan Church featuring a music program of carols, selections from Handel's "Messiah" and a gospel message.

"The only problem was there were so many bicycles you couldn't get through the parking lot," Wilson added. "There was a complete sense of freedom to come and go and a lot of people came in off the street."

On Christmas Day all eight Protestant churches in Guangzhou held special worship services. Wilson attended Zion Church and estimated a crowd of more than 1,000 people was there. Similar reports of packed church auditoriums for Christmas programs came from other parts of China.

A hotel in Nanjing asked an American Christian teacher to help decorate for Christmas. Hotel management also asked advice on how to celebrate the holiday, inviting the American to hold a religious service on Christmas Eve including lighting candles and singing carols. Hotel guests, staff and visitors attended the service.

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Hong Kong's South China Morning Post reported the estimated crowd of 20,000 people attending Christmas Mass in Beijing Catholic churches was laced with uniformed policemen and plainclothes officers. Police reportedly patrolled the capital's Nantang Cathedral to prevent disturbances at its three services.

Eyewitnesses also noted some police were present for "crowd control" at Guangzhou's only Catholic church.

"There are reports of restrictions on Christmas festivities in China but those restrictions were placed on the nonreligious venues -- the secular side of Christmas. They didn't affect the churches," Wilson said. "The government apparently tried to cut down on the secular, economic, commercial aspect of Christmas. The authorities seemed to feel people were wasting economic resources on Christmas parties and cards."

But even with the government's instructions, China visitors saw plenty of prominent pictures of Santa Claus, Christmas lights, parties in progress and Christmas cards. A huge neon Santa Claus complete with reindeer and toy-laden sleigh was seen just a block from Beijing's Tiananmen Square with its equally huge portrait of the late communist leader Mao Zedong.

A Guangdong spokesman verified in an official dispatch that no provincial authorities had banned Christians from carrying out Christmas activities.

"Freedom of religious belief is a basic right stipulated by the constitution for the citizens," said the spokesman in the Wen Wei Po newspaper. "Citizens have freedom to believe and the freedom to not believe in religion, as well as the freedom to disseminate atheism. The citizens who have religious belief and the citizens who do not are all protected by Chinese law."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Mongolia, Baptist aid agency  
sign agreements on workers

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press  
1/13/92

HONG KONG (BP)--The government of Mongolia has asked Cooperative Services International to provide medical and agricultural experts to aid the economically devastated country.

The agreements signed recently call for the Southern Baptist humanitarian aid organization to send five doctors, one health consultant and two agriculturists over the next several months. The medical personnel will help Mongolia's health ministry privatize its socialist medical system. Agricultural experts will train farmers to produce fruits and vegetables in the once-isolated country wedged between China and Soviet Central Asia.

"Mongolia's in transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union," said Jim Diedrich, a Hong Kong-based CSI worker. "Once the Soviets' closest communist ally, now Mongolia is an economic disaster area. Politically, the country's Communist Party has fallen. The new constitution guarantees a multiparty state. But economically, Soviet support that's been withdrawn has destroyed the former socialist country's production base."

Southern Baptists' first career workers in Mongolia -- Don and Helen McNeely of Weslaco and Jarrell, Texas, respectively -- arrived Jan. 7. The former missionaries to Zambia were invited by International Support Services (ISS), a Mongolia-based Christian agency, to work with Ulan Bator's two Christian churches.

The McNeelys follow Stan and Laura Kirk of Memphis, Tenn., who arrived in Mongolia last February to teach English at the Medical Institute in Ulan Bator. The first Southern Baptist workers assigned to Mongolia, the Kirks are beginning the second year of a two-year assignment.

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Diedrich called the agricultural protocol CSI signed with Mongolia "open-ended." The government's agriculture ministry is breaking up the formerly communist country's collective farm system. But officials have yet to work out details of how land will be distributed among the farmers.

The country's lack of fruit and vegetable production has created serious problems. Production of cultivated fruit is nonexistent.

"Worldwide, (Southern Baptists) have success in agricultural programs," Diedrich said. "The agriculture project is ideal for us because we have expertise and it doesn't require huge capital investments. It's also a very 'people-intensive' work and we want a lot of personal contact between our workers and the Mongolian people."

The agricultural project calls for setting up two "model" farms, one in Darchan and the other in Erdenent. Both sites provide highway and rail access to Ulan Bator. Half of Mongolia's population lives in a small geographic area near the three cities. From these central locations, agriculture teams will travel to surrounding villages to train farmers.

Concerning CSI's agreement to provide medical expertise, Diedrich said: "The healing process is holistic, including mental, spiritual and physical dimensions. The health consultant we'll send will deal primarily with mental and spiritual aspects of healing. The doctors' assignment will be a combination of clinical work, helping Mongolian physicians treat patients and also helping those physicians establish private practices."

The Mongolian government granted CSI personnel contracts for five-year terms, renewable for another five years.

Besides committing personnel to humanitarian aid projects, CSI also has helped deliver food and medical supplies to Mongolia in recent months. The aid organization contributed \$15,000 toward the \$150,000 a German Christian relief agency needed to provide supplies to the Mongolian people.

CSI also is working with Campus Crusade for Christ to present a Mongolian-language version of the "Jesus" film, which has been seen by millions of people around the world. The Mongolian government recently granted Campus Crusade permission for a mid-January premiere of the film. CSI is recruiting six three-member teams to show the film throughout the country in July. The agency also plans to cooperate further with ISS to send Southern Baptist church workers to Mongolia.

"We need one career worker and two more (shorter-term workers) to teach English," said Diedrich of other personnel requests for Mongolia. "There's a great demand for English teachers and we can provide an assignment for anybody who wants to teach. Even though someone might not be a qualified teacher, if they have a college degree we can train them to teach English. In Mongolia's turn to the West for expertise, Mongolians really want to learn English. It's the No. 1 foreign language right now."

Diedrich said CSI also hopes to assign two nurses to work with the agriculturalists. "With what we've projected, Southern Baptists could have 24 workers in Mongolia within a year or two, provided we find the people," he said. "So we're looking at a fairly permanent situation there."

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Acts commentary volume  
selected for book club

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NASHVILLE (BP)--The latest volume of "The New American Commentary" published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman Press will soon be brought to the attention of 10,000 evangelical readers.

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"Acts," written by John B. Polhill, professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., has been chosen as the Evangelical Book Club's main selection for its March bulletin.

EBC is a nondenominational book club based in Milford, Mich., near Detroit. According to Steve Bond, marketing planning coordinator for Broadman, the "main selection" status of the Acts volume in the EBC bulletin means the book will be sent automatically to all 10,000 of the club's members unless they return a card saying they do not want to receive it. While Broadman books have been listed in the EBC bulletin before, Bond said this is the first time one has been granted "main selection" status.

"This is a major step forward both for Broadman and 'The New American Commentary,'" NAC general editor David Dockery said, adding he expects the 576-page Acts volume to be one of the best-selling editions in the 40-volume series.

"Early reviews place Polhill's volume alongside the other luminaries of Acts scholarship. This volume establishes the NAC series as an equal to other biblical commentaries," he said.

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Winston Crawley named  
interim FMB vice president

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press  
1/13/92

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Winston Crawley will become the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's interim vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa effective Feb. 3, according to board president R. Keith Parks.

Crawley, a retired veteran of 40 years of foreign mission work, will fill the spot until a replacement is found for Isam Ballenger, who announced Jan. 7 he would step down in protest of FMB trustee actions and philosophies.

Parks and Executive Vice President Don Kammerdiener selected Crawley for the interim post in consultation with FMB trustee chairman Bill Hancock and Steve Hardy, chairman of the trustee committee for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Ballenger, 56, and Keith Parker, 55, area director for Europe, both announced early retirement at a Jan. 7 news conference, saying they could no longer represent the agency. Their decision to step down followed weeks of controversy surrounding decisions in October and December by trustees to defund the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

Current Europe regional staff will handle Parker's work until a permanent vice president is selected and then participates in the search for a new area director, according to Kammerdiener.

Ballenger and Parker will vacate their administrative posts Jan. 31 rather than at midyear under an agreement negotiated with agency trustee leaders. The agreement followed negative reaction from a number of trustees to the pair's public statements at the news conference.

The agreement would allow Ballenger and Parker to remain in their posts until Jan. 31, serve as consultants in February and receive full salary and benefits through their previously announced departure dates of May 31 and July 1, respectively.

Parks said he hopes the selection process of a new vice president and area director would move as normally as possible. The matter will be discussed in the trustees' regional committee meeting in February. Both positions are elected by trustees, but customarily after strong input and recommendations from the president and executive vice president, Kammerdiener said.

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Crawley, 71, who retired in 1987 at age 67, began his overseas career as a missionary, first in China and then in the Philippines from 1947-54. Then he joined the FMB staff as secretary (area director) for the Orient, 1954-68; director of the former overseas division, 1968-80; and vice president for planning, 1980-87. He has written six books on missions.

As director of the overseas division, he coordinated policy and planning and gave general administrative guidance to worldwide mission efforts. As vice president for planning, he assisted the board's president and other administrative officers in developing and interpreting mission philosophy and strategy and in overall planning, coordination and research.

A native of Newport, Tenn., Crawley holds a bachelor of arts degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas; the master of arts degree from Vanderbilt University in Nashville; and master and doctor of theology degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Before he and his wife, the former Margaret Lawrence of Lufkin, Texas, were appointed as missionaries, Crawley taught at Baylor University and Blue Mountain (Miss.) College; was a training union (now discipleship training) worker and editor at the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville pastor in Versailles, Ky.; and a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Crawleys have three grown children.