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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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92-20

SBC churches top
38,000 in 1991

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE (BP)--The number of Southern Baptist churches topped 38,000 in 1991 as gains were posted in nine of 10 key denominational reporting areas.

With an increase of 247 churches -- the largest since 1988 -- the total number of churches stands at 38,221.

A 3 percent or 11,637 increase in baptisms marked the fourth consecutive year of gains. The 1991 baptism total was 396,668 compared to 385,031 the previous year.

This represents the first time since the 1940s that baptisms have increased four straight years, according to Jim Lowry, denominational statistics specialist in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's corporate planning and research department.

Church membership, which topped 15 million last year, increased by 1.3 percent or 193,870 to 15,238,283 in 1991. This was the largest numerical increase since 1982.

Southern Baptists' largest church program organization, Sunday school, posted a 2.2 percent enrollment increase of 174,303, bringing the new total to 8,183,801. The increase was the largest since 1976.

Gains were registered in five other areas, including music ministry enrollment, mission expenditures, ongoing Woman's Missionary Union enrollment, Brotherhood enrollment/participation and total tithes, offerings and special gifts.

In its second year of a new records system, discipleship training enrollment/participation, registered a negligible decrease of 3,725 or 0.17 percent. The new total is 2,202,527.

Sunday School Board President James T. Draper Jr. said the statistics are "a positive sign of health for the denomination. We can rejoice and praise God for this good news but we must not be satisfied. I truly believe plans in process for discipleship training, Sunday school, church growth and other areas will result in greater progress in the future."

In the financial area, total tithes, offerings and special gifts posted a 3 percent gain of \$137,151,740 over 1990, for a total of \$4,704,986,720. The 1991 increase compares to gains of 6 percent in 1990, 4.4 percent in 1989 and 3 percent in 1988.

Mission expenditures increased by \$13,614,716 or 1.9 percent, for a total of \$732,090,078. The 1991 gain is larger than the 0.8 percent increase in 1990 but smaller than the 3.4 percent of 1989.

Ongoing music ministry enrollment registered a 2.1 percent increase of 38,182, for the 26th consecutive gain. The new total is 1,875,610.

Brotherhood enrollment/participation showed an increase of 7,850 or 1.3 percent, for a total enrollment of 601,694.

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Ongoing WMU enrollment increased by 0.2 percent or 2,726, for a new total of 1,200,713. The gain represents a turnaround after two years of decreases.

The statistics were tallied from 37,400 Uniform Church Letters processed by the board's corporate planning and research department.

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Southern Baptist Statistical Summary, 1991-1990

	1991	1990	1991-1990 Change	
			Numerical	Percent
Churches	38,221	37,974	247	0.7
Baptisms	396,668	385,031	11,637	3.0
Church Membership	15,238,283	15,044,413	193,870	1.3
Ongoing Sunday School Enrollment	8,183,801	8,009,498	174,303	2.2
Discipleship Training Enrollment/Participation	2,202,527	2,206,252	-3,725	-0.2
Ongoing Music Ministry Enrollment	1,875,610	1,837,428	38,182	2.1
Ongoing WMU Enrollment	1,200,713	1,197,987	2,726	0.2
Brotherhood Enrollment/Participation	601,694	593,844	7,850	1.3
Mission Expenditures	\$732,090,978	\$718,476,262	\$13,614,716	1.9
Total Tithes, Offerings, and Special Gifts	\$4,704,986,720	\$4,567,834,980	\$137,151,740	3.0

European Baptists offer to discuss future relations; FMB chairman accepts

By Mike Creswell & Stanley Crabb

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DORFWEIL, Germany (BP)--The European Baptist Federation has offered to discuss the future of cooperation with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board but has listed five elements of Christian protocol European Baptists will expect of the FMB or any other mission board in the future.

The offer for a consultation in Europe came in a statement issued after a meeting in Dorfweil, Germany. It follows four months of controversy surrounding the Oct. 9 decision of FMB trustees to defund the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

Bill Hancock, FMB trustee chairman, quickly accepted the offer for a consultation in Europe. FMB delegates to the consultation will be named during the board's Feb. 10-12 meeting in Richmond, Va., he said. It will be held at a time and location selected by European Baptists.

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The five Christian elements for true partnership, which European Baptists leaders say will figure heavily in any consultation, are statements on mutual respect, spiritual freedom, moral integrity, genuine consultation and reciprocal sharing.

Although the federation's leaders acknowledge the need of help with missions in Europe, they said they value preserving unity more.

Quoting John 17:21-23, their statement affirmed unity "is an important witness in a Europe which has suffered so often from division and we would be opposed to anything that would endanger our oneness in Christ."

In sending the statement, European Baptist leaders say they are taking a firm stand to assure that problems such as the way the Foreign Mission Board handled the Ruschlikon defunding do not recur. Relations between the board and European Baptists have been strained since the initial defunding vote in October. Foreign Mission Board trustees reaffirmed the vote in December after meeting with leaders of the federation and the seminary.

Baptist union-designated directors, pastors and teachers from throughout Western and Eastern Europe approved the statement, indicating a broad base of support among European Baptists for its contents, European leaders said.

Thirty-five of 37 delegates still in Dorfweil on the final day approved the statement on Southern Baptists. Only two Polish delegates present abstained from voting, explaining they were not free to sign any public statements without getting approval of their union first.

Relations with the Foreign Mission Board became a late addition to the agenda for the Jan. 26-29 meeting attended by 50 leaders from 23 European Baptist unions at a retreat center in Dorfweil, near Frankfurt, Germany. The main purpose of the session was to develop a document on the role and purpose of Baptist churches in the new Europe in preparation for a conference of European churches this September in Prague.

Delegates approving the statement included three key Baptist leaders from the former Soviet Union -- the general secretary for the overall Baptist union, the general superintendent for all Ukraine (where half of all Baptist churches in the former Soviet territories are located), and the leader of the Baptist seminary in Odessa, Ukraine. The Foreign Mission Board has been preparing a major "Green Alert" missions effort in the former Soviet region.

Hancock, in his letter of response, said "it is a sign of greatest encouragement and hope that the European Federation has set its course on relationships which will be mutually affirming, Christ honoring and productive for the Kingdom of God. The Foreign Mission Board shares this desire."

But Hancock added, "To make this mutual commitment to each other obviously does not mean that all issues have been resolved nor that the points of view of all of us are identical. It does mean that we join with you in the commitment to resolve those issues which would impede fruitful relationships between us."

Hancock did not refer to the five requirements detailed in the statement -- elements which European Baptists say must characterize true partnership as they and missionaries from other lands work together in unity.

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The elements are: (1) "Mutual respect in which the partners deal with each other with candor but with Christian courtesy (Ephesians 4:1-3); (2) Spiritual freedom in which the partners, working within a common commitment, recognize and welcome differences of outlook and diversity of practice (Romans 15:7; Mark 9:38-41); (3) Moral integrity in which the partners honor and maintain solemnly made agreements (II Corinthians 1:12-17); (4) Genuine consultation in which the partners confer together and aim for mutual consent (II Corinthians 8:8-9); and (5) Reciprocal sharing in which the partners learn, work and grow together, each giving and receiving (Romans 1:11-12)."

"We would see the above understanding as basic to any partnership into which we would wish to enter as European Baptists or with any overseas Baptist mission agency," the Dorfweil statement said. "In the light of recent events in Richmond we feel the need to know what is to be the nature of any future relationship with the Foreign Mission Board. Is it to be on the basis of the kind of partnership outlined above (the five elements)?"

"We must accept that the question of (the) Ruschlikon (defunding) is finished," Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, told European Baptist Press Service. "I am tired of this battle. I want to find a way out of it. Ruschlikon will have a future but without the Foreign Mission Board. (Now) we are all concerned with continuing with missions. For example, we now have a very open door to begin work in Albania.

"We need the support of American churches and ... missionaries, because we cannot do all the work we need to do in Europe," Walter said. "We must decide whether we can have partnership with the Foreign Mission Board or with others."

The Europeans expressed appreciation for the partnership of the Foreign Mission Board over many years. "We thank God for the effective work Southern Baptist missionaries have done among us. In our experience they have proved themselves to be committed servants of God, faithful to His Word and true partners with us in the work of the gospel," the statement said.

But the statement also expressed hurt and unhappiness over statements made by FMB trustees in October and December: "We have felt keenly the derogatory remarks made by some members of the Board of Trustees about European Baptists and their leadership. We dare to believe such remarks would not have been made had there been more personal contact between the trustees and our churches.

"The decision relating to the defunding of Ruschlikon came as a shock to us since it was in conflict with our experience of the Foreign Mission Board hitherto and represented a disturbing departure from the Board's courteous way of dealing with its partners. We continue to be of the view that the decision cannot be morally justified insofar as it went back on a clearly established agreement and was made without due consultation or the giving of proper notice," the statement continued.

"It was a matter of even greater dismay to us when the decision was not rescinded in the light of the protests and requests that came from all over Europe and the United States and the representations made" by European and seminary leaders.

"It is our view that these men (the European and seminary leaders) faithfully presented the European situation, whereas the Trustees, we believe, based their decision on a good deal of misinformation," they continued.

The statement also voiced appreciation for Isam Ballenger, FMB vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and Keith Parker, area director for Europe, who have announced early retirement in protest of the trustees' actions. "We have noted with deep concern the reasons they have given for their decisions and wish to register our own disquiet at what would appear to be a major departure from long-standing Foreign Mission Board policy," the statement said.

"We are aware that there have been shortcomings in our witness as European Baptists, but as we have gathered together in Dorfweil we have recognized anew our commitment to Christ, to one another in Christ and to the task of sharing the Gospel. We are grateful to God that, despite coming from diverse backgrounds, we enjoy real unity in the Spirit," the statement said.

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CLC installs message line
on issues in Washington

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has installed a message line in its Washington office to provide up-to-date information on moral, ethical, social and religious liberty issues being considered by the federal government.

The message line, which can be reached by dialing (202) 638-4095, is revised regularly to alert Southern Baptists to the current status of matters before Congress and the other branches of government. The recorded message also provides addresses and telephone numbers for callers to use in expressing their concerns to members of Congress and other government officials.

The Christian Life Commission has offices in Nashville and Washington.

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Missionaries freed to cross
racial barrier in South Africa By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
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DURBAN, South Africa (BP)--Talks between Baptist groups in South Africa have eased strict working conditions for Southern Baptist missionaries there, yet tensions remain between South African Baptists.

In the past, the predominantly white Baptist Union of Southern Africa and the predominantly black Baptist Convention of Southern Africa required Southern Baptist missionaries to declare which Baptist group they intended to work with.

This forced the missionaries to divide their efforts, some working with the older, more powerful union, while others worked exclusively with the smaller mainly black convention, which broke away from the union about three years ago.

However, union and convention representatives, meeting in Joannesburg Nov. 21, agreed to unshackle Southern Baptist missionaries and allow them to move freely between the two Baptist organizations.

The missionaries had become increasingly frustrated with their segregated system. It was clear that their working relationships, however accommodating, were enforcing apartheid, said Mike Baber, of Hot Springs, Ark., chairman of the missionaries working with the union.

"We felt we were perpetuating the country's divisions," he said. "We started asking, 'Please let us just work with all people of South Africa and not be identified as white missionaries or black missionaries. Let us be missionaries to all people.'"

The Johannesburg meeting may also defuse some of the territorial quarreling between the national Baptists, said John Faulkner, area director for eastern and southern Africa. The missionaries and the two groups agreed to form a committee to decide where new churches should be located and which Baptist organization they will align with.

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Two Baptist churches in a South African homeland, Ciskei, starkly reveal the missionaries' frustrations, Faulkner explained. Following the split between the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and the Baptist Convention of Southern Africa, a Baptist congregation meeting at the Baptist International Theological Seminary in Ciskei also split. It formed two churches. One affiliated with the union; the other with the convention.

After the national organization helped construct a building for the union church, the convention purchased land beside it to build its own church. "They're right next door to each other," said Baber. "It's a very embarrassing situation."

Hopefully, he said, the new working agreement will prevent this from happening again.

The two Baptist groups still have a long way to go toward reconciliation. Wounds from apartheid run deep. Racial tension and mistrust abound on both sides, Baber said.

"The two groups have not made a lot of headway in working out other differences but we're now free to do mission work and relate to either body," Baber said. "This is a movement toward being more cooperative, working together, but maintaining identity.

"I liked the way the convention representatives phrased it when I asked what they would say if our missionaries walked across these racial lines and worked with both Baptist bodies.

"They said: 'That's no problem. Look, we are for kingdom building.'"

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Religious freedom bill
will help, pro-lifer says

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act will advance, not restrain, the pro-life cause, an evangelical pro-life leader said at a meeting during the recent National Religious Broadcasters Convention.

"I believe with all my heart we're going to end abortion in America but we're going to end it through the church," said Thomas Glessner, president of the Christian Action Council. "And if we're going to end it through the church, we've got to have religious freedom in this country.

"I've found that there are many reasons people become motivated to be involved in the abortion issue but the primary one that I see is religious conviction," Glessner said. "And when we have religious freedom restricted in this country, there's no pro-life movement. It's gone. Kiss it good-bye."

Glessner joined lawyers and representatives from organizations with pro-life credentials in explaining their reasons for supporting RFRA, a bill with the purpose of restoring protection of the free exercise of religion. Invited to the meeting were participants at the annual convention and leaders of evangelical and conservative groups in Washington. About 35 people attended the meeting but more than 15 of them were either representatives of groups already supporting the bill or members of the press.

RFRA was first introduced in 1990 after the Supreme Court ruled in Employment Division v. Smith the government no longer had to prove it had a compelling interest but only a reasonable cause for restricting free exercise of religion.

The court said free exercise of religion is not a "preferred freedom," as it previously had been with freedom of speech and press, Atlanta lawyer Wendell Bird said. Religious freedom is no longer "on the constitutional bus at all," Bird said. "It's not even the back of the bus. It's behind the bus."

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Speakers addressed the concerns raised by such groups as the National Right to Life Committee and the United States Catholic Conference that claims to a religious right to abortion would succeed under RFRA. Such claims cannot be prevented from being made but are highly unlikely to succeed, some lawyers said.

"It's enough to have religious freedom stated as a broad principle, and we'll fight the perversions case by case," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "... based on the track record we have in the courts, we're confident we'll win. But we're also confident ... these arguments will be made with vigor, especially as we anticipate the reversal of Roe v. Wade. The pro-abortion-on-demand movement must find some other constitutional or statutory claim to advance their cause... ."

"RFRA, without abortion language, is necessary and sufficient."

After months of examination, the Christian Life Commission decided last summer RFRA could be supported without a pro-life amendment.

"Is the same court that throws out Roe v. Wade going to turn around and then find a right to abortion in the First Amendment?" Glessner said. "Nonsense. Nonsense. I weigh that against the harm that is happening to the pro-life movement because of the Smith decision and I come down in favor of RFRA."

"If there is a fundamental, constitutional right to abortion in the First Amendment, it exists in the First Amendment," Glessner said. "It doesn't exist in RFRA."

If RFRA is not passed, one of his concerns is crisis pregnancy centers will be threatened by legislation proposing they be closed after Roe is overturned, Glessner said. The Christian Action Council sponsors more than 400 evangelistic CPC's in the country.

RFRA, which is House of Representatives bill No. 2797, has not progressed in Congress largely because concerns raised by National Right to Life and others have prevented pro-life legislators from supporting it. The House pro-life leadership is supporting the Religious Freedom Act (H.R. 4040), which includes abortion among claims that cannot be made.

"The fact is, the alternative bill cannot be passed" because of the pro-choice makeup of Congress, said Paul Weyrich, national chairman of Coalitions for America.

"We naturally have looked at this, and were the claims of National Right to Life and the Catholic Conference correct, I would not be anywhere near this bill," said Weyrich, a Catholic.

To "break the logjam" on RFRA, supporters should inform Catholic leaders of reasons for supporting the original bill, gain their support and take their names to pro-life congressmen, especially Catholics, opposing RFRA, Weyrich said.

Other RFRA supporters represented at the Jan. 28 meeting were Concerned Women for America, the National Association of Evangelicals and the Home School Legal Defense Association. Presbyterian pastor D. James Kennedy also spoke in favor of RFRA.

Other groups backing the bill but not involved in the meeting include the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way.