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**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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August 21, 1995

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**Texas Baptist CP funding proposal  
would cut SBC gifts by \$1.5 million**

**Baptist Press  
8/21/95**

DALLAS (BP)--In order to launch 1,400 new Texas Baptist churches in the next five years, a reduction of approximately \$1.5 million in giving by the state's Baptists to Southern Baptist Convention national and international ministries is being proposed.

Under a proposal to be considered by the Baptist General Convention of Texas' executive board Sept. 12, the percentage of Cooperative Program gifts for Southern Baptist causes would decrease from the current 35.5 percent to 33 percent in the 1996 budget proposal, while Texas Baptist funding would increase from the current 64.5 percent to 67 percent.

Under the SBC's Cooperative Program budget, half of all gifts received are forwarded to the Foreign Mission Board, one-fifth to the HMB and the rest to other SBC causes. The proposed reduction in Texas gifts to the SBC would be about \$1.5 million, if computed using Texas' fiscal 1993-94 CP gifts of \$59.6 million.

Final approval for the change in Texas Baptist CP distribution would be voted during the BGCT annual meeting, Nov. 13-14 in San Antonio.

The proposal -- already approved by the BGCT administrative committee -- originated with the BGCT/Home Mission Board Study Committee, which was established to study how Texas Baptists and the HMB could work together to reach more than 8 million unchurched Texans with the gospel.

After months of meetings, including sessions with HMB staff and others, and extensive research, the committee concluded that at least 300 new Texas Baptist churches a year must be started to reach the state's diverse and rapidly growing population, said BGCT Associate Executive Director Ed Schmeltekopf, chairman of the BGCT/HMB Study Committee.

"Our state population of 18 million is expected to increase to 20 million by the end of the century. Texas Baptists need to start 300 new churches a year just to keep up with the population increase. Although giving is at record levels for the work of the BGCT, because of the tremendous need, we are falling behind in additional church starts," Schmeltekopf said. "Actually, there is a need for 3,600 new churches between now and the year 2000. To be realistic, we do have the human and financial resources to start 1,400 new congregations by 2000."

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Morris H. Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee which distributes national CP receipts to SBC agencies, reacting to the Texas proposal, noted, "I am confident Southern Baptists, who are passionately committed to world missions, will continue to increase support of SBC missions as directed by the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board. I applaud any effort by the Texas convention to accelerate church starting in its own state, but I regret that it may be accomplished by reducing the Cooperative Program percentage to the SBC. There are so many critical spiritual needs to be met around the world."

Said BGCT Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr., "In an effort to be generous, Texas Baptists for years have agreed to the least-favorable ratio of finances from the Home Mission Board of any state convention while contributing more to the Home Mission Board than any other state."

The study committee concluded that the situation in Texas has changed greatly since the arrangements were first agreed to and that new considerations are in order.

Through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and the Cooperative Program, Texas Baptists contribute about \$10 million a year to the Home Mission Board and receive back about \$1 million.

Almost all of the Home Mission Board personnel and projects are jointly funded by state conventions, associations and the Home Mission Board. In general for jointly funded personnel and projects in Texas, the Home Mission Board supplies 33 percent of the funding and the BGCT supplies 67 percent. In Florida and Oklahoma, the ratio is the reverse, according to Texas officials. These states receive back about one-third of all the funds they send to the Home Mission Board; Texas receives about a tenth.

"If Texas received the same ratio as Florida and Oklahoma, it would receive approximately \$3 million instead of \$1 million, about the additional amount needed for new work," Pinson said.

In July BGCT staff members met with HMB leaders and appealed for a significant funding hike for new work in Texas, especially in light of the HMB's stated priority for new churches.

"While the Home Mission Board staff was very gracious and cordial, they responded by offering to provide only \$101,605 more in 1996," Schmeltekopf said. "This response was in part based on the action of the Southern Baptist Convention last June, approving the recommendation of the Program and Structure Committee that states such as Texas should assume more of the financial responsibility of home mission work in state and that Home Mission Board money should go elsewhere."

Expressing a desire to maintain strong support for foreign missionaries, the BGCT's administrative committee voted to recommend that 50 percent of all funds received above the Cooperative Program goal be sent to the Foreign Mission Board. The other 50 percent will be for new churches in Texas to strengthen the base in Texas for worldwide missions.

Also, the administrative committee voted to recommend that support for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention be included among worldwide causes in the budget instead of Texas causes.

Recognizing that these budget adjustments alone will not provide all the funds necessary for home mission work in Texas, the administrative committee also voted to encourage a major increase in the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions, continued increase in the New Church Fund, continued use of volunteers and other cost containment means to provide funds for the new churches.

Jack Smith of Orange, Texas, chairman of the administrative committee, said, "For years, the Baptist General Convention of Texas has agreed to cooperate with the Home Mission Board on an exceptionally generous, unselfish basis -- more so than any other state. In the meantime, Texas has become increasingly a home mission field.

"We regret that despite Texas Baptists' giving record, the Home Mission Board indicates that a more favorable funding plan is not possible with Texas at this time. But we must accept facts and do what we can to reach the Texas mission field for Christ.

"Even with the proposed increase for Texas home missions efforts, the proportion of Cooperative Program funds for worldwide causes is greater than in some previous years when Texas was far less a mission field and had far more resources in relation to needs in Texas."

The BGCT/HMB Study Committee was appointed by Pinson after the BGCT Strategy Council challenged Texas Baptists to share Jesus with everyone in Texas by the year 2000.

In 1995, about \$2.4 million in the BGCT budget was reallocated to focus on Strategy Council priorities, including starting new churches.

"To achieve the vision of sharing Christ with every Texan by 2000, Texas Baptists must increase their tempo of starting new churches," Pinson said.

"The Home Mission Board reports that about 10 million persons in Texas are not affiliated with any church. We have a tremendous challenge to provide churches for and share the gospel with the growing Texas population."

The administrative committee approved the study committee's proposal that it recommend to the Executive Board sources of funds that will enable the BGCT to provide funds for helping churches and associations to begin at least 200 new congregations in 1996 and 300 annually through the year 2000.

A member of the study committee, James Semple, director of the BGCT State Missions Commission, said the BGCT needs to provide \$4.5 million a year in start-up support for new congregations.

"We now have about \$2.2 million in direct support for starting new churches in combined allocations from the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions and the Cooperative Program, Annie Armstrong Offering gifts coming back to Texas from the Home Mission Board and earnings from the gifts of Texas Baptists to the New Church Fund.

The New Church Fund, which has grown to \$7.9 million in its first two years, has a goal of \$10 million by the end of 1996 and \$20 million by the end of the decade.

Interest earnings from gifts to the New Church Fund are used to help start new mission churches. Also, the corpus of the fund is used in cooperation with the Baptist Church Loan Corporation to guarantee first-unit building loans for new congregations.

The study committee recommended that the process of a cooperative agreement with the HMB for work in Texas be continued.

"This cooperative agreement provides an opportunity for further discussion about mission strategy and increased funding from the board for home mission work in Texas," Schmeltekopf said.

The administrative committee also will recommend to the September meeting of the BGCT Executive Board that the BGCT seek to develop an agreement with the Home Mission Board to receive one-twelfth of annual allocations from the board to the BGCT automatically every month.

"This streamlined procedure would eliminate hundreds of formal requests by the BGCT that result in unnecessary paper work, telephone calls and hours of staff time," Schmeltekopf said.

Of the 3,814 home missions personnel (not including 1,099 Mission Service Corps volunteers), 98 serve in Texas and are paid in part by the Home Mission Board to do language church extension, new church extension and church and community ministries.

Texas Baptists' concern for home and foreign missions is exemplified by the fact that last year 47.7 percent of cooperative missions gifts received by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, including the Cooperative Program and special offerings, were sent on for missions causes outside the state, said Schmeltekopf.

Texas Baptists have extensively supported pioneer missions work in the United States over and above their gifts through the Home Mission Board. From 1956-94, the BGCT provided about \$7 million for mission work in Minnesota-Wisconsin. Also, thousands of Texas Baptist volunteers have helped begin new churches and build facilities in other states.

"By increasing funding for home mission work in Texas, Baptists can start many more new churches, strengthen existing churches and thus help to fulfill the Great Commission in Texas and throughout the world," Pinson said.

"Texas is a mission field," Schmeltekopf said. "There are more unchurched people in Texas than the total populations of each of 42 of the other states in the U.S.A. and a larger number than the total population of each of 94 nations of the world."

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Based on reporting by Orville Scott and Art Toalston.

SBC mission board executives  
deplore Texas funding cut

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press  
8/21/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The executives of the two Southern Baptist Convention mission boards deplored the proposed cut in national Cooperative Program gifts sent to the SBC by the Baptist General Convention of Texas announced Aug. 21.

The proposal, set to be voted on by the BGCT executive board Sept. 12 followed by a state convention vote Nov. 13-14, would decrease the percentage of CP gifts for SBC causes from the current 35.5 percent to 33 percent in the 1996 Texas budget. Texas would retain 67 percent of the CP receipts it receives, rather than the current 64.5 percent.

Texas officials said the proposal would help launch 1,400 new Texas Baptist churches in the next five years. However, the reduction would mean about \$1.5 million less annually to SBC mission causes, based on the last year of record.

Both Larry Lewis, president of the SBC Home Mission Board, and Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board, said in separate statements they regretted the proposed action when the needs of their respective boards are so great.

"Already the Texas convention is retaining 64.5 cents of every CP dollar and sending only 35.5 cents to world mission causes which means the FMB receives less than 18 cents and the HMB 7 cents of every Texas Baptist CP dollar," Lewis said.

"Apparently their administrative committee members feel the HMB should give even more to Texas despite the fact that we are already investing over a million dollars a year of our field budget in Texas. Certainly, we consider Texas a challenging mission field, applaud their goal of establishing 300 new churches a year and want to assist them in any way possible. However, Southern Baptists have identified 20,000 locations across the U.S. where new churches are needed to reach the estimated 183 million lost people in America.

"This is no time for any individuals, church or convention to reduce home missions support," Lewis said.

The HMB president said the agency must consider appropriating funds to states based on their size and strength and the resources available in the state.

"In nearly every case, older, stronger state conventions pay the larger portion while the HMB funds a lesser amount of the cooperative work in the state.

"However, the exact opposite is true in the newer conventions where the HMB funds 80 percent or more," Lewis said.

"Several months ago I met with BGCT leaders to discuss their request for more HMB resources. Although I couldn't agree to their request for an additional \$1 million, I did agree to recommend to our board that the HMB share of funding in Texas be increased from 35.5 percent to 40 percent. Apparently, they feel that would not be sufficient."

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Rankin expressed appreciation for the "strong support Texas Baptists have given to foreign missions" and said he is aware of the great need in Texas, but regretted that the "support of our missionaries serving overseas -- more of them coming from Texas than any other state -- will be weakened by this new proposal." "Some churches have always justified weak support of global missions on the basis of the need to have a strong home base. It is disturbing that state conventions seem to be succumbing to this trend by keeping larger percentages of the CP for use in their states.

"God is opening unprecedented opportunities around the world to fulfill the Great Commission. Record numbers of missionaries are responding to God's call and are expecting Southern Baptists to faithfully channel CP dollars to the SBC and on to the FMB for their support."

Rankin said 92 percent of church receipts remain in the local church and 81 percent of CP funds remain in the individual states.

"We already spend far more on the 'home base' than on global missions. The current Texas proposal only makes the situation worse."

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FMB trustees call Baptists  
to new missions heights

By Mark Kelly

Baptist Press  
8/21/95

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Southern Baptists must redouble their efforts if people who have never heard the gospel will be reached for Christ, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Foreign Mission Board trustees were told Aug. 13-17.

In response, they voted to commit more resources to reach the unreached, to challenge Southern Baptists to new heights of missions involvement and to cooperate with other evangelical groups to try to fulfill in this generation the biblical Great Commission mandate to reach the world for Jesus Christ.

Almost one-third of the world's population -- 2,466 people groups -- has never had a chance to hear the gospel, Avery Willis, FMB senior vice president for overseas services, told the trustees at their meeting at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

Yet for churches to be planted among all those groups, missionary numbers and budgets will have to double, he said.

Trustees responded to that challenge by adopting a strategic plan for the 21st century: "On Mission with God to the Last Frontier." It calls for missionaries and FMB leaders to develop new strategies for taking the gospel to unreached people groups without neglecting the tremendously responsive "harvest fields" of the world.

Existing missionaries and budgets can't just be reshuffled to accomplish both tasks, Willis said.

Southern Baptists have 429 field personnel among the 2,466 unreached people groups, Willis said. If the entire missionary force was redistributed, which Willis said the board does not plan to do, Southern Baptists still would only have one missionary unit per people group, and the work on responsive fields around the world would be devastated.

"We need a presence among these unreached peoples to develop a church planting movement," Willis said. "This would require twice the resources we presently have, twice the people and twice the finances. God has already given us so much in the harvest. We need to ask, 'What more can we do?'"

Trustees took two actions to challenge Southern Baptists to new heights of missions commitment and involvement.

First, they endorsed the enlistment of a respected Southern Baptist pastor as a foreign missions ambassador. John Bisagno, 61, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston, since 1970, will become a special assistant to FMB President Jerry Rankin to help the board promote foreign missions in churches, conferences and other speaking engagements. He also will encourage fellow pastors to give higher priority to missions involvement and support. Bisagno will remain as pastor of the 22,000-member Houston church.

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Rankin praised Bisagno's 25-year tenure at First Baptist Church, noting the congregation gives more than \$1 million a year to local and national Southern Baptist missions and more than \$200,000 a year to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. More than 900 of the church's members have gone overseas as missions volunteers and 87 as foreign missionaries.

"To have a pastor with this kind of track record and vision for missions in a local church would be one of the greatest assets we could have in promoting foreign missions," Rankin said.

Second, trustees ratified a "covenant of cooperation" with a new organization dedicated to helping Southern Baptist churches develop "personalized, prioritized" plans for missions support and involvement.

Global Focus will help Southern Baptist congregations broaden and deepen their missions programs by "strengthening traditional Southern Baptist missions channels with creative, contemporary methods that appeal to a new generation," said Larry Reesor, Global Focus executive director and a member of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga.

"I thank God for all he has done through Southern Baptists," Reesor said. "But with all our storied history, we're only scratching the surface of what we can do to reach the world for Christ."

Global Focus will help congregations design a comprehensive church program that fosters a global vision of reaching the world for Christ and offers opportunities for church members to get personally involved in local, national and world missions, Reesor said.

In Reesor, the FMB has found a "sympathetic ear for wanting to work with us in challenging Southern Baptist churches to a new depth of vision," Rankin said. Reesor understands "what God is doing through Southern Baptists and sees the potential we have of fulfilling the Great Commission," he said.

Global Focus was founded March 27, 1995, with a board of directors that includes Bill Stafford of Chattanooga, Tenn.; Keith Thomas of West Palm Beach, Fla.; Johnny Hunt of Woodstock, Ga.; and Ken Whitten of Tampa, Fla. Bill Morgan, director of the FMB's creative access network, will be staff liaison to the organization.

The organization has signed agreements to develop missions promotion plans for First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga.; Idlewild Baptist Church, Tampa, Fla.; and First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach, Fla., Reesor said. It has also conducted a seminar for Dunwoody Baptist Church, Atlanta.

The trustees approved a total grant of \$200,000 for Global Focus's FMB-related expenses in 1995 and 1996.

FMB trustees also recognized Southern Baptists can't reach all the unreached and bring the world to Christ without cooperating with other evangelical groups working toward the same goal.

Board members voted to join the Evangelical Fellowship of Missions Agencies (EFMA), a voluntary association of 110 mission organizations that send out almost 15,000 missionaries worldwide. Member groups include the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Conservative Baptists, Campus Crusade for Christ, World Vision and International Bible Societies.

"By joining EFMA, we're recognizing we don't work in a vacuum on the mission field and therefore need to cultivate relationships and communication with other evangelical missions," Rankin said. "Our participation in EFMA, at a time of unprecedented global opportunities, will demonstrate our willingness to cooperate at a deeper level than ever before and let us be a catalyst for world evangelization that would honor Jesus Christ until he comes."

"A broad spectrum of evangelicals are committed to world evangelization and the Scriptures, just like Southern Baptists are," said EFMA President Paul McKaughan. "And they're committed to sharing the resources and giftedness God has placed in the body of Christ to see the world evangelized."

EFMA is a "biblically sound and the logically orthodox place where people can strategize and work together to see the world evangelized as much as possible in our generation," McKaughan said. The association allows evangelicals to "join resources, face problems and challenges and see the church respond as the Holy Spirit would want it to respond, that Jesus Christ might be glorified and that the kingdom might grow."

The annual EFMA membership fee is based on the number of missionaries an organization sponsors. The FMB's membership fee of \$15,000 is based on more than 4,100 Southern Baptist missionaries serving in at least 131 countries.

The four-day trustee meeting culminated in an emotional appointment service Aug. 17. Trustees appointed 69 new missionaries and reappointed eight others in the agency's largest appointment service since 1983. The total missionary force now stands at 4,139 -- 3,529 career and associate missionaries plus 610 two-year workers.

Rankin addressed the new recruits in a nostalgic vein, remembering the night 25 years earlier when he and his wife, Bobbye, were appointed missionaries in the same Ridgecrest auditorium.

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Mary E. Speidel contributed to this story.

Ridgecrest appointment service  
evokes memories for Rankins

Baptist Press  
8/21/95

By Mark Kelly & Mary E. Speidel

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Aug. 17 was a nostalgic day for Jerry Rankin and his wife, Bobbye, as he addressed newly appointed foreign missionaries in an auditorium at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees had just appointed 69 new missionaries and reappointed eight others in the agency's largest appointment service since 1983.

Rankin, FMB president, remembered the night 25 years earlier when he and Bobbye were appointed missionaries in the same Ridgecrest auditorium.

"It was amazing to us that, in the midst of the war in Indochina, Southern Baptist missionaries would go to Laos," Rankin said. "Not in our wildest imagination would we have dreamed that today we would send you to places like Russia, Romania and Lithuania. It was beyond our most visionary plans and strategies that others of you would go to join in such an amazing harvest of souls as we're seeing in Africa and Latin America today."

Jerry and Bobbye Rankin counseled the new appointees to expect trials and difficulties in their assignments.

But they also offered appointees three "discoveries" that helped them survive and succeed as missionaries in Indonesia: 1) knowing God's Word is absolutely reliable, 2) trusting in God's power rather than their own strength and 3) finding the resources of God's grace sufficient for every situation.

The Rankins, 23-year veterans of missions before his election as FMB president in 1993, recalled a stressful 30-day period in their first term of service. Their son's life was threatened by an infection, Bobbye had to undergo major surgery, and both Bobbye and Jerry fell seriously ill at Christmas -- only to receive a telephone call telling them Bobbye's father had been killed and her mother critically injured in an automobile wreck.

"Never had we felt so helpless and so alone," Rankin said. "But then the other missionaries came and began to comfort us and God revealed himself to us and we felt the presence of Jesus and an outpouring of God's grace that we had never known before.

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"As you go to the mission field, you don't go on the condition that God is going to protect you from harm, deflect hardship and difficulty and thwart every trial," Rankin said. "But you will find that the resources of God's grace are beyond anything you have ever imagined."

Three of those named missionaries are children of current or retired FMB missionaries. They are Chris Harbin, son of Byran and Dora Harbin, Brazil; Carlos Ichter, son of Bill and Jerry Ichter, retired from service in Brazil; and Robert Pinkston, son of Edwin and Greta Pinkston, Ivory Coast.

Harbin and his wife, the former Karen Goforth of Aiken, S.C., will work in Brazil. Ichter and his wife, the former Shannon Bowen of El Dorado, Ark., were reappointed for Germany, having worked from 1988 to 1993 in Brazil. Pinkston and his wife, the former Sharon Smith of Hot Springs, Ark., will serve in Mali.

In written biographical sketches submitted before their appointment, some of the new missionaries said they sensed God's call to missions while studying or teaching about foreign missions in their churches.

That was the case for Doug Lee, pastor of First Baptist Church, Johnson City, Texas. As he prepared sermons for the 1994 Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions, Lee said God showed him he wanted him to use his gifts overseas. Lee, of Bishop, Texas, and his wife, the former Laura Morris of Clear Lake, Texas, will work in Tanzania.

"The fact that so many of the world's Christians are isolated in such a small portion of the world began to break my heart . . .," Lee wrote.

"It also broke my heart to learn that although only 5 percent of the world's population live in the United States, 95 percent of the world's trained religious leaders live (there). I then realized I was one who must go."

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Jericho festivals herald 'new day'  
for Baptists, Henry Blackaby says By Steve Barber

Baptist Press  
8/21/95

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--This year's Jericho missions festivals "announced a whole lot of things" about where Southern Baptists are in the work of global evangelization, according to the Bible study leader for both events at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Centers.

Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said his experiences at Jericho were evidence "God seems to have called us back on mission with him."

"I really believe it's a new day for Southern Baptists," Blackaby said. "God has said, 'I can trust you, so I'm going to commit to your path as Southern Baptists a major role in global evangelization,' and I see that here."

"In previous years, probably seven out of 10 people who talked to me would talk about burnout and brokenness in their church. This time, I am hearing testimonies of great joy, fellowship and power in the churches."

"There has been a tremendous seriousness on the part of God's people (at Jericho), and there has also been revealed a strong working of God in all age groups. (They) are not asking questions to see if God might be one of their options. They are seeing God as their only option."

Blackaby said the movement of God today followed a time of "brokenness" across the convention, from laypersons to agency leadership, that was painful but necessary.

"I think God had to absolutely humble us. He broke us. There was a period there where none of us said we were worthy to carry any leadership role at all . . . (because) we were so broken and fractured among ourselves. I think God needed to humble us, as if to say, 'I cannot commit a large assignment to a haughty, prideful people,' but now I think he's committing to us, and those I've seen in leadership in the agencies have a humble spirit before the Lord."

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The Jericho week at Ridgecrest, which c ncluded Aug. 18, saw an appointment service for 77 foreign missionaries, the largest single group charged since 1983. Jerry Rankin, president of th Foreign Mission Board, pointed to other superlatives.

"Last year, 545 new missionaries were commissioned by the Foreign Mission Board, the highest net increase in history," Rankin said. "Also in 1994, the board surpassed 4,000 missionaries under appointment."

Like Blackaby, Rankin indicated an expectation of more positive developments to come, thanks in part to Jericho's influence.

"I'm confident that God has been moving throughout these days here, through the Bible studies, the testimonies, the conferences, the worship experiences, the informal discussions and prayer times that you've had, to touch the lives of many of you here, to cause you to join me and to join God on his mission to reach the whole world."

This year's Jericho weeks at Ridgecrest and Glorieta saw the largest combined attendance in the seven-year history of the event, coordinated by the SBC's Missions Education Council agencies -- the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board, Woman's Missionary Union, Brotherhood Commission and Sunday School Board.

Jericho weeks for 1996 are scheduled June 29-July 5 at Ridgecrest and July 27-Aug. 2 at Glorieta and again will offer programming for children, youth and adults. For more information, call 1-800-866-3621.

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Want a tough job? Try being  
a pastor -- and the mayor

By Lynn P. Clayton

Baptist Press  
8/21/95

FOREST HILL, La. (BP)--Which of the following occupations is likely to encounter:

Complaints. Headaches. Constantly ringing phone. Trying to please people of diverse backgrounds and interests. Dealing with upset people. Counseling. Seeing that broken pipes and overflowing sewers are repaired immediately. Low pay. Children playing in a dangerous manner. Squabbles. Everyone gets one vote.

A) Pastor of a small Baptist church. B) Mayor of a small town. C) Both of the above.

The correct answer is C.

So, why would a person who has one of these jobs be willing to hold, at the same time, the other job?

Woodson McGuffee can tell you; he does both. And, he is probably the only person in Louisiana who has done both in two Louisiana towns.

McGuffee has been pastor of 320-member Forest Hill Baptist Church since August 1992. Last October, he was elected mayor of the 500-resident village.

It seemed like deja vu all over again.

Nine years ago, he was serving as pastor of First Baptist Church, Gilbert, and was elected mayor of the village. Both churches and villages are about the same size.

McGuffee recalls while serving as pastor in Gilbert, several people mentioned he should think about running for what would be a vacated mayor's office, but he could not make up his mind if he should.

"Then the thing that pushed me over the line to decide to run for mayor of Gilbert happened," he explains.

"A group of men were talking over morning coffee at the cafe when one of them said, 'I've never seen a preacher that could manage anything, or was worth a dime. That's why they have to move all the time.'

"Right then I made up my mind to run."

He received 66.2 percent of the votes.

"There were a lot of headaches and heartaches, but I enjoyed it," he says.

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In addition to the administrative responsibilities of caring for the community, McGuffee also had to preside over mayor's court.

"It does make it difficult to put a church member in jail," he says with no trace of a smile. "I had to do that in Gilbert once. I had to learn to be a diplomat."

McGuffee accepted a church in Alabama at the close of his mayoral term at Gilbert. After five years there, he returned to Louisiana and began his ministry in Forest Hill, a village 20 miles southwest of Alexandria.

The mayor of Forest Hill at the time was a member of the church McGuffee serves. After 19 years as mayor he was ready to step down. He and McGuffee began talking about McGuffee running.

"I began to feel a good support and decided to run," McGuffee remembers. "By and large, the church membership was also supportive."

McGuffee had one opponent and won again with a two-to-one majority.

McGuffee sees the office of mayor as a ministry expansion. "I have some who think it is wrong, but my concept of ministry is total ministry, not just church house ministry. I definitely believe you should not mix -- cannot mix -- church and state. I tip-toe through the tulips at that point. But I do believe Christians should be involved in government."

While churches in Gilbert and Forest Hill have much in common, the communities are significantly different, McGuffee says.

"One of the main things I had to do in Gilbert was seek all kinds of grants to help our town," he recalls. "Our community had very limited finances and no real way of getting them.

"Forest Hill, on the other hand, owns its own gas, water and sewer company, so we have a strong financial base. Forest Hill is a different setting than Gilbert. Forest Hill is financially secure."

McGuffee recounts time after time through his work as mayor, someone in the midst of crisis came to his office and received something more than mayoral advice. "I have had the privilege of leading many people to the Lord in this office," he says as he sits behind his desk in the mayor's office.

McGuffee has been well received among other mayors in the state as well. In fact, he was recently elected vice president of the Louisiana Municipal Association of Central Louisiana.

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EDITORS' NOTE: In (BP) story titled, "Mickey Mantle was eager for prayers with chaplains," titled 8/15/95, the following paragraph can be added after the third paragraph:

Officiating at his Aug. 15 funeral, former teammate and lay preacher Bobby Richardson recounted that Mantle had told him in July, "Bobby, I want you to know I've accepted Christ as my Savior."

Also, revise the next paragraph by adding to the end of the first sentence "... before his death."

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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HOUSE MAIL

**(BP)**

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