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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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SBC Cooperative Program gifts
down for month; designated up

Baptist Press
11/1/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program gifts for October were down 6.55 percent from the same month a year ago while designated gifts were up 18.33 percent, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee.

For the first month of the 1995-96 SBC fiscal year, CP gifts totaled \$10,937,383 compared to October 1994 of \$11,704,398, a difference of \$767,015 or 6.55 percent.

The monthly requirement for the 1995-96 Program Allocation Budget is \$11,802,427.

Designated gifts for October totaled \$2,326,574 compared to last year of \$1,966,220, a difference of \$360,354 or an 18.33 percent increase.

The SBC Cooperative Program total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 1995-96 Program Allocation Budget.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

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NOBTS presidential candidate
declines; trustee meeting off

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The special trustee meeting Nov. 8-9 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to elect a new president has been canceled as the nominee withdrew his name, according to Morris Anderson, trustee search committee chairman.

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Fred L. Lowery, pastor of First Baptist Church, Bossier City, La., has withdrawn his name from consideration and the search committee consequently has called off the special trustee meeting in New Orleans. Lowery, a trustee, was also vice chairman of the search committee.

As of press deadline Nov. 1, Lowery had not returned a call to Baptist Press.

The sudden turn of events means the seminary's 40-member board of trustees will have to continue a search to replace Landrum Leavell II, president for 20 years who announced his retirement at the end of 1994. He has continued as interim but told trustees at the board's Sept. 12 meeting that the seminary needs a new leader "the sooner the better."

Earlier, Anderson, a Pigeon Forge, Tenn., pastor, said the committee had received 25 to 30 recommendations for president, narrowed it down to about 10 and then trimmed it further to a "few." He did not identify other possible nominees. Jim Henry, SBC president and pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., publicly withdrew his name from further consideration in late summer.

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New Disney homosexual policy
draws protests in Florida

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--The president of the Florida Baptist Convention and 15 Florida state legislators have added their protests to a Walt Disney Co. decision to provide health care insurance for live-in partners of homosexual employees.

In a letter to Michael Eisner and the board of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Ken Whitten, the state convention's president and pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa, said, "In a day where millions are searching for wholesome, clean, safe and family-filled activities, your enterprise, that for years has stood for moral values and family traditions, has caved in to 'political correctness.'

"While others may applaud your 'courageous' actions, there is a God in heaven who looks down with disdain; and true ethics reminds us the question is not 'Does it work?' but the real question is 'Is it right?' It is not, nor will it ever be, right to redefine the family as God has ordained."

Whitten also told Eisner, "There are a million Florida Baptist residents who have been watching with great interest where the Disney Corporation is going. With your apparent endorsement of 'gay days' and anti-family films under such labels as Miramax, we believe the conscience of Walt Disney has been silenced; and we can no longer be silent, but we appeal to you to reconsider such devastating policies."

The new Disney policy, announced in a recent newsletter to the company's 70,000 employees, will go into effect Jan. 1. While covering live-in partners of homosexuals, the health care provisions would not include live-in partners of heterosexuals.

"We made this decision because it brings our health benefits in line with our corporate nondiscrimination policy," said Disney spokesman John Dreyer in an Associated Press report. Asked how the decision will affect the Disney image, Dreyer would only say, "We are a family-oriented company."

The 15 Florida state legislators -- one senator and the remainder in the House of Representatives -- co-signed a similar letter to Eisner and the Disney board. The Oct. 13 letter was sent on the letterhead of Rep. Bob Brooks, R-Winter Park, an elder in Orangewood Presbyterian Church there.

"We are surprised at your belittlement of the sanctity of marriage," the legislators' letter said. "By implying that vows no longer need to be made in order to gain marital privileges, you are alienating the millions of people in this country who take the marriage covenant seriously and believe that it is ordained by God."

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"We strongly disapprove of your inclusion and endorsement of a lifestyle that is unhealthy, unnatural and unworthy of special treatment. Those who practice homosexuality are engaging in a lifestyle that should not be given the same status as heterosexual marriages," the letter said.

Among the signers are five who identify themselves as Baptists and three as Catholics.

The Florida legislators questioned Disney's decision to give medical benefits to a "group of people with such a high medical risk, knowing full-well that other Disney employees and the American people will have to pick up the tab for the inevitable increased health insurance" premiums.

"With your decision, you are alienating the vast majority of families in this country," the letter said. "You may be gaining the applause of a vocal minority of your employees but you are jeopardizing your financial base, which creates the need for those same employees."

The Florida legislators asked Disney policy makers to reconsider the decision, writing, "We wonder what Walt Disney himself would think of your decision if he were alive today. We are inclined to believe he would be quick to pull the plug on such anti-family company policies. We hope you will be quick to reconsider your new policy and work to reestablish Disney as a family-oriented organization."

Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, earlier had called the Disney decision "extremely disturbing to Southern Baptists across the country."

The organization handles arrangements for SBC annual meetings. Orlando was site of the 1994 SBC sessions and is scheduled there again in the year 2000. Chapman said contractual obligations already in place for convention facilities likely will prevent a change in site for the SBC meeting.

"It's a travesty that Disney is no longer a pro-family industry," Chapman said. "It clearly has joined forces with others in the entertainment industry intent on waging war against biblical beliefs and family values that have been the backbone of this country." He said Disney has "built its reputation and business around family values."

"Disney has distorted the definition of 'family,'" Chapman said. "I pray that the American people will challenge this attempt to redefine the family."

Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, said, "This lamentable decision by Disney is yet one more indication of the radical gay rights movement's efforts to get preferential treatment for its lifestyle."

"Disney says they are a 'family-oriented company.' What kind of 'family' are we talking about?" Land asked. "Should we next expect to hear from Disney that Mickey has left Minnie and moved in with Donald? Is that Disney's definition of 'family'?"

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Compiled by Michael Chute.

HMB names regional consultant
for bivocational ministries

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
11/1/95

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Every pastor would benefit from being bivocational at least five years, says the Home Mission Board's first regional consultant for such ministries.

Oklahoma pastor and businessman Leon Wilson says becoming bivocational after 20 years as a fully funded pastor changed his concept of ministry and preaching.

"The cultural shock I got in the real world changed my total concept of the ministry. My preaching changed drastically," Wilson says. "I put up with the same frustrations my people deal with every day."

Wilson has been bivocational pastor of Southpark Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, since it was a mission congregation in 1979. Now the church has 450 members and all four staff members are bivocational.

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"It's been a dream come true," he says. "We've put the church back in the hands of laypeople."

Dale Holloway, home missionary working with bivocational ministries, says the regional consultant role is "the most important development in my 13 years here." Holloway says he hopes to eventually have seven regional consultants serving across the nation. Consultants will serve as Mission Service Corps volunteers.

As a regional consultant, Wilson says he will encourage Southern Baptists to intentionally use bivocational ministers. Limited financial resources mean Southern Baptists need to support bivocational ministries, especially in reaching pioneer and inner-city areas, he says.

He also will encourage college students preparing for the ministry to develop marketable skills. "Then they will have two resources: their commitment to ministry and their ability to make a living."

Wilson graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Missouri before serving as a pastor and church starter. When he decided to leave the pastorate, he returned to Oklahoma and began working in his father's truck business. Eventually he became a bivocational pastor.

Wilson is phasing out of the truck sales business to devote more time to his new role as regional bivocational consultant. He will continue working with the "Lube-A-Truk" business he started.

A national conference for bivocational ministers is set for Nov. 30 to Dec. 2 in Bolivar, Mo. For information, call Holloway at (601) 845-2107.

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College's county raises
nearly \$200,000 in gifts

By Leigh Anne Hiatt

Baptist Press
11/1/95

GEORGETOWN, Ky. (BP)--Scott Countians exceeded all expectations in their donations to Georgetown (Ky.) College's first-ever "Day for Georgetown College." The Oct. 30 event raised \$196,776 in cash, pledges and gifts-in-kind by the end of the day, announced Steve Cook, assistant to the president for church and community relations and coordinator of the event.

"We set our base goal for the day at \$125,000 with a challenge goal set at \$138,000," said Cook. "For us to exceed the challenge amount by nearly \$60,000 is incredible."

Maribeth Hambrick, the event's co-chair and Georgetown College trustee, said, "This says to me that the people of Georgetown and Scott County appreciate the college and what it has stood for all these years and are glad for a chance to say so in a tangible way."

Cook explained the "Day for Georgetown College" is the first time in nearly 14 years the college has launched a formal fund-raising campaign in the Scott County community.

The event was designed to highlight the contributions the college makes to the county and give the community the opportunity to make an annual donation to the college. The gifts will support scholarship programs, capital projects, the academic operating budgets, faculty development and other college needs, with contributions counting for the 1995-96 fiscal year which ends June 30.

"We asked for the community's support because only 53 percent of the Georgetown College operating budget comes from student tuition and fees," Cook said. "The Annual Fund, endowment income, the Kentucky Baptist Convention auxiliary enterprises account for other college revenues."

Gardner Daniel, president of Georgetown Bank & Trust, joined Hambrick as co-chair. Nearly 70 volunteers assisted the college by calling on businesses and individuals in the community to ask for a gift or pledge to the campaign.

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Cook said a study completed by Georgetown College in June 1994 to determine the institution's economic impact on Scott County and the region proved the college's contribution was even more substantial than predicted. The college contributed nearly \$16 million to Scott County in 1993 alone and nearly \$100 million to the county from 1983-93 through payroll taxes and the purchase of goods and services.

The study also showed events on campus attract thousands of visitors each year, student spending stimulates the local economy and the college generates more than 500 jobs annually, and college employees contribute their time and energy to county schools, projects and organizations.

"Scott County and Georgetown College have a 166-year history that began when the college was founded here in 1829," Hambrick said. "Through the years the college and community have worked together to enhance the economic and civic climate that has made our county one of the finest places to live in Kentucky."

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Hiatt is Georgetown College's director of public relations.

Managing money termed
biblically based idea

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
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HOT SPRINGS, Ark. (BP)--If you don't think overspending is a sin, check the Bible.

Carefully managing money is a biblically based concept, said a pastor who led a workshop on the subject during a Fall Festival of Marriage in Hot Springs, Ark., Oct. 27-29.

"Jesus said a lot about money. There are 700 verses about it in the Bible," said Dan Griffin, pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas. Griffin, who keeps a detailed, but simple monthly budget, led the workshop, "Money and How it Matters," at the marriage festival.

Griffin said God wants Christians to maintain control of their finances for two reasons: because the church needs 10 percent and because families operate more healthily when money matters are not a concern.

"Money is the No. 1 cause of marriage breakups," Griffin said. "We need to be very scrupulous and disciplined and Christian about how we handle our money. Money is dangerous."

Ironically, Griffin said, when couples have little money, they pray more.

"But when we get more comfortable, we don't trust in the Lord as much," he said. "And that's why money can be dangerous."

If Christian couples seriously want to get out of financial debt "and promise God they want to tithe, I think God will bless you," Griffin said. But, he said, before God is willing to help a couple break free from their financial chains, he expects them to recognize their problem and want to correct it.

Griffin listed several ways a couple can recognize if they are in financial chains.

"You are in financial bondage if you cannot pay your bills at the end of the month; you and your spouse are arguing on a regular basis about money; you are doing something dishonest regarding money; you live, breathe, eat and sleep making money; you can't afford to give even a dollar to the Lord."

Getting control of finances requires a simple monthly budget listing monthly expenses and monthly salaries. Couples then add their monthly spending, including credit card bills, food, housing, gas, utilities, tithe and miscellaneous, and subtract it from their monthly salary.

"First you get control, and then you either cut your expenses or increase your salary."

Griffin recommended one spouse, "probably the husband," take a periodic second job to eliminate credit card bills.

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"Generally, you pay off the smallest credit card bill first -- the one with the highest interest. Then you use the money you paid monthly on that bill to pay off another bill. Once you finish paying a credit card account, you cut up those credit cards."

The three principles to money management, according to Griffin, are: tithing, taking care of what you have and earning interest by not paying it.

"That means getting rid of the credit card payments," he said. "To do that, we have to start resisting what Madison Avenue tells us we need to be happy. Money is important, but it's not supposed to be our lord and master."

Griffin suggested couples begin actions to reduce or eliminate debt.

"Work with what God has already given you and let him know you want to get out of debt. Take what he's given you and do the best you can with it.

"Who knows, he might start throwing money at you. He can still put the manna on your table.

"God loves you and he loves your children. He wants them educated and fed and clothed. He wants them to have money to take care of them and yourself and his church."

Two resources for couples interested in taking charge of the finances include "Master Your Money" video training kit and workbook and the 1995 doctrine study, "Partners with God: Bible Truths about Giving" by Bobby L. Eklund and Terry Austin.

Fall Festivals of Marriage are sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board. About 25 festivals are being held this fall in locations ranging from California to North Carolina and Florida to Iowa. About 620 people attended the Hot Springs festival.

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Church offers warm greeting,
compassion & gospel witness

By Phyllis Thompson

Baptist Press
11/1/95

MIAMI (BP)--During Friday night Bible study, two children badly misbehave. Some adults want to permanently expel the children from the group. Pastor Jorge Comesanas has another idea.

"Let's visit their home," he suggests. "Something's going on."

Downstairs, the apartment door opens to reveal three men huddled around a tiny, newborn baby. After a few minutes, the young mother comes from a bedroom. Comesanas greets her, explains who he is and offers to say a prayer. She looks nervously at the men and then says OK. The prayer is short and Comesanas says goodbye. He has only gone a few feet from the apartment door when a voice stops him.

"Padre, padre." The young woman speaks softly. "I want to thank you. My own father is a pastor. I know that God sent you tonight to give my baby a special blessing." She hugs him and hurries back to her apartment.

"It's always so exciting," Comesanas says, "to watch the Lord open doors."

They call themselves the kissing church. It doesn't take long to see why. Everywhere you look, somebody is greeting somebody with a hug and a kiss. It doesn't matter whether it's men, women, youth or children, that's the custom at Primera Iglesia Bautista de Coral Park.

It's also the custom to share your faith with everyone you meet. There's something going on here every night and nearly all day on Sunday. Many church members attend five or six times a week.

Why? Simple, says Comesanas. "We're meeting needs."

The way the congregation sees it, the greatest need is Jesus Christ. "Our first priority is the lost person," Comesanas says. "They are welcome here."

When Comesanas became pastor in 1982, church attendance hovered around 200. But within a few years, the congregation had outgrown its building. They bought a Jewish Temple a couple of blocks away.

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Now, the church is once again out of space, with an average combined attendance of 1,500 in three Sunday schools. Among Hispanic Southern Baptist churches, this kind of attendance is unparalleled. All worship services are in Spanish with people from more than 20 nationalities singing praises together. Youth activities are in English.

Comesanas' philosophy of outreach began in Cuba. His parents were Catholic but didn't attend church. When a neighbor asked if Comesanas could attend church with her, he hid under the bed; she pulled him out to go to the service. What he heard during that simple Baptist worship was so riveting that he cannot speak of it without emotion, even now, more than 45 years later.

"The idea that Jesus Christ died for me -- I'd never heard anything like that. I just couldn't believe it. I am so grateful to that neighbor woman who cared enough to take me to church."

Because of those memories, Comesanas isn't hesitant to share the gospel with anyone. After the Friday night Bible study in a low-income apartment complex in north Miami, he and his wife, Carmen, walk to their car through a dimly lit parking lot. In the shadows a group of men loom around a blaring radio. Comesanas walks into their midst, greets them warmly, shakes hands and slaps backs.

The church has 38 Bible study groups -- called Love in Action groups -- meeting regularly. Ileana Gutierrez is minister to the community units that provide a personal touch to the growing congregation. Each group has its own lay minister; if a group becomes too large, another one is formed.

Passing love and faith on to others is as natural as breathing here. "You don't mind telling all your friends about something that's really good," says Lucy Hernandez. Like so many here, Hernandez visited at a friend's invitation and kept coming back because of the acceptance and love she found.

"I grew up in a really dysfunctional family," she says, her face sobering. "I thought that only I could feel the hurt and anger and pain that it brought. But here I found others like myself, beautiful girls who you would never have guessed have been through so much."

Now, Hernandez mentors a class of girls. "You wouldn't believe the hurts these kids face," she says. One recently lost both parents to AIDS-related deaths.

"The church's role is to heal the hurts of a hurting community," says church member Cristina Gallo. "And you can't do that unless you're open to sinners, to lost people. If you require that people be perfect before they join your programs, then you're missing the very people Christ came to save."

Many are surprised to learn that church membership isn't a requirement for belonging to the church choir. "But they are required to attend all rehearsals and to sing at Sunday worship," says Gallo whose husband, Luis, is minister of music. "And they can't help but hear the gospel. I can't tell you how many people have been saved as a result of belonging to the choir."

Comesanas smiles radiantly. "I just can't fathom why a child of God wouldn't be out telling everybody what the Lord has done for them."

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