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95-180

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Home missions offering
passes \$38 million record

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
11/10/95

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Southern Baptists have contributed a record \$38 million to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions, and officials said that figure will rise before year's end.

Home Mission Board and Woman's Missionary Union leaders hailed the announcement as an indication of Southern Baptists' continuing dedication to evangelism, church starting and ministry in America.

On Nov. 8, the offering had reached \$38,103,868. The final total will not be known until the end of the year. The present total is 4.6 percent more than 1994's year-to-date total, said Ernest Kelley, HMB executive vice president for planning and finance. In 1992 Southern Baptists gave the previous record offering of \$37.6 million.

Final figures could be \$1 million more than the offering amount budgeted for 1995, Kelley said. Woman's Missionary Union set an ambitious 1995 goal of \$50 million to coincide with the agency's 150th anniversary. Board planners, however, budget the offering based on the previous year's totals, Kelley said.

All offering dollars go to support home missionaries and projects on the field, he noted. "Not one pencil will be bought out of it for here," Kelley said from the HMB national office.

HMB President Larry Lewis said he was surprised the record was broken so early. "It indicates to me that Southern Baptists still see missions as a priority and give it a loyal and generous support," he said. "In spite of controversy in the convention and financial recession in many areas, support through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering has remained strong and we're grateful."

Kelley agreed. "We really praise the Lord for the faithfulness of God's people.

"We don't get our money in millions of dollars. We get our dollars in little gifts and they're consecrated gifts and much of the time it's sacrificial gifts," he added. "We need to express our appreciation for that generosity and that consecration to missions."

WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien said she was thrilled by the news of a record offering. "When others in the United States are focused on lack of jobs, homelessness and political elections, Southern Baptists have a larger, more encompassing concern -- winning our nation to Christ."

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Th \$38 million will enable missionaries and churches to meet both spiritual and physical needs, O'Brien said. "What's more, the prayer surrounding the Home Mission Study and ingathering of the offering will multiply the dollars contributed and empower his people in service."

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House committee approves
gambling commission bill

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/10/95

WASHINGTON (BP)--The House of Representatives Judiciary Committee has approved a bill to establish a commission to study the impact of gambling in the United States.

The Nov. 8 voice vote by committee members provided a victory in an attempt to form a panel which would compile information on gambling's effects on families, economics, crime and individuals. The National Gambling Impact and Policy Commission Act, H.R. 497, would have three members appointed by the president, three by the Senate majority leader and three by the speaker of the House. Rep. Frank Wolf, R.-Va., chief sponsor of the bill, has said he would like another panel member to be a governor from a state which has legalized gambling.

Attempts to amend the bill in committee failed, a committee spokesman said.

In a Sept. 26 letter to the 35 members of the Judiciary Committee, Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry and Christian Life Commission President Richard Land had urged them to approve the bill.

"The Christian Life Commission is delighted that the gambling industry will be examined closely if Congress follows the lead of the House Judiciary Committee," said Bill Merrell, the CLC staff member who handles the gambling issue. "Claims have habitually been made that gambling is a net good for those states which approve it. We believe that closer examination will demonstrate that those claims are not true."

In a recent letter, Wolf said he had introduced the bill because he does not "believe many Americans fully understand the consequences of legalized gambling."

The commission, Wolf has said, should review the cost and effectiveness of federal and state regulations, gambling's impact on other businesses, the influence of gambling promoters on the development of policies regulating gaming, the relationship between gambling and crime, teen-age gambling and the effect of pathological gambling on individuals, families and social institutions.

The commission also should propose whether gaming operations on Indian lands should be regulated by the states, not just the federal government, he said.

The panel should be chosen in a balanced manner and should provide centralized data for public officials and citizens, Wolf said.

A study by the Congressional Budget Office on the estimated cost of the commission has yet to be made.

H.R. 497 has 109 co-sponsors in the House.

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Poetry gives evangelist
international witness

By Luana Ehrlich

Baptist Press
11/10/95

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)--He had been writing poetry based on the Bible for almost 30 years, but only recently did Kenneth R. Thompson begin submitting his poems for publication in the secular market.

Thompson, 51, an evangelist based in Albuquerque, N.M., sent four of his poems to the National Library of Poets, reasoning, "I knew their books would go around the world, and if just one person would read my poetry and be helped by it, then it would be worth it."

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Now, as a finalist for 1995 Poet of the Year, an honor given by the International Society of Poets, far more than one person is reading Thompson's poetry.

The finalist's honor has brought swift recognition to Thompson, who will have one of his poems published in the book, "Best Poems of 1996."

Thompson, who was saved at the age of 10 in Savannah, Ga., began writing poetry following a tragic car accident that critically injured him and took the life of his girlfriend. He had just graduated from high school in Roswell, N.M., with no real plans for the future. "I hadn't taken life too seriously," he said, "and, all of a sudden, I realized I wasn't ready for the loss of a girlfriend and the loss of my looks.

"I began writing down my thoughts and feelings, seeking to discover more of who I was and more of God," he recounted. His spiritual search led him to renew his commitment to the Lord, and eventually he surrendered to preach. Through the efforts of a friend, he also enrolled in the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell, a place "I really hated." However, he admitted, "The Lord used it to direct my life by giving me the discipline I really needed."

Following his sophomore year, Thompson transferred to a small Nazarene college in Pasadena, Calif. There he joined a college mission team that traveled to East Los Angeles every weekend to preach and sing on the street corners and to minister in several rescue centers.

The experience impacted his life by making him aware of "the tremendous sorrow and loneliness" of people everywhere, Thompson said. Images of these scenes creep into his poetry as he writes of God's love for those who are hurting.

After graduating from college in 1965, Thompson married his wife, Shirley, and together they moved to Fort Worth, Texas, where he began attending Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Although he did not have a formal pastorate, Thompson said he took advantage of every opportunity he encountered to share the Word of God, from preaching at the Tarrant County jail every Sunday to continuing to minister in rescue centers and on the streets.

During this period of his life and in the years that followed, when he was immersed in pastoral ministries in Texas and New Mexico, Thompson was much too busy to write much poetry. However, all that changed after an encounter with the Lord at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center in 1976.

He called his wife after an evening service to tell her, "I believe God is calling me to write and do evangelism." Although he could not imagine such a dual ministry, he returned to his church in Jal, N.M., with a renewed vision of what he calls "everyday evangelism," which he described as "seeking people out on a daily basis and being alert and sensitive to ordinary opportunities to witness for the Lord." Thompson also began writing a few articles and some poetry.

It was not until he left the pastorate in 1990 and went into full-time evangelism, however, that he began to see his poetry as a means of evangelism. Seeking to recover from an unhappy experience at his last place of service, Thompson moved his family to Albuquerque and returned to writing poetry.

"I was hurting," he admitted, "and out of that need I turned to writing as a good way to express those feelings. But God wouldn't let me wallow in self-pity. He made me see hope in him, and how he rescues, and how he ministers, and how he's always there."

Now, as Thompson holds revival meetings throughout the Southwest, he not only preaches and ministers in song, but he also shares his poetry with others who are hurting, from students to pastors to friends.

His friendship with Dallas author, Lana Bateman, led to three of his poems being published in her book, "Poems for the Healing Journey," published by Barbour and Co. in 1992. Encouraged by the use of his poems in the book and wanting his poetry to be a means of reaching an unsaved world, Thompson submitted the four poems to the National Library of Poetry, an organization that receives thousands of poems each year. From that submission, he was named by the International Society of Poets as a 1995 Poet of the Year finalist. (The top honor later went to another poet.)

As Thompson prepares to submit his first book-length compilation of poems for publication, he points to the Lord: "I'm so grateful that God has impressed me to write, has gifted me to write, and has given me the chance to share his blessings with the world."

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EDITORS' NOTE: Permission has been granted by Kenneth R. Thompson for use of any of the following poems.

More To Come

"Yesterday" should never be
The word we always use
In describing blessings sent
From God to me and you.

Blessings given yesterday
Are in our hearts now stored;
Blessings new God also gives
Today from grace outpoured.

When we think of blessings shown
To us from Heaven's sum,
Thankful be for yesterday's,
But look for more to come!

Kenneth R. Thompson
8-17-95

As Angels Sing

The beauty of God's holiness
Does call our hearts to raise
Voices high that we might bless
His name in songs of praise.

Let us sing, as angels sing,
Our Alleluia's song,
Lifting as an offering
Our praises all life long.

Lift to Him our hearts made glad
By seasons of His care,
And rejoice that we do have
His blessings all to share!

Kenneth R. Thompson
11-18-94

Grace Will Get You By

God does see your every need --
His grace will get you by;
In your sorrows grace does seize
The moment to reply!

Grace does speak of tender care
For you the Father has
As His love does reach you where
You hurt that pain will pass!

Grace does lift the heart that fears
And gives it strength divine
So that eyes with many tears
Can see God's mercy kind!

Yes, His grace will see you through
When you in sorrow cry;
It does choose that moment to
Respond and get you by!

Kenneth R. Thompson
7-22-95

You're Not Alone

The farthest star in outer space
To man will not be known,
But to God, who fixed its place,
The star is not alone.

God is everywhere there is
A space, a time, a place;
So He will not ever miss
A tear upon a face!

In the struggles of your life --
To man which are not known --
Like the farthest star in flight,
To God you're not alone!

Kenneth R. Thompson
12-1-93

90-year-old pastor travels
200 miles to serve church

By Connie Davis

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--There's no comparison between Oscar Nash and the Nash Rambler he used to own. He's still going.

Nash, 90, is pastor of First Baptist Church, Harpeth, Tenn., which is 104 miles from his home in Cookeville. He's served the church for five years.

The vibrant senior doesn't see his efforts as unusual. "When you have a love for the Lord and for the people, it's hard to give up." The commute to the church is relaxing, he added.

Since 1935, Nash has been pastor of 42 churches or missions, at times leading seven services a day. He also served as a missionary for the Tennessee Baptist Convention in Jackson County beginning in 1949 and later in Clay and Williamson counties. Throughout his career, much of Nash's work has been starting churches, which he said is one of his callings.

He recounted how he got into the official work of a special missionary:

During a service Nash was leading, he referred to the fact that he had resigned as pastor. Charles W. Pope, then-executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, was in the service and later asked why he had resigned. Nash explained he didn't resign to assume another ministry, but because God had led him to make the decision. Then Pope asked him to work as a convention missionary. The salary was \$100 a month. "Back then that was good money," Nash said.

He fit the role because of another of his priorities -- evangelism. One year he baptized 76 people, he said. He would organize revival meetings, which often would be held in public school buildings. And then he organized congregations.

One thing he has learned, Nash said, is that a person can't criticize people and expect to influence them to become Christians. "You've got to love people and people of other churches, too. You've got to love them to help them. You've got to spend a lot of time with people."

Ministry is hard work, Nash said, which is his main advice for Christians -- work hard for God. Of course, most of today's Christians can't relate to Nash's version of labor. He worked for a sawmill and made 20 cents for a 10-hour day while he was serving a church as a pastor. Nash also has been a mechanic, builder and potter.

During the time he was selling pottery door-to-door in east Tennessee, he had an experience which led him to make his spiritual commitment. After being refused lodging at a large house, the resident referred Nash to another house down the road. Nash had decided to spend the night outside, but he and his partner approached the cottage and were welcomed by the family. Even though the family had little space, they made a place for Nash and his friend.

Before bedtime, the family knelt by their chairs and prayed. The experience made him think. It was after he visited the family on another selling trip that he decided to commit his life to God.

He's had problems, Nash admitted. He lost a finger in a building accident. His first wife, Flora, died. He struggled against God's call to preach for a year, a time when he even resisted work to sustain his family. God finally communicated with him through a dream.

But, Nash said, "Everything the Lord has promised me he's given me. I don't know anybody else the Lord has blessed like me. I've had a good ministry."

Nash admitted he has had an easier ministry in some ways because society has changed. In years past, people who attended church or special services often did so because they didn't have cars, so their options for relief from their lives were few.

Today he sees people confusing conviction with salvation, which doesn't lead people to give up their sin. The most pernicious problem is greed, Nash added. "I've seen so many people dedicate their lives to the Lord and then fall away because they begin to make money."

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Nash said he does plan to retire some time. His wife, Lillie, became ill recently and he has had to miss some services to care for her. But, he added, "They just love me. That means a lot to an old man like I am, you know."

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100-year-old has taught
his 'boys' for 60 years

Baptist Press
11/10/95

SWANSEA, S.C. (BP)--Howard Sturkie, 100, joined Swansea (S.C.) Baptist Church in 1917 and began teaching Sunday school there 60 years ago as the country was making its way out of the Great Depression.

Sturkie fondly refers to the men in his Sunday school class, the youngest of whom is 74, as his "boys."

"He's never bored," says his son, Wallace. "He was out in the fields plowing when he was in his 80s."

Nowadays, "He studies his lesson and works jigsaw puzzles to keep his mind sharp and alert," Wallace says.

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He's said, 'Welcome,'
at church since '56

Baptist Press
11/10/95

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Hearl Johnson, 81, has greeted worshipers at Mayridge Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, since 1956.

Despite his arthritis and his feet getting tired while standing, he remains committed to ushering -- a calling prompted by an experience after his return from World War II.

"We visited a church in Denver that was so cold we never went back after that one visit. I decided right then I would dedicate my life to meeting and greeting people and making them feel welcome when they come to church."

Johnson and his family have been members at Mayridge since it was a mission. "We were looking for a house in the area," he recounts, "and noticed the old chapel being put on a foundation ... I told my family, 'There's a Baptist church. Now we need to find a house close by.'"

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HOUSE MAIL

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