
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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October 24, 1991

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Baptists Committed
won't dissolve yet

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Baptists Committed, one of Southern Baptists' two major moderate-conservative organizations, intends to stay in existence, at least for now, according to its executive committee.

In an open letter in the current Baptists Committed newsletter, committee chairman Jimmy Allen said the group is still needed to help organize state-level opposition to "fundamentalism" and to promote the growth of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the new moderate-conservative umbrella group.

Despite the growing acceptance of the Fellowship, Allen said leaders of Baptists Committed have decided not to dissolve their group immediately, as some observers had expected. According to Allen, a study endorsed unanimously by the group's executive committee concluded that "the need for Baptists Committed is crucial for the foreseeable future."

Allen, of Fort Worth, Texas, said the three-year-old Texas-based group will add strength to the Fellowship as the fledgling coalition prepares for its second general assembly April 30-May 2 in Fort Worth -- its first meeting west of the Mississippi River.

Allen said formation of the Fellowship last May "reflects a growing oneness of purpose in finding positive ways to fulfill the Great Commission in an atmosphere freed from rancor, name-calling and secular political 'hardball.'"

Baptists Committed's second function, Allen said, it to serve as a clearinghouse of information for those who are opposing the efforts of fundamental-conservatives within the various state Baptist conventions.

"Baptists Committed has no apology for calling people to prevent their states from takeover by the fundamentalists," Allen said, "and falling prey to the same deterioration of educational institutions demonstrated at a seminary level and the same repudiation of church-state separation through willingness to become vassals of secular politicians in the national

selling-out of our good Baptist name."

Baptists Committed "never envisioned itself as a permanent entity," Allen said. "When the functions it fulfills are no longer necessary, it will dismante itself."

"It would be our deep desire for the day to come when this would no longer be necessary," Allen said.

Baptists Committed was formed in 1988 by Southern Baptists -- predominantly in the Southwest and Deep South -- who are displeased with the increased control of the Southern Baptist Convention by fundamental-conservatives.

Baptists Committed has concentrated on political strategies to oppose the convention's current leadership, while the other major moderate-conservative group, the Southern Baptist Alliance, has focused on developing alternative ministries for disgruntled Southern Bap3tists.

The Alliance also has retained its own identity, although leaders have opened long-range merger talks with the Fellowship.

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-- By Greg Warner

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is a four-part series on trends in the Cooperative Program, followed by a related news story on changes proposed for the CP.

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Trends in giving
First in a four-part series

Giving patterns are changing
in Southern Baptist churches

By Mark Wingfield and Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- When some Southern Baptists formed an alternative-giving plan last year, one lifelong Baptist quipped that churches would have to attach calculators to offering plates so members could figure how to divide their offerings.

But a little more than one year after formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Southern Baptists have yet to witness changes as radical as redesigned offering plates.

And while the moderate-conservative Fellowship has processed \$2.65 million so far this year, that still represents small change compared to the \$140 million that passed through Southern Baptist Convention coffers last year.

The financial outlook for Baptists -- and all Protestant churches -- is changing radically, but not just because of political turmoil between Southern Baptist factions.

In addition to SBC politics, experts cite at least four other trends impacting the way Southern Baptists give their tithes and offerings:

-- Among Protestants nationwide, the percentage of personal income given to churches has been decreasing since 1985.

-- Even so, among Southern Baptists, total dollars given to churches have been increasing annually for more than 50 years -- generally keeping pace with inflation during the past decade.

-- However, the amount churches pass on to state and national causes

has been decreasing since 1985.

-- This has left Baptist state conventions caught in the middle. Many made commitments in the late 1970s to systematically increase their percentage giving to the national Cooperative Program, the denomination's unified missions budget. The result has been that while state conventions received smaller percentages from the churches, they were obligated to send greater percentages of their receipts to out-of-state causes.

These factors have been playing behind the scenes of the denomination's 12-year struggle between moderate-conservatives and fundamental-conservatives for control of convention agencies.

So the one trend most noticeable in recent years has been changing attitudes in the way people give. Whereas in the past Southern Baptists routinely gave one offering and trusted church leaders to divide it appropriately, now Baptists are prone to designate gifts to certain causes they like and away from others they don't like.

But even this trend is not unique to Southern Baptists, admits the head of the agency most directly affected by Southern Baptist Convention changes.

"We would be parochial, provincial and narrowly Baptist if we didn't understand we're part of a phenomenon that cuts across the Christian world in the United States," said James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington, D.C. Southern Baptists defunded the BJC last June by a vote of convention messengers.

This larger trend has been called "consumer-oriented religion, special-interest giving, tailored charity," Dunn explained. "Folks now don't send in a big check to let someone somewhere else decide what to do with it. They give to causes they believe in. They're much more discrete and discretionary in their giving."

Researcher Sylvia Ronsvalle, a United Methodist, confirmed that trend.

Through interviews in 60 congregations from 12 denominations, Ronsvalle said, one factor surfaced repeatedly: "It appears as though people have changed from stewards into consumers of the church's services. They're buying youth programs, they're buying music programs. They're buying buildings in which to have important ceremonies."

With a grant from the Lilly Endowment, Ronsvalle and her husband, John, monitor charitable contributions nationwide through their company, "empty tomb inc.," based in Champaign, Ill.

"What we have found is that as U.S. per-capita income has increased, church members have tended to give a smaller percentage of their income to their churches," Ronsvalle said. Even though total dollars given to churches may have increased from year to year, real dollars given and percentage of income given did not increase.

Average incomes after taxes and inflation increased about 10 percent between 1985 and 1989, she said. But even so, average giving as a percentage of income during that time decreased from 2.79 percent to 2.62 percent.

Although there is no means of measuring the percentage of income Southern Baptists alone are giving to their churches, annual totals for the national Cooperative Program reveal something is changing.

In the 1990-91 fiscal year, gifts to the national Cooperative Program fell below the previous year's level for the first time in at least 25 years.

Ultimately, the problem facing churches is not changing methods of giving, but the potential demise of biblical giving, Ronsvalle said.

If all U.S. church members gave 10 percent of their income to church ministries -- what many evangelicals consider a biblical tithe -- as much as \$65 billion of additional money would be available annually for international ministries beyond current programs, she explained.

The issue, she said, is priorities. In 1987, the most recent year for which statistics are available, Protestant ministries overseas received a total of \$1.7 billion, she said. In the same year, Americans spent the same amount on Nintendo video products.

"We need to compare the potential of what we could be doing," Ronsvalle said. "Secular businesses have a vision for what they can do with their money. We in the church need to have a vision of what we can accomplish for God with our money."

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Trends in giving
Second in a four-part series

Triple-whammy causes
Baptist bucks to shrink

By Marv Knox and Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention's golden goose got hit by a financial triple-whammy during the past decade.

Economic recession, convention controversy and youthful non-commitment have bruised the Cooperative Program, the unified budget that has enriched state and national causes since 1925, say denominational executives.

"The economy has been a significant factor" in the denomination's fortunes, said Richard Rosenbaum Jr., vice president for business and finance at the SBC Executive Committee. "We're coming out of a recession. This has impacted the churches, then the states and then the national convention."

The Cooperative Program begins with members' contributions to their churches. The churches pass a portion of their receipts to state conventions, and the state conventions pass a portion of their receipts to the Executive Committee for distribution to 18 Southern Baptist agencies.

That money chain mirrors the national economy, with a delay created by the distribution cycle, Rosenbaum noted. "If the economy turns the corner, it may be six-to-nine months before it impacts the national (SBC) level."

In the past year, the Gulf War also afflicted the economy and pinched the SBC pocketbook, he added, saying the international conflict caused "a general hunkering down in the economy."

Barry Allen, director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's business division, echoed Rosenbaum's sentiments: "Most people generally feel the economy is really doing a job on them. There is much caution among Baptist people."

Allen and Carl Johnson, vice president for finance and treasurer of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, cited unemployment as a significant economic factor.

"There are a lot of Southern Baptists out of work," Johnson said. "We are not immune to what is going on in the United States."

Texas has had tough economic sledding for most of the past decade, noted Roger Hall, treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. "There's no doubt but what the economy has had an impact," he said, "but different churches respond to adversity in different ways."

And how churches respond is perceived differently by observers.

"When times are hard, people here still tend to give well to their churches," said Jennings Orr, business manager for the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

"There is a myth that hard economic times force people to reorder

their priorities," the FMB's Johnson said. "And when people reorder their priorities, giving to their church comes out high on the list. That's to the extent they are able to do it. If they have no income, it begs the question."

A second financial factor is denominational controversy.

"The low level of enthusiasm for cooperative missions has impacted us," said Allen of Kentucky.

"Obviously, the controversy has to be a factor," added Rosenbaum, citing \$2.6 million given to the moderate-conservative Cooperative Baptist Fellowship for SBC and to Fellowship causes.

Although the Fellowship reported 77.7 percent of its receipts went to traditional SBC agencies and causes, Rosenbaum said that money "still went to the exclusion of the Executive Committee and the Christian Life Commission, and to some extent to the Home Mission Board and Southeastern (Baptist Theological) Seminary."

Controversy on a state level also has its impact. Hall cited division over the future of Baylor University as an issue in Texas. Nat Kellum, treasurer of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, noted a change in the way Virginia Baptists receive and allocate their money has impacted how churches designate their contributions.

The trend toward designations and alternative-giving plans is a big step away from cooperation, Rosenbaum said. "We feel this to be indicative of a trend toward a societal approach to funding Baptist causes that since 1925 have been funded through the Cooperative Program. To us, that is an indication of a lack of trust."

Trust aside, many younger Baptists simply are not as committed to denominational causes as were their parents and grandparents, observers report.

"There is a trend in society that there is no long-term commitment on behalf of the baby boom generation," Rosenbaum said. "I think that has impacted us some."

"In our local church, we sense that," echoed Hall of Texas. Trends in demographics confirm there is a growing lack of commitment to institutions, he said.

Research conducted by Sylvia and John Ronsvalle, a United Methodist couple who used a Lilly Foundation grant to study church giving trends, buttresses that conclusion.

"It appears as though people have changed from stewards into consumers of the church's services," Sylvia Ronsvalle said. People tend to "buy" the church programs they want rather than give wholeheartedly to the entire church program.

Perhaps the only consolation in the downturn is that churches and the denomination are not alone.

"Look at government, the international order, big business and churches," Kentucky's Allen said. "They're all cutting back right now."

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Trends in giving
Third in a four-part series

Agencies ponder budget impact
as giving patterns change

By Marv Knox and Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP)--Southern Baptists' changing giving patterns have driven denominational money managers to their computers in a search of

new projections.

Consider, for instance, the task of Jack Meredith. He's the budget planner for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

His job is to project income based on receipts from the SBC's Cooperative Program unified budget, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and other forms of revenue.

All three of those sources have been in flux recently. For example, Annie Armstrong receipts have increased sporadically, from a jump of 8.76 percent in 1987 to a projected decrease this year, which would be the first decrease since 1970. The only pattern seems to be that one year is up and the next is down.

The problem of fluctuating Annie Armstrong receipts is compounded by diminished support for the Cooperative Program and by the uncharted impact of income from alternative-funding sources, such as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Fellowship received \$2.65 million between January and mid-September and distributed 77.7 percent of the money to traditional Baptist agencies and causes.

Ironically, the Home Mission Board, which is controlled by fundamental-conservatives, has received \$600,000 from the moderate-conservative Fellowship this year. That fact prompted HMB President Larry Lewis, at the request of his trustees, to send a letter of appreciation to the Fellowship in October, noting the Fellowship's continued support is "imperative" for the HMB to do its job.

Meanwhile, the rate of growth of the traditional SBC funding mechanism -- the Cooperative Program -- has declined nine out of the last 10 years. It has fallen behind the pace of inflation since 1988. And the 1990-91 fiscal year marked the first time in at least 25 years -- maybe 65 years -- that the CP received less money than in the previous year.

Consequently, budget planners and financial managers are scrambling to track the money flow.

The SBC Executive Committee, which has disbursed the Cooperative Program since the fund's founding in 1925, has ordered computer software to help keep up with designated giving, said Richard Rosenbaum Jr., vice president for business and finance.

The Executive Committee's current accounting system only tabulates designated giving in four categories: the Annie Armstrong Offering, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, gifts to world hunger relief and "other." The "other" category now receives contributions designated to particular agencies, and it is showing growth.

"We are receiving an increasing number of special designations," Rosenbaum said. "Theoretically, you would receive checks from 41 state conventions. We are receiving smaller checks from individuals and churches."

For example, some state conventions have modified their budgeting procedures to allow moderate-conservative churches to designate funds away from agencies controlled by fundamental-conservatives, such as the Executive Committee, Christian Life Commission and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"This special action in the states has promoted a reactionary response, where people say, 'Well, I'll designate directly to the Executive Committee or the Christian Life Commission,'" Rosenbaum reported. "However, the frequency (of those contributions) is up, but the amounts are very small compared to the amounts on the other side of the aisle."

Alternate funding has been a life-saver to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The Washington-based religious-liberty organization was defunded by the SBC last summer, dropping \$350,000 per year from its budget.

But the Joint Committee has replaced that money with more than \$450,000 from other sources, said Executive Director James Dunn.

In the past year, the Fellowship contributed \$40,000, while the Southern Baptist Alliance gave \$12,000, he said. Churches and individuals who made direct contributions added \$309,000, and direct gifts from state conventions totaled \$117,000.

"I've been strengthened and encouraged by people who put their money where their mouth is," Dunn said. "I am touched and humbled by the generous, even on a comparative basis extravagant, gifts of some of our older friends."

Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, on the other hand, got money from the Fellowship and wasn't sure what to do with it. During their October meeting, seminary trustees debated whether or not to accept the "tainted" money from the Fellowship.

California trustee Robert Lewis presented a motion that the financially troubled school not accept such gifts. But Robert Zinn, another California trustee, replied, "As long as they are not putting strings on the money they send us, we ought to take it."

For now, Golden Gate trustees decided to accept such funds as long as all six SBC seminaries receive Fellowship money.

This year, the SBC Foreign Mission Board is being hit by decreases in both the Cooperative Program and its Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for the first time since 1932, said Carl Johnson, vice president for finance and treasurer.

The FMB has instituted a couple of changes to cope with less money. "One way is to reduce the capital portion of the board's budget and to reallocate those funds to the operating budget," he said. "We prefer not to do that, but currently we don't have any choice.

"The second way is to reduce support for institutions on the field as these institutions are turned over to national Baptists. The funds released from institutional support are being used in the operating budget."

However, the board is receiving alternative funding from Virginia Baptists and the Fellowship at a combined level of about \$1.8 million, Johnson said.

The board bases the alternative-sources section of its budget on current giving levels, not promises, Johnson noted. "This is brand new from a budgeting standpoint."

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Trends in giving
Last in a four-part series

Old-line states feel
pinch of budget drops

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP)--The oldest and largest state Baptist conventions are facing new problems and smaller budgets.

Many state conventions report they are receiving less money from their churches this year than in the previous year -- an almost unprecedented occurrence.

Missouri Baptists expect to finish the year with their first drop in contributions ever.

Kentucky completed its fiscal year Aug. 31 and suffered its first annual decrease since the Great Depression.

Florida Baptists are expecting their first decline in gifts since World War II.

Texas Baptists anticipate their third drop in five years.

A decrease also is expected in Virginia.

And the list likely will grow longer, according to business directors for the 14 oldest and largest state conventions, who recently met and shared negative forecasts.

"Everybody is expecting a decline, except Mississippi," reported Barry Allen, director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention's business division. "There was not another single person who did not expect to end the year behind last year."

Despite a "terrible month" in September, Mississippi Baptists expect to finish the year close to budget and ahead of last year, said Jennings Orr, business director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Agriculture is good in Mississippi, and that helps the budget, he said.

Virginia, however, has felt a backlash in its spendable funds, reported Nat Kellum, treasurer of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

Last year, Virginia Baptists voted to give churches several options for giving, including the right to determine how their money is divided between state and national causes. Some fundamental-conservative churches promoted giving Virginia 17 percent and the SBC 83 percent, claiming the convention only gives 17 percent of its receipts to the SBC in truly undesignated fashion.

Still, Virginia officials anticipate no change in the policy this year, Kellum added. "We're going to live with this formula and the budget process for another year.... We've given the churches freedom, and we're going to continue to allow them to have freedom."

Texas has dealt with budget difficulties for most of the last decade, since the state's economy went sour, said Roger Hall, treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"For several years, we've been operating with a flat budget," Hall said. The convention has modified its spending to match revenue, he added, noting convention managers have operated on as little as 85 percent of the budget. This year, they are operating on 92 percent.

The Cooperative Program report in Texas does not give the full picture of income, Hall said. About 70 of the state's 5,400 churches are giving to Texas causes only, and those designated funds are not considered Cooperative Program. When the Texas-designated money is compared to the CP shortfall, "we're actually a little ahead of working budget funds," he noted.

State convention money managers are working to balance their budgets, Kentucky's Allen said.

"Everybody is looking at downsizing, although few have formal plans," he noted. "Generally speaking, everybody is saying, 'We're not hiring when we have a vacancy, or we're downsizing by attrition.'"

Financial struggles will force state conventions to look at their purpose, Allen stressed. "For the future, are we too big?" he asked. "Do we have too many staff? Are we offering services for which there is no demand?"

"I don't see it's time to go out of business," added Hall of the Texas convention. "I still see the basic reason churches are in business is as great or more pronounced than it is in times of prosperity and affluence.

"There is no diminishing of our calling or the fields in which we minister," he said.

Open up the Cooperative Program,
Virginia Baptist leader urges

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' main channel of missions funding for 65 years, must be restructured to allow churches more flexibility in choosing which ministries to support, according to one state executive.

Reginald McDonough, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, said such a restructuring could meet two modern challenges facing the Cooperative Program -- "to appeal to the young-adult generation and to depoliticize the Cooperative Program."

McDonough's address to the Virginia Baptist General Board Oct. 1 is considered the first time an executive of a state Baptist convention has publicly called for substantive changes in the Cooperative Program, a mainstay of Southern Baptist financial support since 1925.

It is even more noteworthy since the Virginia executive, as former executive vice president of the SBC Executive Committee, once directed development of the SBC's annual CP budget, which now exceeds \$140 million.

His appeal comes at a time when cultural changes in American society and fallout from 12 years of conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention have undermined the almost unquestioned loyalty the CP once enjoyed.

In the 65 years since the Cooperative Program was initiated, Southern Baptists have undergone profound change, McDonough noted.

"In 1925 we were a denomination that was basically Southern in culture and location, white, rural and lower- to middle-class economically. Now we are in all 50 states, urban, multicultural, affluent and diverse."

Yet, he said, Southern Baptists continue to operate their denomination with a set of assumptions developed between 1919 and 1932. "It's no wonder the patterns put in place after World War I are being stretched to the breaking point," he said. "Diversity creates a centrifugal force that tends to accentuate differences and fling groups apart rather than hold them together."

Historically, Cooperative Program support has been widely considered to be all or nothing. That is, churches either supported the entire CP budget through "undesignated gifts" or they weren't considered supportive at all. "Designated giving," which diverted money away from specific causes, was considered a tactic of those who were not "team players."

In the 1960s and 1970s, it was fundamental-conservatives dissatisfied with what they perceived to be liberal SBC leadership who most frequently designated their contributions. However, since the more conservative shift in SBC life began in 1979, moderate-conservatives have increasingly found designations appealing.

Partly to accommodate the wishes of more conservative Virginia Baptists, the Baptist General Association of Virginia modified its Cooperative Program policy in 1971 and 1983 to allow churches to exclude certain items in the state's budget and still categorize their gifts as "Cooperative Program."

This fall, partly due to pressure from moderate-conservatives, Baptists in Texas will vote on similar proposals.

The combined effect of denominational tensions, a sluggish economy and postwar changes in values and lifestyles has brought Southern Baptists to a "real point of crisis," McDonough warned. As evidence he pointed to a nearly 40-year decline in the CP portion of church budgets.

Now, he said, Southern Baptists are confronted with a stark choice: "Will we move to faithfully advance the cause of Christ or will we retrench and downsize? The question is before us and must be answered soon or we

will not have the resources to answer it."

Restructuring the CP requires facing six realities, McDonough said:

-- To refuse to restructure the CP "is to doom our cooperative missions system to ineffectiveness."

-- "Only a system that will tolerate diversity" can revive cooperation.

-- A strong and efficient cooperative-missions system is essential in a day when obstacles to the gospel "are coming down everywhere."

-- Southern Baptists are entrenched in their divergent viewpoints, which "will not be compromised."

-- "Decentralization of denominational structures" will continue.

-- Decisions about giving need to be made "as near to the giver as possible."

The alternatives are simple, McDonough concluded: "To work in a tightly controlled system that has plateaued and perhaps is in decline, or to work in a system that gives the opportunity to move ahead."

Harold Bennett, president of the SBC Executive Committee, did not respond to a request to comment on McDonough's proposals.

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Fellowship urges direct funding of Ruschlikon

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (ABP) -- Southern Baptists should continue to fund the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, by sending contributions through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, according to Fellowship moderator John Hewett.

The decision Oct. 9 by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to cut all funding for European Baptists' only international seminary "defies credulity," said Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.

"At a time when Eastern Europe is opening to the gospel," Hewett continued, "why in the world would any thinking Christian choose to shut down a school already equipping European pastors and missionaries? What kind of mission strategy is that?"

In deleting the \$365,000 from the FMB's 1992 budget, trustees cited the hiring of controversial Southern Baptist seminary professor Glenn Hinson, who is teaching one semester at the seminary near Zurich, as an example of the school's liberal bent.

"Since the trustees chose to use our mission dollars to satisfy their strange, personal vendetta against Glenn Hinson, Southern Baptists have no choice but to replace the promised \$365,000 out of our own pockets," Hewett said.

"We'll send every sent of every offering straight from Atlanta to Zurich," Hewett said. "We know now what happens to mission dollars routed through Nashville or Richmond."

Hewett pointed out the missions budget of the Atlanta-based Fellowship already provides some support for the Ruschlikon seminary. The Fellowship also has channeled more than \$850,000 to the FMB this year.

Individuals and churches who don't use the Fellowship's alternate-funding plan should designate part of their Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for the Ruschlikon seminary, Hewett suggested.

"The seminary can't survive without those funds," he added. "Either we vote by our silence to ratify the death penalty imposed by the trustees or we vote with our checkbooks to keep this vital missionary outpost alive and well for the future of Europe."

Another Fellowship leader who said she has seen the value of the Swiss seminary called the FMB decision "short-sighted."

"Several Russian pastors are receiving training at Ruschlikon right now," said Carolyn Cole Bucy of Waco, Texas, who visited Baptist mission sites in the Soviet Union this summer.

"I can't understand why the Foreign Mission Board would vote to quench the new wind of the Spirit blowing through the Soviet Union by shutting down Ruschlikon," said Bucy, a member of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council.

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Don't let Ruschlikon debate
hurt Lottie Moon, Parks says

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Keith Parks says controversy over the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, should not cause Southern Baptists to lose sight of other needs funded through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said if Lottie Moon giving decreases, the FMB will fall short of financing its \$183.7 million worldwide missions program.

Parks' reaction follows a statement from John Hewett, moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, who said Southern Baptists who don't support the Ruschlikon seminary through the Fellowship's alternate-funding plan should designate part of their Lottie Moon Offering for the seminary.

Hewett said the Oct. 9 decision by FMB trustees to cut all FMB funds from the seminary's 1992 operating budget "defies credulity," adding that "Southern Baptists have no choice but to replace the promised \$365,000 out of our own pockets."

The FMB's trustees voted 35-28 to delete the \$365,000 -- which represents 40 percent of the seminary's budget -- even though they promised earlier to continue FMB funding through 1992. They cited the Swiss seminary's decision to allow Southern Baptist seminary professor Glenn Hinson to teach there for one semester as an example of the school's "liberal" bent.

Parks, who opposed the defunding action, said Southern Baptists have the right to give to any cause they wish. But he urged persons who make that decision to do so over and above their Lottie Moon contributions.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, which makes up nearly 46 percent of the FMB's budget, supports some 3,900 missionaries in 121 nations. All of the offering -- this year targeted for \$84 million -- is spent for work overseas.

If Southern Baptists take Hewett's suggestion, however, their designations won't be counted as Lottie Moon gifts.

Foreign Mission Board leaders point out the FMB cannot spend money sent to the Lottie Moon Offering to support causes that are not part of the previously approved FMB budget.

If Southern Baptists designate funds for a particular mission project outside the FMB budget -- such as Ruschlikon -- the board will accept that money as designated gifts for that cause, not as Lottie Moon contributions, board leaders said. Lottie Moon funds designated to causes included in the budget are counted as Lottie Moon gifts.

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Civil rights panel supports
stiffer religious-bias laws

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Alarmed by an escalation in religious discrimination, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has urged President George Bush and Congress to enact tougher laws and bolster educational efforts to curb religious bigotry.

In an Oct. 23 letter to the president and members of Congress on behalf of the commission, panel chairman Arthur Fletcher said "every effort must be made, through laws, education and moral suasion, to protect persons from irrational assaults -- verbal or physical -- based on religion."

The commission letter said government "must protect individuals through the availability of appropriate and proportionate civil and criminal sanctions against offenders."

Two federal laws enacted since 1988 were cited as helpful in combating acts of religious bigotry, but the commission said both needed to be strengthened.

Commissioners described the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990, which requires collection of data on crimes based on religion and other hate-related offenses, as significant but "a limited step for identifying the severity" of hate-crime problems.

According to a 1988 law, the destruction of religious property and the forcible interference with the exercise of religious beliefs are criminal offenses. The law represents a step toward protecting victims of religious bigotry, commissioners said, but the law needs to be broadened because it covers only a narrow group of offenses.

Also essential, the letter states, are educational programs to re-establish "the moral basis for accepting those with whom we differ.... This level is still an untapped area for progress."

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, underscored the threat posed by religious discrimination.

"No assault is more threatening to the freedoms Americans enjoy than physical or verbal attacks on one's religion," he said. "Therefore, government can have no higher priority than to oppose such activity. All of us should aggressively support public awareness, education and action against such dastardly deeds."

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-- By Larry Chesser

House committee approves
bill allowing parochial aid

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- After striking a deal with the White House, a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives has voted 26-12 to approve a bill that would allow private and parochial schools access to federal tax dollars.

The House Committee on Education and Labor completed its work on the Comprehensive Neighborhood Schools Revitalization Act (H.R. 3320) Oct. 17. The bill has not yet been scheduled for consideration by the full House.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time in history that the House of Representatives' Education and Labor Committee has voted in favor of parochial aid," said James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

The bill would provide \$700 million for a range of educational-reform options. Among other provisions, the bill would allow states to spend a portion of this money on so-called "choice" programs that provide federal

vouchers for parents to send their children to public, private and parochial schools.

The bill is an alternative to President George Bush's America 2000 plan that includes more aggressive voucher provisions. The president's plan would allocate funds that could only be used for voucher programs, rather than leaving that option to the states.

"At this juncture in American history," Dunn said, "we cannot turn away from quality public education for every child in favor of a scheme that would divert tax dollars to religious institutions."

During the annual meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee Oct. 8, the agency adopted a position statement deploring any attempts to funnel public funds to parochial education.

"This attempt to do indirectly (through vouchers) what cannot be done directly (by direct grants) is constitutionally suspect, bad public policy and a disingenuous political tactic," the BJC statement says.

The BJC statement notes that the bills leave to the states the decision about their participation in the program, but insists if spending public funds on parochial aid is wrong for the federal government, it is also wrong for the states.

Brent Walker, BJC associate general counsel, said, "Spending tax dollars to fund religious education is wrong. The committee's decision to pass the buck to the states doesn't clear up the problem. Although touted as a compromise, the bill really is no better than the president's proposal."

Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., offered an amendment to the bill that would provide choice programs only for public schools, deleting reference to private and parochial institutions.

His amendment was defeated 23-17 after White House Chief of Staff John Sununu struck a deal with Democratic leadership. Sununu sent a letter to Rep. William Goodling, R-Penn., saying the White House would support the current language of the bill if the voucher provisions were not weakened.

In an attempt to reach a compromise, Jefferson offered a modified amendment that would strike language only referring to private and parochial schools.

Choice will lead to the ruination, not revitalization, of neighborhood schools, and to re-segregation, Jefferson said. "In effect two systems would exist. One for whites. One for non-whites. Separate and unequal. The clock of social progress turned back over 100 years."

Rep. William Ford, D-Mich., chairman of the committee, said he preferred Jefferson's original amendment that would delete all choice options, but voted against the amendment in order to avoid more ambitious choice proposals. Ford quoted from Sununu's letter and said, "A deal's a deal."

A number of Democrats said Jefferson was right but said they could not vote for his amendment because of the political realities they face in getting the bill approved and signed into law.

Walker of the BJC later praised Jefferson's efforts. "We commend Mr. Jefferson, a fellow Baptist, for his fidelity to historic Baptist principles. For a first-term congressman to buck the committee leadership and the administration demonstrates a lot of political courage.

"If this bill becomes law," Walker added, "I hope the states will show similar dedication to principle and courage, and say no to this sleight-of-hand funding scheme."

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--By Pam Parry

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