

Associated Baptist Press

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Texas Baptist budget committee proposes funding cut for SBC

By Bob Allen

DALLAS (ABP) -- A budget committee is proposing that Texas Baptists cut funding of the Southern Baptist Convention by about \$1.4 million next year to bolster church-starting efforts within the state.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas' 15-member Administrative Committee voted Aug. 18 to recommend that the state convention keep a greater share of the money it receives from churches through the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified budget.

The proposal is based on recommendations of a committee established to study ways the state convention and the SBC's Home Mission Board might work together to help Texas Baptists reach a goal of starting 1,400 new churches in Texas over the next five years.

"Texas is a mission field," said Ed Schmeltkopf, associate executive director for the Texas convention and chair of the study committee. He noted that Texas Baptists need to start 300 new churches a year just to keep pace with population growth in the state, which is projected to increase 2 million over the next five years to reach 20 million.

With more than 4,000 churches and 2.5 million members, Texas is the largest of the 36 Baptist state conventions affiliated with the 15 million-member SBC and the largest contributor to the national convention.

Currently, the state convention sends 35.5 cents out of every mission dollar received through the unified budget to the national SBC, with the remainder financing Texas missions. The Administrative Committee's 1996 budget proposal would reduce the SBC's share of the split by 2.5 percent, to 33 percent, raising to 67 percent the portion remaining in Texas.

The 1996 Texas Baptist budget must be approved by both an Executive Board Sept. 12 and at the state convention meeting in November. It anticipates income of \$42,688,625 for Texas causes -- an increase of \$1,688,625 over this year's budget -- and \$21.1 million for worldwide causes in 1996, down from \$22.5 million budgeted this year.

Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board, applauded the Texas convention's desire to start more churches but suggested other states need HMB help more.

The Home Mission Board has identified 20,000 locations nationwide where new churches are needed, Lewis said. With an estimated 183 million non-Christians in America, he said, "this is no time for any individual, church

or convention to reduce home missions support."

Another SBC leader called the Texas plan regrettable, since it would take money away from SBC mission boards. "There are so many critical spiritual needs to be met around the world," said Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, which controls the Cooperative Program. Chapman predicted Southern Baptists "will continue to increase support" of the SBC mission boards.

The \$1.4 million reduction in funds from Texas will affect all SBC agencies, not just the Home Mission Board. The Atlanta-based HMB receives about 20 cents of every Cooperative Program dollar sent to the SBC. But the largest recipient is the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va., which gets about half of each Cooperative Program dollar and which stands to lose about \$700,000 in funds from Texas next year.

To reduce the impact of the cut on the SBC's 4,000 foreign missionaries, the Texas Administrative Committee is recommending that any income over the budget be divided evenly between the Foreign Mission Board and Texas Baptists' church-starting efforts.

While the Home Mission Board numbers its missionary force at 4,913, only 40 are full-time missionaries paid by the board, the study committee reported. More than 1,000 are Mission Service Corps volunteers who provide their own support. The remainder are funded in joint agreements with state conventions, with the Home Mission Board providing an average \$10,692 per missionary, excluding benefits, the committee said.

Texas Baptists have traditionally given more than a fair share to finance home missions, said William Pinson, Texas-Baptist executive director. Each year the state convention sends about \$10 million to the Home Mission Board -- through the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong missions offering -- and gets back about \$1 million to fund missions projects in the state.

Most home missions personnel and projects in Texas are funded jointly, with the state convention providing two-thirds of the monies and the Home Mission Board one third. Those percentages are reversed in other established state conventions like Florida and Oklahoma, Pinson said.

"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," Pinson said.

The study committee said times have changed, however, making it necessary for Texas Baptists to put more emphasis on state missions.

About \$4.5 million a year is needed for start-up and support of new churches, said James Semple, director of the Texas Baptist State Missions Commission. Currently, about \$2.2 million is available through combined totals of the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions, the Cooperative Program, Annie Armstrong Offering funds that filter back into the state from the Home Mission Board and earnings from a \$7.9 million new-church fund established two years ago, Semple said.

The study committee appealed to the Home Mission Board for more funds to help Texas Baptists reach the new-church goal, Schmeltekopf said. Though "gracious and cordial," HMB staff members replied the board could commit only about \$100,000 in new monies, in part because of a recommendation by an SBC restructuring panel encouraging stronger state conventions to assume greater responsibility for missions work within their borders, he added.

The HMB's Lewis said Aug. 21 he couldn't agree to the Texas Baptist request for \$1 million more in HMB funds for Texas -- twice the current level of funding. Instead, he offered to boost Texas funding \$100,000, but "apparently they feel that would not be sufficient," Lewis said.

Church starting efforts in Texas will target the state's 5 million Hispanic residents and the 3.8 million apartment dwellers, many of whom do not belong to a church, Schmeltekopf said.

While Texas Baptists need 3,600 new churches between now and the year 2000, he said, the committee decided to focus on 1,400 as a more realistic goal.

Texas is the second large state convention this summer to consider cutting SBC funding. In June, directors of the Oklahoma Baptist Convention voted to recommend a budget reducing the SBC's share of the Cooperative Program by 2 percent. The change, if approved, will cost the national convention about \$240,000 in 1996.

Last year Texas Baptists also dealt with the Cooperative Program, redefining the traditional understanding of cooperative giving in the state convention. In addition to undesignated funds divided between the state and national conventions, the Texas convention for the first time allowed churches to designate certain non-SBC recipients as part of their "worldwide" gifts to the Cooperative Program.

Among approved recipients is the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate missions agency criticized by SBC leaders but popular with many Texas churches who oppose the conservative faction in charge of the national convention.

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-- Toby Druin and Orville Scott contributed to this story.

Carson-Newman, Samford interested in Carver School

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- At least two Baptist colleges have expressed interest in obtaining the Carver School of Church Social Work from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

A committee of seminary trustees currently is studying the future of the social-work school and is to present a report and recommendations to the full board in October.

The trustee committee was formed last spring after President Albert Mohler fired Diana Garland as Carver School dean. The firing came the same day Garland told a group of social-work students that Mohler's faculty hiring policies were jeopardizing the school's accreditation.

The study committee's recommendation apparently could take one of three directions: to retain the school at Southern in some form, to close the school entirely, or to transfer the school's assets to another institution.

Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., both have expressed interest in obtaining the Carver School, officials confirmed. Other institutions reportedly have been in conversation with the trustee study committee as well.

"We would be interested in entering into conversation and dialogue about the possibility of the Carver School coming to Carson-Newman," said Michael Carter, provost at Carson-Newman.

Carter said he has had some "very preliminary" conversations with seminary officials on the subject but doesn't know what the outcome will be.

"The mission of the Carver School and our mission sound very much alike," Carter explained. "Carson-Newman was started to serve the people of East Tennessee, primarily a low economic region. We have historically done that pretty well since 1851."

Although it doesn't currently offer a degree in social work, Carson-Newman has a "very strong social-ministry program through our campus-ministry program," Carter said. There are "a lot of philosophical components that are very similar" between the Carver School and Carson-Newman, he added.

The college, with about 2,100 students, has a small but growing master's degree program, Carter said. The college currently offers master's degrees in school counseling, education and in teaching English as a second language.

The primary degree currently offered by the Carver School is the master of social work.

Likewise, Samford University sees parallels between its mission and the mission of the Carver School, said Provost William Hull.

This interest in social-work education predates the controversy over the Carver School at Southern Seminary, said Hull, who was provost at Southern during the presidency of Duke McCall. Hull said Samford hopes to expand

its options in social work regardless of what happens with the Carver School.

With about 4,500 students, Samford is one of the largest Baptist universities in the United States. It currently offers graduate degrees in business, science, music, education, nursing and law and offers seminary-level degrees through its Beeson Divinity School.

Hull said he could not elaborate on any current discussions between Samford and Southern Seminary's trustees. "At this time, there are no discussions underway suitable for public dissemination," he said.

"We've been thinking about this long before" the current crisis erupted, he said. "Naturally, the issue of the Carver School has caused us to look at this more closely."

Seminary officials would not discuss the work of the trustee study committee.

"The trustee-appointed committee is receiving a wide variety of information, and they will process it appropriately," said David Dockery, Southern's vice president for academic administration.

Trustee Skip Stam, a North Carolina attorney who heads the special study committee, did not return phone calls.

For now, the Carver School remains open at Southern Seminary but is not accepting new students. The full-time faculty has dropped from six professors to two.

The Carver School's primary accrediting agency, the Council on Social Work Education, will make an on-campus investigation this fall, along with the seminary's two general accrediting agencies, the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The Carver School faces accreditation problems on several fronts, including Garland's controversial firing, potential conflict between the opinions of seminary administrators and the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics, and the low number of full-time faculty members remaining in the school. The Council on Social Work Education requires accredited schools to maintain a minimum of five full-time faculty members.

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New Testament now available in language spoken by Gypsies

PARIS (ABP) -- A new translation of the Bible into the language spoken by the world's 40 million Gypsies was launched at a recent ceremony in Paris.

The first official translation of the Romani-language New Testament was sponsored jointly by Virginia Baptists, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the United Bible Societies.

The new translation paves the way for new ministry opportunities among the Romany people -- also known as Gypsies -- scattered across several continents, said "T" Thomas, a missionary for the Atlanta-based CBF.

The project was initiated more than 10 years ago by Mateo Maximoff, a well-known Gypsy writer. "This is the greatest day of my life," Maximoff said at the dedication ceremony. "I have been praying for years that God would see a way for this translation to be printed and that I could one day hold it in my hands."

The two Baptist groups became involved in the project after learning that the United Bible Societies lacked funds for printing and a means of distributing the scriptures. Virginia Baptists responded with an \$11,500 gift to pay for the first printing. Fellowship missionaries "T" and Kathie Thomas will soon begin distribution of the first 2,400 Bibles.

Gypsies number more than 40 million around the world. While their language has broken down into several dialects, a "core language" of Romani is still spoken and understood by most Romanies.

The first official Bible translation into Romani is "an historic event for us," pastor Robert Demeter said at the Paris ceremony. "The printing of this New Testament will not only create a new interest in God's Word among the Gypsy people, it will also encourage many of them to learn to read."

"T" Thomas said the translation could have other important cultural implications. "Once a language is written down and published, that language becomes recognized and accepted," he said. "For centuries the Gypsy people have been told that they have no country, no culture, no real language. At least a part of that prejudice can now be refuted."

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-- ABP staff

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