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**Tropical Storm Allison damages churches in Houston area**

By Ken Camp

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Deer Park First Baptist Church has been without a pastor for nearly a year, but Tropical Storm Allison revealed that the church has a couple of hundred ministers.

The congregation, in a blue-collar suburb southeast of downtown Houston, was one of several churches sustaining serious damage from the killer storm that dumped up to three feet of rain on the Houston area over five days.

Floodwaters, ranging from five to 19 inches high, covered 40,000 square feet of the floor-space inside Deer Park First Baptist Church. Preliminary estimates put damage at roughly \$1 million, according to Donna Hanson, minister of administration. Unlike many Houston-area residents, the church had flood insurance.

Water damaged the pews and soaked the carpet in the church's sanctuary, buckled linoleum throughout the preschool wing, swamped the choir room and saturated at least 1,000 books in the church's library.

But on Saturday morning, June 9, volunteers started ripping out carpet and disinfecting the walls and floors with bleach. By the end of the 12-hour "work party" involving about 200 volunteers, the sanctuary was rendered fit for Sunday worship.

The marquee in the church's front lawn announced a single worship service at 10:30 a.m. Sunday, noting that no child care would be available. "It was really just a time for sharing and for counting our blessings," Hanson said. "We told about needs that we knew of."

From 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Sunday, another 200 volunteers assembled at the church. But this time, many of them split into small work teams that fanned out in the surrounding neighborhood. "Our people went out in the neighborhoods around here, contacting folks to ask what kind of needs they had," Hanson said.

Church volunteers helped their neighbors rip wet carpet and padding from flooded homes, drape rugs and blankets over chain link fences, and drag hopelessly spongy couches and recliners to the curbside with the garbage. Others prepared hot meals and delivered them to families.

At least 40 member families at Deer Park First Baptist Church sustained damage to their homes. Church members opened their homes to displaced families, including some of their flooded neighbors with whom they had only passing acquaintance before the storm.

As many members returned to their jobs on Monday, the volunteer effort at the church continued each evening. Those who were able to be at the church during regular office hours joined the ministers of administration, children, youth and music in cleaning.

Russell Talbert, preschool division director at Deer Park First Baptist Church, continued working at the church on June 12, cleaning anything that could be disinfected and discarding items that could not be reclaimed.

Talbert shook his head as he looked at the saturated carpet in one preschool room that had been glued to the floor so well that volunteers were unable to rip it out. Four days after floodwaters had filled the room, it smelled like a wet dog in a water heater closet.

His wife, minister to children Sandra Talbert, spent days sorting trash from treasures in the preschool wing. As she discarded outdated materials, she smiled and pointed out that the flood provided an occasion for a long-overdue spring housecleaning.

"I'm just so thankful for all the resources that we've had through the years," she said. "We're blessed."

On the north side of Houston, not far from Intercontinental Airport, members of Memorial Baptist Church also rallied to work on their storm-damaged church.

Up to six inches of floodwater filled an unoccupied staff house owned by the church. About one inch of water covered the floors of the church's family life center and preschool building.

The church had just remodeled its preschool area about six months ago, according to church administrator Charlotte Ogden. "But we're just so thankful the water didn't go into the worship center," she added.

At least 35 member families at Memorial Baptist Church sustained property damage in varying degrees, Ogden noted. One member had four feet of water in his house, and another family lost two cars in the flood.

The church opened the doors of its damaged facility to residents of a nearby apartment complex on Friday night, June 8. About 150 displaced people stayed overnight at the church, where members of Memorial Baptist cooked meals for them from their well-stocked benevolence pantry.

On the northwest side of Houston, Baptist Temple also sustained significant damage to its facility, particularly in its basement-level kitchen, Sunday school rooms and fellowship hall.

"We were pretty much knocked out of business on Sunday," Pastor Paul Kenley said. "But we did have a small worship service for those who didn't get the word and showed up."

By Tuesday, June 12, Kenley had learned of at least a dozen member families at Baptist Temple who had some damage to their homes, and he expected to discover others in the days to come.

Four days after the flood, a huge shop fan roared in one corner of the church basement while smaller box fans whirred at various spots throughout the church's lower level in an effort to dry and air out the facility. The sharp, pungent smell of bleach and disinfectant could not mask the musty odor.

"It kind of makes you wonder why people who live among the swamps ever built basements," Kenley mused.

## **Texas Baptists provide relief after Tropical Storm Allison**

By Ken Camp

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Texas Baptist Men provided disaster relief in the wake of Tropical Storm Allison, cooking meals for Houston-area residents and for some hospital patients and staff at the city's massive Texas Medical Center.

The killer storm dumped up to three feet of rain on parts of the region over five days. Allison created floods that claimed at least 21 lives, swamped 20,000 homes and caused an estimated \$1 billion in property damage.

Trained volunteers set up the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Mobile Unit, an 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig specially equipped with a self-sustained field kitchen, in a parking lot behind the Edwin Hornberger Building at the Texas Medical Center.

South Texas volunteers manned a small Texas Baptist Disaster Relief regional unit, joining Dallas-area workers who staffed the large mobile unit and its field kitchen at the Medical Center.

Working in 90-degree heat and sweltering humidity, Texas Baptist Disaster Relief workers prepared 7,000 meals from that location June 11 and 16,500 the next day. Gary Smith of Midway Road Baptist Church in Dallas, on-site coordinator for the disaster relief mobile unit, expected the number of meals to continue to rise for several days.

As the temperature also continued to rise, some men tied bandannas around their foreheads beneath their familiar yellow disaster relief caps, trying to keep the sweat out of their eyes. Perspiration soaked their blue uniform shirts.

The Texas Baptist Men provided meals for some patients and virtually all of the staff at Methodist Hospital and St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital.

They also cooked meals for the staff at Memorial Hermann Hospital -- which suspended operations and evacuated patients on June 10 -- as well as for the security officers and administration at the Texas Medical Center and the Harris County Medical Examiner's Office.

The Medical Center -- a gigantic complex southwest of downtown Houston -- was in one of the worst-hit areas of the city. Four days after the heaviest rains ended, city workers continued operating sump pumps at an intersection a couple of blocks east of the mobile field kitchen. They pumped water from beneath an underpass in an effort to reclaim a submerged car.

Mike Brittain of Morton Baptist Church in Diana directed the East Texas Regional Unit, which was located at First Baptist Church in Humble. Longview-area volunteers cooked 1,800 meals June 12 that Red Cross workers in emergency response vehicles delivered to shelters and neighborhoods throughout northeast Houston. Brittain said the crew was preparing for 4,000 meals on June 13.

Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and Jim Furgerson, executive director-treasurer of the Texas Baptist Men missions organization, toured the flood-damaged area on June 13.

Throughout the next few weeks, the BGCT will implement its long-range response to needs in the area, including assistance to families, facilities consultations for damaged churches, and other services. Texas Baptist Men will mobilize teams for clean-up and reconstruction, as needed.

## Gay activists arrested after protest, accuse Baptists of 'spiritual violence'

By David Winfrey

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) -- Thirty-four demonstrators protesting the Southern Baptist Convention's position on homosexuality were arrested June 13 outside the Superdome where the SBC annual meeting was being held.

This was the second consecutive year the group Soulforce has demonstrated at the annual meeting and staged civil disobedience resulting in arrests.

Last year's demonstration coincided with the adoption of a revised "Baptist Faith and Message" that states homosexual behavior is sinful.

This year, protesters claimed Southern Baptists' attitudes about homosexuality result in spiritual and physical persecution of homosexuals.

"We're here to say the violence must end," said Mel White, a spokesman for the group, which included some former Southern Baptists.

White, a former ghostwriter for such evangelical leaders as Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell before White acknowledged his own homosexuality, accused Southern Baptists of isolating themselves from the world they purport to serve. "The Southern Baptist Convention is the only denomination who has no one studying the issue."

More than 100 protesters staged a New Orleans-style jazz funeral parade in front of the Superdome coinciding with the noon recess from the SBC meeting.

A casket held the photos, names and stories of homosexuals whom White said had faced persecution because of Southern Baptists' stated and implied attitudes of condemnation. Some had left or felt run out of their congregations, he said, while others went so far as to attempt suicide.

Protester Jerry Greeley, a former staff member at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, said he left that congregation because he felt its leaders didn't support his attempt to provide a ministry to homosexuals. "It was my experience that the staff was not sympathetic."

White said Soulforce sought to meet with SBC president James Merritt but received no response. Merritt said during an unrelated press conference that he responded to their letters but added, "I did not see any good that could come out of meeting with Soulforce." Merritt said he perceived the invitation to be an "ultimatum," and "I don't respond to ultimatums."

White said the group at least wanted an SBC leader to come to the protest and join the group in condemning violence against homosexuals.

At his press conference the day before the protest, Merritt said Southern Baptists hold no malice toward homosexuals when they "call sin what the Bible calls sin."

"I can say as the president of this convention that we abhor any physical violence against anyone regardless of his or her race, nationality, political philosophy, religion or sexual preference," he told reporters. "It's our desire, as it is the God we worship, that 'all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.'"

In their march to the Superdome, Soulforce demonstrators marched past picketers aligned with the primitive Baptist pastor Fred Phelps of Topeka, Kan., who claim Southern Baptists are too accepting of homosexuality. The handful of picketers carried signs with slogans such as "God hates fags."

Phelps, whose church is not aligned with the SBC, has cited the actions of individual churches to claim Southern Baptists support homosexuality.

Soulforce leaders said at the end of their press conference that because no SBC leader would come out to hear their concerns they would attempt to take the casket full of stories inside to the SBC messengers, an action coordinated with police.

A police officer outside the Superdome's main entryway told the group their attempt to enter the building was in violation of a city code and asked the protesters to leave.

After a final warning by the police, officers handcuffed 34 demonstrators who refused to leave. The others retreated to the public area where they were allowed to continue their protest. As the 34 were placed in a van to go to jail, their fellow demonstrators cheered and the funeral band played upbeat jazz music.

A Soulforce media coordinator said New Orleans city attorney refused to charge those who were arrested and released them later that afternoon.

Protester co-leader Karen Weldin, a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and a lesbian, said the group had been successful in its goal of starting a dialogue with individual Southern Baptists attending the annual meeting. "We've spent the last two days with people willing to listen to our stories."

White said he didn't enjoy protesting outside the Southern Baptist Convention -- "We're tired of going to jail. It's too costly." -- but he considers it a necessary duty.

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## **Conservatives miffed Ed McAteer passed over for Israeli ambassador**

By Mark Wingfield

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- A campaign to get a conservative Christian activist appointed as U.S. ambassador to Israel appears to have been ignored by the Bush administration, prompting complaints that yet another Republican president has used the Christian vote to get elected and then failed to produce results.

A wide array of conservative Christians and Jews has been lobbying the White House to get Ed McAteer, a longtime supporter of Israel and founder of the Religious Roundtable, nominated to be ambassador to Israel.

But the White House announced May 25 that Bush will nominate Daniel Kurtzer, former U.S. ambassador to Egypt, as ambassador to Israel.

"We were dropped like a hot potato once they got out of these Christians what they wanted," said McAteer, 74.

"It's a pattern with the Republican Party," agreed unsuccessful presidential candidate Howard Phillips, a former official in the Nixon administration who now heads the Conservative Caucus in suburban Washington. "The Republican Party relies on one group of people to get into office, then another group of people to govern. ... This is a pattern throughout."

Letters supporting McAteer were sent to Washington by Don Sundquist, governor of Tennessee; Fred Thompson, Republican U.S. senator from Tennessee; Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis and three-time president of the Southern Baptist Convention; James Merritt, SBC president and pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga.; evangelist James Robison; Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a former Baptist pastor; Judge Roy Moore, of Ten Commandments fame in Alabama; Rafael Grossman, rabbi at Baron Hirsch Congregation in Memphis, the largest Orthodox Jewish congregation in the United States; Herbert Zweibon, chairman of Americans for a Safe Israel; Republican Rep. Ernest Istook of Oklahoma; and Phyllis Schlafly, president of the Eagle Forum. McAteer said as of June 12, he has not received so much as a postcard from the Bush White House, much less any request for a formal interview.

A White House spokeswoman defended Kurtzer's nomination, while not specifically acknowledging

the campaign to get McAteer nominated. "The White House carefully reviewed a number of highly qualified candidates. The president nominated Daniel Kurtzer based on his many years of foreign affairs experience as a career minister in the senior foreign service and former ambassador to Egypt," said Mercy Viana.

News of Kurtzer's nomination has upset ultra-conservative Christians, because they believe he is the virtual embodiment of what they perceive to be a failed Middle East policy of the Clinton administration.

They consider Kurtzer one of the primary authors of the Oslo peace process, which promoted the idea of Israel swapping land to the Palestinians in exchange for peace.

Many Orthodox Jews and Christians vehemently oppose any ceding of land from Israel because they believe all the land Israel now occupies was given to the Jewish people by divine mandate.

Kurtzer is himself an Orthodox Jew and a well-traveled veteran in the Middle Eastern diplomatic community. His potential nomination has been supported by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Rabbinical Assembly.

However, Kurtzer's nomination has been opposed by the Zionist Organization of America, the National Unity Coalition for Israel and other ultra-conservative Jewish leadership.

"We feel strongly that Daniel Kurtzer does not represent the thinking of the American people who have supported President Bush and hope for a fresh approach," wrote Esther Levens, president of the National Unity Coalition for Israel in a letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell.

On the other hand, McAteer is hailed by the most politically conservative wing of American Jews and Christians as a genuine supporter of Israel and a knowledgeable link between U.S. Christians and Jews worldwide.

A former sales executive with Colgate-Palmolive, McAteer is a longtime member of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis. His Religious Roundtable was a sort of predecessor to the Moral Majority. He has organized National Affairs Briefings during major presidential election years -- most notably a gathering in Dallas in 1980 where then-presidential candidate Ronald Reagan quipped, "I know you can't endorse me, but I endorse you."

For more than two decades, McAteer has organized an annual prayer breakfast for Israel, billed as a gathering to follow the biblical admonition to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." Hundreds of Jewish and Christian leaders have attended the events.

"His love for the nation Israel is legendary," Adrian Rogers said of McAteer in his letter to the Bush White House. "He has more genuine Jewish friends than any evangelical Christian I know."

Rabbi Grossman called McAteer "a genuinely devoted friend to Israel." Phyllis Schlafly added, "I really can't think of anyone in America who is a better friend of both the Israeli and the Christian communities."

Those advocating McAteer's nomination as ambassador to Israel have been hopeful the Bush administration would take a firmer pro-Israel stance in the Middle East than the Clinton administration. In their view, unquestioning support for the state of Israel is a theological and historical necessity.

For the Jews among this group, the issue dates back to the covenant between God and Abraham recorded in the Book of Genesis. For the conservative Christians, it also relates to a certain end-times theology.

"When the League of Nations, with strong American support, endorsed the concept of a Jewish homeland in Palestine in 1922, it did so on the basis of the biblical connection between the Jews and the land of Israel," Jewish leader Herbert Zweibon told the Bush White House. "You need an ambassador who understands that connection."

"Appointing Ed McAteer our ambassador to Israel will send a badly needed message that those who appreciate religious values have a place in your administration," he added.

The silence out of Washington on what religious conservatives consider a wonderful idea has left some of them perplexed and worried.

Chief among the perturbed is McAteer, who served as national director of the Christians and Jews for Bush campaign in 1984, when George W. Bush's father was running for the presidency.

The younger Bush's White House, McAteer believes, is demonstrating arrogance and ingratitude toward a major part of its electoral constituency.

It was McAteer, after all, who introduced many of the major players of the Religious Right to each other and helped mobilize them for political action. And now the movement he spawned, although it has become a powerhouse in electing Republican candidates to office, has been unable to get McAteer himself appointed to the one position he most desires.

McAteer recalled a conversation he had several years ago with Ehud Olmert, now mayor of Jerusalem, in which Olmert first suggested McAteer would be a desirable ambassador to Israel. McAteer's response at the time: "I would rather be the ambassador to Israel than the president of the United States."

The reason, he said, is because of his theology. "The rewards would be greater because of eternity."

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## **Charitable-choice backers show readiness to make concessions**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Lawmakers continue to discuss President George W. Bush's controversial proposal to fund religious social service ministries with tax dollars, even as some prominent "charitable-choice" backers are showing a willingness to concede one of the major provisions in the initiative.

The first hearing in the Senate came on the same day Democrats gained control in the chamber, a power switch that may lead to further roadblocks for Bush's faith-based initiative, according to church-state observers. Members of the House Ways and Means Committee held further hearings June 14 and hope to "mark up" the bill and move it through the committee process in the next few weeks.

A spokeswoman for Rep. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., said supporters hope to have the faith-based initiative up for a vote before the July 4 congressional recess, but she added that the fall might be more realistic.

Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism told Associated Baptist Press that the Senate shift spurred by the party change of Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., would help the cause of supporters of a strong degree of separation between church and state. He predicted that charitable-choice opponents would be in position to secure a better compromise on the legislation because of the power shift.

At a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing June 6, Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., said he would now be open to requiring religious groups that wish to be eligible for tax dollars to incorporate a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit group to do so. Under existing law, houses of worship may already take this approach and apply for government funding for non-religious purposes. The concession on the part of some charitable-choice backers is considered an important step in addressing the problems critics have with the proposal.

At a House hearing the following day, however, constitutional law expert Douglas Laycock disputed the claim that creating a separate corporation to receive government funds is sufficient to protect religious liberty.

Laycock, associate dean for research at the University of Texas Law School in Austin, Texas, said in prepared testimony, "Corporate affiliates exist in filing cabinets and the minds of lawyers; they may be wholly

intertwined operationally.” He added, “Either the church or its affiliate may respect or abuse the religious liberty of the clients it serves under the government-funded program.”

During the House hearing, Saperstein addressed the issue of discrimination against religious institutions present under the current charitable-choice policy. Saperstein noted that “it is not the opponents of charitable choice who concocted the idea of treating religion differently; it was the framers of the Constitution.”

Saperstein said, “Only religion has an establishment clause with all of the attendant protections and limitations that imposes. To abandon this idea in pursuit of a ‘level playing field’ is a political time bomb for religion in America.”

While commending President Bush on portions of his faith-based initiative, Saperstein voiced arguments frequently expressed against charitable choice. He said the government money would induce government interference, force a compromise in the religious missions of houses of worship and bring about social divisiveness.

And lawmakers continued to battle over allowing churches receiving funds under charitable choice to maintain an exemption from compliance with civil-rights laws in employment decisions.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., pointed to the lawsuit against the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children for firing a female employee because she is a lesbian. “Is this discrimination on the basis of religion, or is religion being used as a pretext to discriminate against homosexuals?” Leahy asked. “By allowing discrimination on the basis of religion, we may open the door to other forms of discrimination, including race,” he added.

But Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, backed charitable choice, saying, “Allowing faith-based providers the opportunity to reach more of these children will result in less children falling prey to drugs and more children succeeding in life.”

A chorus of religious and civil-rights leaders, as well as government officials, testified on both sides of the issue at the Senate hearing.

One witness at the Senate hearing was Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, Mich., and former president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Adams spoke on behalf of the Baptist Joint Committee, which he serves as a board member, arguing that the separation of church and state and its prohibition on government funding of religious organizations should remain unchanged.

Adams said Bush’s charitable-choice proposal is “wrong-headed” and “unconstitutional,” adding that it would promote “religion as a healing therapy in ways that breach the wall of separation between church and state.”

He also said tax dollars could “dampen religion’s prophetic voice,” and he quoted civil-rights martyr Martin Luther King Jr., who preached that the church “is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state.” Adams added, “If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral authority.”

In written testimony to Congress, Carl Esbeck, senior counsel to the U.S. Deputy Attorney General, said the object of charitable choice “is not to support or sponsor religion or the participating religious providers. Rather, the goal is secular, namely, to secure assistance for the poor and individuals with needs, and to do so by leveling the playing field for providers of these services who are faith-based.”

Esbeck said the government will no longer probe into whether a service provider is “too religious.” He said, “The relevant question is no longer ‘Who are you?’ but ‘What can you do?’”

## Bush, Gephardt blocking work of religious freedom commission

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- With only four of the nine voting members now appointed to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the panel is unable to do its work because President George W. Bush and House Democratic Leader Dick Gephardt, D-Mo., have yet to make their appointments.

The commission must have at least six members to carry on its work and make policy recommendations and issue reports on religious freedom. Bush has failed to make his three appointments and Gephardt has two. The terms of the previous commission expired May 14. Since then the few members on the commission and its staff have had their hands tied.

On June 11, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle made his two appointments. Firuz Kazemzadeh of Alta Loma, Calif., and Charles Stith of Boston, Mass., were appointed.

Kazemzadeh was a former member of the commission, appointed in 1999 by President Bill Clinton. He is a senior advisor for the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.

Stith served as United States ambassador to Tanzania from 1998 to 2001. He is the founder of the Organization for a New Equality, a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding economic opportunity for people historically excluded from the economic mainstream. He served as senior minister of the Union United Methodist Church in Boston and was a member of the president's special delegation to monitor South Africa's first multiracial elections.

Other appointed commission members are Dean Michael Young, who was appointed by Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., and Nina Shea, who was appointed by Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, R-Ill.

Associated Baptist Press reported that Bush is considering naming Southern Baptist official Richard Land, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, to the panel. But Bush has yet to make his final decisions.

Meanwhile, members of the panel whose terms expired in May said the delay in appointments is "deeply frustrating" and is "driving their work to a halt."

They have also voiced concern that Bush has yet to name the ambassador-at-large who will head the religious freedom office at the State Department. Robert Seiple was appointed by Clinton to the post but left last year to start a think tank on conflict resolution.

The birth of the commission came at the passage of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. The panel issues annual reports on religious freedom abuses abroad and makes policy recommendations to the administration and Congress about possible sanctions that could make a difference.

At a recent Senate committee hearing, Young, dean of the George Washington University Law School, told lawmakers that the panel "is unable to make any policy recommendations."

Former commissioner Rabbi David Saperstein of the Religious Action Center for the Reform Jewish movement, agreed and also asked lawmakers to fund the commission's annual budget request of \$3 million. Saperstein said the commission would back a changing of the law to appoint new commission members to staggered terms so the panel's work can go forward despite some of the terms expiring.

## SBC gets final report on Bold Mission Thrust

By Mark Wingfield

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) -- "Whatever happened to Bold Mission Thrust?" longtime Baptists were heard to ask during more than 20 years of denominational fighting among Southern Baptists.

The 25-year plan to take the gospel to every person on earth by the turn of the century sometimes appeared to take a back seat to politics in the years after its launch in 1976. But despite those appearances, denominational officials -- both old guard and new guard -- continued to keep track of the goals and measure successes and failures.

Finding an answer to whether Bold Mission Thrust was a success or a failure, a ministry motivator or a forgotten relic, isn't so easy, though. That's due in part to a labyrinth of goals set over the 25-year period and difficulty in tracking numbers related to some of those goals.

The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee filed its final annual report on Bold Mission Thrust June 12 during the SBC annual meeting in New Orleans. Such reports have been given annually since 1976, when convention messengers set a goal "that every person in the world shall have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ in the next 25 years ... and can understand the claim Jesus Christ has on their lives."

Although it wasn't called Bold Mission Thrust until 1979, this convention-adopted mandate to unite all SBC agencies in a massive effort of "bold mission" set the agenda for SBC missions work for years to come.

Contrary to popular perception, Bold Mission Thrust was not constructed as a single set of goals for the 25-year period. Instead, it developed in stages, with each new set of goals more detailed than the previous set.

The first basic goals were set for the period 1977-1979. They encouraged inter-agency cooperation, increased Bible teaching, more witnessing and emphasis on mission action.

The next set of goals, for 1979-1982, focused on "the church growing," "the church going" and "the church giving." Sub-categories called for a 12 percent gain in Sunday school enrollment, a 10 percent increase per year in baptisms, 5,800 new churches, a net gain of 1,000 career missionaries and doubling Cooperative Program giving.

This mechanism continued to evolve, until the goals for the final period, 1995-2000, fell into 13 specific categories, calling for 2.5 million baptisms over the five-year period, a total of 50,000 congregations, Sunday School enrollment of 13 million, a total of 5,000 home missionaries and 5,600 foreign missionaries, 400,000 missions volunteers and \$2.5 billion given to the Cooperative Program over the five years.

So were all the goals met?

Answers fall into three categories: Yes, no and only God knows. Some goals clearly were exceeded. Other goals are difficult to track. Some of the goals not met were, in hindsight, unrealistic. For example, the goal of increasing giving 10 percent per year was dreamed up in a time of economic inflation that didn't last.

One of the clearest summary reports on Bold Mission Thrust was given to International Mission Board trustees in March by Avery Willis, IMB senior vice president. Willis reported on several of the SBC's overseas goals related to Bold Mission Thrust:

-- **International missionaries.** In 1975, the SBC had 2,667 foreign missionaries, mainly long-term career missionaries. One Bold Mission Thrust goal called for increasing foreign missionaries to 5,000, while another called for increasing to 5,600. The actual total at the end of 2000 was 4,946, an increase of 85.5 percent but slightly short of the goal. That number includes Journeyman and International Service Corps missionaries serving two years or longer but does not include volunteers serving less than two years.

-- **Countries served.** In 1975, the SBC had missionaries in 82 nations. The Bold Mission Thrust goal

was to reach 125. By the end of last year, the actual number of countries served by the IMB was 153, surpassing the goal.

-- **Volunteers.** Regardless of what goals were set, the phenomenal increase in Southern Baptist missions volunteers both at home and abroad is by all accounts one of the greatest successes of the Bold Mission Thrust era. Mission Service Corps, a primary category of volunteer missionary service, was birthed at the same time as Bold Mission Thrust. In 1975, the IMB reported only 1,200 missions volunteers. By the end of 2000, that number had soared to 30,362. The SBC's North American Mission Board reported 250,000 volunteers serving during the five-year period from 1995-2000.

-- **Overseas churches.** In 1975, the SBC related to 7,584 overseas churches. By the end of 2000, the number had grown to 60,988, an increase of 704 percent but short of the goal of 75,840.

-- **Overseas church membership.** In 1975, overseas churches related to the IMB's work recorded 896,063 members. Bold Mission Thrust set a goal of increasing that to 8,960,630. The final total was 5,624,018, an increase of 528 percent but short of the goal.

-- **Overseas baptisms.** In 1975, IMB missionaries and the overseas churches they related to baptized 80,747 new believers. The goal was to increase baptisms to 807,470 annually. Although the 2000 total of 451,301 was a gain of 459 percent, it fell short of the goal.

A spokesman for NAMB said the SBC's domestic missions agency does not produce an annual Bold Mission Thrust report. Therefore, comparable numbers to those given in the IMB report were not available.

However, the final report filed by the SBC Executive Committee sheds some light on these goals and other local church-related goals:

-- **Baptisms.** Various goals were set for increasing baptisms among SBC churches in the United States. One goal called for a 10 percent gain each year. Another goal called for a total of 2.5 million baptisms in the final five years of Bold Mission Thrust. In reality, SBC baptisms in 1975 totaled 421,809. By 2000, the total was 414,657, a 1.7 percent decrease. The five-year total of 2,032,634 fell short of the 2.5 million goal for 1995-2000.

-- **New congregations.** A clear goal of Bold Mission Thrust throughout the years was to reach the 50,000 mark in number of churches and missions. The actual total at the end of 2000 was 46,831, a gain of 34 percent over the 34,902 churches and missions reported in 1975.

-- **Bible study enrollment.** Despite several years of significant growth, total Bible study enrollment in SBC churches grew only from 7,281,532 to 8,186,415. That's a gain of 12.4 percent but far short of the Bold Mission Thrust goal of 13 million.

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