

Money woes putting pinch on state convention budgets
By Mark Wingfield
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(ABP) – Times are tough all over for state Baptist conventions seeking to fund their ministries.

A mid-year survey of the largest state conventions found none meeting their Cooperative Program budgets.

Editors of state Baptist papers in Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Georgia provided giving data for the period from January through June 2003. Data was not available from editors in Alabama, Virginia, Florida, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Arkansas.

In every state for which data was available, Cooperative Program giving not only is lagging behind budget but also behind last year's giving.

Texas and Missouri, two states that have experienced convention splits in recent years, both are running more than 10 percent behind budget. But even some less-politicized states, like Tennessee for example, are running nearly 10 percent behind budget.

Cooperative Program budget deficits at mid-year range from 3.73 percent in South Carolina to 18.55 percent in Georgia. Convention officials in Georgia acknowledge they set a highly ambitious budget goal for the year.

For some state conventions, the picture is even more challenging regarding funds available for use in state-run ministries. In North Carolina, for example, total Cooperative Program receipts are running 8.44 percent behind budget, but undesignated funds available to use in state ministries are running 16.87 percent behind budget.

That distinction is possible in states like North Carolina, Virginia and Texas that allow churches more freedom to customize the distribution of Cooperative Program gifts. In Texas, the amount of money available for state use is running 14.03 percent behind budget, a slightly greater deficit than the 11.65 lag in total Cooperative Program giving.

June turned out to be a dismal month in giving across the board, editors reported. For example, William Perkins, editor of the Mississippi Baptist Record, wrote that Cooperative Program giving there dropped below the \$2 million mark in June for the first time in 34 months.

Although Mississippi started off the year with record giving, that pattern did not hold, he said. "Only April and July have surpassed monthly needs."

Similar accounts are given for other state conventions. However, most noted an upturn in giving in July and hopeful prospects for August.

Clear reasons for the across-the-board slump in giving are hard to come by as well, although the downturn in the national economy often gets cited as a factor.

Staff members at the Baptist General Convention of Texas are holding expenses to 85 percent of budget. Twenty staff positions were eliminated this month.

Designated giving, which includes special missions offerings and donor-directed gifts, also has declined this year in most state conventions. Of those reporting data in this category, only Kentucky showed a slight increase, of one tenth of 1 percent.

The impact of this year's lower giving through state Baptist conventions is masked in some cases by the fact

that budgets for 2003 were set with little or no growth. That decision was made in many state conventions because of slower budget growth last year.

That means, for example, that in some cases the 2003 budget is 5 percent to 15 percent less than last year's budget. When gifts fall below the new budget line, that doubles the impact of the loss over previous years.



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North Carolina Baptists cut 24 staff positions
By Tony Cartledge
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CARY, N.C. (ABP) – The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina cut 24 staff positions Aug. 26 in the wake of shrinking contributions from churches.

Nine of the 24 positions were vacant, but 15 employees lost their jobs. The cuts represent 20 percent of all budgeted positions and 12.5 percent of actual employees, according to Ed Wiggs, the convention's business services director.

Through Aug. 22, convention income was \$1.65 million – or more than 7 percent – below budget expectations and about 2.6 percent below last year's income. Income to the North Carolina Missions Offering, which funds the state's Baptist Men and WMU programs, is down 16 percent from last year.

The convention's executive committee first met Aug. 12 to consider reductions and returned Aug. 26 to consider deeper cuts. Jim Royston, the convention's executive director-treasurer, notified employees by e-mail Aug. 27 that the executive committee had ordered an immediate downsizing. He and other officials then notified the affected persons that their positions would be eliminated Aug. 31. Released employees will receive severance packages based on length of tenure, and all who qualify for retirement will receive full retirement benefits.

Through the staff reductions, convention officials hope to save about \$250,000 in the remainder of 2003, and \$700,000 in 2004.

The cuts were made in a manner that preserves positions that most directly serve churches, Royston said. Terminated were nine program staffers, including an executive team leader, and six support staffers. Royston expressed regret the cuts were necessary and emphasized that reductions were based on positions, not persons or performance.

Nine of the 15 qualified for retirement benefits, and four of them chose to announce their retirements. They are Doug Cole, executive director of the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs; Bill Boatwright, communications director; Becky Stewart, secretary to the executive director-treasurer; and Ted Purcell, a long-time campus minister who was currently serving part time at Duke University.

The strategic initiatives and planning team was dismantled, eliminating the positions held by executive team leader Tom Jenkins and secretary Cynthia Howell. Remaining staffers in the group will transfer to other teams.

Two other staffers with lengthy tenures saw their positions eliminated. Velma Ferrell, who worked with international student ministries, and Carolyn Hopkins, in WMU, had both served the convention for 26 years. Positions working in support of the Council on Christian Higher Education were eliminated, affecting executive director Wayne Wike and secretary Cheryl Cruickshank. The council will continue to function and receive program funds, Royston said, with day-to-day responsibilities shifted to other convention personnel.

Two positions in Baptist Men and one in partnership missions were eliminated. These include youth and student missions consultant John McGinnis, receptionist/secretary Carla Foster, and partnership missions project coordinator Dan Bivins.

Positions held by benefits coordinator Donna Thompson and international student ministry secretary Alice Johnson were also eliminated.

Nine budgeted positions not currently filled will be removed from the budget. These include four program staff and five support staff. In all, the cutbacks affected 13 program positions and 11 support positions.

Royston cited current economic conditions that have adversely affected many industries and individuals in the state. He said the convention had avoided layoffs till now by not filling vacant positions. "Unfortunately, the Baptist State Convention is no longer in a position to take this approach," he said.

Although declining income had already led to a series of cost-cutting moves, the reductions were not enough, he said. "For most of this calendar year we have been in a position of expenses exceeding income. This is a dangerous place for any organization to find itself. This unfortunate reduction of personnel will bring our expense to income ratio back in line."



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Moore's monument removed in Alabama; case closed without federal intervention

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – Despite promises of civil disobedience from hundreds of protesters, authorities removed a stone Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of an Alabama courthouse Aug. 27 without incident.

At the beginning of the business day, with the crowds that have been gathering to protest outside the building relatively light, workers moved the 5,280-lb. granite monument to a non-public part of the state judicial headquarters building.

The action brings to an end a dramatic two-week standoff with Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore. On Aug. 14, he announced he would not comply with a federal judge's order to remove the 5,280-lb. granite depiction of the Protestant King James translation of the commandments from the public areas of the building by midnight on Aug. 20. But Moore's colleagues on the Alabama Supreme Court unanimously overruled him Aug. 21, saying they were duty-bound to comply with federal court orders.

Moore, a Southern Baptist layman, placed the monument in the center of the building's rotunda during the summer of 2001 – without the associate justices' consent or knowledge. He then was sued by a coalition of civil-rights groups, acting on behalf of three Montgomery attorneys.

In November, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson declared the display a violation of the Constitution's ban on government endorsement of religion. After being upheld unanimously by a panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, Thompson ordered the monument removed by Aug. 20, threatening to levy stiff fines against the state if Moore did not comply with his injunction.

Moore said he would refuse because complying with the order would violate the state constitution, which he claims requires the state to "acknowledge God" as the source of law.

But the eight associate justices – seven of them, like Moore, Republicans – invoked a little-used Alabama law that allows them to overrule an administrative decision of the chief justice. The building manager placed partitions to block the monument from public view on Aug. 21.

As a result of his actions Moore was suspended, with pay, from his duties as head of the Alabama Supreme Court on Aug. 22. The state's Judicial Inquiry Commission filed a six-count charge against him for violating judicial ethics. The suspension will last at least 10 days. Moore will be prosecuted in the Alabama Court of the Judiciary – a group convened for the purpose of adjudicating cases against judges.

That court may decide to relieve Moore of his duties permanently.

Attorneys for the groups that filed the original lawsuit to have the monument removed reacted cheerfully to the news of its removal. "This controversy has never been about the Ten Commandments," said Ayesha Khan, legal director for the Washington-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "It's about maintaining a court system that treats all Americans fairly, regardless of their religious beliefs. Judges have no right to impose their personal religious beliefs on others through official action."

But Moore lamented the development. "It is a sad day in our country when the moral foundation of our laws and the acknowledgment of God has to be hidden from public view to appease a federal judge," he said, according to the Associated Press.

In their order overruling Moore, his peers issued the chief justice a stern rebuke. "The justices of this court are bound by solemn oath to follow the law, whether they agree or disagree with it," they said. Moore's continued failure to comply with a higher court's order "would impair the authority and ability of all the courts of this state

to enforce their judgments," they added.

Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor, himself a Republican, a Catholic and a previous defender of Moore's action, endorsed the associate justices' decision after it was announced. "The taxpayers of this state should not be punished for the refusal of the chief justice to follow a federal court order," he said.

Pryor's office will prosecute Moore in the Court of the Judiciary.

Moore ran out of legal options for keeping the monument in place for the immediate future late on the afternoon of Aug. 20 when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to delay implementation of Thompson's order to remove the monument.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled directly on a case about the display of the Ten Commandments in a public building. But lower federal courts have ruled consistently that such displays are permissible as long as they would not, to a reasonable viewer, convey an endorsement of Christianity over other religions and as long as they appear as part of a larger display with other historic legal documents. Such a display appears at the U.S. Supreme Court building itself.

– Photos available from Associated Baptist Press.

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As Congress returns to work, church-state issues on agenda

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) – When Congress returns to session next week from its month-long summer recess, a host of church-state issues will be on the agenda – from gay marriage to school vouchers.

The most visible debate may be over gay marriage. A proposed constitutional amendment that would limit marriage and marriage-like benefits to opposite-sex couples – in some cases overturning state and local laws – appears to be picking up momentum in Congress. The Federal Marriage Amendment, sponsored by Rep. Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo.), will likely receive committee hearings in the early fall.

But other church-state issues are further along in the legislative process and may get action earlier this fall. Among them:

– Religious discrimination in hiring. The issue of religious discrimination in federal programs likely will resurface in Head Start legislation. When the House passed a bill July 24 that reauthorizes funding for the Head Start early-childhood-education program, it included a provision explicitly allowing religious organizations receiving Head Start funds to discriminate in their hiring practices on the basis of religious ideology. This would repeal anti-discrimination provisions under which Head Start has operated for years.

In May, the House added similar provisions to the Workforce Reinvestment and Adult Education Act of 2003. Critics of government funding for social-service programs at churches and other religious organizations claim it's part of a wider plan by the Bush administration to enact Bush's "faith-based initiative" in a piecemeal fashion.

Both bills will come up in the Senate, where the hiring-discrimination provisions are expected to face stiffer opposition in that chamber than they did in the House.

– School vouchers. On Sept. 4, the House is expected to take up a District of Columbia appropriations bill with an expected Republican amendment to start a school-voucher program for D.C. public-school children. The scholarships for low-income children could be spent at private schools, including religious schools. Church-state separationists and many public-school advocates strongly oppose vouchers. Last year the Supreme Court declared an Ohio voucher program constitutionally valid.

Previous attempts to create D.C. voucher programs have failed, but the latest program got a boost earlier this year with unexpected endorsements from Washington Mayor Anthony Williams and the chair of the city's school board.

– Churches and political endorsements. Legislators who think churches should be allowed to endorse or oppose political candidates without losing their tax-exempt status are expected to make a second attempt to amend Internal Revenue Service codes. The latest version of Rep. Walter Jones' (R-N.C.) "Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act," currently in a House committee, has managed to gain 159 co-sponsors at last count.

Although the House soundly defeated a similar bill last year, it has strong support from many Religious Right leaders and organizations. They claim that churches, pastors and religious organizations are being unfairly silenced on political issues by IRS regulations. Opponents claim the bill threatens religious liberty and gives religious groups political privileges that other tax-exempt organizations would not enjoy.

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Baylor professor booted from senate after calling for no-confidence vote

By ABP staff

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WACO, Texas (ABP) – A Baylor University professor who called for a no-confidence vote in the school's president has found himself no longer a member of the school's faculty senate.

Computer-science professor Henry Walbesser said Aug. 20 he planned to ask the faculty senate to vote on the leadership of Baylor President Robert Sloan. According to the Waco Tribune-Herald, he was informed Aug. 22 that he would be removed from the faculty senate for having missed too many meetings during the last academic year.

Walbesser, who told the newspaper that he was "mad as hell" about the ejection, claimed some of his absences were due to a research sabbatical in New Zealand and Australia. Sloan has pushed for more emphasis on research within Baylor's faculty.

Joe Cox, incoming president of the faculty senate, said he didn't know if the removal was politically motivated. "All I can say is we're following the constitution," he told the paper. "We need to tell all our senators, especially since we're now encouraging more faculty research sabbaticals."

Walbesser's call prompted some faculty and staff members to criticize the no-confidence vote and deny widespread dissatisfaction with Sloan's leadership among the non-tenured faculty. More than 100 faculty and staff members sent e-mails in support of Sloan, supporters announced at an Aug. 21 press conference.

Walbesser had been a dean of one of Baylor's graduate schools until Sloan removed him from that position in 1995.

Cox said that even without Walbesser's presence he expects the issue of Sloan's leadership to be raised during the meeting.

Baylor has been mired in controversy over several issues this summer, the latest being a scandal involving the athletic department and payments to a murdered player. The faculty senate's first meeting of the 2003-2004 academic year is scheduled for Sept. 9.



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Fellowship aids economic recovery of Gypsy community destroyed by fire

By Jo Upton

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HYDERABAD, India (ABP) - Since a rampaging fire destroyed the homes and livelihoods of 161 Gypsy families in May, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has helped a third of those families rebuild their lives.

The blaze, which started accidentally from a cooking fire, tore through Pattinagar Thanda, a community of Banjara Gypsies in Hyderabad, India. More than 4 million Gypsies live in south and central India.

The homes, most made from mud and straw, were quickly destroyed. The state government gave each family 1,200 rupees – approximately \$25 U.S. dollars – which was enough to buy a few clothing items and cooking vessels, but not enough to replace the homes and the important bicycle rickshaws that produce their daily income.

"We offered to pay half the cost of a new bicycle or bicycle rickshaw for all those who would sign a contract to pay the remaining half within four months," said missions worker James Francovich.

Francovich and his wife, Robbi, are mission personnel for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship who live in Hyderabad and minister among the Banjara Gypsies.

The bicycle project was funded with \$2,300 from CBF economic-development funds and \$1,000 from profits of an auto rickshaw business started earlier by the CBF's Banjara mission team.

The project provided 26 bicycles to families who use them as transportation to their labor jobs. Another 30 bicycle rickshaws went to families who use them to transport goods. As a result, the 56 families were able to recover quickly from the fire, CBF workers said.

The Francoviches have worked among the Banjara Gypsies since they arrived in India in 1997. One focus of their work is on income-generating projects to support an indigenous church-planting movement among the Banjara.

One of the more successful income-generating projects is the auto rickshaw business, owned and run by Banjara pastors and communities. The business is also a tool for ministry. Banjara drivers often make professions of faith in Christ by observing the lifestyles and business practices of the pastors.

"Our work involves mentoring these pastors, providing training for them, and putting together the businesses," Robbi Francovich said. "The pastors themselves do the direct ministry."

The Francoviches believe the most effective church planters are the Banjara themselves – local pastors who know their people, language and culture. "Banjara pastors and evangelists are trained in Bible school programs ranging from six months to two years," James Francovich said. "After training, they are sponsored by various organizations to minister among their people."

"We are thankful for those who have given sacrificially to CBF projects making it possible for us to immediately respond with both disaster relief and economic development," Robbi Francovich said.

- Jo Upton is a staff writer for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

- Photo available from Associated Baptist Press.

College student's project becomes ministry for low-income children**By Ken Camp****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****August 28, 2003****Volume: 03-81-3794**

MARSHALL, Texas (ABP) – Every child needs a hero, Michael Barron figured. And given good role models, every child has the potential to become a hero to someone else, he said.

That's the philosophy behind the Hero program, an after-school ministry for low-income children that Barron launched last year at East Texas Baptist University.

It started as a homework assignment. Barron was required to plan and implement a ministry project as part of a ministry foundations class.

Barron thought about his involvement with low-income children through his home church in Greenville, Texas. He wondered if anything comparable existed in Marshall. "I thought about what I saw here," he recalled. "Once I recognized the need, God gave me a vision for it."

Barron envisioned an after-school program where ETBU students would "hang out" with children who would be considered "at risk." The university students could offer tutorial sessions, play games and tell Bible stories.

"It's a struggle for kids to find good heroes," Barron said. "That's why so many look up to professional athletes or celebrities. Through this program, a student can be a hero to these kids – the kind of hero who will tell them they are created by God and loved by God. And in time, they can be a hero to someone else."

The ministry foundations class at ETBU is a required course for students receiving ministry-tuition assistance from the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The convention will provide about \$1.7 million this year in ministerial tuition assistance for undergraduates at eight BGCT-affiliated universities.

Barron shared his vision for the Hero program with Dane Fowlkes, his teacher for the ministry foundations class, who also serves as university chaplain and pastor of Bel Air Baptist Church in Marshall. Barron asked Fowlkes if Bel Air Baptist could help.

Fowlkes, a former Baptist missionary to Kenya and India, said he had been seeking ways to lead the church toward becoming "a transforming presence in the community." The church agreed to make its facilities available for after-school ministries and included the Hero program in its budget. Several church members also volunteered to bake cookies for the children and help with tutorials.

Barron recruited student volunteers from ETBC. "It was a start-up process last semester," he said. "We had just a handful of kids who stayed the whole semester. But these were children who didn't have many friends. They needed a place to fit in, and they found that in Hero."

Recently, Barron met with the superintendent of the Marshall Independent School District, and he hopes the Hero program can move its after-school programs to several school campuses this year. "Instead of the kids having to come to us at the church, we want to bring the program to them," he said.

At the same time, Bel Air Baptist Church hopes to offer parenting seminars, divorce-recovery groups and other ministries for the parents of children in the Hero program. The church's newfound ministry focus has helped the congregation shift from merely trying to survive as a church to moving toward an inclusive, community-centered congregation, Fowlkes said.

"The Hero program has helped us in that transition toward becoming Christians who make a difference in our community," he said.