



COOPERATIVE MISSIONS

Annie Armstrong Easter Offering[®]

BIBLE VERSES

“In the local church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.’ Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3).

“But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How welcome are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things” (Romans 10:14-15)!

LEADER PREPARATION

- Pies, enough for at least one slice per person
- Empty pie tin
- Your church’s goal for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering[®] (AAEO) (Find this out from your church office.)
- Index cards or slips of paper, quantity 6

Before class, write the following fast facts from the Web site www.anniearmstrong.com on the index cards or slips of paper, one fact per card or slip. Pass them out as class members arrive.

1. Why we give to Annie Armstrong Easter Offering[®] (AAEO): To help our missionary force reach for Christ an estimated 255 million lost people in the United States and Canada; that’s three of four people.
2. Annie Armstrong Easter Offering[®] (AAEO) national goal for 2011: \$70 million; Our church’s goal for AAEO: (fill in)
3. Amount of Annie Armstrong Easter Offering[®] (AAEO) used to support missionaries and their work: 100%
4. Number of North American Mission Board missionaries: More than 5,300. Generally, a third of the number represents career missionaries, a third are short-term funded missionaries, and a third are Mission Service Corps missionaries.
5. Amount of the North American Mission Board’s budget that comes from the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering[®]: 46%

6. Amount of the North American Mission Board's budget that comes from the Cooperative Program: 36%

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

We often call the apostle Paul (in this passage, he is still known as Saul) the first missionary of the New Testament church. In the Acts 13 passage, we see Barnabas is also a part of Paul's initial missionary voyage. Even more important than the identities of these missionaries, however, are two principles of missions we must not miss.

The first principle of missions is that it is God-ordained. We don't have to debate the rightness or wrongness of trying to evangelize the world. God has called us to this important task. Note these words in Acts 13:2: ". . .the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work that I have called them to.'" God Himself chose the first missionaries!

After the early church learned how to evangelize Jerusalem and minister to the church's members, God turned their attention to the regions around Jerusalem. Through the persecution that began after Stephen's martyrdom, the Jerusalem church scattered everywhere. As they dispersed, they shared the knowledge of Christ and began new churches. Antioch was probably one of those church plants. A new church beginning and maturing that quickly after the Jerusalem persecution was amazing! But God would not let the church rest on its accomplishments. He directed the Antioch believers to turn their focus outward to neighboring cities. Those first steps by Paul and Barnabas would lead to today's worldwide missionary effort.

The second principle in these verses is also very important. Speaking of the church, verse three states: "Then, after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off." God calls His workers; the church sends them out and supports them. In order to achieve God's plan of evangelism, both parts of the plan must be active. We know God will always be faithful to His part of the plan, but what about the church?

Paul illustrates the difficulty of trying to share the gospel without a supporting network. In Romans 10:14-15, the apostle asks four questions. The last one, the question that is the capstone of his entire argument, speaks of the church's role in sending out and supporting missionaries. He asks, "And how can they preach unless they are sent?"

The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® (AAEO) is a plan Southern Baptists have put in place for North American missions efforts. Every year, nearly half (about 46%) of all the funds used by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) come from this offering. As we generously give to the AAEO, we help fulfill our part of the partnership with God to bring the gospel to the whole world.

TEACHING PLAN

Pies and Missions: They Go Together

Begin by saying: "Today is your lucky day! Take a look at the pies (or pie) we have for this meeting. They're all yours! Let's start this session with a slice of pie."

After everyone has a piece of pie, continue (even as they're eating) by saying: "Today we're going

to talk about pies and missions. You're going to see that the two actually go together. For example, when you get the right recipe and the right ingredients, you can have a wonderful pie. It's the same way with missions. When you get the right recipe for missions support and add the right ingredients, you can have a great result.

The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is the recipe Southern Baptists have used since 1934 to help reach North America for Jesus Christ. This offering has been used mightily by God to expand the gospel to all the United States and Canada."

Say: "Let's get to know the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® a little better." (Have the assigned members ready to read their facts at this time.) Ask the following questions:

1. "First, why do we give to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®?" (Allow discussion; then allow the person assigned to read the answer.)
2. "What is the national goal for this year? What is our church's goal?"
3. "How much of the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® is used for missionaries and their work?"
4. "How many North American Mission Board missionaries are there?"
5. "How much of the North American Mission Board's budget comes from the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®?"
6. "How much comes from the Cooperative Program?"

Before closing the session, take out the empty pie tin and show it to the group. Say: "Missions and pies have one more thing in common. When the plate is empty, there's nothing to share. No one gets anything."

Say: "Think of the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® as a pie. It's a pie with a rich heritage that has allowed millions to taste the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ. But you and I determine the size of the pie. This year, as we prepare to give our offerings, let's make sure no one goes spiritually hungry because there's not enough of the "pie." Let's do our part to help reach the estimated 255 million in North America who don't yet know Christ."

Upholding Our End of the Bargain

Begin by saying: "The passage we're reading today in the book of Acts is historic. In it, we see God commanding the New Testament church to set aside Saul (Paul) and Barnabas as the first missionaries. Think of it! All the missionaries, evangelistic efforts, and mission church plants began right here with the church at Antioch."

Say: "God has had an agreement with the church since Jesus gave the Great Commission just before His ascension into heaven. He has promised us His constant presence and empowerment as we go into the world representing Him. Our part of the agreement is to faithfully support those missionaries through our prayers and our monetary support." (At this point, you might want to read the Romans 10:14-15 passage.)

We've heard that more than 255 million people in North America do not know Jesus Christ. We've learned that approximately 5,300 North American Mission Board missionaries have committed to following Christ's command to try and reach those millions. Now we come to our part of the agreement with God. Are we going to send and support our missionaries? Will we uphold our end of the bargain?

Say: "I want to ask you a series of questions. Please listen closely to the answers. They just might impact your life."

Ask: "Did you know that in 2007, NAMB missionaries helped start 1,450 churches? Did you know that more than 25,000 adults and youth participated in World Changers missions projects in 2008? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, did you know that every year about 450,000 missions volunteers help our NAMB missionaries?" (From www.anniearmstrong.com NAMB fast facts)

Say: "The need is great: 255 million people need Christ. The goal is clear: This year's Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® hopes to collect \$70 million. God's call is personal: Will we uphold our end of the bargain by praying, giving, and going?"

ACTION PLAN

How About a Bigger Slice?

Say: "Reaching North America for Christ begins right here in our church. This year, our goal is (put your goal in here)."

Pick up one of the pie tins. Say: "We obviously enjoyed ourselves today! But what would have happened if there hadn't been enough pie to go around? Someone would have been disappointed. Several of us would have gone without."

Now say: "You may or may not remember what you gave to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® last year. However, now that you know just how important it is in helping to evangelize North America, I'm going to ask you to pray about giving "a larger slice" this year. If you and I, along with others, give generously, we can help make the offering better and more effective, and more people will "taste" the wonderful gift of salvation.

LESSON BY

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Provided by the Mission Education Team of the North American Mission Board.

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COOPERATIVE MISSIONS

Together for One Purpose

BIBLE VERSE

“Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

LEADER PREPARATION

- Contact your local association and gather information on the work it does. Ask your associational director of missions (ADOM) to come and meet with the group. Determine the local mission projects taking place in your community and how your group can get involved.
- Speak with your pastor to learn how your church has been involved with the local association both recently and through the years.
- Gather information regarding the history and functions of Baptist associations. J.C. Bradley's book, *A Baptist Association, Churches on Mission Together*, is an excellent resource.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

While ministering in Ephesus Paul received disturbing news from fellow believers in Corinth of dissensions taking place there. Some individuals were loyal to specific leaders, while others shared different views on worship, spiritual gifts, and what was acceptable behavior for Christians. Paul writes to the Corinthians with the hope of restoring unity and to answer the questions they have.

Throughout chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, Paul teaches that we are all individuals with specific gifts and talents. We are all called to use our gifts and talents to perform a task. When we refuse to accept the task assigned us, not only are we living in disobedience, but also someone around us suffers because of our inactivity. Just as each part of the human body was created for a unique purpose, Christians are all gifted with a unique ability to minister. We are all individuals uniquely fashioned by the Creator, but we make up one body—the church. That body is called to reach out and minister to those around it.

Just as individuals make up the church body, individual churches within a community make up an association.

In his book, *A Baptist Association, Churches on Mission Together*, J.C. Bradley offers the following definition, “A Baptist association is a self-governing fellowship of autonomous churches sharing a common faith and active on mission in their setting.”

As in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and state Baptist conventions, Baptist churches within an association are free, independent, self-governing, and autonomous. Additionally, much like being part of the SBC and a state Baptist convention, churches through an association are able to reach and minister to more individuals than they often can on their own.

It is interesting to know that associations are historically Baptist and existed before state conventions and before the SBC. Records of Baptist associations date back to the churches in England in the mid-1600s. State conventions began to form in the early 1800s, while the SBC began in the mid 1800s.

While today the number of churches in the SBC exceeds 42,000 and the number of churches within your state Baptist convention likely ranges in the thousands, the number of churches within your local Baptist association is much smaller. The lower number allows the association to partner and support the churches in its community in a way the state or SBC cannot. It also allows the churches to minister to the needs “at their back door” as people often live and work within the area that makes up the association.

TEACHING PLAN

Differences Coming Together

Open the session with a discussion about the different types of associations people in the group are familiar with or a member of. One of the most common associations is the Parent Teacher Association or Parent Teacher Student Association (PTA or PTSA). Have group members share the positive and negative aspects of associations.

Within any association there will be differences. This is because associations are made up of humans. And as humans we all have different likes, dislikes, opinions, and beliefs.

Share for a moment some of the more surface things people may differ on within the church. Keep this discussion light so as not to touch on any sensitive topics. Some examples where people differ:

- What the temperature in the building should be set on
- How loud the music should be
- How long the sermon should be
- How bright the lights should be

As unique individuals we have unique tastes, likes, and dislikes. Just as our likes are different from others, so are our gifts and talents. God did not equip everyone to preach or sing, neither did He gift everyone to build or cook. Each person has been designed for a specific purpose and each person within a church is there for a specific reason and task.

Unified for a Mission

Have someone read 1 Corinthians 12:27.

Paul wrote to remind the believers in Corinth that we are all one body made up of individuals. Not only are the individuals within a church different, the churches within a community can be different in the ways they are equipped to minister to others.

One church may have a strong music ministry that attracts individuals to concerts while another church may have a children's ministry that attracts hundreds to its Vacation Bible School program. The goal is not for these churches to compete in the different areas but to come together as one and determine how they can use each of their gifts and talents to minister to their community. It is the Baptist association within your community that enables this pooling of resources.

In addition to allowing churches to come together with the common purpose of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, associations have other functions:

- Nurturing harmony in faith and practice, which includes an appreciation for diversity
- Nurturing fellowship between churches, church leaders, and members
- Calling the churches to be on mission
- Providing resources and services to churches and leaders
- Training, developing, and encouraging church and associational workers
- Providing opportunities for working together in missions, ministry, growth, and evangelism
- Establishing and maintaining appropriate communication and relationships within the community and the denomination

Now, using the information you gathered from the Baptist association your church is part of and from your pastor, share with the group:

- How your church and the local association have been involved over the years
- What support your church has given to the association
- What support the association has given to your church

Also, if the associational director of missions (ADOM) was not able to join your group during this specific time, arrange a time for the members of the group to meet him to learn more about the role of the ADOM.

ACTION PLAN

At Your Own Back Door

Using the information you gathered from your local associational office, discuss the needs within your community that are being addressed by your associational office and discuss how your group can get involved.

Some ideas:

- Join with other churches within the association to host a back-to-school activity or an alternative to Halloween activities (such as “Trunk or Treat”).
- Help serve a community Thanksgiving meal.
- Collect coats to distribute within the community to the lower income and homeless.
- Collect food to refresh the association’s food pantry.
- Join a mission trip organized by the association.
- Partner with other churches to host a block party as an evangelism and ministry outreach to the community

LESSON BY

Sherry Roberson is a member of First Baptist Church Powder Springs, Georgia, where she teaches a 10th-grade Sunday School class and helps with the girls’ retreat. She has written youth devotions for LifeWay and for World Changers at the North American Mission Board.



COOPERATIVE MISSIONS

State and National Conventions

BIBLE VERSE

“And if somebody overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

LEADER PREPARATION

- Gather and print information that answers the following questions about the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) from the Web site, www.sbc.net. Answers are in the Teaching Plan section of this lesson. Print enough copies for everyone in the group:
 1. What is the Southern Baptist Convention and what does it do or not do?
 2. When was the SBC organized and when does it meet?
 3. Approximately how many churches make up the SBC?
 4. What are some of the ministries and services under the SBC?

- Gather and print information that answers the following questions about your specific state Baptist convention or Canadian national convention. Print enough copies for everyone in the group:
 1. What does your state/national Baptist convention do?
 2. When was your state/national Baptist convention organized and when does it meet?
 3. Approximately how many churches make up your state/national Baptist convention?
 4. What are some of the ministries and services of your state/national Baptist Convention?

- Bring in five strands of thread or cord. Twist two cords together. Braid the remaining three. Practice pulling on them before class to determine which one is harder to break apart.

- Meet with the pastor of your church or a member of the ministerial staff to learn how your church supports the SBC and your state/national Baptist convention.

- Learn the services and resources the SBC and your state/national Baptist convention provide back to the church. If possible, ask the pastor to come and share this information with your group. If not, be prepared to share it with those in your group when you meet.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The author of Ecclesiastes is most often thought to be Solomon, son of King David. Although there are many conservative scholars who believe there was a different author, the traditional view cites evidence in Ecclesiastes 1:1 where the author identifies himself as “son of David, king in Jerusalem.”

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the phrase “everything is meaningless” or “everything is vanity” is used many times. These words do not paint a very optimistic picture of the author’s view of the world and human existence. However, the Hebrew word for *meaning* or *vanity* is *hebel*, which is literally translated *breath*. This understanding, combined with the phrase under the sun, which follows in most of the verses where *everything is meaningless* appears, shows a different perspective. Rather than having a negative view of his surroundings, the author of Ecclesiastes has the wisdom to realize that earthly existence is brief (but a breath) and material possessions gained while here are of no eternal value.

The relationships we form are of eternal value. First and foremost is the relationship we have with Christ because it grants us eternal life. Next are the relationships we form with others as we go through life. We should ensure that those we have relationships with learn about Jesus.

In Ecclesiastes 4:9–11, the author talks of the importance of having friends who can help us in and through life. In verse 12, a third party is introduced as the reference is made to, “a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Bible study authors refer to Christ as being the third cord that strengthens the rope in any relationship between two individuals, or as in today’s lesson, two entities.

The focus of today’s lesson is the history and current role of the Southern Baptist national and state conventions. Additionally the group should learn how their church is supported by the conventions and how they as individuals can support the conventions.

While information is provided on the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in this lesson, you will need to research information on your state/national Baptist convention.

First, the Southern Baptist denomination is a Christian denomination just as are the Methodist, Presbyterian, and others. While Christian denominations are based on the fundamentals of faith in Jesus Christ, they differ in some interpretations and practices. Denominations also differ in how they structure themselves as a unit of churches and how they carry out their day-to-day church functions.

The Southern Baptist denomination holds firmly to church autonomy and self-rule. The SBC leaves the day-to-day operation of the church in the hands of the local church. The SBC provides for the churches within the Southern Baptist denomination resources to help advance the work of the Great Commission. These resources come in the form of financial gifts, manpower, educational materials, and areas of specific expertise and talents.

TEACHING PLAN

Woven Together

Using the cords you have brought, demonstrate that when two cords are twisted together they are not as strong as when three cords are woven together.

Have someone read Ecclesiastes 4:12.

Explain to the group that this verse speaks of a relationship between two people with Christ serving as the third cord and foundation for the relationship. Further explain that for the purpose of today's lesson, the two cords represent Christian entities that when woven together with Christ (as the third) can make great advances in sharing Jesus with others in this nation and ministering to those in need.

For this lesson, members of the group are going to serve as reporters. They will be given the fact sheets you have printed out, asked to find answers to specific questions, and then report their findings back to the group.

Divide the large group into two smaller groups. For each group you should provide the information found on the SBC and state/national convention Web sites.

Group One

1. What is the Southern Baptist Convention and what does it do or not do?

- The term *Southern Baptist Convention* refers to both the denomination and its annual meeting. Working through 1,200 local associations and 41 state conventions and fellowships, Southern Baptists share a common bond of basic Biblical beliefs and a commitment to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world.
- Southern Baptists firmly hold to the principle of church autonomy and self-rule. The Southern Baptist Convention does not ordain ministers, assign staff to churches, levy contributions to denominational causes, dictate literature and calendar, or assign persons to churches according to place of residence. These are local church matters.
- Allows for a pooling of resources among Southern Baptist churches one of which is the Cooperative Program. Pooling resources allows for a greater impact in spreading the news of Jesus and ministering to those in need.

2. When was the SBC organized and when does it meet?

- It was organized in 1845 and meets two days out of the year, traditionally during the summer months.

3. Approximately how many churches make up the SBC?

- 42,000 in the United States

4. What are some of the ministries and services under the SBC?

- International Mission Board
- North American Mission Board
- Seminaries
- Educational materials (LifeWay)
- Woman's Missionary Union
- Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

Group Two

1. What does your state/national Baptist convention do?

2. When was your state/national Baptist convention organized and when does it meet?

3. Approximately how many churches make up your state/national Baptist convention?

4. What are some of the ministries and services of your state/national Baptist Convention?

Strength in Numbers

Once the group has presented and discussed the basic information on the SBC and your state/national Baptist convention, share with them how your church is directly involved with both organizations. You should have obtained this information from your pastor or some other church staff person.

Information to include:

1. Who from your church attends the SBC and state/national conventions?

2. What takes place at the conventions?

3. How does your church support the conventions financially?

4. What other support does your church give to the conventions?

5. What services do the conventions provide back to your church?

While much information is presented and more can be learned about the SCB and state/national Baptist conventions, never lose sight of the reason for the committees, ministries, organizations, and services. At the center of it all is the third cord that unites believers—Jesus Christ.

Since all churches and conventions are comprised of humans, we are guaranteed to experience differences in opinion about how things should be done. The common ground we all stand on is the love and saving grace of Jesus Christ and our calling as Christians to share the gospel with those around us.

The SBC and state/national conventions do not exist to complicate the process but rather to help autonomous churches combine their efforts to multiply the impact they have on their communities, states, nation, and even the world for Christ.

ACTION PLAN

Making an Impact

This lesson presents a variety of ministries provided through the SBC and your state/national Baptist convention. Have the group discuss which of the ministries they would most like to get involved in. Pray about this decision and commit to getting involved by the next month.

Some suggestions to prompt thinking within the group:

- See if your state/national convention is collecting items or money for disaster relief. Collect items needed or brainstorm fundraiser ideas.
- Plan an event where a local, national, or international missionary comes and speaks about how God is working. Explore ways your church can support this specific missionary.
- Explore the possibility of doing a local mission project or branch out and participate in a mission trip coordinated by the North American Mission Board or the International Mission Board.

LESSON BY

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COOPERATIVE MISSIONS

Cooperative Program

BIBLE VERSES

“Now about the collection for the saints: you should do the same as I instructed the Galatian churches. On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save to the extent that he prospers, so that no collections will need to be made when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you recommend by letter to carry your gracious gift to Jerusalem” (1 Corinthians 16:1–3).

LEADER PREPARATION

- Ask your church office, your associational missions office, or your state convention for a chart that shows the distribution process of the Cooperative Program (CP). You can also find this information on the Cooperative Program Web site, www.cpmissions.net. Click on the Love In Action tab. Post the chart where everyone will be able to see it.
- Call your associational office and ask your director of missions (DOM) to come to your meeting and speak for about fifteen minutes on what is being accomplished through the Cooperative Program in both the association and in the state.
- Ahead of time, find out from your DOM some mission projects your group can get involved in. The more involved believers are in missions, the more likely they are to give to missions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The situation in Jerusalem was severe. After Pentecost, the church in Jerusalem had grown rapidly. (Make sure everyone understands what happened during Pentecost.) Satan, however, hates to see God at work anywhere. In the seventh chapter of Acts, we read that the Jewish authorities killed Stephen, making him the first martyr of the New Testament. The beginning of the next chapter tells us: “Saul agreed with putting him to death. On that day a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1).

As the church scattered, it also shared the gospel with others. Paul, Barnabas, Philip, and others evangelized wherever they went. As a result, churches were created—strong churches in relatively stable environments. Some Christians felt led to stay in Jerusalem and minister in the hostile situation. However, their persecution was taking a terrible toll. Family members were put in prison; believers lost their jobs or were discriminated against. Poverty threatened to stop the spread of the gospel in Jerusalem.

Into this situation stepped the apostle Paul. God gave him the wisdom to put into effect a special offering to be collected in all of the Gentile churches, every week, for the saints in Jerusalem. Setting aside a little bit regularly would be easier, Paul reasoned, than one special offering that would tax believers too much. In today's Scripture passage, we see Paul giving the churches instructions on how to collect the offerings each Sunday as the believers gathered for worship.

Paul combined the offerings of all the churches and had the total sent to Jerusalem, giving the saints there much help. Though Paul may not have given a name to his project, today we might call it the Cooperative Program!

The economic situation in 1925 America was also dire. Farms were failing. The economy was in shambles. The resulting lack of finances crippled the Southern Baptist churches. Todd Starnes tells us in his June 2010 article titled "A Godly Heritage: The History of the Cooperative Program," that the offerings were so low the Home Mission Board (forerunner of the North American Mission Board) had to close down its evangelism division. In addition, churches were inundated with missionaries, each making a plea for support. Not enough time or money existed to grant every request that came through. As a result, godly men and women on the mission field never knew if they would receive their monthly support from the struggling churches in America.

The Future Program Commission, chaired by M.E. Dodd, brought to the 1925 annual meeting of the SBC the recommendation that Southern Baptists take Paul's example of having many churches contribute to the same missions cause. He then uttered this historically significant statement: "That from the adoption of this report by the Convention our cooperative work be known as 'The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists.'" Thus began the program that would launch the largest missions group in the world, a program that would allow Southern Baptists to have a global vision of evangelism.

TEACHING PLAN

Follow the Money

Say: "Follow the money." It's a philosophy that says you'll find answers to almost any complicated situation when you discover where the money involved goes and what it does. It's no different with the Cooperative Program. The better you understand Southern Baptists' plan for reaching the world for Christ the more you will appreciate it.

If you have been able to secure the DOM from your association, introduce him at this time. Say: "Let's see how our Cooperative Program dollars are used in our area and throughout the state." (If you are unable to have the DOM speak, get a list of mission projects, state missionaries, and NAMB missionaries working in the area and share this list with the group).

After the DOM speaks, display the Cooperative Program chart that explains how CP dollars are spent. Say: "Notice that 50 percent of funds sent out of the state to the Cooperative Program go to the International Mission Board. About 22 percent of those funds go to the North American Mission Board. In other words, over 70 percent of our national funds are spent on missions and that doesn't

count the money spent in our state and association on missions causes. Southern Baptists and the Cooperative Program are indeed missions minded!

If there is time, you might take a few minutes to let the DOM answer any questions the group has. Questions about specific missions projects can be asked at the end and used as a springboard to launch participation by your group or church.

The Apostle Paul—a Southern Baptist?

Say: “Could the apostle Paul have been a Southern Baptist? At the very least, he certainly provided the inspiration for the birth of the Cooperative Program. The CP began in 1925, during the annual meeting of the SBC in Memphis, Tennessee. Austin Crouch was elected to serve as the first president of the Executive Committee (the SBC body charged with distribution of national CP funds), a position he held from 1927 until 1949. Listen to what he said about Paul and the Cooperative Program: ‘The Cooperative Program is Scriptural. The work supported by the Cooperative Program may be classified under three heads: missions, teaching, and benevolence The Cooperative Program is Scriptural in its objectives and methods. The plan is, of course, through cooperation of individuals and churches. Paul gave a fine example of cooperative effort. He had urged the churches in different sections to make contributions for the poor at Jerusalem, and the method for raising this money was according to his instruction to the church in Corinth: *‘Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come’* (I Corinthians 16:2). The appeal of Paul and the Cooperative Program is to individuals.”

Say: “The CP allows both small and large churches to play a significant part in winning the world to Jesus Christ. The International Mission Board of the SBC is the largest missions-sending agency in the world. Currently, we have more than 5,500 missionaries on foreign soil. Sharing Christ with as many people groups as possible, these missionaries are greatly dependent upon our faithfulness to continue giving through the Cooperative Program. Let’s follow Paul’s example and lay aside, each week, money that can be used to build churches, buy Bibles, and tell unreached people groups about how Jesus Christ can change their lives forever.”

ACTION PLAN

The SBC Combo: Give *and* Go

Say: “Let’s remember that the Cooperative Program is fueled, not by dollars, but by people—people like you and me. We give our dollars to help get the gospel into areas of the world where you and I may never go. However, the main goal of the Cooperative Program is missions, and that means we cannot ignore local efforts. As we can, each of us should be a part of this area of the Southern Baptist Convention’s missions effort.”

At this point, display a list of current missions projects in your area. Ask: “As we look at each of these projects, do you see one or more that interest you?” Allow time for discussion. If the DOM is still present, you might want to use him as a resource to answer specific questions about each project. If there is general consensus on one project, begin plans for your group becoming a part, either temporary or long-term, of the missions effort.

Close by saying: “This weekend when the offering plate is passed, remember that your generosity enables missionaries around the world to continue their evangelistic work. Your dollars support the Cooperative Program and a lost world is waiting.”

LESSON BY

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COOPERATIVE MISSIONS

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering®

BIBLE VERSES

"He also said to them, 'This is what is written: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things'" (Luke 24:46-48).

LEADER PREPARATION

- Visit the Web site for the International Mission Board (IMB), www.imb.org, to gain additional information on international missions, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® (LMCO), and on the life and service of Lottie Moon.
- Print information from the IMB Web site regarding the life and history of Lottie Moon and the focus of international missions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Gospel of Luke is the third and the longest book in the New Testament. Its author, the physician Luke, is believed by scholars to have been a Gentile and a Greek. While stories of Luke's conversion to Christianity are unknown, he was a known companion of Paul. Luke also wrote the book of Acts, which details Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, as well as several of Paul's missionary journeys where Luke accompanied him.

Luke was not one of the 12 apostles nor did He encounter the ministry of Jesus firsthand. But he was in intimate contact with many individuals who were.

Luke's association with Paul brought him in direct contact with James, the brother of Jesus, and two of the apostles James and Peter. Each of these men provided Luke with oral testimony and their personal experiences with the Messiah.

Many Christians cherish the Gospel of Luke as a favorite since it gives the most detailed account of Elizabeth's and Mary's pregnancies and news of the Savior's birth.

Luke gives special attention to Christ's high regard for women as he tells of: Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1 and 2); Anna (Luke 2:36-38); Joanna (Luke 8:3 and 24:10); the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-18); the sinful woman who anointed him (Luke 7:36-50); and the widow who persevered with the judge (Luke 18:1-8). Perhaps Lottie Moon shared a special preference for the Gospel of Luke given her ongoing passion for women serving on the mission field.

Lottie Moon was 32 and single when she set sail on her first missionary journey to China. Unlike most women of Lottie's time, she was highly educated. She was part of the first small class of Southern women to receive a university-level Master of Arts degree.

Lottie spent 39 years serving in China. The work she did was anything but glamorous. She learned the language, the culture, the customs, and the dress so she could fit in and minister to the Chinese people. Her life was not easy. She wrote numerous letters to the then Foreign Mission Board urging them to send more missionaries.

She battled loneliness and spent countless hours nursing other missionaries whose health had failed. While her furloughs back home were needed to allow her body time to rest, her heart remained in China. In 1912, Lottie Moon died on Christmas Eve while on a ship headed to the United States. She starved herself because she could not eat while the Chinese people she loved so dearly had no food.

In 1918, the Christmas offering started by her suggestion was named after her. Today the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® (LMCO) represents 55 percent of the International Mission Board's total income. Every penny given goes to support Southern Baptist missionaries serving overseas.

TEACHING PLAN

Proclaim His Name

Since everyone's knowledge of Lottie Moon and the LMCO is different, conduct the following activity:

- Divide the class into small groups.
- Print information about Lottie Moon's life and service from the IMB Web site, www.imb.org.
- Divide this information between the groups you have.
- Have each group spend 10 minutes reading over the information, discussing what they already knew about Lottie Moon and the things they learned from the material.
- Have each group make a presentation to the rest of the class on what they learned. Encourage them to throw in facts about Lottie Moon which might be humorous or that are not well known in the stories told about her.

Lottie's letters from the mission field prompted the first offering collection for overseas missions in 1888. The collection totaled \$3,315, enough to send three women to China. Since then over \$3 billion has been given through the LMCO. Receipts for 2009 were \$148.9 million and the goal for 2010 is \$175 million. These funds, which make up 55% of the IMB's total income, make it possible for over 5,300 missionaries to serve and share Jesus with others in remote and often dangerous parts of the world.

To All The Nations

Have someone read Luke 24:46–48.

Focus on verse 47, which says, “. . . repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to *all* the nations. . . ” (Emphasis added)

God is not a biased God. It is His desire that all people come to know Him through His Son. His blessings are not reserved only for those who call themselves Americans or reside in a commercialized nation.

When Jesus began His ministry on earth, He called 12 men. One went astray (Judas), but then another was converted (Paul). It is from these 12 men that the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was spread all over the world. Today those reading this lesson can do so as a result of one of these 12 sharing the story of Jesus in another nation with someone who was bold and passionate enough to keep telling of God’s love and grace.

Think for a moment what might have happened if the gospel message had been contained in the Middle East where Christ lived or in Rome and the countries where Paul traveled? History would have changed in ways difficult for us to fathom.

The calling for Christians today is much the same as it was for the twelve apostles and others who believed centuries ago, “. . . go and make disciples of all nations. . . ” (Matthew 28:19, NIV).

Each day the IMB works to find ways to ensure the gospel reaches all the nations. The theme of the 2010 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® is “Are We There Yet?” Statistics and research shows there are still groups in parts of the world that have not heard the gospel, but that number is shrinking every year.

Though people are hearing, missionaries wait, work, and pray for them to respond. Just as Lottie developed a deep and abiding passion for the Chinese people she was called to serve, the Lord places in the missionaries’ hearts a burning desire for those they live among and interact with to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The work of missionaries continues to be hard, dangerous, and tiring but anyone who has the opportunity to see one person come to know Jesus will tell you it is all worth it.

The work of missionaries also comes at a cost. The following fast facts from the IMB’s Web site show the cost of supporting a missionary:

- \$43,845.86 a year
- \$3,653.82 a month
- \$843.19 a week
- \$120.13 a day
- \$5.01 an hour
- \$.08 a minute

These numbers were reported April 2010. Support includes housing, food, children's education, medical expenses, retirement, and more.

Prior to the meeting, go to the IMB Web site and collect information that tells stories of how the money given through the LMCO supports various people groups and regions around the world. Choose stories that might best appeal to your group.

ACTION PLAN

Tea Cakes and Other Treasures

To help her earn the trust of the people and show goodwill, Lottie Moon made tea cakes for the children in her village in China. After the children ate the cookies, they would take her into their homes where she could share the gospel with their mothers. The recipe can be found on the IMB Web site or from the Web site for Woman's Missionary Union (www.wmu.com).

Discuss with your group if they would like to host a bake sale to raise money for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering®. They could bake these tea cakes and other dessert items.

The group should explore other ways of generating funds for the LMCO. Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Hold an auction. Ask members of the church and the local community to donate items to the auction. All proceeds from the auction go to the LMCO.
- Have members of your class give up their favorite coffee beverage or fast food treat at least once a week for six weeks. The money they would have spent on these items can be put aside and then given to the LMCO.

After reviewing the IMB Web site and the stories of missionaries serving, determine if your group would like to adopt a specific missionary to pray for and support on a regular basis by providing specific items needed. If your class chooses to do so, contact someone with the IMB to assist you with the logistics of providing items to the missionary.

Discuss with your pastor a way your church can support missionaries on stateside assignment by providing them with housing, food, or by meeting other needs they might have while they are on stateside assignment.

LESSON BY

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