

Rankin says IMB saw gains despite restrictions on missionary appointments_62804

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INDIANAPOLIS—The International Mission Board is taking the gospel to more people, but it hasn't been without personal and financial costs, President Jerry Rankin told messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Speaking at the closing session of the convention in Indianapolis, Rankin thanked Southern Baptists for raising the necessary funds to send more approved candidates to the mission field.

Last year, the IMB appointed only 100 long-term missionary candidates due to financial constraints. In 2003-2004, churches collected a record \$115.1 million for the Lottie Moon Offering for International Missions. But that increase still didn't match the needs to send 308 missionaries who applied for service, he said.

“You heard the appeal and in a phenomenal response demonstrated that the hearts of Southern Baptists are devoted to our great mission task,” Rankin said. “This has enabled us to remove restrictions on missionary appointments and move forward in obedience to God.

“Your generous response has enabled us to send out missionaries, many of whom could not go into the field last year,” Rankin continued. “I want to praise God for the faithfulness through you as you and your churches gave to the Lottie Moon offering and totaled more than \$136 million in giving.”

Rankin said that while the IMB saw temporary reductions in the missionary force, that did not stop “the power of God from penetrating a lost world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In addition to setting a new record in Lottie Moon giving, Rankin reported that Southern Baptist missionaries and their national Baptist partners baptized more than 500,000 new believers, a 17 percent increase from last year.

“This increased evangelistic impact is due to a missions strategy in which missionaries firmly committed to the Baptist Faith & Message are planting Baptist churches that continue to multiply and expand access to the gospel,” Rankin explained.

Rankin noted that more than 16,000 new churches were planted, nearly double the amount planted in 2002.

Also, the IMB initiated work among 192 new people groups previously identified as unreached.

“This has not been without cost,” he emphasized. “There are more and more places that do not welcome missionaries.

“Our personnel become vulnerable not simply due to their Christian

witness but because they are Americans living in a hostile world," he added.

Rankin said the four missionaries in Iraq who were killed in a March 15 attack were aware of the risks.

"But they went because of the conviction that Jesus was the answer," Rankin said. "Amazingly this tragic death ... has inspired others to follow in their steps."

Rankin then introduced Carrie McDonnall, the lone missionary survivor of the Iraq attack.

"How can we sit back and say, 'I can't' because it's too hard, especially when the world is saying you can't do that," McDonnall asked. "For my Jesus, it's the least I can do." Through interviews with other IMB personnel, Rankin shared how missionaries are needed to spread the gospel throughout the world.

"God continues to call out missionaries such as these to join him on mission, to extend to the people of God literally to the ends of the earth," Rankin said. "The big thrilling testimonies are built on the foundation of faithful missionaries who have gone before."

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