

Baptist Briefs

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IMB stats show growth. The International Mission Board's annual statistical report covering calendar year 2006 includes a summary of church-growth indicators reported by Southern Baptist missionaries and their overseas Baptist partners. The report noted 25,497 new churches, 12,856 new outreach groups, 609,968 baptisms, about 9.86 million church membership, 4.6 million in Bible study, 567,413 new Christians in discipleship training and more than 1.26 million total church members in discipleship training. The statistics were released during the International Mission Board trustees' recent meeting in Springfield, Ill.

Virginia schools reach agreement. The John Leland Center for Theological Studies, a moderate Baptist seminary in Arlington, Va., and Hampton University, an African-American college in Hampton, Va., have reached a degree-granting agreement for undergraduate students. The agreement allows Leland students who have completed the seminary's diploma in theology program to count all of their 48 hours of credit toward a bachelor's degree in religion from Hampton.

N.M. Baptists approve record budget. Baptists in New Mexico approved the largest budget in their convention's history at the Baptist Convention of

New Mexico's 96th annual meeting, held this year in Albuquerque, N.M. More than 350 messengers from 124 churches attended the convention at Sandia Baptist Church. Messengers approved the convention budget for 2008, which requires \$4,391,157 in Cooperative Program receipts from state churches—a 6.67 percent increase over the 2007 budget. After applying an exception of \$32,673 for exempt obligations, 30.5 percent of the Cooperative Program receipts—about \$1.3 million—will be forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international missions. No increase in the percentage was proposed for next year. Messengers also re-elected the entire slate of officers for a second one-year term.

Religious liberty agency sponsors essay contest. The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty has launched a religious liberty essay contest. Open to Baptist high school students in the classes of 2008 and 2009, the contest offers a grand prize of \$1,000 and a trip to Washington, D.C. Second prize is \$500, and third prize is \$100. Winners will be announced next summer. Entrants are asked to write a 700- to 1,000-word essay discussing the relevance of religious faith to politics, including whether and to what extent faith should be an election issue in 2008. Entries must be postmarked by March 3, 2008. Each student must have a submission coordinator from his or her home church review the essay before submitting it to ensure that it meets all the necessary requirements, is free of typographical and grammatical errors and appropriately addresses the topic. Essays will be judged on the depth of their content and the skill with which they are written. Students should demonstrate a sound knowledge of the subject matter, support their assertions and provide bibliographical references. Essays that do not meet the minimum qualifications will not be judged. Judges reserve the right to present no awards or to reduce the number of awards if an insufficient number of deserving entries are received. Visit www.BJConline.org/contest to

download registration materials and a promotional flier. For more information, contact Phallan Davis at (202) 544-4226 or e-mail pdavis@BJCOnline.org.

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