

# CP is First Priority



## Cooperative Program Status at Prince George Baptist Church

by Steve Bradshaw, Church Health Strategist, Central-East Region

Rev. Lewis Garrett has pastored Prince George Baptist Church for the entire 30 years of its existence. With 48 people to start, the church met in the pastor's home for almost three years before purchasing its own building. In 1984, they were given an opportunity to purchase the historical local Presbyterian church, constructed in 1914. Knowing the positive track record of Southern Baptist churches for reaching the lost, the predominantly Slovakian Presbyterian congregation sold the building to Prince George Baptist Church for \$78,000.

Leading by example in evangelist efforts, Pastor Lewis would surely live up to their expectations. While eating at a local restaurant, he says to the waitress, "May I ask you a very important question?" And, of course, the question is, "If you were to die tonight, would you go to heaven?" He then follows up with, "Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?"

Through Pastor Lewis' pastoral leadership and evangelistic model, Prince George Baptist Church has built into its DNA the importance of spreading the Gospel. With 20 to 40 in attendance, this primarily senior adult congregation is committed to reaching the state, North America, and the world through Cooperative Program giving and missions offerings. Pastor Lewis shared that they are hoping to increase their commitment from 16% to 17% next year. In 2009, the church gave \$6,372.83 to missions. In 2010, their giving increased to \$6,872.38. It doesn't take a mathematician to realize that the remainder leaves little for monthly expenses and the pastor's salary. As a matter of fact, during a 10-year span when attendance

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was down and the offerings were small, instead of decreasing missions giving, Pastor Lewis offered to become bi-vocational. The church agreed, and its pastor worked as a fundraising firm's manager too. After attendance increased, he returned to full-time status at the church. Today, Prince George Baptist Church's Cooperative

Program commitment remains first priority, followed by church utilities. Whatever is left is the pastor's salary—that's right—the pastor does not have a set salary. He actually receives the leftovers. "But God," says Pastor Lewis, "has always provided for our needs."

Prince George Baptist Church is bucking the trend during these difficult economic times. Instead of missions giving being sent from the leftovers, it remains the top priority. It is truly a matter of stewardship. Just as he teaches the members to give to the Lord their first fruits, Pastor Lewis leads the church collectively to give to missions first.

### RESOURCE

- **Website:** [www.sbcv.org](http://www.sbcv.org)
- **Contact:** Call 888-234-7716 for details from your region's missionary.
- **Consider:** What is the status of the Cooperative Program in your church?