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BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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CompuServe ID # 70420,17

October 8, 1996

96-177

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Missionary's TV appearances lead to varied ministries

By Wally Poor

Baptist Press
10/8/96

ASUNCION, Paraguay (BP)--The woman approached the grave of her father, who had sexually abused her when she was 6.

"I have not yet learned to get over the anger I feel toward you," she said out loud. "But I am meeting with a group that is helping me. Next time, I'll bring flowers."

The group helping the woman meets at the Baptist Medical Center in Asuncion, Paraguay. It's one of several ministries started after Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary Hebert Palomino appeared on a television talk show.

When he arrived in Asuncion as a missionary in 1994, Palomino met Arturo Rubin, the host of a popular TV talk show. Learning of Palomino's training in psychology and counseling, Rubin invited him to discuss homosexuality.

Rubin was so impressed with the response to Palomino's first appearance that he invited him to return the next week to discuss hyperactive children. Then, for four more weeks, Palomino appeared, discussing such topics as sexual abuse of children, suicide and how to deal with terminal illness.

His appearances led to other avenues of ministry, such as starting counseling groups for sexually abused individuals and terminally ill patients and their relatives and, just recently, a support group for diabetics. He established a counseling center at the Baptist Medical Center in Asuncion and involved students he teaches at the Baptist Seminary in Asuncion.

Support groups began meeting every two weeks in a room at the medical center. Hurts suffered by sexual abuse victims often remain unresolved and surface years later as problems in the person's own marriage, Palomino noted.

He also obtained a press card giving him access to all sporting events in the country. He counsels players, coaches and sportscasters. "They are lonely people. They go from one country to another," Palomino said.

And Palomino began counseling people in the emergency department of the government hospital where most medical emergencies are handled. "People are so open to hear the gospel when they see that you really care," he said.

Palomino, a third-generation Baptist from Colombia, was studying medicine when he felt the Lord's call to be an evangelist. James Giles, a former Foreign Mission Board missionary and president of the International Baptist Seminary at Cali, advised him to enroll there. He studied there for two years and met his future wife, the former Karen Hickman of El Dorado, Kan., who was in Cali as a Foreign Mission Board journeyman.

He studied at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and they were married in the United States.

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Obsessed with returning to Colombia, Palomino was discouraged when no invitation came from his native land. "Keep going, the Lord has a place for you," said Bryan Brasington, then the Foreign Mission Board's area director for Spanish South America, encouraging the Palominos to seek missionary appointment anyway.

They were appointed to Peru in 1989 and moved to Paraguay in 1994.

A Paraguayan talk show host, a Colombian sportscaster, a Foreign Mission Board missionary originally appointed to Peru. The Lord brought them all together in Asuncion to help the people of Paraguay.

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**Preacher intends to forgive
men who nearly took his life**

By Lee Weeks

**Baptist Press
10/8/96**

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--March 20, 1996, is a date Eric Rich will never forget. As for the actual day, however, he probably will never remember it.

Seven months ago, Rich, pastor of Westside Baptist Church, Red Springs, N.C., was brutally attacked on the front steps of the rural church by two masked men attempting to rob the church and its parishioners. Investigators believe Rich was beaten on the head with the butt of a shotgun.

Rich, a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., was hospitalized in critical condition for 12 days at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. Emergency room doctors originally thought Rich's cracked skull was the result of a gunshot wound, but tests later showed the injuries were the result of blows delivered by a blunt object.

While Rich can't recollect the attack, the suffering and trauma of his brush with death remains painfully vivid.

For more than a week, Rich laid on a hospital bed writhing in pain as fluid built up on his brain causing swelling and excruciating headaches.

Doctors performed a painful lumbar puncture to relieve the dangerous fluid build-up. This arduous procedure involves inserting a long needle in the spine to drain the fluid from the brain.

After leaving the hospital, Rich recuperated slowly at his home. Two months passed before doctors allowed him to perform simple tasks like short walks to the post office.

Throughout his recovery, Rich struggled with double vision and blurred vision before stepping back into the pulpit on June 19. His sense of taste is slowly returning. However, Rich said, he still can't smell.

Rich relies on eyewitness accounts and reports from police and rescue personnel to fill in the details of the incident erased from his memory by the massive trauma to his head.

Choir members said Rich led the intruders out of the sanctuary and outside a side door where they chased him around the church.

"I know that from my own pastor's heart what I was trying to do was get them out of the church away from the people ... and (then) try to get back in to lock them out," Rich said.

But when Rich tried to open the church's front door and escape his attackers, he discovered the door was locked, leaving him nowhere else to turn.

"They said when I was out there on the porch with my head bleeding and all, I got to praying and they said I was real calm," Rich said.

Frances Carlisle, Rich's mother-in-law and church member, held her son-in-law in her arms the night of the attack as he laid on the church porch in a pool of blood. She said she worried then if he survived whether he would be able to recall the many passages of Scripture he had committed to memory.

"The devil tried to beat the Word of God out of his head but he had the Word of God hid in his heart that he may not sin against God," she said.

Carlisle said in his recovery Rich has practiced what he has preached. "It's just made him a stronger, more determined and seasoned preacher," she said.

Rich has served as pastor of Westside for about five years. At 32 years of age, he said he views the brutal attack and agonizing recovery as part of God's plan for his life.

"God had a purpose and a plan and it was all part of his providential care," Rich said. "Oftentimes the Bible teaches us that we have to go through the valley."

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Rich cites Isaiah 43:2 as source of abiding strength throughout his ordeal. "When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned," Rich said, quoting the Scripture text.

"If you're going to stand up for God you might as well go ahead and face it that you're going to do battle with Satan," he said.

Rich said he hopes for another encounter with the two men who savagely attacked him. Red Springs police, who say the church is located in one of the highest crime areas in town, continue to follow leads in the unsolved crime when they become available.

"If they were ever caught by the police and I had an opportunity to talk to them, the very first thing that I would do is share the gospel with them because they need to be saved," Rich asserted. "These guys need Jesus. I don't hate them. I love them."

Rich said the horrifying attack and painful recovery has made him a better husband, minister and preacher.

"I've had a closer encounter, a fresh and new encounter with God just by knowing that he was with me through it all and that even though it was a bad time, God never left me," Rich said. "He has really strengthened me spiritually through this, and things that maybe would have stressed me out or affected me in a different way, God has led me to understand that the most important thing is that my life is not mine, but it's his and if I just put my trust in him, he will definitely bring us through."

Rich said he would rather focus more on the goodness of God and less on the fact that his attackers have never been caught.

"It's good knowing that God was so good to me," he said. "Even in that hard time of sickness, it was amazing how I could just sense the presence of God. The Lord was teaching me through this. Even when I don't even recall what happened, God was still doing something in me and through me. When I came to my senses and knowing where I was, God just began to do a work with me. It's brought me closer to knowing that the life we live is important and it's not important to the fact of what the world thinks of us. But it's important what we do for God and what he thinks of us and how we reflect him in the world."

Rich credited his seminary family at Southeastern with helping enable him to continue to pursue a master of divinity degree and stay on course to graduate in May 1997.

"The seminary has just been a blessing to me and my family," he said. "I just appreciate godly professors who will stand by students when they have to go through these storms and difficulties and trials. It's not just teaching it in the class, but showing how they can help apply (it) in the students' lives."

Rich said his preaching, since returning to the pulpit following the attack, has more unction and power than before.

"Even though I'm not physically strong, I'm probably more spiritually strong than I've ever been and I think that's a blessing," Rich said. "Before this happened to me, I would preach on the apostles or people who were persecuted physically because of the cause of Christ and I never really knew what it was like to experience that, but since this has happened to me I know what it's like to experience it."

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**Harry Dent: Character education
key to 'saving America's future'**

By Todd Deaton

**Baptist Press
10/8/96**

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--"If most people knew better, most people would do better."

With that premise, Harry Dent addresses "the compelling need to give guidance to young parents to help them avoid the pitfalls which are damaging to their children" in "Teaching Jack and Jill Right vs. Wrong in the Homes & Schools."

Dent, chairman of the character education committee of the South Carolina Department of Education, envisions the self-published book as a guide for parents, schools and churches in developing the moral character of young people.

"The aim is to get the character education message to parents and to educators" and ultimately "to the school children -- not that they simply know right from wrong, but that they learn to live right from wrong," said Dent, a member of First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C., and the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

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In his 165-page book, Dent laments a loss of virtues among young people and a rising tide of misbehavior and criminal acts.

"Virtues are now front and center in America because there is a strong concern that moral virtues and values are receding in action and practice by adults and, especially, by youth," said Dent, a former attorney, newsman and businessman who has served three U.S. presidents and on the staff of Sen. Strom Thurmond. With his wife, Betty, Dent now leads a lay ministry, "Laity: Alive & Serving," out of their home in Columbia. He has worked in seven countries, including 12 mission trips to Romania. He also was vice chairman of the executive committee for the recent Billy Graham crusade in Charlotte, N.C.

"Public safety is a major problem across America in our streets," Dent said, noting "efforts to reverse public safety problems will be marginal if internal constraints of human consciences and character continue to decline."

Advocating character development in school curriculums, his suggestion that "communities can come together and agree on common moral virtues to teach and model to students" was approved by the State Board of Education and applauded by religious leaders.

A study by Dent's committee found a consensus on teaching virtues such as honesty, courage, peaceability, self-reliance, discipline, self-control, loyalty, dependability, respect, mercy, unselfishness, kindness and justice.

"School teachers, especially in public schools, need to focus even more on moral education because of the breakdown of families and thus the failure in too many families for parents to be role models of righteousness ... ," Dent said.

The committee's plan involves assisting schoolteachers in teaching and modeling key virtues for students, he explained. Approximately 10,000 teachers will visit parents of at-risk students each month to explain the moral development of children.

"South Carolina is the first state to move beyond the schools and into the homes so that moms and pops may come to better understand the key duties in rearing their kids in righteousness," Dent said.

"Parents need to know and understand rights and wrongs in America today and exactly what their roles are -- to each other, to the children and to society," said Dent, a father of four and grandfather of nine. "We should all be contributors instead of takers and value our responsibilities more than our rights. We must identify the priorities in life, not just for our own enjoyment and purpose, but to provide solutions to the problems facing America"

Heralding character education as "the saving of America's future -- one child at a time," Dent said he believes "the outcome of childhood is not meant to be a haphazard destination; the route is fraught with greater perils today than ever before, and guideposts must be implemented early and often with faith and strength of purpose."

Inquiries about Dent's book may be addressed to him at 1120 Glenwood Court, Columbia, SC 29204; telephone (803) 782-5000.

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**Mounting opposition to tobacco
tough issue for Baptist farmers**

By Darrell Turner

**Baptist Press
10/8/96**

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--In the ongoing controversy between the federal government and the tobacco industry, tobacco farmers often have been the forgotten people.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which has disagreed with the Clinton administration on a slew of issues, solidly backs its campaign against tobacco use by young people. At the same time, a substantial number of Southern Baptist tobacco farmers find their livelihoods potentially being encroached on by the growing number of legal restrictions on their product.

"I know many fine Christian folks, Baptists and others, who are engaged in the tobacco industry," said Maurice Cook, professor emeritus of soils at North Carolina State University at Raleigh and an environmental consultant.

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Cook, who is also a past president of North Carolina Baptist Men and active in the Fellowship of Christian Farmers International, said tobacco farming "is a way of life, and I think it's hard for one who has not been brought up along tobacco road to really understand the importance of the crop and what it means, not only for their livelihood but to the way of life they know."

Thad Sharp, a third-generation tobacco farmer in Sims, N.C., agreed. "We have been forgotten," he said. "We are hard-working, law-abiding and in a lot of cases Christian people that are producing this tobacco. It is a source of livelihood for the building of many churches, building of many schools, building of many towns and hospitals."

Sharp, a Southern Baptist, said he agrees smoking is unhealthy and favors the abolition of tobacco advertising directed at teenagers. At the same time, he said, "I have no problems with the ethics of growing tobacco, because it has done so much good for so many people" economically. What he does have a problem with, he said, is "with somebody telling me that somewhere down the road I can't grow it."

Messengers to the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Kansas City, Mo., passed a resolution encouraging denominational agencies to campaign against the use of tobacco in any form and urging Southern Baptists who grow tobacco "to cease such agriculture and, where feasible, to switch to another cash crop in order to make such products less accessible."

Four years later, messengers to the SBC annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, called on the U.S. government to stop assisting the tobacco industry through trade talks and urged Baptists to declare their opposition to the practice.

National conventions have not adopted any anti-tobacco resolutions during the 1990s, but the Christian Life Commission has supported Clinton and the Food and Drug Administration in adopting policies designed to block the sale and marketing of tobacco products to children under 18. A CLC pamphlet on smoking declares, "Christians have a responsibility to abstain from its use, to encourage others to abstain and to do everything in their power to end the tobacco menace."

"We believe that tobacco is a drug and that it should be regulated," said Ben Mitchell, visiting professor of ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and biomedical and life issues consultant with the Nashville, Tenn.,-based CLC. He said the commission has urged Washington to follow the Canadian model of putting high taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products and using the revenues for research on tobacco-related illnesses.

Mitchell said the situation of the tobacco farmer is "a real dilemma" because producing another cash crop might not be as financially lucrative. At the same time, he said, "if the farmer were really convinced that this is a moral issue, that they were causing harm not only to individuals by producing tobacco but also to the cost of health care, they might be able to look more energetically to alternatives."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says smoking costs the U.S. economy at least \$50 billion annually in direct medical expenses and that nearly half the cost is borne through the Medicare and Medicaid programs. In announcing new federal rules against marketing of tobacco products to children in August, President Clinton said more Americans die every year from smoking-related diseases than from AIDS, car accidents, murders, suicides and fires combined.

It would take a great deal to convince farmers like Sharp, however. He said he's heard all the arguments against tobacco farming and has answers for all of them. He noted alcohol and automobiles are also hazardous to life and asserted tobacco has not had anywhere near the devastating effect on family life as alcohol.

Sharp said reports of addiction to smoking don't convince him because smokers are forced to stop for a week or more when they are in the hospital. "It is a submission to weakness, and you should overcome your weakness," he said. The 65-year-old farmer said he quit smoking two or three times in his life and hasn't smoked for more than 10 years.

Commenting on the death toll from tobacco, Sharp said, "I've never seen it written under any dead bodies that 'I died from smoking.' I do know that there's people dying from lung cancer, but I also know that there's people dying from lung cancer who have not smoked and that nobody from their family has smoked."

With regard to the cost of health care for people suffering from smoking-related illnesses, Sharp said, "If smoking causes lung cancer and you die young, the cost to the federal government is less than if that person lives to be 85 and spends the last of their years in a rest home and the government pays the bills."

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Sharp, his son and grandson grow 200 acres of tobacco on his farm. He said each acre generates thousands of dollars in local, state and federal revenues. "We, and the people like me, are supporting the schools, churches, homes, shopping centers, hospitals," he said. "We're supporting the whole economy in our area. If you took the tobacco out of this area, it would be like taking the water out of the river."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average value per acre of a crop of soybeans in 1995 was \$237. For corn, it was \$358, and for peanuts, \$672. The comparable figure for tobacco was \$3,619.

Max Lennon, president of Baptist-related Mars Hill College in Mars Hill, N.C., and former agricultural dean at Ohio State University, said support for and opposition to tobacco farming varies with geography. In Ohio, he said, "there's a tobacco-producing area towards the Ohio River. The views on the issue vary tremendously from the southern part of the state toward the northern part of the state."

Not only did Lennon agree the farmers are the forgotten people in the tobacco debate, he said the way to help them make a transition to other forms of livelihood has been a forgotten issue. "I think it's an issue for society to address," he said.

And while primarily focusing on the health hazards of tobacco use, the Christian Life Commission's Mitchell agreed the situation of the farmer is a tough one.

"I don't think that there is a quick fix," Mitchell said. "I think that it's going to take a lot of time in some cases for alternatives to be possible."

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**Albania evangelization effort
nourished by Baptist volunteers**

By Julie Nall

**Baptist Press
10/8/96**

MARTHASVILLE, Mo. (BP)--A helicopter crosses a rocky, mountainous area, nearing a remote village. As it hovers and prepares to land in the barren country, goats in the village scurry in fear. Youthful villagers throw stones at the animals to keep them away, and one rock hits the chopper.

When the craft lands and shuts down so the pilot can assess the damage, villagers arrive carrying gifts of hay. They know something is wrong with the monster machine; they wonder if perhaps it is hungry. Rural Albanians are not frightened by technology, they just don't completely understand it.

This past summer, 21,271 villagers saw the "Jesus" film, based on Luke's record of the life of Christ. Many were open to its gospel message, reported Denny Quinn, a member of Charrette Baptist Church, Marthasville, Mo., with his wife, Jenny, served as co-coordinators of two Project AERO base camps.

Project AERO (Albanian Evangelical Rural Outreach) is a mass evangelism effort by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and Foreign Mission Board, Campus Crusade for Christ and Helimission. This year the effort reached into 307 Albanian villages, with 4,426 recorded decisions to receive Christ, Quinn said.

Campus Crusade for Christ missionary volunteers from Albania, the United States, England, Ireland, Wales, the Netherlands, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Austria, Mexico and Colombia trekked across the crags and brush of Albania's countryside.

They took the gospel to villages accessible only by foot, helicopter or four-wheel-drive Land Rovers, sharing the "Jesus" film and other evangelistic efforts in a land that, until recent years, was recognized as the most atheistic nation in the world.

About two-thirds of northern Albania now has been reached -- into "every nook and cranny." Quinn told of one Campus Crusade for Christ associate who is keeping a map of Albania, marking each village that has been visited.

Being completely thorough, he was concerned about one tiny village on the map not marked by a visit, but an investigation revealed the village had been abandoned.

Seventy percent of Albania's population lives in villages. The villagers are looked down upon, harassed and made the subject of jokes, Quinn explained, and there is not much interaction between urban areas and villages. So if not for Project AERO, this 70 percent of the people would not be reached. As it is, they're being reached thoroughly.

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The Scripture that best describes Project AERO is Matthew 9:35-38, Quinn declared. Jesus went to villages, "preaching the good news of the kingdom When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"

And like the passage in Matthew, the harvest in Albania is plentiful, but the workers are few, Quinn added.

After a three-day shift, volunteer teams -- called "Crusaders" -- returned to a base camp in a former communist warehouse at either Peshkopi or Rreshen for food and rest. There they found Missouri volunteers ready to feed them hamburgers and French fries, fried chicken and mashed potatoes, or even pizza.

A cook staff of two or three, ready to feed up to 250 people, prepared the meals beginning at 4:30 a.m. on free-standing propane burners and stock pots like the ones they had learned to use in disaster relief training. They worked around not having water that was running, pure or hot, said Gail Rector, a volunteer from First Baptist Church, Belle, who worked in Albania two weeks.

At times there was no electricity, so they used generators to keep the camp running.

About eight people worked at the base camps, where the Quinns and their staff prepared sleeping quarters for 250 people, built outdoor bathrooms and shower rooms, prepared kitchen and dining accommodations, then prepared meals.

One camp was set up in an old flour mill and warehouse. Local people were hired to scrape caked flour from the floor with putty knives before the volunteers arrived, but still, cleanliness was a challenge, Rector said. Disaster relief training in sanitation was put to good use.

"It was an incredibly dirty place," said Chris Landwehr, a member of First Baptist Church, Canton, Mo., who served as head cook.

"We cleaned years and years and years of flour off the floor. Sometimes if you spilled water on the floor, it made it slimy or sticky."

Before facing the challenges of preparing a large, tasty meal in difficult conditions, base camp workers faced the challenge of getting supplies locally. As head cook, Landwehr spent the entire summer in Albania, learning how to buy 110 pounds of tomatoes and cucumbers at least every other day without putting the local market owner out of business. She also learned to buy ahead. If she purchased peaches that were ripe and good to eat in Tirana, the capital, the four-and-a-half-hour ride over extremely rocky roads turned them to mush.

But the biggest challenge, Landwehr said, was planning a menu that Albanians, Americans, Swiss, Germans and many others would like, because everybody had different tastes. When groups came back from the villages, they were very hungry, so the cooks planned big meals with larger-than-average servings. The favored dishes? Chili and spaghetti.

Coming in from three days in the villages, the Campus Crusade missionaries appreciated the meals. One young man returned from a village to tell Phillip Richards, a base camp volunteer from First Baptist Church, Hillsboro, about an adverse eating situation.

The villagers, who rarely if ever see an outsider, were thrilled to have the missionary visitors. They killed the fatted lamb, and as guest of honor the missionary was served the brains and eyes.

"He prayed, 'I'll take it down, Lord, if you'll keep it there,'" Richards said. "And he did." Richards spent 30 days in Albania, helping where needed to keep the base camp running. His overseas volunteer mission trips, as well as those of Landwehr and Rector, grew from his work with the Quinns during the 1993 flood in St. Louis.

Rector never dreamed disaster relief work would take her to Albania, where she was a vital part of the evangelism effort. "I would get goose bumps every time the helicopter would take off from the base camp because I knew these missionaries were going someplace I couldn't go," she said. "Because they were making that sacrifice, people were being saved."

"Whenever one of the groups came back to base camp, they always had a report time. The testimonies they shared were phenomenal. Quite frequently, they would report that there were 30 to 40 decisions in one village."

For Landwehr, however, meeting career and two-year missionaries in Albania impacted her the most.

"They're the unsung heroes," she said. "While Campus Crusade's Project AERO is a mass evangelism effort, missionaries are the ones who have to go and disciple those new converts. I think that is an important part of evangelism, not just leading people to salvation, but also teaching them to change their lives."

**God uses plumbers, too,
in missionary endeavors**

By Debbie Moore

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Sure, God needs preachers, evangelists and teachers. But who can figure out the drainage field requirements for a sewer system and speak words of truth from God's Word at the same time better than a Christian plumber?

Alton Bene can whip out a New Testament and flip the pages over to John 3:16 just about as fast as he can rig up a shower. And now, thanks to donations from friends and members at his home church, Bene has been able to use his skills -- both the ministerial and the plumberial -- to help out on global missions projects.

An expert with pipes, plungers and plugs, Bene went to Albania this past summer on Project AERO, a joint work of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and Foreign Mission Board, Campus Crusade for Christ and Helimission. His task was to help convert an old flour warehouse into sleeping quarters for more than 300 people from 10 nations, including 50 staff members, who went out from the compound area to the countryside, "trusting the Lord to provide them with food, lodging and a place to show the 'Jesus' film," Bene said.

"It never ceases to amaze me how a diverse group of people can come together and work so well when they are committed to Christ and the building of his kingdom," said Bene, concerning his third mission trip overseas. He has been a member of teams including physicians, nurses, secretaries, carpenters and bricklayers.

Better known as "Bizzie" on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Bene has been an NOBTS employee specializing in plumbing since 1989 and a lifelong resident of New Orleans.

Led to the Lord and discipled in 1979 by NOBTS students witnessing in his neighborhood, Bene's first missions project was to Honduras in 1991 on a construction team.

"When Bizzie called me (from Honduras) to let me know how he was doing, I just knew he'd been bitten by that missionary urge," said his wife, Pat. "I knew God had called Bizzie to this and he had answered, and I knew he'd just have to go back to do more projects somewhere."

As with his other trips, "The work was hard -- emotionally and physically -- and the hours were long, but it was very rewarding," said Bene, a member of Gentilly Baptist Church in New Orleans. In 1994 his church raised the money he needed to go with a Brotherhood Commission team to Goma, Zaire, during the Rwandan civil war crisis. During his three-week stay he used his plumbing skills to construct a water tower, a water purification system and a shower for the missionary compound, using materials left over from Israeli relief efforts.

"I've gotten to see firsthand the Word of God come alive right before my eyes," Bene said.

"But then, this is the same Lord that I trusted to let me go on these mission trips. Nothing is impossible for God!"

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**... Out of the mouths
of parrots -- in Mexico**

By Betty Poor

**Baptist Press
10/8/96**

BAJA CALIFORNIA, Mexico (BP)--Headlines out of Mexico's southern state of Chiapas have been filled with violence between the government and rebels in the area. But not all the news out of Chiapas is grim.

Consider the story Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary Rebecca Alexander tells about the chorus-singing parrot she met there.

Rebecca works with her husband, Allen, in church planting and development in Baja California. She is the national president of Mexico's Women's Missionary Union. Once a year she makes a "missionary journey" to teach about women's and children's work. This trip took her to Tapachula in the state of Chiapas.

"In every home in Chiapas the people had parrots," Rebecca said. Often the parrots sang Christian choruses their owners had learned at church.

One family Rebecca was staying with had a 20-year-old parrot that had lived with them all its life. Her hosts had gone out for awhile, and she was alone in the house with the bird.

The parrot was sitting on top of his cage while Rebecca was seated at a table nearby, working on her material to teach in the churches. She started humming one of the children's songs, but couldn't remember how to finish it. When she gave up trying to remember how it went, the parrot immediately started singing that very song.

"He sang it from the beginning until the end, and he looked at me, and then he twirled around and hung upside down and said, "Up, up with young people!"

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