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**Baptist hunger giving lifts  
street people from brokenness**

**By Mary E. Speidel**

**Baptist Press  
9/19/96**

RIO DE JANEIRO; Brazil (BP)--At 13, Vanessa Silva Queroz is barely a young woman. But already she's lived two desperate lives.

The former street girl who wants to be a secretary ran away from home to escape an abusive father. She found the streets nearly as harsh.

To survive, "I had to steal to keep from being a prostitute," she says.

To cope, she took drugs. "I suffered a lot in the street, but I don't suffer here," says Queroz, sitting on the porch at a halfway house funded through Brazilian Baptists' Good Samaritan project. The house -- located in a thriving area outside of Rio de Janeiro -- opened in 1994.

Through the house's ministry, Queroz accepted Christ as Savior. She now has a message for other street kids: "Jesus loves you more than anyone. If you accept Jesus, many things in your life will change."

The program that helped change her life is partly financed through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board with more than \$77,000 in world hunger giving by Southern Baptists. World hunger offerings recently have financed two other Brazilian Baptist homes for street kids -- one in Recife and another in Belo Horizonte.

Southern Baptists have designated Sunday, Oct. 13, as World Hunger Day, during which they will recognize human needs throughout the world. Through August, they have given nearly \$3 million for world hunger and relief overseas this year. Foreign Mission Board officials expect more than \$5.8 million by the end of year, the first increase since 1992. Last year \$5.7 million funded 225 projects in 62 countries.

The Good Samaritan project is led by Brazilian Baptist Henrique Cesar Gomes, who directs Christian social ministries for Rio's Carioca Baptist Convention. In his work at the program's halfway house, Henrique marvels at the way God rebuilds the broken lives of former street kids.

The children's stories "speak very deeply to my heart," Gomes says. "Every life that's restored motivates us to keep going, to keep trying to reach another."

One restored life is Leandro da Costa, 17. He left his life as a drug dealer in a Rio "favela" (slum) to live at the Baptist halfway house. "I wanted peace," he says.

Today Costa plans to become a Baptist pastor. He volunteers as a counselor at a Baptist facility for recovering drug addicts.

"I'm telling others who need to be rehabilitated about Jesus," he says. "I have happiness and love now. I'm a new creature."

These teens are among about a dozen street kids who have accepted Christ through the halfway house. Several have been baptized at nearby First Baptist Church of Recreio dos Bandeirantes. The children attend there regularly with their housemother, Brazilian Baptist Bernadete Sobral, a former spiritist.

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That congregation has helped meet needs of the 24 children who have come through the house so far.

"These children have lost everything," says church member Arilda Magalhaes, who volunteers in fund-raising for the house. "This program is hard work, but it's so important to the children's lives."

"The children come from very different origins and psychological structures than most children," adds pastor Wander Ferreira Gomes. He's a psychologist who counsels some of the children; another psychologist, a church member, also provides free counseling.

"All of them have family problems," the pastor says. "They need a lot of love and affection. Some have neurological problems. It's very complex to work with them."

But it's rewarding. He recalls a street girl named Adreana, who came to the house at age 8.

"She'd been involved in homosexual practices, prostitution and drugs," the pastor relates. "It was a slow, difficult process to work with her."

But Adreana became the first of the house's children to accept Christ. Today she lives with a Christian family.

Changing a life like hers is "something only God can do," adds Good Samaritan director Gomes. "We as God's people are simply being used by him in the transformation."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed Sept. 18 to state Baptist newspapers by the Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline in SBCNet News Room.

**World hunger giving aids  
all-night street ministry**

**By Mary E. Speidel**

**Baptist Press  
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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (BP)--Two Brazilian mothers sleep cuddled with their children under the ledge of a shop as rain pelts the sidewalk in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It's unusually cool tonight in this tropical city.

"Wake up! Jesus is calling!" sings Brazilian Baptist Henrique Cesar Gomes.

The women stir. Other nearby street people peek out of cardboard boxes draped with plastic sheets. They see about a half dozen Brazilian evangelicals holding a kettle of hot food and a jug of juice.

"This is food for your life," Gomes says. Slowly the street people emerge from their shelters. "We're here preaching Jesus Christ," he tells them. "Have you ever heard about Jesus?"

The evangelicals hand out evangelistic tracts. Gomes, who directs Christian social ministries for Rio's Carioca Baptist Convention, explains the plan of salvation.

They pray with the people and tell them where to find more help the next morning. At churches across the city, social workers will be available to help them leave the streets.

"We bring you the love of Jesus in a material way," says Jacy Curvachu, a retired Brazilian Baptist lay woman.

"I take my hat off to Brazilian Baptists -- that they're trying to do something," says Marilois Kirksey, a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board missionary who is social ministries consultant for the Brazilian Baptist Home Mission Board.

Tonight, Kirksey sloshes through the rain with Brazilian volunteers. By 5 a.m., they're soaked and cold. They head back to Rio's Presbyterian Cathedral, where they and other teams will report how God used them on the city's streets.

Sometimes up to 1,000 evangelicals participate in the program, part of Brazilian Baptists' Good Samaritan project. Gomes started the all-night ministry using Baptist volunteers. Other evangelicals asked to help.

Among Good Samaritan's biggest success stories are former street kids living at a halfway house in a thriving area outside Rio. The program at the house is partly financed through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board with more than \$77,000 in world hunger giving by Southern Baptists.

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Southern Baptists have designated Sunday, Oct. 13, as World Hunger Day, during which they will recognize human needs throughout the world. Through August they have given nearly \$3 million this year for world hunger and relief overseas. Foreign Mission Board officials expect more than \$5.8 million by the end of year, the first increase since 1992. Last year \$5.7 million funded 225 projects in 62 countries.

Helping meet needs at the Rio halfway house is Brazilian Baptist Bernadete Sobral, the children's housemother. Like them, she "came from the mud," she says.

At age 3 she nearly died from burns in a kitchen accident. Trying to save her, her mother took her to a center of spiritism, where she had Sobral "consecrated to the demons."

At age 7, Sobral participated in spiritist animal sacrifices. As a young woman, she worked as a model and hairdresser. She was preparing to become a "mother of the saints," a high leader of spiritism.

"I felt good about myself, that I had arrived financially," she says.

That's when her life started unraveling. After plans to go to the United States fell through, she lost everything and became homeless. "I was ready to commit suicide," she recalls.

She sought help from a spiritist leader. "God is the only one who can help you now," he told her.

"That awakened something in me. I began to seek God," Sobral says. Later she accepted Christ through the witness of Brazilian Baptists. "I made a vow to serve Jesus for the rest of my life."

She started attending seminary and helping with Rio Baptists' ministry to street people, including street kids.

"It brings me joy to help restore these lives. They're our tomorrow," she says.

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed Sept. 18 to state Baptist newspapers by the Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline in SBCNet News Room.

### House overrides Clinton veto of partial-birth abortion ban

Baptist Press  
9/19/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. House of Representatives voted Sept. 19 to override President Clinton's veto of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act.

House supporters of the bill gained a favorable vote of 285-137, thereby achieving the two-thirds majority required for an override.

The override attempt faces an uphill struggle in the Senate, however. The Senate approved the measure originally by only a 54-44 vote. If all 100 members vote, supporters of the legislation will have to gain 13 for an override. The House achieved a two-thirds majority, 286-129, in March before sending it to the president.

The late-term procedure banned by the bill involves the delivery of an intact baby feet first until only the head is left in the birth canal. The doctor pierces the base of the baby's skull with surgical scissors, then inserts a catheter into the opening and suctions out the brain. The collapse of the skull enables easier removal of the dead child. The bill allows the use of the method only when the life of the mother is endangered.

Unprecedented opposition from some religious leaders met the president's April veto. Then-Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry and 10 former presidents called for Clinton, a Southern Baptist, to repent of his action. SBC messengers adopted a resolution condemning the veto and calling for an override. Evangelist Billy Graham told the president he was wrong. The country's Roman Catholic cardinals and the head of the church's bishops said they would work for an override.

Even pro-choice members of Clinton's party, such as Rep. Richard Gephardt, D.-Mo., the minority leader, and Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D.-R.I., voted to ban the procedure in the spring.

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**FDA calls RU-486 safe,  
final approval nears**

**By Tom Strode**

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Food and Drug Administration pushed the RU-486 abortion method to the verge of final approval Sept. 18.

The FDA informed The Population Council, which holds the U.S. patent to the abortion drug, it had determined RU-486 was safe and effective but needed more information on such issues as its manufacture and labeling before making a final decision. The FDA's communication to the New York-based group is known as an "approvable letter."

The action followed by only a week news the FDA had given the go-ahead for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America to hold clinical trials on another drug-induced abortion procedure.

The signal the FDA is prepared to approve RU-486, which would be the country's first abortion drug, came as no surprise. An agency advisory committee endorsed RU-486 in July by a 6-0 vote, with two abstentions. This followed a process which began on President Clinton's third day in office in 1993. He directed the FDA to determine if the import ban on RU-486, which is legal in three European countries, should be lifted. At the time, pro-life leaders predicted the federal government would do all it could to gain approval for the drug.

"This is, indeed, a very sad day in the moral life of a nation which has in the past put a premium on human life," said Southern Baptist biomedical ethics specialist Ben Mitchell. "Today, a tax-funded agency came a step closer to approving a weapon to be used against future taxpayers.

"What used to be the safest place on earth -- the mother's womb -- is now being made a toxic dump for the purpose of killing its resident."

Pro-lifers have criticized the FDA for placing the abortion drug on a fast track to approval.

When the advisory committee recommended approval of RU-486, it did so based on clinical trials from France. The Population Council did not have complete data on its 1994-95 trials involving more than 2,100 women at 17 sites in the United States.

"Most FDA drugs take a minimum of five years and cost \$100 million to \$150 million in research," pro-life consultant Richard Glasow told The Washington Times. "In this case, the FDA has fast-tracked this drug and given this priority status.

"Usually, drugs are prioritized for life-threatening diseases, but pregnancy is not a life-threatening disease," said Glasow, whose pro-life work has focused on RU-486 in recent years.

RU-486, also known as mifepristone, is used with a prostaglandin, misoprostol, to induce abortion in women in the early weeks of pregnancy. RU-486 causes the lining of the uterus to release the baby, who usually suffocates or starves to death. Misoprostol causes the uterus to contract, expelling the child's body.

The procedure requires at least three visits to a clinic. On the first visit, the woman takes three tablets of RU-486, then returns two days later for two tablets of misoprostol. After a four-hour stay at the clinic on this second visit, about 70 percent of women have an abortion, according to the council. The remainder of women will abort after they leave the clinic. Two weeks after the first visit, the woman returns to make sure the abortion is complete. If it is incomplete, a surgical abortion is done.

The FDA described the drug combination as safe and effective "when used under close medical supervision." The French trials revealed the method was about 95 percent effective, according to the FDA. It said a "very small percentage required hospitalization, surgical treatment, and/or blood transfusions."

Pro-lifers not only have decried RU-486 because it kills an unborn child but because of its potential effects on women who use it. They have cited a death and other injuries to women in Europe, as well as a near death at a clinical trial in Iowa as support for their concerns. The incomplete data from the United States trials showed about 2 percent of women needed surgery to stop bleeding, according to the National Right to Life Committee.

"Not only will RU-486 endanger the physical lives of thousands of women each year, but it will inevitably take a serious toll on the emotional lives of the women who take it," said Mitchell, consultant for the Christian Life Commission and a visiting ethics professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky. "Who knows what the long-term psychological side effects will be of making the womb a killing field?"

When approval comes, it appears certain to change the dynamic of the abortion battle and to cause further debate in the medical field. A survey released in July by the Kaiser Family Foundation of California showed four of 10 obstetricians who now refuse to perform abortions would prescribe RU-486 for abortion, The Washington Times reported.

Pro-lifers and pro-choicers seem to agree RU 486 may increase markedly the number of abortions in the country beyond the current 1.5 million a year and could thwart anti-abortion demonstrations targeting clinics and doctors. The name of the manufacturer has not been revealed.

Some activist pro-lifers said it would not block their efforts.

"You may as well add pharmacists and drugstores to the FACE Act, because we will expose them," said Jeff White, director of Operation Rescue California.

The Federal Access to Clinic Entrances Act, a 1994 law, provides federal protection for abortion clinics.

Baptist Press sought a response from The Population Council but did not receive one before its deadline Sept. 19. Margaret Conway, a vice president at Planned Parenthood, called the FDA's action a "major advance," according to The Washington Post.

RU-486 is legal in France, Great Britain and Sweden. In May 1994, The Population Council received the patent by donation from Roussel Uclaf, the French developer of RU-486.

Planned Parenthood announced Sept. 11 it would begin testing another abortion drug combination this fall. The trials will involve about 3,000 women. They will begin at 17 PPFA affiliate sites, with possibly 35 to 45 involved by next year. The original test sites include Nashville, Tenn.; Houston; New York; Boston; Denver; Phoenix, and San Diego, according to news reports.

The trials will be for methotrexate, which kills the baby, and misoprostol, the prostaglandin used with RU-486. Methotrexate already has FDA approval as a chemotherapy drug for some cancer. Some doctors already have prescribed the drug combination "off-label" for abortion, while others have expressed concerns about the side effects of methotrexate.

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### **Mitchell: Abortion drugs will poison unborn child**

**By Dwayne Hastings**

**Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The assault against the unborn stepped up a notch as Planned Parenthood clinics across the United States announced plans for medical abortions using two currently available drugs -- methotrexate and misoprostol.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced Sept. 14 the clinics would trial the proposed medical abortion regimen in which the woman's body is tricked into miscarrying her child.

"Methotrexate is a chemical abortion that kills the newly developing baby, and as in all abortions, will harm women," said Suzanne Sevier, executive director of Tennessee Right to Life, noting studies using this drug in this manner are still in their experimental stages.

The announcement, coming on the eve of the FDA's signal it intends to approve the controversial abortifacient RU-486, was a blow to right-to-life advocates but welcome news to abortion proponents.

"When women are faced with an unintended pregnancy, we believe in their right of a safe option," said Barbara Baldwin, executive director of Planned Parenthood of Middle Tennessee, in a report in the Nashville Tennessean, saying the drug combination gives women a "another alternative for people who would terminate their pregnancies."

Explaining methotrexate works by blocking cell growth, C. Ben Mitchell, visiting professor of Christian ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., said in the protocol "babies are literally being poisoned to death in the womb."

The clinic will then administer misoprostol, most often used to treat stomach ulcers, to "force the mother's body to expel the corpse," added Mitchell, who serves as a consultant for biomedical and life issues for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

While abortion proponents express support for these newer means to end a pregnancy because, unlike a surgical abortion, the mother can receive the drugs in a doctor's office and abort the child at home, Mitchell warned the long-term consequences of chemical abortions may be even more harsh to the mother.

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"Imagine leaving a clinic and knowing that your baby is dying within your body, and that within the week you will have to flush the dead child down the toilet," Mitchell said. "The psychological impact of such an act is unimaginable."

The abortion drug will only be given to women no earlier than 30 days and no later than 49 days into their pregnancy, according to news reports.

Patients in the trial will initially receive an injection of methotrexate, which has been used to treat rheumatoid arthritis and tubal pregnancies and which will halt embryo development; a week later the woman is given misoprostol to prompt uterine contractions and expel the baby. Women who are still pregnant after a month will have to undergo a surgical abortion.

Noting the abortion drug regimen involves multiple visits to the clinic, Michael Burnhill, vice president of medical affairs for the Planned Parenthood Federation, told the Associated Press, "It is not the kind of procedure for women who are not good at following directions."

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**U.S. Senate condemns  
Christian persecution**

**By Dwayne Hastings**

**Baptist Press  
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Members of the U.S. Senate added their voices to the chorus of evangelicals decrying the worldwide persecution and martyrdom of Christians by adopting a resolution Sept. 17.

The resolution, authored by Sens. Don Nickles, R.-Okla., Sam Nunn, D.-Ga., "unequivocally condemns the egregious human rights abuses and denials of religious liberty to Christians around the world," calling upon "the responsible regimes" to halt their oppression of religious minorities. While non-binding, the resolution expresses the sense of the U.S. Senate.

"The persecution of Christians around the world is something that cannot be tolerated by the United States or any other nation," said Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind.

"In many parts of the world, Christians are restricted in or forbidden from practicing their faith, victimized by a 'religious apartheid' that subjects them to inhumane, humiliating treatment and in certain cases are imprisoned, tortured, enslaved or killed," said Coats, who co-sponsored the legislation.

The Senate resolution also implores the Clinton administration to "expand and invigorate the United States' international advocacy on behalf of persecuted Christians."

Numerous evangelical groups have complained the U.S. government has ignored the reports of persecution, continuing to pursue business-as-usual relations with the countries where the maltreatment is reported.

"Clearly, the United States government has been woefully negligent in dealing with the issue of the persecution of Christians around the world," reported Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, in testimony before a subcommittee of the U.S. House Committee on International Relations in February.

"This issue has not occupied a significant place in American foreign policy; that must change," Land continued, adding, "A foreign policy that denies our basic values and seeks only to meet the requirements of commerce and business is, and will always remain, totally unacceptable."

The Senate resolution also expressed support for a day of prayer for persecuted Christians. Southern Baptists meeting in New Orleans in June similarly urged SBC churches to join with other Christians worldwide in marking Sept. 29 as an International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

The U.S. House of Representatives is expected to act on a similar resolution offered by Rep. Frank Wolf, R.-Va.

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**Ethnic leaders take steps  
for recognition, inclusion****By Sarah Zimmerman**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist ethnic leaders are taking steps toward more recognition and inclusion in denominational life.

Presidents of 31 ethnic fellowships, representing 20 ethnic groups and 5,000 Southern Baptist congregations, met Sept. 14-18 in conjunction with the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee Sept. 16-18 meeting in Nashville, Tenn. Fellowship presidents also discussed a rally and "peace walk" during the 1997 SBC annual meeting in Dallas.

Meeting simultaneously with the Executive Committee gave fellowship presidents the "opportunity to see Southern Baptists in action. It has really been an eye-opener," said Russell Begaye, director of the Home Mission Board language church extension division.

The ethnic presidents have been involved in their group's activities, but most have not been involved in SBC organizational structure. Before the Executive Committee meetings, Begaye explained the process of the convention president appointing the Committee on Nominations which in turn recommends people for boards of SBC agencies. The presidents divided into groups to attend Executive Committee subcommittee meetings as observers, and together they attended Executive Committee plenary sessions.

"Your presence here this week in the midst of executive directors, agency leaders and Executive Committee members will send a strong message," Begaye said. "I know we will reap results and it will open doors to begin discussions."

In addition to attending Executive Committee meetings, the ethnic presidents had sessions for training and inspiration. Speakers were a "who's who" of Southern Baptists: Richard Land, Christian Life Commission president; Jerry Rankin, Foreign Mission Board president; Ronnie Floyd, Arkansas pastor and Executive Committee chairman; Paige Patterson, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary president and SBC Inter-Agency Council chairman; Bob Reccord, Virginia pastor and Implementation Task Force chairman; James T. Draper Jr., Baptist Sunday School Board president; Tom Elliff, Oklahoma pastor and SBC president; and Morris Chapman, Executive Committee president and chief executive officer.

"For the great majority of the ethnic presidents, this was their first time to meet and dialogue with leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention," Begaye said. "They have expressed great appreciation for the leaders taking time to speak to us. It says the leaders are concerned and interested in the 106 ethnic groups we as Southern Baptists reach with the gospel."

The ethnic presidents described SBC leaders as men committed to Christ who spoke to them from the heart. The leaders were treated as celebrities, with the ethnic presidents wanting group pictures with each man. But SBC leaders weren't spared the tough questions, such as why greater percentages of SBC resources are not allocated for reaching ethnic groups.

Rudy Hernandez, Texas evangelist and member of an ethnic leadership task force created by the Home Mission Board, is among leaders calling for the rally and peace walk during the SBC annual meeting next year. Hernandez also is a member of the Implementation Task Force which is overseeing the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring of the Southern Baptist Convention now under way.

To be held at First Baptist Church of Dallas, the ethnics' rally is scheduled for Sunday afternoon preceding the annual meeting. Hernandez led the ethnic presidents to brainstorm on ideas for the rally, including speakers, multi-ethnic choirs and simultaneous interpretation of the service into various languages. Plans are under way for rally participants to leave the church and walk to the convention site where the Pastors' Conference will be in session.

Hernandez stressed the ethnic groups would not interrupt the Pastors' Conference and the rally would be a way to say "thank you Southern Baptists for all you have done to reach ethnic America with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Many of the ethnic fellowships meet in conjunction with the SBC annual meeting. Ethnic presidents expressed unanimous support of the rally and peace walk, pledging to schedule their meetings to not conflict with the rally.

Begaye also has asked for 15 minutes on the SBC annual meeting program to recognize leaders of ethnic fellowships.

**Ridgecrest creative hiring  
achieves more than cost cuts****By Linda Lawson**

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--With the Buncombe (N.C.) County unemployment rate down to about 2.7 percent, Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center managers were faced with a choice. They could raise salaries and attempt to compete head-to-head with other local employers or they could try a variety of creative options.

With an already tight budget, they chose the latter approach that has included volunteer and co-op programs, internships, apprenticeships and the use of international students from Japan, Russia and Brazil as summer staffers. Partnerships have been established with a vocational rehabilitation center, an organization for the blind and sight impaired and a women's prison. Church youth groups are solicited to rake leaves in exchange for contributions to mission projects.

The results have included not only dollars saved but also ministry opportunities, according to G.W. Lankford, Ridgecrest director, and Sandra Boone, administrative coordinator.

Begun in 1995, the Ridgecrest volunteer program uses local people, including some Ridgecrest retirees, to do needed services but tasks that would not be filled by paid employees.

This summer, 10 people from North and South Carolina, Louisiana, Texas and Alabama served as summer volunteers. Their responsibilities included serving as hosts at the entrance gate, in the lobby as guests registrants and at the entrance to the dining hall as greeters. They also were available to give campus tours and provide campus shuttle service.

In exchange for a minimum of 30 hours' service per week, they received room and board and the opportunity to serve as surrogate parents and spiritual mentors to teenage summer staffers.

So far, four students have served as Ridgecrest interns, earning college credit in their fields. Interns have included students majoring in tourism, nursing, child development and family relations. People seeking certification as electricians, plumbers and landscaping technicians are currently participating in the apprenticeship programs.

Ridgecrest provided several weeks of summer employment to Japanese students participating in a hotel/motel management partnership through the Blue Ridge YMCA. The 10 students spoke no English, which provided a unique challenge, Boone acknowledged, but barriers were overcome and the students made helpful contributions.

"Even though the communication barrier was there, they cried and cried when they left," she said. They also received Bibles in their language provided by BSSB trustee Ken Speakman, a Gideons executive.

Five Russian students served at Ridgecrest as part of a Sister Cities program through Durham, N.C., that placed students in conference centers and camps throughout the area. When they arrived with very few clothes, the conference center met their needs. Summer staffers welcomed the opportunity to make friends with the Russian students and help them adjust to a different culture. Employees and guests also shared their faith in direct and indirect ways. The students also received the gift of a Gideon Bible in Russian.

A staffer from Brazil, whose parents are missionaries, was sponsored by the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Her Christian witness and ability to speak English was a tremendous encouragement to the international students, Boone said.

"We may never know the results of the seeds we planted this summer," she added. "We hope to continue this program next year."

Through a partnership with the Blue Ridge Vocational Rehabilitation Center, mentally and physically challenged adults worked under the supervision of rehab job coaches at a variety of tasks, such as grounds maintenance and dish washing. They also assumed full responsibility of the recycling program.

"We have gotten a lot of affirmation from attendees with regard to our employing disabled persons," Lankford said.

Through another partnership, blind and sight impaired people are helping with food service tasks such as sorting silverware, stacking trays and laundry tasks such as folding linens. Inmates from a nearby women's prison work in housekeeping and food service in supervised roles.

While fall brings guests to the conference centers who enjoy watching the change of seasons, it also brings leaves. Through LeafMission, church youth groups are invited to spend a Saturday raking or blowing leaves in exchange for a contribution to their mission project or mission trip. The response has been so positive there is now a waiting list of youth groups.

"We hope to expand this program to include some other one-day tasks" Boone said. "The students enjoy the work and we appreciate their service."

Boone and Lankford estimate savings through these efforts have been as much as \$22,000 for the summer. In addition to exceeding their original goal of cost containment, they agreed the opportunities to touch lives cannot be measured.

"We didn't set out to minister to people through these efforts but we feel truly blessed that this has been a result. The success of the program and the spiritual impact could only be a part of God's awesome plan for Ridgecrest," Boone said.

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**In the midst of cancer,  
she found assuring faith**

**By Jon Walker**

**Baptist Press  
9/19/96**

LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga. (BP)--Amidst the celebration and fireworks of Independence Day 1986, Frank Cox leaned across the hospital bed of his 27-year-old wife, whose unsteady breathing signaled the approaching end of her mortal life. Gripping the one good hand left on a body ravaged by cancer, Cox whispered into Debbie's ear a thank you for being his wife and the mother of their 4-year-old son, Stephen. Within moments she was gone, and Cox, 30, was a widower.

"What do you do when you lose something that is precious to your life?" Cox wondered, and it was a thought he would wrestle with for a long time as he sat and cried at the grave of his wife, telling God it hurt so bad, that his life was spinning round and round.

At one point, Cox demanded God give him his wife back. "I want her back," he said. "With a full head of hair, and I don't want there to be a bum arm or a splint on her leg. I didn't bargain for this; I just want her back."

But Cox sensed God saying, "If I opened up heaven and said, 'OK, Debbie, you can go back,' she wouldn't want to come, Frank. She's enjoying everything I ever prepared for her. Now get up and get on with your life."

And sitting there, Cox remembered a quote from another whose wife was deathly ill during his ministry, "God is too good to be unkind; he is too wise to be mistaken; and when you can't trace his hand, that's when you must learn to trust his heart."

Cox, pastor of North Metro First Baptist Church, Lawrenceville, Ga., began to learn that God's sovereignty meant he could do whatever he pleases while always being pleased with whatever he does.

"I thought about the last time I lifted Debbie out of bed and carried her to the car to drive her to the hospital for a CAT scan," Cox said. "That was the day we found out the tumor's growth had hopelessly expanded."

Yet, God impressed upon Cox that omnipotence and omnipresence are more than just theological terms. He sensed God saying, "Frank, I was there before you put Debbie in that car. I was there before you placed her on the CAT scan table. I knew the length of Debbie's days before the world was formed and before you ever met her."

It was an ironic lesson to learn because just two years before, on Easter Sunday 1984, Cox had preached a Sunday night sermon on trusting God in the midst of suffering.

"I preached that God would never put anything on you that he wouldn't give you the strength and the means to overcome," Cox recounted. "I didn't know that the next day I'd be sitting in a neurologist's office being told that my wife had a malignant brain tumor. Suddenly, this wasn't somebody else's wife or somebody else's life."

As Debbie and Frank struggled through the next two years of her illness, they began to see that nothing else mattered except a relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

One day, as Cox was heading to a church service, Debbie, in tears, said she wasn't really sure she was saved. "Now you have to understand, I had known Debbie since she was 15 years old. I had seen her active in church; I had watched her roll up her sleeves and serve people in the name of the Lord; I had discussed the things of God with her, and now she was having her doubts," said Cox, adding there's precedence for such doubts in the Bible. "John the Baptist, just before he was beheaded, sent a message to Jesus, asking, 'Are you really the one?'"

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Cox led his wife through the Scriptures, showing her how to have the assurance of eternal life, and then she prayed, "God, if I was not sincere as a child, I want you to know that I am sincere today."

Later, Cox came into the room and found his wife glowing. "God has assured me that I am a child of his," she said.

About a month later, during a revival at their church, Frank looked up to see Debbie struggling to get down the aisle. She was leaning on a cane, one leg and one arm in a splint, and once at the front, she told her husband, "God has convicted me that I am to be baptized as a witness to these people."

Cox told the congregation what had happened a few weeks before and why Debbie was coming forward now, and 30 people came forward to receive Christ. The next night, more than 20 came, and on Sunday, when Debbie was baptized, 15 more came to know Jesus.

In February 1986, while Debbie was recuperating from her second brain surgery, she said, "God has impressed upon me that I'm not going to make it this year." Frank refused to accept that and told her, "Deb, we're going to beat this thing. We're going to go on together. One day we'll be sitting on a front porch together looking back on the ministry God gave us."

"No, I won't make it, but I want you to know that's OK," Debbie said. "I've been praying about the woman who will come into your life, to take care of you and Stephen."

Debbie did get worse, eventually spending the last two weeks of her life in the hospital. "Each day I would watch the doctor test Debbie's eyesight by having her follow a small light, and each day I would see her eyes move less and less as the tumor expanded toward the base of her skull," Cox said. Barely able to see, Debbie asked Frank to read Psalm 62: "My soul waits in silence for him only, from him is my salvation. He only is my Rock and my Salvation, my stronghold. I shall not be shaken."

Frank's father, a preacher, and Debbie's father, a deacon, were in the room. "One of us would read a few verses and cry, then read a few more verses and cry some more," Cox said. "But the whole time Debbie had a smile on her face. She was at peace with her God."

Just before Debbie slipped into a coma, she took a Bible with her one good hand and ran her finger down a page until it stopped at Romans 8:18. Frank read it and cried some more: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Within a year after Debbie's death, Cox met his new wife, Mary, and discovered she had been praying for a godly man to marry since February 1986, concurrent with Debbie's prayer for a new wife and mother for Frank and Stephen.

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**Athlete says wins, losses  
both part of God's plan**

**By Jacqueline Holness**

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ATLANTA (BP)--It's rare to hear any athlete boast about being a "near Olympian." But Bob "Bart" Bardwell, a two-time near Olympian, believes whenever you accomplish -- or almost accomplish -- a goal, you should "celebrate."

Bardwell, a wheelchair marathon racer and a paraplegic since 1973, spoke on "Winning Isn't Only First Place" to Georgia Tech Baptist Student Union members in August.

Bardwell said he knows about wins, but also about losses -- and both are part of God's plan for him.

"When you love God, you allow him to make turns and detours in your life."

He was in Atlanta for the Paralympics as a part of the chaplain team of JAF (Joni and Friends) Ministries, a ministry primarily to the disabled community. Although he spent most of his time in Atlanta focusing on the needs of the Paralympians, he also sought to encourage others through his life.

When a construction accident robbed him of the use of his legs, doctors told Bardwell he would be in the hospital for six months, never have children and that he would have to adjust to a new way of living. Of all of those predictions, only one came true. Bardwell did have to adjust to a new life, but it was not as the doctors might have predicted.

"God was there as a faithful refuge," Bardwell said, "to make me better not bitter."

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Since giving his life to Christ at age 19, Bardwell knew that if God gave him "an acre and a dollar," he would start a Christian youth sports camp. Even after his accident, he still wanted to serve God in that way. He didn't know how he do it without legs, but eventually God opened the door.

"When God gives you something, he gives you the grace to go through it," Bardwell said.

Before his accident, he was an exceptional wrestler. If not for a knee injury at the Olympic trials for the '72 games, he believes he would have made the U.S. wrestling team. After the accident, he wondered if he could be an athlete.

Then a friend introduced him to wheelchair racing. Although he fell into a pothole during his first race, Bardwell said, "Something happened inside of me."

To date, he has been in 225 wheelchair races and 68 marathons. In 1988, he qualified for the Paralympics, but God had given him the resources to start a Christian youth sports camp. He decided his responsibilities as a youth director were more important. "I am trying to make a difference for God," he said.

In fact, although he's won many of those races, he reiterated that winning shouldn't be the only goal. "I want to be a finisher. It doesn't matter what place I come in," Bardwell said.

He emphasized life doesn't always happen as expected, but God will give a person the "desires of your heart" if it is in his will. In his own life, despite doctor's predictions, he has four daughters -- three of them triplets.

"God has made me a rich man," Bardwell said.

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Holness was an intern at The Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' newsjournal.

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