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August 25, 1971

Operation Touch Gives Medical Aid To Hondurans

by George Sheridan

ATLANTA (BP)--Between 6,000 and 8,000 Honduran villagers were touched with Christian love and the helping hands of Atlanta physicians during a medical mission program in Honduras sponsored by Atlanta's Northside Baptist Church.

Called "Operation Touch," the Northside Drive church project involved 37 medical doctors, dentists and youths in providing inoculations, medical and dental services to villagers in six pueblos scattered throughout two states of Honduras.

The laypeople also gave testimonies in evangelistic services conducted in the villages by Southern Baptist missionaries to Honduras.

In one village, 1,691 patients were treated, 891 teeth were extracted, the group witnessed to more than 1,300 persons and 36 decisions were recorded.

And in that village, where there had been no evangelical witness whatever previously, a Baptist church was started.

From the beginning, "Operation Touch" had its dramatic moments.

As the first plane load of "Operation Touch" workers landed in Mapulaca, Honduras, a shot was fired at the airplane.

Southern Baptist Missionary Harold Hurst, who established Southern Baptist work in Honduras nearly 20 years ago, reasoned that the shot was fired "as a ruse" to convince the OAS (Organization of American States) of the need for its troops to remain at the border for protection.

Three of the villages--Mapulaca, Virginia and San Antonio--lie close to the Honduras border with El Salvador. The two countries have been at war for three years, and OAS troops are maintaining a shaky peace along the frontier. Troops were stationed at each of the three pueblos.

Despite the presence of the troops, the "Operation Touch" groups in the border villages could hear shots almost every night.

But the one shot fired at the plane was the only sign of unfriendliness the groups encountered during the 17 days in Honduras.

There were other dramatic moments in helping people whose needs were overwhelming.

In Mapulaca, Atlanta chest surgeon Bedford Davis did major surgery twice, eliminating two severe hernias, using only local anesthetics. He was assisted by his son, Merrill, missionary Hurst and his son, Timothy, and by Kay Braswell.

After the second operation, the patient made a profession of faith in Christ. Both operations were successful. Adding to the drama, the village generator in Mapulaca had to be started on an emergency basis to provide the three electric lights needed for the operation.

In Candelaria, Dr. John Tate of Rome, Ga., was awakened early one morning to sew up a machete wound a man had sustained in a drunken brawl. The man had slain his opponent. In the operation, Dr. Tate removed a piece of skull that had cracked loose.

"On the moon, I think we had some divine guidance, helping us to be able to interpret what we saw," he said.

"A lot of people never thought we would find a rock like the 'Genesis rock,' one possibly dating from the creation of the moon. But the fact that we found it, the fact that it was positioned like it was, has really impressed me. It was supported like it was on a hand, like saying, 'Here I am, take me.'"

As Irwin had said earlier in a first-person account of his trip, he felt not only God's presence and guidance in exploring, but his aid in carrying out the tasks of the mission.

"There were several times when tasks seemed to be impossible," he said. "But they worked out all right every time. We were able to accomplish almost all of our objectives and I believe it helped to have someone there watching over me."

Irwin's personal faith in Christ, which began in a Florida revival 30 years ago, was nurtured mainly in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. It was only last summer, during a vacation to his Florida home town, that he discovered that the church where he trusted the Lord was a Baptist one.

He continued going to Presbyterian and Methodist churches until about three years ago, when he and his children began attending Nassau Bay Baptist Church. He is now a member there and both by his own testimony and that of his pastor and other church members, enjoys a close relationship with the congregation across NASA Road I from the Manned Spacecraft Center.

"I think that God has a plan for everyone's life," he declared. "I feel happy with my own relationship and I feel close to God, so naturally I am satisfied that I am doing God's will."

While Irwin said he had not pondered the place of space flight in God's master plan, he does think it is inevitable that man will visit the planets and eventually, travel throughout the universe.

In discussing the effect of space flight on men's faith with pastor William Rittenhouse, Irwin agreed with Deacon Bill Pogue, an astronaut slated for the Skylab program, that simply going into space and seeing the beauty of God's creation from a different perspective will not give a man faith.

"But it gives you a deeper appreciation of God as you look around and have pause to think of it--if you already have some faith," he said. "Just that aspect alone would strengthen one's faith."

Irwin, whose own faith was tested and strengthened during three months in a hospital following a plane crash, said space flight will alter men's relationships with each other and with God.

"I think as we go out to the moon and other planets, it will make us appreciate God's creation more and, in giving us a closer relationship with him, will give us a closer relationship with each other," he said.

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Mississippi Pastor Dies In Flaming Auto Collision

8/26/71

WAYNESBORO, Miss. (BP)--The pastor of First Baptist Church here, Eldie Francis Hicks, was killed Aug. 22 when his car hit a bridge abutment and burst into flames.

Hicks was driving to church for Sunday morning worship services after having coffee at a restaurant south of town.

The new Buick he was driving had been recently given him by close friends as an expression of love and appreciation.

Hicks had been pastor of the Waynesboro church since 1961, and had also been pastor of the church from 1943 to 1955. He was pastor of First Baptist Church, Magee, Miss., from 1955 to 1961 when he returned to the Waynesboro church for a second time.

A native of Paducah, Ky., Hicks was a graduate of Union University, Jackson, Tenn., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

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New Orleans Baptist Board
Calls For Church Apology

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The Executive Board of the New Orleans Baptist Association adopted here a resolution calling for Mid-City Baptist Church and its pastor to issue a public apology for involvement in a church bond scandal that caused bondholders to lose "hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars. "

The pastor of the church, J. Paul Driscoll, said in response that the church was planning to issue some statement in reaction to the association's action, but could not say when such a statement would be forthcoming.

Driscoll, had pleaded "nolo contendere" (no contest) to one of 13 counts charging mail fraud in the sale of securities totalling nearly \$12 million during the period of 1961-66. He was given a suspended sentence and placed on probation for three years by U.S. District Judge Lansing W. Mitchell here on May 19.

The resolution adopted by the New Orleans Baptist Association stated that Driscoll's conviction and a public rebuke by the judge for his involvement in the bond sales had done "great harm" to the proclamation of the gospel and had "scandalized" Baptist work in the New Orleans area.

The resolution pointed out that the pastor had not issued "a public statement of regret, remorse or repentance for the tragedy for which he has been judged responsible." It added that the church had taken no disciplinary action against the pastor or issued no public apology for complicity.

The association resolved to "sternly reprimand the Reverend J. Paul Driscoll and the Mid-City Baptist Church for their nefarious activities:

The action stated further "that we call upon this pastor and this church to make public apologies expressing regret and remorse for the unhappiness they have caused, with repentance for their actions,

"That we call upon this pastor and this church to put forth every effort to make restitution to the many people who have suffered financial loss,

"And that we publicly declare that the illegal actions of the Reverend J. Paul Driscoll and the Mid-City Baptist Church are not representative of our ministers and our churches."

The resolution also pointed out that each Baptist church is an independent entity "responsible to no ecclesiastical officer or organization and the New Orleans Baptist Association therefore had no power or authority to prevent the events which have taken place."

The statement added that "it is the desire of this board to take action which would be redemptive and would avoid the possibility of a breach in fellowship between the New Orleans Baptist Association and the Mid-City Baptist Church."

An official of the association said in a telephone interview that before it had adopted the resolution calling for a statement of repentance from the pastor and the church, there had been discussion by board members of possible moves at the association's annual meeting on Oct. 11 to withdraw fellowship from the church.

The spokesman added that the adoption of the resolution was an effort to bring reconciliation between the association and the church and to prevent possible action in October to withdraw fellowship.

Though deacons at the church reportedly had attempted to frame a statement in response to the association's action, there had been no official response from the church as of 10 days following the action of the association board.

Driscoll, in a lengthy telephone interview with Baptist Press, asked that he not be quoted. He did indicate in a later conversation that the church would probably have some statement in response to the association's resolution in the future.

The church is in a Chapter 10 bankruptcy, with a court-appointed trustee managing the financial affairs of the church and its elementary school. Warren Simmon, a New Orleans attorney who is the court-appointed receiver, said he was willing to issue a statement in defense of the church with the approval of the judge.