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Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

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Texas Baptist Pastor Fights Paralysis to Continue Ministry

By Robert O'Brien

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Donald Cox knows how it feels to lie gripped by a deadening paralysis and fight back the tears.

He knows how it feels to lie night after night in the 4 a.m. solitude of a hospital room and pray with his wife that God would give them continued opportunity for ministry.

He knows how it feels to suddenly realize that God had left him a voice and a brain and continued opportunity for Christian service.

And he knows how it feels to be thankful for something as "simple" as movement in his arms.

Cox, 40, had been pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Bonham, Tex., for four years, when he resigned July 2.

That afternoon, on a family outing at Bonham State Park, he dived into a lake and crushed his fifth vertebra.

He spent the next 3 1/2 months on the critical list at the Veterans Administration Hospital, Dallas, paralyzed from the neck down.

Doctors declined to operate for fear of killing him, and they left little hope that he would ever walk--or move very much--again.

But Donald Cox gritted his teeth. "Granny," he told his wife's mother, "I'm going to put my feet under your table on Christmas day."

Cox may spend the rest of his life as a quadriplegic--paralyzed from the neck down--but for two weeks during the Christmas holidays he will be at 602 Wilcox in McKinney, Tex., spending Christmas with his family and putting his feet, with some help, under "Granny's" table.

That's more than his family or his doctors hoped for during the critical weeks after his injury when he lay imprisoned in a collar and body-stretching frame in danger of losing his life.

Since October 25, he has undergone rehabilitation for quadriplegics at the Veterans Hospital in Memphis. He will return here for further treatment for an indefinite period.

During two visits by Mrs. Cox since his transfer to Memphis, Bellevue Baptist Church here has helped with room and board to ease the family's financial burden and allow her to concentrate on his rehabilitation.

Some feeling has returned to his body and he can move his arms enough to allow doctors to hook them to a device which operates an electric typewriter.

He can't grip with his hands or move his legs but doctors don't completely rule out the possibility that someday he may regain the use of his feet, with the help of braces, Mrs. Cox says.

Cox is determined to return to a pastorate, to continue in the ministry despite his handicap. And he hopes for opportunities to preach.

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But, in the meantime, he is taking every opportunity to witness for Christ to other patients and their families and to hospital personnel.

"A nurse in Memphis has asked Donald to talk to her about Christ," says Mrs. Cox. "He realizes now more than ever before than God can use what he has and that he should not give up hope because of what he no longer has."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cox, Leilani, 17, Sheila, 15, and Gregory, 13, are living temporarily with Mrs. Cox's mother, Mrs. Beatrice Vier, a 61-year-old widow, in McKinney.

"If it hadn't been for Christian friends, especially from small churches where he's served as pastor, the Cox family probably wouldn't have made it financially thus far," says Bill Roe, Texas Baptist annuity secretary from Dallas.

"So far their combined monthly benefits are a little more than \$350 a month," Roe says. "And because the small churches he's pastored have contributed only \$1,969 since he first joined the Southern Baptist Annuity Board's Plan A in 1965, only about \$204 of that amount can be paid by us in disability benefits. Even that will cut back to a basic \$141 by the time all the children are 18. He was never enrolled in Plan B, which would have provided additional benefits."

Even so, each child will be eligible for \$600 a year for four years past high school through Plan A's educational benefit feature.

The Coxes view their future status as a matter for God's leadership.

"We know, without a shadow of a doubt, that the Lord will take care of us," says Mrs. Cox with a confident smile. "He's done it so far and we know he will continue to do it if we place our trust in Him."

As for Donald, Roe says, he continues to think more of ministering than being ministered to.

"While he was still in the Dallas hospital, he heard that a 13-year-old boy at Calvary Church in Bonham had a jawbone removed because of cancer.

"His first reaction was to ask his wife to write a check and send it to the family. She did. And that typifies how God is continuing to work through them."

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"Community-In-Crisis"
Project To Aid Churches

12/4/72

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here is participating in eight pilot projects dealing with what is called the "Community-In-Crisis."

Increased mobility, the rapid deterioration of whole communities, and the breakdown of neighborhoods, have caused the board to begin investigating ways to minister to the "community-in-crisis."

Warren Rust of the board's Division of Associational Services said that there are three levels of churches in the transitional community: (1) The community is changing and the church doesn't realize it. (2) Symptoms of change are recognizable. Funds are decreasing, the deacons are leaving. (3) The church has reached crisis level and is becoming a shell.

"It is to this third level that this program will minister," said Rust. "But we are in the development process for a system of training for churches in level one."

The board will help provide assistance in operational costs leadership, and special research and study in the projects which will be directed from the Baptist associational level.

The whole concept is based on the fact that individual churches just don't have the ability in many instances to minister to transitional communities. So the churches in an area pool their resources to provide ministry in a fuller sense.

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Peninsula Baptist Association in Newport News, Va., will concentrate on Hampton Roads Baptist Church which is on the "border" between a black and white community.

Some of the objectives of the projects will be to train the pastor in sensitivity for leadership in a transitional community, train the church to react to a transitional community, take an in-depth survey of the community, and establish procedures for community involvement in the life of the church.

"We just teach these people to react to change constructively," said Rust.

Another association developing a team relationship of churches is the 14 church association in Baltimore which includes Utah Place Baptist Church where famed home missionary Annie Armstrong attended church and Lee Street Baptist Church where Southern Baptist leader E.Y. Mullins was pastor.

Other projects are with the Birmingham Baptist Association in Alabama, Long Run Baptist Association in Louisville, Kansas City Baptist Association in Missouri, Broad River Baptist Association in Gaffney, S.C., Augusta Baptist Association in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and Wise Baptist Association in rural and mountain churches of southwest Virginia.

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Lawrence to Lead Alaska
Christian Social Ministries

12/4/72

ATLANTA (BP)--C.J. Lawrence of the Buckner Baptist Children's Home in Dallas will assume duties Jan. 1 as director of Christian social ministries for Alaska Southern Baptists.

Lawrence was appointed to the position jointly by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here, and the Alaska Baptist Convention with offices in Anchorage.

His first work in the nation's largest state will be to organize a child care program for Alaska Baptists by revamping and extending current efforts. He said he hopes to build a foster home facility to provide temporary shelter and counseling from 60 to 90 days for children with no place to go.

He plans also to extend the work of family services for the Alaska convention to include family life conferences in churches, working with pastors, teaching techniques for dealing with family problems, and in dealing with families themselves. He also will be working with juvenile delinquents, unwed mothers, illiterates and others.

A Southern Baptist Home Mission Board spokesman noted Lawrence's experience in all these fields. As chaplain-pastor, Lawrence has served at Buckner Baptist Children's Home, the nation's largest Baptist children's home, since 1964.

Previously, he has been pastor of churches in Oklahoma and Kentucky, and was a chaplain intern at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Houston.

A native of Stone City, Ark., he is a graduate of Tulsa University in clinical psychology, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

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