



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**---FEATURES**

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**Operation Blue Thumb Brings  
Happier Days for the Aged**

By Larry Jerden

VICTORIA, Tex. (BP)--Baptist men here have found a way, working in cooperation with city officials, to help low-income elderly persons whose homes cannot withstand the elements.

A story in a Sunday edition of The Victoria Advocate described the plight of the aging citizens and a sermon on Christian service, using that story as its basis, sparked them into action.

Within two weeks after James Adams, then pastor of Victoria's First Baptist Church, urged his people to respond, more than 20 men in the church had launched Operation Blue Thumb, a ministry to the needy elderly.

They had a simple aim--to repair the homes, which city building inspector Don Fox said "won't even turn wind and rain," and bring them up to the city's housing code minimum.

With Fox making specific needs known, one of the laymen, J.C. (Scrappy) King, organized the men into teams of four and planned a Saturday work schedule with one team slated to work each week on a rotating basis.

While the basics seemed simple, Fox pointed out the effort involved more than just picking up a hammer.

"Before the repair work could be done," Fox said, "we had to do our paperwork at the city. Then the individuals had to be qualified as eligible for assistance.

"For one thing, they had to own their own homes--we didn't want to help the slum lords."

But even with selectivity, plenty ranked in the "qualified" category--elderly people, mostly on social security, who owned their homes but lacked sufficient resources to bring them up to city standards.

Some of the city's builders donated materials for the project, and many of the members of the church donated materials, time and money. The local Jaycee's were also involved in the project for a time. The men stored the materials in a vacant building at First Baptist Church, and to King fell the involved job of coordinating teams, materials and projects.

Jack Pace, one of the team captains, described the importance of the coordinator's job.

"You have to have a key layman to coordinate it, or it won't go," Pace said. "If the materials are ready, I can take a crew and work any Saturday, but someone has to prepare and coordinate during the week. That man is the key."

The importance of coordination is also pointed up by the fact that one crew rarely finished a project on one day.

"Since a different team will come in the next week and finish the project, it's important for the captains to be coordinated," Pace said.

Under guidelines established by the city, the Baptist men didn't do any new construction, only outside repair. The work included roof covering, weatherproofing, walls, screens, glazing, some steps and porches.

But even within the limits, the 25 or so men involved feel the project is well worth the effort.

"At first I wasn't convinced we wouldn't end up helping some who could help themselves," Pace said, "but Mr. Fox spoke to us men at church and convinced us of the need.

"After seeing the needs and taking part, I can only say that I don't know of anything better we could do. It's comparable to visiting in prisons or any other form of mission action.

"It's dirty work and a lot of people don't want to do it, but it's worthwhile.

"We worked on several jobs where people didn't say a word of thanks and others where they knocked themselves out thanking us, but it doesn't matter.

"Our men are busy people who could use their Saturdays to good advantage, but when you see people who can't keep water out, or insects out--old people who could fall and hurt themselves on a broken step--you just know it's worthwhile."

Pace's experience on an earlier project gave the building effort its name--an errant hammer contacted a thumb instead of a nail, and the inspiration for "Operation Blue Thumb" was born.

Guadalupe Baptist Association Missionary Victor Nichols plans to spread the idea to other churches in the area, and while he is not pulling for more "blue thumbs," he does hope more folks than ever will have warmer and dryer winters because of some Christian men's concern.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Larry Jerden is associate editor of World Mission Journal (formerly Baptist Men's Journal), the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's newly designed publication. This article is adapted from the Journal's November issue.

# # #

Baptist Press Feature

Tennessee Layman Enters  
New World of Non-Readers

10/18/73

By Tim Fields

KINGSPORT, Tenn. (BP)--Nick Deskins, a shift worker at a paper plant here, "jumped at the chance" to learn to teach non-readers because he "always had a real feeling for people who couldn't read."

And in the process, Deskins, who completed a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board course in literacy training, opened up two new worlds: the limited world of non-readers and his own concept of how to help others solve their problems.

But he had to wait nearly a year to put into practice what he had learned in the 32-hour course, which equipped him to teach adult non-readers how to read and internationals how to speak English.

"I couldn't go up to people and start asking them whether or not they could read, so I just had to wait," Deskins recalled.

"One day I received a call from Dan Fowler, a deacon at Colonial Heights Baptist Church where I'm a member. I was thrilled when he said 'Nick I think I've found your first student.'"

Deskins' new pupil proved to be a real test of literacy training.

"Claude Bainer was not only an adult non-reader, but he had a mental learning disability because of epilepsy at birth," Deskins explained.

"Bainer frequently shopped at the Woolworth's store which Fowler manages," Deskins related.

One day he asked Fowler the price of a certain item in the store.

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"The price is right there above the shelf," Fowler told him. Bainer hesitated for a few minutes and then replied, "Could you tell me what it says? I can't read."

Fowler immediately asked Bainer if he would like to learn how to read. "When he said yes Fowler called me," Deskins said.

Shortly after Deskins began his twice weekly sessions with Bainer, he realized his new student would probably never read fluently because of his disability.

"Nevertheless, he learned quickly those first few weeks," Deskins pointed out. "Clyde was an extreme introvert who lived with his parents. I had to pry every word out of him."

As weeks passed, Deskins' student learned how to read price labels and street signs and could stumble through passages in the Laubach Skill Book 1.

"When Clyde reached his learning capacity in reading and writing, I forgot about attempting to teach him to read and I just tried to be his friend," the layman said.

Through Deskins' suggestions, Clyde began attending a neighborhood church.

"He never attended church with me because I lived so far away," Deskins explained.

"During our weekly sessions I tried to share my faith in Christ with Clyde and he assured me he knew the Lord.

"In spite of Clyde's limited reading level, our friendship seemed to draw him out of his shell. He went and purchased a new desk, a bunch of new pencils and numerous note books.

"Between sessions Clyde would copy the animal figures used to teach the alphabet in the workbooks. I'd come for his lesson and notice that he'd filled 50 to 60 pages with figures of birds and animals from the books," Deskins said.

"At least this interest gave him something new in his extremely limited world. I began taking Clyde with me when I went downtown, and he always made a point to read all the price signs he saw in the stores," Deskins said.

"Every time Clyde went to town he would buy 40 or 50 new pencils and more note pads. He was so excited about being able to put a pencil in his hand and use it that he'd buy every kind of pencil he could find," Deskins said. "I finally had to tell Clyde if he didn't stop he'd own every pencil in town."

His experience with Bainer opened up a whole new concept of ministry for Deskins, who also serves as a volunteer associate probation officer in his county and is actively involved in Brotherhood work with Baptist Men and Royal Ambassador boys in his church.

Before long he launched into another phase of literacy work, with a young Hindu girl from India who could neither speak nor write English.

Sorgajini Jahnjir, who had moved to Kingsport with her Moslem husband, was converted at an independent Baptist church in town.

"My wife, who is Japanese, hosts a Bible study for internationals in our home," Deskins said. "The study meets weekly and Sorgajini came to the meeting and expressed the desire to learn to read and write English."

While Deskins has twice weekly lessons with the Indian girl, his wife teaches the girl's mother who came to the United States from Bangladesh.

"I was a little frightened at first because Sorgajini couldn't speak a word of our language, and I had to first teach her conversational English," Deskins explained.

After a year of study, the Indian pupil is now working in Laubach Skill Book III and is reading simple Bible stories about Jesus.

"In our training sessions in literacy, we were told that a person's reading disability might lead us to other needs in a person's life," Deskins said. "In the case of the Indian family, we found this to be true."

The Deskins and other members of the church have helped Sorgajini, her husband and six other family members to find and purchase a house and to find jobs in their new country.

Sorgajini has since been baptized at Colonial Heights Church. She is an active member, and her husband, although he has not accepted Christ, attends church regularly.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Tim Fields is editor of curriculum materials and press representative for the Royal Ambassador division of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Memphis. This article is adapted from the November issue of World Missions Journal (formerly Baptist Men's Journal).

BP PHOTO mailed to state Baptist paper editors.

# # #

Cooper Urges National  
Day of Prayer in 1974

10/18/73

RICHMOND (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Owen Cooper said here he will ask the North American Baptist Fellowship to undertake organizing a nationwide day of prayer and fasting in June of 1974.

Cooper reiterated the idea he has touched on before during a surprise visit to a meeting of the Virginia Baptist General Board here.

The Mississippi layman recalled that on June 7, 1774, Virginia patriots observed a day of prayer and fasting in the famous Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, on behalf of the sister colony of Massachusetts.

The prayer meeting in 1774 took place after Virginia's Governor Dunmore, antagonized by sympathy in the House of Burgesses for the Boston Tea Party, dissolved the House. The Boston Tea Party was a violent protest to the English Tea Tax.

Unlike 1774, Cooper's proposed prayer meeting in 1974 would not be designed as a protest but as a day of thanksgiving and recommitment to the ideals of democracy and the Christian way of life.

Fred Laughon of the SBC Radio and Television Commission, who accompanied Cooper, said he hoped "Bruton Parish Church would be made available for a Baptist prayer meeting, nationally televised, in 1974. When the 1774 meeting was held, Baptists were still being jailed in Virginia for preaching."

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#### CORRECTION

In graphs 2 and 3 of Baptist Press story mailed 8/16/73, headlined Seminary Gets \$370,000 Bequest for Endowment, change the name Sample to Sampson in three different places, making them read Laura Dunlap Sampson, Mrs. Sampson and W. Emmett Sampson. Thanks.

---Baptist Press