

March 6, 1974

Baptist Commissioner
Works for Prison Reform

By Jim Newton
for Baptist Press

It was an exciting week for Edward LeRoy Leonard, an inmate in the Tennessee State Prison serving a 99-year sentence for murder.

Not only was he to see his 21-year-old son for the first time in 18 years, but he was accompanied on the trip from the state prison in Nashville to Memphis by State Corrections Commissioner Mark Luttrell and Mrs. Luttrell.

Luttrell, a Southern Baptist layman, was going to Memphis to attend the Republican Governor's Conference. During the week he introduced prisoner Leonard to Tennessee Gov. Winfield Dunn during the dedication service of Transition House, a Memphis halfway house for inmates.

The governor was not aware that the thin, neatly dressed man was a "trustee" at the state prison.

The story of how Leonard came to be in Memphis that week is a vivid testimony of the kind of compassionate concern Luttrell demonstrates for the inmates in the Tennessee prison system.

The commissioner wanted to help when he heard that Leonard's son was having serious psychological problems because he had just learned that his real father was in prison on a murder charge, and that his step-father was not his real father.

Luttrell took the responsibility for Leonard. He trusted him, telling Leonard plainly that he knew he would not run off, because Leonard could escape any day he wanted to from the main prison in Nashville where he works at the prison's checkpoint entrance.

The reconciliation between father and son in Memphis that week apparently helped to clear up the young man's problems. "My son liked me right off," Leonard said. And after their three-day visit, his son told him, "After 15 years in prison, I believe you've paid for what you did. The future is what counts now."

Leonard later described Luttrell as "the most wonderful man I've ever known... He is the best corrections commissioner we've ever had, and I've been here through four or five commissioners."

Because of Luttrell's concern for the prisoner's plight, some inmates have described him as "a convict's commissioner."

Luttrell, they say, cares about people. He carries a burden for bringing about change in the state's outdated and inadequate prison system, trying to improve the inmate's situation from within the system.

Though he will work day and night to achieve his goals, he's never too busy to listen to an inmate's problems.

Although he is noted for his compassion, Luttrell can also be tough when the situation demands it, and the inmates respect him for it.

A fellow member of Luttrell's Sunday School class at Immanuel Baptist Church in Nashville said, "He represents Christian dedication through his work in a finer way than anyone I know, including pastors and missionaries. He is deeply committed to carrying out his faith in his daily work. He is able to communicate a real virility, coupled with great compassion and kindness."

Luttrell's pastor described him as an active member who wears his religion well. "It's not for show. He's sincerely interested in all we're trying to do through the church."

Pastor Gaye McGlothlen said Luttrell had recently been elected a deacon and last year was arrangements chairman for a lay renewal weekend led by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's division of evangelism.

Like most of the more progressive advocates of corrections reform, Luttrell firmly believes in a decentralized, community corrections system, where penal institutions are located in major population centers rather than remote isolated regions.

Most of the inmates come from the cities, not isolated areas. He believes rehabilitation is better accomplished when the prisoner has contact with the free world, has support from his family, interested and concerned citizens, and friends.

"Punishment alone is not likely to help motivate a man to improve himself. The ideal thing is for an inmate to walk out of prison a better man--better prepared to withstand temptations, realizing that the type of life he lived before is for the birds," Luttrell explained.

Commissioner Luttrell tries to stress the need to help inmates develop a better self-concept so that the convicts will see themselves "as one of God's creatures with worth and potential," even though they are in prison.

Unfortunately, the average citizen does not see this as the major purpose for most prisons, but the percentage of people who want the prisoner punished, not rehabilitated, seems to be lessening, Luttrell said optimistically.

Luttrell said he feels the best hope for rehabilitating an inmate is for Christian people to take a personal interest in him, visit him, and try to help him adjust to society.

The commissioner feels he still has a large task ahead of him. He wants to see the concept of regional correctional institutions become a reality in Tennessee and to decentralize the main prison in Nashville. He would also like to make the department treatment programs as effective as possible, and to "enlist as many interested, compassionate and concerned citizens as possible and put them in touch with prisoners.

"I could put 100 Christian men in touch with 100 inmates and boys immediately, and not only would the inmates benefit, but every one of the Christian men would grow spiritually," he said.

Luttrell feels that, unfortunately, he does not have as much support in his goals from the religious community as there ought to be. Not many Southern Baptists are concerned enough to do anything about it, he admitted.

Mark Luttrell obviously is not only concerned, but is doing something about his concerns.

And in doing so he has personified the compassion of Jesus Christ, who came "to preach the gospel to the poor, . . . to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." (Luke 4:18, KJV)

(BP) PHOTO mailed to Baptist state paper editors

Adapted from the March issue of World Mission Journal, Jim Newton, editor



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March 6, 1974

Death Haunts Cornstalk
Huts in Sub-Sahara Africa

By Carl W. Tiller
for Baptist Press

The nature of the human distress in the famine belt of Africa, to which the Baptist World Alliance relief program is currently addressing much of its effort, is vividly revealed in excerpts from a recent letter of a missionary stationed in one of the six countries concerned.

He says: "The babies are dying by the score!

"Yesterday R--found one little section with about seven huts where three babies had died the night before. Today R-- and G-- found another group of about 15 cornstalk sheds where six had died the day before.

"Naturally this is only a drop in the bucket for there are at least 1,500 of these little brush sheds (where displaced persons from villages farther north are now living).

"We carried eight loads of mothers and babies to the baby clinic today. Many of these babies have measles and other killing diseases. Dr. M-- told me that if a baby has not had sufficient protein and gets measles there is just really no hope. Many are just starving to death, or get so weak that when they get flu they die.

"There is cholera here and just south of here, so you see what we dreaded has arrived. We have been able to get some penicillin and other drugs in Nigeria and N--; these are the only such drugs in town.

"We need thirty tons of grain a week so that each of these people may have about four pounds a week. This is basic to their survival. They must eat. Even if we can get the grain free (from government sources), we will need at least \$1,160 every week to haul it and get it out.

"Even if we wear out a truck in the next six months, it will be money well spent, because it will save lives, a lot of little children and babies included!

Gas here is \$1.26 a gallon. There is no one who has a truck who is willing to carry any grain to any area without the total transportation being paid in advance and in full.

"G-- and R-- come back every day ready to cry, because things are in such a mess. We have permission from the mayor to do anything we wish; they feel that they have failed to get anything done, and no one can deny that we are in a disaster!"

The famine in the Sahel area is the result of a prolonged drought extending over five or six years. Crops have failed and herds of animals used for food have been decimated. The countries affected are: Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta.

In the past nine months, Baptist compassion has brought \$50,000 to the Baptist World Alliance for relief in the six affected countries of Africa, just south of the Sahara desert. The Alliance in turn has made grants through Baptist channels for relief in these countries as fast as funds arrive.

Mr. Tiller is associate general secretary, Baptist World Alliance, Washington, D. C.

**Cooperative Program Up
15% for Five Months**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists gave more money through the convention's Cooperative Program (unified budget) and to designated causes during the first five months of fiscal 1973-74, than in the same period of record-breaking fiscal 1972-73, a report here shows.

Cooperative Program receipts for October through February of the current fiscal year totaled \$16,297,122.83, up 15.15 per cent over the same period for 1972-73, according to figures released by John Williams, director of financial planning and assistant to the treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

Designated offerings through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions sponsored by the Woman's Mission Union reached a record \$16,140,032 by the end of February.

Total designated offerings for October through February were \$17,709,872.73, a 17.01 per cent increase over the same two quarters in 1972-73.

Williams said that although a new one-month period in the history of Cooperative Program giving was realized in January, 1974, totaling \$3,937,030, "This is the first February in Cooperative Program history that receipts ever went over \$3 million.

Cooperative Program contributions reported in February alone, reached \$3,485,787.72 compared with \$2,952,762.46 for the same time in 1973, an 18.05 per cent increase.

Extra gifts or overages of \$596,000 from four states sharing funds received from their 1972-73 budgets, plus a longer month, accounted for January being a larger month than February, Williams noted.

"We're looking real good on Cooperative Program gifts. If we continue this pace of giving, both the operating and capital budgets will be met and might enable advance distribution to the agencies," Williams said.

Texas Baptists led the Baptist state conventions in February with \$473,965.42 in Cooperative Program contributions and in designated giving with \$2,581,436.26 for a \$3,055,401.68 total gifts.

Six other Baptist state conventions exceeded \$1 million in total gifts for February: North Carolina (\$1,651,122.34), Tennessee (\$1,378,298.98), Florida (\$1,311,529.50), Georgia (\$1,269,577.43), South Carolina (\$1,164,510.19) and Alabama (\$1,046,500.94).

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**Hotel Reservations Lag
For Dallas Convention**

3/6/74

DALLAS (BP)--Many rooms near the Dallas Convention Center are still available for those planning to attend the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) here, June 11-13, 1974.

Thus far, 4,389 rooms for 8,496 guests have been assigned, according to the convention housing bureau.

At this time a year ago, 5,069 rooms had been reserved for the Portland, Ore., meeting of the SBC in June, 1973.

Convention officials say, however, that it is too early to speculate on how much the energy crisis will affect attendance.

When Southern Baptists met last in Dallas, in 1965, convention registration was 16,053, only slightly behind the 16,678 registered in New Orleans in 1969, the highest in convention history.

Adequate parking space will be available this year at the Dallas Convention Center, and shuttle buses will be used between the convention hotels and the convention center, according to the local arrangements committee.

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Hotel registration cards are being distributed by Baptist state convention offices.

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Evangelists Plan Afternoon
Meeting in Dallas, June 12

3/6/74

DALLAS (BP)--The Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists will meet at First Baptist Church here, June 12, 1974, during the week of the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Speakers for the one-afternoon session will include Bailey Smith, First Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., and evangelists Moody Adams of Baton Rouge, La., Bill Penley of Asheville, N. C., and John Haggai of Atlanta.

A special guest will be ventriloquist Geraldine Regan and "Rickey."

The conference will open at 12:30 p.m. with an instrumental concert and a concert by music evangelists. Other special music will include presentations by Ivy Walsh of Atlanta, Randall Veazey of Alabama, Lowell Leistner of Orlando, Fla., Bette Stalnecker of Lake Charles, La., Ferrell Brakefield of Oakman, Ala., J. W. and Bettilu Turney, Austin, Tex., and Jayne Ferrell.

John Bos and Joe Nichols will be program accompanists.

Present officers are Jerry Spencer of Brownsville, Tenn., president; John Bos, Orlando, Fla., vice president; Ed Stalnecker of Lake Charles, La., music director; E. C. McDaniel, First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., pastor advisor; and Don Womack of Memphis, Tenn., secretary-director of the central office of Southern Baptist Evangelists.

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