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October 9, 1974

**Missionary Reports On
Honduras Relief Actions**

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras (BP)--Long-range disaster relief is a priority in the minds of Southern Baptist missionaries and national Baptists in Honduras several weeks after Hurricane Fifi devastated much of the northern coast of the country.

Within hours after the hurricane struck, every Southern Baptist missionary in the country was mobilized to help, according to A. Clark Scanlon, Foreign Mission Board field representative for Middle America, who saw the immediate disaster relief first hand as he traveled by helicopter with missionaries on relief trips.

The executive committee of the Honduras Baptist Convention asked all churches and missions to organize emergency committees to collect money, food and clothing. Among the victims are some church members who lost family members in the winds and floods, as well as many who lost everything they owned.

In two or three months, the real effect of Fifi will be felt, according to Scanlon. Although Honduras is a relatively small country, it is the second largest exporter of bananas in the world. In fact, the banana industry comprises about 50 per cent of the country's economy.

Of the two major producers, United Fruit Company lost 90 per cent of its crops and Standard Fruit Company, 75 per cent. The corn crop on the north coast, to be harvested in November, was also destroyed. Corn is the main staple in the diet of those in rural Honduras.

Scanlon says this will cause a real hunger crisis. The country is still living on the grain stored from earlier crops so this effect has not yet been felt. Scanlon said international aid is also slowing down since hurricane disaster is no longer in the headlines.

"The most liquid asset that can be used is money," Scanlon explained. "Any other materials that might be sent would have to be screened to determine what could be used."

Southern Baptist missionaries have been meeting almost nightly with Leslie G. Keyes, chairman of the mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in the country) to evaluate the activities of the day and plan for future involvement.

While missionaries are still engaged in emergency relief efforts--distributing food and clothing, giving medical attention, maintaining radio and phone contacts--the mission has discussed the possibility of concentrating Baptist efforts in one or two towns after the immediate crisis passes.

Cooperating with the Honduran government and other evangelical groups, Baptists would determine a single area on which to focus their attention. If this is done, Scanlon said, the strategy would be to help people rebuild homes, furnish kitchens, engage in a medical ministry and provide tools such as hammers, saws and machetes.

Dr. W. David Harms, medical missionary, was holding a weekly medical clinic in Mapulaca on the border of El Salvador, when the hurricane struck. Because the winds and rain made it impossible for the Missionary Aviation Fellowship pilot to pick him up on schedule, he offered his services by short wave radio if a government helicopter could pick him up.

He and missionary nurse Frances Crawford were flown to Toco on the Caribbean coast. For a week, they gave inoculations and met other medical needs. Later, a helicopter picked up Miss Crawford and took her to Empacador, and Dr. Harms flew to San Pedro Sula where he took charge of receiving and distributing medicine for Christian groups working in Honduras.

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Scanlon also accompanied Dr. Harms as he rode in U.S. Army helicopters to deliver food and supplies to refugees.

Other missionaries were equally as busy. For example, in a single day, Keyes secured 84 sets of blankets and sheets to distribute, hauled tons of basic staple grains for hard-hit communities in the Sula Valley and, with his wife, housed missionaries coming from other parts of the country to help with relief work. Scanlon said Keyes' task was made more difficult since his telephone had been out several days before the actual hurricane struck.

Other missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. S. Wayne Wheeler, Mr. and Mrs. C. Grady Nowell and Robert A. Williams all went to the San Pedro Sula area to help in temporary clinics. Mrs. Nowell is a registered nurse. Missionary Journeyman Linda Tamashira, who had only been in the country one month, also accompanied them.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe W. Bruce not only had to clean away a tree that fell on their house, but they also worked with Keyes in housing workers.

In the far south coast town of Choluteca, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph A. Wilson worked with church people in gathering food, supplies and money. Although corn and cotton crops there were damaged, the devastation did not compare with that on the Caribbean coast.

With money from the Foreign Mission Board, the Baptist World Alliance and Honduran Baptist churches, more than 13,000 pounds of grain have been purchased and distributed.

Mrs. Ralph A. Wilson, missionary press representative, said that interested Baptists in the United States have contacted missionaries in the capital, Tegucigalpa, where phone service is now functioning, asking what they can do to help. Gifts from churches, she told them, can be channeled through the Foreign Mission Board.

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For Convention

Abilene Laymen Build
Benches for Mexicans

10/9/74

By Roy A. Jones

OAXACA, Mexico (BP)--Because 14 laymen from First Baptist Church of Abilene were not content to set idly by and waste their God-given skills, messengers to the Mexico Baptist Convention here didn't have to stand at their annual meeting this year.

The 14 men, led by an expert cabinetmaker, donated a week of their time to constructing 41 pews for the First Baptist Church of Oaxaca, Mexico, so that the church could host the national convention.

Now that the successful convention (more than 600 in a church with only half that many members) is history, it is difficult to tell who received the biggest blessing from the mission project--the church members of Oaxaca or the men from Abilene.

"I learned this," said Guy Shaw, a prominent Abilene attorney and one of the "p w crew" members. "If any layman wants to be used of the Lord, all he has to do is just be willing and take the first step. The Lord will take over from there."

The six-day trip to Oaxaca, 1,500 miles south of Abilene, was "one of the biggest blessings of my life," he said with feeling.

In the summer 1973 Eugene Grubbs of the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board received a request from James Philpot, Southern Baptist representative to Oaxaca, to recruit a group of men from the U.S. to build pews for the church in the city of about 100,000.

"The church could provide materials for the pews but did not have the skilled workmen to build them and did not have funds to pay others to do the construction," Grubbs explained.

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The request was relayed to Lester Vinson, assistant pastor of Abilene's First Baptist Church. After conferring with Vinson and the pastor, James Flamming, men of the Brotherhood agreed to undertake the project.

Paying their own expenses and taking as many hand tools as space allowed, members of the 'pew crew' flew to Oaxaca. When they returned home a week later, they had constructed 41 pews--one more than requested--a feat which all agreed would have been impossible without the Lord's help and guidance.

Grady Everett, an accomplished cabinetmaker, confessed that he "wasn't the type" who could make a speech about his Christian testimony and added modestly, "I'm glad I could contribute something to the Lord in my line of work."

Laymen who made up the 'pew crew' came from diverse backgrounds, ranging in age from 20 to 81 and in occupations from student to retired. Still they had two things in common: a desire to serve the Lord with whatever skill they had, and with the exception of Everett, no experience in constructing a pew.

"When we first got there, it was like walking into a lumberyard," said Joe Howser, a licensed vocational nurse who doubled as the team's "medic."

Shaw recalled, "there was just a stack of rough lumber, three inches thick and 12 inches wide, that we had to get dressed down, smoothed, cut to proper lengths and widths and glued together. And to complicate matters, all they had was one homemade table saw.

"But Grady set us up into teams and told us what we each had to do," he added. "One might drill only four holes and pass the piece of wood on to the next guy. What we did, really, was set up an assembly line."

Clinton Murphy, a retired postal clerk, told of some instances of what he called "the Lord taking over.

"We started by cutting out all of the lumber, of course, and it was just too much for the homemade table saw. When we got down to the last two or three boards, the motor went out. Luckily, we had brought a portable saw with us.

"But the lumber was so tough that just as we finished the last board, it burned up, too. It was a perfect example to me of the Lord working...letting the equipment hold out until we could get through with the job."

Murphy said the project "did my spiritual life more good than it did those people, I think. It made me realize what a foreign missionary has to go through, how dedicated they have to be to stay with their work."

Because of the job's immensity and the lack of proper tools, the men worked 12-14 hours a day (except Sunday), pausing only to eat home cooked meals brought to the church by missionary Philpot's wife.

Everett said the crew had to work right up until the last night to finish the final pew. A spontaneous gathering by church members to express their appreciation was especially meaningful to many of the crew, Shaw said.

He added, "There wasn't a dry eye in the building and we weren't crying from the blisters we had, either. We had really grown to love those people and vice versa."

Only three crew members could speak Spanish fluently, but the language barrier didn't keep the Anglos from witnessing.

On Sunday, the men split up into three groups with one of the fluent spokesmen in each group, to witness in area Baptist churches. A wedding was being held in one of the churches and it gave Col. Harvey Stewart, one team member, an unusual opportunity to "break the ice."

Whipping out his Polaroid camera, he suddenly became the official wedding photographer and gave the elated bridal couple all the pictures. "In doing this, I had an opportunity to talk to them that I couldn't have had otherwise. It was just another door opened by the Lord," Stewart said.

"It just shows you what laymen can do if they will dedicate whatever skill or special talent they possess to be used by the Lord," Vinson said. "We've very definitely seen some lives changed because of this project." -30-

Roy A. Jones is reporter for the Abilene Reporter-News, and a member of First Baptist Church, Abilene, Tex. Adapted from the October, 1974, issue of World Mission Journal.