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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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**Houston Church Gets
Guideposts' National Award**

By Charlene Warnken

HOUSTON (BP)--South Main Baptist Church here has been named the recipient of the annual Church Award of Guideposts' magazine on the basis of its work with single adults.

The national award has been given for the past 18 years to churches around the country that have "dedicated themselves to the service of God and man with an imagination and energy conspicuously beyond the normal call of religion."

Guideposts is an interfaith monthly magazine with more than seven million readers. The founder and publisher is Norman Vincent Peale.

South Main has done perhaps more than any other church in the Southern Baptist Convention to minister to the divorced. A special center for single adult activities, the Main Point, was opened two years ago under the direction of the Dan Yeary, then a South Main staff member.

"Divorce can happen to two people who both think they love God and are serving Him," said Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main.

"It is not our job to hunt out the guilty and punish them, nor to hunt out the innocent and canonize them. We are hunting out the people who hurt and are trying to help them."

The response to the church's special ministry has been overwhelming. Out of 95 attending the first session, 90 never had been to South Main before. Many were not Baptists.

The church offers a divorce seminar three times a year. The seminar is a five-week course on Wednesday nights. It includes a talk by Chafin on Biblical hope for the divorced, a session by counselor Nancy Potts on coping with grief and suggestions from Yeary on "how to begin again."

"Divorces are like car wrecks," Chafin said. "People can survive them, but they seldom are the same. What impresses me about this award is that it will call this ministry to the attention of other churches in other denominations. There aren't any communities left where there isn't this need."

One out of every three adults in the U. S. is single. Houston has more than 150,000 single adults, many of them formerly married.

Main Point offers not only seminars, but counseling services, growth groups, Bible studies and classes teaching everything from cooking for men to mechanics for women. Entertainment includes theater in the round and appearances of celebrities.

"This ministry really has focused our attention on marriage and the family with an intensity we never experienced before," Chafin said.

The result has been an accelerated ministry to married and about-to-be married couples by Bob Hines at South Main. One seminar featured a psychiatrist who met for several weeks with about 50 couples to discuss marital problems.

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"We in no way are idealizing divorce, but the breakup of a marriage does not mean you have failed your whole life," Chafin said. "There are some very whole persons who are single. The stereotype of singles as incompetent persons has been completely fractured by our experience."

Many divorced persons are "bleeding," however, Chafin acknowledged. As many as 1,500 of those persons have been helped by the South Main ministry.

"We have 700 persons coming on a regular basis," Chafin said, "I recently read that when a group of really unhappy people get together, the phrase they most often use is 'if only.' The phrase we would like them to use is 'next time.'"

Yeary has left South Main to accept the pastorate of the University Baptist Church in Coral Gables, Fla. South Main is searching for a new minister of single adults to carry on his work. The church will sponsor a conference on single adult ministry next year, inviting other churches to attend and learn from its rich experience.

The Guideposts award, a crystal obelisk designed by Tiffany & Company, will be presented to South Main in October.

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Charlene Warnken is religion editor of the Houston Post. She nominated South Main Baptist Church for the Guideposts award.

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Missionaries at Chaffee
Turn Fear to Friendship

By Ruth Fowler

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FORT CHAFFEE, Ark. (BP)--Two big, dark eyes peek out from under a fringe of black hair. The Americans come closer and speak to her in Vietnamese. The little girl's fear turns to friendship.

In her own language, she hears Gene V. Tunnell, Southern Baptist foreign missionary, greet her and ask her name. The American woman, Mrs. Tunnell, speaks her language, too. At the day care center, Mrs. Tunnell sings to the little girl in Vietnamese. Maybe America isn't so frightening after all.

The Tunnells are among 14 veterans of the missionary effort in Vietnam now at Fort Chaffee working among 24,000 refugees.

Tunnell now devotes his time completely to the sponsorship process--finding, matching, counseling Vietnamese and prospective sponsors. Working with him in the newly opened sponsorship office are five former Southern Baptist Missionary Journeymen (a two-year program for young college graduates) and a lay volunteer. All of them served in Vietnam.

The sponsorship office represents a cooperative effort with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. The Vietnam veterans aid the Home Mission Board personnel, who have never been to Vietnam but who have the responsibility to help care for the refugees now that they are in the United States.

One journeyman, Linda Pegram, works with the education system, counseling with young Vietnamese who want to go to college in the U. S. Until just recently, all of the journeymen and Tunnell worked in administrative roles in the education system.

Anna Adams, the lay volunteer, serves as Tunnell's secretary. She will continue overseas service in Costa Rica after the first of the year. Former Journeymen Doug Kellum and Doug Vandevender interrupted studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., to come to Chaffee. John Parsons and Phyllis Tyler were among the journeymen in Vietnam at the time of the country's fall. Former journeyman Greg Holden was originally responsible for sponsorship while the system of aiding the refugees was just being set up.

Jack Miller, also a volunteer from the Vietnam effort, is active in many phases of refugee work. His current list of projects includes building benches for English classes and serving as liaison between the Southern Baptist missionary efforts at Chaffee and the education system. His wife serves with him. Olive Allen, emeritus missionary, is involved in the day care centers.

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Robert C. Davis Jr. has just arrived at Chaffee to take over the chapel program as auxiliary chaplain in charge of Protestant ministries. This position is being vacated by James M. Gayle, who is seeking reassignment and will return to a foreign mission field. Both men and their wives are career missionaries.

Trueman Moore is coordinating the efforts of foreign mission-related personnel, home mission-related personnel and volunteer efforts by Southern Baptists. Moore, a member of the Home Mission Board and a former missionary to Bangladesh, serves as pastor of Eastside Baptist Church in nearby Fort Smith, Ark.

As the first refugees began to arrive at Chaffee, education and chapel programs were set up. Moore went to the camp administration, volunteering Southern Baptists, and received permission to begin religious work. The education work followed.

English classes began with volunteer teachers enrolling about 18,000 of the 24,000 refugees. Volunteers from local churches and a variety of other individuals manned the program for a number of weeks. Music classes, taught by local ministers of music, courses in home economics for women, and day care centers were added.

The government then felt that the education of the refugees was its responsibility and contracted with a local college to provide teaching for the Vietnamese. Southern Baptists remained in the education system for a short time, but then felt their services would be better used in the area of sponsorship.

The chapel program is a vital part of the Baptist influence at Chaffee. Each morning begins with a prayer meeting, in Vietnamese, and later a Bible English class, designed to teach Bible vocabulary to Vietnamese Christians. The Bible English classes began with such popularity, they were opened to even non-Christians, with the understanding that the basis and emphasis of the classes would be Bible.

Church of Christ meetings are held in the afternoons three days a week and also a new believer class in doctrine every day. Every Protestant group who had work in Vietnam or has a significant number of Vietnamese members on the base has use of the chapel.

Every evening there is an evangelistic service, with one English-language service on Saturday. Also, there are baptisms, a total of several hundred so far, in the swimming pool. Sunday School is held on Sunday, along with two regular Sunday services, a youth organization meeting and special meetings, such as a panel discussion on sponsorship.

Tunnell and Gayle agree that the most important of all Baptist work is not the missionary efforts at Chaffee but the sponsorship of refugee families by Southern Baptist churches. Approximately 5,000 more sponsors are needed at Chaffee alone.

Sponsorship is going slowly according to Tunnell. The Vietnamese people are enthusiastic, eager and waiting for the chance to become contributing members of American society. Many single adults, alone in America without families, also need sponsors.

Why don't more people sponsor Vietnamese? Tunnell says several things deter them. One is ignorance about the Vietnamese people. The other is fear of the unknown.

Although more sponsors are needed, bottlenecks have developed which have caused slowness in responding to some sponsors' requests for refugees. In some cases, Baptists seeking to sponsor refugees have received very quick response. In other instances, potential sponsors have waited for weeks or months without word.

The situation has caused the Home Mission Board to pass a resolution to study a more active and effective relationship with Church World Service (CWS), one of nine agencies officially-recognized by the government as a channel for refugees.

Tunnell feels that the moving of Southern Baptist personnel into fulltime sponsorship will help at this point. He and Moore hope that CWS will work out a plan with Southern Baptists in which red tape can be cut to a minimum.

If that doesn't work, Moore says the alternative, as outlined in the Home Mission Board resolution which he introduced, is to study the possibility of applying for a contract from the government and starting to handle sponsorship requests directly.

But, whatever the method of sponsorship, there remains at stake the urgent needs of the refugees themselves which should transcend administrative procedures.

"Baptists and others who have been involved in the program have been instrumental in helping people to realize that these refugees are people just like them," Tunnell said. "Christians talk about giving and caring. Now the time has come to either put up or shut up. We'll see what Christianity is all about."

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to Baptist state papers.

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