



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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76-25

FMB Staff Members Survey Relief Needs in Lebanon

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--W. Eugene Grubbs and Bob Harper, representing the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, made a recent survey trip to determine relief needs here.

During their visit they were briefly detained and questioned, but released unharmed. Two rolls of film taken by Harper, art editor for The Commission magazine, were confiscated. Grubbs, the board's disaster relief coordinator, and Harper were accompanying missionary Finlay M. Graham and a Lebanese Baptist pastor on a trip to observe and photograph the pastor's partially destroyed church. In spite of the incident, Harper and Grubbs continued the mission they had begun a few days earlier.

Relief aid is expected to be appropriated for basic survival needs among the Lebanese people. The funds are to be administered by national Baptist churches in consultation with Southern Baptist missionaries. The industrial section of Beirut has all but shut down in the midst of battle and self-employed men and women are unable to find work or get to the businesses they run.

There is a need for basic essentials plus funds for repairing and rebuilding damaged properties. Three Baptist churches were damaged; two by direct attack and one during an attack on nearby buildings. The home of the pastor of Tripoli Baptist Church was also damaged, as was the home of one missionary family. Many families have lost everything they own, including their home.

No Baptists lost their lives in the conflict, but one Baptist pastor lost a brother when the car he was driving was ambushed. All missionaries and their families are unharmed.

All Baptist ministries in Beirut continued, though many were severely limited. The seminary operated continually, only slowing down when students were caught at home by fighting and were unable to get back to classes. They will make up the work later. The Beirut Baptist School, whose students are divided evenly between Muslim and Christian backgrounds, operated one month of the three month term. The school which serves all religious and political factions was virtually undamaged in the conflict, although located in an active part of the city.

Publications and radio ministries were the most hampered. Publications workers were unable to get to their office for weeks at a time and broadcasting workers were unable to respond to inquiries because of the lack of mail service.

Most churches continued to have at least morning services. The seminary held emergency services on campus for all who were not able to get to their usual place of worship. One pastor, commanded not to leave his home, had church services in his living room during his confinement. Another pastor, confined to his building without food, water or electricity, received encouragement from missionaries by telephone.

Church life and life in general are rapidly returning to normal while people hope for permanent peace agreement.

Board Gives \$100,000
For Earthquake Victims

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board appropriated \$100,000 to aid victims of the intensive and disasterous earthquake which hit here early Feb. 4. The action was taken in the board's February meeting held in Richmond, Va.

"Other needs will be met in Guatemala as they are made apparent to us," said Charles W. Bryan, the board's secretary for Middle America and the Caribbean. "Southern Baptists are continuing to respond with relief efforts."

Medical teams and various supplies have been dispatched to the area in response to requests made by Dr. Alfonso Lemos, head of public health in Guatemala.

According to A. Clark Scanlon, Southern Baptist missionary field representative stationed in Guatemala City, Lemos asked Baptists to send a general practitioner, two surgeons and four traumatologists (surgeons experienced in treatment of accidental injuries).

He also requested extensive medical supplies, splints, stretchers, sleeping bags, tents, a portable x-ray machine and a jeep.

Responding to the request were traumatologists George Sibley, Bill Perry and S. Barkley; and surgeon Scott Middleton, all Baptist laymen from Dallas, Tex.

Also, Southern Baptist missionary doctors George H. Kollmar and Robert L. Edwards from Barranquilla, Colombia, and W. David Harms from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, are in Guatemala. Assisting them is Francis Crawford, Southern Baptist missionary nurse from Tegucigalpa.

An order for medical supplies was placed immediately after receiving the requests from Lemos with Medical Assistance Program (MAP), a voluntary international Christian organization that responds to needs of mission hospitals and missionary physicians.

A jeep, 10,000 pounds of medical supplies, 300 tents, two immunization jet guns, and one ton of food have been sent to the area.

"Within hours after the disaster, Southern Baptist missionaries and nationals were aiding victims," said W. Eugene Grubbs, the board's disaster relief coordinator and consultant for laymen overseas. "Clark Scanlon was at the grainery before it opened, standing in line to get food for relief efforts. Food amounting to 15,000 pounds was distributed immediately after the quake."

Baptist church members in Guatemala prepared individual food packages containing five pounds of beans, five pounds of rice and ten pounds of corn to be given to families.

"The people there are very resourceful," Bryan said. "They're handling the situation in a mature fashion. They're having to take the basics and go from there."

The Florida Baptist Convention has a construction crew of 16 men ready to depart for the disaster-stricken area. The crew will assist in the rebuilding efforts.

"Various state Baptist conventions and staff personnel have been most cooperative," Grubbs said. "They have initiated contact with the board to offer assistance. Norman Godfrey of the Brotherhood Commission has called to offer assistance, also."

Six Baptist church buildings were destroyed in the quake that registered 7.5 on the Richter Scale. Two church buildings were badly damaged. Many Baptists were killed and many more left homeless by the quake that has been called "one of the most disasterous in history."

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Bicentennial Feature
Baptists Protest
'Toleration Act'

Baptist Press
2/10/76

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., June 13, 1775 (BP)--A so-called "toleration bill" which would prohibit dissenters from worshipping at night was protested by Virginia Baptists here in a petition to the House of Burgesses. -more-

If enacted, the measure also would prohibit Baptists and other dissenters from fastening the doors of their meeting houses, admitting slaves to worship services or baptizing them without the permission of their owners, or conducting services anywhere except at registered meeting houses.

For years Virginia Baptists have demanded their rights under the Act of Toleration passed by the English Parliament in 1689. Under its provisions dissenters are allowed to worship in their meeting houses and their ministers are licensed to preach under certain conditions.

Baptists have not enjoyed the benefits of this act in Virginia, however. On charges of "preaching without a license" or "disturbing the peace," with their sermons, scores of Baptists have been arrested and imprisoned and even tortured.

"Baptists find themselves restricted in the exercise of their religion, their teachers imprisoned under various pretenses, and the benefits of the Toleration Act denied them," Virginia Baptists petitioned the House of Burgesses in 1772, three years before the current protest. They asked then to be "treated with the same indulgence in religious matters" as other dissenters.

Not only have Baptists been subjected to intolerance and persecution, but the courts have made it virtually impossible for them to obey the law where it is observed. Ministers seeking a license must apply to a state court which meets not more than twice a year and which may be miles away. Courts have limited the number of dissenters' meeting houses to one per county.

James Madison recently observed that "that liberal, catholic and equitable way of thinking, as to the rights of conscience, which is one of the characteristics of a free people . . . is but little known among the zealous adherents of our hierarchy . . . Besides, the clergy are a numerous and powerful body, have great influence at home by reason of their connection with and dependence on the Bishops and Crown, and will naturally employ all their art and interest to depress their rising adversaries."

But Baptists may not long content themselves with futile pleas for toleration. Throughout the colonies there is growing opposition to the established church and the crown, and Baptists are aligning themselves with those who stand ready to fight for civil and religious freedom.