

Psalm Gives Comfort
To Guatemala Family

By Dan Martin
for Baptist Press

Ruby Vargas waits and prays for her family in Guatemala.

For five days after the killer earthquake struck the Central American nation, she waited to know if her parents, three brothers, a sister-in-law and two nephews were alive or dead.

During the five days without communication she found comfort in Psalm 46:1-2, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea..."

She found the scripture by accident.

"My husband told me about the earthquake that morning," she said. "At first my mind was a blank. I wasn't really thinking about anything."

Mrs. Vargas, a secretary in the Texas Baptist evangelism division, is a native of Guatemala City. Her parents live in zone five, one of hardest hit sectors.

"That afternoon, I happened to see a magazine with a picture on the cover. At the bottom was a verse of scripture. The verse was Psalm 46:1-2," she said.

She quoted the scripture again.

"I just felt a real big relief," she said. "I wasn't desperate. Inside I felt, 'God is taking care of them...'"

But even with the confidence of God, Mrs. Vargas had some "natural" worry about them. She still does.

In the long hours which followed the earthquake she prayed. Then, at 9:15 Sunday night, the telephone rang. "The operator told me it was long distance from Guatemala. When I heard my brother's voice, I couldn't help it, I just started to cry," she said.

Mrs. Vargas said she told her brother, Jonathan, "You talk. I'll listen."

She found that her father, Jose Herrera, and mother, Ziola, were safe, as were her brothers, Guillermo, Jonathan and Harold. Also her sister-in-law, Yolanda, and two nephews.

The elder Herrera is a deacon at Bautista Betania in Guatemala City.

Their homes were destroyed, and they were living in the streets. "It is winter there now and most of the time it is raining," Mrs. Vargas said. "They are pretty cold. They would like to have some place to go but there is not any place to go..."

The earth continues to tremble and shake, she said, and the people in Guatemala "are afraid the volcanoes are going to erupt..."

Mrs. Vargas, who came to the United States in 1968 from Guatemala to study at Mexican Baptist Bible Institute in San Antonio, is the wife of Ramiro Vargas, pastor of Antioch Church in Seagoville, a suburb of Dallas. Vargas also is an employee of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board.

She is still concerned about the safety of her parents and said: "I would like to see them safe... I would like to see them here, with me... safe."

"I was worried about them, but at the same time I had this confidence deep inside of me that God was going to take care of them.

"I still am worried but I believe God will take care of my family." (BP)



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"Guatemala--On Your Feet!"
Local Baptists Lend A Hand

By Charlie Warren

GUATEMALA CITY (BP)--"Guatemala en Pie!" The homemade sign seemed to typify the courage and determination being demonstrated by victims of Guatemala's earthquake. "Guatemala--On Your Feet!"

The attitude apparent throughout the Central American nation was, "Let's pick up the pieces of our homes and our lives and carefully, deliberately put them back together again."

Guatemalan Baptists were among those here who aided quake victims as they began to rebuild. Aided by Southern Baptist funds, missionaries and volunteers, these Latin American Baptists immediately began not only to care for their own numbers, but to assist their neighbors as well.

At 2 p.m., the day of the earthquake (Feb. 4), seven Guatemalan Baptist pastors met with Southern Baptist missionaries to plan a relief strategy. The group decided to work as much as possible through the pastors in order to provide a witness opportunity for the pastors -- and the churches they represent.

Southern Baptist missionary William W. Stennett, elected by the group to be the relief coordinator, explained the missionaries' attitude.

"We want to let Baptist nationals do most of the planning and provide all the help they can," he said, "then missionaries and Southern Baptist dollars can assist."

Of the three most urgent needs--food, water and shelter--the Guatemalan pastors and their church members are assisting with two. They are distributing packets of food and providing tents for shelter. The Guatemalan government, along with the fire department, is providing the water.

Two Baptist churches in Guatemala City are being used as distribution centers. The pastors prepare and distribute packages containing five pounds of beans, five pounds of rice and 10 pounds of corn. This is a two-day supply for an average Guatemalan family.

Local churches have collected money, food and clothing to help those around them who have lost even more than they.

One young Baptist husband-wife team, Miquel and Naomi Caceres, both medical doctors, went immediately after the quake to the hard-hit villages of San Andreas and Irzapa to provide medical care. She is the daughter of a Baptist pastor.

About 100 people were being housed temporarily at Guatemala City's Baptist seminary. Many of them were injured in the quake. All were homeless. Guatemalan Baptists were ministering to them and are planning to help them reestablish their homes.

Teams of young people from several Baptist churches have formed "cleaning brigades." These teams will go to villages and parts of Guatemala City, take food for the hungry, help shovel away the rubble, tear down damaged houses and help the quake victims rebuild. They will also witness and hold evangelistic services.

The courage and determination of the Guatemalan people is inspirational. Even those who have little are willing to share with those who have nothing.

Daniel Moscoso, pastor of Guatemala City's Bethany Baptist Church, was asked by his church members, "Is it true that the missionaries are going to give us food?"

"We are not going to accept anything from the missionaries," Moscoso told the congregation. "We are not as needy as many of our neighbors. We are going to give to them. Let's take up an offering right now to help our neighbors.

More than \$40 was collected.

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Baptist Student Union
Assoc. Elects Officers

Baptist Press
2/12/76

DANVER (BP)--Wendell Foss, director of the California Baptist Student Union (BSU) program, has been elected president of the State BSU Directors Association.

The association, a fraternal organization of leaders of state BSU programs, met last week in Denver. The purpose of the organization is to discuss problems of mutual interest.

Foss, who was named president-elect at last year's meeting, became president when John Appleton, who headed the Alabama BSU, resigned as president to enter the pastorate.

Also elected was Gene Bolin, Maryland BSU leader, president-elect, and Chet Reames, Texas BSU director, secretary-treasurer.

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Two Baptist Pastors Die
In Guatemalan Earthquake

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GUATEMALA CITY (BP)--Two Guatemalan Baptist pastors and at least 15 other Baptists were killed in the earthquake that shook much of the southern region of this Central American nation in early February.

Six Baptist churches were leveled and four others had structural damage. Many Guatemalan Baptists lost their homes.

U. S. Ambassador Francis E. Meloy Jr., in charge of U. S. relief efforts here, called the quake "the worst disaster that has befallen Central America in recorded history."

Baptist Pastor Boanerges Mendoza died in the village of Paramos. Clemente Garay, pastor of the Baptist church in Tecpan, died there.

Honduran Baptists, who experienced a major disaster when Hurricane Fifi swept across their nation in 1974, collected a special offering to assist their Latin American neighbors to the west. A check for \$1,000 was presented to the Guatemalan Baptist Convention.

Baptists in Colombia contributed by giving blood which they have arranged to be sent to Guatemala.

An interdenominational organization of evangelical Christian groups (CEPA), has assigned Guatemalan Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries four areas in which to concentrate their relief efforts.

Baptists will work in Guatemala City's zone three, one of the hardest hit zones in the city. They will also minister to the rural villages of Paramos, San Andreas and Itzapa.

Supplies from Southern Baptists, coordinated through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB), have arrived in Guatemala and will be used mainly in the four areas. Supplies already sent include a jeep, about 500 tents, medical supplies and staple foods.

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The board is also sending shovels, picks, crowbars, wrecking bars, hammers and other tools to help in cleaning away the rubble, tearing down damaged buildings, and rebuilding churches and houses.

"Baptist" tents will provide temporary shelter for many of the quake victims until they can rebuild their homes. The tents will be used first in Guatemala City, then in rural areas where "people can adapt more easily," according to A. Clark Scanlon, the board's field representative for Middle America, stationed in the capital city.

Southern Baptist volunteer construction crews will help to rebuild 10 Baptist churches and six pastor's homes. The churches will cost about \$8,000 to rebuild and the homes about \$7,500.

A more specific estimate of the rebuilding costs has been requested by Charles Bryan, the board's secretary for Middle America and the Caribbean. The Guatemalan Baptist mission will provide an itemized breakdown of construction needs.

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(BB) Photos to be sent to Baptist state paper editors.

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U.S. Doctors Report
Guatemala Is Recovering

Baptist Press
2/12/76

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)--"The people of Guatemala are coping with an unbelievable catastrophe in an unbelievable way," a Dallas doctor said after spending four days ministering in the earthquake-torn country.

Dr. George Sibley of Dallas was one of four doctors who went to Guatemala at the request of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB).

He and his colleagues--Drs. Phil Berry and Skip Barkley of Dallas, and Dr. Scott Middleton of Corsicana--returned Wednesday evening.

"We saw nothing to give us the impression of what we had been reading in the newspapers," Sibley, a member of Dallas' First Church, said.

"We expected to see a lot of people screaming with broken bones, but we actually saw none of that," added Sibley.

Sibley added the pressing need now is for medical supplies and money to purchase food.

"They will need construction crews later when the rebuilding starts," he added. But for right now, I think the Guatemalans are doing a great job."

Berry, who is a member of Cliff Temple Church of Dallas, said: "We had envisioned being in a hospital situation where they would be air evacuating people in and that sort of thing."

"We had more in mind the Vietnam sort of operation," Middleton added.

Instead, they said they found people who were "calmly" waiting for medical assistance.

"The Guatemala authorities told us they were handling the acute emergencies adequately," Berry added. "I saw no reason not to believe them."

When asked why their report is at odds with news reports, Sibley replied: "Some of the reports simply are not true."

"I realize the story I am telling is not as much news as some of what I read, but I also realize that one isolated case in the whole country makes a news story."

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Sibley said he had talked with a number of persons--missionaries, government officials and Dr. Franklin Fowler, medical consultant for the FMB--before forming his opinion.

"I think that probably any two observers looking at a catastrophe have different shades of impressions. But there are some basic facts to which everybody we talked with agrees.

"First, there is no such thing as mass hunger. Second there is no such thing as people not able to get water.

"We were afraid that there would be food shortages in the city, but we saw food distribution in operation. Very few meals were missed. We saw the Guatemalan government handing out rice, corn and sugar to the people in zone three.

"There isn't any starvation in the outlying areas because they are rural areas. Earthquakes don't damage farm products; earthquakes just knock down buildings," Sibley added.

He noted there are problems with housing, but said the tents Southern Baptists sent to Guatemala are now being used and that the people are coping with the housing problems.

As to water shortages, he said there was sufficient water in zone three to use some of it to sprinkle the streets to keep dust down.

"We also saw no unburied bodies. We had seen on TV that there was a stink because of the unburied bodies. Well, we didn't see any of that. The day after the earthquake, the government had mass graves projects under way.

"But, one incident can make a news story . . ."

He added he also believes medical needs are being met. "In the first few days after a tragedy the life or death medical needs are met or the people die. From then on, it is follow up," he said.

The team of doctors worked through the public health director for southern Guatemala, Dr. Alfonso Lemus--a man who attends a Baptist Sunday School.

"He gave us official status. Many volunteers from America were turned back because they had no official status," Sibley said.

Sibley added: "We thought our job was to do work where they (the authorities) thought we could serve the best."

The team of doctors--augmented by two physicians from Barranquilla, Columbia, another from Honduras and a missionary nurse from Honduras--set up a clinic in Bethel Baptist Church in zone three of Guatemala City, one of the hardest hit sectors.

"We just set up our clinic and started working," Middleton said.

He added that none of the doctors performed surgery and generally were called on for examination and other work of a less major nature.

"I lanced some boils and treated some wounds, but other than that, it was general work," Middleton added.

None of them could give a count of how many patients had been seen, but Middleton estimated that on one day they saw 300 persons.

"We were set up for more than two and a half days, so I guess it would be 800 or so," he added.

What now?

"We need some medicine," Berry said, "and need to be able to get into the outlying areas.

"The problems now are related to follow up," Berry said. "The kids are exposed to the night air, sleeping in tents and on the ground, and it is 45 or 50 degrees down there right now.

"We went down expecting it to be hot, but it is cold. There will be medical problems relating to that--colds and pneumonia."

Innoculations also are needed, and immunizations.

"The dust problem is tremendous," Middleton said. "The houses that fell down all were made of adobe and they are trying to clear the streets of rubble from the houses. The dust is incredible."

"It is causing pulmonary problems," he added.

Each of the men lauded the Southern Baptist missionaries in Guatemala City.

"They were doing a terrific job . . . Clark Scanlon, FMB field representative for Middle America, had formulated a plan of what they would need in a disaster. He planned for five things: food, shelter, medical supplies, spiritual assistance and long-range housing."

"While it was not what I expected it to be and we weren't doing what I expected to be doing, I think things went remarkably well," Sibley said.

"A person from another evangelical denomination came by the church where we were working and said the Baptists were the first church group he had seen who were responding to the need.

"We thought things were moving a little slowly, but Baptists did respond. Supplies came down and Baptists did respond," Middleton added.

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(BP) Photos to be sent to Baptist state papers.

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CORRECTION:

In BP story "Board Gives \$100,000 for Earthquake Victims," dated 2/10/76, correct graph six to read as follows:

"Responding to the request were traumatologists George Sibley, Phil Berry and Skip Barkley, all laymen from Dallas; and surgeon Scott Middleton, from Corsicana, Tex."

THANKS

BAPTIST PRESS