



-- FEATURES

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September 7, 1976
War in Lebanon
Affects Churches

09-27-76

By Frances (Mrs. Wayne W.) Fuller

BEIRUT (BP)--Fighting, looting, killing-- war touches everything, including Baptist churches.

Of the 16 churches and mission points related to Southern Baptist work in war-torn Lebanon, all have lost members by either emigration or temporary departure. Several have suffered destruction and robbery. Five have lost their pastors. Three are not functioning at all, and several have severely curtailed activities.

At the same time, some fellowships are experiencing a deepening spirituality, the growth of lay leadership and a spiritual hunger in their communities. One new meeting place has been opened.

Communication between the cities and villages of Lebanon is poor, but various Baptist communities have gathered some information about each other.

In Tripoli, both the church and the pastor's home have been damaged. The pastor has been threatened with death and never leaves his house. His wife goes out for supplies and church members come to the home for worship together.

The pastor of the Musaltbeh Church has emigrated to the United States and many families have sent their young people out of the area. The church is going on under missionary and lay leadership. Five teenage boys are taking turns preaching in the church each afternoon.

The Ras Beirut Church, which had dedicated a large and beautiful building shortly before the war and was without a pastor at the time, is still meeting on Sunday mornings. A woman member, whose apartment building has been hit by rockets three times, said, "Though we have suffered much, not for anything would I have missed the faith in God we have gained."

In Rahbe, a village in the north of Lebanon, the church building was badly damaged. The young pastor and his bride were robbed at gunpoint, and their remaining possessions were piled up and burned in the house. The young men of the church have left for the sake of safety and only a few women believers are left in the village. There is no information available concerning the fellowship in Kafr Hebu, a village near Rahbe.

The pastor in Miya Miya, in the south near Sidon, is still present under extremely difficult circumstances. No church services are being held and most Christians have left the village.

In the strongly Muslim Baqaa Valley, the churches in both Baalbek and Rayak ceased to function early in the war after the pastor of the two groups was threatened and the Baalbek meeting place looted. The Syrian Army now occupies the valley and in many respects life has returned to normal.

Churches in the rightist-held areas of Beirut and the mountains east of the city have fared better.

The National Baptist Church in Ashrafiyeh is carrying on successfully under lay leadership since the pastor, who was very ill, departed for the United States.

The Badaro Street Church in Furn Es Sheback has been able to continue most of its programs. The pastor recently had one of the narrow escapes now common in Beirut when the balcony on which he was visiting a church member two minutes earlier was destroyed by an unexpected shell.

In Sin Elfil the lay pastor of a mission point sees unusual opportunities to serve people and to build a church in his community.

The same outstanding lay leader is serving the church in Hadath, where fighting has been severe and all of the regular pastor's possessions were taken by looters. The pastor has a child with encephalitis and has taken him to the United States for treatment.

In Bikfaya the pastor is trying to make arrangements to go to the U.S. Four of his seven children have already left. The village of Ain Dara has been surrounded by dangerous territory and practically cut off from the rest of Lebanon for many months. In July, a large number of the church members came out over a little-used dirt road and drove all the way to Jordan to attend a Baptist conference. They reported their church was continuing and healthy.

The pastor, who lives in Jal Adib, is conducting services there and in Sid El Bashari.

One new congregation has been organized because of the war. When believers in the Mon-souriyeh area could not reach their churches in Beirut because of fighting, they started a worship service and Sunday School on the Arab Baptist Seminary campus. Nominal Christians among their neighbors, previously uninterested in spiritual matters, are attending.

Mrs. Wayne W. Fuller is a Southern Baptist missionary temporarily stationed in Jordan.

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Mercer Names Comish
Assistant to President

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Allen B. Comish of Nashville has been named assistant to the president for denominational relations at Mercer Univeristy, a Baptist school here, effective January 1.

Comish, 55, who directed the church services and materials division at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board for five years before his recent resignation, will succeed the retiring P. Harris Anderson.

He will return to a state in which he was active in denominational affairs before joining the Sunday School Board for a second tour of duty in March, 1971.

Comish spent 16 years as an associate pastor and pastor in churches in Brunswick, Jonesboro and Columbus, Ga., interrupted by a period as both superintendent of intermediate work and training for the Sunday School Board's Sunday School department, 1955-59.

He has served as vice president of the Georgia Baptist Convention, moderator of the Colubmus (Ga.) Baptist Association, and chairman of the Georgia Convention's executive, administrative and education committees. He was also a trustee of the Sunday School Board, 1967-71, and secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, 1968-69.

Comish is a graduate of Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, and earned master and doctor of religious education degrees respectively from New Orleans (La.) Baptist Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. Mercer conferred an honorary doctor of divinity degree on him in 1968.

A native of Louisiana, he is married to the former Lucille Minchew and has one son.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Baptist Missionary Relates
Survey Trip to Quake Area

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9/27/76

By Robert N. Nash

COTABATO CITY, Philippines (BP)--As the Sidley-Hawker prop jet plane soared southward over the Philippines from Cebu headed for the area hit by August's killer earthquake and tidal wave, I began to recall my first trip to the area.

It had been in December 1964. My wife, Jan, and I were half way through full-time language study in Manila. I had been invited to preach in revival services in one of the churches in the Cotabato City area where God had called me to serve as a field evangelist. In the more than six years that followed we became attached to the city. It became our home.

But this trip was not the normal homecoming. William T. Roberson, Southern Baptist Missionary press representative, and I were on our way to inspect the damage caused by the earthquake and tidal wave that struck the area on August 17.

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As the plane continued its course and flew over the Iligan between Iligan City and Ozamis City in Northwestern Mindanao, the once-populated shores of the Moro Gulf were now barren, having been swept clean by the tidal wave.

More than 4,000 people had been killed and 4,000 were missing. The greatest damage was in the loss of life caused by the tidal wave that swept the shore line clean around the gulf as far inland as 500 meters (almost 550 yards) in many areas.

The three-day trip was depressing to say the least. Seventy-five percent of the buildings in Cotabato City, a town of 65,000 people, had been destroyed. This was a city in chaos with tremors and aftershocks still rocking the area a couple of times each day. People were living in the streets.

We later traveled across the bay to Pagadian City where we were informed by Governor Jose Tecson of the effects of the tidal wave. This was the area hardest hit and where so many were washed out to sea.

A friend told us that after the tragedy those that had been killed but not washed away had been taken to the Catholic church. All of the able-bodied carpenters had been enlisted to make caskets or boxes. Many victims were given mass funerals. Friends and relatives buried others.

During the trip, Roberson and I offered financial assistance to our Baptist people, to the city and provincial disaster control centers. These funds and others, made possible through Southern Baptists and the denomination's Foreign Mission Board (FMB) were used for food, clothing, medicine and temporary shelter for the victims.

Some will be used to rebuild the four or five church buildings that were completely destroyed in the disaster. The funds will also be used to enable some of our Baptist people to get a new start in life.

There is no way to tell how many of the 8,000 people who died in the disaster had professed faith in Christ; however, it is safe to assume that the majority had not. Many of these people were Muslim, and many did not claim allegiance to any religion.

I have had trouble sleeping recently because I cannot divorce myself from responsibility for those who died without hope in Christ. When we lived in Cotabato, I used to pride myself on knowing my area and the people. There were few places I had not been or lead rs I did not know.

Now I keep asking myself, "What could have been done that might have enabled those people to be reached with the gospel before the disaster struck?"

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NOTE: Southern Baptist Missionary Robert N. Nash is chairman of the Philippine Mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries).

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

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Lebanese Mail Ministry
Begins Again from Greece

Baptist Press
9/27/76

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--The Baptist publications ministry in Lebanon will make an effort to revive its correspondence course through recently reestablished mail service to Beirut via a Greek address.

Mail service is being reestablished in predominately Christian areas of Lebanon, and Southern Baptist missionaries have obtained a post office box in Rhodes, Greece, for service to these areas.

The war cut off communications with thousands of correspondence students throughout the Arab world.

The Office of Baptist Publications, the Beirut Baptist School and the Baptist Mission house are all in an area where there is no mail service. However, Frances (Mrs. J. Wayne) Fuller, director of Baptist publications, sent correspondence files and materials from that side of Beirut to the other side during a recent trip to the city -30-

South Americans Form
New Baptist Union

COCHABAMBA, Bolivia (BP)--Representatives of 10 Baptist groups in Latin America formed a Latin American Baptist Union during a constitution assembly here in September.

The assembly produced a constitution and proclamations that call for evangelization of South America and the world, cooperation and fellowship among South American Baptists, and fraternal relations with missionary representatives from Baptists outside the continent.

Joao Falcao Sobrinho, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of Brazil, was elected president of the newly formed Union Bautista Latino Americana (UBLA). He had served as "coordinator" for an initial UBLA planning meeting in September 1975 at Lima, Peru.

Other officers elected were Paul H. Eustache V., Venezuela, and Luis Pozo Burdiles, Chile, vice presidents; and Jose Caballero Montafio, Bolivia, and Emigdio Veizaga, Bolivia, secretaries.

V. Carney Hargroves, president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1970-75, represented the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) at the UBLA organization meeting. Both the BWA and the UBLA constitutions state that close relations will be maintained between such organizations.

Hargroves reported enthusiasm among Baptist nationals and missionaries for the UBLA and for Baptist work in South America.

And he noted that a spirit of unity is evident in proclamations issued by the constitution assembly, each prefaced by the phrase "Let us Unite."

The proclamations statement concludes with this summary:

"This being a crucial hour for Latin America, as Baptists, we are confronted with the greatest responsibility and privilege of participating in the evangelization of our continent and of the world, without wasting any opportunity or resource, in order to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only hope for the man who is far from God, and of emphasizing the principles of religious freedom, together with the separation of church and state."

South American countries represented at the meeting were Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina.

The constitution states that the UBLA assembly will meet every three years and that its executive committee will meet annually. The headquarters city will be designated later, said Hargroves.