

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 6, 1978

78-16

Board Said Ready To Meet
Disaster Needs Promptly

By John J. Hurt

BANANIER, Guadeloupe (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board is prepared to "respond appropriately and promptly to disasters" in foreign lands with both humane and spiritual ministry, some 40 participants at the board's first disaster response training session were told.

Missionary personnel who coordinate disaster response met with Eugene Grubbs, the board's coordinator for worldwide response, and his associates at the four-day conference to share experiences in planning with others who had served in times of disaster. The major agreements which emerged from the conference were:

1. The best response from Southern Baptist Convention churches and individuals is to provide money for the Foreign Mission Board to make purchases of needed supplies.
2. Members of Southern Baptist churches who volunteer for work assignments in subsequent months should offer their services through state convention offices or the Foreign Mission Board so there can be coordination with missionaries on the scene.

Robert Zimmerman of Washington, U.S. government overseas disaster assistance officer under the Department of State, said to his knowledge this was the first such conference to include long-range planning. Uniquely, plans here were made at a conference center half-way up La Soufriere Mountain where a volcano 18 months ago threatened eruption and caused evacuation of 70,000 people to an adjoining island for six months.

Missionaries from Honduras and Guatemala, where Southern Baptists have conducted major reconstruction projects, shared liberally in the conference. Honduras was wrecked by Hurricane Fifi in 1974 and Guatemala had 23,000 killed in an earthquake in 1976.

Charles Bryan, the board's area secretary for Middle America and the Caribbean, reminded the coordinators that ministering to people in times of disaster is one of the responsibilities of missionaries. "You are the person whom God has put his hand on," he said, reminding them it also is a duty "to let the world know there is hope in Jesus."

Teddy E. Yarbrough of Alabama, response coordinator in Guatemala, told the missionaries "I have had some of my greatest spiritual experiences" with volunteers from the Southern Baptist Convention in farewell services with nationals after reconstruction assignments.

"I have seen tears and embraces in a language everybody understands," he said.

Missionaries with experience in both Honduras and Guatemala emphasized that advance planning with national conventions will make response more effective. They also agreed local Baptist churches should be used as centers for distribution of relief supplies.

Grubbs told the conference an enlarged board coordination staff and experience in this decade guaranteed "appropriate and prompt" response to appeals from the field. He agreed with the missionaries that it was essential "to keep in mind the spiritual dimension and follow through with evangelism."

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Two medical missionaries said a pastoral ministry is essential in an emergency. W. David Harms, Florida doctor assigned to Honduras, and Lee Baggett, Texas doctor serving in Mexico, gave as much attention to the pastoral as to the medical in their reports. Baggett said it was not unusual for disaster victims to stand in line for hours for medical attention when "a pastoral ministry was the major need."

Both Bryan and James Cecil, a furloughing missionary working as associate consultant on laymen overseas, had high praise for volunteers who had gone to disaster areas to help rebuild churches and homes. "These men become home missionaries," Cecil said in reference to their returning to churches to tell their experiences on mission fields.

"We are using these volunteers in our own programs and priorities," Bryan said. He added that the long-range planning in the conference would make the work of volunteers more effective in addition to providing a quicker response from teams already assigned for emergency response.

"This is the most effective and significant thing our office will participate in this year except in the event of a disaster," Grubbs said of the conference.

Grubbs expressed his concern that Southern Baptists become more aware of needs resulting from disasters in areas more remote than the Caribbean and Middle America. He said Southern Baptists must be alert to continuing hunger in such places as Bangladesh and to disaster response assistance throughout the world.

The response coordinators were advised on how to purchase emergency supplies quickly in times of disaster, how to organize local residents to assist in relief centers, and left with the admonition from Bryan: "See the immediate need but keep your focus on the eternal."

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Hurt, retired editor of Texas' Baptist Standard, took part in the disaster response conference.

(BP) Photos to be mailed to state Baptist papers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

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Grant Heads Education
Commission Search

Baptist Press
2/6/78

NASHVILLE (BP)--Daniel R. Grant, president of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., has been named chairman of a seven-person search committee to find a successor to Ben C. Fisher, who will take early retirement Sept. 30 as executive director-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Education Commission.

Education Commission chairman, George E. Bagley, executive secretary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, also named J. M. Boswell, president of Cumberland College, Williamsburg, Ky.; John E. Johns, president of Furman University, Greenville, S. C.; Tom J. Madden, director of the convention ministries division, Tennessee Baptist Convention, Brentwood; and James L. Sells, president of Southwest Baptist College, Bolivar, Mo. Bagley will serve as an ex officio member of the committee.

Fisher, who will be 63 in May, will announce retirement plans at a later date.

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Tennessee Baptists Seek
Executive Secretary-Treasurer

Baptist Press
2/6/78

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. (BP)--The administrative committee of the Tennessee Baptist Executive Board will serve as a search committee to find a successor to Ralph Norton as executive secretary-treasurer of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

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Norton, who has held the post since Jan. 1, 1973, will retire Dec. 31, 1978.

George E. Capps, associate executive director of the Southern Baptist Education Commission, Nashville, is chairman of the administrative committee, which has approved guidelines for the election of Norton's successor.

The committee will hold its next meeting March 9.

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Annuity Board Benefit Payments Escalate

DALLAS (BP)--The Southern Baptist Annuity Board paid benefits amounting to \$19.1 million to retired persons in 1977--"light years away from the Baptist world of 1918" when it paid \$1,397 in services, Darold H. Morgan told board trustees.

Since 1918, the first year the board paid benefits, retired ministers and church and denominational employees or their dependents have received \$177,641,286, the board's president said at the agency's 60th annual meeting.

He said the \$19.1 million also exceeds benefits paid during the first 23 years of existence of the board, which began operation with only \$100,000.

The board also paid relief benefits in 1977 totaling \$324,096, an increase of \$38,591 over 1976. The relief program provides financial aid for aged ministers or widows with inadequate income from funds allocated through the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget. No other funds handled by the board come from the Cooperative Program.

"The dollar figures paid through the years are impressive," Morgan told the trustees in his historical overview. "Our ministry is supposed to do that, but another important fact is the financial security these funds have meant to thousands of men and women across these six decades."

In his report, Morgan said with the exception of the stock market, 1977 was a very good year. "Like everyone else, we watch the market closely. We expect it to turn upward at any time, providing the investment earnings experience that will allow the board to once again credit additional interest."

In recent years, earnings over and above what the plans required allowed the board to credit additional interest called Good Experience Credit to active members and a "13th Check" to annuitants.

Morgan pointed to key 1977 accomplishments, headed by the declaration of a permanent 8.33 percent increase in retirement benefits for most annuitants, retroactive to Jan. 1, 1977, and the development of an investment strategy intended to cope with the declining stock market. One of the major objectives was the installation of the new Fixed Fund in which interest was credited at the rate of 7.5 percent per year during 1977 and projected for the same amount in 1978.

Other successes, he said, included inauguration of the new retirement program for career ministerial personnel; enlistment of 545 new churches and 2,169 pastors and church employees in the retirement program, and upgrading of plans for 3,000 participants.

Including the new members and upgrades, the board recorded a total of 26,516 members participating in Plan A program, 15,669 in Plan B and 1,970 in Plan C.

"This was the finest year ever in enlistment," Morgan said. Financially, the board reported assets of funds held in trust reached \$498,977,661, an increase of \$26,758,992 over 1976.

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Income from premiums and dues for retirement protection of churches and agencies reached a record \$45,603,942, an increase of \$3,123,540. In the insurance program, the volume of life insurance in force amounted to \$584,772,550, exceeding the 1976 figure by \$48,971,100. This total includes almost \$5.6 million for life insurance for seminary students, an area of significant growth for the Annuity Board, Morgan said.

Morgan introduced Pat McDaniel, former executive director of the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, as the new executive vice president and operations chief and noted a new provision for nonstandard forms of medical and long-term disability insurance for church lay participants who failed to qualify for standard coverage.

In another speech, R. Alton Reed, president emeritus, traced developments of the board since 1918. "Knowing the board's past helps put its current position into perspective and suggests paths for the future," Reed said.

John S. Rasco, retired pastor of the First Baptist Church, Odessa, Texas, was re-elected chairman of the board, and James E. Hibdon, University of Oklahoma professor, vice chairman. The trustees also honored Kermit E. Whiteaker, who retired as senior vice president of operations, and Charles L. Burrall, Jr. of Philadelphia, the board's actuarial consultant from Huggins & Company, Inc.

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Telephone Links Class
Of Sunday School Shut-Ins

Baptist Press
2/6/78

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--Every Sunday at 9 a.m. a Phoenix telephone operator calls about 20 persons and asks them to stay on the line. At 9:30 a.m., with everyone waiting, the operator dials First Southern Baptist Church and tells Cecil Stewart that his class is ready.

This telephone conference call, designed for shut-ins who cannot attend church, is perhaps the most unusual Sunday School class in Arizona. Stewart, 74, said the idea came from a similar class in another state. The shut-ins "were all for it," he says.

Each class costs 40 cents per person. The church pays the fee and buys lesson materials, published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. Stewart, an ordained minister, begins the class by calling roll and greeting each listener. Then prayer is said and he gives the lesson.

One of the class listeners will occasionally be asked to pray or read the scripture, but "I can't encourage class participation because of the time," he says of the half hour class.

Only twice has the class been interrupted. Once a woman listener became sick and hurriedly hung up, leaving the receiver off its cradle. A loud squawking sound soon drowned out the lesson. The other time was for trouble on the line.

Mrs. Jesse Dodd, confined to her home most of the time because of a heart problem, said that she "lives for it (the class) from Sunday to Sunday."

Another class member recently told Stewart, "I am blind in one eye and can see very little out of the other eye and have a bad heart and can't get around much...I miss going to Sunday School and church. I was a teacher for many, many years up until my health gave way two years ago. Thank you again for the wonderful lesson."

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