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Prison Ministry Leads
Condemned To Christ

By John J. Hurt

KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent (BP)--Donald G. Overstreet walked slowly to the gallows with three masked men--first two and then one--and prayed with them before the trapdoor was dropped open.

Ten days later, the Southern Baptist missionary read to the little St. Vincent Baptist Chapel the men's letters confessing the sins which had cost their lives and assuring the people that they died trusting Jesus as Saviour.

Overstreet also played a tape recording that one of the condemned men, James Jarvis, made in the prison cell the night before the executions. On the tape Jarvis sang an original hymn with the constant refrain, "How sweet it is to know that Jesus loves me...his blood was shed for me."

Now the little Southern Baptist chapel of 38 members is striving to minister to the families of two of the men. It is seeking to give them respectability in the neighborhoods where they live.

When Jarvis' 10-year-old daughter is old enough to understand, Overstreet will give her Jarvis' Bible and a letter from her father which Overstreet has not opened.

The local newspaper, reporting on the first executions on this Caribbean island since 1970, told briefly of Overstreet's ministry to the three convicted murderers, noting that he "spent the entire night with the three condemned men in their cells." It added the men "were either reciting some Psalm or singing some hymn, or praying, on their way to meet the hangman."

Maybe the man on this island with the greatest appreciation for Overstreet is Chief Richards of Her Majesty's Royal Prison, who is cooperating to the extent that the missionary is known as the prison's "unofficial chaplain."

"Oh yes, he makes a big difference," said Richards, standing just inside the prison walls. "We all like to work with him."

Richards explained that prison guards have an easier job because of the Bible class which 24 prisoners attend each week, in addition to a literacy class and counseling with prisoners which are part of Overstreet's ministry.

The Overstreet prison ministry obviously is the most dramatic but it is only part of this California couple's ministry. They left Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in Redlands to launch a Southern Baptist ministry on this island, 11 by 18 miles, with a population of 104,000.

They observed their first anniversary here on New Year's Eve and still strive to give "recognition" to the Southern Baptist name. One recognition effort is concerts by the chapel choir in a rented hall downtown.

"God has just worked one miracle after another," the Overstreets say. They found a home to use for a chapel, talked to the owner about an adjoining building and learned he was a Christian who knew of the need in the neighborhood. Now, a former furniture manufacturing building is the chapel and the adjoining house is used for educational purposes.

An application for electric lights in the chapel was turned down because no meter box was available. A visitor in the service where the need was mentioned worked for the electric company. A meter box was installed the next day.

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Look at the missionary schedule for the week: There are two services on Sunday; Monday night is for training church leaders with 18 enrolled; Tuesday is for the choir; Wednesday they go to an adjoining village for Bible study and Thursday is for Bible study at the chapel. Most of Saturday is given to the prison ministry.

Overstreet works to know the Island leadership. He met the governor on a tennis court and now they are friends. He knows most of the other government officials and they probably know him as the "Bible man." He makes sure each acquaintance has a Bible.

The Overstreets came here, they insist, wondering how to launch a Southern Baptist ministry. Now they've learned how: "God starts it."

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Hurt, retired editor of the Baptist Standard, recently returned from a tour of Southern Baptist work in Middle America and the Caribbean.

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

Youth Meeting Features
International Leaders

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist leaders from Taiwan, Sweden, and the United States will be featured speakers at the 1978 Baptist Youth World Conference in Manila, The Philippines July 19-23.

More than 5,000 persons from 70 countries are expected to attend this ninth youth conference sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance.

Lien Hwa Chow, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Taipei, Taiwan, will keynote the opening session with an address on the conference theme, "Jesus Christ--the One Light for All People." Chow graduated from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Larsake W. Persson, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Vasteras, Sweden, will address the evening session focusing on youth and self-identity. Peter McLeod, pastor of First Baptist Church, Waco, Texas, will speak to the theme of faith. Paul Nichols, dean of the school of theology at Virginia Union University, Richmond, Va., will close the conference with an address on youth and mission.

Daltro Keldann of Brazil, chairman of the BWA youth committee, announced a total goal of \$100,000 has been set for travel scholarships to assist in travel and lodging expenses of young people from countries that would not otherwise be represented. The fund is being raised chiefly by contributions from individuals and churches.

Programs have been planned to encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences between participants. Each day's meeting will begin with small group discussions around a Biblical emphasis.

A souvenir swap will follow the first evening's session. Delegates are being asked to bring items typical of their countries to exchange with other people from around the world.

A "Late Night Show" the last three evenings will have two programs running simultaneously, featuring both informally structured conversations with several young people and performing musical groups.

To be considered as participating musicians, individuals and groups must submit a reel-to-reel tape of three selections, an eight-by-ten photograph and a complete repertoire list to Mark Blankenship, Baptist Youth World Conference music director, 127 Ninth Avenue North, Nashville, Tenn. 37234.

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