



BAPTIST PRESS

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78-31

Waverly Pastors Lead
After Train Disaster

By Norman Jameson

WAVERLY, Tenn. (BP)--Clouds, flags and faces hang at half-mast over this middle Tennessee town one week after a derailed propane gas tank car exploded killing 12, injuring over 50 and leaving 15 families homeless.

Under a steel-gray winter sky, railroad workers labor among the sodden timbers and smoldering ashes which still push swirls of smoke into a biting wind. One-ton steel wheels lie where the explosion tossed them, rusting and naked against the bright yellow bulldozers of the clean-up crew.

The 15 homeless families are foremost in the thoughts of Maurice Coleman, pastor of First Baptist Church, as he pokes among the wreckage. He explains the part Waverly's ministers played after the tank car, declared safe hours earlier by a Tennessee Civil Defense Inspector, sent sheets of flame through the town and 1,000 feet into the air.

"The first thing as far as we were concerned was food, clothing and shelter," Coleman said. About 600 people sought shelter in the National Guard Armory and the high school when authorities ordered an evacuation of the area for fear a second derailed tank car would explode. The cars were part of a 23-car derailment which occurred on the L & N tracks Feb. 22, two days earlier.

Coleman and other Waverly pastors met to minister at nearby Nautilus Memorial Hospital which quickly overflowed with injured and families looking for missing ones.

The Tennessee Department of Human Resources and the Civil Defense moved quickly into the town, which lost both its fire and police chiefs in the blast, to provide rescue and evacuation guidance. They set up a food distribution center in the basement of First Baptist Church.

Coleman said rescue workers distributed about \$200 worth of food to every home that suffered damage or loss to family members. Truckloads of clothing arrived in too much disarray and in too limited variety to be of much use. More valuable were the blankets they received in abundance. Fortunately, there were enough to accommodate those who needed them and the milling crowds of curious who picked up blankets to take home for themselves.

It was almost an "insured disaster," Coleman said, with most of the businesses and injured covered adequately. But the injured face immediate unemployment and a great need exists for cash to cover the expenses of daily living.

Already gifts from Tennessee Baptist churches are arriving in Coleman's office, for distribution by him as the man closest to the need. The Tennessee Baptist Convention sent \$2,000 from their relief fund for immediate needs. Nashville's First Baptist Church gave \$2,167 from a Sunday morning offering.

Waverly's pastors met and appropriated \$100 to each family which lost its home or a family member. They went through the lists of dead and injured and assigned each affected family a pastor to offer counsel and assistance in the coming weeks.

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County ministers planned a meeting for the day after the local meeting and Coleman has received calls from Baptist churches all over Tennessee and other states offering assistance. Churches of other denominations have also offered assistance.

Investigators still have no explanation about why the tank car exploded--even after they checked it for leaks and found none. It had been upright and was sitting on its wheels when it burst, sending the brunt of the blast skyward instead of through the town as it would have on its side.

Still, the terrible power of the blast was easily evident. Buildings bordering the tracks left no sign they ever existed. No walls stood, no chimneys reached to the sky, no framework remained.

Further away, two chimneys stood around a circle of ashes. Thirteen retarded children had been evacuated before the blast demolished the children's home. Rubber was burned off the wheels of antique cars parked in a nearby, enclosed, concrete block shed, the wooden steering wheel of one disintegrated.

The owner said a piece of the exploding tank car knocked a 12-inch hole through the pre-stressed concrete wall, passed through a steel support beam, penetrated through an automobile outside and buried itself 30 inches into the ground, severing a 4-inch water main.

A woman standing in her yard a quarter mile from the blast sustained blisters on her face from the estimated 1,700 degree heat at the blast scene.

"Why" is the question most on the lips of bewildered officials and the 14,000 residents of Humphreys County. One early guess is that the inner tank of the car ruptured during the derailment, slowly building pressure on the outer tank until it burst. That could explain why investigators detected no leaks only hours before the blast.

"But the church can't spend its energy asking why something happened when there's so much to do," Coleman says.

The town, trying to get back to normal as quickly as possible, did not close school. And the churches held services Sunday, two days after the accident. That day, Coleman preached on "the faith that stands," from the third chapter of Daniel, where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are about to be thrown into a furnace for refusing to worship King Nebuchadnezzar.

They told Nebuchadnezzar, in Coleman's own paraphrase, "If the Lord desires, he can spare us from the fiery blast. If not, we serve him anyway."

-30-

Wood Protests Inclusion
Of Churches in Lobby Act

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Lobby registration and disclosure legislation, aimed primarily at major paid lobby organizations, but which also includes church efforts to affect public policy, advanced through the House Committee on the Judiciary.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, in testimony submitted to the judiciary committee urged that churches be excluded from the requirements of the bill (H. R. 8494). "We believe that the bill as now constructed seriously jeopardizes the guarantees of the First Amendment with regard to 'the free exercise of religion,'" Wood said.

The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee is also working on lobby disclosure bills but has not yet issued a final version.

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The House measure would require registration with the government by any organization or group of individuals which spends \$2,500 in any quarter to lobby or draft lobbying communications or which employs one or more persons who lobby 13 or more days per quarter or two or more persons who lobby seven or more days per quarter.

Wood asserted that involvement of the church in public affairs is "an inescapable responsibility" and "integral to the mission and ministry of the church... H. R. 8494 clearly puts a substantial burden on the churches of accountability to government for maintaining an advocacy role in public affairs and in the formulation of public policy."

The bill would require information identifying the organization and its lobbyists as well as the issues of concern and the methods of lobbying used. It would also require disclosure of money spent for lobbying and salaries of lobbyists.

-30-

Finances Bleak For Ethnic
Missionaries, Romo Says

By Everett Hullum

Baptist Press
3/2/78

CHICAGO (BP)--Inflation and "business-oriented standards" have resulted in disturbingly inadequate salaries and retirement incomes for a majority of ethnic missionaries in the U. S., an official of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board said.

Oscar Romo, director of language missions for the board, detailed results of a survey to missions leaders attending the 21st annual Language Missions Leadership Conference in Chicago.

The study indicated more than 50 percent of language missionaries can qualify for food stamps, he said.

In addition, dozens of language missionaries face an old age of substantially lowered incomes. One, recently retired, receives monthly "only one dollar for each of the 36 years she served," Romo reported.

Urging conferees to re-examine state commitments, Romo challenged: "It is our responsibility to communicate, to encourage, to lead eligible and talented language-culture persons to avail themselves of the benefits as well as the struggles of language missions."

Romo blamed the "startling statistics" on two conditions--success standards of missionary work based on "traditional, Bible-oriented, rural culture" and failure to communicate with persons who don't understand "our own various terms, axioms and policies."

Commenting on the first condition, Romo said most ethnics live and work in metropolitan, non-Bible oriented, multicultural environments and that typical SBC standards of success cannot be applied to them because their setting is more difficult.

As for communication, Romo said, Southern Baptists can't expect people whose understanding of English is based on dictionary definitions to understand SBC terms, policies and "language of Zion." Often ethnics don't understand retirement options or other opportunities open to them, when they are phrased in difficult-to-understand terms.

Missionary salaries are paid jointly by Home Mission Board and state Baptist conventions, which must make joint decisions on salary and benefits.

Highlights outlined in Romo's "state of language missions" message, included:

--Spanish language work has become so strong that if all Spanish congregations in the SBC organized their own convention, it would be the largest Spanish-speaking convention in the world. Three new Spanish language works begin each month.

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--Ethnic missionaries have helped the Southern Baptist Convention become "the most cosmopolitan evangelical organization in the world."

--More SBC units of Vietnamese work probably exist in the U. S. today than existed in Vietnam when Saigon fell; more SBC Arab congregations probably meet in the U. S. than in the Arab world; a new Korean unit has been established each month since January, 1971, and more than 75 Korean congregations now dot the SBC; two new Chinese and two new Laotian works begin each month.

Other Baptist agencies, Romo said, also prepare materials in other languages, such as the Sunday School Board, which has added a position for persons to minister to ethnic congregations.

The momentum cannot be sustained, however, if SBC leaders and institutions "are not awakened to the realities of the American scene. We must equip people to serve in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, transitional society," Romo said.

Southern Baptists familiar with traditional "business enterprise methodologies" cannot continue to expect "return on investments based on the predictability that we give, they grow; we tell, they do; we train, they learn; we pay, they produce," Romo said.

Nor can "we continue to operate on the assumption the melting pot exists, in spite of the acknowledged increasing ethnicity of the nation," Romo said.

-30-

Ex-Con Becomes Man H Missed

AURORA, Ill. (BP)--Broken promises from a man who agreed to take a young boy to church probably made life more difficult than it had to be for ex-convict Gene Fritz. Now he's helping to make sure it goes easier for other boys.

Fritz was a petty thief by the time he was six years old. When he was 10, a judge ordered him to attend church regularly in lieu of harsher punishment.

"He found a man who agreed to pick me up every week," said Fritz, now 43. "But he took me only one Sunday. That's the last I ever heard of him. Looking back, I feel that if some man had shown a real interest in me, my life might have been different."

But no one did and Fritz went from petty crime to bigger things, serving time in four prisons by the age of 33.

Fritz became a Christian while at Joliet state penitentiary. He was paroled to the Wayside Cross Rescue Mission in Aurora that takes in alcoholics, parolees, burn-outs, "anyone who needs a home." There he met Beverly, a graduate of Wheaton College and a summer staff worker at the mission.

"My wife, Beverly, believed in me," Fritz said. "When you're in prison you get to feeling bad about yourself. You feel like a bum. You feel like you're nothing. But Beverly helped restore my self-confidence. She showed me I have a future, that tomorrow is more important than what happened yesterday."

Fritz and Beverly have four foster children from a Puerto Rican family whose father shot their mother and himself. "And then we adopted a son, Jason, who's two years old," Fritz said. "He's Afro-American, so together, we have a small United Nations around our house."

The Fritzes are long-time leaders in children's church too. He remembers the day when a male figure might have meant a difference in his life. He's going to be that difference to as many youngsters as possible.

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