



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Baptists Active in Relief For Hurricane Victims

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Within hours after Hurricane Frederic blew goodbye to the Mobile, Ala., area, hundreds of Baptist laymen from the state and surrounding states began pouring in to minister to the people of a paralyzed city.

For more than eight hours, the vicious hurricane, which also wreaked havoc in Mississippi, had lashed and whipped powerful girders and towering oaks into twisted scrap and splinters. It left the city with no safe water, no electricity, and no means of communication--knocking out broadcast and newspaper facilities and telephones.

As morning's light broke and people emerged from a night-long nightmare, the sight was unreal. One civil defense worker said the downtown looked like a war zone. Travel was impossible in streets littered with tens of thousands of trees and limbs of live oaks laden with Spanish moss. Hardly a building remained undamaged.

Disaster relief vans from the Louisiana and Tennessee Baptist Conventions set up feeding operations in the beleaguered city. Another van from Florida Baptists set up across the bay in Baldwin County, Ala., after pausing in the hurricane-lashed Pensacola, Fla., area where relief efforts were not as badly needed.

Relief workers described it as miraculous that only about nine persons in the two-state area lost their lives in Hurricane Frederic, whose eye was reportedly 50 miles long and 40 miles wide, the largest ever recorded. Massive evacuation, spurred by memories of over 250 deaths in Hurricane Camille in 1969, has been credited with the low death toll.

Some 650 Baptist volunteers from Alabama, Florida and Louisiana have been at work in Alabama assisting in clean up and repair operations and others will come in an effort coordinated by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, in cooperation with state Brotherhood departments.

During relief efforts, two Baptist workers were injured. One, Bobby Street of Hokes Bluff, Ala., was retained in a Mobile hospital with a broken collarbone. The other, Marvin Crumpton of Clanton, Ala., suffered a crushed cheekbone when he was hit by a falling tree. He consulted a plastic surgeon in Montgomery and returned home.

Meanwhile the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board is standing by to provide relief funds where needed. Alabama Baptists have issued an appeal for churches to give \$1 million in a special offering for disaster relief and have earmarked \$35,000, currently in reserve for disaster relief, for immediate use.

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In Mississippi, the disaster relief van of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, set up in hard-hit Pascagoula and dispensed more than 8,000 meals in a three-day period. Feeding operations have ceased in Pascagoula, but will continue indefinitely in Mobile, maybe as long as a month, according to John Winters, director of Baptist Men and boys for the Louisiana convention.

Difficult travel and crippled communications have made it impossible to determine the number of Baptist churches and other property damaged. But a report from Mississippi estimated that dozens of churches suffered varying amounts of damage, along with the offices of the Gulfcoast Baptist Association and the Baptist Seamen's Center, both in Pascagoula. A number of Alabama churches, including the Oakdale Baptist Church, Mobile, which sustained about \$500,000 in damage, suffered varying degrees of damage.

Associate editors of three state Baptist papers who covered the disaster said the extent of damage to Baptist property will be forthcoming as relief efforts restore some semblance of order.

In Alabama, Earl Potts, director of disaster relief operations for Alabama Baptists, said he will enlist working crews on a continuing basis for several weeks to come.

Immediate needs of staple foods, baby food, ice, power saws and water are being met, he said, but carpenters, electricians and construction specialists will be needed for weeks to come.

Bill Arnold, associate in the division of church services for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Dallas, has been at work in Mobile, helping M. Pat Harrison, pastor of Mobile's First Baptist Church, coordinate work teams.

Work crews are being organized to assist elderly persons and persons with limited incomes with repair of their homes, according to Winters.

The Louisiana van, located in a demolished shopping center, provided civil defense workers, law enforcement officers and other workers with hot chocolate and coffee around the clock and has constantly fed hungry people.

"From the time we started with breakfast the first morning until the police called a 7 p.m. curfew that night, there was never a break in the serving line," Winters said. "We just changed the type of food from a breakfast menu to a lunch menu and kept going."

The unit served an average of 3,000 meals a day for the first three days. Area residents, who had not had a hot meal in three days, consumed a huge quantity of food the first day alone. It included 110 gallons of tea, 40 gallons of coffee, 40 gallons of hot chocolate, 6 gallons of corned beef hash, 6 gallons of ravioli, 28 gallons of beef stew, 42 gallons of green beans, 48 gallons of peaches, 75 pounds of rice, 24 gallons of chile con carne, 30 dozen eggs, and 1,400 hamburgers.

An Alabama Red Cross official said the basic emergency needs have been met. The next phase, rehabilitation, will take a long time and a lot of money.

Most churches in Mississippi and Alabama held services of praise and thanksgiving the Sunday following the hurricane. In many, the only light came from candles and sunlight streaming through roofs and broken windows.

"They are now praying that the rain will hold off until damage to roofs can be repaired," said one observer. "Rain could turn a minimally damaged church into a major disaster if repair doesn't take place quickly."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Baptist Press compiled on-the-scene hurricane reports from Jack Brymer, associate editor of the Alabama Baptist, Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr., associate editor of the Baptist Message in Louisiana, and Tim Nicholas, associate editor of the Baptist Record in Mississippi.

Harold Bennett Installed As
Executive Secretary-Treasurer

Baptist Press
9/18/79

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Harold Clark Bennett was installed as executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee during services at First Baptist Church.

The installation came as the Executive Committee held its annual fall meeting, its first session since Bennett succeeded Porter W. Routh in the post.

Two of the three men who have preceded Bennett as executive--Routh and Duke McCall--issued challenges to the former executive secretary of the Florida Baptist Convention. McCall, now president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, told Bennett:

"Perhaps the most pressure (you will face) is from people and positions who will try to force you into their mold. But one of the greatest gifts you can give to Southern Baptists is not to fill a mold, but to be the man you were called to be...unique...infinite...conformed to the mind of Christ."

McCall also called on Bennett to "hold us together." He added: "You are not the keeper of the gate for we are not concerned with maintenance of boundaries. Be the keeper of the standards...the standards around which we witness to the world in the name of Jesus Christ."

Routh, who now is teaching at Southern Seminary, urged Bennett to look at the faces of the people around him: staff, executive committee, agency, leaders, pastors, people of faith, but to most of all seek the "incomparable, sensitive, loving face of Jesus."

Routh joked as he noted there was no torch to pass on to Bennett. "Duke (McCall) and I think there may have been no torch to pass between us, but there have been many fires during the years, so there have been many brands to snatch up for light or heat..."

Bennett, in his response, said: "I love Southern Baptists. I love Jesus Christ. I am grateful for His salvation. I am grateful to be given the opportunity to be a servant of him through his church."

He added: "Pray for me. Let's walk together down the tremendous pathway on which Christ has led as we share the gospel with every person in our day."

Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, delivered the address and told the audience: "I believe God is getting ready to do something in our convention that the most visionary of us has not even dreamed of."

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Ingram Confirms
Gritz Termination

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Joe Ingram, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, has confirmed that Jack Gritz was terminated by the convention's board of directors as editor of Oklahoma's Baptist Messenger, Sept. 11.

Earlier, Baptist Press reported the board approved a motion that Gritz, who will be 63 in December, retire early.

Ingram said the board action suggested that Gritz, who will be paid full salary through March, 1980, could take disability or early retirement and that the board would work out a non-Cooperative Program supplement which would, in effect, pay his full salary and benefits through his normal retirement age of 65 in Dec. 1981.

Gritz has had health problems which the board felt makes him eligible for disability retirement, Ingram said. He said, however, that the board's decision was not based on health but on the work of Gritz, who has served as editor of the Baptist Messenger for 30 years. He said he did not initiate the action to terminate Gritz but agrees with it.

Gritz has said he does not wish to take disability retirement because his health is good and that he does not wish to take early retirement either. He said he will discuss the matter with the board's committee.

A report in the Baptist Standard, Texas Baptist news publication, said Oklahoma Baptist president Joe Don Abernathy sent a letter to Oklahoma pastors referring to Gritz's departure as a retirement and that it had received only one dissenting vote.

Gritz said the termination took him by surprise and hurt him, but he added, "I have some good years left and hope to make them count for the Lord."

Only a few weeks ago, Gritz wrote in an editorial marking his 30th anniversary as editor, "I started young as editor and have several years yet to go."