



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Baptists Give Early Response  
To Storm-Ravaged Dominica

By Norman Jameson

ROSEAU, Dominica (BP)--Every grain of rice Dominicans eat, every new-shirt they wear, and every shelter they crawl into for the next nine to 12 months will have to be a gift from another country.

Hurricane David so utterly devastated the already impoverished island nation that it will have no income from its fruit exports for nearly a year. All of the trees bearing bananas, coconuts and grapefruits, Dominica's only exports, were destroyed when David pillaged the 29-by-14 mile island for five horrifying hours Aug. 29.

Southern Baptist missionaries plan to handle food distribution in the town of Boetica if they get permission from the interim government of Prime Minister Oliver Seraphim. The storm left only 20 dwellings inhabitable in the town of 500.

All four Baptist missionary houses in Roseau lost their roofs. The missionaries huddled under beds, in a car, in closets and a basement apartment during the wild afternoon and none were injured. Betty Walker, her son Alan, and a household helper hid behind a washer and dryer, singing "He is Lord," and praying.

Mrs. Walker, who admitted she hadn't taken storm warnings seriously, said, "I began to take it seriously when my roof went."

The 150-mile-per-hour winds of the century's worst hurricane stripped the leaves off the few trees that remained standing, collapsed palm branches like beach umbrellas folded for the winter and even tore up the grass. Thirty-three-foot waves pummelled the island from the normally glassy surfaced Caribbean and 55-foot waves lashed at it from the Atlantic side.

Dominica looked as if winter came to the tropical island that had never known cold; or a forest fire ravaged a nation, leaving no ashes. Torrents of rain tore strips of green velvet forest off the slopes like a giant cat using the mountains for a scratching post.

Fifty percent of the houses on the island, which just achieved independence from Britain less than a year ago, were destroyed; "flat down" as the numbed islanders said. Another 40 percent were severely damaged; none were untouched. All schools, hospitals and clinics were wrecked. The only factory that escaped will stand vacant for a year until coconuts appear in the mountains again.

Officials estimated it will take at least nine months to restore electricity to the capital city area of Roseau, longer elsewhere.

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Only about 40 deaths were counted, plus an indeterminable number of "Dreads," members of a religious cult that inhabit the mountains.

Dominicans attributed the low death toll, considering the absolute destruction, to the fact people stayed in their houses and did not scurry about where they could fall victim to the galvanized steel roofing that sliced through the air, decapitating at least one citizen of Roseau.

Four men from Texas Baptist churches, in a marvel of logistics, arrived Sept. 10 in Dominica on a boat loaded with building supplies from Barbados. It was the first building supplies to arrive after the storm. They replaced roofs on two missionary houses and Deliverance Baptist Church and put a temporary covering on the roof of a neighbor.

A second team of 15 men from Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, was to follow with additional supplies, accumulated by Barbados missionary Jerry Harris with disaster relief funds appropriated by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

That team will concentrate efforts in Boetica, where missionary Fred Walker is pastor of a mission church. The church and missionary house there lost their roofs.

Special project dentist John Ross and Doug Hill, part of the first work group, are members of Wilshire. The Dallas men will build ten 10-by-12 foot houses in Boetica and restore as many of the original dwellings as possible with supplies brought from Barbados.

Two weeks after the storm, there were still no building supplies available in Dominica except what Southern Baptists brought in. "If your house is a shambles and you can't even buy a nail, what can you do?" asked Mrs. Walker.

The Walkers bailed water from their house for more than a week from the rains of Hurricanes David and Frederic before a roof was restored. All five missionary personnel who remained in Dominica lived in the basement apartment, eating canned foods and searching for drinkable water. They eventually found a spring and then drank water from purification plants set up by the United States.

The British destroyer HMS Fife floated off the coast of Dominica until David passed, then docked and immediately sent 400 of its 500 men ashore to clear roads, distribute food and fly doctors via helicopter to remote areas. Fife was the only help Dominica got for four days.

Flights out of the country were booked for weeks. Most of the 80,000 inhabitants of the 29-by-14 mile island wanted to leave for "a better life" even before the storm. Now there is nothing to hold them.

The Southern Baptist missionary families of Walker, Ross, and Don Snell and missionary journeyman Colleen Thompson have all decided to stay and continue work in Dominica. Mission Service Corps volunteer Mark Allen and his wife Jan, who is pregnant, have returned to the United States. Some of the wives and children evacuated temporarily to Barbados, but have since returned.

"I felt like God's call to me was for Dominica," said Betty Walker. "Like marriage vows, it's for better or for worse. Just because it got worse didn't change God's call. Remaining was the only way we could be of assistance."

Northwest Leader Named  
New Florida Executive

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Dan C. Stringer, executive director-treasurer of the Northwest Baptist Convention for eight years, has been elected executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist State Convention.

Stringer, 51, will assume his Florida position Nov. 1. He succeeds Harold C. Bennett, who resigned to become executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee.

"Leaving the Northwest has been a real grief experience for my wife and me," Stringer told Baptist Press. "It has been frontier territory, especially with the expansion of the work in Canada."

"As I look at Florida, I see it as an equal challenge," he said. "It is different in that the churches are established and stronger. Many of them are doing an outstanding job, while others need to move up to new dimensions."

As he spoke of his new post, Stringer noted Florida challenges, including population growth, work among ethnics, opportunities for outreach and evangelism and the need for new churches.

Stringer was elected by the state board of missions Sept. 11, after a search committee headed by James Monroe, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach, recommended him.

The executive board of the Northwest convention--which includes Washington, Oregon, part of Idaho and most of Western Canada--will meet Oct. 4 to name an interim executive. Under a backup system implemented by Stringer, it is expected to be Bill Peters, director of missions.

Stringer will terminate his work in the Northwest Oct. 12.

Under his leadership, the Northwest convention has expanded from 250 churches to more than 360, and has tripled Cooperative Program giving, from \$292,000 to \$975,000.

He is a native of Cordell, Okla., and graduated from an Albuquerque, N.M., high school, Baylor University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also attended the University of New Mexico, Wayland Baptist College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He married the former Harriett Rogers of Lisbon, Fla., in 1948, the same year he was ordained to the gospel ministry. They have two children.

Stringer has been pastor of churches in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Nevada, and has been in denominational work in Arizona and the Northwest. In Arizona, he was associate director of missions, secretary of stewardship, institutional and financial coordinator, director of missions and associate executive secretary.

Registration Inquiry Reveals  
No Massive Wrongdoing

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The long-awaited investigation of alleged registration irregularities at the national meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in June in Houston did not reveal massive wrongdoing.

But the investigation by SBC registration secretary Lee Porter of Nashville did reveal problems calling for measures both by churches and the SBC to correct flaws, ambiguities and "sloppy" procedures which threaten the integrity of the SBC's balloting system.

Porter's report, made to the SBC Executive Committee's semi-annual meeting in September in Nashville, also declared that a "get out the vote" campaign was in evidence as part of the widely reported effort to elect an SBC president committed to biblical inerrancy as an issue.

In that election, Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., was elected to the presidency on the first ballot on the opening day of the SBC, Tuesday, June 12. Rogers collected 6,129 votes out of 11,975 cast, outdistancing his nearest competitor in a six-man race by 3,338 votes, and exceeding the 50 percent needed for a first ballot election by 168 votes. (Porter's report revealed that nearly 20 percent of the messengers registered at that time did not vote.)

Amid charges that irregularities had violated the registration process, SBC messengers voted in Houston to instruct Porter to study any such irregularities and report them to the Executive Committee, which serves as the convention between annual sessions. The Executive Committee, in turn, was asked to "report or recommend to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention next year (1980) necessary bylaw changes and/or registration procedure to prevent irregularities and to maintain the integrity of the balloting system."

The Executive Committee will study Porter's report and present the findings at its February meeting in Nashville for action and eventual report to the 1980 SBC in St. Louis next June.

The Executive Committee voted to commend Porter for his "very thorough and incisive analysis of alleged registration irregularities" and expressed gratification that the inquiry "has confirmed the high level of integrity of the broad spectrum of convention messengers... (and that) the great majority of improper registrations appear from the report to be the result of ambiguities and misunderstandings concerning messenger qualifications." It also noted: "Intentional abuse of the registration and balloting process, to the extent that this may have occurred in Houston, even if on a very small scale, is reprehensible and is denounced.

Porter said the irregularities he did uncover are probably types of irregularities which have occurred in past years in the SBC registration system.

Rogers declared that "Lee Porter has been as fair and even-handed in his report as a man can be." The SBC president said that he had felt all along that an investigation would reveal no large scale wrongdoing and said he was happy that had proven true.

Responding to questions from denominational and secular press, Porter said he could find "no evidence that the irregularities uncovered centered around churches or messengers committed to a particular theological or doctrinal persuasion or located in a particular section... They were across-the-board-type Southern Baptists."

The only exception to that statement, he said, involved the get-out-the-vote effort.

"Approximately 200 churches with 150 to 1,000 members located within 150 miles of Houston elected 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 messengers. Most of those registered on Tuesday (the day of the presidential election). Through a sample survey, I have confirmed that many of these came in small vans or buses and that 83 percent attended only business sessions on Tuesday. The survey indicates that 71 percent of them also attended the Wednesday night service at the Astrodome. In my judgment, registration facts point to a 'get out the vote' campaign."

In his comments to the Executive Committee, Porter said, "We must be careful of making reckless charges. Political activity is not illegal as such and is not in violation of convention bylaws."

Although such activity is not illegal, messengers at the SBC's Thursday morning, June 14, session in Houston voted a resolution "disavowing overt political activity and organization as a method of selection of its (the SBC's) officers."

Porter said his investigation showed that reports of large numbers of discarded ballots at the SBC were true. "One usher collected about 400 sets off the floor. Others turned in 30 to 40 sets in the registration booth. The clean-up crew showed me another large container of discarded ballots. Apparently, between 1,000 and 2,000 sets were thrown away after the Tuesday afternoon session."

He said the investigation uncovered no evidence of massive busing of voters, no evidence of stolen ballots (although security was breached "for three hours on Tuesday morning when numbers of people traveled through the registration booth"), and that some messengers voted by proxy.

That included husbands voting for wives and vice versa and pastors and others voting for church members. He said letters of confession from persons indicated at least 50 votes cast in this manner.

The investigation also showed technically improper registrations by at least three interim pastors and wives from churches other than ones where they were members, five foreign missionaries, four newly constituted churches, two churches not in cooperation with the SBC, and "one individual at the convention (who said) he was a former supply speaker and an honorary member of the church that elected him."

Porter, who declared the investigation was not of the election of Rogers but of the registration process, said the report revealed that "the mass of our people were meticulously careful" in following proper procedures and the letter and spirit of SBC constitution and bylaws.

In a pre-session news conference, he said less than two percent of nearly 16,000 registered messengers were in violation but that "there are a lot of gray areas which need clarifying."

He reported that his investigation revealed 284 registrations absolutely out of line, characterizing the messengers in question as being "caught with blood on their hands." They included registrations beyond the maximum allowed to churches, double registrations, registration of children not elected and other illegal registrations.

Porter also pointed out about 1,000 messengers who registered without being elected by their church, noting that these included many pastors and their wives. For example, he said, they included pastors and wives whose churches had voted to provide travel funds for them to attend the convention but had failed to elect them formally as messengers. Much of that, he said, could have resulted from interpretation of the messenger registration card which he said is ambiguous.

He noted that at least 47 churches permitted only 10 messengers, had more than that, including one with 22, one with 20, one with 16, two with 14, five with 13, eleven with 12 and twenty-six with 11. The top five churches in that list, he said, were from Texas with none from Houston. Twenty-eight of the 47 were from Texas.

"Thirty-nine churches," he said, "had members who had not been elected or appointed by the church and registered on their own. Thirty-one of those persons who registered on their own were denominational workers (convention-wide, state or associational)." That, declared Porter, a Baptist Sunday School Board staff member, was "very sad."

He noted, however, that First Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., which probably has more denominational workers in its membership than any SBC church, represents a model of how churches can set up proper procedures to avoid problems with election of messengers.

Porter drew 10 conclusions from the investigation which he hopes will be incorporated in whatever recommendations the Executive Committee brings to the SBC annual meeting in 1980 in St. Louis.

--Churches must elect their messengers carefully in keeping with the (SBC) constitutional provisions.

--Churches must publicize the names of elected messengers so that other members will not register on their own.

--Messengers must bring proper credentials with them to the convention. (About half the messengers did not have their credentials with them in Houston, he said.)

--Messengers must register individually.

--The SBC must change bylaws in regard to proxy voting. Only 10 of some 60 ballots were by computer card ballot. When a person is present and another is absent on a hand ballot, the voter raises only one hand. Therefore, a person should vote only one ballot. No proxy voting should be allowed.

--Alternates must not register; churches must be responsible for changing an alternate to an elected messenger when the need occurs.

--Plans must be developed to eliminate churches over-registering and to prevent individuals registering twice.

--The registration card needs to be redesigned, and the constitutional provisions on registration need to be clarified.

--The integrity of the balloting system must be maintained.

--The registration process must continue to operate on a system of trust of the churches and the personal integrity of the individual messengers.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers.