



--FEATURES

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Kidnapping, Distress, Resignation:
Missionaries Return Despite It All

By Wally Poor

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay (BP)--Nine years after his son was kidnapped by communist terrorists, Southern Baptist missionary Jimmie Spann has been able to reconstruct a church which the same group had nearly destroyed.

In August 1970, while home on vacation from medical school, Stephen Spann was kidnapped and held for about six hours by the communist-backed Tupamaros while the car he had been driving was used in a bank holdup. After the holdup, he was released unharmed.

During the same period, the Paso Molino Baptist Church was being torn apart by the struggle between a Leftist pastor--later jailed as a recruiter for the Tupamaros--and those who remained loyal to Christ. Finally, the pastor succeeded in having the truly Christian members expelled and remained in possession of the church's building until his imprisonment. The scandal led to the church being expelled from the Uruguay Baptist Convention.

Shaken by their son's kidnapping and other factors, the Spanns resigned as missionaries. Five years later, they were reappointed and returned to Uruguay in 1976.

Meanwhile, the Uruguayan government had overcome the Tupamaros. The Baptist mission was able to recover possession of the Paso Molino property. The group expelled by the Leftist pastor had continued to meet in other places, and they were allowed to begin meeting once more in the building.

But, it was in ruins. All electrical wiring and plumbing had been ripped out by the group of young toughs the Leftist pastor had gathered about him. All the windows were broken out. The church's pump organ had been carried to the balcony and hurled to the floor below, badly damaging it.

Though they were meeting in the building and got another pastor to preach on a part-time basis, the remnant of believers was a small, seemingly defeated group. The church's testimony in the neighborhood was practically nil. Some doubted if a church could ever grow there again.

Spann had returned to Uruguay to supervise the extension department of the Baptist Theological Seminary. However, in December 1977, he accepted the call of the church, which now was named the Ebenezer Baptist Church

In the next 18 months (before he and his wife returned to Texas on furlough in June, just in time for their son's graduation from medical residency), Spann succeeded in turning around the once nearly dead church. Membership was doubled from 20 to 42. Attendance has quadrupled.

"When he came, there was a spirit of defeatism," says Spann. "Now there is a spirit of growth and outreach. Our growth has been among young people and young adults."

In addition to building up the church, Spann, who is handy with tools, has also done a lot of repairs. He has built 16 pews including pulpit benches. Now the young people are building a volleyball and basketball court to use in an outreach ministry.

How has Spann managed to revitalize the situation at Ebenezer?

"A regular program--constant, faithful," is Spann's formula. "The people know we're going to be there and that there's something going on."

In the past 18 months the church has had three revival meetings and also participated in the nationwide Luis Palau evangelistic campaign in April 1978. The church has an active youth group which Spann terms "our brightest spot." Missionary Journeyman Becky Thomas worked with the young people.

Spann's wife, Norma, formed a church choir. The church's youth group has sponsored two citywide music festivals. Brazilian Baptist missionary Marinette Vanderlie has worked to build up the church's religious education program. Now newly-arrived Southern Baptist music missionary Joe Benfield has joined the church and started working with the choir.

In addition to his work with his church, Spann serves as zone missionary for Montevideo, working with the 16 existing churches in Montevideo to encourage missionary outreach.

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Wally Poor is mission press representative for Uruguay.

Missionary Leaves Turkey;
Future Work Questionable

ANKARA, Turkey (BP)--John Allen Moore, retired Southern Baptist missionary serving as a volunteer pastor in Turkey, has resigned his post and has returned to the United States.

Moore was pastor of an American congregation in Ankara, serving under conditions prescribed by the Turkish government. He and his wife were the only Southern Baptists working there under Foreign Mission Board auspices.

John D. Hughey, the board's secretary for Europe and the Middle East, will meet with the congregation in early November to determine the future of Southern Baptist-related work in Turkey.

Moore was asked to fill the Ankara pastorate after James F. Leeper, Southern Baptist missionary to Turkey for 12 years, was asked to leave the country last year. Leeper had helped to establish the American congregation and had continued to serve as its pastor until the Turkish government refused to renew his residence permit. They claimed the church itself was illegal.

Moore had been granted a one-year visa provided the church moved off its rented property. Because the church could not meet anywhere on Turkish territory, it was forced to move to quarters at the U.S. embassy.

Hughey cited a dwindling membership as part of the reason for Moore's early return to the states. Many of those attending while the church met in a rented house found it less appealing to meet at the embassy, Hughey said.

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Resettlement Rate Up, Needs Remain Unmet

ATLANTA (BP)--Although Southern Baptists are resettling Indochinese refugees at the quickest pace in several years, sponsors for the newcomers are not stepping forward fast enough, a Home Mission Board resettlement coordinator said.

"We settled more refugees in August than we have at any time since 1975, when refugee camps were located in the United States and American awareness of the problem was at an all-time high," said Gene Tunnell. "We also had a good month in September, and October is off to a strong start.

"But we're held back by the availability of sponsors," he added. "We urgently need them, especially those who can help families of five to seven members.

"We can accommodate every sponsor (person, church, group of churches or association of churches) with a refugee family," Tunnell said. But without sponsors, the families must await placement.

Despite the pressing need, resettlement figures from recent months provide reassurance that headway is being made.

In August, 116 sponsors resettled 527 persons, Tunnell said. September was "right on the heels" of the record month, with 83 sponsors placing 408 persons, and in only the first five days of October, 160 persons were settled by 28 sponsors. Each sponsor is responsible for one family.

The recent surge in resettlement followed a challenge issued in early July, requesting Southern Baptist associations of churches to sponsor at least 1,000 refugee families by Nov. 1. William G. Tanner, board executive director-treasurer, extended the challenge and appointed a special committee to facilitate the effort.

As of early October, 405 families totaling 1,883 persons had been resettled.

Potential sponsors may contact refugee resettlement officers in their state Southern Baptist conventions or contact Tunnell at the Southern Baptist Refugee Office, 2715 Peachtree Road, NW, Atlanta, Ga., 30305 or call 404-873-4041.

Baptist Media Specialists:

'There's No Doubt; It Works'

By Jennifer Anderson

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Here's the situation: You're a Christian media specialist assigned to produce evangelistic programs for broadcast, but because of government regulations you can't use words like Bible or God.

Would you: (a) Quit; (b) Transfer to another country; (c) Try outdoor advertising?

"None of the above," answer a group of Baptist media specialists in Mexico City who face those exact obstacles. They've found something that works.

"Our content is religious but our program isn't," explains a convincing and enterprising Jim Watson. Watson is assistant to the director of Medios Educativos, the Baptist media group that occupies offices at Mexican Baptist Theological Seminary. Besides Watson, Medios is composed of David and Lorna Daniell, Southern Baptist representatives to Mexico City; and Sofia Alarcon, a Mexican Baptist. Daniell is director, Miss Alarcon is general manager and Mrs. Daniell is graphic artist.

Medios Educativos is forced to do things differently because of Mexico's stiff radio broadcast regulations. "We're very low key," says Watson. "But everything we do is identified as being Baptist and with a Christian organization. We get as much as we can on the air that the government allows."

Mexico's government requires programs to use a Mexican-born announcer and won't allow "God" or "Bible" to be aired. "But we can talk about 'the Word,' 'the Father,' 'Scriptures,' or 'the Creator,'" Watson says. "It's just one of those things in Mexico."

With these in mind, Medios Educativos has produced "Sabe Usted?" ("Did You Know?"), one of its most popular programs. The series takes an historical or scientific fact or a social issue, explores it by interviewing specialists in the country, then, in conclusion, makes a spiritual application--all in compliance with government mandates.

For instance, one "Sabe Usted?" starts up with a strong, fast-beat song leading into the Mexican announcer's introduction to the program. This particular broadcast deals with the importance of vaccinations against disease.

A prominent Mexican physician is interviewed on the topic, then a government health department official airs his views. Wrapping it up the announcer tells the audience that a "vaccination for sin is a new life in Christ." He reads II Corinthians 5 from the Scriptures: "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation."

The program closes with a special gift--this time a calendar. "Every program offers a gift, if they'll write us," says Watson. "And with that special gift we also send a correspondence course about the Bible and Christianity."

Medios Educativos means educational media, "which kind of lends itself to that type of thing--educational," says Watson. "As you can see our programs are religious. But they also give information."

Letters from across Mexico express people's interest in knowing more. In the case of one woman who was contemplating suicide, "Sabe Usted?" helped her find a new life--she became a believer.

Watson and the medios team are convinced that programs like "Sabe Usted?" work. "Yep," he says. "There's no doubt about it."

SPECIAL FEATURE

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SERVICE OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

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Autumn in the Air,
Dinner on the Ground

By W. C. Fields
Director, Baptist Press

With the Fall of the year on us and approximately 1200 annual associational meetings in progress, these days should be rich in Christian fellowship for Southern Baptists.

The gathering of messengers from the churches is something of a family reunion. Along with the sermons and reports, the reviews and previews, there will be in most places some variation of the old fashioned basket lunch. Tables will groan under loads of harvest-time food, adding to the atmosphere a fraternal warmth.

The renewal of those personal bonds among friends in Christ has been an important aspect of such meetings from the earliest times.

The first assembly of this sort was in Jerusalem (Acts 15). As a forum for Christian opinion it set the pattern for free exchange of views and for dealing forthrightly with kingdom business.

In 1707 five Pennsylvania churches formed the Philadelphia Baptist Association, the first in America. They described the organization as "An association of messengers authorized by their respective churches to meditate and execute designs of public good."

These meetings are a mixture of conclave, caucus, council, and convocation. They show the best and the worst in Baptist life. The important point is that much of Baptist life is determined "at the association."

After all of this time these yearly gatherings still deserve the attention, interest, and prayerful participation of every Baptist.

And don't forget the dinner on the ground!