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79-197

Georgia Choir, N.Y. Church
Coordinate Needs, Resources

By Marv Knox

STAMFORD, N.Y. (BP)--There's a Southern Baptist church at the foot of the Catskills, thanks to a group of high school students who traveled 1,000 miles to sing, paint, chop wood and mingle among the people.

When the youth choir from Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta first trekked to Stamford, the village had only a tiny Bible study group which met in an old convent. The closest Southern Baptist church was 50 miles away.

Now, more than a year and two mission trips later, the Bible study group has transformed into a full-fledged church, the congregation is making an impact on the community and members are reaching into nearby towns with a Christian message.

"Great things have happened here," said Waylon Bray, Stamford pastor. "But without the youth choir from Second Ponce, we might still be a year away from constituting as a church." The congregation formally organized into a church early this fall.

The young people first became involved with Baptist work in Stamford after Georgia "adopted" New York in the Bold Mission Thrust effort, the Southern Baptist endeavor to reach the world for Christ by the year 2000.

From the beginning, the relationship has been fulfilling. Stamford's convent was almost large enough to house Second Ponce's huge youth group, and that group had the manpower to meet Stamford's physical needs and penetrate the community. From both perspectives, needs and resources fit hand in glove.

On the first trip, made in 1978, nine adult sponsors accompanied 76 youngsters who painted most of the convent's exterior. They also converted a garage into an apartment, chopped tons of wood, conducted church surveys in Stamford and two nearby communities and presented gospel concerts.

But more importantly, they created goodwill among local residents.

"At the time, we had 18 members. Only two were men, including myself," Bray said. "We were hampered by extremely low visibility in the community.

"But you can't put that many kids in a small town without people noticing them," he added. "The local adults were impressed with the quality of Second Ponce's young people. This created an entirely new image and gave us credibility."

By the time the group arrived in 1979, Stamford anticipated their coming.

"The community was interested in being associated with the youngsters," Bray said. "People from outside the congregation asked to keep some of the kids. I guess people heard through the grapevine that the kids were coming and wanted to be a part.

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"Whatever their reasons, the idea worked--at least two young adult men became Christians as a result of young people living in their homes. Also, the musical was better received in 1979. About 450 people heard it, compared to 175 in 1978."

In 1979, the young people also conducted 10 backyard Bible schools and held a tent revival with an emphasis on music. These events reached further into the community, thus facilitating growth, Bray said.

He believes much of the progress the Stamford church has made can be attributed to the relationship between his church and the Atlanta congregation. Second Ponce has supplied the youth choir, helped with supplies, paid for three summer missionaries and one semester missionary. But Stamford has remained financially independent.

"Work in pioneer areas that is given other than financial aid can develop the fastest," Bray said. "People feel the need to be involved, and that causes them to develop good stewardship habits."

"This helps them to become more mature as Christians, and maturity is what we need," he added. "We've got to develop an indigenous church, since we don't have Southerners who've been Southern Baptists a long time."

Bray believes the ongoing relationship experienced by the Stamford and Atlanta churches provides the "planning linked to flexibility" which is necessary to meet these needs.

"We have been the program planners and developers, and they have been the implementers and helpers," he explained. "We've created respect for each other. And that has made this work so well."

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Two Suspects in Douglass
Murders Caught in Colorado

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OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. (BP)--Police captured two suspects in the murders of Richard and Marilyn Douglass Nov. 21 in Craig, Colo.

Douglass, pastor of Putnam City Baptist Church, and his wife were killed in their home Oct. 15. Their son, Brooks, 16, and daughter, Leslie, 13, were also wounded by the intruders but have since been released from a local hospital. The children are now living with relatives and have been guarded by a deputy sheriff since their release from the hospital.

Capture of Glenn Burton Ake, 24, and Steven Keith Hatch, age 26, on a ranch in northwest Colorado was the first word of the suspects since their trail grew cold in Arkansas shortly after the murders.

Moffat County Sheriff S.L. Valdez said Hatch tried to escape unarmed through a window in the ranchhouse but was caught nearby without incident. Ake, reportedly armed with a shotgun and a revolver, also tried to flee but shots fired by sheriff's officers forced him to stop.

Valdez said he first learned of the suspects' presence in the area when rancher Mike Pondella called him to say he had escaped from two men who had beaten and bound him. The Colorado sheriff said the men were also suspects in a recent murder in Hardy County, Texas. The suspects were reportedly driving a car belonging to the murder victim in Texas.

It is expected they will be extradited to Oklahoma and stand trial for the Douglass murders.

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Laity, Pastors Convene
For Renewal Conference

TOCCOA, Ga. (BP)--Laity and pastors from 16 states participated in the seventh annual National Renewal Evangelism Conference, to promote personal evangelism, train lay leaders and support volunteer missions endeavors.

The conference, sponsored jointly by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and Home Mission Board, attracted 175 persons.

Ralph Neighbour, pastor, author and urban evangelism specialist from Houston, Texas, challenged participants to reach unbelievers by serving them. "Learn to wash feet, clothe the naked, feed the hungry," he said. "Help the poor who will not hear the gospel until it flattens them with its impact."

Lay Renewal Weekend training centered on "helping lay people become involved in evangelism and ministry," said David Haney, lay renewal director for the Brotherhood Commission. In special workshops, coordinators and consultants learned to work with churches in planning and conducting the weekend meetings.

The volunteer emphasis directed attention to convention-wide programs such as Christian Service Corps, Mission Service Corps and disaster relief. Program representatives met with potential volunteers to explain the extent of needs which can be met through lay efforts.

"This was one of the best renewal conferences we've ever had," Haney said. "There were more people who came with a general interest in these types of opportunities--with a desire to explore all areas in which they can minister. Quite possibly, Southern Baptists are opening up to the idea of renewal and volunteerism."

"This year's conference may come to represent a watershed in the lay renewal movement," said Reid Hardin, director of lay renewal for the Home Mission Board. "For years, participants in the movement have been journeying inward, gaining spiritual maturity and depth. Now they are ready to journey outward--to minister to both the physical and spiritual needs of people around them."

"They are saying, 'We are ready to go now,'" he added. "They can accept the challenge to commitment just as well as missionaries and pastors."

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UMC Must Stand Trial In
Retirement Homes Case

By Stan Hastey

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court announced it will not prevent the United Methodist Church (UMC) from being sued by former tenants of a group of bankrupt Methodist-related retirement homes.

The high court's brief order means that it will not rule on the constitutional question of whether a church body such as the UMC can be held liable in such cases until the justices hear the case on its merits.

Pacific Homes, the bankrupt corporation, was named along with the United Methodist Church in a series of suits totaling \$366 million brought by 162 former residents.

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Two California courts have differed on the question of UMC liability but the higher of the two, the state court of appeal, ruled last March that because it interpreted the UMC to be a hierarchical church, the denomination could be held liable in the damage suits.

Methodist theologians and historians had argued before the court of appeal that their church's polity is connectional rather than hierarchical.

When attorneys for the UMC appealed the California court's decision to the U.S. Supreme Court, they were joined in a friend-of-the-court brief by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which argued that making the UMC liable for the retirement homes' bankruptcy "would unconstitutionally mandate the demise of religious denominations as they now exist."

The California case has attracted wide attention in religious circles because of its potential implications for the financial liability of denominations in the operation of a variety of church agencies and institutions, many of which are controlled by relatively independent boards of trustees.

Church officials across denominational lines are worried that allowing the former residents of Pacific Homes to name the UMC as a liable party in their case establishes a dangerous precedent which could lead to an outbreak of similar cases brought by disgruntled individuals or groups.

The Supreme Court's decision to concur with the California court in forcing the UMC to go to trial in the case does not mean, however, that the question of liability will not be dealt with when the case makes its way up the appeals ladder once more, this time on its merits.

But it does mean that church officials will have to wait at least a year or two before the troublesome question is finally decided.

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Weather Brings Change
To Mission Strategy

By Susan S. Cahen

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UPPER VOLTA (BP)--Years of prevailing drought in Upper Volta led Southern Baptist missionaries into relief ministries but a break in the weather is pointing their work in new directions.

Seven of the last nine years have brought drought, dealing harshly with the rural areas of Upper Volta which border the Sahara Desert.

Now that an adequate rainfall this year has insured a successful harvest and the immediate needs of the people have been met, missionaries are emphasizing a new trend toward development and prevention rather than relief.

From well-digging projects and grain storage and distribution, the missionaries have moved into agricultural and livestock demonstration projects aimed at helping the people increase productivity. Other measures are planned.

Recently Southern Baptists sponsored five immunization clinics in Ouagadougou, the capital city. With the help of an English physician, who volunteered her time and skill, more than 150 children were immunized for measles, typhoid, typhus and polio.

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Also, literacy classes have begun in five locations in the country which has a literacy rate of only 10 percent. The classes, in French and two local dialects, are the first concerted effort of the mission toward a comprehensive literacy program with a full-time director.

Southern Baptist missionaries and government officials are cooperating in a dam feasibility study.

Already a church in the United States is eager to contribute a substantial amount toward one of the community development projects if the dam is built and to send an agriculturalist to help direct the project.

As in many developing nations, emerging church leaders must be given vocational training to support themselves until their churches become strong enough to support them. Such training is incorporated into the program at the Rural Baptist Training Center at Koudougou.

The current school year marked the opening of the center in newly constructed quarters. Ten students are in their final year of a three-year program in vocational, agricultural and biblical instruction.

The missionaries' new direction has met favorable response throughout the country. Some responsive areas were not targets of the development and prevention strategy but are the result of a highly successful Christian witness. One such area is that around Tenkodogo, a town of about 8,000.

The Norman L. Coads, from Missouri and Arkansas, will minister, teach and witness to townspeople and people in two neighboring areas where Baptists have just begun work.

Although there has been great response in rural areas, the success of Southern Baptist witness has not been confined to them. When the missionaries began working in Upper Volta in 1971, they worked among the educated class in population centers.

First, a highly successful correspondence school in Ouagadougou was founded. Now the city boasts a Baptist Center, and land has been acquired adjoining the university for a student center.

Each student wishing to use the center is required to have a participation card. To obtain one, he must have a personal conference in which the "four spiritual laws" are presented, giving each student at least one contact with the gospel.

More than 400 persons have had these conferences, many hearing the plan of salvation for the first time, and many making professions of faith.

Since 1971, the missionary force in Upper Volta has grown to 12 couples and one missionary journeyman. A national convention has been formed with 22 self-supporting churches and 42 national pastors.

"Upper Volta is as responsive as any of our countries in West Africa," says John E. Mills, area secretary for West Africa. "That just isn't the case in many countries where Southern Baptists work."

Coad agrees with the responsiveness of the country. "Everything we've tried here works," he says. Much of the credit must go to the active lay leadership roles of the nationals. "They are converted; they want to go back to their home villages and tell others about Christ," he adds.