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80-38

Mission Service Corps:  
A Story of Volunteers

By Erich Bridges

ATLANTA (BP)--Melvin and Carmel Smith, a middle-aged couple from South Carolina, sold their successful tire business last year and moved to Arizona to minister to poverty stricken Mexican-American children in inner city Phoenix.

--R tired Georgia pastor Carl Peacock and wife Neva endured 130 straight days of snow last winter and revived a dying Southern Baptist church in Fort Benton, Mont., once a wild frontier town on the Missouri River where preachers proclaimed the gospel from saloon tabletops.

--Texas native Brenda Moyer, 23, graduated from Michigan State University in June and stayed on campus as volunteer Baptist Student Union director, charged with the task of reaching 42,000 Michigan State students for Christ.

What do they have in common? These five volunteers and hundreds of others are all astride a galloping horse called Mission Service Corps, the Southern Baptist plan to place 5,000 volunteers for one or two years of service at home and abroad by 1982.

As of February, the Home Mission Board has placed 251 Mission Service Corps volunteers in 40 states, Puerto Rico, Canada and American Samoa, and the Foreign Mission Board has placed 114 MSC volunteers in 32 countries.

Tennessee construction contractor Will Fields moved with his wife and five children to Pennsylvania recently to help Southern Baptist congregations build new churches.

--Former South Carolina educator Barney Anderson began work last year to develop a comprehensive statewide volunteer program for Michigan Baptists.

--18-year-old Mark Smith, Mission Service Corps' youngest volunteer, graduated in June from high school in Marietta, Ga., and within a month moved to Buffalo, N.Y., where he works with inner city youth.

That kind of dedication is infecting the volunteers' home churches. One small North Carolina congregation agreed to sponsor a member as a volunteer and in the same session voted to double their Cooperative Program giving.

A rural association of churches supported a volunteer couple this year and also met their overall mission budget goal--for the first time.

Ten of 13 churches contacted in an informal survey have increased their missions giving through the Cooperative Program while supporting a Mission Service Corps volunteer, indicating that such involvement increases overall missions support, rather than decreasing it, as some had feared.

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Smith receives regular monthly support from high school friends in his youth group at Milford Baptist Church; they work part-time jobs to contribute. "Through Mark our whole church feels more hooked into missions," says Oscar Cope, pastor.

"The strength and commitment of the volunteers amazes me," says David Bunch, Mission Service Corps coordinator for the Home Mission Board. "I'm praying that the floodgates will open for this project. The mission opportunities are limitless."

Two common characteristics seem to bind together this hodgepodge of volunteers, however: a fervent dedication to the goals of Bold Mission Thrust--bold growing, bold going and bold giving--and a remarkable disregard for the growing negativism and confusion that grips so many Americans.

"This is an adventure that involves a lot of risk," says Richard Graham, a Kentucky volunteer. "It means leaving familiar things and risking yourself, your faith, your time, your money and your effort for something you say you believe in."

"The '80s will be the decade of the volunteer," adds Home Mission Board Director-Treasurer William Tanner. "If we're serious about sharing the Gospel with every person in the world, we've got to have volunteers, thousands of them. What we're doing in Mission Service Corps is an integral part of our entire mission effort, and becoming more so daily."

"We haven't even begun to see what can happen."

-30-

New Refugee Act Clears  
Congress, Goes to Carter

By Larry Chesser

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist concerns for the admission and resettlement of refugees in the United States were served as the House of Representatives cleared the Refugee Act of 1980 for action by the president.

The measure (S.643), which initially passed in the Senate and House last year, triples the number of refugees which can be admitted annually, broadens the definition of persons qualifying as refugees, and provides a more uniform basis for the provision of assistance to refugees.

The House vote on the conference report was a surprisingly narrow 207-192 in favor of the measure, one week after it had been approved by the Senate.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board communicated its support for the act to President Carter and the measure's sponsors, U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., and U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman, D-N.Y.

Gene V. Tunnell, consultant on refugees for the Home Mission Board, called the passage of the act good news and said it will affect a more equitable assistance program for refugees. Tunnell considers the new definition of persons qualifying as refugees even more important than raising the annual limit of refugees entering the U.S. to 50,000.

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The act defines refugees as persons who cannot live in their own countries because of "persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on the account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

"This brings the definition of what constitutes a refugee in line with the definition used by the United Nations," Tunnell said.

The act provides for the admission of 50,000 refugees for fiscal years 1980-82 and authorizes the president to increase that quota, after consultation with Congress, should conditions warrant it.

The final version of the act provides for refugees to be admitted conditionally as refugees with a retroactive adjustment of their status to lawful permanent residents after one year.

The act also creates an office of refugee resettlement within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, which will administer resettlement programs directly and through other agencies. The measure also establishes a U.S. coordinator of refugee affairs to be appointed by the president, subject to Senate confirmation, to represent the U.S. in international negotiations and in consultations with state and local governments and nonprofit organizations involved in refugee resettlement.

Resettlement programs are authorized for three years and will be administered jointly by the State Department and HEW during 1980-81. At the beginning of fiscal year 1982, the contracting authority will be transferred to HEW unless the president deems otherwise on the basis of a study to be completed by March 1981.

The act authorizes \$200 million annually for fiscal years 1980-82 for refugee services, including English language training, employment and social services training and health, social and educational services.

Though the act provides for some improvement in the area of refugee assistance, Tunnell told Baptist Press it fails to change the priority categories of the present law. Because priority is given to refugees who have relatives already in the U.S., many would-be sponsors have been unable to be matched with refugees.

"Sponsors have come forth," Tunnell said, "but because of the categorical program, almost 90 percent of the Indo-Chinese coming to the U.S. are coming to families. This means we have sponsors in many areas of the country who have little chance of getting refugees."

Southern Baptists provided resettlement for more than 3,300 refugees during 1979 and presently have a backlog of more than 100 churches waiting to assist refugees, according to Tunnell.

-30-

Larry Chesser is assistant to the director of information of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and a Washington correspondent for Baptist Press.

Churches Ask Court Review  
Of Armstrong Church Takeover

By Stan Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--Religious groups representing more than 80 million Americans, including 27 million Baptists, asked the U.S. Supreme Court here to review a case considered by experts as one of the key church-state controversies in recent memory.

A jointly filed friend-of-the-court-brief declares that "the heart of the First Amendment would be mortally wounded" if California is allowed to proceed in its demands that Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God be forced to turn over to the state attorney general all church records, including financial statements.

Famed church-state attorney Leo Pfeffer, law professor at Long Island University, and principal author of the brief, told a news conference called to announce the statement's filing that it represents more individual citizens than any other such request in Supreme Court history.

The coalition of religious groups includes the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the National Council of Churches, the Synagogue Council of America, the Lutheran Church of America, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the United Methodist Church, the United Presbyterian Church, the National Association of Evangelicals, and the Northern California Ecumenical Council.

According to the brief, the basic issue in the case is whether California Attorney General George Deukmejian violated the First Amendment's religion guarantees by placing the 87-year-old Armstrong's church under state receivership more than a year ago.

The brief asserts that the rights "of every religious body and every American" are threatened by Deukmejian's action. If the California official's "claimed power to supervise religious institutions" is upheld, "traditional religious freedoms" will be violated and the path will be cleared for the adoption of "state-established standards of religious observation and practice."

Attorney General Deukmejian ordered all church property and records placed under state receivership on Jan. 3, 1979, after six former members of the controversial church claimed Armstrong and other church officials had misused church funds. The state of receivership was eventually dissolved, but only after other church members posted a surety bond of \$3.4 million.

Deukmejian's action was based on his claim that churches and religious organizations are public, charitable trusts accountable to the state.

That view, the religious groups' brief contends, makes numerous assumptions unacceptable under the First Amendment. They include the idea that churches really do not own their own property, that church records are public and subject to audit and review by the state, that churches may be compelled to account for income and expenditures, and that church officials are actually public trustees "who serve as agents of the state."

Deukmejian's action assumes further, the argument continues, that the state may appoint a receiver to seize church property and records and supervise operations, and that it may conduct an ongoing investigation into church affairs as a means of achieving its objectives.

The case "presents a startling and...unprecedented situation in the history of church-state relations under a Constitution that forbids the establishment and secures the free exercise of religion," the brief argues.

Pfeffer, assisted by three other church-state attorneys including Baptist Joint Committee general counsel John W. Baker, argued in the brief that the "no establishment" of religion clause of the First Amendment was violated in all three testing points established by the Supreme Court in previous decisions. The high court has ruled that the "establishment" clause is violated unless laws or actions have a primary secular purpose, have the effect neither of promoting nor inhibiting religion, and avoid excessive entanglement between church and state.

Deukmejian's action failed the primary purpose test, Pfeffer wrote, in that the state's sole purpose was "the inhibition of the religion professed by the Worldwide Church of God and its members." Pfeffer said that because the actual purpose of the state throughout the legal battle has been to "destroy" the Worldwide Church, the effect of the action would consequently be the dismantling of the 70,000-member group.

As to the entanglement test, Pfeffer said that the state's "war" against the Worldwide Church "reeks of excessive entanglement." "The idea of a state-appointed official controlling the functions and operations of a live, ongoing church is frightening," he declared.

Asked about the concern of many church leaders, pastors and others who resent the Worldwide Church's failure to make voluntary financial disclosure, Pfeffer said that no American is forced to maintain affiliation with or membership in a religious group which does not disclose its financial dealings. The First Amendment grants to the American people the "right of entry and the right of egress," he declared.

Dean M. Kelley, executive for religious and civil liberty of the National Council of Churches, insisted that the broadly-based coalition's legal support of Armstrong and his embattled church does not constitute an "endorsement." He said that the disillusioned church members who originally complained about alleged excesses by Armstrong and other church leaders should have charged fraud in a criminal proceeding.