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-- FEATURES

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Cuban's Freedom
Means Preaching

By Jim Newton

FORT CHAFFEE, Ark. (BP)—For the first time in 15 years, Romelio Gonzalez has had the freedom to preach the gospel to the Cuban people.

But to find this freedom, he had to leave Cuba with his family on a shrimp boat crowded with 100 other refugees and sail across rough seas to Florida on Cuba's "freedom flotilla."

Two days after he arrived at Fort Chaffee, the refugee processing center near Fort Smith, Ark., Gonzalez volunteered to start a Baptist congregation and hold worship services every night for the Cuban refugees.

In less than a month, 45 Cuban refugees trusted in Christ as their personal Savior as a result of the evangelistic efforts of Gonzalez and others. As many as 150 attended the nightly services.

Gonzalez was amazed not only by the response, but also by his freedom to preach the gospel openly. Such freedom, he explained, is a startling contrast to his experiences in Cuba.

Fifteen years ago, Gonzalez was one of 54 Cuban Baptist pastors, other church leaders and two Southern Baptist missionaries who were rounded up in the middle of the night and taken to prison on charges of opposing Fidel Castro's communist government and being informers for the American CIA.

All of those arrested, including SBC missionaries Herbert Caudill and David Fite, denied any connection with the CIA, but were convicted and thrown into prison anyway.

Gonzalez served three years and four months of his seven-year prison term before being released in 1968, but he never again felt free to openly preach the gospel.

For years he tried to leave Cuba, but was unable to do so. As late as October 1979, he filled out all the papers necessary to get a visa to come to the United States, but his application was snarled in red tape.

When Castro announced following the takeover of the Peruvian Embassy in April that any Cuban who wanted to leave could do so, Gonzalez already had the papers ready to go.

His wife, Carmen, however, refused to leave Cuba without all four of their children. Their oldest daughter, her husband, and their two daughters were living in another city, and they had not filled out all the necessary papers.

Finally, after dozens of letters were written and papers were filled out in record time, permission to leave Cuba was granted, and 12 members of the Gonzalez family boarded a shrimp boat for Florida's Key West.

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During the long, difficult trip, Carmen, who suffers from diabetes, became violently ill, and the family feared she might die. But she survived, and the Gonzalez family unhesitatingly attributed the "miracle" to the grace of God.

Gonzalez and his family plan to continue their ministry after they are released from Fort Chaffee.

Sponsored by the Cotton-Commanche Baptist Association of Lawton, Okla., the Gonzalezes will move to Lawton where they plan to start the first Baptist church among the 2,000 Spanish-speaking people who live in the area.

Gonzalez is convinced that God led him and his family out of Cuba so they could freely share the gospel with Cubans in America.

"Even though we faced great difficulties in preaching the gospel in Cuba, here in the United States everyone from Cuba has an opportunity to hear the gospel," he said.

It is a newly-found freedom that pastor Gonzalez will never take for granted.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Memphis bureau of Baptist Press.
Adapted from the September issue of World Mission Journal.

Missionary Ken Watkins
Injured in Paraguay Accident

Baptist Press
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PUERTO PRESIDENTE STOESSNER, Paraguay (BP)—Kenneth H. Watkins, Southern Baptist missionary to Paraguay, was seriously injured Aug. 18 when his Volkswagen van collided with a Jeep in this city near the Brazilian border.

He is receiving treatment in the intensive care unit of a private hospital in Puerto Presidente Stoessner. His condition was listed as serious, but improved and stabilized.

Watkins, 43, was driving alone in the van when the accident occurred about two blocks from the hospital. He was taken to the hospital and underwent surgery immediately for multiple internal injuries. He also received a broken arm and broken leg in the accident.

No other details of the accident were available.

Watkins, who was born in Enterprise, Ala., and grew up in Bartow, Fla., was pastor of the Keene Terrace Baptist Church in Largo, Fla., when he and his wife, the former Linda Claville of Brandon, Fla., were appointed missionaries to Paraguay in 1967. He is a general evangelist.

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Churches, Consultants Honored
For Work in Changing Sectors

Baptist Press
8/20/80

ATLANTA (BP)—Churches and consultants who have worked to overcome barriers created by changing communities have been honored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The honors came during Home Missions weeks at Ridgecrest and Glorieta Baptist conference centers.

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Swope Park Baptist Church of Kansas City, Mo., and Robert Deen Nowlin of St. Louis, Mo., were honored at Glorieta, while Southlawn Baptist Church of Montgomery, Ala., and Larry Bryson of Columbia, S.C., were honored at Ridgecrest.

The churches and consultants are part of PACT (Project: Assistance to Churches in Transitional Communities) program of the HMB's metropolitan missions department.

According to Jere Allen, associate director of the department, some 2,500 Southern Baptist churches in metropolitan areas are in significantly changing areas. Work to help these church successfully meet transition is one of the board's Bold Mission Thrust priorities, Allen said.

The Swope Park church was organized in 1911 and flourished during its first 50 years, said HMB executive William G. Tanner as he made the presentation to Wade Paris, Swope Park pastor.

When the congregation realized it was in the midst of transition, "it made the commitment to reach its changing neighborhood for Christ," Tanner said.

Southlawn was founded in an all-white neighborhood in 1968, with an initial Sunday School enrollment of 400. Racial transition began in 1975, and membership declined until it reached a low point in 1977, Tanner said.

"A PACT consultation was conducted," Tanner said. "The membership says the study made them more aware of what was happening in the community and made concrete recommendations on actions to take in reaching the community for Christ.

"Through the leadership of the present pastor, Steve Slusher, the church has not only reversed the decline, but it also has shown growth," he said.

Tanner said both churches began to make gains in their communities after they participated in the PACT programs.

Nowlin, director of Christian Social Ministries (CSM) for St. Louis Metro Baptist Association, was cited because of his record of service and because that service had been extended above and beyond his normal duties, Tanner said.

"Bob Nowlin works in CSM, but he tithes his time," Tanner explained, adding that Nowlin has assisted nearly 15 churches through PACT over the years.

In making the presentation to Bryson, director of the missions department of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, Tanner said: "Larry Bryson is honored because he has been one of the pioneers in PACT consultations. He has conducted more than 20 PACT consultations."

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Feather Named
By Baylor University

Baptist Press
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WACO, Texas (BP)—Robert O. Feather of Dallas has been named vice president for external affairs at Baylor University, effective Sept. 1.

For the past two years, Feather has been executive vice president of the World Evangelism and Christian Education Fund, in Dallas, an affiliate program of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

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Feather, a native of Shawnee, Okla., and graduate of Baylor and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been president of the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association, chairman of the Southern Baptist Metropolitan Education Conference and member of the SBC Long Range Planning Committee.

He has served churches in Dallas and Bowling Green, Ky.

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New Work Best Hope
For Reaching Hispanics

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)— Southern Baptists' best hope for reaching Hispanics in the United States is through new churches, a consultant on church programs says.

Al Guajardo, supervisor of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church programs and services language unit, says unreached Hispanics live in the neighborhoods of virtually every Southern Baptist church.

"Some can be reached through the regular programs of a church, but most will be reached only if something in Spanish is offered," he says. Many Hispanics, he added, "speak English when they need to speak English, but their language is Spanish. They prefer to worship and study in Spanish."

Small congregations also might be the most effective instrument for reaching some segments of Spanish-speaking people, he added.

"Those (people) who are comfortable gathering in larger numbers are those who are doing well economically," he said. "Others will be reached by small, new groups or not at all."

Churches sponsoring such units need to understand that many of the congregations will remain small, but will nevertheless be effective for reaching and developing a particular group of persons.

Guajardo headed a task force which last spring set a goal of doubling by 1985 the number of ethnic persons enrolled in Southern Baptist Sunday schools. The goal includes blacks, Hispanics and other language groups and is part of massive strategies and actions to increase the denomination's Sunday School enrollment to 8.5 million by 1985.

Currently, Guajardo estimates 65,000 Hispanics are enrolled, less than one percent of the present enrollment of 7.3 million.

Guajardo is optimistic Southern Baptists will display increasing effectiveness in reaching Hispanic persons, noting a goal of 175,000 to 200,000 Hispanics enrolled in Sunday School by 1990 is "very reachable."

The consultant said trends among Hispanics also are encouraging, citing Florida, where he predicts work among Cuban-Americans will grow 50 percent in the next 10 years.

In Texas, which now has about 550 Hispanic congregations, Guajardo hopes the total will grow to more than 750 by 1990.

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He predicted "significant growth" among Hispanics in California where he cited an "admirable spirit of evangelism," and he expects to see growth within New York City's current 27 Spanish-speaking churches as well as the addition of new congregations.

For growth to happen, Guajardo said three things should happen.

First, denominational, state and associational strategies must be carefully tailored to meet the needs of Hispanic churches and that Hispanic persons must be involved in their development.

Also, growth strategies must be widely promoted among Hispanic leaders and "at least the basic materials" must be in Spanish.

Finally, Hispanic institutions and media must be used to promote strategies and to train persons in carrying them out.