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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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October 13, 1980

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Van Nuys Church Joins Cooperative Program

VAN NUYS, Calif. (BP)--First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, California's largest independent Baptist congregation, has voted to include the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention in its 1981 missions budget.

The 11,600-member church will give 20 percent of its missions budget in 1981 and 33 1/3 percent of its missions budget in 1982.

Prior to the action by the church's missions board and the trustees, the church cooperated only through designated gifts by church members. "This is the new spirit of the First Baptist Church," Jess Moody, pastor, said. "We are no longer a giant independent, we are now a giant cooperative."

The announcement was greeted with enthusiasm by several California Southern Baptist leaders.

"We have nothing but good experience (with the church) since Jess (Moody) has been there," observed Gene Lakes, director of missions for the San Fernando Valley Baptist Association, which includes the Van Nuys area.

Lakes said the church "can be a lot of help to our association. Jess has expressed a desire for some of their people to be involved in some of our mission work." Lakes noted "they could be a real opening for new work, as well as strengthening some of our existing work."

In 1978 the church considered changing its bylaws to join the association. The effort was defeated when it failed to achieve a two-thirds majority affirmative vote. Moody said he doesn't anticipate the church will consider the issue again any time soon. "We are taking it one day at a time."

By contributing to the Cooperative Program the church will be eligible to send messengers to the state convention and the national Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting.

Robert Hughes, executive director of the state convention, said, "We are delighted that First Baptist Church, Van Nuys, is moving to join in the missions challenge this state represents. The missions channel provided by this convention is an avenue through which sister churches of all sizes work together in carrying the gospel beyond their doors."

Moody, in an interview with Baptist Press, said he expects the church to formally approve in December the action taken by the church's missions board and board of trustees. He said the church's polity permits major church boards to set policy, such as participating in the Cooperative Program.

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The pastor, who has served the California church for the past four years, said the missions portion of the 1981 church budget is projected to be nearly \$300,000. The 20 percent earmarked for the Cooperative Program "should be between \$50,000 and \$60,000," he said.

The pastor also explained the church will continue its contributions to the Conservative Baptist Association of America's missions program. This support provides direct assistance to missionaries on the field. "We would never bring ourselves to completely discard that program," Moody said.

Commenting about the action, Moody said, "We just feel good about the efficiency of the Cooperative Program." He further noted the Cooperative Program provides for an "efficient use of money by less cost to get the dollar to the mission field and has a more expansive concept of missions."

Concluding, Moody expressed, "We don't want to dominate anything out here. We just want to be a part, a servant church to the world. What I hope we can say more clearly than anything is that we don't want to be one of these giant independents. We want to be a large, cooperative, humble, serving church."

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Judge Orders Buchanan's
Name Placed on Ballot

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Alabama Congressman John Buchanan's reelection bid received new life when a federal district court ordered the state to list the eight-term Republican on the ballot as a Whig Party candidate.

Judge U.W. Clemon's ruling revived, at least temporarily, Buchanan's candidacy after the Southern Baptist minister lost a September Republican primary battle to Albert Smith, whose campaign was aided by massive support from Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority.

The Republican Party, on behalf of the state, appealed Clemon's decision to the Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans.

Buchanan's candidacy is being pushed by the Whig Party as well as a group called Citizens for Buchanan.

Pointing to a poll taken in Alabama's sixth district two weeks ago which showed the incumbent ahead of both Smith and Democratic candidate Pete Clifford, Buchanan aide Terry Apple was optimistic about the veteran lawmaker's chances in the November general election.

"I don't know how much the tone of the district has changed in two weeks, but I still think we can win this thing," Apple said.

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Bellevue Baptist, Hurst,
To Resettle 138 Cubans

HURST, Texas (BP)--A missions group affiliated with Bellevue Baptist Church in Hurst, Texas, is resettling 138 Cuban refugees in what is probably the largest single project of its kind.

Ron Meers, director of Bellevue Missions International and a local building contractor, worked through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, World Refugee Relief and the U.S. State Department to screen and interview refugees at the Indiantown Gap, Pa., refugee camp.

He interested about 40 construction companies in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in providing jobs for the refugees if they had the skills. Ten Cubans were chosen as a kind of test run and arrived a week before the others. They went to work for construction companies and at a Chinese restaurant owned by a Chinese Baptist, himself a refugee from mainland China, who speaks Spanish.

"The 10 who have been here a week have been absolutely model," said Bellevue pastor Douglas White. "They want to work."

White said the refugee project grew from a conviction that "churches are going to have to be innovative to reach the world for Christ. We're making some mistakes and bumping our noses, but that's a lot better than sitting around doing nothing."

The church is not directly sponsoring the Cubans because Bellevue Missions International is utilizing \$150,000 in State Department funds. Direct church involvement would entangle it with state affairs.

"But there were people in the church who were willing to do it on their own," said White. "The church is just trying to serve as a liaison, a human welcome wagon. The church is involved more in a support role, to offer the human element, a friendly handshake."

Bellevue Missions International, which includes about 25 volunteers and three staff members, is involved in mission efforts in Honduras where they've built a chapel and helped treat 5,000 children suffering from roundworm. They are currently working on a project to resettle several thousand Thailand refugees into Honduras.

Meers exemplifies the best kind of mission concern to pastor White. "We sit around and look at the problems," he said. "But here's a guy with a lot of guts and a whole lot of gumption. He has an incredible desire to help people."

Reporters questioned White about the possibility of homosexuals being among the Cuban refugees. Rumors of Castro agents and homosexuals being among the thousands of refugees who escaped Cuba on the "Freedom Flotilla" have hindered resettlement attempts.

"There will be problems in the group," White said. "Just pick out 138 people in Fort Worth and you'll probably find all kinds. But I thought we were supposed to deal with sinners."

Several church members will live with the Cubans at the Haltom Inn in Fort Worth where they have settled until they find jobs and can move into apartments on their own. The refugees will be instructed in English, and shuttle buses will take them to their jobs.



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'The List': Tougher Barrier
Than Bullets for Refugees

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—"The List" stood as a final barrier in the escape route of Ge Vang.

The trek through jungles and mountains, where 40,000 of his Hmong countrymen died from hunger, disease and communist guerrilla gunfire in the last year, had not stopped him and his family. But The List had.

In February, 1980, Ge—one of the hardy Hmong (pronounced mong) mountain people who have run and died through generations of Asian history—took yet another look at that list of sponsored refugees posted in Thailand's Ban Vinai refugee camp.

For the first time after nearly five years in the Nong Khai and Ban Vinai camps, it bore his name. Ge and his wife Kha learned that something called a "church"—which they thought must be in California—would sponsor them. But, instead of California, their perilous journey would end in Nashville, Tenn.

Ge, 30, and his little band of survivors—24-year-old Kha, five-month-old Sia, three-year-old Mee and six-year-old May—were sponsored by First Baptist Church. Gradually, committee members pieced together how 5-foot-2, 120-pound Ge courageously guided his family through a 42-day escape from terror in Laos and a five-year exile in Thailand.

The sixth of eight children, Ge has known little but danger from childhood. Communists killed his father when he was four. Because his mother could not support them, at age 12, he and his sister went to live with Gen. Vang Pao, eminent Hmong commander in the Laotian army and U.S. ally in Southeast Asia. Ge received eight years of education—a benefit highly prized by but seldom available to the persecuted, nomadic Hmong, whose name means "free men." He worked on Gen. Pao's chicken farms for 25,000 kip a month (about \$20 U.S.).

Married and with a small baby, a major communist offensive chased them from their new wooden house with a tin roof and launched their desperate flight.

As Hmong dropped all around them, Ge and three friends, also with wives and daughters, escaped into the jungle and headed toward a rendezvous with a car which would carry the women to another village. It cost 1,000 kip per family—money available to them because Gen. Pao, who now lives in Montana, gave many of the Hmong money to aid their journey to Thailand. At each step the price mounted in kip and lives.

Realizing the communists would less likely kill a car full of women, Ge and his friends sent them ahead and began a two-day walk with backpacks and rifles. They traversed steaming jungles, precipitous mountain trails and a raging river, dodging marauding bands of guerrillas.

Kha, baby May and the other women waited anxiously in a village crowded with Hmong headed for Thailand. When the men arrived, they paid another 3,000 kip apiece to a driver who eventually turned them out when communist soldiers came too near.

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Countless Hmong, the will to live inbred by thousands of years of flight from danger, struggled along that "trail of tears." "Many, many, many Hmong" died in the jungles and mountains, recalls Ge.

Reaching another village, Ge and his friends paid 40,000 kip apiece to the operator of a motorized canoe for a trip across a lake. They huddled, hot and crowded, in the bottom, while the boat zigzagged through communist gunfire from the shore. Ge learned later that the masses of the people who walked the long way around the lake were killed or taken prisoners.

They plunged into a forest on the other side of the lake, eventually finding a car headed for Vientiane, the forbidden destination on the Thai border. The driver demanded 50,000 kip apiece. Ge had to take two silver coins from Kha's necklace, a treasured dowry of women in the Hmong "banking" system.

The long ride ended prematurely not far from a small village. Spotting signs of communist soldiers, the driver turned them out and fled. The guerrillas confronted Ge. "Are you going to Vientiane," one suspiciously asked. "No," responded Ge. "We're going to live in the village." Miraculously, the guerrillas believed them—and let them live.

For 20 days, Ge bided his time, living in a vacated house. He bought a pig, butchered it and sold the meat. With the money he bought a calf, butchered it and sold it. He repeated the process until he got enough money to continue the escape.

Before dawn on June 26, 1975—"very early before communists wake up," Ge explains—the three families took a 1,000-kip car ride to Vientiane. Then they set out on a 20-minute, 40,000-kip trip to Thailand and safely across the dark and dangerous Mekong River—the grave of many Hmong.

First in a small tent and then in a small room with three others, the Vangs existed through nearly five years in the camps. Sia and Mee were born. Ge raised a garden to sell produce to refugees, helped build refugee dwellings and used some of Kha's necklace to buy medicine during a serious illness suffered by May.

The long wait, which will never end for many refugees, culminated for the Vangs when Church World Services, working through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, matched their names with First Baptist Church, Nashville.

In May, two months after his arrival, Ge stood in a three-block-long building at the Baptist Sunday School Board staring wide-eyed at voluminous stacks of printed material. It was his first day as a shipping order clerk, a job made possible by board president Grady Cothen.

Glenda Turner of the First Baptist Church refugee committee pointed at the literature and said, "Ge, those are all books about Jesus."

"I don't know what went through the mind of a man accustomed to the spirit-dominated rites of animism," recalls Mrs. Turner. "Ge had never even heard the name of Jesus before he came to Nashville."

"But when people ask why we have gone through all the expense and effort to work with the Vangs, I simply tell them that we have done so because we have heard the name of Jesus and his commandment to love all people."

"Hundreds of Hmong people have resettled in Nashville. They and other refugees here and in many places need jobs, financial assistance, better housing, help with learning English—or just a friend who cares."