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Uganda Press Reports Bleak,
But Baptists Voice Optimism

By Mary Jane Welch

FORT PORTAL, Uganda (BP)--News reports paint bleak pictures of Uganda and while other aid groups withdraw most personnel from the country, Southern Baptist missionaries are staying there and increasing their forces.

"The general feeling in our mission right now is one of excitement and openness, tempered with a concern for the future," said Fred Findley, Southern Baptist missionary who arrived in midsummer with his wife to join the two veteran couples and three more recently arrived missionary families.

The rumors and news reports are accurate, he said, but they show only a partial picture of Uganda. "We have enjoyed in these people joy, excitement, laughter, friendliness, openness. Children often peek under our hedge and, in very precise, punctuated English, shout, 'Good morning, madam,'" said the Findleys.

Not only are missionaries able to travel and do their work, but churches are meeting and many are growing, said Findley, in a letter following an early October meeting of the Uganda mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries).

Web Carroll, Southern Baptist missionary to Uganda since 1963, reported that in the Busoga district around Jinja, more than 300 have been baptized and about 12 new churches started in the last year.

Ugandan Christians also are giving more to associational missions and to the newly reorganized Baptist Union, said Findley. The union was inactive during the rule of former president Idi Amin who banned Baptists and 26 other religious groups. Its reorganization since the restoration of religious freedom "is one of the most promising signs of Baptist progress in the country," said Findley. The union elected Moses Ochwo, head of the religious knowledge department at an Mbale high school, as general secretary.

Relief work, which Southern Baptists began even before Amin was deposed, continues in spite of a need for more personnel to carry out relief programs, said Findley. Ironically, more personnel is the mission's most urgent need, though there will be a problem housing them since both housing and construction materials are almost unavailable.

The Bible Way correspondence course continues to grow, and has more than 2,000 students. Since the volunteer directing the school returned home, missionary Betty Carroll has been working long hours to "hold it together" until someone comes to direct this ministry, said Findley.

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Hal Browning Boone, a medical doctor and special project worker, conducts clinics throughout the country, a ministry his father carried out several years earlier. Boone will serve only a year, but a missionary was appointed in October to continue the clinic work. By early October, Boone estimated he had conducted 25 clinics and seen between 4,000 and 5,000 patients.

Availability of Bibles is a continuing problem in Uganda, not only for Baptists, but for all mission groups, said Findley. Scriptures in English and in local languages are in short supply.

"And the hunger and respect for God's work is one of the most striking things to this newcomer about Uganda," said Findley.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Arkansas Baptists Adopt
Alien Immersion Report

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Arkansas Baptists adopted a report defining "alien immersion" and "open communion," and adopted a "binding policy" concerning challenges to messengers as they met here last week.

In addition, messengers officially welcomed their new executive secretary-treasurer, Huber Drumwright, passed an \$8.1 million budget and re-elected John Finn, director of missions for the North Arkansas Baptist Association, as president.

The definitions and the policy both were adopted in reference to a long-standing controversy in the convention over alien immersion and open communion.

The definitions, which were adopted officially as "a point of information" rather than a part of the constitution, were presented by the Constitution and Bylaws Committee on Baptisms. The report defines alien immersion as "immersion or baptism administered by a group that does not follow the New Testament teachings on salvation and the church." Open communion is "the corporate observance" which allows persons "not having New Testament baptism" to partake.

According to a convention official, the definition will be used for "guidance, if challenges come up. Some people have said alien immersion and open communion have never been defined, but now they are."

Messengers also adopted a "binding policy" which says challenges to any messengers would have to be submitted in writing to a special committee at least 30 days before the annual meeting.

The proposal was made as an amendment to the constitution, but was changed to a binding policy. Under Arkansas rules, an amendment must be passed or abridged by a two-thirds majority, while a binding policy can be adopted or changed with only a simple majority vote.

In another constitutional change, messengers deleted wording which gave the executive committee authority to fill temporary vacancies on the board. Now, vacancies will remain until filled at the annual meeting.

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In other action, messengers:

--Welcomed Drumwright and his wife, Minnette. Drumwright assumed the executive post Sept. 1, coming from being dean of the school of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

--Adopted an \$8.1 million budget, of which 37.23 percent will be shared with Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program causes. The SBC portion represents a half percent increase over last year.

In a related action, messengers approved continuation of a study of working toward a 50-50 split in undesignated gifts by 1985.

--Had special prayer for Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith, who sent the convention a telegram asking them to pray for him.

--Adopted a resolution calling for continued support of the separation of church and state, and participation in the efforts of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The resolution drew opposition from several persons who accuse Americans United and the Baptist Joint Committee of "opposing prayer in the public schools."

The 1981 annual meeting will be Nov. 17-19 in First Baptist Church, Fayetteville.

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BSSB Consultant Survives
Fire in Las Vegas Hotel

By Linda Lawson

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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Thanksgiving came six days early for Ann and Charles Smith.

As flames swept through the MGM Grand Hotel the morning of Nov. 21, the Smiths fought smoke, fear and the possibility that each had perished in the flames, before being reunited nearly five hours later at Sunrise Hospital.

Ann Smith, a consultant in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department, Nashville, Tenn., had concluded a single adult conference the evening before. The Smiths were preparing to check out and return to Nashville, where he maintains a marriage, family and child counseling practice.

An estimated 83 persons died in the hotel officials estimate contained as many as 8,000 persons, including guests and employees, when flames erupted shortly before 7:30 a.m. (PST).

Smith had left their room on the 25th floor to go to the lobby to find a bellman. Ann was talking by phone to J. Clark Hensley in Jackson, Miss., a longtime friend and director of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission.

At that point their separate nightmares began.

When the elevator doors opened in the lobby, Smith was met by a black wall of smoke. He remained on the elevator which went to the 17th floor and stopped. He got off there and tried to return to the 25th floor.

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"I tried to telephone her from the 17th floor, but I had to go through the hotel operator and there was no response at the switchboard," Smith said.

He climbed to the 21st floor but was halted by smoke and a locked fire escape door. Using a Kleenex to filter the smoke-filled air, he returned to the fifth floor where he got out on a roof and then the ground.

Smith was then taken by bus to the Las Vegas Civic Center where an emergency center had been established. There he met bus after bus containing evacuees from the hotel, in a futile search for Ann.

Meanwhile, when Ann smelled smoke and heard fire engines, she put down the telephone and went to the window. Seeing the smoke and flames she rushed to the hallway and found it filled with smoke.

She escaped to the balcony and attempted to lower herself to the floor below.

"My feet would not touch from one banister to the next. I just sort of hung by one hand and gave myself a boost so I'd go over on the balcony of the next floor and not land on the railing," she said. "I really thought I was much closer (to the floor of the balcony below)."

As she landed on the 24th floor balcony, her left leg broke and a bone pierced the flesh. She crawled into the room and wrapped a wet towel around her leg. She then returned to the balcony and began waving another towel to gain the attention of firemen below. "I was afraid if I went back into the room, nobody would find me," she said.

"I think I have faced death in a way that I had never faced it before. I realized my fear would be in dying, not in death. I just prayed for all the people who were, at that point, worse off than I was," she continued.

"I just prayed the Lord would protect those of us he could and that if I should meet death, I would meet it with peace. Then I did have a certain kind of peace that was helpful."

Eventually, she was rescued by firemen who carried her by stretcher to the roof. She was airlifted by helicopter to the hospital, still not knowing if Charles were dead or alive.

At the Civic Center, the Red Cross learned that Ann had been hospitalized and immediately transported Charles there.

The reunion with her husband at her bedside "was almost a miracle. We rejoiced and cried," Ann said.

People in Las Vegas were quick to come to the aid of the Smiths and other victims. A minister gave Charles a room in his home and provided him with a car and clothes.

Others helped him try to find out when and how he might return to the hotel room to retrieve their belongings. Three Baptist single adults and Jim Reid, the Baptist chaplain to The Strip, volunteered to walk to the 25th floor and carry down papers, clothes and other articles.

"When people think of Las Vegas, they usually only think of the casino industry and don't realize there are many fine Christian people living here," Ann said. "I've been really moved by the many wonderful people who have helped us."

The Smiths were expected to remain in Las Vegas for further treatment before returning to Nashville.

Shoemake Receives Top Honor
Given By Dominican Republic

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (BP)—Howard Shoemake, who in 1962 became the first Southern Baptist missionary to enter the Dominican Republic, has been presented the country's highest civilian award.

The badge of the Order of Duarte, Sanchez, and Mella—named for the nation's founding fathers—was presented in a ceremony Oct. 24 at the Rehabilitation Center for Invalids in recognition of Shoemake's service in medical and social fields.

Shoemake, 60, has been receiving treatment at the center, which he helped develop, since June 1978, when doctors diagnosed that he had multiple myeloma, cancer of the bone marrow.

Although the disease is now in remission, he and his wife, Dorothy Dell, left the Dominican Republic Nov. 1 to begin early furlough in Dallas, Texas.

Appointed a missionary in 1947, Shoemake served in Colombia and Ecuador before beginning work in the Dominican Republic. Most of his work had been in field evangelism until the last two years when he began counseling with other cancer victims.

Shoemake's own struggle with cancer has been a painful one since the beginning—June 26, 1978—when doctors gave him three to six months to live.

At one point, as friends prayed for his healing, Shoemake said he offered counter prayers that "if I must die, Lord, take me now and relieve me of all this suffering." Later, in a state of depression induced by massive doses of medication, he feared he would take his own life.

The turning point came in January 1979, when he spent several hours with a doctor who, as a cancer patient eight years earlier, had been given one year to live.

Then Shoemake says his original plea, "Lord, take me home," changed to "Lord, how can you use me in this situation?" His prayers were answered and Shoemake now has immediate rapport—and an effective ministry—with problem-plagued people.

Although he is not a medical doctor, Shoemake has helped organize medical centers throughout the Dominican Republic through his church, Templo Bautista Central in Santo Domingo.

After serving as vice president of the rehabilitation center for almost 15 years, he suddenly found himself a patient there, using the facilities of the physical therapy department almost daily for the last 16 months.

Dr. Jordi Brossa, internist at Clinica Abreu, calls Shoemake "the most remarkable patient I have ever had. I have never seen anyone with the will to live that he has."

Indeed, almost miraculously, Shoemake has managed to rise from each crisis and in September the disease went into remission.

Dr. Brossa and hematologist Manon Caolo are writing an article for a medical journal on Shoemake and missionary Sara Hines Martin is writing a book about his struggle with cancer.

Shoemake, who was called "a son of the Dominican Republic" during the awards presentation by Minister of Health Jose Rodriguez Soldevilla, has said he would like to spend another 18 years in the Dominican Republic. At the end of a 10-month furlough he will decide if he's going back.