



-- FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

March 15

82-41

Trucker Moving From
Grease Pit to Pulpit

By Mark Smith

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MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)—Russell Hess has spent more time preaching over the fender of a big rig than he has from a pulpit.

For 10 years, Hess has been a diesel truck mechanic. Since becoming a Christian in 1974, he has used every opportunity to tell fellow truckers and mechanics about Jesus Christ. He is now preparing for the gospel ministry at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Truckers are a different breed," says Hess, "one that I feel is often misrepresented in the media. They are portrayed in the press and on television as hard driving, hard drinking, pill popping, dope smoking, macho men who enjoy chasing the honeys.

"Like any profession, there are a few who have trouble. But for the most part, they are the most hardworking, dedicated people I know."

Hess chose to be a mechanic over driving because he does not enjoy being away from home for cross-country trips. He feels being a mechanic gives him more opportunities to witness for Christ than he would have confined to a cab.

"When I worked on a truck, I would always road test it," Hess recalls. "Almost every one of the drivers would want to go with me because that rig was their baby. It was their home. They lived in it, ate in it, slept in it.

"Some of them had microwave ovens, refrigerators, television sets and stereo systems in them. Many were valued at \$85,000 or more, so they didn't begin to feel confident with me until they saw that I could handle the truck as well as they could. When they were relaxed and could see that I respected them and their equipment...at that point I usually tried to tell them about Christ.

"Most of them tolerated my message and some even argued, but all of them listened to me, because I was one of them. One thing about it, I certainly had a captive audience, because they weren't about to get out of their truck moving 60 miles an hour."

Although Hess won few drivers to Christ, he was not discouraged. He said he was "called to preach, not save people," and that "God is in the business of saving people, I am in the business of planting the seed."

"Truckers are very opinionated and are usually not at all interested in spiritual things," he said, "so I had to be creative in walking my talk. I tried to leave them with something positive to remember me by, like a good attitude or giving their rig some special attentions. I would clean their windshields, adjust brakes, repair a light, secure a loose mirror or other minor things that would usually cost them extra. That was good for my reputation but it was even more important for the kingdom of God.

"Lots of times I would leave a gospel tract in copies of their girlie magazines, or place a welcome card from my church in their ashtray or log book. Always I'd tune their radios to a Christian station so that was the first thing they heard when they turned them on. All I did was plant the seed. How God used my marks was his business."

Hess knows God is growing those seeds because he still hears some truckers on the two-way radio ask for prayer by saying "Remember me to your boss."

Volunteers, Filipinos Elated;
13,544 Decisions in Crusades

RB

MANILA, Philippines (BP)--Thousands of Filipinos accepted Christ as savior during two partnership crusades in January and February.

Reports, still lacking totals from at least 10 churches, indicate 13,544 people made professions of faith, 1,078 were baptized and 242 indicated a desire to enter full time Christian ministry.

The crusades were the first sponsored fully by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board since it assumed partnership evangelism from the World Evangelism Foundation Jan. 1.

The first crusade, held Jan. 24-31 in three Baptist associations on the island of Luzon, drew 171 Southern Baptists from the United States who paid their own way to participate. Another 179 came for the second crusade in the metro Manila area Feb. 21-28. A total of 71 Filipino Baptist churches participated in the two crusades.

Decisions to follow Christ as personal savior are recorded only after individuals have signed decision cards also bearing the name of the person who witnessed to them, said missionary Jim Slack. "We don't count raised hands and give those figures as professions of faith."

The figures are impressive. One Southern Baptist pastor, who has witnessed little response in five years at his home church, was overwhelmed by more than 500 professions of faith during his week in the Philippines.

For years Southern Baptist missionaries in the Philippines have said the country is a ready field for witness. "You won't find a people more responsive to the gospel than you will find here," missionary Bill Tisdale told crusade participants.

To reach the people, Southern Baptists and Filipino Baptists paired up. Every morning and afternoon they went out into areas around their assigned churches to witness, encourage and invite people to evening services. Every evening the American pastor preaching in the local church brought an evangelistic message and called for decisions. Toward the end of the week a baptismal service was held.

In doing so, they penetrated virtually every level of Filipino society.

Partners worked in fishing villages along the coast and farming communities in the mountains, among the affluent of metro Manila and the poor packed into its slums. One team spent a week among the prisoners at the national prison in Muntinlupa where 1,000 believed and several worked among the cardboard and plywood hovels of squatters migrating to the cities from the provinces in search of a better life.

"The churches of the Luzon Baptist Convention are ecstatic about what has happened," said Bob Nash, chairman of the Philippines Baptist Mission. "The crusades have put church growth here years ahead of what it would have been without them."

In planning for the crusades, Filipino Baptists asked God for 30,000 professions of faith and 10,000 baptisms during the year. To reach those goals will require extensive follow-up efforts on their part.

"Now our work begins," said Henry Cabalang, pastor of University Baptist Church in Manila and chairman of the crusades' steering committee. "Now we have to disciple these people and help them become part of our churches."

Though the American volunteers will not be able to see the full results of their efforts, they already are seeing some results in themselves. The consensus of the group was they'd never be the same. Their experience with partnership evangelism had changed them.

"There is not a one of us from our city who could have afforded to come here on our own," said Carol Ann Yarber of Mesquite, Texas. "When you see the seven of us, think of the 500 who supported us financially and helped us to come. Somehow, we've got to share with them what we learned about leading others to Jesus."

Even Charles Bryan, vice president of overseas operations for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, was unprepared for the depth of feeling he received from the crusade.

"I used to talk about being bold in our witness," he said. "But now that I've been here, I know what boldness is."

Bryan, who lead a team from Applewood Baptist Church near Denver, Colo., worked with Open Door Baptist Church in San Pablo City, about two hours by bus from Manila. During the week he saw more than 500 people make professions of faith and participated in a tandem baptism service, with four pastors baptizing, for 66 people.

One who accepted Christ as personal savior during that week was the mayor of a nearby town. Though there were numerous interruptions as the group visited with the mayor, Bryan managed to talk seriously with him about Christ. Before they left, the mayor knelt and asked Christ to come into his heart.

"Whatever else we do on the mission field," Bryan said, "We' got to remember that our first priority is to win souls to Jesus Christ."

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

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Publishing House Sales Hit
Almost \$2.5 Million in 1981

Baptist Press
3/15/82

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Baptist Spanish Publishing House at El Paso, Texas, recorded total sales of nearly \$2.5 million during 1981, an all-time high in its 76-year history.

The publishing house produces and distributes scripture, books and other church materials to more than 70 countries. Mexico was the major market in 1981 with nearly a half million dollars in sales.

Foreign Mission Board members, meeting March 9, approved an additional \$190,750 for construction of a two-story, 28,000-square-foot addition to the publishing house complex, bringing board appropriations for this project to nearly \$900,000, enough to complete construction and to buy a portion of the needed furnishings.

The construction, already underway, will be the first significant addition to the facility since 1960, though the publishing house's work has increased more than ten-fold during that time, according to Aldo Broda, general director.

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Coup Suppressed In Surinam;
Church Services Not Affected

RB

PARAMARIBO, Surinam (BP)--Church doors were open and life was returning to normal in Surinam after the military government suppressed an attempted coup March 11-12.

Southern Baptist missionary Martha Lewis reported by telephone March 15 that Sunday worship services were held, radio stations resumed broadcasting, schools and businesses were open and a curfew had been relaxed.

Rebel leader Sgt. Maj. Wilfred Hawker--freed from jail when rebels initiated the coup attempt and stormed army barracks in Paramaribo--was executed at dawn March 13 as Lt. Col. Desi Bouterse, the nation's leader, stabilized his control.

Although government and rebel forces exchanged gunfire during two days of skirmishes, missionaries did not feel overly alarmed or personally threatened, according to Mrs. Lewis.

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Stewardship Commission Adopts
Plan to Train 9,000 Speakers

Baptist Pr ss
3/15/82

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Stewardship Commission adopted a "Bold Mission Encounter" plan to train 9,000 lay speakers to present information about the Cooperative Program in every Southern Baptist church this year.

The plan calls for staff members of the Stewardship Commission to help state stewardship departments to train laymen in their states beginning in May. Each trained layman will then present to four churches information about the Cooperative Program, the unified budget through which Southern Baptists support state and national missions and education.

In other action at their annual meeting in Nashville, commissioners adopted a \$1,839,500 budget; re-elected E. Harmon Moore as chairman; and learned the Together We Build section helped 105 churches secure pledges from their membership of \$34,895,292 for building projects.

The largest single project is that of the First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., whose members committed \$3.4 million to build a 1,400-seat sanctuary and renovate the existing building into educational space.

In the eight years of the Together We Build program, 621 churches have committed \$174,452,459 to building projects.

Commissioners also learned that in 1981, Southern Baptists gave a record \$84,047,695 to missions and education through the national Cooperative Program, an increase of 14.7 percent over the previous year. Stewardship Commission Executive Director A.R. Fagan attributed the increase to the fact that 19 state conventions increased the percentage for the SBC Cooperative Program in their budgets.

On the local level, Fagan said the percentage of the undesignated collection plate dollar given to the state and SBC Cooperative Program rose from 8.34 percent to 8.89 percent of total church receipts.

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(BP)photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers