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Three Churches Can't Forget
New Orleans Plane Disaster

By Craig Bird

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--New headlines have pushed memories of the July 9 crash of Pan American Airlines flight 759 into the background for most Americans but the tragedy is still vivid for three Baptist churches.

Bridgedale Baptist Church in Metairie, La., First Baptist Church in Kenner, La., and Sheridan Hills Baptist Church near Fort Lauderdale, Fla. had members killed in the disaster. In fact, the home of a family from Bridgedale absorbed the main impact of the crash. Melani Trahan, 25, and her four-year-old daughter, Bridgette, were killed but, miraculously, 16-month-old Melissa Trahan survived the devastation.

Six-year-old Lisa Baye, who had recently made a profession of faith at the Kenner church was killed on the ground and Lucy Ombres, a stewardess on the flight, was an active member of Sheridan Hills. She had been married less than eight weeks.

The jet crashed four blocks from First Baptist and about one-and-a-half miles from Bridgedale church after veering from a flight path that would have taken it directly over the Kenner church.

"We have about 30 people in the immediate area of the crash who are members of First Baptist but none of their homes were hit," Rick Williams, minister of education and administration, said. Lisa was playing at a friend's house that was hit by the plan .

Bridgedale pastor Gene Richards recognized the Trahan station wagon on one of the first live telecasts from the scene and worked his way to the house by repeatedly identifying himself as the pastor of one of the families. He was on hand when the bodies of the mother and daughter were uncovered and when Bridgette was found alive. "It looked like a bomb had gone off--there were no larges pieces of the house left," he said.

Melanie Trahan had grown up in Bridgedale Baptist Church (both her father and grandfather are deacons there and her mother is church training director). She was church hostess, taught a Sunday School class and lead one of the children's choirs. Her husband was not a member but often attended and played on the church softball team.

Two days after the crash Richards stood in the pulpit and tried to help the congregation deal with the obvious and painful question--Why?.

"It was a very difficult service," he said. "I told them that we don't have the answers but must trust in God. I know that everything is in the permissive will of God but I don't believed God caused it to happen. There were a lot of broken hearts and a lot of wetted eyes."

Melissa Trahan and her father are living with Melanie's parents and the church family has been wonderfully supportive, Richards said. "For the first week I don't think they had to worry about cooking a single meal and our people have sustained them both emotionally with their presence and prayers and physically by taking car of their needs."

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Lisa Baye's story has seen her parents and her church deal with the pain by reaffirming their faith in God. Her father, John, is a deacon at the Kenner church and in recent weeks had seen his newly converted daughter lead a friend to Christ.

At the Sunday night service, "there was not a lot of weeping....It was a celebration time," Baye said. Pastor Ron Herrod, a member of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention who returned from a trip to Honduras when he learned of the tragedy, reported 17 professions of faith were made public during the evening service. He preached on the second coming and heaven and Baye gave a testimony on the comfort of the second coming.

Mr. and Mrs. Baye and Herrod have also appeared on local television to share how they dealt triumphantly with the trauma.

In Florida, distant from the carnage of the crash, the pain and the dependance on spiritual strength also was evident.

Alexander Ombres, whom Lucy had married in May, stood in front of more than 1,000 people at a memorial service and spoke of how his wife's radiance had touched and changed him and brought new meaning to his life. "Quality is more important than quantity and we had two months of the highest quality."

Lucy Ombres taught a children's Sunday School class at Sheridan Hills, sang in the choir and was vice-chairman of the Sheridan Hills Baptist Church Home for Boys (where care is provided for 24 disturbed youngsters). Until her marriage she had lived with pastor Bill Billingsley and his family and was "practically a daughter," according to church members. Friends and co-workers from Pan American Airlines shared with the congregation how they had seen Jesus Christ through Lucy Ombres.

"This has been a shocking thing," Richards said. "We will feel the pain for a long time." He was speaking of Bridgedale Baptist Church but the words are just as true for First Baptist Church of Kenner and Sheridan Hills Baptist Church.

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Allen Charges Coercion In
School Prayer Amendment

By Larry Chesser

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Charging President Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment on school prayer would lead to coerced prayer, former Southern Baptist Convention president Jimmy R. Allen joined representatives of a wide range of other faiths in opposing the legislation now pending in Congress while issuing a call for "authentic" prayer.

"No amount of semantic toedancing," Allen said, "can change the fact that what the prayer amendment seeks is not voluntary prayer but forced religious rituals."

Allen's remarks came at a breakfast sponsored by the Campaign for Religious Liberty, a coalition of more than 50 religious, political and educational organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, on the eve of the first hearing on the prayer amendment by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Allen, president of the SBC Radio and Television Commission, was one of several religious leaders scheduled to appear before the panel on both sides of the issue.

"We are not here because we don't believe in the need for prayer but because we believe in the need for authentic prayer," Allen told the breakfast gathering which highlighted the distinctive religious expressions of Jewish, Buddhist, native American, Islamic and Christian faiths.

Opposing coerced prayer is essential, Allen said, "once you decide that prayer is a free and voluntary expression to God."

The former pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio, cited a "lack of confidence" in prayer by those "reaching out to get the power of the state" to make prayer function. He attacked the politicizing of prayer which he said takes "a real and sensitive lifeline for strength" and makes it "a controversy over which we argue."

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Prayer, Allen said, "is the urgent need of our nation," adding that problems such as anxiety, injustice, hunger, war and erosion of integrity "cannot be addressed by shooting laws in their direction."

He also described prayer as a "uniquely personal experience" which cannot be coerced without losing its validity. Pointing out that "God himself refused to make a robot out of man," Allen concluded government is in no position to apply coercion in religious matters.

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Baptist Men Mix Evangelism
With Conference Sessions

By Robert O'Brien

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7/28/82

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)—Baptist men from 26 nations mixed "hands-on" evangelism with a series of speakers and workshops during the five-day third world conference of Baptist Men in Nairobi.

More than 3,500 persons attended two evangelistic rallies sponsored by the men's department of the Baptist World Alliance at Nairobi's Uhuru Park. About 150 made various decisions for Christ.

The rallies featured advance witnessing efforts in Nairobi, sermons by Harold A. Carter, black Baptist pastor from Baltimore, Md., testimonies by Baptist leaders from around the world and music by Nairobi bands and choirs.

In related action, Lee B. Satterfield of Altavista, Va., chairman of the men's department, announced that W.H. (Dub) Jackson Jr. has been named coordinator of BWA men's activities.

Jackson, former president of World Evangelism Foundation and now assistant to BWA president Duke K. McCall, will work out of an office provided by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

More than 325 persons at Kenyatta Conference Center participated in the mix of evangelism, workshops on improving ministry, and plenary sessions. The sessions included a "Kenya Festival" at Shauri Moyo Baptist Church featuring African drama, music, crafts and food.

The men applauded vigorously when Douglas Waruta, principal of the Baptist Seminary of East Africa, Arusha, Tanzania, declared that Africa needs a healer for its spiritual and physical ills, but not the "false healers" who flock to the continent.

"Africa has been looking for a healer like a drowning person looks for help, but we must not fall prey to a lot of false healers who bring their own economic, political, military, spiritual and ideological views," he declared.

"Many are realizing that true healing comes through Jesus Christ," Waruta said. "His healing is not like the healing of politicians, scientists and economists. They give us a lot of good advice but do not make us whole and bring the peace and dignity we need."

Several speakers, including James H. Smith of Memphis, Tenn., and Owen Cooper of Yazoo City, Miss., made pointed references to the fact that men should not sit back and wait for church and denominational employees to do the work of reaching the world for Christ.

"The Bible makes no distinction between clergy and laity for the responsibility to witness," said Smith, executive director of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Smith, who said he has a vision of one million Southern Baptist men organized to evangelize the world, urged other Baptist men of the world to join in.

Cooper, secretary of the men's department, added, "We (his department) cannot fulfill the challenge to reach the world for Christ in this century by ourselves--and we cannot do it without each person assuming his role as a minister."

Sven Ohm, who directs foreign missions for the Baptist Union of Sweden, revealed statistics which, he said, show the Christian gospel "spreading like a prairie fire all over the world."

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"The number of Christians," he said, "is increasing by 22 million a year or 63,000 a day, and the number of churches is increasing about 1,600 a week."

But he urged the men to look at the other side of the picture which shows that the percentage of Christians to the world population is decreasing.

Besides that, he noted, many tribes and groups of people exist in the world who have never even heard the gospel, though it has been preached on every continent.

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Southern Baptist Beauty
Named 1982 'Miss Illinois'

By Robert Hastings

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MT. CARMEL, Ill. (BP)--When Jaleigh Jeffers, a member of First Baptist Church, was named 1982 Miss Illinois at Elgin earlier this month, a former Miss Illinois told Jaleigh's dad, "Thank God, he has given us another Christian girl to represent the people of Illinois."

Miss Jeffers, 21, will represent Illinois in the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City Sept. 11.

The new Miss Illinois is a senior at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, where she is majoring in accounting. She was a member of the 1981-82 youth evangelism team of the SIU Baptist Student Center and during the past year worked in the center offices.

"Jaleigh was born and grew up in Mt. Carmel," said Bryant Jeffers, her father. "Before she went away to college, she was church pianist, taught six and seven-year-olds in Sunday School, and likely would have taught in vacation Bible school this summer had it not been for all the excitement in preparing for the pageant."

Just before the final competition at Elgin, her parents told her their prayer was not for her to win but that God would give her the strength to do her best. Before the family left the motel in Elgin to go to the finals, "we joined hands and prayed that each of the 37 finalists would do their best," Jeffers said.

Right after she won the Miss Illinois title, Jaleigh told her parents their advice about asking God for strength to do her best "really worked."

She told how, a few hours before the pageant, she went alone to the chapel on the campus of Judson College at Elgin, where the contestants were housed.

"I went into the chapel, played 'My Tribute,' which is one of my favorites, and asked God to help me do my best," she said. "My Tribute," written by Andrae Crouch, is a personal expression of thanks to God for what he does for his people.

She performed the song in 1980 when she won the Miss Wabash Valley Scholarship Pageant and again in 1981 when she was crowned Miss Southern Illinois.

"We know this song means a lot to Jaleigh," her father said, "for at times when she's been tense and under pressure, she would go to the piano at home and play it."

Her pastor, John L. Clements, said, "We are extremely proud of Jaleigh Jeffers. She is a credit to her church and to Baptists of Illinois."

After her selection, the First Baptist Church placed a paid ad in the Daily Republican Register in Mt. Carmel which read, "Congratulations Jaleigh! God loves you and so do w."

Her father is a deacon in the First Baptist Church and he and Mrs. Jeffers teach junior high youth in Sunday School.

After her win, Miss Jeffers said: "As Miss Illinois, I want my faith to come through naturally, not artificially. I don't want to push my faith on other people, but let it come naturally, from within. I hope the people I meet will sense the difference in a Christian and recognize the true Christian joy that comes from within."

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She recalled "six or seven straight summers" that she attended GA and Acteen camps at Lake Sallateeska. "I remember the people who influenced me, the messages I heard. Now I hope to share some of that inspiration with others."

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Campers On Mission Rally
Focuses On 'People Energy'

By Leisa Hammett

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--More than 200 Baptists and other Christians pulled campers and hauled tents from 20 states to participate in the 10th annual national Campers on Mission (COM) rally July 23 to 25.

In keeping with the theme of the Knoxville 1982 World's Fair -- "Energy Turns the World," -- the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board-sponsored event concentrated on energy resources, primarily on the energy of Christians ministering to others.

Workshops detailed ways in which members of Campers on Mission can use their energies to minister in the city, country, to youth and in campgrounds.

Mike Robertson, associate director of special mission ministries at the HMB, challenged campers to tithe their vacations, giving a portion to ministry efforts.

"The Lord will bless your family," Robertson said. "He will bless your life in mission work. I could stand up here and tell you our needs. I could burden you. I won't do that. But America's hungry."

Robertson reminded the participants of the resources they have for Christian work, and noted that among the resources are recreational vehicles and camping gear.

Claude McGavic, COM promotion/coordination consultant, explained that if campers will get in touch with the Home Mission Board the SBC agency will match the volunteers' interests with particular missions needs.

Those who participated in the workshops included Dennis Evans, minister of education at First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Va.; Pete Petty, director of special missions ministries for the Arkansas Baptist Convention; W.A. Gaylon, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gatlinburg, Tenn.; Keith and Mary Young, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary students from Louisville, Ky.; Bill Black, resort missionary, Gatlinburg; and Doug Houston, on-site director for Baptist Ministries to the World's Fair.

During the rally, David G. Peach, executive director of Baptist Ministries, briefed participants on Baptist efforts at the World's Fair noting that some 200,000 visitors have been hosted by the Baptist Pavilion since it opened in May.

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