



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Sorrels' Appeal To Be Heard By Virginia Supreme Court

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Supreme Court of Virginia has agreed to hear the workmen's compensation appeal of paralyzed Mission Service Corps volunteer Robert W. Sorrels.

Sorrels' original claim for workmen's compensation was turned down in July 1982 by L. W. Hiner, chief deputy commissioner of the Industrial Commission of Virginia. Later, the full commission upheld Hiner's ruling.

Sorrels, 31, was injured in an automobile accident April 15, 1980, less than a week after he arrived in Nigeria, where he was to be an accountant for one year. He went to Nigeria as a volunteer in the Mission Service Corps program, which is designed to give Southern Baptists an opportunity for one to two years' missionary service in the United States or overseas.

Sorrels, paralyzed from the shoulders down, has entered Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, with a goal of becoming a preacher or missionary. Before the accident, he worked for a Washington, D.C., savings and loan firm.

The District of Columbia Baptist Convention Foundation is providing Sorrels a \$400-a-month scholarship while he is in school, said Vinton Koons, foundation president. A \$60,000 fund given by people and groups who wanted to help support Sorrels had been providing \$400 a month, but now will be used mostly to build him a small barrier-free house near the seminary campus, said Koons. Originally, Koons and other founders of the fund had hoped donations to the fund might total \$150,000 to \$200,000, which they felt could provide for Sorrels' needs.

Commissioner Hiner ruled in 1982 that no actual employer-employee relationship existed between the Foreign Mission Board and Sorrels. He found instead that Sorrels was a volunteer, not an employee. Hiner also held that even if there had been such a relationship, Sorrels would not have been entitled to state compensation because all of his work was done outside Virginia.

The Foreign Mission Board declined to accept long-term financial responsibility for Sorrels because he had gone to Nigeria as a volunteer, not as a career missionary, and because all Mission Service Corps volunteers signed waivers absolving the board of responsibility in the event of a disabling injury.

But the board did spend more than \$28,000 for Sorrels' medical care and voted to continue a monthly stipend of \$603.50 until October 1982, when he would become eligible for government disability benefits.

A group calling themselves the "Friends of Bob Sorrels" circulated letters criticizing the Foreign Mission Board for not providing more funds. Later, however, Walt Tomme, associate pastor of Sorrels' church, Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington, was instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation between Sorrels and his supporters and the Foreign Mission Board.

Tomme, now pastor of the church, and many others in the congregation took meals to Sorrels and provided other assistance while he lived in Washington. Although the Foreign Mission Board does not recognize any legal obligation, Board President R. Keith Parks has encouraged Southern Baptists to contribute to the special fund for Sorrels' support. Both board members and staff have been among those who contributed.

Young Baptist Family
Missing in Lebanon.

By Frances Fuller

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--A Baptist family from the resort town of Bhamdoun, Lebanon, is missing.

Nadim Khairallah, his wife, Maria, and three of their four young sons were in their home when Israeli forces withdrew in the middle of the night Sept. 3. Christian Phalangist and Druse militiamen immediately began a battle for control of the area. The Druse captured the town after three days.

Relatives and friends of the Khairallahs haven't heard from them since.

The couple's eldest son, nine-year-old Anthony, was away at summer camp at the time and is now living with a relative.

"We still believe they are alive, though we have no evidence," said Charles Costa, pastor of Ras Beirut Baptist Church where the Khairallahs are members. For several days he has searched refugee camps. His church members have been "praying constantly," he said.

The Red Cross has been unable to enter Bhamdoun, located on the Damascus highway, to check on survivors. Some people believe civilians are being held prisoner there.

An estimated 20,000 residents of Bhamdoun fled to the Christian town of Deir Al-Kamar, which has been cut off from the outside by Druse militia and now faces shortages of food, water and medicine. The Red Cross has lists of refugees who are there, but the Khairallahs are not among them.

Khairallah's brother died in Bhamdoun seven years ago during the Syrian invasion of Lebanon. The missing children are two, five and six years of age.

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(Full r is Southern Baptist missionary press representative for Lebanon.)

American, Southern Baptists Find
Missions to b Common Ground

By Mary Jane Welch

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists groups which separated more than a century ago came together Oct. 7-9 and found the mission cause which first drew them together is still common ground.

Speakers from American Baptist and Southern Baptist traditions touched on common themes such as Christ as the hope of the world, the suffering of the church, the increasing role of overseas Baptists in reaching their own people and ministry which touches all areas of life.

To honor the 200th anniversary of Luther Rice's birth, the two groups met at First Baptist Church, Washington where Rice was once a member.

Rice went to India as a Congregationalist missionary but along with Adoniram and Ann Judson, became a Baptist after his arrival. Rice returned to the United States to seek Baptist support for the young couple. He never returned to the mission field but is credited with drawing scattered Baptist congregations together into a denomination around the mission cause.

In trying to draw Baptists together and shape them from a despised people with individual concerns into a group of Christians committed to missions, Rice faced a number of "giants," said Emmanuel McCall, black church relations director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Traveling long hours on horseback, Rice faced a group of people who had a disdain for trained clergy, a fear of paying their preachers, hostility to blacks and American Indians and other troubling attitudes, McCall said.

But "while his enemies took the same materials and built spiritual shanties, Rice built spiritual palaces," McCall said, adding, Baptist leaders today may still face the offspring of Rice's giants--people with closed minds, wagging tongues, empty heads and no vision.

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Esther Byu, a Baptist leader from Burma where the Judsons opened Baptists' first mission field, reminded participants that, like Rice, many other Baptists have faced suffering and been strengthened by it. In her own country, she said, Baptists have faced times of persecution, but have continued to grow.

She admitted Burmese Baptists were sad when the country's government forced American Baptist missionaries to leave several years ago, but they continue to celebrate their faith and have learned to sing in the midst of suffering.

Byu also reminded Baptists the principal of encouraging national Baptists to take leadership positions while missionaries take a back seat is not new. She quoted a Baptist missionary society letter from 1864 which urged missionaries to allow Burmese Baptists to take the chief responsibility for winning their own country. It also encouraged them to act as advisors and give Burmese Baptists places of honor and to let the Burmese make their own mistakes and learn from them.

The message that the suffering church can be the growing church was also brought by Denton Lotz, an associate secretary for the Baptist World Alliance, who told about growing churches in China and Eastern Europe, in one of nine workshops offered during the consultation. Leaders of a workshop on Europe pointed out that two-thirds of European Baptists live in Eastern Europe, where religious freedom is limited by the government.

Baptists can learn from others around the world, Lotz said. They can learn prayer from Korean Baptists who rise daily at 4:30 or 5 a.m. to pray at the church and they can learn zeal for personal witnessing from Latin American Baptists.

The plight of millions living in poverty was the focus of a workshop on missions in Latin America led by Victor Mercado of American Baptists and Don Kammerdiener of Southern Baptists. Mercado described the situation for many of the people in Latin America while Kammerdiener talked about the positive and negative effects Marxism has had in the area. Both agreed the church, not politics, offers the only solution for the problems of the Latin American people.

In a Saturday evening message, Emmett Johnson, director of evangelism for American Baptist Churches of America, sketched a picture of a world living in increasing pessimism and poverty under the shadow of nuclear death, saying this is the world to which Baptists minister.

But he reminded participants Jesus promised his followers they would do much greater things than he had done and history has proved Jesus' promise. Jesus never traveled much more than 100 miles from home and had a small band of followers, but because he sent the Holy Spirit to be with his followers, they have traveled around the globe and won millions, Johnson said.

Johnson also sounded a theme repeated throughout the consultation when he reminded Baptists they must express their unity because Jesus said the world would recognize them by their love for one another. He asked whether Baptists can ever reflect a unity deeper than simply being nice to each other. The future will call for it, he said, especially "to mend that mean old rift between Baptists north and south."

The consultation was sponsored by the Board of International Ministries, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, and the North American Baptist Fellowship of the Baptist World Alliance.

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New Sunday Schools
Topped 1,000 Last Year

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--New Sunday Schools begun in the 1982-83 church year ending Sept. 30 topped 1,000 for the sixth consecutive year, with a total of 1,089 reported to the Baptist Sunday School Board's Sunday school department.

The total represents an increase of 62 over the 1981-82 tally of 1,027. Since 1977, 7,301 new Sunday schools have been reported. The largest number, 1,273, was reported in 1978-79.

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Texas led all states last year with a total of 262 new Sunday schools, exceeding the state goal of 200. Florida was second with 128 reported, surpassing its goal of 100. California was third with 100; Ohio, fourth, 60, and Arizona, fifth, 38.

Seven other conventions or fellowships reached or exceeded their state goals: Kansas-Nebraska, 24; Louisiana, 20; Michigan, 22; Nevada, 20; New England, 20; New Mexico, 10, and North Carolina, 24.

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'Theology Is A Verb'
Focuses on Social Justice

By Patti Stephenson

Baptist Press
10/11/83

ATLANTA (BP)--A veteran foreign missionary advised Southern Baptists attending the "Theology is a Verb" conference to "look hard at the women at work in any SBC church--and then just imagine what would happen if all those women just sat down."

Anne Neil, retired missionary to Ghana and now a visiting missions professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., decried Southern Baptists' reluctance to "allow women called by God as ministers to claim all their gifts.

"We nurture our young girls by building their awareness of missions. We support and educate them at our colleges and universities. Then suddenly they come to the end of the tunnel and we have no place for them to minister," she warned.

"Perhaps when we appeal for commitment in our churches we should offer the disclaimer 'for men only,'" she said. "Southern Baptists must realize women in ministry today are not competitors, rivals or uppity women who don't know their place, but sisters called by God."

Workshops on peacemaking, race relations, women and other concerns rallied more than 80 participants to the conference at Morningside Baptist Church.

The annual conference originated last year at St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., and "gathers Southern Baptists who are concerned with social justice issues and want to learn how they can impact those issues," explained Nancy Hastings Sehested, associate minister of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., and a member of the conference planning committee.

The conference serves as an "ongoing dialogue among concerned clergy and laity," Sehested said. "It provides fellowship, information, education and support to help local congregations rethink and retool their mission."

In the keynote address, Wendell Belew, director of the Home Mission Board's missions ministries division, observed "Southern Baptists today are crossing frontiers of theology more difficult in some ways than the geographical barriers we have crossed."

Being a "scalp collector in the name of Jesus" is not sound theology for the servant church, Belew said. "Churches aren't places where we hide from the world but where we go to learn who God is and then venture as pilgrims back into the world."

Ed Wheeler, dean of the Morehouse School of Religion in Atlanta and former associate director of the HMB's black church relations department, examined the state of black-white relations in the SBC.

"The white church has rarely taken the black church seriously," Wheeler noted. "Southern Baptists must decide whether they're really serious about adding strong black churches to their associations and incorporating black worship experiences."

Relations between blacks and whites will not change "until the white church examines its intentions," he said.

Wheeler called for a "greater awareness of the legitimacy of the black church in Southern Baptist seminaries, churches and literature."

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He also cited the need for black and white pastors to exchange pulpits. "I'm not sure every church must be a mosaic to be the true church, but every church must be open to all," Wheeler said.

The responsibility of Christians regarding the nuclear arms race was debated in a workshop on peacemaking led by Leslie Withers of Atlanta Clergy and Laity Concerned.

"As Christian stewards, we must recognize we are risking destroying the world God entrusted to our care," Withers declared. She warned against the "idolatry of worshipping nuclear arms as our security."

The possession of nuclear arms "violates the commandments to love God first and our neighbors as ourselves."

In another conference address, SBC Today editor Walker L. Knight observed the SBC's conservative coalition may be focusing less on the inerrancy issue and moving toward "Moral Majority positions on issues such as prayer in public schools."

If conservative unity around the inerrancy issue is diluted, "their alliance may fragment because of their low level of tolerance for diversity," he said.

Knight warned Southern Baptists "run the risk of poor stewardship by burying our faith to preserve it from the threat of liberalism. Meanwhile, we continue to lose ground in the inner cities and lose our sense of meaning of what the church is supposed to be."

Sehested, who preached the conference's closing sermon, reminded participants of the need to "reject the world's image of power as being able to control others and playing God."

She urged them to embrace "a new image of power that is powerlessness." Such power requires identifying with powerless and oppressed people, she said. "We can't carry on a ministry to the poor and suffering through a correspondence course."

Such powerlessness must not succumb to the temptation to "create patterns of dependence where we hold the purse strings," Sehested noted. "We don't just help those who suffer, we must offer them hope and vision. There's a difference between charity and liberation."

Participants voted to hold a third conference next year at Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., and elected a steering committee to refine the conference's directions and policies.

Sehested said she does not believe the conference "is intended to become a political arm of the SBC," but is intended to help equip concerned Southern Baptists to shed light on issues of peace and justice."