

JAN 17 1984



**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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January 16, 1984

84-8

New 'Complaint' Number  
For Ambassador Given

WASHINGTON (BP)--Persons wishing to follow James T. Draper Jr.'s advice need to try a new number.

Draper, president of the 14-million member Southern Baptist Convention, last week urged Baptists to deluge the White House with calls and letters to protest President Reagan's decision to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican.

Draper announced the phone number of the White House switchboard when he made the suggestion. However the switchboard will not record the calls.

Rather, the comments should be directed to 202-456-7639, the liaison office set up to monitor public reaction to presidential policies.

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SBC Hunger Experts Disagree  
With Hunger Task Force Report

By Michael Tutterow

Baptist Press  
1/16/84

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist hunger experts criticized findings of President Reagan's Task Force on Hunger Assistance, labeling the commission's report biased and out of sync with the condition of poor people in America.

"It makes me wonder who they listened to," said Nathan Porter, national domestic hunger consultant for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. He added reports from Southern Baptist home missionaries and volunteers who work with the poor "show this committee has not been exposed to what's really happening.

"There are literally millions of Americans who are struggling to provide food for their families," he said.

The 13-member presidential commission presented its report to President Reagan and conceded "hunger does persist" but claimed allegations of "rampant hunger" could not be substantiated and it was impossible to measure the extent of hunger in America.

The New York Times reported the commission claimed federal cuts in hunger assistance "have not reduced the availability of the major federal food assistance to Americans with incomes at or below the poverty line."

The Task Force recommended a series of policy changes in food assistance, including some cuts in federal aid programs and the creation of block grants for states.

W. David Lockard of the Christian Life Commission, which coordinates the Southern Baptist Convention's hunger education and action, criticized the report's conclusions as "subjective, superficial and debatable."

The task force, he said, ignored "volumes of existing and reliable data" in its study. He referred to a joint statement released last summer by mayors of large U.S. cities which cited hunger as a significant and continuing problem in urban areas.

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"Yet this concern, along with the testimonies of thousands of persons who serve on the front lines of the war against hunger, was not reflected in the task force's report," he added.

Foy Valentine, executive director of the social concerns agency, pointed out Southern Baptists' response to hunger in America should not be dampened by the controversial report.

"Our responsibility has not lessened," he said. "The Bible has not changed. Regardless of another bureaucratic study of the problem, we are mandated by our Lord to feed the hungry and help the oppressed wherever they may be found."

Andy Loving, administrative director for SEEDS, an Atlanta-based organization of Southern Baptists concerned about world hunger, charged the commission was not bi-partisan in make-up and did not represent a broad spectrum of positions on hunger concerns.

Most of the committee members were Republicans and committee chairman J. Clayburn LaForc, dean of the UCLA Graduate School of Management, admitted he had little knowledge of federal food assistance programs before the task force convened, Loving explained.

Southern Baptist home missionaries and others "who are on the firing lines" and have contact with poor people, report two to three times as many people now seek food assistance than before budget cuts were implemented two years ago. Loving said the commission's lack of knowledge about hunger in America reveals the need for some sort of on-going monitoring system to determine needs.

Compared to the bloated stomachs and other outward signs of hunger overseas, the committee was correct in stating rampant hunger could not be substantiated, said Everett Gill, a Southern Baptist who is director of Christians Against Hunger in Georgia, an ecumenical lobbying group. Unlike other countries, said Gill, "We give only enough relief to prevent poverty from becoming an embarrassment. In a country as rich as this there's no excuse for people to have to worry about what they will eat and how they will buy it."

"The committee was almost obligated to say it (hunger) is not there because if it is, then the Reagan administration has to do something about it," Gill said. "You can't put as much money and concern into building armaments as this administration does and at the same time acknowledge the dimensions of poverty in this country."

Gill said federal aid is insufficient to meet poverty needs. Using Georgia as an example, Gill noted Governor Joe Frank Harris has proposed only a three percent increase in Aid for Families with Dependent Children payments, raising payments for a typical family of three to \$210 a month. "That family has to make choices between food, heat and clothing that people with enough money don't even have to think about," Gill said. "Would we say a person who doesn't have heat instead of food is not hungry because he chose to eat while freezing?"

The spokesmen also warned the panel's proposal to lump federal anti-hunger funds into block grants for states would lower national standards for minimum needs. Two-thirds of state payments for food assistance are matching federal funds, explained Gill. Without a national average, he warned, states could drop standards far below the national average, endangering millions of poor people.

Guaranteeing adequate benefits for poor people should be a primary concern for Southern Baptists, he said, especially in light of the fact for 1981 the 11 states with the low st benefits were all traditional Southern Baptist states.

Malnutrition and undernutrition also are dangerous, said Loving, noting medical studies have linked infant mortality rates and rise in the number of low-weight newborns to poor nutrition. Budget cuts have decreased food stamp benefits to some 800,000 people, dropped three million from school lunch programs and half a million from school breakfast programs.

In addition, noted Porter, 35 million people live under the poverty line with another 35 million on the border. Further cuts would endanger these people, he said, many of them children or elderly.

"Reports like this will simply add to the apathy toward poor people," charged Porter. "We're being lulled to sleep by the supposed rise in the economy and by reports like this."

Loving added if the committee's proposed budget cuts are adopted, churches and other private sector groups will have to take up the slack. He said perhaps the church should be more involved anyway, but "there is a degree to which the government should not disengage itself. I don't mind debate between the church and government over who helps and how much, but hungry people have to eat in the meantime--and they can't afford our lengthy and verbose discussions."

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Black Congregation Provides  
'Open Door' To White Neighbors

By Mark Kelly

Baptist Press  
1/16/84

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Black Baptists have started a mission for white Baptists in a town which was the focus of racial turmoil 25 years ago.

Christ Temple Missionary Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., has begun a white Southern Baptist mission across the street from its building, which formerly housed a white Assembly of God church.

The 5,400-resident community is changing again--pluralizing, according to Christ Temple pastor James Thrower.

Thrower and his congregation realized they could not minister to a significant portion of their neighborhood when a witness team "got stalled" at the door of a fearful, elderly white woman's home. "We wanted to find a way to reach white people in this area, without making them afraid," said Thrower.

The church already owned part of the answer, a second building across the street from its own. The congregation began surveying the community for prospects, but leadership was still a problem.

That answer came when two of Thrower's classmates from Boyce Bible School, Jerry Kinney and Bob James, introduced Thrower to a young Black Muslim they had won to Christ. Thrower talked with them about the proposed mission, and things seemed to click.

Kinney and James turned out to have been residents of the neighborhood before the first transition. In fact, James had lived only three blocks from the mission's location.

On Aug. 14, Open Door Baptist Mission opened its doors with four people present, its two bivocational pastors among them. Three months later, Sunday morning worship averages 16, and plans are being made to begin a Sunday school program.

The mission is already contributing to the Pulaski County Association and the Cooperative Program, according to Kinney.

"There are lots of reasons for not doing this," explained Thrower, recalling perennial economic depression, a struggle for acceptance, theft, vandalism and the three leaders' relative inexperience--all are first-time pastors.

"The only answer we have found is Matthew 28: 'go, baptize, teach.'"

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Seminary Nixes Film  
With Suicide Ending

Baptist Press  
1/16/84

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Because the gospel--not suicide--is the solution to life's problems, Jessica Lang and Tommy Lee Jones won't be filming a movie on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

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Warner Brothers had indicated an interest in filming part of "Everybody's All-American" on the campus of the Southern Baptist seminary. But since Gavin Gray, the fictional University of North Carolina football star in Frank Deford's novel, sets fire to his house, killing himself and almost killing his wife, Southeastern President W. Randall Lolley declined.

"My basic problem is the movie's final solution to the human situation is suicide," Lolley told Raleigh Times reporter Williams Cohan. "The theme is just not consistent with our theme of redemption.

"There is the gospel which can provide a solution to people's troubles. And if any of the film were shot at Southeastern, we would be giving out mixed signals about that. We don't want to do that--it is just not our way of solving that situation.

"We realize this is not a cream-puff world. It's a tough world. But there is someone, somewhere who will see this movie and in a moment of weakness will be led to believe suicide is an answer. And that is a total contradiction to what we believe at this school."

The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill had earlier declined to allow the movie to film on its campus since it would disrupt classes. Duke University and the town of Wake Forest are reportedly going to wind up being used as sets.

The film has a budget of \$13 million.

Southeastern is one of six seminaries affiliated with and supported by the Southern Baptist Convention.

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Minnesota Baptist Church Offers  
Hope To Hopeless Laotians

By Janice Trusty

Baptist Press  
1/16/84

ST. PAUL, Minn. (BP)--Nay Vang pointed to a photo of the green mountains of Laos. "This was my home. I like, but cannot go back. Communists kill."

Like so many refugees from Southeast Asia, Nay Vang and his family are grateful to be in America where they feel safe.

The Vangs are Hmong (pronounced "mong"), a Laotian word which means "free men." Most of the Hmong actively supported the United States during the Vietnam war. After the war, many of them spent weeks in the jungle or on rickety boats to escape their war-torn homeland.

In his former mountain-jungle home, Vang provided for his family by farming. Adept in guerilla warfare, Vang felt confident he could protect them from the enemy. But in his new homeland everything is different and his family's greatest enemies are the English language and American culture.

Coming to Vang's aid and that of more than 400 Hmong was the Roseville Baptist Church in St. Paul, Minn. Their ministry began with volunteers driving refugees to doctors' appointments and church, often ending with an invitation to Sunday dinner.

Among these attending services was Bong Vang, whose brother Joshua Vang coordinates Southern Baptist Home Mission board refugee work. Learning of its involvement with area Hmong, Joshua Vang called the church, informing them of another group of Hmong which wanted a place to worship.

"It was an answer to our prayers," said pastor James Stephens. "We had attempted to establish mission endeavors in several areas, only to find door after door closed--hundreds of people around us not knowing Christ and we couldn't find anyone to minister to. We were glad to have the Hmong."

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As more and more Hmong attended the church, the task of getting them there became increasingly difficult. Assistance from the Home Mission Board enabled the church to buy a van. On Monday and Thursday evenings the van brings Hmong women to church for a sewing class.

"I had never taught a sewing class--not even to Americans," said instructor Norma Hall. "I was nervous. I said, 'Lord, what am I going to do?' He answered, 'Just keep it simple.'"

She first taught women to make dish towels and pot holders, then to make clothes. Now her students have made curtains and blankets for the bitter Minnesota winters. Because the women still have trouble reading pattern directions Hall stays close by to help.

On Sundays, the van and a bus, a gift from a West Virginia Southern Baptist, transport Hmong to worship services. Limited facilities make it necessary for Hmong to meet Sunday afternoons, following the English service.

To prepare himself for his second congregation, Stephens read everything he could find about Hmong history or culture. The information proved invaluable for ministry. In 18 months, 70 Hmong have been baptized. "We know their conversion is real," said layman Ken Baker, "because they follow it."

Carol Baker and Deanna Williams lead weekly Bible study. "They're like sponges," Baker said, "eager to learn about the Bible and their new culture."

Seeing physical as well as spiritual need, Roseville members search local flea markets for low cost items. They also serve as translators for Hmong during job interviews, living their disappointment with them when failures come.

"You learn to take things in stride," said Hall. "Sometimes it's slow, but people who hire Hmong are pleased. They find them hardworking and competent." Observed Ken Baker, "They are survivors and certainly can teach us about family--the way to look after one another."

During good times, as well as bad, the Hmong share material wealth. With this in mind, the Roseville church divided a portion of its property in small farm plots. Whole families came to hoe, water and harvest. The yield supplemented food budgets during the summer months with plenty to freeze or can for the winter.

Roseville members have worked hard to make the Hmong feel at home in their new land, but there are still questions. "We wonder sometimes," explained Carol Baker, "if we are doing as well as we could. With more space and workers we could have individual Sunday school classes. But we feel confident in our aim to train Hmong leaders. One day we might possibly establish their own church with a Hmong pastor."

That dream may soon be realized. Recently, Youa Chou Thao, a young Hmong man, answered God's call to preach. With financial aid from Roseville church, he plans to study for the ministry.

And the work goes on, bolstered by the steady support of a church that has experienced ministry at work. With gratitude, pastor Stephens reflected, "It's a joy to see someone come from total hopelessness to hope."

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(Adapted from Missions/USA, July-August 1983)

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

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