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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 6, 1984

84-19

Texas Baptists Launch
 Valley Disaster Aid

By Orville Scott

DALLAS (BP)--Texas Baptists have launched a major program to aid Rio Grande Valley residents left poverty stricken after a severe freeze in December.

The freeze virtually destroyed the South Texas citrus and vegetable crops, leaving thousands of workers unemployed. A veteran Baptist disaster relief leader called the freeze the "third worst in Texas history."

Fifteen thousand families in a six-county area of the Rio Grande Valley were said to be in desperate need of food, shelter, clothing, heating fuel and medical aid.

In response to the needs, the administrative committee of the Texas Baptist Executive Board approved plans of emergency and long-range disaster relief.

The committee endorsed a request by Texas Governor Mark White who appealed to Texas churches to promote "a second offering program for the needy" on Sunday, Feb. 19. Meeting with representatives of various denominations, the governor explained the special offering is needed to "extend care beyond the limited and now exhausted government assistance services."

Charles P. McLaughlin, Dallas, chairman of the Texas Baptist disaster relief committee, said a special committee of various denominations will administer the Texas' Valley Disaster Relief Fund. The executive committee for distribution of relief funds will include other Protestant, Catholic and Jewish organizations.

Recommendations for distribution will be channeled through the public non-profit organizations set up to coordinate disaster relief in the six south Texas counties.

The Baptist administrative committee also approved a long-range plan involving upstate churches in partnerships with Valley churches to help the members get back on their feet.

Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and one of the denominational leaders who met with White, said three counties in the Valley had long ranked as the nation's worst poverty areas and after the freeze, unemployment has risen to 40 percent.

Bob Smith, director of missions for the Rio Grande Association, said the usually lush green Valley is brown and seared. He said the trees have lost their leaves and the ground beneath is a mass of yellow decaying fruit. The trees have been hurt so badly it may be two years before they produce another crop, he said.

A Baptist pastor told Smith suffering people were beating on his door crying, "Do you have anything we can just borrow. We don't have any blankets for our children."

A Texas Baptist Convention disaster relief task force, working with Smith, reported 39 missions and churches are in trouble because of the disaster. Work crews are needed to repair pipes and walls in 12 churches and roofs for five or six buildings.

The task force said church partnerships of up to two years' duration are needed. Smith requested some of the funds be used to set up part-time jobs to help people help themselves by repairing their own churches.

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He encouraged partnership churches to visit the churches in the Valley to become personally acquainted with the needs of the people.

McLaughlin said the matching church program would be coordinated through the Texas Baptist River Ministry office and the Rio Grande Association to insure money and projects go directly to the people and the churches.

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Annuity Trustees Review
1983 Financial Report

By Ray Furr

Baptist Press
2/6/84

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist Annuity Board trustees reviewed a successful financial report for 1983 and honored a retiring executive at their winter meeting.

A retirement reception honoring senior vice president and director of investments, Marvin T. York Jr., highlighted the success of a new era in the board's investment department. Annuity Board President Darold H. Morgan told trustees and guests York had played an important part in developing the current retirement investment pools and funds.

He said the 1977 change allowing participants to choose their investment funds marked a significant change which increased the total assets of the board. Morgan noted the asset base of the board had tripled since York had become director of investments. York, a former trustee, took early retirement from First National Bank of Dallas to become director of the board's investment department in 1977. York will continue as investment consultant.

In his final address to the trustees, York said the board "...must continue to be an innovative organization with the flexibility of meeting the ongoing objectives." He said he thought the economic climate for 1984 would be such the board would have another successful year with good returns for Southern Baptist investments.

Other business included a report by Morgan on a board medical insurance study regarding applicants denied coverage due to pre-existing health conditions. He noted less than six percent of the 1982 applicants to the Church Medical Plan were denied coverage under the plan. "However," Morgan said, "we must want as many Southern Baptists who want coverage under our system to be included without jeopardizing the program."

Morgan said to allow more applicants to the Church Insurance Program, the board has worked with the underwriter to alleviate some of the qualifying restrictions without creating increases of premiums for those persons already in the program.

Highlights for 1983 included record numbers in premium income, benefits paid and investment earnings.

Premium income which includes retirement insurance contributions and relief received, totaled \$98.32 million, an increase of \$12.8 million over 1982.

Retirement and relief benefits paid in 1983 were \$32.3 million while \$37.6 million was paid in insurance benefits. Investment earnings reached a record height of \$150 million, pushing the total asset base of the board to \$1.2 billion.

Contributions in retirement funds earned 11.3 percent in the fixed fund and 17.2 percent in the balancing fund. The variable fund closed the year with a value of \$4.16 per unit, while the short term funds ended the year earning 9.4 percent.

The trustees reelected Billy C. Austin, Birmingham, Ala., chairman and T.L. Cashwell Jr., Raleigh, N.C., as vice chairman.

Trustees rotating off the board in 1984 include: D.L. Lowrie, Lubbock, Texas; Sam Burk Jr., Denver, Colo.; Harold W. Sorrell Jr., Clinton, Md.; Stanley R. Hahn, Savannah, Ga., and Stanley H. Dill, Champaign, Ill.

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Brotherhood Commission Holds
Continuing Studies Conference

By Mike Davis

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The attraction of volunteer groups and how those groups assimilate new members were among topics at the Brotherhood Commission's first ever continuing studies conference.

The conference, held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was designed to give professional and para-professional Brotherhood workers in-depth training on how to use psychological, social and theological insights in involving men in missions.

Five Southwestern professors led the 30 participants in discussions about how persons are motivated to join and participate in groups and talked about some of the dynamics present in existing church groups.

Bob Brackney, assistant professor of social work, listed three major reasons why persons volunteer--they agree with the task of the group, they like people in the group and they feel the group can satisfy a need. Knowing why people join groups can help in developing the kinds of activities needed for a successful program, he explained.

Fifty to sixty million people volunteer to do something in America each year, Brackney said, and, "We have to give consideration to the number of people who are willing to work."

David Fite, director of Southwestern's continuing education for ministry department, emphasized learning best takes place in groups. He outlined five stages of a group: orientation, when participants are excited; dissatisfaction, when some participants realize the group isn't going to fulfill their expectations; resolution, when participants really find out what the major task of the group will be; production, when the major task of the group is done, when the group disbands or starts on a new project.

Identifying those other traits of groups is important in developing successful church programs, Fite said.

Ted Dowell, professor of psychology and human relations and director of Southwestern's marriage and family counseling center, said a characteristic of Baptist groups is members tend to care deeply about one another. "This is one of the most gratifying and self-fulfilling of life's experiences," Dowell said. "If we don't use it, we're incomplete."

Several more continuing studies are planned by the Brotherhood Commission. The conferences will emphasize in-depth training for Brotherhood professional workers and experienced Brotherhood volunteers.

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Deadline Extended For Housing
During Summer Olympics

Baptist Press
2/6/84

LOS ANGELES (BP)--The deadline for obtaining housing in area Baptists' homes during the 1984 Summer Olympics has been extended to July 1, according to Vicki McEntire, staff assistant for Summer Games Ministries, the Southern Baptist-sponsored outreach effort.

SGM is coordinating reservations for out-of-town guests in local hosts' homes July 25-August 12. Rates are \$20 per adult and \$15 per child for a room and breakfast in a private home in the 200-mile area encompassing the 23 Olympic sites.

McEntire noted the total payment must accompany the application. If an applicant cancels a reservation, SGM will retain \$25 for processing and refund the balance. If housing in Baptist homes is not available, SGM can refer visitors to other housing services offered by area United Methodists and Lutherans, she added.

Information and applications can be obtained by contacting SGM at 445 West King Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90037; phone 213/749-7043.

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YES Provides Answer
For Unemployed Teens

By Phyllis Thompson

CLOVIS, N.M. (BP)--In June, Barbara Ferguson received an eviction notice because she hadn't paid rent on her three-bedroom house for nearly eight weeks. Ferguson wasn't pleased by that notice, but neither was she worried.

"I just sat down and talked to the Lord," she said. "I told him, 'I don't think this is a very good witness, but I'm not going to let it bother me if it doesn't bother you.'"

Ferguson was not making it financially, even though she was working 70-hour weeks and successfully managing what she called "one of the most rewarding and challenging jobs of my life." Her office, Youth Employment Services (YES), is always busy.

Ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week, Ferguson matches available jobs with Clovis teenagers. Her one-woman agency, operated on a \$12,000 annual budget contributed by local churches, found 600 jobs this past summer.

Unfortunately, said Tommy Zorns, a retired high school teacher and supporter of the program, "she pays for everything on that tight budget but Barbara." Ferguson explained, "There just wasn't enough to go around. The program needed the money more than I did."

Ferguson is not a poor manager. She simply owed herself \$1,155 in back salary. Friends found out about her financial dilemma, and the missing salary soon appeared on her desk.

Youth Employment Services started more than two years ago after two local youth were killed in a motorcycle accident caused by their use of alcohol and drugs.

"That set the town in motion," remembered Zorns. "Basically, we thought kids became involved in drugs and alcohol because there was nothing else for them to do."

Several people banded together into Concerned Christians of Clovis and asked teenagers--two white, two black, two Hispanic and two Asian--for suggestions on how growing-up years could be improved. At first the kids couldn't agree on a solution. Finally someone suggested jobs.

A short time later, Ferguson read a newspaper ad asking for a director of a youth employment agency. A widow of eight years with two teenage sons, Ferguson took the job. Although she knew the salary for the position wouldn't stretch far enough to meet monthly bills, the ad was "like an answer to prayer."

At first, Ferguson felt like a complete failure. After visiting 500 businesses the first two weeks, she found only two employers willing to hire teenagers.

"Then I realized I needed to appeal to the churches," she said. So she spoke at every church she could find, helping members understand the program was to help them, too. The requests began to pour in.

Jobs range from window washing, baby sitting and house cleaning to employment in local restaurants, department stores and businesses.

Ferguson is careful to prepare teenagers before sending them to meet a prospective employer. She requires each applicant to attend an orientation session, teaching them how to fill out a job application, how to handle a job interview, how to apply by phone.

Teens are often surprised by Ferguson's support, especially when they are fired from jobs. "Barbara never criticizes," Zorns said. "She just asks them why. And in the process of telling them about other jobs, she is often able to tell them about God."

When Ferguson found clothes for one teenager to wear to a critical job interview, he asked, "Why are you doing this for me?" As Ferguson explained her religious beliefs, he grew interested and accepted a Bible. A short time later he became a Christian.

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"That's the thing that distinguishes us from government agencies," Zorns said. "Kids know this is a Christian organization. We show them a difference."

Ten years ago, newly widowed Barbara Ferguson came to Clovis, her husband's hometown, hoping to be welcomed with open arms. She had worked alongside her pastor husband in new work areas where their church excluded no one.

But in Clovis she began to invite her neighbors--some black, some alcoholic--to church. Some members thought that improper. She and her boys, because of a lack of money, rode their bikes everywhere, even to church. She recalled, "Some thought that improper, especially for a middle-aged woman."

She was different and those first years were lonely.

But the passing years have brought change. Economic hardships have made townspeople more accepting, less judging. Support for the job program is evidence of support for Ferguson, believes Zorns. "She's doing a fine job," he said, "a mighty fine job."

But Ferguson insisted, "It's just the Lord. He has a way of working things out."

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(Adapted from the November-December issue of Missions/USA, the Home Mission Board's magazine)

**Extremists Threaten Christians,
Stop Religious Film Showing**

Baptist Press
2/6/84

YADALAM, India (BP)--Religious extremists broke up a public showing of the film "Jesus," in Yadalam, India, and chased after the three Baptists who brought it to the village.

The pastor who arranged the showing in the Kannada language said he feels led to establish Christian work in Yadalam and plans to return to build a ministry there.

He and the two Indian Baptist Mission representatives with him were unharmed because village people blocked the extremists from the Baptists' car as they hastily packed.

Trouble started when villagers were interrupted about 20 minutes into the film by a group of Rashstriya Sewal Samaj volunteers, uniformed and wielding sticks. A loud whistle sounded, and voices ordered the film be stopped. But the villagers demanded the showing continue.

Then someone switched off electricity for the entire town. Amid mud throwing and yelling, the Baptists packed to leave and headed for the car. More religious extremists arrived, but the crowd of villagers, angered at the intrusion, protected the Baptists and promised they would arrange another showing of the film. The extremists then chased the car on foot as it left the village.

Rashstriya Sewak Samaj, which claims responsibility for assassinating Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi because of his good will toward religious minorities, has been opposing Christians in the area for several years.

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