



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

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

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Pastor's Son Killed In Beirut Attack

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)—Michael Ray Wagner, one of the two Americans killed Sept. 20 in the car bomb attack at the U.S. Embassy Annex in Beirut, was the son of North Carolina Baptist pastor Donald Wagner of Rocky Hock Baptist Church.

Michael Wagner, 30, was a petty officer first class in the Navy. He grew up in Pilot, a small Franklin County community. He attended Bunn High School and studied business at Gardner-Webb College in Boiling Springs, N.C.

He later sold automobiles in Charlotte, N.C. before joining the Navy in 1977. He volunteered for duty in Beirut in November 1983.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the first of three articles based on recent coverage of Baptist work in Central America by Erich Bridges and Joanna Pinneo. Articles on Honduras and Nicaragua are scheduled to be released later.

El Salvador Missionaries Say You Learn To Live With War

By Eric Bridges

Baptist Press
9/26/84

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (BP)—Southern Baptist missionaries Bill and Libby Stennett were sitting in a San Salvador hamburger shop one day when a group of armed men in civilian clothes barged into the restaurant, grabbed four or five young males and hustled them into a van waiting outside.

One of the kidnapers returned, looked long and hard at the missionaries, and said, "You haven't seen anything, have you?" Then he left and the van sped away.

Maybe the kidnapers were a death squad. Maybe they were guerrillas on a "recruiting" drive. "When something happens, you never know whether it's the left, the right, or just somebody taking advantage of the situation," says Stennett. He has no idea what happened to the kidnap victims.

As the war between Marxist guerrillas and El Salvador's shaky government drags into its fifth year, the Stennetts have almost forgotten what peace is like. You don't get away from the war, they say; you learn to live with it. That's what they've done for most of their seven years as literature missionaries in the tiny Central American nation.

More than 40,000 people have died in the violence. Hundreds of thousands of the nation's 4.8 million people have abandoned their homes because of the fighting. Death squad killings continue. And the guerrillas talk of a new fall offensive.

The Stennetts know about offensives. So do their missionary colleagues Ernie and Lee Ann McAninch. The younger McAninches arrived as new missionaries in December 1980, one month before the guerrillas' so-called "final offensive" rocked San Salvador with daily bombings.

But things were calmer this summer in the city. The guerrillas concentrated on the eastern countryside. According to the Stennetts' son John, there's no reason for fear unless you happen onto the "wrong place at the wrong time "

More hopeful news is that the Baptist bookstore and book deposit (operated by the San Salvador missionaries) are setting sales records. People want Christian books, Stennett explains, because conflict drives them to search for answers to life's questions. A pastor by training, he can barely keep up with preaching opportunities and baptized at least 100 people last year.

So the missionaries feel fairly confident about the present and future. But you don't make long-term plans in El Salvador. The following incidents would have sent less determined persons home long ago:

--A group of polite young guerrillas stopped the Stennetts one morning in January as they were getting into their car. The guerrillas declared they were "borrowing" the car but promised to return it. They fled when a compatriot ran up warning of approaching police.

--The Baptist bookstore received an anonymous note demanding a large sum of money be brought to a city park or the bookstore would be destroyed. Stennett and McAninch, shadowed by the police, went to the park carrying a satchel stuffed with paper. Nobody showed up.

--Four bombs exploded near the bookstore on another day, each blast coming closer. "I thought, now this is our day, we're finally going to get something," remembers Stennett. "We lost a few windows and the employees got shook up a little bit, but within an hour we were back open again and in business as usual. That's the way people are here—you can bomb them out in the morning the next day they're cleaned out, and if they have anything left, the next day they'll be back in business."

More than 100 Protestant and evangelical missionaries worked in El Salvador when the Stennetts arrived seven years ago. Perhaps 10 remain, he estimates. Some of the original group wanted to leave. Others were pulled out by mission agencies because of "horror stories" in the U.S. media, according to Stennett.

The two Southern Baptist couples appreciate the fact the Foreign Mission Board has allowed them to make their own decisions about staying, though that policy draws occasional criticism from concerned churches and anxious family members of missionaries in trouble spots.

"Hey, I'm not a martyr," McAninch emphasizes. "I take care of my skin. But if you're in God's will and you're killed or harmed in any way, you'll be with him in glory. I don't mean that to sound like I'm some kind of hero. I'm not. But that's what I believe. If it weren't for that we wouldn't be here. Also, if I thought it was unsafe enough for my kids and my family, I wouldn't come."

One question often put to the two couples is: what's the point? How much ministry can be done in a war situation? Their answer: plenty. According to a new study, evangelicals now number at least 700,000 in El Salvador, roughly 15 percent of the population. That's more than triple the number counted five years ago, when the war began to heat up. If growth trends hold steady, evangelicals could make up a quarter of the population within two years.

"El Salvador is faced with so many extremes," explains McAninch. "You have the far left. You have the far right and every different color in between. They've had change of government ever since the beginning and people are tired of it. They're looking for something more firm, something that's not going to change. And the Word of God does not change."

Some 55 churches in the Baptist Association of El Salvador (primarily related to American Baptists) count about 5,000 members. Perhaps 100 independent Baptist congregations nationwide draw thousands more.

But Baptists suffer. Last fall guerrillas shot and killed Mario Agila, lay youth director at First Baptist Church of San Salvador. He was driving with the church youth group through eastern El Salvador, returning from a trip to Honduras. Guerrilla snipers mistook their Jeep for a military vehicle.

At the same time, Fields said state paper editors should "seek authoritative answers to questions related to the Sunday School Board." A result of the efforts of state papers should be to lift the level of Baptist expectations of the board and other agencies of the denomination, he noted.

Elder said the editors suggested many ideas during problem-solving sessions. Also, he said a number of possibilities were identified concerning ways the state papers and the board can mutually support one another.

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Teen-ager's Funeral
Becomes Revival Service

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9/26/84

DEL CITY, Okla. (BP)—Twenty-six young people made professions of faith following the funeral for 14-year-old Larry Ross Carlile Sept. 12. A tape recorded Bible study given recently by Carlile at a Royal Ambassador meeting was played during the service at Howard Memorial Baptist Church, Del City, Oklahoma.

In the Bible study, Carlile said: "A lot of y'all would probably say, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em,'" but "if Jesus would have said that...we would be nowhere now. We wouldn't have a Bible, we wouldn't have a church, we wouldn't have nothing. But he went ahead and paid that price. So I think if he can do it, we could all do it." Theme of the Bible study was peer pressure and faith in God.

More than 700 family members, friends and schoolmates attended the funeral of the Del Crest Junior High School student killed in a car-motorcycle accident. The driver of the car was charged with negligent homicide and driving with a suspended license.

John Reasoner, Howard Memorial assistant pastor, said the response to the invitation given at the close of the funeral was a direct answer to prayer. "Our pastor, Rick Goodman, and I had been praying that God would use this tragedy to prove that he can make all things work together for good by bringing unsaved young people to Christ. We've seen him do exactly that and we're expecting several more decisions in the near future."

Carlile's mother, Mrs. Sondra Carlile, said she favored playing her son's recorded Bible study. "If it would help the kids or anybody, I was for it," she said.

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Group of Indonesians
Makes Love 'Concrete'

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JURANG PORONG, Indonesia (BP)—In the predominately Moslem village of Jurang Porong, eight Indonesians who have watched Christianity in action the past two years have committed themselves to Jesus Christ.

For several years about a dozen men in Jurang Porong had met regularly for worship and Bible study, but little growth had taken place and no women had joined. So in 1982 members of the group decided to mobilize their love to help the community.

With help from Southern Baptist missionaries Fred Beck of Florida and Bobby Jones of Oklahoma—and \$3,000 in Southern Baptist Hunger and Relief Funds—the men designed and built a concrete cistern to catch water during the rainy season. Now women no longer need to tote 20-gallon buckets of water three miles up the mountain from a stream.

During the past year the cistern has provided the village a steady supply of water and has stood as a "concrete" example of Christian love and concern. The small group of believers has begun to grow—five new members are women who watched Christianity in action.

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First Baptist of Santa Ana has also lost members. A former member who became a pastor in another city was assassinated. When death squad killings peaked in Santa Ana, says pastor Manuel Figueroa, "No one, in the middle of the night, liked to hear a car motor running outside of the house."

As a community leader and a minister, Figueroa walks a thin line. "Here in this country, politics is a matter of life and death. When you go to one side you're identified with that side, win or lose. If you lose, sometimes you lose your life. So the church and the pastor must not be seen identifying with the extreme of either side. Because then not only he but his church can be hurt from the other side."

Baptists haven't let their own pain blind them to the pain of others. Emmanuel Baptist Church, for example, sponsors a children's home in San Salvador for war orphans and children separated from their families by the conflict. (Southern Baptists have provided shoes, clothes, medicine and other materials for the children).

On a national scale, Baptists (and Southern Baptist relief funds) have aided thousands of refugees through CESAD, an interdenominational, evangelical relief committee that Stennett helped launch before the war. CESAD distributes food to refugees nationwide. It also runs medical clinics in refugee camps, distributes Christian literature, aids destitute pastors and rents land for poor farmers or helps them get loans.

Stennett envisions the evangelical community doubling, and eventually changing the nature of El Salvador--the endemic poverty, the corruption, the culture of violence. "It'll take years," he admits. "I won't see it. But if the McAninches can stay, they might."

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

Crucial Role Of State Papers
Cited By BSSB President

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A recent workshop with Southern Baptist state paper editors strengthened the conviction of the president of the Sunday School Board that state papers play a "dramatically significant" role in denominational life.

BSSB President Lloyd Elder said he convened the two-day workshop to share information about board programs as well as to conduct problem-solving sessions on communications strategies and revitalization of the denomination.

Calling the 25 state editors who attended "a group of tough-minded people," Elder said, "I see the state papers as crucial to the health of the denomination."

Elder said he believes the Southern Baptist Convention "is in a time of maturity when we must face the issues of uniqueness and change. The great crisis facing the denomination is primarily a crisis of change."

He called for a communication strategy to help Southern Baptists be aware of current changes and help church members toward an increased knowledge of the convention's heritage.

"Some things in the Southern Baptist Convention must not change," Elder told the editors. "Other things ought to change. One of the greatest avenues for denominational renewal is communication. A role of communicators is to guide the denomination toward a renewed vitality by sharing information and trust."

W.C. Fields, associate executive secretary for public relations, SEC Executive Committee, said, "Communication does not always create unity, but good communication is essential to finding a basis for unity."

Fields said the role of the Sunday School Board should include continuous efforts to maintain credibility and openness. He urged board officials to seek a conscious partnership with state papers and support of the ministry of state papers.

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1985 Church Insurance
Rates To Decrease

DALLAS (BP)--Insurance rates for Southern Baptist ministers and church employees will decrease next year.

On Jan. 1, 1985, life and disability insurance premiums will be reduced for persons in the Annuity Board's Church Insurance Program. Insurance Services Director John Dudley said term life rates will decrease 13 percent and disability plan rates will be reduced five percent.

There will be no increase in medical rates and premiums for those persons eligible for Medicare will decrease 10 percent.

Dudley noted "the initial out-of-pocket expense" for a family will be reduced from \$600 to \$400 per year, while the individual deductible will not be changed.

He said even though medical inflation rates continue to rise, church rates are stabilizing due to "administrative practices and cost containment measures taken by the board in the last two years." Dudley said one of the most successful measures of controlling rate hiks was the replacement of "first-dollar coverage" with a deductible feature.

He also noted "Southern Baptist ministers and church employees have been instrumental in helping us contain medical cost."

Persons in the program were more selective in seeking medical care which has been a significant factor in the 1985 reductions, he added.

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CORRECTION--In (BP) story, "A.C. Miller Dies In Texas" please change "Miller is survived by...two sons, Allister C. and E. Marden, both of Houston...." to "Miller is survived by...one son, Allister C. of Dallas."

Thanks,
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*460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219*

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LYNN MAY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 9TH AVE NO
NASHVILLE TN 37234

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