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(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of three articles on the effect of fighting in Central America on Baptist work in that area.)

Baptists On Honduran Border
Caught In Deadly Conflict

By Erich Bridges

F - FMB

SAN MARCOS DE COLON, Honduras (BP)--The border is as quiet as a cathedral today. Deathly quiet. The green hills of Honduras roll serenely southward into Nicaragua just as they did before there was a border, or a war.

Yesterday was more typical, says Baptist laywoman Celina Sandoval. "We hear shooting nearly all the time," she explains. "Yesterday the contras crossed here and we could hear the fighting just inside Nicaragua."

Sandoval, her husband and nine children live in a house about 50 yards from the border, down a hill from an army outpost and checkpoint crossing. Nicaraguan rebels ("contras") based in this part of Honduras regularly sneak into Nicaragua to attack towns and soldiers. Their aim: to overthrow the Marxist Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Sandinista forces regularly chase them back, sometimes crossing into Honduras.

Most of the other houses on both sides of the line stand empty, their former occupants long gone to less dangerous regions. In their house the Sandovals run a tiny coffee shop for Honduran soldiers. They feel relatively safe being so close to the army outpost.

When the shooting comes the children run up the empty highway, followed by their parents if the fighting gets fierce. Not long ago mortar shrapnel ripped into the Sandovals' roof.

The Sandoval home was once a preaching point of Berea Baptist Church in nearby San Marcos de Colon. But it's too dangerous to meet here now. And the family may not stay much longer. "We can't go on like this forever," admits Jorge Sandoval. "A wise man looks at his situation. But we don't want to leave. This is our home."

Honduras, the poorest country in Central America, is caught in the middle. Guerrilla wars rage in El Salvador to the west and Nicaragua to the south, and trouble is spilling over both borders.

Thousands of refugees from El Salvador languish in camps on the western frontier. At least 10,000 contra fighters reportedly use southern Honduras as a base for incursions into Nicaragua. Nicaragua is charged (though not yet convicted) with funneling arms to Salvadoran guerrillas through southeastern Honduras and through the adjacent Gulf of Fonseca.

Honduras must also deal with its own small guerrilla insurgency, a growing American military presence, food shortages and a staggering economy (per capita income: \$600 per year).

Unlike its troubled neighbors, however, most of Honduras remains at peace. Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries work largely unhindered by violence. If anything, the regional turmoil has spurred ministry.

"There's a greater sense of urgency among both nationals and missionaries to get the gospel out because of the things happening in the countries around us," says Grady Nowell, chairman of the organization of 38 Southern Baptist missionaries in Honduras. "Nobody's sure of how long we might be here."

That urgency, Nowell believes, plus better planning and an emerging generation of strong Baptist leaders, is paying off in ministry. Honduran Baptists and missionaries baptized 616 new believers last year, the most ever.

Baptists now number more than 4,000. Churches number some 45, plus nearly 80 mission points. Strategic planning targets numerous other locations for new churches. Nowell predicts membership can be doubled, perhaps tripled, in the next 10 years.

Missionary evangelists report significant church growth, particularly in the cities and towns of the north coast. And more trained pastors are preparing for leadership of those churches: student enrollment at the Baptist seminary in Tegucigalpa has jumped from four in 1982 to 24 this fall, plus at least 70 in extension programs.

Baptist social ministries range from medical work, agricultural education and nutritional centers to well drilling, fluoridation and latrine building.

But back in the southern border town of San Judas near Nicaragua, people fear a Sandinista invasion. The contras maintained a base camp in a local gold mine until recently. Farmers plant little now, says Baptist pastor Elias Morena. Jobs disappear. Families go hungry. Morena himself witnessed a recent border skirmish when about 150 Sandinistas clashed with contras inside Honduras.

Yet his church thrives. "When you hear the cannons going off and a foreign army could come through your territory, you want to be right with the Lord," layman Benito Moreno said.

Nicaraguans did invade in 1979--not troops, but thousands of refugees fleeing the victorious Sandinista revolution. Southern Baptist missionary nurse Frances Crawford remembers treating wounded Nicaraguan civilians during that exodus.

"How did you get shot?" she would ask. The usual reply: "Senorita, we were just trying to get out of the way."

Some went home eventually, but many Nicaraguan families still live in southern Honduras, many in extreme poverty. About 600 Nicaraguans live in San Marcos de Colon; eight Nicaraguan families attend Berea Baptist Church there. A few of the men admit they are contra fighters, but not willing ones.

Junio Garcia (name changed to protect his family) makes \$2 a day as a common laborer. He lives in a tiny house on a grim street with his wife and six children. His two-month-old son is sick.

A former Nicaraguan soldier, Garcia dared not go to a border refugee camp when he brought his family to Honduras five years ago. He feared the Sandinistas would sweep in and kill all the men. So he settled in San Marcos and professed his faith in Christ through the ministry of Berea Baptist Church.

Now he wants to live and work in peace, but contra leaders come to San Marcos periodically looking for Nicaraguan "volunteers." You go willingly or they force you to go, claims Garcia. Other Nicaraguan men in town say the same.

Garcia has no desire to fight, and even if he did, his absence leaves his children with no one to provide food. "It just isn't fair for my family to suffer," he says. "The Lord knows what we are going through."

Berea Baptist helps Nicaraguan church families with food and other aid when the contras "carry off the husbands to fight," according to one deacon.

"The people of Honduras don't want war with Nicaragua," says Samuel Venis, pastor, seminary professor and president of the Honduras Baptist Convention. "War is no solution."

Honduran Baptists especially don't want war. Most don't seriously expect it either, at least not an outright invasion by one side or the other. But when the social ministries committee of the Baptist convention recently drew up a forecast of potential domestic disasters, major guerrilla conflict topped the list.

Convention president Venis believes as Baptists grow numerically and spiritually, they can make a contribution to peace in Honduras and Central America. "Not only because of what Scripture teaches," Venis says, "but because of who we are."

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

N-BSSB

Trustees Delay Price Increase
Hear Bold Mission Thrust Reports

By Linda Lawson

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A church literature price increase scheduled for April 1985 was delayed three months to July 1985 by members of the Baptist Sunday School Board trustee executive committee in their monthly meeting in Nashville Sept. 27.

Committee members also heard President Lloyd Elder and four program leaders urge involvement in Bold Mission Thrust and outline 1984-85 plans for support of the Southern Baptist Convention goal of sharing the gospel with every person in the world by 2000 A.D.

The postponement of the scheduled five percent literature price increase was made possible by excellent sales in 1983-84 and will result in a savings to churches of approximately \$700,000, according to James Clark, executive vice-president.

The delay marks the fourth time in the board's history, and the second consecutive year, that literature price increases have been delayed.

"There is a commitment on the part of the Baptist Sunday School Board to provide the finest possible literature at the most economical price and to pass any savings along to the churches," said Elder.

He also called for a heightened sense of urgency toward evangelism and missions, describing contributions through the churches to the success of Bold Mission Thrust as the most significant challenge facing the Sunday School Board.

"I want to encourage all Southern Baptists to turn aside from private agendas and issues, to rejoice in the gains and achievements God has given to us and to claim God's continued blessings on Bold Mission Thrust 1984-85," said Elder.

Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school department, said the purpose of the Sunday school is "to mobilize the laity of the churches to implement the Great Commission."

The 1984-85 goal of a net gain in Sunday school enrollment of 500,000 will be possible only as individual workers and members become involved in reaching people. "The purpose of 'Reach 5 in '85' (1984-85 theme) is to challenge every youth and adult in Southern Baptist life to seek to enroll five persons in Bible study," said Piland. "The goal is simple, clear, definite and attainable."

Roy Edgemon, director of the church training department, said the denomination's training enrollment is expected to top two million for 1983-84, after four consecutive years of increases.

Since 1979, church training has been expanded to include discipleship training, doctrinal study, short-term training and new-member training, as well as ongoing curriculum, said Edgemon.

Since its release in 1979, the "Survival Kit for New Christians" has sold 1.7 million copies in English and is now available in approximately 50 languages. "Through this training tool, we are touching millions of new people with training," said Edgemon.

MasterLife discipleship training is now being conducted in 80 countries, he added. More than 104,000 persons will have participated in MasterLife by Sept. 30, 1985, said Edgemon.

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Joe Stacker, church administration department secretary, said a priority of the department for 1984-85 is support of the Strengthening Families emphasis with materials and conferences.

One feature is conferences on the minister's family, "to help ministers and their families deal with their own family life," said Stacker.

Douglas Anderson, secretary of the family ministry department, said the Strengthening Families emphasis includes three projects—Family: Opening the Word Together, Marriage: Growing in Oneness and Parents: Building a Christian Home.

A goal of 500,000 Southern Baptist families committing themselves to regular Bible study and worship in the home is a major part of Strengthening Families, Anderson said. Also, each church is being asked to conduct one family enrichment project.

"The Sunday School Board will commit itself, its resources and energies to Bold Mission Thrust and the successful achievement of our 17 programs," said Elder. "We will be a program board on behalf of the Southern Baptists and in the name of our Lord."

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Jones Suggests SBC
Manifesto On Equality

By Jim Newton

N - HMB
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CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP)—An Atlanta Baptist pastor proposed a Southern Baptist Convention "Manifesto on Equality" to counteract a resolution adopted by the SBC last June which he claimed "denigrated every woman on the planet."

Peter Rhea Jones, pastor of First Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga., suggested the manifesto during an address to about 85 Baptists attending a seminar at First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, sponsored by an group calling itself "Christians on Pilgrimage," organized following the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Kansas City, Mo., last June.

Jones and three other speakers urged participants to organize effectively and go to the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas prepared to voice their views on the role of women in the church and convention.

Although the group did not draft a proposed resolution, seminar participants gav Jones' proposal for a "Manifesto on Equality" a standing ovation and discussed the process for presenting their views when the SBC meets next year in Dallas.

Jones said such a "Manifesto on Equality" should be based on the writings of the Apostle Paul who said in Galatians 3:28 that "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Jones compared the current debate concerning the role of women in the Southern Baptist Convention to the debate on slavery before and after the Civil War. There were hundreds of Southern Baptist pastors who in those days took specific verses in the Bible out of context and used them to argue that God approves of slavery, Jones said. "If they had turned to Galatians 3:28, things might have been different."

He called for a healthy debate on ordination in Southern Baptist convention, expressing hope Baptists will study the entire Bible rather than using only a few verses to prove their point. The debate, he added, should not just deal with the ordination question, but th role of women in the church.

Jones said the resolution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention last June was far worse than a repudiation of churches which ordain women as deacons and ministers. "What it did was to denigrate every woman in the planet...by putting every woman in an inferior position."

He quoted from the resolution which states that the Apostle Paul excluded women from pastoral leadership in order to preserve "a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall."

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Jones said the argument used in the resolution is that since a woman (Eve) sinned first in the Garden of Eden, therefore all women are responsible for sin in the world. And since all women are responsible for sin, therefore all women are subservient to men.

He encouraged participants to memorize other scriptures, including Romans 5:12 where Paul said "sin came into the world through one man (Adam)," rather than through woman (Eve).

Jones said the SBC-adopted resolution, which cites a dozen scriptures, "pivots" on I Timothy 2:12-13. He claimed this scripture was ripped out of context and "plopped" into today's debate women's ordination, even though it does not say a word about ordination.

A former New Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., Jones said debate on the issue in the SBC could be healthy, provided polarization is avoided, by helping Baptists understand the whole Biblical revelation on the role of women.

In another speech at the seminar, Molly Marshall-Green, assistant professor of theology at Southern Seminary, said there is a new wind blowing within the Southern Baptist Convention in which women are seeing with new vision the call of God to be ministers.

Such vision, she said, must be accompanied by courage and determined initiative. "The great sin of women today might be to think too little of themselves."

Anne Neil, former SBC missionary to Nigeria and Ghana now teaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., traced her own pilgrimage in ministry, urging women to be like Jesus and seek to be servants of the church.

"God forbid that we (women) fall into the trap of trying to get ahead of others instead of trying to serve others," Neil said. She added the church must recognize and utilize the gifts of women in ministry and provide broader opportunities for women. It is poor stewardship to do otherwise, she said.

Carolyn Blevins, assistant professor of religion at Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tenn., traced the history of the role of women in the Southern Baptist Convention, pointing out the key role women have played in missions. Women, however, have held very few key leadership roles in the denomination, she said. No woman has ever been elected president of the convention and only two have been elected as a vice-president, she said.

"Either women have made very little impact on Baptists, or Baptist historians (most of whom are men) have ignored the role of women," she said.

In a closing summary during the seminar, June McEwen of Chattanooga, one of the organizers of Christians on Pilgrimage, said the time has passed for women to rely on patience and long-suffering, but now women must speak up for equality in the denomination.

Carol Graham of Signal Mountain, Tenn., another of the organizers, urged those present to form a coalition of men and women to attend the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas. Her husband, Chris Graham of Signal Mountain Baptist Church, suggested chartering a bus for concerned Chattanooga area Baptists to go to the SBC in Dallas.

Don Harbuck, pastor of the host church, pointed out in group discussion that election of the president of the Southern Baptist Convention is the key to bringing about change within the denomination.

"We are in the clutches of an adamant fundamentalism that will kill off the life of faith in our convention if it continues," Harbuck said.

The week before the seminar, First Baptist of Chattanooga ordained two women as deacons, and Signal Mountain Baptist Church elected its first woman deacon, the group was told.

About one third of the 85 attending the seminar came from outside Chattanooga, most of them from west Tennessee, said McEwen.