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84-183

Refugees Cripple
Beirut Hospital

By Irma Duke

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)—Dec. 19 a year ago armed men from one of the fighting factions barged into the Christian Medical Center Hospital in Beirut, Lebanon, and told the refugees following behind them to make themselves at home.

Since that time, the C.M.C. Hospital, the only Protestant hospital in Beirut, has been all but shut down. Previously running a nursing school and maintaining 50 beds on six floors, the hospital is down to one floor and five beds. The rest—the men's ward, the women's ward, the children's wards, the kitchen, the nursing school—has been taken over by 38 refugee families.

Peter Manogian, almost 70, and his wife, Iola McClellan Manogian, stood by helplessly as the refugees moved in, tearing out walls, moving furniture and setting up housekeeping in what the Manogians and their partners had spent a lifetime building up.

Mrs. Manogian, from Missouri, went to Lebanon in 1948 as a Southern Baptist missionary nurse. She resigned in 1950 to marry Manogian. He delivered many of the babies Southern Baptist missionaries had in Lebanon.

The Manogians, members of University Baptist Church, are the only full-time staff members today. Their surgical procedures almost have been eliminated because they no longer have facilities to provide extended care. They performed 312 operations, mostly tonsillectomies and appendectomies, last year, about what they did in one month during the hospital's prime.

Manogian does what he can for his patients but in many cases has to send them away, knowing they will pay much more than he would have charged. "It hurts me to have to send them somewhere else," he says.

While his personal revenue continues to fall, he digs into savings to keep the hospital going. For the first eight months of 1984, his electric bill was close to \$900—about seven times the normal amount—because he's expected to pay the bill for the whole building. And he still pays taxes on all of the building even though he's lost control of most of it.

The Manogians say they have not asked God why this has happened to them after a lifetime of service to others but they do question the fighting that's lasted for 10 years in Beirut.

"How can man be so sick that he would set a car bomb to go off where kids are getting out of school?" Mrs. Manogian asks. At least five hospitals have been shelled, she adds. Theirs got eight direct hits in 1978.

Several times Manogian has had close calls with bullets going through his windows and hitting places where he was standing just seconds earlier. Mrs. Manogian said her husband's life has been spared so many times "we know the Lord has more for us to do."

They say they are not bitter toward these refugees. How can they be? Manogian himself came to Beirut as a refugee from Turkey during World War I. Voluntarily they had taken in three refugees. But Mrs. Manogian thinks they should have been warned the refugees were coming so they could have gotten some things they needed, such as medical records, from some of the rooms the refugees took over.

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The Manoogians aren't the only victims. Some other institutions in the city have similar situations because there is no low-income housing and the people have nowhere else to go.

Most of these refugees are homeless but not destitute. Many of them still go back and forth to work every day. When fighting got bad in their villages, they packed up their belongings and sought refuge in the city.

The Manoogians would like their own housing situation to change. They want to retire, to move to the States where their six children are. But so far no one has bought the hospital. Even before the refugees came, interested buyers came three times to look at it but shelling started while they were inspecting it. They left and never came back.

So the couple stays. Even with the limitations they still feel they have a ministry. Many of the patients Manoogian has had for years still come to see him, sometimes for treatment, sometimes just to talk.

He feels most helpful to older patients whose families have been killed or moved to safer places and left them behind. "Those people have no one to look after them."

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

Tornado Destroys Building,
Spare Preschool Children

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
12/20/84

DALLAS (BP)—A Mesquite, Texas, pastor witnessed "the sovereignty of God" as he saw nearly a third of his church's family center destroyed but more than 30 preschoolers spared when a severe thunderstorm and accompanying tornado ripped across north Texas Dec. 13.

Ronnie Yarber, pastor of Gross Road Baptist Church, was in his office when the morning sky outside his study turned dark and he heard a tremendous roaring.

"I saw the double doors of our family center explode outward and the building begin to swell," said Yarber. The front third of the family center which houses a gymnasium, was blown away and steel girders were curled and twisted back over the roof of the structure.

Normally, as many as 30 to 35 preschool children would have been playing in the gym as part of a Mother's Day Out program. However, the workers in charge Thursday morning arbitrarily decided to let the children stay in the nearby education building for activities.

Yarber and a custodian located the children and the preschool workers unhurt and huddled in the middle of the floor in a dark room, singing "Jesus Loves Me."

"The bottom line was that God did not intend for those children to be hurt," Yarber said. "That building was just iron and steel. It can be replaced. We can redo a building, but we cannot replace a life."

Ironically, the portion of the family life center destroyed by the winds was scheduled to be dismantled that same day. The building, which was built in 1981, was going to be expanded, and the new foundation had already been poured.

At least a half-dozen families in Gross Road Church sustained serious damage to their homes, but there were no casualties among the church members, according to a Mesquite police captain who is a member of the church.

Town East Church, Mesquite, had several windows blown out by high winds but reported no other damage. Although high winds and possible tornados were reported in Ferris, Balch Springs, Garland and Wylie, no other Southern Baptist churches reported damage.

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However, Lake Lavon Encampment lost a concession stand, covered walkway and breezeway, and porches behind the chapel to high winds. The storm also did damage to the roof and windows of the dorms and blew away about 2000 square feet of roofing off the cafeteria. David Griffin, camp manager, also reported "extensive damage" to his home.

Though there were no fatalities, there were numerous injuries including a child at a west Mesquite Assembly of God church who was struck by a flying brick. The girl, Lori McCallum, suffered a skull fracture and was listed in serious condition in the intensive care unit at Methodist Hospital, Dallas. The Assembly of God Church was severely damaged by the high winds, as was Calvary Baptist Church in south Mesquite, a non-Southern Baptist congregation.

Gross Road Church, which had purchased the building once occupied by the now disbanded Central Baptist Church, planned to make the abandoned church building available to one of its devastated sister congregations for Sunday services.

By Thursday afternoon, Gross Road Church had turned its attention from itself to its surrounding community. Its staff was already moving throughout the town to learn about families in need of food, lodging or repairs that men in the church could perform.

The Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Mobile Unit was at the scene of the storm damage by Thursday evening. It was later moved to Richardson Heights Church, Richardson, where hot meals were prepared for disaster victims and carried to victims in the wind-stricken areas by volunteers.

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a two-part series on black Baptists)

Future For National, Southern
Baptist Relations Encouraging

By Leisa A. Hammett

Baptist Press
12/20/84

ATLANTA (BP)—Relations between the Southern Baptist Convention and the largest black Baptist convention in America look encouraging for the first time in three decades, according to the director of SBC Home Mission Board's black church relations department.

Emmanuel McCall, a black Southern Baptist, said much of the credit for improved relations between the SBC and the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., is because of steps taken recently by presidents of the two conventions.

When T.J. Jemison was elected president of National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., two years ago, his plans included reconciliatory action toward Southern Baptists. Jemison said it was time the two conventions work together on a national level.

During the National Baptist Convention this year in Washington, Jemison invited both McCall and Southern Baptist Convention President Charles Stanley of Atlanta to speak and bring fraternal greetings. In the past, said McCall, such fraternal greetings or platform recognition "were tolerated," but Stanley spoke for 20 minutes, and received a standing ovation by black Baptists attending the convention, something no Southern Baptist Convention president previously had received, according to McCall.

"The difference this year," he explained, "is that T.J. Jemison invited us to the platform and presented us with graciousness.... That was the signal (to the National Convention) to respond openly to us. I think (these gestures are) important because the grassroots respond according to national leadership," he added.

"The significant thing is national leadership from both conventions are talking together," McCall explained. "The fact Jemison is making positive statements is sending a message to the rank and file that it's okay to be involved with Southern Baptist Convention agencies," added McCall.

In its fall meeting, directors of the Home Mission Board adopted a motion commending Stanley and McCall for the "special meeting" with the convention and the resulting "rapport."

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During Stanley's address at the convention, the audience broke out in applause several times. McCall said the convention was very affirming of Stanley, who "knew how to communicate to that audience."

McCall added the friendly reception he and Stanley received began the moment their taxi arrived at the convention hotel. The crowds' recognition and response to Stanley, McCall observed, was due more to the fact that he is a national television personality rather than a Southern Baptist. According to Fred Powell, senior associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Stanley's sermons are seen weekly by an estimated two million television viewers.

During the broadcasts, both blacks and whites can be seen in the sanctuary choir. The fact that First Baptist, Atlanta--where Stanley is pastor--has black members, served as an "entree" to the black convention, added McCall.

In contrast, First Baptist received national media attention during the early 60's because of the church's attempts to bar blacks from worship services. (Stanley was hired as associate pastor in 1969, and became pastor in 1971.)

Today, blacks are warmly welcomed, said Powell, speaking on behalf of Stanley. "They are a vital part of our ministry."

With a history of racial segregation, blacks have been slow to join SBC churches and black churches have been reticent about membership in the convention, according to a report in HMB MissionsUSA magazine.

As racial integration became common across the nation, blacks began to join SBC churches in the 1960's. In the 1970's, their numbers increased. Today, approximately five percent of Southern Baptists are black.

But this movement produced a growing tension between SBC and the seven-million member National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. A "political" rivalry between the two conventions, emerged during the early 1970's--somewhat of an aftermath of civil rights activities.

Southern Baptists' size, monies and resources contributed to that sense of rivalry, said McCall. National Baptists felt they were being "shown up" and their potential leaders were being lured into the SBC.

This "feeling" among black Baptist national leaders eventually infiltrated to the state level, draining interest, finances and activities until Jemison became president.

McCall explained though national leaders of the black convention were not on congenial terms with Southern Baptists during the past few decades, state and associational cooperative work between National and Southern Baptists did continue.

McCall said attitudes of national leadership have a definite effect on how the state level carries out cooperative ministries.

The SBC employs personnel in each state convention to work with black Baptists in three black denominations: National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., National Baptist Convention of America and The Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Cooperative ministries between Southern and National Baptists include scholarships for blacks preparing for full-time Christian vocations, racial reconciliation efforts and undergirding the National Baptist Student Retreat among others. Southern Baptists began sponsoring the annual retreat in 1949 for students on black college campuses when blacks were not allowed at Ridgecrest and Glorieta Baptist conference centers.

Despite a past checkered with racial discrimination, Southern Baptists are changing, indicated by an increase in black membership and responsibility. Dale Cross, HMB director of metropolitan evangelism strategy stressed the importance for maintaining relations with the larger black community and with National Baptist leaders while also supplementing the SBC with black leadership.

"If we act like we don't need (National Baptists,) we will be entrapped by our own denominational exclusiveness," said Cross. For some time in our major cities, black directions and priorities will flow out of National Baptists and other large black denominations. We need to affirm those leaders and build relations with them," Cross asserted.

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Former 'Green Acres' Star
Still Trusting The Lord

By Bonnie Sparrow

Baptist Press
12/20/84

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—The fresh, young face of Eb, the likable hired hand on the "Green Acres" television show is mature now. A little more experience with the world is written in the easy smile. The six-year-long role which made him a familiar face to millions of television viewers did not lead to other long-term acting commitments.

He's added to his resume guest appearances on various television shows, two Disney movies, three Billy Graham crusades and more than 1,000 appearances in churches. But now, even though "Green Acres" is still showing in syndication, he's not as well known as he was and invitations to speak are fewer.

But the strong sense he was in God's will as Eb on "Green Acres" and the sense he remains in God's will while living in Hollywood has not deserted Tom Lester.

Lester was in Fort Worth, Texas, recently to appear on "Lifestyle," the magazin format talk show which offers positive values for living. The hour-and-a-half program is seen four days a week on the ACTS network.

For the past seven years the Mississippi-born actor has sought financial backing on a movie project he is convinced has an earning potential of \$50 million.

"It's a low-budget movie about Arnold Ziffel, the smart pig on the 'Green Acres' show," he said. "'Benji', which earned \$40 million seven years ago was based on the exploits of the dog in 'Petticoat Junction'. With the increase in theatre ticket prices, if just half the people who saw 'Benji' went to see a movie about Arnold, it would make \$50 million."

Even though there have been human let-downs, Lester is "still excited to be a Christian. It's easy to trust God in the good times but when the going gets a little tough you don't just shake your fist in his face. You keep right on trusting. I don't understand some things but he is helping me trust his sovereignty."

"One thing's for sure," he said. "If I didn't have a real sense that God wants me in Hollywood, I'd be back in Mississippi by morning."

Lester, a member of First Baptist Church, Van Nuys, Calif., grew up in Laurel, Miss., where his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Pat Lester, still live. He gets home three or four times a year and takes advantage of opportunities to share his faith in some of the smaller churches in the area.

"When I became a Christian I knew I'd never be happy unless I did what God wanted me to do," he told Lawanna McIver and Carol Cole, "Lifestyle" co-hostesses.

He felt God wanted him to be an actor. The problems was, he was 6'4" tall and weighed 118 pounds. And when people asked what he planned to do with his life the list of reasons why he shouldn't be an actor included too tall, too skinny, too ugly ("You don't look like Rock Hudson") and a southern accent.

So Lester majored in chemistry and biology at the Universtiy of Mississippi and taught school for a year after graduation. But he wasn't happy. "I'd always rather try and fail than not try at all so I quit my teaching job and headed for California."

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Lester credits his survival in Hollywood to his Christian faith. "The first thing I did was find a Southern Baptist church." There he met Lorene Tuttle and began attending her acting classes. This led to acting showcases and Little Theatre productions. One of his Little Theatre co-stars was the daughter of Paul Henning, creative producer and writer for "The Beverly Hillbillies" and "Petticoat Junction."

When Henning came to see his daughter perform, he also saw Lester. When he was named executive producer of "Green Acres," he invited Lester to read for the part of Eb.

Lester has some ideas on how a Christian actor can be successful in Hollywood and still maintain the right kind of relationship with God. "First, of course, find a church. Then know your craft. Be a good actor. Have some standards and be determined not to play any role that will not be redemptive."

He explained. "If a part calls for a role as a drug addict, an alcoholic, or a thief and that part is not going to show that such a lifestyle is wrong, then I don't think God will honor our efforts."

He agrees maintaining the right relationship with God is tough for some actors. "It really depends on how important the acting business is to you," he said.

"If your career is more important than your relationship to God, then it is not as tough because you had rather work in the motion picture business. If God is more important there are some roles you have to turn down and that hurts. But, whatever your profession, if you are true with the Lord, God will give you a peace about what you feel you should do."

Lester also has strong feelings about Christians who condemn the the quality of entertainment today.

"Christian people have no right to gripe and complain if they are not going to support Christian efforts in those areas," he declared. "Thousands of Christian businessmen in America could help by investing in projects Christian film workers have going and, at the same time, those businessmen could make themselves a lot of money. Christian people should support good pictures. They will make money and that will send a message to Hollywood."

But whether Christian people support the industry or not, in his own life Tom Lester will still trust the sovereignty of God.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Radio and Television Commission.

Louisiana-Korean Partnership
Yields Language Materials

By Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr.

Baptist Press
12/20/84

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)—Louisiana Baptists' translation of teaching curriculum for Korean Baptists has come full circle.

Now, Korean Baptists are sending back materials for use by Koreans living in America.

Charles Lowry, director of the Louisiana Baptist church programs division, said until about two years ago there was no age-group Bible teaching curriculum in the Korean language.

"Now they have Bible Book curriculum for youth and adults. And, Koreans are translating material which is sent back to the Baptist Sunday School Board to be printed for the 400 Korean congregations in America to use," he said.

A four-session unit of Uniform Sunday School curriculum was "deculturalized of American terms" by Lowry, his wife Carolyn, Mrs. Raymond Jones and Sue Rother and translated by Korean Baptists.

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Mrs. Jones, who lives in Minden, is the wife of a retired director of missions and Rother is director of age group work at First Baptist Church, Lafayette.

The first four-unit sequence--preschool, younger and older children, youth and adults, was used for the first nationwide Bible Teachers' Convention in Seoul Jan. 10-13, 1983. More than 2,000 Korean Baptist pastors and Sunday school leaders attended that meeting.

Lowry said, "They had had no age group Bible teaching curriculum prior to that time. They did have general adult material for teachers only, but none for students."

Korean leaders asked Louisiana Baptists to help develop the curriculum. A full year of material for each age group was prepared.

Louisiana Baptists will lead the "Evangelism Through Sunday Schools" campaign in South Korea April 16-29 in 20 pilot programs to train Korean Baptist leaders in methods of evangelism through the Sunday school, according to Charles Harvey, Louisiana Baptist evangelism director.

Each team will consist of a religious education team leader, pastor-evangelist and lay leaders for adult, youth, children and preschool Sunday school work. Korean "pilot" churches will become resource groups to train other Korean leaders.

The April campaign will be the final major project in a partnership between Louisiana and South Korean Baptists which began with city-wide crusades in 1970. That crusade was conducted with 66 Louisiana Baptists in 20 cities and resulted in 11,000 decisions for Christ in one week.

In 1980, 52 Louisiana Baptists spent two weeks in Korea leading witness training sessions and Harvest Revivals.

In preparation for the 1985 effort Louisiana Baptists have been involved in curriculum preparation, leadership training and planning.

Lowry said after preparation of the first group of lessons they began training Korean leaders and missionaries to rewrite and reformat curriculum. "Koreans have produced the second year based on our lessons.

"The third step is to train Korean writers to write their own scriptural background for the lessons. After several years step four will be for them to do the entire process."

The Sunday School Board has been generous with curriculum and artwork at no cost, Lowry said.

Orientation for team members is scheduled during the Louisiana Baptist Evangelism Conference Jan. 28-29, during the Religious Education Association meeting Feb. 28-March 1 and a final session about March 28.

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French Quarter Church
Host Witnessing Groups

By Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr.

Baptist Press
12/20/84

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Members of the Vieux Carre Baptist Church in New Orleans are planning a year-round witnessing program to be launched during Mardi Gras.

"We want our church to be an inner-city retreat center for non-acquaintance witnessing," Pastor Roy Humphrey said. The church, all 19 members, has sponsored a witnessing program during Mardi Gras for a number of years and plans to continue that.

However Humphrey, who has been pastor for 10 years, said, "We want to use our facilities as a year-round, inner-city center for witnessing by Baptist groups." The program is a cooperative effort with the New Orleans Baptist Association.

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Church facilities at 711 Dauphine Street, a block from Bourbon Street, recently were remodeled with sleeping space for more than 55 persons.

Baptist laymen are being registered for a special effort Feb. 14-19, Humphrey said. This is the week preceding Mardi Gras when the city fills with visitors.

Persons arriving Feb. 13 will meet for evening prayer and then make a tour of the Quarter, talk with those they meet and observe life in the Vieux Carre, he said.

Humphrey feels part of the dynamic of "non-acquaintance" witnessing (his term for "street witnessing") is the experience of staying at the church and working as a group which also includes sharing experiences and learning from each other.

"I would like to see youth groups as well as adults use the facilities throughout the year as a retreat center which will include witnessing in the Quarter and holding prayer retreats," Humphrey said. He noted numerous groups have made the church a center for their activities in the past but often not practiced the type of witnessing Baptists follow. Many of them were from out-of-state.

The Vieux Carre Baptist Church is an autonomous congregation.

It is not a mission, although Humphrey expresses appreciation for the Louisiana Baptist Mission Division for grants to support a witnessing program.

He also said Campers on Mission remodeled the facilities to provide living space in addition to the worship facilities. This includes two dormitories, baths, kitchen with microwaves, garbage disposals and deep freezers. Buildings are air conditioned.

"The small but dedicated membership always has given support to the ministry of the church, which, in addition to regular worship experiences, includes a ministry to shop owners and visitors to the city," he said.

He acknowledged the small group could not save the quarter but "at least we can provide a haven for those who come to help us witness."

The church was organized in 1964 according to Louisiana Baptist Convention records. Until Humphrey became the bi-vocational pastor 10 years ago the congregation experienced pastoral changes about every year.

Persons wishing to participate in witnessing retreats as mission projects may contact Humphrey at 2152 Graham Drive, Gretna, La. 70053 or Nolan Johnston, director of missions, New Orleans Baptist Association, 2222 Lakeshore Drive, New Orleans, La. 70122.

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Medical Pioneer Looks Back:

'Starting Things' His Specialty

By Mary Jane Welch

Baptist Press

12/20/84

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Some people might say Franklin Fowler was destined to be a pioneer.

His parents were the first Southern Baptist foreign missionaries appointed from Florida and one of the first couples to arrive in Argentina. But that wasn't enough.

"Father always felt any other missionary within 500 miles was too close," says Fowler. His father moved the family from Buenos Aires to Santa Fe, from Santa Fe to Rosario, and finally, when Fowler was one year old, from Rosario to Mendoza. They stayed there for 16 years until his father died and he and his mother returned home to Harriman, Tenn., for him to finish high school.

His father's love for moving on, starting something new, left its mark. As Fowler approached his Dec. 31 retirement after 37 years as a medical missionary and consultant with the Foreign Mission Board, he felt his biggest accomplishment through the years has been "getting things started."

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He's started plenty.

As a medical missionary in Paraguay, he started the first Baptist hospital in South America. Then he started a church in the hospital laundry. Before he left Paraguay to help stabilize a new Baptist hospital in Mexico, he and his co-workers set up internship and nurses' training programs which would have a lasting impact on medical work in Paraguay.

Today a Foreign Mission Board directory would list numerous consultants, but Fowler was the first. He suggested the title in 1961 after he was asked to join the home office staff and give guidance to a medical missions program which was beginning to grow out of control. Because someone was also needed to pull together missionary medical files and interpret them for missionaries and staff, he soon added that to his portfolio.

Within a year, Fowler began an annual missionary loss study aimed at better understanding why missionaries leave the field and started a medical volunteer program to fill gaps career medical missionaries couldn't cover.

Throughout the years, Fowler has nudged the Foreign Mission Board to keep up in the rapidly changing medical field, according to Winston Crawley, who first met Fowler when he rented a room from Fowler and his mother. Crawley was a graduate student at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., where Fowler was attending medical school.

They never dreamed they'd work together someday, but since 1961 Crawley has depended on Fowler's medical expertise when making decisions as an area director, as director of all the board's overseas work and most recently as vice-president for planning.

He says Fowler has helped the board become aware of trends in medical ministry. He has kept terminology up-to-date and has encouraged the board to grasp opportunities to add community health and primary health care to its more traditional hospital and clinic programs. He has eased the board through the transitions which have come as overseas governments have exerted stronger control over medical work in their countries.

Fowler admits medicine has changed a good deal since his first days as a missionary doctor. Besides the move toward more sophisticated equipment and techniques, the very idea of what constitutes good health care has changed. When Fowler went to the mission field, sick people went to hospitals and clinics to have doctors cure them. Although the Baptist hospital gave vaccinations when it could, preventing disease wasn't the primary concern of doctors anywhere.

That began to change, says Fowler, in the early 1970s. Today, the medical community puts an increasing emphasis on prevention, especially in Third World countries where poor health practices can send a patient to the doctor over and over with a preventable disease.

One of Fowler's major contributions to health care ministries has been a continuing emphasis on the evangelistic ministry of health care institutions and health care workers. "He has all along had this holistic view of our mission work. Long before we began to use the term very much, the concept was central in his approach to our health care ministries," Crawley said.

Fowler admits that evangelistic potential was a major consideration in choosing a site for the Baptist hospital in Paraguay. A look at the map made it clear that all roads--and rivers--in Paraguay lead to Asuncion. And most of the people live there or nearby.

He and his colleagues realized a hospital in a rural area would reach only a few people. In the capital, it could serve most of the nation--and open doors to the gospel in a country with only two young Baptist churches. In the capital it could also serve as a training center for young doctors and nurses.

Today, Fowler feels their decision was wise. There are more than 110 churches and preaching points in Paraguay. About 20 Paraguayan doctors, most of them Christians, work on the hospital staff. During the hospital's early days, there were only four evangelical Christian doctors in the country--and three of them were missionaries at the hospital.

Fowler's concern that evangelism and health care be combined is reflected in one of his last projects before retirement--drawing up a proposed health care curriculum for Baptist seminaries around the world. The aim: To prepare ministers in Third World nations to provide basic health care as well as spiritual care for their people.

Fowler would be the first to say being a pioneer is not always easy. Many of his career highlights were reached only after he overcame a major obstacle.

To become licensed to practice medicine in Paraguay, Fowler had to pass tests on every one of the 36 subjects offered in medical school there--and he had to do it in Spanish. Studying for and taking the exams was one of the more difficult periods of his career, he says, but the hard work paid off.

Shortly after passing his last exam, Fowler was walking downtown and ran into a Paraguayan doctor he barely knew. The man gave him the Paraguayan hug, shook his hands and said, "Now you are one of us."

It made the whole thing worthwhile, said Fowler. He believes he and fellow missionary physicians, William Skinner and Don McDowell, were the first foreigners to pass the exams.

Starting the Baptist Hospital in Asuncion wasn't easy either. He and his colleagues couldn't even get in to see the secretary, much less the minister of health who had to give permission for them to build the hospital.

But they woke up one morning to find the government had changed overnight and a man friendly to evangelicals had been installed as minister of health. They were ushered into his office and less than 24 hours later received written permission to build the hospital.

Then the search for a hospital site was a story of dead ends until the search team offered a ride home to the man helping them locate property. On the way, he asked them to pull over at a site he thought might be for sale. The property, an orange orchard, was an instant hit.

Initially, the owner didn't want to sell. He had bought the land as a gift to his late wife, who had loved the flowers and trees. But Fowler explained they wanted to build a hospital, primarily to take care of babies. A few days later, the man sent a note saying he would sell.

Some would say Fowler now looks at a time of endings, but he doesn't seem to feel his days of starting things are over. He has a collection of materials on the Foreign Mission Board's medical missions program he would like to organize. And there's seminary--he never went, but he'd like to start now.

He's dabbled in art, but would like "to find out how you really do it." And then there's one other thing he's wanted for years to do--write his memoirs of his years as an MK to help MKs and MK parents going through similar experiences today.

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