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August 6, 1985

85-94

Cuba Baptist Music Director
Cites Problem With Termites

By Jim Newton

ATLANTA (BP)--The director of music for the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba, Miriam Escudero, told directors of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's language missions committee that Baptist work is going forward in Cuba, despite unique difficulties.

Mrs. Escudero, who also works as an administrative assistant for the Baptist seminary in Havana, was one of six Baptist leaders from Cuba permitted to travel to the United States to attend the Baptist World Alliance in Los Angeles this summer.

"It (Baptist work) is very difficult in Cuba, but God is with us and is blessing our churches," she said in an interview following her presentation to HMB directors.

One of the major problems is that so many of the pianos in Baptist churches are being destroyed by Cuban insects similar to termites, only worse, she said. It is also very difficult to keep the pianos tuned because of the deterioration of the instruments and the extremely high humidity, she said.

Almost all the 105 churches and missions have a piano, she said, but all were imported prior to 1959. Now only Soviet-made pianos are available, and they are very expensive.

One of the other major problems she faces in Cuba is that printed music in Spanish is not available for choirs and music directors. To solve the problem, she and others copy the music by hand onto mimeograph stencils, using a stylus and ruler to draw in the staff lines and notes. Last year, Cuban Baptists mimeographed 20 music scores for their choirs using this technique.

They print the music on a Gestetner mimeograph machine held together by baling wire. The machine has been used by the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba for more than 30 years. Her husband, Rafael Escudero Garcia, is general secretary and office manager for the convention.

As a music professor at the Baptist seminary in Havana, Mrs. Escudero teaches music, piano and conducting to about 45 lay church leaders and to seven full-time music students.

Last year, she said, there were 21 students enrolled in the seminary; with seven students in each of the three major fields of study--music, religious education, and theological training for the ministry.

In June, two of the theology students graduated and were called as pastors of churches, but two new students are expected to be admitted for study this fall, she added.

In addition to the seven full-time seminary students, about 70 lay leaders are enrolled in courses on doctrine, theology, Bible and homiletics taught each Monday, and 30 pastors are enrolled in continuing education courses.

The seminary has 11 professors, all unpaid volunteers who work as pastors and leaders in the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba. Rector (president) of the seminary is Leoncia Veguilla, who earlier this year was permitted by officials to travel to the United States and Mexico to work on a graduate degree in theology.

Although Mrs. Escudero acknowledged there is a shortage of trained pastors in Cuba, most of the pastors serve more than one church. There are 105 Baptist churches and missions in Cuba with 65 pastors, she said. Total membership of the churches is about 7,000. Last year, the churches baptized 250 new believers, she said.

Although there is a shortage of trained pastors, Cuban Baptist churches have strong leadership in the music ministry which Mrs. Escudero directs.

The 105 churches and missions have 393 music directors, most of whom have some training. Most churches have several trained music directors. Every church also has a pianist, with a total of 192 pianists in the convention.

The churches have 60 adult choirs and 26 youth choirs, with a total of 2,206 people enrolled in music ministry programs in the churches, she said. Recently, more than 200 Cuban Baptists attended the music camp at the convention's encampment.

At the camp, she was able to train several Cubans to use a new electric organ recently purchased for the encampment. Only four Cuban Baptist churches have organs, but many of the church pianists are interested in learning to play the organ, she said.

Almost 27 years ago, Mrs. Escudero was able to learn basic organ techniques when she attended music week at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center as a teenage girl. Her parents had given her a trip to Ridgecrest as a present for her 13th birthday. It was her first trip to the United States.

She had dreamed of being able to return to Ridgecrest for music week this year, but her travel papers were not approved in time. She said that music week at Ridgecrest in 1958 had a tremendous impact on her life, preparing her in so many ways for her ministry later in life. She expressed deep appreciation for the concern of Southern Baptists and the relationship Baptists in Cuba enjoy through the Baptist World Alliance.

Mrs. Escudero said the visit of Home Mission Board Vice-President Gerald Palmer and Language Missions director Oscar Romo in 1984 has helped open doors for Baptists in Cuba and allowed her and other Baptist leaders to travel to the United States.

"We thank God for Southern Baptists," she said. "Please pray for us in Cuba. We need your help, and God's."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers, available to others on request from Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

VBS Project Enrolls 20,000;
2,418 Jamaicans Accept Christ

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
8/6/85

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—More than 470 Southern Baptist volunteers returned to the United States from Jamaica in late July after a week of Vacation Bible Schools, medical and dental clinics and construction projects.

Workers taught about 20,000 children in VBS and also led 2,418 people to first-time professions of faith in Christ through evangelistic rallies and personal witnessing.

Meanwhile, physicians and dentists with the project treated about 7,400 people, with the dentists removing 3,800 teeth during the week. Construction crews worked on dozens of church buildings and a school on the Caribbean island.

The annual project on the Caribbean island is one of the biggest volunteer efforts of its kind among Southern Baptists and the largest to date led by Foreign Mission Board staff members, according to James Cecil, associate director of volunteer enlistment, who headed the project.

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VBS enrollment showed a 20 percent increase over 1984, while professions of faith increased by 25 percent, he said. The number of volunteers also was up from 446 who took part in 1984. Volunteers came from churches in 17 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. They worked in 127 Jamaica Baptist churches, just under half of all Baptist churches on the island.

"It is a service of value at this particular time, because it is meeting a definite need of our people," said Cawley Bolt, assistant general secretary-treasurer for the Jamaica Baptist Union. Bolt, who heads education work, including VBS, for Jamaica Baptists, traveled across the island to watch many teams at work.

In past years, he explained, his union's original aim was to have Jamaica Baptist leaders learn from visiting volunteers how to conduct VBS and evangelism crusades, gradually taking over the work. But a sagging economy has hit Jamaica hard in recent years, leaving churches cramped for money and resources. Young people who normally would lead VBS work, for example, have been forced to seek work so they can continue in school. Thus, without Southern Baptist help, many Jamaican Baptist churches would not be able to have VBS this summer.

Economic depression also has made it hard for churches to get old buildings replaced or renovated. Dental and medical care has become too expensive for many Jamaicans. Thus, the visiting Southern Baptist medical/dental teams made significant contributions to church members and non-church members alike, he said.

The Jamaica project is an annual partnership effort between the Jamaica Baptist Union and Southern Baptists. It originated as a VBS project undertaken by churches of St. Johns River Baptist Association in Florida; the association asked the Foreign Mission Board to take over coordinating the project in 1981 after it had grown to include almost 300 volunteers.

While the Jamaica project was the first overseas effort for some volunteers, others have been on many such assignments. This was the 20th trip to Jamaica for Lorace Cothran, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Palatka, Fla., who helped direct the project in earlier years. This year he coordinated work in the north central part of the country.

Unlike last year, when a volunteer team was robbed and roughed up by armed robbers, there were no major problems or incidents this year.

Medical and dental teams worked in some 40 locations. Many physicians became frustrated that they could treat only a small percentage of people who lined up waiting to see them. At St. Ann's Bay, one dentist said he left more than 200 people standing in line to see him when he had to leave to return home.

"It just breaks your heart to see the need and realize that we can only scratch the surface with what we're doing here," said Joe B. Craig, a dentist from Charlotte, N.C. Craig is president of the North Carolina Baptist Medical-Dental Fellowship and coordinated the medical work, helping medical personnel get government certification for practice in Jamaica.

Both physicians and dentists were handicapped by setting up clinics in church buildings--dentists worked by flashlight in most places--but those questioned agreed they were able to help. Chuck Hoover, an internal medicine specialist from First Baptist Church, Monroe, N.C., said he treated a boy's badly infected arm by draining a wound and applying antibiotics. "We probably saved his arm," he said. Hoover worked with his wife, Fran, a registered nurse, at Old Harbor Bay Baptist Church southwest of Kingston.

Joe Pullen, a dentist from Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., said his main service was removing teeth usually decayed down to the gum line. Some patients he saw have had constant pain from bad teeth for years, he said. While he would have preferred saving some of the teeth, that would have meant seeing fewer people. Pullen hopes to return to Jamaica next year and bring other dentists and physicians with him. He worked in the Maldon area, a mountainous area south of Montego Bay.

Several volunteers said they were staggered by leading VBS classes with 40 to 100 children. Those who worked with children who normally attend a Baptist church said the children were well-trained in Bible. "These kids here will astonish you at how well they know their Bible," said Cindy Francisco, a member of First Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss., and a reading teacher at Whitten Junior High School.

One of the largest teams was the 50-member one from Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala. Twenty-seven women led Vacation Bible Schools in 10 churches while 23 men renovated a school building for Maldon Baptist Church. The Jamaican pastor, Heckford Sharpe, said the building will be used for a vocational training school to teach job skills to young people during the daytime. At night it will be a Bible training school for ministers.

The Whitesburg group reported tremendous response to their evening evangelistic services which included preaching, special music, puppets and dramatic skits. Sharpe estimated more than 700 people attended the closing service led by the group.

Volunteers funded the project, paying between \$400 and \$600 each for transportation to and from Jamaica, food and lodging. Also, teams provided varying amounts for VBS, medical and construction supplies. About 120 of the volunteers stayed in rented apartments and the rest in college dormitories or with Jamaican Baptists.

As soon as plans with Jamaica Baptist Union leaders can be completed, enlistment for next year's project will begin, said Cecil. Those interested in participating next year may contact him at the Foreign Mission Board, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, Va. 23230.

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

Retirees Setting Record
Building New Churches

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
8/6/85

DALLAS (BP)--A group of retired Texas Baptist volunteers are on the way to another church building record in 1985, according to group organizer Olen Miles of Austin.

The mission action volunteers, who range from 65 to 85 years of age, set a new record when they built 20 churches last year, but they're planning to exceed that before this year is over.

Because they give their skills and labor, they can build a church for up to half the normal cost of construction, said Miles.

About Aug. 1, the group will begin their 14th and 15th projects of 1985 at Bullard Southern Baptist Church in East Texas and San Gabriel Hispanic Mission of Crestview Baptist Church in Georgetown.

Earlier in July they erected sanctuaries and education space for Emmanuel Baptist Church, Colesneil, and Fairdale Baptist Church near Hemphill, both in the "Big Thicket" area of East Texas.

The retirees are sponsored by Texas Baptist Men, and the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions helps to purchase and maintain construction and trailer park equipment.

A project by the retirees is identified by a sign that reads, "This Building Being Built for the Glory and Honor of God by the Texas Baptist Men."

The volunteers, primarily couples, travel to a building site in travel trailers and live there until their work is finished. Since beginning their volunteer ministry with a building for Knobbs Springs Baptist Church in Central Texas in 1979, the retirees have built about 80 churches and related facilities.

Most of their efforts have been in Texas, but they have traveled as far as Minnesota and even Hawaii to help their fellow Baptists have facilities to share God's love.

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In the process, they have saved Baptist churches millions of dollars, said Bob Dixon, executive director of Texas Baptist Men. They also have made it possible for struggling congregations to have new facilities to reach their communities for Christ.

"Many of the churches would not have been able to build without the labor contributed by the retirees," said Dixon. "They are truly an inspiration to Texas Baptists to achieve a Mission Texas goal of 2,000 new churches in our state by 1990."

"All we ask is that a congregation have a need and be willing to provide us with one meal a day and permit us to hold a revival during the building project," said Miles, the retirees' 78-year-old leader.

Churches commonly report their members and even their communities have been spiritually revived by the time the retirees move on to another project.

The speed and skill with which the retirees work is a never-ending source of amazement for local people. Andrew Smith, 18, of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Colesmesneil, remarked while sweating alongside the retirees at the partially-completed building, "These people may be old, but they're about to kill me."

An innovation for the retirees came earlier this year when several college students from Baptist Student Unions helped them construct a building for Lakeside Baptist Church, Granbury. "The retirees loved the young people, and said some of them ought to be on every job," said Miles. The BSUers vowed to serve with the retirees again at the first opportunity.

R.E. Barclay, pastor of Fairdale Baptist Church south of Hemphill near Toledo Bend Lake, said the church had run out of space but wasn't able to build until the retirees came to help.

"They (the retirees) not only helped us in regard to serving our community better," said Barclay, "but we just have a different spirit in our church. One of the men from the community who helped with the project had not been in church. He said, 'I'm going to be the first down the aisle.'"

At Bullard, near Tyler, the retirees will help to complete a 300-seat auditorium for the new Bullard Southern Baptist Church.

Miles believes the numbers of church building volunteers will multiply as the Mission Texas thrust for 2,000 new churches gathers steam. "People are just waiting to be challenged to serve the Lord," he said, "and it's up to us to provide them with the opportunity."

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Midwestern Seminary Students

'Experience' West Indies Missions

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press

8/6/85

ST. LUCIA, West Indies (BP)—Wearing a dingy "Little Slugger" baseball cap, a St. Lucian toddler dozed in the arms of a Southern Baptist mission volunteer. The cap drooped over his eyelids, barely exposing his runny nose. Nearby, Theresa, his mother, cradled another child in her lap. With her free hand, she covered her face as she prayed.

"Why not tonight?" the islanders sang from their faded Baptist Hymnals. Their voices carried a slight French accent.

Across the aisle in the Laborie Baptist Chapel, Theresa's cousin, Jennifra, trembled as she brushed a mosquito from her daughter's ebony arm. Beside her, sisters Ermain and Leigh Donat glanced quickly at each other. Their brother, Columbain, nudged a friend named Roule.

These young adults live on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, located two islands north of Grenada. During the past year, Southern Baptist missionaries Jon and LaHoma Singleton introduced them to Jesus Christ.

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In the village of Laborie, the Roman Catholic Church towers above the one-room shacks housing island nationals. Discipleship is costly for Lucians who openly profess evangelical faith. Following Christ in believer's baptism may mean losing family, friends or income.

Like many St. Lucian women, Theresa lives with a man who is not her husband. He supports her and their house full of children. They cannot afford a traditional Lucian wedding.

Jennifra also lives in common-law marriage. Both women face a tough choice concerning baptism. "Because of the influence of previous evangelicals on the island, they think they can't be baptized until they are legally married," explained missionary LaHoma Singleton. "If they leave the man, they lose their means of support. In most cases, the man probably wouldn't want to marry them anyway. Marriage costs too much in St. Lucia."

Young singles, the Donats live with their mother. The village priest has visited her, asking questions about her children's spiritual decisions. Their mother is a devout Catholic. If they receive believer's baptism, she might kick them out of the house.

That night at the Laboire Baptist Chapel, six students from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo., watched the struggle on the faces of these Lucian Christians. What they saw made a lasting impression.

The students participated in a summer mission internship sponsored by the seminary and the Foreign Mission Board. Each summer the seminary offers the two-week course, designed to give students a first-hand view of foreign missions. Past teams have traveled to St. Lucia, Dominica and Belize.

This summer's team included Richard Glass, Griffin, Ga.; Dot and Bob Needham, Cape Coral, Fla.; Angela Ray, Ada, Okla.; Mary Speidel, Cape Girardeau, Mo., and Donna VotEAU, St. Louis.

Maynard Campbell, associate professor of preaching at Midwestern, was faculty sponsor for the trip.

Team members lived and ministered with the Singletons, the only career missionaries on the island.

Two years ago the FMB transferred the couple to St. Lucia from the Caribbean island of Dominica. Since they arrived, the Singletons have opened the Hewanorra Baptist Centre in Vieux Fort, the island's southernmost community. There they offer counseling and classes such as nutrition and literacy. The facility also includes a reading room and a listening center.

Since last summer, journeyman Tom and Paula Stocks have operated most of the center's programs. Their ministry has freed the Singletons to begin planting churches in Vieux Fort and in nearby Laborie and Saltibus.

Working closely with the Singletons, Campbell and student mission interns led crusades in the villages of Saltibus and Laborie. They also presented worship leadership, church growth and drug/alcohol abuse seminars. Because teenage pregnancy is a problem on the island, one female team member led a sex education seminar for teenage girls. Students also canvassed in all three communities.

Some team members discovered communication barriers with the nationals. Although English is St. Lucia's official language, islanders often speak "patois," a creole combining English, French and African. The language is unwritten, so missionaries must pick it up from the nationals.

For a few students, the trip was a first time to travel outside the United States. "I was surprised by the third world conditions, especially the lack of money," related Ray, a second year religious education student. "Life is so simplistic there. The people don't get weighed down by material things."

Students also gained some valuable insights into missions by interacting with the Singleton family. "One thing that impressed me on this trip was our missionaries--seeing the burden they have for their work, how well they have adjusted to the culture, the way they relate to the people, the way the people respect them," commented Glass, a second year divinity student. "I was impressed by the way they were willing to work with us and by their openness in sharing about their ministry and the struggles they have had."

Voteau, a former journeyman to Liberia, said she appreciated the Singleton's approach to cross-country ministry. "They had a gift of relating to the people. They did missions the way it is intended to be done, by turning the work over to the nationals," she noted.

Mission interns found one of the toughest adjustments to the field was learning how to work as a team, in spite of differing theologies and ministry styles. "The variety of personalities and backgrounds of team members emphasized that interpersonal relationships are very important on the mission field," pointed out Bob Needham, who, with his wife, was a special project missionary in Ghana.

One seminarian changed vocational directions because of the internship. "I have finally admitted what God has been leading me to do," related Glass, who had planned to be a seminary professor before the trip. "I was able to learn first-hand what a field evangelist does...I had to be honest with myself and say, 'This is what the Lord has called me to do.'"

All six team members brought back a renewed commitment to missions. "I have grown up hearing about missions but now I have experienced missions," said Ray. "I saw that the Cooperative Program does make a difference."

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Associate Director Named For
FMB Missionary Learning Center

Baptist Press
8/6/85

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Georgia Hill, Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil, has been named associate director of missionary learning for the Foreign Mission Board, effective Aug. 6.

In her new position at the Cauthen Missionary Learning Center outside Richmond, Va., Hill will help with department planning and with managing orientation of new career missionaries.

In Brazil, Hill directed the religious education department at Baptist Theological Seminary of Parana, Curitiba, since 1980. From 1973 to 1975 she was a journeyman in Brazil.

The Ivanhoe, Calif., native received the bachelor of arts degree from California Baptist College, Riverside, and the master of religious education degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

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

Memorial On India Campus
Will Honor Carey, Others

By Dwight Baker

Baptist Press
8/6/85

SERAMPORE, India (BP)--Ground was broken in July for a memorial to honor missions pioneer William Carey and two other Baptists who started a college to educate Christian evangelists in India.

In 1818 Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, known as the Serampore Trio, began Serampore College with a goal of providing Christian evangelists with as thorough an education as Muslim and Hindu scholars received in the country. The school now offers courses in theology, arts, commerce and science.

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From its beginning, Serampore College has been popular with Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Students have been admitted without regard to caste, religion or color. The college also has been a pioneer in educating women. Today 55 percent of its students are women.

Previously the only commemoration of the college founders was a small museum with preserved books.

Former Southern Baptist Convention president Owen Cooper of Yazoo City, Miss., has been leading efforts to raise money for the campus memorial. Cooper and others hope the memorial will stimulate interest in preserving the founders' nearby grave sites. All have suffered from neglect and are in poor condition. Recently Baptists have begun to rebuild the wall which surrounds the cemetery where the graves are located, devise adequate drainage and hire a reliable watchman to prevent further vandalism.

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(Dwight Baker is a missionary in India.)

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