



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

## NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #751  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2351  
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, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201-3355, Telephone (214) 720-0550  
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

September 6, 1985

85-108

## Baptist Men Respond To Hurricane Elena

BILOXI, Miss. (BP)—Baptist disaster response teams from Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida responded quickly after Hurricane Elena hit the Mississippi coastal area Labor Day.

The hurricane, packing 125-mile-an-hour winds, spent the weekend playing cat-and-mouse before it made landfall near Biloxi Sept. 2. During the long waiting period, Elena caused evacuations as far south as St. Petersburg, Fla., as residents all along the Gulf Coast prepared for the worst.

Elena caused damage in excess of \$1 billion, including more than \$2 million to Baptist churches and other institutions. Because of well publicized requests for evacuation, loss of life was minimized, officials said.

The most seriously damaged Baptist institution was William Carey College's campus in Gulfport, which received an estimated \$1.5 million in damage. Elena flattened two of the four dormitories under construction, and damaged a third.

The hurricane made landfall less than a mile from the beachfront campus, part of the Mississippi Baptist Convention owned college. The school's main campus is in Hattiesburg.

A 75-foot section of the administration building roof was torn off, causing water damage to offices and an art gallery. The student center also lost part of its roof, causing damage to the bookstore. The school's 200-foot fishing pier was destroyed.

Classes were scheduled to begin Sept. 3, but were cancelled until Sept. 9. The construction project was expected to be completed by January, but college officials now anticipate a late spring or early summer completion.

W.J. Ward, vice-president for business affairs, said insurance is expected to cover the school's losses.

The Jackson County Baptist Association in Biloxi lost its office building. Three seaman's centers--housed in double-wide mobile homes--were destroyed, and the Gulf Shore Baptist Assembly in Pass Christian lost the roof of the auditorium.

Many churches along the coast were damaged, and some were destroyed.

The back wall of a recently constructed educational building at Griffin Street Baptist Church in Moss Point was blown down. Pastor Athens McNeil told the Mississippi Baptist Record: "We are open to the public. Literally."

First Baptist Church, Gauthier, which was heavily damaged by Hurricane Frederick in 1979, lost the roofs to both the sanctuary and the gymnasium.

Prior to Elena's landfall, Baptist churches from St. Petersburg to Biloxi served as emergency shelter locations for evacuees.

In Florida, churches in 14 associations along the Gulf of Mexico housed persons displaced by the storm. Other evacuees found shelter at two Florida Baptist Convention owned assemblies, Lake Yale in central Florida and Blue Springs in the Panhandle area.

--more--

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

Charles Morris, pastor of First Baptist Church in Crawfordsville, near Tallahassee, opened the church doors to more than 60 persons. "When they see church people opening the doors, handing out blankets, pillows, bedrolls, food and all that, it has to make an impression. I feel like it impacted them (the evacuees) for good," he said.

At St. Petersburg, First Baptist pastor James Graves and other staffers heard radio reports that the church had been designated as an emergency shelter, although the broadcast was the first notification they had of the fact.

Graves and other staffers opened the church, providing what they could until more definite arrangements could be made. They made do by serving chicken noodle soup and crackers for breakfast Saturday (Aug. 31) when Elena hovered off the Florida coast.

In all, more than 600 persons--residents of nursing homes, families from low-lying areas and street people--were fed and housed in the church gymnasium.

In the aftermath of landfall, disaster relief units from Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana moved in and began serving meals to residents and other relief workers. The Mississippi unit set up on the parking lot at First Baptist Church, Pascagoula; the Alabama unit at First Baptist Church, Biloxi, and the Louisiana unit at First Baptist Church, Gulfport.

The Tennessee Baptist Convention relief unit went to Montgomery, Ala., Labor Day, where it remained on standby. However, the unit returned to Tennessee after relief coordinators decided it was not needed in the immediate aftermath.

Cameron Byler, director of Baptist Men at the Southern Baptist Convention Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn., coordinated the cooperative effort by Baptist Men's units throughout the southeastern United States during the long weekend before Elena made landfall and in its immediate aftermath.

Following the landfall, Byler toured the hardest hit areas to coordinate further efforts.

By week's end, the operating units had served thousands of meals to residents who were still without electricity and water, and who were dazed by the fury of the storm and its damage. The units also served refreshments to relief workers on hand to assist in the cleanup.

In Pascagoula, Dennis Johnsey, pastor of First Baptist Church, said the presence of the van shows the community First Baptist "is a caring church." He added one result of Elena is "some ungodly people have become godly," and predicted revival in the church.

According to spokesmen for the Mississippi convention, additional help will be needed in the days and weeks to come, as people, businesses and institutions dig out and attempt to rebuild. "Many of the people are dazed and will need 'advocates' to work with federal agencies and insurance companies," said one observer.

Continuing relief efforts are being coordinated by Paul Harrell, director of the Mississippi Baptist Men, in Jackson.

--30--

(Providing information for this report were Tim Nicholas, associate editor, The Baptist Record; Dick Jensen, director of marketing, SBC Brotherhood Commission; Larry Brumley, public relations director, William Carey College; Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr., public relations director, Louisiana Baptist Convention; Robert Duck, public relations director, Alabama Baptist Convention and Don Hepburn, public relations director, Florida Baptist Convention.)

Former Pastor Charged  
With \$60,000 Theft

Baptist Press  
9/6/85

MACON, Ga. (BP)--The former pastor of one of the largest Southern Baptist churches in Macon, Ga., was indicted by a Bibb County Grand Jury Sept. 5 on charges he stole almost \$60,000 from his congregation.

C. Michael Blizzard was indicted on 44 counts of "theft by taking" and two counts of "theft by conversion." He was pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church for four years until last January, when he resigned "for personal reasons."

After his arrest, Blizzard was released on \$60,000 bond.

He is not pastor of "any church that we have heard of" at this time, according to a spokesman at the Georgia Baptist Convention, but apparently still resides in Macon.

Sharon Ratley, Bibb County assistant district attorney, said no one person had filed charges against the 37-year-old pastor but that "reports from church members" lead to an investigation by the district attorney's office and an indictment by the state.

She added the trial probably will be in November.

Among the accusations against Blizzard is that he converted to his own use \$522 donated by a church member to buy "Christmas turkeys to help feed the hungry" the indictment says.

Blizzard has an unlisted telephone and could not be reached for comment, but his attorney, Luther Strickland of Macon, told the Atlanta Constitution his client has not committed a crime and "welcomes his day in court."

Wayne Crowley, attorney for Tabernacle Baptist Church, said, "this action is not an official action of the church, the church is remaining neutral in this case," but added several individuals had taken what they felt was incriminating evidence to the district attorney's office.

--30--

Tennessean Thomas Elected  
New BJCPA General Counsel

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press  
9/6/85

WASHINGTON (BP)—Oliver S. (Buzz) Thomas, a partner in the firm Thomas and Thomas of Maryville, Tenn., has been unanimously elected general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The Tennessee native will assume his duties October 1.

Thomas, 30, is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Tennessee and an honors graduate of the University of Tennessee College of Law and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

At New Orleans, he was named the 1980-81 Broadman Seminarian, an award presented annually to the most outstanding student. He finished first in his New Orleans master of divinity class and third in his law school class.

While in law school Thomas was a clerk for the Tennessee Court of Appeals, where he wrote more than 30 judicial opinions. He also did research and legal writing for U.S. District Judge James H. Jarvis, of the Eastern District of Tennessee, Knoxville.

For the past two years Thomas has practiced with his brother in the family law firm in Maryville, outside Knoxville, where some 20 percent of his caseload has involved free service to indigent criminal defendants, juveniles and other low income clients referred from the Knox County Legal Aid Society. The remainder of his practice has ranged from constitutional law to divorce and child custody cases.

Active as a supply preacher and teacher in Baptist churches, Thomas and his wife, Lisa, have been leaders in the Knoxville chapter of Bread for the World, a Christian citizens' hunger lobby. He also helped form the Blount Youth Emergency Shelter for juvenile delinquents and status offenders, and is a director of the Blount County Dismas House for former prisoners.

During seminary days, Thomas was an associate minister at Coliseum Place Baptist Church, a biracial congregation in inner-city New Orleans. He has said it was there "that I first felt the urgency to translate the gospel into meaningful and concrete social policy." He was also summer youth minister at First Baptist Church, Maryville, in 1978.

--more--

Thomas succeeds the late John W. Baker, who worked at the Baptist Joint Committee from 1969 until his death last January.

Members of the search committee recommending Thomas were BJC chairperson Wes Forsline, pastor of the American Baptist-affiliated Calvary Baptist Church, Minneapolis; first vice-chairperson Lloyd Elder, president of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; second vice-chairperson Violet Ankrum, past president of the Women's Auxiliary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.; secretary Donald E. Anderson, editor of The Standard, monthly publication of the Baptist General Conference, and BJC Executive Director James M. Dunn.

After the search panel recommended Thomas' election, the full 43-member Baptist Joint Committee was polled by mail and telephone.

---30---

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

Crowders Claim Rights  
Violated At Convention

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press  
9/6/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Crowder of Birmingham, Ala., have notified the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee they intend to file a lawsuit if the Executive Committee does not correct what they claim are "violations of the bylaws" of the SBC.

Emmet J. Bondurant of the Atlanta lawfirm of Bondurant, Stephenson & Smith, sent a letter Sept. 5 to James P. Guenther, attorney for the SBC, saying the lawfirm has been "retained to represent... (the Crowders) in seeking to correct violations of the bylaws of the Southern Baptist Convention which occurred on June 12 and 13, 1985."

Bondurant says the Crowders were messengers from Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, and adds: "It is their position that Dr. Charles F. Stanley (convention president) violated the provisions of the bylaws of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the rights of Mr. and Mrs. Crowder as registered messengers to the Dallas convention, by ruling out-of-order a motion from the floor of the Convention to amend the report of the Committee on Committees, and by refusing to allow the motion to be voted upon by the convention delegates, including Mr. and Mrs. Crowder, who were at the convention."

According to Bondurant, the action stems from the presentation of the 1985 Committee on Committees, nominating the 1986 Committee on Boards. The Committee on Boards nominates trustees to govern the national agencies of the SBC.

The letter claims Stanley did not allow amendments to the committee report, "ignored the vote of the convention...refused to entertain points of order...or to allow an appeal of his ruling."

Bondurant says Stanley's action "in refusing to allow... (the) motion to amend the report of the Committee on Committees was a clear violation of Sections 11, 16, 32 and 35 of the bylaws...."

In his letter, Bondurant says the Crowders believe "that these violations...should be remedied quietly and voluntarily by the officers and the Executive Committee."

Bondurant asks a meeting be held prior to the Sept. 16-18 meeting of the Executive Committee in Nashville. Participants would include Bondurant, the Crowders, Harold C. Bennett, president of the SBC Executive Committee, Guenther, and "the present officers."

The Atlanta attorney wrote Guenther: "It is our hope that you, Dr. Bennett and the officers can be persuaded to recommend that the Executive Committee take prompt and effective action at its meeting...to remedy the violations...and to assure that similar violations of the bylaws are not repeated in the future."

---more---

Bondurant adds he believes the Executive Committee "has the authority to set aside the illegal election of members of the Committee on Boards at the Dallas convention and to elect new members of the Committee on Boards, and to propose any necessary amendments to the bylaws to assure that the chair does not ride roughshod over the rights of the convention and the messengers at any future conventions."

He cited Section 20 of the bylaws, which authorizes the Executive Committee "to act for the convention ad interim in all matters not otherwise provided for."

Executive Committee President Bennett told Baptist Press he has taken a poll of the officers of the committee, and with their authorization, will "decline the invitation to meet with the officers, but instead will schedule a presentation by the Bondurant and the Crowders the Monday night session of the Executive Committee."

"They will have the opportunity to present their views for discussion," he said.

Bennett added plans "are being considered to open discussion to all who are present, observers as well as Executive Committee members" following Bondurant's presentation.

After the discussion, Bennett said, the Executive Committee will be adjourned, and a separate meeting between the Executive Committee and Guenther will be conducted. The meeting will be a "client-attorney conference" and will be closed to all but members and staff.

Guenther told Baptist Press he opposes closed meetings in Baptist life, but feels "in this case it is my duty to assess the situation in an attorney-client setting."

At the conclusion of his letter, Bondurant says if the Executive Committee officers should be unwilling to meet, or if the Executive Committee "should be unwilling to take steps to correct the violations...then Mr. and Mrs. Crowder will have exhausted every available avenue of redress within the Southern Baptist Convention and will have no alternative but to seek the aid of the courts to enforce their rights and those of other messengers...."

The letter says the Crowders could sue in a Georgia state court since the SBC is a nonprofit Georgia corporation and Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, is a resident of Georgia. He adds the suit also could be filed in federal district court.

Bondurant also writes: "An action...for a declaratory judgment and an injunction to enforce the bylaws of the Southern Baptist Convention does not involve church ritual or doctrine...but is in the nature of an action to prevent the illegal exercise by the Committee on Boards of power over the property of the convention."



**BAPTIST PRESS**

901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

LYNN MAY                      HO  
HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
901 COMMERCE  
NASHVILLE, TN 37203

NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION