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October 28, 1985

85-133

Mexico Earthquakes Spawn
Church-Starting Project

By Judy Garrett

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Amid the rubble of two major earthquakes, Mexico City Baptists have launched a project challenging every Baptist church in the city to organize a new church during the next year.

The "September 19th Project"--named for the date of the first of two earthquakes which struck Mexico City--emerged as Baptists recognized the many new opportunities for ministry beyond immediate earthquake relief work.

"We don't know if we'll start 40 churches or 60 churches, and we don't know if we'll see a bunch of them organized in the very month of the anniversary of the earthquake, or whether some will organize in nine months and others in a year and a half," said Southern Baptist representative Craig Johnson, urban missions director for the National Baptist Convention of Mexico. "We're not going to impose on them some kind of artificial deadline."

But Johnson said he hopes Mexico City's 55 Baptist churches will see the project not just as something to start, "but as something to finish as well. We have faith that God is going to start the churches. We hope the number will be at least 50. He may be planning on many more."

Johnson, of Forest Park, Ga., designed the project proposal with Raul Castellanos, a Mexican Baptist layman and treasurer of the Baptist convention. The convention's executive committee quickly approved the plan. It fits in with Mexican Baptists' national goal of growing to 2,000 churches by the year 2000. There were 556 churches at the end of 1984.

Mexican Baptists already were aiming to start 100 churches nationwide by the end of 1986. In light of the many needs and opportunities created by the earthquakes, the even more ambitious goal of 50 new churches in Mexico City alone is seen as realistic.

Mexico City pastors met for a project kick-off breakfast Oct. 12, the morning after Southern Baptist representative James Philpot was shot and killed following a traffic accident. Johnson considered canceling the breakfast after hearing of the shooting, but several Mexican pastors urged him to go ahead with the meeting.

According to Johnson, the whole tone of the meeting was conditioned by Philpot's death. Many arrived for breakfast not knowing of the tragedy, but as they became aware of it, "God took hold of the meeting and gave a real spirit of solidarity," he said. "Everyone sensed that God had placed them in a very special hour in history, and that one of God's special servants had given his life for the Christian cause in Mexico."

Responding to challenges from several Mexican Baptist leaders, 40 pastors publicly committed themselves and their churches to the project. Johnson believes many pastors unable to attend will make commitments later.

Some churches already have begun working to meet their goals. Members of Zion Baptist Church joined Johnson and a group of Southern Baptist volunteers from Texas for four hours of home visiting. They led 20 people to faith in Christ and started three home Bible studies.

Jesus Leon, a Baptist layman and Christian bookstore owner, has committed himself to closing his store for half a day on Saturdays so it can be used as a preaching center. Several churches have set goals to begin more than one church during the coming year.

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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In other earthquake-related developments, Southern Baptist representative Eldon Sturgeon completed a survey of deaths and damage suffered by Mexico City Baptists. Three Baptists are now known dead: 22-year-old Noemi Avila Betancur, a nurse earlier reported missing and presumed dead in the ruins of a hospital; Angel Alfaro, a 17-year-old student, and Jose Luna Marin, a sailor whose age was unknown. Still missing and presumed dead is a Baptist doctor from Guadalajara who was staying at the Regis Hotel in downtown Mexico City Sept. 19 when it collapsed.

Four Baptist families lost their homes. Four Baptists saw their businesses destroyed or severely damaged. Five others lost their jobs.

Nazareth Baptist Church was extensively damaged, as was a house used for worship by a mission of Christ the Light of the World Baptist Church. At least seven other Baptist churches sustained minor damages.

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(Garrett is press representative for Southern Baptist representatives in Mexico.)

Midwestern Trustees
Affirm Peace Effort

Baptist Press
10/28/85

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, during their semi-annual meeting in October, adopted a statement affirming the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee, voted to complete a trustee scholarship endowment and heard committee reports.

Trustees affirmed the role and purpose of the SBC Peace Committee, formed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1985. "We expressed our appreciation for the deliberate and prayerful way in which the committee...has begun its work and focused its energies," the statement read. "We pledge to the committee our prayer support, our personal encouragement and our official cooperation."

Trustees also voted to complete the endowment of a \$500 trustee scholarship awarded annually to a qualified Midwestern student. Trustees began the scholarship in April 1982.

Reports included information on a record fall enrollment of 613 students and an update on the campus master plan, a 10-year campus development program approved by trustees in 1983.

In other action, the board:

- adopted a \$3,168,920 budget and reviewed a five-year projected budget.
- adopted a resolution of appreciation for William B. Coble, professor of New Testament and Greek. Coble, who came to Midwestern in 1960, will retire from full-time teaching Dec. 31, 1985.
- named William H. Morton professor emeritus of biblical archaeology, effective Aug. 1, 1985. Morton joined the faculty in 1958.
- named George D. Thomason professor emeritus of New Testament and Greek, effective Aug. 1, 1985. Thomason came to Midwestern in 1959.
- accepted a recommendation from the development committee urging 100 percent participation by trustees in the seminary's Annual Fund. Money raised for the Annual Fund is used to supplement Midwestern's regular operating budget. Kermit McGregor, trustee chairman, thanked Midwestern alumni for their "extraordinary achievement in supporting the Annual Fund."

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Brotherhood Commission
Elects New Officers

By Jack Childs

Baptist Press
10/28/85

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--In a combined meeting with state Brotherhood leaders in Memphis, Tenn., Oct. 23-25, trustees of the Southern Baptist Convention Brotherhood Commission elected new officers, voted to spend \$24,881 to improve the agency's shipping and mailing facilities, approved changes in Brotherhood materials effective in 1987 and heard reports on a wide range of Brotherhood activities.

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Norris Stampley, a retired executive with the Mississippi Power and Light Company in Jackson, Miss., was elected chairman of the Memphis-based agency. Leslie Albro, an automotive dealership owner from Jeffersonville, Ind., was voted vice-chairman, and Bill Summerlin, a Gaston, Ala., hospital administrator, was elected secretary. Commission President James H. Smith was reelected treasurer.

In related sessions involving only state Brotherhood leadership, Cliff Satterwhite, associate director in the South Carolina Brotherhood department, was chosen co-convenor.

The Brotherhood Commission will revamp its 6,000 square foot shipping and storage facility and add shrink wrapping equipment which will automate the magazine mailing process.

Changes in the commission's monthly magazines for Royal Ambassadors were approved effective with October 1987 issues which will enable the agency to more finely focus the age level content.

The financial report revealed receipts exceeded disbursements by \$200,000 during the commission's fiscal year which closed Sept. 30, 1985.

Trustees approved a preliminary budget of \$3,136,500 for 1986-87.

They also heard commission President Smith remind them the Brotherhood Commission is a service agency to all Southern Baptist churches and that he is convinced it can better serve all churches if he leads in a non-controversial manner.

"I have pledged my personal support and that of the staff of this agency to cooperate fully with Southern Baptists' Peace Committee and to work with the committee any way we can," he said.

Smith described how God "is spectacularly opening opportunities for us to witness in the world. Through the tragedy of suffering such as the hunger problems of Africa, the disastrous earthquake in Mexico City and the hurricane-riddled coasts of our country, we have been given opportunity to minister and witness. Baptist laypeople are responding in a marvelous way."

In other action, Russell Griffin, director of the commission's children and youth department, reported on plans for the seventh National Pioneer Royal Ambassador Congress to be held in Memphis, Tenn., Aug. 4-7, 1986.

Reports also were given concerning a Brotherhood Enlargement Campaign, the Emerging Laity, Disaster Relief and National Prayer Plan, World Mission Conferences and the Fellowship of Baptist Men.

Following business sessions, Brotherhood Commission trustees, staff, state Brotherhood leaders and their spouses participated in a lay renewal weekend.

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(BP) photo to be mailed by Brotherhood Commission.

Despite Snowstorms,
Nevada Baptists Meet

By Mike McCullough

Baptist Press
10/28/85

WINNEMUCCA, Nev. (BP)—During its seventh annual meeting the Nevada Baptist Convention adopted a \$1,132,000 budget and elected Jim McLeroy, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Las Vegas, as president of the convention.

The convention was held in Winnemucca, Nev., and despite snowstorms, 137 messengers and almost 100 visitors attended the meeting. Many of the messengers had to drive through heavy snowfall--particularly in the mountain passes--enroute to the meeting.

The \$1.1 million 1986 budget reflects an anticipated Cooperative Program income of \$325,000, down from \$390,000 projected in the 1985 budget. Currently, the convention is running 15 to 18 percent behind in anticipated revenues, and the trimmed back estimates are in keeping with current revenues. The \$325,000 will come from the 70 churches and 70 missions affiliated with the NBC; the remainder will come from the SBC Home Mission Board and Baptist Sunday School Board.

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The convention voted to increase world missions giving from 21 to 22 percent—to \$71,500.

McLeroy was elected president on the second ballot from an original slate of five candidates. McLeroy is not the first of his family to serve as president of the convention. In 1980, his wife, Beverly, was elected first vice-president of the convention. During that year the elected president accepted employment at the state convention and Mrs. McLeroy became president. In 1981 she was elected president, the first woman to serve as president of a state convention solely aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention.

McLeroy succeeds Reno businessman Jerry Johnston who served the maximum two terms.

In other business the convention adopted the first stage of a new strategic long-range plan for 1985-1990. The document is scheduled to be completed by the 1986 annual meeting.

The eighth annual meeting of the Nevada Baptist Convention is scheduled for Oct. 21-22, 1986 at Sunrise Baptist Church, Las Vegas.

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Southern Baptists Start
874 New Sunday Schools

Baptist Press
10/28/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptists started 874 new Sunday schools during the 1984-85 church year for a total of 9,326 new Sunday schools reported since an emphasis on new starts began in 1977.

Texas reported 311 Sunday schools while Florida had the second highest total with 72.

Four conventions met their goals for new Sunday school starts for the year. Ohio had a goal of 30 and started 35 new Sunday schools. New England met its goal of 25 new Sunday schools. Kansas/Nebraska topped its goal of 10 with 17 new Sunday schools while Alaska started 12 new Sunday schools with a goal of eight.

There were 1,151 new Sunday schools started during the 1983-84 church year. Sunday school starts have topped the goal of 1,000 per year for the seven years prior to 1984-85. The highest total was in 1978-79 when Southern Baptists started 1,273 new Sunday schools.

Bold Mission Thrust goals for 1985-90 call for starting 8,000 new Sunday schools, including 2,000 ethnic Sunday schools, said Jerri Herring, growth consultant at the Sunday School Board.

The goal for 1985-86 is 1,200 new Sunday schools. State conventions also are setting goals for the year and for the next five years. Alabama has reported a plan to start 733 new Sunday schools in the next five years, Herring said.

The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board will provide funds for contract workers in new Sunday school work. "We would like to have at least two Sunday school contract workers in each state," Herring said.

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Jerusalem Baptists Initiate
Letter Campaign, Court Appeal

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
10/28/85

JERUSALEM (BP)—The Narkis Street Baptist Church intends to present its case for rebuilding to both Israel's prime minister and High Court.

The Jerusalem congregation—a victim of arsonists three years ago—is sticking by its rebuilding plans, despite an adverse ruling by an Israeli district planning commission.

"We all feel this is a moral issue that we've got to stand on," said Robert Lindsey, pastor of the congregation of 300 and a longtime Southern Baptist representative in Israel.

Church leaders have launched a letter-writing campaign to urge Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to intervene in their behalf. They are asking Southern Baptist pastors and church members to participate in the effort.

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Church leaders also have approved the preparation of an appeal to the High Court, Israel's highest judicial body.

The church is mailing a notice of its letter-writing campaign to more than 1,000 individuals and groups in various countries who have contributed to a rebuilding fund. So far, more than \$500,000 has been contributed.

"Just a simple letter" to Peres in Jerusalem is sufficient, Lindsey said.

Explaining the inherent moral issue, the pastor said, "First, our chapel was burned down by what we call religious terrorists, fanatics. Everybody is against terrorists today and that's exactly what they are." No arrests were made after the Oct. 7, 1982, fire that gutted the 60-seat chapel.

"And secondly, political-religious pressure has kept us from being able to rebuild according to our needs," Lindsey said.

In essence, "... we are suffering a limitation on our religious freedom. The same kind of thing could happen to some other Christian church (in Israel)."

Lindsey also pointed out, "A kind of subtle permission is being granted to those who would violently attack Christian institutions by the refusal of the authorities to speedily grant permits to rebuild and enlarge."

Letters to Peres may prompt concern that the commission's failure to protect religious liberty is "making a bad name for Israel," Lindsey said.

The congregation worked with the Jerusalem municipality for two years for approval of its rebuilding plans. Since November 1984, the delay has been with an Israeli agency, the Jerusalem district planning commission. Meanwhile, worship services have been in a tent-like structure next to where the chapel was built in 1933.

In October, the commission turned down plans for a new facility encompassing a 400-seat auditorium, several Sunday school rooms and office space. Instead, it offered to let the congregation build to about half that size. New plans would need to be developed and the entire review process repeated.

Lindsey believes "it's almost certain" that pressure from Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups prompted six of the commission's nine members to vote against the church's plans.

The commission is part of the interior ministry, which is headed by a member of Shas, one of several ultra-Orthodox political parties in Israel. Shas members hold only three of the Israeli Knesset's 120 seats, "but they have much more power politically because (larger) rival parties woo them to join in a coalition," Lindsey said. The interior ministry also controls visas and other travel-related matters.

Another ultra-Orthodox group, Y'ad L'achim, organized a protest in front of the Baptist church in January, promoting it with posters throughout Jerusalem. About 100 people participated.

Lindsey believes the letter-writing campaign can be an encouragement to many Israelis to take a stand for religious liberty.

Orthodox Jews number about 20 percent of all Israelis. Secular Jews, who comprise 80 percent of the population, generally have more of a "live-and-let-live" view toward Christians, Lindsey said.

Many of the Orthodox are zealous for their faith, having weathered various sorts of persecution in Europe. Many regard belief in Christ as contrary to Judaism. "We think of Jewish believers as still Jewish," Lindsey said. "Legally they stay Jewish if they become believers."

Even though the church is in a Jewish neighborhood, the pastor said, "We never had any dissension until some group began to incite some of our Orthodox neighbors."

(BP)

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NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION