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Human Touch Eases Famine
Of Love In Ethiopia

By Robert O'Brien

RABEL, Ethiopia (BP)—Even brief contact with people on the edge of death numbs the mind at first.

Then it brings tears as you see mothers with starving babies and frail old people reach out with trembling hands to accept the first food they've had in days—or even weeks.

The sight of sick, ragged, starving people overwhelms a newly arrived visitor to the hunger area of Ethiopia. It's probably harder on people who see it daily.

Mary Saunders, 61, and Sally Jones, 25, face that sight daily in the isolated 10,000-foot highlands around Rabel, Ethiopia. Saunders earlier spent more than 20 years in Africa as a Southern Baptist missionary nurse. Jones grew up in Kenya as the daughter of a missionary nurse. Yet neither has seen anything to match the Ethiopian scene.

"I've lived in villages and seen pockets of hunger, but not the vastness of the needs here," Saunders said. "What I do here feels like a drop in the bucket. But I remember the Swahili proverb: 'Drop by drop the bucket fills.' So I keep on with my little drop."

The two volunteer nurses and others who operate the Southern Baptist feeding station and health care center in Rabel say they cry a lot and pray a lot as their "little drops" save lives.

Between the tears and prayers, they've provided food and medicine to ease the famine of food, and the touch of love to solve a different kind of famine—a famine of love. That famine, which grows out of Ethiopians' desperation and pain, equals or exceeds their famine of food.

Ethiopian children and adults hunger for more than food. They hunger for the human touch. "Everytime we appear, they want us to touch them. I've never been anywhere people want to be touched like here," Saunders said.

Workers in Rabel sometimes have to turn away from the scene to regain their composure. But as Saunders and Jones struggle to save dying babies, wash eyes crusted shut by disease and dirt and examine frail bodies, they don't want to turn away.

"Today I wept with a father who came to tell me his son died last night," Saunders said. "It was all I could do for him. Tears come more and more these days, but there's joy in my heart because I've had the privilege of weeping with people who have such overwhelming needs."

"The nurses have shown the absolute love of God," marveled an Ethiopian relief worker. "It's worked miracles in the lives of our people, even though the nurses can't speak our language without an interpreter."

It doesn't take long for a visitor to sense the presence of God's love in Rabel. It's so real, without a word being said, that you feel you can reach out and take it in your hand. The touch which transmits that love causes wilted lives to blossom before your eyes.

Eleven-year-old Arage arrived in Rabel so skinny you could see his heart beating through his chest. Now he's a healthy, happy child with more love to give than he received.

Moses, 22 months old, had withered to the point of death. The nurses fought to save his life with love, medicine and intravenous feeding through his nostrils, while a Foreign Mission Board porting team watched with growing emotion.

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The team left Rabel not knowing whether Moses would live. Within a couple of weeks, Saunders wrote to say she had removed the intravenous tubes and Moses had begun to eat. Then one day he rewarded her with a smile.

"I sat down with his mother and watched him, and we rejoiced together in a language all our own," Saunders said.

Experience has shown that some of these people will survive because of the extra dimension of love when food and medicine alone wouldn't have worked. Ethiopians who have felt it flock to the nurses and others, eager to touch their hands, look into their eyes, feel their embrace and learn why they love like they do.

"We continue to ask the Father to use our eyes, our touch and our voices to make him real," Saunders said. "I really believe we're laying some foundation stones for the day when the story—the wonderful story of God's love—can be proclaimed boldly and openly here."

That kind of love is changing lives in Ethiopia. After you've seen it work in that painful place, you'll never be the same again and will accept no substitute for it.

Missionaries to the world's painful places gain a new perspective on life's priorities. It hurts them to see Southern Baptists in America, who sent them and support them, embroiled in something other than God's love.

It makes them feel that the famine of love has no geographical boundaries. They wonder if controversy-plagued Southern Baptists need as many tears and prayers in their painful place as starving Ethiopians do in theirs.

"I wonder if some of our Southern Baptist leaders who're fighting with each other about God's Word could come out here with me and hold a dying baby in their arms and then go back home and fight some more?" asked a missionary to Ethiopia.

That's a question to ponder while we decide whether Southern Baptists also suffer from a famine of love.

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

Evangelist Says Sandinistas
Confiscated Food, Clothing

By Larry Chesser

Baptist Press
4/23/85

WASHINGTON (BP)—A Southern Baptist evangelist has charged that Nicaraguan authorities have gone back on their agreement to permit him to distribute food and clothing and to conduct evangelistic services in the war-torn Central American nation.

Larry Jones, who heads an Oklahoma City-based evangelistic and relief ministry called Feed the Children, told reporters two weeks ago that top Nicaraguan officials, including President Daniel Ortega, had assured him he could preach without restrictions and that more than 130 local participating churches would be allowed to distribute the food and clothing supplied by his ministry.

Instead, Jones charged during an April 23 press conference on Capitol Hill that Nicaraguan authorities had confiscated his large food shipment as well as religious publications he took with him to Nicaragua. Rather than being permitted to preach in a national stadium or some other large facility, Jones told a group of reporters in the office of Sen. David L. Boren, D-Okl., that he spoke in a church yard while in Nicaragua.

Jones said he returned to Washington to meet with Boren and other members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation in hopes of having pressure exerted on Nicaraguan leaders to release the food and other supplies. He dismissed the notion of any connection between his press conference and the House and Senate votes scheduled the next day on President Reagan's request for \$14 million in aid to rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

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"I'm not trying to influence the vote," Jones declared, adding he was trying to "surface the issue" as much as possible in an effort to influence Ortega to release his supplies.

Jones predicted the international community will look with "ill repute" on the affair and expressed optimism that his food would be released.

He added, however, "If I don't get the food back, I doubt if we will work in Nicaragua."

Jones said his shipment of 228,000 pounds of beans and rice and 25,000 pounds of clothing arrived in Nicaragua in late March. He estimated the food he shipped would supplement the diets of 50,000 people for a month. In addition, Jones said he lost 5,000 Spanish New Testaments, 600 Spanish Bibles, 50,000 gospel tracts and 10,000 sermons translated into Spanish.

"Yes I feel duped," Jones said in response to a reporter's question. "I feel doublecrossed. I came home empty handed."

Jones, member of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., told reporters three stipulations must be met before his ministry goes into a country. He must be permitted to preach; local churches must be permitted to distribute food and clothing, and Jones must be allowed to film some of the distribution activities.

"There is nobody more shocked about this than I am," Jones said of the developments. "I am doubly shocked that this was done right before the vote tomorrow."

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Southern Baptists Provide Ethnic Ministry Model

By Michael Tutterow

Baptist Press
4/23/85

HOUSTON (BP)--Language and culture serve as the needle and thread for weaving the gospel into the lives of ethnics, a key principle in Southern Baptists' ethnic mission strategy, said a Southern Baptist language missions specialist.

Oscar I. Romo, director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's language missions division, described as "contextual" the ethnic missions strategy employed by the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Romo's comments were addressed to more than 700 people attending a general session of the National Convocation on Evangelizing Ethnic America.

Romo, who noted his ancestors lived in the Southwestern United States "before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock," said Southern Baptists traded the "melting pot" view of American culture for that of a mosaic, interwoven with a variety of cultures and experiences.

Because of the diversity of American culture, Southern Baptists have employed a variety of techniques to reach ethnics, said Romo.

Fermin Whittaker, director of ethnic church growth for the Home Mission Board, noted Southern Baptists have adapted the concept of laser technology into their approach to ethnic missions. The laser, he explained, can be focused on a small area or spread over a wide area.

Southern Baptists pinpoint specific ethnic groups over broad geographical areas through a concept called Laser Thrust, said Whittaker. In addition to identifying ethnic groups in a particular area, the Laser Thrust also helps identify ethnic leaders with the goal of beginning new churches, he added.

Laser teams, made up of experienced people of a targeted ethnic group's language and culture, spend four or five days in a community, establish contact with local ethnic leaders, lead them to faith in Christ and begin new ethnic churches, said Whittaker.

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Romo, who also was the convocation's chairman, said Baptists also employ "catalytic" missionaries to work in urban areas with a variety of ethnic groups. These persons are "catalysts" who initiate and guide new ethnic church starting, relate to churches which sponsor ethnic congregations, and develop materials for churches doing language missions, he explained.

"A strategic factor in evangelizing and congregationalizing Ethnic America is the contextual equipping of ethnic leaders," said Joe Hernandez, director of ethnic resource development at the Home Mission Board. He added such training "must be characterized by programs which are flexible, accomodating to languages and outreach to internationals and refugees make use of contextual curriculum and teaching methods."

Southern Baptists' Ethnic Leadership Development (ELDs) centers blend culture and theological education, said Hernandez.

Millions of internationals--diplomats, tourists, students, representatives of corporations and businesses, seamen, to name a few--annually visit the United States, noted Wallace Buckner, director of multi-ethnic ministries for the Home Mission Board. Their visits present U.S. Christians with an opportunity to minister to and share their faith with people "whose country does not allow a Christian ministry," Buckner said.

Southern Baptists' outreach to internationals is two-pronged, he explained. Southern Baptists attempt to present the claims of Christ to internationals who may not have another opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel, he said.

They also work with internationals who profess faith in Christ, teaching them how to share their new-found faith with persons in their own country, said Buckner.

Despite extensive language missions efforts, Southern Baptists currently reach less than one-half of one percent of the U.S. ethnic population, lamented Romo. He noted, however, Southern Baptists have set a goal of reaching three percent of American ethnics--2.9 million persons--by the end of the century.

He also said the 14.3-million member denomination will expand its outreach to 16 more language groups, making a total of 100 language groups with which the denomination will work.

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SBC NewScene To Air
Pre-Convention Special

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4/23/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A preview of the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention will be featured on a special edition of SBC NewScene on Baptist Telecommunication Network.

The 30-minute special will provide an overview of major events and issues expected to surface at the convention in Dallas, June 11-13.

Special guests on the program also will discuss the resolutions committee process and messenger registration.

The NewScene special will be hosted by Gomer Lesch, senior BTN consultant and anchor of the weekly SBC NewScene.

Guests will include Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee; Reginald McDonough, associate executive secretary and director of program planning; W.C. Fields, assistant to the executive secretary and director of public relations; Lee Porter, registration secretary, and Martin Bradley, recording secretary.

The program will be useful for persons planning to attend the convention or those who will be watching SBC NewScene's gavel to gavel coverage of the convention on BTN, Lesch said.

The NewScene special will be telecast on BTN at 11:30 a.m., May 3, and will be repeated 12:30 p.m., May 8; 10:30 a.m., May 20; 10:30 a.m., June 3; and 1:30 p.m., June 7. All times are Central Daylight Time.

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Dedication Marks First
For Historical Commission

By Lonnie Wilkey

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—An agency charged with preserving the heritage of Southern Baptists recorded its own bit of history April 22.

During its annual meeting in Nashville the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention dedicated its facilities in the new SBC building including the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

The event marked the first time in its 34-year history the agency has had its own facilities. Historical Commission offices previously were located within the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Lynn E. May Jr., executive director of the Historical Commission, said the new facilities will play an important role in the commission's assignment of being the central depository and archives for the denomination. "We are committed to a great task," he said.

In an earlier business session commission members approved the 1985-86 budget of \$483,750, up slightly from the present budget of \$482,765.

The new budget includes \$412,000 from Cooperative Program receipts with the remainder coming from the sale of publications and microfilm, interest and dividends and miscellaneous sources.

Commission members also adopted a proposed 1986-87 budget of \$577,175 including a CP allocation request of \$501,425. May said the larger budget is needed to provide additional staff support. The commission, he said, presently is operating with a librarian who works four days a week and an archivist who works only one. Both need to be full-time, he charged.

A charter change which would begin eliminating local at-large members received approval from commission members. It will be presented by the Historical Commission and the SBC Executive Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention, June 11-13, in Dallas for full approval.

The revision was brought about because of escalating costs. May said the move would be gradual and those at-large members presently serving who would be eligible for a second four-year term could be reelected.

The 34-member commission now has eight local at-large members. By 1992 the commission would be reduced to 26 trustees, one member from each eligible state convention. Additional members would be added as other state conventions become eligible to provide trustees for the agency, according to Charles Deweese, director of publications and communications for the commission.

Commission members were informed the Baptist Information Retrieval Service (BIRS) has been terminated after 11 years because of cost. The 1984 Southern Baptist Periodical Index, an annual printout of BIRS, will be the last such publication.

Marion Lark, pastor of First Baptist Church, Henderson, N.C., was elected chairman of the commission for 1985-86. Other officers include: Stan Rushing, pastor of First Baptist Church, Leland, Miss., vice-chairman; Richard McCartney, editor of the Baptist Messenger, Oklahoma City, recording secretary and Lynn E. May Jr., executive director of the Historical Commission, treasurer.

The 1986 meeting of the Historical Commission will be held April 28-30 in Nashville .

(BP)

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