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November 25, 1985

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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Baptists Give Volcano Victims  
Medicine, Supplies, Compassion

By Art Toalston

IBAGUE, Colombia (BP)—Edisson Ortis, five years old, is a new amputee and possibly an orphan. No family members have visited him in the state hospital in Ibague, Colombia. The only toy at his bedside came from a Southern Baptist missionary.

Edisson, who lost his left foot to gangrene, was one of 3,000 to 4,000 hospitalized throughout Colombia following the eruption of volcano Nevado del Ruiz. He's among 50,000 left homeless, people who somehow survived a wall of hot mud and debris, as deep as 60 feet in places, that buried the town of Armero, 22,000 surrounding acres and 20,000 to 40,000 people.

About 15 Colombian Baptists, Southern Baptist missionaries and Foreign Mission Board staff members have assisted Colombian Red Cross workers, government officials and medical personnel in disaster relief.

"The Baptists have done a work that is incomparable," said Ramiro Lozano, a gynecologist who heads the Red Cross chapter in Ibague, relief headquarters, about 70 miles south of Armero.

Helping alleviate acute shortages in medicines and medical supplies is but one of numerous ways missionaries have used Southern Baptist relief donations to aid Red Cross workers.

"Don't abandon us now—the work has just begun," Lozano said to James Giles, disaster relief coordinator for the Southern Baptist mission in Colombia. Reuniting family members in various hospitals and shelters across Colombia will be a formidable challenge, Lozano said.

"How are these (survivors) ever going to adjust to life after this?" asked Giles' wife, Mary Nell, after several days of visiting victims. "There's no way to even describe it...horrible, sad, devastating, heart-breaking, shocking."

The Gileses and Ellis Leagans, mission chairman, took a two-burner stove, pots and pans, dishes and clothing to one apartment where 25 relatives had taken refuge. Included in the group were two women who had lost husbands. One also lost three of her four children; the other, all three of hers.

Missionaries are investigating opening a goodwill center in Ibague to help amputees and others with debilitating injuries and teach new skills to those left jobless. Government officials have not decided what long-term help religious organizations will be asked to provide.

"These people now need somebody to listen to them," added Giles, who spent a half-hour with a Presbyterian pastor from Armero, Rafael Charry, whose wife and two children are presumed dead. Tears dripped to the pastor's cheeks as they closed the visit in prayer.

"If God rescued me from this tragedy, then he must have a purpose for my life," the pastor told Giles. "Everybody ended up without anything, but we have God and we have faith."

"I have had pain with the people," said Adriana Robledo, chief nurse at the emergency room of the Baptist Clinic in Barranquilla, who came to Ibague with missionary physician Robert Edwards. "I have listened to them so they could unload their hurts, tensions and pains," said Robledo, a member of Barranquilla's Genezaret Baptist Church.

There are "hundreds, if not thousands" of people in grief, many of them farm workers or operators of small home businesses, Mrs. Giles said. Most victims' faces still show an expressionless sort of shock at their sudden, immense losses.

Missionaries have listened to a young father tell of the loss of his 25-day-old son. He believes his wife is alive but doesn't know where she is. A mother with a fractured pelvis is hospitalized beside her 10-year-son, whose leg was amputated. She lost her husband and three younger children.

Another woman, just a week away from giving birth, lost her husband and mother. A toddler with "NN" (no name) above his bed and a gash atop his head held out his arms and cried for "Mami" (mommy). He ate only when someone could be found to breast-feed him.

Leagans and his wife, Judy, since 1979 the only Southern Baptist missionaries in Ibague, a city of a half million people, feel "a personal loss. I sink my roots wherever I am," Leagans said. There's "an intense regional loyalty" in the state of Tolima, where Ibague and Armero are located. Leagans also knew the director of a Presbyterian-related secondary school in Armero, Vicente Rodriguez, who still is missing.

Leagans gave "high, high marks" to Colombians in their response to the crisis. "They haven't sat back and waited for the rest of the world to respond. They've been working tirelessly themselves."

Joining Robledo and Edwards in assisting at the state hospital in Ibague were Guillermo Chaparro, a general practitioner and member of Bogota's Northside Baptist Church, and Don Pearson, an orthopedic surgeon and member of College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. Maria del Carmen de Alvarez, a neighborhood nurse and member of Bogota's Central Baptist Church, worked in various relief locations.

Survivors of the mudslide "look like they've been pulled over broken bricks for a couple miles," Edwards said. In the flowing mud, Charry recounted, "I felt like I was being ground up like a mill grinds wheat."

Both Edwards and Pearson lost count of the operations they performed, each estimating the number at 25 or more. Edwards cleaned wounds of mud and infection, working on one patient, for example, with a bladder full of mud that had been pressed through the man's mouth, nose and ears. Pearson handled gangrene-caused amputations and cleaned wounds.

Nearly every relief worker has battled weariness. After several days on the scene, Mrs. Giles recounted, "I didn't know if I could go anymore." But the next day, "seeing people who are hurting and in such need, you just forget about yourself and keep going."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press (Art Toalston and photographer Joanna Pinneo returned to Richmond Nov. 23 after a trip to Colombia to cover relief efforts.)

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Colombian Baptist Nurse's Love  
Shared In Helicopter Rescue

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

IBAGUE, Colombia (BP)—Maria del Carmen de Alvarez stepped past 10 corpses to reach a man covered with dry mud. In agony from numerous infected wounds, he loudly vented his heartache, "My children, my children, where are my children?"

Alvarez, a neighborhood nurse and a member of Bogota's Central Baptist Church, knew the man somehow had survived a full week in the hardened aftermath of the eruption of volcano Nevado del Ruiz. She plus five Colombian soldiers and five rescue workers, laboring under stifling heat, placed the young man aboard a hospital-bound helicopter.

His physical suffering demanded far more medical expertise than Alvarez could provide.

Still, the 47-year-old mother of four sought to minister during the flight. The victim had ceased his yelling and Alvarez, sensing that he could hear, asked tenderly, "Do you know that God loves you? He loves you so much because he has not called you to his presence. He wants to give you another opportunity to trust in him."

A soldier overheard her words and quipped in sarcasm, "Look who's with us."

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To the soldier, Alvarez replied, "It's true about you, too, that God is giving you another chance to hear his message." A second soldier sided with Alvarez, saying, "That's true. God is using us to give life to these people." To Alvarez, he said, "I can tell you're an evangelical."

"Yes, I'm a Christian," Alvarez replied before resuming her witness. "Repent of your sins," she counseled the traumatized man, "and trust in Jesus." He began weeping just as the helicopter approached the hospital landing pad.

Alvarez, one of several Baptists among disaster relief workers in west-central Colombia, doesn't know whether the man survived. Still, such encounters have assured her "that I can be useful at a moment of such critical need on the part of so many."

She decided on her own to travel to Ibague to help survivors from Armero and the surrounding region buried by a monstrous mudslide after Nevado del Ruiz erupted Nov. 13.

Except for a ride to Ibague with Southern Baptist missionaries Nov. 18 and lodging with new acquaintances here, she said she had not asked anybody for anything.

"I didn't want to sit in front of the television and see the suffering," Alvarez continued. "Rather, I wanted to come and be of service." She also was motivated by thankfulness for the good health of her children and for new skills from a community health course at the Baptist Clinic in Barranquilla.

Disaster relief work "has made me develop more love for people, even though I've always served with love," said the veteran of nearly 30 years in nursing. "Spiritually, I'm very rich; materially, I'm very poor, but I give what I can, which is service to God to help others."

Alvarez reported to a disaster relief center after arriving in Ibague and was told she could sort clothing. Believing she should do more, she boarded a bus to head toward a school that had been turned into a temporary hospital on the outskirts of Ibague.

That morning she treated 30 patients; that afternoon she agreed to look for a hospitalized mother's lost child. The helicopter rescue mission interrupted her unsuccessful search for the child.

Alvarez intends to continue working wherever she's needed in Ibague, simply "waiting for the Lord to indicate how long I should stay."

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

Request Doesn't Shock  
Texas Baptist Men

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

DALLAS (BP)—Two members of the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Team traveled to the Caribbean Nov. 23 to help restore electrical service lost as a result of Hurricane Kate.

At the request of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, electricians Larry Blanchard, Lindale, Texas, and Jerry McCauley, Gilmar, Texas, flew to Caicos Island to work as linemen. The island had been without electricity since the hurricane made landfall.

The men are expected to work on the island seven to ten days in cooperation with Ed Parimon, missionary. Though it means being away from home during Thanksgiving, Blanchard said his family understands the importance of the mission.

"My wife and I decided a long time ago that we would seek the will of the Lord for our lives and try to follow it," he said. "My wife told me, 'Well, we'll just have to thank the Lord this year that you could have a part in that ministry down there.'"

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Baptist World Alliance  
Dedicates New Building

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)—The president of the Baptist World Alliance has challenged the worldwide organization of Baptists to view its new building as a "means, not an end" in its service.

BWA President G. Noel Vose asked those attending the Nov. 24 dedication to think of the facility "not as a clerical clearing house dispensing an interminable ticker-tape of memos and letters, but as a place where a group of international Christians exercise a deeply biblical prophetic role in a world convulsed with the agony of its self-inflicted wounds." Vose is principle of Baptist Theological College of Western Australia, Bentley.

Following an open house and ribbon cutting ceremony at the BWA building, located in McLean, Va., participants—including representatives from Yugoslavia, Romania, Nigeria, Australia, Mexico and Canada—moved to McLean Baptist Church for the dedication ceremony.

In explaining the importance of the building, Vose stated: "It marks in a most tangible way—what can be more tangible than bricks and mortar—the importance of the BWA to 34 million Baptists around the world. And this importance lies not merely in efficient administration but in encouragement, fellowship, help and above all in a prophetic quality that the team located here is meant to express."

Gerhard Claas, BWA general secretary/treasurer, described the dedication as "a coming true of many dreams and an answer to many prayers." He pledged the building would be used to further "work for the sake of the Kingdom of God."

The dedication ceremony program included two longtime BWA leaders—Robert S. Denny, BWA general secretary emeritus, and Duke K. McCall, BWA immediate past president.

The BWA formerly occupied a building jointly owned with the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. Expansion of BWA ministries necessitated additional space.

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Arkansas Baptists' Annual Meeting  
Spotlights University's Centennial

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. (BP)—A spirit of fellowship and celebration prevailed as Arkansas Baptists helped their oldest institution of higher education celebrate its centennial anniversary Nov. 19-20 during the 132nd annual meeting of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

Messengers adopted a record \$12.25 million 1986 budget, including an increase of .75 percent in the amount going to worldwide Southern Baptist concerns through the national Cooperative Program. Arkansas will send 40.66 percent of its receipts on to national causes.

In 1984, the site for the annual meeting had been changed to the campus of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Although fears had been expressed about the adequacy of motel, restaurant and parking facilities, those concerns apparently failed to keep messengers away from the convention. Registration had reached 1,189 by the closing session of the two-day meeting, surpassing last year's total.

Arkansas' partnership linkup with two Baptist conventions in Equatorial Brazil highlighted the annual meeting. Brazilian pastor and evangelist Nilson do Amaral Fanini addressed the closing session of the convention, challenging Arkansas Baptists to "come together" for the sake of bringing the world to Christ.

Brief testimonies about first-hand experiences in Brazilian mission projects were sprinkled throughout the program, and the Arkansas Baptist News magazine published a special eight-page "progress report" focusing on the linkup. Arkansas Baptists have completed the first year of the three-year partnership.

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Messengers elected Lawson Hatfield, pastor of First Baptist Church, Fordyce, as president of the state convention. Hatfield was director of the ABSC Sunday school department for 23 years before returning to the pastorate. Eddie McCord, director of missions for Independence Baptist Association, Batesville, was elected first vice-president, and James W. Bryant, pastor of Grand Avenue Baptist Church, Fort Smith, was elected second vice-president by acclamation.

Six resolutions were adopted by messengers. Five of them, adopted without debate, urged participation in the 1986 "Good News, America" revivals; encouraged prayer for the Reagan-Gorbachev summit conference and for world leaders "in a search for a solution to the arms race;" resolved prayerful support for the Southern Baptist Convention "Peace Committee;" reaffirmed Baptists' determination to combat gambling, pornography, alcohol and other drug abuse, and expressed appreciation for convention office and the host campus.

A sixth resolution on abortion drew substantial debate. The language of the resolution toughened opposition to abortion, compared to resolutions of previous years. Decrying the "Roe v. Wade" Supreme Court decision as the cause of "millions of elective, convenience, casual abortions," the resolution called on Arkansas Baptists to actively support "appropriate and responsible legislation" to decrease the number of abortions in the state and across the nation.

The adopted resolution called upon Baptists to "work toward that which will assure the highest regard for life, born or unborn" and provide alternatives to abortion. It indicated: "We clearly state our opposition to abortions, except in the cases of rape, incest or (danger to) the life of the mother."

Two amendments were rejected which would have eliminated cases of rape and incest and put messengers on record as supporting efforts to place on the state's 1986 general election ballot a constitutional amendment dealing with abortion. That proposal would prohibit expenditure of state funds for abortion. Currently, no state funds are so spent.

The 1986 meeting will be Nov. 18-19 at Geyer Springs First Baptist Church in Little Rock.

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Doctor, Wife Adapt Lifestyle  
To Serve Nine Stints Overseas

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

MENA, Ark. (BP)—For him, there were no other options; for her, it was a second chance. Together, David and Elsie Fried have been missions volunteers nine times since 1960.

The Frieds turned to volunteer work after realizing they couldn't be appointed as foreign missionaries. The Mena, Ark., family practitioner and surgeon looked into a career in missions in the early 1950s, but found he was "too old." The age limit was 35 at the time. He was 39.

Several years later, he inquired again. The age limit had been raised to 40. He was 43. (Today, it's 45. He's 72.)

Nevertheless, the Frieds have found a place in missions. In their nine trips as volunteers, they've worked in seven countries for stints ranging from two weeks to a year.

For Mrs. Fried, volunteer work has been a way of following through on a desire for missions involvement dating back to her teenage years. "Being able to marry and have a family has been excellent," the mother of three grown children said. But with opportunities to serve abroad, "it's been kind of like the Lord giving me a second chance."

The Frieds, members of Mena's First Baptist Church, were among the first volunteers sent abroad through Foreign Mission Board channels. Their plans to spend three months in Nigeria in 1960 caught the attention of a news service, which circulated a story across the country.

On that first trip, they divided their time between two Baptist hospitals, filling in for furloughing missionary physicians. Only after arriving at the airport did they learn that the initial part of their work would be in a remote "bush" region.

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After leaving Nigeria, the Frieds offered to return for three years and to pay their own way. To demonstrate their seriousness, they said they would sell their house and deposit the overall cost of their venture with the Foreign Mission Board, to be paid back 1/36th of the total each month they stayed in Nigeria. Fried said he realized the board, in turning down the offer, was hesitant to set such a precedent.

In mid-1967, when Nigeria was in the midst of a civil war, the Frieds returned to that country for a one-year assignment.

Their latest trip, in May 1985, involved two weeks of exploring medical ministry possibilities in Brazil's Amazon region.

The Frieds also have worked three stints in Ghana (in 1977, 1981 and 1983) and other stints in Tanzania, Gaza, Thailand (two months among Cambodian refugees in 1979) and India (in October 1984, the same month Indira Gandhi, the country's prime minister, was assassinated).

The degree of appreciation among his overseas patients sticks with Fried. "I think every doctor would be much better off if he would go work a little while in the third world," he said. "You have to be able to adapt to the culture. You wonder, 'How am I going to get along here?' But within a day or two, you see everything is going all right."

For Mrs. Fried, the biblical teaching that "from those who have much, much is required" comes to mind.

As volunteers, she noted, "we are not going over there to tell (the missionaries) how to do it. We are not going to be entertained." Each missionary has "a full, full schedule. We are going to fit in, to be just as flexible as can be and fit in with their plans and the situation in which they work. We're not going over there as heroes, but to work and to serve."

In paying for their various travels, Mrs. Fried said, "the money situation seemed to take care of itself." They kept their cars longer before buying something newer, and they put less money into home improvements.

"We've always had what we needed," Fried said, "but we have not always had all we wanted. There's a lot of difference in needs and wants."

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

Sunday School Called  
'Key' To Great Churches

By Terry Barone

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

DALLAS (BP)—"Great churches have great Sunday schools," more than 500 participants at the Pastor/Staff Sunday School Convention Nov. 18-20 were told.

The "first ever" meeting of its kind was held at Hyde Park Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, with a theme of "Sunday School is the answer to building a great church."

John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston, said, "The Sunday school saved my life, my ministry and my church." Since 1970 his church, the largest Baptist congregation in Houston with more than 18,000 members, has grown from an average attendance of 500 in Sunday school each week to more than 5,000, he said.

Bisagno said he feels the Sunday school is charged with religious education, outreach and evangelism, stewardship, fellowship and ministry. He testified the key to his church's growth was through the Sunday school. He said, "You cannot build a ministry on a personality. The structure of the Sunday school is the foundation which makes the church work."

Speaker after speaker echoed the challenge of pastors and church staff members to mobilize the lay members of their churches to reach out into their communities and win lost persons through the Sunday school.

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James T. Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, pointed out the purposes of the Sunday school are to "reach, teach and minister." Calling the Sunday school "missionary and evangelistic by nature," Draper said, "the purpose of the Sunday school is not to teach the Bible, but to teach people the Bible."

Carlos McLeod, director, Texas Baptist Evangelism Division, said, "It is going to take an all-out effort to do what God has called us to do (reach people for Christ)," arguing it is imperative for Sunday school and evangelism to work together to reach lost persons.

William M. Pinson Jr., executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, reinforced McLeod's message by saying Mission Texas gives high priority to the Sunday school.

"When people are reached for Bible study," Pinson said, "Sunday schools will grow and will contribute to meeting the Mission Texas goals of reaching people, developing believers, strengthening missions, prayer for spiritual awakening and stewardship growth."

A major goal of the Mission Texas emphasis is establishing 2,000 new churches by 1990.

Harry Piland, director, Sunday school department, Baptist Sunday School Board, said "8.5 by '85" and "Challenge 10/90" deal with numbers but that each number represents a person.

He said he believes there is a new day in Sunday school in Southern Baptist churches because recent statistics show there have been six consecutive years of growth and that four of those years were record increases in enrollment.

"The direction has been turned," Piland said, "but this is not the ultimate end, this is only a direction in which to go. The end result is that Bold Mission Thrust will become a reality and that every person on earth will hear about Jesus Christ."

To reach Bold Mission Thrust goals, Lloyd Elder, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, said, Southern Baptists must have "teaching grounded in Holy Scripture, hard pioneer work and dedicated leadership."

"The Sunday school organization has a mighty, significant and eternal place in Southern Baptist life," Elder said. He said this tradition must continue if Southern Baptists are to reach their goals by the turn of the century. By the year 2000, Elder said Southern Baptists have projected to have 50,000 churches, 24 million members, 16 million enrolled in Sunday school, 10 million in average attendance and record one million baptisms.

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Study Neighborhoods  
Like Bible: Leslie

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

ATLANTA (BP)—Just as pastors traditionally critically examine the Bible verse by verse, they also should examine their neighborhoods house by house, a Chicago pastor told urban leaders at the fall forum for urban evangelism sponsored by the associational evangelism department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"Seminary trained us to franchise churches—to do the same thing everywhere we are," said Bill Leslie, pastor of LaSalle Street Church since 1961, but "pastors should not only exegete the Bible, but also exegete our neighborhoods."

The non-denominational church is situated within blocks of both Chicago's Gold Coast, the second most wealthy area, per capita, in the nation and Cabrini-Green, the second poorest area in the nation. Cabrini-Green was the temporary residence of former Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne during her campaign to fight poverty.

When LaSalle Street Church had declined to 40 members, "we asked each other what we thought God wanted our church to be. We figured at that point we didn't have much to lose," recalled Leslie. They concluded they wanted to be a church which gives itself away.

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They committed to four goals. "We first committed ourselves to pluralism and diversity," said Leslie. While Leslie says he understand why first and second generation ethnics would want an ethnic congregation, "I can also see a mark of the Kingdom is to struggle with that issue."

Because LaSalle Street is an inner-city church, it has become a port of entry for ethnics. "The poor in cities are where the city is oldest, where it decays first," Leslie explained.

"To evangelize the city," he continued, "we must evangelize the ethnics." To do this in a worship setting, Leslie said each group must hear its own sound, its own music; each group needed to be seen in leadership positions; and preaching had to be profound, but in simple language. His church is "becoming whiter," he admitted, "although many of their ministries are to ethnics."

The second thing the church committed itself to was servanthood and ministry. "Instead of one minister and 200 assistants, we have 200 ministers and one assistant," Leslie said.

The third commitment was to a wholistic approach to evangelism. "In witnessing to someone, we've only done half the job. We also have to love them as God loves us," Leslie explained.

The fourth commitment made by the church was to the poor. The church did a Bible study of the poor and justice. "We found 87 verses about the poor and justice. Our Legal Aid Clinic came somewhat out of that," said Leslie.

The Cabrini-Green Legal Aid Clinic, now it's own entity, began when Chuck Hogran, a real estate lawyer who was a member of LaSalle Street, began to receive calls from mothers who wanted his help to get their children out of jail. He discovered often they had been wrongfully accused or accused with illegal evidence.

The two-block by five-block Cabrini-Green area houses 3,700 families, including 10,000 children under 17. The clinic provides free legal services to all residents who qualify. They average 450 cases per year. They also have added a social worker to their staff to provide follow-up services.

With these commitments, must come the commitment to an inward journey. "The city will unmask you, tear you apart. Burn-out is a serious problem," Leslie said.

Describing his own struggle with burn-out, Leslie said he felt "raped by God. That's not very theological," he admitted. "But I felt violated, used, by God, by my congregation and by my community. They depended on me to help."

Hogran explained Leslie's prescription to avoid burn-out, "Believe what you are doing is important; be part of a support group; one day each week, attend a university course unrelated to your work the rest of the time, and, one weekend a month, go to Wisconsin."

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Discipleship Training  
Provides Foundation

Baptist Press  
11/25/85

SHREWSBURY, Mass. (BP)—New Christians need more than details about how their church is organized; they need help to get started growing in their faith, a New England pastor says.

"New Christians need the foundations of basic Christian beliefs," said Bruce Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Shrewsbury, Mass. "People in the Northeast don't have a biblical background like some might have in the South."

To meet the need in the Shrewsbury church, Bill Freeman, a fairly new Christian himself, began a class for new Christians last August using the "Survival Kit for New Christians," produced by the Sunday School Board's church training department.

Freeman had completed the survival kit on his own in April and thought it would be good training for all new Christians in the church. The first members of his class completed the 12-week course Oct. 27.

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Although all of the more than 50 persons baptized into the church in the past year have been given survival kits for individual study, Freeman is one of the few who actually completed the kit and memorized the verses on his own.

He has since completed Continuing Witnessing Training, a Home Mission Board evangelism training program, and other Christian development programs. He wanted to start the discipleship class to help others "build a strong foundation on the cornerstone of Christ," he said.

Individual study works for some people such as Freeman, but most need the encouragement of an enthusiastic teacher, Allen pointed out.

"I can't say this is the way for every church to go, but it works for us. I know new members have covered all the basics when they've completed the course," he said.

The Shrewsbury church began 12 years ago as a home Bible study. There are now more than 300 Sunday school members with an average attendance of more than 85. Basic foundational training is important here because only about five members have been Christians for more than five years, according to Allen.

The church is growing spiritually and with training such as the survival kit and CWT, the church is getting ready for "explosive growth," Allen predicted.

Allen became pastor of the church a year ago. He had been on the evangelism staff of the Georgia Baptist Convention and his wife, Laura, was a Home Mission Board consultant. "The Lord called us to do the kind of missions we had been telling others about," he said.

Freeman's philosophy is to help new Christians grow in Christ, since "they need to learn that they can grow. This is the beginning and more training will build stronger commitments."

He plans to continue the Discipleship I class adding new members as new people join the church. He also would like to start a Disciple II class using "The Journey Continues: Survival Kit II," but he has not completed that course himself yet.

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

Hymn Text Writers Urged  
To Listen To The World

By Charles Willis

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—The writer of a hymn text should begin with a first-hand knowledge of the joy and pain of what is happening in the world, according to Brian Wren, a widely known hymn writer from Oxford, England.

"Start by really being able to see what is going on in yourself, your church or the world around you—even if it is painful," Wren told a group of musicians, students and aspiring hymn writers at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Observing "It's easy to write a schmaltzy hymn about marriage," Wren said it is much more difficult to write a hymn for persons "who have been married a long time through times of struggle. How can we sing about that kind of relationship faithfully with Christian hope and grace? That's more difficult because it involves critical thinking."

Wren believes singing of faith requires persons to hear the voices of the world. "If we take the Holy Spirit seriously, we will ask what does our neighbor want from us," he said. "The Scriptures will come alive in a new way because we are bringing new questions to them."

Persons who sing hymns bring their experiences to the words they sing, Wren said. "When a well-written hymn is sung for the 20th time, you may find something new—not in the words, but in the thought that comes to you.

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"The process of writing is not that of passing on information, but of putting a picture on the wall," he continued. "People bring to the picture their perception of color, beauty and their experience. They will understand what the Spirit brings to them at that moment."

In encouraging hymn text writing to meet contemporary needs, Wren offered seven guidelines to help writers provide congregations with hymns that speak to today's issues and needs.

First, clarity, simplicity and obedience to rhythm are characteristics of hymns that are immediately understandable, while being intellectually deep enough to be sung repeatedly.

Second, use of normal speech patterns and words will enable the singers to express personal meanings in terms they would use conversationally.

Third, a memorable first line, followed by a "point" expressed in each succeeding verse, proves a progression of thought for the hymn.

Fourth, strong nouns and active verbs are better than adjectives. Archaic words and phrases from older hymnbooks, sentimental words that have feeling without thought and rare and technical words should be avoided.

Sixth, words should be evaluated as spoken as well as sung to well loved melodies. If a hymn is worth singing, it is worth reading.

Seventh, Wren advised, be your most severe critic. Evaluate why a new hymn is needed, if there is something distinctive to say and if it provides a good Christian statement.

To both hymn text writers and those who sing hymns, Wren suggested, "If you find the words coming alive, they are doing their work."

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