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86-14

Baptist School In Beirut  
Reports Record Enrollment

By Art Toalston

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--In a country where buildings and families have crumbled during 11 years of civil war, the Beirut Baptist School is upholding "values that used to be highly prized, values that kept the country... (and) families together," says its superintendent, Jim Ragland.

Ragland and his wife, Leola, believe the school's emphasis on values is one reason it has a record enrollment as it celebrates its 30th anniversary. The school's students also have scored well on government examinations that determine future collegiate opportunities.

The west Beirut school reports 900 students in preschool through the first year of collegiate-level studies. Last year there were more than 800 enrolled. Three-fourths of the students are Muslim.

Three Southern Baptist missionaries, the Raglands and Nancie Wingo, work with 53 full- and part-time Lebanese teachers at the school. On the faculty are evangelicals, Shiite, Sunni and Druse Muslims and Greek Orthodox. A retired missionary, Mabel Summers, does secretarial work.

"Lebanon is changing very quickly," says Ragland, who has led the school since its beginning. "The students here feel very keenly the currents that are sweeping through the (Middle East) nations. Values are being disregarded, swept away by ideas and practices that, even in the United States, are not acceptable.

"The strife the last 10 years has had its effect, but even without the war, ideas from the West--drugs, pornography--have really hit this country."

A recent Newsweek article reports that Russian roulette is a deadly fad among some Lebanese young adults. The fad was sparked by Russian-roulette scenes in an American movie, "The Deer Hunter," which drew sellout crowds in Beirut two years ago.

"We're dying 10 times daily," one 20-year-old Muslim was quoted by the magazine as saying. "If I die while playing, at least I'll know how and I'll know I died once and for all."

Ragland says values important at the school include truth, a belief in God, honesty, hard work, parental respect, sexual morality, respect for national laws and a respect for all people, regardless of their religion or economic background.

"I think people appreciate our fairness," Ragland adds. "We do not play favorites with one group over the other."

Mrs. Ragland, who directs the preschool, says she is thankful the students learn to study, to think and to treat their neighbors as themselves and that they learn of "a faith that can help them go into the world and make a contribution."

She tells of a former student who, 12 years later, has enrolled her daughter at the school. "She sat in our office and wept and said, 'The happiest days of my life were the days I was at BBS (Beirut Baptist School).'"

One of Ragland's prayers for the school is that the students "will see in us the gospel of Christ being lived out."

"It's just amazing that we're still able to keep going," says Mrs. Ragland. This term the school has closed only a few times because of sectarian fighting since classes began in October.

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Ragland credits prayer from churches in America with having a big part in the school remaining effective. "We simply could not have stayed open had we not had the prayer support behind us," Mrs. Ragland adds.

They are in telephone contact with Southern Baptist missionaries in east Beirut nearly every day. Five of about 15 missionaries and several of their children evacuated to Cyprus Jan. 18 because of intense sectarian fighting. The Raglands haven't visited with the east Beirut missionaries in person for six months.

They are not the only Americans in west Beirut, however; others are at the American University and its hospital.

Although west Beirut has become predominantly Muslim, Ragland says there are a number of Christian families there. "Quite a few have left the area. Every day, in fact, you see trucks being loaded up with furniture, moving to the east. But many of the families have chosen to stay. They own property here, their friends are here. They are a part of the social fabric of this part of the city and they feel comfortable here."

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Nashville Church Prepares  
For Good News America

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press  
2/5/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"Sharing God's Grace in the Heart of Downtown Nashville" is a commitment First Baptist Church makes through its advertising.

The 2,500-member congregation obviously is serious about the commitment as it gears up for Southern Baptists' 1986 evangelistic emphasis, Good News America, God Loves You, with multi-faceted witnessing and discipleship training activities.

"Most churches in our downtown situation are going to die if we don't get back to an emphasis on personal evangelism," said Charles Page, who became pastor of the church in 1985.

Evangelism is "absolutely our first priority," Page said. He added heartfelt, person-to-person evangelism must be supported with prayer, education and discipleship.

Preparation for the Good News America revival, scheduled April 6-11, began on Witness Commitment Sunday, Jan. 26, with a churchwide campaign to encourage members to read the book, "Concentric Circles of Concern," by the late Oscar Thompson, professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. The book emphasizes lifestyle evangelism through personal spheres of influence.

The church training equipping center module, "Training Sunday School Workers to Witness," will be taught beginning Feb. 9, with Page leading the large-group sessions.

"I am personally leading these sessions because I feel so strongly that Sunday school workers must be committed and trained to be witnesses," he said.

A one-day training blitz, "The People Challenge," is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 22. Ongoing training of as many as 150 encouragers, persons who will help new Christians get started in their faith, is under way, along with Continuing Witness Training and five MasterLife discipleship groups. Page leads a MasterLife group made up of church staff members.

Special prayer emphases also are planned just before the revival.

"We're doing a lot, but it's all very basic to growing a church," said Minister of Education Jimmy Dunn. "We see all of our training and discipleship programs as supplementary to our Sunday school, where our primary evangelistic thrust must take place."

"We do not have visions of being a mega-church," Page emphasized. "We hope to win people and disciple them for ministry and mission. A stream stays fresh only as you have continuous inflow and outflow."

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The method of witnessing through personal spheres of influence in "Concentric Circles of Concern" emphasizes identifying non-Christians, praying for them and seeking opportunities to be a witness, actions anyone can do, he said.

On the denominational level, Good News America offers Southern Baptists an opportunity to unite around a common commitment to evangelism, Page noted.

"If we can all become of one mind in the area of bringing people to Christ, this can unite us to get the job done," he said.

In his Witness Commitment Day sermon, Page listed five things "we can all do" to be witnesses. "We can commit our lives to concern for the lost, start our own prayer lists and begin to make ourselves available," he said, also urging church members to take advantage of witness training opportunities.

And, he noted, "When God gives you a nudge, go on the basis of what he has provided.

"We must take Bold Mission Thrust seriously," Page said in his closing challenge. "Let's quit talking about it and start doing it."

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Mission Plane Forced Down  
In Kenya's Bush Country

Baptist Press  
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NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--A severe oil leak forced a Southern Baptist mission airplane to land among wild animals and Masai tribesman in the remote bush country of Namanga, Kenya.

The Cessna 210, flown by Tanzania missionary pilot Cordell Akin, was enroute from Nairobi, Kenya, to Mbeya, Tanzania, Feb. 1 with three passengers: Tanzania missionary Evelyn Knapp and two Tanzanian nationals, Jaston Binala and Austin Mwakijungu.

Akin, an experienced pilot from Nashville, Tenn., flew low over the landing site to drive off impala and wildebeest which covered the area. He made two more passes to try to examine the field, despite extremely poor visibility through an oil-streaked windshield, and landed successfully on his fourth approach.

The cow-herding Masai came running from nearby huts, intensely interested in the plane and its passengers, touching their skin and hair. A father pushed his small child, who had never seen white people, toward Mrs. Knapp so he could touch her white skin.

After examining the engine and wiping off excess oil, Akin decided to try to make it about 100 miles back to Nairobi. He took off, flying just above tree level over a road so he could land safely in an emergency. He landed successfully an hour later in Nairobi.

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VBS Can Be Key  
To Evangelism

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press  
2/5/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Vacation Bible School has been a fixture of many Southern Baptist churches for so long that leaders may be overlooking its greatest benefits, a Bible teaching expert believes.

Vacation Bible School can be one of the most significant evangelistic tools of the church program, said Wayne Etheridge, a Bible study administration specialist for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Last year's national VBS statistics reveal an increase in the number of professions of faith in Christ and prospects discovered as well as a national Cooperative Program offering of more than \$1 million for the first time, he said, citing these as some of the strengths of Vacation Bible School.

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Those statistics are increasing even though enrollment in Vacation Bible Schools declined slightly and the number of schools declined by more than 2,000. Etheridge attributed the drop in enrollment to a decline in the number of children and preschoolers in the post-baby boom years.

Reports from 34,073 Vacation Bible Schools, Backyard Bible Clubs and Mission Vacation Bible Schools conducted in 1985 show 57,455 professions of faith by participants. The 1985 total is an increase of more than 4,000 from the 53,417 professions of faith reported for 1984 schools.

Churches reported 609,533 prospects discovered through Vacation Bible Schools in 1985, compared with the 592,258 listed for the previous year.

"VBS prospects can be a gold mine for churches if they follow up on them. Many times they aren't added to the church's prospect file," Etheridge pointed out.

The more than 600,000 prospects from VBSes throughout the convention translated into 16 children and 24 parents, or 40 prospects, for each church conducting a VBS, he reported.

"Those are prospects that already are interested in your church and have shown interest in attending," he said.

The possibility of those persons making professions of faith is even greater if they are enrolled in Sunday school after attending a VBS, Etheridge added. One out of every three VBS prospects enrolled in Sunday school makes a profession of faith within a year of attending VBS.

The 1985 report shows 8,332 professions of faith that were listed as follow-ups from 1984 Vacation Bible Schools.

"The key is enrolling those persons in Sunday school and ministering to them," he said.

Vacation Bible School also can teach participants about the Cooperative Program--Southern Baptists' national unified budget for missions and education--and its role in Southern Baptist work. Vacation Bible Schools in 1985 gave \$1,030,213 to the Cooperative Program, up from \$935,219 in 1984. Cooperative Program offerings were collected by 78.8 percent of the Southern Baptist churches that conducted Bible schools.

The 34,073 Vacation Bible Schools, Backyard Bible Clubs and Mission Vacation Bible Schools in 1985 reported a combined enrollment of 3,183,489. That total is down from the 36,415 schools with enrollment of 3,240,727 in 1984.

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Haiti Schools Closed  
Because Of Turbulence

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
2/5/86

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--Educational work by Baptists and other religious groups in Haiti has been halted by violence and unrest.

By government order, all schools have been closed for a month. "There doesn't seem to be any real prospect for them to open anytime soon," said Jack Hancox, who, with his wife, Doris, are the only Southern Baptist missionaries in Haiti.

Violence, looting and political unrest soared in January. Schools were scheduled to reopen Jan. 6 following a Christmas break, but they still were closed when Hancox was interviewed by telephone Feb. 4.

Eight out of every nine schools in Haiti are church-related, Hancox said. About 100 churches affiliated with the Baptist Convention of Haiti operate about 140 schools, including 100 primary schools, 13 secondary schools, three vocational schools and a seminary. In all, up to 28,000 students are enrolled in Baptist schools.

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Haitians' continued resistance to government measures to control the unrest may lessen hope for classes to resume anytime soon, Hancox said. Rumors are circulating that the school year will be called off. Hardest hit will be secondary students who will have to wait an additional year before taking government examinations.

"All the major cities are still shut tight," Hancox said. This is the first time in Hancox's eight years in Haiti that the school year has been disrupted.

Almost every major church, whether Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, Nazarene, Pentecostal or Seventh-day Adventist, operates a school in Haiti.

Numerous missionaries with children are leaving Haiti to arrange for schooling in the United States, Hancox noted. He said he intends to advise Southern Baptist lay workers Dan and Freddie Peters, who have two teen-age daughters, to do the same.

Hancox, using Southern Baptist hunger relief funds, supervises a school nutrition program for about 15,000 children in 60 Baptist schools. Food for nutrition programs in the other Baptist schools is provided by CARE, Church World Service and Catholic Relief Services.

Even though schools were closed, Hancox worked during January to distribute food supplies to the 60 Baptist schools. He said he doesn't know how much food actually reached the schools and how much was lost to looters. And he does not know whether the schools have been preparing meals or giving the students dry food to take home.

Hancox went ahead with the distribution despite such uncertainties because, "for many of the children, the only good meal they get is at school."

There is no way to assess what effect the unrest ultimately will have on Christian work in Haiti, he said, noting Catholic and a number of Protestant leaders have, in some quarters, been blamed for precipitating the current crisis by calling for human rights and elections.

"Some (religious leaders) have been attacked because they were associated with the government and some have been attacked by government people because they were considered agitators," he said. He personally knows ministers "who have been abused and whose homes have been penetrated by crowds."

Hancox added to details about three break-ins at the Baptist warehouse in Port-au-Prince during daylight hours Jan. 31. About \$14,000 worth of food, tools, other equipment, rabbits and cages were taken.

About a dozen looters with pistols struck first. Twice later in the day, mobs of 300 or more people flooded the grounds. In the first two raids, food supplies intended for Baptist youth camps were stolen, along with the rabbits and cages. In the third raid, tools for well-drilling operations, including hard hats, were stolen.

"They just went through like locusts," Hancox said. "Everything that wasn't nailed down they took." Four workers, not two as previously reported, were on the scene. Hancox had instructed them to offer no resistance.

Two well-drilling machines in the warehouse were undamaged, and one was placed in operation Feb. 4 not far from the grounds. A larger rig was on a job, and Hancox had not been able to learn whether it was damaged.

Looting throughout Haiti hit its peak the week of Jan. 27. The Hancoxes, however, heard gunfire the evening of Feb. 3 "up 'til we finally dozed off about midnight."

**(BP)**

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