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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75L
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. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Missionaries Are Optimistic
As Philippines Gets New Chief

By Marty Croll

MANILA, Philippines (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries heard firecrackers and gun blasts late into the night Tuesday, Feb. 25, as Filipinos in Manila celebrated the rise to power of a new government promising democracy and free speech.

Missionaries are optimistic about the future of work in the Philippines, having seen no sign that Baptists will be less welcome with President Corazon Aquino than they were with former President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Marcos fled the country as a rebellion of military officers and civilians ended his 20-year rule.

During the rebellion, Southern Baptists' mission chairman in the Philippines and the four other administrative committee members went on with a scheduled meeting at their offices in Manila. In Davao City, on the island of Mindanao, a training workshop led by Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to other countries also went on as planned.

Missionaries are not anxious about being in the country, said Les Hill, the mission chairman. "Our impression is the populace as a whole leans toward the revolution," he said, about three hours before the Philippine people heard that Marcos and 55 of his family and aides had fled from Malacanang Palace, home and office of the Philippine president.

"Today the people have been very happy, rejoicing over a new feeling of being relieved of fear," said Hill's wife, Jan, as confirmation came Wednesday, Feb. 26, that Marcos was en route to Guam and Aquino was beginning to set up her new government. "They sound like they are so eager to start over."

Jan Hill recalled leading a Bible study in which business people expressed their anger, and fear, at Marcos.

"There have been a great deal of prayer meetings, both Catholic and Protestant, since the first of the year," said Les Hill. "It is valid, I think, to say what is happening may well be the answer to that kind of prayer."

The Philippines, a predominantly Roman Catholic nation of 55 million people, in recent years has been one of the countries most responsive to Southern Baptist sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ in recent years. Three Filipino Baptist conventions, with help from 163 Southern Baptist missionaries and short-term personnel, last year reported baptizing 12,452 Christians. This was the fourth-largest number of baptisms reported by missionaries in any of the 106 countries where Southern Baptists work.

Marcos began losing his grip on the country's armed forces Saturday, Feb. 22, when two top military leaders broke from his regime and announced their support of Aquino, who had opposed him in national elections Feb. 7. The officials, Lt. Gen. Fidel V. Ramos, deputy chief of the armed forces, and defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile, turned Camp Crame in Manila into their command post and called for a provisional government led by Aquino. Crowds estimated up to one million people surrounded the post to keep Marcos' tanks at bay Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.

Aquino had been named winner of the election by an independent group of vote-counters. But Marcos denied it and went ahead with his own inauguration by the chief justice of his Supreme Court Tuesday, Feb. 25, in front of about 500 people holed up in the presidential palace. Hours later he asked for safe exit out of the country. Aquino, guarded by soldiers formerly under Marcos, also was inaugurated Tuesday in a country club. She was setting up her government on Wednesday after Marcos left.

"The big phrase that is being stated here is that seldom in history is tyranny successfully brought down to a democracy, but it is unheard of where civilians have protected the military. The people see this as a spiritual victory," said Les Hill. "They stopped the tanks by standing in front of them and then asking the soldiers to climb down and pray with them. And the soldiers did. What they were saying was, 'The Bible says prayer can move mountains; well, in this case, we have seen prayer that has turned tanks.'"

During the campaign and unrest preceding the election, Baptist churches scheduled several prayer meetings, Jan Hill said. Her husband attended a prayer breakfast involving evangelical churches the day before the election. He also attended meetings among evangelical leaders who debated whether to schedule special pre-election prayer meetings at strategic points in the city, and decided against it out of concern that prayer could become subservient to politics, he said.

During the revolt itself, churches were opened for prayer meetings, and people prayed in the streets for a peaceful resolution. Most of the turmoil was centered around Camp Crame and Manila's radio and television stations. The Hills listened to the Protestant radio station, DZAS. That station had offered its services as a communications arm of the revolution if Marcos' forces took Radio Veritas, the Roman Catholic station, off the air, Les Hill said. DZAS regularly interspersed Scripture readings in its ongoing coverage.

"The people attribute what is going on to their Christianity," he said. "I think you'd find the Catholic and Protestant alike in their viewpoint on that here."

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Churches Erect Barriers
To Aging, Sociologist Says

By Joe Westbury

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WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)--In spite of all the church is doing to minister to the aging and elderly, local congregations often unconsciously erect barriers to hamper participation by senior citizens, a sociologist told a Baptist conference at Colonial Williamsburg, Va.

Some churches sustain prejudices that are demeaning to the self concepts of the elderly and indulge in discriminatory practices which shunt the elderly aside, thus unwittingly violating biblical ideals, said David Moberg, professor of sociology at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis.

Moberg spoke to the Southern Baptist Association of Ministries with the Aging as the group celebrated its 10th anniversary at the three-day conference in mid-February.

"Both in terms of scheduling and content, the programming of church activities often fails to consider the capacities, needs, and interests of aging members," the sociologist said. Most adult activities typically are held at night when people with diminished eyesight are reluctant to leave their homes, he added.

"Too often the subject matter is oriented toward 'the family,' interpreted to mean husband-wife units who still have children living at home," he continued.

Moberg urged conference participants to be sensitive to needs of the elderly and to help them utilize the talents which they have developed over a lifetime.

"We as human beings have a need to be useful--even when we are old. The frail elderly often are depressed but need to be shown they are also of use to others. For example, even shut-ins can show friendship by extending a listening ear to problems of those who come to visit," he explained. "Or they can be useful by suffering through an illness in an exemplary manner that demonstrates one's faith and hope in the future. In this way they serve as an example to younger family members as well as older friends."

Moberg, of Swedish Baptist heritage, also stressed the importance of churches enlisting the elderly in intercessory prayer ministries.

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"Through such a network, the church could share its specific needs for prayer as well as the answers that come in response to the prayers," he said calling prayer ministries "a great opportunity for older adults to demonstrate and refine their spiritual gifts."

"Regardless of your age, God can use you," he said. "You don't have to move a muscle to be a prayer warrior. Even if you've lost your ability to talk, you can still give God your thoughts."

Ben Dickerson, director of the Institute of Gerontological Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, encouraged Southern Baptists to increase their ministry to the nation's aging population.

"Every day in the United States, 1,600 adults become age 65. Every week, nearly 125 Americans reach their 100th birthday. God has given us life, and we must look seriously at maintaining the quality of that life," he said.

"Eleven percent of our population is age 65 and older. If you lower the age bracket to 55 and older, you have one out of five Americans," he explained.

Dickerson cited a government study which revealed the number of senior adults in central cities--the core of metropolitan areas--has declined while the number in small towns and the suburbs has increased.

Acknowledging that the majority of Southern Baptists live in those areas, he challenged Baptists in small towns and suburbs to intensify their ministry to the aging.

One way grassroots Baptists can enlarge their ministry is by recognizing the importance of the association, he continued. Because many small churches lack the staff or resources to tackle such a ministry on their own, Dickerson suggested a pooling of talents that would be coordinated through the local Baptist association.

"Health screening clinics and information referral systems that already exist in larger cities could be brought to the smaller community through such a network," he said. Additionally, senior adults could establish a council that would make recommendations to the association regarding needed ministries in the community.

"Senior adults are finding they are living longer than they ever anticipated," Dickerson added. "We need to be prepared to help them make their lives more meaningful during these added years by encouraging them to have purpose and a sense of mission."

"Growing older does not have to be looked at as a disease to be avoided, but rather a time of continuing growth and fulfilling experiences."

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Awards Presented To Texan,
Floridian, By Aging Group

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WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (BP)--W.L. Howse III of Lewisville, Texas, and the late Agnes Durant Pylant of Jacksonville, Fla., were honored for service to senior adults by the Southern Baptist Association of Ministries with the Aging.

Presentation of the second annual Adkins-Kerr Award came during the 10th anniversary banquet of the national organization, meeting in Colonial Williamsburg, Va., in mid-February.

Pylant, who died last year at age 85, was the first salaried youth director in the Southern Baptist Convention and wrote the first study course book on recreation for the Baptist Young People's Union.

In the 1930s, she taught church recreation in the School of Religious Education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and later taught at Wayland College in Plainview, Texas. In 1954 she was named first director of the church recreation department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn.

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Pylant's department also co-sponsored the denomination's first workgroup on aging as well as the first Senior Adult Chautauqua at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center.

She was the author of six books, two published after her retirement at age 62.

Last year she moved from Jacksonville to Richmond, Va., to be near a daughter, Patty Pylant Monhollon, who accepted the award on her behalf. Pylant died in Richmond Aug. 5.

Howse, minister of education and administration at First Baptist Church of Lewisville, Texas, accepted the award for his ministry to senior adults.

In addition to serving on church staffs in Texas, he has been employed by Buckner Baptist Children's Homes in Dallas, and he was director of organization for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and director of the alcohol and drug abuse section for the Tennessee Department of Mental Health, both in Nashville.

A graduate of Union University in Jackson, Tenn., and Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Howse also was director of the Hurt Gerontology Center of Virginia Baptist Homes in Culpeper.

A delegate to the 1981 White House Conference on Aging, Howse is a licensed nursing home administrator and currently is executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Association of Ministries with the Aging.

He is the 1982 recipient of the distinguished service award presented by the Virginia Association of Non-Profit Homes for the Aging.

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Solutions To World Hunger
Complicated, Students Told

By Paula Jones

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SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--World hunger has no simple cause or cure, hunger experts told Oklahoma Baptist University students and faculty during a world hunger symposium sponsored by the Kerr Leadership Development Program.

The symposium focused on actions Christians must take to alleviate hunger. Speakers acknowledged long-term solutions are difficult and will require more than just cash donations and prayers.

Only a realistic understanding of the hunger problem will enable Christians to respond logically, said Robert Parham, director of hunger concerns for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Causes behind the hunger crisis in Africa are more complex than simply a lack of rain, Parham said, noting, Africa's hunger problems have become deeply rooted through the politics of colonialism which left Africa an agricultural system leading to famine, foreign aid that has done little to battle starvation, overpopulation which largely has been ignored and a stagnant economy that constantly is sliding backward.

"We can't make it rain," he said, "but we can work to overcome the problems caused by man. The little things we do can make a difference. We can't carry the whole world on our shoulders like Atlas, but we can shoulder more than we have."

Parham offered three suggestions for fighting world hunger: Christians must live courageously and not give up hope to overcome the crisis; they must become hard-headed and move beyond sorrow, tears and outrage and begin to think critically about world issues; and they must act logically by taking the initiative to help the hungry, contacting political leaders and gradually changing the moral values of communities.

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Ronald Sider, professor of theology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, pointed to three biblical truths dealing with the world hunger crisis. Citing Exodus and other instances throughout the Bible when God acted to liberate the poor and put down their rich oppressors, Sider said God has been at work in history exalting the poor and casting down the rich who got that way by oppression or who do not share their wealth with persons in need.

"Religious people who don't seek justice for the poor are not really God's people," Sider insisted. "In Matthew 25:41-46, Jesus said that those who don't feed the hungry and clothe the poor go to hell."

God doesn't want extremes of poverty or wealth but wants everyone to be able to make a living, he said, contending humans are merely stewards of their possessions. God is the absolute owner.

"We need to live more simply so that others may simply live," Sider said.

Steve Coats, issues director of Bread for the World, an interdenominational Christian social action group, rounded out the symposium by offering practical suggestions for ways to combat world hunger. It must be attacked through public policy and by making the U.S. government more responsive to the problem, he said.

Citing victories toward ending world hunger through changes in public policy, Coats said, "There are signs of hope, but this is not a time for complacency. Separation of church and state doesn't mean Christians should withdraw from public policy. They need to be out there taking over poverty and oppression."

Coats encouraged Christians to be active in changing public policy by writing their congressmen to let them know the public cares about the world hunger crisis.

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901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

LYNN HAY NO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
901 COMMERCE
NASHVILLE, TN 37203

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