

(BP)**- - BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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December 12, 1986

86-185

Monthly Prayer Emphasis Urged;
Career Appointees Set Record

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Pray like never before, especially the first Sunday of every month, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees urged the denomination's churches during their December meeting.

The trustees' plea is that churches will join in a monthly "concert of prayer" for world evangelization beginning Feb. 1.

"Widespread spiritual awakening and world evangelization will never take place without a united, sustained concert of extraordinary prayer," said Barbara Cunningham, chairwoman of the committee that brought the recommendation.

"I cannot expect," she added, her voice breaking with emotion, "to see extraordinary prayer take place across my convention, if it's not happening in my own life."

A toll-free telephone number to inform churches of the latest prayer requests will be established at the Foreign Mission Board. For several years, the board has operated such a toll-free number during the Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions in December.

In addition to the toll-free number, the board's prayer office will continue its monthly prayer alerts. The current mailing list is comprised of 23,000 Southern Baptists.

Momentum toward a plea for convention-wide prayer for world missions began to build after an Oct. 12 prayer meeting when about 30 of the 84 trustees prayed in shifts throughout the night.

While trustees planned a concerted prayer effort for world missions, they also rejoiced at the appointment of 43 new missionaries at a special service at Weatherford Memorial Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., Dec. 9. This addition brought the year's total of career missionary appointments to a new record, 256.

President R. Keith Parks announced that Harwood and Louise Blanks Cochrane of Richmond had made new gifts to the Foreign Mission Board totaling about \$6 million.

The couple gave the land on which the missionary orientation center is located, not far from their home in Rockville, about 25 miles northwest of Richmond, and provided financial contributions toward its construction.

Their latest gifts included shares in Overnite Transportation Company, founded by Cochrane, which was sold earlier this year to Union Pacific Corp., and other Richmond and North Carolina properties.

Throughout the meeting, special prayers were offered for George Senter and his son, Philip, 15, in the aftermath of the Nov. 26 murders in Liberia of George's wife, Libby, and Rachel, their 10-year-old daughter. In a resolution of "deep appreciation for faithful service," the board pledged its prayer support for the family in the days ahead.

The murders occurred in a country that has been relatively stable in recent years. In contrast, some of the board's 3,765 missionaries work in countries that most consider far riskier.

In a report later in the meeting, Charles Bryan, senior vice president for overseas operations, showed part of an October video interview with missionary Frances Fuller of Beirut. She explained that by staying on when most other Americans have left, she and other Southern Baptist missionaries have gained credibility for their witness about Christ.

Despite such conditions, the board's human resources committee reported the missionary force continues to grow. Additions to the force in 1986 totaled 411, the second-highest total for a single year but below last year's record 429. In 1985, the board appointed 237 career missionaries, the highest number up to that time.

This year's total also includes 11 career missionary reappointees; 25 missionary associates, including two who were re-employed; 99 journeymen; and 20 special assignment personnel.

Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for human resources, said the high number of appointments, coupled with a low attrition rate, has helped put the board almost two years ahead of schedule toward meeting its goal of 5,000 missionaries by the year 2000.

But in looking at the urgency of global evangelization, he said, a much larger number of missionaries may be required to mount the kind of worldwide strategy Parks has challenged the board to undertake. As many as 8,500 missionaries might be needed, depending upon a number of factors that a new Global Strategy Group proposed at the December meeting could study, he added.

To ensure adequate human resources for the urgent global task, he said, pastors must come to regard themselves as the missions leaders of their churches and use the pulpit and the budget to supplement missions education work done by church organizations. He also urged pastors to take a prayerful look at the board's greatest single unmet personnel need year after year: preaching missionaries.

Major attention at the December meeting was focused on Parks' plan for reorganization of the board's staff to gear up for global evangelization. At Parks' request, the board elected a transitional committee to work with staff members in preparing detailed plans for the reorganization.

The 13-person committee, expected to meet early in January, includes six chairmen of the board's standing committees, Mary Strauss of Maryland, Bob Cochran of Virginia, Mark Cortis of North Carolina, W.W. Walley of Mississippi, Lloyd Hansen of Tennessee and Jim Jeffries of Missouri.

Other members are Morris Mills of Tennessee, Dee Bryan of West Virginia, Sam Sorrell of Texas, Alastair Walker of South Carolina, Barbara Cunningham of Texas, Howard Baldwin of Virginia and Bill Rowlett of Kentucky. Board Chairman Bob Smith of Texas will be chairman of the committee, and the board's two vice chairmen, Buck Buckalew of Virginia and Claude Kirkpatrick of Louisiana, will be ex officio members.

Parks said he hopes that the staff and board representatives could bring definite recommendations in February, with the new staff alignment to take effect March 1.

Reaching "closed countries" that do not allow the entrance of Christian missionaries is one of the major priorities identified by Parks for future Southern Baptist work abroad. That objective also highlighted a report by Lewis Myers, director of Cooperative Services International, the office created by the board in 1985 to enhance Southern Baptist involvement in countries where missionaries cannot live.

Myers reviewed the first year of Cooperative Services International work, which has focused on assisting Christians and others in China through education, medical work, business and other avenues. The office is studying possible involvement in scores of other "closed countries," a term Myers said he increasingly dislikes.

"That doesn't mean the people are closed to friendship, compassion, concern or prayer," he said. "The country is just closed to missionary residence, and God's intent doesn't rise or fall on the political processes of granting visas."

The board ended the year by adding Canada to its mission fields with the appointment of a third couple to work as fraternal representatives with Canadian Baptists, but removed Brunei from the list. Brunei officials turned down a visa renewal application by Bob and Dorothy Evans, who have lived in Brunei since 1981, and said there could be no appeal of the decision. This leaves the total mission field count at 108.

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'Creation Science,' Evolution
Pitted In High Court Clash

By Stan Hastey

N-BJC
Baptist Press
12/12/86

WASHINGTON (BP)—A simmering national debate over the validity of teaching "creation science" in public school classrooms came to the U.S. Supreme Court Dec. 10, leaving justices with the dilemma of deciding whether the hotly disputed discipline amounts to true science or religion.

Hearing oral arguments in a case challenging the constitutionality of a Louisiana law requiring "balanced treatment" in the teaching of creationism and evolution as theories for the origins of the universe, the high court also was presented the option of sending the dispute back to lower courts before deciding the basic questions at a later time.

That option was urged upon the justices by a special assistant attorney general for Louisiana, Wendell R. Bird of Atlanta, who argued a federal court of appeals erred by not accepting as true what he called "uncontroverted evidence" presented by expert witnesses that creation science is indeed scientifically valid. Bird said the case should be sent back to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans with instructions to weigh that evidence in making a new ruling.

The lower panel held last year that Louisiana's law, "The Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act," violates the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion. Bird reminded the high court that the vote in that decision was 8-7. Earlier, a U.S. district court also had stricken the law as unconstitutional.

Although Bird said he preferred for the high court to send the case back to the 5th Circuit, he suggested the justices could decide instead to reverse the lower panels, both of which found the law to have a religious rather than secular purpose. For the last 15 years, the Supreme Court has decided such disputes by using a three-prong test requiring that a challenged law or public policy have a secular purpose, have the "primary effect" of neither advancing nor inhibiting religion and have a result that does not involve "excessive entanglement" between church and state.

Questioned on the point, Bird acknowledged while some Louisiana legislators might have had a religious purpose in mind when they enacted the challenged statute five years ago, their main purpose was secular. At most, he insisted, some lawmakers might have had a "tertiary"—but not a "primary" or even "secondary"—religious purpose in passing the law.

Asked by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor if the Constitution permits the teaching of a purely religious concept to balance what is perceived to be an anti-religious view, Bird refused to concede creation science is a religious concept, a key argument throughout his half-hour presentation.

When asked by new Justice Antonin Scalia if creation science requires the teaching of a personal God, Bird replied with an emphatic "no." Creation science, he elaborated, requires neither belief in a creator-God nor the account of creation in the book of Genesis.

But in a lengthy exchange with Justice John Paul Stevens, Bird reluctantly acknowledged the categories of creationism and evolution are mutually exclusive, thus requiring a basic choice between them.

Arguing the high court should uphold the lower court rulings, American Civil Liberties Union attorney Jay Topkis of New York City admonished the justices to heed the late Justice Felix Frankfurter's view that when legislative purpose is questioned, the "plain language" of the disputed law be taken at face value.

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In an unusually animated presentation—at one point likening opposing attorney Bird to Tweedledum, a less than brilliant character in "Alice in Wonderland"—Topkis heaped ridicule on the notion that the Louisiana legislature's purpose was anything but religious. Reading definitions of "creation" from different editions of Webster's New International Dictionary, he deflected questions from several justices with short, tart replies.

At one point, asked by Stevens if the record of debate in the legislature did not reflect a stated concern for academic freedom as one reason for enactment of the law, Topkis shot back, "Oh, sure ... let's give God equal time." He added the statute "calls for the very antithesis" of academic freedom.

At that, Scalia countered, "It never occurred to me that Louisiana was dominated by fundamentalists."

A decision in the case is expected by early July 1987.

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Fired Seventh-Day Adventist
Has Her Day At Supreme Court

By Stan Hasteley

N-BUC
Baptist Press
12/12/86

WASHINGTON (BP)—Paula A. Hobbie, a Seventh-day Adventist fired from her job in a jewelry store for refusing to work on the Sabbath and then denied unemployment compensation by the state of Florida, had her day at the nation's highest court Dec. 10, as her attorney argued she was denied the constitutionally protected right of free exercise of religion.

Attorney Walter E. Carson of Washington told Supreme Court justices the decision in Hobbie's case will have "a profound effect on the free exercise rights of all Americans." Hobbie, he argued, "was forced to choose between her religion and her work."

Hobbie converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church after working in a Winter Park, Fla., store owned by Lawton and Co., a nationwide chain of more than 650 jewelry stores, two and one-half years. She initially worked out an agreement with her immediate supervisor through which she would work every Sunday in exchange for having Saturdays off. Seventh-day Adventists give strict observance to a Sabbath that begins at sundown Friday and ends at sundown Saturday.

But when higher management learned of the arrangement, Hobbie was informed it was unacceptable. After she refused on religious grounds to work on Saturdays, she was dismissed. Florida's Department of Labor and Employment Security subsequently rejected Hobbie's application for unemployment compensation benefits.

After exhausting all possible administrative appeals, the Florida woman filed suit against the state agency in a state court. But that panel also agreed with the state's position. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed last April to review Hobbie's claim.

Attorney Carson repeatedly cited a pair of earlier Supreme Court decisions in similar disputes, claiming they are clear precedents controlling his client's case. In 1963, the high court upheld the unemployment benefits claim of another Seventh-day Adventist discharged by a South Carolina employer because she declined a job when informed she would not be given time off every week to observe the Sabbath. In the second decision, the court in 1981 ruled in favor of a Jehovah's Witness denied unemployment benefits after quitting his job at an armaments factory on religious grounds.

In his oral argument, Carson said these decisions "reached an important milestone" in judicial understanding of the rights of workers under the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. The state, he argued, may not "burden" a worker's free exercise right unless there is a "compelling" state interest in doing so.

He also disputed the state's claim that Hobbie's case is fundamentally different from those in the earlier decisions because she converted to a new faith while under employment and then demanded schedule changes to meet her new religion's requirements. "Such a distinction is not a valid one," Carson argued, adding the right to convert to a new faith is "fundamental and central" to the free exercise clause.

If the high court were to rule against Hobbie, he warned, the effects "would be far-reaching and perhaps devastating" and would lead to a "generation of litigation."

Carson concluded, "Paula Hobbie asks of this court only that the free exercise clause be applied, not only for herself, but for a host of others."

On the other side, attorney John D. Maher of Tallahassee, Fla., faced close questioning from a number of the justices on his basic contention that the earlier Sabbath-worker cases do not apply in Hobbie's case. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor told Maher she found his reasoning "strange," adding it "seems to allow the state to place a special burden on religion."

Maher repeatedly made the point that Hobbie's case broke new legal ground. "She wants the state to carve out a special exception" to meet her peculiar religious claims, he argued. The state unemployment commission's policy involved no coercion, he added, but a simple refusal "to carve out a special exception."

Although Mayer alone represented the state's position during oral arguments, the federal government has filed a friend-of-the-court brief asking the court to reject Hobbie's claim.

That move recently prompted a strong reply from 15 religious and other organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. In a letter to Attorney General Edwin Meese III, attorneys for the groups accused the government of seeking a "radical interpretation" of the earlier Sabbath-worker cases, adding, "We are hard pressed to identify any interest of the United States which justifies the taking of such a position." Among those signing the letter was Oliver S. Thomas, general counsel of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee.

In a separate statement following the oral arguments, Thomas told Baptist Press, "It's fascinating that the Reagan administration is perceived as being pro-religion when here it is asking the Supreme Court to throw out the most important safeguard for religious exercise of the last 25 years." Referring to the longstanding Supreme Court test that government must prove a compelling state interest in such cases, Thomas added, "When you look beneath the surface, the administration could be more accurately described as pro-government on church-state matters."

While administration officials "think government should be able to promote religion if it so chooses," Thomas said further, "they also find it acceptable for government to burden or inhibit legitimate free exercise." The contradiction, he said, amounts to "a statist mentality that, thank God, the Supreme Court and most of the American people haven't bought."

Last June, Thomas filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the Hobbie case for the Baptist Joint Committee urging the high court to uphold its previous holdings that free exercise may be burdened "only if it is necessary to achieving a compelling state interest."

A decision in Hobbie's appeal is not expected until next spring.

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Elder Pledges Support
Of Peace, Bold Mission

By Linda Lawson

N-BSSB

Baptist Press
12/12/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptist Sunday School Board President Lloyd Elder pledged continuing support of peace efforts in the Southern Baptist Convention while focusing the resources of the denomination's church program and publishing agency "on the purpose that joins us together."

"Bold Mission Thrust (the Southern Baptist Convention goal of sharing the gospel with every person in the world by the year 2000) is our commitment as we walk in the spirit of God," Elder said in an address to state convention program leaders and board staff members attending annual planning meetings in Nashville, Tenn., in mid-December.

In response to 1986 SBC statistical projections showing relatively small gains in baptisms and church membership, he said: "What we do not yet have is a breakthrough in Bold Mission Thrust. As we labor toward a breakthrough, anticipate it and strategize for it, we must be utterly dependent on God."

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He cited several projects under way within the board—Bold Mission Thrust planning, a marketing/ministry study, space study and reorganization—which he said are designed to support churches in their mission of reaching people and developing believers.

"The only reason the Sunday School Board exists is to fulfill its mission, not to maintain itself," said Elder. "Results don't happen in the Sunday School Board. They happen in the churches, or they don't happen at all. What we're really looking for is results outside the Sunday School Board."

"We are not just one among many publishers, but we are a denominational publisher. We are committed to doing the best job in such a way that results take place in the lives of people and churches."

In the changing environment of today's world, Elder said, churches, the denomination and the Sunday School Board face threats of erosion of purpose, confusion of identity and fragmentation of constituency.

He predicted the denomination can move forward to greater growth "if we can keep a constancy of purpose with a network of strong gifted leaders. This is a time when we focus on the purpose of God that joins us together."

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Foreign Board Studies
Ministries For Deaf

By Erich Bridges

N - FMB
Baptist Press
12/12/86

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board is studying ways to involve more deaf Southern Baptists in missions and increase ministries to an estimated 5 million to 10 million deaf people of the world.

During its December meeting, the board adopted a statement on deaf ministries in response to a motion made at the 1986 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta. The motion, referred to the Foreign Mission Board by the convention's Committee on Order of Business, called on the board to reverse a perceived policy that it would not appoint deaf people as missionaries.

"Contrary to the perception noted in the motion at the Southern Baptist Convention, the Foreign Mission Board does not have policies precluding the appointment of deaf personnel," the statement said. "Our appointments are based on field requests. We do not have field requests calling for the matching of gifts and skills of the non-hearing with related field needs and opportunities."

But the statement went on to report that mission board staff members have been meeting for several years with representatives from the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf, a national fellowship. Meetings and correspondence have centered on exploring the needs for ministry among deaf people overseas and ways deaf Southern Baptists can get involved.

In October, several deaf volunteers from Applewood Baptist Church in Wheat Ridge, Colo., participated in a partnership evangelism crusade coordinated by missionaries and Baptists in South Korea.

Board staff members and missionaries are investigating possible ministries for deaf mission workers in other countries. Baptist ministries to the deaf or deaf congregations already exist in Japan, Taiwan, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Colombia.

In February, board personnel and leaders from the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf will travel together to the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Trinidad. They will survey the potential for ministries to the deaf in those countries and the possibilities for using deaf mission personnel.

Staff members also have identified at least a dozen missionaries with ability to communicate in American Sign Language. A manual may be developed to aid them, other missionaries and volunteers in ministering to the deaf.

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Attitudes toward the deaf vary from country to country. Although realization is growing that deaf people can become valuable, contributing members of society, many countries do not have adequate training and opportunities, reported board research specialist Clark Scanlon.

"Some Christian groups do have evangelistic ministries among deaf overseas and are reporting response. We cannot avoid the conclusion that there is a need, that there are opportunities and that there is response," he said.

There also is a large potential reservoir of Southern Baptists who can respond. Of the estimated 1,500 deaf ministries or congregations in the United States, between 800 and 1,000 are Southern Baptist.

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Home Board Personnel
Make Career Changes

N-HMB

Baptist Press
12/12/86

ATLANTA (BP)—Three Southern Baptist Home Mission Board employees have resigned to pursue personal career opportunities.

Bob Duvall, who has been employed by the agency for the past six years as director of hospital chaplaincy, has become the director of chaplaincy with the Gwinnett Hospital System in Lawrenceville, Ga.

He began his denominational career in 1978 when he became chaplain to hospitals affiliated with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. He served in that position under missionary appointment by the Home Mission Board. He also has been interim pastor of churches in Minnesota and Alabama as well as serving as hospital chaplain in Texas and Minnesota.

Loretta Hays, who has been director of employment services for the Atlanta-based missions agency since 1982, resigned to accompany her husband to a new pastorate in Lexington, Ky. She joined the board in 1981 as a secretary and previously was an elementary school teacher in North Carolina.

Ron Loftis, who joined the board as assistant director of the church and community ministries department in 1985, has become director of missions for Roberson Baptist Association in Lumberton, N.C.

Loftis began his denominational service in 1977 as a home missionary, director of Christian social ministries in New South River Baptist Association in Fayetteville, N.C. He previously was pastor of churches in that state. Prior to entering the ministry, he was a highway engineer in Fayetteville, N.C., for 16 years.

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Genevox Music Group
Is Publishing Name

N-BSSB

Baptist Press
12/12/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Genevox Music Group was unveiled as the new name for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's music publishing department during a national church music planning meeting in Nashville, Tenn., in early December.

Genevox Director Fes Robertson told church music leaders from across the United States the name comes from the words "genesis," Greek for creation, and "vox," Latin for voice.

The group will encompass the existing Broadman, Van Ness and McKinney music imprints and labels, as well as other imprints and labels that may be developed in the future, Robertson said.

Announcement of the name came two months after the Oct. 1 official beginning of the component, authorized by the Sunday School Board's trustees in February 1986.

Robertson said Genevox will produce music products primarily for church use at the present time but expects to provide items for school, home and personal use as the group develops.

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Printed music items are expected to include collections, cantatas, octavos and keyboard, handbell and instrumental music.

Additional products expected to be produced include vocal and instrumental recordings, musical instruments and other related items.

Genevox will work cooperatively with the existing church music department, directed by Wesley Forbis, with Genevox publishing products to support and complement the church music program, Robertson said.

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Relief Workers Told Many
Disasters Due To Sin

By Bill Bangham

F- B' Hood
Baptist Press
12/12/86

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptist disaster relief workers were told sin is the cause of many disasters. The comment was made during the National Disaster Relief Conference, December 6-8, by Neal Frank of the National Hurricane Weather Service in Miami. The conference was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Disaster relief, a ministry of Baptist Men, is administered by state Brotherhood departments and coordinated nationally through the Brotherhood Commission.

Frank told conference participants to anticipate more needs for their services in the future, particularly along the U.S. coastline. "The problem with the coastline today is development on little coastal islands," he said. "We don't have any business on those little islands, but we're there."

The islands and other fragile coastal areas are most susceptible to major hurricane damage, he said. Construction of multi-storied condominiums and seawalls in these areas interrupt the natural formation of dune and beach. When a hurricane comes along, damage can be severe and the potential for loss of life great.

"We not only want to live on the waterfront, we want to live in the water ... within the highwater mark. When we do, we interrupt the natural laws of God. Humans need to live in harmony with the natural laws, as well as the spiritual laws, of God," said Frank, a Methodist layman.

"As long as we have unregenerate people on the coast with big profits to be made ... we'll need organizations like yours," he told conference participants.

Ann Metzger of the Memphis State University Earthquake Center discussed earthquake preparedness. "It's possible to save lives through planning," she said. "It's usually 48 to 72 hours before meaningful help can get into an area after a major quake. Families should be prepared for this period."

When most Americans think of earthquakes, they think of the West Coast, she said. But there are other seismically active areas in the United States. Within the New Madrid seismic zone there are 150 to 200 earthquakes a year. Most never are felt. This zone is in the center of the United States, running from a point about 50 miles west of Memphis, Tenn., northeast to the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

The danger from this active zone is that bedrock underlying the area transmits shock waves a great distance. Damage was reported from a major quake centered in southeastern Missouri in 1811 as far away Virginia to the east, Lake Michigan to the north, Texas to the west and Louisiana to the south. Paducah, Ky., is the only city in the area to date that has a seismic building code.

"With a tornado, you have a brief warning to move to another location," said Metzger. "With an earthquake, the first warning you have is when the ground begins to shake."

Bobby Baines of the National Red Cross in Washington, and Cameron Byler, national disaster response coordinator for the Brotherhood Commission, presented a new working agreement between the two agencies. "We have confidence in each other's capability," said Baines. "Unfortunately, often times there were people in the Red Cross concerned about turf. And regretfully, you have people concerned about turf. This led to our statement of agreement."

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Baines complimented Baptist Men on the organization's involvement and high level of expertise. He encouraged members to work with the Red Cross in pre-disaster planning on the state level. "This is where relationships develop," he said.

Nathan Porter, national consultant for domestic hunger, disaster relief and migrant ministries for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, also addressed the group. "Home Mission Board strategy for disaster relief," said Porter, "is for the Brotherhood Commission to do it. We have been very successful with this strategy."

More than 100 participants from 20 state conventions attended the meeting.

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Names of participants representing state Baptist conventions available from state Brotherhood offices.

Mudslide Survivors
Need Encouragement

By Art Toalston

F-FMB

Baptist Press
12/12/86

IBAGUE, Colombia (BP)—Simple letters of encouragement would mean much to survivors of the massive mudslide that buried the town of Armero, Colombia, last year.

Most of the 5,000 survivors are living in tents at the small village of Lerida, near Armero.

Colombian Baptist social worker Lidia Kelly has asked Baptists in the United States to spend a few moments during the Christmas season to write to Armero survivors, particularly to encourage those without faith to "go ahead and get to know the Lord."

In a telephone interview, Kelly said each letter "will tell them that someone who is far away is thinking about them. I think this can be a great help."

Kelly works at the Center of Hope, a Baptist ministry to several dozen mudslide survivors who have settled in Ibague, a city 70 miles from Armero. The Center of Hope will be the distribution point for letters of Christian love. Its address is Box 1235, Ibague, Tolima, Colombia.

The intensity of trauma and grief has lessened somewhat in recent months among the survivors. By official estimates, they lost 24,000 of their relatives and friends in the volcano-triggered mudslide of November 1985. Many survivors are former agricultural workers now without a means of income.

Southern Baptist missionaries and Colombian Baptists have sent two medical-dental-pastoral teams to Lerida, one in November at the one-year anniversary mark and an earlier one last summer. About 450 people received medical or dental care during each team's four-day visit.

Survivors regularly mentioned their losses last summer, recalled Southern Baptist missionary Jeni Hester, "and as soon as they did, they started crying. (In November) the people seemed to be coping better." Even so, the teams' pastors and social workers stayed busy with tent-to-tent visits and small-group Bible studies. Hester is a nurse who coordinates the medical caravan work of the Baptist Hospital in Barranquilla.

Last summer, many survivors still did not believe so many of their family members and friends had died, added Richard Rolfe, a missionary evangelist based in Ibague.

"They didn't see them die," Rolfe said. "Secretly they were hoping they had gotten out and were alive somewhere else." That hope was fueled by false rumors that some of the injured had been taken to other countries for medical care.

A one-year anniversary observance at the hardened-mud-and-debris site of Armero drew not just survivors but thousands of Colombians on Nov. 13. "It helped a lot of people finally bury the past," Rolfe said. "Armero has become a graveyard. There are grave markers all over. A lot of them are made of concrete and stone." He added no efforts are planned to rebuild the once-thriving agricultural town.

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"Each tent (in Lerida) contains all that is left of each family unit," Rolfe said. "Sometimes the father or mother is missing. Often one or more of the children are gone. In one tent, a 60-year-old grandmother lives with her three small grandchildren. Her main concern was that she will not live long enough to care for the children, 'and then who will care for them?'"

Southern Baptist world hunger funds will help feed a number of elderly adults in Lerida as well as young orphans, he added.

Lerida's water supply and its schools cannot handle the influx of Amerero survivors, and these needs may lead to ministry opportunities, the missionary said. The village also needs a Baptist pastor, "somebody stable to build the work around."

Two-year-old Alexis Acuna and 6-year-old Deison Valderrama, two children spotlighted in last year's news coverage of the tragedy, are doing well.

A photograph of Acuna, then thought to be orphaned, appeared in many newspapers across the United States last year. He was shown with his arms outstretched crying for his "Mami." By year's end, his widowed mother had been located.

The toddler is doing well, although his mother still receives treatment for a leg injury, said Southern Baptist missionary Ellis Leagans.

Valderrama, who lost his left foot to gangrene, also was thought to be orphaned after the mudslide. But he was reunited with his widowed mother about two weeks later. He has become one of Kelly's special concerns at the Center of Hope.

"When he reached here, he had a lot of problems," Kelly recounted, "but now I feel he is trying to do his best."

Also working with Kelly at the center are fellow Colombian Baptists Rafael and Mary Blanco. While Kelly leads a women's Bible study each Friday and handles children's work, the Blancos are leading a blossoming mission and assisting about 15 amputees in visits to a prosthetist.

Valderrama's grandmother and an aunt and uncle were among 30 people baptized in the mission's first such service in early November. Forty to 60 people attend the mission's Sunday services, and 70 to 80 come on Thursdays. The mission, Kelly said, has the makings of "a great church."

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