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86-187

Christmas Project Benefits  
Children Of Prison Inmates

By Kathy Palen

F-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)—When a fellow church member asked Eloise Clarke if she thought their church might be interested in participating in a new Christmas project, Clarke agreed to give the project a try. But she did so "with a measure of concern."

A year later, Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., is again taking part in Project Angel Tree, a program sponsored by Prison Fellowship Ministries. Through the project, churches and other groups fill the Christmas gift wishes of children whose parents are in prison.

The program has gone over so well at Mt. Pleasant that next year the church plans to request twice as many children's names, said Clarke, coordinator the church's participation. She added some of the church's newer or less active members have become involved through the project.

When a church agrees to participate in the program, it receives the name, age, sex and three gift wishes of each child for whom it is to be responsible. It also receives the prisoner's name and prison facility.

Some churches set up a Christmas tree decorated with paper angels on which are written the children's names and gift wishes. Members then select gifts to purchase. The gifts are wrapped and delivered to the children on behalf of the incarcerated parent.

Within the Mt. Pleasant congregation, many of the members who purchase the gifts also make the actual deliveries. Others who are unable to buy gifts help with delivering the gifts.

"Our members enjoy it as much as the kids do," Clarke said. "There are some who don't have any children of their own and others whose children are grown up, so they enjoy shopping for children's gifts."

Many of the gift requests are for clothing, Clarke said, adding, "But knowing the people with those names, those children will get a toy also."

Clarke pinpointed a two-fold reward from participation in the program.

"First, you know there's an actual child receiving the gifts because of the follow-through of the delivery," Clarke said. "In some of the homes, the children wouldn't have gotten much and probably nothing that would have said 'Dad' on it.

"Second, we hope it will have some impact on the prisoners. We hope their knowing that there are people who gave will draw them a little closer."

Project Angel Tree is one of a variety of programs sponsored by Prison Fellowship, which was organized by Charles W. Colson, himself a Baptist. Colson, an aide to President Richard M. Nixon, was imprisoned for seven months for his role in the Watergate scandal.

"I remember vividly what Christmas in prison was like," Colson said. "It was painfully frustrating, my heart aching for my family. And my anguish was compounded by the realization that my wife and children were suffering more.

"I'm convinced that the ones who are hurt most are the little children. Christmas marks the birth of Christ—God come to earth in the person of Jesus. When we remember these little ones, we are, in the most eloquent way, remembering him."

Kentucky Volunteers  
Find Kenya Responsive

By Craig Bird

F - FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—A new "active" ingredient has been added to Baptist efforts to tell Kenya about Jesus Christ.

With the help of that new element—Kentucky Baptist volunteers who pay their own expenses to participate in short-term projects—Kenyan Baptist Convention leaders expect 100,000 Kenyans to become Christians during 1987 and hope 400 new churches will be organized.

The Kentucky-Kenya partnership is just one example of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's effort to link Baptist state conventions and associations with individual countries for long-term evangelism and church development projects.

Because national Christian leaders and career Southern Baptist missionaries who live in the countries are involved in the planning and coordination, the enthusiasm and skills of short-term volunteers can be used in the most productive ways possible.

"If we are moving in Mombasa or Nairobi or anywhere, we are moving together," Arthur Kinyanjui, chairman (president) of the Kenya Baptist Convention, explained during a recent visit to Richmond, Va.

The partnership has allowed Baptists to take advantage of a responsiveness which is sweeping the eastern Africa country. "Kenya is so open now," Kinyanjui said. "People are coming to accept Christ without so many excuses."

One example is the proud Masai. For decades, career missionaries have worked with the pastoral cattlemen but recorded few conversions. But recently the years of preparation began to bear fruit and entire families and tribes became Christians.

Many Kentucky volunteers are working with the Masai—and leading them to Christ. "The first group of Kentucky Baptists which went out to witness to the Masai made them angry—the Masai got upset when it was time for the team to move on to the next group," Kinyanjui explained. "They wanted the whole team to stay with them permanently."

In Mombasa, a heavily Muslim area, evangelistic teams reported more than 4,000 professions of faith in just two weeks.

Such success stories have been reproduced throughout the country. And the Bluegrass Baptists have not gone unnoticed.

Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi several times has expressed his appreciation for Baptist work, especially the relief project coordinated by the career missionaries, and the trans-tribal appeal of the gospel as presented by the Baptists. Such an approach makes the Kenya Baptist Convention one of the true "national" bodies since membership cuts across ethnic, geographic and economic lines.

In October, while attending Kinyanjui's church in Nairobi, Moi publicly asked Kinyanjui to "go take my regards to the people of Kentucky" for what they have done and will do for Kenya.

His remarks were reported nationwide on both television and in newspapers.

Southern Baptist missionaries have been in Kenya since 1956 and the Kenyan Baptist Convention was formed in 1971. In 1985, when the partnership began, the convention had about 750 churches. Two years later the count is 1,050.

During 1987, the third and final year of the partnership, another 600-700 Kentucky Baptists are expected to provide their own expenses and go to Kenya to share their witness. The convention, the missionaries and the Kentucky volunteers intend to start another 400 churches in 1987.

Kinyanjui has an additional timetable, however. "As far as I'm concerned, Kentucky Baptists can keep coming to Kenya until Jesus comes again!"

National WMU President  
Predicts Healthy Future

By Karen Benson

*N-WMU*

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—Woman's Missionary Union might be on the verge of a "science fiction" future if current enrollment and financial trends continue, according to the national WMU president, Marjorie J. McCullough.

Speaking in mid-December to staff at the national WMU headquarters, McCullough predicted "times like we have never thought of before."

WMU membership nationwide increased by an estimated 1.5 percent this year, bringing the total WMU membership in Southern Baptist churches to almost 1.2 million.

WMU and church music enrollments were the only two church programs to show an increase in the 1986 year, according to just-released Southern Baptist Convention statistics.

WMU officials attribute the increase to the VISION 88 enlistment campaign, which is an effort to double WMU enrollment by the end of 1988, WMU's centennial year.

Additionally, the WMU national headquarters showed more than a \$500,000 surplus of revenue over expenses in the 1985-86 operating budget of about \$9 million—continuing WMU's history of operating "in the black," said Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of WMU, SBC.

Although a final decision has yet to be made, it is anticipated that the finance committee of the WMU Executive Board will designate most or all of the extra revenue for debt retirement.

By the organization's centennial date—May 14, 1988—WMU expects to pay the entire \$6 million debt on the relocation from downtown Birmingham to New Hope Mountain on the outskirts of the city, including the new national headquarters building.

Less than \$3 million is still needed to pay off the debt.

A special "Centennial Thank Offering" is being taken—above regular tithes and special missions offerings—to retire the debt. Thank Offering envelopes are available through state WMU offices and the national WMU, SBC, headquarters.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The 1986 SBC statistics released by the Sunday School Board show an increase in WMU membership of 1.8 percent. However, one church with a very large membership used different reporting procedures this year than last year, resulting in a reported increase that was much larger than the actual increase. WMU has chosen to go with the lower figure. If you need further information or clarification, contact Karen Benson, WMU, SBC, (205) 991-8100.

Brazil Project Will Be Pilot  
For Student Foreign Missions

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press  
12/16/86

*N-BSSB*

CHAPEL HILL, Tenn. (BP)—A plan to send as many as 100 student volunteers on a two-week global missions encounter in Brazil will be the flagship for developing student involvement in foreign missions, according to foreign missions and student ministries leaders.

A commitment to the plan was solidified with the endorsement of state convention student ministries directors meeting in annual planning sessions at Henry Horton State Park in Chapel Hill, Tenn.

The directors made commitments to fill 65 of the volunteer positions and said they would attempt to send the requested team of 100 students.

The Southern Baptist students will be teamed with Brazilian university students for mission activities throughout Brazil during the first two weeks of January 1988.

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"The Foreign Mission Board has given us a real opportunity to involve students. Our dream for world student missions is to involve every Southern Baptist student in a missions project and show them how to use their gifts," said Charles H. Johnson, director of national student ministries of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

The missions project fits in with ideas presented by Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks to have a force of volunteers to assist in missions work, said Bill O'Brien, FMB executive vice president.

"It is a vital concern that we find avenues for students for foreign missions," said Harlan Spurgeon, FMB vice president of human resources. The Brazil project will be one of many opportunities to involve students in volunteer foreign missions, Spurgeon said.

Involvement in the project will require students with the assistance of their supporting Baptist Student Unions or churches to fund much of the estimated \$1,700 cost for the trip.

State student ministries departments will be responsible for selecting students from their states who will participate in the project.

Brazil is the ideal location for this pilot project because the people are open to the Gospel, explained Mattie Lou Bible, a Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil who works with the Brazilian Baptist National Youth Board in student work.

Bible spoke to the state student ministries directors before returning to Brazil from a three-month furlough. She will be coordinator of the Brazil missions project.

While the project is designed to expose Southern Baptist students to foreign mission work, it also will help Brazilian Baptists see what can be done through student work and volunteer student mission projects, Bible explained.

In the three-day planning session with the theme "Trends Toward Tomorrow," the state student ministries directors reviewed project plans through 1990 and discussed plans for 1990-95.

Johnson told the directors that they are facing a new chapter in student ministries with changes on the college campus brought about by an influx of international, ethnic, commuter and older students.

"As we approach the future, we can be frightened or we can be challenged. I am excited about the future of student ministries," Johnson said.

He predicted Baptists will have student ministries work on 1,500 campuses "in a few years." Currently, state directors list Baptist work on 1,086 campuses with 768 other campuses targeted for student ministries.

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F-NOBTS

Leavell Finds 'Right'  
Things About Christmas

By Breena Kent

Baptist Press  
12/16/86

NEW ORLEANS (BP)—Despite the commercialism of Santa Claus and the materialism of Christmas shopping and decorating, Landrum P. Leavell II said he has found some things that are right about Christmas.

First, "it is right to celebrate the birth of our Lord into the world of men," said the president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"A lot of people get disillusioned when they find out December 25 might not have been the exact date when Jesus Christ was born. But that to me is not the important thing," he said to seminary students and faculty members during a December chapel address.

"The important thing is that he was born and Christians today have an opportunity at a certain time every year for rejoicing and thanking God for his unspeakable gift."

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Second, "the spirit of sharing is right about Christmas." However, Leavell said giving needs "clarification."

"Do we give too many gifts to our children simply because their friends receive the same amount?," asked Leavell. "Do we give what we give at Christmas to overcome what we've failed to do for the other 11 months of the year ... because we realize we've neglected the family and now we're trying to buy them off?"

Leavell said a third thing "right about Christmas" is the emphasis on the home. "We should not only emphasize the gathering of loved ones and friends, but we ought to emphasize the characteristics that make up a happy home," he said. "A home without love is just as empty as a Christmas without Christ."

"It's an easy thing to neglect your family when you're a seminary student. It's an easy thing to get so engrossed in what you feel to be God's will for your life," he said. "Let me remind you that it is also the will of God that you take proper care of your family. ... But don't use Christmas as a cover-up for what you failed to do the rest of the year."

The last thing right about Christmas is that "Christ offers the sole solution for a world in tension and crisis," said Leavell. "No matter what is taking place around us, we know that something has taken place within us."

He said Christians should "affirm the message of hope."