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Crowd Of 10,000 Believers
Catches Leaders Off Guard

By Laura Lee Stewart

MOMBASA, Kenya (BP)--Except in the presence of Jesus Christ, food for 300 has not proven to stretch too well in a crowd of 10,000.

At least, that is what Southern Baptist missionary Ralph Bethea thought as he gazed out into a crowd, knowing he had enough "mandazi," a type of bread Kenyans like, to feed only the number of new believers for whom he had prepared.

Bethea and Kenyan pastors planned the meeting in the Likoni area of Mombasa, Kenya, to follow up in training new believers who had emerged from a recent evangelistic outreach.

After advertising, they prepared for 300 people. When 10,000 showed up, they went ahead with their plans, using the Gospel of Mark to help the people understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

But part of the day was scheduled as a time to share a small amount of mandazi. They had enough for 300 people. As Bethea puzzled over what to do, a pastor stood and told how Jesus fed 5,000 people with a handful of food. Then the pastors handed out the mandazi and watched as people in attendance tore their mandazi and shared with neighbors. Some had brought their own food, and they opened that and shared.

Lack of bread was not the only difficulty that tested the group's faith. At about 3 p.m. the electricity failed. Bethea and the pastors prayed for a way to make themselves heard to the crowd. Then a car came by, and someone in it lent them a portable loudspeaker to use. Since it was small, leaders had to speak in one direction, then another, and another, repeating what was said each time. But it worked, and the crowd was able to hear.

About 20 house churches have resulted from evangelistic work in the area.

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Helicopter To Aid
Ethiopia Relief

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ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)--The organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Ethiopia has bought a helicopter to help relief workers fulfill a three-year development contract with the Ethiopian government. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board released \$15,000 in hunger relief money for a deposit on the helicopter in late July, when missionaries signed an agreement to buy it.

The four-passenger, \$300,000 craft cruises at about 110 miles per hour and is capable of carrying 3,200 pounds. It can carry workers into areas where projects are underway or, if necessary, evacuate two patients on stretchers. It will be operated and maintained by Air Serv International, formerly an arm of Missionary Aviation Fellowship.

The helicopter will play a key role in transportation throughout the remote, mountainous Menz-Gishe and Merhabete districts, where travel by land is treacherous. Development there during the next several years will focus on improving the water supply, working to enrich the soil and increase crop yields, breeding more healthy animals and maintaining roads.

Missionaries hope to help the Ethiopians go beyond the point of being one crop failure away from famine. They expect their development techniques will affect more than 90 percent of the 500,000 people who live in the two districts.

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Nichols Resigns RTVC;
Wright Named To Post

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Michael A. Wright has been named director of affiliate relations for the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission effective Aug. 1, succeeding G. William Nichols, who resigned to join a San Antonio, Texas, advertising agency.

Wright was American Christian Television Service regional manager before becoming vice president for cable relations of the ACTS network in 1986. ACTS is owned and operated by the Radio and Television Commission. Wright will continue as vice president for cable relations while assuming the affiliate relations responsibilities.

Wright attended San Joaquin (Calif.) Delta College, Fresno (Calif.) City College, California Baptist College and graduated in business from Dallas Baptist University. Professional experience has included private business management as general manager for Electronic Business Products, Inc. of Carmichael, Calif., and broadcast programming, advertising and announcing.

Nichols, who has been senior vice president for cable relations since 1982, will join Atkins and Associates, Inc. of San Antonio. He said he would work with the Atkins organization "to assist ACTS in national and local advertising sales, marketing, merchandising and public relation activities."

Atkins and ACTS recently reached a tentative agreement to name the San Antonio firm to be the network's national representative.

Nichols previously was northeastern regional manager for ACTS and vice president for cable relations. A graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Nichols was pastor of churches in Florida, Georgia and Texas before joining ACTS.

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'Evil Spirits' Don't Shackle
Indonesian Church's Witness

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A death-defying Indonesian congregation is at it again.

Jenar Baptist Church meets next to a cemetery -- not a choice spot in an area where everyone else fears "evil spirits."

A bamboo stretcher is kept at the church for funerals in and around Purworejo, a village of several hundred people in central Java. Local Islamic leaders declined to keep it at the mosque.

Now the church plans to cultivate a field that supposedly has been infested with evil spirits for 42 years.

Last December, after a Christmas service at one of the church's two preaching points, a local government official, a non-Christian, asked, "If your God is (as) powerful as you say, can he protect you if you cultivate this field?" The official offered to let the church grow rice on the field for four years.

The church decided to proceed, and a number of its 70 worshipers, along with representatives from other Protestant churches, gathered for a prayer meeting at the field, dedicating it to God. Next it was cleared and plowed. All that remains is waiting for the proper agricultural conditions to plant the seed.

"The whole village is aware of this project," reports Wayne Pennell, a Southern Baptist missionary who told of the church's boldness during Foreign Missions Week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. He has taught a theological education class at the church since 1974.

"Many have warned the church members not to go through with it," Pennell recounts. "They fear what might happen to those who do the work. They fear illness, mishaps or even death."

Church members, however, are not just praying for God's protection, but also "for a testimony of God's power to the whole community," Pennell notes.

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Choirs Sing More Than Music,
Rehearse More Than Songs

By Charles Willis

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Choir members rehearse more than music during the week and sing more than songs on Sundays, a national church music leader said at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center during the Church Music Leadership Conference.

Terry W. York, hymnal project coordinator for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church music department, told adult choir members their role is "a very important link in a chain."

One of the ways God has chosen to speak to people is through the message of songs, York said. God does choose to speak directly to anyone in the chain, he said, but often God inspires the composer/author and, in turn, the minister of music, the choir member, the congregation and the community.

"We need to be sure nothing gets in the way of internalizing the message," he cautioned. "Not just when the notes are right; but you are ready to pass it along when you feel the message inside."

York said choir members who are faithful in their roles rehearse not only music, but also stewardship of time and talent, submission to authority, cooperation and teamwork, and an attitude of understanding.

On Sundays, choir members demonstrate by their faithful presence that fulfilling a responsibility is important.

"A full choir versus empty seats becomes a barometer of how things are going in the church," he said. "A full choir loft means something is going on that is exciting and healthy. An obvious sea of empty chairs communicates something is wrong."

York said after serving churches as a minister of music, his recent years as a choir member have shown him "the other side of the music stand. I have learned what a temptation it is to go home after prayer meeting or to sit with my family on Sunday instead of singing in the choir."

He urged choir members to model "being tuned in to the worship flow" by taking Bibles into the choir loft and using them and by keeping their eyes focused on the pastor during the sermon.

The most obvious opportunity for the congregation to actively participate in worship is in singing hymns, and the choir needs to encourage that involvement by demonstrating participation, he said.

Choir members can experience worship during rehearsals by applying the texts of the music they sing to their own lives, York said. Choir members who give themselves to God, striving for their best, express devotion.

"Our best may not please God so much as our striving to do our best," he said.

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

Cults Challenge Baptists
To Know What They Believe

By Terri Lackey

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Cults. For some, the word may bring to mind followers devoted enough to share their worldly possessions or drink poison for the cause in which they believe.

Instead, the increase in the number of cults and the proliferation of their followers should motivate Southern Baptists to learn more about their own beliefs as well as those of cult groups, said Gary Leazer, associate director of the interfaith witness department at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

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"Many people, especially young adults, are now willing to consider alternative religious groups," said Leazer, author of "The Christian Confronting the Cults II," an equipping center module released earlier this year by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department. The first module on cults was released in the late 1970s.

"A cult is a group which claims to be Christian but denies essential Christian doctrines," he said. "It is easy to be drawn into a cult because it meets the spiritual longings and emotional needs of people. Followers are sincerely looking for God, and they can be deceived by following the wrong group."

That is why those without solid Christian nurture and Bible knowledge, especially young adults ages 18-30, are ill-equipped to respond to the challenge of the cult, Leazer said.

It is important for Southern Baptists to study cults and know something about them so they can be effective witnesses to cult members, he said.

The cults Leazer addresses in the module include The Way International, the Baha'i World Faith, Hare Krishna, transcendental meditation, the Church of Scientology and The New Age Movement.

The New Age Movement is the cult Leazer finds most interesting and most threatening in today's society.

"There are 2,000 to 3,000 New Age groups, and most are very small, with about 25 members," Leazer said. "The New Age Movement will present the greatest challenges to Christian churches in the next decade."

The diverse groups and organizations in the New Age Movement share the view that humanity is on the edge of a new age of self-enlightenment, harmony and worldwide transformation through which the world's social, political and economic problems will be solved by releasing unlimited human potential.

"The New Age Movement refers more to a philosophy than a particular group or organization," he said.

Studying about cults helps Christians "define their own faith," Leazer added: "A lot of people just assume certain beliefs. They can be challenged by the study of the cults."

Even with the vast diversity of cults, there are some similarities which apply to most, "if not all," he said.

Most cults have a single charismatic authority as the living leader, Leazer said, noting, "The leader is seen as a special spokesperson for God through whom new revelations or truths are received.

Most cult members believe their group is the only true church or religious organization, he said. Many redefine theological terms which come from their parent faith, usually a world religion from which the cult takes its major beliefs, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism or Christianity.

"Some cults have lost their followers, but new groups always spring into existence," Leazer said.

It would be wise for Southern Baptists to study some of the major and most threatening groups, he said, "because cults are not going to go away."

Missionary Named Associate Director
For National Fellowship Of Baptist Men By Steve Barber

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Larry Cox, 38, an agricultural evangelist in Burkina Faso, West Africa, since 1980, has been named associate director for the National Fellowship of Baptist Men.

Cox will assist in the development of NFBM fellowships, which are the main components of a national effort by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission to organize Southern Baptist men for mission service through their vocational skills and interests.

"NFBM will be a vehicle to educate lay people about world missions needs and challenge them to answer the call by using their special abilities and talents," Cox said.

The organization is an effort of the Brotherhood Commission with cooperation of the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission boards, Woman's Missionary Union and Southern Baptist laymen.

The project is supported in part by the Brotherhood Commission and the mission boards. The executive director is a Brotherhood Commission staff member. However, most financial support comes from members of the various NFBM fellowships.

Cox felt that he was being called to service with NFBM after his work while on furlough with the Brotherhood Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. It was there, as a missionary-in-residence during 1984-85, that he organized the Mississippi Baptist Agricultural Missions fellowship. His work caught the attention of Ed Bullock, executive director of NFBM.

Cox's special emphasis with NFBM will be to organize fellowships for agricultural specialists, veterinarians and educators.

"The growth of NFBM fellowships is limited only by the number of laymen in the Southern Baptist Convention," Cox said, "and I use the word 'laymen' in a generic sense only, because many Baptist women are already involved in these fellowships. Also, many wives are involved in the various fellowship programs with their husbands."

Other vocational fellowships exist for construction, law and government, transportation, communications, business, and entertainment.

The long-term goal of NFBM is to organize a fellowship for each area of specialization in every state convention.

Before his appointment as a missionary to Burkina Faso, Cox was a religious education promoter for the Foreign Mission Board in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

He also has been a summer missionary and a minister of education and youth to churches in Mississippi and Kentucky. He is a graduate of Mississippi College, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Mississippi State University.