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September 11, 1987

87-138

Southern Baptists Plan Help
For Venezuela Flood Victims

By Eric Miller

MARACAY, Venezuela (BP)--Southern Baptists are hoping to provide gas stoves, food, clothing and medicine to victims of a Sept. 6 Venezuela flood that may have killed 200 people and left 20,000 homeless.

Southern Baptist missionary Ben Kirby and other missionaries are working with Venezuela officials to get clearance to provide relief following one of the worst natural disasters in the country's history. Two months' worth of rain fell in six hours, causing mountain mud slides that uprooted trees and set boulders in motion.

Maracay, a city of 500,000, was one of the hardest hit. Many people were at a nearby resort beach when heavy rains hit mountains located between the beach and Maracay, Kirby said. A 10-foot-deep tide of mud swept hundreds of cars off a mountain road.

"A lot of cars were thrown down into big holes," Kirby said. "They're not sure how many people are down in these cars. Some of the people -- they may not ever be able to get them out because they're buried in mud and under trees. It does look pretty bad." At least 250 people were missing and 1,000 injured, media reports said.

A Venezuelan Baptist pastor told Kirby that several members of his church had lost everything. The flooding and mudslides happened suddenly and survivors "just got away with their lives and the clothes on their back," Kirby said. No deaths have been reported among Baptist church members so far, he added.

Kirby and Southern Baptist missionaries Stan Parris and Ron Adams and a Venezuelan Baptist pastor waited 13 hours to meet with a state legislator and a disaster relief representative appointed by President Jaime Lusinchi.

The representative told the men the biggest need was for portable gas stoves. Temporary shelters are set up for the homeless, but there are no stoves for cooking.

"Venezuela normally takes care of its own disaster situations without too much outside help," said Bryan Brasington, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area director for Spanish South America. For a long time, Venezuela has had more money per capita than any other country in South America, he added.

Nevertheless, if the missionaries receive government approval to provide stoves, food, clothing and medicine, that will be a good Christian witness because most of the victims "have nothing whatsoever now," Brasington said.

"We were waiting there 13 hours, and it was tiring, and those people could see that we were concerned," Kirby said.

The Baptist mission in Venezuela has \$7,000 in human needs ministries and hunger relief funds to use for flood relief, Kirby said. Several Tennessee churches have offered financial support. Tennessee churches have been involved in partnership evangelism with Venezuela.

Kirby noted that mountainsides are scarred where large sections have fallen away, and "houses were just filled with mud or just not there." About 12 miles of a main road is gone.

In the first two days following the flood, about 32 bodies were dug out of mud and rubble in a suburb along the Limon River, and 30 bodies were flown out of the mountains. About 200 cars and several buses were buried or trapped by mud slides. Five bridges were destroyed.

Two Home Mission Board VPs
Asked To Delay Retirement

ATLANTA (BP)--Two Southern Baptist Home Mission Board vice presidents have been asked by HMB President Larry Lewis to delay their retirement plans.

Gerald Palmer, missions vice president, and Leonard Irwin, planning vice president, were to retire at the end of 1987. At Lewis' request they both plan to continue until the end of 1988.

"With their almost 70 years of experience, they are valuable to the board, especially during this transition when we are seriously considering reorganization," Lewis said.

Both Palmer and Irwin will be part of the Home Mission Board task force, scheduled to begin working in October. Planning future mission strategy and reorganization of the Atlanta Home Mission Board offices will be part of their work.

Palmer, with 41 years of missions experience, has been vice president since 1974. "I didn't feel a need to stay for my personal fulfillment, but my concern is for the good of the board. If my being here helps, then I'm glad to stay," he said.

Palmer will work on the task force to further develop the board's strategy of missions. By staying an extra year, he hopes to "help shape the new-work emphasis and to help make an orderly transition to any organizational changes."

Irwin, who has been at the HMB 27 years, has been vice president of planning since 1971. "Larry Lewis is a man with vision and commitment who can lead the HMB toward accomplishing Bold Mission Thrust. It would be rewarding to make my last 27 years more effective by staying one more year," Irwin said. "It's good to know you're in a place where you're wanted and where you can make a contribution to the Kingdom's work."

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(Editor's Note: Following is the last of a four-part series on church conflict.)

Building Can Bring Victories
Or Stress And Uncertainty

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
9/11/87

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Even though pastor and people often flinch in dreadful anticipation, church building programs do not have to be synonymous with congregational conflict, church leaders familiar with building programs maintained.

Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., and a veteran of building programs in several churches, is convinced building new churches can result in victory and unity instead of ruptured fellowship.

Gwenn McCormick, director of the church architecture department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, said his department works with about 3,500 -- 10 percent of all Southern Baptist churches -- every year. He believes they now generally are doing a better job of planning and preparation than in years past.

"One of the greatest sources of conflict comes about because personal agendas intrude and become obsessions," McCormick said. "Leaders and congregation need to pray and strive for an openness to the Lord's leadership so they can build bridges of understanding and cooperation."

Keeping church members fully informed probably is the key to success in dealing with matters relating to potential congregational conflict, Henry stressed.

"Communication is the most critical thing, and prayer is the most important," counseled Henry, who urges pastors to "fully and completely inform people."

In Henry's experiences, a committee first studied the needs of the church, and then church leaders were apprised of progress. Next, "lots of information to look at and think about" was shared with the whole church body, with time for questions.

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"As people see needs, most of the time they will rise to the occasion," Henry said. "If they don't understand, they probably won't participate."

At First Baptist of Orlando, where Sunday school attendance averages about 3,300, a new facility has been built from the ground up, requiring a move from the church's original downtown location. When the process is completed, costs will total more than \$24 million, all on a pay-as-you-go basis.

Building a new facility "doesn't have to have a negative side, because the positives far outweigh the negatives," Henry said. That is not to say, however, that there are not times of doubt, conflict and searching for answers.

For Henry, the decision to move was, in one way, "the darkest night of my soul," when he realized that some of the church members were going to remain in the old facility. Today, Downtown Baptist Church has about 900 members.

"My pastor's heart wanted to take all the sheep with me," he said. "When that didn't happen, I was disappointed because I didn't want to leave any one of them. Working through that drove me to more prayer and dependence on God than I ever had before. It also made me realize the strength I receive from the laity, other staff members and pastors from other churches who reached out to encourage me and our church.

"I found that the Holy Spirit sent manna in the most unexpected ways to meet me when I was at my lowest point," Henry said, "like a letter, or a phone call from people I didn't know. The Lord knew where we were and what we needed."

Henry advised pastors involved in a building program to strive to keep their spiritual lives at their best. And whether people are for or against a new facility, the pastor has got to keep on loving them.

When things look uncertain, stand by biblical principles to achieve stability, he continued. Church members should be challenged to sacrifice and give generously to avoid a financial bondage and great stress on the pastor and staff, which can result in loss of church members.

"It creates stress on the pastor and people when the church doesn't have money for ministries, missions and salaries because it is paying off too much debt," Henry explained. "Stress creates anger, bitterness, resentment, fear and uncertainty.

"I have been in building programs in rural, suburban and downtown churches for 27 years." In all those situations, I have seen what a new facility can do in reaching people. I have also seen joy in victory and participated in celebration services when giving goals are reached or we move into a new building. When you come to that victory day, there is a unifying factor.

"There is pain in preparation, and it can be a tough experience," Henry acknowledged. "But in a race, when you cross the finish line, it's worth it. You forget the pain when you see the victory.

"We looked on our building programs as an opportunity to be a blessing for the generations to follow. We charged our committee to look to the future of our children and their children. That breeds unselfishness and speaks of a commitment that God is on his throne till he calls us home.

"It can be exciting on one hand, or 'Oh me!' on the other," Henry laughed. "For me it is exciting, speaking of progress, blessing, vision and hope for tomorrow."

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(BF) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Senior Adult Lifestyles
Call For Ministry Changes

By Terri Lackey

NASHVILLE (BP)--Barring unusual circumstances, an intelligent, hard-working and hard-playing middle-aged adult who passes from his 59th to his 60th year does not instantly metamorphose into a feeble, bedridden older person.

According to Southern Baptist standards, at that age a person gives up the adjective "middle-aged" or "median" adult and takes on the more ominous, yet distinguished, one of "senior."

At the same time, senior adults and especially retirees are changing, and the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department is in the process of spreading that word to churches.

"We recognize the changing nature of the retired population already," said Horace Kerr, manager of the family ministry department's senior adult section. "More recent retirees are better educated, more financially independent, in better health and have a longer lifespan."

To substantiate their position, section personnel enlisted the board's research services department to study statistics and projections from the values and lifestyles program in which the board participates. The data traces the emerging lifestyles of senior adults from the present to the year 2000.

"What our research indicates is that coming down the pike in 10 to 15 years is a different kind of senior adult," said Cliff Tharp, urban/church growth research specialist in the research services department. "Senior adults are shifting significantly from a heavy survivor/belonger category to a balanced composition of survivors, belongers and achievers."

Currently, senior adults, ages 60 and up, comprise 23 percent or 3.3 million of the 14.6-million-member denomination. Ten percent of those are survivors, 79 percent are belongers, 10 percent are achievers and 1 percent comprise a combination of the remaining six values and lifestyles categories, he said.

This compares to the denomination as a whole in which 5 percent are survivors; 53 percent, belongers; 29 percent, achievers; and 13 percent, a combination, said Tharp.

According to the values and lifestyles program, survivors and belongers tend to desire an environment which is structured, clearly defined, non-threatening, status-quo, traditional, has little ambiguity and stresses fellowship and community or family life.

Achievers, while desiring a conventional setting, are more self-confident and decisive. While not desiring radical change, they are more open to change, less structure and more ambiguity. Achievers desire quality and even luxury and they are practical and pragmatic, according to the program's research.

Meanwhile, Tharp said, if the number of Southern Baptist senior adults increases in line with the U.S. senior adult population as a whole, there will be about 15 percent more, or an increase of 500,000, to 3.8 million Southern Baptist senior adults by the year 2000.

By 2000, Tharp said projections indicate only 3 percent of Baptist senior adults will be survivors and 56 percent belongers, while the number of achievers will have increased to 37 percent, with 4 percent in the other categories.

What this means to churches and the family ministry department, Kerr said, is that churches must gradually move toward providing activities more tailored to the needs of the emerging senior adult. For example, a ministry based primarily around events such as covered-dish luncheons will be inadequate.

"Senior adults of the future are going to want or demand more participation in planning what they are going to be doing," Kerr said. "They are going to be interested in and want to be involved in discussion of major issues. We must place a bigger emphasis on teaching senior adults some skills they can use in retirement, such as money management."

What churches cannot do, Kerr said, is plunge directly into self-improving seminars from game-playing and craft-making activities many senior adults now enjoy.

"We can't just go from the past to the future in one jump," he said.

What can be done, though, is planning, Kerr said.

"Churches have to think in terms of better-trained leadership for senior adults. Many seminaries are beginning to gear up now to provide high-level professional training for people who work with senior adults," he noted.

Senior adults had traditionally been overlooked by churches until the 1970s, Kerr said, adding that society's view of older adults spilled over into the churches' treatment of them.

"People generally thought of folks in that age group as not wanting to do anything or as being old and tired," Kerr said. "We had senior adults in our churches, but they were inconspicuous, and it was largely because the senior adults themselves were not demanding."

But as the number of senior adults grew, so did the churches' recognition of them, Kerr said.

Gone are the days when senior adults were content "to just sit in a corner of the church somewhere," Kerr said. "These senior adult achievers are already becoming more involved in what's going on in the total church. They are our decision makers and they are on our major committees."

"They are no longer content just to belong to the church."

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Reaching Today's Youth
Requires Facing Issues

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
9/11/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Teenagers today represent a break in the chain of Southern Baptists who have been taught the basic beliefs of the denomination, according to a Southern Baptist youth consultant Richard Ross.

Numerous youth-related issues must be faced by Southern Baptists if the denomination is to reach the upcoming generation of teens, Ross explained to more than 90 ministers of youth attending a seminar in youth ministry coordination at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

"To a degree, we are in 'foreign missions' because today's teens have not received a heritage of faith from their parents," said Ross, who works in the church administration department of the board.

The parents of today's younger youth were the teenagers of the 1960s, many of whom never discovered a personal faith in God, he explained. Additionally, he estimated that as many as 60 percent of those parents are former drug users.

"We are in a new age in youth ministry which must be evaluated differently than we did years ago," Ross continued. "We must minister to a culture which has no religious background."

One issue that certainly will be faced in some Southern Baptist churches one day soon will be the question of dealing with a member of the youth group who has AIDS, Ross told the youth ministers during an address on trends in youth ministry. He advised them to read books on ministering to the terminally ill and consider how they will handle the potentially explosive situation.

The danger to teenagers from AIDS is extremely high, because of the tendency of youth "to fall in and out of love quickly. Another fact of life is that teens are not going to protect themselves," he said.

"We need to tell the world we have the only answer to safe sex, and that is sex shared with a marriage partner for life," Ross said. "For too long, Southern Baptists have been perceived as anti-sex, which makes us easy to ignore."

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"I think we need to say God has a practical answer to joyful and safe sex." In God's plan, sex always is a symbol of lifetime commitment which brings babies into complete families and never makes people sick. We may be able to get a hearing because people are so concerned."

Ross also listed several other trends that could have significant effects on youth ministry.

First, the coming influx of younger youth into the denomination's youth programs is the beginning of the turnaround in the general population of the United States. He said 1990 will be the first year to break a trend of recent years in which the number of teenagers in the country has decreased.

Many churches are finding that changes are required when younger youth represent a majority of the youth in a church's program, he added. Solutions may include involving younger youth in planning and occasionally having activities which are exclusively for younger or older youth to address issues not appropriate or of interest to the other age group.

Other topics raised for consideration in churches were how to build a youth ministry that is considerate of an increasing number of working youth; understanding the New Age movement and other para-church religions; compensating for an aging population that refuses to fund public school items such as music education or personal counseling and ministering to youth who spend extended or frequent time with non-custodial parents.