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December 10, 1987

87-188

ACTS Announces
1988 Preachers

N-CO
(RTVC)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Four Southern Baptist pastors have been selected as 1988 preachers for programs on the ACTS satellite network, announced Jimmy R. Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Houston, was named preacher for the morning edition of "The Baptist Hour." He will replace James Flammig, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va.

Preacher for the evening "Baptist Hour" will be Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Gregory, recently elected president of the Texas Baptist convention, has been the speaker on "Word of Life," a weekly Bible teaching program. Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church was the preacher during 1987.

The two "Baptist Hour" speakers also will share responsibilities on "Baptist Hour" radio programs, Allen said. Gregory will be the radio preacher for the first six months, and Young is to be preacher for the last half of the year.

At the September meeting of the SBC Executive Committee, objections were raised against Jackson continuing as "Baptist Hour" speaker because he had been a Southern Baptist Convention presidential candidate in 1987 and was being discussed as a possible candidate in 1988. Allen, who also is president of ACTS, said a change of speaker would be made as scheduled in January.

Commission administrators informed all four preachers of the objections to a convention presidential candidate's selection as an ACTS preacher, but they did not ask the preachers to pledge that they would not seek an SBC office during 1988, RTVC Executive Vice President Richard T. McCartney told Baptist Press.

"We did not ask them to make a pledge or write a letter," McCartney said. "We simply made them aware of the objections that had been raised, but we did not require anything of them.

"We asked them to make their decisions (whether to accept the preaching positions) in light of these objections. It would be up to them to make a decision if someone approached them and told him he should seek office."

Preachers for the other two shows will be Frank Pollard and John Bisagno.

Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss., will replace Gregory on "Word of Life." Pollard previously was speaker on the "At Home With The Bible" series produced by the commission for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Allen explained the "Word of Life" switch: "The normal cycle calls for 'Baptist Hour' preachers to be changed each year. Since one of the 1988 preachers already is featured on 'Word of Life,' the speaker for that program will change also."

Bisagno will continue as speaker for the long-standing "Invitation to Life" evangelistic program. Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston, has been preacher on the revival program since it began in 1984.

Bisagno recently completed a new series of "Invitation To Life" programs that will be featured on ACTS during 1988.

The changes will be effective Jan. 17.

27 Appointed To HMB
Strategy Task Force

N-HMB

ATLANTA (BP)--A 27-member task force to study and recommend future strategy and structure for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has been announced by HMB President Larry L. Lewis.

Lewis had been authorized by the board's 84 directors last July to appoint and convene the Strategy Planning Task Force. Lewis announced his appointments during the board's executive committee meeting in December.

The 27 appointees include six pastors; six vice presidents and executives on the HMB staff; four Baptist state convention executive directors, including one retired; four Baptist seminary professors, including two retired; the dean of the school of theology at a Baptist university; two associational directors of missions; one evangelist who is a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention; one church growth consultant; one Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union executive; and one state convention staff member assigned to starting new churches.

In addition, Lewis also appointed a dozen members of the HMB staff as observers to assist the committee as consultants and resource persons in their areas of expertise.

Scope of the study by the task force will include purpose of the agency, HMB objectives and strategies, and organizational structure.

Lewis pointed out the board has been involved in strategy planning for many years and in 1983 adopted a major long-range plan called "Target: AD 2000" outlining the agency's objectives and goals as a part of the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust ministry campaign.

The board has not undergone major structural reorganization since 1971, Lewis observed. "Almost everyone I talk to agrees the board needs to reorganize, not for the sake of reorganization, but so that our structure better enables us to accomplish our strategy in achieving the objectives and goals of Bold Mission Thrust," he said.

The task force will meet for the first time Feb. 15-16, 1988. Other meetings scheduled include sessions April 11-12; July 18-19 in St. Louis; and Aug. 29-30. All meetings except the July session will be in Atlanta. The group may need to meet again in the fall of 1988, Lewis said.

The pastors include Clark Hutchinson, of Eastside Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., and chairman of the HMB directors and James Chavis, former pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church, both in suburban Atlanta; Joe Ratlif of the predominantly black Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston; Rick Warren of Saddleback Community Church in Laguna Hills, Calif.; Billy Weber of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas; and Richard Jackson of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, who has been mentioned as a possible nominee for president of the Southern Baptist Convention next June.

A former Southern Baptist Convention president, evangelist Bailey Smith of Atlanta, was named to the task force. Smith was SBC president from 1980-82.

State convention executive directors selected are Tal Bonham, and Ray Roberts, retired, both from the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio; James Currin from the Baptist Convention of New England; and C.B. Hogue from the Southern Baptist General Convention of California.

Members appointed from Baptist seminaries and colleges included Charles Chaney, dean of the Redford School of Theology at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.; Leonard Sanderson, visiting professor of evangelism at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.; and one retired and two current and professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas: Danny Sanchez, associate professor of missions; Roy Fish, professor of evangelism; and Cal Guy, retired professor of missions.

Associational directors of missions named to the task force were Larry K. Martin of Boston and Ernie Perkins of Oklahoma City.

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Also appointed were Bobbie Sorrill, associate executive director in the missions education system for Woman's Missionary Union; Ron Lewis, a church growth consultant from Nashville; J.V. Thomas, church extension coordinator for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

HMB executives named to the committee are Bob Banks, executive vice president; Wendell Belew, associate vice president for missions strategy; and four vice presidents: Bob Hamblin, evangelism; Gerald Palmer, missions; Bob Bingham, services; and Leonard Irwin, planning.

HMB staff observers are four regional coordinators: Jim Coldiron, Carlisle Driggers, Ernest Kelley and Fermin Whittaker; six division directors: Paul Adkins of missions ministries, David Bunch of church extension, Oscar Romo of language missions, Bobby Sunderland of direct evangelism, Orrin Morris of research, and Kenneth Day of communication; and two department directors: Emmanuel McCall of black church relations and Jim Newton of news and information.

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Foundation Trustees
Affirm Staff Procedures

N-CO
By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
12/10/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Foundation trustees affirmed their staff's management of foundation assets, responded to the denomination's Peace Committee and elected officers during their annual meeting in early December.

The foundation's assets grew 20 percent during the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, reported President Hollis Johnson. The gain represented a \$10.2 million increase, pushing assets to more than \$61.4 million.

Assets have increased almost \$20.1 million, or 48.5 percent, in the last two years, Johnson added, attributing the gains to "appreciation of financial assets and increased use by individual Southern Baptists and convention agencies."

Trustees also focused on the foundation's performance during the current fiscal year. The economy has been plagued by instability since "Black Monday," Oct. 19, when the stock market suffered a 508-point crash.

But Johnson reported the foundation's overall market value declined only 4 percent during October, a drop that compared favorably to the Dow Jones Industrial Average's 23.2 percent decline.

The foundation fared so well because only 26 percent of its assets were in stocks when the new fiscal year began, and because bonds rallied in October, recouping some of the stock losses, he explained.

"We're long-term investors, not traders and speculators," he reiterated. "We still have confidence in the economy over the long haul, although there could be a slowdown over the next two or three quarters."

Turning to a non-financial matter, the trustees expressed gratitude for the Peace Committee's work and affirmed the doctrinal integrity of the foundation's staff.

The Peace Committee was formed in 1985 to ascertain the causes of and solutions to the theological/political controversy within the convention. In its report earlier this year, the committee asked trustees of Southern Baptist institutions to "build their professional staffs and faculties from those who clearly reflect such dominant convictions and beliefs held by Southern Baptists at large."

The foundation trustees' response to the Peace Committee, approved unanimously, stated: "The trustees of the Southern Baptist Foundation thank the Peace Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention in their work to bring peace to the Southern Baptist Convention.

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"In response to the exhortation of the Peace Committee in its report to the convention in June 1987, we affirm the doctrinal integrity of the foundation. We report that the professional staff of the foundation accepts without reservation the entirety of the Baptist Faith and Message as adopted in 1963, and specifically that portion which states that the Bible is truth without mixture of error."

John P. Gifford Sr., a Nashville businessman and member of Immanuel Baptist Church, was re-elected trustee chairman. Other officers are Gorman J. Roberts, a Louisville, Ky., investment banker and member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church, vice chairman; and Osta Underwood, a Nashville attorney and member of Belmont Heights Baptist Church, recording secretary.

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HMB Tops \$30 Million From
Annie Armstrong Offering

N-HMB

Baptist Press
12/10/87

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has received more than \$30 million through the 1987 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, an increase of 8.7 percent over last year's income.

Bob Banks, executive vice president of the board, reported a favorable financial picture during the board's December executive committee meeting.

The stock market crash in October affected the board's income only slightly, said Banks. He explained that 85 percent of the board's investments are in fixed income investments, and only about 15 percent are in short-term investments affected by the stock market.

"At the end of November, we experienced a paper loss of only 1 percent on the board's total investments due to the stock market crash," Banks said. "We are very conservative in our investments."

The \$30,032,349 received through the Annie Amrstrong Easter Offering as of Dec. 8 is short of the \$37.5 million goal but represents an increase of 8.7 percent over income through the special offering at the same time last year, Banks said.

In addition to the \$30 million from the special offering in Southern Baptist churches, the board has received \$22.7 million through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program budget; \$3.3 million from gifts, grants and designations; \$11.1 million from interest on investments, church loans and bonds; and about \$360,000 from sales, rentals, and other income.

Expenditures so far this year, Banks reported, have totaled \$57.6 million, or about \$6.5 million less than income.

In other action, the HMB executive committee elected four new staff members to fill vacancies in the Atlanta-based office and appointed 26 missionaries and approved financial assistance to 44 other missions personnel.

New associate directors elected to the staff are Robert L. Moore of the metropolitan missions department; Larry M. Braley of the missionary personnel department; and John Gordon Lawrence of the program research department. Jeffrey Collins Lewis was elected assistant director of Mission Service Corps coordination.

Moore, a native of Virginia, currently is director of missions for Prince Georges Baptist Association in Maryland. Braley, a native of Louisiana, is director of missions for Greater Detroit Baptist Association in Michigan. Lawrence, a native of Tennessee, is a church planter and mission pastor in Mansfield, Texas. Lewis, who was born in Germany, is a Mission Service Corps volunteer involved in starting new churches in Lock Haven, Penn.

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High Court Hears Arguments
On Religious Use Of Peyote

N- BJC
By Stan Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--The ancient American Indian tradition of using the hallucinogenic drug peyote in religious ceremonies came to the U.S. Supreme Court Dec. 10, as the justices heard arguments for and against the claim that the Constitution's guarantee of free exercise of religion protects the practice.

Arguing against the claim by two members of the Native American Church in his state, Oregon Deputy Attorney General William F. Gary told the high court Oregon "has determined there is a compelling state interest in regulating the use of drugs," an interest that supercedes the constitutional claim of free exercise of religion.

On the other side, Oregon Legal Services Corp. attorney Suanne Lovendahl said she found the state's argument that violating a criminal statute takes precedence over a free exercise claim "most disturbing."

The case arose when two employees of a state alcohol and drug abuse prevention and treatment center were themselves discharged after admitting they used peyote in ceremonies of the Native American Church. Alfred L. Smith and Galen W. Black had agreed in writing before being employed they would abstain from alcohol and drug use.

After being fired, Smith and Black applied for state unemployment benefits. Although a pair of state referees agreed they were eligible, the Oregon Employment Appeals Board reversed the findings.

Both a state appeals court and the Oregon Supreme Court sided with the fired workers, however, holding their right to free exercise overrode the state's interest in banning drug use. The state then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

During arguments, Deputy Attorney General Gary told the justices that in this case, "the state does have a vital health and safety interest." He noted peyote is a "Schedule 1" drug, meaning it has no safe use, even under the supervision of a physician. It is outlawed in all 50 states, he added.

"Drug use in the workplace is a very serious (state) concern," he concluded.

But Lovendahl argued the Supreme Court has ruled repeatedly that citizens may not be put in a position of having to choose between a constitutional right and a state benefit, in this case unemployment compensation. In some instances, she said, the protection of the Constitution must take precedence over the state's interest in forbidding illegal conduct.

Beyond that, Oregon law discriminates against the Native American Church by outlawing the use of peyote even for ceremonial purposes, she said, suggesting Smith and Black would not have been fired if they had been Catholics who drank wine during Mass. Under Oregon law, she insisted, the two situations are essentially the same.

The justices are expected to decide the case and issue a formal opinion before the current term's conclusion next June.

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Single Adult Ministry
Called Next Frontier

N- SSB
By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
12/10/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Single adults many times unfairly get dubbed as weird, confused, incomplete, maladjusted or losers, an author and pastor told state family ministry consultants meeting in Nashville.

"But Jesus Christ was not weird. He was not confused, incomplete or maladjusted. Yet he was a single adult," said Jerry Hayner, pastor of Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., and author of "Growing Together: Singles and Churches."

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Being either a swinging single or unsuitable for marriage "are the stereotypes we place on nearly 50 percent of our adult population because they are single," Hayner told the leaders meeting at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

But the spiritual lifestyle of single adults is one ripe for claiming, he said: "The ministry to single adults is the next great frontier of the church. The most fertile evangelistic field is that which pertains to single adults."

Churches should take advantage of the Sunday School Board family ministry department's year-long 1987-88 emphasis on singles by creating a place for them, he noted: "Churches can come to the aid of single adults and vice versa. Single adults need churches, and churches need single adults. Churches need singles' spiritual gifts and their uniqueness, realness and involvement."

Single adults include college students and the career-minded, Hayner said. They include the formerly married, separated, divorced or widowed.

Because they have lost their partner through death or divorce or have never had one, some single adults may tend to have a poor self-image, he said: "There are some who have zero self-image and are open to anything. There are some who have been hurt so severely and are so tight inside themselves that they must be cracked open. And there are some who will open like a flower and who are looking toward the future for hope, help, meaning and fulfillment."

Meanwhile, family ministry department representatives reported their work with couples and parents is flourishing.

As of Nov. 30, 8,097 churches have taken part or are currently taking part in the Lay Institute for Equipping course Parenting by Grace, which was introduced to churches in 1986, said Jimmy Hester, an editor in the family ministry department.

More than 60,000 parents have taken or are taking the course, and about 1,700 have completed Parenting by Grace leader training workshops, Hester said.

Also as of Nov. 30, 10,535 marriage partners have completed or are taking the new course Covenant Marriage, Hester reported. Almost 800 people have been trained to teach the course, which was released in October 1987.

Hester introduced a second Parenting by Grace course that is set for an October 1991 release. Planning for Self Esteem: Parenting by Grace began early "so that the second course will be as high in quality and as meaningful and effective as the first."

A companion piece to Covenant Marriage, Communication and Intimacy, is being planned for an October 1992 release, he said. A new book, "Family Enrichment in Your Church," will be available March 1, 1988, he said. It should "help the church as leaders get in touch with what family enrichment is and what to do about it. It also tries to walk family enrichment committees through some specific tasks they commonly deal with. The book is good for church committee members in that it makes them know what they are doing is valid and important work in the church."

The annual family ministry meetings were held Dec. 4 and 5.

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Oakdale Churches Respond
To Prison Hostage Crisis

By C. Lacy Thompson

Baptist Press
12/10/87

OAKDALE, La. (BP)--Nov. 21 may have signaled an end to small town innocence for Oakdale, La., but the ensuing week offered a demonstration of the big-hearted love of area residents and churches.

The nation mobilized when Cuban detainees seized control of the Federal Detention Center in this small central Louisiana town last month and took 28 employees hostage.

Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Prisons, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, as well as state and parish police officers, descended on the town.

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In addition, media from throughout the nation swarmed into town, setting up camp for the duration of the event. Oakdale's resources were taxed as area residents attempted to meet the needs of the multiplying population.

Helping in those efforts were Louisiana Baptist churches and church members from throughout the area and as far as an hour's drive away.

The effort crossed denominational boundaries. A center for hostage families, headed by Reba Byrd, a member of Mt. Hope Baptist Church in Oakdale, was set up at Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

Byrd said she stumbled into the work. Weeks earlier, after learning of her son's drug addiction, she told God she was tired of playing games and was willing to do whatever he wanted her to do.

"My chance came all too soon," she noted. When she offered to bring sandwiches to hostage families at the hospital, she discovered the need for a central relief center and asked the Catholic church if its facilities were available.

Before she knew it, Byrd was running a full-blown operation that fed 250 people three times a day. She worked non-stop for 48 hours, then began working 18-hour days during the remainder of the ordeal. The work was exhausting and at times she felt too tired to go on, she related: "But I knew there were these (hostages) that could not step out of the situation of their own free will. And I, too, was not going to step out of the situation until these guys came home."

Help came from all corners, she said. When supplies were needed, they arrived. When money was needed to buy necessary items, it was given.

First Baptist Church of Oakdale ministered to wives of American detainees at the center. The pastor of another area church arrived with funds just when they were needed to buy breakfast for the group at the center.

Churches throughout the Mt. Olive and Vernon Baptist associations responded wonderfully to the crisis, reported Bill Green, pastor at First Baptist Church of Oakdale.

Members of Mt. Hope Baptist Church, concerned about three fellow church members held hostage, were at the relief center for the hostage families throughout the ordeal. Husbands would come by when they finished work; wives would spend their days at the relief point.

"Everyone was so amazed that here at this Catholic center all faiths were pouring in," Byrd noted. "The psychologists were overwhelmed with the spiritual support. (One) said he saw the hand of God in this and that it did not take a religious person to see the hand of God in the support given to these people."

One Red Cross volunteer said the work represented the best cooperative relief effort he had ever seen, said Mt. Hope Pastor Bobby Bonds. "People could not get over the tremendous support given by Christian churches in this area."

Byrd credited her role in the effort to God: "I've never done anything like this in my life, so I know it was supernatural. It demonstrated God's power in my life far beyond my own capabilities. I am totally humbled by the experience. I hope I'll never see somebody's need and turn my head again.

"It's changed me. I hope I'll stay changed and never slip back. I see myself three weeks ago as complacent. Now, I don't have an opinion of myself anymore. I have a greater knowledge of God's power -- that's all."

Bonds credited Mt. Hope's role in the effort to its growth into "an involved, caring, warm fellowship." He contended the incident made the Oakdale community more open to the Christian message. "That old saying -- 'People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care' -- all seems to put it into focus," he said.

Byrd is sure the incident has changed the town forever, noting, "If Oakdale does not see the hand of God in all of this, I don't know what it will take."

Faith, Bibles Sustained
Baptist Prison Hostages

F-CC
(LA.)
By C. Lacy Thompson

OAKDALE, La. (BP)-- Phillipp Bedwell related again his experience as a hostage at the Federal Detention Center in Oakdale, La.:

"The easiest way I've come up with to describe the incident is when you have that split second when you know you're about to be in a car wreck -- that instant of terror. And just imagine that terror lasting for eight days."

Another ex-hostage, Donald Thompson, nodded at the description: "It's like hanging on a fence. ... You fall one way, you live. You fall the other way, you die. And you're sitting there rocking back and forth. And you really don't know which way you're going to tip."

Bedwell, Thompson and Bill Hoffpauir -- all members of Mt. Hope Baptist Church in Oakdale -- were among 28 detention center officials held by about 1,000 Cuban detainees who seized control of the federal center Nov. 21. The action followed a governmental agreement that would send some of the Cubans back to their native country.

For the next eight days, the hostages constantly faced death. Emotions rose and fell with reports of negotiations. Freedom seemed impossible much of the time. Death appeared inevitable.

But 13 days following the initial takeover, Bedwell, Thompson and Hoffpauir met at the church to recount the details of a nightmare that ended with the release of all hostages Nov. 29. They spoke of their fears and the faith that sustained them throughout.

The Mt. Hope members are three of at least five Louisiana Baptists held hostage during the seige. Scott Sutterfield, a member of First Baptist Church of Oakdale, and Henry Billings, a member of Harmony Baptist Church in Glenmora, were unavailable for comment.

Bedwell recalled how the rioting started after inmates charged the front gate and were turned back. "If they had gotten to us initially, ... they would have probably killed us on the spot, because at that time they were still a mob," he said.

Thompson recounted how he and other center officials at first tried to barricade themselves in a room. When the Cubans entered the room, they demanded keys to release other detainees. Some of them protected the center's personnel from prisoners who wanted to harm them.

The hostages originally were housed in one area, then divided into smaller groups and separated. Hoffpauir and Thompson were in the same group until Hoffpauir's release Thanksgiving Day. Physically, their treatment was good, but the ordeal took its mental toll.

Prisoners who guarded the hostages talked of protecting the captives from other Cubans who wanted to kill them.

But when a television report indicated a dawn attack was planned, the inmates "just went crazy," Thompson added. "They went running and grinding down tools and sharpening things up. When that happened, they came in and told us, 'If they (the soldiers) come, you're dead.' I didn't want them to come at first, but it got to a point where I'd take my chances."

Bedwell added, "We didn't care how it ended, as long as it ended one way or the other." And Hoffpauir, too, was affected by the threat of death. He noted he had decided if he saw the worst coming, he was going to take a handful of blood pressure medicine.

Thompson agreed the manner of possible death was frightening. Added Bedwell: "The actual fact of dying didn't bother me. It was just the way I was going to die." As far as dying, I was more worried about how Pam (his wife) and the kids were going to make out than I was worried about me, because I knew I was going to be all right eventually."

Paranoia reigned among the captors, who believed at one time that soldiers were tunneling into the compound and who sent delivered food back because they feared federal officials would try to poison the hostages and blame it on the Cubans.

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By two days after the takeover, the hostage groups had received Bibles from some Cuban Christians. "It just so happened that I turned into Acts where Peter was set free from prison. That was one of the first things I read," Bedwell laughed.

Hoffpauir noted devotional times were important as he fought high blood pressure. When his blood pressure was taken following some prayer and Bible reading, it was the lowest it had been in years. "So it relaxed me," he recalled. "It did me a world of good."

Bedwell agreed. "Having the Bible there and being able to read and doing the praying, that's probably the main thing that got me through the whole thing without going slap crazy."

Thompson recalled he read the Bible in the daytime and prayed at night: "I was doing bad until they brought the Bibles. I started reading the Bible, and it just eased me up a little bit. I knew where I was going to go if they (killed us). That's the reason why I said come now, because if you come and I die, I'm going over to a better place than where I was right then and there."

After a few days, the hostages accepted "what the Lord willed would be done," Hoffpauir said. But it was a hard affirmation.

"That's the hardest prayer probably I ever had to pray, to lay there when I really thought that that was it and say, 'Lord, your will be done,'" Bedwell admitted. "Because I didn't want to die. It didn't bother me about dying, but I didn't really want to die."

However, the hostages were preparing for what at times seemed a certainty, arming themselves with juice cans and planning to use mattresses to shield themselves from attack.

Early on, the hostages felt it was just a matter of time before they died, Bedwell explained. But Thanksgiving came and, with it, hope for release. In fact, Hoffpauir was set free as a good faith gesture for negotiations that seemed to signal an end to the ordeal. The media images of him walking out of the center flashed hope throughout the country.

However, the ordeal did not end for the released officer. "I felt a little bit of relief that night because I wasn't in danger, but my heart was still inside that room. I stayed hyped until I saw these boys get off that bus at the hospital. And then I felt relieved," he related.

That bus ride did not come on Nov. 27 as anticipated. Talks broke down, and the day came and went without a settlement. Prayers for the hostages continued.

"I definitely felt the prayers of the people on the outside," said Bedwell, who is a licensed preacher. "There's no other way to describe it except the fact that all the prayers that were going up, that the Lord gave instructions to the Holy Spirit to give us comfort on the inside. There's no other reasonable explanation for the times of peace and comfort that would come over me on the inside except that it was by the Holy Spirit."

All three men agree the ordeal strengthened their faith and commitment to God and their appreciation of "all the little things."

Bedwell said his daughter wanted to cling to him, even after five days of freedom. But, he added, "I don't mind a bit."

Thompson, who was ordained as a deacon at Mt. Hope two months ago, tearfully remembered how his two-year-old daughter would look at him in the hospital following his release and want to cry: "She wouldn't have anything to do with me. So we go back home and she was playing with (friends), and she said, 'I'm glad my daddy's back home.' And within five minutes she came back and kissed me. "Nothing meant more to me than that."

Except perhaps that instant Nov. 29 at 2:22 p.m., when the gate was opened and the hostages walked out. Free.

"We wouldn't believe it until we walked through the gate," Bedwell said. "And then, once you walked out the gate, it still took a little bit of time, a few minutes, to realize that you were finally out."

"After going through eight days, it's just not something that you turn off. There was a big relief, and it was finally the fact that you could just let go of all the emotions and you didn't have to worry about trying to be strong anymore, because it was over.

"And you could just let loose."

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Baptist Chaplain Ministers
To Oakdale Hostage Families

F-HMB
By Sherri Brown

Baptist Press
12/10/87

OAKDALE, La. (BP)--Southern Baptist chaplain Angela Church spent her Thanksgiving holidays ministering to hostage families and federal workers at Oakdale Alien Detention Center in South Louisiana.

Church, a chaplain trainee at Federal Correctional Institution in Fort Worth, Texas, was summoned to the prison soon after Cuban detainees took 28 hostages. She was part of a nine-member chaplain team chosen to work at the prison.

Cuban prisoners rioted and took the hostages Sunday, Nov. 22. The riot erupted after Cuba and the United States agreed to repatriate 2,700 Cubans, classified as undesirables by their own country.

Church worked 17 hours a day, talking with the hostages' families housed at a nearby Catholic church. Members of First Baptist Church of Oakdale helped provide three meals a day for the families.

All the area churches pitched in. "There were no denominational lines; no battles for who should be recognized," she said.

"The worst day for the families was Friday morning after Thanksgiving. We had expected the hostages to be released that afternoon, but as the day wore on, we found out it wasn't going to happen," Church remembered.

"But these people were people of faith. They cried and held on to each other, but they believed they'd see the hostages again."

Church also ministered to the Bureau of Prisons workers who surrounded the prison yards, ready to react to any violence on the part of the Cuban detainees.

"They were scared," she said. "They would tell me, 'I've never killed anyone. I don't want to hurt anyone.' Some were angry about not being able to go home. But there was a sense of bonding there, too."

All 28 hostages were released unharmed Monday, Nov. 31.

That evening an ecumenical Thanksgiving service was held at Sacred Heart Catholic church and Church was asked to lead it.

"It was a marvelous experience," she said. "I talked about faith and hope and believing we'd all be home again. By that time we were family, the family of God."

Throughout the experience, Church said, she felt "overwhelmed, but sustained. After it was over, I learned people had been praying for me. I realized then that God had been holding me up, as well as others."

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