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December 22, 1987

87-195

N-FMB

Relief To Ethiopia
Planned Despite Inadequacies

By Marty Croll

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)--Southern Baptists again are planning to help avert starvation in central Ethiopia next year, although adequate grain, air transport and personnel for a major relief program are not yet in sight.

The sun has scorched the rutted earth of the highlands much as it did during the 1984-85 famine. Even along the more moist canyon rims, where scattered strips of vegetation can be seen growing, the heads of grain stalks are stunted and small.

Relief experts predict an 85 to 90 percent late-season crop failure across parts of Ethiopia's midsection, and the government has asked Southern Baptists to maintain seven feeding stations there in 1988. In some areas farther to the north, a total crop loss is projected. Some estimates report 5 million people facing starvation.

As rains in 1986 produced healthy crops in most places, Southern Baptists began phasing out the monthly food rations for Ethiopian families. But spring rains in 1987 were more scattered. And in mid-1987, during the long rainy season, the central highlands saw scarcely six days of rain. Some areas farther north saw none.

Now, Ethiopians are eating the harvest that resulted from the spring rains, said Southern Baptist volunteer Bob Walls, who directs the work in one of two relief areas. Walls expects Ethiopians' food supplies to run dry by early spring. He and Ed Mason, a Southern Baptist volunteer directing relief in the other area, will attempt until then to stockpile enough grain in two warehouses to meet the expected need.

"The people are in fair physical condition now," said Walls. "We know they've got some grain. It's really going to start getting bad in February, March and April. That's why we're trying to stockpile as much as possible."

Southern Baptists are feeding 85,000 people a month now, down from the 145,000 they fed during the last crisis. Walls expects the number to increase to about 175,000 next spring. Relief experts are predicting a less edible harvest will result from the present crop than in any recent year, including the year that led to the 1985 famine, Walls said.

But so far, Walls does not know where he will get the relief grain. "We don't have near the donors we had in '86," he said. "We just don't know what kind of grain we're going to have coming to Ethiopia next year."

Southern Baptists transport donated grain to warehouses by trucks. From the warehouses it goes to the feeding stations, only minutes away by air, but hours by land. Medical services are available at five of the stations.

In 1986 various relief groups helped provide air transport for the Southern Baptist distribution system into remote areas. But the outpouring of aid from people worldwide has slowed, and Walls does not know what kind of air support might be available. Southern Baptists maintain 10 Mercedes trucks but own nothing designed to airlift supplies. Road travel from the warehouses along boulder-strewn, hand-cut roads through the canyons takes anywhere from four to eight hours.

"Without air support, we won't be able to feed half these people," Walls said. The trucks stay busy supplying grain to the warehouses from central sources in Addis Ababa. Even that travel costs each truck a set of six tires every six weeks. "Just grain alone, we're talking about moving over 2,000 metric tons per month." Add to that the tons of milk powder and cooking oil required.

Providing medical services to such a large number of people would be difficult, too, with present personnel. "We're short of nurses. We're down to just two," said Walls. At least eight more are needed, he said.

"If it gets real bad, there's just no way one nurse can handle a feeding station by herself. There's too much for them to do." With 10 more nurses, two could work at each of the five stations that will have medical facilities, and two could relieve others. "They just can't take this stuff month after month," he said. "What we do is try to bring them down (to Addis Ababa) for a week after about four weeks, but you have to have somebody to put in their place."

At least two features of this relief effort give Southern Baptists an edge over last time, Walls said. For one, the distribution system is already in place. The facilities are built. During the last famine, Southern Baptists came in during the middle of the crisis, and people already were dying while roads and outposts were being built.

Also, the Ethiopian government has just agreed to allow the use of shortwave radios, offering a communications link between all the feeding stations, the warehouses and Addis Ababa, the center of Southern Baptist operations. During the last effort, a nurse almost died of typhus because she was stationed at a remote feeding station with little access to outside help.

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

Long-Awaited Visas
Granted For Venezuela

N-FMB

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
12/22/87

CARACAS, Venezuela (BP)--For the first time in a year, the Venezuelan government has granted visas to Southern Baptist missionaries.

The Venezuelan government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs approved visas for three Southern Baptist couples Dec. 18 and for a fourth couple Dec. 21. A fifth couple's visa request still is pending.

"Specific, united, continuing prayer" helped open doors, said Betty Law, associate area director of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board work in Spanish South America. The eight missionaries and their children will move to Venezuela as soon as possible.

The missionaries will join 78 other Southern Baptist workers in Venezuela "at a time of advance and great opportunity," Law said. They will work with the 10,000-member National Baptist Convention of Venezuela, which has adopted a 1-million-member goal for the year 2000. The eight missionaries were among personnel requested by the convention to assist in the campaign.

Two missionaries still waiting for visas are Bill and Kathy Cashion, both of Slater, S.C. They have remained in Costa Rica since finishing language school in San Jose in December 1986. Cashion has worked in Nicaraguan refugee settlements just inside the Costa Rican border. He started by organizing baseball teams for youths. Later came Bible studies and baptismal services. The Cashions are hoping to do church development work in Caracas.

During the year-long drought in visas, three couples were reassigned to work in Chile. The Foreign Mission Board's prayer office first reported the prayer concern in January 1987. The Tennessee Baptist Convention, which had been in a partnership with Venezuelan Baptists, called for a special day of prayer Aug. 6. FMB President R. Keith Parks also had noted the need for visas to Venezuela as a priority concern the first Sunday in August for the concerts of prayer in churches across the Southern Baptist Convention.

The four couples who received visa approvals finished language school several months after the Cashions.

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Butch and Pam Strickland finished in April and have been waiting in Palmer, Alaska, for word about their visas. Strickland is from Dimmitt, Texas, and his wife is from Anchorage, Alaska. They are assigned to church development work in Maracaibo.

Paul and Robin Tinley finished language school in August and worked in Costa Rica until their visas there expired at the end of November. Both consider Guadalajara, Mexico, to be their hometown. He is the son of Presbyterian missionaries, and she, the former Robin White, is the daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries to Mexico. They are assigned to church development work on Margarita Island.

Steve and Jan Lyon, both of Houston, finished language school in August. Until their visas expired in mid-November, Lyon had taught at the Baptist Center for Theological Education in Costa Rica. In Venezuela, he will join the faculty of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Los Teques.

Dickie and Dee Nelson finished language school in August and have been waiting in Slidell, La. Nelson is from Slidell and his wife is from Chickamauga, Ga. They are assigned to church development work in Barinas.

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Retired Florida Exec,
John H. Maguire, Dies

N-10
(F10.)

Baptist Press
12/22/87

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--John H. Maguire, 87, former executive secretary-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention, died Dec. 18 at his Jacksonville, Fla., home. He had been suffering with cancer for nearly a year.

Maguire led in the development and growth of the Florida Convention from 1945 until his retirement in 1967.

During his 22-year tenure, the number of Southern Baptist churches cooperating with the state convention grew from 826 to 1,426, and the number of Southern Baptists grew from 184,140 to more than 600,000. Today the convention is the largest evangelical religious denomination in the state, with more than 900,000 members.

"There has been no person in Florida Baptist history who has made a more significant contribution in Florida Baptist life than Dr. Maguire," said Dan C. Stringer, current executive director of the Florida Convention.

Maguire's contributions included a strong "evangelistic outreach, the starting of new churches, the funding of Southern Baptist missions through the Cooperative Program unified budget, institutional development within the state and the development of an extremely capable staff," Stringer said. "His mission concern for Florida was expressed in mission church starts and mission (financial) support."

Harold C. Bennett, president of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee and Maguire's immediate successor in Florida, called Maguire "the greatest man I have ever followed. He made Florida Baptists aware of mission needs, not only in Florida, but throughout the world.

"His commitment to world missions through the Cooperative Program was without question, and he led Florida Baptists to increase world mission support through the Cooperative Program consistently."

Edgar Cooper, retired editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, the convention's weekly newsjournal, said: "John came in when Florida Baptists were really in need. The state was beginning to grow, churches were needed, evangelism needed to be enhanced. What we needed was someone strong. John was that person."

A native of Brock, Okla., Maguire became executive secretary-treasurer of the state convention in 1945. He came to the post from Birmingham, Ala., where he had been pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. He previously was pastor in Florida, and Alabama and had been a Sunday school specialist for the Alabama Baptist Convention from 1927 to 1936.

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A graduate of Howard Payne College, Maguire did graduate study at George Washington University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and received honorary doctorates from Howard Payne, Stetson University and Florida Memorial College.

He is survived by his wife, the former Clyde Merrill; a son, John David of Claremont Calif.; and two daughters, Merrill Skaggs of Madison, N.J., and Martha Worsley of Jacksonville.

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Maryland/Delaware
Moderates Form Group

By Bob Allen

N-10
(Md./Del.)

Baptist Press
12/22/87

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (BP)--About 40 Maryland/Delaware Baptists dedicated "to promote, preserve, defend and enhance our heritage as Southern Baptists" adopted objectives and an organizational structure and elected officers in a meeting at Heritage Baptist Church in Annapolis, Md., in mid-December.

Members of the group, most of whom attended a previous meeting in November at Forest Baptist Church in Upperco, Md., agreed to call the organization "Friends of the Southern Baptist Heritage."

At the November meeting, the group voted to form an official organization and appointed a temporary steering committee to recommend purpose and objective statements and a structure to implement the objectives. Wayne Kempson, chairman of the temporary steering committee and pastor of First Baptist Church of Waldorf, Md., presented the committee's report at the second meeting.

The group adopted the purpose and objective statements and the committee structure, and elected Ralph Ehren, pastor of Colesville (Md.) Baptist Church and immediate past president of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, as its chairman.

The purpose statement adopted by the group reads: "Our calling is to see all persons come to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God has given to Southern Baptists a unique avenue whereby we can summon a lost world to faith in Christ. Thus, our purpose is to promote, preserve, defend and enhance our heritage as Southern Baptists so that the cause of Christ might not be hindered."

Kempson said the aim of the group will be to promote "an authentic understanding of our Southern Baptist heritage. We really don't have a theological agenda. We believe there is a heritage of Southern Baptists ... (and) it can be established with an unbiased survey of history."

An explanation supporting the purpose statement in the document identifies a "dynamic fellowship" in Southern Baptist heritage. "Fellowship which unites diversity of theology and method in a cooperative effort for the sake of missions lies at the heart of who we are as Southern Baptists," the explanation statement concludes.

Three objectives adopted by the group are "to encourage and promote fellowship among all Southern Baptists throughout the Maryland and Delaware convention, to keep an accurate understanding of our Southern Baptist heritage before Baptists in Maryland and Delaware and to gather and exchange information regarding developments in denominational life which affect our Southern Baptist heritage."

Three committees -- fellowship, education and liaison -- parallel the objective concerns.

A rationale statement supporting the fellowship objective states: "We have no desire to become just another fragment of the unravelled fabric of Southern Baptist life. We seek to find ways in which Baptists can come together as God's people to share and work in authentic peace and harmony. We recognize that many of our fellow Baptists feel alienated. We believe that God is wise and powerful enough to lead us through the avenues of confession and repentance to find true reconciliation with one another."

A priority of the fellowship committee will be to foster relationships with leaders of the Conservative Evangelical Fellowship, a Maryland/Delaware group in sympathy with a nine-year effort nationwide to turn the Southern Baptist Convention toward a more conservative stance.

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The second objective of the Friends of the Southern Baptist Heritage, of education about Baptist heritage, carries the following rationale: "We are not left to conjecture about the nature of our heritage. The lordship of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the competency of the individual soul in matters of faith, the autonomy of the local church, freedom of conscience; these convictions are established by the unbiased study of our history as central to our heritage. We cannot take these truths for granted. They must be taught to each new generation of Southern Baptists.

The supporting statement for the objective to monitor developments in Baptist life affecting Southern Baptist heritage reads: "Tragically, we find ourselves thrust into a debate not our choosing. As Southern Baptists we have been given no other means of participating in the debate than involvement in the democratic process which governs our convention. To be good stewards, we must be as fully informed as possible regarding the issues at hand. Furthermore, in a spirit of cooperation we seek to encourage Baptists in other locales through mutual sharing, fellowship and action."

The liaison committee, whose charter will be the third objective, will have a responsibility "to facilitate participation in the democratic process." That could include the mobilization of messengers for state and/or national convention meetings. The liaison committee also will be responsible for interaction with similar groups in other states, with which the Friends of the Southern Baptist heritage has shared concerns but no formal affiliation.

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Lay Ministers Offer Comfort
To Tornado-Ravaged Community

N-Texas
By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
12/22/87

PALESTINE, Texas (BP)--When trained disaster relief workers arrived in Palestine, Texas, to aid victims of a November tornado, they discovered about 100 lay ministers from Southside Baptist Church already at work. More than a month later, members of the church are still at work, meeting needs in Jesus' name.

The tornadoes that cut a swath through central and eastern Texas hit Palestine mid-afternoon Nov. 15. Within two to three hours, Southside Church was set up as an emergency disaster relief center. Throughout the night, Southside members provided sandwiches, hot coffee and listening ears for their disaster-stricken neighbors.

"I think the strongest impact the church had on the community was through its initial response in the hours following the tornado," said Steve Reece, a layman at Southside and chief photographer for the local newspaper. As a photojournalist, Reece was able to see firsthand citizens' responses to the church's ministry.

"Before the tornado, a lot of people took a dim view of Southside because of the pari-mutuel issue," Reece said, noting the church took a strong and unpopular public stand against legalized gambling prior to the Nov. 3 statewide referendum.

"After the storm, people saw that Southside really cared about the community," he said. "They saw how church members stepped out to lend a hand at a crisis time. Love for Jesus Christ brought them together immediately to respond. Our people did what they had to do to meet needs of people touched by the tornado."

Doing "what they had to do" included working around the clock four days operating an overnight shelter, food pantry and hot-meal service. After the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Mobile Unit arrived Nov. 16, Southside members also assisted disaster relief team members in serving victims and rescuers at the mobile field kitchen and alternated with team members in cooking meals.

"I never helped cook so many huge pots of chili and fixed so many sandwiches in all my life," said Mamie Vickery of Southside. Although her primary duty was in the kitchen, Vickery and other volunteers also were called on to counsel.

"Some people wanted to talk about what had happened to them," she said. "We just tried to show the love of the Lord to them and to all the people who came in."

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"Some of our people also took food out into the neighborhoods that were hit by the tornado," said Southside member Rita Calhoon. "That was probably one of the best things we could have done. A lot of people who were needy wouldn't leave their homes to come for help.

"People who went out with the food came back to the church crying. They couldn't get over how well they were received."

Southside Pastor Dwight Blankenship believes one reason his church was ready to respond with helping hands was because of lay renewal and discipleship weekends led at the church by Don Gibson, renewal leader and state director of the Baptist Men missions organization.

"I believe there is a direct correlation. A number of the leaders in disaster relief were involved in those two events," said Blankenship. "Our people discovered that they can be involved in ministry, and, in fact, that Christ expects them to do so."

Lay renewal and other programs "prepare us to do the Lord's work and to be his disciples," said Mark Hollis of Southside. "We've learned that we're not supposed to sit comfortably in our little circle of friends. You could say we have surrendered to ministry to the people of Palestine."

Southside is continuing its ministry in the community, including ministry to sister churches.

"Our church is helping a black church that was completely blown away buy a piano and song books," said Blankenship.

Men and boys from Southside also have been devoting their weekends to helping clear limbs and debris from Lakeview Methodist Encampment. About 75 percent of the buildings at the camp were severely damaged by the storm.

In addition to helping the Methodists clear their campground, the Baptist Men and Royal Ambassadors from Southside also are cutting the fallen trees and limbs into firewood and delivering them to widows and other elderly residents in Palestine.

"We may have worked with a church as involved as Southside, but we've never worked with one more involved in physically fulfilling the mandate of Jesus Christ," said John LaNoue, on-site coordinator for the Texas Baptist Men Disaster Relief operation.

"As I look at Scripture, I see that Jesus did two things: He met human need where he found it, and he brought people to God. The folks at Southside are doing a great job at both."