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December 30, 1987

87-196

Baptists Minister To Victims
Of Arkansas 'Double Disaster'N-CO
By Dan Martin

WEST MEMPHIS, Ark. (BP)--Members of First Baptist Church of West Memphis, Ark., gave up Christmas Day with their families to minister to victims of the second part of a "double disaster" which hit the Mississippi River town in December.

About 16 or 18 inches of rain fell Christmas Eve, flooding sections of the town which had been badly damaged by a tornado which killed six persons, injured scores and left hundreds homeless Dec. 14. The Christmas flooding, complicated by the debris which clogged storm drains, left additional hundreds homeless, although no deaths were reported.

Heavy flooding also hit Millington, on the Tennessee side of the Mississippi River. Staff and members of First Baptist Church of Millington also gave up Christmas Day with their families to participate in rescue and relief efforts for those forced from their homes by rising waters.

Tommy Hinson, pastor of First Baptist Church of West Memphis, said the flooding "was probably more disastrous than the tornado. The flooding was very deceptive since the water came up so rapidly in the night."

Hinson, also a member of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, added he is in his 27th year as pastor of the church and has "never seen anything to compare with this."

He was awakened at 3 a.m. Christmas Day by a telephone call from two church members who wanted to know if the Family Life Center could be opened to house people being forced from their homes by the rising waters.

"I told them I could have it open in 15 minutes," Hinson related. "Just as I got there and got the lights turned on, a fire truck drove up and wanted to know if we were receiving people. I told them to bring them on."

He said he called one of his deacons -- a farmer -- to ask if the man could use his farm vehicles to help rescue people from the waters.

"He asked me what I was doing calling him so early Christmas morning," Hinson said. "I told him the water was rising rapidly. He asked, 'What water?' but when he put his feet down, he stuck them into water which had flooded his bedroom."

He also told of the nurse who came early Christmas morning to help people with medical problems. "She told me it was her finest Christmas, even if she had not been able to spend it with her small children because she was doing what she had been trained to do."

Hinson said the church was manned by at least six people from the church, who spent Christmas Day and the five days following "monitoring, assisting, counseling and doing personal work. We know of at least six people who made professions of faith in Jesus Christ."

The pastor said many people have asked why the double disaster hit West Memphis. "I told them there is always the why, but I tried to turn the question around and tell them we are not God and that our response should be more a response of how rather than why; how we can help those who are in the midst of a tragedy."

Hinson added: "I am grateful God gave us the privilege of doing this."

He said the church provided food, in cooperation with the Red Cross, and has received the promise of aid -- money, dried food, blankets and Bibles -- from Operation Blessing, an arm of the 700 Club. "The folks who raise funds for television ministries have been made to look pretty bad (this year), but they have put about \$30,000 into this (relief efforts)," Hinson said.

He added the effects of the tornado and flooding will be felt in West Memphis for months to come. "Probably the flooding was even more devastating than the tornado," he said, "because most of the folks had insurance for the tornado, but not for the flooding. "There is a need for a long-term recovery," he said.

Hinson said Baptist churches who wish to help can best provide aid by sending money.

"The local Baptist pastors, with the assistance of the associational director of missions, have committed themselves to administering the funds of churches who wish to send contributions. People who wish to contribute can send funds to First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1835, West Memphis, Ark. 72301 and carefully mark the envelopes 'Disaster Funds'," Hinson said.

In nearby Millington -- a suburb of Memphis, Tenn. -- members of First Baptist Church turned out to drive church buses on Christmas Day.

Pastor Ray Newcomb of First Baptist Church said relief workers said there was a need for the buses to take flood victims to shelter after they were rescued from the water. "We drove the buses as close to the water as we could and when the boats would come up to shore, we would take the people off and take them wherever they needed to go," he said.

The church was prepared to house the homeless, but was not needed, Newcomb said, since the community center was in use and military personnel from the Memphis Naval Air Station were housed at the naval base.

Members and staff also went door to door in some of the devastated areas after the waters receded, handing out food and cleaning supplies to help in the cleanup work. Others worked with those who were housed in the community center, providing for both physical and spiritual needs.

In central Tennessee, a longtime Nashville Baptist leader and his wife drowned when they were trapped by rising floodwaters on a suburban Nashville road.

John O. Ells, 73, a retired banker, and his wife, Evelyn Frazier Ellis, also 73, apparently drowned when their pickup truck stalled on a flooded road in Williamson County as they traveled in the pre-dawn hours Saturday to a bird watching event.

Ellis, a life deacon at First Baptist Church in Nashville, and a long-time leader in the church's college department, had been a member of both the Southern Baptist Foundation and the Tennessee Baptist Foundation's boards of directors. At the time of his death he was a member of the Southern Baptist Foundation's advisory investment board.

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Ethnic Consultant Hired
To Enlist Missionaries

By Eric Miller

FMB - N

Baptist Press
12/30/87

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--An ethnic relations consultant -- a first for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board -- has been hired by the Richmond-based organization to challenge members of 6,000 Baptist ethnic churches to become missionaries.

Geriel (Jerry) DeOliveira will begin duties in January as ethnic church relations director in the missionary enlistment department of the board. He will work with Southern Baptists whose primary language is not English or who are from homes where the primary language was not English.

DeOliveira, 45, born and reared in Brazil, has "a rich cross-cultural" background, said Bill Morgan, director of the missionary enlistment department. He has been a member of Korean and Hispanic churches, and the pastor of multicultural churches. Sixteen ethnic groups were represented in one church where he was pastor.

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Before joining the board, he was executive director of the San Francisco Peninsula Southern Baptist Association for seven years. This association includes ethnic Southern Baptist churches representing 21 languages.

DeOliveira, a U.S. citizen since 1970, speaks and reads Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, English and French fluently. He has taught Portuguese, Spanish and French in public schools and colleges. He also reads Greek and understands Romanian and Catalan.

He expects much of his time will be devoted to trying to enlist Hispanic Baptists since there are more than 20 million Hispanics in America, making them the largest ethnic group in the Southern Baptist Convention.

But he also will challenge others -- Koreans, Slavic groups, American Indians, Japanese and Chinese -- to become missionaries.

Victor Davis, director of the black church relations section of the missionary enlistment department, is enlisting blacks for missionary service.

Employment of ethnic Southern Baptists is essential "if we are going to get Bold Mission Thrust to become a reality by the year 2000 and if we are going to touch every group in the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ," DeOliveira said. Southern Baptists are growing more rapidly among ethnics than among Anglo-Americans or blacks.

Brazil, he noted, has few Chinese churches. But it has 800,000 Chinese residents and 3 million Japanese -- the result of the Brazilian government offering favorable conditions to Chinese and Japanese immigrants after World War II. The Chinese population also is large in Venezuela and Guatemala, he said.

Almost 13 percent of the population in the San Francisco bay area is Chinese. It will be a "blessing" if "we can get the Chinese to go into Brazil right now," he said.

Since they have had to adapt to the American culture, ethnic Southern Baptists probably can adapt to a culture outside the United States better than Americans who have experienced only the U.S. culture, DeOliveira said.

And ethnic Baptists who go to countries where their primary language is spoken will not have to deal with an obstacle some missionaries face because of their foreign accent.

DeOliveira hopes to make ethnic Baptists aware of foreign mission opportunities through literature, conferences and classes. He will speak at conferences and help coordinate foreign missions emphases in camps conducted for Hispanics by state Baptist conventions in California, Florida and Texas. He also will reach out to Indians in Oklahoma.

He wants to see some missions classes at Baptist seminaries and colleges "specifically designed" to make ethnic groups aware of missions, he explained.

"I do believe that God is in the business of calling ethnics into foreign missions as he's calling the so-called non-ethnics," DeOliveira said. "I don't think God is making a distinction."

Some ethnic Baptists get seminary training but can't find a job in a church. So, they go into secular work. They probably would pursue foreign missionary careers if they knew of the opportunities available, DeOliveira believes. Some ethnic Baptists never have heard of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, he noted.

DeOliveira is married to the former Sylvia Ann Martin of Greenville, S.C., and they have three children, Geriann Michele, 19; Eric Antonio, 16; and Sherie Giselle, 14.

A graduate of California Baptist College and the University of California, both in Riverside, he earned three degrees from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif. He is seeking a doctorate degree in language education and literacy, with emphasis in cross cultural education, from the University of California in Berkeley.

CORRECTION: Please make the following substitution in the story mailed 12/18/87.

Malaysia Churches Closed;
Arrested Baptist Released

Substitute this for the first paragraph:

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (BP)--Thirty-three evangelical churches in Malaysia received orders Dec. 15 to suspend services within seven days, as Baptists and other Christians in that country continue to feel repercussions from recent government enforcement of the Internal Security Act.

Also, in paragraph two, after the first sentence, add: "Four of these are Baptist churches in the Malaysia Baptist Convention."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Arkansas Workers See
Power Of Holy Spirit

By Eric Miller

FM B-N
Baptist Press
12/30/87

MANAUS, Brazil (BP)--Arkansas and Brazilian Baptists fell only 500 short of a prayed-for goal of 10,000 professions of faith in Christ in 10 days as they went about presenting the gospel to a whole city in Brazil in late fall.

Nearly 200 Arkansas laymen helped Brazilian Baptists hand out 250,000 to 300,000 New Testaments in Manaus in October and November, visited door to door, distributed the last of 3.5 million tracts, sang in schools, and preached in churches, parks and on a beach, said Jack Bledsoe, a trustee of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board who reported on the effort during a December trustee committee meeting.

Arkansas and Brazilian Baptists also conducted a three-night crusade in a soccer stadium with Brazil's best-known evangelist, Nilson Fanini, who is a Baptist.

Bledsoe said he tells young preachers in Arkansas, "If you're tired of preaching every Sunday and seeing people sit there and not responding to the invitation -- if you're tired of going week after week, month after month without ever going to your baptistry, let us send you overseas, and you'll have people saved every time you preach."

He quoted missionary Luther Williams as saying that in 10 days Arkansas Baptists had advanced Baptist work in Manaus by 20 years.

"What thrilled me the most was the power of God's word as you went in and sat down in someone's home," he said. Out of respect for the Bible, a man without a shirt excused himself and returned wearing a shirt when people witnessing to him began reading Scripture.

A group of men drinking beer on a Saturday afternoon put away their beer and empty cans when Baptists began witnessing and reading Scripture. Each of the men made a profession of faith in Christ, Bledsoe said.

"Their hearts are open, and they're hungry for the word of God," he said of Brazilians.

In the hotel where they were staying, laymen led the hotel manager to Christ. The manager then called together his staff. The laymen preached, and most of the staff members made professions of faith, Bledsoe said.

Arkansas vocalists and musicians with brass instruments performed on the beach near the hotel and drew a gathering of beach-goers. After a sermon, "many people were saved on the beach," said Glen Ennes, associate director of the church music department of the Arkansas Baptist Convention.

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Ennes, who attended the night services in the stadium, said 4,000 people made professions of faith. Baptists "just were not prepared for the masses of people that came forward," he said.

The lieutenant governor of the state of Amazonas and the governor's bodyguard made professions of faith during the stadium services, Bledsoe said. Also, a colonel was lead to Christ, and the governor of Amazonas expressed an interest in the gospel while in the stadium, Ennes said.

Use of the media, including television, radio, newspapers and billboards, helped promote the 10-day crusade, titled "The Solution Is Jesus," said Glendon Grober, director of the Brotherhood department of the Arkansas Convention.

The crusade marked the completion of a four-year partnership project between Brazil and Arkansas. Arkansas Baptists worked in construction projects as well as evangelism.

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Missions Involvement Helps
Struggling Church Survive

By Ken Camp

TET- N

Baptist Press
12/30/87

DALLAS (BP)--The community is changing ethnically. The economy is depressed, and church receipts reflect that depression. But First Baptist Church of Wilmer, Texas, is finding missions involvement to be the secret for the church's continued survival.

"The community is dying," said Byron Barnes, pastor of First Church in the southern Dallas County community. "We need young people. This was a bedroom community, but because of the economy people are moving elsewhere. We're struggling financially, but without missions outreach, we'd be in much worse shape."

For the past several years, missions involvement has meant annual mission trips to Utah, New Orleans and other areas for Vacation Bible Schools and Backyard Bible Clubs.

"The Lord has been good to us. We've made the mission trips even when we really couldn't afford to go," said Barnes. "And this past year, we've been bringing missions home."

The process of "bringing missions home" has included providing a Vacation Bible School for Hispanic children that attracted more than 60 youngsters and Backyard Bible Clubs that have drawn as many as 200.

First Church also had about 160 children in a community Vacation Bible School. Average Sunday school attendance at the church is about 80.

"Our people are beginning to develop a desire to do missions right here," said Barnes. "They are growing through missions involvement."

Barnes noted one difficulty for his church is learning how to reach an increasingly transient population: "It's not easy spending all your energy on people when you know in another 60, 90 or 120 days they'll be moving on. But our church is committed to ministering to them while they're here. That might not be the way to build up our church, but it's helping the total cause of the Lord."

As the son of a Southern Baptist Home Missions church planter in Arizona, Barnes said: "I just have missions in my blood. The Lord hasn't called me to be a missionary, but he keeps my spiritual tank full by letting me do missions through our church. It's my way of serving the Lord and having a good time doing it."

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