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88-115

Despite nagging questions,
Parrishes don't doubt God

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (BP)--They have worked through some of the "what ifs" and know they probably will still have to deal with some "whys," but James and Martha Parrish don't doubt God called them as Southern Baptist missionaries to Ecuador. And soon they hope to go back and resume their ministry there.

That ministry -- he is a general evangelist and church planter working with two congregations, and they both have a variety of outreach ministries in the seaport town of Esmeraldas -- was interrupted and the Parrishes' lives altered forever July 4.

A gasoline explosion and fire at a service station killed their 3-year-old son, John Martin, and critically burned his brother, Stephen, 7. Parrish also was burned severely on his face and arms as he struggled to pull the boys from their burning truck. They had stopped for gasoline before enjoying a day at the beach with another missionary couple, the Tom Owenses, who were coming from Santo Domingo.

Parrish and Stephen were first briefly hospitalized in Esmeraldas, then flown to Quito and then to Methodist Medical Center in Dallas July 8. Parrish was released July 19 but is undergoing daily treatment and therapy at the hospital.

Stephen, with 40 percent of his body burned -- principally his legs, arms and head -- will be hospitalized another two weeks and will undergo daily treatment and therapy thereafter for an undetermined period. He was to have skin grafts to his legs, which were the most severely burned, July 21.

The Parrishes recounted the events in mid-July as they prepared to move into a missionary residence provided for them by Fairview Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Texas. They expect to be in the house for three or four months before returning to Ecuador. Their address during this time will be 324 N.E. 12th, Grand Prairie, Texas 75050.

Parrish was standing beside the family's truck as a service station attendant primed a flooded gas pump. Both boys were in the cab of the truck when a spark inside the pump apparently ignited the blaze.

The father ran to the door of the truck to help his sons. "I grabbed Stephen and tried to find John and couldn't," he said. He pulled Stephen from the flames and set him aside. He started to go back for John but saw Stephen moving toward the flames and grabbed him again and carried him to safety.

"As I turned back to the truck, it had exploded again, I guess from more fumes or something," he said. "I just couldn't get in. Something was telling me John was already dead."

A taxi driver stopped and drove father and son to the Esmeraldas hospital. Parrish immediately called his wife from the hospital, asking her to contact the mission office in Quito, the capital city, and get them moved there. The hospital in Esmeraldas is poorly equipped, he said. Before he and Stephen could be treated in the emergency room there, he had to walk across the street and purchase antiseptic to clean their burns.

Mrs. Parrish did not see or hear from her husband or Stephen for almost four hours, from the time of the phone call until they got to the plane. During this time, she contacted fellow missionaries, and they worked together to make arrangements to fly Parrish, Stephen and John's body to Quito, where John was buried July 5.

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"They were some of my worst moments," she said, "not knowing how badly burned both of them were. There was the thought that they could both be dead by now."

Both Parrish and Stephen were hospitalized in Quito that evening and Stephen was in critical condition until July 8, when doctors determined he could be moved to the United States.

Both have been undergoing treatment for their burns, which are immersed twice daily in a whirlpool bath and the dead skin scrubbed away. Parrish was burned on his face and ears, hands and arms as he reached into the truck for Stephen. His eyes were protected by his glasses.

Stephen, who was wearing shorts, was burned most severely on the inside of his legs above the knee. The backs of his legs and arms and face, all uncovered, also were burned.

In spite of the pain of the burns and the heat of the fire, Parrish had difficulty at first accepting the reality of what had happened, he said.

"Yet there was a peace that accompanied me through the whole thing and gave me the ability to get my son to the hospital and to see he was cared for and to call my wife," he said. "The Lord was good to be there in the midst of tragedy."

Running through his mind, he said, were the "what ifs."

"What if I hadn't stopped here at all, what if when we saw we couldn't get gas for awhile (because of the pump) we had just pulled on out?" he said he reasoned. "But I realized that I couldn't live with 'what ifs.' There are a lot of what ifs, and I guess some of those will still come back to haunt me.

"But God is still God, and it happened, and he gives you the grace to go on."

The Parrishes have been in Ecuador only since December and had just begun to get through all of the initial cultural adjustments in Esmeraldas when the tragedy struck. They are the only Southern Baptist missionaries in the city of 120,000 on the coast just south of the Colombian border in northwestern South America.

Parrish was working with the two congregations in Esmeraldas, one a split off the other, trying to get them reconciled and to build a strong work in the city.

The Parrishes believe God called them to Ecuador and plan to go back, they said, probably to Esmeraldas, but they are open to service in some other place in the country. Going back to Esmeraldas and its memories -- they had celebrated John's third birthday only two days before the accident -- will be especially tough.

"We feel like the Lord can use this accident and what has happened as a witness to the people in the area," Parrish said. "A lot of people in the city are aware of what happened. We are hoping the Lord can use it to bring reconciliation to the two churches and that we can see a stronger work coming out of it."

In the meantime, they will help Stephen and find time to grieve over the loss of John.

"At this point," Mrs. Parrish said, "there really hasn't been time yet to grieve for John. Emotionally the numbness is beginning to wear off a little bit, and I am beginning to realize he is gone. But we will probably have to deal with that grief when we go back to Ecuador and back to our home.

"Of course, we miss the comfort of his (John's) presence. He stole everyone's heart. A lot of people are missing him besides us."

On Sunday before the accident, John had an earache, she said, and she had stayed home with him, just holding him and comforting him much of the day.

"I realize now his need for me is over," she said. "My need for him isn't. But it is comforting just to know that John is with the Lord and that he is being taken care of."

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There will still be some anger to work through, she said: "And we may still have to deal with some 'whys' -- why did this happen, why John, why Stephen?"

"I haven't worked through it all. I keep asking myself is John's death and all this somehow tied in with his (God's) reason for putting us in Esmeraldas? I don't know. I can't say and won't say and don't believe that God caused this. But I do believe that he permitted it and he was in control of it and that he is going to use it.

"I am just waiting for the fulfillment of Romans 8:28. He is going to bring good out of it."

Both have been comforted by friends and other Christians around them and verses of Scripture that have come to mind.

The second and third chapters of Philippians have meant much to Parrish, impressing him that there is encouragement in being united with Christ and fellowship in his Spirit, he said: "I can't imagine what people do who don't have Christ and have to go through tragedy. There is nothing to hang your life on. There is support in the body of Christ, the church.

"The Lord has left his footprints all around us; his fingerprints are all over us through other people."

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

Musicians address
organist shortage

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--A growing shortage of church organists -- reaching crisis proportions in Southern Baptist churches -- brought concerned musicians together at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center to address the problem.

In a think-tank session during the Church Music Leadership Conference, more than two dozen keyboard musicians discussed the circumstances that have created the crisis and ways church musicians can help alleviate it.

Sharron Lyon, music/recording editor for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church music department, said the crisis is not limited to Southern Baptists.

In a recent meeting of the American Guild of Organists, 25 participants representing several major denominations questioned if musicians would be considering careers as organists by the end of the century.

"The problem is universal," said Lyon. "All denominations have the same problems. For example, youth are singing with tape tracks, so they don't always hear an organ in church. Also, an orchestra sometimes takes the place of the pipe organ or the organ is placed in the background."

Lyon also acknowledged "the busy-ness of youth today and the lack of opportunity for some to play an instrument. The fine arts have taken a back seat in public schools, so many times church is the only place where children are exposed to music."

Consequently, a shortage of organ majors exists in colleges today, she said.

Russell Hodges, organ professor at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark., said organ majors who graduate are many times employed immediately, often by churches of other denominations.

"All of us who teach organ are constantly being asked if there is anyone we can recommend for church staff positions. Usually there isn't anyone available," said Hodges.

"Very few Southern Baptist churches can employ an organist full-time," Lyon said. "The opportunities just are not there."

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Therefore, for organ students who are determined to use their talents in a Southern Baptist church, an extra commitment may be required, such as earning a degree with two majors. The church position, Lyon said, becomes a moonlighting position, while the full-time job is in a different field.

Changing technology contributes to the decrease in organ use in churches, participants agreed. For example, some churches are buying synthesizers instead of organs. In other congregations, taped or computer-generated music is considered the most economical solution for accompaniments.

Waning interest by would-be accompanists has come about in part because of the use of taped music and a decrease in Sunday school opening assemblies, according to the musicians. Allowing young piano students to play preludes and offertories for worship services can be a great encouragement for continued study, they said.

Beverly Scott of Emmanuel Baptist Church in San Jose, Calif., said her church uses a churchwide survey to determine musical talents and interests. As a result of the survey, classes are established to help people with interests in keyboard instruments, guitars and directing music.

Participants from Oklahoma, Texas, Mississippi and New Mexico said state convention-sponsored music festivals have helped sustain interest among keyboard students of all ages.

Dale Owens, organist at First Baptist Church of Natchez, Miss., supported the idea of statewide competitions, noting he is "a product of the state music festival program."

Teresa Thomason, keyboard consultant for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, said the Louisiana festival offers five levels of participation, for ages 5-99.

"This is our future," she said. "If we don't get them up there to play, we're losing out."

The Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the Sunday School Board's church music department.

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Poole to head Missouri Baptist
public relations department

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Philip Poole will join the Missouri Baptist Convention executive board staff Aug. 15 as director of the convention's newly restructured public relations department.

He will come to that position from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, where he has been as a public relations specialist since November 1984.

Prior to accepting the Sunday School Board position, he was director of communications for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and earlier he was adjunct instructor in communications for the seminary. He also has been book clubs manager for Word Inc.

A native of Texas, Poole is a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and holds a master of arts degree in journalism from North Texas State University in Denton. He also has earned accreditation by the Public Relations Society of America.

In the restructured position, Poole will supervise the work currently done by the Missouri Baptist public relations and graphic services departments. He also will take on some responsibilities previously held by the associate director of the convention's business services division, a position eliminated during the restructuring.

Poole and his wife, Shellyn, have two daughters, Melissa Shellyne and Caroline Elizabeth.

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Teaching children
can reach families

By Charles Willis

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Carrie Cardwell believes she is called to teach children, not music.

The children's choir coordinator at First Baptist Church of Corsicana, Texas, said it took her a long time to realize "music is my tool."

"If we just focus on teaching music, there are some things we are not going to take into account," she told participants in the Church Music Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Among members of her children's choirs, Cardwell outlined situations of family deaths, parental divorce, family business failure, learning disabilities, birth of a sibling and making the decision to accept Christ as specific opportunities for ministry.

"When we are called for a purpose, we need our individual tools for special children," she said. "God knows all the children I'm going to have in my choir and gives me the tools to minister to them."

But Cardwell said a children's choir program should minister to families, including those who are not members of the church.

"If Jesus is to be lifted up, we have to be the lifters," she said.

Only half of the children in the choir program at First Church of Corsicana are from families in the church, she said. The rest come from the community, where the reputation of the children's choir program has spread by word of mouth from church families to the unchurched.

Cardwell said contact with the church has reached parents and families through children's choir concerts and seasonal events in a non-threatening way that has led some to active church involvement.

Among children, she said, churches need to build a reputation that choir is fun, worthy of the child's time, a place with minimum stress and a place to be themselves.

Among community families, she said, the children's choir should be known as a positive, safe place where their children have proper role models and where "they know us by name, understand our needs and expand our talents."

Cardwell said she believes success in ministering to children and their families is not in teaching music.

"We have to recognize what is important in the lives of individual children and be supportive," she said. "We need to recognize their achievements, attend their school events and give them a hug when they need it."

Church Music Leadership Conference was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church music department.

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Airborn angels descend
in answer to prayer

By Roberta Anderson

Baptist Press
7/20/88

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--What's noisier than an angel but descends from heaven in answer to prayer?

A red-and-silver Bell 222-UT helicopter owned by Memphis (Tenn.) Medical Center Air Ambulance Service.

David Bluford is the chaplain assigned to the helicopter service for Baptist Memorial Hospital in Memphis, one of four local hospitals that jointly operate the service known as Hospital Wing.

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Although the air ambulance service is only a small part of Bluford's responsibility, it's an exciting symbiosis of machine and ministry to the mustachioed chaplain.

After a car crash in Alabama killed a member of his church and seriously injured the man's wife, Bluford helped arrange for the woman to be picked up by "The Wing" and flown back to Memphis.

"This service/ministry enabled the wife to be with family in more familiar surroundings, to participate in the arrangements for her husband's funeral," Bluford reflected. "Maybe she could have recovered physically in Birmingham, but recognizing the need of the total person, more than just the physical, a ministry was provided by The Wing."

Most of The Wing's flights involve critical-care patients. The chaplain estimates nine pilots and 17 flight nurses respond to 75 to 100 calls a month.

Bluford describes his involvement with The Wing as casual: "As hospital chaplain, my responsibility is more one of informally relating with the staff of Hospital Wing. This is a particular joy personally since flying is an interest of mine."

But flying with the helicopter crew to pick up a victim is out, Bluford said: "No. I would if I could. There's no room."

Or time. "We try to get airborne within five minutes of a call," said A.L. Williams, director of Hospital Wing.

They are able to respond so quickly, he explains, because weather conditions around the region are checked periodically by rotating shifts of pilots.

And the helicopters, including the sophisticated medical equipment aboard, are prepped, ready for any emergency.

The copters' close quarters normally fly one patient, one pilot, and two flight nurses. But they can accommodate two patients and three nurses when necessary.

They cruise at 165 miles per hour and generally respond to calls within a 150-mile radius of Memphis.

Williams notes his newest helicopters have autopilot and color radar screens to help the pilots. And although he downplays the risks involved in air ambulance service, he said he thinks the media has overplayed safety concerns.

He also notes that his helicopters are twin engine. "In the event one engine did fail, it can continue to fly on the other engine," he explains.

Only a small part of Bluford's time is spent around the hangar and dormitory space of Hospital Wing.

Most of the 33-year-old chaplain's time is spent across busy Union Avenue at Baptist Memorial, the largest private hospital in the world.

Bluford is one of five chaplains and two student chaplains.

When he's not working face-to-face with people, the high-tech chaplain may be setting up a computer program for his department or working on a patient-education segment for Baptist's closed-circuit television system.

The mix of settings and opportunities for ministry is one that fits Bluford well.

"A chaplain is one who is available to provide care and counseling and support for people in crisis," he said.

Whether in the air or on the ground -- wherever it is -- it's as simple as that.

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(BP) photos available on request from Brotherhood Commission. Call 800-238-5917.