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China province restores
Lottie Moon's church

PENGLAI, China (BP)--Authorities in China's Shandong Province have completed the restoration of a historic church where famed Southern Baptist missionary Lottie Moon worked and worshiped.

China International Travel Service officials recognized the crumbling church's historical value and reportedly spent thousands of dollars refurbishing it. Located in Penglai, formerly Tengchow, the church has become one of the most popular stops on China tours sponsored by the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

The restoration began last year. Work crews cleaned the premises, repaired the interior and exterior walls, floor, ceiling and entrance gate, painted the building and installed new pews.

The "Little Crossroads" church was built by Southern Baptist missionary T.P. Crawford in the late 1860s and is one of the oldest Baptist structures still standing in China. During much of the next century, it played host to most of the Chinese Baptist pastors and missionaries in the region, including Moon, who lived near the church for many of her nearly 40 years in China.

The church was closed and fell into disrepair after the Japanese occupied the region in 1937. It probably never reopened as a church after World War II. Shandong remained closed to most foreigners until the last few years.

A group of Southern Baptists visited Penglai and the church in 1985. Behind the crumbling outer wall in front of the empty sanctuary, they found a small stone monument to Moon toppled over in the trash-strewn courtyard. Their visit and others sparked renewed interest in the historic building among local Christians as well as government officials.

More than 100 Christian families, most formerly related to Baptist and Presbyterian traditions, live in Penglai. Some now worship in home meetings. But restoration of the old Baptist structure, the only church building still standing in Penglai, has raised expectations that it will once again become an active house of worship -- this time for all the Christians in town.

"We are so glad that the good news of the gospel will again be proclaimed in this old church after such a long time," said one elderly believer who was baptized 63 years ago by Southern Baptist missionary Wiley B. Glass.

The church is not yet open for worship, but a recent group of foreign visitors was told it will open within the next six months.

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Hundreds of Air Force recruits
find Christ in basic training

By Mark Wingfield

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LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (BP)--Baptist chaplains at America's "Gateway to the Air Force" opened the door to faith in Jesus Christ for at least 316 young men and women last year.

Lackland Air Force Base, the nation's largest Air Force base, has been dubbed the Gateway to the Air Force because every new enlistee passes through its gates for basic training.

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For the past two years, many of those new recruits have encountered Southern Baptist chaplain Capt. Clifton Perry, one of five chaplains assigned to work with incoming airmen at Lackland's Chapel 8. Perry and Col. Darrell Highsmith, assistant center staff chaplain, are the base's two Southern Baptist chaplains. Both are endorsed by the denomination's Home Mission Board.

Lackland is the only Air Force base with a Baptist worship service every Sunday. Perry and Highsmith conduct it with Col. Charles Macrander, an American Baptist chaplain.

At the Baptist service, trainees are invited to make public commitments of their faith in Jesus Christ. Last year, 316 were baptized at First Baptist Church of nearby San Antonio, Texas, through the ministry.

The Baptist chaplains also help conduct two contemporary Protestant worship services in Chapel 8 every Sunday. More than 3,000 people attend the Baptist and Protestant services each week.

Although chapel attendance is strictly voluntary, at least 90 percent of all new recruits will attend one service during their six-week stay at Lackland, Highsmith says. About 35 percent of those are attending church for the first time in their lives.

The evangelistic opportunities are enormous, Perry says. Because he never has the same congregation twice, Perry believes his witness is more far-reaching than any civilian pastor.

In addition to leading worship services, the chaplains interact with airmen around base during the week and are available for private counseling. After just two years at Lackland, Perry's counseling log records 810 names.

However, the Protestant worship services remain the most common initial contact recruits have with the chaplains. Worship is a stark contrast to what recruits experience the other six days of the week.

The average age of trainees is 18. They are torn away from parents, wives, husbands, girlfriends and boyfriends and thrown in bunk rooms with 20 strangers.

Upon arriving at Lackland, the young men and women are the most vulnerable they will ever be, Perry says.

In their first hours on base, the recruits meet their training instructors "who scare them to death," Perry says. They begin learning to take commands by getting their hair cut to regulation.

Every minute of a recruit's time is scheduled. Up before dawn. Classes. Marching practice. Classes. Inspections. Cleaning. To bed by 9 p.m.

"Chapel is the only time they can smile," Perry says. "I try to make them laugh."

Trainees who attend the Protestant and Baptist services do plenty of smiling and laughing. The atmosphere is electrified like a high school pep rally on the eve of the season's biggest game.

On a summer Sunday morning when the steamy South Texas air has left most of the printed bulletins limp, the 1,000 trainees in Chapel 8 surge with excitement.

They congregate by groups -- rainbows, pickles and graduates. Rainbows have just arrived on base and still wear their multi-colored civilian clothes. Pickles wear green trainee uniforms and show more scalp than hair. Graduates wear blue Air Force uniforms signifying their imminent departure for other assignments.

Seats toward the front fill long before the service begins. Musicians -- singers, pianist, drummer, guitarist -- arrive early to teach the congregation songs that will be sung in the service.

Pews serve only to separate rows of people during this time as everyone stands and sways with the music. Hands clap and voices shout out the words to "Thank the Lord with Songs of Praise," "Love Come 'a Tricklin' Down" and "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

Perry jokes with his congregation about the trials they face in the Air Force. He illustrates his sermon with reference to a popular Patti LaBelle song, "New Attitude."

"You've experienced an attitude change from being a civilian to being an airman. Are you happy about that attitude?" he asks.

"Yes, sir," the crowd replies almost in unison, relaxed from their normal regimen but still bound to their newly learned courtesies.

Perry preaches from Philipians 2 about the new attitude Christ gives. He stresses teamwork and good conduct.

Telling people about Christ is like learning to march, Perry says. Neither is done perfectly the first time, but practice makes a difference.

He compares the uniform of an airman with the label a Christian wears in the community. The conduct a person exhibits in public determines what others will think of the person or organization he represents, Perry says.

"The bad airman may affect someone's attitude about the Air Force, but the bad Christian may affect someone's attitude about a decision to accept Christ," he says.

In the Protestant service, Perry lets his congregation know he is available if they need to talk. In the Baptist service, he extends a traditional altar call.

During the altar call, rainbows, pickles and graduates sing "Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling." Men and women in uniform boldly step out in front of their peers -- those they study with, shower with, eat with, march with -- to record decisions for Christ.

As Perry counsels with each person who has made a decision, Highsmith remarks on the influence these Christians will bear, both as defenders of the state and ambassadors of the faith.

"This is unlimited ministry," he says. "We're helping to shape the men and women of tomorrow."

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'Tourists' to Mombasa
reap 4,720 decisions

By Craig Bird

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MOMBASA, Kenya (BP)--It was a Swahili Pentecost.

Five days of evangelism through street preaching, door-to-door visitation and medical clinics in Mombasa, Kenya, led by 104 Southern Baptists who came to eastern Africa on a tour, has produced 4,720 professions of faith in Christ.

Several churches were organized, including one in an area where Baptists had been thrown out violently three times previously; a witch doctor accepted Christ and gave the woman who witnessed to him his beads; and bewildered German tourists halted in their walks along the beach as the Indian Ocean was turned into a baptistry.

Laymen who never had preached saw scores of people respond to their sermons, people who never had told another person how to trust Christ successfully shared the gospel -- the message of Jesus -- with those anxious to accept it.

"You volunteers are making us professional missionaries look bad," Ralph Bethea Jr., the career missionary who was host for the group, joked one evening after listening to person after person recount almost unbelievable experiences of responses to the gospel.

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But the joyful tears in his eyes revealed his true feelings about what is happening in the 1,000-year-old city that has long been a Muslim stronghold. The significance was enhanced since the decisions were made during Ramadan -- a sacred month of fasting for Muslims.

Groups of volunteers teamed with local Baptist church members, and the response staggered the Americans. "You can feel the spirit of God all over this place -- but I'm not used to almost everyone I talk to accepting Jesus," was a typical testimony.

And the Mombasa Baptists gently chided the visitors for repeatedly asking new converts if they understood what they were doing: "They told you they understand, now hurry up -- some more people (are) waiting to talk to us."

Over and over the contrast between Mombasa and the United States dominated conversations. "I took CWT (Christian Witness Training) a few years ago, and I figured I would use it here," said Bennie Norton, of Smyrna, Ga. "But I usually couldn't get past the second point before the person I was talking to would say he was ready to accept Christ."

John Bryan, pastor of Curtis Baptist Church in Augusta, Ga., used interpreters simultaneously. One gathered a crowd by telling them a man had come all the way from the United States to tell them something, another translated Bryan's sermon from English into Swahili to a second group while the third local Baptist took the names and addresses of people who had made decisions from the previous sermon.

"We were seeing the power of the Holy Spirit at work," explained Hoyt Dees of Atlanta. "We just needed to share a little bit, then get out of the way and let the Holy Spirit work."

The "tourists" were mostly from Georgia and Kentucky but included people from North Carolina, South Carolina, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Illinois, Florida, Tennessee, Missouri and Texas.

They were led by Wayne Dehoney, former Southern Baptist Convention president and a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Dehoney owns a travel agency that specializes in evangelistic trips all over the world, often working with the volunteer section of the SBC Foreign Mission Board to tie in with Southern Baptist missionaries on the field.

Like other tour groups, this one traveled in rented vans, wore safari suits, carried cameras and struggled to convince waiters that, yes, they really did want a full glass of ice with their soft drinks instead of the two cubes Europeans prefer.

But unlike normal tourists, they pressed their Kenya van drivers into service as translators for medical clinics and spent most of their time far from the typical tourist haunts.

"You people are going where tourists never go," Bethea told the group the first day. "These people are going to know you care about them just because you are going into their communities."

After worshiping in local churches on Sunday -- "They prayed and sang and preached for five-and-a-half hours!" -- the Monday-to-Friday schedule called for medical/dental clinics during the morning and evangelism during the afternoons.

More than 3,700 patients were treated at the clinics which, according to Bethea, "provide a living picture of what we are saying to the people of Mombasa -- that we love you because Jesus loved us. Many people are afraid to come to a church, but when they get help at a clinic their ears are opened to the meaning of the gospel, that God does want good things for them."

Of course participants felt different levels of enthusiasm for doing evangelism on vacation. Six group members complained about the emphasis to Jerolyn Morrison, a tour director for Dehoney's company, before the group left the United States.

"They said I was cramming Christianity down their throats and that all the schedules were for going to church and witnessing," she admitted. "I told them they could set up their own tours if they wanted, but we were running an evangelistic tour, and I was not going to set sight-seeing tours to compete with evangelism.

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"I didn't put their names on any of the teams, but every one of them wound up joining either a medical team or an evangelistic team because they saw how excited the others were and wanted to be a part of it."

The results, although impressive, were not unique. Team members followed in the footsteps of several volunteer groups that have journeyed to Mombasa in recent years and have had good results.

"Volunteers have given us tremendous support," Bethea said. "They have plugged in at a time when we needed manpower and a way to get a hearing platform for our national preachers. Most of our pastors come from the lower economic class and don't have a lot of stature in the community. But when they are seen working with visiting Americans, it opens doors for them -- it gives the pastors a rapport and respect, and the gospel has a hearing it couldn't get before."

But Bethea stressed the recent results in Mombasa are built on the planting and watering of others: "For decades Cooperative Program (unified budget) money has been pouring into Mombasa, and missionaries have been giving their lives here -- and weeping over the lack of response," he pointed out. "The beauty of the Cooperative Program is that it gives us staying power in the tough places and then the resources to respond when revival breaks out."

And revival has broken out.

In 1985 the Kenya Baptist Convention reported six churches in Mombasa with a combined membership of 350. But in the past three years, more than 10,000 new believers have been baptized, including more than 1,000 Muslims, and more than 80 churches have been started in Kenya's second-largest city. Ushindi Baptist Church does not even have a building, but attendance runs 2,000 to 3,000 and it has established 25 house churches and sent out 50 missionaries to other parts of the country in two years.

"We are absolutely covered up with discipleship training, and we've used up our entire budget already for Bibles. We can't give them to everyone who wants them," Bethea admitted.

Shortfalls in the Southern Baptist Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions or low levels of contributions through the Cooperative Program may seem like mere numbers until they translate into a new Christian going without a Bible because Southern Baptists in the United States failed to give.

But while Bethea, a first-term missionary from Mississippi, is frustrated by the unmet needs in personnel -- there are only two SBC career missionaries working in church development in Mombasa -- and budget, he accents the positive.

"Working in Mombasa is like living the book of Acts," he insisted. "The Christians here read about the early church and don't see any reason it should not be the same on the Kenya coast."

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Meese says 'social agenda'
was not top Reagan priority

By Stan Haste

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Outgoing Attorney General Edwin Meese III said July 25 that issues such as abortion, school prayer and aid to parochial schools have not been top priorities with the Reagan administration when compared with other public policy objectives.

During a question-and-answer session following a major address at the National Press Club, Meese -- who resigned his office earlier in July and is expected to leave the administration sometime in August -- said such "social revolution" issues were "were not the primary objectives of the president."

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Although all of the attorney general's speech and most of the questions he fielded after the 30-minute address dealt with legal problems that have plagued him for the past 16 months, Meese said abortion, school prayer and aid to parochial schools are not issues "the federal government can do much about." They are dealt with primarily in state legislatures and in the courts, he added.

At the same time, Meese said, "there has been no lack of attention to these issues on the part of this administration."

Meese also offered brief assessments of each of the three major "social agenda" issues.

On abortion, he observed, "we are still one vote away" from reversing the Supreme Court's 1973 decision legalizing most abortions, a reference to present membership on the high court. President Reagan has appointed three of the nine justices on the nation's highest tribunal.

On school prayer, Meese said nothing about the president's failed constitutional amendment to restore state-sponsored prayers to the nation's public school classrooms but voiced hope the Supreme Court will uphold moment-of-silence laws now on the books in about half the states.

And on aid to parochial schools, the attorney general cited the high court's recent 5-4 decision upholding federal payments to churches to fight teen-age pregnancy and abortion as a hopeful sign that more forms of parochial aid soon will be upheld.