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Bush meets with evangelicals,  
including Southern Baptists

By Stan Hasty & Marv Knox

WASHINGTON (BP)--A meeting last month between Vice President George Bush and a group of prominent evangelical leaders -- including a half-dozen Southern Baptists -- has been described as a frank but cordial session designed to let the religious leaders make demands on and hear the views of the Republican presidential hopeful.

Top Bush campaign aides also met separately with the delegation. Several participants in the meetings -- held at Bush campaign headquarters and the vice president's home -- said Bush and his aides reassured the religious leaders the vice president favors school prayer and legal curbs on abortion, among other matters of concern to the nation's 30 million evangelical voters.

Six Southern Baptists attended: SBC President Jerry Vines of Jacksonville, Fla.; immediate past SBC President Adrian P. Rogers of Memphis, Tenn.; Texas appeals court Judge Paul Pressler of Houston; pastors Morris Chapman of Wichita Falls, Texas, and Edwin Young of Houston; and longtime Republican party activist E.E. McAteer of Memphis.

Other participants included well-known evangelical leaders Jerry Falwell, Bill Bright, Tim LaHaye, James Kennedy and some 30 others.

Bush campaign official Doug Weed, the vice president's liaison with religious groups, said participants at the meetings repeatedly asked Bush and his aides for assurances evangelicals would be given key posts in a Bush administration. Weed described the requests as pleas to "include us" and "keep us involved."

He said some participants expressed "great disappointment" that under Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan evangelicals largely were ignored for key government jobs. One participant, for example, noted specifically that of more than 700 Reagan appointees to federal judgeships, only four are known to be "born again" Christians, Weed said.

Weed also said the meetings were "sparked" by a Rogers telephone call "several months ago." The three-time SBC president was the "real catalyst" for the meetings, he added.

Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, noted the vice president's campaign staff actually made the meeting possible, as an expression of Bush's concern. "They have initiated the whole thing by putting a man like Doug Weed on their staff and saying, 'We want to be sensitive to evangelicals,'" he noted.

In putting together the group invited to attend, Weed said, campaign aides included both supporters and opponents of Bush during the Republican primary election season. Of the latter -- many of whom supported religious broadcaster M.G. (Pat) Robertson's bid for the White House -- Weed said, "We neutralized them from going around bad-mouthing the vice president."

Some of those invited, he said further, recently "have been beating up a bit on George Bush," particularly following revelations that First Lady Nancy Reagan has consulted astrologers before giving her approval to scheduling certain presidential trips and appointments. "The astrology thing has left a little bit of cynicism," he said.

Beyond "neutralizing" the evangelical leaders, Weed said, the Bush campaign intends to nurture a continuing relationship with them.

The group met first with top Bush aides in a three-hour session at campaign headquarters in downtown Washington presided over by political director Rich Bond. Some 30 of the 40 participants then traveled across town to Bush's home for a one-hour session described by another Bush official as a "heart-to-heart" conversation on issues of mutual concern.

"The vice president asked them how he could best make sure his true views were conveyed to their constituencies," the official said. He characterized the meeting as "a very open, forthright exchange," adding one persistent theme dealt with the religious leaders' question, "Why should we support you?"

These and other details of the meetings were confirmed by several of the Southern Baptist participants, including newly elected SBC President Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla. Vines described the meetings as "very helpful" and said Bush "seemed to be very receptive" to participants' views. The vice president, Vines added, came across "as a very attentive person" who gave the impression he wanted "to understand and listen. ... I came away liking him very much as a person."

At the same time, Vines emphasized he has not in the past been active in presidential politics and has "no intention in the future" of doing so. "It has not been my style" to endorse candidates for public office, including the presidency, he said.

"I went primarily as a listener and a watcher" and not as a representative of Southern Baptists, he said. "I recognize as president of the Southern Baptist Convention that I don't speak for Southern Baptists."

Vines said further, "Of course, I would be very happy to do the same with Gov. (Michael) Dukakis," the Democratic presidential candidate. "I have no identification with political groups," he added. "I don't vote by party."

Rogers echoed Vines' willingness to sit down with Dukakis. "I would be happy to meet with Mr. Dukakis, should he extend an invitation," Rogers said, noting he would be willing to help get a group of evangelical leaders together for such a meeting. But of the possibility for such a session, he added: "To this point, there has been nothing but deafening silence. I appreciate the Bush campaign reaching out to evangelicals."

The two sessions with the Bush campaign were valuable, Rogers said. "The main import of most of our discussion was our desire to have whomever is president of the United States affirm what we consider to be the traditional Judeo-Christian values, while at the same time recognizing the separation of church and state," he explained.

"There were no specific commitments. It was a time of hearing the heartbeat of the vice president and a time for him to hear the concern of evangelicals across America," Rogers added. "For the most part, we were pleased. This does not mean we would agree in totality with every idea" presented by Bush and his staff.

On the larger issue of the upcoming presidential election, he said, "I am most concerned that the Christian family study the platforms of both parties and vote intelligently, not for a personality, program or party, but for principle."

Pressler, a registered Democrat, told Baptist Press: "George Bush and (Democratic vice presidential hopeful) Lloyd Bentsen have both been friends of mine for many years. I see them both from time to time, ... and I'm grateful both of them are my friends."

Pressler distanced the meeting and its Southern Baptist participants from the ongoing controversy within the SBC.

"The issue in the Southern Baptist Convention is not politics," he said. "The issue in the Southern Baptist Convention is what Scripture is. There are many that would try to divert attention in the convention from the real issue. Because a person is involved in convention life does not mean he cannot be involved in anything else."

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McAteer, who eight years ago recruited prominent religious figures to the first Reagan campaign, said the meeting with Bush aides was particularly frank. "They (the religious leaders) had a real letdown of the hair," he said in characterizing the session's tone. "Those fellows are meaning business. They want some commitments if they are going to participate" in the campaign.

"These people have big constituencies. They are interested in their schools and institutions. They want to know what will be there for them in a Bush administration."

McAteer said the support of evangelical leaders is crucial to a Bush victory in November. "This is going to be a very close race," he said.

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Labor troubles barrage  
Korean Baptist hospital

By Erich Bridges

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
8/4/88

PUSAN, South Korea (BP)--Months of labor union struggles, including violence, threaten the future of Wallace Memorial Baptist Hospital in Pusan, South Korea.

The strife has caused the resignations of the hospital's Korean administrator and medical director and could possibly close the institution until budget problems are resolved.

The hospital, one of the best-known medical facilities in the southern part of the country, has a staff of almost 600 and treats more than 200,000 patients each year. It is the major downtown general hospital in Pusan, the nation's second-largest city. The hospital is named for Bill Wallace, a Southern Baptist missionary doctor to China who died in 1951 in a Communist prison.

Begun in 1956 by Southern Baptist missionaries, the hospital remains in the legal name of the missionary organization in South Korea, which also holds title to the property and buildings. But the institution has been self-supporting for many years, and missionaries represent a minority on the governing board of trustees. Nine Southern Baptist workers, including four medical doctors, are on the hospital staff.

South Korea's fledgling union movement has targeted all private hospitals in South Korea -- particularly the famous Baptist institution -- for complete unionization, reported Sam James, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director for East Asia. James said "radical elements" within the union in Pusan have caused the effort to turn ugly.

Union actions in Pusan have included camping out on the hospital parking lot and sidewalks, blocking entrances, posting placards and painting profane slogans inside the hospital, intimidation of patients in the wards and fist fights with hospital employees.

Extremists have angered many of their own union members on the hospital staff, James reported.

The patient count is down drastically.

The union's main demands have been a closed shop -- that is, unionization of all hospital workers -- and the resignation of Medical Director Kim Sung Chin. Kim, a renowned specialist in lung disease, strongly opposed any negotiations with the union until the current labor contract expires next year.

"The first two-year contract with the union was signed in 1987 by both parties," James said. "The disturbances now are illegal. We have a valid contract with the union. They have not honored that contract."

Police and city officials in Pusan have been reluctant to intervene, James reported, perhaps out of concern that their involvement might create further tensions in the weeks leading up to the Summer Olympic Games beginning in September.

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Union actions forced Kim's resignation, and hospital officials made several other concessions that ended the labor disturbances at the end of July. But the hospital so far has resisted total unionization, although James said about 95 percent of the hospital workers already are union members.

Hospital Administrator Lee Koung Soo, who repeatedly met with union forces against the wishes of the trustees, also has resigned.

Southern Baptist missionary doctor Dan Jones has been named acting administrator for August and is running the hospital with two Korean staff doctors. Meanwhile, the Southern Baptist mission has called for a financial audit of the hospital and will explore the legal aspects of closing part or all of the hospital.

The mission also is considering a whole new medical evangelism strategy for South Korea designed to help start new churches. The program would emphasize health care in needy rural areas.

Closure could have serious implications for health care in Pusan. Missionaries and Korean hospital workers have exerted a major evangelistic influence on the area for decades, helping start many churches and leading thousands of patients to faith in Christ.

But James said Christian medical workers at the hospital, who have carried out effective mobile medical evangelism projects in rural areas for some years, are tired of the restrictions of the institution.

"Our major concern is that the hospital return to fulfilling the purpose for which it was founded, which is the healing of people and proclamation of the faith," James said. "For some time now, it has not been able to fulfill that purpose in the way we would like."

James said recent anti-American sentiment in South Korea has not been a part of the labor conflicts.

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American blacks taste  
missions work in Jamaica

By Eric Miller

F - FMB  
Baptist Press  
8/4/88

KINGSTON, Jamaica (BP)--After a week of Vacation Bible School work in Jamaica, 14 of 93 black Southern Baptists involved in the project publicly committed themselves to further involvement in overseas missions.

For Victor Davis, black church relations director for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, that was a step in the right direction. He and the board would like to see more blacks involved in foreign missions.

"I would love to go back," said Gwendolyn Pitts, a public school teacher in Richmond, Va. While in Jamaica, she taught 50 children in Vacation Bible School, which usually is the highlight of those children's summer, she noted.

Pitts said she also wants to teach in VBS in another country.

The trip was the first overseas mission project for James Kennedy, pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Flint, Mich. "It gave me a chance to get a bird's eye view of what missions is about and what it can be," he said.

After Kennedy told his congregation about his work in Jamaica, several members told him they want to go overseas as volunteers.

Kennedy said he is too old to be a career missionary, but "perhaps the Lord called me to point the way for others who might go overseas as missionaries."

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People experience a "hunger for the word of God overseas," Kennedy noted. About 60 people showed up the first day he preached, and by the third day, attendance had more than doubled. Some worshipers had to stand outside the church.

"I'm not a profound speaker," Kennedy said. "This says the Lord can use anybody who is willing to avail themselves."

Altogether, 396 volunteers of varying ethnic backgrounds participated in the project from July 6 to 16. They comprised the third of six groups of Southern Baptist volunteers involved in missions work in Jamaica this summer.

By July 26, 14,773 children had enrolled in VBS; 2,502 Jamaicans had made professions of faith; and 21 volunteers had said they desired further involvement in missions. Twelve said they would apply to become missionaries.

The last group this summer will finish in late August. By then, 491 volunteers will have gone to Jamaica and worked in 127 churches. Their labor is part of the Foreign Mission Board's efforts to get Southern Baptists to volunteer time on mission fields.

The Jamaica project also is part of Global Vision '88, a plan to get members of at least 100 black Southern Baptist churches involved in volunteer projects this year, Davis said. With blacks volunteering time in the Philippines, England, Bermuda and Jamaica, the 100-church goal has been reached, he added.

Churches in predominantly black Jamaica have a "tremendous affection" for black churches in America, partly due to a common heritage of slavery, Davis noted. This closeness may be a reason blacks already are talking about volunteering more time in Jamaica, rather than another country.

"But I'm careful to point out that the world is our mission field -- not just Jamaica," said Davis, who is black.

No matter where blacks volunteer time, Davis encourages them to tell about their experience at churches and state Baptist conferences. For a long time, many blacks have seen the pulpit as the only means for going into full-time ministry. Davis said he believes volunteer work will help blacks broaden that view to include career missionary work.

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Fellowship opens  
communication lines

By Deborah Aronson

W-60  
(B'hood) Baptist Press  
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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (BP)--When Michael Richardson was 10 years old, his father, an engineer and a layman, helped set up the first Christian radio station in West Africa.

Today, 34 years later, Richardson is engaged in setting up the first volunteer effort to assist Southern Baptist missionaries worldwide with their communications needs.

Richardson is volunteer coordinator of the National Fellowship of Baptist Communicators, part of the network of fellowships under the National Fellowship of Baptist Men, a ministry of the adult division of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. The larger fellowship seeks to involve laymen in missions through their vocational skills and avocational interests.

The communicators' fellowship "will involve laymen and laywomen with expertise in their field of communications in responding to missionaries' requests in furthering the gospel," Richardson said.

The work may include anything from producing a video to setting up television and radio stations.

Richardson hopes that when a missionary needs something done in the area of communications, the fellowship will serve as a resource of available volunteers and expertise.

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Richardson, editor of editorials and regionals for the St. Petersburg Times in Florida, sees his responsibility with the fellowship as "coordinating the energies of laymen to assist in the dreams of missionaries."

The communicators' fellowship deals exclusively with messages the missionaries want sent.

"We are not a sending agency," said Richardson. "We are a skills bank."

Still in its beginning stages, the communicators' fellowship is projected to be ready for action by the summer of 1989. Richardson said he hopes a communications talent bank will be available to missionaries by that time.

"Our goal is to be available," he said. "Our purpose is to respond to the missionaries' requests."

More than 100 people already have expressed interest in the new fellowship.

For Richardson, the potential of the new fellowship is unlimited. By using new and appropriate technology, the message of the missionary can be furthered.

"There have been several technologies that have come about in recent years that are suited to missionary work," he said. "We must make use of our resources."

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(Aronson is a communications associate for the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina.)

Religious freedom helps  
missionaries in Nigeria

N - FMB

Baptist Press  
8/4/88

OGBOMOSHO, Nigeria (BP)--Nigeria's religious freedom in schools has helped the Christian witness there, a Southern Baptist missionary says.

The government encourages the Federal Government College, a public boarding school in Ogbomosho, to conduct religious services, says missionary Margaret Tarpley.

Officials in the western African nation recognize that every citizen "believes in a Supreme Being, whether expressed as the Christian God in Christ, the Muslim Allah or the African traditional one god who may be approached only through lesser deities or spirits," Tarpley explains.

Students of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary and Christian teachers in the boarding school coordinate interdenominational worship each Sunday in a school dining hall.

The school requires preaching to be rotated among preachers with Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal, Baptist and other Christian backgrounds. When baptismal services are conducted at Antioch Baptist Church in Ogbomosho several times a year, 15 to 20 high school students from the boarding school present themselves for baptism, Tarpley says.

The Sunday school program at the boarding school is directed by Southern Baptist missionaries and students from the Nigerian seminary. With the government's encouragement of religious services in the school, Tarpley says, local Christians find themselves in a "field white unto harvest" in a country in which Muslims make up the largest religious group.

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