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Southern Baptists minister  
to Mexican hurricane victims

DALLAS (BP)--Within 48 hours after Hurricane Gilbert unleashed its fury on northern Mexico, Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers were taking food, emergency supplies and the love of Christ to storm victims south of the Rio Grande.

Meanwhile, Baptists throughout south and central Texas began assessing damage to church facilities and homes of church members. Initial reports indicated churches were spared from the brunt of the hurricane's fierce winds and rain and from the many tornadoes spawned by the storm.

About 25 trained Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers from Texas and Louisiana under the direction of Jerry Bob Taylor, manager of Circle Six Ranch near Stanton, Texas, arrived in San Fernando, Mexico, about 75 miles south of Brownsville and 30 miles from the coast, Sept. 18.

Jerry Johnson, director of missions in the Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association, and Isaac Torres, Partnership Missions representative in Mexico City, had surveyed the storm-ravaged areas near San Fernando, Jimenez and Soto la Marina the previous day.

The caravan of emergency vehicles included the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Mobile Unit, the Texas Baptist Command Post, the Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief Unit, two Salvation Army canteens and assorted pickup trucks.

The Texas Baptist Mobile Unit is a specially equipped 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig with a field kitchen capable of feeding up to 10,000 people a day. The same unit, and many of the same volunteers, were involved in disaster relief in Mexico City following the 1985 earthquake there.

"We were greeted in San Fernando by 1,000 to 1,500 people who seemed to be in awe of the big units coming down their narrow streets," said Orville Scott, Texas Baptist news and information director, reporting via an amateur radio relay set up by the Texas Baptist disaster relief communications network. "People came out of their houses and applauded the units as they rolled down the street."

Simultaneously, Texas Baptist Aviation Fellowship members Jim Wren of Woodway and Mike Harwood of Corsicana were airlifting beans, rice and other supplies into isolated areas of the Mexican interior at the request of the sheriff's office in Brownsville. The airlift was coordinated by the Civil Defense authority.

"There seemed to be no damage to our church in San Fernando," Johnson said. "Its sanctuary, parsonage and educational buildings were loaded with 80 to 100 people seeking shelter during the storm."

Seven workers and the Louisiana Baptist Convention's Disaster Relief trailer arrived Sept. 18 in a village near San Fernando, Mexico, to minister amidst the thousands of victims of Hurricane Gilbert.

The volunteers served relief workers barbecued chicken and were preparing to expand food services to victims in the village of Mendez, 15 miles northwest of San Fernando, a town of 50,000 where thousands were left homeless and without their possessions following the storm.

"A lot people don't have a home, clothes or food," said Patricka Gonzales, principal of a school of special education, where the Louisiana van was made operational. "They need a lot of help."

Relief operations in Mexico were initiated at the request of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico and were coordinated through the Rio Grande River Ministry and Texas/Mexico Partnership Missions offices.

From Mexico City, Southern Baptist representatives Larry Gay, Mike McAleer and Hugo Torres-Gomez and Mexican Baptist leader Roberto Torres headed toward the border region to help the teams of Baptist men in relief efforts in San Fernando.

McAleer also was to help mobilize Baptist relief work farther south in the coastal city of Tampico, while representatives Brian Allen and Phil Templin were scheduled to organize work in Veracruz state if needed.

In the Yucatan, Southern Baptist representatives Roberto and Kathy Diaz of Merida continued their relief work in cooperation with Mexican Baptists and the Mexican government. Joining them were representatives Allen Alexander and Eddy Williams. They were surveying hurricane-stricken towns and coastal villages and reportedly had reached the heavily damaged resort area of Cancun.

"They're taking materials that you build houses and roofs with and getting that out," said representative Ruth Baggett, reached by telephone in Guadalajara. "One (Baptist) team goes through and assesses the needs for people in the different towns, then another team comes through and gives out to the people the number of coupons and food that the first team said they needed, along with the corrugated roofing and so forth."

All hurricane relief funds used so far by Mexico-based Southern Baptists and their Mexican co-workers have been supplied by the Mexican Baptist convention.

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(Contributing to this article were Ken Camp, Dallas bureau of Baptist Press; Erich Bridges, Richmond bureau of Baptist Press; and Lynn P. Clayton, Louisiana Baptist Message.)

Jericho '89 launches  
SBC missions experiment

N-FMB

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Five national agencies have joined forces to design summer events for 1989 and 1990 that will immerse children, youth and adults in the sights and sounds of Southern Baptist home and foreign missions efforts around the nation and the world.

The events, which usher in the final decade of Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust to the year 2000, will take place at the denomination's Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist conference centers under sponsorship of the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

"Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival 1989" will launch the two-year experiment, July 8-14 at Ridgecrest, and July 29-Aug. 4 at Glorieta. Follow-up events are set for the summer of 1990.

The Foreign Mission Board will suspend its annual Foreign Missions Weeks at the two conference centers during 1989 and 1990 because of Jericho '89 and follow-up events. The Home Mission Board will conduct its regular Home Missions Weeks and the WMU its regular leadership weeks in addition to Jericho.

Planners describe the Jericho '89 experience as "a festival, an event, a conference all wrapped into one" for all ages and backgrounds. That includes preschoolers; children, who will have a day camp; and youth, who will have a specially programmed youth track, "A Journey to the Future."

The youth track will feature a week of hands-on missions experience interspersed with video presentations, musical drama, computer simulation, international games, special conferences, and personal Bible study and prayer.

Jericho '89 is designed to help individuals, families and churches break down barriers which shut out the will of God, identify and use their unique gifts, and come to spiritual crossroads of decision.

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The week will feature intergenerational programming designed to cause participants to explore and interact with ethnic cultures and the past, present and future of home and foreign missions.

The program will include a global village of yesterday, today and tomorrow; an original musical drama written especially for Jericho; activities re-creating the sights and sounds of missions; Bible study, prayer participation, fellowship and inspirational speakers; first-hand contact with home and foreign missionaries; a home and foreign missions fair; recreational activities from around the world; and special conferences on a range of subjects related to missions, ministry and the world scene.

Other national mission groups meeting during the Jericho '89 week include various specialty fellowships related to the National Fellowship of Baptist Men, Mission Service Corps, Baptist Nursing Fellowship and a symposium of the Baptist Medical/Dental Fellowship.

Participants may register for Jericho '89 at either the Ridgecrest or Glorieta Baptist conference centers after Feb. 1, 1989, and write Jericho '89, Woman's Missionary Union, Box 830010, Birmingham, Ala. 25283-0010 for more information.

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New Orleans center  
avoids state taxation

By Lacy Thompson

N- (CO)  
(La.)

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--An old saying asserts only two things are certain -- death and taxes.

A Southern Baptist mission for the needy in New Orleans almost proved that proverb in early September when Louisiana officials announced a plan to collect a sales tax from the ministry organization.

The Louisiana Department of Revenue and Taxation informed administration at the Clovis Brantley Center that the department planned to begin collecting a 4 percent sales tax from the mission Sept. 1.

The center offers hot meals and a bed to needy people for \$3.75 per night, or \$1 for children. The price made Brantley Center subject to a Louisiana law requiring anyone renting a room for more than \$3 per night to pay the sales tax.

Upon receiving the news, the 61-year-old mission increased its fees to \$4.50 and \$1.25 to cover the tax, administrative costs and the city sales tax that seemed sure to follow.

Center Director Tom Lilly, Associate Director Tobey Pittman and other concerned people also began a series of letters and calls to state officials, including the governor.

As a result, the mission collected only two days of taxes for the state.

The state took the matter under advisement Sept. 2. Ten days later, two taxation representatives visited the mission and learned it did not rent rooms but beds in dormitory-style halls.

When they left, the representatives admitted their error and assured Lilly and Pitman the tax would not be collected from the mission.

Lilly said last week he felt official notification of the change was imminent, adding, "We felt like it was an unfair taxation since the people it applied to have no means of paying it."

The center, funded by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and contributions from churches and agencies, houses about 150 people a night and serves 400 meals each day. It also houses 27 people as part of a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program.

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Church building programs  
can unite or cause 'war'

By Charles Willis

F-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--Building a church facility can unite and renew a congregation or cause internal conflict, the leader of Southern Baptists' church architecture program told participants Sept. 12 in a national church building conference at the denomination's Sunday School Board.

"For many churches, a building program is a time of growth and excitement," said Gwenn McCormick, director of the board's church architecture department. "Attendance, income and baptisms increase, fellowship is deepened and relationships are strengthened."

However, McCormick added, not every church has that kind of celebrative experience.

"For some churches, building is like a war, with one battle after another resulting in fragmentation and division," he said. "The pastor and staff may get caught in the middle and end up in a no-win situation. Building programs can create alienation, hurt feelings and barriers to church growth."

What makes the difference in these two outcomes, McCormick said, are motives, attitudes and organization.

"Only when these three factors are well-developed will the building venture reach its potential in effectiveness," he observed. "Weakness or distortion at any of these points will seriously threaten the program."

Personal agendas can vary greatly from a church's agenda, he continued.

"The primary business of the church is to win people to Christ, to develop them as disciples and to be the continuing expression of the incarnation of Christ in our world," McCormick said. "But sometimes in building planning, committee members get hung up on facilities that will contribute more to their personal motives than to the central purpose of the church."

Spiritual climate also affects the outcome of a building program, McCormick said, cautioning that construction is not a good way to revive the spiritual climate of a church.

"If the church is alive and growing and if it has its priorities in order, the building venture will receive a powerful impetus and be launched with a positive attitude," he said. "However, if the church is just coasting with little spiritual purpose and direction, the building program may encounter major obstacles."

Organized and complete communication of the space needs, program purpose and total cost can bring people and resources together most effectively to accomplish the task.

"Information must be adequate for evaluation and decision-making, allowing time for thought and prayerful consideration," he cautioned. "Sometimes the congregation is deluged with information and then asked to decide immediately. Often the result is frustration and fragmentation."

"Wise financial planning can help the church focus its energies and resources on paying for new facilities within a reasonable period so they can move on in their mission."

Some congregations do not see church construction as a part of the mission of the church, McCormick said, but he believes a building program opens the way to dream, adjust emphases, rewrite agendas, and plan new direction, new ministries and new expressions of faith.

"Imagine what could happen in the building venture if the church really focused on the biblical imperative in its mission," he said. "The venture would then become the occasion for revival rather than an exercise focused on selfish interests."

"A divided congregation meeting in the best church money can buy will never really be a church. The primary goal in construction is not to create a church building. It is to generate a worshipping, witnessing, discipling congregation that is obedient to Christ and in fellowship with one another."

Alternative schedules meet needs,  
provide expansion possibilities

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--When Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas begins the new church year, as many as 1,000 people are expected to break with tradition and attend worship and Bible study on Saturday night.

The north Dallas church is among a handful of Southern Baptist churches attempting or considering a Saturday night alternative in addition to the traditional Sunday morning schedule. Bill Taylor, associate pastor/minister of education at Prestonwood, believes the church is leading in a trend that likely will become common.

Prestonwood plans to begin the Saturday night schedule Sept. 25. First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., began a Saturday night schedule in November 1987, and Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, has considered such a schedule but has decided to delay its implementation.

Saturday night Bible study and worship services offer an alternative to people who are not able to attend church on Sunday morning and give an immediate outlet for the pressure of rapid growth in the Sunday morning Sunday school and worship, Taylor said.

"We have maxed out our Sunday morning capacity with two Sunday schools and three worship services," he explained.

More common alternatives of off-site Sunday school locations and rental space did not seem feasible, so the church began studying the Saturday night alternative a year ago.

Nearly 800 Sunday school members have agreed to move to Saturday night sessions. The majority of the single adult Sunday school division likely will move to Saturday night, according to Taylor.

Those transfers will be joined by people who were never able to attend on Sunday, Taylor said.

"We estimate that as much as 20 percent of the population in our area works on Sunday and can't attend services then," he explained.

Those people will be able to have similar experiences in a Saturday night worship service at 6 p.m. with the same sermon by Pastor Bill Weber as well as an orchestra, choir and essentially the same music as the three Sunday morning services. The service likely will be more casual, Taylor said.

The Bible study will follow at 7:15 p.m. with a small-group structure similar to that of the traditional Sunday schools.

"Saturday night may become our most popular service. We feel if we can get people started with it for eight months, it will go," Taylor said.

He expects the church's Bible study attendance to increase by about 1,000 next year because of the alternative time and the increased space on Sunday morning.

If response exceeds capacity on Saturday night, an additional Bible study is another alternative, Taylor said.

At First Baptist Church in Norfolk, similar space problems and a concern for outreach led to a decision for a Saturday night alternative, said Wayne Jones, minister of education.

The Saturday night session started with 60 enrolled and has grown to an enrollment of 115. Jones gauges the success of the schedule by the 16 professions of faith during the Saturday evening services of people who likely would not have been attending a Sunday morning service.

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In San Antonio, 930 people from the average 2,100 Sunday school attendance at Castle Hills answered a survey saying they could and would be willing to attend a Saturday night program instead of Sunday morning, but only 150 actually signed up for it.

The plan has been discussed as an alternative for space needs during several phases of remodeling and construction. The number that signed up for it would not alleviate the space problem, so the plan was delayed.

"We decided it was not an option for our situation right now, but it is something we likely will try later," said Steve Davis, preaching assistant and education coordinator.

"A Saturday night schedule will reach a lot of people. It may start small, but it will grow," Davis said.

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Artist finds answers  
through literature

By Frank Wm. White

F - SSB  
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Placement of the plan of Christian salvation in Southern Baptist Sunday School Board literature has achieved its intended purpose as far as a Nashville free-lance artist is concerned.

Jackie Liggett, who for the past three years has accepted assignments to illustrate and paste up some Sunday School Board publications, discovered the plan of salvation while working on a youth Sunday school leisure-reading magazine event.

The plan of salvation began appearing in Sunday school periodicals this year as part of an increased emphasis on evangelism through the Sunday school. Features explain how to become a Christian or how to lead someone else to accept Christ.

Liggett discovered the feature at a time when she was searching for answers. Her father had open-heart surgery in December 1987.

"That was the first time I ever remember really praying. After that, I was curious about God but didn't know about the plan of salvation," she said.

She began reading the Sunday School Board materials with more interest than just her concern for finding photography and art possibilities to illustrate them.

"That's when I found the plan of salvation. The way it was written, it seemed really easy. I found out it really is easy," she said.

She accepted Christ after talking with a Nashville pastor. "I knew I had been coming to this for a long time, but I didn't know how to go about it. What I read helped me find what I was needing faster," she explained.

"If the material just helps people ask questions like I did, it serves its purpose."

Now, editors at the Sunday School Board who work with Liggett are bringing her books and helping her grow as a Christian.

"At the board, I'm surrounded by Christians. I can learn while I'm working. I pick up bits of information from the material I work on, and people are willing to answer any of my questions they can," Liggett said.

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