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Arab Baptist seminary
returns to Lebanon

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--After an 18-month absence, Arab Baptist Theological Seminary has moved back to strife-torn Lebanon.

Classes have been held in Cyprus since March 1987 for about a dozen students. The seminary relocated there after passport privileges for Americans in Lebanon were suspended by the U.S. State Department. Three Southern Baptist missionaries affected by that action comprised the core of the seminary's faculty at the time.

The return to Lebanon stems from the Greek Cypriot government's refusal to allow the seminary to continue operating in Cyprus. The government issued orders to immigration officials to stop the seminarians from returning for fall classes.

Classes resumed Oct. 18 at the seminary in predominantly Christian East Beirut. Since the move to Cyprus last year, only a Baptist radio station and congregation have been housed in the facilities.

Several leading Lebanese Baptist pastors are conducting classes for students from Lebanon and other Arab countries. An Arab assistant administrator will be chosen, said Dale Thorne, director for Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa. The seminary president, missionary Emmett Barnes, will remain in Cyprus because of the continued United States stipulation against American citizens using their passports to work or live in Lebanon.

In Beirut, the seminary again is operating in the midst of civil war that broke out in 1975. At present, two factions -- one led by Maronite Catholic and Greek Orthodox politicians, the other led by Muslims -- are deadlocked in a struggle to control the government.

Lebanon still needs prayers "that the suffering can stop," Thorne said. The war has claimed 130,000 or more lives. Outright fighting has subsided in recent months, but tensions remain high. And the economy remains extremely weak, with ongoing inflation and devaluation of Lebanese currency.

Lebanon's 12 Baptist churches nevertheless are faring well, with attendance continuing to climb, Thorne said. Two churches are building new facilities.

The churches also have cooperated in a project to feed 1,200 families -- mostly refugees -- during the past year, using \$160,000 in Southern Baptist hunger funds.

Several missionary couples remain intent on returning to Lebanon when the State Department restores passport privileges. In the meantime, they continue to live in Cyprus while assisting Beirut-based Arab Baptist ministries. Others among the two dozen Southern Baptist missionaries forced to leave Lebanon have been transferred to other countries, Thorne said.

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Baptists to spend \$750,000
in Bangladesh flood relief

By Marty Croll

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DHAKA, Bangladesh (BP)--Southern Baptists plan to spend at least \$750,000 in the next several months to help relieve suffering in Bangladesh, where disease is likely to run rampant and an estimated 8 million people are homeless.

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The dire conditions were triggered by floods that swept across two-thirds of the country in late August and September. At one point, government officials estimated at least 50 million of the nation's 110 million inhabitants had been driven from their homes, many after mud walls of the houses dissolved and collapsed.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board will use disaster and hunger funds for several projects to be monitored by missionaries already on the field.

"What we're trying to do is find some way to provide help that really helps," said Earl Goatcher, the board's associate director for community development. "How can we help them in a long-term way?"

Relief efforts have been hampered by washed out roads and bridges, Goatcher said. Still, in the midst of flooding, missionaries and Bangladeshi Baptists were able to provide meals using \$25,000 in Southern Baptist hunger funds. More than 100,000 people in four hard-hit areas received free meals even as the waters were cresting around them.

Dazed Bangladeshis who live in the 50 flooded districts on the crowded flood plain east of India still stare with amazement at high-water marks left on trees and buildings, sometimes 15 feet above the ground.

Flooding is commonplace in Bangladesh during late summer after monsoon season sets in. But last year's damage was the worst in 70 years, and this year's is even more severe. Silt said to be loosened by deforestation in surrounding nations is washing down streambeds and riverbeds in Bangladesh, clotting channels where water once flowed.

Goatcher spent four days in early October touring damaged areas of Bangladesh with Southern Baptist missionaries there. He and veteran missionary Jim McKinley from Louisville, Ky., met with government ministers of agriculture and livestock.

"It's bad news," he said. "There has been a lot of crop damage, and water got into the factories and ruined machinery. The concern is that unemployment will be high, and that will create hungry people, and hungry people will be more susceptible to disease."

The new Southern Baptist aid will cover a wide geographic area but focus on development at the local level. The board plans to release \$575,000 for hunger-related needs. General relief needs will cost \$150,000, which has been provided by a single Southern Baptist donor. Foreign Mission Board general relief funds have been depleted in recent months.

Bangladesh government officials expressed particular interest in Southern Baptists' plan to help introduce corn farming to the people, Goatcher said. Before the season changes, time may remain to harvest corn, although time has passed to reap another rice crop to replace the one washed away. Southern Baptists will contribute \$225,000 as part of an effort to import and distribute seed corn from Thailand.

The denomination also will provide \$100,000 to import ducks from Thailand. In past years missionaries in Bangladesh have imported hundreds of thousands of ducks. They have taught Bangladeshis to use the ducks for meat and eggs.

Southern Baptists will contribute \$50,000 to pay for animal vaccine. Many cattle that were not drowned have suffered from an epidemic of hoof-and-mouth disease. Cattle represent a major portion of the country's agricultural production. During his trip, Goatcher passed several Bangladeshis pulling carts, with cattle lashed to the top, heading for a veterinarian.

Another release of \$200,000 will pay for tube wells. Contaminated water from ponds and open wells has caused thousands of deaths. Baptists already have dug more than 5,000 wells in the country over the years; about 40 were washed away in the flooding.

Homeless people represent another major need, Goatcher said. Many homes are just piles of mud and twisted tin. Homes standing now might not be standing soon. Termites, driven from the ground during the floods, have begun to find lodging in wood, bamboo and thatch. Southern Baptists will provide \$150,000 to help rebuild basic shelters.

"The magnitude of this disaster defies comprehension," said Goatcher. "All the figures and forecasts are estimates. Hunger, starvation, disease and famine will leave few families untouched."

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Sunday school key to growth,
Lewis tells church planters

By Mark Wingfield

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. (BP)--Too many Southern Baptist churches have the "Little Bo Peep" philosophy that when people are ready to come to church, they will, Larry L. Lewis told a group of denominational missionaries.

Instead, churches should have the "Good Shepherd" philosophy of seeking out everyone who is not a Christian, or lost, said Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said.

"Don't let anybody be born and live and die in your community without having the gospel forcefully presented to them," Lewis told about 30 New York home missionaries. He made the comments during a new-church growth conference for church planters, pastors and directors of missions from the Baptist Convention of New York.

In this presidential election year, most homes in America will be visited by political campaign workers, but not by church workers, Lewis noted. "Our churches ought to be encouraging people to cast their vote for Jesus Christ" through door-to-door witnessing, he said.

The best way to grow a church in the 1980s remains the Sunday school, Lewis continued: "The Sunday school is the only way I know to grow a church. The primary task force for outreach in the church is the Sunday school."

Lewis recalled his own experience as a child when he heard the gospel through the witness of a Sunday school teacher. "I wouldn't be a Christian today, much less president of the Home Mission Board, if it weren't for the concern of an evangelistic Sunday school teacher," he said.

The popular "Flake's Formula" of Sunday school growth developed in the 1920s still holds true for church growth in the 1980s, Lewis said. The five-step formula calls for discovering prospects, enlarging the organization, training workers, providing space and visiting.

He encouraged church starters and mission pastors to use every resource available from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in growing their churches.

Lewis also challenged the New Yorkers to spend at least one-fourth of their time in visitation and to continually discover prospects in their communities.

"In recent years, I've gone to church after church and found the pastor has no prospects," he said. "You don't reach people if you don't know who they are and where they live."

He also reminded the New Yorkers that ministry grows churches. "The very best way I know to reach people is to meet their needs," he said.

The meeting was one of six regional training conferences sponsored this year by the Home Mission Board's new-church growth department.

Joel Land, director of that department, reminded the audience that passing the milestones of 50, 100 and 200 members poses problems for any church. At each point, pastors must adjust their leadership styles to meet the changing dynamics of the congregation, he said.

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Hispanics plan pre-SBC rally,
pastors' conference in Las Vegas

By Joe Westbury

ATLANTA (BP)--Hispanics who attend the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., next year will have a variety of opportunities to share the gospel with the city's residents.

Bob Sena, coordinator for the Southern Baptist Hispanic Ministers' Conference, said street witnessing and door-to-door visitation June 9-10 will launch a week of Hispanic involvement in the convention sessions.

The 18-month-old fellowship is coordinating its activity with the evangelism section and the language missions division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, which is overseeing an evangelistic thrust of the city.

Sena, pastor of First Hispanic Baptist Church of Atlanta, said the Hispanics also will participate in the board's "Here's Hope" revival emphasis. Hispanic pastors will be placed in churches throughout the area for a series of pre-convention revival services, he added.

Nearly 30 pastors already have volunteered to participate in the revival services at their own expense.

Six Hispanic missions now minister in Las Vegas, and the pastors will target new areas of the city for locations to begin additional congregations, Sena said.

"The beauty of this venture is that churches and pastors who have been on the receiving end of (Southern Baptist) Cooperative Program funds are now able to return that investment by ministering to others," he added.

June 11, the Sunday prior to the SBC meeting June 13-15, the fellowship will sponsor a rally that is expected to attract 1,000 participants. The rally will "motivate laymen and pastors to saturate the area with the gospel" as well as provide visibility and unity of Hispanics in the denomination, Sena said.

Theme for the rally will be "Exalting Christ through Excellence in Ministry." Elui Camacho, associate director of the evangelism department for the Southern Baptist General Convention of California, will be guest speaker.

Geriell DeOliveira, director of the ethnic church relations section for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said the agency is considering conducting a special ethnic commissioning service during the rally. The service will hinge on the number of ethnics who are appointed prior to the June meeting.

The fellowship will sponsor a Hispanic pastors' conference June 12 and encourage the ministers to attend the evening session of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference that night.

The Hispanic conference will stress preaching, worship, sanctification and witnessing.

The weekend following the SBC meeting, Hispanic pastors again will speak in Las Vegas churches and in adjoining states in a series of worship services, Sena said.

The event will mark the second year the fellowship has sponsored pre-convention activities. The rally, street witnessing and pastors' conference are the result of the nation's largest ethnic group moving into the mainstream of Southern Baptist life, Sena said.

Peace is mandate,
Maryland layman says

By Jim Burton

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (BP)--Mike Keller would like to give peace a chance.

"I have come to the conclusion that the foremost mandate for Christians in the 20th century is to look for ways to prevent our civilization from experiencing an horrendous end," said Keller, a 42-year-old higher education analyst with the state of Maryland.

"The Bible is right. In the nuclear age we have to be our brother's keeper."

Although Keller, a member of First Baptist Church of Eastport, Md., was influenced by his own Vietnam experience, his concern for peace, as well as other social and ethical issues, blossomed through spiritual growth and Bible study.

"One of the things that I have benefitted from greatly in relating foreign policy," said Keller, "is my study of the gospel and the tremendous mandate that Christ has for peace."

Seeing Christ as a reconciler, Keller challenges Christians to model the master peacemaker. "The bottom line is that there is no other alternative for Christians," he said.

As with most peace activists, Keller's greatest concern is with the massive nuclear buildup of the super powers.

Most weapons experts say that if each super power had 400-500 nuclear warheads, both would have a sufficient defense. Instead, Keller says there is a combined force of 60,000 nuclear weapons. While an advocate of a strong national defense, he believes the nuclear buildup has gone too far.

"How do you deal as a Christian with something like nuclear deterrents?" he asked.

"If you want to reduce it to a base level, basically it says, 'If you kill our children, 30 minutes from now we'll kill all of yours.' How does that square with the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'? It doesn't."

He insists that unless adversaries become neighbors, civilization will not survive.

"Many Christians have simply ignored the scriptural mandate that we seek reconciliation with our adversary," said Keller, "that the true sense of our security is God, not military weaponry."

Keller said the super powers must seek a negotiated end to nuclear testing -- a comprehensive test ban treaty.

And that is where his personal ministry begins. As a member of numerous peace organizations (Clergy and Laity Concerned, Amnesty International, Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, and others), Keller is involved in peace lobbying and education.

For Keller, peace is a basic issue in Christianity. Yet, he realizes that many Christians do not share his position.

"I find it very ironic that many Southern Baptists will argue about the need for an inerrant interpretation of Scripture," said Keller, "but they are very selective in how they apply that, especially in regard to the peace issue."

In addition to his involvement with the peace issue, Keller is a state legislative watchdog for the Maryland/Delaware Baptist Convention. During the legislative session, he writes a weekly column for the state paper, Baptist True Union, to keep Southern Baptists informed about state legislative issues.

"I find a tremendous lack of knowledge about the moral and social issues that are being considered by our elected officials," said Keller.

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He is also chairperson for the Arundel Baptist Association Christian Life and Social Ministries Committee. In that capacity, Keller said he is unlikely to work on peace issues because interest in the association lies more with family and hunger problems.

Keller identifies his calling with the political action to which he is committed. He also identifies it with Scripture which says: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

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Ministers to deaf
examine theology

By Breena Kent Paine

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"Each person has the right of direct, individual, personal access to God in salvation," theology professor J. Terry Young told ministers to the deaf from throughout the nation during the "Ministering in the Deaf Congregation" conference at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Although others may assist one in coming to God, no one can stand between me and God. ... Jesus is the one and only mediator," said Young, a member of the New Orleans Seminary faculty.

Priesthood of the believer also involves "the right of personal interpretation of the Scriptures to determine belief, to feed on the word, and to find the will of God," he explained. "Each person has the right of personal approach to God in prayer for confession, for petition, and for praise."

But he cautioned, "In exercising the privilege of priesthood, I must fully respect the equal rights of all others to enjoy their privileges of priesthood."

Each "priest" has the responsibility to build up the church, recognize its diversity, enhance its usefulness, bring other people to know Christ, help younger believers to grow and minister to people in need, he said.

In a seminar on the Holy Spirit, Robert Barnes, New Orleans professor of church history and theology, said: "You and I cannot convict anyone of sin. ... We must depend on the Holy Spirit." Once a person is convicted of sin and accepts Christ, the Holy Spirit aids the Christian in service and in witnessing, he added.

A change should occur in the believer, brought on by the filling and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, Barnes said: "If there isn't anything different in your life, then you have no credibility. You've been set apart. Your life ought to show it" through bearing the "fruit of the Spirit" -- love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and temperance.

In a session on prayer, Ed Thiele, associate professor of discipleship, said, "Your belief in prayer will determine your practice of it."

He noted some helps for a healthy prayer life, such as "a set time, a primary place, a specific plan, a prayer list, a prayer partner or group and the Holy Spirit." Hindrances are "the weakness of the flesh, the lack of a sense of urgency, not seeking the Father's will, marital conflict, selfishness, cherishing sin, unbelief, unforgiveness, pride and disobedience."

During a session on the will of God, Fisher Humphreys, professor of theology, discussed some traditional ways Christians make decisions "so as to do God's will" -- seeking an inner sense of direction; Bible study; "putting out the fleece," or asking for a sign from God; "opened and closed doors," or opportunities available and not available; waiting upon God; and being practical.

Humphreys proposed a three-step method for major decision-making. First, "commit yourself to do God's will." Second, "try to make the most responsible decision you can." Third, "trust God to take care of it from then on."

"We think God's problem is to get us to make the right decisions, but God's problem is really to get us to commit ourselves to him," he insisted.

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