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88-195

New Nicaragua ties  
follow hurricane

By Art Toalston

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--More than six years after Southern Baptist missionaries left Nicaragua, new ties with Baptists there are on the horizon.

Doors may open for post-hurricane relief efforts by Southern Baptist volunteers, reported Joe Bruce, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's work in Middle America and Canada.

Bruce, who spent three days in Nicaragua in late November, also said officials at a university and a hospital related to the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua have requested sister relationships with Baptist institutions in the United States.

Hurricane Joan cut a 200-mile path of ruin across Nicaragua in late October, killing more than 100 people and destroying more than 29,000 dwellings. It stands as the country's second-worst natural disaster, topped only by the 1972 earthquake that pummeled the Managua area.

Bruce was scheduled to return to Nicaragua the week of Dec. 5 to develop an action plan for relief help. Expected to accompany him were Garry Eudy, associate mission administrator, and Russell Fox, a Southern Baptist missionary and construction engineer in Honduras who will oversee volunteer efforts in Nicaragua if plans proceed.

Southern Baptist efforts likely will focus on the coastal city of Bluefields, where most buildings and houses were destroyed or severely damaged, Bruce said.

A back annex of Zion Baptist Church in Bluefields was destroyed; an adjacent elementary school operated by the church lost a wall and its roof; and the parsonage sustained extensive damage, Bruce said. Southern Baptist volunteers also may help with home repairs, he said.

During his first visit, Bruce gave the Baptist convention a \$5,000 check from Southern Baptist disaster relief funds for the purchase of hammers, saws, nails and other items to help people repair their homes.

"One of the big problems is going to be securing materials," Bruce said. "There are little or none in the country." Materials may be purchased in Costa Rica and sent to Nicaragua by boat.

If sending volunteer teams does not prove feasible, Bruce will explore other avenues of Southern Baptist assistance.

He also met with officials at the 1,500-student Polytechnic University of Nicaragua, who expressed interest in a sister relationship with a Southern Baptist university. The institution in Managua is the only Baptist university in Central America and one of the few evangelical universities in Latin America, he said. It also operates a nursing school.

Officials of Baptist Hospital in Managua also indicated interest in a sister relationship with a Southern Baptist hospital and in short-term volunteer anesthesiologists, Bruce said. When an eye clinic opens, ophthalmologists also may be needed.

Bruce said he sensed openness among Nicaraguan Baptist leaders to ways Southern Baptists might cooperate in developing their work. He is "not sure yet what all the long-term implications will be. But the door certainly is not closed to the possibility of having some career personnel in there at some time in the future," he said.

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The Baptist Convention of Nicaragua encompasses some 70 to 80 churches.

Two Southern Baptist couples worked in Nicaragua until 1982, when Nicaraguan Baptist leaders voted to recommend that the missionaries leave because of the "sociopolitical and ideological situation." The first couple began a literature ministry in 1976 at the invitation of Nicaraguan Baptists and later opened a bookstore. A second couple came in 1980 to do music ministry. A Southern Baptist volunteer taught at the Baptist seminary in Managua from 1984 to 1986.

American Baptist Convention work in Nicaragua dates back to 1917 and still continues.

In another development, a volunteer team of nine Southern Baptists preached in a simultaneous revival campaign in Nicaragua two weeks after the hurricane. The campaign was sponsored by another Baptist group, the International Baptist Convention of Nicaragua.

The International Convention also wants ties with Southern Baptists, reported volunteer team leader Ernesto Chaparro, pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Corona, N.Y.

"We had freedom to preach the gospel," even in a post-hurricane state of emergency declared by the Sandinista government, Chaparro said. "In nine days, nobody stopped us to give us regulations or anything like that."

Chaparro preached to crowds of up to 600 people in churches, he said. The volunteer team divided up to preach in 21 churches and several missions. The churches recorded 125 public professions of faith in Christ.

Bruce has received no correspondence from the International Convention and had no contact with its leaders during his trip, he said. He is "waiting to see what direction they decide to take" in requesting ties to Southern Baptists, he added.

The International Convention encompasses three dozen churches and two dozen missions, according to Chaparro. The Southern Baptist volunteer team included eight Hispanics and one Anglo-American participant.

The International convention's leaders told Chaparro they want "any kind of help" from Southern Baptists, including relief assistance, missionary personnel, religious education materials and hymnals, he said.

Volunteer Jose Garay, pastor of First Spanish Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio, said the International Convention feels alone. After the hurricane, one pastor told Garay, "We did not receive even a postcard of encouragement, much less a dollar for the needs."

The volunteer team took in 1,400 pounds of clothing and about \$4,000 in medicines and donations for hurricane victims.

Chaparro admitted being wary of venturing into Nicaragua. "People think right away Nicaragua is communist," he said. "I expected no real freedom there."

But people in Nicaragua "are very open to the gospel," he said. "They listen. They receive." He also noted Roman Catholic influence in Nicaragua was not as pervasive as he had expected.

The International Convention has a five-year plan for planting churches in every region of Nicaragua, Garay said. Many churches have similar church-planting goals. "They are going out, winning people to the Lord and congregationalizing them into churches," he reported.

Garay told of one layman with a calling for planting churches who drives throughout Nicaragua in a 20-year-old Jeep with no doors. It has to be pushed to start and goes no faster than 30 miles per hour.

Volunteer Charles Shelton of Lyman, S.C., told of meeting a young fisherman who was adrift with a friend for 23 days after their boat capsized in a storm. "They prayed to God that if he would help them and change their lives, they would serve him," Shelton recounted.

Turtles that normally avoid human beings began coming to the boat. The men survived by catching and killing the turtles, eating the raw meat and drinking the blood, until a tanker rescued them. Today the two men are preaching in churches throughout the country, Shelton said.

Nicaraguans have weathered an earthquake, a political revolution and now a hurricane within 20 years, Garay said. Their economy has been devastated along with "their hopes for a secure future. But rather than giving up, they are looking for answers. We saw an open field in Nicaragua, white for the harvest."

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Study shows congregations lead  
in providing voluntary service

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--American religious congregations practice what they preach when it comes to serving others, a national study has concluded.

Churches and other religious bodies are the major supporters of voluntary services for neighborhoods and communities, according to a report recently released by Independent Sector, a non-profit coalition of 650 corporate, foundation and voluntary organization members with national interest and impact in philanthropy and voluntary action.

The study found that in 1986 almost half -- 46 percent -- of the \$41.4 billion contributed to congregations flowed into service to others. The remaining 54 percent was spent on internal activities, such as worship and religious education.

Congregations also are involved in a wide range and variety of service activities, the report said. The study revealed that 87 percent of all congregations reported programs in human services and welfare, and 79 percent reported programs in international activities. In addition, 70 percent had public and societal benefit programs, 68 percent reported health programs, 43 percent had arts and cultural programs, 38 percent reported educational programs and 27 percent had environmental programs.

"We undertook the study as part of our effort to gain a fuller understanding of the ways that voluntary organizations serve society," said Brian O'Connell, president of Independent Sector. "Up to now, there has been a tendency to assume that religious groups are so different from other non-profit organizations, relating largely to salvation, that perhaps they didn't really belong in the voluntary sector.

"On the basis of our studies, we realize even more than we had expected how much the organized neighborliness of religious organizations means to the kind of caring society we are."

George Gallup, whose organization conducted the national survey, called the project the first attempt by any group to study congregations scientifically. What emerged from the study was a "shining example of faith in action on a broad, national scale," he said.

"I was struck anew by the fact that congregations are among our most cost-effective institutions," said Gallup.

Among other findings in the report were:

-- Religious groups provided \$8.4 billion in direct grants to other organizations, making them a primary source of financial grants.

-- Volunteers other than clergy devoted 51 million hours per month to their congregations' community services.

-- Sixty percent of congregations reported providing in-kind support -- such as food, clothing and housing -- to human service programs.

-- Ninety percent of congregations reported their facilities were available to groups within the congregation for other than congregational activities, and 60 percent reported their facilities were available to other groups in the community.

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The report was based on a three-stage survey conducted from May 1987 through March 1988. The survey was limited to congregations and did not include denominational organizations, religious charities or other religiously affiliated institutions. The national sample was developed from the telephone directory and was selected from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas in the nine national census regions.

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Elder pledges team relationships  
with state convention leaders

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Pledging even greater efforts at team relationships between the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and state convention leaders, board President Lloyd Elder outlined an "undaunted sense of direction we are trying to communicate."

"If the Sunday School Board is successful in working with state conventions to embrace all the churches, it may be the most unifying force we can implement," Elder told state Sunday school, church training and church building leaders attending annual December planning meetings at the board offices in Nashville.

He outlined areas receiving priority attention as part of efforts "to continue to do things so the end result is good for all of us."

Leaders are working at strengthening Southern Baptist Convention and trustee relationships, he said: "We are going to go forward in every way we can. It is our responsibility to join our lives beside the 89 convention-elected trustees."

He cited two major publishing projects, a new Baptist hymnal and a multi-volume Bible commentary, which he predicted will make major contributions to Southern Baptist life.

Recommendations of improvements in Sunday school curriculum will go to the trustees for consideration in February 1989, said Elder.

"Literature helps to shape the whole denomination," he said. "It is our expectation that we will serve Southern Baptist churches better, they will grow stronger spiritually and in numbers, and the Sunday School Board will undergird this with reasonableness in the cost to the churches."

The 1 million Sunday school workers in 37,000 Southern Baptist churches are "our largest army for reaching people for the Lord Jesus Christ," he noted.

Elder pledged efforts to undergird the board's church training department in discipleship training and educating Baptists about their heritage and the meaning of churchmanship: "If ever we have a known need in Southern Baptist life, this is one. Let us find a way to act upon it."

Plans to construct a new office/conference tower atop the board's Operations Building will move forward in 1989 with submission of construction bids to the trustees. "The Sunday School Board is not going to wait and see if Southern Baptists grow. We are going to provide the resources for Southern Baptists to be successful," he said.

Elder pledged increased support for the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget. "Like others, perhaps I have taken it for granted," he said. "The Sunday School Board will do more to lay its encouragement behind the Cooperative Program. We have much work to do."

In his six years at the board, Elder said, he continues on a journey of learning more about the institution and more about Southern Baptists. As part of that learning process, he is learning how to be a better steward of the gospel, how to serve all the churches and continue to express his faith in Southern Baptists, he added.

"This old (Baptist) family has been around for a while. This is a good time to establish faith in the Southern Baptist family and to say so," said Elder.

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Also, he said, he is learning the importance of being gracious to others even when people and groups are expressing different beliefs.

The Sunday School Board and state conventions must work together because "the work is worth it. The strength we get from one another enables us to better do the work God has called us to do," said Elder.

"Let each one of us bow before him who is Lord, plow our programs and plow our common faith deeply."

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Student leaders note advances,  
set plans in priority programs

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Every student deserves an opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ and to grow in grace through the ministry of a local church, Charles Johnson told Baptist state directors of student ministry.

A commitment to the priorities of student ministry is needed to provide the opportunities students deserve, added Johnson, director of the student ministry department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, addressing the directors in annual planning meetings in Nashville.

He identified the priorities of student ministry as strengthening student ministries on campuses, expanding church ministries to students and developing world student ministries.

Johnson pointed to student ministry gains in the past year as indicators of success in the focus areas. State student ministry directors reported 157,190 students involved in campus programs during the 1987-88 academic year, up from 142,839 reported the previous year.

The total participation in Baptist Student Union is larger than the combined totals of three other major evangelical student organizations, he said. Information collected by the student ministry department staff from national headquarters of the organizations indicates Campus Crusade has 18,000 students; InterVarsity, 24,000; and Navigators, 10,000.

Southern Baptists also are represented on more campuses with 1,018 compared with Campus Crusade, 385; InterVarsity, 750; and Navigators, 105. However, the number of campuses with Baptist Student Unions is down from 1,042 the previous year, Johnson said.

The report indicates 25,970 students were involved in mission projects in 1987-88. Because of the addition of a report for students involved in local community missions through Baptist Student Unions, churches or associations, the total cannot be compared with previous years.

State directors reported \$1.83 million contributed by students for missions projects. That total also includes items not counted in previous statistical reports.

Student ministry priorities have been enhanced with relationships the student ministry department has developed with the Sunday school division and the church training department at the Sunday School Board and the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home mission boards, said Bill Henry, manager of the student ministry department's program section.

Relationship with Sunday school and church training have helped balance campus and church ministry to students, Henry said. Student ministry materials are being designed to assist the as many as 30,000 church workers with college students as well as campus ministers, he added.

He cited Collegiate Bible Study Sunday school materials now included in "The Student" magazine and Collegiate Discipleship materials planned for release by the church training department beginning in the spring of 1990 as support for campus and church ministries.

Plans to expand student involvement in foreign missions could place students in Taiwan as early as the summer of 1990 in a pilot project involving the Foreign and Home mission boards.

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Four to six campuses will be selected to pilot the Taiwan project, said Helen Wood, associate director for student and career guidance at the Foreign Mission Board.

The plan involves contact with Taiwanese students in Taiwan before they arrive in the United States, continued contact while they are on a U.S. campus and follow-up once they return to Taiwan. If successful, the project will be expanded to other nations and campuses.

Other projects will be developed to increase international awareness in student ministry and involve international students in student ministry events.

The state directors approved guidelines for planning major events that set national student conferences for every 10 years instead of the current five-year cycle. The next national conference, Mission '90, is planned for Fort Worth, Texas, Dec. 27-31, 1989.

Global Student Missions Encounters based on the Brazil-United States pilot project in January 1988 will be conducted every five years. A project is being planned involving 12 countries between December 1990 and August 1991.

Nations identified by the Foreign Mission Board for the project are The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, France, Germany, Indonesia, Trinidad, Suriname, Guyana and Israel. The countries with large Islamic populations will allow students to focus on ministry to Muslim students.

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Pastors urged to realize  
need for family programs

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist pastors have not incorporated family enrichment programs into their churches as they should, a fact that eventually could lead to the breakdown of families and churches, a seminary professor said.

"Most pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention are not exerting much leadership in this area," said Guy Greenfield, professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Greenfield is author of "Families Practicing God's Love," the 1989 Christian Home Emphasis book published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

"No church is stronger than its families," Greenfield said. "When families begin to crumble, churches are not far behind."

At the year-end meeting of state Baptist family ministry consultants and personnel in the board's family ministry department, Greenfield stressed the dire need for churches to minister to families creatively.

"As we shape the family, we shape the church," Greenfield said in explaining how changing morals should force churches to take a look at their family programming.

Divorce, couples living together, single-parent homes, child abuse, teenage pregnancy and adolescent suicide are growing occurrences that must be addressed, he said.

"What Southern Baptists do about family life will determine the direction of churches in years to come," Greenfield said. "The future of our churches, our denomination, the Home and Foreign mission boards and ultimately world evangelization hinge upon the quality of family life."

Douglas Anderson, director of the family ministry department, agreed one of the weakest areas in church programming is family enrichment.

"No one has really invested in getting anything going for families," Anderson said. "Single and senior adult work has emerged out of the grassroots."

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"People of the church have gone out and done it. But family enrichment is an area of work which is underdeveloped. No one has really taken the ball and run with it."

Greenfield said family enrichment leaders could help shape family enrichment programs by enlisting a higher degree of pastoral leadership in the area, helping churches understand they must minister to families of the future and offering guidelines and modeling for growing, healthy families.

State leaders could "stimulate and encourage aggressive pastoral leadership in the area of family enrichment," Greenfield said. "As goes the pastor, so goes the church."

One way to stimulate pastoral leadership in family enrichment programs is to incorporate family ministry programming into state evangelism conferences, Greenfield said: "Most pastors' hearts are in evangelism and church growth more than in family life. If the pastor recognized family as both a means and a target for evangelism, he would be more likely to value family enrichment."

Another way to shape families and churches is to minister to the family of the future, he added: "The family is always changing. It is always with us, but it doesn't stay the same. If we are going to minister to the family of the 1990s, we must see a profile of the changing families. The model family -- father, mother and a few children -- is no longer the norm."

Single adults, single-parents, empty-nest couples, blended families and senior adults, both married and widowed, should be included in the concept of the modern family, Greenfield said.

Finally, the Bible can offer guidelines and modeling for growing, healthy families, he said: "The nature, character and action of God in Jesus Christ should provide us with the criteria for a healthy and stable family life. Christ is not only the criteria for personal life, but also for family life."

Meanwhile, state leaders learned of the family ministry department's plans to develop resources for sex education and a concept paper that sets the direction, course and philosophical base for family ministry resources. The date for release of the sex education resources has not been determined, said Gary Hauk, manager of the department's family enrichment section. The concept paper will be available in January.

Through a Baptist Telecommunication Network newsclip, Jimmy Hester, design editor in the family ministry department, reported to state directors that almost 7,000 single adults participated in state, associational and churchwide conferences, and 10,300 attended national events. Nearly 10,000 senior adults attended 13 Chautauquas, he said.

After two years, 82,086 copies of the Lay Institute for Equipping course, Parenting by Grace, have been sold, and 23,607 copies of the course, Covenant Marriage, have been purchased, Hester said.

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Mississippi's Kelly  
sets August retirement

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--Earl Kelly, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board for more than 15 years, has announced his retirement for Aug. 15, 1989. He will be 66 Dec. 16.

The announcement was made during the board meeting Dec. 6 in Jackson.

The search committee for Kelly's replacement is the board's executive committee. Eugene Dobbs, pastor of First Baptist Church of Philadelphia, is chairman.

Kelly came to the Mississippi Baptist post from the pastorate of Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Jackson. Before that he had been pastor of First Baptist Church in Holly Springs, Miss.

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Under Kelly's administration, the annual Cooperative Program unified budget for participating Baptist churches in the state has risen from \$5.2 million to more than \$20 million for 1989.

Kelly initiated a \$40 million endowment campaign that was completed this year for Mississippi College, William Carey College, Blue Mountain College and the Mississippi Baptist Children's Village.

Kelly is a native of Ecu, Miss. He is a graduate of Sunflower Junior College, Mississippi College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

During his tenure, Kelly's wife, Amanda, died. He later married Marjorie Rowden, a vice president at William Carey College and a former missionary to Israel whose husband had died.

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Texans elect Semple,  
dedicate new building

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

DALLAS (BP)--James H. Semple of Paris, Texas, was elected director of the Texas Baptist State Missions Commission and a new Baptist Building was dedicated when the 193-member Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board met for its quarterly meeting in Dallas Dec. 6.

Semple, pastor of First Baptist Church in Paris since 1963, will succeed D.L. Lowrie, who has resigned to become executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention. As commission director, he will oversee the work of the convention's evangelism missions, church services and Sunday school divisions.

Semple is a graduate of Stetson University in Deland, Fla., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Previous pastorates include churches in Ocala, Fla., and in Wise County, Mineral Wells, Fort Worth and Plano, Texas.

In conjunction with the executive board meeting, a dedication service and open house was held at the new Baptist Building, less than two miles east of downtown Dallas.

Construction of the \$10.9 million facility was funded entirely by proceeds of the sale of the previous Baptist Building in downtown Dallas, earnings on those funds and a designated trust fund. No funds from the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified missions budget were used in construction.

The new facility houses the offices of the BGCT Executive Board staff, Woman's Missionary Union, Texas Baptist Men and the Baptist Church Loan Corporation.

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Healing Jesus opens  
ministry to Filipinos

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

AL MOKHA, Yemen (BP)--The medical treatment of a Philippine worker named Jesus began a Christian ministry among Filipinos in the Middle East nation of Yemen, where evangelization of Yemenis is illegal.

Jesus' abdomen was crushed in an accident during construction of the Al Mokha power station. He was taken to Jibla Baptist Hospital, three hours away.

Southern Baptist physician Jean Dickman of Daytona Beach, Fla., performed surgery on Jesus' abdomen and stood by him in the long days of recovery that followed. She told him about another Jesus, the Son of God, and gave him a Bible.

A Baptist lay pastor on the Philippine work crew heard about Jesus' accident, visited him in the hospital and met Dickman. A Bible study among the Filipinos, led by the lay pastor and Southern Baptist workers, was established in 1986. Twice each month since then, the Southern Baptists have driven from Jibla to the Red Sea port of Al Mokha to conduct services. The Filipinos also attended an international Easter sunrise service on the hospital grounds in 1987.

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Interest waned when the lay pastor completed his contract and went home to the Philippines, but Southern Baptists hope to train others to take his place in leadership. In the meantime, the pastor's daughter has come to work as a nurse at the Jibla hospital.

Yemen is a solidly Muslim country where Christians can spread the gospel only among expatriates. Southern Baptists' primary work in Yemen is at the 75-bed hospital and clinic in Jibla.

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Samford University names  
Beeson School Of Divinity

Baptist Press  
12/8/88

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The divinity school at Samford University has been named the Beeson School of Divinity, to honor benefactor Ralph Waldo Beeson of Birmingham, Ala., and in memory of his late father, John Wesley Beeson.

Samford trustees approved the new name Dec. 6, recognizing Ralph Beeson's contributions to the Alabama Baptist school. Samford president Thomas E. Corts described Ralph Beeson as "the university's greatest donor."

A plaque on a new statue of Beeson on the Samford campus notes: "In a spirit of love and Christian stewardship, he gave away all that he possessed to the glory of God. In the halls of this university, and in the hearts of its sons and daughters, the Christian charity of Ralph Waldo Beeson lives on forever."

Beeson, 88, was announced as the anonymous donor who last spring provided for the divinity school and the university the largest gift in Samford history. The amount of the gift was not announced.

While Samford is a Baptist institution, the Beeson School of Divinity is interdenominational. Corts said Beeson told him: "You Baptists do a lot of good, but you can learn from others. And you ought to share with others what you already know."

The divinity school, which opened this fall with a class of 32, offers a curriculum leading to the Master of Divinity degree, the standard graduate-theological degree in ministry.

The program is open to people of all Christian denominations. Enrollment ultimately is expected to approach 180, Samford officials said.

Samford's university center was named for Beeson, and its Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education and building were named for his late wife during the 1970s. A summer program for public schoolteachers operates with support provided by Mrs. Beeson.

Beeson Woods, Samford's residential village that opened in 1986, honors Beeson's grandfather, father and other family members. Beeson Woods houses 500 students in apartment-type suites.

Dwight Moody Beeson, Ralph Beeson's brother who died in 1985, also was a Samford supporter. The new Dwight and Lucille Beeson Center for the Healing Arts was dedicated in August. Dwight M. Beeson Hall houses the university's School of Business.

The Beesons' father was an ordained Methodist minister and a Mississippi educator.

Ralph Beeson joined Heralds of Liberty, a life insurance association, during the 1920s and helped build the organization into the Liberty National Life Insurance Co. He was the first southerner to be president of the nationwide Life Office Management Association and was president of the Institute of Life Insurance Underwriters.

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Maston secretary:  
bridge to prof

By Elizabeth Watson

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Dora Etta Bridgford was one of few women to serve in the U.S. Navy during World War II and one of the first women who pursued a doctorate at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

But perhaps her greatest distinction is the ability to read the late T.B. Maston's handwriting.

Until the late professor emeritus at Southwestern died this year, Bridgford was his part-time, volunteer secretary. She typed all but two of his 23 books and helped him correspond with thousands of people.

"I first began working with Dr. Maston during the summers as a seminary student. He would be without clerical help, so I started typing for him," she said.

Bridgford moved from Pensacola, Fla., to Fort Worth in 1939 to attend Southwestern. One of her first classes was "Recreation in the Church," taught by Maston.

"I became friends with the Mastons through the classroom and our mutual membership at Gambrell Street Baptist Church," she said.

Following graduation from Southwestern, Bridgford moved to Houston to serve as youth director at Baptist Temple. A year later, she joined the Navy as a communications officer and was stationed in Memphis, Tenn. She headed telephone exchange operations and mail distribution on the base. All the while, she remained in touch with the Mastons.

Bridgford also decoded messages -- something that was handy when she returned to Southwestern in 1950 and resumed working for Maston.

"He said nobody could read his handwriting but me," Bridgford said. "And I used to tell him, 'If I can't read it, I'll just make something up and put it in.'"

Occasionally Bridgford helped Maston think up titles for his books. But she thinks her greatest contribution to Maston's work was simply being a diligent decipherer and helping him "put his books on paper."

"About two-and-a-half years ago, my doctor told me to drop everything. I told him I'd stop everything except working for Dr. Maston. No one else could come in and pick up where I left off because I knew the people he corresponded with, and I knew how he said things," she said.

Bridgford currently is collecting and organizing Maston's correspondence, sermon notes and hand-written first drafts of his books. She also has prepared Maston's personal library for presentation to the Baptist seminary in Calgary, Canada.

"In my opinion, the work I am doing now is some of the most important work I have done for Dr. Maston," Bridgford said. "As I sort through his things, it's a matter of deciding, 'Does this have any bearing on the Southern Baptist Convention, on Southwestern Seminary, on Christian ethics?'"

"T.B. Maston was a great man, an outstanding Christian gentleman. He was genuinely concerned about everyone. He made all these years of typing manuscript after manuscript a true joy."