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88-196

Baptists assist
quake victims

NASHVILLE (BP)--Baptists have offered \$30,000 to help victims of the Dec. 7 earthquake in Soviet Armenia.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has offered \$20,000 for medicine, warm clothing and housing. The Baptist World Alliance, through its Baptist World Aid program, has made \$10,000 available, to be channeled through the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, a member of the BWA.

A larger amount for hunger-related needs will be made available from Southern Baptist world hunger funds if Soviet Baptists indicate such help is needed, said Keith Parker, director of Southern Baptist work in Europe.

Foreign Mission Board officials expect to receive further details Dec. 13, after Nodari Kvirikashvili, the superintendent of Baptist work in Soviet Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, arrives in Moscow. They are looking for the most expedient way to deliver the aid to the earthquake victims, Parker said.

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Denton Lotz and President Noel Vose sent a telegram to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, expressing sympathy on behalf of the BWA, for the loss of life. The BWA leaders assured Gorbachev, "Our Baptist people are prepared to help in any way possible."

Another BWA telegram notified All-Union Council leaders of the availability of the \$10,000 in aid. The telegram said: "The Baptist World Alliance joins you in sorrow over the tragic loss of life in Armenia. Please be assured of our prayers and concerns."

The Foreign Mission Board's Parker said Soviet Baptists have issued an urgent plea for prayer support during the crisis.

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Note to Editors: Addresses for relief funds are Baptist World Aid, 6733 Curran St., McLean, Va. 22101; and Foreign Mission Board, P.O. Box 6767, Richmond, Va. 23230.

Mission personnel chief
takes liaison assignment

By Bob Stanley

Baptist Press
12/9/88

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Louis R. Cobbs, who has directed the processing of about 6,000 Southern Baptists for overseas missionary service in the past 20 years, will take on a new role at the convention's Foreign Mission Board in January.

He will become special assistant to the executive vice president, assuming liaison responsibilities with Southern Baptist seminaries and the coordinating committee of the Inter-Agency Council, through which the 20 agencies and boards of the Southern Baptist Convention relate. He also will prepare documents concerning the board's whole personnel selection process, which has become a model studied by other missionary-sending agencies.

Cobbs, director of the personnel selection department since 1968, cited personal health problems in asking to be relieved of the administrative responsibilities related to his personnel position. But he said he is delighted with the opportunities of the new assignment and feels it is "a place where I can serve effectively."

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Until his successor is named, Wendy Norvelle, associate director of the department, will act as director.

Both President R. Keith Parks and Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for mission management and personnel, said they do not foresee any change in the board's appointment processes as a result of Cobbs' decision.

"Louis has made a tremendous contribution to Southern Baptists by leading one of the most thorough and professional screening processes for appointment found anywhere in religious or secular life," Spurgeon said. "We would see the continuation of his good work in the years ahead."

Cobbs will continue to be a resource person for a special committee set up last June to review the board's missionary appointment process. The committee includes four board trustees and three staff members.

He said his decision was not related in any way to this committee or to controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. The point was underscored by Parks, who said there was "no external pressure of any kind."

Cobbs said it was a "privilege and opportunity" to work with the study committee. He has worked with similar study committees in the past, he noted, and "each time the processes of appointment have been strengthened."

Executive Vice President Bill O'Brien said he is "genuinely excited" about the strengths Cobbs will bring to his new assignment. Cobbs is "known and well-received" at all six of the Southern Baptist seminaries and "brings a strong dimension to interpreting where we now stand in the world Christian mission," O'Brien said.

Cobbs, 63, is a native of Dallas. He came to the Foreign Mission Board in 1964 as an associate secretary for missionary personnel. In that capacity, he headed the personnel department's volunteer division and also developed the journeyman program, in which recent college graduates are trained and given overseas assignments under supervision of career missionaries.

In 1968, he was named director of the personnel selection department, supervising the process of bringing missionary candidates to appointment for overseas service. The 6,000 candidates who have been processed under Cobbs' direction comprise almost 60 percent of more than 10,000 who have been approved since the beginning of the board in 1845.

Before joining the staff, Cobbs worked five years as an associate in the student work division of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, where he supervised the Baptist Student Union summer mission program and worked with local campus programs. Earlier he was pastor of three churches in Texas and director of the Baptist Student Union and Bible instructor at Texas Technological College, now Texas Technological University, in Lubbock, and Texas Western College, now the University of Texas at El Paso.

He is a graduate of Howard College, now Samford University, in Birmingham, Ala., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va.

He and his wife, the former Mary Vic Weir of Detroit, have four grown children.

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

Foundation nets
record increases

Baptist Press
12/9/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foundation set records in asset value and income production during the 1987-88 fiscal year, SBF trustees learned during their annual meeting Dec. 6-7 in Nashville.

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Market value of SBF assets climbed \$6,413,023, to a record \$67,816,478, reported President Hollis E. Johnson III.

The market value increase represented a 10.46 percent gain, compared to a book value increase of 15.64 percent, Johnson said. The difference was caused by "the tremendous decline in stock prices during the first month of the year," October 1987, when the stock market crashed, he explained.

SBF policies and practices enabled the financial institution to thrive, despite the "Black Monday" crash, he noted: "The large cash position and policy of owning top-tier quality growth stocks enabled the foundation to successfully weather the unprecedented market decline. In fact, the growth fund operated to pool investments of many accounts actually increased in value during the year, due to investment in real estate, which appreciated."

The SBF's record income of \$4,645,582 marked the highlight of the year, Johnson said. That amount was an \$855,975 -- or 22.59 percent -- gain over the previous year.

He cited Baptist support as the reason for the banner year: "The record of achievement is made possible by increased confidence by Baptist institutions and agencies in the foundation as investment managers. The ability to produce competitive investment performance results and above-average income with monthly availability has attracted additional funds. Without the capacity to adequately account for the increased assets of the various accounts, all of these results would not be possible."

The SBF aided nine Baptist state foundations during the year, he said. It provided help with investment management, investment counseling, trust accounting, disbursement of income to clients and filing tax returns.

Southern Baptists' return on their investment in the SBF operating budget also set a record, Johnson noted. The convention's \$283,800 allocation produced a return of \$16.37 per \$1 allocated, compared to \$8.94 to \$1 a decade earlier.

Trustees elected officers during the meeting. They are Chairman Gorman J. Roberts, an investment banker and member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.; Vice Chairman Clarence Edmonds, an accountant and member of Brentwood Baptist Church in the Nashville area; and Recording Secretary Osta Underwood, an attorney and member of Belmont Heights Baptist Church in Nashville.

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Church training compared
to 'moral compass'

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
12/9/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists entering the last decade of the 20th century in a "bewildering, controversial, changing time" need a moral compass to keep them focused on the tenets of the Christian faith, Roy Edgemon told state church training leaders attending annual December planning meetings in Nashville.

"I think church training is that moral compass," said Edgemon, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department.

"So many things are changing, and consequently moral values are being threatened," Edgemon said. "American people are caught up in strange and bizarre teachings. Cults are being disguised in the clothing of Christianity."

Through church training, Southern Baptists who are unsure of what they believe can study the Bible and learn the basic doctrines that lie at the foundation of the Southern Baptist faith, he noted.

"What we are doing in our 1989 Baptist Doctrine Study book ("The Doctrines Baptists Believe") is trying to keep the compass focused on the important doctrines of our faith," he said.

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The church training department began a three-year "back-to-basics" emphasis in October, said Edgemon, who explained the emphasis is an effort to call Baptists back to their roots.

The influx of people from other religions into Southern Baptist churches, as well as those who become members but do not know the foundations of their faith, is causing the root system of Southern Baptists' heritage to decay, he said: "We can't build on somebody else's faith. Baptists have to have some roots and understand why they believe what they do.

"It's time churches train their members and call their people back to the basics."

The basics also include "what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be under the lordship of Christ. We have to learn what God wants for our life, morally and ethically, and how he wants us to carry out the ministry in his world. We need to give our people the basics and follow the true course of the Bible."

The Bible's moral teaching is the only answer for this "crazy, pressurized" world, he said: "We are going to explode as a world if we don't come back to these values. I don't think people can keep their sanity in a crazy, pressurized world without having these moral values."

The results for churches who teach their members the basics of their faith will be strong and unified congregations, Edgemon said.

"The families in the church will be solid, moral families with high ethical value that will pull family members to one another. The ministry of the church will become evangelistic and missions-minded as members see they have to take the gospel into the world."

Meanwhile, state Baptist church training leaders discussed an umbrella discipleship training program due out in 1990, a new record-keeping system and numerous other program-related concerns during their year-end meetings.

DiscipleALL is the umbrella discipleship program to be launched in October 1990. It calls for a balanced discipleship training program for all church members and their families. The 1995 Southern Baptist Convention goal for church training enrollment is 2.5 million.

Implementation of a new church training records system begins in October 1989. Stanley Howell, manager of the church training growth section, said the new system allows church leaders to compile summaries of all the training done throughout the year, rather than a point-in-time summary at the end of the associational year. Howell said the system also greatly simplifies roll-keeping.

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Work starts on center
for Caribbean Baptists

By Eric Miller

Baptist Press
12/9/88

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (BP)--Baptists broke ground Dec. 8 for the Caribbean Baptist Communication Center in Hollywood, Fla., a \$1.2 million facility that will produce Christian literature and broadcast material for the people of the Caribbean.

Construction will take about seven months and the center is to start functioning fully next August, said Bill Richardson, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board director for Brazil and the Caribbean.

At least six Southern Baptist missionaries and one journeyman will work at the center. Several Caribbean Baptists also will work there, including Arthur Edgar, director of Caribbean Christian Publications.

The two entities that will occupy the building are Caribbean Christian Publications and the Caribbean Baptist Media Center. The publication operation is now in El Paso, Texas, where the Foreign Mission Board's Baptist Spanish Publishing House also is located.

Southern Baptists established the media center for the Caribbean in Nassau, the Bahamas, in 1980, upon recommendation by the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship. However, Florida will be a more convenient location, Richardson said.

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"People from the Caribbean come often to Miami to go to other places in the Caribbean because of plane schedules and flight patterns," Richardson said. Located 30 minutes from the Miami airport, the Hollywood location "will facilitate travel to and from the Caribbean" and will reduce material shipping costs, he added.

A significant production of the media operation that will continue in the Hollywood center is the television series "Caribbean Heartbeat," as well as "The Baptist Hour," which is broadcast on radio each Sunday.

Most other productions of the Bahamas center also will continue in Hollywood, including "CBF Presents," which the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship airs weekly over two-thirds of the Caribbean region through five radio stations.

The Hollywood center may employ Miami-area residents with Caribbean backgrounds for acting or voice parts in films and radio broadcasts, Richardson said.

Caribbean Baptists contributed \$100,000 for the planned one-floor, 13,000-square-foot building. The Foreign Mission Board covered the rest of the cost, relying mostly on money from the sale of the media center's property in the Bahamas.

Richardson said land was hard to find for the center, and Sheridan Hills Baptist Church in Hollywood helped by selling some of its property to the Foreign Mission Board. The church also is providing temporary office space and equipment while the center is under construction.

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Baptist women instrumental
in opening Chinese church

By Susan Todd

Baptist Press
12/9/88

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The residents of Penglai, China, now have a place to worship, due in part to the influence of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union tours to China, national WMU leaders said.

WMU began making plans last year to sponsor tours to China to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Southern Baptist Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions. The tours specifically have focused on the Shandong Province, the area in which Moon worked. Moon, for whom the offering was named, was one of the first single women missionaries to China.

In initial negotiations with Chinese tour officials, one particular building in Penglai became the center of interest.

"During that time, government authorities and tourist leaders became aware of the significance of the Penglai church building because of our interest," said Catherine Allen, WMU associate executive director.

The church had been partitioned into a small clinic but no longer was in use, said Allen. It was in disrepair and had been boarded up.

When Chinese tourism officials questioned WMU leaders about their interest in the building's restoration, the women saw it as an opportunity for establishing a meeting place for a congregation. Chinese Christian leaders had long had an interest in securing a place for Christians in the area to worship.

"We told them, 'yes,' we were interested in seeing the building restored, but not as a museum for tours," Allen said. "'We are interested to know if it can be used by a congregation,'" they told the Chinese officials.

"At that time, there was no open church in this part of China. The nearest one was about 40 miles away," she explained.

Since tour groups began arriving in Penglai in March 1988, the building restoration progressed, financed by contributions from Chinese and at least one Chinese church, but no sign of its use as a place of worship surfaced -- until recently.

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When national WMU President Marjorie J. McCullough lead a group to Penglai in October, they discovered that the building not only had been restored completely, but a congregation of about 100 people was meeting in the church.

"Because they don't know a lot of hymns, they meet an hour before a service to learn hymns using flip charts," McCullough said. "That's what they were doing when we got to the church to see it -- learning hymns."

The Western Christians joined the Chinese Christians in a spontaneous worship service.

"The lay leader of the church led us in doing something we could do together," she said. "We recited the Lord's Prayer. It was great. One Hispanic woman in our group said it in Spanish. We had two Brazilians with us, and they said it in Portuguese."

The impact of the building restoration on the Chinese of Penglai also has made an impact on McCullough and other WMU leaders.

"It shows that no place is truly closed to the gospel," Allen said. "It shows that tourism is one way to make a witness possible. But the main thing I have felt is that it is an affirmation that what is done for God will last."

Allen described the connection WMU has had to the building in the past: "The Penglai church building had been built just before Lottie Moon arrived in China in 1873. It was designed and paid for by foreign missionary T.P. Crawford, but the (Southern Baptist) Foreign Mission Board had agreed to reimburse him for the cost when funds were available. The board did not have funds for repayment.

"However, the women of Virginia and Georgia had been raising a 'Moon House Fund' in order to finance building a personal residence for Lottie and Edmonia Moon. But when Lottie was able to take over an existing missionary residence instead, she suggested the women permit the fund to be used to repay Crawford. So, that church building in Penglai was paid for by our foremothers."

Allen pointed to the reopening of the Penglai church as an example of what can happen when taking a Christian witness into another country.

"We're learning principles through the China tours which can be used in other countries," she said. "I don't know that we've tested the power of a well-trained, disciplined group moving in to study another culture and leaving a positive example of Christianity."

WMU began sponsoring tours to Lottie Moon's China earlier this year and has 17 tours scheduled for 1989.