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89-19

Paraguay Baptists hopeful  
after Stroessner's ouster

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

ASUNCION, Paraguay (BP)--The bloody overthrow of Paraguay's military dictator of 34 years has left Baptists sorrowful over the loss of life but hoping for a new democracy.

"Most people seem to be in a prayerful, hopeful attitude," said Tom Kent, a Southern Baptist missionary physician at the Baptist hospital in Asuncion, Paraguay's capital.

"They seem to be happy that things are working out the way they are," in that Latin America's longest-ruling dictator, Alfredo Stroessner, has been replaced by a general pledging democratic reforms, Kent said. But "they're sorry that folks had to lose their lives."

Wire services reported as many as 300 people may have been killed Feb. 3 in early-morning fighting between troops loyal to Stroessner and forces commanded by the new military leader, Gen. Andres Rodriguez.

Baptist leaders from throughout Paraguay had finished the first session of the Evangelical Baptist Convention of Paraguay's annual meeting several hours before the coup.

"Everybody had gone home for the night," Kent recounted. The convention's leaders canceled the remainder of the sessions. The high school where the meeting was being held is several blocks from military facilities where tanks commanded by Rodriguez attacked troops in Stroessner's presidential unit.

Paraguay's uncertain future calls for prayer, Kent said. Rodriguez, the new president, has pledged to uphold the country's constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion and of assembly; hold democratic elections; and uphold human rights.

But the new president also has called for renewed respect for the Roman Catholic Church, Kent reported. Roman Catholicism is named as the official state religion in the constitution.

A Southern Baptist church association in Alabama that began a partnership with the Paraguayan convention last year still plans to assist Baptists in the South American nation.

A team of 12 church members from Etowah Baptist Association in Gadsden is scheduled to work with Paraguayan churches March 17-28. George Williams, the association's director of missions, said, "As far as we know, there is no problem" with continuing the partnership. He said he plans to stay in touch with Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board officials aware of further events in the country.

Williams was part of a 14-member evangelistic team from the association that went to Paraguay in October.

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Teleconference prompts  
prayer request exchange

By Susan Todd

N-00  
(WMM)

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--As missionaries asked viewers to pray for non-Christians in the United States, telephone operators were doing some praying of their own during the 1989 Southern Baptist Home Missions Teleconference Feb. 5.

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Traditionally, phone calls primarily have come from viewers who had missions questions to ask or who wanted to report their viewing site. But this year, phone operators discovered that several non-Christians and hurting people were watching and calling the toll-free number.

In an interview during the teleconference, Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis told of one phone call he answered. A woman whose husband died two years ago called to say she was lonely.

Lewis told her one good thing about being a Christian is that Christians never are alone. He asked her if she were a Christian. She said she wasn't sure.

"I read some Scripture to her and talked with her," Lewis said. Afterward, the woman prayed to receive Christ into her life.

"When we finished, she said, 'Praise God,'" he said.

One woman called to say her granddaughter is missing and asked for prayer. Another called to say her marriage was falling apart. She, too, wanted prayer. Even an hour-and-a-half after the show aired live, the phones still were ringing with prayer requests.

In addition to exchanging prayer requests during this year's teleconference, several Southern Baptist home missionaries also shared with viewers the work they do.

Lori and Rob Pengra, missionaries in Scappoose, Ore., told of their method of starting churches by phone.

"We made 3,600 phone calls, followed up with mailouts for five straight weeks," Pengra said. Going through telephone directories and placing calls, the Pengras asked two questions of each person who answered the phone call: "Do you have a church home? If not, can we send you information about a new church we are going to start?"

"We called them all back right before the first service," he said. "We asked them to bring cookies ... to be ushers." On that first Sunday, 40 people whom the Pengras never had seen showed up for church services.

But more remains to be done, and they say prayer will help. "The best way to pray for us is for the development of leadership and for a vision for church starting," Pengra said.

"Our heart is for the whole area, not just Scappoose," Mrs. Pengra added.

Starting churches also is what Ray Allen has invested his life in doing. Allen is director of evangelism and stewardship for the New England Baptist Convention, which includes six states.

"Half of our churches do not own their own buildings," Allen said. "Twenty-five percent of our members speak a language other than English."

Allen cited the crucial need for more pastors and trained laypeople. "Pray that God will continue to raise up leaders ... to touch a strategic corner of his vineyard," he said.

Augustine Salazar, director of migrant ministries in California, described the fields in which he ministers.

"As we minister to the migrants of California, we find they are very open to the gospel as long as we don't criticize their religion," Salazar said.

Some 400,000 to 500,000 migrants work in California, he said. Almost 100 percent of the migrants speak Spanish. By the year 2000, Hispanics will be the largest ethnic group in the state, some demographers predict.

"The greatest need among migrants is spiritual. The Lord said to Moses, 'Moses, gather the people together -- the men, women and children,'" Salazar said. "Those people are the migrants. The state is ministering to their physical needs, and it is up to the church to meet their spiritual needs."

Salazar, like the other missionaries, requested prayer, and he emphasized the importance prayer plays in his work.

"Pray for me as I minister. Pray that I can minister in a more meaningful way, and that I can find more volunteers to work with the migrants."

Salazar also requested prayer for God to provide bilingual summer missionaries to work in his area.

Other home missionaries were featured during the broadcast. John Haeger of Fraser, Co., requested prayer for the Baptist church in nearby Winter Park. Members are facing an April 1 deadline for finding a new place to meet.

Retired home missionary Clarence Hanshaw of Ridgeland, S.C., asked Southern Baptists to pray that black pastors will have more educational opportunities.

Other ways Southern Baptists can be involved in home missions also were highlighted -- sacrificial giving to support missions and volunteering to serve on the home mission field.

HMB President Lewis and Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union national President Marjorie J. McCullough both emphasized this year's Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions. The national goal is \$39 million.

Lewis told viewers Southern Baptists only gave 18 cents per non-Christian in America through the offering last year.

"We've got to do better than that," McCullough said. "We can do better."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU

Baptist migrant workers  
can harvest crops, souls

By Ken Camp

*N-Texas*

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WESLACO, Texas (BP)--As they move north gathering the nation's harvest this year, Southern Baptist migrant farm workers can reap a harvest of souls as lay missionaries, according to speakers at the first-ever conference for Texas-based migrant workers.

Pastors of five lower Rio Grande Valley churches and lay leaders of other area congregations met with Southern Baptist Home Mission Board representatives from 10 states during the conference Jan. 29 at Grace Hispanic Baptist Church in Weslaco, Texas.

The conference was sponsored by Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association, the Home Mission Board and the church ministries section of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"If a person has Jesus in his life, he is a missionary. If he does not, he is a mission field," said Nathan Porter, HMB national consultant for migrant ministry. "We are either a target for missions or a people on mission."

Pointing out that every Christian believer is called, gifted and sent out to be a witness, Porter encouraged the South Texas church leaders to carry a message to migrant workers who are members of their congregations: "We need you desperately as lay missionaries. Whereas you are now non-resident church members for about six months of the year, you could be missionaries during that time."

Bob Gross, director of the migrant mission center in Hope, Ark., said 2 million legal migrant workers are in the United States, along with anywhere from 3 million to 10 million undocumented workers.

"Think what a great missionary force that would be if each Christian farm worker shared Jesus with his family and friends," he said.

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Gross added he envisions a network of Southern Baptist migrant workers sharing Christ with unchurched fellow workers, starting home Bible studies along the way and sharing the names and addresses of their contacts with Home Mission Board state representatives.

He encouraged migrant workers traveling through Arkansas to stop at the migrant mission center, a ministry sponsored by the Home Mission Board, the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and Southwest Arkansas Baptist Association, noting that about 100 migrants accept Christ each year at the center.

Jerry Johnson, director of Rio Grande Valley Association, encouraged the migrant farm workers to realize that many people they encounter in their work will not be Christians, that Jesus is their only hope of salvation and that God wants to use willing Christians as instruments to bring others into fellowship with himself.

Although some people traditionally have been reluctant to come forward and identify themselves as migrant workers, Robert Sowell, Texas Baptist Christian social ministries consultant, said he believes the conference was a first step at helping Baptist migrants to recognize the important role they can play in home missions.

Tentative plans already are being made for an all-day Saturday training event next year to help equip migrant workers in personal evangelism and church planting, Sowell said.

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Discipleship motivates ministry  
in Leesburg, Fla., church

By Terri Lackey

F-SSB

Baptist Press  
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LEESBURG, Fla. (BP)--Hang a right onto 13th Street from Main in the central business district of Leesburg, Fla., and begin counting the houses on the left.

First is a huge, two-story, gray house -- currently under renovation -- but soon to be a healing place for women and their children who have been displaced by abuse, poverty or some other crisis.

Next are two red-brick, diesel-splashed buildings packed with furniture, clothes and household goods. A mechanic's shop in previous years, the structure is a thrift shop in its embryonic state.

Skip a house and then come to a bold blue house, beautifully landscaped with seemingly skillful hands. Middle-aged men with stubbled chins are milling about the yard. They are residents of the rescue mission sponsored by First Baptist Church of Leesburg.

The next house, a sandy-colored residence, is an emergency rescue center for children; skip another house, and then comes a pregnancy care center that offers free pregnancy tests and Christian counseling for any woman who walks through the door in need.

This street lined with compassion is no coincidence. The congregation at First Baptist of Leesburg has decided its mission is to minister to people who are truly in need.

Pastor Charles Roesel is proud of his church, located just across the street from the ministry projects, and the various ministries it supports, about 50 in all.

"We're interested in seeing churches all over the convention start doing these kinds of things. They are not that costly," he said.

The Leesburg congregation, with a resident membership of 2,000 and average Sunday school attendance of about 1,000, realizes total receipts of \$1.2 million. Out of that, Roesel estimates the rescue mission, women's care center, children's shelter and pregnancy care center cost about \$95,000.

Expense comes in start-up costs, he acknowledged. The house for the women's shelter cost the church \$50,000 and renovations are running about \$20,000.

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The rescue mission, begun in 1982 as the first ministry, sleeps about 10-15 men per night, about 250 per month, said Roesel, who has been pastor of the church about 13 years.

"We take these people in and provide shelter, food, clothing and help them find work," he noted. "More importantly than all that, we confront them with the claims of Christ."

It was homeless people who showed Roesel how vital ministering to people in need could be.

"I used to resent having to deal with transients. But God really laid me low on how much he loves these people," said Roesel. "He said, 'Here they are knocking at your door, and you're turning them away.' It was absurd (turning them away). It is one of the greatest opportunities for witness that I know."

One result of these ministries is increased baptisms, Roesel said.

"The church baptized 339 last year. That placed us sixth in the state convention of 1,700 churches," some two and three times Leesburg's size, he said. "And it is through our ministries that over half of these were reached. I call that hard-core evangelism."

Motivation for the ministries has come in large part from church member involvement in MasterLife and MasterBuilder, adult discipleship training courses produced by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department. In the five years Leesburg has offered MasterLife, about 75 members have completed the course, he said. He had no figures for MasterBuilder.

"We use MasterLife and MasterBuilder heavily, and this moves the people into a willingness for service," Roesel said. "Our people have been matured through MasterLife and MasterBuilder to recognize their gifts and how to use them for the Lord."

Betsy Howard is one of those people.

Through MasterLife, Howard learned she had the gift of exhortation. She has used that gift to teach MasterLife and cultivate other leaders in her church. "All the ladies I teach come out of the class with at least one specific area of ministry," she said.

The pregnancy care center, explained Debbie Pinkston, director of the center, is one specific ministry of the church that uses graduates of MasterLife.

Like the rescue mission, Pinkston uses the pregnancy care center as an evangelistic tool. Since the church added the center in 1987, 82 people have made professions of faith through the center, she said.

"We witness to every one of them. We find out where they are spiritually, and if they tell us they're not interested, we don't push it," Pinkston said. More than 1,100 girls and women between the ages of 12 and 46 were tested for pregnancy in 1988, she said. The church added the center in 1987.

Of the children who stay in the children's shelter home, Roesel said, about 65 percent to 70 percent have been sexually abused.

The church works with the state's human resource services in housing the children for up to 30 days until a suitable home is found for them. About eight children stay in the home at one time, he said.

About 380 have stayed in the children's home since 1985, when the church added the ministry, and many church members have taken children into their homes, Roesel said.

These "special ministries of the church are far-reaching, touching more than just people with whom the church ministers, Roesel said.

"This is marketplace evangelism, and it's a tremendously important way to reach the people," he said. "The lost community is really impressed by a church that helps the people."

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