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April 11, 1989

89-56

Gospel openness reported
amid Namibia fighting

By Marty Croll

N-FMB

OSHAKATI, Namibia (BP)--Fighting broke out in early April in a border area of Namibia where Southern Baptist missionaries report great openness to the Christian gospel.

Eight congregations with a total attendance of about 500 people meet in an area where South African-led security forces and guerrillas of the South West Africa People's Organization clashed in bloody skirmishes. Two of the congregations are new and have not organized into churches.

"We have new church groups being started practically every month," said Carlos Owens, the sole Southern Baptist missionary assigned to develop churches in the northern section of Namibia. "The people are responding like everything. I told somebody the other day we're just trying to keep up with it."

Owens and his wife, Myrtice, are from Paris, Tenn., and Dunedin, Fla., respectively. They live in Tsumeb, a town about 200 miles south of the fighting. They work with about 30 congregations, many of them along the northern border with Angola. Another Southern Baptist missionary couple, Adney and Vel Cross of Clarksville, Tenn., live farther north in Oshakati, where they said they were able to hear gunfire from the skirmishes.

In a recently concluded accord for Namibian independence from South Africa, the South West Africa People's Organization had agreed to withdraw its forces from the country and maintain them in bases in neighboring Angola at least 100 miles north of the border. Under the plan, Namibia will hold its own elections in November. The organization has been fighting for independence since 1966 and is said to enjoy strong support in the north.

But according to news reports, South African security forces have encountered the organization's guerrillas who are said to have been entering Namibia from Angola since April 1. The reports said some U.N. officials suggested the organization's troops mistakenly thought the final peace accord would allow them to set up bases in Namibia -- a misunderstanding resulting in some of the fiercest skirmishes yet reported in the area.

In a letter to Owens, one Baptist pastor told him fighting was raging all around him and was very close to many people in his congregation. But because of poor communications, Owens was unable to determine whether any church people were hurt or injured in the crossfire.

Vel Cross reported hearing gunfire at night and seeing hundreds of South African security force members around Oshakati. Rumors circulated that the insurgents planned to attack the white district of Oshakati, where South African security forces are based, a few miles away from the Cross home.

"We don't feel like it's unsafe (to be here)," Mrs. Cross said. "At the point we feel we ever should leave, we will. We won't take a foolish risk."

Her husband, who is suffering from an unidentified ailment that causes severe chills and blisters in the eyes, teaches in a teacher-training college within walking distance of their home. The Crosses, first-term missionaries, attend a Baptist church in an outlying area and work with a group in town.

"People told us we were foolish to move out of the white security district, but in many ways I feel safer here," said Mrs. Cross. "When we lived there, we were under mortar attack twice." The Owambo people who populate the area have "been very protective of us," she added.

Hymnal committee work progresses;
two former editors honored

By Charles Willis

N-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--The 78-member committee to produce a new Southern Baptist hymnal honored editors of previous "Baptist Hymnal" editions during on April 6-7 meeting in Nashville.

W. Hines Sims, editor of the 1956 edition, and William J. Reynolds, editor of the 1975 edition, were guests at a banquet and program to honor their contributions to Southern Baptists' hymn singing.

James L. Sullivan, retired president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, called Sims "one of the smartest men in the music field I ever knew," while board President Lloyd Elder praised Reynolds for "giving his life in the training of ministers of the gospel."

Gary Cook, the board's vice president for church program organizations, said both musicians have contributed to the lives of Southern Baptists who "use hymns to mark those very special moments in our own heritage."

Sims, who retired as director of the board's church music department in 1970, is the author of several books in addition to having edited numerous hymnals and choral collections published by Broadman Press.

Reynolds, professor of church music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Fort Worth, Texas, since 1980, held various editorial positions in the board's church music department from 1955 until becoming head of the department in 1971. He is a composer and arranger of sacred choral music and has been music director of meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Youth World Conference. He is the author of several books on hymnody and singing.

In other business, the committee reviewed about 250 hymns, choruses, calls to worship, benedictions and choral responses. They earlier completed a review of contents of the 1975 edition of the hymnal.

Wesley Forbis, director of the board's church music department and editor of the hymnal, said he expects 800 pieces of music will be approved for possible inclusion in the hymnal, of which about 575 will be used.

While the meeting was the final event for the full hymnal committee, some subcommittee work will continue throughout this year, and voting will be conducted by mail ballots. Forbis said new, unsolicited musical material continues to be received by the church music department.

A report of the worship aids subcommittee included unveiling visual symbols proposed for inclusion, and a list of possible Scriptures for responsive readings was presented.

Committee members affirmed announcement of the hymnal name, "The Baptist Hymnal," by Forbis, who said many Southern Baptists had suggested names to be used.

"The heritage of the 1956 and 1975 editions was strongly considered," he said. "Among deciding factors in selecting a name for the hymnal is that it is to be a hymnbook of Southern Baptist doctrine."

A family of 28 products and an ongoing periodical to support the use of the hymnal were reported to committee members, including orchestration of the entire hymnal and notations for handbells and guitar, among others. The number of support products represents an increase from 17 products related to the 1975 edition.

"The Baptist Hymnal" and all related products will be released in March 1991 during PraiSing II, a music worship celebration in Nashville.

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

Texas CLC chief urges increases in child abuse prevention funds

By Ken Camp

N-Texas

DALLAS (BP)--Federal challenge grants to state children's trust funds offer a tremendous return on the original investment, both economically and in prevention of suffering by children, Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, recently testified before a congressional subcommittee.

Stickland submitted testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Select Education April 6 in support of reauthorizing challenge grants for children's trust funds. The Child Abuse Prevention Federal Challenge Grants Act should be reauthorized and funding should be increased to about \$15 million to provide a 50-50 match to eligible state expenditures for trust funds, he said.

"These funds deal with one of the most fundamental problems that we face in our society," said Strickland, first chair of the Children's Trust Fund of Texas. More than 1.5 million child-abuse/neglect cases were confirmed in the nation in 1986, and the rate of confirmed abuse increased 66 percent from 1980 to 1986, he noted.

The damage of child abuse is high both in human suffering to victims and in societal costs, Stickland said. Sixty-five percent of the inmates in the Texas Department of Corrections were abused as children, he pointed out.

"The cost of treating our failures is inundating us," he said. "Our prisons are overflowing, drug crimes engulf us, our mental hospitals are underequipped to handle the need, our public health services are taxed beyond their capacities, child abuse outraces our ability to respond and social services programs reel from overload.

"We are investing huge amounts of money to treat our problems. We are investing little to prevent them."

The federal challenge funds have had a significant impact on child-abuse prevention in Texas, Stickland noted. Two years of matching funds have enabled children's advocates to develop a public awareness program, launch an adolescent parenting instructional pilot project, conduct professional forums and a poll on child discipline, and provide technical assistance to communities developing local child-abuse prevention programs.

"In light of the impact that child abuse has on our society, I suggest that \$15 million is a minimum investment the federal government should be making in trying to prevent this massive problem," Strickland said, noting that the proposal is about equal to the amount budgeted for Senate stationery.

"This is at least as important as one SH-60 helicopter for the Navy or one 'Super Stallion' helicopter for the Marines," he said.

"Few investments are ultimately more important in this country than investing in the lives of our children. Few investments in the lives of our children are paying higher ultimate dividends than investments in child-abuse-related programs through the children's trust funds across this nation."

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Alcohol-warning labels criticized by supporters

By Louis Moore

N-LO (LL)

Baptist Press 4/11/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has issued a temporary rule on warning labels for alcoholic beverages as required by legislation enacted by Congress in 1988.

But the temporary rule has drawn criticism from groups such as the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which supported the new law.

The complaint arises from the way the bureau would allow alcoholic beverage companies to place the labels on the bottles.

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Larry Braidfoot, the commission's general counsel, said the bureau's ruling would allow the companies to place the warning labels on the back or side of the bottles and to print those labels in hard-to-read print.

That ruling is inconsistent with the intention of the law, he added.

Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., principal sponsor of the legislation in the last session of Congress, has said the bureau's ruling "would circumvent my intention in pursuing passage of this vital legislation."

The warning label required by law would convey the information that beverage alcohol may cause birth defects and affect one's ability to drive an automobile. The legislation was supported by a coalition of more than 100 consumer, health, parent and religious organizations.

Coalition leaders have called for letters of protest of the temporary rule and of support for requirements that the warning labels be on the front of the container in a type that is not difficult to read and is highlighted by a box outlining the type. They also urge support for a requirement that the warning label be larger on bigger containers.

"Passage of this legislation required 20 years of hard work," said Braidfoot. "Southern Baptists and others concerned with the effects of beverage alcohol should insist that the law be implemented in a manner that adequately conveys the warning required by law."

Letters of concern can be addressed to Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, 1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20226, Braidfoot said.

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CLC, Southwestern consider
Fort Worth seminar in 1991

By Louis Moore

N- CO
(CLC)

Baptist Press
4/11/89

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Leaders of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have agreed to explore the possibility of holding the commission's 1991 annual seminar on the seminary campus in Fort Worth, Texas.

During an April 4-6 visit to speak to Christian ethics classes at the seminary, CLC Executive Director Richard Land approached Southwestern President Russell Dilday and other seminary leaders about the possibility of the seminary cooperating with and supporting such a seminar.

The commission holds its annual seminar each March in different cities. The seminars focus on various themes involving Christian ethics.

Dates, theme and speakers for the 1991 seminar are yet to be determined. Land and Dilday both agreed to seek support and coordination of dates and sites with their respective staffs.

"The program assignments of Southwestern Seminary and the Christian Life Commission overlap at numerous points," said Land. "There is obvious advantage in our seeking ways to work together to sensitize and inform Southern Baptists on the moral and ethical demands of the gospel in application to everyday life.

"The kinds of dialogue and sharing of ideas and views afforded by invitations such as the one that brings me to this seminary greatly facilitate the possibilities of working together on numerous projects in the future," Land said.

During Land's visit to the seminary, various seminary leaders, professors and students expressed a desire for a closer working relationship between the commission and the seminary.

Guy Greenfield, professor of Christian ethics, asked Land to keep a file on "everyone who has been through" the seminary's doctoral program in Christian ethics and use that file as a resource for prospective speakers, writers and employees. Land said he was warmly received and was favorably pleased with a roster and information files he recently received on the seminary's doctoral graduates.

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Land told students in a variety of ethics classes: "We Christians must be both salt and light. As salt, we help keep a decadent society from rotting. As light, we bring the message of Jesus Christ to bear on our culture.

"We must recover a comprehensive understanding of the Christian Gospel and its application to our daily lives."

Christians need to become gravely concerned about humanistic influences which are transforming American society from secular to pagan, he said: "Christians should be the most humanitarian of all people. Christians should be interested in the humanities. And we need to keep pointing out that those are different from destructive humanism."

Southwestern students asked Land for a list of the commission's priorities on social and ethical issues. Land responded that he cannot categorize issues into No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, but must group those that deserve the most attention together in clusters.

In the top category, he included racism, pornography, abortion, and alcohol and drug abuse. He said, however, these do not represent an inclusive list. But these four issues should top any list because they result in the loss of human life on a consistent, even daily, basis, he added.

"We're going to have a bigger focus on families than the Christian Life Commission has had in recent years," Land said.

In two graduate seminars, students asked Land about the political tension in the Southern Baptist Convention. He said he discerns five groups emerging within the convention -- liberals, moderates, conservatives who want to preserve the status quo, conservatives who believe the "course correction" has not gone far enough and fundamentalists.

SBC agency heads must avoid overt convention political activities, including endorsement of candidates for convention president, he said reiterating his pledge to abide by that policy.

When one seminary student called himself a "moderate" and said he felt people with his beliefs are being excluded from convention life, Land asked the student why he chose to label himself in that manner. The student cited his stand on capital punishment, noting he believes capital punishment is allowed by the Bible but must be practiced with equality and caution.

Land responded by noting that until 1988 the commission's official pamphlet on capital punishment said that as it is practiced in the United States capital punishment is "contrary to the spirit and teachings of Christ" and called upon Christians to "support the abolition of capital punishment in those states and federal jurisdictions where it is now prescribed."

That pamphlet is now under revision, he reported. The commission's current position is similar to the one the student cited, that capital punishment is an option God gives to the civil magistrates but which must be practiced without prejudice based on race, creed or color and which is limited in the crimes it can be employed against, he said.

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Youth baptisms up slightly
for first gain since 1982

By Joe Westbury

N-HMB

Baptist Press
4/11/89

ATLANTA (BP)--For the first time in six years, Southern Baptists have posted a slight gain in baptisms among youth.

A total of 80,506 young people ages 12-17 were baptized by the denomination in 1988, according to Southern Baptists' annual statistical report. That figure is up 606, or 0.8 percent, from the 79,900 posted the previous year.

Southern Baptists reported a record 137,667 youth baptisms in 1972, and the second-highest number, 102,259, in 1982.

"What is significant about this increase is that we have registered a gain in a year in which there was a decline in births for this age group," explained Dean Finley, national youth evangelism consultant for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

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That gain is the exception in a period of repeated decreases in population for the age group and alarming drops in baptisms, he added.

From 1972 to 1987, the nation's youth population declined 13.2 percent, while baptisms for the age group plunged 41.9 percent.

Last year's increase remains a mystery because it cannot be explained by any particular program or evangelistic emphasis, Finley said: "It's basically an act of God that cannot be attributed to any particular program or methodology. We have found no common thread among any of the (Baptist) state conventions that explains the increase."

However, this age group, whose members were not reached as children, now provides a greater challenge for the denomination, as the young adults enter their college and career days.

"Many youth are now entering their adult years as unsaved individuals because we didn't do a good job in reaching them earlier. Churches and campus workers need to be aware of the challenge that is before them," Finley said.

Bobby Sunderland, the board's direct-evangelism director, expressed optimism over the increase in baptisms for youth: "It's real encouraging to see the new emphasis on evangelism in the youth programs in Baptist churches. If we're not careful, youth activities can become 'Coke and cookie' parties just for our own youth."

Young people are being encouraged more to reach out to their unchurched friends and are finding them "very receptive to the gospel witness," he said.

In a separate category, baptisms for children ages 6-8 broke the 40,000 barrier for the first time, with 40,524 baptisms. That figure is up 8.5 percent from 37,079 posted the previous year.

The previous high for the group was in 1982, when 37,690 baptisms were recorded.

Baptisms for children ages 9-11 were up 4.5 percent, to 66,839, an increase from the previous year's 63,831. The increase was not a record, since Southern Baptists baptized 92,168 in 1980.

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'Lost generation' poses
challenge of evangelism

By Mark Kelly

F-LO
(ARK)

Baptist Press
4/11/89

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--A new "lost generation" is coming of age in America, youth ministers report.

In the 1960s, the term referred to a multitude of teenagers and young adults who "turned on" to hard drugs and free sex and "dropped out" of the mainstream of American life.

In the 1990s and beyond, it may identify the hundreds of thousands of teenagers that Southern Baptist churches have failed to win to faith in Christ during the last decade and a half. And, according to one observer, it may well be dramatized by empty pews and unmet budgets in thousands of churches across the country.

For more than 10 years, Southern Baptists have been concerned about a decline in the denomination's baptisms, which are down 24 percent since 1972. But as serious as that decline may be, a Southern Baptist evangelism expert has identified a trend he finds even more disturbing: a precipitous drop in the number of teenagers professing faith in Christ and being baptized into local congregations.

Dean Finley, a national consultant on youth evangelism for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, explains that the rate at which Southern Baptist churches are baptizing teenagers has declined far more sharply than the overall Baptist rate. As evidence, he points to statistics which show that in 1972 Southern Baptists nationwide baptized 137,667 young persons between 12 and 17 years of age. Sixteen years later, in 1988, only 79,000 were immersed into membership. That amounts to a decline of 42 percent.

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Finley finds the implications of that trend staggering. If Southern Baptists allow the decline to continue unchecked, he projects the whole denomination will be baptizing fewer than 30,000 teenagers per year before the decade is out. And if Southern Baptist churches had just maintained their 1972 level of youth baptisms, 588,000 more teenagers would have found Christ as savior during the intervening years.

The decline in youth baptisms is a complicated phenomenon, and one that is not easily explained, Finley says.

He points out that one contributing factor has been the overall decline in the number of teenagers in the U.S. population. With the baby boom generation passing into middle adulthood, teenagers are constituting an even smaller percentage of the population. As a group, the number of teenagers has declined 13 percent since 1972.

Yet that accounts for only a small part of the decline in youth baptisms, Finley says. He observes that, while Southern Baptist youth Sunday school enrollments have declined at about the same rate as the youth population in general, the bottom has fallen out of youth baptisms.

That reinforces Finley's concern for non-Christian youth. "The statistics tell us that not only are we winning fewer and fewer lost youth from outside the church, but we also are reaching fewer and fewer of our own teenagers who are enrolled in our Bible study programs," Finley says. "Particularly in the South, our churches have a high percentage of local youth enrolled in Sunday school, but they are not reaching them for Christ."

Whatever the causes of the decline, Finley believes one factor is not the lack of resources devoted by local churches to youth ministry.

"Without any question, churches today have more and better programs, more financial and physical resources, and more and better trained professional leadership than they had in the early 1970s," he says. "And yet, in the midst of all that, baptisms have declined.

"That should tell us that one thing we don't need in another youth program or emphasis. These things do not necessarily cause problems in reaching youth, nor do they need to be eliminated, but increases in those areas do not automatically mean youth baptisms will be turned around."

Finley speculates that one possibility is churches are not confronting teenagers individually with simple questions like, "Would you like to accept Christ as your savior?"

"The gospel still draws individuals. It has not lost its power," says Finley. "And today's kids are as responsive to the gospel as ever. Whenever you declare the gospel and give them an opportunity to respond, they turn to Christ like they always have.

"It may be that, in the midst of all the other things we are doing for youth, we have stopped giving them the opportunities to respond to the gospel. If we cannot identify a place in our program where youth could get saved, we have to ask ourselves serious questions about what we are doing."

Johnny Burnett, minister to youth at First Baptist Church of Russellville, Ark., says he and many of his colleagues have seen what is happening and are troubled by the trend.

However, Burnett expresses reservations about Finley's claim that teenagers are as responsive as ever. He sees significant cultural developments that have affected youth responsiveness and hampered church efforts to reach teenagers.

Whereas community institutions used to plan their calendars with local churches in mind, today congregations increasingly find themselves competing with school activities and see parents allowing their youth to choose the school activities over church, he notes.

The church is outside of and running counter to the culture stream, Burnett adds, and that generates pressures on youth that were not as pronounced 20 years ago.

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The problem is further complicated by adults who fail to model the witnessing Christian life, Burnett adds: "Teenagers exaggerate the wrong they see adults do. If they don't see their parents witnessing to their lost neighbors, they won't witness to their lost friends. They just fall into the mold."

Burnett believes one-to-one relationships are the key to winning youth to Christ. While enjoyable group activities are necessary because today's youth, like their parents, are entertainment-oriented, it is nevertheless difficult to translate decisions made in a large group setting into baptisms and personal discipleship.

"Activities are important," he says. "We need to share the gospel in a culturally relevant manner without compromising it. But group activities cannot replace one-to-one relationships. That is where a turnaround in youth baptisms will have to happen."

Randy Brantley, minister of youth at Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Ark., agrees with Burnett's assessment. He fears many youth programs have shifted away from one-to-one relationships toward the "big event."

"It may be our churches are guilty of entertaining kids, rather than discipling them," Brantley speculates: Parents of teenagers who want them "kept interested" exert pressure on church leaders. Eventually the question degenerates into who has the bigger and better show. But instead of capitulating, youth leaders need to strike a balance between good programs and intentional evangelism.

"Students today are looking for an anchor. They want to keep their lives on course," concludes Brantley. "When crises come, their anchor will be that they have been grounded in the Christian life. If we fail to give them that anchor, we have failed them."

Southern Baptists absolutely must address themselves to the decline in baptisms generally and with youth particularly, says Jim Lagrone, associate in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention evangelism department. "This is a crisis of astronomical proportions," he asserts. "We apparently are not even reaching our own teenagers, much less those in the lost world.

"We are literally talking about hundreds of thousands of teenagers who are lost to eternity, teenagers we would have won to Christ 20 years ago. They are struggling hard, looking for answers. Some of them have become so hard, looking for answers. Some of them have become so despondent, they have turned to suicide to escape the pain.

"But the problem doesn't stop there. We are also talking about the generation that should be moving into the leadership of our churches. Since we have not been winning them to Christ, who will stand in our pulpits? Who will teach our Sunday school classes? Who will help us meet our budgets?

"If our hearts cannot be burdened by the thought of hundreds of thousands of teenagers going into eternity without Christ, perhaps we can be moved by a vision of empty pews and unmet budgets."

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Former drug addict
lives out his sermons

By Breena Kent Paine

F-10
(WDBTS)

Baptist Press
4/11/89

HOUMA, La. (BP)--Frank Tenorio proves his preaching.

A former drug addict and alcoholic, Tenorio was "healed" when he became a Christian. Now he ministers to people of similar backgrounds.

As bilingual pastor of First Baptist Church of King's Beach, Calif., affiliated with Nevada's Sierra Baptist Association, Tenorio ministers to Lake Tahoe hotel and restaurant workers from Latin American countries. Many of them are poor drug addicts, alcoholics, and abused wives and children.

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"Basically, I'm a street minister in the sense that I'm working with people one-on-one outside of the church setting," he said. "In treating the people I do, you have to treat the family, because that is what they have to go back to" when freed of their addictions and abuse.

Tenorio understands this more than most, for his life once was like that.

He was born in a log cabin in the mountains of Colorado and raised in the "skid row" area of Denver. His parents worked, and Tenorio was left unsupervised as a child.

At the age of 4, he was sent to jail for stealing mail, and was sent again for burglary when he was in kindergarten. A drug addict and an alcoholic by the age of 12, he constantly was told by family and others that he was worthless. "I resorted to stealing in order to have the kind of life and things that would attract friends," he said.

Throughout his life, Tenorio began but never finished his schooling "because they (family, friends and others) programmed me to self-destruct" by telling him he was a failure.

In 1960 he married Julia Juarez of Frederick, Colo. They had four children, "and I made a mess out of their lives, too," Tenorio said. "By 1977 our family had come apart, our children were running away from home, our finances were gone."

While filing for a divorce, Tenorio moved in with his sister, a Christian who had been praying for him for many years. Out of respect, he accompanied her one Sunday to a small church in Truckee, Calif., where he heard the testimony of a new Christian who said, "I want to praise God because it's so neat to cry for joy instead of for sorrow."

"That was the key to my receiving Christ," Tenorio recalled. "I turned to my sister and said, 'I want to have that.' My sister said, 'You can,'" and explained that by accepting Jesus Christ, he could be clean of every sin.

Tenorio prayed, "God, if you're real, and if what my sister is telling me about your son Jesus Christ is real, ... give me back my family, and I'll serve you for the rest of my life."

"Within three months, my wife, my four children, and my 81-year-old mother were living with me. They were all saved," he said. "God healed me of my drug addiction and my alcoholism. He was faithful on his word, and then he called me on mine."

Later, as a member of First Baptist Church of King's Beach, Tenorio often helped the pastor hand out food to the poor. When the pastor transferred to another church, the members asked Tenorio, "What do you plan to do with God's call in your life?" When he answered that he planned to act on that call, they asked him to be their pastor.

Located in a "ghetto on the lake," First Church was in financial need, however. Rather than paying rent on an apartment, Tenorio, who works as a shepherd and a cook in the area, moved into the church building so his family could pay rent to the church.

Because the log cabin church has no insulation, the winter wind often whistles through the cracks between logs, and temperatures may drop to 19 below zero. In addition, the roof leaks, and the Tenorios often find their bed soaked; but they are dedicated to keeping the church doors open.

Help has come through the hands of Mulberry Baptist Church in Houma, La., which took an interest in First Church through Louisiana Baptists' partnership with Nevada Baptists. The Houma church already has bought First Church a wood stove, and is working now to provide adequate insulation, a new roof and re-wiring for the building. This summer, Houma members plan to send a team of workers to lead a Vacation Bible School ministry with children in King's Beach.

"Mulberry has come to our rescue many times," Tenorio said, "by supporting me and encouraging me over the phone with prayer."

Through the triumphs and sorrows, he has found God is the provider of strength, and he wants to show drug addicts and alcoholics that God can perform a miracle in their lives just as he performed one in Tenorio's life.

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(BP) photo available upon request from New Orleans Seminary

Rural Missouri congregation:
'Our vision is the world'

By Shari Schubert

F- (MO)

AMY, Mo. (BP)--The gravel road that runs by Amy Baptist Church once was the main wagon route from Mountain Home, Ark., to West Plains, Mo. Travelers could stop and shop at the Missouri community's store or mail a letter at the Amy post office.

Those days are gone. Bypassed by Highway 160, the Amy community, eventually dwindled to one church -- Union Chapel -- and a cemetery. But about four years ago, a new white-frame church building appeared on the spot where the store used to be. The members of its congregation are demonstrating how a small, rural Baptist congregation can carry on a viable ministry to their community.

The Amy Baptist congregation is about 50 years old, said Pastor Larry Strobe. But until six-and-a-half years ago, the congregation shared the facilities of Union Chapel. The two congregations met together for Sunday school and alternated pastors, with the Baptist pastor preaching twice a month.

Strobe became pastor of the Amy congregation in 1982. Recognizing the limitations of using another church's facilities, the difficulties of blending Baptist doctrine with teachings of another denomination, and the potential for growth as a "full-time Baptist missionary body," he led the 23-member congregation to move out on its own.

Members met in the home of their Sunday school director until they could purchase property and build a new facility. The congregation has grown steadily, baptizing 79 people from 1983 through 1988, and growing to a resident membership of 115.

One of the keys to Amy's growth has been that the congregation "believes in getting outside of the four walls to minister in their community and surrounding area," explained Eva Jackson, a member of the church.

Youth and adult Sunday school teachers from the congregation share teaching duties for a Sunday school class at Pleasant Valley Manor, a West Plains, Mo., residential care facility for the elderly operated by Howell County Baptist Association through a non-profit corporation. Larry Hopkins, a welder who is Amy Church's volunteer youth minister, conducts mid-week Bible study at Pleasant Valley.

Members of the congregation also help provide singing and devotional services at two nursing homes. They help deliver meals to the homebound through the West Plains Senior Citizens' Center. The church also has a benevolence ministry that assists transients with food and gasoline and assists fire victims.

Located close to "Cloud 9" resort, Amy Church provides a place to worship for summer vacationers, many of them active Baptist families, Strobe noted.

In addition to Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services, Amy Church holds a Wednesday morning Bible study and prayer meeting, attended primarily by second-shift factory workers and elderly people who prefer not to get out at night. "This crowd is small," Strobe acknowledged, and added it probably will stay small. But he pointed out it gives members who can't attend services at the traditional times an opportunity to keep growing at the same pace as other members of the congregation.

"Our vision at Amy is the world," Strobe said, adding the congregation is determined to "start in our own Jerusalem" through personal evangelism and local ministry, and then reach out to touch areas beyond its immediate reach through such efforts as the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget and personal involvement in volunteer missions. He noted Mrs. Jackson and her husband, Bedford, retired director of missions for Howell County Association, are representing the church as home mission volunteers in Talahina, Okla.

"My vision is positive for the small rural churches," he said. "Our vision does not have to be limited, because we serve a God who is not limited."