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May 12, 1989

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89-78

Southern Baptists ready  
for new era, Vines says

By Dan Martin

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Southern Baptists have resolved their theological dispute and are ready to move forward, Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines said.

"To my view, we have settled the debate over the nature of Scripture. So the time is right to move into a new era of growth for our local churches," he said.

Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., made the comment in an interview with Baptist Press, the denomination's news service, as he nears the end of his first one year term as president of the 14.8-million-member denomination. He announced in February he is willing to be nominated for a second term when the convention meets June 13-15 in the Las Vegas (Nev.) Convention Center.

He said: "Southern Baptists have said in a variety of ways that we are a people who believe the Bible is the word of God, without error. The view which would question the accuracy and complete authority of the Scriptures is a pronounced minority view in the SBC."

After he was elected to the presidency at the 1988 annual meeting, Vines said he believed continuing the "theological correction," brought about in 11 years of disputation between conservatives and moderates in the SBC, is important.

In the 1989 interview, Vines said he believes "the theological renewal in our convention is underway. I am confident that our administrations and the boards of trustees of our institutions will lovingly monitor its progress unto resolution."

Of his presidency, he said: "I have made a conscious effort to create an atmosphere where healing and reconciliation could occur. I have purposely lowered the rhetoric, though I have not compromised my theological convictions. I have tried to avoid divisive or explosive statements.

"This year, I have seen signs that many who have differing convictions are coming to an understanding that these convictions can be held not only without compromise but in a spirit of kindness and acceptance toward one another."

His appointments to four key committees which will serve during the 1989 annual meeting in Las Vegas, "reflect my views on this matter," he said. "As I indicated, we have certain parameters which are overwhelmingly accepted in Southern Baptist life. These parameters have to do with the nature of Scripture.

"Within those parameters there is splendid latitude in matters of interpretation. I believe my appointments this year, and, if I am elected again, my appointments next year will reflect this kind of openness.

Of his appointments, Vines said he had "made every effort, within the parameters I set for myself, to include as many people as possible; to name people who had never served before."

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In reviewing his year as president, Vines said the presidency of the SBC is a "rigorous job. "I have found there are not enough hours in the day or days in the week to do everything that has needed to be done.

"It has been rigorous but rewarding. Juggling the responsibilities as president of the convention, pastor of a large church and a husband and father has been quite difficult."

A big surprise was the "volume of the work," he said "I was not prepared for the volume of mail and calls. Just handling the mail has been a considerable assignment. I have made every effort to answer every letter that has been written to me. I have not been as successful in returning all of the telephone calls because time just has not permitted me to do that."

He joked that "any man who wants to be president of the SBC ought to have his head examined," but then added: "I hasten to say that I can identify with Thomas Jefferson's statement concerning the presidency of the United States. He called it a 'splendid misery.'

"It has been rigorous, but it also has been rewarding. One of the rewards has been that almost daily, I have received letters and calls telling me of prayer support, and that has made my impossible assignment possible.

Another reward has been his enjoyment at "moving among our Southern Baptist people," he noted. "I have found them to be a great people, a loving people and a group of committed pastors and people who have genuine desire to share Jesus with others."

His year in office, he said, "has given me a greater grasp of our work because being president has given me a perspective that cannot be obtained any other way. I have visited most of our major boards and have seen harmony and willingness to work together. The people on our boards do their own thinking but prayerfully subjugate their own desires for the good of Christ's kingdom and our SBC work.

"I also have been impressed with the caliber of the employees and their dedication to their assignments. The overwhelming majority I have met look upon their assignment not merely as a job but as a ministry.

Vines said he does not believe "anyone is necessarily entitled to anything" but said he is "willing to submit the matter of a second term to the will of the Lord and the will of the messengers. I will say that if the messengers favor me with the privilege of a second term, I believe I can be a better and more effective president during a second term because of the experience gained in the first term."

If messengers "favor" him with a second term, Vines, said the emphasis of his second term would be "an extension of the first year's emphasis, personal evangelism."

"The second year would reflect my understanding of New Testament evangelism, which I understand to be winning people to Christ and then involving them in a local Bible-believing church. Baptizing them and teaching them. In my second year, I would emphasize building soul-winning churches, and I would like to lead our convention to a renewed emphasis on church growth.

"The time is right. We have settled the debate over the nature of Scripture. Now it is time to move into a new era of growth in our local churches. We may very well be on the verge of the greatest years of growth in the local churches that we have ever experienced."

Vines said he is optimistic about the future of the Southern Baptist Convention: "While I believe we should be realistic, I believe we have every reason to be optimistic. I am optimistic because baptisms are up. They are not up as much as they should be, but I am thankful for any trend upward.

"I read with gratitude that our foreign mission offering is up. Our mission programs are safe and strong."

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He affirmed changes in the budgeting process of the SBC, which moves from a goal-oriented budget to a performance oriented budget. "We had to face reality in that we have not made our goal for several years and it is unrealistic to continue to increase the budget on a goal orientation when the funds are not there. We are now in more realistic budgeting.

"Now that this has been done, we will be in a position to increase every year."

Vines said in the seven years he has been pastor of the Jacksonville church, the congregation has increased gifts to the denomination's unified budget, the Cooperative Program, by more than 250 percent.

Figures indicate the church gave \$200,141 in 1987; \$250,141 in 1988; and Vines said it will be more than \$300,000 this year. "We have been increasing significantly every year," he said.

Conservative churches are going to increase giving," he said. "From the personal perspective of the church which I serve, I think we have. I would never say we are where we ought to be, but at least the direction in which we are moving is toward increased support."

As he concluded the interview, Vines said: "I want to thank Southern Baptists for the privilege and honor to be their president this year. I would ask that all Southern Baptists join me in prayer for a harmonious convention in Las Vegas as we prepare to do what Southern Baptists do best: telling the old, old story of Jesus and his love."

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SBA seminary board elects  
Ashcraft acting president

By Marv Knox

N-CO

Baptist Press  
5/12/89

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Morris Ashcraft, former faculty dean at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, has been elected acting president of the seminary to be started by the Southern Baptist Alliance.

Ashcraft, of Wake Forest, N.C., was elected during a spring meeting of the seminary's provisional board in Richmond, Va., site of the new seminary, tentatively called Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

The seven-member board also adopted a mission statement for the school and elected Mary Strauss, of Hagerstown, Md., as its chairperson.

The Alliance is an organization of Southern Baptist moderates. They have vowed to remain in the Southern Baptist Convention but have charged current SBC leaders with rejecting principles and causes they hold dear.

Alliance members particularly have expressed concern about the future of Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest. In October 1987, Southeastern trustees' new conservative majority altered the way the school chooses its teachers. Ashcraft, President W. Randall Lolley and other faculty and administrators subsequently resigned, citing the policy changes -- which they interpreted as ensuring that only biblical inerrantists can be added to the faculty -- as their reason.

A proposal to start the Alliance seminary was approved 462-42 during the organization's annual convocation March 1-3 in Greenville, S.C.

Start of the school is contingent on availability of funds, said Alliance Executive Director Stan Hasteley. He predicted the seminary will need \$500,000 for its first year and that the school would not open before the fall of 1990.

Ashcraft, who will retire as professor of theology at Southeastern Seminary following the spring semester, was elected for "approximately one year, but with no termination date," Hasteley said. Ashcraft is on sabbatical leave from Southeastern, and the effective date for his work with the new seminary is May 15.

Hasteley outlined several duties for the new seminary president.

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"One is to find, identify and cultivate funding sources. He intends to bring a development officer on board as quickly as possible," Haste said. "We have not engaged in any fund-raising activities. We now have just under \$100,000 in cash and pledges for the project.

"He also will have the responsibility for collecting and evaluating potential faculty members. He is functioning as the chief academic officer as well as the chief administrative officer, and I expect it will remain that way if we get this off the ground.

"He also is engaged in negotiating with Northminster Baptist Church in Richmond about use of some of that church's facilities for the new school. We're hopeful that our request for space will be approved by the congregation, and we believe it will be. But that has not been completed yet.

"Another duty is the ongoing negotiation with the chief academic officers of the three schools in the Richmond Theological Center (the School of Theology of Virginia Union University, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and Presbyterian School of Christian Education) with a view toward application of our school at the appropriate time to become a fourth member. ... They are ready to approve us.

"One other major area of responsibility will be making the proper application for accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. Our primary accreditation as a theological institution would be through ATS, and we would apply to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools later."

Ashcraft is a native of Arkansas and a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He also has done postgraduate study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and the University of Chicago Divinity School.

He taught at Southern Seminary, 1950-58; Furman University in Greenville, 1958-59; Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., 1959-81; and he began his tenure as academic dean and theology professor at Southeastern Seminary in 1981.

The Alliance seminary's new mission statement says:

"The purpose of the seminary is to provide advanced theological education and training for effective leadership in the various ministries of the church for those men and women who are called and committed to Christian ministry.

"As a community of learners committed to God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the seminary is dedicated to the following principles:

-- "The seminary will be distinctively Baptist in terms of heritage and will be racially and gender inclusive with an ecumenical commitment and a global perspective.

-- "The seminary, while stressing classical theological disciplines, will be open to new avenues of education and will include in its curriculum opportunities for hands-on practice in ministry.

-- "The seminary, while seeking excellence in scholarship, will provide for and encourage the spiritual growth of its faculty, staff and students.

-- "The seminary, in the development of faculty and staff, pledges itself to seek and maintain balance in gender and race."

Of the role the mission statement will play in the seminary, Haste said: "The importance is to put some flesh on the bones of our stated commitments of this school. We are not setting out to re-create what Southeastern Seminary used to be. This surfaced repeatedly in our discussions, and it came from people most connected with Southeastern.

"We felt we needed this statement to establish an identity in our own minds of what it is we want to do."

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Seminary supporters particularly will emphasize the mission statement's first and fourth points, Hasteley said: "This seminary is to be distinctively Baptist, (and) the idea of inclusiveness is well thought-out, well-stated."

Mary Strauss, the new chairperson of the seminary's provisional board, is president of the American Medical Association Auxilliary.

Other board members are Sue Fitzgerald, professor of religion at Mars Hill (N.C.) College; Basil Manley, an ophthalmologist from Greenville; Ross Shearer, a retired government worker from Arlington, Va.; Linda Weaver-Williams, an ordained minister currently taking a leave of absence to rear her children, from Richmond; and Elmer West, a retired missionary and denominational worker and current volunteer chaplain at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, from Richmond.

Ex-officio members are Hasteley and Alliance President Anne Thomas Neil of Wake Forest.

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(Note to editors: This story replaces one released by Baptist Press May 11 on tensions in Panama.)

Missionaries in Panama  
taking added precautions

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
5/12/89

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--With additional United States troops being sent to Panama, escalating tension has prompted at least five Southern Baptist missionary couples to relocate temporarily near the U.S.-protected Canal Zone, according to Jackie Cooper, chairman of the Southern Baptist mission organization in Panama.

"We're pulling most of our missionaries into the Balboa area," Cooper said in a May 12 telephone interview. Balboa is on the west side of Panama City, Panama, near five U.S. military bases and the Panama Canal.

On the morning of May 11, Cooper had reported that Southern Baptist missionaries in Panama felt no danger. That changed during the day.

"We were encouraged by Panamanians to leave the smaller towns," Cooper said. The missionaries' Panamanian friends voiced concern over unpredictable paramilitary gangs like that which bloodied opponents of ruler Gen. Manuel Noriega May 10.

"We're not part of the evacuation that's been reported in the States," Cooper emphasized. "We're taking some contingency measures among ourselves because of the uncertainties of what might happen.

"There was no violence reported yesterday," he said, "but we don't know what next steps the (Noriega) government might take. We don't know what steps even our (U.S.) government might take. We know that the U.S. is sending troops down here," which will escalate tensions, Cooper said.

Many U.S. civilians who work at U.S. bases in Panama have moved from their homes in and around Panama City to U.S.-controlled canal areas. And President Bush, in announcing the deployment of additional troops in Panama May 11, encouraged U.S. businesses in Panama to send all U.S. employees there on extended leaves.

Cooper said the missionaries hope to return to their homes as soon as possible. "We're hoping there's going to be some sort of negotiated settlement so things will get back to normal," he said. "But if that doesn't work out, we just don't know how long this might last."

Twenty-seven Southern Baptist missionaries are assigned to Panama. Eighteen are currently in Panama. Others are in the United States on furlough, vacation or medical leave or are in Costa Rica for language study.

"There's tremendous tension" in the Panama City area, Cooper commented, referring to the bloody confrontations May 10 between supporters and opponents of Noriega. "People are not sure what's going to happen."

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The tension along with an 8 p.m. curfew spread by word of mouth but never officially announced, prompted numerous Baptist churches to cancel Wednesday evening services May 10. "A lot of people just didn't want to be out at night," Cooper said.

Tensions in Panama, which have swirled around May 7's contested election, have prompted the missionaries to put a partnership with the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia on hold. The four-year partnership began in January. A number of Georgia Baptists were scheduled to work with Panamanian churches during May.

Also, the arrival of a two-year volunteer media specialist, Keith Morris of Abilene, Texas, has been delayed until after May.

Violence erupted May 10 when T-shirted members of Noriega's "Dignity Battalion" clashed with protesters led by opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Endara and his two vice presidential running mates. The three men and others with them were bloodied and one of their bodyguards reportedly was killed.

That night, the Noriega government nullified the election, blaming American interference. Opponents, meanwhile, accused Noriega's supporters of stealing, burning and otherwise destroying thousands of vote tally sheets.

"We've noticed a stepped-up anti-American situation" ever since the American government charged Noriega with drug trafficking more than a year ago, Cooper said. This is reflected in slogans, military checkpoints at various locations and the like.

But, he noted, "It's mostly political." The anti-Americanism is not coming from the Panamanian people in general, he said.

"No missionary has been overly harassed," he said. "We have been stopped and we've had to present credentials and this kind of thing, but no missionary has been molested in the sense that we've been under any kind of danger up to this point."

Cooper said he hopes Southern Baptists will not allow the turmoil in Panama "to cause them to be less concerned for the Panamanian people. There is no open hostility between Panamanians and North Americans.

"The Panamanian people are just as open and as friendly as they can be. They're decent, hard-working people who want good relationships with everybody," Cooper said. "They're not trying to thwart our ministry."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Southern Baptists have 27 missionaries assigned to Panama. Eighteen were on the field May 12; others were in language study or in the United States. One volunteer couple from Georgia is in Panama. Some names on a list on BP file 7 are repeated when missionaries are related to more than one state.

Brotherhood Commission  
erases budget deficit

N- CO  
(B'hood)

Baptist Press  
5/12/89

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission erased a \$159,402 budget deficit during the previous six months, commission trustees learned during their spring meeting.

That deficit was reported, and a \$150,000 budget reduction for the current year was approved during trustees' fall meeting last year.

"We're in good shape this year," Brotherhood President James Smith told the trustees' executive committee. "At the end of the past six months, we had \$177,023 more income than we had spent."

The October deficit was due to several factors, Smith said. They included costs of start-up for new materials, inadvertent underpricing of new materials and assumption of \$86,000 indebtedness of the National Fellowship of Baptist Men.

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In addition, Baptist Book Store inventory of Brotherhood materials was kept at lower levels than usual last fall due to the consolidation of regional mail-order centers to Nashville. The commission also wrote off \$40,000 in outdated materials at the close of the 1987-88 budget year.

In the president's report, Smith said three financial factors "will be working in our favor" during the last six months of the current fiscal year:

-- "We're going to add a 3.8 percent increase on new products," he said, noting the price hike is the first for the commission in three years.

-- "All of the other Southern Baptist agencies have quarterly leadership kits. We're introducing Royal Ambassador leadership kits this summer," Smith said.

-- "Baptist Book Stores have been reducing inventories, but they will soon gear up," he added.

Smith said he believes Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget income also will increase during the next six months.

Trustees also approved a \$3,132,788 budget for 1989-90, a cut of \$12,012 from the budget they approved a year ago.

Like most Southern Baptist agencies, the commission will face a 2.05 percent reduction in anticipated Cooperative Program income -- down roughly \$20,000, to \$966,560. The commission anticipates \$1,423,538 from sales of periodicals and \$739,690 from sales of other materials.

Trustees approved a salary plan that makes 6 percent increases available to staff during the coming year. Smith called the increase a priority item and reminded trustees, "Last year we cut out an increase for staff."

Smith announced he had named World Mission Journal-Baptist Men Editor Jim Burton to a new position, director of communications. Burton will continue to edit the Journal.

A communications audit of the Brotherhood Commission completed last year concluded the organization needed a director of communications to maximize its communications efforts.

Burton, who joined the commission in 1986, will coordinate the total communications effort of the commission, primarily as it relates to news and information services.

The Madisonville, Ky., native is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green.

In other action, trustees approved purchase of a mainframe computer at a cost of \$47,000 to replace an outdated unit the commission has had for eight years. The computer, to be used for bookkeeping and other business functions, will be installed around July 1.

Trustees also gave permission for the purchase of nine personal computers and two printers for word processing, editorial and graphic arts use. With software and peripherals, that package will cost nearly \$48,000. The purchase will be made this fall as funds become available.

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Attitude of praise  
said to fight stress

By Charles Willis

N-SSB

Baptist Press  
5/12/89

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Praising God during times of difficulty can have great value in helping overcome stress, a Southern Baptist pastor said at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in the annual meeting of Baptist Book Store personnel.

James Flamming, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., told book store managers and other personnel of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's book store division that praise can divert one's focus from a consuming preoccupation with self.

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"During heavy times of stress, we become totally preoccupied with our problems, unless we can get ourselves into a mode of praise," he said. "A great deal of stress that accumulates during the day can be handled during your quiet time. In that process, you are being redeemed in His own way.

"In handling life through prayer, in the presence of God, you are also controlling some things before they happen. You can line up your day so that getting behind in your work does not create stress."

When stress conquers people, they experience physical and emotional symptoms, from chronic indigestion to depression, Flammig said. To battle stress symptoms, he recommended "a five-fold discipline," including physical exercise, spiritual exercise, taking one day at a time, doing something despicable and doing something enjoyable.

"Laziness sets in during times of high stress," to the degree that some people do not participate in activities they used to enjoy regularly, he explained.

Stress can be brought on by others' agendas, interpersonal relationships, the workplace, overscheduling and inner emotions, Flemming said.

Stress can be good until it becomes debilitating, he said, likening stress to tuning a violin. "The strings must be tightened to make music," he noted.

Workaholics are people whose lives are "walled in" by activities that deplete them with no restoring activity in their lives, he said. Urging balance in life as a means to prevent debilitating stress, Flammig said: "Unexamined stress will kill you. Stress, if left alone, is as bad as a virus that cannot be treated."

The unifying center of some people's lives is made up of factors that are far removed from their belief systems, he continued.

"You may believe in grace," he explained, "but you are working your way to heaven.

"Let your stress come from that which you cannot control, not from that which you can control. You are not held responsible for things you cannot control. The world may go berserk, but you can keep your place in order. The vertical dimension of life puts the soap opera dimension of life in perspective."

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High School Baptist Young Men's  
Missions Speak Out winner named

By Mike Day

N- (O  
(B'hood)

Baptist Press  
5/12/89

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Kendall Shuler of Marshfield, Mo., has been selected winner of the 1989 National High School Baptist Young Men's Missions Speak Out competition. The annual speech award is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Shuler, a junior at Marshfield High School, won the award in competition with finalists who represented nine Southern Baptist state conventions. He previously placed first in Missouri's Missions Speak Out competition. Shuler's original speech, titled, "Discovering My Gifts for Missions Service," was videotaped and forwarded to Memphis, Tenn., for judging at the Brotherhood Commission.

As national winner, Shuler will receive an expenses-paid trip to the Southern Baptist Convention in Las Vegas, Nev., where he will deliver his winning speech during the annual Brotherhood breakfast on June 14.

About 500 people are expected to attend the breakfast, where comedian Jerry Clower will present the National Jerry Clower Award to Shuler. The award is named in honor of the Christian comedian from Yazoo City, Miss., who endorses and supports the High School Baptist Young Men's Missions Speak Out.

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Shuler also will receive a college scholarship, presented by the trustees of the Brotherhood Commission, a Baptist Young Men's blazer, and an expenses-paid trip to a Southern Baptist mission point.

Shuler is an active member of High School Baptist Young Men at Mission Chapel Baptist Church in Elkland, Mo. He is the son of the John Shulers; his father is a pastor.

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Photograph available upon request from the Brotherhood Commission.

Lebanon Baptists suffer  
new losses from shelling

By Mary Jane Welch

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
5/12/89

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--A young Lebanese Baptist woman was killed and a young man seriously injured in recent shelling that also damaged Baptist property on both sides the divided Beirut.

Many, including some Baptists, are trying to leave Lebanon in the wake of the most intense shelling in years, reported Frances Fuller, Southern Baptist missionary now living in Cyprus. "There seems to have been a kind of despair that has set in," she said.

Fuller said the young woman, a 17-year-old new believer and Sunday School teacher at Mouseitbeh Baptist Church, was killed in a nearby building. A young man with her, also a church member, suffered two broken legs and numerous cuts, Fuller said.

Elias Bitar, principal of the Beirut Baptist School, wept as he tried to tell former principal and Southern Baptist missionary Jim Ragland about damage at the West Beirut school. A shell made a direct hit on the main building, destroying four water tanks, going through the roof and damaging a bathroom underneath, Fuller said.

Another shell landed on the school's tennis court, breaking all remaining glass in the school's newest building and a nearby mission house.

The school's buses were riddled by shrapnel, and three cars, belonging to the Baptist mission and two teachers, were badly damaged.

Damage was lighter at the Baptist seminary and Baptist International Arab Ministries building in predominantly Christian East Beirut, Fuller said. Six or seven shells fell on the property, mostly breaking windows and damaging shutters.

Still, Fuller was told by a young woman, who lives in the surrounding community of Monsouriyeh, the damage is so heavy Fuller wouldn't recognize her old community. "It doesn't look like the same town you left."

About 60 people from the Baptist community are living in the basement of the ministries building to escape the shelling, Fuller said.

Loss of life has been amazingly low for such heavy fighting, Fuller noted, saying it was partly because people have been living underground; partly "because the Lord works day and night trying to save Lebanon."

A cease-fire has calmed the city but shelling continues along the coast, she said. So many cease-fires have been broken, she said, that people no longer trust them.

Almost daily, she said, missionaries in Cyprus talk with someone in Beirut. They have a constant request: "Just keep praying for us."

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CORRECTION: Please change the first part of the 11th paragraph of the 5/8/89 Baptist Press release titled "Baptist musicians prepare to 'sound word, share love'" to read:

The conference will feature concerts by the Singing Illinoisans, primarily comprised of laypeople who are active members in church music ministries in the Illinois Baptist State Association; ...

Thanks,  
Baptist Press