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May 19, 1989

89-81

RTVC trustees reject
sale of ACTS network

By Toby Druin

N-10
(Texas Std.)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission voted 13 to 5 to reject a \$15 million offer for the ACTS network May 18 and pulled the network off the market.

They will trust God and Southern Baptists to make the system a financial success, they said in a special meeting to hear a proposal from a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, group to buy the network.

Chairman Harold Brundige of Martin, Tenn., whose vote on the five-member negotiating committee brought the proposal to sell the network before the commission, said after the meeting he felt it would "take a miracle, if ACTS survives."

"But God is still in the miracle business," he added.

The special meeting at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport was called by Brundige to hear a proposal from DFW Uplink Inc., a group headed by Ralph Tacker of Dallas.

The Tacker group was one of three which made offers when another deal with San Antonio, Texas-based Friends of ACTS Inc., fell through in March. No follow-through was made on the other two offers, however, Brundige said.

The Tacker group, which included Patsy Ayres of Austin and San Antonio, Texas; Bob Cargill of Fort Worth; Dick Davis of Arlington, Dr. Lawrence Eugene Thomas of Arlington and Bill Ratliff of Birmingham, Ala., made a package offer to buy the network that included \$12.5 million in cash or irrevocable release from the RTVC's \$8.4 million indebtedness on the network plus cash; four hours of programming daily for 30 years; 10 percent of the original issue of capital stock to be purchased after five years by the network for \$2.5 million; and a representative from the commission on the company's board of directors.

Tacker is a businessman and member of Cliff Temple Baptist Church in Dallas. He became a Southern Baptist Mission Service Corps volunteer in the early 1980s, working with the Radio and Television Commission and formed DFW Uplink to provide ACTS with access to satellite transmission. The company to be formed if the RTVC accepted the offer would go public and would issue about \$25 million in stock, he said. The name of ACTS would be changed to ACTS Interfaith Network, he said, and it would be multi-denominational.

He and others noted the challenge of the new Vision Interfaith Satellite Network, which has the backing of several cable television industry officials and support of 20 Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Jewish groups;

More would have to be spent on ACTS to meet the challenge, Tacker said. The network has a growing number of potential viewers -- now estimated at 9.5 million homes -- but declining numbers who watch the network because of low quality programming, he noted.

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In the initial discussion, two RTVC trustees, Russell Lawson of Oklahoma City and Leroy Stevens of Phoenix, Ariz., urged sale of the network. The Tacker group offer was fair and Southern Baptists had not demonstrated they "are willing or able to support" ACTS, Lawson said.

The debt service on the \$8.4 million balance of the loan on the network and cost of the lease on the transponder to carry the network signal are \$250,000 monthly -- "41 percent of our budget," Stevens noted. He added that no Southern Baptist leaders have stepped forward with a "positive, up-front" plea to keep the network, that the Southern Baptist Executive Committee had told RTVC trustees no "deep pockets" are available to finance ACTS and that he is not convinced Southern Baptists ever have been behind the network.

Several questions were raised by others about the public nature of the proposed new company, and fears were expressed about the potential loss of control.

August Peters of Hillsdale, Mich., expressed concern about who would own the network after Tacker and the others pass from the scene and what would happen to Southern Baptist television efforts after the 30-year agreement concluded.

Laverne Butler of Pineville, Ky., said the public aspect of the new company was contrary to what had been discussed before.

Ron Welborn, a member of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, in Fort Worth and consultant to the Tacker group, said the group had no interest in ever relinquishing control and they intended that the controlling block of stock always remain with the original group. Shares could be sold to anyone, but Tacker group members would hope investors would have the same Christ-centered views as the original group.

Sara Diaz Warren, trustee from El Paso, Texas, urged the commission to "focus on the Lord," not the money, that "he (God) can make it a success." She said she was "100 percent against the sale."

Other trustees speaking against the sale were T.W. Terral of Baton Rouge, La., Jewell Morris of Fort Smith, Ark., Ernie Helton of Grove City, Ohio.

Mike Huckabee, pastor of Beech Street Baptist Church in Texarkana, Ark., opposed the sale on behalf of ACTS affiliates, the ACTS groups in local communities. Huckabee is southwest regional representative for ACTS affiliates.

The discussion about the proposed sale during the past 14 months had resulted in diminished support because of the uncertain future, Huckabee said. But he added he was against the sale because weekly he sees people making decisions for Christ whose initial contact with the gospel came through the network.

More than 20 affiliates had contacted him and were unanimous in opposing the sale, he said. "If we will keep to our principles (hiding behind the cross, "God will take care of us," he noted.

The trustees took a ballot vote. The 13-5 decision not to sell would have been a majority had all the 25 trustees been able to attend the meeting, observers noted.

Brundige, who heads the search committee seeking a new successor to President Jimmy R. Allen, convened that committee for a brief meeting following the session, but nothing was reported.

He said he was satisfied with the trustee action but noted Southern Baptists' reluctance in the past to fund the network. It is operating on a smaller percentage of the Southern Baptist Convention budget than it was when it was begun in 1983. The RTVC budget this year is \$7.8 million.

Acting President Richard T. McCartney, said the RTVC budget had been pared to permit the commission and network to meet debt requirements and continue operating the network but that more funds will be needed in the future.

Missionaries resume ministry
in tenuous Panamanian calm

By Art Toalston

N- FMB

PANAMA CITY (BP)--A week of relative calm has prompted Southern Baptist missionaries in Panama to venture back to their ministries.

"For the weekend, we plan to attempt, at least, to have a normal ministry," Southern Baptist missionary Jackie Cooper said May 19. "I want to go home," he added, referring to the town where he lives 20 miles from Panama City.

Cooper and his wife were one of several missionary couples who temporarily relocated near the U.S.-protected Canal Zone after an outbreak of violence in the country May 10.

Tensions in the Central American country have swirled around a disputed May 7 presidential election and a May 10 incident when vigilantes linked to ruler Gen. Manuel Noriega bloodied opposition presidential candidate Guillermo Endara and his two vice presidential running mates. The night of May 10, the Noriega government nullified the election.

Fourteen Southern Baptist missionaries remain in Panama, said Cooper, chairman of their mission organization. Several couples temporarily relocated near the zone May 12 at the urging of Panamanian friends fearful that Americans also might come under attack.

Now, in returning to their residences, the missionaries will be "taking it a day at a time," Cooper said. "I plan to have a service early tonight in one of the missions, and I fully intend to preach Sunday morning."

Two couples have embarked on short vacations in the United States and are planning to return at the end of May or early June, Cooper said. In all, 27 missionaries are assigned to Panama; nine of them were in language school in Costa Rica or on furlough, short leave of absence or vacation prior to the May 7 election.

A partnership involving Georgia Baptist volunteers remains on hold at least until the end of the month.

"Things are calm," Cooper said, "but I wouldn't say they're normal by any means. We don't know how long (the calmness) is going to last. This is the way things stand today. Tomorrow may be a completely different story. No one knows what's going to be the next event."

One uncertainty, Cooper said, is the sort of government Noriega will create since the election was voided.

Cooper added, "We're not in danger, but there's enough going on down here to be concerned about our people and our work."

For example, five relatives of the wife of one church leader are among several dozen Panamanians being detained by the Noriega government.

Times of evening worship services have been moved up in most churches "because there's still an undeclared curfew," Cooper said. "Everybody thinks it's on, but nobody has ever heard it declared officially. The streets are deserted at night. Most churches are trying to be out by 7 o'clock at the latest."

Cooper asked that Southern Baptists pray for the wisdom he and other missionaries, affiliated with 84 Baptist churches in Panama, will need in future decisions about the course of their ministry. They often only have sketchy information about developments within the country, he said. Cooper also asked for prayer for relatives in the United States who worry about the missionaries' safety and prayer for the safety of Panamanian believers and their relatives.

Chinese Christian students
march in demonstrations

By Erich Bridges

N- PMB

NANJING, China (BP)--Chinese Christian students have joined in the demonstrations for democracy sweeping China.

Students from Nanjing Theological Seminary, the main national Protestant school, marched May 19 with other students in the city, carrying banners emblazoned with their school's name and Bible verses about freedom.

Christians, including a man carrying a 4-foot cross, also have appeared in demonstrations in Beijing's Tian An Men Square.

In another development, the Amity Foundation, Chinese Protestants' social service organization, has sent a statement to government and communist leaders urging them to understand the students' position and to enter into dialogue.

No statement has yet emerged from the China Christian Council. Two leaders of the council, including the council president, Bishop Ding Guangxun, were traveling overseas. Reports from Shanghai, site of the largest demonstrations outside Beijing, indicated Christian students there had no organized participation.

In Nanjing, the Christian students' march was witnessed by Britt Towery of Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist organization that assists in education and various projects in China and other nations where missionaries do not work.

"Students from the seminary did march with their own banners that had the name of the school on them and Christian Scripture verses," said Towery, a veteran of work in China. "The Christians are involved. We can say that without question. The Buddhists are also marching, so the religious element (is represented). Actually it's 99 percent of the people behind this thing. Everybody's for this. I never saw such a groundswell. The Christians feel if they don't get involved in this, they won't ever relate to China. This is the people. I never saw anything so spontaneous in my life."

Towery arrived in Nanjing May 18 from Beijing, where he visited Tian An Men Square and talked with demonstrators there.

"In Beijing the Christians are more conservative," he said. "The seminary there said they're not involved officially, but the students have been out to watch it. But everybody's sympathetic. It's like a festival."

In Shanghai, Cooperative Services International Director Lewis Myers also reported a cautious attitude among Christians. One pastor expressed concern that the students might "push too far too quickly. There's no direct involvement by Christians here to take a stand in support or in criticism of them (the students)."

"It seems in talking with Chinese Christians as well as university presidents and professors that there's a great deal of general sympathy for the cause of the students," Myers said. "I don't believe I've talked with anybody who said that the cause for which the students are marching is wrong. Almost everybody agrees that the cause is right and just, that there is a legitimate complaint that they have."

"At the same time, there is a great deal of anxiety on the part of university officials that the students might be pushing too hard and either cause a pretty severe crackdown on them and thus on the whole system, or the whole thing might get out of hand and just cause anarchy."

Myers said students were "blanketing the city" and had brought it to a peaceful standstill.

"There's been no violence as far as we have heard, certainly not any we've seen, and we've been out a good bit. You can't go out anywhere without being in the middle of students," he said.

Myers and Towery both reported that all Southern Baptists teaching in Chinese universities under CSI sponsorship were safe and well, although classes in most cities have been canceled.

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The Amity Foundation reported May 19 that the parents of American teachers sponsored by Amity "can be assured of the safety of their children during this, one of the most peaceful demonstrations we know of. The teachers are excited to witness this history-making event."
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Youth face dangers
of satan worship

By Jim Lowry

N-SSB

Baptist Press
5/19/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Youth who flirt with Satan worship through Ouija boards, horoscopes and fantasy role-playing games can unexpectedly find themselves dangerously wrapped-up in occult activities, according to a youth evangelist.

"What begins as a harmless fad or a search for new excitement begins to provide a sense of power and control to those who feel powerless or neglected," said Jay Strack, youth evangelist from Dallas, Texas. "There is a hidden factor in Satan worship which becomes addictive and very, very dangerous."

Strack, who regularly preaches at youth evangelism conferences on how to deal with Satan worship, has recorded a tape on the subject for Broadman Press to be included in a new edition of The 24-Hour Counselor tape series, which will be released July 1.

Satan worship has become a topic of serious concern in rural and urban areas alike, said Mark Wynn, a Nashville policeman who specializes in investigating occult activities in middle Tennessee.

Wynn said 35 to 40 satan-worship sites have been discovered during the past year by police who have found everything from candles and pentagrams to dead bodies. A book on Satan worship reportedly sold 5,000 copies in Tennessee alone, pointing to significant interest among junior- and senior-high students, he added.

Tony Rankin, youth minister at Judson Baptist Church in Nashville, has counseled with youth who are asking about Satan worship practices they have seen or heard about among their friends.

The motivation for youth to become involved in Satan worship may be a rebellion that overshadows drugs, premarital sex or alcohol, Rankin said. Some youth may consider Satan worship to be the "ultimate rebellion" against their parents and the church, he noted.

"To effectively help youth deal with the subject of Satan worship or other serious problems, youth ministers must have the support of parents when the youth get home," Rankin said. "Parental involvement is the only way you can affect youth."

Southern Baptist youth ministers must provide a Christian role model for youth, even though that lacks the glamor of the hero role model for youth," he added.

The tape on Satan worship is one of 12 to be included in the new "youth doubt" edition of The 24-Hour Counselor, which will address topics of concern related to theology, such as the unpardonable sin, baptism, suffering and science; denominational distinctions; and the Bible.

An edition for parents will be released simultaneously July 1 and will cover subjects such as communication, discipline, eating disorders, peer pressure, suicidal teenagers, school failure, the struggle to be a single parent and relating to teen-age step-children.

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

California-Soviet link
source of delight, concern

By Mark A. Wyatt

F-10
(Calif.)

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)-- For David Oglesby, the developing link between California Southern Baptists and Ukrainian Baptists is a source of great delight. It also is a matter of grave concern.

"I couldn't be more pleased," Oglesby said just before a group of 10 California Southern Baptists left the state to visit churches in five cities in the Soviet Union. "Certainly it is coming at a time in the history of both countries when there is a willingness to listen and to talk with each other."

Oglesby, retired business manager of the California Southern Baptist Convention, believes that willingness is crucial to the world's future.

"I see two great problems facing the world today: the threat of nuclear annihilation and environment decimation," Oglesby explained. "Maybe the primary reason for an approach like this (linkage) is communication between our congregations. Communication between us can only help in working to solve both of these problems."

Oglesby started the ball rolling for the Ukrainian-California Southern Baptist link. In early 1984, he persuaded fellow members at Trinity Southern Baptist Church in Fresno to adopt a resolution to explore the possibility of linking churches in California with others in Russia. The purpose stated in the resolution was to "initiate dialogue ... for mutual spiritual benefit and understanding."

Oglesby immediately sent copies of the resolution to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the Baptist World Alliance and the Reagan White House. At one point, he managed to get the resolution presented to Soviet Baptist leaders in Vienna, Austria. But Oglesby was unable to achieve any follow-through. By this time, he had retired and had begun to suspect stronger hands were needed to get his plan in motion. Still, he never gave up.

Then, almost exactly three years to the day after his church adopted the resolution, Oglesby asked C. B. Hogue, California Southern Baptist Convention executive director, to intervene. In a letter to Hogue, Oglesby suggested that contact from "a strong state convention" might carry more weight.

"Can you imagine the effect on both of our countries," Oglesby wrote, "if a thousand California churches were corresponding with a thousand Russian worshipping communities? It is very hard to hate someone and pray for them at the same time."

Hogue carried Oglesby's idea to the state convention executive board, which endorsed the concept and instructed the executive director to work toward forging a link with Russian Baptist churches.

In July 1987, Hogue met with Alexei Bichkov, general secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Bichkov suggested the plan connect churches in California with Ukrainian Baptist congregations. He reasoned the Ukraine represents the strongest Baptist work in the Soviet Union, and membership in its 2,500 churches most closely approximated the size of the California Southern Baptist Convention. Hogue and his Ukrainian counterpart, Jakiv Doukhonchenko, agreed.

Bichkov was expected to be on hand in mid May when Hogue and other California Baptist leaders arrived in Moscow for a 15-day visit with Doukhonchenko and Ukrainian Baptists.

While he is pleased with the progress, Oglesby said he views the trip as only a beginning. "I'm happy to see the relationships established," he said, "but my ultimate goal is to see one-to-one relationships between individual congregations in our two countries.

"From the two groups interchanging ideas, I hope we can get together and talk and have the mechanics emerge that will help us solve problems together."

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Oglesby sees the emerging relationship presents an opportunity for concrete responses to real-world problems.

"Baptists are real good about talking in abstract (terms) and then doing nothing," he said. "I don't see this being that way. I see us becoming involved to solve problems.

"I see us at work in the two greatest nations on the face of the earth. Hopefully, we can have a number of congregations here and a number there working together to alleviate problems. If we don't do something about it, we may not see the 21st century."

Baptists in California and Kiev can take steps toward solving such global problems as the arms race and environmental destruction. "We can both pray, and we can get ourselves involved in the processes in our countries to solve them," he said.

"Let it be grandiose. You've got to start somewhere, why not here? Why not stretch? You've got to have an overarching purpose for all that you do. Then you can begin to lay the foundation to achieve that purpose."

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Texas lottery proposal fails,
but gambling fight continues

By Ken Camp

N-TEXAS

Baptist Press
5/19/89

DALLAS (BP)--Lottery came up a loser in the Texas House of Representatives, but gambling opponents still face an uphill battle in the state Senate to kill offshore casino gambling and a pari-mutuel "bail-out."

HB 33, a proposal calling for a non-binding referendum in November on a state lottery, was defeated in the Texas House by an 84-59 vote May 17.

"This is a major victory over what is potentially the most destructive gambling legislation this state has yet to see," said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"I hope the lottery is dead as an issue in Texas for several years to come," said Rep. David Hudson of Tyler, a floor leader in the fight against lottery. "In my opinion, nothing could do more to work to the detriment of the people of Texas than the legalizing of gambling in any form. Gambling undermines the moral fiber of the state."

Other bills had been introduced earlier in the legislative session calling for a constitutional amendment to legalize lottery in Texas. However, a constitutional change requires a two-thirds vote in the legislature and approval by voters in statewide balloting. Lottery backers considered the non-binding referendum a better opportunity, since it required only a simple majority in the statehouse.

Rep. Ron Wilson of Houston, author of the non-binding lottery referendum proposal, claimed his bill was defeated due to a "God squad" of religious zealots seeking to impose their view of morality on others. Weston Ware, citizenship associate with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, disputed that allegation.

"The coalition represented a broad variety of political, social and religious groups opposed to the non-binding referendum on lottery for a variety of reasons: because lotteries hurt individuals and families, because sponsorship of the lottery by the state detracts from the moral stature of government, or because they do not believe the state should govern on the basis of popularity polls," he said.

"The defeat of this proposal means Texans should not have to face the threat of a state-sponsored lottery at least until the 72nd session of the legislature in 1991, and we will not have to wage a costly and time-consuming statewide campaign between now and November."

Gambling foes had little time to savor their victory in the House, since other gambling bills were pending Senate approval in the final two weeks of the 71st legislative session.

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HB 141, which would allow casino cruise ships to operate from Texas ports, was approved in the Texas House of Representatives on May 9-10. The bill was assigned to Senate committee and could be debated on the Senate floor at any time.

"Casino cruise ships are the camel's nose under the tent for casino gambling in Texas," said Ware. He predicted that if gambling operators gain approval for offshore gambling in this legislative session, they will be back within four years seeking to legalize casino gambling on the mainland in the port cities.

SB 1822, which opponents are calling "the Pari-mutuel Bail-out Bill," would virtually eliminate Texas revenue from pari-mutuel gambling by decreasing the tax rate from 5 percent to 1 percent of the first \$200 million wagered and would increase the track's take from 8 percent to 19 percent.

"This is nothing but welfare for the rich," said Ware. "It is a breaking of the promise that gambling supporters made to Texans in 1988 when voters approved pari-mutuel gambling as an alleged revenue raiser for the state coffers. This bill assures more money for the gambling investors but leaves the state holding the feedbag."

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Updated Bible text headed
to Spanish-speaking world

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

Baptist Press
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EL PASO, Texas (BP)--An updated version of the Bible in Spanish is making its debut after 10 years in the making.

The new version, the Reina-Valera Actualizada, is being published under the Spanish World label of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House, an El Paso, Texas, arm of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

It is the first revision in nearly 30 years of the Reina-Valera, the Bible widely used among Spanish-speaking evangelicals. The Reina-Valera, the first Spanish translation of the Bible, dates back to 1569, predating the English King James Version.

The revision of the Reina-Valera is probably the largest undertaking in the 84-year history of the publishing house, officials said. About 200 contributors were involved in the project, compared to about 40 who produced a Spanish-language study Bible in 1977.

And it is an outgrowth of the publishing house's commitment in the mid-1970s to increase its contribution to Bible publishing among the world's 250 million Spanish-speaking people, officials said.

However, the revision is not exclusively a Baptist undertaking. Two of the project's 10 major editors, for example, were husband-and-wife Presbyterian professors from Venezuela; a third was a Peruvian member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Rounding out the major editors were six Baptists: husband-and-wife professors from Spain; a Chilean Bible scholar and one from Argentina; and three Southern Baptist missionaries. Joe Poe, a 33-year missionary, led the revision as well as the earlier study Bible project. He is director of the publishing house's Bible and commentaries department.

"We've had a jillion answers to prayer across these years," Poe said, noting that Foreign Mission Board funding for the revision was ample and no key participants were sidelined by illness or denied travel documents necessary to attend important work sessions in El Paso.

During the next six weeks, the Reina-Valera Actualizada will begin appearing in bookstores in Spain and 18 Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, as well as Baptist Book Stores in the United States, said Laverne Gregory, the publishing house's sales director. The publishing house also will make it available to other evangelical bookstores in the Americas and about 40 countries around the world. Then, he said, will come the challenge of distributing the new version through secular and Catholic bookstores.

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The first 1,000 copies of the Reina-Valera Actualizada were flown to El Paso from the printer in England for sale during a May 19 dedication service in connection with the spring meeting of the publishing house's trustees.

"This is just the beginning of many launch activities worldwide," Gregory said. Events will be held in each Spanish-speaking country to highlight the revision's debut.

Among the Reina-Valera Actualizada's distinctives, Poe said, is its use of gleanings from the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic texts not previously incorporated into any Spanish-language revision. The new text is based on a 1909 revision, one of more than a dozen in four centuries.

The American Bible Society did a revision in 1960, and the publishing house used that text for its 1977 study Bible. Other Spanish-language texts available today are the Catholic Jerusalem Bible and translations from English of the New International, New American Standard and Today's English versions.

The new revision will be available in three modes, Poe said. "God's Book for Today's Family" will include a series of evangelistic Bible studies for home settings. "God's Book for Today's Church" will include the words to 150 hymns and gospel choruses for use in missions and house churches lacking hymnals. The regular full Bible, meanwhile, will carry a concordance of people, places and key words found in the Bible.

A range of footnotes also appears on each page of the three versions, Poe added.

Hardback copies of the revision will sell for \$6.95 in the United States. The Bibles will cost less in foreign countries, thanks to supplemental Foreign Mission Board funding. Leather editions also will be sold.

The revision will join two Spanish-language New Testament editions published by the El Paso ministry. The "Come Unto Me New Testament," published in 1986, also included home Bible studies. The pocket-size "Abundant Life New Testament," in 1987, included helps for one-on-one witness.

The Reina-Valera name stems from the 1569 work of Casiodoro de Reina to translate the Bible into the common language of the people and the first revision of the translation by Cipriano de Valera in 1602. Both men were Spanish monks who had fled Spain to avoid death during the Spanish Inquisition.

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Boyce, Mississippi school
will begin joint venture

N- (SO
(SBTS)

Baptist Press
5/19/89

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Boyce Bible School will begin a joint venture of theological education with a predominantly black school in West Point, Miss., effective this fall.

Ministerial Institute and College, a school sponsored by National Baptist churches in Mississippi, will offer the curriculum of Boyce, a division of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., that provides ministry training to people who do not have college degrees.

The Mississippi school will retain its identity, buildings and governing board, said Boyce Dean David Q. Byrd. "We will operate the academic side of the school," he said, noting the school will function just as the 16 other Boyce centers.

Ministerial Institute and College, founded in 1891, historically has provided theological education to black ministers in northeastern Mississippi.

President L.C. Cook said the Mississippi school decided to affiliate with Boyce in order to strengthen its educational offerings and to "add credibility to the program." Enrollment at the school fluctuates between 50 and 100, he said.

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"One of the things that made the arrangement possible is the similarity of curriculum of the two schools," he said. "Boyce has the same philosophy that we have, which is not to deny people training because of (academic) background."

"We are delighted about going into Mississippi," said Byrd. "That's my home state, and that's (Southern Seminary) President (Roy) Honeycutt's home state. But that's not the reason we're going there. We are going there because there are many fine, young ministers in the area who want training."

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Texas Baptists respond
as storms rack state

By Tery Barone, Ken Camp & Orville Scott

N-TEXAS Baptist Press
5/19/89

DALLAS (BP)--While volunteers on the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Unit ministered to people in Jarrell, where a tornado destroyed several homes, other Texas Baptists began assessing damage and helping neighbors in the wake of storms that racked the state May 16-18.

One member of First Baptist Church of Jarrell testified that God performed a miracle by saving the life of her and her son on May 17 during the tornado, which hit the central Texas town located about 40 miles north of Austin.

Within an hour after the tornado ripped through the town about 4 a.m. First Baptist was opened as an emergency shelter. The Texas Baptist Disaster Relief Unit was at the church by that evening and began serving hot meals to victims of the storm and cleanup workers the next morning.

Pastor Max Johnson said most of the members of his congregation were not "hit hard" by the storm.

But Molly Ramon was one who was hit hard. The tornado destroyed her family's mobile home, and she testified how God spared the lives of her and her two-year-old son, A.J.

"It was like God had his hands around us," she said. Both Ramon and her son escaped the twister without a scratch. The tornado moved their mobile home about 10 feet and knocked out all the walls and the roof.

Awakened by the storm about 3 a.m., she said the storm was raging and "then it stopped suddenly. I looked out the window and saw a white light going around and around so I got my little boy and got on the floor and covered up with a blanket and began praying to God to keep us safe."

She could not tell how long the twister lasted, but said it sounded like a car being crushed. After it was over, she and her son were trapped by debris and could not get out. But they heard neighbors who helped them out.

"If I ever needed a prayer answered, it was then. He answered it," she said.

Minor damages to church buildings in Williamson Baptist Association were reported, and the Texas Baptist Children's Home in Round Rock was unscathed.

The Jarrell church received minor roof damage while barely escaping the path of the funnel cloud that passed just to the east.

Holland Smith, director of missions for Williamson Baptist Association, said Palm Springs Baptist Church in Palm Springs near Austin, narrowly escaped damage as either high winds or a possible twister ripped the roof off a lumber yard across the street from the church.

For most of the day May 17, First Baptist of Jarrell was the emergency center providing shelter for people who had no place to go and providing food for the homeless and volunteers until a permanent shelter could be established.

More than 200 people were helped through the church that day.

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Johnson said he was pleased to open the church for the emergency shelter because "our ministry (in the Jarrell community) is broader than just the congregation."

"By opening up the church to the community, we reaffirmed to these people that we care about them. Hopefully this will open up new doors for potential outreach and expanded ministry."

By opening up the church and by having the disaster relief unit in Jarrell, the church has shown the community that they care, he added: "This shows our community that Baptists are doing something. The response made by Baptists is more than just an individual or local response, it is a convention (Baptist General Convention of Texas) response as well."

Groups from the Texas Baptist Children's Home also pitched in to help in whatever way possible. Richard Mangum, chaplain at the home, said he walked through the community May 17 to see if he could help families.

Other staff members from the children's home helped serve meals from the Disaster Relief Unit, and a couple of houseparents helped a family with some electrical problems.

By the evening of May 18, the Disaster Relief Unit was preparing all the meals to be fed to the homeless and clean-up crews. Larry Blanchard of First Baptist Church of Lindale, the on-site coordinator of the unit, said that it would be in Jarrell through May 20. Several hundred volunteers were expected to be involved in a "Come Help Jarrell Clean-up Day" which was being promoted throughout central Texas.

In other areas of the state, a tornado struck Nacogdoches in east Texas May 17, damaging facilities of Fredonia Hill Baptist Church and wiping out trees at Southside Baptist Church. The storm moved the church's steeple, destroyed trees and damaged the church's day-school playground. It also damaged three houses owned by Fredonia Hill.

Memorial Baptist Church of Nacogdoches was an emergency shelter after the storm, caring for 15 families in its facilities.

First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches helped provide food for the disaster victims.

A tornado took the roof off the educational building at Allentown Baptist Church in nearby Lufkin, said Derald Douglas, associate director of missions for Unity Baptist Association. Water also damaged the sanctuary at Allentown Baptist Church.

Another tornado hit Sunset First Baptist Church, southeast of Bowie in north central Texas, where an uprooted tree totally destroyed the church's educational building, according to Ed Wiggins, director of missions for North Central Baptist Area.

The local Family Assistance Task Force is working with Richard Faling, coordinator of church ministries for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, in response to 23 requests from Gainesville flood victims, Wiggins said.

First Baptist Church of Gainesville, which offered temporary shelter to more than 100 Cooke County storm victims, had 59 windows knocked out by wind and hail. Three other Baptist churches in Gainesville -- Harvey Street, Temple and Grand Avenue -- also were damaged severely.

Calvary Baptist Chapel in Cleburne sustained serious water damage with three to four inches of water standing in the sanctuary, said Bill Roe, director of missions for Trinity-Brazos Baptist Area. At least four families related to Texas Baptist churches in the Cleburne area were severely impacted by the storm, he noted.