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May 26, 1989

89-85

Panama missionaries say
co-workers can return

N- FMB

PANAMA CITY (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in Panama, after meeting in late May to assess the national situation, have advised co-workers currently out of the country to return.

"As missionaries, we must be prepared to make necessary adjustments to working in a more tense environment," said mission Chairman Jackie Cooper. "We do not see an immediate solution to the current crisis."

But conditions in places where missionaries work continued have returned to normalcy, with the exception of several areas where they have been advised not to return for a time, they said.

Violence and tension following the disputed May 7 presidential election, later nullified by the government, included the harassment of some Americans. Several missionaries relocated near the United States-protected Canal Zone, and six other missionaries and volunteers temporarily left the country. Three missionaries were on vacation out of the country at the time, and a new volunteer was advised to remain in the United States until further notice.

In light of the return to relative calm, Cooper said: "The mission feels all missionaries can return to the field. Future ministry conditions may need to be evaluated on the field."

Cooper did not say how soon a postponed partnership effort with Georgia Baptist could resume. Some Georgians had been scheduled to work in Panamanian churches in May.

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Vietnam: Baptists help
rebuild what war destroyed

By Erich Bridges

F- FMB

Baptist Press
5/26/89

DANANG, Vietnam (BP)--In a place where they once destroyed the land and killed each other, Americans and Vietnamese are building together.

Southern Baptists have supplied materials to help the people of Quangnam Danang Province in Vietnam build a dam and improve health care through a new hospital and several local clinics.

The nearly completed dam rises out of rice fields that were free-fire zones during the Vietnam War. American Marines first landed on the beaches of nearby Danang, and opposing forces clashed in the region in some of the fiercest fighting of the war.

Bomb craters still scar the countryside, like smallpox upon the earth. Unexploded bombs still kill farmers and unsuspecting children every year, perhaps 4,000 civilians since the end of the war. Defoliated hills and "white land" -- soil incinerated to the color of snow by saturation bombing -- still dot the landscape of the province.

In such a place, aid from a group of American Christians is a powerful symbol, a Southern Baptist delegation visiting Vietnam in late April and May discovered. Hundreds of curious and friendly onlookers surrounded the Americans at the dam site, hospital and medical clinics.

The delegation represented Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist organization that assists nations where missionaries do not work. The group included Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks; CSI Director Lewis Myers and his wife, Toni; former Vietnam missionaries who once lived in Danang; and CSI's Indochina specialists, physician Marvin Raley and development worker Fred Kauffman.

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The delegation inspected CSI projects in Vietnam and met with government officials and Christian leaders in Hanoi; Ho Chi Minh City, formerly called Saigon; Danang; and several other locations.

Southern Baptists began emergency food and medical assistance to poverty-stricken Vietnam four years ago through the efforts of Raley, a pediatrician from Houston who helped start and run a children's hospital in neighboring Kampuchea, formerly called Cambodia. Now he coordinates CSI's small-scale but expanding health and development work in Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos.

"When I first met Dr. Raley, he said he wanted to help end malnutrition here. The dam can help that," said Pham Si Tho, engineer and vice director of Quangnam Danang Province's hydrology service. The dam will help irrigate 27,500 acres of rice fields, he reported, and "the lives of hundreds of thousands of local inhabitants will be remarkably improved."

Quangnam Danang is one of the rice bowls of Vietnam, but even there, malnourished children are a common sight.

"People are always struggling for food," said a local official, explaining that tens of thousands of acres still produce poorly because of toxic agents used in the war.

Defoliants dropped on the area during the war, like Agent Orange, also are suspect in an infant mortality rate that averages 63.5 per thousand. Killers include mysterious cancers and deformities in newborns. But the most common health problems are hunger, intestinal parasites, malaria, respiratory infections -- preventable causes of much of the suffering in the Third World.

Yet even the resistant and deadly strains of falciparum malaria found in the province -- introduced by malarial soldiers treated for common strains and rushed back to the battlefield -- are a leftover curse of war.

"Almost everything we're fighting can be traced directly back to the war," Raley asserted. "They talk about people being killed by unexploded bombs. I'll guarantee a lot more people are being killed by falciparum malaria."

The new district hospital and local clinics aided by CSI are fighting to bring better health to the area, but their weapons are primitive. "These clinics don't have the equipment I would normally carry in my bag," said Raley. One clinic alone serves an area populated by 15,000 people.

CSI is providing basic medical equipment units recommended by UNICEF.

Life also is harsh in North Vietnam. Climate and terrain there are unfriendly to rice production. Decades of war, climaxed by years of American bombing, destroyed much of the land. And communist economics spanning more than a generation have failed to improve living standards, as government leaders now acknowledge.

In mountainous northern Bac Thai Province, one of the cradles of the communist revolution, the average monthly rice ration is 11-13 kilograms per capita -- well below UNICEF's recommended minimum calorie requirements. In some areas, it is half that. Sick people in remote areas must walk days to reach a district hospital. Many of them don't make it.

Southern Baptists are aiding a hospital and clinics and funding a planned irrigation project to improve food production in Bac Thai's Dinh Hoa District. Hoes, plows and dawn-to-dark labor constitute farm technology in Dinh Hoa; a tractor is not in sight. The irrigation project could nearly double production for 2,000 people in the area. Asked if the project is a big undertaking for the area, the Vietnamese design engineer answers, "It's big if you haven't had it before."

Bac Thai people may have little, but "one thing they've always had is their dignity," said Raley. "When you get out in the villages, people are so honest. They talk straight, 'This is where we are, and this is what we need.'"

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And like Vietnamese everywhere else the CSI delegation went, they are friendly, despite the memories of American carpet bombing during the war, delegation members reported. "Many people in the north had never seen an American before, just the open bay of a B-52," Raley said.

Why the apparent lack of hostility? "Hate is history," and so is the war, answered Bui Thanh Tin, a Hanoi newspaper editor who fought both the French and the Americans during a 38-year military career. He lost 20 family members, including his mother, who was shot by a French soldier in 1948.

"Our situation is more difficult now than in wartime, many more times difficult," he stated. "We have a lack of assistance, a lack of money, a lack of investment. We lost all our factories, all our schools, all our bridges. The bombing killed women and children. But the character of the Vietnamese people is always for friendship, even with American veterans. Many have come here recently and been well received. The opportunity is for two peoples to understand each other."

Most Vietnamese simply want to forget a grim past as they fight to overcome a grim present, they have said. A common reaction to American visitors is, "Why are you here?" The CSI delegation responded by sharing its Christian motivation in providing assistance and relating the historical character of Southern Baptists.

"I think there is a special affinity between Vietnamese people and Baptist people, or should be," Raley said, "because we historically have been a poor, farming people who have had to work very hard. So we respect what the Vietnamese are trying to accomplish, and we want to work as partners."

What the Vietnamese are trying to accomplish at the moment is survival, observers have noted. More than 65 million people must be fed. Major government liberalization measures, particularly in the last two years, have opened the economy and society to the outside world but have not yet produced substantial economic progress. Vietnam remains one of the world's poorest countries.

Still, the open-door policies have produced new hope among the people for the kind of democracy and economic growth they see among their more prosperous Asian neighbors. The announced Vietnamese military withdrawal from Kampuchea this year, they hope, finally will produce normalized political and economic relations with China, the rest of Asia and the United States.

"Things will change," asserted one shop clerk in Ho Chi Minh City. "They must change. If we wait, it will be too late."

Through their aid, Southern Baptists are trying to help. Future assistance may include the placement of English-language teachers in Vietnamese universities and the application of Southern Baptist agriculturist Harold Watson's innovative Sloping Agricultural Land Technology program in the north. Another possibility on the horizon is the location of a resident CSI project coordinator in Hanoi. An application soon will be submitted to the government.

CSI workers hope the credibility their assistance has gained in Vietnam so far will set the stage for effective expansion. If Nguyen Dinh An's opinion is an indication of future prospects, the outlook is good.

"Your people came early, before we applied the openness," said An, vice president of the Quangnam Danang provincial government. "You have our high appreciation for your assistance. The tasks we have to solve are severe and our capabilities are limited, so we desire much more cooperation."

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Photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Vietnam's Christians
testing new freedoms

By Erich Bridges

F-FMB

Baptist Press
5/26/89

HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam (BP)--As North Vietnamese tanks rumbled toward Saigon in April 1975, Vietnamese Baptist pastor Le Quoc Chanh found himself surrounded by chaos and panic.

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The South Vietnamese government and army were crumbling. The last American forces were airlifting dependents and others to ships off the coast. Thousands of terror-stricken refugees flooded into the city, desperately attempting to escape a predicted communist "bloodbath," a massacre of vengeance against anyone connected to the defeated regime and its allies.

Chanh held a precious exit pass but gave it to a friend. "I'm stronger than you," he said. "I can face what comes."

It was an extraordinary act of courage in the face of the unknown. No "bloodbath" occurred, although difficult days were to follow. Christians didn't escape hardship, but Chanh never has regretted his decision.

Fourteen years later, Chanh still is pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Ho Chi Minh City -- formerly Saigon -- the only remaining Baptist church in Vietnam. The others were closed or taken over by the communist government for other uses, although some Baptists continue to worship in their homes.

But Grace is flourishing: Hundreds of believers crowd its small sanctuary on Sundays. Prayer meetings, youth gatherings, choir practices and other activities keep the building open virtually every day of the week. Chanh barely has time to prepare his sermons.

"The spirit of the people who come for worship is more sincere, the worship is more deep, the prayer more fervent," he says. "Under difficult circumstances, people move toward the Lord. After Liberation (the end of the war), evangelism has become very fruitful. People I thought would never come to the Lord have come."

The daily early morning prayer meeting is entirely a postwar phenomenon, says Chanh, because "after Liberation, the heart of the Christians to pray burned hotly. It was spontaneous."

Chanh was a young man when he became the first Christian convert of Southern Baptist missionaries in Vietnam in 1961. He saw them reluctantly leave the country with most other foreign missionaries in 1975 and never expected to see them again "on this side of heaven."

Now 51, with a gentle smile and thick eyeglasses, Chanh had an emotional reunion with a visiting Southern Baptist delegation in late April. The group was led by Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks and former Vietnam missionaries Lewis and Toni Myers. Chanh had become a Christian after hearing Myers preach his first sermon in Vietnamese. Today Myers directs Cooperative Services International, a Southern Baptist organization that provides assistance to Vietnam and other countries where missionaries do not work.

The delegation found that economic and social changes are sweeping Vietnam, like many other communist nations, as the nation struggles to emerge from poverty and renew ties with its Asian neighbors and the West. The open-door policies adopted over the last two years have yet to yield major economic results, government leaders admit, but they have produced expectations of new freedom and prosperity among the people.

Consequently, Vietnamese Christians are breathing more freely.

Protestants report significant growth in recent years. The Evangelical Church of Vietnam, or Tin Lanh (Good News) Church, Vietnam's largest Protestant group, estimates some 300,000 believers in hundreds of churches, including 70 congregations in greater Ho Chi Minh City alone. Reported membership in 1975 totaled only 200,000 people -- many of whom fled Vietnam at the end of the war or soon afterward. So the Protestants remaining behind may have more than doubled their ranks with new converts during the communist era.

Protestants also received permission to open a seminary in Hanoi last year, and 19 students currently are enrolled. Two pastors from the south have joined the faculty as professors.

The much larger Roman Catholic Church -- East Asia's second-largest Catholic community after the Philippines -- claims up to 10 percent of more than 65 million Vietnamese citizens. Catholic leaders also report rapid growth. Several seminaries have reopened, and more young people are offering themselves for the priesthood and religious vocations.

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Both Protestants and Catholics are working to increase their involvement in social ministries, such as hospitals, shelters for the homeless and aged, and aid for street kids, or "children of the dust," as they are known in Vietnam. Government leaders appear to be welcoming the trend, church sources say.

A reportedly widespread house-church movement also is said to be gaining followers in many areas, including rural districts and isolated mountain regions populated by tribal peoples.

One house-church leader in Ho Chi Minh City says at least 80 "quiet home churches" meet in the city. The government knows about them, he acknowledges, but apparently has decided not to close them because of the new liberalization policies. He admits once wanting to leave Vietnam, "but now I want to stay in my country. The harvest is crying, and we need many reapers."

For its part, the government adopted a religion policy in 1977 guaranteeing "the freedom to have religion or have no religion for all citizens." Religious believers must observe all laws, practice their regular observances in "worshipping centers" and obtain state permission for special gatherings or doctrinal classes, as well as official approval of faculty and students involved in religious education and the ordination or appointment of ministers.

"Those who take advantage of religion" to damage or oppose the state, the policy says, "will be severely punished by the law."

"Unfortunate things happened between the church and the state in the past, but the trend and our hope is that it is better," says Chau Quoc Tuan, chairman of the government religious affairs bureau in Ho Chi Minh City. His Hanoi counterpart refers to "many misunderstandings" between believers and government representatives, particularly grassroots-level officials unfamiliar with religious rights.

In the years following the end of the Vietnam War, the victorious communists accused many Christians of having supported the defeated southern regime and foreign imperialism. Some, such as military chaplains and anti-communist Catholic leaders, were sent to harsh re-education camps, with southern army officers and others seen as threats to the state.

Other believers repeatedly were summoned for questioning about their association with foreigners, barred from jobs and opportunities for education, and excluded from meaningful participation in society. Many churches and nearly all Christian institutions were closed or taken over by the state. Much of the church's leadership already had left the country; many more departed legally or as boat people after the war.

They were bitter years. But Christians north and south agree that the church of Vietnam, once dependent on foreign institutions and support, has been purified and strengthened. "We needed to be washed as in the ocean, to be purged," reflects one believer.

Church-state clashes have by no means disappeared, particularly as the powerful Catholic Church tests the limits of the government's new liberal policies. And although nearly all Christian military chaplains have been released from re-education camps, reports persist that some pastors and priests still are being held in prison on charges that their church activities were counterrevolutionary. General religious freedom varies widely from province to province.

Churches also suffer from a lack of Christian literature and Bibles, inadequate religious education, aging leadership and internal divisions over theology and direction. After decades of separation, northern and southern Christians mistrust each other, leaders in both regions admit.

But they believe the Christian gospel is penetrating Vietnamese society in a way it never did before. Even some Communist Party members reportedly have turned to the faith.

The open-door policies are having a "great impact" on religious life, one non-believer in Hanoi concludes. "The role of the Catholic and Protestant church is increasing. They will have their voice in the life of society."

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Photos mailed to Baptist state papers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Vietnam veterans' service
seen as model for others

By Louis Moore

N-60
(CLC)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Heroes, survivors and victims, as well as opponents and supporters of the Vietnam War joined in a service of "recognition and reconciliation for Vietnam veterans and other Americans affected by the war" at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., May 21.

Several veterans attending the service said it marked the first time they have been recognized by a non-veterans' group.

The Crescent Hill congregation greeted the veterans, many of whom came dressed in their military uniforms, with applause.

Southern Baptists who organized and participated in the service said they hope it can become a model for other congregations to follow.

"The service had a powerful, moving impact on the veterans as well as on others in the church," said Glen Stassen, a Christian ethics professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and a participant in the service.

Stassen is a leader in both the Crescent Hill Peacemakers and the Baptist Peacemakers organizations. He also was one of the people who encouraged the Southern Baptist Convention to establish its annual Day of Prayer for World Peace, the first Sunday of August.

The service originated from a discussion between H. Stephen Shoemaker, Crescent Hill's pastor, and Robert Greenberg, a Louisville psychiatrist who specializes in treating Vietnam veterans, Stassen said.

Greenberg, the author of the new children's book, "Tyranosaurus Tex," and a member of Crescent Hill Church, said Vietnam veterans as a group are in need of the encouragement such a service of recognition provides.

"There are two words a soldier needs to hear returning from war," Shoemaker told the congregation attending the reconciliation service. "The first is, 'Thank you.' The second is, 'Welcome home.' Because of the conflicted heart and mind and will of our nation, we would not say either as we should, and that has deepened your wounds, veterans of Vietnam.

"Jan Scruggs, who spearheaded the Vietnam War Memorial, did so with the conviction that the Vietnam veteran could be, should be, honored, regardless of our positions on that war -- that the warrior should be, could be, separated from the war.

"We at this church have within our body many different, highly divergent positions on the war. But we have gathered in common purpose this day to honor you, and to recognize you, who are veterans of the Vietnam experience. We are here to say the words you have most needed to hear and words that have been too slow coming: 'Thank you. Welcome home.'"

The service was punctuated with personal testimonies from four Vietnam War survivors -- a triple leg who was wounded as a soldier in Vietnam, the widow of a U.S. soldier killed in Vietnam, a Vietnam-era soldier who was troubled about whether to participate in the war but who was assigned to duty in Germany and a U.S. Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam who told of emotional and spiritual scars resulting from his return home to a nation unwilling to recognize those who served in Vietnam.

From his wheelchair, Wayne Givens, husband of Southern Seminary student Linda Givens, told about his lingering questions about the physical price he paid for a war that concluded with the North Vietnamese capturing South Vietnam. He has found meaning by participating in Crescent Hill Peacemakers, he said.

Peggy Hester, whose first husband, Tim Cole, died in Vietnam and who now is married to Southern Seminary professor Michael Hester, brought tears to the eyes of many in the congregation as she recounted the day U.S. officials arrived at her home to inform her of Cole's death. Although her life has been blessed with the love of her second husband and the birth of children to that marriage, Mrs. Hester said the pain of the loss lingers.

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Jim Smith told about his emotional struggles in boot camp over whether he could ever actually kill another human being and about his lingering anxiety because he never had to make a firm decision, since he was assigned to duty in Germany and never made it to Vietnam.

David Smith, on the other hand, told about his duties as a helicopter pilot flying injured soldiers from battlefields to medical care. He recounted a story about years later meeting a man who thanked him for saving his life by gallantly flying him from battle to a hospital.

Smith earned the Flying Cross for heroism in Vietnam but kept the medal in a box for 13 years after returning home from the war because of the turmoil in the country over the conflict, he said.

In 1977, Smith penned a poem that included the lines: "How long shall we remain buried in your consciences?"

"People have been waiting a long time to get things out of their hearts. We veterans have been left to talk to each other because others were not willing to listen."

"Vietnam is certainly 'unfinished business' for our nation. The wounds are deep in our hearts and souls. I applaud Crescent Hill Baptist Church and all of the Southern Baptists involved in this laudable effort at healing and reconciliation," said Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"I strongly encourage Southern Baptists and others throughout our land to reach out in similar ways to those American men and women who, in the overwhelming percentage of cases, served our country so bravely, honorably and sacrificially in that war and who were too often welcomed home in a way that dishonored the country they served so well."

Congregations interested in holding similar services and wanting to know more about the reconciliation service at Crescent Hill should write the church at 2800 Frankfort Ave., Louisville, Ky. 40206, and request a copy of a taped recording of the service or a text, Stassen said.

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Unification Church dispute
to go to trial in California

Kathy Palen

N-BJC

Baptist Press
5/26/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--A jury in California will decide whether two former members of the Unification Church should receive damages for injuries they claim to have suffered as a result of becoming members of the church.

By refusing to review the dispute, the U.S. Supreme Court left in place a decision by the California Supreme Court that the case should go to trial.

David Molko and Tracy Leal, the former church members involved in the dispute, claim they were approached and invited to Unification Church events by members who denied the church's identity or religious nature.

Both say they were at church-run facilities for several weeks before learning the groups in which they were participating were part of the Unification Church. Both joined the church several months later.

Although admitting church members never used actual or threatened physical force or restraint, Molko and Leal said members used "psychological" manipulation -- including sincere affection, positive reinforcement and guilt -- to keep them from leaving.

Molko and Leal, who left the Unification Church after being "deprogrammed," filed suit against the church in California Superior Court, claiming fraud, coercive persuasion and restitution. The court rejected their claims.

In affirming the lower court's ruling, a state appeals court said it would be impossible for a jury to differentiate between brainwashing and religious faith without violating the U.S. Constitution by questioning the authenticity of the church's religious teachings.

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But the California Supreme Court reserved the decision and ordered the dispute to go to trial.

In appealing to the nation's highest court, Rex E. Lee, counsel for the Unification Church, wrote: "The state's asserted interest in protecting its citizens from 'overly persuasive' religious speech and conduct designed solely to convert someone to a new religious faith clearly cannot constitute a compelling state interest. Otherwise, the state court will be given the authority to decide for itself what religious conversion experiences are appropriate and which involve an abuse which can be severely curtailed or perhaps even absolutely prohibited.

"Absent physical violence or other tortious conduct, the state cannot leave unorthodox religious organizations to the not-so-tender mercies of a jury to decide whether statements made by church representatives to persuade new members to join the church are acceptable."

But Ford Greene, attorney for Molko, said, "When a religion is not chosen freely and voluntarily, the First Amendment should not shield the church from responsibility for its excesses."

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Executive Committee to vote
on whether to hear Moyers

By Dan Martin

N-10

Baptist Press
5/26/89

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--During its June 12 meeting, the Southern Baptist Executive Committee will vote on whether to invite television journalist Bill Moyers to discuss his documentary, "The Battle for the Bible," before it airs in September.

Moyers requested an appearance before the 76-member committee at its June meeting after a resolution critical of his three-part series on religion and secular politics was adopted at the committee's February meeting.

The Executive Committee, by a 40-14 vote, adopted a resolution proposed by Paul Pressler, a Texas appeals court judge and one of the architects of the conservative movement in the Southern Baptist Convention, which called the Moyers documentary "biased" and expressed concern about the use of federal tax dollars to air the series on public television.

Following the action, Moyers sent a telegram to Pressler, with a copy to Charles Sullivan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tenn., and chairman of the Executive Committee, which referred to Pressler's "spurious accusations," and requested an appearance by both men before the June 12 Executive Committee session to "compare notes, take questions and discuss these matters in a Christian manner."

Sullivan told Baptist Press in May he had denied Moyers' request for an appearance in June "because of the time frame in which we meet. We have very restricted time and a number of items of business that have to be finalized for the convention (annual meeting). We can't give up an hour and a half for a debate and still get our business done."

Sullivan added he would present Moyers' request to the full body "for them to decide about extending an invitation" for a discussion of the matter in September.

"We have to be very careful about opening the Executive Committee meetings to any and everyone wanting to appear. We have a lot of people making requests, and we do not have time to hear all of them. We have to be very careful about who we invite. I will present his request to them in June, and they will consider whether they want to hear him," Sullivan said.

Baptist Press was unable to contact Moyers, but a news release mailed to announce an "encore broadcast of 'The Battle for the Bible,'" said he had been informed no time was available before the Executive Committee and charged the group is "now controlled by fundamentalists."

The show was aired by the Public Broadcasting Service May 21 and shown in many places on that day. Other PBS stations, however, have scheduled the show for presentation at other times.

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Moyers' news release said the "encore broadcast ... will feature new productions and conclusions by Moyers which will address the efforts by Judge Pressler to discredit the program since its original airing in December 1987."

Pressler said he was aware the matter will not be discussed in June, and said: "I will go with him (Moyers) before the Executive Committee at any time the Executive Committee schedules. I welcome the opportunity and think it should be discussed before the Executive Committee."

"The public has a right to know whether the program was fair or not. The fact he has rescheduled the program right before the annual meeting gives validity to the concern that we have expressed that it is being used to support one faction in an intradenominational conflict. Otherwise, it would have been shown after the convention rather than before."

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Texas Baptists continue
disaster relief efforts

By Ken Camp

N - Texas

Baptist Press
5/26/89

DALLAS (BP)-- After serving about 8,800 meals to homeless flood victims in the Houston area, volunteers with the Texas Baptist disaster relief mobile unit moved their feeding operation 80 miles east to First Baptist Church of Beaumont, Texas, May 25.

Texas Baptist volunteers in Beaumont met with local American Red Cross officials May 26 to plan relief operations for anticipated flooding over the weekend. Flood waters from the previous week's violent spring rains were expected to crest just north of Beaumont May 26.

The disaster relief mobile unit, an 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig with portable field kitchen, had arrived in Houston May 22 after feeding more than 2,500 meals in Jarrell following a tornado that devastated that central Texas community.

When the unit was moved to Houston, more than 8,000 homeless flood victims were located in isolated pockets throughout a large region northeast of the metropolitan area. Many had gone without hot meals for 48 hours.

Meals were prepared by Texas Baptist volunteers at the disaster relief unit, stationed next to the American Red Cross Houston office, and delivered in emergency relief vehicles to the homeless.

The Texas Baptist disaster relief unit is capable of serving up to 10,000 meals a day. The unit has provided hot meals for disaster victims throughout Texas and in emergencies as far away as Mexico City and Honduras.

The Texas Baptist disaster relief program works cooperatively with other private organizations through Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters. The organization includes the Red Cross, Salvation Army and other church groups.

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Plans made to impact
SBC women's ministry

N - CO
(WYM)

Baptist Press
5/26/89

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Representatives of four organizations met in Birmingham, Ala., May 19 to discuss their relationships to Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, participants said.

Betty McGary, president of Women in Ministry and minister to adults at South Main Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, called the meeting.

Other participants included Reba Cobb, president of the board for the Center for Women in Ministry in Louisville, Ky.; Thomas H. Conley, senior minister of Northside Drive Baptist Church in Atlanta, representing the Southern Baptist Alliance; and Catherine Allen, associate executive director of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham.

"We discussed the present relationship of all these groups and then made some recommendations which ... will be presented to each one of the organizations at the appropriate time," McGary said. "This group will recommend that the Center for Women in Ministry in Louisville will become the Center for Southern Baptist Women in Ministry and that the organization will govern all the operations of the center."

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"Each of the following organizations -- Southern Baptist Alliance, Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, the Center for Women in Ministry, Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention -- will be invited to send representatives to the steering committee meetings.

"This is the heart of our recommendation. I realize the details of this will have to be negotiated with each of the groups."

McGary cited Southern Baptist Women in Ministry's growing need for administrative services and its need to provide accountability and continuity in its work as the main reasons for the recommendation.

The organization will not respond formally to the recommendation until its June 1990 meeting in New Orleans, La., she said.

"I think the timing is good," Cobb said. "Historically, I think we are ready for a united effort. I certainly felt the sentiments were positive and affirming of women in ministry and of the work of the Center for Women in Ministry."

Cobb said she does not know what people involved in the center will decide: "They have invested much time and money, and they feel deeply about what will happen. I hope that when they review (the recommendation), we can come to a consensus."

"It's up to Southern Baptist Women in Ministry to frame their own future," Allen said. "They have some important decisions to make. There seems to be a willingness on their part to be an inclusive organization, and I commend them for this."

Allen affirmed the group's willingness to involve the wide variety of organizations in their steering committee meetings.

Said Conley, "It looks like to me -- and I'm pleased with this -- that the women's work in the Southern Baptist Convention will tighten, be more efficient and more productive" as a result of the upcoming recommendations.

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Photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers from Woman's Missionary Union.

Missionaries to receive help
to endure Middle East stress

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

Baptist Press
5/26/89

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Measures to help missionaries cope with the Middle East's tensions are being developed by administrators who direct Southern Baptist work in the region.

The Middle East can be "a very hostile and stressful environment" in which personal and family problems, as well as difficulties in work relationships, often arise, noted Dale Thorne, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board administrator who oversees the work of 165 Southern Baptist missionaries in seven countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

Thorne outlined measures he and other administrators are taking, describing them in a May 24 written report to the board's trustees.

The Middle East is not the only place "beset by strife and turmoil, but if we take the proportion of news coverage we receive as an indicator, we rank at the top of the most tumultuous regions of the world," he acknowledged.

In listing various struggles missionaries face in the Middle East, Thorne noted, "Lest you should feel that all our missionaries have these experiences, I assure you that they do not." But since "sufficient numbers" are "especially vulnerable," efforts are needed "to counter this negative impact on our work."

Among the steps Thorne reviewed for undergirding missionaries as they confront the stress of the Middle East:

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-- Greater help "to identify and work through pre-existing problems in their lives" during the seven-week orientation at the Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Va. "As much as is humanly possible, new missionaries need to enter their ministry with a clean slate," Thorne noted.

"When hurts caused by past problems have not been properly dealt with before coming to the (mission) field," he commented, "the missionary inevitably finds that the problems are resurrected and intensified when he is called upon to adjust to a completely new set of rules for living."

-- Greater help in the orientation period after missionaries arrive overseas, "to enhance rapid adaptability to and acceptance of the local people and their culture."

-- An emphasis on strengthening relationships and approaching them in more rational fashion, within and among missionary families.

-- Expanded training to aid Southern Baptist missionaries in becoming knowledgeable about the people and religions of their area.

-- Additional "spiritual growth opportunities such as mission retreats and area-wide conferences which encourage our folks to be increasingly open to the Holy Spirit's ministry in their lives."

-- Expanded resources for "mental, emotional and spiritual support" for missionaries whose problems compel them to return to the United States, with an eye toward "nursing them back to health and effectiveness during times of furlough and medical leave."

Thorne amplified several common scenarios of stress among missionaries in the Middle East.

Even before venturing overseas, the missionaries weather uncertainties and delays -- and sometimes denials -- in applying for visas and work permits, he said.

After arriving in the Middle East, "they learn that most likely their telephones are monitored, their actions watched, their mail censored and a file kept on them by the authorities," he added. "This file is consulted any time they apply for extension of visas or work permits, or even request a driver's license. They are warned that official informants may be found anywhere -- in their neighborhood, in the institutions where they work, or even in their church fellowship.

"Improper activity can not only jeopardize their own presence in the country," he added. "It may severely affect their fellow missionaries and their national colleagues.

"War and civil strife are almost a 'given' in our part of the world," he said. Nearly every missionary who works in Gaza or with Arabs on the Israeli-occupied West Bank "has experienced some type of 'close call.'"

"All too often, the symptoms of distress manifest themselves in the family," Thorne noted. "Husband and wife become at odds, maybe for the first time. Children rebel, and the parents are at a loss to know how to deal with them."

Sometimes tension is heightened by a lack of support from family members in the United States, he said. A number of new missionaries experience "open hostility from their families," he explained. "This rejection of their call loads them with an extremely heavy emotional burden."

The problems will not go away by waiting "until 'things get better,'" Thorne said, because "looking realistically at our experience of recent years, the general situation has worsened rather than improved."

Southern Baptists must, he said, develop "a comprehensive program which will prepare missionaries for service within the prevailing environment."