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89-104

Pressure builds on Baptists  
as Gaza uprising continues

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

GAZA (BP)--Southern Baptist workers in Gaza are struggling to continue their ministry in a nightmare world torn by street fighting, curfews and strikes that keep them virtual prisoners in their homes for up to 12 days at a time.

Fighting erupts sporadically between Israeli occupation troops and Palestinians in streets around the workers' homes.

Southern Baptists have 10 career workers and three volunteers assigned to Gaza, most working with a nursing school in Gaza City. The workers have suffered no injuries so far, but they report multiple near-misses in recent months. They have narrowly escaped bombs, stonings and shooting while passing through the area.

In the worst incident, career worker Shawn Hodges of Hickory, N.C., and her 7-year-old son, Daniel, encountered rock-throwing Palestinian youths on the street as they walked home from a visit to another worker's home. Israeli troops arrived. "Just as they got out of their vehicles a Molotov cocktail (a gasoline bomb) was thrown from a school wall nearby and it landed in front of their vehicles," Hodges said. The mother and child ran for cover under a building as shots were fired and then fled to a friend's home.

Another time the Hodgeses' vehicle was showered with debris from a bomb that exploded close by as they drove through the city.

Two Southern Baptist families evacuated to Israel June 23 for several days when the kidnapping of an American relief worker in Gaza prompted fears other kidnappings of Americans would follow. The worker was released unharmed.

Southern Baptists working in Gaza are virtually the only Americans living there. As in Lebanon, American males are thought to be potential kidnap targets. Generally, women have not been targeted for kidnapping in the area.

To cross from Israel's modern, four-lane highways into Gaza is to cross into an already-poor land disfigured by conflict. The fronts of most buildings have been painted with independence slogans or strike announcements, which in turn have been covered with black paint by authorities.

Groups of Israeli soldiers in full riot gear patrol the city. Women in traditional, long Arab dresses shop quickly at roadside stands; stores are open only from 8 a.m. until noon, the reduced hours ordered by Arab leaders. By 8 p.m., streets must be cleared because of a curfew ordered by Israeli troops.

At one intersection a small Arab boy throws tiny rocks at soldiers a block away. They are too far away to notice the pint-sized assailant, but the scene suggests the intensity of a struggle in which 5-year-olds teach their younger brothers how to throw stones -- virtually their only weapons for now.

Gaza is a strip of land about 25 miles long and 5 miles wide along the Mediterranean Sea. Israel took control of Gaza from Egypt and the West Bank, an area along the Jordan River, from Jordan during the Six Day War of 1967. More than a half-million people live in Gaza, many of them in refugee camps. All but about 1 percent are Muslim.

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In a complex chain of events, the Palestinians have sought independence. Their efforts flared into open opposition in December 1987. In Arabic the uprising is called the Intifada.

Southern Baptist representatives in Gaza take no political sides in the conflict and are interested only in performing Christian ministry. But they find themselves caught up in a struggle so old many observers date it back to the Old Testament, yet so contemporary it makes news almost daily.

Tension over the prospects of outright war, kidnapping, street violence and the constant uncertainties of curfews and strikes have taken their emotional toll over recent months, Baptist workers agree. Curfews are announced by the military, but strikes may be heard about from Arab neighbors or through messages scrawled on town walls.

Keeping a nursing school functioning has been difficult, said Southern Baptist representative Karl Weathers of Earle, Ark., director of the School of Allied Health Sciences in Gaza City. Enrollment has dropped to 39 students. Classes frequently have been interrupted. Southern Baptist representative Debra Norris of Clovis, N.M., nursing director, spends much of her time revising daily schedules to accommodate the conditions.

"You just go from day to day," said Weathers. "If you've had a real bad day you get up the next morning and you might feel, 'I just can't do this again.' And then the next day is a good day. You can't make long-range plans. It's just impossible. That's the biggest frustration. There's no telling what tomorrow is going to be."

Male students, who normally commute from home, now stay in crowded quarters at the school because travel is dangerous and often impossible. Classes can continue during troubled times because the school is located in a walled compound which includes the school, Ahli Arab Hospital and housing units for Southern Baptist personnel.

Weathers struggles with water and electrical services that often are interrupted. He is trying to start a new library at the school, probably the only medical library in Gaza, but books cost \$100 apiece and are difficult to import. This year the students have no textbooks.

Getting food for the school has been hard at times. Buying vegetables often resembles buying bootleg liquor during Prohibition as workers sneak to a house, gain entry by giving secret door knocks and then hasten back to the campus with completely legal, fresh vegetables. Food prices have soared in Gaza: with one-third fewer students than a year ago, food for the school now costs twice as much.

"It gets to the point where we're down to almost no food quite often. So we eat whatever we have," said Weathers. "The students might have rice with a little bit of something on it or they might have rice with rice."

If the 13 third-year students persist and graduate later this year, they are assured of finding work, Weathers said. One result of the Intifada's bloody fighting has been an increase in respect for the nursing profession.

Dean Fitzgerald of Waco, Texas, a Southern Baptist surgeon at the hospital, says the case load has tripled in the past 18 months. More than half of the patients are gunshot victims. Often, less seriously injured patients are put on mattresses on the floor because of lack of space. The hospital, once operated by Southern Baptists, was turned over to the Anglican Church in 1982.

But the Baptist workers agree the physical discomforts are less important than the emotional rigors. "Probably the biggest stress for me has been seeing so many needs and then for an extended period of time you're inside and can't get anything done," said representative Jack Hodges, who works with Gaza Baptist Church.

His wife, Shawn, worries about the effect of so much violence on her children. After the near-miss in the street, she noticed Daniel's behavior change. She asked him, "Have you thought any more about what happened to us in the street that day?"

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"He just cried and cried before he could say anything," she recalled. "Finally he said, 'Yes, Mama, I'm just so afraid it's going to happen again.' I said, 'Daniel, I can't promise you that it won't happen again. I wish I could. All I can say is that we just have to pray and trust the Lord to take care of us.'"

Southern Baptist workers Paul and Harriett Lawrence have tried to keep their two children, Bonnie, 9, and Ben, 7, from absorbing the hatred around them. "It must be the grace of God that has helped us through that," said Mrs. Lawrence. Lawrence, of Leeds, Ala., teaches at the nursing school; Mrs. Lawrence, of Hopkinsville, Ky., has worked with English classes and performed other duties.

Other young people in the Baptist families include David Fitzgerald, 17, and Eddie and Elizabeth Weathers, ages 16 and 15, respectively, all of whom attend school in Israel. Originally scheduled to come home on weekends, they often must remain at a student dormitory supervised by volunteers.

To remain accessible when travel is impossible, Gaza Baptist Church has launched two house churches in the last five months. Pastor Hanna Massad hopes to start others.

The church has lost members during the conflict. Some have fled the country seeking safety. Others are too busy with simple survival to take part in church activities. Yet during a recent lull in fighting, Jack and Shawn Hodges led a quiet class on Christian marriage for several couples while troops passed on patrol outside.

A byproduct of the uprising has been an intensification of Islam in Gaza. Loyalty to the faith is seen by many Palestinians as an integral part of the independence movement. One Arab Christian woman received threatening phone calls, warning her to wear the scarf, long sleeves and long dress considered proper dress for women in Islamic culture. Fearful of reprisals, she complies with the dress code in public.

Several of the Baptist representatives in Gaza previously have experienced war. The Fitzgeralds worked in Jordan during a civil war there in 1970-71. Nancy Wingo of Santa Anna, Texas, served in Lebanon, as did Mabel Summers of Bardstow, Ky., a retired worker now in Gaza as a volunteer.

Wingo says the Gaza situation is in many ways more unsettling than Lebanon, where civil war has continued more than a dozen years. "We have an average of two strikes a week here," she said. "We don't always know ahead of time when they're going to be," a situation which makes it "very, very frustrating" to carry out her English-language classes with nursing students and others.

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Court upholds one religious display, prohibits another

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

Baptist Press  
7/5/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court has banned the display of a nativity scene in a county courthouse in Pittsburgh, but upheld the placement of a Hanukkah menorah on public property just one block away.

The high court ruled 5-4 that the creche -- which was located by itself inside the main entrance of the Allegheny County Courthouse and included the proclamation "Gloria in Excelsis Deo!" -- violated the First Amendment's ban on government endorsement of religion.

But a 6-3 majority held the nearby display of the menorah next to a Christmas tree in front of a city-county building did not convey such an endorsement.

Writing for the court, Justice Harry A. Blackman said the setting of the nativity scene -- with its "unmistakably clear" religious meaning -- sends "an unmistakable message that it supports and promotes the Christian praise to God."

The Supreme Court has held government may celebrate Christmas in some manner and form, Blackman said, but not in a way that endorses Christian doctrine.

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"Here, Allegheny County has transgressed this line," he wrote. "It has chosen to celebrate Christmas in a way that has the effect of endorsing a patently Christian message -- Glory to God for the birth of Jesus Christ."

Joining Blackman to prohibit the creche display were Justices William J. Brennan Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Sandra Day O'Connor and John Paul Stevens.

But of that group, only O'Connor joined Blackman's opinion to uphold the display of a menorah -- a candelabra used in Jewish worship. Also concurring with that part of his opinion were Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Anthony M. Kennedy, Antonin Scalia and Byron R. White.

By displaying the menorah with a Christmas tree and a sign declaring the city's "salute to liberty," the city avoided endorsing either the Christian or Jewish faith, Blackman said. Rather, he added, the city "simply recognizes that both Christmas and Hanukkah are part of the same winter-holiday season, which has attained a secular status in our society."

Although agreeing the menorah display should be upheld, O'Connor said Hanukkah need not be characterized as a secular holiday in order to reach that opinion.

"By accompanying its display of a Christmas tree -- a secular symbol of the Christmas season -- with a salute to liberty, and by adding a religious symbol from a Jewish holiday also celebrated at roughly the same time of year, I conclude that the city did not endorse Judaism or religion in general, but rather conveyed a message of pluralism and freedom of belief during the holiday season," O'Connor wrote.

Kennedy -- in an opinion joined by Rehnquist, Scalia and White -- criticized the court's use of an "endorsement test" in such cases. He said such an approach borders on "latent hostility toward religion" and is fundamentally flawed and unworkable.

Blackman called Kennedy's charges of "latent hostility" and "callous indifference" to religion by members of the court "as offensive as they are absurd."

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Outreach Bible Study reaches  
beyond church walls: leader

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

Baptist Press  
7/5/89

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--If Southern Baptists are to break outside the church walls and share the gospel with people who are not Christians, they will need to use non-traditional strategies, such as Outreach Bible Study, which meet non-Christians where they are, a Sunday school leader said.

Outreach Bible Study, a program eight-week evangelistic Bible study groups conducted away from church, not only helps bring non-Christians into the church, it is a foundation for active involvement of new Christians, Sharon Smith, a Sunday school special worker from Tallahassee, Fla., told participants in a session during Sunday School Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Smith and Ken Parker, product specialist in the Sunday school division of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, led sessions to acquaint youth and adult workers with Outreach Bible Study.

Smith conducted her first Outreach Bible Study group in January 1987. From the four groups she has conducted, 17 people have accepted Christ as personal savior, and all are involved in their churches.

A woman from the first group Smith led now is working with preschoolers and has enrolled 22 preschoolers in the Sunday school department where she teaches. With those preschoolers have come parents, Smith pointed out.

A man from the second group Smith led was too shy to even talk during the sessions. He accepted Christ in the final week of the study and now he teaches a fourth grade Sunday school class, Smith said.

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Parker pointed out that conducting Outreach Bible Study is not easy. Many churches have difficulty locating unchurched people who are willing to participate in the study, he said. Then, finding the right location is crucial.

With youth, "you've got to do it on the kids' turf. Find a location that is comfortable for them," he said.

For youth Outreach Bible Study, he suggested locations such as a community swimming pool or recreation center where they are comfortable.

While the work may be hard, the effort is important if a church is going to reach people who won't come to the church, Parker said.

Outreach Bible Study can be successful and works in Florida and other states, said Smith.

For example, First Baptist Church of Frostproof, Fla., has started 11 new Sunday schools using Outreach Bible Study. A new church in Miami started from a group conducted in an apartment complex, she said.

"It works to grow an existing Sunday school. It works to start new Sunday schools, and it is an exciting way to start a church," Smith said.

In Mississippi, several churches have used Outreach Bible Study successfully, said Keith Williams, director of adult Sunday school work for the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Freeny Baptist Church outside Carthage, Miss., with a Sunday school enrollment of about 75, targeted unchurched families with a census and is conducting two Outreach Bible Study groups in the community.

In Natchez, Miss., Parkway Baptist Church planned to start an adult group in an apartment complex. After knocking on doors and inviting people, the focus was changed to youth, said Williams.

The church also is doing an effective job of assimilating participants into the church, even before they complete the Bible study, he said.

"The eight weeks (of an Outreach Bible Study group) is never the end of the story," said Smith. "It's like ripples in the stream as new Christians reach others."

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Pastor opens a 'New Haven'  
of love for disabled children

By Scott Collins

F-10  
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press  
7/5/89

MINERAL WELLS, Texas (BP)--As he lifted 2-year-old Kalli from her orthopedic chair, Jim Rhodes cupped the little girl's head in his hand and kissed her cheek.

The victim of child abuse, Kalli suffered a broken leg, two black eyes, a dislocated hip and a spinal injury. "They told us she would never sit up," Rhodes said.

As he talked, Rhodes laid Kalli on her back and told the girl to touch his hand with her leg. A smile creased Rhodes' face as Kalli responded with both legs.

"This is what the Lord has done," Rhodes said. "Look at her now. She is a miracle child."

But Kalli is not the only miracle child in the Rhodes' home. Phillip lives there, too. Like Kalli, Phillip was the victim of abuse. When he was 5 months old, his parents locked him a closet and argued about whose turn it was to feed the baby. When Phillip was almost dead, they took him to a hospital. Starvation killed 55 percent of his brain, and he was nearly blind. He weighed only 4 lbs. 8 oz., one pound less than when he was born. Today Phillip brings home good conduct certificates from school.

Altogether, Jim and Margie Rhodes have adopted nine miracle children and have three of their own biological children. Two 4-month-old babies also live with them.

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And while the Rhodeses have seen miraculous changes in the children, perhaps the greatest transformation is their own lives.

Seeing them today in the old boarding house they bought by paying back taxes, it is hard to imagine that nine years ago they were making \$150,000 a year, owned two houses, an airplane and a cabin cruiser.

The change came in a Baptist church in Oklahoma when Rhodes joined the church because he thought it would be good for business. But he realized he was playing games with God and later made a genuine profession of faith in Christ.

A year later, he applied to attend in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. But they faced the obstacle of selling their veterinarian laboratory and other possessions. "Margie made two phone calls in one day and sold everything," he said. "It was a miracle."

While at Southwestern, doctors found cancer in Mrs. Rhodes. Surgery prevented them from having more children. It was a blow, for she had dreamed of having 10 children.

Down but not defeated, the Rhodeses adopted a baby with cerebral palsy. The girl, Robin, had been beaten, and doctors said she was retarded and would never walk.

"They tell us that nothing can be done medically for these children," Mrs. Rhodes said. "We tell them that we know a greater physician."

Five years later, Robin is a bright-eyed girl making A's and B's in school.

The two-story house in Mineral Wells, Texas is another miracle, Jim said.

It is also a testimony to the family's hard work. When they bought it last year, the house was being used by drunks and was full of sickening odors. It was falling apart. Today it has 10 bedrooms, a new kitchen and a large family room.

Slowly, Rhodes is working his way through the house, fixing rooms as money allows and using his skills as a carpenter to build what he needs. He gets supplies where he can because the family depends on help from churches and individuals. "I look at it this way," he said. "If God wants it to be here, then God's going to take care of it."

They named their home New Haven because "to a child, his home is a haven, a retreat," Rhodes said. "If something goes wrong and the child has to leave, he has to find a new haven, and that's what we are -- a place of refuge for the ones that nobody else wants."

A soft-spoken man, Rhodes is pastor of the Baptist church in Whitt, just outside Mineral Wells. The church has grown steadily since he became pastor.

He also credits people in the church for helping the couple continue with the children: "You can't have these children without having that love of your congregation. My people love the children. They love to love and to help. They have grown so greatly in loving others and in ministry."

Although the Rhodeses have a house full, they still cry "because there are so many that we feel like we could help if we could only feed them."

While they provide what they can for their children, they believe the greatest provision they make is love.

Love is so thick at New Haven at times it seems to hover like a cloud over every room. The Rhodeses attribute the progress of the children to love.

All they want, he said, is for each child to be all God intended for him or her to be. If the child walks and talks and leads a "normal" life, they believe that is God's will. If not, then that is God's will too.

"Love disarms people," he said, pointing to 5-year-old Sarah, a girl with Down's syndrome who is a "hugger."

"We look at her and say, 'This is what the world says is abnormal,'" he said. "But by my Bible, this is what God says is normal -- that you love everyone unconditionally, without regard to age or sex, ugliness or anything else."

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Pomegranates help plant  
seeds of faith in Taiwan

By Teresa Dickens

F- (O  
(Mo.)Baptist Press  
7/5/89

SHELBYVILLE, Mo. (BP)--Sending plants to a missionary can help share Christ with the world, a Missouri Baptist couple has discovered.

Weldon and Wahneta Stevenson, members of First Baptist Church of Shelbyville, were hosts to Ben Tomlinson, a Southern Baptist missionary to Taiwan, during a 1987 World Missions Conference in their local Baptist association. Since then, the Stevensons have stayed in touch with the Tomlinsons through correspondence.

In January of this year, the Stevensons received a letter from Tomlinson which read:

"Weldon, I have a request. We are trying to win a wealthy Hakka (Wang Nyan-Sheng) here in our area. Several of his kids already know the Lord. He recently went to America where he ate a pomegranate and liked it so much he brought some seeds back. He asked me why it wouldn't produce. I read up a bit and found out that the best time to get a cutting is February and that the tree grown from a seed will not produce. What I need is a short article about pomegranate planting and cultivation and a cutting ... perhaps you could send it by a letter or small package airmail."

"I was not familiar with the fruit," explained Stevenson, "but I was willing to try to find out all I could and send the cutting to him."

Stevenson began with the local county extension office, but had no luck. He tried various nurseries in his area and around the state, but still nothing. Eventually, he obtained the names of two nurseries -- one in Pennsylvania and the other in Tennessee -- that might have the plants.

"I called the nursery in Tennessee, and they told me they could help," said Stevenson. "I had three plants shipped to Ben, so maybe at least one of them will live."

Tomlinson reported that upon arrival of the plants, he delivered them to Wang and explained that Stevenson "sent the plants to show his love for Jesus."

Tomlinson said he also gave Wang tracts sharing with him that the gospel "is like seeds planted in a person's soul. When the gospel seeds take root, you need never fear becoming a 'wandering ghost' again," a common fear in Taiwanese folk religion of individuals being lost in eternity without anyone to worship their spirits.

Tomlinson remarked that he and Stevenson had done their part, and that they now are praying "that Mr. Wang will invite Christ into his heart."

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Seminary student  
child of 2 kings

By Pam Alewine

F- (O  
(SWBTS)Baptist Press  
7/5/89

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Charles Mwakitwile is a child of two kings.

One king is his earthly father, chief of the Tanzanian tribe Mwakitwile was destined to lead. The other is his heavenly father Mwakitwile has followed to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Although Mwakitwile's great-grandfather shook hands with the famous missionary David Livingstone, Christianity did not come to the Mwakyusa tribe.

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Mwakitwile was only 9 when missionaries came into his Tanzanian village, 100 years after Livingstone, and asked his father, chief of the tribe, if they could use a house to teach a Sunday school class.

"My father offered that house to the missionaries," Mwakitwile said, "and I was one of the first to enroll in the class."

What transpired challenged the beliefs and rituals of the Mwakyusa tribe.

In the Sunday school class, Mwakitwile learned about Jesus from the missionaries and John 3:16. "I read that and God used that text to draw me to himself. It was a turning point," he said.

Concerned about his father's reaction to his new-found faith, Mwakitwile prayed and soon shared about Christ with his mother.

With boldness, Mwakitwile then shared the gospel with his father and others in his family.

Remembering their great-grandfather, Mwakitwile and his brother invited the local Baptist missionary to visit the tribe. Through the missionary's witness, Mwakitwile's father accepted Christ.

"It was a breakthrough," Mwakitwile said. "So many people came to know the Lord as a result of my father's decision." Among those following Christ were 19 of the father's 25 wives.

"We thank God, because inviting Christ into our family has made such a difference," the young man said.

A major difference has been the impact of Christianity on the entire tribe.

"Of the whole tribe, 70 percent are Christian now," Mwakitwile said. Polygamy has disappeared, along with many of the other rituals.

"I thank God because Jesus Christ has been my friend. The people in the tribe love one another now," he said. "I have received so many blessings."

For Mwakitwile, that testimony is a fulfillment of his name, which means "son of many blessings."

And although Mwakitwile has enjoyed studying in the United States, his heart is still in Tanzania with his tribe.

"I'm constantly praying for God to lead me home," Mwakitwile said.

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Coordination, orientation vital  
keys to successful mission trips

By Teresa Dickens

F- (O)  
(MO)

Baptist Press  
7/5/89

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Missions volunteers are essential in accomplishing the Great Commission, but without the proper coordination and orientation, their ministry effort can result in misunderstandings and misconceptions, according to Southern Baptist missions leaders.

"Volunteers have skills and expertise that can greatly benefit the work on the field," said Ron Boswell, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's volunteers in missions department. "They provide support in many areas of ministry, including spiritual and physical.

"But, if they are not expected on the field, they will not feel welcomed, and, often will leave behind conflict for the missionaries and mission."

"Volunteers are needed to help fulfill the strategic planning of a mission," added Bill Damon, the board's associate area director for Brazil and the Caribbean. "But it is very important that they plug into the priorities of the mission and not preempt the work going on there."

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Within the past several years, Southern Baptist involvement in missions has continued to grow. Last year, the Foreign Mission Board coordinated trips for groups of volunteers involving nearly 11,000 people. The groups worked in evangelism efforts, partnership evangelism projects and general-purpose teams, varying from construction teams to clean-water groups to bee-keepers.

"Volunteerism has been its own success," noted Boswell. "The missions experience fulfills a deep need in the life of a believer. For most, the one experience is not enough. ... They keep going back for more.

"It works, and well. Southern Baptists, especially missionaries, will only try something once. If they do it a second time, it is because it works."

"Missions involvement has a positive influence on the volunteer," noted Ed Moss, the board's associate area director for eastern and southern Africa. "Experiencing a different culture helps them understand the difficulties missionaries experience in working on the field.

"Their experience also generates good prayer and financial support for missions. Their experience continues even after they come home."

Along with nearly 11,000 individuals who went under the auspices of the board, leaders speculate that hundreds, maybe even thousands, of other Southern Baptists participated in missions experiences on foreign fields. The greatest potential for misunderstanding, misconceptions and conflicts lies within these independent mission groups, board officials said.

Many times, volunteers who have not coordinated their trip through the board discover that missionaries are not available to participate in their ministry, they said. This leads the volunteers to believe that missionaries are not interested in them or what they are doing.

"Missionaries have job descriptions," explained Carl Hunker, a retired Southern Baptist missionary to Taiwan and current pastor of Emmanuel Chinese Baptist Mission in Overland Park, Kan. "They have their own schedule of priorities. When their schedule can't be interrupted to work with the unexpected workers, it can communicate that they don't care."

Hunker, who was involved in theological education and church planting during his missionary service, warned that misunderstanding can lead to broad generalizations: "Volunteers go to a field with personal evangelism as their goal. When they discover the missionary is not available to travel and interpret for them, they conclude the missionary is not involved in personal evangelism. Often, this one incident will be enlarged to communicate that missionaries are not involved in personal evangelism."

Americans need to be very careful in their use of personal evangelism in a foreign culture, he explained, noting, "Americans are very respected in most cultures, and nationals will respond positively to the gospel of Jesus Christ simply because an American asked them to."

Explaining that many such individuals fail to be truly converted, he warned, "It is true that they may 'accept' Jesus, but he will just be the 'American's god' to them." This results from the pluralistic nature of many cultures, he said.

Financial support from volunteers to nationals or individual missionaries also can create misunderstanding and jealousies, missionaries and board leaders said.

"The proper use of financial support is the most difficult area," noted Hunker. "When Americans respond to the financial needs among nationals, it often interrupts the mission's desire for the churches to become indigenous (self-supporting). Their giving can hurt the overall goal."

The most sensitive situation is when nationals look to visiting Americans for additional financial support, related Moss: "When Americans respond to a financial plea, it creates the feeling among nationals that 'They care more about us than the missionaries do.' Or, if they don't respond, the nationals are hurt, and this, too, creates difficulties for the missionaries.

"The best answer to the money situation is work with the mission. They understand better the needs of an area and individual churches."

Hunker emphasized that orientation and preparation before a mission trip ensures the best results. "Good preparation on the field and good orientation for volunteers are very important for any missions trip," he said.

"Southern Baptists are free-spirited people," assessed Boswell. "When they hear of a need, they are not afraid of getting involved.

"Many people are reluctant to go through the 'big corporation' (the board) to do missions work. They believe all the red tape will limit the creativity of an individual group. It is hard to convince them that the process we require is for their protection, not a way for us to keep tabs on what they do on the mission field."

Coordinating missions involvement through the board benefits not only the volunteer but also the missionaries and the nationals, Moss noted, listing four advantages of the process:

-- Opportunity is provided to coordinate with missionaries on the field. It allows the missionaries the time to plan and make the proper arrangements for groups of volunteers to come.

-- Volunteers are provided with orientation to the culture -- the do's and don't's in a given culture.

-- Relationships between missionaries and nationals are strengthened as they work together in planning for mission teams.

-- It involves Southern Baptists in the workings of the board, thus strengthening their commitment to pray and give.

"We utilize a lot of volunteers," remarked Damon. "We could have never accomplished all that we have in the past and neither will we accomplish as much in the future without the dedication and ministry of volunteers."

"Volunteerism requires sacrifice, understanding of God's plan for the world and faith on the part of every individual," said Boswell. "Our part is to help them fulfill their missions desire. ... We just want to help them do it better."

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Health said to impact  
spiritual conditioning

N-SSB  
By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press  
7/5/89

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Southern Baptist pastors often hinder their relationship with God and their efforts to develop a church by ignoring their own physical health, a Virginia pastor and former college football player said.

Ken Hemphill, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., and a former defensive linebacker at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., was preacher for the second of three Sunday School Leadership Conferences at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center. He spoke to fellow pastors about physical conditioning.

"There are a lot of jokes about fat Baptist preachers, and we all laugh about them," Hemphill said. But a lack of physical conditioning can affect a person's ministry and ability to use spiritual gifts, he noted, adding poor conditioning also sends the wrong message as a preacher talks about personal discipline in other areas.

"A pastor's lack of physical discipline becomes an offense to the congregation and to the community as he talks about being disciplined in prayer life and other areas," Hemphill said.

Through organized sports in his youth and college days, Hemphill said, he never had to be disciplined about exercise. "There was always somebody telling me when to run and how far to run," he explained.

However, after a few years as pastor in Norfolk, he became absorbed in the rapid growth of the church. Suddenly, he said, he didn't recognize the pudgy pastor he saw in the mirror.

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"I tried every diet and plan for losing weight going, but it wasn't until I came to the realization the problem was sin -- failure to care for the temple of God -- that I was able to come to grips with it," he said.

Hemphill equated the need for a time of physical exercise with the need for prayer time and devotional time because of the relationship between one's physical condition and spiritual condition.

Only when the body is at full efficiency can a person's spiritual gifts be functioning at full efficiency, because those gifts must be carried out through the body and mind, he pointed out.

"My motivation for physical fitness is to be pleasing to God," he said.

Hemphill did not prescribe a particular method of physical fitness. He hates running because he was forced to do so much running as part of sports conditioning, he said. Diet and other physical activities work for him.

Exercise should be like prayer -- without ceasing, he said. It can be incorporated into daily routines in ways such as using stairs instead of elevators and parking away from the entrance of a building instead of insisting on finding the closest parking spot.

His efforts at physical conditioning have aided the development of his ministry and growth of his church, he added: "We went to two worship services about six months after I really got back into shape. I couldn't have handled the physical demands of two services before then."

Without the two services, the church's growth would have been limited, he said. Now the church has a Saturday evening Bible study and worship service and is planning to add a third Sunday morning service to accommodate more than 2,100 people who attend Sunday school and to make room for additional growth.

The problem of physical conditioning is not limited to pastors, Hemphill said: "Laypeople are just like pastors. We all start devotional times, prayer times and exercise times and then drop off for some reason or another. Discipline and an awareness of the importance for spiritual development and devotion to God are needed to maintain a balance for all areas of conditioning."

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

Ministry to mentally ill  
requires setting fears aside

By Shari Schubert

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(Mo.)

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--When a brother is thirsty, it's fairly easy to give a cup of water in Jesus' name. But when the brother is a mental patient, high ideals of ministry often crumble under the weight of fear and ignorance, observers say.

Typically rejected and isolated by society, those who suffer from mental illness and its aftermath need the caring touch of the church, their advocates report. But instead of a cheerful welcome, cards, calls, visits and prayers, what they may encounter are embarrassed stares, awkward silence or even criticism.

Churches can minister effectively to the mentally ill, insist professionals in the mental health field. But before they can do so, members may need to examine their attitudes toward the mentally ill and perhaps discard some distorted perceptions.

People's first reaction to a person with mental illness is fear, explained Bill Carpenter, director of pastoral care at Oklahoma City's Baptist Medical Center. "For most of us, there's a part of us we're not sure about either, and we're afraid that just might come out," he notes.

Fear also has been perpetuated by unrealistic portrayal of mental illness by the mass media, observes John Twiehaus, director of the Missouri department of health's division of comprehensive psychiatric services. Sensationalism in reports of crimes involving mentally ill individuals, combined with the distorted image seen in movies such as "Psycho" have created the impression that the typical mentally ill person is violent and perhaps dangerous, he says.

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"The vast majority of mentally ill people never commit any kind of crime," emphasizes Sharon Buchanan-McClure, director of public affairs for the Missouri department of mental health. In reality, she says, the typical mentally ill person usually is docile.

The department of mental health personnel also points out a difference between a person who is mentally ill -- thus unable to control his behavior -- and a person who is capable of regulating behavior but simply refuses to do so. Many people who are involved in illegal or immoral behavior belong to the latter group, they explain.

Another common misperception about mental illness is the idea that "all you need to do is get yourself together," Twiehaus says, acknowledging that past trends in the mental health profession itself have been partly responsible for perpetuating that idea.

Some mental patients can be helped by counseling alone, but research now is confirming that many mental illnesses can be traced to physical causes such as an imbalance in body chemistry, head injury, brain abnormality or even a tumor. Manic depression now is known to be hereditary, and heredity may be involved in schizophrenia as well, Twiehaus notes. Mental illness needs to be seen as a disease process, he adds; the patient cannot will the problem away.

Mental illness among church members or their families is not an uncommon problem. Seven of nine Missouri Baptist pastors contacted by Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, recalled that someone in their current congregation or a previous congregation has experienced a serious mental illness.

Even that may not give an accurate picture of the scope of need, says Thom Meigs, associate professor of pastoral care and psychology of religion at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. Mental illness probably occurs in every church, whether members are aware of it or not, Meigs suggests. But because of the stigma involved, many people attempt to keep it hidden from others in the church and community.

Patients admitted to Fulton (Mo.) State Hospital sometimes reject the offer to contact their local pastor, notes Bill Mosby, a Southern Baptist chaplain there.

When patients or their families hide the need from their church, it prevents those who would be willing to minister from doing so, adds John Duncan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Cassville, Mo.

On the other hand, the first place many people turn for help with a mental problem is to a minister, Twiehaus notes. The minister then can be an important link in getting them the help they need.

Outside the church family are many more people suffering from mental illness and needing the church's caring ministry, especially in the larger cities, where patients who have been treated and dismissed from mental hospitals often are found among the homeless population, observers note.

"The inner city becomes a dumping ground, almost, for those who have mental problems," says Ken Smith, pastor of Forest Avenue Baptist Church in Kansas City.

Forest Avenue Church operates a shelter for the homeless and seeks to minister to such people. According to Smith, the ministry has experienced some success. The fear and loneliness that accompany mental illness "can become a bridge to bring them to Christ," he affirms.

Most of the pastors say they believe their congregations would be able to respond appropriately if someone in the congregation developed a serious mental illness. But some expressed reservations about whether their churches would know the right things to say or do.

The relationship between spiritual health and mental health becomes a crucial issue as the church seeks to minister to the mentally ill. Pastors and church members need to recognize both their potential for ministry and their limitations, health-care professionals say.

About 52 percent of mental patients have some "spiritual concerns," Mosby notes. But he explained that when a person becomes mentally ill, his religious belief system often becomes ill as well.

Mental illness can be related to a religious problem, Mosby acknowledges, but "we need to deal with the illness first, and then we can help them with the religious problem."

Faith can provide a support system for the mental patient, Twiehaus points out. "Faith gives you something to hang on to," he says.

But prescribing prayer, Bible study or "getting right with the Lord" for a problem that needs medical and/or psychiatric attention is "the worst thing you can do," insists Mosby.

The patient already has the problem of his illness, the chaplain emphasizes. If he then is counseled in a way that implies he has done something wrong to cause the illness, it "puts another guilt trip on them."

"Mike," 39, who has suffered from manic depression since his early teens, explains that being in the down cycle of depression is "like being in a vacuum." During those times, his faith is of little help, he admits. "I can't pray. I can't praise." Because of the ups and downs of the illness, he says, it's very difficult to get a handle on his spiritual condition.

What he needs from his church, he explains, is simply acceptance, reassurance, someone to listen and care.

"I want to be a good person, a good helper, a good friend, a good provider," he says. "I just want to love people the way they are, and I want them to love me the way I am. ... Jesus loves me the way I am."

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Workers urged to present gospel  
to people with mental handicaps

By Shari Schubert

F - (O  
(Mo)

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--The special needs of a mentally retarded person and his family present the church with an excellent opportunity for ministry and witness, said Gene Nabi, consultant in ministry to exceptional persons for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Mentally handicapped people need the opportunity to hear, and respond to, the gospel -- just as anyone else does, Nabi emphasized. In addition, providing for a retarded individual in the church's activities often can be the key to reaching an unchurched family for Christ or reactivating a family that has dropped out of church.

Families of a mentally retarded person sometimes have difficulty finding a church where worship and Bible study are offered at an appropriate level for the retarded family member, explained Louise Hofstetter, a longtime worker in special ministries at First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo. They also may need for their church to provide for the retarded person at other times besides the Sunday school hour so family members can attend mission organizations, choir, business meetings and other activities, she said.

The number of churches providing ministry to the mentally handicapped is increasing, but very slowly, she noted.

Among the decisions a church has to make about how it will minister to a retarded person is whether to enroll the individual in a regular class or provide a special education class, Nabi said, adding, "The ideal is to work toward mainstreaming."

But whether a retarded adult can be successfully integrated into a class usually depends on the personality of the class, as well as the personality of the person being mainstreamed, he said, acknowledging some problems may be involved.

For instance, he said, most retarded adults would be placed in a singles' department or class -- but many singles' groups have difficulty accepting a retarded person. "They don't want to be identified as being in the same group with this kind of person," he observed.

"That's sad," he added, pointing out that Jesus set a different example as he spent much of his time ministering to people with special needs and problems.

Most mildly retarded children can be mainstreamed, Hofstetter said. A special class may be needed for those who are more severely retarded or hyperactive, she suggested.

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When a retarded person is placed in a regular Sunday school class, an additional teacher who is equipped to work with him may be needed, Nabi said.

Any person who is a good teacher and feels at ease with retarded individuals can become a successful special education teacher, he said. Basically, the same principles of teaching that apply to any other class apply to teaching in a special education class, he noted, saying, "They learn the same as anybody else." The difference is the speed and level at which learning occurs.

Hofstetter pointed out a teacher needs to have good training in how to teach and communicate the Bible, and a lot of patience. "You have to do a lot of repetitive teaching," she explained. "You don't see a lot of progress rapidly."

The teacher also needs to accept that preparation for teaching a special education class is "really work," she added.

Lecture-style teaching is not a good method for work with retarded people, Nabi emphasized. He recommended that special education teaching be activity-oriented. Concentration games, word searches, puzzles and board-type games often can be used effectively, he noted.

Activities need to be lesson-oriented, he continued, adding, "We don't do activities just for fun."

Activities also need to be age-appropriate, he said. If a normal person the same age wouldn't do the activity, a teacher should not expect a mentally handicapped person to do it, he said.

Adults do not want children's material, even if their mental age is still that of a child, Hofstetter said, noting, "They want to be treated like adults."

Children's materials sometimes can be adapted for use with adults, Nabi said. For instance, when using children's Bible study leaflets with adults, he places an adhesive label over the word "children's" and adds the student's name so the cover will read, "John's Bible Study." Leaflets can be cut apart, keeping the Bible story material and discarding supplementary materials that pertain only to children, he noted.

Hofstetter stressed the importance of an individual approach in teaching. Group teaching tends to be mostly entertainment, she said. Some participants will catch on, but others will not. Most of the significant learning takes place in one-on-one situations, where the teacher can become familiar with the individual's interests, reactions and learning style and teach accordingly, she said.

Providing opportunities for mentally retarded class members to express themselves is important, Hofstetter added: "They like to talk. They like to discuss things."

Because retarded people have a strong desire to be loved and accepted, they readily respond to the love and acceptance of Christ, noted Helen Timbrook, a member of Richland Baptist Church in Kingdom City, Mo. She and her husband, Sam, parents of a retarded son, have led conferences on ministry with the mentally handicapped.

"Most of them will readily accept Christ," Hofstetter agreed. But she cautioned, "You have to know the person really well to know whether they're understanding or just mimicking."

A retarded person may have difficulty understanding some of the abstract concepts and vocabulary often used in witnessing contacts, explained Ann Putnam, national consultant with disabled persons and church weekday ministries for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. For that reason, she said, attempting to lead a retarded individual to accept Christ in a one-time contact usually is not appropriate.

The best approach by far, she said, is to enroll the person in Bible study and work with him over a period of time. "We have to find out where they are, ... what their understanding is," she said.

But retarded people are capable of making a genuine profession of faith, she emphasized. In fact, faith may come more easily for a retarded person than for many other people, Hofstetter said, noting, "Their thinking is so simple that they don't let other things get in the way."

Timbrook has found that retarded individuals, in dealing with the issue of sin, usually don't try to rationalize or make excuses. Approaching the matter in a simple, straightforward way, they are willing to acknowledge, "I really hurt God."

A personal testimony usually is an effective approach in witnessing to a retarded person, Timbrook said. "I explain what having Christ in my life has done for me," she said.

When witnessing to a retarded person, a person should use simple, clear language, she added. Because they usually take everything literally, it is important to avoid expressions such as "the blood-sprinkled way of the Lamb."

"And be praying that the Holy Spirit will communicate in ways we don't understand," added Putnam.

Some people have the idea that mentally handicapped people are automatically covered by God's grace, Nabi said, insisting, "That's not so."

There is a "mystery" about how God deals with people who are so low-functioning that they apparently cannot comprehend even the simplest presentation of the gospel, Nabi acknowledged. But he pointed out most mentally handicapped people are capable of understanding that they have done wrong and need to take steps to make things right with God. "Until those folks take those steps, they're lost," he insisted.

About 80 percent of mentally retarded people reach a mental age of at least 14, Timbrook said. Pointing out that normal young people often accept Christ at the age of 10 to 15, she observed that puts "a whole different perspective" on evangelism with the mentally retarded.

A retarded person should not be expected to understand all the ramifications of a decision for Christ any more than a child would be expected to understand, Putnam said. The person's decision must be accepted at the level at which he is able to make it.

"Our job is to treat them as if they can learn," Nabi said. "We need to present the Bible's message of salvation to them in clear language. The Holy Spirit takes it from there."