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July 28, 1989

98-115

New members, converts must be
reached at altar, Edgemon says

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--Any numerical increase concerning Southern Baptist churches usually is perceived as good. But when the jump reflects a gain in non-resident inactive membership over resident membership, it is malignant growth, a consultant said.

For three of the past four years, the number of new non-resident inactive church members or those who move away from their churches and do not see fit to join another has far outgrown the number of new resident -- active and inactive -- church members, said Glenn Smith, a consultant in the growth section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department, which will become the discipleship training department later this year.

"That means we are losing from the participating membership in larger quantities than we are gaining," Smith said.

"It is great to grow in Sunday school, discipleship training, baptisms and active resident membership. But when non-resident inactive membership (29.6 percent of the denomination) is growing at 55,000 a year and resident membership is growing at 35,000, that's a growth that will kill you."

Active resident members are those who live within commuting distance of their churches and who have attended or supported their churches financially at least once in the last year. They make up about 50 percent, or 7.4 million, of the 14.8 million Southern Baptists, Smith said.

"That figure can include those who attended church only one time, say at Christmas or Easter. It also includes those people who might not have attended church but who sent in a tithe at least once," he said.

Inactive resident members are those who live within commuting distance of their member church and are physically able to attend but have not supported the church in any way within the past 12 months, he said. They number about 20.4 percent, or about 3 million, in the denomination.

In 1988, a total of 55,625 Southern Baptist church members moved away from their churches and did not join another, while new resident membership gained by only 35,101. Smith said. The percentage of resident inactive members included in the 35,101 figure is not known, he added.

In 1987, the net loss in active members was greater.

New non-resident inactive members totaled 84,772, and new resident membership was 24,431, he said.

"We had 60,000 more people move away from their home churches and not join another than we had in gain of resident members," Smith said.

The most favorable statistics in the last four years came in 1986, when Southern Baptists had 77,243 new resident members as opposed to 54,891 new non-resident inactives, Smith said.

But in 1985, Smith said, 89,347 Southern Baptist church members became non-resident inactive, while only 47,399 became active, a difference of 41,948. The statistics were gathered by the board's research services department from information on the Southern Baptist Uniform Church Letter statistical survey, he noted.

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"I think one of the main reasons Southern Baptists lose so many people is because our evangelism has too long focused on decisions and not disciples," said Roy Edgemon, director of the church training department. "A decision is only one element of many in the goal of seeing people become disciples and responsible church members."

"I believe that discipleship begins at the altar with well-trained counselors who can clearly help a person find the biblical answers to their spiritual needs."

One of the six church tasks assigned to church training is to orient new members for responsible church membership.

To combat the downturn, churches should reach new members and converts at three places: counseling at the point of a decision, extensive biblical training following a decision to accept Christ and new-member training in Baptist doctrine and church polity, Smith said.

"These methods probably will not affect bringing people back into the church who have already dropped out," Smith said, "but it will stem the flow of resident inactive membership."

For counseling at the point of decision, Smith suggested churches use the church training department resource, Commitment Counseling Manual. The Survival Kit for New Christians in adult, youth and children's editions should be used with new Christians, as well as "The Meaning of Church Membership Series" with new Christians and new church members, he said. Basics for New Baptists is a church training resource for new members due out in January 1990 for people joining Baptist churches from other denominations.

"All of us want to see an increase in decisions resulting in baptisms, but somewhere we have to be equally concerned about what's happening to those we baptize," Smith said. "Presently, one-half of those we baptize are ultimately being lost from the mission and ministry of the church."

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European Baptist gathering
surpasses previous marks

N-FMB

Baptist Press
7/28/89

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--More than 5,000 people registered for the European Baptist Federation Congress in Budapest, Hungary, making it the largest federation gathering ever.

Congress participants came from every country of western Europe and East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and, for the first time, Bulgaria. Participants also came from as far away as Ghana, the Philippines and Cuba, as well as the United States.

The opening session included an address by Hungary's National Assembly president, Matyas Szuros, who praised Baptists, explaining they are contributing in making "structures of a new society." He spoke appreciatively of the "values of the democratically controlled model in Baptist churches."

The president's speech was praised by Janos Viczian, himself a member of the Hungarian Parliament. He is president of the 11,000-member Hungarian Baptist Union. "Our political situation has changed," Viczian said. "We have a real reform situation in Hungary."

Evangelist Billy Graham was scheduled to address the July 29 closing session -- a special evangelistic rally in the People's Stadium expected to draw as many as 150,000 participants.

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Graphic violence on television:
How should Christians respond?

By Teresa Dickens

F- (O)
(Mo.)

Baptist Press
7/28/89

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--American television viewers have been exposed to the horror of civil unrest in recent weeks as news broadcasters have shown the results of the bloodbath in China. Viewers have seen beatings, dead bodies -- most of them bloody -- and in one instance, the remains of a Chinese soldier after he had been tied to a bus by the neck and set afire.

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On another news broadcast, viewers heard the tape recording of a Florida boy's call to 911 in which he told the events of accidentally shooting his younger sister. In a terror-stricken voice, he recalled finding his dad's gun, pointing it toward his sister and, not realizing the gun was loaded, pulling the trigger. Before a rescue team could arrive, the little girl died.

On a prime-time news show, viewers saw the story of an Indiana woman who had been beaten by her husband. She was first seen in a taped interview, bearing scars of a severe beating, telling police the sequence of events in the attack. Eventually, viewers saw her body lying on the front lawn of a neighbor's house, where her husband finally caught up with her and beat her to death.

Such violence on television comes from the evening news and a prime-time news show, not to mention shows such as "Hunter," "In the Heat of the Night" and "China Beach," to name a few.

Violence has always been a part of society, but in recent years it has increased markedly, researchers report. Some of them attribute a large part of that to the increase of violence on television.

Thomas Radecki, a psychiatrist and chairman and research director for the National Coalition on Television Violence, reported: "Since 1956, when TV first became violent, murder has increased 300 percent per capita, rape 500 percent and assaults 600 percent per capita. Television is worse today than ever before. Forty percent of all TV and film entertainment contains high levels of physical violence, usually in a glamorized or exciting format.

"Television and film entertainment is one of the most important factors contributing to the formation of values and behaviors." Noting that family, peers and schooling are the other major factors, he added, "How we choose to entertain ourselves and our children plays a major role in who we are and who we become."

Based on his research, Radecki made several startling observations about television viewing:

-- The average person currently watches television 24 hours per week and listens to radio an almost equal amount of time.

-- The average American child with pay cable and/or a VCR in the home will witness 32,000 murders, 40,000 attempted murders and a quarter-million total acts of violence by age 18.

-- At current rates, the average person will never witness a real-life murder in his or her lifetime but will see more than 70,000 on entertainment TV.

-- Prime-time television currently is averaging nine acts of violence per hour, and Hollywood movies average 24 acts per hour.

-- Forty-one cartoon series have been developed since 1982 to help sell lines of war toys.

Joe Shelton, chairman of the department of behavioral science at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., agreed with Radecki, noting that violence seen on television affects viewers both psychologically and physiologically.

Based on a study done by Shelton and a group of students at the university, viewers tested before and after watching violent films showed an increase in their hostility and aggression level, along with an increase in blood pressure and pulse rate.

Although the findings were insignificant from a scientific standpoint, Shelton said the findings made one thing certain: "Watching violence affects people. Our study involved a short period of time, and we saw a change in our participants. Just think about the effects of an indefinite period of time."

Shelton noted two possible results of constantly viewing violence: the development of violent behavior or apathy toward violence, a numbness.

"The greatest danger for Christians is growing apathetic," he stressed. "If you constantly view violence, you soon lose sight of its seriousness. You are no longer shocked by anything you see.

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"I believe that is where we are today. Most Christians watch violence and never think about the consequences it has on them."

One question on which psychologists do not agree on is whether violence/aggression is learned or is an innate part of human nature. Those who believe it is learned say individuals are born free of aggression and acquire it as they observe and consequently model external factors.

Proponents of the innate theory suggest an individual is born with an aggressive nature and the need for express that nature. They say that is why men enjoy contact sports, car racing, hunting and fishing. The "learned" theorists counter that an individual enjoys particular sports because their fathers or other role models did.

Robert Troutwine, associate professor of psychology and chairman of the psychology department at William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., combines the two theories, suggesting that man is born with an aggressive nature, but how he expresses it is determined by his environment.

"Aggression is a part of human nature," he said. "How we express our aggression is determined by what we see modeled."

For most youngsters, the models include parents, peers and the media, Troutwine noted, emphasizing that in many cases the media has the greatest influence.

"Children spend an average of eight hours a day watching television," compared to only five hours of classroom time each day in school, he said. "And since violence is the primary way television deals with conflict, it is easy to see why television has such an influence."

Like Shelton, Troutwine said the greatest danger for most people is becoming desensitized, but he also warned against isolation: "Parents can't isolate their children. There is no way parents can protect their children forever."

"Television can be a great educational tool." He suggested that television viewing should be a family event followed by interpretative discussion when needed.

Christians should be very concerned about the amount of violence on television and in movies, stressed Larry Braidfoot, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. Noting Christians' response to "The Last Temptation of Christ" and pornography, he said: "Christians should have the same kind of concern over how violence is portrayed."

"'Blessed are the peacemakers' is the biblical mandate concerning violence. That, along with the non-violent lifestyle of Jesus, is the pattern we are to follow."

The church can have a role in resolving the problem, Braidfoot added: "One of the greatest ministry roles a church could have is in teaching conflict resolution. Our society has taught us to be in control. The church must teach us how to do it in a peaceful way."

Along with the church's role is the role individuals can play. Radecki and Troutwine both offered suggestions on what Christians can do to help combat the way violence is portrayed in society.

-- Model a non- or anti-violent lifestyle. Inappropriate verbal and physical actions can teach "violence is the answer to conflict," Troutwine warned.

-- Monitor entertainment and recreation activity. Not only should parents monitor what television programs their children watch, but also the kind of toys they buy for their children. "It is not healthy to teach your children to play war," Radecki emphasized.

-- Become involved in the larger social issue. Christians can write letters to producers and networks protesting the violent nature of programming and to lawmakers in support of legislation attempting to address the issue.

"We can do a lot if we decide to," remarked Braidfoot, "but we must first recognize it as a problem."

Radecki agreed: "What we do on our own will not be enough. But collectively, our efforts can help break the chain of violence."

Gentle breezes of healing, new life
blow over hurricane-ravaged Mexico

By Ken Camp

F - Texas

GREENVILLE, Texas (BP)--Months after the violent winds of Hurricane Gilbert dealt death and destruction in northeastern Mexico, the gentle breezes of healing and new life initially fanned by Texas Baptist disaster relief teams continue to blow across the region.

Last September, the Texas Baptist Men organization served 18,000 meals from San Fernando and 18,000 from the little fishing village of Carbonera to survivors of the hurricane. Out of that emergency response came an ongoing relationship between a northeast Texas Baptist church and a hurricane-ravaged northeast Mexico community that has resulted in more than 140 professions of faith in Christ.

At a Rio Grande River Ministry retreat in February, leaders of First Baptist Church of Greenville, Texas, met with Jerry Johnson, director of missions for Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association, about a potential missions project.

While Johnson emphasized the need for volunteers in several areas, his description of the doors of opportunity that had opened in Carbonera since Hurricane Gilbert captivated the Greenville workers.

"We prayed about it, and the Lord really laid that village on our hearts," said D.D. Sumrall, pastor of First Baptist Church.

Before long, the church was working in partnership with Bethany Church in San Fernando and the Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association to plan a summer mission trip.

On June 19-23, a 22-member team traveled from Greenville to San Fernando. In five days, the volunteers led Vacation Bible School and revival services in San Fernando and conducted backyard Bible clubs and evangelistic visitation in Carbonera.

Using a River Ministry Spanish-language tract, "How to Get to Heaven from the Border Area," the Texas Baptists saw 142 professions of faith in Christ. Among that number were about 110 adults who completed forms registering decisions and requesting Spanish Bibles from the River Ministry.

The evangelistic, agricultural and medical/dental programs of the River Ministry are supported by Texas Baptists through the Cooperative Program unified budget and the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Nearly all of the volunteers who went to Mexico -- including one couple who postponed a honeymoon to go -- are involved actively in the "Lay Renewal Journey" of prayer and discipleship, Sumrall noted.

"Since we began the journey, I can't say enough about what it has done for our church," he said. The lay renewal program, coordinated by Texas Baptist Men, includes an emphasis on discovery of spiritual gifts for service, prayer and discipleship.

"Before we left Mexico, we started a discipleship program with those who had made decisions," said Sumrall.

The Texans started the new believers in a study of the Spanish-language "Roman Road" Scripture portions until they had time to receive their new Bibles from the River Ministry.

Out of appreciation for the work of Texas Baptist disaster relief volunteers, a building site for a Baptist church in Carbonera was donated by local governmental officials last year. First Baptist Church of Greenville hopes to begin sending a series of construction crews to Mexico in the months ahead to help San Fernando's Bethany Church start that building.

"We want to stand by our commitment to the people there," said Sumrall.

Bicycles hauling food, hope
to 'saucepan bandit' victims

By Craig Bird

F - FMB

SOROTI, Uganda (BP)--The "saucepan bandits" and the Baptist bicycles are in a tug of war in northeastern Uganda. Starvation is the rope.

Over the past three years an already chaotic civil war has degenerated into a series of robberies as armed gangs roam the Teso District. Ambushes have twice driven the Red Cross out of the area, and until recently food truck convoys reached the town of Soroti only with heavily armed escorts.

"We're told the 250,000 people of this district have lost 4 million head of cattle," says Harry Garvin, a Southern Baptist missionary from Cisco, Texas, who has worked in the area since 1971. "There used to be cows everywhere and now you can drive for miles and not see any."

You won't see many chickens, sheep, goats or hoes, either. Even cooking pots ("saucepans" in the British English of Uganda) are scarce -- snatched up by the thieves.

"These people don't deserve to be called rebels -- they are bandits pure and simple," Garvin says. Many of the cattle thefts have been charged to the Karamajong people -- traditional tribal enemies of the Iteso people. But the gangs the people derisively call "saucepan bandits" are mostly Iteso, stealing from their own people. The bandits often torch what they can't haul off, including crops in the field or stored grain.

The natural result has been widespread hunger.

By mid-1987, 60,000 refugees had fled into Soroti and the protection of the government's National Resistance Army. Southern Baptist missionaries in Uganda requested \$60,000 in hunger relief funds from the Foreign Mission Board and set up one of the first feeding programs for the refugees.

But Garvin and area Baptist pastors knew many people who could not or would not leave their villages. And they were starving.

Trucks could not safely leave the main highway. But bicycles might dodge the ambushes -- and the pastors who made up the Baptist Relief Committee all owned bicycles. More importantly, they were willing to risk their own lives to carry food, seed, blankets and hoes up to 45 miles beyond the protection of government troops.

Regularly the pastors walk those miles, pushing bicycles creaking under 100-pound loads. Most of the time they make the trips safely. Most of the time.

"In a year and a half we've lost only two bicycles, 28 hoes and 15 blankets, which is remarkable when you think of how much these men have hauled and where they have carried it," Garvin says. "Of course, 'just a bicycle' is not accurate here because when they lose a bicycle it's like an American losing a Cadillac."

The pastors, who themselves have been victims of bandits and are having trouble feeding their own families, risk both physical harm and financial loss. Hunger funds are restricted and cannot be used to replace stolen bicycles. Their courage does not surprise Garvin.

"I would put these men up against any in the world for honesty and integrity," he says. "And they don't get a penny in salary for all this. They do it out of love for the Lord and love for the people."

The missionary is not the only person holding that opinion. Soroti government officials tell other groups who want to assist in the relief work to "pattern yourselves after the Baptists. They're honest and do good work." The Food For the Hungry organization was so impressed it has offered to provide food if the Iteso Baptist pastors will distribute it.

The \$60,000 Foreign Mission Board grant for 1988 was followed by another \$158,000 this year in hunger relief gifts from Southern Baptists. So the feeding can continue until the fighting finally ends and people can harvest their crops again.

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By January 1989 -- via bicycle in the rural areas and trucks in the refugee camps around Soroti -- Baptists had distributed 10 tons of sorghum seed; nearly 5,000 hoes, 2,000 cooking pots, and 2,000 blankets; and more than 200 sacks of beans, cornmeal and millet flour.

"We fed a lot in the camps at first but as other groups came in we turned over as much of that as we could and kept moving out where no one else would go," Garvin says. "We naturally go to areas where we have strong work (about 10,000 Baptists live in the district), but once we get there the distribution is from government lists, not our church rolls."

While the pastors are nonpartisan in handing out food and blankets, they are still pastors. "We preach every time," Garvin explains. "The food distribution dominates but we share the gospel alongside it."

On a few occasions distributions turned into near-riots when the pastors took enough food for 900 people (based on the government lists of camp population) and several thousand rushed the truck.

"It is so sad," Garvin admits. "We have to force our way into the truck and just drive off leaving them hungry. Otherwise somebody would get killed." But as soon as the lists are corrected, the pastors return with food -- and the Bible.

As the government gains control of more territory and the bandit groups surrender, refugees are returning to their abandoned farms. But the "outflux" of refugees from Soroti is slower than the influx. They know the government's hold on much of the area is tenuous. They also know there is not much to go home to.

"It is still dangerous to return home when people know you have been in Soroti," says John Ekuru, a member of the relief committee. "After dark a group of men will come to your door and say, 'Come out and give us what you brought back from town.'"

As Garvin points out, "It is a big risk to leave the camps because at least there the people are getting something to eat every day. If they go back they don't have anything to eat until they get their first harvest. But if they don't go back they can't plant and there won't be a harvest. This area is usually just one crop failure from famine anyway. The soil here will produce but not like other parts of Uganda. So the people have to work harder to survive."

Ironically, many bandits who have surrendered return to their villages as destitute as their former victims. "The people are joking about the men coming and begging for help, but they don't have anything to share with them because the men had stolen it earlier -- even the saucepans!" Garvin says.

But many of those villages will be visited by Baptist pastors pushing bicycles. The grain to feed people today, the blankets to keep them warm tonight, the hoes to dig the ground and the seeds to plant for tomorrow's harvest will then be available. Even to some former "saucepan bandits."

And the Baptist bicycles will have won the tug of war.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Baptist hunger relief effort
could spark Ugandan revival

By Craig Bird

F-FMB

Baptist Press
7/28/89

SOROTI, Uganda (BP)--Thousands of Ugandans fled to the Soroti refugee camps to escape death by starvation or ambush.

Now as the flood of people begins to wash back out into the rural areas, the seeds of spiritual revival are going with them, Southern Baptist missionary Harry Garvin believes.

Garvin, who has worked with the Iteso people of northeastern Uganda since 1971, has wept and worked his way through the last year and a half as civil war forced 60,000 refugees into Soroti, a town which normally has a population of 10,000.

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The sight of babies whose curly black hair had turned straight and yellow from severe malnutrition became commonplace to Garvin, but the pain didn't lessen. Nor did the frustration of being unable to move freely throughout the district to assist the 65 churches and 10,000 Baptists.

But Garvin sees good coming out of the tragedy.

"We have a dream of 1,000 Baptist churches in the Teso District by the year 2000, and these refugees are going to start many of those churches," he says. "Baptists have fed refugees without a break when even the Red Cross pulled out, and we've fed them in areas where even government troops were afraid to go. And wherever we feed people we preach the gospel."

Crowds of 400 to 500 people overflow Soroti Baptist Church each Sunday morning. The house where relief supplies are stored between distributions is used throughout the week for Bible studies, choir practices and women's meetings.

Eight refugee families live in the church and eight more live among the roofless ruins of Garvin's former house (destroyed in 1986 by anti-government forces).

The mix of humanitarian aid and Bible-based preaching finds a receptive audience in Soroti and the outlying areas, where Baptist pastors ferry food, seed, blankets and hoes for distribution in areas still controlled by armed bandits.

"When these people return home they will carry the gospel with them and start churches where we've never even attempted to have work," Garvin says. "We've already had one refugee go back home and start a church. He's already asking us to come do some teaching and training."

"But what is really exciting is that all this work has been beyond my reach for a long time now. This isn't the missionary from America starting churches and training disciples. This is Ugandan pastors risking their lives and their property to go out and preach. This is God moving among local people using local resources."

The pastors themselves often view the difficult times the Iteso have faced in light of how God will work it out.

It is good, they say, that raiders have stolen their cattle, "because we loved our cows so much we worshiped them instead of God."

It was good that several pastors had to flee their home villages to Soroti. It was good that several of them have been arrested and thrown into prison, "because we have been able to preach and people have seen that our God takes care of us."

Now they will soon be able to return to their villages. The pastors expect the working relationship that has been so effective in hunger relief will continue as they work together in spreading Christianity throughout Teso.

"You know," says Garvin, his voice choking with emotion, "when we get to heaven I'm going to look up and see all of these guys so far ahead of me. The quality of the men God has raised up here humbles me and gives me confidence God is going to do great things here."

And that, as the Ugandan pastors would say, is good.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Stanley Howell bikes
to Ridgecrest at age 64

By Terri Lackey

F-SSB

Baptist Press
7/28/89

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--In 1948, as a young staffer at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center, Stanley Howell made up his mind to ride a bicycle from his home to the conference grounds near Asheville, N.C., some day.

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Forty-one years later, Howell, manager of the growth section in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training (whose name is changing to discipleship training Oct. 1) department, has finally fulfilled that promise he made to himself while dipping ice cream behind a counter at the Nibble Nook.

On July 8, the 64-year-old Howell hopped aboard his Shogun touring bike and began the 320-mile trek to the Church Training Leadership Conference, a trip that took him seven days and six nights to complete.

Howell, who began training last August, said he had to make the trip this summer because he plans to retire in April 1990.

"This will be my last trip to Ridgecrest as a Sunday School Board employee, and I plan to send my bike back on the truck. I have no intention of riding it back to Nashville," he laughed.

Howell took up bicycling as a hobby in 1988 after a visit to the doctor.

"A while back my doctor told me I ought to do something great, something important I could say I did, and finish it," Howell said. "He said to get rid of some of my stress at work, I needed to have a hobby outside my work, something I could get wrapped up in."

Howell took his doctor's advice and bought a \$99 bicycle last August, the first he could ever claim all his own. He rode that for several months to determine if he would like biking. Then in March he graduated to the 18-speed touring bike he now peddles.

"I started out buying a department store bike to see if I could really do it," he explained. "At first, I thought I was accomplishing something when I rode my bike six miles to the Opryland Hotel and back home."

Howell's ride to Ridgecrest took him from Nashville east through the Tennessee towns and cities of Lebanon, Watertown, Alexandria, Liberty, Smithville, Sparta, DeRosset, Crossville, Rockwood, Kingston, Knoxville, Dandridge and Newport.

"At the Newport Cafe I ate some of the best pancakes ever," said Howell, who assured pancakes are a good source of carbohydrates needed for high energy. He also ate many bananas for potassium to keep his legs from aching and drank Gatorade mixed with water for energy.

From Newport, Howell rode to Hot Springs, N.C., where he bedded down in "a family-owned hotel right on the Appalachian Trail. The towels are like the towels you have at home. Everything was real, not all plastic, and there were big trees in front."

Howell rode into Ridgecrest from Hot Springs, one of the toughest legs of his journey.

"There was one place between Hot Springs and Asheville that I had to walk my bike out of necessity," he remembered. "The mountain was so long and steep that I just could not peddle it all.

"Sixty-eight miles was the longest one-day ride, from Crossville to Knoxville. It was rough, too, because there was one hill after another from Kingston on in to my motel in Knoxville.

Along the trip, Howell stopped at accessible Baptist churches to drop off literature about a new Discipleship Training Records System that starts in October.

"I left about 15 brochures at churches along the way," he said. "I did not stop at all Baptist churches because some were way up a hill on the opposite side of the road or on a steep gravel driveway.

"It made me aware of problems handicapped persons have to go through. The churches weren't convenient to me on a bicycle, and I just imagined how difficult it is for handicapped people to get in some places."

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Yes, Howell said, biking has added a dimension to his life: "I'm convinced I get bikers' high. The first thing I want to do when I get home from work is change into my biking clothes and go."

The 320-mile trip to Ridgecrest is not the culmination of Howell's biking goals.

He wants to ride 100 miles in one day, a feat he believes his body can handle, but perhaps not his watch.

"I think I can do it physically. I just have to find the time."

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

Seminarians tour Chicago,
study variety of ministries

By Breena Kent Paine

F- (CO
(NOBTS)

Baptist Press
7/28/89

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--From "yuppie" congregations to meals for the poor, students in an urban missions course at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary experienced city ministry in Chicago firsthand during a summer term.

Sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the seminary, students traveled to Chicago to visit more than 10 ministries to diverse socio-economic and ethnic groups.

"We saw ministries to Blacks, Spanish, Anglos, yuppies and suburbanites, ... from the wealthiest to the very poorest, trying to get a picture of the urban scene," said A.J. Glaze, professor of missions and course leader.

To better understand the struggles of inner-city existence, students had only \$4 per day for food and other needs and slept on the floor of Uptown Baptist Church, using some of the same facilities as the homeless. During their stay, they helped serve a meal to more than 400 people from the community.

Ministering in a low socio-economic community, the Uptown church offers ministries to senior citizens; internationals with language congregations for Cambodian, Vietnamese, Spanish, Ethiopian, Korean and Russian; refugees; drug addicts; alcoholics; abused families; and others. The ministries involve programs for counseling, health education and service, overnight shelter, food, job referrals, furniture distribution, lifestyle rehabilitation and housing.

"At times, I forgot I was in Chicago; I thought I was in New Orleans," said Sherrie Bumstead, a student from Beaumont, Texas. "I found people's needs are the same wherever you go, but people's outlooks and attitudes about life are different.

"When we helped serve an evening meal to the homeless, I (realized) sometimes we forget those people have pride, too. We forget it takes a lot for them to come and admit they need food."

On the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, students visited Willow Creek Community Church, which holds services geared toward a young community of professionals, attracting about 4,000 yuppies each Saturday night. The gospel is presented clearly but in a "non-threatening" way, said Glaze, and much of the music is up-beat and relates to the young professional lifestyle.

The class also visited Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church, ministering to a Black middle-class community; Christ Church of Oak Brook, ministering to a wealthy neighborhood; Brainard Avenue Baptist Church, discovering its identity and the needs of the surrounding community; New Faith Baptist Church, ministering to a black, wealthy, professional community, using music ranging from soul to classical; Hillcrest Baptist Church, ministering to a racially mixed, lower-middle-class community; Armitage Baptist Church, ministering to a low-income neighborhood; and Rockwell Baptist Church, ministering to a Spanish-speaking community.

"Churches we saw that were growing or doing an effective ministry did not present a program in hopes that people would respond; they felt the needs of the people, and then adapted organizational programs to meet those needs," Glaze said, describing a process he calls "contextualization."

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Most of the ideas implemented catered to particular situations in Chicago and would probably not work in other areas, said Larry Haggard, a student from Macon, Miss., but "I learned to be concerned about the people's needs and to do whatever it takes to meet those needs," even if it means creating a new program.

"Those people have such a vision for that city," Bumstead said. By observing the various programs offered, she learned "it's OK to be non-traditional. You don't have to go overseas to do foreign missions."

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Deaf pastor to build
bridges to hearing world

By Breena Kent Paine

F- (O)
(NOBT)

Baptist Press
7/28/89

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--The world of the deaf is a culture within a culture, striving to communicate through visual means in an environment of sounds, observers have noted. As a result, deaf persons have unique needs.

Rocky Shifflett hopes to meet some of those needs and bridge the gaps between the hearing and the deaf in Louisiana.

A recent graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Shifflett is the newly elected president of the Louisiana Baptist Conference of the Deaf, a position which can only be filled by a deaf person. His goal is to advance ministry among deaf people through deaf awareness conferences for hearing people and leadership training workshops for deaf people.

One need Shifflett hopes to fill through these workshops is the teaching of Baptist doctrine. Many deaf people have spent years in hearing congregations receiving the message through an interpreter. Any phrases or words which are unclear in the translation cannot be explained in such a situation, and the deaf person is left without full comprehension, he explained. Very few deaf people have the advantage of seminary training, and most Bible translations contain vocabulary unfamiliar to many in the deaf culture.

Shifflett would also like to raise an awareness of deaf needs by providing workshops for hearing ministers and interpreters, helping them understand deaf culture and teaching them to lead music in a way that would be meaningful to a deaf person.

"A lot of pastors are ignorant about the needs; they don't know what to do. Sometimes they have the wrong idea about the deaf; they put them in the back with interpreters," Shifflett said. "When I try to explain to (hearing) persons about the deaf world, they want to rely on their own philosophy. ... I want to give them the resources, people to contact" for advice.

Although deaf from birth, Shifflett "grew up in a hearing world," of his family. As a result, he has learned much of the cultures of both deaf and hearing people. "I want to turn around what I've learned from the hearing world and teach the deaf," he said.

Shifflett's childhood memories in a hearing church are of watching a red-faced preacher pound on the pulpit or a music minister wildly waving his arms. At the time, he did not know what it meant, for he heard no sounds; and even when an interpreter served as intermediary, something was always lost in the message, he said.

"Now I want to teach deaf people to worship with their own thoughts, (instead of) growing up like a robot: go to church, behave, go home," he said. "I want to let the deaf people know God knows their language. ... Let the deaf people be themselves. Let them worship the way they can worship."

Although he has excellent speech skills, Shifflett said he often has felt frustrated because when he talks with people, "hearing people understand me, but I don't understand them." Also, many spoken idioms do not translate into sign language, such as "kick the bucket." Deaf people would take the phrase literally.

"When I see deaf people afraid to ask (what something means) I want to say, 'Don't be afraid. I was like you before,'" he said.

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Shifflett is the fifth deaf person to graduate from New Orleans Seminary in recent years, and the second in the seminary's School of Christian Training. He has served on the Southern Baptist Conference of the Deaf and has been pastor of deaf congregations in Beaumont and Lubbock, Texas.

Currently, he is a missionary-at-large for Canal Boulevard Baptist Church in New Orleans, starting a deaf congregation in La Place, La. His wife, Cindy, and children Traci, 9; Tina, 5, and Jason, 3, all can hear.

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Young writer's story
'witnesses' for Christ

By Breena Kent Paine

F- CO
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Baptist Press
7/28/89

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Christy Wilton prayed her story would be chosen to win the 1988-1989 Young Authors Contest -- not because she wanted an award, but because "she wanted to "be a witness."

Her prayer was answered, as the 12-year-old's story of her conversion and baptism won first place in the contest's non-fiction division for Louisiana. The story was published in the New Orleans The Times Picayune, and she was won a medal and certificates of achievement.

"The main reason why I wanted to (enter) was because I knew if my story won, it would go in the newspaper," said Wilton. "I wanted to be a witness to the people who would read it. Many people might not go to church, but they may read the newspaper."

A fifth-grade student at Jean Gordon Elementary School in New Orleans, Wilton is the daughter of Rod and Irene Wilton of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Her father is a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I think she is probably one of the most eager young ladies I have had," said her teacher, Suzy Owens. "Not only is she bright, but the things she doesn't know she makes it a challenge to (find out). She's a perfect example -- polite, sincere. The whole family's like that."

Wilton also "likes to make everything right," continued Owens, who feels Wilton has been a positive influence and an encouragement to other students. When she notices someone is sad or has a problem, "she'll write you a little note, and she'll always put her own artistic (touch) to it," something that has touched many of Wilton's classmates.

After entering her composition in the contest, Wilton said, "I prayed a few nights in a row that ... it would be chosen not only because it was good but because it would be a witness."

The winning story, along with others Wilton had written, was published in Jean Gordon Expressions, a book of students' compositions put out by her school. "Everyone (in my class) lined up one by one to read it because my teacher opened the book up to that page," said Wilton. "One of the persons in my class, I think, ... got touched by my story."

Although she does not plan to be an author "when I grow up," Wilton likes to make every composition she writes count in sharing Jesus with other people.

"The stories I've written have all had to do with church and the Lord. One story about an old lady was about kindness. I like to put a lesson in each one of my stories."

This is her winning story:

"This is a true story about an experience which I had in the country of Israel. This was a very special occasion because my dad, who is a pastor, baptized me in the River Jordan. This is the same river (in which) our Lord Jesus Christ was baptized. This experience of mine happened as a result of another experience which took place about three to four years ago.

"My Dad, who was the pastor of a church in South Africa, preached a powerful message. It said at the end that if anyone wanted to have Jesus come to "live" in their heart, they should go to their room and just pray to him and ask him to come in and take full control of their life.

"That was the night God really spoke to me, and when I came home, I did just what my Dad suggested.

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"I believe that from that moment on a change slowly took place in my life, and I want only to do the things that will make God happy. Often I make mistakes, but my heavenly Father forgives me when I ask him to.

"We left South Africa in November of 1987 to come and live in America. My dad wanted to study at the New Orleans Baptist Seminary. On our way, we traveled through many countries. Israel was first. What an exciting time we had as a family.

"One of my highlights in Israel was my baptism on November the 6th. We all woke up early and after making our bunk beds in the youth hostel, which was on a high mountain above the Sea of Galilee, we walked outside and looked at the lovely view. Dad took me aside and read some verses from the Bible to me. They talked about Jesus' baptism so many ... years ago.

"We drove down to the River Jordan. The water was cold and there was a light drizzle, but my heart was warm and God showered me with his blessing."