

(BP)**- - BAPTIST PRESS**

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September 28, 1989

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89-140

Power of God's grace follows
power of Hurricane Hugo

By Mark Wingfield

MACEDONIA, S.C. (BP)--"We've seen the power of God, and now we're seeing his grace and mercy right behind it," deacon Dave Tracy said as Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers scurried about him attending to the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo.

The demonstration of God's power came in the hurricane itself, which swept across the South Carolina coast and then moved inland to wreak havoc on rural communities such as Macedonia, he added.

"It drove home to me that God was illustrating his power -- that he can turn this world upside down in the snap of a finger," explained Tracy, who weathered the storm in his house with his wife, three daughters and other relatives.

"When the storm was over and we were able to go outside and see the devastation, I just stopped and told my girls to thank God that he had spared our lives," he recalled, his voice choking with emotion.

The demonstration of God's mercy has come through the efforts of Southern Baptist volunteers from Tennessee who have worked nearly around the clock at Providence Baptist Church in Macedonia.

In the first five days after the hurricane hit, the disaster relief team served 12,000 hot meals and became the focal point of relief efforts in the county.

The Tennesseans were among Southern Baptists from 11 states who manned 13 disaster relief units in the aftermath of the hurricane.

Although Providence Baptist Church was one of the smallest churches hosting disaster relief efforts, it had the largest sustained effort of any church in the state. The 17 Tennessee volunteers and dozens of local workers converted the church's modest facilities into a bustling relief center.

The fellowship hall became a warehouse for boxes of food brought in by the American Red Cross and other donors. The kitchen and two porches were used for cooking massive quantities of food.

A funeral home canopy and a small revival tent provided refuge from the heat and rain for people who came to eat. And the Sunday school rooms became distribution points for baby supplies, medical attention and building materials.

Because the Tennessee group brought several large power generators with them, the church was the only place in town with electricity. With that power, the church hosted the local fire department and several ill children who needed electricity to operate life-support systems. One generator was placed on the church's water well to provide the only clean drinking water in town.

Food arrived from all over the Southeast -- truckloads of ice, canned goods and frozen meats. The volunteer cooks prepared food from 30 cases of No. 10 cans each day and cooked quantities such as 400 pounds of fresh chicken and 300 pounds of beef loin.

"I've been around the world several times and then under it in a submarine, and I'm still amazed at what I've seen happen here," said Tracy, who is retired from the U.S. Navy.

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The volunteers credited two men as the key to the disaster relief project's success -- Providence's pastor, Mickey Caison, and Cameron Byler, Brotherhood director for the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

Caison is a volunteer fireman and was involved in disaster assistance from the first gust of wind. As the storm moved in early Friday morning, Sept. 22, he began getting people out of their homes and taking them to shelter. At one point, the pastor had to abandon his vehicle and take refuge in the community shelter himself.

"When it got daylight, I just couldn't believe what I was seeing," Caison recounted. "It was total destruction."

The pastor immediately called Ben Connell, Brotherhood director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, to request assistance. Within 24 hours, the Tennessee disaster relief unit -- the first on the scene -- had arrived and begun serving hot meals.

After watching the pastor's ministry in the community night and day after the storm, one Tennessee volunteer who is a veteran disaster worker described what he had seen. "He's not just a minister, he's a humanitarian. He preaches seven days a week by his service," said Jack Valentine from Knoxville.

Byler, who previously was disaster relief coordinator for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and has worked disasters for 21 years, agreed. "If it hadn't been for this pastor, I don't know what these people would have done," he said.

Though weary from the work, Caison said he is overwhelmed by the change the disaster relief efforts have brought about in his church. Individuals to whom he has told about Christ for years have been at the church working and plan to attend worship for the first time. Church members who seldom shared their faith are doing just that.

"Our people are just elated to be part of such a ministry," he said. "I hope our witness will be more credible in the eyes of people because they have felt love expressed."

"Even though there is so much devastation, I feel good because God is working among his people," Tracy added. "A revival has started in this community."

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Leavell says Southern Baptists
have neglected local church

N-Texas
By Terry Barone

Baptist Press
9/28/89

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptists have spent too much time on what "the other guy believes" while turning their backs on the health and growth of the local church, according to Landum P. Leavell II, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Speaking to almost 5,000 participants at the Texas Baptist State Sunday School Convention at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, Leavell said, that during the last 10 years Southern Baptists have "neglected the body and the bride of Christ, ... and I believe that has eternal consequences."

"If we spent the same time that we've spent in letter writing, in phone calling, in attending caucuses to get somebody elected or to get an appointment ourselves, we could have won thousands to our savior," he said. "Brother, when you get that kind of swap out, you can't tell me that Jesus is pleased with it."

Leavell also called on pastors to take the responsibility for not providing adequate leadership for the more than 37,000 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. Sixty-eight percent of Southern Baptist churches have either "plateaued or are declining," he said, adding "One out of every six did not baptize one person last year."

Comparing churches to businesses, Leavell said: "Any business that has the track record of most Southern Baptist churches showing decline over a period of years would call a board meeting and have the CEO (chief executive officer) on the carpet. I can guarantee you in the businesses of America it would not continue to be business as usual when the graph is down, down, down year in and year out."

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Leavell also called on laypeople to be "active, not merely reactive," with a philosophy that says, "Let's go get them," not "'Ya'll come.'"

"If you are waiting for the lost multitudes to come to your church and beat down your doors to get in, you are going to wait in vain," he said.

Too many Sunday school classes have become "clandestine Bible study groups" that meet on Sunday and possibly during the week for a discussion of the Bible that has no effect of their lifestyle, he said.

"If Bible study does not lead you and me to a more Christlike lifestyle and to a deeper involvement with society, our Bible study has missed the mark and is futile," he explained. "The purpose for studying the Bible is that we might do the Bible. If we are producing a generation of people that all they want to do is read it, study it and don't have any interest in doing it, somehow or other, we are missing the mark."

Another task of Sunday school, according to Leavell, is to develop character based on the word of God. He compared it to the kind of character that equips a Christian teenager to "just say no' ... to crack, smack, cocaine, heroine, beer, liquor, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, and to everything that is forbidden in the word of God."

Southern Baptist must to use the same tools of the first century Christians in growing churches -- prayer and the ministry of the word of God -- as recorded in Acts 6:4, he said.

Calling first century church members a bunch of "rag-tag Christians," Leavell said they used prayer and the ministry of the word to grow the fastest-growing church in the history of the world.

"It can happen again if we are using the right tools and producing the right kind of product," he said.

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Southern Baptists focus on cities
for Sunday school outreach effort

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

Baptist Press
9/28/89

ATLANTA (BP)--With more than 400 Southern Baptist churches in the Atlanta metropolitan area -- including several of the denomination's largest -- Southern Baptists seem to be doing their best work in the Georgia capital.

But in the traditional Southern Baptist stronghold, as in other major cities in the United States, the denomination is losing against a tide of population growth that has outdistanced Southern Baptist growth of the past 30 years, said Joel Harrison, director of church development for the Atlanta Baptist Association.

Based on 1988 statistics, about one of every 18 residents of the Atlanta metropolitan area is a Southern Baptist. That is a change from the 1950s when half the population was Southern Baptist, or even the 1960s, when one out of every three people was a Southern Baptist, Harrison said.

The Atlanta Metro Sunday School Enrollment-Training Clinic Sept. 16-24 was an effort to help 184 Atlanta churches locate prospects and develop a Sunday school organization to reach those people.

The clinic was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, the Georgia Baptist Convention and eight associations in the Atlanta area.

During a people search on Sunday afternoon, Sept. 17, about 9,400 canvassers from the 184 participating churches located 24,600 prospective members.

Also during the clinic, churches enlisted 1,152 new Sunday school workers and created 820 new classes and departments to alleviate over-crowding or to accommodate new growth, said Joe Haynes, clinic coordinator from the board's Sunday school division.

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Harrison, the local coordinator, said churches made the commitment to do the hard work required for clinic participation because they saw the potential and the need for growth. "We saw churches begin to catch a vision for growth as they prepared for the clinic," he noted. "They have set some new goals."

Participating churches included large regional churches and suburban congregations as well as new missions.

Among the churches from the greater downtown Atlanta area were First Church of Atlanta, Second-Ponce de Leon Church, Wieuca Road Church and First Church of Decatur. Suburban churches included New Hope in Fayetteville and Johnson Ferry north of Atlanta. Missions, such as Northbrook in Gwinnett County and Living Faith in the southeast area, also participated.

Also involved were Hispanic, Korean, Laotian, Cambodian and deaf ministries striving to reach the diverse language populations of Atlanta.

During the clinic, 850 guest directors and age-level specialists worked in teams at each church to train workers and suggest ways the churches could organize to more effectively reach their communities.

Some suggestions were being implemented immediately, said Barry Thompson, coordinator for the southwest region.

For example, Liberty Baptist Church in Riverdale was to vote Wednesday, Sept. 27, on Sunday school organization changes recommended by the metro team to help the Sunday school grow, he said.

Several churches already have started moving walls and making other structural changes recommended by the metro teams in addition to the organizational changes, he added.

After the clinic team working with Harvest Baptist Church suggested the need for more Sunday school space, pastor Bill Burnett brought in a bulldozer the next day to begin preparations for placing a portable building on the church property.

Other results may not be obvious immediately, but in the next 18 months churches that have plateaued in enrollment will show growth and others will have accelerated growth, Harrison predicted.

"They will have more growth because the clinic has given them more tools for growth," he said.

Thompson said many of the smaller churches realized for the first time during the clinic that they can call on others for help and advice for their Sunday school organization. "It helped the churches realize they are not out there on their own," he said.

The Atlanta clinic is the 13th metro clinic the Sunday School Board has conducted in the past eight years. Other are planned for Chicago in September 1990 and Dallas in September 1991.

Clinics following the metro model are being conducted by Baptist state conventions and local associations using workers trained in the metro clinics.

The clinics are only one effort to target major population centers for Sunday school growth, said Harry Piland, director of the Sunday School Board's Sunday school division.

For example, the division plans to target churches in key cities and help revitalize churches that are not growing, Piland said.

The outreach communication plan and the related Broadman prospect services are designed to help churches contact people in their communities. Outreach Bible Study, comprised of evangelistic short-term Bible study groups for non-Christians, gives churches a tool for reaching people away from the church, Piland said.

"The future of the church is with the people sharing the gospel," he said. "Whether in the cities, suburbs or rural areas, we need to recapture the idea that reaching people with the gospel is a task of the Sunday school."

Shifts in nation's population
requires changes for churches

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists traditionally have been a rural denomination, but a shift in the nation's demographics may require changes in order to reach people in the nation's cities, according to observers of the trend.

The Atlanta metropolitan area typifies the change from rural to urban settings. Many churches participating in the Sept. 16-24 Metro Sunday School Enrollment-Training Clinic are dealing with the change to a metropolitan mindset.

The clinic, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, the Georgia Baptist Convention and eight Atlanta-area associations, was designed to help churches locate prospects, train workers and develop organizations oriented to reach those prospects.

In the Atlanta area, population growth has created a need for new churches as well as a willingness on the part of existing churches to grow, explained Joel Harrison, director of church development for the Atlanta Baptist Association and local coordinator for the clinic.

New Hope Baptist Church in northwest Fayette County would have needed "to appoint a committee to stop growth" as subdivisions were developed around it in the past 10 years, Pastor Dwight (Ike) Reighard quipped.

The white clapboard country church building still stands across the parking lot from New Hope's modern 2,100-seat worship center as a reminder of the church's rural roots.

An almost overnight explosion of growth began in the community about 10 years ago, and the church grew with it, Reighard said. Although the church is 109 years old, it is experiencing the awkward stages of new growth.

For the last six years, the church has emphasized Sunday school growth. Participation in the metro clinic was one part of the church's efforts to establish the Sunday school organization needed to reach the community, Reighard said.

New Hope also sees the need for other churches in the rapidly growing area south of the Atlanta airport. The church has started one mission and is participating with three other churches in sponsoring Greentree Baptist Church, just nine miles away.

For Greentree, the metro clinic was an opportunity for training and refinement before its first Sunday as a mission.

The church's first services were Sept. 24, the Sunday following the clinic. The 183 people in worship and 82 in Sunday school made it the second-largest start in the state convention, said Pastor Barry Thompson.

In a telephone survey, Greentree located 1,427 families not involved in any church who are living within eight miles of the church who said they would be interested in a church, Thompson said.

Ministries already are planned to involve people and get the church started, he added.

As pastor of another new congregation preparing for growth, Bill Burnett has a vision based on things that are not readily apparent from looking at the pine thickets surrounding Harvest Baptist Church.

Burnett pointed out tracts of land adjacent to the church that soon will be developed as subdivisions. He noted that a planned interstate loop around Atlanta will come within three miles of the church when it is completed in about 10 years.

As that growth develops, Burnett and other leaders of Harvest Church hope to be ready by growing now.

The church that started as a mission two years ago and became a church only four months ago already is stretching the capacity of its facilities with a Sunday school attendance of more than 80.

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When the metro clinic team assigned to Harvest Church told church leaders that Sunday school attendance could be increased immediately if space were available, they decided they could not wait for a new building.

The next day after the team made the recommendation, Burnett was directing a bulldozer operator where to level an area for men from the church to build a temporary building to hold four or five Sunday school classes.

In Gwinnett County northeast of Atlanta, the number of churches in the county cannot keep pace with projected growth, said Paul Hugger, pastor of South Gwinnett Mission.

Five missions in the county were among the 184 congregations participating in the metro clinic.

Gwinnett, which has been identified as one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation, has a population of more than 320,000. That is expected to double by the year 2000.

Churches need to be willing to reach their communities and start new missions in order to reach the area, Hugger said.

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

Large, older churches
face challenge of change

By Frank Wm. White

F-SSB

Baptist Press
9/28/89

ATLANTA (BP)--Making rapid changes in the complex structure of a large Sunday school presents the same challenge as making a sharp turn with an oceanliner, according to ministers of education at three of Atlanta's larger, older churches participating in the Atlanta Metro Sunday School Enrollment-Training Clinic Sept. 16-24.

Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of Decatur and First Baptist Church of Atlanta were among 184 churches involved in the clinic jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Georgia Baptist Convention and eight Atlanta area associations. A team of Sunday school specialists worked with each church to evaluate its Sunday school, identify needs and suggest strategies for growth.

Nolen Rollens, minister of education at First Church of Atlanta, said the need for workers, training and motivation are constant and are the same for large churches as for smaller churches -- just on a bigger scale.

"Our greatest need is how to motivate people to do what they know how to do," Rollins said.

Sunday school growth for the downtown Atlanta church has been stifled by space limitations, with attendance holding at about 3,200 for the past three or four years, Rollins said.

The church staff is considering a possible third Sunday school by next fall. It could help increase attendance, but that will require more workers.

The church looked to the clinic for recommendations on how to reach people while in the current location and then how to be the right kind of Sunday school organization when the church moves to a suburban location in about three years, Rollins said.

"We needed encouragement that we are doing a good job as well as a challenge to rethink what we are doing," he said. "We wanted help to motivate our people to move forward."

Jon Beshears, minister of education at Second-Ponce de Leon Church in upscale north Atlanta, said after several years of a slow but steady decline in enrollment, a 7 percent Sunday school enrollment increase has been registered this year. Baptisms also are up about 45 percent over 1988.

"We've been working on a commitment to growth," he said.

Ten years ago, the church was dealing with people moving out of the neighborhood. Now people are moving back in, as high-rise condos develop in the area.

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"There is a tremendous number of single adults here now. We are taking the challenge seriously to reach people downtown," he said. "We are working to change attitudes to get more people involved in outreach."

First Church of Decatur has faced difficult changes in the past 25 years and now is seeing yet another community transition, said Terry Hamrick, minister of education.

The church had an average Sunday school attendance of around 1,600 in 1961 but had declined to 650 in 1979, he said. Now, the average attendance is 750, as the church has experienced moderate growth.

"Our goal now is to move on up. We're working to get the Sunday school organization to do the basics that work," he said.

The church is creating new units for singles and young adults and strengthening prospect communication efforts as ways to reach people in high-rise developments and young professionals restoring homes in the area.

Four new Sunday school classes were started based on the recommendations of the metro team, Hamrick said. Two new units also were started in the church's Cambodian fellowship.

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Conference emphasizes
use of arts in worship

By Pat Cole

N- CO
(SBTS)

Baptist Press
9/28/89

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Churches could help nurture their members by encouraging "a full expression" of the talents of all their members, claimed a Southern Baptist theologian.

"It is axiomatic that humans are artistic," said William L. Hendricks, professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. "It is consequent that Christians should express their artistic abilities and cultivate their worship through appreciation for and production of the beautiful."

Hendricks addressed Southern Seminary's first national Conference on Religion and the Arts. The conference drew 125 people and focused on the use of various musical, dramatic and visual art forms in local churches.

During his address, Hendricks made some observations about current art forms used in Southern Baptist congregations.

Music is Southern Baptists' most prized and most highly developed art form, he said, noting that 1.7 million Southern Baptists participate in graded choirs and 4,800 full-time ministers of music work in Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptists express a wide variety of musical tastes, he noted.

A "diminishing core of commonly known or appreciated hymns" exists in Southern Baptist life, Hendricks said.

"Tensions mount when highly trained ministers of music seek to refine or redefine the musical tastes of congregations," he added. "Gospel songs and praise choruses are desired by some congregations; anthems and classical hymns by others. There are increasing numbers of churches who have both hymn books and gospel song books in the music racks of the pews."

Southern Baptists face the challenge of making music a "unifying rather than a divisive art," he said.

Architecture, which he pointed out is sometimes called the oldest art form, also has received some attention by Southern Baptists, Hendricks said. He said that Baptist architecture progressed from rural log meeting places in the colonial period to "brick churches of some architectural importance and beauty" which began to be built as urban areas grew. In recent years, however, "function has been more important than aesthetics" in the design of many Southern Baptist churches.

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Much of the design, Hendricks noted, incorporates fashionable colors and furnishings but lacks theological awareness. Modern designers are "presumably unaware of the visual symbols of the Christian faith" and are thus "finishing and furnishing our church interiors in the fashion of television studios, commercial offices and swanky public buildings."

Paintings and other related visual arts are Southern Baptists' most neglected art forms, Hendricks said. Few paintings exist in Baptist churches except for rural baptistery art, he noted.

"There are no theological reasons that we should not worship God with our eyes," said Hendricks. "We whose tradition has often stressed the visual aspects of eschatology (the end times) would do well to incarnate and encourage appropriate visual aspects in our worship here and now."

While Southern Baptists have not been noted for their emphasis on the arts, Hendricks cited encouraging signs. The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church drama work has had "burgeoning results." Baptist campus ministries and the two mission boards have made increasing use of the arts. He cited Southern Seminary's Center for Religion and the Arts and a new Southern Baptist organization called Churches and Christians in the Arts as examples of Southern Baptist interest.

In another address, John Dillenberger, professor emeritus at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., called for the incorporation of both the visual and the verbal in Christian worship.

Churches need "a rightful view of both the visual and the verbal," he said. "They represent one reality though two modalities, each appropriately important and necessary for the full expression of our humanity."

Dillenberger concurred with Hendricks in noting that visual arts are the least-accepted art form in churches today. "It is surely ironic that many churches will not shrink at spending large sums of money for a new organ but not a penny for paintings or sculpture," he said.

He encouraged conference participants to develop a "discerning eye" to enhance their appreciation of the visual arts.

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Baptist layman finds
truth in tales

By Jim Burton

F - (CO)
(B'hood)

Baptist Press
9/28/89

LYNCHBURG, Va. (BP)--Friends have to be careful what you tell Gwynn Ramsey, because he might repeat it. When the tall, bearded college professor slips into bibbed overalls and a coonskin cap, anything is fair game.

Ramsey is a practitioner of Southern Appalachian storytelling. He comes by it naturally. Raised in western North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, he grew up hearing folk tales from a storytelling grandmother.

Even with a natural drawl, Ramsey must switch from a widely published professor with a doctorate in botany to a grammar-chopping mountaineer with tales of running moonshine, treeing 'coons and the fish that got away.

"I ain't never heard no such no how," said Ramsey, who lost his left arm in a traffic accident when he was 19.

Telling tall tales can be dangerous for a Southern Baptist Brotherhood director, a position Ramsey holds at Calvary Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va. But storytelling is his ministry as well as avocation.

"Most of the tales are told to be enjoyed," said Ramsey. "But more and more I'm trying to learn tales that will have more of a Christian message in them. Sometimes they hear messages from these frivolous stories that they have never gotten before."

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Through stories such as "Jesus to Supper," which illustrates Matthew 25:40, and "Wicked John and the Devil," he is able to teach basic Christian truths that he first learned in Royal Ambassadors, the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's missions education program for boys.

"In reflecting back, you could not pay a price for being an RA," said Ramsey.

Ramsey's commitment to missions education through Brotherhood is a natural outflow of his childhood RA experiences and professional teaching commitment.

"Being involved with Brotherhood has increased my faith," said Ramsey who started RAs at Calvary Baptist and has been an associational RA director. His commitment to missions has now extended to adult work.

"Missions education is really the main thing," affirmed Ramsey. "When men pray together, it leads to a growing faith and an increased confidence in being a Christian."

Ramsey describes the courses he has taught the past 24 years at Lynchburg College as reasonably difficult. Even more difficult are the issues he deals with as a Christian scientist -- particularly evolution and ecology.

To many scientists, the Bible and science clash over the issue of man's origin. But Ramsey has worked through that issue.

"In my own heart and mind there are no conflicts," he said. "I believe a supreme power (God) created the universe and the earth."

For Ramsey, exology may pose a greater conflict. Churches have been lax to present a Christian world view of ecology, he noted.

"We treat nature as if God is an absentee landlord," said Ramsey.

As a botanist who specializes in the study of natural plants, he is convinced of the interrelatedness and value of all created things.

"We honor the creator by taking care of the things that are created around about us when we try to bring harmony to the environment," said Ramsey. "I firmly believe the saying, 'For every mistake that man makes, nature will exact a penalty either now or in the future.'"

"There is no such thing as mother nature. Nature is God."

And that's no tall tale.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Brotherhood Commission