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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367

DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201

NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300

RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151

WASHINGTON 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Disaster response units prepare
to leave S.C. after record ministry

By Joe Westbury & Tim Yarbrough

N-HMB

CHARLESTON, S.C. (BP)--Southern Baptist disaster response units are preparing to leave hurricane-ravaged South Carolina after serving a record number of meals but are just starting feeding efforts on the Caribbean island of St. Croix.

A team from the Texas Baptist Men organization built three mobile kitchens on the U.S. Virgin Island of St. Croix at the request of American Red Cross officials. Two of the units are located on the sites of Baptist churches that were destroyed completely by Hurricane Hugo.

Red Cross officials said the long-term needs in the Virgin Islands may extend for three months until electrical power is restored. Officials estimated 80 percent of the buildings on the island were severely damaged or completely destroyed.

Meanwhile in South Carolina, Cliff Satterwhite, associate Brotherhood director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, reported the 13 Baptist Men feeding units from 11 states had provided a record-breaking 250,000 meals in the 12 days following Hugo's landfall Sept. 22.

Douglas Beggs, director of the adult division for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, said the meal count nearly doubled the 175,000 served following Hurricane Alicia's landfall at Galveston, Texas, in August 1983.

During that disaster, seven feeding units from six states ministered to storm victims from locations scattered along the Texas coastline.

"We have now fed more people following Hurricane Hugo than through any previous domestic disaster," Beggs said.

Alabama, the first unit on the scene, was the first to leave Sept. 30 due to a broken generator and a broken water pump.

Other feeding stations which have since left include units from Arkansas and Mississippi, both Louisiana units and one Florida unit. Teams from Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina and Tennessee are expected to return home this weekend, Satterwhite said.

George Bullard, director of the missions division for the South Carolina Baptist Convention said state's command center in the Baptist Building in Columbia is being scaled down and moved into the Brotherhood department offices.

The command center, which was open for up to 15 hours a day, coordinated all Southern Baptist disaster response efforts in the state.

The state convention has since named a 10-member disaster response task force to continue the long-range aspects of the ministry as needs are identified.

Association drops church
because of women deacons

N- (O)
(Ky.)

CORBIN, Ky. (BP)--Kentucky's Zion Baptist Association has voted 93-20 to withdraw fellowship from First Baptist Church of Corbin.

The association's Sept. 15 action is traced to the election and ordination of two women, Ann Hacker and Betty Black, as deacons at First Church a year ago.

The association's credentials committee met last spring with Pastor John Dunaway and the church's deacon chairman and chairman of the deacon nomination committee. No formal recommendation was made to the association by the committee.

Herschel Walker, pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church of Corbin, a messenger who introduced the issue at the associational meeting, said: "Our backs were against the wall. Our church bylaws state that qualifications of deacons are those found in I Timothy. ... If they are right, then all our preaching brothers (in the association) have been wrong. ... I certainly hated it. This is a no-win situation, and we Baptists lost."

Walker further expressed concern that Mt. Zion churches might withdraw from the association and join other associations if the action were not taken. "We really had no other choice," he said.

Raising the question at the associational meeting, Walker said: "Can we ... continue to fellowship with a church that does not interpret the Scriptures as we do? I don't think we can. Therefore, ... I move that Mt. Zion Association disfellowship the First Baptist Church of Corbin."

Dunaway is a former president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and was chairman of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee earlier this decade.

"We hold no ill will," Dunaway told the Western Recorder, the Kentucky Baptist weekly newsjournal. "In all likelihood, we will continue to support certain mission projects developed by our director of missions in the rural areas of our association. First Baptist Church has had a harmonious working relationship in Mt. Zion.

"This is an unfortunate situation that should not have taken place. It is a continuation of problems of ideology of the Southern Baptist Convention in a narrow interpretive position that does not allow for freedom of difference."

Janus Jones, Mt. Zion director of missions, said, "After a year of debate among pastors and some of the churches, it is my opinion we have reached a point where we go on and pick up the pieces and be the organization the Lord wants."

Meanwhile, First Baptist Church of Williamsburg, also a member of Mt. Zion Association, responded with a resolution adopted by unanimous vote at a Sept. 20 business conference.

The resolution objects to and reproves "the recent action taken by the Mt. Zion Association in withdrawing fellowship from the First Baptist Church of Corbin, as it is not in keeping with the best traditions of Baptist principles." The resolution also supports "the right of the First Baptist Church of Corbin to decide matters within its own congregation without outside influence save that of God."

Harold Mauney, pastor of the Williamsburg church, resigned from the association's executive board and other associational committee assignments. "The resolution of our church speaks for itself," he said.

Polish Baptists happy, cautious
about democratic government

By Mike Creswell

F - FMB

WROCLAW, Poland (BP)--Polish Baptists are cautiously beginning to use freedoms gained under a new democratic government for increased evangelistic activities.

But they are moving slowly because old, repressive laws remain on the books. Until elections next spring, local government officials remain unchanged, said Konstanty Wiazowski, president of the Baptist Union of Poland.

World attention focused on Poland for months as it elected its first non-communist government in more than 40 years. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a former opponent of communists, became prime minister in a series of maneuvers by Lech Walesa and other Solidarity trade union leaders.

"It's rather encouraging for us, because it's for betterment maybe in economics and improvement in democracy," said Wiazowski. "We cannot say anything about the new government; it's only a few weeks old. But we're identifying with a society that is very much for a new government, for removing the political element from the economy, for putting the economy on its feet. As Baptists, we were always for it. The opinion of the common man was that communists were not competent."

Others are even more frank.

"I never thought I'd live long enough to see this change to democracy, to see the collapse of this nonsensical system," said a jubilant Ruth Kowalczyk, director of an English school being started by Wroclaw Baptist Church. "I thought maybe my son would see it. I didn't think it would go so quickly. A few years ago people were in prison, beaten and tortured. I thought Walesa was history."

During communist rule, Poland's more than 3,000 Baptists often were shut out of government offices or jobs, which usually were distributed on the basis of allegiance to the Communist Party and atheism. The result: "We Baptists abstained from the political side," Wiazowski explained.

A few Baptists were active in Solidarity's early struggles, and some were jailed for their political activism as late as 1981. Those activists have since moved to Canada or the United States.

Stefan and Lydia Zachanowicz, a Baptist couple living in Wroclaw, said they dropped out of Solidarity several years ago because of its close ties to the Roman Catholic Church. "It is not right to mix religion and politics as they have done," she said.

Although relations between Baptists and Catholics are generally good now, Baptists are watching to see if close Catholic ties with the new government will result in pressure on other Christian groups. Poland's people are more than 90 percent Catholic. Non-Catholic groups often are seen as suspect, Polish Baptists say.

The new prime minister, a devout Catholic, has given assurances on freedom of religion, Wiazowski said, but refers to "the church," meaning the Catholic Church, and "other confessions," meaning other groups. Still, Ruth Kowalczyk rejoices that the prime minister said "God will help us" in his opening address. "This is something we haven't heard for over 40 years," she said.

Church services were held freely in earlier days, but open religious meetings such as evangelistic crusades were difficult, Wiazowski said. Even the renting of private meeting halls required Communist Party approval. "The party decided what type of meeting could be held. If I was religious, well ..." Wiazowski dismissed the idea with a wave of his hand.

A few years ago, Christian groups who visited Poland from the United States were told they could sing in city parks but could not talk of faith because it was "not compatible" with the society's aims.

Now Baptist leaders encourage church members to evangelize outside their churches. In Gdansk, Gdynia and Krynica, Baptists have set up book shops on downtown streets. "The police are not interfering so much," Wiazowski said.

In Warsaw, young Baptists now are able both to sell Christian books in the city center and talk with people about their faith. "They are very much excited about this," Wiazowski said.

But launching a major evangelistic thrust will be difficult for Baptists in Poland, whose 56 churches average fewer than 50 members. Growth has been slow in recent years because of government repression and because many Baptists have left the country along with thousands of other Poles seeking better living conditions elsewhere.

Along with other Poles, Baptists suffer from an economy still hobbled by the red-tape legacy of communist rule. The average worker -- including the typical Baptist pastor -- earns the equivalent of only \$15 to \$20 a month. Wages have increased, but runaway inflation has kept buying power low while prices have skyrocketed.

A quart of milk costing 53 zlotys in June cost 455 zlotys by late September. A loaf of bread has soared from 215 zlotys to 1,355 during the same period. The price of ham has jumped nearly 1,000 percent.

What is a zloty worth? At the end of June, about 4,900 of them would buy a U.S. dollar. By September, 10,000 were required.

Many basic consumer items -- flour, cheese, soap, washing powder, clothing, shoes, furniture -- are scarce. When stores do get shipments of sugar, coffee or other basic items, they usually sell out within minutes.

"If you see a shop with a line of people out front, you get in line. It means they have something to sell. If there's no line at the store, it means the store is no good. It has nothing to sell," said Baptist Lydia Popko. As with many Poles, she depends on food grown in a backyard garden to augment what she can buy at the local grocery store. Another Baptist told of a friend who bought a tank of gasoline for his car after sitting in line for 24 hours.

Yet Poles find many items in special stores that accept only Western currency. Thousands of Poles either move to the West to live permanently or stay in other countries for weeks or months to earn Western funds. People tell of nurses who hang wallpaper in Belgium and medical professionals who wash dishes in West Germany to earn enough to live in Poland.

Still, Poles must have patience and give the government time to change policies and get the economy going, several Baptists observed. But "we're like other Poles," Wiazowski said. "We're fed up with current conditions."

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Creswell, correspondent for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, visited Poland in late September.

Polish Baptists launch
school to teach English

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

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WROCLAW, Poland (BP)--A new English-language school opened by Polish Baptists in October already has registered 280 students and turned away 1,000 applicants for lack of classroom space.

Another 2,000 Poles have requested information about the school, and Southern Baptists plan to send resident workers to Poland to help staff the institution.

A ministry of 250-member Wroclaw Baptist Church, the school will be a Baptist contribution to Poland's development under a new democratic government, said school Director Ruth Kowalczyk during an opening ceremony Sept. 23.

Several local government leaders, including representatives of the religious affairs and education offices, attended the ceremony to praise the high standards in the new program. One official said he was so impressed with Baptist work that he approved a permit needed for the program to proceed.

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Kowalczyk, a teacher with 25 years of university-level experience, will direct an eight-member teaching staff -- four English-speaking Poles and four teachers from Great Britain and the United States.

During a Sunday morning service, church leaders held a dedication ceremony for the teachers, laying hands on them and asking God to bless their ministry.

A \$4,000 grant from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board provided video equipment and other materials for the school, said Jim Smith, a Southern Baptist fraternal representative to Eastern Europe.

The mission board is seeking both volunteers and career personnel to work at the school, Smith said. They will be the first Southern Baptist personnel assigned to Poland. The board has helped finance the church's new building, which will include an apartment to house the new Southern Baptist workers.

Wroclaw is a strategic location for Christian ministry: the one Baptist church there is said to be the only evangelical congregation in the city of more than 500,000 people.

While the church's language instruction will be largely non-religious, Kowalczyk said language teaching is a "powerful tool" for evangelism because it allows Christian teachers to develop relationships with students. Plans call for starting home Bible studies for interested students.

The school grew out of English-language camps the congregation has held during several summers, she said. In each camp several people accepted Christ as savior. Eighty percent of the students come from the local neighborhood, an area dotted with high-rise apartment buildings and home for about 120,000 people. Class members include physicians, attorneys and businessmen as well as university students, Kowalczyk said.

English is becoming the common language for Europe, much as Greek was the unifying language during New Testament times, said Pastor Adam Otremba during the opening ceremony. Poles with English skills, he said, will have a big advantage in getting jobs.

Church members rushed classroom construction in their new church building to be ready for use in October. The building has been under construction for six years. The brick structure measures more than 21,000 square feet and covers much of a city block. It will include a chapel that will seat more than 500 people.

Although the structure has cost about \$200,000 so far, construction consultants estimate the same building complex would have cost more than \$2 million to build in the United States. Much of the funding has come through donations from abroad. But church members also have given sacrificially, with most contributing a month's salary each year to the building fund. They plan to make some furniture themselves.

Members also have done much of the construction work, with an average of 50 working weekly at the site. Church member Stefan Zachanowicz has used a Baptist union truck to haul supplies from across the country, often sitting in lines for days to secure cement and other scarce items.

Otremba has been pastor for six years, but he said members already had plans for the new building and a range of accompanying ministries when he came. They assured him they would continue to carry out the building program, freeing him to emphasize ministry.

The church also has ministries to single mothers and to alcoholics and their families.

Gore criticizes regulations
on alcohol warning labels

N-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--Warning labels that are to be carried on all alcoholic beverage containers beginning this fall may end up being useless, said Sen. Albert Gore Jr., D-Tenn.

Citing a recent report by Congress' General Accounting Office, Gore said regulations approved by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms would allow labels to be so small and inconspicuous that they will not effectively warn anyone.

Congress last year passed legislation requiring all cans and bottles containing alcoholic beverages to bear a label stating: "Government Warning: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery and may cause health problems."

Gore expressed specific concern that pregnant women will not receive adequate warning about the effects of maternal alcohol consumption. Polls indicate the vast majority of people are unaware that even moderate alcohol consumption during pregnancy can cause mental retardation and serious birth defects on the developing fetus, he said.

"A visible warning on a bottle or can, pointing out the dangers of consuming alcohol during pregnancy, may be the most important and perhaps the only information about fetal alcohol syndrome that some women receive," he said.

Pressure from the alcoholic beverage industry appears to have played a major role in undermining the new warning program, Gore noted. The industry has generated more than 4,000 "consumer" letters urging the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to adopt regulations allowing "virtually microscopic warning labels," he added.

"We have a warning for the alcohol beverage industry," Gore said. "They can help make this program work, or they can be sure that we will be back with a new program."

Gore pledged to work with other senators -- including Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., principal sponsor of the original warning-label legislation -- to correct the bureau's regulations.

"Thank goodness Sens. Gore and Thurmond are not under the influence of the alcohol industry," said Robert M. Parham, associate director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Sen. Gore's criticism of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearm's proposed rule on warning labels on alcoholic beverages is on target."

"The bureau's proposed regulations on health warning labels are a sobering reminder that the powerful alcohol industry steers some federal agencies, allowing the uncontrolled drive for profits to place pregnant women and their unborn children at risk," Parham said.