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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL

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By Art Toalston

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October 25, 1989

Orphans, needy in Lebanon
receiving Baptist aid

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Southern Baptist hunger relief offerings are helping put food on the tables of three orphanages and homes for the elderly and handicapped in predominantly Muslim areas of Lebanon.

"The food is for people who are hungry ... in institutions that are broke," said Pete Dunn, a Southern Baptist missionary based in Cyprus, referring to the \$40,000 allocation of Southern Baptist hunger relief funds.

"Each box of food that is going in says it has been donated by the Baptists in Christian love," he said.

The food is being delivered by World Vision, an international relief-oriented ministry. Dunn recounted that when World Vision workers told a Muslim official in Lebanon that Baptists would be supplying food, the leader replied: "I know the Baptists. This would be fine."

During the summer, another \$40,000 in Southern Baptist hunger funds went to several Lebanese Baptist churches to aid needy families. Countless people had not worked since March, Dunn said, "and the churches had exhausted their ability to help."

Many Christians and Muslims who fled artillery battles in the Beirut area are returning to their homes, said Dunn. The shelling began in March and finally ended with a mid-September cease-fire.

But many Lebanese fled the country with no intention of returning, Dunn lamented, including a woman who was directing Arab-language Baptist television programs. The woman has moved to Canada. Dunn directs Arab-language radio and television work.

Several Baptists were among more than 800 Lebanese killed in the warfare involving Maronite Catholic forces, backed by Iraq and Muslim militia, backed by Syria.

Lebanon's civil war has raged for 14 years, claiming more than 125,000 lives. Dunn was among 24 Southern Baptist missionaries who lived in Lebanon until 1987, when the hostage crisis prompted the U.S. State Department to suspend passport privileges for Americans there.

Some Baptist ministries continued, at least during tenuous lulls in the shelling earlier this year. "Baptist Publications has six or seven new titles at various presses," Dunn reported. "As soon as electricity comes on a more consistent basis, they'll be finishing those." Media workers have continued program production, often working at night when electricity is on.

Students at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in East Beirut and secondary students at Beirut Baptist School in West Beirut were able to attend class periodically, he said. Sometimes they were only able to drop by to pick up assignments. Elementary classes at Beirut Baptist School were canceled for nearly three months.

The center where Baptist ministries are located sustained heavy damage, Dunn said. One shell that exploded in front of the center left a 4-foot-wide hole in the structure and blew in a doorway. Another shell, in almost the same place, "must have left about \$10,000 worth of windows and other things damaged," he said. The West Beirut school and at least two churches sustained similar damage.

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To help Lebanese Baptist pastors improve their crisis-counseling skills -- and get away for a few days of encouragement -- Southern Baptist missionaries are planning to invite the ministers to a conference early next year in Cyprus.

"We need to put our arms around them and get on our knees with them and pray with them," Dunn said. "This is something we need to do as much as they need done for them. There's a lot of frustration on our part to sit over here and watch the smoke on our TV screens."

The people of Lebanon "have been through probably one of the deepest human tragedies of the past two or three decades," Dunn said. He wishes the missionaries could do even more. "We need to go back in and stand by their sides in the churches and talk to those who did not have the money to flee, who had to weather weeks and months of artillery fire that did not let up. We need to give them a listening ear. They need to talk about what they've been through" and have someone remind them of "the peace that passes understanding, that there is hope, there is something more."

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Southern Baptists complete
Mongolian training project

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press
10/25/89

ULAN BATOR, Mongolia (BP)--Four Southern Baptist teachers have completed a pilot project in Mongolia to help the country in its five-year plan for 1990-95 to expand English-language instruction in primary and secondary schools.

The Mongolian government, which is seeking increased relations with Western nations, asked Cooperative Services International, a Southern Baptist aid organization, to help design English curriculum and train its English teachers.

"They want us to help them train their Mongolian teachers," said Jack Shelby, CSI's Hong Kong-based administrator. "They don't want a lot of foreign teachers, and this is not likely to ever be a big program."

The Southern Baptist team conducted workshops at the ministry of education in Ulan Bator in September and designed and wrote curriculum for a 33-week English course in Mongolian secondary schools. Accompanying Shelby in the two-week project were Ronald Midkiff of Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., Nancy Sherman of Memphis State University in Tennessee and Vi Marie Taylor of Austin, Texas.

The project was CSI's second in Mongolia. In February, another four-member Southern Baptist team taught English to Mongolian travel guides working for Zhuulchin, the government tourist agency.

As a result of the two visits, the government has invited CSI to conduct three more projects in Mongolia. CSI plans to send an English professor to teach at Mongolian State University. In addition, the government has asked for two or more teachers to teach English in secondary schools in Ulan Bator. The teachers are expected to begin work in September 1990.

Mongolian officials also requested a CSI consultant in linguistics and English to work with the government's ministry of education to design curriculum and train teachers for the country's English-teaching program. CSI plans to fill the consulting position as soon as possible.

Shelby stressed the educational nature of the projects.

"People are not going as missionaries," he emphasized. "We cannot preach or evangelize or start churches. The fact that we are a Christian organization is not a problem as long as we respect their guidelines and their feelings in the matter."

The Mongolian government is not sympathetic toward religion. The first country to follow the Soviet Union as a socialist nation, Mongolia officially is atheistic. Previously it was a Buddhist country.

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"In recent years, Mongolians have opened one (Buddhist) monastery in the heart of the capital," said Shelby. "It's the only functioning religious institution of any kind in the entire country. Mongolia is a country of 2.5 million people with no church, no mosque and only one Buddhist temple."

Less than a dozen Christians are known to live in all of Mongolia. The Bible is not available in the Mongolian language. However, a British Bible translator has just completed a Mongolian translation of the New Testament and is working on the Old Testament.

"Any attempts at (Christian) outreach would be seen as proselyting," Shelby cautioned. "What we're asking people to do is to go there and simply model a Christian lifestyle and then avail themselves of whatever personal testimony opportunities they have within constraints imposed by culture and government restrictions."

"The Chinese say they don't want to be a dot on anybody's missionary map. Mongolians would feel the same way, only with a vengeance. I believe if we pray and are patient and serve the needs of the people of Mongolia, the time will come when we can witness more freely."

A staunch Soviet ally, the government now is interested in opening Mongolia to the outside world. Historically, Mongolians have had strong trade ties with Russia and Eastern Europe but now they want to extend those ties to Western nations, especially Japan and the United States. The Mongolian government views English as a key to helping expand trade. Japanese also is being taught in the state university.

CSI also might help Mongolia in the medical, agricultural and manufacturing fields, Shelby said. But he reiterated that the programs are likely to be small because the government emphasizes teaching its own people to train other Mongolians.

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Innovation fans romantic flame,
counselor tells married couples

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
10/25/89

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Frustrating evening rituals, young or teen-age children, exhaustion -- even television -- can douse the passion a married couple should feel regularly for each other, a counselor told participants in a conference for married couples.

"Sex between husband and wife can become boring, dull, monotonous and routine" if partners do not find ways to keep it exciting, said Tim Teague, a licensed professional counselor and minister of counseling and family life at Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Va.

Teague led three sessions of the seminar, "Intended for Mutual Pleasure," for capacity crowds at an Oct. 20-22 Fall Festival of Marriage at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. About half of the 1,264 people who attended the conference participated in Teague's seminar.

In a recent poll of 141,000 married couples, Teague said, most responded that their sex life had "indeed gone down hill."

Teague noted poor sexual relations in marriage is an invitation to participate in extramarital affairs: "The Scripture is quick to recognize that sexuality is a need, not just a desire. The Scripture tells us we set ourselves up to be tempted by not meeting that need in one another."

According to medical reports, people born after the year 1950 could easily live to be 100, Teague said, noting, "That means you could be married 80 years, so you'd better learn to enjoy all 80 of them."

Obstacles to sex for married couples number in the hundreds, Teague said, including frustrating -- to husbands -- rituals of women as they prepare for bed, worry, exhaustion, children and television.

"Many of you would do well to get the television out of the bedroom," he warned.

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Constant rejection of sex by one partner or the other eventually leads to a failure to initiate, Teague said, noting, "A lot of people don't even go to the bedroom until they are sure their spouse is asleep because they know it will be a negative situation when they get there."

Three types of anxiety -- performance, control and letting go -- often are found in the bedroom of married couples, he reported.

Performance anxiety is the fear of failing, Teague said: "The problem with sexual anxieties is that they can become self-fulfilling prophesies. Our most important sex organ is our mind."

Control anxiety is a fear of feeling vulnerable or losing control emotionally. Therefore, the "controller" acts cold or critical toward his or her partner so as not to experience vulnerability.

The letting-go anxiety is the fear of losing control physically, he said.

During each seminar, Teague took a poll asking groups of husbands and wives, who sat at opposite ends of the room, how many times a week they would like to have sexual relations. Men averaged four times a week; women, three.

"It's a tragedy to hear this many people say those numbers and know, by what you are telling me, what is actually happening," Teague said. "Many of us are missing out on one of God's greatest gifts."

Loving partners can do many things to beef up their sex lives, Teague said.

They can bring sexual adventure to their marriage, seek counseling to deal with other problems in their marriage, take care of personal grooming seven days a week and overlook bad days or "dry spells" of a partner, especially those that occur during the time before and after childbirth, he said.

"We just have to be even more creative to meet each other's sex needs during these off days," he said.

During the seminar, Teague had the groups of husbands and wives list ways to create a more exciting sex life.

Some of the suggestions made by men were:

- Be aggressive occasionally.
- Come to bed earlier.
- Leave problems out of the bedroom.
- Change the atmosphere and time for sex.
- Be more honest in expressing feelings.
- Be spontaneous.
- Keep negative small talk out of the bedroom.
- Leave on the light.
- Plan ahead; make a date.
- Be innovative.

Some suggestions women made for their husbands were:

- Be more affectionate throughout the day.

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- Encourage sex at various times instead of at night when both are tired.
- Help with chores that keep them away from the bedroom, such as washing dishes.
- Don't be a grouch all day, then turn into a lover boy in the bedroom.
- Don't program sex on certain days.
- Give gifts; send flowers; show care.
- Take a day off work for intimacy.
- Create a romantic setting with candles and music.
- Talk outside of the bedroom, as well as in.
- Be innovative.

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6 factors described as
marriage 'priorities'

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
10/25/89

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Worship, relationship, finances, communication, celebration and forgiveness comprise the priorities of marriage, participants in a Southern Baptist marriage enrichment conference were told.

Clyde Besson, director of Christian Growth Ministries of Tyler, Texas, illustrated the conference theme, "The Priorities of Marriage," at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

Besson's session was one of eight such conferences sponsored nationwide this fall by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

"What are the priorities of marriage?" Besson asked his audience, about 550 couples.

"My mind always begins with worship," he answered. "First is personal worship. My most honest prayer time is when I picture Jesus there talking with me.

"Next is family worship, where you and your mate and your family share together what God is doing in your lives. Then comes corporate worship, where we gather together in church -- like a halftime lockerroom experience of a ball team, where the Coach (God) points out what we've been doing right and wrong."

The second priority is one of relationship, Besson said, focusing primarily on the relationship between spouses.

"Don't you ever get so busy at church that you forget your mate," he warned. "Don't let your job ever be so important you can't say no to your boss to say yes to your mate.

"Wives, don't marry the children. Put your husband first, and let the children flow from that."

Finances are the third priority, he said, noting: "Most of us in America today allow our finances to control us because we've forgot a simple Bible verse -- 'The borrower is a slave to the lender.' Most of us do not make too little money; we just use it poorly."

The fourth priority is communication, Besson reported. Barriers to communication are a lack of time and a lack of security in Jesus Christ, he added.

"You'll never have more time than you have today," he insisted. "You must choose to create time for your mate."

Concerning security, he added: "You must share through the Holy spirit and trust one another, developing self-esteem through faith in Christ. If you're going to resolve your problems, you must know who you are in the Lord Jesus Christ and share with one another."

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Celebration is the fifth priority, Besson said. He lamented: "There's a mindset in America where we forget the good things and zero in on the bad things. We start complaining and forget the good times."

As antidotes to this problem, he suggested couples affirm each other verbally; "get out of the rut" by doing things that are "a little unusual," such as trying new restaurants or taking trips together; and "celebrate physically," realizing "the sexual relationship is a celebration of the one-flesh principle" of the Bible.

Finally, forgiveness is the sixth priority of marriage, Besson noted: "For a marriage to grow and be real, forgiveness must be ever present, for you never will be perfect. The secret is not perfection but forgiveness."

That involves accepting and understanding God's forgiveness, he said, explaining, "When we understand how God forgives us, we ought to forgive others."

The purpose of the eight Fall Festival of Marriage conferences is "to provide a weekend of marriage enrichment that focuses on the opportunity for growth," said Susan Lanford, a family enrichment consultant at the Sunday School Board. "It is not problem-focused, but takes place in an atmosphere in which growth can occur."

A second purpose is "to model the kind of activity that a church or association can take home with them" and use in a local setting, Lanford added.

About 6,000 people were expected to participate in the eight conferences, she said.

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Balance called key
to fighting stress

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
10/25/89

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A balanced lifestyle can help Christians handle stress, participants at a Fall Festival of Marriage workshop in Ridgecrest, N.C., were told.

A well-balanced spiritual and physical life, supported by self-management techniques and a "re-designed" lifestyle, can overcome stress, said Carolyn and Wayne Jenkins.

She is minister to youth and college students at First Baptist Church of Nashville; he is a discipleship training promotion specialist for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. They led a stress-management workshop at one of the eight fall marriage enrichment conferences sponsored nationwide by the Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

"Each generation seems to have a catchword for what happens to the people," Jenkins said, noting today's "stress" previously was known as "nervousness" and then "anxiety."

"Stress is not what happens to you, but how you react to what happens to you," he explained.

He cited seven post-World War II trends that produce stress: increasing urbanization, greater mobility, dependent consumerism, global interconnectedness, sedentary occupations, changing roles of the sexes and an unpredictable future.

"Things are more strategic, more dynamic," he said. "We don't know how things will turn out. All this paints us into a corner where we're faced with stress. Our job as Christians is to be the type of people in Jesus Christ who can handle these forces."

She described seven stresses that bind people today: physical, brought on by disease or catastrophe; emotional, "something you can't put your finger on"; time, or not enough of it; participatory, the strain of dealing with co-workers and other people "with whom we must deal"; situational, resulting from "one-time things," such a child's illness or a pregnant teen-age daughter; encounter, the hassle of "bumping into so many people in a day"; and identification, the frustration of poorly defined roles at home and work.

"Our bodies just can't handle this much stress," she said.

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A well-balanced spiritual life is the first key to handling stress, he noted: "The most basic thing we can do spiritually is accept salvation in Jesus Christ -- tap into God's power. ... The connection we have with God is more powerful than the stuff that is causing stress."

Christians should adopt a "triangle of lifestyle" that includes Bible study, prayer and quiet time, and Christian fellowship and support, he added: "When people are disconnected from these things, they have a greater problem with stress. Of course, Christians have stress, but we're armed."

Physical balance comes from a second lifestyle triangle that involves a proper diet, relaxation and exercise, he said.

Focusing on the importance of self-management, she said: "I'm going to teach you how to do it. Say, 'No.' To be able to say, 'No, I can't do that' will be the best way to handle stress."

Learning one's limits is important, even for Christians involved in church work, she emphasized: "We need to work for the Lord. But if you fall apart, what good will it do? I see people who do too much, fold up and fall in -- don't come to church for three months. Is that what God wants?"

To Christians who feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities at church, she advised, "Find something you love to do and do it well, but say no to other things."

The Jenkinsons noted that adopting a "re-designed" lifestyle involves balancing six key areas of life: spiritual, personal, professional, financial, social and culture-creative.

Often, however, that means setting priorities, he added, noting, "Sometimes we have to eliminate the extracurricular and just do the essentials."

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Belmont gets pair
of \$1 million gifts

Baptist Press
10/25/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Belmont College in Nashville has received two \$1 million gifts for its Massey Business Center.

Barbara Massey Clark of Nashville made a personal commitment to the center's building campaign, and Joe Massey of Atlanta announced an identical contribution on behalf of the Massey Charitable Trust.

Belmont's Jack C. Massey Graduate School of Business and Massey Business Center are named for the entrepreneur and Baptist layman who is Clark's father and Joe Massey's uncle.

In addition to his work with businesses such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, Hospital Corporation of America and the Mrs. Winners restaurant chain, Jack Massey also helped develop Southern Baptist interests. He aided in laying the groundwork for the Southern Baptist Foundation, was chairman and a 12-year member of the board of Baptist Hospital in Nashville, chaired the building committee of Belmont Heights Baptist Church in Nashville and supported Belmont College, a Tennessee Baptist school.

The latest contributions push total gifts and pledges for the Massey Business Center to slightly more than \$7 million, Belmont officials said. The Massey School drive is part of a \$20 million campaign to raise funds for the entire college.

Massey Center construction is to be completed in March 1990. The center's campaign calls for \$7.5 million to be raised for construction, furnishings, equipment, land acquisition and fundraising costs. An additional \$1 million is to be raised for endowment of building maintenance and operation.

The 115,000-square-foot center is to accommodate more than 1,200 undergraduate and 100 graduate students in Belmont's business schools. It is planned in anticipation of growth and to provide conference space for area businesses and organizations, Belmont officials said.

The Massey school was established in 1986 with a program designed to accommodate working adults.

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Former church loans officer
David Morgan dies in Phoenix

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--David L. Morgan, 53, former assistant director of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's church loans division, died Oct. 18 following a long illness.

He had taken medical disability retirement from the board Dec. 1, 1987.

Morgan had worked in numerous positions with the board, including missionary associate as director of missions for Yuma Baptist Association in Phoenix, Ariz., and national consultant for the board's associational administration department.

Morgan was a 1955 graduate of Southwest Baptist College in Bolivar, Mo. He later attended William Jewell College, Liberty, Mo.; Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville; and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

He also had been as director of missions for four associations in Missouri.

He is survived by his wife, the former Mary E. Klausmeyer, and four children.

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Iowa Fellowship
re-elects Berry

Baptist Press
10/25/89

AMES, Iowa (BP)--Tye Berry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bettendorf, Iowa, was re-elected president of the Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship during the annual meeting in Ames, Oct. 20-21.

The 133 messengers also adopted a budget of \$950,234, of which \$240,742 will come from the 64 congregations affiliated with the fellowship. Of the receipts from the churches, 17 percent -- \$33,823 -- will be sent to support the worldwide causes of the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget, up one percent from last year.

In addition to Berry, messengers also re-elected Barry Stewart, pastor of Albia Road Baptist Church in Ottumwa as vice president. Eugene Linn, pastor of Sioux Rapids Baptist Church, was elected secretary.

Messengers adopted a resolution which said "pro-abortion forces have determined to stop the election of political candidates who stand against the sin" of abortion, and encouraged "courageous candidates" to continue to oppose abortion.

The 1990 annual meeting will be Oct. 19-20 at Ashworth Road Baptist Church in West Des Moines.

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Rural church puts money where
its heart is -- in missions

By Jim Burton

Baptist Press
10/25/89

FOREST, Va. (BP)--Tucked away in the rolling hills of south central Virginia, North Bedford Baptist Church sits picture-perfect along a curve in state Highway 644. With bright red doors, the clean white-framed structure radiates warmth to passersby of this oak-shaded rural church.

When Charles Stinson became its bivocational interim pastor 18 years ago, North Bedford Church was just another rural Southern Baptist congregation tightly knit by family ties. The personable Stinson quickly became a part of the family.

But through the years, the church's growing commitment to missions has made it a leading Southern Baptist church in per capita giving. In 1988-89, North Bedford gave 58 percent of its receipts to missions, including \$18,000 to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and \$15,800 to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions. More than \$7,000 was contributed during the recent World Hunger Day emphasis. Average Sunday morning attendance is 70.

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"Small churches have a tendency to think small," said Stinson, a former tool and die worker. "They don't realize that they can do some things like send out a mission team or give a significant amount of money to missions.

Because they don't think they can do it and nobody has ever told them they can do it, they never do."

When Stinson arrived, the church had virtually quit supporting the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget and the missions offerings, he said.

After evaluating its stewardship, Stinson said, North Bedford decided that if it were going to be a Southern Baptist church, it should act like one. The church began tithing 10 percent of undesignated funds to the Cooperative Program. In addition, \$400 was budgeted for both the home and foreign missions offerings.

Eventually the \$400 cap was removed on the special offerings, and Cooperative Program giving grew to 15 percent of undesignated gifts.

"When we took the cap off, people who wanted to give to missions could give, and if they didn't want to give, they didn't have to," said Stinson, who now serves the church full time.

A healthy regional economy, anchored by nearby Lynchburg, has blessed many North Bedford Church members. But Stinson credits the church's missions stewardship to two other factors -- missions involvement and church renewal.

Ten years ago, North Bedford's Baptist Men organization made first short-term missions trip to Ohio. Working alongside volunteers from Texas and Ohio, North Bedford's men met other men who were spending their vacations doing missions.

And they learned firsthand about the work of home missionaries.

The volunteer spirit quickly brought results back home. Desperate for more space, Baptist Men tackled a volunteer construction project that eventually doubled the church's worship and education space and added a fellowship hall and kitchen.

"By the time we built it and occupied it, we had raised enough money to pay for it," said Stinson.

North Bedford's Baptist Men group functions as a mission-action unit. It is the only missions organization in the church. For each of the past 10 years, the Baptist Men group has participated in a volunteer church-building project, usually specializing in electrical work. As the men gained experience, their numbers grew, and the church's giving increased.

New mission trip volunteers want to go on other trips," said Dan White, a lifelong North Bedford member. "Most people have the fear that they are not capable of doing anything. Everybody can do something if they just go," he noted.

North Bedford's missions involvement expanded recently to disaster relief when three men joined Strawberry Baptist Association's cleanup efforts in Lancaster, S.C., following Hurricane Hugo. In addition, the church raised about \$2,000 for South Carolina Baptist disaster relief.

Active in all phases of Strawberry Association, which is Virginia's oldest, North Bedford sponsored two women in an associational partnership-evangelism project to Tanzania. About 329 decisions were made for Jesus Christ, according to Stinson.

That the church's stewardship is a natural outgrowth of involvement, he said: "There's nothing exciting about a pie chart that says X number of dollars goes one place and this goes somewhere else. When you go and see where your money is going and see the needs that are there and you are constantly confronted with these things, people will give."

Several years after its missions involvement began, the church held a Lay Renewal Weekend. A program emphasis of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and Home Mission Board, the church renewal journey is designed to help church members examine their relationship with God while discovering their spiritual giftedness. The church renewal journey served as a time of affirmation within North Bedford Church, Stinson said.

"The response to the renewal was extremely good," he reported. "It really generated a lot of enthusiasm among our people and got them involved in some things that they'd never been involved in before."

Stinson had never been a pastor prior to his tenure at North Bedford. With encouragement from Lloyd Jackson, Virginia's Baptist Brotherhood director, Stinson had become a Baptist Men's trainer in central Virginia. The public-speaking opportunities associated with the job helped him discover his abilities to communicate to groups. It also brought back his calling, first sensed as a 16-year-old, to the pastorate.

Stinson served the church part time four years before leaving his secular job. He credits his own church involvement as a layman as the key to establishing relationships with his congregation.

"I just sort of became another one of them," recalled Stinson. "There wasn't a separation between me as a pastor and the laity. There never has been."

Aubrey Foster has been a member of North Bedford Church since 1943. Foster credits Stinson with creating the missions awareness that gave the church its current direction.

"Our pastor has helped the people have a better understanding of how this is the main mission of the church," said Foster, "to further the gospel and work it through missions."

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

Fort Worth church rises
from ashes of despair

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
10/25/89

DALLAS (BP)--Like the legendary Phoenix rising from ashes, Templo Bautista Emanuel of Fort Worth, Texas, has found new life and purpose in the months after an arsonist burned its facilities.

In April, fire completely destroyed the interior of Templo Emanuel's main building, which at one time had been the home of Rosemont Park Baptist Church. Two small educational buildings were relatively unscathed.

Investigators ruled the blaze as arson, noting it was the fourth congregation in the Fort Worth area to be torched in recent months.

"After the fire, we presented alternatives to the church," said Pastor Guillermo Soriano. "We could meet in the facilities of another church. We could rent a home or meet in the homes of members. Or we could do the best we could with our remaining buildings."

Gambrell Street Baptist Church, former sponsoring congregation of Templo Emanuel, offered its facilities as a meetingplace, and Tarrant Baptist Association offered its support. But the congregation voted to meet in the remaining educational buildings.

"It was very rough for our church," Soriano said. "At first, some of our people said, 'We used to be in homes. Now we're going to be right back where we were.'"

Determined to salvage their sanctuary, church representatives contacted J.D. Karnes of Northside Baptist Church in Weatherford, Texas, state director of the Texas Baptist Men Weekend Builders program.

Karnes was able to schedule the building program between other projects, and he acted as construction supervisor on the job. Although the majority of the job was done by subcontractors, additional volunteer labor was provided by church members on weekends and evenings.

"I just felt like it was God-appointed for me to be on that job. I got such a blessing out of it," Karnes said.

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Thanks to Karnes' expertise in supervision and in obtaining the best subcontractors for the lowest price, Templo was able to use its insurance settlement to redesign the worship center to meet the congregation's specific needs and desires.

"In a sense, the fire did us good," said William Estep, a member of Gambrell Street Church who attends Templo Emanuel. "What we have now is not a hand-me-down, but a building we've had a hand in designing and reworking."

"I believe our people have experienced a transition from a 'mission mentality' to thinking of themselves as an indigenous church," Soriano said.

When Templo met for a rededication service recently, members celebrated not only the completion of a building project, but also the drawing together of the church family and the community.

"We felt prayerfully supported," Soriano said. "Going through the experiences of the fire was a refining process for our church. We'll never be the same again."

The church has grown spiritually since the fire, Soriano said. The pain of seeing their church building go up in flames has sensitized the members of Templo to the hurting of others.

"Individually, I see a greater sensitivity to the emotions of each other," Soriano said. "I can see how God has worked through the experience."

In the near future, the church plans to add another educational building to its facility. Architectural drawings have been completed, and the church is waiting for approval by city officials. Soriano hopes that the Texas Baptist Men Retiree Builders will be able to fit the project into its schedule.

"The church has grown, and we're seeing additions regularly," said Estep, professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. "It literally has gone from ashes and despair to hope and new life."

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