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89-166

Nigerian churches rebound
from adversity, violence

By Donald Martin

N-FMB

KADUNA, Nigeria (BP)--In the face of political, economic and religious adversity, Baptist churches in northern Nigeria not only have grown but have prospered.

"At the heart of this tremendous growth is the Baptist pastors' school in Kaduna," said Dewey Merritt, a former Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria. More than 100 Nigerian Baptist churches trace their beginnings to Baptist pastor's school and Bible college.

Merritt, now associate director for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's volunteer department, worked in Nigeria for more than 20 years -- 15 teaching at the pastor school.

The pastoral leadership developed at the school has helped establish a strong Christian community in an area dominated by Islam, Merritt said. Muslims make up almost half of Nigeria's population, and the majority of them live in the north.

The Christian leadership was tested in 1987 when militant Muslim elements in northern Nigeria rioted, leaving more than 20 people dead and 152 church buildings burned.

Rioters burned eight church buildings and three pastoriums in the Zaria area, one church building in Funtua and five church buildings in Kaduna. The rioting also left a number of pastors homeless and the homes and businesses of other Christians severely damaged.

However, during the week-long upheaval, three mosques in the region also were burned.

"During the time of the all the burning, Christians were meeting to kneel, pray and not fight back," said Southern Baptist missionary Payton Myers, an evangelist and teacher at the Baptist pastor's school.

"This was a moral victory for Christians," Myers said. "Muslims I have talked with were very sympathetic with the Christians about this."

Repairs on most of the damaged buildings are near completion, Myers said. Only one church in Kaduna is behind schedule in its rebuilding efforts.

In the meantime, church members have used some of the charred materials from burned churches to build temporary buildings. Churches in Zaria and Kaduna did not even miss a Sunday worship service. Days after the riots, members in both cities gathered at the remains of their churches, picked through the debris for something to sit on and began praying.

One Muslim woman who saw the local Christians kneel and pray during the rioting was so taken aback by the unusual response to the violence that she began talking to local Christians.

"She saw how the Christians were reacting. She was surprised that they would not fight back. She decided to investigate what caused this and later became a Christian," Myers said.

Nigerian Christians believe their mostly peaceful response to the violence has helped ease tensions and avoid further problems. Muslim extremist groups, who were pressuring President Ibrahim Babangida to declare Nigeria a Muslim state, might have won a stronger voice if Christians had struck back in revenge, Merritt said.

But soon after the riots, Babangida, a Muslim, announced Nigeria would have no state religion and would "provide an umbrella under which all religions can thrive."

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The Nigerian government has provided more than \$3 million for rebuilding churches. Babangida said the money was provided because the riots were not part of a religious crisis but an attack on the Nigerian government itself. Babangida's conciliatory tone may not have existed if the northern Christian leaders had reacted differently, Merritt said.

Myers, like Merritt, gives much of the credit for strong Christian leadership in the area to the 37-year-old Baptist pastor's school.

Simon Tambaya is an example of the school's success. Tambaya, a Christian and farmer in the northern area, came to Kaduna looking for work. He became a gardener for missionary Don Frazier but soon felt the call to preach.

Tambaya began studying at the Baptist pastor's school in 1982 and graduated at the top of his class in 1986. Since then, he has helped develop Yan Goro Baptist Church from a small struggling congregation of less than 30 people into a healthy church that must hold two morning services each Sunday. The church plans to move out of its mud-brick building into a larger concrete building. It also has sponsored two mission churches and sent members to help with the new growth.

"Most students of the school over the years have gone back to their people," Myers said. "One man said of all the people in the north, his people needed his ministry most because he is one who understands them."

Despite harsh conditions in the rural areas, churches are opening because the Baptist pastor's school has been successful in spreading its graduates out into the countryside, Merritt said.

The level of education at the pastor's school is not as high as a seminary, but that works to the school's advantage, according to Merritt. Highly educated students would tend to gravitate to the major cities, but the majority of Nigeria's 90 million people live in rural areas, he said.

Although Baptist work is growing and evangelistic response is outstanding, the economic situation is grim, Merritt said. External debt ties up almost 60 percent of Nigeria's hard currency, which is earned mostly from the sale of oil. This keeps local churches from being able to afford even subsidized church literature.

One pastor in the northern area has tackled the scarcity of teaching literature as well as Nigeria's low literacy rate by drawing on the country's rich oral traditions.

Each Monday, Andrew Auta meets with a small group of men, leads a Bible study and repeats his Sunday sermon. The men then travel to smaller churches in the region and deliver the message from memory.

The mother church in Lafia, led by Auta, now averages about 600 people each Sunday and has started 44 other congregations of 75-100 people each in the area.

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Northwest targets \$1.6 million;
re-elects Griffith president

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(NW)

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TACOMA, Wash. (BP)--Nearly 600 messengers and guests representing 352 churches in Washington, Oregon and upper Idaho gathered Nov. 14-16, adopting a budget of slightly more than \$3 million and electing Lawton Griffith, 25-year veteran Northwest pastor, for a second term as president.

Northwest Baptist Convention churches are expected to contribute \$1,597,119 to the budget, with \$1.28 million to come from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, and the balance from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and other sources. The Northwest Convention has designated 30.5 percent of the undesignated receipts from its churches to support world-wide mission activities of the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget, an increase from 30 percent for 1989.

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Griffith, pastor of Eastmont Baptist Church in East Wenatchee, Wash., was elected for a second term as convention president. W.A. "Bill" Phillips, pastor of Kennewick Baptist Church in Kennewick, Wash., was elected first vice president, and Ron Bryant, an eastern Oregon attorney and member of Forest Avenue Baptist in Redmond, was elected second vice president.

Gerald Palmer, longtime vice president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, was introduced as "the newest staff member of the Northwest Baptist Convention." Palmer will join the NWBC staff in early January, when his one-year, post-retirement term as special assistant to HMB President Larry Lewis is completed.

Palmer will be a special consultant in the development of new churches. "I am going to discover whether the things I have been preaching for 40 years with the Home Mission Board will really work on a mission field," Palmer said.

Harmony marked most of the proceedings of the 42nd annual gathering of the convention, observers said. One credentials committee recommendation related to seating messengers from a new congregation in southern Oregon was challenged unsuccessfully, and a recommendation from the convention's executive board that would have limited NWBC annuity contributions for an individual pastor to an amount not exceeding his church's total Cooperative Program contributions was tabled for further study.

The 1990 NWBC annual meeting will be held in Pasco, Wash., Nov. 13-15.

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Mississippians unite to battle gambling

By Tim Nicholas

N-CO (MISS.)

Baptist Press 11/20/89

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--A group of about 130 Mississippians linked by opposition to legalization of gambling have organized to promote their cause.

The Mississippi legislature is slated to consider in January a proposal to rescind the constitutional ban on gambling in order to help fund an educational reform package proposed by Gov. Ray Mabus. Part of the funding for the package would be from a state-sponsored lottery.

The anti-gambling group was called together by Paul Jones, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission in Jackson, and Donald Wildmon, executive director of the American Family Association in Tupelo.

The meeting involved representatives from Southern Baptist churches, the Baptist Missionary Association, United Methodist churches, Assemblies of God, Presbyterian Churches in America, and Pentecostal churches. Other denominations sent messages of interest and intent to participate.

The group decided to call itself Citizens Advocating Responsible Economics, and agreed to utilize a post office box to avoid too close an identification with any one denomination.

Each denominational group, according to a general agreement among participants, will suggest one or two people to serve on a steering committee. That committee was to meet in mid-November "to develop and clearly define the purpose of the organization and to begin the process of producing materials and communicating our position on the lottery issue to citizens of Mississippi," Jones said.

Wildmon, a United Methodist minister, told the group, "Our best chance of killing this thing early is if senators and representatives get about 500 to 700 calls and letters saying, 'I want you to vote against the referendum.'" If a legislator knows the issue "is going to get him beat, he'll be with you," he said. "There are not too many statesmen around."

"If the pastors within the next month do not stand in the pulpit and give the people the facts and aggressively call our people to action, we're going to get beat, and we deserve to be beat."

Larry Braidfoot, general counsel and associate executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, told the group: "What's so bad about a lottery? It's a regressive way of raising revenue for the state."

The group agreed informally that their organization would address any government-backed form of gambling in Mississippi.

William Carey College
gets \$4.1 million loan

By Tim Nicholas

N-CO
(MISS)

Baptist Press
11/20/89

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (BP)--William Carey College has secured a \$4.1 million loan from a consortium of Mississippi banks which, according to participants, will place the Hattiesburg-based college back on a sound financial base.

James Edwards, who was elected early in November to be president of the school, told the Mississippi Baptist Record, "We've achieved financial stability again at Willian Carey College."

The loan, signed Nov. 13, will be paid from money due to Carey from the Mississippi Baptist Convention. Instead of giving Carey its higher education funds from the state convention budget, the convention board, acting on request from Carey trustees, will write monthly checks to the lead bank in the consortium.

Technically, the convention board is simply assigning to the banks a portion of what the board would have paid Carey had the loan not been made. However, Carey needed the loan to refinance its operations.

Carey would otherwise receive about \$800,000 as its portion of Mississippi Baptist Convention funds.

The \$4.1 million to Carey will allow the college to pay off most existing notes, bonds and leases, past due accounts and notes, and up to \$900,000 in "borrowings and encroachments" made by Carey in the past. The borrowings and encroachments include spent endowment money and past money received from the convention for falsified student enrollment figures.

Edwards pointed to several reasons for the successful negotiation of the loan. He credited MBCB Executive Director-Treasurer Bill Causey "and his leadership through the state with the banking community and our trustees."

Edwards said the school's vendors and creditors had been "patient with us in very significant ways." He added "the alumni and churches in the state have begun to support Carey in both tangible and intangible ways.

"The next step is to make all of Mississippi Baptists and our other constituents proud of Carey again and willing to support Carey with students and financially," he said.

Causey told the convention board meeting the morning before the signing that "William Carey College was actually bankrupt. Their creditors had said 'No, we cannot go farther.'" He said that with the signing of the loan, the auditors said Carey would have a "clean audit."

Causey also told the board that the Carey trustees have agreed orally to begin looking at possible sale of dormitories on the Gulf Coast campus which are costing more than they are taking in, and possible sale of Carey's nursing program in New Orleans which is making a profit.

Should those two sales occur, said Causey, about \$2.5 million of the \$4.1 million loan could be paid back immediately, and "Carey will be better off than in the last 10 or 15 years."

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Senior-adult marriages
face challenges, changes

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Long-time marriages of senior adults could benefit from change, excitement and spark, while newlywed senior adults need to realize the challenges they are about to face, the author of the 1989 Chautauqua theme book said.

Mature marriages require flexibility as seniors enter a transitional period of their life, said John Howell, author of "Transitions in Mature Marriage," the 1989 theme book for Senior Adult Chautauquas, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Howell, a professor of Christian ethics at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., said the challenges to senior-adult marriages can be met if both partners have a healthy self-esteem, emotional maturity and a commitment to growth.

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Howell listed transitions in senior years as passage, or a normal consequence of aging; change, an abrupt and challenging change, such as divorce or death of a spouse or friend; and conversion, changes in attitudes or behavior.

He identified three types of senior adult marriages that could benefit from change and excitement: the stable-but-stagnant marriage, the antagonistic marriage and the problem-focused marriage.

The stable-but-stagnant marriage might always have been passive, or it might have been a vital marriage that lost its spunk, Howell said.

Characteristics of a stable-but-stagnant marriage include lack of intimate companionship and shared goals, divided interests, sexual dissatisfaction and a breakdown in communication, he said.

"In the stable-but-stagnant marriage, communication often is shallow and does not risk dealing with deeper issues of the relationship," Howell said. "Changing non-communication into effective communication demands deliberate intention but can be done."

The antagonistic marriage includes constant bickering and hostile feelings, Howell said.

Bickering creates tension "about little things that mean almost nothing at all" and leads to feelings of hostility between the couple, he noted.

Hostility normally is a reaction to stored-up negative feelings, which could be solved by giving and receiving forgiveness and resolving not to allow the buildup to occur again Howell said.

In a problem-focused marriage, "one or more significant problems can create stress in the relationship that never seems to be resolved," Howell said. "Tension over changing roles, particularly created by retirement of one or both spouses, can be an area of ongoing stress."

Too much or too little togetherness, inadequate finances, religious differences and problems with children or grandchildren can all lead to a buildup of stress that must be resolved, he said.

Meanwhile, first marriages or remarriages that occur during the senior years "are change points that challenge maturity," Howell said.

Besides "being good for your health," people marry or remarry during later years for personal affirmation, intimate companionship, sexual fulfillment, physical care and financial security, he said.

But some challenges to marrying later in life exist, one of those being fixed habits, Howell said: "If a person has lived alone for several years, dealing with the adjustment to living in a couple relationship can be a struggle. Whether the habit is simply how to wash clothes or dishes, when to go to bed or get up, or any other practice of daily living, fixed habits that are difficult to change can create tension."

Other challenges to later-life marriages, Howell said, are hasty marriages, marital ghosts, new households and children's objections.

Hasty marriages usually occur when divorced people begin a new marriage before completing the grief process from a former one. "Hasty marriages can contribute to an unsatisfactory marriage," noted Howell. "Divorced people tend to remarry sooner than those whose mates died."

Marital ghosts carry expectations or fears from the first relationship into the new one, Howell described.

Howell led the seminars on transitions in later years at a Chautauqua at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. The Chautauquas are sponsored by the senior adult section of the Sunday School Board family ministry department.

Ambulance driver
shares God's love

By Breena Kent Paine

F-10
(NOBTS)

NEW ORLEANS (BP)---Mark Best gingerly lowered the quadriplegic man into the ambulance. The man had been bleeding internally, and his blood pressure was dangerously low, his eyes drooping.

"Do you feel all right, Alvin? Can you hear me?" Best asked, smiling at him. The man nodded his head.

Best never saw the man again after the ambulance ride to the hospital. The same goes for most of his passengers. But as a paramedic and a Christian, Best uses a smile and a gentle touch to share Christ with the hurting people he meets.

One girl was riding her bike when someone in a parked car opened the door in front of her, he recalled. She flew through the window, her face horribly disfigured by the cut glass. When Best arrived to help, she was crying, afraid no one would love her anymore.

"It's not so important what's on the outside, but what's on the inside," Best told her. "And Jesus loves you just the way you are."

Although his present job with Medic One ambulance network in New Orleans deals mainly with transfers and occasional emergencies, Best has worked high-stress, tragedy jobs in such cities as St. Louis, Dallas/Fort Worth and Baton Rouge, La. He chose his present lower-stress job to free him up for his studies as a theology student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"In this town is so much anger and hatred. I think it's part of the rapid lifestyle," said Best, a native of Tyler, Texas. "Working at a secular job, it's really easy to let the world rub off on you, to let the anger, hurt, frustration be a part of you."

His seminary education has helped him focus on "what God wants me to be," since several professors "have taken personal time to talk with me. It's been fascinating to see how they are eager to share and are real examples of agape love."

Of his profession, he notes, "I've seen some paramedics who (act as if being a paramedic) is just a job to them, treating someone who has just been through the trauma of an auto accident without caring." But his aim is to treat people with the compassion that Jesus might have in that situation.

"My family's really important to me," said Best of his wife, Pamela, four-year-old daughter Jennifer, and 2-year-old son, Andrew. "Sometimes Pamela and I discuss some of the things that happen at work and the tragedies. We're able to pray for the people."

Just before coming to New Orleans Seminary more than a year ago, Best's ambulance arrived on the scene to help a woman who had been in a car accident and had a broken collarbone. She and her husband were new in the community, and as they chatted in the ambulance, Best told her he was the interim music minister in a church in that area. She seemed interested, so he invited her to church. After he got off shift, Best, his pastor and a deacon stayed with the woman in the emergency room until her husband arrived.

"After she got out of the hospital, there she was in church," Best said. "She said she appreciated someone being there for her from a local church to meet her spiritual needs from the time the accident happened, through the ambulance drive and in the emergency room; then a nurse on her floor (in the hospital) was also a Christian."

Best added: "While I'm helping (the people), I pray for them. I want to be able to empty myself and let God use me as a paramedic. That's the way we should be in everything. Let the Lord work through our hands and speak through our voices.

"I think we have a marvelous opportunity to tell people about Jesus here in New Orleans, and I don't think we ought to miss it. New Orleans should be our first priority because that's where we are, not our hometown, not where we're going to be missionaries, but here where we are."

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(BP) photo available upon request from New Orleans Seminary