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Recommendations sought  
for key SBC appointments

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--An open letter has been issued by Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines seeking recommendations of people to appoint to key committees to serve at the 1990 SBC annual meeting in New Orleans.

"I am beginning the process which will result in my appointments for the 1990 Committee on Committees, Resolutions Committee, Credentials Committee and Tellers Committee," wrote Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.

Vines, who was re-elected to a second one-year term as president of the 14.8-million member denomination at the 1989 annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., noted the people he appoints will serve at the first annual meeting of a new decade, the last decade of the Twentieth Century.

"I believe that the 90s may well be the greatest years in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention," Vines told Baptist Press. "Baptisms are moving up, if ever so slowly, and the last two months of Cooperative Program (unified budget) giving have been record breaking months.

"All of the vital signs are positive. I think the great need now is for spiritual revival in our hearts and our churches. To that end, I encourage our people and our churches to be very attentive to the calls for prayer on the part of our national prayer leaders."

Vines noted the appointments of the four committees are very important as Southern Baptists move into the new decade. He asked Southern Baptists to "join me in prayer that the Lord's will shall be done concerning these appointments.

"I am looking for good, committed, salt-of-the-earth Southern Baptist people to appoint," he said. "I want them to be Bible-believing, cooperating Southern Baptists."

Vines added he plans to follow a practice he established last year in appointing "as many new people as I possibly can," people who have not had SBC responsibilities before.

Vines will appoint slightly more than 100 people to serve on the four committees; last year he named 111.

Under the SBC constitution and bylaws, the SBC president appoints the Committee on Committees and the Resolutions Committee "in conference with" the two vice presidents; the Credentials Committee "in consultation with" the vice presidents; and the Tellers Committee "in consultation with" the SBC registration secretary.

The Committee on Committees, composed of a layperson and a clergyman from each of the 33 eligible states, nominates the Committee on Nominations for the subsequent year as well as any other committee not otherwise provided for.

The Resolutions Committee, made up of 10 members, including three current members of the SBC Executive Committee, deals with all resolutions introduced during the annual meeting.

The Credentials Committee, which last year was made up of 22 members, oversees registration and deals with any disputed seating of messengers.

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The Tellers Committee, which last year had 13 members, tabulates all votes at the annual meeting.

In seeking recommendations of people to appoint to the committees, Vines said he was "surprised" the number of recommendations he received in 1989 "were not larger. I received a good number, but not to the level that I anticipated."

He added he believes the process of appointment in 1990 will be "a bit simpler" this year because he has a year of experience. "I am not going to be any less serious or meticulous about it, but I do understand the process and the deadlines better this year.

"I hope I will do a better job this year because of what I learned last year. Last year, I received a very positive response to the appointments and that made my work a real pleasure," he said.

He asked people wishing to make nominations to send the material to him by March 1, 1990, at First Baptist Church, 124 Ashley Street, Jacksonville, Fla. 32202. The envelopes should be designated on the lower left-hand side, "SBC Committee Recommendations."

Vines said the process is made easier if specific information on the nominees is included.

The information should include:

-- Whether the nominee has served on SBC committee or board previously, and whether any member of the nominee's church currently is serving or has previously served on a national committee or board.

-- The full name, correctly spelled, of the nominee; complete mailing address, including ZIP code; home and business telephone numbers, including area code; whether the nominee is clergy or denominationally related or is a layperson. The correct title or occupation of the nominee should be included, as well as the complete business address.

-- The nominee's church affiliation, including the church mailing address and telephone number; total church membership, the amount the church gave through the Cooperative Program unified budget during the 1988-89 associational year and the percentage of the church budget the CP gives represented.

-- The number of baptisms in the church during the 1988-89 associational year, whether the nominee plans to attend the 1990 annual meeting, and the state convention in which the nominee lives.

Vines asked that nominations include the nominator's name, title, mailing address and home and business telephone numbers.

Copies of a form on which to submit nominations are available from Vines church.

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Layman risks life taking food  
into Romania; FMB gives \$100,000

By Art Toalston

N- FMB

Baptist Press  
12/29/89

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Baptist layman Petrila Traian, a Romanian refugee, spent his Christmas holidays delivering food and medical supplies to his homeland after thousands died in rooting longtime Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu from power.

Traian began making daily trips into Romania on Christmas Eve. He drove his personal van from Vienna, Austria, where he has lived a number of years, to Hungary's border to re-enter his homeland.

He has been purchasing food and medical supplies in Hungary with some \$2,000 in offerings from Baptists in Vienna and \$1,000 in Southern Baptist relief funds. He also has been delivering supplies provided by the Red Cross.

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On Christmas Eve and Christmas, Traian went to Arad, his hometown. The day after Christmas, he went to Timisoara, where he had been a student. An estimated 12,000 of Timisoara's 350,000 people were killed in political violence in mid-December that marked the beginning of the end for Ceausescu, who ruled Romania for 24 years.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board on Dec. 28 allocated an additional \$100,000 -- \$50,000 in general relief funds and \$50,000 in world hunger funds to purchase food, medicine and other supplies needed in Romania, said Keith Parker, director of Southern Baptist work in Europe. The board is working through Hungarian Baptists, who are mounting relief efforts for Romania.

One relief team is being organized by two brothers who are Baptist laymen and medical doctors in Szeged, a Hungarian town near the Romanian border, Parker said. Baptist churches in Budapest, Hungary's capital, are pulling together another relief team.

"This shows the effectiveness of our cooperative way of working with European Baptists," Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks noted. "We have ready-made channels for being certain that food and relief supplies get to needy people."

Parks voiced concern, however, that the \$50,000 relief allocation will reduce by more than one-third funds the board can use to respond to other catastrophes that may occur worldwide.

A Swiss businessman has advanced \$34,000 to the small Swiss Baptist union to launch a relief effort, Parker reported. Relief offerings also have been taken in Baptist churches in England and in English-language Baptist churches in Western Europe, according to David Borgan, a Vienna-based Southern Baptist missionary.

Both food and medical supplies were in short supply even when Ceausescu was firmly in power, Parker said. But the shortages were exacerbated, he added, when political violence erupted Dec. 17 in Timisoara and spread throughout much of the country. On Christmas, Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were executed after a trial sanctioned by the Romania's provisional government, the National Salvation Committee.

Telephone communication with Romanians proved nearly impossible in late December. But a call did get through to Nick Jheorghita, a medical doctor and lay pastor of Second Baptist Church in Oradea, a city of 300,000.

"Here ... there was not any shedding of blood," Jheorghita said. "Of course, there are some tensions on the streets.

"The situation in our city is under the control of Almighty God," he continued, crediting a spiritual revival in Oradea for its relative calm.

Spiritual vibrancy, in fact, is one of the hallmarks of the Baptist Union of Romania, the second largest Baptist body in Europe behind only the Soviet Union's. There are some 160,000 Baptists in 660 churches among Romania's 23.2 million people. Baptist churches, despite severe religious oppression under Ceausescu, have been baptizing some 8,000 to 12,000 people each year, according to Parker.

Traian, the Baptist laymen venturing into Romania, is the caretaker of Mollardgasse Baptist Church in Vienna, Austria's oldest Baptist congregation. Beyond Mollardgasse's Austrian members, two other congregations meet at the location, one composed mostly of Romanian refugees and one of English-speaking foreigners.

"He was on one of the first convoys that went in," reported Borgan, pastor of the English-language congregation at Mollardgasse. "He wanted to get the food there for them by Christmas and to help as soon as he could."

Traian, in a telephone call to his wife, Lucia, said he felt "the most afraid for his life" in entering Arad on Christmas, Borgan recounted. "He felt like he was in 'the devil's circle' -- those were his words. It was just so confused and he could hear shooting all the time. There were lots of terrorists who were still roving around.

"He's going to keep going in, he says, until the food runs out," Borgan said.

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Borgan was impressed with Traian's wife, also a Romanian refugee, who stayed behind with their children. "She has supported him 100 percent. This was Christmas Eve and she was behind him even though she was hearing reports of all the shootings."

Members of the Romanian- and English-language congregations in Vienna met for worship on Christmas, Borgan said. The Romanians were "overjoyed ... that their country has been liberated. They had cut out the Communist part of the center of their flag and were shaking hands through the hole. But they're also very sad and very concerned for the great suffering in Romania."

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Panama relief work starts;  
Baptist teen-ager killed

By Mary E. Speidel

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
12/29/89

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--The day after Christmas, Southern Baptist missionaries and Panamanian Baptists began relief efforts in Panama City following the U.S. military invasion Dec. 20.

Most combat in the capital ceased just two days after deposed Panamanian leader Gen. Manuel Noriega sought refuge at the Vatican Embassy Dec. 24, according to news reports. Civilian traffic resumed and Panamanians began returning to work, Southern Baptist missionaries said.

At least one Panamanian Baptist casualty has been reported, a teen-age boy who attended Las Mananitas Baptist Church in Panama City. He was killed Dec. 24 when one of Noriega's "dignity battalions" fired on him on the side of a road, said Southern Baptist missionary James Gilbert, from Jackson, Miss.

Church members were not able to travel to the nearest cemetery to bury the victim, so a member's parents donated land to begin a new cemetery in the neighborhood, said Gilbert. Pastor Nieves Ortega conducted the funeral on Christmas Day.

Members of the disaster relief committee of the Baptist Convention of Panama have begun food distribution efforts, said Gilbert, who directs the committee. Baptist volunteers obtained food from a U.S. government deposit Dec. 26 after it was made available to nonprofit organizations providing relief.

"Each day is better and we feel like the Lord has really answered prayer. We feel like the worst is over," said Gilbert. "We're thankful for the relief that's coming in and we hope to work with it as long as there's a real need here."

On Dec. 26, Baptist workers in vehicles loaded with food were stopped en route to Redemption Baptist Church, headquarters for the Baptist relief effort, said Gilbert. Troops rerouted the volunteers because of continued sniper fire on some streets, he said.

Once food arrived at Redemption, Southern Baptist missionaries and Panamanian Baptist volunteers sacked the food to be given to the 44 Baptist churches and missions in the Panama City area, Gilbert said. An average of 20 sacks per church and 10 per mission will be distributed initially. Church members will take food from house to house to people in need in their areas.

"We're trying to meet some of the urgent needs until people can purchase food of their own," said Gilbert.

Gilbert said the Baptist mission and Baptist associations in the Panama City area have some \$14,000 immediately available in relief funds.

Gilbert's wife, Dorothy, also from Jackson, Miss., was among about 30 volunteers sacking rice, lentils, sugar, shortening, canned milk and salt at Redemption Church. Scripture portions and tracts were placed in each bag, she said.

Near the church, U.S. soldiers patrolling the area were well received by Panamanians, said Mrs. Gilbert. Panamanian Baptist volunteers gave cold drinks to soldiers in the street outside the church, she said.

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All of the Southern Baptist workers in Panama except one couple have moved temporarily to Panama City to be closer together, said Joe Bruce, the Foreign Mission Board's area director for Middle America. A total of 15 Southern Baptist missionaries and three volunteers are currently in Panama.

Southern Baptist missionaries Ed and Kathy Steele and volunteers Howard and Marvin Hooper traveled to Panama City on Christmas Day. The Steeles, from Moore, Okla., and Carnegie, Okla., respectively, live in Rio Chame, an hour and a half from Panama City. The Hoopers, from Alexandria, La., and the Bronx, N.Y., work at a Baptist camp in Santa Clara, on the Gulf of Panama.

Glenn and Pauline Nicholson remained in David, about 300 miles outside of Panama City, because the situation in that area was fairly calm, Bruce said. The Nicholsons are from Forrest City, Ark., and Cherry Valley, Ark., respectively.

Southern Baptist missionary Ed Steele, vice chairman of the Baptist mission in Panama, reported that the mission office, near the Panamanian Defense Headquarters in Panama City, did not sustain damage during fighting. A building next door to the mission was damaged and a Panamanian military building across the street was reduced to "ashes and just a shell of a building," said Steele.

Southern Baptist missionaries reported quiet Christmas observances. On Christmas Eve, the Gilberts celebrated a traditional Christmas dinner at midnight with Panamanian neighbors. On Christmas day, they were able to travel to the home of another Southern Baptist missionary family for Christmas dinner, Mrs. Gilbert said. "We had turkey and all the trimmings," she said.

In a Baptist Press story released Dec. 21, the Gilberts had reported continued fighting and Noriega's "dignity battalions" roaming their neighborhood near the Marriott Hotel in Panama City.

Currently in that area, "Things are calm. I slept through the night last night. I didn't hear any firing," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Things are getting somewhat back to normal."

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Though plagued with pain,  
student sees life as a gift

By Ken Camp & Nan Dickson

F-Texas

Baptist Press  
12/29/89

DALLAS (BP)--In spite of severe pain, chronic physical ailments and the immediate need of a kidney transplant, Julie Liss greets her problems with a smile, viewing life as a gift from God.

For many pre-med students, a four-week, mid-semester hospital stay could be scholastically fatal, but for Liss, a junior at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas, it was just another in a long string of obstacles to be overcome.

"I've been taking upper-level chemistry, biology and psychology courses and an English class. I made up the work, and I'm expecting all A's and B's," she said. "God has helped me through a lot."

Liss, a member of First Baptist Church of Belton, who considers Universal City, Texas, her hometown, is no stranger to physical ailments. Her most recent hospitalization was due to a severe kidney infection and other problems with her urinary system.

"I'm looking down the road now at a kidney transplant. It appears inevitable," she said, noting that doctors urgently are seeking a kidney donor.

She suffers from a condition in which she has no control of smooth muscles from her neck to below her waist, and a spinal tap performed at age 16 left her semi-paralyzed and temporarily bound to a wheelchair.

"I still don't feel stuff like normal people do. I have to think when I walk, or else I trip," she said.

Furthermore, she has had one tumor surgically removed from her thyroid, and others discovered inside her intestine may have to be treated with chemotherapy.

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But in spite of physical problems, she remains a committed Christian, an award-winning athlete and a dedicated student whom friends and faculty most often describe as "smiling," "radiant" and "determined."

Before transferring to the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, she won titles in diving at Eureka College in Illinois and a national ranking in track. On the Belton campus, she is active in the Chemistry Club and Baptist Student Union, and she is junior class president.

"I've never seen anybody as strong emotionally. She's incredible," said Lori Horner, college intern at First Baptist Church.

Although she frequently is in severe pain, Liss often forgoes her pain medicine in order to keep her mind clear and to enable her to study, Horner added.

"She's a very courageous young lady," said Donald Foster, professor of organic chemistry at the Texas Baptist university.

Although Foster said he worked with Liss in allowing her to make up missed assignments and tests, he was quick to add: "Her attitude was never, 'Give me this, or give me that, or do me any favors.'"

"In spite of the hurdles, she showed tremendous dedication and courage, staying in there and doing her work with a positive attitude."

"I am impressed with her drive and determination for life," said Michele Morgan of First Baptist Church, a neighbor in the university dormitory. "Liss sees life as a gift, when most of us take it for granted. She depends on God and lets Jesus shine through her."

"She is grace under pressure," said Donna Plank, dean of women at the university.

"She is not even aware of the impression she has made on people. She is young and facing difficult things, and yet she is doing a beautiful job keeping on keeping on. As I have watched her cope, dealing with stress and life-threatening situations, she has dealt with things with maturity."

Liss believes she is able to handle her situation by turning it over to God.

"I just pray every day, 'I'm putting myself in your hands. Just guide me,'" she explains.

Looking beyond her immediate problems and her need for a kidney transplant, Liss anxiously anticipates entering medical school after university graduation in May 1991.

"I would love to be a doctor," she said. "I want to be able to stand on the other side of the table and say: 'I can sympathize with you. I really do know what you are going through.'"