



# - - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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January 5, 1990

90-2

Baptists witness beginnings,  
hope for revival in Panama

By Mary E. Speidel

N- FMB

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--With ousted Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega in U.S. custody and American troops beginning to withdraw, a spirit of new beginnings is emerging in Panama, said a Southern Baptist missionary there.

"It's just so much different now," said missionary James Gilbert, who lives in Panama City. "We feel a security we did not have before. More people are going to work, cleaning up and getting ready to build again. There's a different spirit among the people."

Against that backdrop, Panamanian Baptists and missionaries are providing hunger relief and preparing for spiritual revival.

About \$15,000 in hunger funds have been distributed throughout the nine associations in the Baptist Convention of Panama, said Gilbert, who directs the convention's disaster relief committee. Funds were provided by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the Panama Metro Baptist Association.

The Foreign Mission Board sent an additional \$15,000 for hunger relief by Jan. 5, said Joe Bruce, who directs missionary work in Middle America and Canada.

After each association receives funds, Baptist leaders purchase food and distribute it through the association's churches and mission congregations. Church members determine which families in their areas most need food, said Gilbert.

Baptist relief efforts began Dec. 26, when relief committee members acquired food made available to non-profit organizations through a U.S. government deposit.

Because church members take food directly to families, the project provides personal contact with people in need. "More than just giving them a bag of food, (volunteers) can hear them and they can share with them," said Gilbert, who is from Jackson, Miss.

People from all social classes have been helped by Baptist relief efforts, Gilbert said. He told of one university professor whose family had been cut off from food supplies. The family had no food in the house the day Baptists brought a week's worth of groceries.

Southern Baptist volunteer Keith Morris from Waco, Texas, helped deliver food to Las Mananitas Baptist Church in the neighborhood where Panamanian teen-ager Luis Mendez was killed by one of Noriega's "dignity battalions" Dec. 24. The 19-year-old youth had made a public profession of faith in Christ at the church but had not yet been baptized, according to missionaries.

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In addition to relief efforts, Baptists have found opportunities to meet spiritual needs. On New Year's Day, Gilbert and a Panamanian deacon visited a group of U.S. soldiers at a camp in Panama City.

Later, Gilbert shared the gospel with an American soldier who had experienced a close call during the U.S. invasion. The soldier's parachute snagged on a tree, and he was left hanging. "He finally cut himself down, but he had a real soul-searching experience," said Gilbert. "He was wide open to listen to the gospel."

Panamanian Baptists are preparing for citywide evangelistic crusades and simultaneous revivals to be held Feb. 28-March 11 in Panama City, Colon and La Chorrera. About 60 Baptist churches and mission congregations will participate. Brazilian Baptist evangelist Nilson Fanini will preach at the crusade in Panama City.

The Foreign Mission Board is seeking to enlist 12 Spanish-speaking and six English-speaking pastors to help with the crusades. During the past year, projects scheduled through the current partnership between Georgia Baptists and Panama Baptists have been placed on hold because of tensions in Panama. In light of recent events, Georgia Baptist partnership projects are being re-evaluated, board officials said.

As missionaries and Baptists prepare for revival, Gilbert urged Southern Baptists to pray for "spiritual awakening" in Panama. "There's a vacuum in our people. ... We need to fill that with something that's positive. You can't rebuild a nation just by building buildings," he said.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Mike Creswell, Baptist Press correspondent for Europe, filed these two stories after accompanying a shipment of food and medical supplies into Romania Dec. 31.

Baptists deliver 2 tons of  
food, medicine to Romania

N-FMB  
By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
1/5/90

ARAD, Romania (BP)--Hungarian Baptists, working in cooperation with Southern Baptists, delivered more than two tons of food, clothing and medical supplies to Romania Dec. 31.

The relief effort, part of an international drive to help the stricken country, was the first of several shipments to come from Baptists throughout Europe and other areas. Romanian Baptists are distributing the supplies in two areas near Timisoara, where the uprising against Romania's communist government began in December.

Romanians -- including soldiers and rifle-toting civilian militia members -- welcomed the relief vehicles with smiles, tears of joy and V-for-victory signs. "You are the instruments of God," declared Romanian Baptist leader Traian Grecu as he welcomed one delivery team. Grecu, president of the Romanian Baptist Union, also leads Arad Baptist Association, made up of some 150 churches and 20,000 members.

Romania was reduced to poverty by 24 years of rule by communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. His regime ended with his execution amid bloody fighting in late December as citizens rose up and took over the government.

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Most relief efforts have focused on Bucharest and other population centers, but relief workers said needs are pressing in smaller, more isolated towns and villages. Despite the current aid, needs in the country likely will be long-term, at least until new crops can be harvested next fall, cautioned Southern Baptist representative Errol Simmons. Based in Budapest, Hungary, Simmons helped deliver the shipment to Arad.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board appropriated \$100,000 for Romania relief -- an initial \$10,000 emergency grant to be followed by another \$90,000 in coming weeks.

Baptists delivered the first supplies in two shipments, each carried by a truck and a car. One shipment went to Arad, about 30 miles north of Timisoara, scene of some of the fiercest fighting in the uprising. A second shipment went to the nearby towns of Oradea and Zalau.

The vehicles traveling to Arad went from Szeged, Hungary, in a Red Cross-sponsored convoy because of the possibility of attack by remnants of Ceausescu's Securitate, or secret police force, now referred to as "terrorists" by Romanians. Convoy vehicles, mostly trucks, moved slowly because of heavy loads, fog and slushy roads created by a recent snowfall. But officials warned them to keep moving, lest they become easier targets.

Two days before the Baptist shipments entered Romania, a Hungarian covering the same route to deliver supplies was wounded severely when gunmen demolished his car with heavy automatic weapons fire. The man, shot through the leg, rolled out of his car and later was taken to a hospital in Szeged.

Baptists in Arad reported a gunfight broke out at the Arad train station the day before the relief delivery. Streets were calm Dec. 31, although pro-democracy army troops and armed civilians manned checkpoints in the city and on incoming roads. They wore red, yellow and blue armbands, the colors of the national flag, minus the hated Communist Party symbol.

The Baptist shipments consisted of flour, sugar, rice, baby food, canned food, hospital equipment, antibiotics, insulin and other drugs and medical supplies, medical textbooks, daily newspapers, Bibles in the Hungarian and Romanian languages, and other Christian literature. One of the Romanians' greatest hungers is for reading materials, especially Bibles and other Christian literature long denied them, Baptists said.

The actual amount of the drugs and medical supplies provided through Foreign Mission Board funds exceeded what the relief funds normally would have bought because a Hungarian church member arranged a bulk purchase at reduced prices. Hungarian Baptists in the Szeged area collected most of the other items going to Arad under direction of pastor Arpad Revesz.

Arad Baptist Association will oversee delivery of later Baptist aid shipments to the neediest people in the area to allay concern that food and other items might wind up for sale on the black market. Items delivered to Arad Dec. 31 were being distributed by the Hungarian Baptist church there, led by pastor Laszlo Kiss.

Medical supplies were delivered to three Arad hospitals. All three hospitals were being guarded after an attack on one by Securitate forces during the revolution. Army troops and armed citizens repulsed the attack, hospital officials said.

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A spokesman for the Arad county hospital said staff members had difficulty treating scores of injured people because they had almost no drugs on hand when the uprising broke out. Even simple medications such as aspirin generally were unavailable, officials said.

More than \$1,000 in supplies and food, plus a truck full of clothing and other items, were delivered to the towns of Oradea and Zalau by leaders of Kispest Baptist Church in Budapest. The amount may seem small by U.S. standards, but most members of the Hungarian church earn about \$100 monthly.

"It was truly a sacrificial gift for them," Simmons said.

Hungarians feel a special kinship with the estimated 2.5 million ethnic Hungarians who live in an area of Romania once part of Hungary. Ethnic Hungarians there were forbidden to speak their native language and were targeted by Ceausescu for repressive measures, including the wholesale destruction of Hungarian villages and churches.

In Hungary, people wept openly as they watched televised reports on the violence in Romania, Simmons said. Black flags flew on many public buildings in Budapest to register Hungarian concern about the situation.

Eleven blood pressure monitoring sets provided by Foreign Mission Board funds were given to Baptist nurses working at the Oradea hospital because the facility lacked even that basic equipment. "Now I can really treat patients," a nurse exclaimed upon receiving the kits.

"The people we saw are very poor with inadequate clothing," said Kispest pastor Andras Lovis, noting that temperatures are below freezing at this time of year in Romania. "The people are tired and sad. They have no hope, no faith. They have been reduced to begging for food and clothes. They are a put-down people, physically and spiritually."

Still, "everybody is glad for the liberty they have now," said Kispest church council member Tibor Fulop. "And they're very glad because they can speak Hungarian now and have Hungarian-language newspapers."

Baptists in Budapest already have gathered at least another ton of food supplies to be delivered during the first week in January. The biggest need in the Arad area now is for food, especially powdered milk for children, clothing and basic drugs such as aspirin, Grecu said.

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

2 Baptists killed  
in Romanian violence

By Mike Creswell

N- FMB

Baptist Press  
1/5/90

ARAD, Romania (BP)--Two Baptist men were among more than 80 people killed in the eastern Romanian city of Arad during fighting to overthrow Nicolae Ceausescu's communist regime in late December, Baptist leaders reported.

As demonstrations grew in Arad in December, Baptist leaders preached sermons calling for liberty. Hundreds of church members knelt to recite the Lord's Prayer and chanted, "God is with us! God is with us!"

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Along with demands for freedom, the Baptists called for an emphasis on the gospel. "Every home must have a Bible, and we must build many churches," a speaker said. "We must build more churches -- not more bars."

Despite years of oppression, Romanian Baptists number some 160,000, second only to the Soviet Union among European Baptist bodies. They also baptize between 8,000 and 12,000 new converts annually.

"After 40 years, we are free and it's wonderful. We can't find the words to describe the reality," exclaimed Petru Bofian, Baptist pastor in Arad and vice president of Arad Baptist Association, with about 150 churches.

Reports on churches in other areas were not available because of problems with the national telephone system and travel restrictions imposed by continuing outbreaks of violence.

Unlike some Romanian cities, where the death toll ran into the hundreds, Arad saw less killing of civilians because of a singular event, Bofian said. When area members of Ceausescu's feared Securitate secret police heard radio reports that the Romanian army had sided with the people, they switched allegiance. Securitate forces in other areas were sent to attack the rebel forces in Arad, and they fought each other.

At one point, Securitate forces, now called "terrorists" by Romanians, attacked an Arad hospital but were repulsed. At another hospital, a worker said no fighting occurred, "but we had lots of terror." Arad was the second Romanian city where major demonstrations and fighting broke out, following even harsher conflict in Timisoara, about 30 miles south.

When word reached Arad that Ceausescu had fled Bucharest, the capital, people cheered from windows and blew horns on the few cars in the city. "Dracula is dead," people screamed.

"Not even Hitler killed his own people as Ceausescu did," said a hospital worker who escorted a Baptist relief truck from one hospital to another. The worker had searched in vain through a Romanian dictionary to find a word to adequately describe Ceausescu's wickedness, he said.

Separating fact from rumor has proven difficult in Romania. Observers now say the number of deaths during the uprising may number fewer than 4,000, not 70,000 as reported earlier by the new provisional government.

Physician Janos Szenohradzky, who works for a university hospital in Szeged, Hungary, said his hospital was notified it would receive more than 800 wounded people from Romania in late December. Ambulances were dispatched to the border and waited two days, but no patients arrived. Later, Romanian hospital workers told the doctor that Securitate forces had executed 1,500 patients. The story could not be substantiated.

Another story receiving wide circulation in Arad was that Ceausescu had blood drawn from children in orphanages and given to himself as a rejuvenation treatment. A Japanese journalist reported he had heard the same story in Timisoara, but again the story could not be verified.

The Transylvania area of Romania is connected in legend with the blood-drinking Dracula figure of novel and movie fame, who in turn is traced to an evil Transylvanian ruler of the Middle Ages.

Federal court restricts  
aid to parochial schools

N-CO

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--In a decision with national implication, a U.S. district court has struck down a Missouri arrangement that allowed parochial school students to receive a greater share of federal education funds than their public school counterparts.

Two Southern Baptists -- a pastor and a professor -- had filed suit in federal court in 1985 against then U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett challenging guidelines established for allocating federal education funds.

The Southern Baptists are Rudy Pulido, pastor of Southwest Baptist Church of St. Louis, and Hugh Wamble, a professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. They were joined by John Swomley, professor emeritus at the United Methodist St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State in Silver Spring, Md., backed the suit.

Then-Secretary Bennett issued a series of guidelines that set up an "off-the-top" system which gave first priority in allocating federal education funds to parochial schools. He also encouraged the use of public funds to buy portable classrooms for instruction at religious schools.

According to documents submitted in the case, the "off-the-top" plan meant that some parochial school students in Missouri received four times as much federal aid as public school enrollees.

Judge Joseph E. Stevens Jr., in his Pulido v. Cavazos decision found the "off-the-top" funding plan to be an unconstitutional violation of church-state separation because it had the effect of aiding sectarian institutions.

"This type of aid," he wrote, "is not the type of 'indirect and incidental' benefit that the Supreme Court has recognized as constitutional. Rather, this aid confers the type of direct benefit to the private schools that the Supreme Court has found impermissible because it provides 'a subsidy to the primary religious mission of the institutions affected.'"

The opinion added, "While it is constitutional to use public funds to provide for remedial education of public school students, the Constitution does not require, and indeed this court finds that it forbids, the taking of federal funds from public school students in order to allow the services to be provided to private school students."

The decision also barred the placement of publicly funded portable classrooms on parochial school property. The judge ruled the mobile classrooms may be placed on public property adjacent to parochial schools, although he conceded such close proximity may send a message to the public of church-state cooperation.

Americans United attorney Lee Boothby said the "decision is a major legal victory for church-state separation. The court has clearly signaled the view that government may not either directly or symbolically aid religious institutions through the use of federal programs."

Robert L. Maddox, executive director of Americans United, praised the ruling as a significant step in church state religious, as well as education policy. "The court has said that government officials may not rob public schools in order to subsidize parochial schools," he said.

Top Soviet official endorses  
Baptist seminary in Moscow

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

MOSCOW (BP)--A top Soviet official has endorsed the opening of a Baptist seminary within walking distance of the Kremlin, according to leaders of the nation's Baptist union.

Anatoly Lokyanov, vice president of the Soviet Parliament and first deputy to Mikhail Gorbachev, met with two Baptist leaders Dec. 29 and was quoted as saying, "You shall have your building and your property for your needs."

Trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board last year set aside \$200,000 from the denomination's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to help Soviet Baptists launch the seminary.

Lokyanov's endorsement of the seminary came during a session with Vasili Logvinenko, president of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and Alexei Bichkov, the union's general secretary.

The meeting marked the first time ever a top Soviet official has received Baptist leaders, Bichkov said. The session, which lasted nearly an hour and a half, brought the opening of the seminary a step closer to reality after more than 10 years of lobbying by Baptists.

Baptists received written permission for the seminary from the Soviet Office of Religious Affairs last February. At that time, Baptist leaders and Soviet officials discussed several possible seminary sites, several more than two hours from Moscow by car. They since have agreed on use of a two-story building in Moscow that formerly housed a kindergarten. Baptists plan to add a third floor, expanding the building to 1,500 square meters.

The building is several blocks from the Baptist union's headquarters and within a couple of miles of the Kremlin, said Keith Parker, who directs Southern Baptist work in Europe.

No schedule for beginning renovations has been set. "It may be days; it may be months," Parker said. More negotiations involving various levels of Soviet bureaucracy lie ahead, he noted.

Bichkov said the Baptist union envisions opening a full-time, four-year course of study for 20 theological students by 1992 if talks with the government proceed smoothly. The enrollment later will expand to 40, he said.

A theological seminary is important to Baptist ministers, Bichkov said, because it will better equip them for responding to the ways today's Soviet citizens think. "(Many adults) graduated from the technical colleges and universities," the Baptist leader said. "The level of education of the last two generations is very high."

The new seminary will not eliminate the need for a Bible correspondence course begun by the Baptist union in the late 1960s, Bichkov said. More than 600 church leaders have completed the three-year theology program or two-year music curriculum. The council plans to add a fourth year of ministerial training. Enrollment stands at about 100 per year.

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Funding for the new seminary will come from a variety of Baptist sources, Bichkov reported. "We hope that our main contributors will be from our own churches," he added. "Our people have been waiting for so long and have prayed so much for this announcement. They are very generous people, and we believe they will give very much money for the seminary."

During the Dec. 29 meeting with the Soviet official, discussion included the persecution Baptists have weathered over the years, Bichkov said. The official promised conditions will be much better for all religious groups in the future. He also promised Baptists would have the opportunity to suggest changes in Soviet law regarding religious freedom once an initial draft of the changes is completed.

The Soviet Union's 548,000 Baptists comprise the fourth-largest constituency of the Baptist World Alliance, after the United States, India and Brazil. The Soviet Union encompasses one-sixth of the world's land mass and more than 100 language groups. Baptists currently are found in about 30 language groups in the nation.