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N- BJC

Action expected in Congress  
on protections for disabled

By Kathy Palen

WASHINGTON (BP)--As Congress begins its new session, members are expected to resume work on legislation that would extend broad anti-discrimination protections to the estimated 43 million Americans who have physical and mental disabilities.

The Americans with Disabilities Act would give the disabled the same civil rights protections given to women and minorities under the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The bill, which the Senate passed last fall, has been referred to four House committees. The Education and Labor Committee gave its approval to the bill just before Congress adjourned in November. It still must be considered by the Energy and Commerce, Public Works and Transportation, and Judiciary panels.

Thus far, the bill has enjoyed bipartisan support on Capitol Hill, as well as the endorsement of President Bush.

The Senate-passed version of the bill would apply to both public and private sectors but would include exemptions for religious organizations.

The bill would ban discrimination against individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, such as stores, restaurants, theaters and office buildings. It would not require that existing facilities be modified but would apply to new facilities or existing facilities that undergo renovation.

But the measure excludes religious institutions or entities controlled by religious institutions from a list of categories of establishments considered to be public accommodations.

The bill also would prohibit any employer -- except those with fewer than 15 employees -- from discriminating against any qualified individual with a disability. Employers would be required to make "reasonable accommodations" to the needs of a qualified individual with a disability unless such accommodations would impose an "undue hardship" on the business' operation.

The legislation, however, would allow religious organizations to exercise religious preference in hiring. It also would allow a religious organization to require all applicants and employees to conform to the organization's religious tenets.

The Senate version would protect people who have AIDS or the related HIV virus, but it would not include coverage for a variety of sexual practices, including homosexuality. It also would not cover current users of illegal drugs or alcohol.

The bill now must receive approval by the three remaining House panels before going before the full House. Should the House-approved version differ from the Senate bill, the two would have to be reconciled before being sent on for the president's signature.

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Benin churches grow  
despite economic chaos

By Donald D. Martin

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Baptist Press  
1/26/90

COTONOU, Benin (BP)--Baptist churches in Benin continue to grow despite the west African nation's economic crisis, reported Southern Baptist missionaries.

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"We have seen a greater influx of people into the churches," said Lydia Greear, a missionary from Ashland, Ky. "In Cotonou, at least 15 to 20 new people come to church each Sunday. We've seen at least a 5 to 10 percent increase in the total congregation size in the last year" to more than 250 members.

Greear and her husband, Asa, of Campton, Ky., live in Cotonou, Benin's largest city, where he is a church developer. In the last two years, Cotonou and Porto-Novo, the capital, have been the scene of protests and strikes by students and government workers. Most of the protests center around calls for political reform as the country's economic crisis worsens.

The country's economic performance has "dramatically deteriorated" since the early 1980s, according to a report from the U.S. Embassy in Benin. The current situation is the worst economic crisis in the country's 27-year history, the report said. A World Bank report estimated the gross national product in 1987 averaged only \$310 per person and was expected to fall even lower for the country's 4.4 million citizens.

Government employees recently have gone on strike to protest not receiving pay for six months in 1989, according to news reports. The government paid two months of overdue salaries at the end of December after the International Monetary Fund and France, Benin's major creditors, lent the government \$27 million in an attempt to diffuse the growing crisis. However, street protests and strikes continue, reports said.

Many church members are among the workers who have gone without pay. The three Cotonou Baptist churches where the Greears work operate food relief programs to help ease the problem.

"We give out rice and grain in bulk to the people who come and show a specific need," regardless of church affiliation, she said. "That's one of the ways we use to reach out to the people."

The Greears personally try to employ as many people as they can and tailor their spending so as to use local products and food.

"We find that it's better to eat the vegetables and other foods that are locally grown and then pay someone to come in and prepare the meal," she said. "Staying with the local goods gets money back to the people who desperately need it." Several well-educated people sometimes work in their garden because they can't find any other work.

One Baptist couple's experience illustrates how the nation's economic plight has affected people's lives, explained Mrs. Greear.

The husband is a deacon and a government employee. His college education once assured him of an adequate middle-class income. But since July 1988, he has received only six months' wages.

At first he turned to his family for help, then to his fellow church members. Recently the couple moved into a much smaller house to save money. He does odd jobs to feed himself and his wife. What rent they can pay comes from family and church members.

"In the culture here, it is more important to help someone who comes to you in need than it is to feed yourself," Mrs. Greear said. "That's their thinking. There are a lot of discussions in church and in the Sunday school classes about the fact that if your brother comes to you in need of help, then you will give him something, even if that means you do without.

"We come here to teach and find that this is just the way things are done. It certainly makes me humble."

The deacon has never lost hope, she said: "He's had every opportunity to become bitter and angry, but he keeps a real positive attitude and talks about the need for faith. He knows he will be taken care of.

"We have seen a tremendous outpouring of faith among the Christians because they just believe that God will take care of the situation."

**CORRECTION:** In the Jan. 25 Baptist Press story titled, "Baptists to coordinate Eastern Europe aid," please delete the third and eighth paragraphs and replace them with the following.

**THIRD PARAGRAPH SHOULD READ:**

Baptist Response-Europe is the name of the committee, created during a Jan. 22-23 consultation sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and two affiliated organizations, the European Baptist Federation and International Missions Secretaries. Attending were representatives from Baptist unions in seven Eastern European countries, Baptist mission agencies in Western Europe, the Southern Baptist Convention, American Baptist Churches and Canadian Baptists. The 33 participants met in Dorfweil, West Germany.

**EIGHTH PARAGRAPH SHOULD READ:**

Baptist Response-Europe will seek "to gain more accurate information and develop more appropriate means of meeting needs without some of the chaos that has existed," Parker said. He will be one of three members of its coordinating committee, serving in behalf of the International Missions Secretaries. Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, will be the chairman. Archie Goldie, director of the Baptist World Alliance's relief department, will be the third coordinating committee member.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

Hill encourages Christians  
not to be pious/judgmental

By Terry Barone

*N-Texas*

Baptist Press  
1/26/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Drawing on personal experience, evangelist Junior Hill challenged Christians to not be "pious and pass judgment on someone who has been through forced termination."

Speaking at the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference, Hill, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention from Hartselle, Ala., also encouraged ministers not to quit, recounting an incident that occurred while he was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary more than 25 years ago.

As pastor of a small rural church, Hill preached a sermon about Jesus loving people of all races -- "red, yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight."

The next weekend, he went to the local barber shop. While Hill was getting his hair cut, the barber, a member of his congregation, told him the church had a business meeting on Wednesday night and voted to fire him.

"I preached the gospel of equality when it wasn't popular ... because I believe the gospel is for everybody or it's for nobody," Hill said.

He never will forget the "hot tears of humiliation which streamed down my face as I walked out that barber shop that day," he said.

Too late to return home in New Orleans, Hill and his wife "slept in a borrowed bed in the home of someone we knew didn't want us," he said.

That night, Hill said, "the devil tried to get me to quit, but I never considered it. I'm in it until hell freezes over or Jesus says it is enough."

Because of his experience, he exhorted pastors: "Don't quit. Don't quit. Don't quit."

Tent church places  
people before steeples

By Mary E. Speidel

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MARACAIBO, Venezuela (BP)--Al Fraser used to travel across western Kansas putting up a large red-and-white tent.

A tractor salesman for a farm equipment company, he displayed his wares under the tent. "I wondered for two or three years why I was breaking my back, sweating and learning how to put up a tent," said Fraser, now retired, of Olathe, Kan.

He found out in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

A member of Messiah Baptist Church in Leawood, Kan., Fraser went to Maracaibo for a week as a volunteer to help out with evangelistic crusades at Capernaum Baptist Church. The young congregation didn't have a building yet; services were held in a church member's house.

One day Fraser visited the home of Isaias Rojas, Capernaum's pastor. He noticed a large piece of red-and-white canvas in a corner. It looked familiar. "What's that?" Fraser asked.

"It's a tent," the pastor replied.

Church members had bought it to use as a meeting place until they could afford a building, Rojas explained. But no one knew how to set it up.

Fraser examined the folded canvas more closely. It was exactly the same type of tent he had used in Kansas. "I knew right away why I had been sent to Maracaibo," he said.

Five years later, the tent Fraser installed is frayed and faded. But the 130-member Capernaum Church still worships under its shelter.

"We work like Baptists work. First of all we look for souls," said Rojas. "Then we build a temple for the people who come to know Christ as their savior."

Today, Capernaum is beginning to build its "temple." That also has brought evangelistic opportunities.

Capernaum had been meeting in a member's home for two years when members began praying for land. Members noticed a "for sale" sign in the yard of Ruben Moran, a Roman Catholic and devout follower of San Antonio, patron saint of the state of Zulia in Venezuela. Maracaibo is that state's capital.

Members approached Moran about buying the property, but they didn't have enough money. Moran agreed to let the church use his land until they had adequate funds. Members purchased the tent as a temporary meeting place. Moran and his family continued living in their house on the lot. After the tent went up, he began attending worship services.

All his life Moran had prayed to the patron saint. But the more he prayed, the more he realized "there weren't any answers. There wasn't anyone to help me, even though I cried out to the saint. I was always worried about work, whether I could keep my job, whether I could feed my family," said Moran, a refrigeration repairman.

He noticed the people at Capernaum found answers to their prayers, so he tried praying to their God. One by one, his prayers were answered.

Soon he committed his life to Christ. He offered to sell his property to the church for one-third his original asking price. He knew he could get more money for the land, "but the relationship I have with Christ moved me to sell the property I had to the church, knowing this would have more value than just the value of the land," he said.

Another evangelism opportunity came when Capernaum tried to start construction last October. Volunteers from Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta came to help begin the building. Because of several complications, they were unable to do the work.

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Instead, some of the Dunwoody volunteers helped with construction at nearby New Jerusalem Baptist Church. Others led a crusade at Capernaum. About 151 people became Christians during services, reported Leonard Page, volunteer coordinator from Dunwoody.

Capernaum still lacks a building, but that hasn't stopped members from planting new churches. The 6-year-old church has begun three mission congregations and three home Bible studies that eventually may grow into churches, Rojas said.

Southern Baptist missionary D. H. (Butch) Strickland, a church planter and developer, works with Capernaum and several churches in the southern part of Maracaibo. Strickland, from Dimmitt, Texas, is interim pastor at Capernaum's Fountain of Living Water Baptist Mission. He also works with Capernaum volunteers at a preaching point called La Canada.

One of the church's mission congregations meets in the National Prison of Maracaibo. Capernaum member Acisclo Mejias began the work after his son was imprisoned there. An accountant for the Venezuelan justice department, Mejias knew prison officials. They gave him permission to begin church services inside the prison.

Since the mission started, about 36 prisoners have committed their lives to Christ. "The word of God penetrated through the walls of the prison and the bars of the cells to get to the hearts of these men," said Mejias. "There's an unreached people group in the world, and they're behind prison walls."

After Mejias got the mission started, Neptali Molino, a volunteer missionary of the National Baptist Convention of Venezuela, and another church member assumed leadership.

Later one grateful Christian prisoner found a tangible way to thank God. Jose Ignacio was a Maracaibo policeman arrested for vigilantism. He was jailed at the federal prison, where he heard the gospel at the Baptist mission.

"I felt a great void in my life because I felt beaten down. My home was completely destroyed. I was separated from my wife. I was beaten because of sin in my life. But Christ healed me," he said.

When Ignacio began attending services, worshippers met under a mango tree inside prison walls. He felt prisoners needed a more worshipful environment, so he sold everything he owned and used the money to buy building materials.

With permission of authorities, he and several prisoners made concrete pews and a pulpit for the mission. "Just the fact that the pulpit and pews are there has made a difference in the ambiance of the area," he said. The act expressed "in a concrete form what Christ has done in my life."

On the front of his black leather Bible, a sticker proclaims, "If Christ has set you free, you are free indeed."

Capernaum members have encouraged prisoners through a letter-writing ministry. Church leaders also have taught discipleship courses at the prison mission.

"One of the things that has helped me is that these people have been faithful to come. They stay in contact with me," Ignacio said.

Since becoming a Christian almost two years ago, he has led seven prisoners to faith in Jesus Christ. When he is released, "the first thing I want to do is to share Christ with my family," he said.

By the time Ignacio finishes his prison term, the worn red-and-white tent probably will be folded up in a corner somewhere. But wherever they worship, the Capernaum Christians will provide spiritual support for him, he said.

"Now I have a base on which I can grow. I can go to Capernaum Baptist Church."