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90-35

Alabama's Tondera
to make v.p. bid

By Elaine Witt

N-CO

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--An engineer and rancher from Huntsville, Ala., announced March 6 that he will represent Baptist laity in June as a nominee for the second vice presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Steve Tondera, a former president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, said he agreed to be nominated because he believes the denomination is wrongly dominated by clergy from the conservative wing.

"As a layman, I will do my best to work toward returning the Southern Baptist Convention to efforts of mission and ministries and away from the control of a few for political power purposes," he said.

Tondera, a part-time cattle rancher and senior engineer at Marshall Space Flight Center, is a member of First Baptist Church of Huntsville.

He was endorsed at the news conference by his pastor, Allen Wallworth, and by Daniel Vestal, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dunwoody, Ga.

Vestal has announced he will allow his name to be placed in nomination for the SBC presidency for the second year in a row. He is expected to run against Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas.

Tondera, who led the Alabama convention from 1987 to 1988, said he was distressed by the laity's faltering voice in the national convention.

"This political power group has been and is using credalistic measures to influence the laity and many pastors into thinking that if you do not adhere to their man-made test, you are, quote, liberal, and you cannot be part of the convention," he said.

He admitted that the SBC vice presidencies are largely ceremonial posts, since appointive power lies almost exclusively with the president and the SBC Committee on Nominations.

But he said his candidacy was more than symbolic.

"It is an indication of the importance of the laity, and we make up about 90 percent of the convention."

Vestal and Tondera said they also would support the expected nomination of Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, former executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, for the SBC first vice presidency.

Vestal acknowledged that the advance announcement of what appears to be a moderate "ticket" is contrary to the normal practice of announcing nominations at the June convention. He referred to an article in a newspaper published by the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, in which he was criticized for politicizing the president's race.

"I think what's important is we're not living in normal times. We're living in times of crisis," he said. "Theirs is a politics of exclusivity," he said of the conservatives.

"For 11 years, they've excluded people not because they don't believe in the Bible, but because they won't participate in the politics of the denomination. Theirs is a politics of slander, ... and of belittling other people and intimidating other people, and that kind of politics has no place in this denomination.

"I want to reaffirm my commitment to a decision-making process that is inclusive instead of exclusive."

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Elaine Witt is religion editor of the Birmingham Post-Herald.

Hunger gifts plunge
from 1988 to 1989

By Louis Moore

N-CD
(CLC)

Baptist Press
3/8/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' hunger gifts in 1989 plunged to the lowest point since 1984, according to figures released by the two Southern Baptist mission boards.

Southern Baptist contributions for domestic and foreign hunger in 1989 totaled \$7,905,322. This represents a decrease of 12 percent from similar giving in 1988. In 1984, Southern Baptists gave a record \$7,166,772 to hunger ministries.

That mark was shattered the next year with a record \$11,830,146. Giving dropped in 1986 to \$9,089,279. Hunger contributions totaled \$8,931,339 in 1987 and \$9,009,764 in 1988.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board reported receipts of \$6,613,785 in 1989, a decrease of \$1,015,667 from 1988. Receipts for domestic hunger through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board were \$1,291,537 and represented the first drop in five years in domestic hunger gifts.

The total figures for 1989 do not reflect receipts for general relief at the Foreign Mission Board. General relief funds go for projects that are not necessarily hunger specific, such as church rebuilding. Total figures also do not include money given for hunger ministries that were utilized in local Baptist churches, associations and state conventions.

"The sharp drop in hunger gifts to one of the most comprehensive and effective hunger ministries in the world is extremely disappointing," said Robert Parham, associate director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which coordinates education and action on hunger issues among Southern Baptists.

"The drop is bad news for hungry people everywhere, but especially for those at the dawn of life. So much of a child's life is determined in the first several years of development," Parham said. "Malnutrition can mean that brains and bones fail to develop properly. It's a real tragedy."

"Southern Baptist agencies, Baptist state papers and other leaders need to tell the bad news about hunger and the good news about what our mission boards are doing to meet hunger needs."

Nathan Porter, domestic hunger consultant for the Home Mission Board, said: "I am extremely anxious about the giving to world hunger because we have associations, churches and missionaries who have established extremely effective hunger ministries which are dependent on these funds. They have no other place to turn.

"These hunger funds have been an impetus -- a motivation -- for churches and associations to begin hunger ministries."

John Cheyne, director of the human needs program at the Foreign Mission Board, cited "donor fatigue" as a major factor in the decrease in giving. Donor fatigue results from the "awesome number of appeals made by so many organizations interested in the issue of hunger," he said.

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Decreased media attention on world hunger as well as the reporting of non-Baptist misuse of hunger funds have both contributed to the decline in giving, he said.

"There has been a rather significant backlash from the many stories that have gone out about the misuse or the alleged misuse of hunger funds," he said.

Richard D. Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission, said the commission "is committed to assisting any church, association or organization we can to promote hunger giving."

The Christian Life Commission in 1988 produced a video on world hunger. That video is available in the offices of each association in the convention as well as through the CLC office in Nashville.

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Reconciliation top challenge,
Nicaraguan Baptist leaders say

By Mary E. Speidel

F- FMB

Baptist Press
3/8/90

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--Aiding national reconciliation is the No. 1 challenge facing Nicaraguan Baptists during the country's transition to a new government, two Baptist leaders said.

Nicaraguan Baptists "have a very great challenge ... helping people to understand that Jesus Christ is stronger and deeper than political differences," said Tomas Tellez, executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua.

"The church has to work in the reconciliation and then in the reconstruction of our country -- in spiritual, moral, physical reconstruction," added Gustavo Parajon, a Baptist pastor and member of Nicaragua's National Reconciliation Commission, an outgrowth of the 1987 Central American Peace Plan. That plan, adopted by five Central American presidents, was designed to end conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Following Nicaragua's Feb. 25 presidential elections, Violeta Chamorro also called for national reconciliation as she claimed victory over Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega in a surprise outcome. Chamorro represents the National Opposition Union, or UNO, a 14-party coalition whose members embrace a range of political views. Ortega, Nicaragua's president since 1984, leads the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

The Sandinistas rose to power in 1979 by overthrowing dictator Anastasio Somoza. Under their government, Nicaraguans have endured economic decline, civil war and a U.S. economic boycott.

In 1982, U.S.-backed contra rebels began raids into Nicaragua from Honduras, starting an eight-year civil war that reportedly has claimed 30,000 lives. The U.S. Congress suspended military aid to the contras in 1988.

Reactions to the Sandinistas' revolution and rule -- and the contra war -- have divided the nation as well as the church, a fact acknowledged by Parajon in a post-election interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation. "The revolution has been a central phenomenon that has polarized every group, including the church in Nicaragua in the last 10 years," he told the BBC.

Baptists haven't escaped the political divisions affecting almost every family, but Baptist leaders repeatedly have called on the United States over the years to end support for the contras.

In the wake of the election, the Sandinistas and the emerging UNO coalition are political forces that "have the tendency to be antagonistic," Tellez noted. "We have to understand that the people have the freedom to have the political options they decide. That doesn't mean that we will have to be enemies. We have to understand that Jesus Christ and his love is a deeper source of unity and strength."

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Chamorro, who will take office in April, reportedly is a conservative Roman Catholic. Parajon said he isn't sure what effect her government will have on Baptist or other evangelical ministries in Nicaragua.

"It's difficult to say right now until we know more about the program the UNO government has" and its attitude toward evangelical churches, said Parajon, also president of the Evangelical Committee for Aid and Development in Nicaragua, or CEPAD. "We deduct from their statements we shouldn't have any difficulty in the carrying out of our ministries."

Tellez doesn't expect the election results to significantly affect Baptist ministries "because we as Baptists get our motivation from Jesus Christ. So we have to continue our work as we have done in the past, placing an emphasis on evangelism, Christian education and Christian service. We didn't have any problem with the Sandinista government. We don't envision that we're going to have any problem with the new government."

As Nicaragua faces changes, Nicaraguan Baptists "request the prayers and solidarity of our Baptist brothers and sisters in the United States on behalf of Nicaragua during these special times," said Tellez.

The suffering of Nicaraguans has made them open to embracing the gospel, he added: "The people of Nicaragua are hungry to hear a gospel that really responds to their needs. They don't want to hear just words. They want ... a gospel like the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel that preaches, teaches, serves, heals and counsels the people."

Parajon said he believes Nicaraguans "have turned a corner, that we are convinced that war is not the answer to the problems, to the differences we have among ourselves. We have to work at them by negotiation and by conversations."

The ministry of reconciliation isn't new for Baptists and other evangelicals in Nicaragua. In the past decade, pastors and church members have participated in more than 33 peace commissions throughout Nicaragua, Parajon pointed out. They also have advocated human rights and provided material aid to fellow Nicaraguans.

Baptists also have been at the forefront of an evangelical outreach to contra prisoners, noted Tellez.

More than 600 prisoners have accepted Jesus Christ as savior inside the national prisons through the ministry, he said. After being pardoned by the government, many have become members of Nicaraguan Baptist churches. Some have become evangelical pastors.

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Evangelize Romania now,
Baptist pastors say

By Mike Creswell

F- FMB

Baptist Press
3/8/90

ORADEA, Romania (BP)--Western Romania's biggest needs are spiritual, not physical, according to Romanian Baptist pastors.

Poverty remains a problem throughout Romania, but evangelism is the biggest need in the western region, the pastors told a visiting Southern Baptist delegation evaluating human needs in Romania.

Many among 22 pastors at the meeting asked for help to launch an major thrust throughout Romania, especially in smaller towns and villages.

Iovan Valeriu, pastor of Talpos Baptist Church near Salonta, suggested evangelists should drive through villages announcing crusades over loudspeakers. "People would come," he said.

"Now is the strategic time to share the gospel through crusades across the country," said one pastor. Another added: "We need to build many new churches. Now that we have the freedom to do so, we do not have the money."

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More than 200,000 Baptists worship in Romania, but many pastors are burdened with leading multiple congregations. Government restrictions on Baptists have hindered growth and outreach, and friction has developed in some areas with the Orthodox Church of Romania, pastors reported.

"After the revolution, we find there's hunger and thirst for the Word of God," said another pastor. "We need help with getting more Christian literature and help in how to teach it."

Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board representatives have been meeting with Baptist leaders from Eastern European countries to determine how Southern Baptists can best help respond to evangelism and church growth opportunities in the region.

The board also has announced it will spend more than \$1 million in hunger relief funds donated by Southern Baptists. The funds will buy seeds, fertilizer and other help for farm cooperatives, plus medical supplies and equipment for a hospital and orphanage in northeastern Romania, where physical needs are urgent.

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Recreation now called
legitimate church ministry

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

Baptist Press
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Forty-two years after Southern Baptist Convention messengers voted to establish a program of church recreation, several recreation ministers said they feel they have scored some important points in the battle for recognition.

"Back in the early days, recreation wasn't perceived as a ministry, and we weren't called ministers," said Bob Raus, professor of church recreation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "We were called directors or recreators."

Bob Hammond, activities director at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, recalls being anxious when he heeded the call 31 years ago to become a recreation minister.

"I wondered if this (recreation ministry) was really going to last," Hammond recalled. "I didn't want to get into a career field and have to bail out of it later."

Raus, Hammond and several other long-time recreation ministers attended a 25th anniversary celebration of Rec Lab at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, Feb. 23-March 1, where they discussed the changes that have occurred in church recreation over the past four decades. Rec Labs, annual conferences for recreation ministers, are sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church recreation department.

Church recreation as a ministry started for Southern Baptists in 1948 when messengers to the SBC annual meeting voted to commission the Sunday School Board to start a recreation department. Five years later, the board began the program under the direction of Agnes Pylant.

In the early stages of recreation ministry, "it was more play and competition, a win-at-all-cost situation," said John Potts, minister of recreation at North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz.

"Now the winning is still there, but it is more important to be witnessing to win people to Jesus Christ," said Potts, a 32-year veteran of church recreation ministry. "Recreation is now a way to get people into your facility that normally wouldn't be in a church situation so that you can witness and share Jesus Christ with them."

Patti Randolph, recreation director at South Main Baptist Church in Houston, said "it's easy" for church members to lose sight of recreation as an outreach and evangelistic tool.

"Some people get it through their heads it's just play," Randolph said. "You have to keep reminding your church it's a ministry. It's not an entertainment program. It's not a social program. It's a ministry." South Main has adopted the philosophy that recreation "is to support and undergird the evangelical mission of the church and spread the gospel."

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Hammond said recreation finally has come of age.

"We are now more accepted by other staff members," he said. "Whereas before, they thought we were just the sports guys who really didn't have any education as far as theological or biblical knowledge."

Recreation ministry actually has gone beyond being accepted, he added. Sports facilities have become the drawing cards for many churches, he explained.

Ray Conner, director of the church recreation department, said: "More and more churches are seeing the value of recreation in support of the total mission of the church.

"Recreation must focus on worship, evangelism, outreach and ministry. Recreation as an end in itself is not what most churches are seeking."

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Organizer describes
'Olympics of soul'

By Jim Burton

F- (CO
(B'hood)

Baptist Press
3/8/90

SEOUL, Korea (BP)--In 1988, the world tuned in to broadcasts of the Seoul Olympics. But to Park Se-Jik, president of the Olympic Organizing Committee, it was something else.

"From my experience of organizing the Olympics, I learned a few lessons," said Park. "One of them is that the Seoul Olympics turned out to be the Olympics of the soul."

Under Park's leadership, Korea met the challenge of hosting a world-class event while faced with the threat of student unrest and political pressure from North Korea.

Park assumed the role of OOC president at a time when some Koreans said the Olympic preparations were in disarray. Appointed minister of sports in 1986, he solidified Korea's efforts with diplomacy and prayer.

In 1981, Park retired from the Republic of Korea Army as a major general. Since then, he held in a number of government positions, including vice president of the Korean Electric Power Company, minister of government administration and director of the National Security Planning agency. The NSP is equivalent to the United States CIA.

Knowing how to work within Korea's infrastructure facilitated Park's OOC task. But the real credit for Seoul's successful Olympics is prayer, he said.

"I asked many Christian brothers and sisters to join us in praying to God for three things -- security, harmony and good weather," he said. "We believe God blessed us in all three themes of prayer."

Park combed the country speaking in churches and asking the people to pray for those three items.

"I was impressed by those Christian brothers and sisters who practiced fasting for that purpose," recalled Park. "I was so impressed that I followed them, and for three months prior to the Olympics I fasted every Friday."

The prayers were particularly helpful in negotiations with the communist government of North Korea, which demanded to host some Olympic events. Park was involved in the negotiations.

"We were successful in keeping them quiet and tolerant," he said.

Park became a Christian under the influence of Australian missionaries in 1945 while attending a teacher's college. In 1970, he joined the small Yoido Baptist Church in Seoul where he remains an active member. Park credits the influence of his pastor, Hahn Ki-Man, with facilitating his spiritual growth.

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"Pastor Hahn has such a strong courage in his heart," said Park. "He is such a noble person. I respect his devotion to God and his integrity."

Each Saturday, Park participates in the 6 a.m. men's Bible class and the Yoido Baptist Church Christian Business Association. The association functions like a Baptist Men's mission action unit in Southern Baptist churches.

Whatever his marketplace, Park has been willing to share his faith. Prior to and during the Olympics, his theme centered around trusting in God.

"All my life and all my speeches and lectures, even the orientation of the Seoul Olympics special preparations, have the conclusion that you have to believe in God," said Park. "Otherwise the Olympics cannot be successful."

"I felt so much the will of God behind me. That was the key of success in the Olympics."

Park has found other assignments, particularly National Security Planning, to be less glamorous. Since the separation of the Koreas is one of the most delicate political situations in the world, intelligence personnel face acute pressure, he said.

"I believe God was trying to use me (as head of security) to walk between the sunshine and the shadow," he said. "I wanted to be seen as sunshine in a shadowy area such as intelligence."

Now that his official Olympic duties are completed, Park is in transition. While some Korean political observers speculate Park will run for president or even be appointed prime minister, he discounts a future in politics.

Recalling his roots as an educator, he said politics is not his first choice.

"I would be satisfied bringing some influence on education," said Park, who has earned a master's degree from the University of Southern California. He also holds honorary doctorates from two U.S. universities, Columbia and Towson.

"Christianity is good education," he said, "to make people reborn."

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Brotherhood Commission

Baptist aid helps
migrants hang on

By Barbara Denman

F- (O)
(f/a)

Baptist Press
3/8/90

WAUCHULA, Fla. (BP)--Three-year-old Rosa Zuniga walks awkwardly on her bowed and twisted legs. As a child of migrant parents, Rosa may remain crippled for the rest of her life. Migrants have little money for leg braces or medical attention.

Jose and Jovina Zuniga, who work in South Florida's orange groves, are rearing Rosa and 10 other children in a shabby, neglected rented shack on the outskirts of Wauchula. The house is in such disrepair that family members spend the daylight hours in their parked car, eating on the hood, napping on the seats.

The December freeze, which crippled Florida's vegetable and fruit crops, limited the amount of work available to Rosa's parents. Unable to pay bills and buy food on their meager pay, the couple turned for help to a nearby Hispanic Baptist mission where Mrs. Zuniga attends services.

Through funds provided by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and Florida Baptist Convention, Jose Islas, pastor of the mission, provided enough money to pay the Zunigas' unusually high natural gas bill for December.

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The Zunigas' troubles are not isolated. Thousands of South Florida migrants have been caught in the squeeze of ongoing expenses and slim wages. And hundreds of them -- from Homestead in the south to Clermont in Central Florida -- have turned to Florida Baptists for help during their hour of desperation.

Since the freeze, Baptists have spent \$50,450 to aid migrant families such as the Zunigas. The money has come from the Home Mission Board's hunger and disaster-relief funds and from over-budget gifts to the Florida Baptist Convention's state missions offering.

It won't be enough, however.

Although federal and state governments have not yet put a price tag on the destruction brought on by the Dec. 24-25 freeze, early estimates indicate that it was "one of the most devastating as far as economic loss," said Walter Kates.

Kates, manager of the labor division of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, reported that the impact of the freeze is not over. Citrus growers lost a fourth of the fruit on the trees, Kates said, and "we don't know how many trees will come back after the freeze."

Vegetables were most widely destroyed. A whole planting cycle of vegetables was wiped out. Questions still remain about how the change in the planting pattern will affect the local economy, Kates added. For migrant workers who come to Florida each winter, the effects were swift and devastating.

But, only 6,000 of the state's migrant workers, all of whom depend on Florida's agricultural industry for their livelihood, applied for disaster unemployment assistance. In previous freezes as many as 80,000 migrants applied for help.

The drop in applications is attributed in part to an increasing number of illegal aliens, who cannot receive government aid and who fear extradition if the government discovers their presence.

Anita Castillo, a young woman in her early 20s, arrived in Wauchula from Mexico immediately after the freeze. She came to pick oranges, as did her brother, his wife and five children ranging in age from four months to 10 years.

But the oranges are gone. Having spent all their money to get to Florida, Castillo and her group couldn't earn enough money to return to Mexico.

Now they are living with relatives -- 15 people in a 30-foot trailer. Because the electricity in the trailer was about to be discontinued, the young woman came to see Islas, whose mission congregation is sponsored by First Baptist Church of Wauchula.

Islas gave Castillo \$50. He also provided a food subsidy to her brother and his family. Their four-month-old daughter had been without baby formula for several days.

Isais Gallegos, pastor of Hispanic missions in Immokalee and La Belle, hopes the critical needs among migrants in his area are ending. A new crop of vegetables -- peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and potatoes -- should be ready for harvesting in about three weeks.

But that won't be soon enough for some families, Gallegos said. "We ran into families being evicted from their homes," he reported. "They didn't have groceries on their tables."

Many of the government agencies were up to three weeks behind in processing subsidies, the young pastor said. "If there had not been funding by Florida Baptists, a lot of these people would have been on the streets," he added.

But even with a roof over their heads, many of the migrants face deplorable living conditions -- no running water, backed-up sewage, floors open to the ground, and plentiful rats and roaches.

Gallegos distributed \$1,400 in hunger funds to buy groceries and \$2,900 in disaster-relief funds for electricity bills, rent, medicine and propane gas.

While helping 57 families survive the freeze, Gallegos also reaped a harvest of decisions -- four professions of faith in Christ, eight baptisms and four rededications. All came as a result of the financial assistance.

The young pastor especially appreciates of the aid from Florida Baptists. Before he was aware of the availability of funds, Gallegos was giving the migrants money out of his own pocket.

Florida Baptists "showed interest and concern to the migrant families," Gallegos said, "even though Florida Baptists don't know them personally.

"They showed the love of Christ and helped us, as pastors, reach out in his name."

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BP photo available upon request from the Florida Baptist Convention