



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce Street
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2000
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Mary Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

March 28, 1990

90-45

VBS enrollment
up for 1989

By Frank Wm. White

N-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--Total enrollment and the number of church Vacation Bible Schools increased for 1989, while the number of mission Vacation Bible Schools and Backyard Bible Clubs was down.

A report for 1989 Vacation Bible Schools compiled from the Southern Baptist Uniform Church Letter annual statistical survey, as well as reports from Baptist state conventions, indicates 3,443,676 people were enrolled in Vacation Bible School in 1989, up from 3,351,280 the previous year.

The number of church schools reported was 28,783, up from 28,631 in 1988. However, the number of mission Vacation Bible Schools was 1,619, down from 2,676 in 1988, and Backyard Bible Clubs totaled 3,218, down from 3,980.

Churches reported 54,611 professions of faith in Christ made during Vacation Bible Schools, for a decrease from the 55,643 of the previous year.

Participants in Vacation Bible School gave \$1,149,137 to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget in 1989, for an increase over the \$1,136,144 contributed to the budget in 1988.

"The church Vacation Bible School enrollment and the number of schools is encouraging, but churches need to look at the potential of Backyard Bible Clubs and mission Vacation Bible Schools," said Willie Beaty, consultant for Vacation Bible School in the Sunday school growth and administration department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

As churches begin to plan schools for 1990, Beaty encourages them to focus on reaching outside the church for prospects. "So many times, churches think of children in their church rather than new prospects," Beaty said.

Vacation Bible School materials are available for adults and youth. Programs for those age groups as well as mission schools and Backyard Bible Clubs can be effective in locating prospects, he said.

The potential for prospects from Vacation Bible School often is not realized because churches do not follow up on people who participate in their schools, he added.

In 1989, churches reported 521,086 prospects discovered through Vacation Bible School. While that is down from the 572,926 prospects reported in 1988, it still is a significant number of prospects for churches, Beaty said.

The lack of follow up from Vacation Bible School is reflected in the number of prospects transferred to Sunday school rolls, Beaty pointed out. In 1989, churches reported 60,057 prospects, or 11.5 percent of the prospects discovered, were transferred to Sunday school rolls.

Transferring prospects to Sunday school rolls is an effective way to ensure that they will be followed up rather than forgotten, Beaty said.

--30--

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

Russell Dilday recovering well
from triple-bypass heart surgery

N-CO
(SWBTS)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is recovering in a Fort Worth, Texas, hospital following more than two hours of open-heart surgery March 28.

Doctors performed triple-bypass heart surgery to relieve blockage in three cardiac arteries.

The 59-year-old seminary president is "doing fine," reported his wife, Betty.

Manucher Nazarian, Dilday's surgeon, said the president's heart is in good condition and told family members the surgery was a success. Dilday is to be in intensive care for two days, followed by a week in the hospital and three weeks of recovery at home, Nazarian said. Dilday is expected to resume his duties at the seminary in late April.

Before entering the hospital March 27, Dilday said he had no symptoms of the heart problems and added "my overall health is excellent, so there was no undue urgency." However, after reviewing dates and consulting with doctors, Dilday decided to have the operation as soon as possible to enable him to begin recuperating.

Doctors said the surgery was necessary after balloon dilation failed to clear the arterial blockage, Dilday reported.

Dilday will rely on the administrative staff of the seminary to continue the school's day-to-day operations until he resumes full duties, he said.

--30--

South Alabama floods draw
multi-state disaster response

By Jim Burton

N-CO
(B'hood)

Baptist Press
3/28/90

ELBA, Ala. (BP)--Members of Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana Baptist Men organizations have joined Alabama Baptists in a disaster response after flooding claimed 16 lives in southern Alabama.

Tennessee and Mississippi mobile feeding units are assisting the Alabama mobile feeding unit in preparation of about 3,000 meals a day in Elba and Daleville, said Jim Furgerson, the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's national disaster relief director. The towns are located about 90 miles south of Montgomery near Enterprise. In addition, mud-out crews from Louisiana are assisting in home and church clean-up in Elba.

Working with the American Red Cross, the Alabama mobile feeding unit is stationed at the courthouse square in Elba and the Tennessee unit is operating from the First Assembly of God, the designated Red Cross disaster-relief command center. In Daleville, the Mississippi unit is preparing meals for Red Cross that are being delivered within a 25-mile radius.

"It's the smoothest operation I've ever seen with the Red Cross," said Furgerson. "I think it is a result of our good relations in Hurricane Hugo and the California earthquake."

In 1989, the Brotherhood Commission coordinated the response of 13 mobile disaster-relief feeding units from 11 state Baptist Brotherhood departments. The units prepared and served a record 350,000 meals in South Carolina following the hurricane.

Through March 26, about 28,180 meals had been prepared by the three feeding units. Tommy Puckett, Alabama Brotherhood director, anticipated releasing the units the weekend of March 31-April 1. The total meal count is expected to exceed 50,000.

Elba was devastated by flooding when 18 inches of rainfall broke the town's levee at two places on the Pea River. An 18-foot wall of water reportedly swept through the town, which had been evacuated. Elba's two Baptist churches -- First and Westside -- suffered extensive damage, on-site observers said.

--more--

"The churches will probably undergo complete interior restructure," said Puckett. "Walls have got to come out. The water mark was between 12 and 14 feet in the churches.

"Our men have been involved with food preparation and cleaning the two churches," he continued. "Mud-out crews have been working in people's homes to get food, clothes and furniture out. As the ceilings come down and sheet rock comes off they have pulled that out as well. Everybody that does any work in town has to be inoculated with tetanus shots."

The citizens are emotionally distraught, and more trained counselors are needed, Puckett said. Still, some have found comfort as they experience the loving action of Christians who have come to help, he added.

"We have had professions of faith (in Christ) at the food line," said Puckett. "First Baptist Church had their worship service here Sunday, and a man they had been praying for 10 years made a profession of faith."

First Baptist is using the First Assembly of God for worship, and Westside is using its activities building.

"We had one of our men get in last night and led one person to Christ before he went to bed," said Cameron Byler, Tennessee Brotherhood director.

Jim Didlake, Mississippi Baptist Brotherhood disaster-relief coordinator, reported similar experiences in Daleville.

"We feel like we have had a good ministry," he said. "We've accomplished a lot and have had some good encounters of personal witnessing."

Puckett said that while the feeding will probably end soon, the disaster response will continue for months, with clean-up and rebuilding.

"Rebuilding opportunities will be available for church work groups to come in and be a part of helping these people get back into their facilities," he said.

--30--

BP photos available from the Alabama Baptist State Convention communications office

Again: 'Come over to
Macedonia and help us

By Mike Creswell

N - FMB

Baptist Press
3/28/90

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--Baptists in Yugoslavia are sounding a New Testament plea: "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

With just 3,037 members, Baptists are a tiny fraction of Yugoslavia's 23.7 million people. But they have developed detailed plans for outreach and growth from northern Yugoslavia, where most of their 119 churches and missions are, towards the south, which includes the area known in New Testament times as Macedonia. The southern region has only three churches and four missions.

Baptist leaders shared their plans with Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board representatives at a recent meeting in Budapest, Hungary.

Yugoslavian Christians for years have had more liberty than many other Eastern European believers. Now, with even fewer government restrictions, is the time for an aggressive evangelism and church planting plan, said Stephen Orcic, Baptist union president, and Zelimir Srncic, union general secretary.

"We believe we have a good opportunity because our country's official (communist) ideology has experienced catastrophe," Orcic said. "We may say that now without danger. There's a need for sound biblical life and doctrine. Baptists can give that."

--more--

"Confronted with radically new possibilities for evangelization of Yugoslavia, we realized old programs can't meet the spiritual hunger of our people," Orcic and Srnec wrote in a report on evangelism plans for the next decade. "Political changes are offering greater, almost unimaginable opportunities for opening toward the world with the gospel, the saving power of God."

Foreign Mission Board representatives are discussing ways they can help support the Yugoslavian Baptist plans, possibly through funds for literature, films and seminars on church planting, said Keith Parker, director of Southern Baptist work in Europe.

The Baptist union is working on a new constitution, a revised statement of beliefs, and new training sessions for church members to equip them for missions and outreach, Srnec said.

Macedonia, referred to in the Bible's Book of Acts, chapter 16, covered an area across what is now southern Yugoslavia, northern Greece and Albania. Greece has long been a difficult field for evangelicals because of opposition from the state-aligned Greek Orthodox Church, although limited work is being done.

Communist Albania, with 3.2 million people, remains one of the most closed countries in the world, especially to religion. Since 1967, when Albania declared itself the world's first atheistic state, all religious institutions have been banned. The population earlier was estimated at 70 percent Muslim, 20 percent Albanian Orthodox and 10 percent Roman Catholic.

Evangelicals can work more freely in Yugoslavia, but daunting challenges exist. The country is a loose collection of six republics with five languages and two alphabets, plus a dozen non-Yugoslavian minorities, including Gypsies. Regional and ethnic differences have resulted in increasing conflict recently. Twelve million citizens identify with Orthodox or Catholic churches, two groups often at odds with each other.

More than 4 million Muslims are becoming more fundamentalist and zealous in outreach, Baptist leaders said. Muslims recently completed a major new mosque in Zagreb as the center of their missionary work in western Yugoslavia.

"In every big city there are tens of thousands of Muslims," said Srnec.

One of the greatest remaining hindrances to organizing churches, he said, is finding places to meet. Without a permanent place, a group of believers cannot register with the government. Unregistered churches remain illegal.

Yugoslavian Baptists baptized about 100 people in 1989. New churches along the central coastal area are growing fastest, said Srnec. Mission projects are under way in several areas. An art gallery will be used as a meeting place in one location; paintings with biblical scenes will be displayed as an outreach tool.

Baptists hope to open a Christian bookstore in Sarajevo, where Muslims have established a university and publishing center. Srnec estimated 2.5 million Muslims live in the area. Two Yugoslavian Baptist missionaries have been working in the city since 1988.

Macedonia is "a great mission field," the Baptist leaders wrote in their report. "New political situations (and) more democracy are opening up new possibilities for development of Christian witness."

A Yugoslavian Baptist pastor now studying in the United States is expected to direct new work in Macedonia, beginning in Skopje, the main city in the region. Baptists hope to release a new Macedonian-language Bible this year.

Accompanying the drive for starting churches are plans to offer seminary courses on missions and Muslim outreach, to open more Christian bookstores and to expand a correspondence evangelism program and summer camp on the coast.

--more--

A highlight of current Yugoslavian Baptist's ministry is their two publishing houses. One in Zagreb publishes mainly Christian, evangelism-oriented books in Croatian, intended for popular consumption. A second publishing house in Novi Sad publishes theological literature in Serbian.

A 20-volume commentary on the New Testament released two years ago is thought to be the only one of its kind in the country and is very influential among evangelical churches, Orcic said. A 28-volume commentary on the Old Testament is being prepared.

A new Serbian translation of the Bible also is under way. A Bible in one of the two principal Gypsy languages will be released later this year.

Baptists also have signed a contract with a radio station near Zagreb to begin Christian broadcasting. Southern Baptist representative Nela Williams, based in that city, is exploring the use of Christian movies and video. Williams, who teaches at the Baptist seminary, has written a teaching book on New Testament Greek in Serbo-Croatian used widely in the country.

--30--

East German mood bad for
evangelism, leader says

By Mike Creswell

N-FMB

Baptist Press
3/28/90

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--East Germans are so captivated by open borders, new freedoms and reunion with West Germany that evangelism is much more difficult, said Ulrich Materne, general secretary for East German Baptists.

Materne spoke in a Baptist meeting in Budapest, Hungary, before the first democratic elections in East Germany March 18, in which candidates favoring quick unification with West Germany won victories.

East German Christians now are free to evangelize as much as they like, Materne said: "In relation to evangelistic work, we can do anything. There are no barriers or limitations on us any more."

Ironically, the climate for evangelism is bad now. "People seem to be totally encompassed and obsessed with the outward aspects of life, travel in the West and so forth, and are not thinking of inner dimensions," he said.

Observing how quickly events have moved in East Germany, Materne said church leaders dared not think about German reunification as late as December. Now the main question is how long reunion of the countries -- and the church groups within them -- will take. "But with these thoughts, there's lots of fear, lots of problems and lots of uncertainty," he said.

The separation of East German and West German Baptists came about, Materne emphasized, because of the political situation, not because of arguments between the churches. But now East German Baptists are united with Brethren and Pentecostals in the 20,000-member Union of Evangelical Free Churches in East Germany, which has 460 registered congregations and mission stations.

Brethren churches also relate to West German Baptists in their union, but Pentecostals do not. Reunification of the two Baptist groups will involve working out such relationships, he said.

"Through 40 years of being together and working together, there's a fellowship that has grown," Materne said of the East German church arrangement. "They want to protect and preserve that fellowship."

Also, within churches East and West, "many things are similar, but on the other hand many things are still different," he said. "The hard thing is to try and combine our thoughts and feelings and bring those into harmony."

--more--

Besides considering reunification with West German Baptists, East German Baptists are eager to relate to Baptists in other lands as well. "To understand yourself, you must see yourself mirrored in other people. The important thing is to help find God's will," Materne said.

--30--

Germans say immediate action
needed to evangelize E. Europe

By Chip Alford

N- CO
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
3/28/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptists have been encouraged to launch an all-out effort to evangelize Eastern Europe and help keep the world's newest mission field from falling into the hands of Eastern religions and cults, a West German Baptist official said during a recent visit to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

"East Germany and other eastern European countries are in a very devastated shape," said Hans Guderian, director of the church growth department of the West German Home Mission Board.

"We, as West Germans, are willing to help, and it is our responsibility to help. But the task before us is so big that we as 71,000 West German Baptists cannot do it alone. And if we do not do it, then Eastern religions and cults will."

Baptists from around the world must come together "to build a real church infrastructure for doing the task of spreading the gospel in these countries," Guderian said.

He is one of 13 German Baptist leaders visiting Southern Baptist churches and agencies in four states to learn about church growth. The group visited Southwestern Seminary as guests of the school's World Mission and Evangelism Center.

Outreach is a new concept for East German Baptists, said Wolfram Hosche, a member of the visiting group who is pastor of a Baptist church in Sonneberg, East Germany.

"We can express ourselves freely now, openly, even in the newspapers," Hosche said. "We have all these possibilities, but we haven't had a chance to think about all of them yet; there are so many."

To provide support and fellowship, Guderian said, more than 100 partnerships between West and East German Baptist churches already have been initiated. In addition, many joint conferences, retreats and other programs are planned, including the first evangelistic tent revival in East Germany in decades this summer. Another possibility is the reunification of the East and West German Baptist conventions.

Guderian named three ways Southern Baptists can help meet the needs of Baptists in Eastern Europe: prayer, travel to both countries to assess the situation for themselves and financial support "to help raise the Baptist work in all Eastern Europe."

Short- and long-term American volunteers also are needed to help with church growth and evangelism, Hosche added. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board recently listed establishing churches in Eastern Europe as one of its top-10 strategic personnel requests.

While the Germans said they are challenged by the task ahead of them, they are taking time to enjoy the momentous changes in their homeland since borders were opened in November.

"We were very, very surprised and very happy," Hosche said of the historic changes that took place in his country. While he lives only two miles from the West German border, travel had been restricted for 40 years.

"We could see West Germany, but we couldn't go there," he said. "This is such a great freedom for us to travel there."

--more--

Guderian grew up in Berlin and witnessed both the construction and destruction of the wall. He took his family to the city shortly after the borders were opened to see the changes.

"It was such a wonderful feeling," he said. "People were going in and through the border. The soldiers were very friendly. It was a totally changed situation."

The German visitors said their trip to America has been both educational and enjoyable. "I am very impressed with how churches emphasize missions here and how they grow," said Werner Wolf, a lay leader at a Baptist church in Essen, West Germany.

Wolf was anxious to visit America under happier circumstances. His last visit came during World War II as a German prisoner of war at Camp Maxey near Dallas. As he looks back at the experience, Wolf said, he is thankful for his good treatment in the United States, adding he believes God guided him and helped him survive the war.

Hosche said he was impressed by American methods of evangelism. "Things just don't happen by chance here, they are specifically planned," he explained.

--30--

Southern Baptists show support
for home missions through mail

By Susan Todd

F- (CO
(WMMU)

Baptist Press
3/28/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The U.S. government has done its share this spring to flood the mail with income tax forms and census questionnaires. But Southern Baptists have done their share for the postal system, too.

Southern Baptists aren't sending money or answering questions. They are promising to pray specifically for eight Southern Baptist home missionaries.

Preprinted postcards were distributed in churches throughout the Southern Baptist Convention during the Week of Prayer for Home Missions observance March 4-11. The eight postcards were to be mailed one per day during the week of prayer.

Each postcard listed several specific prayer requests made by the eight home missionaries featured during the week.

The response has been overwhelming, according to the missionaries.

Anne and Randy Foster of Jackson, Wyo., have received enough postcards to fill 20 plastic grocery sacks.

"I have counted over 20,000, and I haven't even begun," Mrs. Foster said. "And this doesn't even count all the letters we've gotten."

She listed three groups of people from whom they especially were thankful to get responses -- college students, missionaries' children and elderly adults.

"I was impressed with the number of college students who sent cards," she said. "So many times they get left out of things like this. And the MKs (missionary kids). Maybe they understand the needs a little better than some other people."

The Fosters have seen results from the prayers of Southern Baptists. After the first cards arrived, their oldest son, Andy, faced some critical health problems.

"We can see God's hand in Andy's recovery," Mrs. Foster said. "We do appreciate the prayers."

Kenneth and Barbara Chadwick of Salt Lake City, have received more than 36,000 postcards.

"This has been real exciting for us," Mrs. Chadwick said. "Even our mailman, who has never indicated his church preference, has really been interested."

--more--

Because of the Chadwicks' location in a predominantly Mormon area, they received many letters from people interested in various aspects of work with Mormons, they said.

"We will try to respond to the ones who made specific requests," Mrs. Chadwick said. But due to the overwhelming response, they know they won't be able to answer every letter.

Brenda and Doug Lee of Grand Forks, N.D., asked Southern Baptists to pray that God would raise up workers for their church, especially Sunday school and missions organization leaders.

Two weeks after Southern Baptists prayed, Lee saw the answer to this prayer request.

"A young couple accepted Christ last night," he said. "I attribute that to prayer. They have a lot of potential. Last week (another) young couple joined the church, and they're very talented."

Perhaps the most direct answer to Lee's request came when a woman recently starting attending the church. He has since learned that she taught Sunday school for years in her former church, and that she is interested in beginning Woman's Missionary Union organizations in this church.

Lee is convinced the prayers of Southern Baptists work.

Timothy Park, coordinator of Korean ministries for the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, has received more than 49,000 cards.

Park said he was very impressed by the response to his prayer requests. "Knowing that 9-year-olds and 12-year-olds are praying for me is important to me," he said.

The letters that especially touched Park were those from Korean young adults who were adopted by American families within the last two decades. "They asked me to proclaim Christ to their natural parents," he said.

Don Ledbetter, director of evangelism and Brotherhood for the Nevada Baptist Convention, has received more than 40,000 cards.

"They're precious mail," Ledbetter said.

Ledbetter, like the other missionaries, has received many letters. Some of the letters were from people he knew long ago and has not heard from in years. Others were from people who know a non-Christian living in the Reno or Las Vegas area and want the non-Christian to be told about Christ. Ledbetter is sharing this information with pastors in the area. He also received letters from people who offered words of encouragement and the assurance of prayer support.

One highlight for Ledbetter came from a woman who sent a postcard and then called him.

"A woman from Hattisburg, Miss., called me at the first of the month to say she was coming out for a convention and wanted to know if there was anything she could do while she was here," Ledbetter said.

She ended up attending revival services with Ledbetter in his church, South Reno Baptist Church, while she was in town. Putting a face with the name on a postcard made the prayer support even more personal for him, he said.

Franklin Beam, church extension consultant in south Florida, has received more than 40,000 postcards.

"We knew a lot of people were praying for us," Beam said, "but to actually see it in a physical way, we had never had that privilege before."

--more--

Carol Reese, a Christian social minister at Chicago's Cook County Hospital, also has received thousands of cards.

For Reese, the postcards and letters have brought encouragement and support, as well as tears and anguish. Several letters came from Southern Baptists who wanted to tell somebody who would understand about their experiences with AIDS. At least three writers wrote that they had never been able to tell their stories.

"Those are the stories that have brought tears to my eyes and torn my heart out and made me angry because the church is not responding to people," Reese said.

"All this will have been worth it if these stories can be told, and the church, particularly Southern Baptists, can move in a direction of being more merciful and gracious to folks whose families are affected by AIDS."

Debbie Scott, former home missionary and now a Mission Service Corps volunteer in Puerto Rico, has a unique appreciation for the prayer support indicated by the thousands of cards she has received.

Scott resigned the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board as a career missionary Dec. 31, 1989, to become a volunteer working with new converts at Glenview Baptist Church in Ponce, Puerto Rico. Scott said that when the missionaries were chosen for the Week of Prayer observance, no one could have known this career change would even be on the horizon.

"I think that it was God's timing that I would be included," she said. "I need more prayers now than I needed when I was salaried. I don't know from day to day if all my funds are going to come in."

Even though Scott's prayer requests today might include some related to her new work, those listed on the card still reflect her desire for the people of Puerto Rico to know Christ as Savior.

"I enjoy knowing that so many people were praying for me at one time," she said.

The big question now for the eight home missionaries is what to do with thousands of postcards representing prayer support.

As Anne Foster said: "I can't just toss them into the trash. That would be like tossing something that's more sacred than paper."

--30--

Avalanche of mail
descends on Reese

By Bill Webb

F - 20
(III)

Baptist Press
3/28/90

CHICAGO (BP)--Missionary chaplain Carol Reese and Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association Executive Director Everett Anthony were frustrated.

And the associational office's mail carrier was downright mad.

Smack in the middle of the Week of Prayer for Home Missions, pre-printed postcards addressed to Reese and mailed by praying Southern Baptists began arriving at the association's office in mailbags.

And the post office had more bags it would not deliver due to insufficient postage.

"The post office called and said, 'You have postage-due mail, and you owe us \$289.16,'" Anthony said. The over-sized postcards required 25 cents of postage instead of 15 cents.

"The next day the mail lady came in. The office staff spoke to her, and she said sharply: 'Don't talk to me today. I am two hours late dealing with your mail,'" Anthony said.

--more--

By the end of the second week, more than 28,000 pieces of mail had arrived, with several thousand more hung up at the post office with insufficient postage.

Reese had been asked by the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union to count the cards and file them by the states from which they had been sent, a task that quickly became impossible for her. "I was angry and frustrated about it that day," she said.

The next morning, she got to the office at 7 a.m. to open envelopes that had begun arriving.

"That was the day my cold, hard heart melted," she said smiling.

The letters expressed appreciation for her difficult chaplaincy ministry to AIDS patients at Cook County Hospital and their families.

They came from youngsters and adults of various ages, and a few "gut-wrenching" letters came from people whose relatives had died from AIDS.

The Chicago Baptist staff arrived at work to find Reese weeping over a pile of letters and cards.

"That was the day I got the image of people attached to all these cards and letters," she said. "And I felt very supported that day."

The "gut-wrenching" letters came from people who wanted to tell their story of a son, a brother or a grandson who had died from AIDS. At least three of the writers said they had been unable to tell anyone their stories.

"Those are the stories that have brought tears to my eyes and torn my heart out and made me angry because the church is not responding to people," she reported.

"All this will have been worth it if these stories can be told, and the church, particularly Southern Baptists, can move in a direction of being more merciful and gracious to folks whose families are affected by AIDS."

She recounted the story of the young woman who wrote to tell the story of her hemophiliac brother who died, leaving three preschool children and his wife.

Reese recalled the letter from a 72-year-old woman who cared for a grandson with AIDS with her husband, a retired Southern Baptist minister.

"They could not tell anybody," she said. "They weren't able to afford themselves of the support of the church they had served for years and years and years."

"My feeling is that people don't trust the church."

"I know of two guys with AIDS from the hospital, and they told their pastor and were kicked out of the church. There is good reason not to tell pastors and people in the church."

"There are other pastors who are wonderful and respond in a way that I think is appropriate."

Reese also has reason for encouragement.

"All these letters and postcards have said to me, 'We're really not sure about what we think about all this, but it's the right thing to do, for you to be where you are and for us to be supporting you, not only financially but with our prayers and concern,'" she said.

Many writers offered personal encouragement.

A retired female pediatrician in Kentucky expressed her support and wrote, "I wish I could come and help you."

--more--

Another person in Christian social ministries wrote: "I pray that you will not be discouraged or burned out in what must be a very stressful ministry. . . . We will receive our reward in heaven when Jesus says, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.'"

A Texas pastor and volunteer emergency medical technician wrote, "I also prayed for strength, ability, compassion, wisdom for you as you face so many people with so many needs."

A 10-year-old boy from Colorado sent 55 cents and wrote: "I'm glad there are people like you out there. Your friend, Jeremy."

A few other envelopes have included money, including one with a check for \$100.

The biggest surprise was the envelope postmarked "Richmond, Va." that carried no return address. Inside was a postcard signed with a first name and an offering envelope. That envelope contained six \$50 bills and two \$100 bills.

The funds have been placed in a designated account for Baptist ministries at Cook County Hospital.

Reese has maintained her sense of humor in spite of having her work promoted across the Southern Baptist Convention.

Her friends have been giving her a "hard time" about all the mail and publicity. They told her, "We're all waiting for the Carol Reese comic book."

--30--

Missionary's prayer requests
produce avalanche of mail

By Don Hepburn

F-60
(F12)

Baptist Press
3/28/90

SUNRISE, Fla. (BP)--Franklin Beam was told he probably would receive several hundred postcards after being one of eight home missionaries featured in promotional materials for the recent Southern Baptist Week of Prayer for Home Missions.

Instead, he has received more than 40,000 postcards and letters, as well as positive proof that prayer works.

"Shock and amazement" was Beam's reaction to the flood of postcards delivered to his Sunrise, Fla., home. At first, they came by the handfuls. Then they were delivered in plastic bins, until postcards and letters covered the floor of Susan and Franklin Beam's living room.

Their 7-year-old son, Stephen, who usually meets postman Mike Iorio at the mailbox each day, said he was "shocked" when Iorio insisted the bins of mail belonged to the Beams.

"I still don't believe this," Stephen said. "We've never gotten so much mail in our life."

Iorio, too, said he was surprised by the volume of mail he began delivering to the Beam home. He and his postal colleagues were even more surprised, however, when they discovered the postcards carried promises to pray for the missionary family.

"We were shocked that it dealt with prayer rather than a donation," recalled Iorio, a Roman Catholic.

"We knew a lot of people were praying for us," Beam said, "but to actually see it in a physical way, we had never had that privilege before."

Each night the Beams gather around the mail bins and read a few of the postcards, and Stephen and his 4-year-old sister, Elizabeth, pinpoint each card's origin on a map. "We tell them where it's from and they get excited," Beam said. "They're thrilled to know that people are praying for us all over the country."

--more--

The prayer postcards were designed by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union for use by Southern Baptist churches during the Week of Prayer for Home Missions this year.

Members of Southern Baptist churches were encouraged to mail the preaddressed postcard to each of the eight home missionaries featured in the Week of Prayer materials. The postcards listed prayer requests each missionary had identified. The sender was encouraged to mail the postcard and to pray for the missionary featured each day during the March 4-11 emphasis.

Beam, a church-starting strategist who was the featured missionary for Wednesday, March 7, listed six prayer requests related to starting mission churches in southern Florida. But, unlike the other missionaries, Beam included a seventh prayer request that had a personal dimension. It asked Baptists to pray for strength for his wife, Susan, as she cares for their three children.

Mrs. Beam recalled having mixed feelings on March 6, the day before the Beams were to be the focus of the prayer emphasis. "I felt a sense of anticipation that something exciting was going to happen," she said. But, she thought: "Maybe it will be some trial that I will need special strength for. And that's what it ended up being."

The next afternoon, while Beam was away at an appointment, she was reading the latest batch of postcards. Meanwhile, Emily, their 7-month-old daughter, discovered a can of wood filler and began tasting its toxic contents.

When Mrs. Beam realized what had happened, she called the 911 emergency assistance number and frantically requested an ambulance. Within minutes the mother and baby were en route to the hospital.

During the next five hours, doctors ran a series of tests to determine what damage, if any, the infant had suffered. Although concerned, the Beams said they felt a special sense of divine comfort. "We were reminded that someone was praying for us," Mrs. Beam said.

By the end of the day, Emily had been given a clean bill of health by the doctors, and the family returned home.

The Beams said they experienced other abnormal occurrences in their daily routine that week, but those seemed minor by comparison. "We have just laughed at things like that, knowing that we are being uplifted in prayer," Mrs. Beam explained.

Each night, when the household chores are completed and the three children are asleep, she likes to settle down to read through the postcards, she said.

"I read these and cry," she explained with tears in her eyes. "Most of (the writers) are complete strangers, but they are praying specifically for us. And most of them add little things that they are praying for in addition to what's on the cards."

Initially the Beams tried to send out a mimeographed letter in response to each postcard. But the cost of the postage and the ever-growing stack of mail prompted them to rethink their plan.

The family now intends to save all the letters and postcards that have personal messages and place them in a scrapbook. They also hope to include the 40,000-plus signatures in the scrapbook.

"When Satan tries to get us down, when we get discouraged, we can open that book of prayer and know that people are praying for us," Beam said. "And we'll remember what it was like during these days."

--30--

BP photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU