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90-75

Former FMB chairman responds
to Parks' letter to Baptists

By Robert O'Brien

AI-FMB

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--C. Mark Corts, chairman of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees for the past two years, has questioned "both the timing and conclusions" of a letter board President R. Keith Parks wrote to Southern Baptists about the effect of controversy on foreign missions.

Parks issued a plea to Southern Baptists May 15 to rise above the denomination's 11-year-old theological/political controversy or risk losing opportunities to reach 3.5 billion people for Christ worldwide.

Parks said the controversy is taking the focus off missions, hindering the biblical mandate for missions and creating an image around the world that Southern Baptists are a people of controversy rather than evangelism and missions. He said the controversy is eroding appointments of missionaries, undercutting missions support and excluding many major supporters of missions.

The Foreign Mission Board president called for a spiritual solution to the controversy, urging Southern Baptists to humble themselves, pray and fast until "our convention is reconciled."

Corts' response came in a letter to Southern Baptists dated May 24 and sent to state Baptist newspapers.

He said in an interview following his letter that he "did not respond as an adversary of Keith Parks" but only as a colleague to present a balancing perspective.

Corts, who stepped down as trustee chairman in April, told Baptist Press he responded to "make a contribution to peace and harmony on the board and to show that it's possible to be responsive to Dr. Parks without attacking him or jeopardizing his leadership." Corts, who also is chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention's 1990 Resolutions Committee, will end 10 years as a trustee in June in New Orleans. Board trustees will meet there June 8-9 at Tulane University before the SBC's annual meeting June 12-14.

"There's no doubt in my mind that (Parks') purpose is to galvanize Baptists into better mission support," Corts said in the interview. "We absolutely agree that Baptists aren't doing enough to support missions, but we may not agree on all the reasons for that."

In his letter to Southern Baptists, Corts said: "I join with Dr. Parks in calling for an urgent recommitment from all Baptists to share Christ with the whole world. While I deeply respect him and his sacrificial commitment to world missions, I question both the timing and conclusions of his letter, though certainly not his motives."

The Winston-Salem, N.C., pastor said Parks' "appeal to 'rise above the controversy' may fall on its own timing. By appearing just a few weeks prior to the convention, the letter thrusts missions directly into the controversy and fuels it rather than rising above it."

Parks said in an interview following his letter that his plea to Southern Baptists is not political. "I'm focusing not on politics but on missions and my assessment that the SBC controversy has damaged it. I'm focusing on calling Southern Baptists back to commitment to the mandate for missions which was the reason for the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Corts' letter responded: "No doubt, the SBC controversy has taken some focus off missions, but it may be unfair for the controversy to be the scapegoat for our failure.

"Are not ... controversy and decline in missions support (both) symptoms of our desperate need for revival and reformation? The controversy may reveal our denominational weaknesses rather than create them."

The SBC controversy "created the negative aspect" of some publicity the Foreign Mission Board has received on certain thorny issues it has handled in recent times, Corts said, "but the controversy did not create the issues themselves." Foreign Mission Board trustees and staff agreed on the handling of the issues, he added, including such areas as evangelism strategies, missionary deployment and policies involving divorce and missionary appointment.

Noting Parks' concern that SBC politics is excluding major supporters of cooperative missions, Corts wrote:

"If 'major supporters of cooperative missions' are no longer supporting missions because they feel excluded, their very withdrawal proves they may not actually be supporters of cooperative missions. I appeal to them to take an inclusive approach to missions and continue support for missions in spite of the temporary controversy rather than because of it.

"In the past when many conservatives felt systematically excluded," Corts continued, "they were exhorted by many to continue their support for missions in spite of their concerns. If it was appropriate then, cooperative support for missions is appropriate now."

Corts also cited troubled economic times and a decline in the Consumer Price Index between 1980-88 as factors in a trend that has undercut giving to churches, the Cooperative Program and special mission offerings.

"Because of our diversity, we have always been a mixture of more than 'two major groups,'" Corts said in reference to Parks' contention that Southern Baptists must maintain their historical balance of types of Baptists.

Noting a variety of Baptists have many concerns, Corts said there are "a large number of loyal Baptists concerned about a loss of biblical authority who believe that the decline in missionary activity in many mainline denominations in the past 30 years is directly correspondent with the decline in biblical orthodoxy.

"They feel history serves a clear warning to Baptists today that we cannot separate our mission mandates from confidence in the integrity of the Word of God which provides that mandate."

Corts also responded to Parks' view that the SBC controversy, which began in 1979, has led to a four-year decline in missionary appointments. "The matter of missionary candidates appears to be cyclical without regard to the controversy," Corts said. "We have appointed 224 missionaries in the past six months and if this rate continues, this will be a year of record appointments."

Corts clarified in the interview that the 224 figure includes mission personnel appointments from October 1989 through April 1990, rather than appointments in one calendar year. The figures include more than 100 International Service Corps personnel scheduled to be added at the board's June meeting.

He said the Foreign Mission Board's projection of about 380 missionary appointments in 1990 supports his view that appointments are cyclical, since the projection forecasts a possible increase of 70 appointments over 1989.

Missionary appointments over the past five years have descended from a record 429 in 1985. Appointments fell to 411 in 1986, to 407 in 1987, to 371 in 1988 and to 310 in 1989 -- the first year the SBC recorded a net loss in the total foreign mission force since 1972.

"We dare not put our heads in the sand and deny the need for biblical reformation and spiritual revival among us for the sake of temporary peace and unity," Cortis concluded. "Let us as Baptists be known everywhere as a people committed both to practicing missions and a biblical authority which is the foundation for our mandate to reach the lost persons of the world."

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Continued fighting in Liberia
forces more missionaries out

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
6/1/90

N. JMB

MONROVIA, Liberia (BP)--More than half of the Southern Baptist mission force has left Liberia in recent weeks because of continued fighting between government and rebel troops.

Twenty-five Southern Baptist missionaries remained in Liberia June 1, down from 53 mission workers at the beginning of May.

Most of them were in Monrovia, the capital city. Seven were at mission stations in towns outside Monrovia, said Betty Kay Yamaoka, the Southern Baptist Foreign Missions Board's associate area director for west Africa.

Missionaries still in Liberia are free to evacuate to Togo and Ivory Coast, Yamaoka said. However, most who have left have chosen to return to the United States on early furlough or personal vacation. All short-term mission workers are out of the country; only career and associate missionaries remain.

Most of the remaining missionaries were still planning to stay in Liberia despite the growing unrest, said missionary Robert Bellinger, of Carbondale, Ill., in a June 1 telephone interview.

Transportation options are limited for the remaining missionaries, he said. Rebel troops have attacked government troops within a few miles of Robertsfield International Airport, 20 miles southeast of Monrovia, so air travel is quickly diminishing as a way out of the country. Driving also is not an option because fighting has made most roads unsafe, he added.

"We still feel safe," he said. "For the most part, I don't see any problem in staying. We're not a threat to anyone."

About 1,100 U.S. citizens live in Liberia. Most are either business people or missionaries, according to the U.S. State Department.

The United States sent the USS Saipan, a helicopter assault carrier, and five support ships to international waters off Liberia's coast May 30. The U.S. flotilla is said to be available for evacuation of U.S. citizens if needed. Bellinger, who is aware of the U.S. ships, said the U.S. Embassy in Liberia is in close contact with American missionaries.

Longstanding Foreign Mission Board policy places the final decision to evacuate or stay in a country with missionaries.

Many of the missionaries were "carrying on with business as usual," Bellinger said. Many also were helping with food preparation and transportation for several hundred refugees who were moved May 31 from a United Nations compound to a Lutheran church. The refugees were attacked by a group of men dressed in military uniforms May 30.

Press reports said the men attacked the U.N. compound because the refugees were members of a rival tribe. The attackers killed a U.N. security guard, wounded two people and abducted more than 30 people.

The United Nations has protested to Liberia against the attack. U.N. officials said they will evacuate all 57 U.N. personnel from Liberia.

Bellinger said Providence Baptist Church, along with other churches in Monrovia, is helping cook meals for about 700 refugees.

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Violence in Liberia has spread as rebel troops advance toward Monrovia. On May 20 rebels attacked and eventually captured Liberia's second largest port in Buchanan, 75 miles southeast of Monrovia. Government and rebel forces clashed again May 27 when rebels attacked the town of Kakata, 40 miles northeast of Monrovia. Reports did not confirm whether the rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, gained control of the town.

Government troops have had little success in putting down the rebellion, which started last December when the rebels invaded Liberia's Nimba County from Ivory Coast.

The rebels are trying to overthrow Liberian President Samuel Doe, who came to power after the assassination of President William Tolbert in a 1980 military coup. Doe has survived eight coup attempts during his 10-year rule. The rebels, led by former Doe associate Charles Taylor, accuse Doe's government of being corrupt and ruining the nation's economy.

Administrators of the Liberian Baptist Theological Seminary, a few miles southeast of Monrovia, closed the school May 23. The seminary, which has about 100 students, ended classes six weeks early. School administrators said they could no longer guarantee the safety of students and faculty.

The Ricks Institute, a Baptist school for kindergarten through 12th-grade students, also closed May 26 because of the fighting. The school is located about 15 miles west of Monrovia.

In Monrovia, leaders of Providence Baptist, the oldest church in Liberia, called for three days of fasting and prayer in response to the country's growing violence, said missionary Pat Bellinger.

The church also held a special service for the missionaries, she said.

"In the midst of the turmoil around them and in their own distress, they are concerned about missionaries who work with them," she said. "We came to minister and found ourselves being ministered to by fellow Christians."

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Lineberger slated
to nominate Vestal

By Toby Druin

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Jewes)

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6/1/90

DALLAS (BP)--Phil Lineberger, pastor of Richardson Heights Baptist Church in suburban Dallas and president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, will nominate Daniel Vestal for president of the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans June 12.

Vestal is pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta where he was served since late 1988. Previously, the Waco native was pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas, for 11 years.

"Dan is a longtime friend, and he asked if I would nominate him," Lineberger said. "I said I would consider it an honor to nominate him."

Vestal was nominated in 1989 but lost the presidency to incumbent Jerry Vines by a vote of 10,754 to 8,248. Vestal announced last September that he would permit his nomination again this year.

Also to be nominated are Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas. John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston, announced in February that he will nominate Chapman.

Another Texas pastor, Dan Bates of Millican Baptist Church, has announced he will nominate himself.

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St. Croix volunteers
restore family's dignity

By Clay Renick

F 9M3

FREDERIKSTED, St. Croix (BP)--Annette Gereau will never forget the storm at night--or the volunteers in the morning.

The 34-year-old St. Croix resident lives with her sister, Edith, who has six children. When Hurricane Hugo started, they huddled in a closet.

"The children thought someone was outside taking the roof off," recalled Gereau. "They didn't know the wind had done it."

The hurricane pulled everything out of one room. Another bedroom saw everything go but the bed frame. Water stood knee deep in the house.

"I didn't know which way to turn," said Gereau, a schoolteacher. She couldn't afford repairs and they had no insurance.

St. Croix is in the U.S. Virgin Islands about 75 miles southeast of Puerto Rico. As a U.S. territory, victims received grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

But some contractors raised their prices and cheated residents. Gereau paid her grant money in advance. The contractor said he needed it for supplies.

She never saw them again. And they left only part of the materials. Several months passed with the family living under a plastic covering. During rain storms, the children, ages 7 and younger, would sleep in two old cars.

"There was not a single room in the house that was dry," said Ben Purcell, a Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commissions volunteer from Clarkesville, Ga.

Brotherhood teams came from all over the United States to help. About 45 volunteers a week stay at Grace Central Baptist Church. The volunteers provide free labor for the people who can't pay for a new roof.

Recently a group of 57 volunteers were completing their work week when Gereau asked for help. M.B. Howard, on-site coordinator, agreed to assist but found more problems than expected. Rafters needed replacing. Wiring was fouled. Trash remained from the storm and the supplies weren't enough to finish the job.

The volunteers contributed about \$300 for the remaining supplies and arrived at 8:15 on Saturday morning. Four hours later the roof was on, the house was clean and even the family grave out front was filled where it had sunk during the storm.

"It's like the good Lord put his hand down and said, 'OK fellows. We're going to do this quick,'" recalled Steve Thomas of Springfield, Tenn. "And that's how it happened."

"This project was one of the most emotional things we have done," said Howard of Covington, Tenn. "When we first looked at the project on Thursday night, Gary Kahler of Midland, Texas, had to get off by himself and cry that night."

"That four hours of work on Saturday morning was worth the whole trip," said Kahler.

A number of women volunteers cleaned the house, even polishing aluminum thresholds. They removed all the trash and debris, making a pile that would fill three pickup truck loads, said Howard.

"We gave that family dignity," he continued. "They had totally given up on that house."

But volunteers have not given up on St. Croix.

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"Everyone paid their own way," added Harold Bailey, 66, from Dallas. Volunteers even left \$1,000 to help other residents who lacked enough roofing materials. Bailey said neighbors would stop by during the project wondering how Gereau, who now attends Grace Central with her family, could afford all the workers.

"They volunteered to do it," she told them. "God worked a miracle in my life."

The Brotherhood Commission's St. Croix project continues through July 31. Those interested in participating should contact their state Brotherhood director.

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West German church sends
cars, Bibles to Romania

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Baptist Press
6/1/90

KAISERLAUTERN, West Germany (BP)--An English-speaking Baptist church in West Germany has made aid to Romania a major ministry, sending two cars, 700 Romanian-language Bibles and other items to help Baptist work there.

The two used cars, provided by Faith Baptist Church in Kaiserlautern, West Germany, are being used to transport Romanian Baptists to a series of teaching sessions in a "School of the Prophets" program led by visiting Southern Baptist professors. Scores of Romanian Christians are receiving training in the Bible and ministry through the program.

Members of Faith Baptist Church, a 725-member congregation, come mostly from the 12 U.S. Army and Air Force bases in and around Kaiserlautern. About 100,000 American military personnel live in the area.

Six men from Faith church recently went to Romania for 10 days to deliver the cars and other supplies. Four are members of the American military forces assigned to NATO bases in West Germany.

"The Romanians were impressed to have American NATO officers in their country, since in their army people were never promoted to officer level if they're Christians," said Faith pastor Jim Tomberlin.

The Faith team preached, taught or sang daily during their visit to Baptist churches in five Romanian towns near Oradea and Arad, Tomberlin said. Steve Kahne, a major in the U.S. Air Force and a Christian of Jewish background, taught sessions on Old Testament festivals.

Among other items, the church sent several typewriters, medical supplies and a bicycle to help a Romanian Baptist pastor with transportation. One team member repaired a copy machine Faith church sent earlier to the Baptist association office in Arad.

"Lines were everywhere in the stores, but the situation isn't as bad as earlier," said Tomberlin. "The stores are very bare and half-empty still, though."

The visitors were impressed with the vision and zeal Romanian Baptists displayed for reaching their land for Christ. "Their churches are flourishing despite the hardships. If they can equip their people and send them into the other Eastern European countries, they'll have a far greater hearing than we would," Tomberlin said.

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CORRECTION: In Baptist Press story titled "New Orleans personalities drawn from 26 states," mailed May 31, please make the following correction:

In the next to the last paragraph, please change the name of Bob Hatfield to Chris Kihn.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
