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90-76

Some missionaries evacuate
Liberia on U.S. flight

By Donald D. Martin

N. JMB

MONROVIA, Liberia (BP)--About half of the 25 Southern Baptist missionaries remaining in Liberia evacuated at 2 p.m. June 4 on a U.S. Embassy-chartered flight to Freetown, Sierra Leone, according to missionary Robert Bellinger.

Passengers included 12 Southern Baptist missionaries, about 65 other U.S. citizens, about 15 Japanese embassy personnel and about 30 Africans. The embassy will try to arrange additional charter flights, Bellinger said.

Twelve missionaries remained in Liberia -- three couples in Monrovia, capital of the West African country, and three couples in other towns in northern Liberia, Bellinger said.

Previously, 28 other Southern Baptist missionary personnel had departed Liberia as fighting between government and rebel troops intensified.

Missionaries staying in Monrovia are Bellinger and his wife, Pat, of Carbondale, Ill.; Jim and Jane Park of Paducah, Ky.; and Fred and Mary Lou Levrets of Abilene, Texas.

The missionaries outside of Monrovia are staying in towns that have remained quiet through most of the six months of fighting. They are Ed Laughridge of Rock Hill, S.C., and Fran Laughridge of Clinton, S.C., who remain in Mano River; Kenneth Nicholson of Magdalena, N.M., and Joyce Nicholson of Seaside, Calif., in Voinjama; and Chris Wilkinson of Gainesville, Fla., and Gwen Wilkinson of Ardmore, Tenn., also in Voinjama.

Missionaries remaining in Monrovia hope to continue working at the Baptist mission as much as possible and help with refugee work in the city, Bellinger said. The missionaries also are helping with food preparation and transportation for about 700 refugees who are staying at a Lutheran church in the city. The Baptist mission also is supplying funds for the food, he said.

The Southern Baptist missionaries who evacuated changed their minds about staying in Liberia after the U.S. Embassy "strongly urged" them to go, Bellinger said. Once the missionaries are in Sierra Leone they will make plans to travel to Togo, Ivory Coast and the United States, he said.

Bellinger said he and the others staying in Monrovia still feel safe and do not believe they are in danger. They are staying in contact with mission officials in other African countries and with mission directors at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va. They receive most of their news from British Broadcasting Corporation and Voice of American on short-wave radio, he said.

Monrovia is still fairly calm, although tension is high as rebel troops move toward the city, he said. Press reports place the rebels within 30 miles of the city and indicate that they face little resistance as they advance.

Electricity is off during most of the daylight hours, but telephone lines are still open, Bellinger said. All commercial flights into Robertsfield International Airport, 20 miles southeast of Monrovia, have been canceled, he said.

According to the Associated Press, the only significant government military presence in Monrovia was around President Samuel Doe's executive mansion, where 2,000 Israeli-trained troops were stationed. It was not clear what has happened to the remainder of Doe's 5,300-man army.

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Missionaries who left Liberia June 4 are Dale and Nancy Allison of Dallas; Brian Barlow of Pensacola, Fla., and Vicki Barlow of St. Petersburg, Fla.; Bret Brown of Amarillo, Texas; Mary Katherine Campbell of Abilene, Texas; Daryl Cox of Lake City, Tenn., and Glenda Cox of Atlanta; Rachel Dubard of Carrollton, Miss.; Margaret Fairburn of Tylertown, Miss.; and Lawrence and Alice Hardy of Savannah, Ga. Dean Ekberg of Rockford, Ill., drove out from Fahnja to Sierra Leone on June 2.

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High Court upholds
equal access act

By Kathy Palen

N-BOC

Baptist Press
6/6/90

WASHINGTON (BP)--Students in public secondary schools who wish to form religious clubs may have the same "equal access" to school facilities and privileges as students in other non-curriculum related activities, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled.

In an 8-1 decision, the high court upheld the constitutionality of the Equal Access Act, a 1984 law that prohibits public secondary schools that receive federal funds and maintain a "limited open forum" from denying equal access to students who wish to meet within the forum on the basis of the content of the speech at such meetings. The statute prohibits discrimination based on the "religious, political, philosophical or other content" of the speech.

Under the law, a limited open forum exists when a public secondary school allows one or more "non-curriculum related" student groups to meet on school property during non-instructional time.

In writing for the court in *Westside Community Schools v. Mergens*, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said the term "non-curriculum related" is best interpreted broadly to mean any student group that does not relate directly to the body of courses offered by the school.

"In our view, a student group directly relates to a school's curriculum if the subject matter of the group is actually taught, or will soon be taught, in a regularly offered course; if the subject matter of the group concerns the body of courses as a whole; if participation in the group is required for a particular course; or if participation in the group results in academic credit," O'Connor wrote. "We think this limited definition of groups that directly relate to the curriculum is a common-sense interpretation of the act that is consistent with Congress' intent to provide a low threshold for triggering the act's requirements."

Such a reading of the Equal Access Act allows schools and school districts to retain a significant level of authority over the type of officially recognized activities in which their students participate, O'Connor said.

Schools and school districts, she explained, have the authority to determine appropriate subjects of instruction; prohibit meetings that would interfere with the orderly conduct of educational activities; and assure that student attendance at meetings is voluntary. They also may escape equal access obligations by refusing federal financial assistance, she added.

"Congress clearly sought to prohibit schools from discriminating on the basis of the content of a student group's speech," O'Connor wrote, "and that obligation is the price a federally funded school must pay if it opens its facilities to non-curriculum related student groups."

A school or school district may not define as "curriculum related" anything remotely related to abstract educational goals, O'Connor wrote. "To define curriculum related in a way that results in almost no schools having limited open fora," she said, "or in a way that permits schools to evade the act by strategically describing existing student groups, would render the act merely hortatory."

The court's definition of non-curriculum related activities "looks to a school's actual practice rather than its stated policy," she said.

O'Connor wrote for herself and three other members of the court -- Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Harry A. Blackmun and Byron R. White -- on whether the Equal Access Act violates the First Amendment's establishment clause.

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The high court's logic in *Widmar v. Vincent* -- which applied the three-part test from *Lemon v. Kurtzman* to hold that an equal access policy at the state university level does not violate the establishment clause -- applies with equal force to the Equal Access Act, O'Connor wrote.

"There is a crucial difference between government speech endorsing religion, which the establishment clause forbids, and private speech endorsing religion, which the free speech and free exercise clauses protect," O'Connor said. "We think that secondary school students are mature enough and are likely to understand that a school does not endorse or support student speech that it merely permits on a non-discriminatory basis."

In addition, the statute limits school officials' participation at meetings of student religious groups and requires that such meetings be held during non-instructional time, she said. Although the possibility of student peer pressure remains, she said, there is "little if any risk of official state endorsement or coercion where no formal classroom activities are involved and no school officials actively participate."

A school that permits a student-initiated and student-led religious club to meet after school -- just as it allows any other student group to do -- does not convey a message of state approval or endorsement of the particular religion, O'Connor said.

Nor does the school run the risk of excessive entanglement between government and religion, she said. In fact, she added, a "denial of equal access to religious speech might well create greater entanglement problems in the form of invasive monitoring to prevent religious speech at meetings at which such speech might occur."

In a concurring opinion, Justice Thurgood Marshall -- joined by Justice William J. Brennan Jr. -- warned that the statute's low threshold for triggering equal access raises "serious establishment clause concerns where secondary schools with fora that differ substantially from the forum in *Widmar* are required to grant access to student religious groups."

Unless such secondary schools take steps to disassociate themselves from religious clubs' speech, Marshall wrote, they could appear to endorse that speech.

"The crucial question is how the act affects each school," Marshall said. "If a school already houses numerous ideological organizations, then the addition of a religion club will most likely not violate the establishment clause because the risk that students will erroneously attribute the views of the religion club to the school is minimal."

"But if the religion club is the sole advocacy-oriented group in the forum, or one of a very limited number, and the school continues to promote its student-club program as instrumental to citizenship, then the school's failure to disassociate itself from the religious activity will reasonably be understood as an endorsement of that activity."

But Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, writing for himself and Justice Antonin Scalia, argued against the application of an "endorsement" test. Rather, Kennedy said, the court simply should determine whether the statute gives direct benefits to religion to such a degree that it establishes a state religion or religious faith or allows government to coerce any student to participate in a religious activity.

The lone dissenting vote in the case was cast by Justice John Paul Stevens.

Under the Equal Access Law, he contended, an extracurricular student organization should be considered non-curriculum related if it has as its purpose the "advocacy of partisan theological, political or ethical views."

"A school that admits at least one such club has apparently made the judgment that students are better off if the student community is permitted to, and perhaps even encouraged to, compete along ideological lines," Stevens wrote. "This pedagogical strategy may be defensible or even desirable."

"But it is wrong to presume that Congress endorsed that strategy -- and dictated its nationwide adoption -- simply because it approved the application of *Widmar* to high schools."

Groups praise decision
in equal access case

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--Four religious groups that were instrumental in the passage of the Equal Access Act have praised the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling on the 1984 law.

In an 8-1 decision, the high court upheld the statute, which prohibits public secondary schools that receive federal funds and maintain a "limited open forum" from denying equal access to students who wish to meet within the forum on the basis of the content of the speech at such meetings.

The court's decision in *Westside Community Schools v. Mergens* vindicates Congress' judgment that discrimination against student religious groups in public secondary schools could be stopped without violating church-state separation, according to a statement issued by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Christian Legal Society, National Association of Evangelicals and National Council of Churches.

"For years confusion has existed on the issue of religion in the public schools," the statement continued. "An almost paranoid fear of faith has been created by overreactions to and misinterpretations of the Supreme Court's prayer decisions. Some school districts have gone so far as to single out student religious groups for discriminatory treatment by telling them that they alone cannot hold on-campus meetings before or after school.

"The Mergens decision makes clear that such a policy of unequal access to public school facilities violates federal law. This decision restores a proper balance between the separation of church and state and the constitutional guarantees of free speech and free exercise of religion. The court recognized the critical distinction between school-sponsored and student-sponsored religion: the former is unconstitutional; the latter is not."

Calling equal access "our best hope for resolving the school prayer debate," the groups said they are recommitted to facilitating the law's proper implementation.

"Millions of American students are the real winners in this case," the statement concluded. "They now can claim the right of equal access for their religious, political and philosophical speech."

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Court refuses to rehear
dispute over peyote use

By Kathy Palen

N-BJC

Baptist Press
6/6/90

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to reconsider its recent decision in a case involving the religious use of the drug peyote.

In a one-line order issued June 4, the court denied a petition for rehearing in *Employment Division of Oregon v. Smith*.

A diverse coalition of religious and civil liberties organizations, along with 55 constitutional law scholars, had joined the petition asking the court to reconsider its *Smith* decision, in which the court held a state not only can prohibit the religious use of peyote but also can deny unemployment compensation to individuals dismissed from their jobs for using the drug.

The decision also limits application of the "compelling state interest" test to a narrow range of cases involving the free exercise of religion. The test, which was set forth in a 1963 Supreme Court decision, requires that governmental actions that substantially burden a religious practice must be justified by a compelling state interest.

"The denial of our petition for rehearing was disappointing, but it does not mean the battle is over," said Oliver S. Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. "We're already talking with a number of members of Congress and constitutional experts about a possible legislative solution to many of the problems caused by the *Smith* decision. And, frankly, with the broad coalition that has developed around this case, I think we have a reasonable chance of success."

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Organizations supporting the petition for rehearing included the American Jewish Congress, American Civil Liberties Union, American Jewish Committee, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Baptist Joint Committee, Christian Legal Society, American Friends Service Committee, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, National Association of Evangelicals, National Council of Churches, People for the American Way, Rutherford Institute, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Unitarian Universalist Association and Worldwide Church of God.

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VP candidates vie
for missions vote

By Greg Warner

N-G (Gla.)

Baptist Press
6/6/90

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (BP)--When Southern Baptists vote for first vice president, they will choose between two people who have given their lives for world missions.

Doug Knapp of Gainesville, Fla., a layman who retired in 1988 after being a missionary in Tanzania for 24 years, and Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, who was executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union for 15 years, both have announced they will be nominated for first vice president during the Southern Baptist Convention June 12-14 in New Orleans.

Knapp was touted as the "conservative candidate" in the June issue of the Southern Baptist Advocate, a conservative publication. He is expected to be nominated by Tom Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla. Elliff knew Knapp while serving as a missionary in Zimbabwe.

Crumpler has been endorsed by Atlanta pastor Daniel Vestal, the moderate candidate for president. She lost the election for first vice president during last year's convention in Las Vegas, Nev., collecting 33 percent of the votes in a field of four candidates.

In a prepared statement released to the Florida Baptist Witness, newsjournal of the Florida Baptist Convention, Knapp cited Crumpler's defeat last year as a factor in his decision to be nominated this year.

"Last year in Las Vegas, I was prepared to stand for nomination," Knapp said. "A Florida pastor wanted to nominate me. However, when Carolyn was nominated I decided to stand aside in deference to her. Carolyn has been a personal friend of mine for many years, and I decided not to oppose her. However, she proved to be unelectable at that time, and she lost by a wide margin.

"Carolyn is a controversial figure in some segments of our convention. There is doubt as to whether she can win the vice presidency. Having stood aside for Carolyn in 1989 and seen her lose, I think I should go ahead now for the sake of missions and evangelism."

Crumpler, who grew up in Frostproof, Fla., said she was surprised to learn about Knapp's nomination: "I couldn't believe it because we were friends. ... We've been friends for 30 years."

She said Knapp's nomination will be used by conservatives "to offset my missions emphasis," forcing messengers to make an unfair choice between two missions advocates.

"There are some conservatives who would vote for me because of missions who now can say: 'I don't have to vote for Carolyn. I can vote with my side,'" she said.

Knapp, however, said his nomination is non-political and not directed at Crumpler.

"I am not running against anyone," he said. "Rather, I am running for evangelism and missions. I want to use all my influence to challenge Southern Baptists back to the basis for our purpose, which is for evangelism at home and around the world.

"Carolyn and I, and whoever else may be nominated, offer messengers at the convention a choice. This is not a conflict or condemnation but simply an opportunity to choose the best candidate."

Crumpler said the choice won't be over missions, since there's "no difference" between the two announced candidates in that regard. She pointed out 304 other retired signed a statement endorsing Vestal for president. The Knapps declined to sign.

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Crumpler said messengers likely will decide who to vote for on the basis of who nominates each candidate. She said she doesn't yet know who will nominate her. She said she doesn't know what effect Knapp's nomination will have on her chances, but she said she is optimistic.

Knapp said "many people" have encouraged him to run, including SBC President Jerry Vines of Jacksonville and other pastors in the state. "Jerry Vines was by no means the first one to talk to me about this," Knapp said. "He did not put the idea in my head."

In February Vines introduced Knapp to a Jacksonville rally during which Morris Chapman of Wichita Falls, Texas, was announced as the conservative candidate for president. No mention was made at the time of Knapp's nomination for vice president.

"I certainly am a conservative," Knapp said this week, "but I'd like to think I am the candidate of anyone who feels that world evangelism and missions are the pre-eminent concerns of Southern Baptists and who wants to see a dedicated missionary with a proven record of devotion to this cause serve in this position."

Knapp, a native of Lakeland, Fla., said he first thought about the vice presidency when he and his wife, Evelyn, returned from the mission field in 1988. "I had the idea that the wide exposure our work in Tanzania has received throughout the convention has placed me in a unique position to be electable as vice president," he said.

More than 58,000 Tanzanians were baptized during the Knapps' 24-year ministry as agricultural missionaries in the Kyela District of the West African country. Their work was chronicled in the book "Thunder in the Valley."

Crumpler retired last year as executive director of WMU, an SBC auxiliary that promotes missions education, missions involvement and missions support. During her tenure, Southern Baptists quadrupled their gifts to the annual home missions offering and tripled their gifts to the annual foreign missions offering, both of which are co-sponsored by WMU.

After retirement she married Joseph Crumpler, a pastor in Cincinnati.

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Baptist Men respond to
Indiana tornados

By Jim Burton

N. B. HOOD Baptist Press
6/6/90

PETERSBURG, Ind. (BP)--A series of deadly tornadoes in the Midwest has prompted the response of Kentucky and Ohio Baptist Men's disaster relief teams to assist two small Indiana Southern Baptist churches.

Southside Baptist Church in Bedford and Immanuel Baptist Church in Petersburg, each representing the only Southern Baptist church in its county, suffered little damage to their buildings. But each church must now minister in the midst of extensive tragedy.

Six Petersburg residents and three Bedford residents were killed. Another fatality was reported in Roachdale, Ind. Several people are reported missing.

"Petersburg is unbelievable," said Jim Furgerson, Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission national disaster relief director. "It looks like an arc light hit. That is when a B-52 drops a thousand, 1,000-pound bombs. Half of the town is gone."

In Petersburg, estimated population of 3,500, the tornado jumped over the home of Tom and Leigh Rush. He is the pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church which averages 35-40 people in Sunday school. No church members were killed, but up to five families lost their homes, said Rush.

Rush was at the church Saturday night preparing the Sunday bulletins when the tornado passed over before ripping through surrounding neighborhoods. Sunday services were cancelled to help church members begin cleanup.

The Ohio Baptist Brotherhood's disaster relief feeding unit is stationed with 10 men in Petersburg at the Red Cross command center. The crew is sleeping in vans and in Immanuel Baptist Church.

All emergency feeding was turned over to Southern Baptists. On Monday, 1,200 meals were served to victims and disaster relief workers.

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"There has been no electricity or water," said Ron Martin, Ohio Brotherhood and disaster relief director. "It has been a very unusual situation."

"We have had to furnish our own electricity and the National Guard brings a water tank," he continued. "We have to heat all of our water for everything."

Allen Haynes, director of missions for White River Baptist Association which includes Petersburg and Bedford, said all five counties in the association suffered damage. The Southern Baptist volunteers have been accepted in Petersburg, he said.

"At first they were leery (of Southern Baptists) because they have never heard of us too much here in Indiana," said Haynes. "But now they are working with us real good."

Mark Coppenger, executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, visited Bedford Sunday, June 3.

"There was no object larger than a pie plate at a Bedford trailer park," said Coppenger. "It looked like confetti."

The Kentucky Baptist Brotherhood's disaster relief feeding unit began serving lunch Monday, June 4, at Southside Baptist Church to victims and disaster relief workers in Bedford. Bob Simpkins, Kentucky's Brotherhood and disaster relief director, said 30 Kentucky volunteers are preparing meals and removing debris. Another 10 were expected by Tuesday, June 5. Volunteers from First Baptist Church of Crane, Ind., are assisting.

Kentucky Baptists have been named coordinators to match services from all volunteers with needs requests.

"We are also coordinating with government agencies at the church," said Simpkins. "They moved to this site to be close to the operation performed by Kentucky Baptists when they recognized our professionalism and experience in this type of work."

"Everyone is working together to make this operation work," continued Simpkins. "Turf battles normally associated with this type of operation are not occurring."

The Kentucky Baptists fed fewer than 500 meals through noon Tuesday. The bulk of their work has been cleanup and debris removal.

"I've got loggers on my team who do this every day," said Simpkins. "They come in here and cut mobile homes apart and trees apart and stack them up."

This marks the first multi-state response by Brotherhood disaster relief teams in Indiana, which does not have a disaster relief program. Furgerson is in Indiana serving as on-site coordinator for the Southern Baptist effort.

"I think (the Southern Baptist response) is not only going to be a big help to the people at the scene but it will help the esprit of being a Southern Baptist," said Coppenger.

"This is a beautiful example of the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program at work as agencies move in to help a state that has not organized to respond to this kind of ministry," said Douglas Beggs, Brotherhood Commission adult division director.

The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board has authorized the use of domestic hunger funds in Bedford for use in the disaster response, and \$20,000 was sent to the Indiana Baptist convention, said Paul Adkins, HMB vice president for ministry.

The training and response of Southern Baptist volunteers to disasters is a ministry of the Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn. The board distributes emergency funds in disasters.

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Dockery named general editor
for 'The New American Commentary'

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NASHVILLE (BP)--David S. Dockery, assistant professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., has been named general editor of "The New American Commentary," replacing Michael A. Smith, who resigned to return to the pastorate.

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Smith, an editor of Broadman books at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board for five years, will become pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Hermitage, Tenn., effective July 1.

"My decision to return to the full-time pastorate is not a casual one," Smith said. "It is the result of long thought and prayer. I have come to see and admit that I am a pastor at heart, that the local church is the arena in which I do ministry best and that New Hope Baptist Church is the particular place in which God wants me to exercise my calling."

The first two volumes of "The New American Commentary" are scheduled to be released in June 1991. Writers have been enlisted and are working on manuscripts which will be released between 1991 and 1995.

Dockery, 37, recently accepted a position at the board as editor of academic books to be effective at the end of the school year. He was approved to assume leadership of the commentary project by Elder and Johnnie Godwin, vice president for general publishing at the board, to ensure a smooth transition in the plans and production of "The New American Commentary." Dockery is writing the commentary volume on I and II Peter and Jude.

"Interest is growing in the commentary project, which is on schedule and has the full support of trustees and the administration," Elder said.

Dockery, a native of Alabama, received the bachelor of science degree from the University of Alabama-Birmingham; master of divinity degrees from Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Ind., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; master of arts degree from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth; and doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Texas-Arlington. He has done additional study at Drew University in Madison, N.J.

Prior to joining the faculty of Southern Seminary, Dockery was professor of theology and New Testament at Criswell College in Dallas for four years.

He also has been associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"The New American Commentary" project was approved by Sunday School Board trustees in February 1987. The writing team selected by the consulting editors and approved by Broadman officials includes three pastors, numerous educators and one layman. The text of the Bible will be printed in the commentary from the New International Version.

The commentary is being written and edited according to the doctrinal guidelines of the Baptist Faith and Message statement, and the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy serves as the operating definition of biblical inerrancy.

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WMU to coordinate
missionary housing

Baptist Press
6/6/90

N-WMU

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Housing arrangements for Southern Baptist foreign missionaries in the United States will be transferred from the Foreign Mission Board to the Woman's Missionary Union Sept. 1.

The change resulted from an arrangement between the board and the WMU that this function was one the WMU is ideally positioned to handle.

"Women of the WMUs have long been involved in the provision of housing, and often they are the ones who are responsible for the equipping of the houses and receiving the missionaries upon arrival," explained Kistie Patch, the board's missionary housing coordinator.

The board has maintained a list of missionary housing sponsors from throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, Patch said. "We serve as a resource to the missionaries and to those who wish to provide housing for missionaries. We work to get these two groups of people together," she said. In addition to furlough periods, housing is made available to missionaries during medical emergencies, when they have problems obtaining resident visas overseas or at other times.

Patch makes the lists available to missionaries, who contact sponsors directly to secure the housing.

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Effective Sept. 1, Barbara Yeager at WMU will be the new housing coordinator. She can be contacted at WMU, P.O. Box 830010, Birmingham, Ala. 35283-0010. Her phone number is 205-991-4021.

This responsibility will blend well with WMU's function of missions education, said Yeager. "We thought it would be a perfect avenue to further our own ministry here at WMU," she said.

The Foreign Mission Board has coordinated U.S. housing for missionaries since the early 1970s. Earlier, Southern Baptist sponsors and missionaries handled arrangements themselves.

Southern Baptist sponsors offering housing include individuals, local churches, church associations and state Baptist conventions. About 350 sponsors are registered with the board. Other Southern Baptists also make housing available on their own to missionaries.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Michael Chute, Asia correspondent for Baptist Press, wrote the following stories during and after a visit to Nepal in late May.

Nepal pledges religious freedom,
release of Christian prisoners

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press
6/6/90

F B - FMB

KATMANDU, Nepal (BP)--The government of Nepal has assured a visiting human rights delegation that religious freedom will prevail in the newly democratized kingdom.

The delegation, sponsored by Christian Solidarity International, also was told that Nepalese Christians imprisoned for promoting their faith soon would be released. Christian Solidarity, a worldwide organization, campaigns for religious freedom and works on behalf of people persecuted for religious beliefs.

Delegation member David Atkinson said the group came to Nepal "to reflect concern of Christians worldwide" for 29 Nepalese Christians in prison, including nine under the age of 18, and 33 others on bail pending appeal.

"Our further concern is the present constitution (of Nepal), which outlaws (religious) conversion," said Atkinson, a Roman Catholic and Conservative member of the British Parliament.

"We leave with assurance that prisoners will be released as soon as the judicial process allows and that the new constitution will permit religious freedom," Atkinson added. "We would not expect Nepalese Christians to suffer from a government so committed to human rights."

Atkinson was joined on the four-member team by Dorothy Taft, a Presbyterian and legislative assistant to U.S. Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J.; Steven Snyder, a Presbyterian pastor and the U.S. president of Christian Solidarity International; and Zak Patnaik, an Indian Baptist and advisor to the organization's international president in Zurich, Switzerland.

The delegation submitted a list of 29 Christians serving terms in Nepal prisons to Nepalese Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and to Nilambar Acharya, minister of law and justice. During their May 23-25 visit, the delegation members also relayed their concerns to Nepali Congress Party Supreme Leader Ganesh Man Singh.

"With the new democracy now firmly established in Nepal, religious freedom goes hand and hand with democracy," Snyder said during a press conference May 25. "We're interested in those sharing their faith -- whether Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or some other religion -- having the freedom to share that faith in Nepal freely and without interference."

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Chute, Baptist Press correspondent for Asia, is traveling in Nepal.

Freedom for Nepal Christians
rests on society, not government

By Michael Chute

Baptist Press
6/6/90

F FMB

KATMANDU, Nepal (BP)--Nepalese Christian leaders say societal pressures from the country's overwhelming Hindu population, not governmental laws, will determine future prospects for religious freedom in Nepal.

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Still, the Christian minority is exerting some influence through newly won freedoms. Mass demonstrations in April toppled King Birendra's absolute monarchy, resulting in a pro-democracy interim government in the world's only Hindu state.

The demonstrations ended a ban on political parties and established a multiparty system. The government promises free elections will be held after a committee frames the new constitution, probably within the next year.

Churches affiliated with the Nepal Christian Fellowship sponsored a mid-May rally in a downtown convention center in Katmandu, the nation's capital, to celebrate the new government's guarantee of religious freedom. The first rally of its kind ever staged in Nepal, the gathering attracted more than 4,000 Christian participants. The meeting followed an earlier Easter procession through the streets of Katmandu by about 400 Christians.

Addressing the Christian rally, Nepali Congress Party supreme leader Ganesh Man Singh emphasized the need for religious tolerance and a secular state in Nepal, reminding Christians that "free worship" is one of the party's four goals. He listed other goals as "free platform, free conscience and free association."

"Nepal must be a secular state," said Tirtha Thapa, Nepal Christian Fellowship general secretary, about Christian desires for Nepal's new government. "Also, all cases against Christians in the courts must be canceled and all Christians in prison must be released."

Persecution of Christians in Nepal grew in the 1980s as increased Christian efforts in the nation drew Hindu ire. Conviction for proselytizing meant a six-year prison term; religious conversion brought a one-year term.

Thapa noted that 85 cases, involving 250 Christians, are slated for litigation in Nepali courts. The Nepal Christian Fellowship took a list of 29 Christians held in Nepali prisons to the interim government, asking for their immediate release. Thapa and NCF President Mangal Man Maharjan met with Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai at the end of May to discuss the families of those killed in the demonstrations and people still in prison.

The Nepali Congress Party also passed a resolution during a special convention stating that all religious prisoners should be released.

"But it's been a month since they passed that resolution," said Loknath Manaen, secretary of the Bible Society in Nepal. "There's no reason, no grounds, no justification for holding those people a day longer. The time may come when we need to decide to take to the streets or some other means to petition the government" concerning religious prisoners.

In recent weeks the interim government has continued its message of religious tolerance towards people of all faiths. Besides Singh's speech to Christians, Prime Minister Bhattarai addressed similar celebrations by Muslims and Buddhists.

However, "We're not counting on the government to help us achieve our goals," Manaen stressed. "Our mandate as Christians is quite clear: we will continue our work regardless. Previously we had to jump through the window. Now the door is wide open."

Since Hindu leaders claim 95 percent of Nepal's nearly 19 million people are faithful to their religion, Christian leaders say Hindu society won't be changed by laws. They believe opposition to the church still will come from the Hindu community, which strongly opposes change. But under a new constitution supporting religious freedom, they point out, a person would not be imprisoned for changing religions.

Government guarantees of religious freedom have prompted debates of increasing intensity over the right to proselytize and the establishment of a secular state. Government officials say they believe constitutional changes expected within the next three months could settle the issues in favor of religious minorities.

But talk of guaranteed religious freedom has brought a backlash from Nepal's Hindu sector. Robert Karthak, pastor of the Gyaneshwar Christian church, noted that while some Nepalese political leaders sympathize with calls for religious freedom from Christians, Muslims and Buddhists, many Hindus oppose more freedom.

The Nepal Arya Samaj, a Hindu organization, has issued a statement saying Nepal should not become a secular state because that would run contrary to the religious sentiments of Nepal's majority.

"The (705 million) Hindus throughout the world consider Nepal the center of their faith, which is a matter of great pride for the Nepalese people," said the statement.

"The majority is on their (Hindu) side," Karthak admitted. "But (a Hindu backlash) wouldn't affect us much. The Lord, during 40 years, has looked after his people. The church has survived and grown, not only numerically but spiritually. Persecution has been a blessing in disguise.

"Throughout the past 40 years the church has been under pressure. It's against the (old) constitution to convert, and officially the church didn't exist. Now democracy has come and we're hoping human rights will be granted and we'll have full religious freedom in this country."

Bible society leader Manaen is not overly concerned about a Hindu backlash, either. "What's happening should not be mistaken as a Hindu attitude, but only a handful of people trying to maintain the old power base. It's been proven in a short time that Nepal is not the Hindu kingdom we thought it was. There's no going back for Nepal in religion or politics; going back to a Hindu kingdom concept is several steps backward. Thinking people won't allow that to happen."

Karthak expressed a different fear of some church leaders: that religious freedom will open Nepal to an onslaught of proselytizing efforts by religious cults. He pointed to the Children of God and Jehovah's Witnesses as examples of groups making inroads among Nepalese Christians. Because of this influx of cults, Karthak said, "We have a fear that when full freedom is granted, the status of the church will go down."

Before 1950 no known Christians lived in Nepal, according to Karthak and other Christian leaders. Karthak was part of the first group of Christians who came to Katmandu from Darjeeling, India, in the early 1950s. They started a church with about 15 Indian expatriates.

Today estimates on numbers of Christians vary, but most sources agree on about 50,000 Nepalese Christians. Most churches affiliate with the Nepal Christian Fellowship, which claims 90 churches and 800 preaching points throughout the country. Another 20 Assembly of God churches formed their own association. A small number of churches is not aligned with either group.

Church leaders find it increasingly difficult to instruct church members in the freewheeling environment democracy has brought to Nepal. "Some of the young people are so excited they want to go and preach," Karthak explained. "We haven't been given any recognition and some of our people think it's time to show the government and people that we're Christians and we're here."

But he thinks the church should "abide by God's time. God himself will guide us, and we feel he will give us recognition when the time comes."

Yet many Christians believe the time has come. They say the Easter street procession and open rally in Katmandu tested the waters. Nepal Christian Fellowship leaders are scheduling a national rally for Christmas, when they plan to fill the 60,000-seat National Stadium in Katmandu.

Other church leaders are asking their constituents to move slowly and not draw too much attention to the church by their actions. Some Nepali Christians also caution Christians outside Nepal to use restraint in future dealings in their country.

Nepalese critics of Christianity often have called the faith an American religion. Foreign Christians' willingness to spend missions money in Nepal could make the situation more difficult for the church, Karthak noted.

"American dollars have actually done a lot of harm," he said. "We don't need money; we need prayer. Fellowship in the gospel and prayer support are what we need most. We're like the children of Israel when they didn't have a king and everyone did his own thing, his own way. We really pray the Lord will give us a spirit of unity, a spirit of submission, or otherwise freedom will be misused."

Nepal Christian Fellowship churches will devote this year to training church members about proper expressions of democracy. They also will emphasize training in evangelism.

"In many places in Nepal, people have never even heard the gospel once," said NCF President Maharjan, who also is pastor of Patan Church. "Our plan is to at least once let everyone hear the gospel. For that goal, our church members need training in evangelism. In this time of the interim government, it's a good opportunity for us. When democratic elections are held, after that, we don't know."

Manaen predicted only a few years of religious freedom in Nepal. "Then the power will move again into the hands of a few people," he said. "A decade of harvest is what I see. We have to do what we can in a short amount of time."

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Baptists, United Mission unsure
about future work in Nepal

By Michael Chute

F-FMB Baptist Press
6/6/90

KATMANDU, Nepal (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in Nepal are unsure about future work in that country since the latest five-year agreement between the Nepalese government and the United Mission to Nepal expired May 26.

Southern Baptists' two missionary couples in Nepal work under the direction of the United Mission to Nepal, an interdenominational Christian mission that began work in Nepal in 1954 to help Nepalese in the areas of health, development and education. Today the United Mission coordinates the work of 382 missionaries sent by 38 evangelical Christian groups from 18 countries in Asia, Europe and North America.

The Southern Baptists are Wayne and Pat Thorpe and Robert and Mindy Watson. The Thorpes live in Tansen, where he, a Richmond, Va., native, is a physician at the United Mission's hospital and she, of Shelby, N.C., is a nutritionist and social worker. The Watsons, of Tyler, Texas, live in Katmandu, where he works as a lab technician at Patan Hospital and she is a church and home worker.

The United Mission's executive director, Edgar Metzler, said Nepal's interim government granted only a six-month extension of the mission's work at the end of May. Government officials assured the organization no problems exist relating to the mission's future work in Nepal, but added any agreement must be negotiated with the new government, since prior arrangements were forged under the former government of King Birendra. Metzler hopes a new agreement can be reached by July 1.

The agreement with the Nepalese government declares mission personnel "will not engage in any proselytizing and other activities outside the scope of their assigned work."

While avoiding "evangelistic" work, missionaries freely share their faith and expertise under the United Mission's constitution, Metzler said. The constitution states the mission's goal is "ministering to the needs of people in Nepal in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ, and to make Christ known by word and life."

The question for the United Mission always has been the meaning of "proselytizing," according to Metzler. With political changes sweeping Nepal and the prospects of religious freedom, the group's leaders wonder if the phrase could be deleted from a future working agreement.

"We've tried to determine what they (Nepalese) understand that term to mean," said Metzler, adding that Nepalese generally acknowledge that proselytizing "involves trying to convert someone by coercion or inducement. If that's what proselytizing means, we don't want to do that anyway."

In the United Mission's 36 years in Nepal, no affiliated missionary has been accused of proselytizing, Metzler said. "We are free to live our faith, worship, express our faith and witness to people. Of course, we've been very active in the Nepali church."

Besides the United Mission ministry, other Christian work in Nepal includes various types of medical work sponsored by the Leprosy Mission, Seventh-Day Adventists, the Lutheran World Federation, the Evangelical Alliance Mission and an interdenominational group called International Nepal Fellowship, the largest mission organization working in Nepal.

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Cherish salvation treasure,
Cothen charges graduates

By Debbie Moore

F-CC
(NBTS)

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Comparing God's treasure of salvation to humanity's treasure of the Hope Diamond, Joseph H. Cothen presented a charge to 238 candidates for graduation, the largest class in the 73-year history of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Cothen, New Orleans Seminary's vice president for academic affairs, first compared the two treasures in their uniqueness. The Hope Diamond "is so unique, it must always be protected. You could never carry it out into public." Salvation, however, can be given away and still possessed; it can never be lost, and can be found "wherever you go," he said.

Secondly, Cothen compared the two treasures in their value. While the Hope Diamond "was able to possess its owners instead of being possessed by them," salvation "enriches everyone it touches with no diminution of its own worth."

The Hope Diamond "is of tremendous value, but only as a curiosity and an archival collection." The eternal value of salvation, on the other hand, "is well known, while its temporal value remains for us to rediscover, every day of our lives."

"This treasure, God's treasure, in our earthen vessels will sustain us, for as you go out from this place into kingdom service, it assures you," he said. "You may be troubled on every side, but you won't be distressed; you have the treasure. You may be perplexed sometimes, but you'll never be in despair because you have the treasure. At times you may be persecuted, but you will never be forsaken because you have the treasure. They may cast you down, but they cannot destroy you; you have the treasure."

Thirdly, Cothen compared the two treasures in their beauty. The Hope Diamond "has a frightening mystique" in its beauty and required a fixed amount of time for the forces of nature in the heart of the earth "to compress raw carbon into the beautiful jewel." The length of time required to create the beauty of the Hope Diamond, however, "was not anything like as long as it took eternity to provide our treasure," which came "from the heart of God ... to bless the hearts of men."

Referring to II Corinthians 4:5-10, Cothen reminded graduates that "we have this treasure (of salvation) in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." Christians are salvation's "display case ... commissioned to show this treasure to a poverty-stricken world."

Cothen concluded: "This treasure, this marvelous message, we carry out of here today in clay pots as humble servants. But let me admonish you: Clean the vessel and keep it clean that bears the treasure. Never let there be anything in the vessel that detracts from the treasure."

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Baptist Men told success
is measured by obedience

By Jim Burton

N-CC
BKCO

Baptist Press
6/6/90

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Obedience to God should be measured in terms of experiencing God and not in numerical growth, said Henry Blackaby, director for prayer and spiritual awakening at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

God decides when a Christian has been obedient, Blackaby told 172 students and faculty at Baptist Men's University, a national training event sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission for elders in the Baptist Men and Baptist Young Men organizations. Obedience, Blackaby added will be measured against the commission to take the gospel to every person.

"The dimensions of experiencing God are open ended," said Blackaby. "God is infinite. You will never come to the end of the magnitude of what you can experience with God when you are obedient to him."

Blackaby discouraged participants from relying on methods in their ministry.

"The key is not a method," he said. "It is a relationship."

"Jesus said, 'I will build my church.' The best thing Southern Baptists can do today is let him. Jesus has never failed in an assignment God gave him."

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Blackaby challenged Baptist laymen to listen to God to determine where their ministry should be focused and issued a warning.

"As a child of God, don't ever look at what God is doing without expecting to radically adjust your life to what God is doing," he said.

James H. Smith, president of the Brotherhood Commission, told participants that the biblical basis of missions is founded upon the purpose of God to raise up a people in which he can manifest his presence.

"We are the determiners of destiny," said Smith.

Baptist Men and Baptist Young Men are church-based missions education programs that emphasize mission action. Smith told participants that mission action must be kept in perspective.

"Good works should be the fruit of faith and not the root of faith," he said.

With that perspective, Douglas Beggs, Brotherhood Commission adult division director, noted that mission action often is the key to spiritual ministry opportunities.

"Mission action gives the church the opportunity to move into the language of the heart," he said.

Twenty-three states and Canada were represented at Baptist Men's University, the second in a three-year cycle of national training events sponsored by the Brotherhood Commission. Held at Rhodes College, in Memphis, Tenn., Baptist Men's University follows Royal Ambassador University which was held last May. A national Brotherhood convocation is scheduled next May at Camp Linden in west Tennessee for training in disaster relief, associational Brotherhood work, adventure recreation and campcraft.

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Baptists send \$100,000
for Afghan refugee aid

Baptist Press
6/6/90

N-JMB

PESHAWAR, Pakistan (BP)--Southern Baptists sent \$100,000 in early June to aid about 3,000 Afghan refugee families facing critical food shortages.

The money will supply flour and oil to the refugees for two months. Sent by the Southern Baptist aid organization Cooperative Services International, the assistance will be distributed in cooperation with SERVE, an emergency relief agency.

The Afghan families live in refugee camps in northwestern Pakistan near the border with Afghanistan. They are among more than 65,000 refugees who flooded across the border last year after Afghan rebels laid siege to the Afghan city of Jalalabad.

Pakistan, already host to hundreds of thousands of refugees from the long war in Afghanistan, opened five additional camps to accommodate the new arrivals. Pakistani refugee officials called on volunteer relief agencies to provide food aid until long-term arrangements could be made.

No food remained by the end of May, a SERVE report said, and "the only hope the 65,000 refugees have of receiving food rations" in June is from volunteer agencies.

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Heather Vose dies
in Indiana hospital

Baptist Press
6/6/90

N-C (Ind.)

FORT WAYNE, Ind. (BP)--Heather Margaret Vose, wife of Baptist World Alliance President G. Noel Vose, died Tuesday, June 5, in a Fort Wayne, Ind., hospital.

She was stricken Sunday, June 3, with a cerebral hemorrhage while attending the second session of conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite World Conference.

A lecturer and author, she travelled with her husband during his five-year tenure as BWA president and was known to Baptists worldwide.

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She was born in Western Australia and was an author, research fellow and part-time lecturer at the University of Western Australia, where she earned bachelor's and doctor's degrees.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by a son, Stephen; a daughter, Valerie; and four grandchildren, all of Perth, Western Australia.

J. Ralph McIntyre, director of the BWA study/research and evangelism/education divisions, was to travel with Noel Vose to Australia.

The BWA has established a Heather Vose Memorial Fund.

Condolences for Mrs. Vose may be sent to BWA, 6733 Curran St., McClean, Va. 22101-6005 and to the Vose home, 17 Padbury Rd., Darlington, W.A., Australia.

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