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August 22, 1990

90-111

20 Southern Baptist workers  
evacuating Jordan, Yemen

By Art Toalston

*N. J. M. S.*

NICOSIA, Cyprus (BP)--Six Southern Baptist workers have evacuated Jordan and 14 in Yemen are making arrangements to evacuate as Middle East tensions continue to mount.

The workers from Jordan are the first Southern Baptist personnel to leave any of the countries of the Middle East since Iraq created a global crisis by invading Kuwait Aug. 2. They went to the island nation of Cyprus.

The deployment of U.S. troops to protect Saudi Arabia has stirred anti-American, anti-Saudi resentment and demonstrations in the region, especially in Jordan and Yemen.

Meanwhile, relatives of two Southern Baptist workers detained in Kuwait continue to receive reports from the U.S. State Department that the couple, Maurice and Laurie Graham, and their 13- and 10-year-old sons remain safe in the U.S. Embassy compound in Kuwait City. The Grahams are among some 3,000 Americans stranded in Kuwait.

Iraq has ordered foreign embassies in Kuwait to close by Aug. 24 and move their personnel to Baghdad, Iraq's capital. The United States and numerous other countries have dismissed the order.

The U.S. Embassy in Kuwait will remain open and U.S. diplomatic personnel will remain there to relate to "the legitimate government of Kuwait," a U.S. State Department spokesman told Baptist Press Aug. 22.

Whether to evacuate "has been a tough decision" for every worker in Jordan and Yemen, said Dale Thorne, who directs Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa from a base in Cyprus.

U.S. Embassy officials in Jordan and Yemen have advised Americans to leave, Thorne said. The highest-level advisory was issued in Yemen, he said. In each country, pro-Iraq public opinion is sizable.

Beyond the six Southern Baptist workers who have left Jordan, others there also may evacuate to Cyprus, Thorne said. Nine Southern Baptist workers in Yemen hope to continue working at a 70-bed Baptist hospital, one of the very few Christian ministries in the country.

In all, 19 workers have been in Jordan during the mounting crisis and 23 in Yemen.

"We hope it's temporary. We're buying round-trip tickets in faith that we can use them within three months," Thorne said. And in Yemen, the Baptist workers are obtaining exit and re-entry visas to allow them to return when they want to and not lose their work permits, he said.

For now, the evacuating Southern Baptist workers plan to reside in Cyprus, an island nation in the Mediterranean near Turkey. Cyprus also was the initial destination for 24 Southern Baptist workers who left Lebanon in 1987 after the United States suspended passport privileges for Americans there.

The workers assigned to Jordan and Yemen have mixed feelings about leaving, Thorne said. They "want to be there" to continue their ministries with Jordanian and Yemeni co-workers, he said, but are concerned for their safety and feeling frustrated at "being tied down" by having to stay inside or close to their homes.

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The first three families to evacuate Jordan are Jeff and Susan Vann of Hickory, Ky., and Sacramento, Ky., their two sons, ages 10 and 5, and a 7-year-old daughter, who left Aug. 17; Charles and Nancy Browning of Judsonia, Ark., and Lonoke, Ark., their three daughters, ages 14, 11 and 2, and two sons, ages 10 and 5, who left Aug. 19; and Gary and SuEllen DeBerry, both of Gadsden, Ala., and their 11-year-old daughter, who left Aug. 21.

Vann is a first-term worker based in the city of Irbid. Browning both works at a conference center for Jordanian Baptists and handles maintenance needs for Southern Baptist workers in the country. DeBerry oversees two Baptist bookstores in Amman, Jordan's capital, and one in the city of Zerka.

The first Southern Baptist worker scheduled to leave Yemen Aug. 23 or 24 is Judy Knight of Reidsville, N.C., along with her three sons, ages 11, 9 and 3. Her husband, Fletcher, a hospital maintenance worker from Madison, N.C., is one of the nine workers planning to remain in Yemen.

The others who hope to continue at the Yemen hospital are three doctors, two nurses, an administrator, a pharmacist and a lab technician.

The hospital, in the town of Jibla, was founded in 1968. Its staff has climbed to nearly 200, including Southern Baptist personnel, Yemenis and others from several countries.

A small demonstration was held around the hospital compound several days ago, Thorne said. The government, which always has assigned several soldiers to provide security at the hospital gate, increased its contingent to as many as 25 last week. Yemeni officials have assured Southern Baptist workers at the hospital that they are not regarded as "part of the American establishment that (demonstrators are) protesting against," Thorne said.

The operation of the hospital is being scaled down, Thorne said, because hospital workers from the Philippines, India and Egypt, including four doctors and a number of nurses, also are leaving Yemen.

Concerning the Grahams in Kuwait, Mrs. Graham's mother, Margaret Nuzum of Hutchinson, Kan., said the State Department telephoned her son Aug. 18 to report that "they were still in the embassy and the boys had kids to play with and Maurice was busy with people."

Previous messages relayed by the State Department concerning the Grahams have been equally brief. The Grahams have not been able to telephone relatives in the United States since the early morning hours of the Aug. 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

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Elevating missions to program  
status seen as coming strategy

By Sarah Zimmerman

N- NMB

Baptist Press  
8/11/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Elevating a church's mission work to the same status as education and music is the coming strategy for missions, churches with ministers of missions agree.

"Mission programs have been a stepchild of Southern Baptist churches for a long time. We plan our Sunday school, we plan our music, but we don't plan our missions," says Harvey Kneisel, minister of missions at First Baptist Church in Houston. "We've got to give the same support to missions as we do to Sunday school and music and the youth."

About 40 churches in Texas have missions directors in some phase, including some who are bivocational, says J.V. Thomas, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas project management department. "The missions director does the same thing for the mission program that an education director does for the education program. He updates the mission work to church program status."

However, ministers of missions approach their task in different ways.

Involving church members in missions is a key element of Ron Wells' job as minister of missions and discipleship at Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas. He says, "Discipleship in a vacuum is not discipleship. Without evangelism and missions, discipleship is impossible."

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Wells' emphasis is "getting God's people to use their gifts. All of our mission work is led by key lay people. Every time we start something new, there is someone who emerges as a leader who wouldn't have an interest anywhere else.

"Most of us have lived in isolation so long, we think our token giving will take care of the Great Commission," Wells says. He suggests that "every church ought to have hands-on projects in its Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria." Wells points out that the mission fields listed in Acts 1:8 are inclusive; Jesus did not intend Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth to be either/or options for missions.

Members of the Tyler church are involved in each of those areas, from sponsoring churches and social ministries locally to sending musical teams to home mission areas and building churches in Central and South America.

Kneisel says his primary responsibility is to "promote missions locally -- to make missions a reality." First Baptist Church of Houston has a missions committee with six subcommittees for specific ministries. The church has been a leader in starting Bible studies in apartment complexes and is becoming involved in foreign mission ventures.

Kneisel describes part of his job as equipping people to plant churches. "I am not a church planter, I'm the equipper. The people do the planting."

Thomas says about one-third of the new churches in Texas have been planted by the "handful of churches" with a person on staff to direct mission ministries.

Leading his church to plant other churches is the only responsibility of the minister of missions at Flamingo Road Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Steve Nerger began work Aug. 5 as the church's first minister of missions.

The church decided to employ a minister of missions because "this area is absolutely exploding, and our church is the only evangelical church of any kind in five miles any direction," says pastor Dan Southerland.

Southerland says 95 percent of people in Broward County, where his church is located, are unchurched. "Our goal is to start one fully constituted church per year for the next 10 years."

The church plans for each church start to be fed with 50 or 60 members of Flamingo Road Baptist Church, which averages 550 people in Sunday school.

The vision for a church's mission ministries must start with the pastor, Wells says. "You can't do it around him."

Having a minister of missions on staff is not an issue of money, Kneisel says. It can be done through volunteers or reassignment of staff responsibilities.

Flamingo Road Baptist Church pays about 60 percent of the minister of missions' salary, with the remainder coming from associational, state convention and Southern Baptist Home Mission Board funds.

"If Southern Baptists respond to the challenge of winning our world to Christ, the minister of missions will become as common as the minister of youth or minister of education," Kneisel says.

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Crime-ridden neighborhood claimed  
for Christ by Fort Worth church

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
8/22/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The corner of Tennessee and Bessie in east Fort Worth, Texas, is more than the meeting place for World Missionary Baptist Church, according to pastor Howard Caver. It is a place where miracles happen.

In a neighborhood known for drug dealing, prostitution and violent crime, World Missionary Baptist Church -- a mission of Harvey Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth -- is becoming known as a tiny spark of light in a sea of darkness.

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"Where there is a great deal of darkness, the light shines brighter," said Caver.

About 15 years ago, the neighborhood surrounding World Missionary Baptist Church was targeted for industrial development, according to Caver. As the city began redirecting more of its resources to other parts of town, families in the area that could afford to relocate did so, leaving behind the poor and elderly.

But when the Texas economy went into recession several years ago, plans for industrial development were postponed.

"That's when drug dealers targeted the neighborhood. Street people drifted into the area, and drug pushers began seeking safe haven here. For about the last four years, it has been seen as a free zone for drugs and prostitution," Caver said.

But for several years, World Missionary Baptist Church has worked to offset the moral deterioration of its neighborhood. Begun in 1981, the small congregation met in homes and in a YMCA building for about two years before moving into a building across the street from its present location.

With only about 20 members, the church started an extensive outreach program to its neighborhood, offering a food pantry for the hungry and low-cost medical and dental services for the needy.

After renting a building for five years, the congregation discovered one day that its meetinghouse had been sold. Members met at the pastor's home temporarily until they could buy their own building. But for the financially hard pressed congregation, the dream of building seemed illusory.

"The banks and savings and loans wouldn't even give us an application to turn us down," Caver recalled.

However, the community learned about World Missionary Baptist Church's need. Aware of the vital services the congregation was offering in its neighborhood, churches representing six denominations worked together to provide the necessary financing for the struggling church.

"God cut deals with people who wanted to give," Caver said, recalling countless times when lumber yards, building contractors and other businesses offered the church goods and services at drastically reduced prices.

With the help of the Texas Baptist Men Retiree Builders, Tarrant Baptist Association and many volunteers from other churches, World Missionary Baptist Church was able to move into its new building in 1988.

"This place is a corner of miracles. God gave a small congregation the assurance that he still performs miracles," Caver said.

Although financial needs continue to arise, God always provides, the pastor said. Often, the money comes from unexpected sources, and usually the amount received is exactly the amount needed.

"The exactness of the Lord demonstrates it is his doing, not ours. People who live constantly in a financial bind need a financial confirmation of God's power," Caver said.

"We've always asked God for a vision bigger than us and our resources. Then when it becomes a reality, God gets the glory. We don't."

The current compelling vision of World Missionary Baptist Church is to bring the unemployed black men in the neighborhood "away from the fires" and "out from under the trees."

"I believe that young black men are the greatest target of Satan," Caver said. "Most in our area are high school drop-outs. They have no bootstraps with which to pull themselves up."

"Look around in the winter and you'll see them huddled around a barrel where they've started a fire. They'll stand there eight hours a day drinking. Then in the summer, they'll be hanging out under the trees in the yards, drinking and doing drugs."

To combat the problem, World Missionary Baptist Church offers reading classes for adult illiterates and one-to-one tutorial help for struggling young people who are still in school.

The church continues its food pantry, through which about 60,000 baskets of groceries have been given to the needy.

Recently, the congregation also placed its first resident in low cost housing, and in the future Caver hopes the church can do more to locate jobs for willing workers.

"I would like to work with Christian businessmen to let us begin an employment agency. Even those individuals who haven't proven themselves deserve an opportunity. I would urge the Christian employers to take a chance on these people, just the way that Jesus takes a chance on all of us," he said.

Caver emphasizes that all of the outreach ministries of the church exist for one purpose -- to evangelize the lost and bring them to faith in Jesus Christ.

In the last three years, Sunday school attendance has more than doubled, worship service attendance has tripled, and a number of former drug addicts and alcoholics have come "out from under the trees" and into the church.

"Ultimately, we want to see missionaries spring from this ministry here. That's the reason for our name -- World Missionary," he said.

"For now, we give through the Cooperative Program and the offerings to support missionaries, but our primary mission field is right here. We can go right down the street to find the lost."