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August 29, 1990

90-114

Prayer services held in Kuwait;
water, food run low in embassy

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--In Iraq-controlled Kuwait, prayer services are being held at the embattled U.S. Embassy, which the State Department admits has water and food only "sufficient for several days."

"We are having prayer services each night," Southern Baptist worker Maurice Graham reported in a message via the embassy's communications link with the State Department Aug. 27.

Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's reported promise Aug. 28 to free captive American women and children has not been confirmed by the State Department, a spokesman said. At present, the promise exists only in news reports, not in diplomatic channels, he said.

And it is uncertain whether Hussein's promise would apply only to Americans detained in Iraq or also those in Kuwait, the oil-producing country seized by Iraqi troops in the early morning hours of Aug. 2.

Graham, of Shelbyville, Tenn.; his wife, Laurie, of Hutchinson, Kan.; and their 13- and 10-year-old sons are among an undisclosed number of Americans who took refuge at the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion.

"We are fine," Graham said in his brief, most recent cable to the Richmond-based Foreign Mission Board and to relatives in Tennessee. "Spirits are good and our faith is strong."

A State Department spokesman said Aug. 29 that "it's hard for us to be exact" about water and food supplies still on hand at the embassy compound in Kuwait. He confirmed news reports that such supplies will last only a few more days.

After that, the spokesman only would say, "We'll see what happens."

Iraqi forces in Kuwait cut off water and electricity and blocked entry and exit at the embassy compound after the United States refused to obey an Iraqi order to close the embassy Aug. 24. The same actions were taken against other countries' embassies that remained open. A generator at the U.S. Embassy has since provided electricity to the compound.

At the helm of the embassy is Ambassador W. Nathaniel Howell, who was a member of Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, Va., as a youth and later was active in the Baptist Student Union during his studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. He is leading a skeletal staff of about 10 officials who remained in Kuwait after Iraq permitted non-essential U.S. personnel and dependents of diplomatic officials to leave Kuwait Aug. 23.

In Cyprus, meanwhile, 12 Southern Baptist workers from Yemen and 10 of their children arrived safely at the city of Larnaca Aug. 27.

The evacuees from Yemen join nine Southern Baptist workers who came to Cyprus from Jordan several days earlier. Pro-Iraq, anti-American demonstrations and sentiments, coupled with advisories from U.S. diplomatic officials in each country, spurred the workers to leave Yemen and Jordan as the international crisis festers. Iraq added Kuwait as one of its provinces Aug. 27, while the United States continues its military buildup in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East.

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Ten Southern Baptist workers are still in Yemen to continue the operation of a Baptist hospital in a region where only three hospitals are available to some 2 million people. Nine other Southern Baptist workers remain in Jordan. They are providing shelter to some of the thousands of refugees from Iraq and Kuwait who have flooded Jordan. One worker also is continuing as an administrator at one of the two Baptist schools in Jordan.

Hugh Provost, chairman of Southern Baptist workers in Yemen, said a decision for a contingent to leave the country was made Aug. 19 after the U.S. Embassy said it might be forced to close, and some Yemenis had begun prodding the workers about the U.S.-led blockade of Iraq, asking why America was "starving babies in Iraq."

Provost said Yemeni co-workers were supportive of the Baptist workers' decision to leave, although some didn't understand why the Baptists had reached the decision, Provost said.

"Everybody was quite happy we were only going to Cyprus," Provost said. "That's not as final as going to the United States."

Among Baptist workers themselves, Provost said, "Everybody feels that it's not final, that we're not leaving Yemen and never coming back." But none of them sees a quick solution to the Middle East crisis, he said.

The hospital's operation has been scaled down from a 70-bed capacity to 25 beds, Provost said. Yemen's Ministry of Health has offered to provide two or more doctors and five or more nurses while the Americans are away, and the offer has been accepted, Provost said.

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2,500 accept Christ during
campaign in Venezuela

By Mary E. Spiedel

F-FMB

Baptist Press
8/29/90

MARACAIBO, Venezuela (BP)--They received more than twice what they prayed for.

Baptist leaders in Maracaibo, Venezuela, had prayed that 1,000 people would become Christians during a partnership evangelism project with Southern Baptist volunteers. When the campaign ended Aug. 26, more than 2,500 people had accepted Christ as Savior.

But that wasn't the only answered prayer.

Two of those 2,500 people had been praying for someone to help them with spiritual questions.

One was a young woman who was washing clothes outdoors when Southern Baptist volunteer Gary Longenecker visited her neighborhood. Speaking through an interpreter, Longenecker told her about Christ. The woman said she had been reading the Bible for several years but did not understand it.

"This morning I prayed that God would send someone to help me understand," the woman told Longenecker, pastor of First Baptist Church in House Springs, Mo. "God sent you to help me understand. Thank you for coming," she said.

Volunteer Kendall Hamilton, minister of children/family at Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., had a similar experience. He and a Venezuelan Baptist shared their faith with an elderly man in his home.

"I've been waiting five days for someone to come tell me about Jesus," the man said. "I prayed because I knew I needed something. You are my answer to prayer."

Longenecker and Hamilton were among 81 volunteers from Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma who helped lead evangelistic services Aug. 12-19 in 30 Baptist churches and missions in the Maracaibo area. Almost half the volunteers were students and faculty from Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.

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Venezuelan Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries followed up the services with a citywide crusade Aug. 19-26 in a local baseball stadium. John Click, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church of Wichita, Kan., was the evangelist.

The project was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the Wellspring Foundation in Prairie Village, Kan.

Wellspring was begun by Southern Baptist layman Harold Finch and his wife, Peggy, using funds from the sale of a business. Wellspring enables volunteers who have never been on the mission field to experience foreign missions. "Our principal objective is to help others catch the excitement of the Great Commission," said Finch, volunteer coordinator for the Venezuela trip.

Volunteers reported many of their own prayers answered. For volunteer Deanna Hamilton of Oklahoma City, Okla., participating in the campaign itself answered her prayer. She had been praying for the opportunity to visit Venezuela, where she grew up the daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries Jim and Bobbie West. Mrs. Hamilton, who moved away from Venezuela in 1981, translated for her husband, Kendell, who preached during the crusades.

Mrs. Hamilton recalled telling an elderly woman on the street about her Christian faith. After only about 10 minutes of conversation, the woman said she wanted to become a Christian. "I could see the change in her eyes when she accepted Christ," Mrs. Hamilton said. "She was just so open and ready."

Volunteer Larry Hodges also saw the fruits of his prayers. Hodges, professor of theology at Southwest Baptist University, had studied several languages but never Spanish. He prayed for help in picking up Spanish so that he could speak directly with Venezuelans. By week's end, Hodges was able to carry on limited conversation in Spanish.

Hodges led a volunteer team that worked with Churuguara Baptist Church, about 350 miles from Maracaibo. Church members had asked to participate in the Maracaibo campaign, although the church is some six hours from Maracaibo. Hodges preached under a circus-sized tent set up near Churuguara's town plaza.

"In my 25 years of full-time ministry I've never had a more productive or challenging spiritual experience," said Hodges.

With a Venezuelan Baptist pastor, Hodges told several city officials about his faith. When they called on the head of municipal services, the official was busy handling a problem with the town's water system. The Baptists said they would return later.

But the official insisted they stay. He accepted Christ in an office full of people with typewriters clanging in the background, Hodges said.

After the trip, "I realized that God had won more people to the Lord through me in one week than in several years of active ministry (at home)," said Hodges. "That challenged me to come back and to say, 'Lord, when you give me an opportunity, even if it's just for five minutes, help me to share that which is most precious to my life -- your Lordship,'" said Hodges.

For volunteer Mario Llano, a senior tennis star at Southwest Baptist University, the trip provided something he hadn't prayed for.

Llano, from Medellin, Colombia, had volunteered to go on the trip as an interpreter. A new Christian, he thought he would help American volunteers by translating for such matters as hotel services and transportation.

But during his first night in Venezuela, he translated for a guest evangelist. After the service, he was asked to pray with some Venezuelans who wanted to become Christians. "I'd never done that before ...," said Llano.

But after that first night, "I just wanted to do more and more. I was hungry for it," he said.

In fact, Llano spent most of his days and nights telling others how to become a Christian. Some nights he said he stayed out long after midnight to talk with Venezuelan young people who gathered outdoors to socialize.

"The trip changed my life," said Llano. "I saw clearly God was with me. There was no way I could say or do everything I said or did by myself."

Volunteer coordinator Harold Finch said he saw the results of earlier volunteer projects. In 1985 he had visited several new Baptist missions in Maracaibo. Now, many of them are churches with several missions of their own.

One is Capernaum Baptist Church, which began in a home with about 12 people. During a 1985 volunteer project, a Southern Baptist from Kansas helped the church put up a large red and white tent for a meeting place.

But during this summer's trip, Finch preached at Capernaum in the church's new building. Though still under construction, the building will eventually house up to 1,000 people. Members have built the structure with the help of Southern Baptist volunteers.

"In that five-year span, I've seen the real multiplication that takes place during one of these short crusades," said Finch. And five years from now, he predicts, "I'm sure the missions we were in this time will be churches with missions of their own."

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SBTS fund

By Marv Knox

N-CG (K.Y.)

Baptist Press
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An independent non-profit foundation has been established to receive funds to support Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

Alumni and Friends of Theological Education Inc. was incorporated in Kentucky Aug. 21 by H. Stephen Shoemaker, pastor of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville.

According to the foundation's articles of incorporation, its purpose is to advance and promote "all branches of learning, knowledge, research and investigation whatsoever in the field of religious education"; establish endowments, scholarships and other funds "for the use and benefit of" Southern Seminary and its students; and "to encourage, foster, promote and implement the continuous education and activity of friends and alumni" of the seminary.

The foundation provides a way for alumni and friends to support Southern Seminary, even though they not agree with the new Conservative majority of the school's trustees, Shoemaker said.

"There are people afraid to give to a Southern Baptist agency like Southern Baptist Seminary who might give money to the institution if that money would not be controlled by people hostile to the heritage of the institution," he explained. "My major motive for the establishment of this fund is to provide a means by which people can continue to give freely and in good conscience to the Southern Baptist causes they love."

The foundation's articles of incorporation stipulate that gifts will be considered endowment unless otherwise noted and that the principal of the endowment will not be spent.

The articles also note that if three-fourths of the foundation's directors conclude that Southern Seminary "no longer fulfills its mission in a manner consistent with the heritage of the institution during the first...125 years of its history, the directors may order that the benefits...be diverted to another educational institution--Southern Baptist entity, whether college, Southern Baptist Convention seminary or Southern Baptist-sponsored seminary--whose mission statement provides for the training of ministers for the congregations and convention entities of the SBC and the various Baptist state conventions."

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As an example of how the fund might be used, Shoemaker noted it could endow a professorship for "a kind of teaching the administration would like but that the trustees might not want to fund" with the seminary endowments and funds they control.

"It also gives the president some leverage to say, 'I am receiving from a source outside....I've got to be responsive to more than one constituency,'" Shoemaker added.

"There is some psychological satisfaction in knowing the gift is going to Southern without going through trustee hands and psychological assurance that the money never would be used for purposes with which the donor does not agree."

The foundation is to be directed by a self-perpetuating board of directors, composed of Southern Seminary alumni and friends. A four-member incorporating board will select the first ongoing board and develop bylaws in the first year, Shoemaker reported.

In addition to Shoemaker, the other members of the incorporating board are John H. Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.; Herbert C. Gabhart, chancellor and former president of Belmont College, a Baptist school in Nashville; and Jeffrey G. Roberts, an investment counselor and member Crescent Hill Church in Louisville, Ky.

The foundation was reviewed by the officers of the seminary's national alumni association and has their endorsement, Shoemaker said.

The foundation also will receive cooperation from Southern's development office, said Thomas Mabe, the school's vice president for development.

"Ideally, we would have it as it always has been--people giving through regular channels to the seminary," Mabe said. "Some people have indicated they cannot give through the regular channels.

"We would encourage them to give in this means, if they wish. Otherwise, we would not receive the money."

He added: "We see this as just another channel of giving to Southern Seminary. Some give through the Kentucky Baptist Foundation and other state foundations."

Noted Shoemaker: "We don't know whether this will be a big help or a little help, but we have brought it into being to help Southern Seminary.

"This may be a model for all SBC agencies and institutions, so they can receive money from people who would feel skittish otherwise."

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Southwestern faculty affirms
colleague Leon McBeth, book

By Scott Collins

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Calling the decision not to publish a book by Leon McBeth an "arbitrary act of censorship," the faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth voted unanimously to affirm the book's author and encouraged publication of the manuscript.

The seminary professors meeting for their annual retreat Aug. 24, greeted McBeth, professor of church history at Southwestern Seminary, with a sustained applause as a show of support for McBeth and the embattled book.

McBeth's book, written for the centennial of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, became an issue of controversy when trustees at the board voted to destroy all copies of the manuscript, except one which will remain in the board's archives in Nashville.

McBeth, who has taught at Southwestern Seminary for 30 years, wrote the book at the request of the Sunday School Board. But board trustees voted Aug. 15 to scrap the manuscript, which was in the late editing stages. Trustees said McBeth was unbalanced in chronicling conservative confrontations at the board over the past decade.

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The resolution of affirmation for McBeth and the book reads in part, "We confess that we fail to understand this arbitrary act of censorship, which we utterly deplore. Therefore, we call upon the trustees of the Sunday School Board to reconsider their action and encourage the board to proceed with the publication of Dr. McBeth's manuscript as soon as possible."

The resolution states that Baptists should "be able to judge for themselves the merits of this work."

McBeth's colleagues on the seminary faculty referred to him as "a competent church historian. We hold Dr. McBeth in the highest esteem, both as a scholar and colleague. His ability as a perceptive Baptist historian and his superb writing style are well known," the resolution states.

It further states that McBeth's "commitment to the fundamentals of the faith as Southern Baptists have formulated them in the Baptist Faith and Message is unquestionable."

McBeth said he is "humbled and grateful for the affirmation of my colleagues who have known me and my work for 30 years."

McBeth, who said he has received requests from three different publishers to publish the book, said he is uncertain of the manuscript's future. "I hope the (Sunday School Board) trustees would reconsider (the decision)."

McBeth said he does not know the status of the book, but he expressed confidence it will some day be available to Southern Baptists. "I hope and believe that this manuscript will some day come to light," he said. "This is a story which can encourage and help our people. It is a thrilling story that deserves to be told."

Admitting the book is "not perfect," McBeth added, "Nothing I have written is beyond critique, correction and improvement. I have never claimed this manuscript is perfect. I do not believe, however, that it is slanted or unbalanced."

The book is "precisely the kind of book I was asked to write," McBeth said. "It is an interpretative history."

The 59-year-old professor said he does not anticipate any legal action over the rights to the manuscript. "I could never see myself in an adversarial role against the Sunday School Board," he said.

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Baptist diversity evident
at Sunday school conference

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
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N-553

GLORIETA, N.M.(BP) -- The sounds of "Lily of the Valley" being sung in Vietnamese could be heard from one room while three people in the hallway exchanged greetings in Spanish.

Pastors and Sunday school general officers from Korean Southern Baptist churches gathered in another room.

More than 50 pastors and other leaders from churches with fewer than 50 enrolled in Sunday school attended a conference designed especially for their situations.

The annual Small Sunday School Leadership Conference Aug. 20-24 drew a record 1,307 participants from a multiplicity of language and culture groups as well as Sunday school leaders from predominantly white churches, most with a membership of 300 or less.

Conferences were conducted in Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. Blacks and American Indians also could choose specialized sessions.

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"We have one nationality here, American. We have a lot of ethnic heritage," said Bill Banks, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's special ministries department which works closely in conference planning with the Sunday school division, sponsor of the week.

He said participants from all groups have in common the size of their church, the fact that most are led by a one-person staff and many pastors are bivocational.

Specialized training and the opportunity for fellowship with other Southern Baptists drew 89 people from the Montana and Dakota Southern Baptist fellowships where the feeling of isolation is a common problem.

Stephen Jones, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Brookings, S.D., said he gained practical ideas to implement in his Sunday school which has an enrollment of 62.

"I learned the importance of stating a specific purpose of Sunday school and then putting together tasks to achieve the purpose," said Jones.

Beverly Sonnier, a Sunday school teacher at Kennesaw Avenue Baptist Church in Atlanta, attended black church development "leadership conferences.

"The biggest thing I've learned is G-O-S-S, growth-oriented Sunday school," said Sonnier.

Leon Postoak, director of missions for the Muscogee-Seminole-Wichita Baptist Association, led conferences for American Indian general officers.

"In a conference like this, people are searching for ideas to meet needs in their areas. People in the conference are able to help each other with ideas," he said.

For example, because children generally are not included in American Indian worship services, several came looking for ideas about starting a children's church.

Training in Sunday school work applied to the specific needs of culture groups was cited by several.

Anne Moy, a Sunday school specialist from Olney, Md., said most Chinese Southern Baptist churches have traditionally given a stronger emphasis to growth through the worship service rather than through the Sunday school.

Moy said specialized conferences for Chinese general officers could deal with the organization and development of the Sunday school at a level to meet the needs of participants.

Chang Sun Moon, pastor of Tacoma Korean First Baptist Church of Tacoma, Wash., led sessions for Korean general officers.

"In this conference, we can apply the principles of Sunday school to the Korean culture," he said.

Concepcion Padilla, consultant in the language section of the Sunday School Board's special ministries department, said Hispanics are drawn to the conference "because they know Bible study methods will be interpreted to them in a way that will fit their culture."

Harry Piland, director of the board's Sunday school division, said the conference, first held at Glorieta in 1975, has grown from 250 participants the first year.

He said the Sunday school division, in cooperation with the special ministries department, plans to give increased effort toward promoting attendance at the conference.

"The possibilities are certainly here to expand this conference even beyond the current language and culture groups," said Piland.

Growth principles
need flexibility

By Linda Lawson

F-SSB

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP) -- Southern Baptist church growth principles work best when applied with flexibility, Noble Ford preaches and teaches.

A former pastor, Ford works as a church growth consultant with the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and the Home Mission Board as well as individual churches.

He attended the Small Sunday School Leadership Conference Aug. 20-24 at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center.

Ford emphasizes church growth through basic Bible study -- Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, Backyard Bible Clubs, Outreach Bible Study and other methods. This process for growing churches ran counter to traditional black church emphases on reaching people through worship in the late 1970s when Ford first became involved in church growth.

"Sunday school is the pool you draw from to develop the church. Before you can reach out, you must develop a base," said Ford, who in seven years led Prospect Baptist Church of Pontiac, Mich., to grow from seven members to more than 250. He left that congregation earlier this year to give his full time to helping churches grow.

Before Ford begins working with a church, he surveys the community to determine needs. Then he studies the organizational structure of the church.

Ford works with the pastor and the congregation to identify and develop strategies, goals, a structure and a training plan to accommodate the growth.

"The principles of growth don't have any pigmentation," he laughed.

Whether working with a black, white or multiethnic congregation, Ford emphasizes a four-step process.

"First, you agonize. That's prayer," said Ford. "Then you strategize. That's planning. Then you organize and implement.

"The reason I became a Southern Baptist," Ford explained, "was because of the Christian education program and the denomination's support of missions. The Southern Baptist program is a smorgasbord, "and you choose whatever you can use at the time to meet the needs of your community."

Ford, who has helped to develop and implement a five-year growth training plan in Michigan, believes the potential for growth among Southern Baptist churches is unlimited.

"We need to go back to the drawing board and rethink some of our strategies to build in flexibility," he said. "We don't live in a black society or a white society. We live in a pluralistic society."

With constant population shifts, a neighborhood "that is black today could be Anglo tomorrow. What is Anglo today could be Asian tomorrow. We have to look at the whole body of Christ in kingdom building."

Ford envisions a future that includes not only more multiethnic Southern Baptist churches but also churches of one culture group sponsoring missions of other groups.

"The biggest drawback is not resistance to reaching other groups but that one group does not know how to put together an organization and plan for reaching another group," said Ford.

"If our denomination is going to impact communities, our nation and even the world, it must begin with the local church."

The Small Sunday School Leadership Conference was sponsored by the Sunday School Board's Sunday school division in cooperation with the special ministries department.

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BP photo will be mailed separately to Baptist state paper editors.

Michael Whitehead nominated
for CLC Washington post

By Louis Moore

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NASHVILLE (BP) -- Michael K. Whitehead, a Kansas City, Mo., lawyer and deacon at First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo., will be nominated as General Counsel and Director of Christian Citizenship and Religious Liberty Concerns of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

If approved by the Christian Life Commission's trustees at their meeting Sept. 10-13 in Nashville, Whitehead will join the CLC's Washington, D.C., staff Oct. 1. He will succeed Larry Braidfoot, who resigned from the CLC staff in May to accept a position as academic vice president at William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Miss.

Whitehead, 40, will specialize in religious liberty and Christian citizenship issues. Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans in June approved changes in the CLC's program statement adding religious liberty as an assignment in addition to Christian ethics, social concerns and public policy.

In 1980, Whitehead and his law partner, Jim Smart, handled an equal-access case before the U.S. Supreme Court. That case, known as Widmar vs. Vincent, involved the right of Christian students to hold Bible studies and prayer meetings in the student union at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. The court ruled in the students' favor. That case is considered a pivotal decision leading to the 1990 Mergens case. In the Mergens case, the court ruled that the equal-access principle of Widmar applies to public high schools as well as colleges.

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Missouri at Columbia, Whitehead received his law degree in 1975 from the University of Missouri Law School. He has practiced law in Kansas City since 1978. He is with the law firm of Crews, Smart, Whitehead & Waits. From 1975 to 1978 he was a captain in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, where he prosecuted criminal cases.

He was converted and baptized at age 10 in First Baptist Church, Independence, Mo. Whitehead has served in a number of lay positions at First Baptist Church, Raytown, Mo., including chairman of deacon's in 1988-89. First Baptist Church currently gives 15.3 percent of its contributions to the Cooperative Program unified budget and leads the state of Missouri in Cooperative Program giving by a church. The church also has been among leaders in baptisms in Missouri Baptist churches.

His other affiliations include the Kansas City chapter of Lawyers for Life, the Washington, D.C.-based Christian Legal Society, the Heart of America Christian Justice Center in Kansas City, and the Kansas City chapter of Coalition Against Pornography. He and his wife, Janet, have three children.

"We feel Mike is God's man for this job," said CLC Executive Director Richard Land. "The CLC's Executive Committee and I look forward to the rest of the commissioners having the opportunity to meet and interview Mike. We are confident they will feel, as we do, that he is God's man, in God's place in God's time."

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"Read through the Bible"
session held at NOBTS

By Debbie Moore

Baptist Press
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NEW ORLEANS -- Fifty-five members of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary faculty, staff, and student body recently participated in a three-day, four-night vigil to read the Bible through nonstop in the seminary's Roland Q. Leavell Chapel.

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Starting at 9:45 a.m. Wednesday, August 22, attendees, beginning with New Orleans Seminary President Dr. Landrum P. Leavell II, took turns standing behind the chapel pulpit to read through a New American Standard Bible. The Bible, containing the signature of each participant, was left on the pulpit at the end of the event, 7:17 a.m. Sunday, August 26.

Seminary family members who took part in the session experienced a range of emotions as they listened to the Bible being read straight through, said Becky Brown, staff member from Natchitoches, La. "There were many times when the reader and everyone listening broke into tears," she said, "especially during the recitation of Christ death.

Dr. Leavell started the seminary's first chapel service of the new school year by recounting the Bible-reading experience and by reading the last chapter of the book of Revelation.

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Debbie Moore is the director of the Office of Public Relations at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Retiree builders anticipate
another record-breaking year

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
8/29/90

DALLAS (BP)--Texas Baptist Men Retiree Builders anticipate another record-breaking year as they look forward to completing at least 36 church buildings in 1990 "for the glory of God."

With three projects underway in Texas and one in Oklahoma by mid-August, the tireless retirees already have completed 26 church construction jobs this year, according to their founder, Olen Miles of Austin, Texas.

The volunteer group has grown from 12 couples in 1979 to more than 200 couples currently. The average age of a builder is about 70, but 84-year-old Miles notes that a few early retirees in their early 50s bring that number down.

In addition to the church building teams, the retirees also have an active group of TBM Retiree Camp Builders, and they have inspired other state conventions to begin similar ministries.

Wherever the retirees work, they display a sign stating, "This Building Being Built for the Glory and Honor of God by the Texas Baptist Men."

With labor supplied by the retirees and tools provided by Texas Baptists through their gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions, churches throughout the state acquire new facilities they otherwise could not afford.

At a typical church building site, as the retired men hammer and saw, their wives do door-to-door, evangelistic visitation and home Bible studies.

Providing their own lodging in trailers parked at or near each construction site, the TBM Retiree Builders ask only two things of any church they serve: a home-cooked meal at noon and the opportunity to lead a revival in each newly completed building.

Working one hot August day at Cunningham Baptist Church, Red River Valley Association in northeast Texas, Miles surveyed the work site and reflected on the dedication of the volunteers.

"These people worked hard all their lives. They don't have to do this, but they're out here at 7 o'clock in the morning hard at work," said Miles.

"There's no way you could pay them to do this. They're doing it for Jesus."

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