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September 5, 1990

Parks, other leaders appeal
for dialogue and CP support

By C. Lacy Thompson

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks has responded to the recent meeting of moderates in Atlanta with a plea for dialogue and support of the Cooperative Program giving plan.

Parks and FMB trustee first vice chairman Morris Mills issued an Aug. 29 open letter that affirms, "The cooperative way is still the best way."

The letter was response to the gathering of 3,000 moderates last month to discuss fellowship and alternate funding possibilities. The group established an interim organization to allow churches and individuals to designate funds outside the Cooperative Program. The group also elected a steering committee to develop plans for a permanent funding alternative and for fellowship organization. Leaders of the Atlanta meeting insisted the group was focusing on renewal, not a new convention. They also voiced a commitment to support Southern Baptist missionaries and missions efforts.

Parks and others from the board attended the Atlanta meeting as observers. Just days after the gathering, the two board leaders issued their open letter.

The letter praised the Southern Baptist combination of the Cooperative Program and mission offerings as "the most effective way any group has yet found to jointly sponsor missions and other commonly agreed upon causes. It is a system built on trust and a commitment to financially support together a witness and ministry beyond what each church could do singly."

Parks and Mills said they were gratified by the expressed commitment by Atlanta participants to support foreign missions. But they added: "It was distressing that the vast majority seemed to feel that distrust and alienation made it impossible to continue that support through the channels of the Cooperative Program as it now exists. Many Southern Baptists are feeling grief, but it would be a great tragedy for Southern Baptists to revert to an independent church approach for supporting missions and other causes of common concern. It would be highly regrettable for an alternate funding system to be implemented."

The open letter concludes: "For the sake of this lost world, we would call on the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention and the leadership of this (Atlanta) group to try one more time to find a way to restore trust and join in support of our agreed upon causes through a single Cooperative Program."

SBC President Morris Chapman of Wichita Falls, Texas, called the Atlanta meeting "unfortunate" and said it indicated moderates "have now made it clear they have no desire to cooperate with mainstream Southern Baptists."

Chapman said the alternative funding plan could require some initial budget adjustments by convention entities. "But in the longterm, I believe Southern Baptists will respond overwhelmingly in giving through the Cooperative Program to support our missionary efforts. I think the Cooperative Program is woven in the fabric of Southern Baptists and action taken by moderates in Atlanta will not shred that fabric. Southern Baptists are a resilient people, and we will -- as a convention -- come through this time."

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Chapman suggested the meeting "set the wheels in motion" for moderates to withdraw from the convention. "First, over the years they've moved from conservative theology. Now they're moving away from cooperative methodology. And these are the two great traditions of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"(The prospects of a new denomination) appears inevitable as long as they maintain the intensity and severity of spirit expressed by this (Atlanta) action," Chapman added. "(But) Whatever they may do, I am comforted that the larger family of Southern Baptists will stay bonded together by conviction and cooperation."

Chapman said he did not know how productive dialogue of convention and Atlanta leaders would be but noted he has voiced his willingness "to meet with any person at any place who wants to share their heart-felt convictions."

However, he reiterated earlier statements that the impetus for such dialogue lies with moderates, who he said have remained resistant to conservative theology and leadership.

Chapman stressed keeping the recent meeting in perspective. "Southern Baptists must remember we have 37,000 churches, and by far most of those churches were not in attendance in Atlanta," he said. "And there's no way to immediately gauge the results of this meeting due to the fact that those attending will have to go back to their churches, and the individual churches will have to make those decisions.

"And I just believe the larger body of Southern Baptists is going to find it very difficult to be uncooperative," Chapman said. "I think Southern Baptists will be reminded that our resources are in heaven and God will provide for our needs in funding missions around the world. Historically, Southern Baptists always have been steadfast in doctrine, stouthearted in spirit, courageous in convictions and faithful in fellowship.

"I do not believe that will change."

Daniel Vestal, chairman of the Atlanta group's steering committee, noted he has been "dialoguing for 12 years" in an effort to promote reconciliation. "But there can't be reconciliation without a willingness to share in decision making," he said.

Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, disagreed that the impetus for dialogue lies with moderates. "We have no power. We are disenfranchised. We have nothing. We have no leverage. We have no way to compel anybody to do anything. So what we have done is choose as free Baptists to voluntarily associate ourselves together in good will for the sake of missions and evangelism.

"I don't wish ill to those in control (of the convention)," Vestal added. "But they don't want us. They want our money, but they don't want our participation. So we have no recourse but to seek ways to participate in the service of Christ.

"They've been saying for 12 years that people like us don't have a place. We're still not leaving, but we are going to try to get on with the work of the kingdom."

Vestal emphasized the Cooperative Program means of funding Southern Baptist causes depends on shared decision making. "Until those in control of the convention are willing to allow that to happen, I don't think they can expect people to contribute to that mechanism.

"The Cooperative Program is more than a funding mechanism. It is a way of cooperating in mutual trust and respect in fulfilling the Great Commission. If that mutual trust is destroyed, then the mechanism won't work. Those who are in control of the convention are in a position to demonstrate that (trust) or not to demonstrate that. And that will determine whether people participate in the mechanism."

Southern Baptist Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis and Executive Committee President Harold C. Bennett were out of their offices and unavailable for comment.

Baptist couple still in Kuwait
as Americans begin leaving Iraq

By Art Toalston & Mary E. Speidel

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A birthday wish for Maurice Graham's older brother was the only message that relatives of the Southern Baptist worker and his wife, Laurie, received as the exodus of Americans from Iraq and Kuwait began in early September.

"We are all fine and just waiting out the situation. Give family our love," Graham said in an Aug. 31 birthday greeting to his older brother, Jay, of Shelbyville, Tenn., via the State Department's communications link with the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait.

More than 100 Americans set foot on friendly soil the first two days of September, but the Grahams and their 10- and 13-year-old sons were among an estimated 2,500 or more Americans still being held hostage in Iraq and Kuwait, the oil-rich country seized by Iraqi troops Aug. 2.

As of Sept. 4, relatives of the couple had not heard whether Mrs. Graham had been able to make arrangements to leave Kuwait with her sons following Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's Aug. 28 announcement that foreign women and children could leave Iraq and Kuwait.

"We have no confirmation at this time of any departing flights," a State Department spokesman said Sept. 4. He said he had no confirmation of news reports that more Americans would be on an Iraqi jetliner slated to leave Baghdad Sept. 4.

The Grahams took refuge in the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait several days after the invasion. Graham has been holding nightly prayer services there and scheduling appointments to offer counseling or a listening ear to an undisclosed number of Americans who also took refuge at the embassy compound.

Conflicting reports continue to swirl around conditions inside the compound in Kuwait. Iraqi troops cut off water and power to the compound after the United States refused Hussein's order to close the facility.

"Contrary to news reports ... the truth of the matter is that they have ample food, and they have water," said a State Department spokesman who handles queries from relatives of Americans stranded in Iraq and Kuwait.

"They will not stay there if supplies run out," she said. Asked where the Americans at the embassy otherwise might go, she replied, "It's hard to speculate on that."

Another State Department spokesman said Americans at the compound "have water and food for several days" -- the same report issued a week earlier.

News reports, however, have painted a bleaker picture. A photographer who was with preacher-politician Jesse Jackson in a visit to the embassy said Americans there were boiling water from the swimming pool for drinking water. The photographer also said Americans were cooking with chopped-up pieces of furniture. Other news reports said food was spoiling and people were sleeping outdoors to escape the heat.

An American man released by Iraqi authorities because of health problems said Americans at the compound were eating mostly frozen turkey to survive.

Cables from the Grahams, relayed by the State Department to relatives in the United States, have made no mention of conditions inside the compound.

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Missionaries in Cyprus continue
their 'wait-and-see' attitude

NICOSIA, Cyprus (BP)--In Cyprus, nine Southern Baptist workers who evacuated Jordan, and 12 who evacuated Yemen, have been discussing "what it would take" for them to return to their assignments in each country, said Dale Thorne, who directs Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa.

"We've had a lot of discussions, but no definite plans for anyone going back as yet," Thorne said Sept. 4 in a telephone interview from his office in Nicosia, Cyprus.

"It's so difficult to know which way the whole situation is going to go," he said, so the evacuees continue their "wait-and-see" vigil.

Some exploration also has begun of possible temporary assignments in other countries for some of the workers, Thorne said, "but nothing definite" has been decided.

Thorne said the workers from Yemen are concerned that 10 of their colleagues who stayed in Yemen are sorely understaffed, even with their Yemeni co-workers, in running a Baptist hospital that is one of three medical facilities for a population area of some 2 million people. For now, the hospital that Southern Baptist workers have operated since 1968 has been scaled down from 70 beds to about 25.

Southern Baptist worker Marge Lewis said her husband, Roger, who remained in Yemen, is "in the Lord's will. We've prayed about this. While it's not easy to be separated, we have peace that we've done the right thing. I'm hoping to go back as soon as possible."

Mrs. Lewis, of Milo, Mich., evacuated Yemen for Cyprus with their three daughters, one 14 years old and twins who are 12. She said she and the girls are "doing pretty well."

"Part of it may be because my husband is a military child," she added, "and he's used to his father going off at times. Because of the stories he (Roger) has told, it wasn't a strange thing for our family."

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Chapman meets with
SBC prayer leaders

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
9/5/90

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman met privately for more than three and one-half hours with key convention prayer leaders Sept. 1 at Mt. Lebanon Baptist Encampment near Dallas to discuss prayer and spiritual awakening.

"I wanted to learn more about what is occurring in solemn assemblies with leaders around the country," said Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas.

Avery Willis and T.W. Hunt of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and Henry Blackaby of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board were at the encampment for the "Cedars of Lebanon" prayer retreat, sponsored by Texas Baptist Men organization. Minette Drumwright of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and Doug Beggs with the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission flew in specifically at Chapman's request.

Chapman said that even before the votes were tallied June 12 in New Orleans (site of the 1990 SBC annual meeting), God had directed him to emphasize prayer and spiritual awakening if he were elected president of the SBC.

"Once I was elected, one of my first thoughts was to call together these prayer officers of our convention agencies," he said.

"I wanted to listen to them and hear some of the things that they had learned about prayer since first calling Southern Baptists to solemn assembly in September of 1989."

The solemn assembly is based on the Old Testament practice of calling together God's people for prayer, fasting, corporate repentance and confession of sin. "I am greatly encouraged by what I believe God is going to do among Southern Baptists as we increasingly come before him," Chapman said.

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Though he indicated he would have to "give more thought and prayer" to the matter before making specific plans, Chapman said he was considering ways to help implement the idea of solemn assemblies among Southern Baptists.

Throughout the weekend Cedars of Lebanon retreat, speakers asserted that the SBC was suffering under the remedial judgment of God and needed desperately to repent.

Since he had not heard the sermons referring to judgment, Chapman said it was difficult for him "to determine how God views our spirituality at the present time," but he agreed that Southern Baptists need to seek God in humility and repentance.

He declined naming specific sins from which Southern Baptists need to repent, saying, "I think we first as a corporate body must be sure we're bringing ourselves into the presence of God, then he most likely will reveal to us the times in which we have failed to follow him."

Chapman said he reported to the prayer leaders the great number of converts in Kenya and Korea who professed faith in Christ and whom he had helped to baptize during recent evangelistic trips.

"I've seen God moving in an extraordinarily powerful way," he said.

"I pray God will bring that kind of awakening to America. It will require repentance, confession, surrender and sacrifice."

In a sermon following the meeting with Chapman, Blackaby urged prayer retreat participants to pray for their convention president, who has "a deep, burdened heart for spiritual awakening."

Blackaby also requested prayer for the SBC Executive Committee, who will hold a solemn assembly on Sept. 17 as part of their regularly scheduled meeting. Blackaby said Chapman plans to deliver a "state of the union" address at the Executive Committee meeting, and "wants a clear and unmistakable word from the Lord."

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Judgment or revival are SBC
options, say prayer leaders

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
9/5/90

DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptists either are headed for a final judgment from God or for the greatest revival they ever have experienced, according to national prayer leaders who spoke at the "Cedars of Lebanon," Aug. 31-Sept. 3.

To escape judgment and experience genuine spiritual awakening, God's people must become broken, repentant and overwhelmed by the awesome holiness of God, prayer leaders told more than 350 people who attended the retreat at Mt. Lebanon Encampment near Dallas, sponsored by Texas Baptist Men organization.

God is "stirring the nest" of Southern Baptists and of the United States, said Avery Willis of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Hurricanes, earthquakes and floods experienced last year and the current crisis in the Middle East all are God's way of "trying to get our attention" and redirecting his people to himself, he said.

"God is trying to shake us up so we will hear him," Willis said. "God is stirring our nest and letting us down on the briars."

Before God can use Southern Baptists for his glory, they first must be broken, according to Don Miller of Bible-Based Ministries in Fort Worth, Texas. However, he added that God breaks his people to create something else out of the shattered pieces, not so that they can remain broken.

"God wants to make something out of us. We dare not sit and moan and groan in our brokenness," said Miller. "The potential is too great."

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As the bride of Christ, the church must be pure, faithful and holy, according to T.W. Hunt of the Sunday School Board.

"There is a mystical purity that is already there," he said. "Practically, we have a long way to go."

In recent months, Hunt said he has been encouraged by meetings of Southern Baptists characterized by deep confession of sin and by total lack of awareness of time as God moved.

"I've seen people overwhelmed by God's dread holiness," he said. "God has taken the initiative in a profound way."

The pattern is not new, according to Richard Owen Roberts of International Awakening Ministries. Every Old Testament revival was preceded by a tragic moral and spiritual decline, by a righteous judgment from God, by the raising up of immensely burdened leaders and by some extraordinary act of God, he said.

Currently, the Southern Baptist Convention is under the remedial judgment of God, said Roberts, a Congregationalist minister serving the non-denominational Providence Chapel in Wheaton, Ill.

Remedial, corrective judgment is characterized by the "withdrawal of God's manifest presence," he said, and is a merciful act toward a disobedient people who still have the opportunity to repent. A final judgment, on the other hand, is when God strikes his people dead, and they have no opportunity left for repentance, he explained.

"God restrains his wrath by turning his back because he cannot gaze upon sin. We should be thankful God is withdrawn. Otherwise, we would not be here," Roberts said.

"God would have to cease to be holy to associate with an unholy people in a manifest fashion. God does not cause his face to shine on people in love with their sin."

God's people must truly repent based on their felt needs and on genuine understanding of God's holy nature, Roberts said.

"True biblical repentance provoked by godly sorrow is not a single act but a continuous activity," he said. "Repentance is not something once done, forever accomplished."

Roberts, who authored the definitive booklet on "solemn assemblies," warned Southern Baptists not to make the solemn assembly a "fad" or a "program." Based on an Old Testament practice, the solemn assembly is a time in which believers are called together for prayer, fasting, confession of sin and repentance.

Henry Blackaby of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board said Southern Baptists' national prayer leaders consciously have resisted all efforts to turn the solemn assembly into "just another program."

"There is a deep moving of God in our leadership, but most Southern Baptists have never heard of solemn assembly. We haven't gone far enough into solemn assembly to have corrupted it yet," he said.

Blackaby underscored Roberts' assertion that Southern Baptists are under God's remedial judgment, and the need for repentance is urgent.

"We've taken seriously what God has said to us -- to hurry to the people called Southern Baptists and say, 'God has given us one more chance,'" he said. "What a tragedy it would be if our leaders did not recognize the judgment of God."

Blackaby said God's people must come to God's word and allow God's Spirit to speak to them.

"That doesn't lead to an encounter with God. That is an encounter with God," he said, adding that believers must approach that encounter with a prior commitment to obey.

God wants to do a "new thing" among Southern Baptists if they will seek him in prayer, according to Willis.

"If you want to be in on what God is doing, don't watch the news. Go to your prayer closet," he said.

The "new thing" will be initiated by God, he will interrupt his people and give them a vision to involve them in it, and he will instruct them as they go, Willis explained.

"When God sends a vision, it's probably unexpected, because it's not something you initiated. When God sends a vision, it's probably unappealing, because it's not something you would have chosen," he said. "When God sends his new thing, it may interrupt old traditions."

Persons receptive to the "new thing" from God should expect opposition from those who are not open to change, Willis said.

"The establishment always has a problem with God's new movement. They are ready for anything that will enhance their establishment, but not anything that will tear down their establishment," he said.

The "revival that is coming" among Southern Baptists will be bathed in prayer and based on God's word, Willis said. The fourfold message to be preached in that awakening movement will be the sovereignty of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the repentance of God's people.

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Special meeting is called
of WMU executive board

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9/5/90

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The executive board of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union will meet in a called session Friday, Sept. 21, and Saturday, Sept. 22, in Richmond, Va.

Dellanna O'Brien, executive director, said the meeting is being called so board members can "consider our directions for the future."

"We feel it is important for us to consider WMU's response to the variety of needs emerging in our denomination related to missions," O'Brien said.

The meeting is being held in Richmond so that state WMU executive directors can participate. They will be in Richmond, along with state Brotherhood directors, state convention executive directors, and state Baptist newspaper editors, for a briefing by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board staff to update them on foreign missions work.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the WMU executive board is Jan. 5-11, 1991, at the WMU national headquarters building in Birmingham.

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Baptist Book Stores support
New Testaments for Moscow

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NASHVILLE (BP)--The Moscow Project, a plan to place four million New Testaments in the Russian capital so that every family living there may have one, will be supported through collection of donations in the 62 Baptist Book Stores owned and operated by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Johnnie Godwin, vice president for general publishing at the board, said canisters have been placed in all Baptist Book Stores. Many other Christian book stores around the country will support the Moscow Project by collecting money and sending it to the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association, sponsor of the project.

All donations will be used solely for purchase of Russian New Testaments, Godwin said. None of the money will be used for administration or fund raising.

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ECPA officials estimate that \$1.6 million will be needed to cover the cost of printing the New Testaments in the "Synodal" translation, which is favored among Russian-speaking people.

Godwin, who is on the board of directors of ECPA and serves on a task force on publishing in the Soviet Union, said donations to the project will be matched by donations from the International Bible Society. Based on the estimated cost of paper and printing, a donation of \$10 will provide copies of the New Testament to 40 Russian families.

Distribution of the New Testaments will be in the summer of 1991, Godwin said. Shipments to Moscow will be divided into four equal parts, with one million each being sent in June, July, August and September 1991.

Russian Baptist leaders agreed with Godwin and others that this would make the distribution project, part of which will coincide with the biannual International Book Fair in Moscow in August 1991, more manageable.

According to Godwin, a key to the success of the project is a partnership between Russian Baptist leaders and Baptists around the world for fund raising and then assistance in the distribution. Plans are being made now for persons attending the International Book Fair to help with the distribution.

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Illinois Baptist disaster
vehicle destroyed in fire

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
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CREST HILL, Ill. (BP)--The Illinois Baptist Men organization's disaster relief truck was destroyed Thursday, Aug. 30, in a propane explosion as volunteers prepared to serve lunch to victims of a killer tornado and to workers who were there helping with the clean-up.

The explosion and resulting "fireball" injured four people, one seriously, at about 9:30 a.m. Thursday in this community southwest of Chicago. The fire turned the semi-tractor/trailer rig and its contents into blackened rubble.

A propane tank on the trailer was being refilled from a propane supply truck when the explosion occurred.

Joliet, Ill., Fire Chief George Plese said the blast was caused by improper fueling of the storage tank without shutting off appliances before hand.

Rob Carr, state Brotherhood Services director, said the storage tank was overfilled, and exhausted propane was apparently ignited by a stove that stood 6 to 8 feet away.

Scott Sharp, with the propane company, received second and third degree burns over 35 percent of his body. He was in serious condition at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Ill., Tuesday, Sept. 4. He had been critical until Sept. 2.

The three other injured people were Illinois Baptist volunteers. Les Reynolds of Goose Lake was released Aug. 31 from St. Joseph Medical Center in Joliet. He suffered first degree burns on his arms and the back of neck, according to his wife, Grace. They are members of First Baptist Church of Wilmington, Ill.

Bob Haines, a member of Curtis Avenue Baptist Church in Joliet, received first degree burns and injured his leg. Louise Benson of Wilmington had a cut on the back of her head and an injured knee. Both were released from St. Joseph Medical Center Aug. 30.

The explosion occurred within sight of an apartment complex that had been struck two days earlier by a tornado that was part of a storm that killed 27 people. The Illinois Baptist volunteers were there to provide hot meals for those in the area.

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Sharp was on the ground beside a propane tank mounted to the underside of the disaster relief trailer when the explosion occurred, said Gary Blumenstock, a member of First Baptist Church of New Baden, Ill.

Sharp came out from under the trailer with his hair on fire, and he ran, witnesses said. Haines, who himself was burned, stopped Sharp from running.

"Bob did a very heroic thing," said Andy Gillespie, pastor of Frankfort Church. "Bob ran over and started hitting (Sharp) on the head until the fire was out."

Blumenstock provided the next heroics. When the propane line from the supply truck was finally shut off, Blumenstock drove the truck a safe distance from the flames.

"The worst thing that could have happened was the flame get to the supply truck," said Charles Gugerty, a fireman with the Lockport (Ill.) Township Fire Department, who happened to be a short distance away filling a fire truck with gasoline when the propane exploded.

Joliet Fire Chief Plese described the supply truck as a bomb hooked to a fire.

Apartment houses within in a half-mile radius were evacuated and vehicle traffic stopped after the explosion in fear the supply truck would explode.

"There would have been a crater, I don't know how big," if the supply truck had blown, said Gugerty, who earlier was heard telling Blumenstock, "Thank you. You did a good job."

About 14 Illinois Baptists were working at the feeding station when the propane exploded. They were preparing to serve about 600 people during lunchtime, workers said.

All of the witnesses told of the "fireball" that erupted. Dennis Cress, pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in North Chicago and unit coordinator, estimated the flames reached 50 feet into the air.

Gillespie said: "We could feel the flames. We were lucky to get away without any burns, too. ... We were tripping and started rolling trying to get away from it."

Cress said, "I was scared that thing was going to lift right off the ground" in the explosion.

Marty Skonetski, a member of First Baptist Church of Wilmington, said: "I don't know how we managed not to get burned. The fireball was so big. ... The feeding van meant a lot to us."

Three hours after the blaze, two large cookers containing ravioli that had been intended for lunch still stood untouched. The charred, burned-smelling tractor and trailer stood nearby with workers cleaning the mess that was left.

After the explosion and fire became known, Baptist relief units from Mississippi, Texas, Missouri and Tennessee were prepared to come and serve meals, Carr said. However, the Red Cross decided they would not be needed.

Carr said a planned disaster relief meeting later this month still will be held. "We're down, but we're not out. I'm still committed to disaster relief, and I want to see us recover from this."

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Illinois church grieves
for tornado victims

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
9/5/90

PLAINFIELD, Ill. (BP)--Michael Nolen slowly read a list of names of those who had died. There were 27 of them -- victims of a devastating storm that tore through this community and nearby towns.

About 135 people gathered under a yellow and white tent in Plainfield, Ill., Sunday, Sept. 2, to pray for the families of the dead, to worship God and to seek comfort amidst the rubble.

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The tent and folding chairs were set up in a field north of the storm-damaged building of Friendship Baptist Church. As pastor Nolen spoke and the people sang, the smoke from burning debris wafted through the air and the sound of heavy equipment provided background noise.

Some of those at the service had survived close brushes with death. Others had come hundreds of miles to help in the recovery effort. Nolen estimated 30 of the people who attended were Plainfield residents not associated with the church.

They came dressed in casual clothes, including T-shirts, shorts and tennis shoes. There were tears, hugs and smiles; and some lifted their hands in praise to God.

Nolen and his family were among those who five days earlier survived the killer storm.

Ten minutes before the storm hit, Nolen walked from the church to the parsonage next door to let his wife, Dana, proofread a letter. He sat in a recliner with his 2-year-old son, Jared, in his lap and watched the approaching storm through a sliding glass door.

Mrs. Nolen, who is 7 1/2 months pregnant, walked into the room and suggested they go to the basement. Nolen stood with his son, turned to leave the room, and then the west wall of the room exploded.

For a brief time, Mrs. Nolen thought her husband and son were dead. Then she heard Jared calling, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy." Nolen, who laid on top of his son, responded and they stayed on the floor.

Mrs. Nolen said that while they laid there she thought, "We've been spared for some reason." And she started singing "God Our Father We Adore Thee" while debris still blew overhead.

"I had a real sense of peace that God's hand was there, and we were going to be OK," she said.

Two people died about 200 yards from the Nolens' house. Homes and schools were leveled, a Catholic church was heavily damaged, and tree tops were ripped away -- all of this devastation within sight of the Nolens' home.

Five families associated with Friendship Church had their homes destroyed by the storm.

"We know that some that are even here this morning are without a home," said music director Mike Matlock during the outdoor worship service.

The church building also was pounded. All but one of the brick walls were bowed by the winds, windows were knocked out, and the steeple was gone. Inside the education wing, wet dirt stained the ceiling where it had been blown in between the wall and ceiling, leading some observers to speculate the roof was lifted by the storm.

Nolen said the future of the building has not been determined.

"Right now our focus is on helping people in the community," Nolen said.

Church member Ronald Young was part of a group that helped in the community Saturday. "We're going to worry about the church last, ... and go out there and see if our neighbors need our help," he said.

Friendship Church also has received some out-of-state help in ministering to the community. A little more than 24 hours after the storm struck, a disaster relief crew of Kentucky Baptist Men rolled into the church parking lot and began setting up to feed victims and relief workers.

Through noon Tuesday, Sept. 4, the Kentucky Minutemen had served about 10,500 meals, according to Bob Simpkins, Kentucky Brotherhood director and disaster relief coordinator.

Seventy Kentucky men have worked in the mobile kitchen and in clean up crews in Plainfield, Simpkins said. And a number of Illinois Baptists also helped in the work.

The number of meals served "dropped off drastically" the day after Labor Day, and Simpkins said he would like to shut down the feeding operation after the group serves the evening meal Wednesday, Sept. 5.

The Kentucky crew's goal in disaster relief is to have the people who are served meals remember that the local church "ministered in their time of need," Simpkins said. "We feel this operation well represents our Lord when we go out.

"We relate more to the hurt of the people than to the damage to the property," Simpkins added. When you deal with people's personal situations, "it tends to make you forget about the physical loss."

Church member David Burns described Plainfield as a "close community" and heavily Catholic. "To see a Baptist relief van, I honestly believe its going to have an impact," he said. "It gives a symbol that Baptists do care."

Nolen said he hopes the storm helps the church "focus on who we really are and what we are about." The church, which averages 90-100 in Sunday morning worship, has recorded 33 additions in the 10 months since Nolen came as pastor.

In his Sunday message, Nolen said, "When the storms of life strike us they often leave us dazed and confused, not knowing what to think."

He read from the Old Testament book of Job about a "mighty wind" that brought death to Job's family. "I want us to learn some lessons from the whirlwind," Nolen said.

He listed four such lessons:

-- "Life's storms are not necessarily the result of sin in our lives," he said. "God did not send this tornado as a judgment on us."

-- "God is always in control of life's storms," Nolen said. "Only if God is in control can we find meaning" in such circumstances. "If God is in control then we have hope."

-- "God can use storms in our lives" to strengthen character, to move people to comfort others and to "teach the preciousness and shortness of life."

-- "God is with us in our storms," Nolen said. "I know that God was with us in that den" when the wall exploded.

He reminded those gathered that Jesus would never leave them, nor forsake them.

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First Baptist in Atlanta
completes sale of property

Baptist Press
9/5/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Members of First Baptist Church of Atlanta voted Aug. 29 to sell most of the church's 14-acre site in midtown Atlanta to an unnamed buyer for \$43.5 million.

On Aug. 26 the congregation approved plans for a new \$40 million facility. The church bought 52 acres of land on the northern edge of Atlanta's city limits in October 1988 after members voted to sell the midtown property.

Charles Stanley, former Southern Baptist Convention president, is pastor of the 12,000-member church.

First Baptist will continue to occupy its current facilities until April 1994. Plans for the new facility call for a 145,000-square-foot sanctuary to seat 7,000 people, a small lake, gardens with fountains and a reflecting pool, picnic facilities and walking trails. The church will renovate a 240,000-square-foot building currently on the property for educational space.

First Baptist Church has been in downtown Atlanta since 1848. The current sanctuary was constructed in 1930.

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