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September 13, 1990

90-121

Laurie Graham, sons leave Kuwait;
Maurice still in embattled embassy

By Mike Creswell

N-GMB

LONDON (BP)--Southern Baptist worker Laurie Graham and her two sons have evacuated from Kuwait with a plane load of American and British citizens, but her husband, Maurice, remains behind in the U.S. Embassy where the family had taken shelter since Iraq's Aug. 2 invasion.

"I can't imagine the experience of going through this without faith," Mrs. Graham said shortly after she set foot in a free country for the first time in six weeks.

The Grahams are Southern Baptists' first workers in Kuwait and had been there only about three months when the invasion occurred.

Mrs. Graham, with sons Peter, 13, and Aaron, 10, arrived in London late on the night of Sept. 13, enroute to the United States the following afternoon. They were healthy and in good spirits despite having lived through days of terror when they feared for their lives, she said in an interview.

"There have been times during the last six weeks when we've been nervous and absolutely terrified," she said. "Especially the first day when troops were in our house four times and I wasn't sure if I'd be raped or killed, and other times when we were afraid we would be rounded up and taken to Baghdad."

One time of terror occurred when they traveled through Kuwait City in a bullet-riddled church car whose windows had been broken out, she said.

"But the overwhelming feeling we had, except for those isolated days when we were terrified, was to be encouraged. We have sung over and over, 'God will take care of you,'" Mrs. Graham added. "We knew our strength lies in God and that he will watch over us no matter what happens."

Although Maurice was safe when she left, she said only rice and tuna fish remain as food. "We're not sure how long it will last," she said.

But life in the embassy compound, even with 120 degree temperatures and no electricity or air conditioning, may be preferable to that of many foreigners whom Iraqi forces have moved to strategic military sites as human shields. Mrs. Graham knew of two members in the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait where they worked who were captured by Iraqi soldiers.

George Cienciala, a British church member, was rounded up by troops two days after the invasion when he went out to buy fuel. The British Embassy later reported he is being held in Baghdad.

American member Guy Seago was taken prisoner after failing twice in attempts to flee across the Saudi Arabian border, she said.

Maurice had planned at one point to reopen the church building, but stopped when the Iraqis began rounding up people found on the streets and carrying them into Iraq, she said. The church building was thoroughly looted by soldiers the day of the invasion, she said, though Maurice managed to save an oil painting that had been overlooked.

The Iraqi invasion especially frightened her two sons, Graham said, because they had followed news from Liberia, West Africa, where the Grahams formerly served. "They heard that 600 people had been slaughtered there, and then they saw the soldiers here," she said.

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But the two boys rallied and seem to have handled the situation well, she said. "I'm stronger from this experience," Peter told his mother. Also, she said the boys no longer take things such as electricity and water for granted.

Embassy personnel coped with the stress of confinement by trying to keep busy with physical things, she said. She taught school subjects to her boys, and they were able to swim in the embassy pool. "Morale was good for people with good attitudes," she said.

Nightly candle-lit prayer services led by Maurice provided a big boost for everyone, she said, as did the singing of Christian hymns.

For now, Mrs. Graham said she plans to visit family and friends in Tennessee and Kansas and explore getting her sons into school.

She also will keep a watchful eye on reports from Kuwait, where her husband and many others are still captives.

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Release of Laurie Graham, sons
greeted with rejoicing, agonizing

By Art Toalston

N-5MB

Baptist Press
9/13/90

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--"Becky, this is Laurie. The boys and I are in London ... and Maurice is still in Kuwait."

For Laurie Graham, the six-week-long nightmare of living in Iraqi-devastated Kuwait had ended for her and her sons, Peter, 13, and Aaron, 10. But her first telephone call to a friend Sept. 12 reflected the plight of her husband, Maurice, whom she left in Kuwait.

Mrs. Graham and her sons were scheduled to arrive at the Raleigh-Durham, N.C., airport the afternoon of Sept. 13.

When she arrived in London after leaving Kuwait, she placed her first call to close friend Becky Love in Nashville, Tenn. "I was so excited I missed part of the conversation," Mrs. Love confided.

Their chat lasted only a few moments. When Laurie mentioned her husband, "You could tell her voice dropped. I'm sure it was very hard to leave him in Kuwait," Mrs. Love reflected. "But there was no choice." Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has been allowing foreign women and children to leave Iraq and Kuwait but not the vast majority of foreign men, including about 1,500 Americans.

"Evidently there must have been a long line of people to use the phone," Mrs. Love said. Mrs. Graham rushed through her plans to travel to the Nashville area to visit her husband's parents, J.V. and Ruby Graham, and others before heading for Kansas for a reunion with her mother, Margaret Nuzum, and others in her home state. Mrs. Love said the conversation ended with Mrs. Graham rushing off, not knowing where officials would take them during the wait for the next leg of the trip to the United States.

In Kansas, the first word of Mrs. Graham's release came when a State Department worker telephoned her brother-in-law, Dave Chartier, earlier in the day. The worker said Mrs. Graham and her sons were aboard a U.S.-chartered flight with about 290 Americans and more than 150 Britons evacuated from Kuwait and enroute to London.

Chartier, of McPherson, Kan., said he "kept asking over and over" if the State Department were sure of its information. For several hours the previous weekend, State Department spokesmen reported Mrs. Graham and her sons were on a Sept. 8 evacuation flight before reversing themselves. Officials said numerous errors in one of the passenger lists caused the false alarm.

This time, Chartier recounted, the official "convinced me. There was no doubt in my mind that they were on that flight"

Then at 5:30 that afternoon, flipping through the network newscasts, he settled on CBS, which was interviewing a woman who was on the day's evacuation flight. "There was a little boy sitting in a chair behind her, and it was obviously Aaron," Chartier said.

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"There was no doubt. I think that's when it soaked in to me that they were really out."

Mrs. Graham's mother, Margaret Nuzum of Hutchinson, Kan., said she "didn't really believe it until somebody really talked to Laurie." Then she learned of her daughter's call to Becky Love in Nashville.

"I just felt (her release) was coming sometime, but I wasn't going to broadcast it until it came," Mrs. Nuzum said. "So, I've been on the phone all evening broadcasting it now that I know it's true."

"It's fun to talk about it now," Chartier added. "The last week or two it's been a pain. We obviously have mixed emotions, with Maurice still being there. But knowing that the kids and Laurie are safe sure is a relief, too."

Mrs. Love said she is elated, "yet at the same time my heart breaks because Maurice is still there. We can only imagine what they've gone through, yet she's been there and knows exactly what he's still living through. And that's so hard, I'm sure. It's going to be difficult on the boys and Laurie while they're here and he's still there." Graham remains in the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait with a number of other Americans who took refuge in the compound after Iraqi troops stormed the country Aug. 2.

Mrs. Love, a member of Nashville's Two Rivers Baptist Church, first met Maurice Graham in 1980 in Memphis. She had taken her 4-year-old daughter to St. Jude's Children's Hospital for a leukemia treatment. Graham had just begun work as a chaplain there. The daughter's leukemia went into remission, but she later suffered two relapses and had a bone marrow transplant several years ago. "Maurice was always there for us," Mrs. Love said.

Graham's brother, Dwight, of Winchester, Tenn., said he is ready to take his brother's sons fishing. He took them on their first-ever fishing trips before the family departed in June to begin their youth and music work at the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait.

"They had a ball," Dwight Graham said. "They're just boys." He said he hopes the boys will open up about the trauma they have weathered. "I don't want them to bottle it up in them," he said. "I've always felt like once you talk about something, the more times you tell it, the easier it gets on you."

Ed Johnson, a former hostage who took shelter in the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait and became friends with the Grahams, said Maurice Graham remains in "absolutely the best place anybody could be ... in Kuwait or Iraq because (people in the compound) have food and water. They aren't like the people in the homes who are struggling to get food."

Food supplies at the embassy are "limited, but sufficient for some period of time," said Johnson, vice president of international sales for Fasco Industries in St. Louis. Johnson was caught in Kuwait during a three-day business trip.

Johnson, 62, who left the embassy Sept. 1 on a medical evacuation, described the Grahams as "very loving people, very down to earth. They never really got upset about anything."

He also described U.S. Ambassador W. Nathaniel "Nat" Howell as a skilled diplomat worthy of promotion "anyplace in the Middle East or in Washington or the United Nations." Howell, a native of Portsmouth, Va., attended Court Street Baptist Church there as a youth. As college student, he was active in the Baptist Student Union at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

Howell "talked to the president at least every other day on the telephone ... probably because Bush wanted to know what was happening from the horse's mouth," Johnson said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Designated giving may
help Lottie, O'Brien says

By Pat Cole

N-10 SBT's

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The emerging trend of designated giving among Southern Baptists might bolster gifts to the 1990 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions, predicted Dellanna O'Brien.

"I'm not saying that's a good thing," said O'Brien, executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham, Ala. "I'm just saying that is probably what is going to happen. Part of that is a result of the fact that people love missions and they want to see the missionaries have everything they need."

A number of moderate Southern Baptist churches, disenchanted with some denominational programs, are taking steps toward supporting national causes in the denomination through designated gifts rather than through the Cooperative Program. In August, more than 3,000 moderates meeting in Atlanta established the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program which will channel funds directly to SBC agencies.

In an interview at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, O'Brien said, "Churches and individuals who hold back their funds from certain other areas of Baptist work may double up their gifts to the Lottie Moon offering." O'Brien visited the Louisville, Ky., school to address a Sept. 11 chapel service.

WMU, she said, never has addressed the 11-year controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. However, now that the controversy has begun to have an impact on missions, WMU's sole interest, the organization will have to give attention to the controversy, O'Brien said:

"It is difficult for us to know what the new plans that are emerging for alternative funding of missions will mean, but we cannot keep our heads in the sand when we know there will be some impact on missions."

Although she does not foresee involvement in the controversy by WMU, she acknowledged there will have to be a "heightened interest in the controversy and its impact on missions."

The alternative giving issue is the primary reason WMU called a special meeting of its executive board for Sept. 20-21 in Richmond, Va., she said. She described the matter as "urgent," noting the board could not wait until its regular meeting in January to address the issue.

The Atlanta meeting played a key role in WMU's decision to address the controversy's impact on missions, O'Brien said. Some who participated in the Atlanta meeting are members of churches that give large amounts of money to missions, she said, noting WMU cannot "ignore that reality."

In the midst of denominational turmoil, O'Brien continues to urge Southern Baptists toward greater support for missions. To those who are having difficulty supporting missions because of the conflict, she said: "All you have to do is step inside a country and see the missionaries there who are faithfully doing what they are there to do and your heart says 'we can't do anything but support them and whatever it takes to provide for their needs we must provide it.'"

Meanwhile, O'Brien said WMU hopes to "provide support for every church in the denomination that chooses to have a missions involvement."

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Pastor angry his name on
steering committee list

N-10 (Calif.)

Baptist Press
9/13/90

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--A California pastor is angry that he has been named -- without his permission -- to an interim steering committee of the new SBC moderate fellowship. The fellowship has created a Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., to receive and distribute funds from SBC churches to causes they support.

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E.W. McCall Sr., pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church in La Puente, Calif., told the California Southern Baptist, newsjournal of the California Southern Baptist Convention, he is "very concerned and disappointed" in the news article released by Baptist Press and printed in the California Southern Baptist.

"The article said I was nominated (the Baptist Press article said elected) to a 60-member steering committee on Aug. 25. This same article implied I consented, and gave permission to be nominated to such a post. It further implied the label 'moderate' was one I ascribed to as a Southern Baptist. I want it to be known I have not contacted any person that would give this impression," McCall said.

More than 3,000 people met in Atlanta two weeks ago in a Consultation of Concerned Baptists. The group created a fellowship, as yet unnamed, with an interim steering committee to propose future meetings, plans, programs and budgets. As a possible alternative to the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget, the group established the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., to allow churches to choose their own particular causes to support rather than go through the SBC Executive Committee. That committee distributes Cooperative Program monies from the state conventions to the various SBC agencies and institutions.

McCall said he and the La Puente church intend to "remain with the SBC and continue our Cooperative Program participation."

"I have been aligned (in the action by the fellowship) with a movement that is totally opposed to my 'loyal Southern Baptist stance.' It is unethical to use a person's name without ever gaining his or her permission in such a controversial issue," he said. "It is so wrong, if this was the motive, to assume that because I am a Southern Baptist 'that happens to be black' that I am a moderate or liberal. I am theologically a conservative and anyone who knows me is aware of that fact."

McCall said he is baffled as to why his name appeared on that list. He and his wife were on vacation at that time, on a cruise in Mexico, and had no contact with the people in charge of the Atlanta meeting. He said he felt he had been "used" by the moderate movement.

The California newsjournal contacted Ron Sisk, pastor of Tiburon Baptist Church, north of San Francisco, who attended the Atlanta meeting and was a member of the nominating committee of the new fellowship.

Sisk said the committee tried to contact McCall and although they were unable to reach him, committee members felt confident in his willingness to serve. The committee had only about 24 hours to come up with nominations, Sisk said, and attempted to contact all those nominated. He said he does not know McCall and did not nominate him. The nomination came from a black pastor on the committee but Sisk did not identify him.

Sisk said he is sorry McCall is unhappy about the situation but that he has possibly misunderstood the purpose of the fellowship. Sisk said there is no intent for the fellowship to separate from the SBC.

McCall said he was invited to the Atlanta meeting by Jimmy Allen, former SBC president and agency executive, one of the leaders of the new fellowship.

"I did not respond to (his invitation) and put it in the trash can I appreciated the invitation, saw it as an honor to be thought of but that is not what I'm about."

McCall said he thought his name was used to give the new fellowship "legitimacy" in the black community.

"Let it be further known, I am too busy, building the kingdom of God, winning people to Jesus Christ, here in California, to get involved in such a movement More than any labels we have given ourselves as Southern Baptists, I am a Christian, working for the Kingdom of God."

The other Californian named to the interim steering committee was Cherry Chang of Duarte, retired state catalytic missionary. She was contacted by Catherine Allen, head of Samford University's Sesquicentennial Committee.

Chang said the steering committee is an interim group and she would be taking a long hard look at what has happened. Chang classified herself as an avowed conservative and "definitely not a moderate."

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Baptist chaplain helps Marine recruits cope at basic training

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
9/13/90

PARRIS ISLAND, S.C. (BP)--If U.S. soldiers cope with the tensions of the Persian Gulf crisis, it could be because chaplains have helped them deal with previous trials in their military careers.

Southern Baptist chaplains like Norman Drummond often have contact with military personnel from the first day they hit boot camp. The ministry done in those first weeks can set the course for a recruit's future, he says.

"This is the one great opportunity we have to impact their lives," Drummond says of his work at the Parris Island Marine training camp. "We realize what happens later on may depend a great deal on what goes on here."

Since U.S. forces began challenging Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, training at Parris Island has proceeded as usual. "We do the same things we have done before, but we're reminded more that we have to make the best of the time we have with the recruits," Drummond says.

Parris Island, located about 90 miles south of Charleston, S.C., is one of two training camps for Marine recruits. From 3,500 to 5,500 recruits and support personnel are stationed at Parris Island at all times.

Most recruits spend only 11 weeks at Parris Island before moving elsewhere for more specific training. However, during those 11 weeks the 18- and 19-year-old Marines are likely to be more open to ministry than at any other time, Drummond explains.

The recruits are open, he says, because they are frightened and lonely.

Recruits arrive at Parris Island by bus from Charleston between midnight and 1 a.m. The first person to greet each bus is a drill instructor.

After spending about 45 minutes filling out paperwork, the recruits are issued uniforms and allowed to bundle their civilian clothing up to be shipped home. They are not allowed to sleep until the next night.

"From that day until the day they leave, the drill instructor will tell them everything to do," Drummond says. "They find out immediately what it's like to be in the ranks."

That's where the chaplains step in.

"When the recruits get here they find out the training is so difficult mentally and physically that they have to find some strength to help them get through," Drummond says. "Hopefully we're able to capitalize on that need they have for extra strength."

"We teach that God is able to give out strength. If they learn that lesson here it is going to help them through all of life."

Drummond supervises six chaplains who serve in the five recruit battalions. Those chaplains spend as much time as possible in the field with their recruits. When the recruits do physical training, the chaplains exercise with them; when the recruits go on a nine-day trip into the woods, the chaplains pack a tent and go with them.

"Ours is a ministry of presence," Drummond says. "We're being seen so they know they're not out here alone and God hasn't left them."

The chaplains become an important part in a rigorous training program designed to separate the survivors from the quitters. "A lot of mental stress is put on the recruits intentionally by the drill instructors. They have to know the recruits can handle it here rather than waiting until they get out in the field," he says.

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Recruits usually find their way to the chaplain when the stress becomes too great. "Most of our counseling is the same sort of thing," Drummond says. "They say there's no way they can take it and they have to get out of the Marine Corps."

Helping panicked recruits provides an open door for ministry, he adds. "We help them call on religious faith to make it. We remind them that God is a part of everything they do."

Drummond is motivated by his own experience as a Navy recruit 20 years ago. "As an enlisted person in the Navy, there were a lot of times I needed help -- spiritual encouragement -- and it wasn't there. The Lord spoke to me through all of that to give my life to help other young guys out there who are like I was."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

PrayerLife session alters
course for college student

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
9/13/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Todd Chesebro has returned to New Mexico State University at Las Cruces with different objectives than when he left the campus in the spring.

A PrayerLife conference he attended during the Student Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, Aug. 11-17, unexpectedly changed his plans.

Following a session on praying for missions, Chesebro said he realized he had been holding out on a willingness to accept a call from God to vocational missions.

"I've been pastoring a church, and I felt that was enough. I felt that's where I needed to be, so I ignored what I believed was a call to foreign missions a year ago," Chesebro said.

During the PrayerLife conference led by Rich Murrell, a consultant in the discipleship training department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, "I realized I needed to be willing to be sent," he said.

"Rich asked us to pray for one specific need from a list of missionary needs. I realized that when I pray for workers, that I need to be willing to be one of those workers," he explained.

"Rich closed the prayer session with a one-sentence prayer that some person in the room needed to give his life to missions. I knew he was talking about me," said Chesebro, a junior finance major.

In talking with Murrell after the conference session, Chesebro discovered that Murrell had felt led to pray the prayer and had not planned it in advance. "I knew it was the Holy Spirit at work."

That night in the evening service, Mildred McWhorter, a Southern Baptist home missionary in Houston, spoke and gave an invitation for people to commit their lives to missions.

Chesebro responded.

Chesebro, who accepted Christ when he was 13 and dedicated himself to full-time Christian service two years ago, said involvement in Baptist Student Union has helped provide a focus on discipleship and evangelism. He is a discipleship group leader in the BSU.

Also through BSU, he has gained experience in missions.

At the end of the spring semester, Chesebro resigned as pastor of Lewis Flats Baptist Church, a mission of First Baptist Church of Deming, N.M., so he could be pastor/evangelist on a BSU summer missions team that traveled throughout New Mexico during the summer.

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Now, as he looks for a new place to serve, Chesebro plans to become a youth minister rather than a pastor so he can broaden his base of experience -- something he believes he will need as a missionary.

The PrayerLife sessions were offered as seminar options during Student Week. Normally, PrayerLife is a 13-session study based on "PrayerLife: Walking in Fellowship with God", written by T.W. Hunt, prayer consultant at the Sunday School Board, and Catherine Walker, retired missionary to China and Indonesia.

The sessions are designed to be conducted in local churches to establish a ministry of prayer.

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Church in Kenya fights,
wins 8-year land battle

By Craig Bird

N SMB

Baptist Press
9/13/90

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--What began in June 1982 with a few men kneeling in late-night darkness was a celebration involving 775 people in brilliant sunlight this summer.

After eight years of climbing financial mountains and treading political waters -- or swimming upstream in them -- Parklands Baptist Church in Nairobi, Kenya, formally has dedicated a 9.3-acre site where the church will relocate.

The land, one of the last remaining undeveloped plots in the booming Westlands suburb of Nairobi, combines ample room for building with a high-profile location.

Parklands is the largest Baptist church in a metropolitan area with an estimated population of three million. Projections say Nairobi will be one of the 15 largest cities in the world by A.D. 2025. Property is becoming more scarce and more expensive at a breathtaking pace.

The church, an English-language congregation with a membership about 95 percent African, has overflowed its present facilities for several years. Despite several additions to increase seating capacity to 400 it is still common for 50 to 100 people to sit outside during Sunday morning worship.

At the dedication, Parklands Pastor Charles Tope, whose ministry has played a large role in growth of the church into a major, urban congregation, briefly recounted the history behind the land acquisition.

Tope, a Southern Baptist missionary, led the crowd, which spilled out of a massive tent erected for the occasion, to "dedicate to God this plot of ground" and "pledge to give sacrificially of our strength and substance" to build the facilities.

The church is dreaming of a 3,000-seat sanctuary but funding for that size facility has not yet been realized.

Missionary Jimmy Hooten, pastor when it was organized in 1977 and now a church developer among the Maasai south of Nairobi, preached the dedicatory sermon. From the first, he said, it was clear the church would someday outgrow what was then called the Parklands Baptist Center, so he began seeking land.

One site, which he pursued for months, is now the location of a 30,000-seat athletic stadium.

A 25-member Maasai choir accompanied Hooten to provide special music. The group, clad in their traditional red garments with women wearing neck collars, earrings and bracelets of intricate beadwork, provided a vivid contrast with the suit-and-tie, urban membership of Parklands.

At a June 1982 deacons' meeting, Tope and several other men drove to the vacant lot, knelt in prayer and claimed the land for God and their church. In 1984, during a personal interview with church leaders, Kenya's president, Daniel T. arap Moi, telephoned the commissioner of land and instructed him to give the property to Parklands Baptist Church.

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Instead, the church was informed the area had been designated "open land for public use" and was not available for development.

The church declined an alternate plot, smaller and not as strategically located. Members continued to work for their "claimed ground."

As years passed, rumors circulated, some of which were printed in Nairobi newspapers, saying such things as the land had been subdivided, part of it had been sold, or a shopping center would be constructed on it.

The moderator of the Baptist Convention of Kenya, Arthur Kinyanjui, began to intervene on Parklands' behalf with President Moi. In October 1988 a "letter of allocation" was issued in the joint names of Parklands Baptist Church and the Baptist Convention of Kenya.

Much of 1989 was spent trying to secure the title deed and have the four designated plots combined, but Nairobi City Council officers repeatedly denied those requests. Finally, in August 1989, a freehold title deed was finalized and given to the registered trustees of the church.

But negotiations between the church and the Baptist convention over how the ownership would be structured and discussions with illegal squatters who occupy one edge of the property delayed formal dedication for 11 months longer.

While the formal dedication in July marked the end of one conquest, it marked the beginning of another. A special offering was taken for the building fund, and church members were informed they would receive questionnaires about the type of pastor needed to guide the church through the building program and the anticipated growth in membership and ministry.

Tope retires in 1991 after about 25 years as a missionary in eastern Africa. The congregation will call a national pastor at that time.

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Eastern European students
soak up Bible 'like sponges'

By Mike Creswell

F-SMB

Baptist Press
9/13/90

BUDAPEST, Hungary (BP)--Students from nine Eastern European countries enrolled in the new International Baptist Lay Academy this past summer, and all soaked up the Bible-based training "like sponges," administrators said.

A near-capacity 110 students attended summer classes in Bible, English and Christian topics during the first three two-week sessions which opened July 1. The European Baptist Federation and Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board sponsor the school in cooperation with Hungarian Baptists.

The school, located on the campus of the Hungarian Baptist academy, provides basic Christian training to Baptist laypersons and bivocational pastors from throughout Eastern Europe. Students from every Eastern European country except Albania attended.

Classes are taught in English, to provide a common language to the varied language/culture groups represented. Christian materials are scarce in many Eastern European languages, so those wanting to study must do so in another language for now. The school provides intensive study of English.

"We've been tremendously pleased with the attitude of our students," said Southern Baptist representative O. Errol Simmons, IBLA administrator and associate director. "Attitudes are so positive and they're grateful to learn." Students asked for shorter breaks so they would have more class time; students attending on work-study programs have volunteered to work longer hours just to show their appreciation for IBLA, Simmons said.

"I've been praying 10 years to do something like this," said student Nikolai Devyatkin of Archangelsk, U.S.S.R.

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"Are they willing to learn? They're not merely willing -- they're eager," said George Beasley-Murray, a specialist in the New Testament. A British Baptist, he was principal of Spurgeon's College in England and taught at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. During summer he taught a course on the gospel of John at IBLA.

"Some of the young men have only a rudimentary understanding of English but are desperate to learn all they can," Beasley-Murray said. "They're anxious to learn more of the Bible, to get a better grasp of the gospel, to teach it and to preach it and bear witness in their lives. They are practical."

Most students have secular jobs and work in their churches as volunteers. A few are pastors or serve churches in other ways; Soviet Baptist Victoria Mazharova edits a Baptist newspaper, The Christian World, in Moscow.

Bulgarian Theodor Oprenov, 21, is eager to share the gospel in his home country now while people are responsive. "Some of our Christian young people want to study outside Bulgaria. When they come back, they'll be prepared to work, but I'm not sure Bulgarians will be hungry to listen like now. Next year, two years from now, maybe they won't listen like now," he said.

Oprenov is a mechanic in a steel factory, work he chose to perform for five years rather than serve in the Bulgarian army for two years. He found Christ as Savior following the death of his mother in 1985.

Bulgarians enjoy more freedom since historic free elections were held recently, Oprenov said. A man assigned by the government to lead Sofia Baptist Church is now out, and the congregation has obtained ownership documents for their property for the first time, he said. "We can now work on the street. Everyone can say, 'I want to tell you about Christ.'"

A recent youth congress held by Baptists, possibly for the first time, drew 150 persons, he said. Still, he said, freedom is limited; Baptists do not yet have permission to open a bookstore. "The government is moving very slowly," he said. But Bulgarian Baptists have started half a dozen churches among Gypsies, a persecuted minority in several Eastern European countries, he said.

Jacek Syska, 31, from Katowice, Poland, is a physicist and assistant professor at a government university. He specializes in cosmology, or study of the whole universe. But at IBLA he wants to learn how to minister to youth at Katowice Baptist Church.

"I wanted to know more about Christian doctrine and I am interested in Christian psychology. I want to help students and young people, because I had the same problems when I was beginning in the faith," he said.

Eugen Stinean of Arad, Romania, said he came to IBLA to improve his English and to learn how to prepare better sermons. A mechanical engineer in a machine tool factory, he spends many of his non-work hours at the 1,500-member Hope Baptist Church, where he is secretary and lay preacher. Stinean's pastor, Viorel Iuga, also has attended IBLA.

The challenge for Romanian Baptists, Stinean said, is to learn how to upgrade church programs and ministries to compete with the country's improved and expanded television programs and travel possibilities.

"Before the revolution, the church was full of people, extremely full. There were only three hours of TV per day, and two of those hours were about Csesceau" (the late Romanian dictator). "Now they have films and music on TV, and many people stay home and watch TV, even at midnight," he said. People also are traveling now that passports and gasoline are available, he noted.

Despite new freedoms in Romania, Baptists still are denied access to newspapers and TV for publicizing their programs, since most media carry only news of the Romanian Orthodox church, he said.

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Czechoslovakian Baptist Samuel Gallat, 24, wanted to study theology years ago, but it was impossible before revolution swept his country last year. He studied economics instead; after graduating from a university in 1989 he went to work as a planner for a government unit that includes 400 restaurants.

After completing IBLA courses this summer, he plans to enroll in the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland. He still is not sure what sort of minister he wants to be: "We need lots of workers, not just pastors. We don't have teachers. We don't have ministers among young people, handicapped people, people in hospitals. Before the revolution it was impossible to work in schools, in hospitals. Now there's freedom to do that."

Baptists in Czechoslovakia, he said, must learn to live in a free country. "Political freedom is not the highest freedom," he said. "The highest freedom is spiritual freedom." Through preparing himself for ministry, he hopes he can help his countrymen enjoy "the next level of freedom."

It costs about \$80 for a student to attend a two-week session at IBLA, said Simmons. Special gifts have enabled it to sponsor 16 students during the first two sessions, but now there are no more scholarship funds. Many students attend on a work-study program, exchanging work for partial tuition. IBLA has a relatively modest operating budget of \$80,000, to last at least three years.

But original cost estimates have been hit by harsh economic realities jolting all Eastern Europe in these days of change. IBLA costs have escalated rapidly because of price hikes in Hungary's economy, currently in the throes of converting from a communist economic system to a free market one, Simmons said. He projects IBLA will have to charge higher fees next year. If the academy charges \$100 for two weeks of classes, room and meals, that amount equals about a month's wages for most East Europeans, he said.

IBLA functions with a minimum of staff. Hungarian Baptist Laszlo Gerzenyi is director. Errol Simmons is associate director and his wife, Mary, is bookkeeper. IBLA has one paid secretary and several kitchen workers. Aaron Summers, a junior at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., served at IBLA 10 weeks this summer, helping direct work-study among other tasks.

Teachers are Baptist volunteers from the United States and Europe. Three teachers and a student from Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee taught English for six weeks this summer. They are teachers Robert Clarke, Rosemarie Jones and Carolyn Cole, with senior student Mike Guerin.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Youngblood's writing
points people to God

By Jim Lowry

F. SSB

Baptist Press
9/13/90

SAN DIEGO (BP)--The image of a prophetic Old Testament scholar, stooped and serious, dark and brooding, is not an appropriate one for Ronald F. Youngblood.

Youngblood, professor of Old Testament and Hebrew since 1981 at Bethel Theological Seminary (West Campus), in San Diego, is a personable, articulate Old Testament scholar who writes to point people toward the "remarkable, unified word of God."

A teacher, pastor, scholar and writer, Youngblood is recognized for his long-term study of the Old Testament. This includes the book of Micah, which is the subject of his writing assignment for the The New American Commentary, a publishing project of Broadman Press.

Youngblood has been a student of the Old Testament for more than 30 years. He is a graduate of Valparaiso University, Fuller Theological Seminary and Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning.

Writing, according to Youngblood, is a natural outgrowth of teaching, which is his calling and first gift. He is the author of commentaries on Genesis, Exodus and Isaiah and has scheduled writing projects on Judges, Samuel, Proverbs, Kings and Micah. From 1970 to 1978, he was a translator-editor on the New International Version of the Old Testament.

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Youngblood's office at Bethel West Seminary offers a panoramic view of the hills surrounding the southern California city. Inside, however, almost 6,000 books organized for reference surround his desk and computer work station, where he sets aside four hours every day to write.

Animated conversation about sports, politics or the best cheeseburger in town spills over into his work and dedication to Old Testament study.

As he writes commentary on Old Testament passages, that same enthusiasm becomes a determination to better understand and explain the word of God. His devotion to accuracy and energy for writing guides his daily search for understanding Scripture.

"Scholarly Bible study is an attempt to think God's thoughts after him," Youngblood said. "In commentaries, we try to bring into contemporary work what the Bible and its authors intended to teach.

"When I write commentary, I bring in parallel passages that undergird what the author is saying at that particular point," he continued. "Then I try to show how Scripture explains Scripture.

"A commentary expounds on the word of God without adding, subtracting or distorting in any way. That is the task and the trick, and it is not easy to pull off," he added. "You speak words after God so what the God of the Bible says is reflected as accurately as possible in what the commentary says.

"My conviction is that Scripture is a remarkable, unified library, especially when you consider first that it was written over a period of 1,000 years," he said. "The Bible claims to be God's word from beginning to end, and I assume God has not stuttered, but spoken truly."

As Youngblood makes plans to write the commentary on Micah, he said he likely will divide the book into logical thought units, to explain the text for pastors and students.

He speculated that not many pastors preach through the book of Micah, which contains one of the best Old Testament descriptions of the messianic kingdom and of the messianic King. It also tells the positive and negative sides of what religion is and what religion is not, he said.

"One problem we face in the modern pulpit is preachers who preach from only a few texts again and again," Youngblood warned. "We have to tell pastors to preach from the whole counsel of God.

"There is also a tendency to preach only the New Testament," he said. "Pastors fail to realize the New Testament stands on the shoulders of the Old Testament. You cannot preach the New Testament without understanding the Old Testament."

He said the New Testament quotes more than 300 times from the Old Testament. "If New Testament evangelists quoted so much from the Old Testament, we ought to as well.

"New Testament evangelists did a better job preaching from the Old Testament than we do preaching from the New Testament," he concluded. "They turned their world upside down preaching from the Old Testament, and we haven't turned the world upside down preaching from the New Testament."

The first volume of the 40-volume set of The New American Commentary, which will cover the books of Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, will be released in June 1991. A release date for Youngblood's volume on Micah has not been announced.

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