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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #7E
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355**BUREAUS**ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367. Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas, 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5100
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

September 17, 1990

90-122

Grahams realize God's care
during ordeal in Kuwait

By Mary E. Speidel

M.E.S.

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Huddled on a mattress in a Kuwait City apartment, Laurie Graham hummed "God Will Take Care of You."

Iraqi soldiers in the room listened while she strummed a guitar and sang Christian tunes with her family and five Filipino friends. "They (the soldiers) didn't know what the lyrics were, but we did," said Mrs. Graham, a Southern Baptist worker in Kuwait.

Four times on Aug. 2, the day Iraq invaded Kuwait, Iraqi soldiers entered the apartment where Mrs. Graham, her husband, Maurice, and their two sons were staying.

At one point, Mrs. Graham was so terrified she thought: "Just get me to a tiny town in Kansas ... and I'll never leave." She is a native of Hutchinson, Kan. Her husband is from Shelbyville, Tenn.

"Before we went to Kuwait, that was one of the first times in my life I was willing to say, 'Here I am. I'm willing to do whatever,'" she said. Now that she's back on American soil, she said she still feels the same way.

Mrs. Graham and her sons, Peter, 13, and Aaron, 10, arrived in the Raleigh, N.C., Sept. 13 aboard a Northwest Airlines charter flight from London. They were among about 290 American women and children who evacuated Sept. 12.

When Mrs. Graham stepped off the plane in Raleigh, she appeared calm and poised, carrying one suitcase and a briefcase. Her sons, tanned and wearing shorts and sports shirts, toted black backpacks on their shoulders. Their baggage contained the few possessions the Grahams managed to take from Kuwait.

But, like most of the other passengers, they left behind much more than personal belongings. They left Mrs. Graham's husband and the boys' father in the U.S. embassy compound in Kuwait City.

He is among a handful of Americans still at the embassy, where the family took refuge Aug. 6. "I don't know what's going to happen," said Mrs. Graham. "I feel good about the diplomatic process, but I really still feel we've got to wait it out."

While waiting for a Sept. 14 flight to Nashville, Mrs. Graham described her family's six-week ordeal in Kuwait. Nearby, her sons played games on the floor in the Raleigh-Durham airport.

Before the invasion, the Grahams lived in an apartment above the National Evangelical Church in Kuwait, where they had served less than three months. Maurice Graham was assistant pastor; Mrs. Graham worked in church music. They were the first Southern Baptist workers in Kuwait.

About 5 a.m. on Aug. 2, the family awoke to gunfire that "sounded like fireworks," said Mrs. Graham. Later, some Filipino friends took refuge in the Grahams' apartment. They reported gunfire had shattered the windows in the Grahams' car and that a bullet had pierced the rim of one tire.

The church and apartment are across the street from Kuwait's national assembly building, where some of the heaviest fighting occurred. Iraqi soldiers came in and out of the apartment during the day, wanting food, water and a chance to watch television. As the day wore on, the Grahams decided it was not safe to stay in their home.

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They called an American consul friend, whose wife told them to come to their home immediately. They grabbed the bags they had packed earlier and dashed downstairs with the Filipinos. Just yards away an Iraqi soldier was hot-wiring another car. As they drove away, "he didn't pay any attention to us," said Mrs. Graham.

The streets were filled with abandoned cars and empty busses with motors still running. The group prayed silently as they drove the 20-minute route to the embassy official's home. "There were troops everywhere. But it was as if angels were surrounding us," said Mrs. Graham, her voice breaking. "They (the soldiers) didn't even look at us."

When they arrived safely at the consul's home, they examined the damaged tire. A bullet had pierced the rim but narrowly had missed puncturing the rubber. "It was like a miracle," said Mrs. Graham. "If we had had to change a tire while we were leaving, who knows what attention we would have drawn."

The Grahams stayed at the consul's home for four days. They and about 20 others staying there pooled Kuwaiti money to help buy what food they could find in a nearby grocery store. The Grahams kept some emergency backpacks by the door in case they were rounded up by Iraqi soldiers.

On Aug. 6, embassy officials ordered all diplomatic families to the U.S. embassy compound. The Grahams went with the consul's family. When they arrived and officials learned Graham was a minister, someone said, "We can sure use your skills," Mrs. Graham recalled.

Their first night there, Graham was asked to lead a prayer service, which still continues nightly at the embassy. On Sundays, Graham leads worship services and serves communion twice a month.

Mrs. Graham, who led the singing, said she found comfort in the hymns they sang, though she had never been a fan of traditional hymns. "All the words were about distress and oppression, and I had never really been through anything where all I could do was rely on God to get me through," she said.

Besides leading worship, part of the Grahams' Christian witness was in how they coped with the crisis. "I think it was really apparent to the people there that we were hanging onto something that was giving us a real inner peace," she said.

Maurice Graham had many opportunities to help others cope by using counseling skills honed while he was a chaplain at St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. In that role, he regularly helped families of dying children.

When embassy officials learned Graham was a trained counselor, they posted signs around the compound announcing his services. He also went periodically to the hotel across the street to counsel with British women and children held by Iraqi soldiers.

Graham also counseled with frightened expatriates who phoned in from outside the compound asking about evacuation flights from Kuwait.

Daily life at the embassy was comfortable before Iraqi soldiers cut electricity and water, Mrs. Graham said. One of the Graham boys told his parents, "You know if I didn't watch the news, I would think this was a great place," related Mrs. Graham. The children enjoyed day camp, swimming, playing table games and watching videos with the other children at the compound.

Mrs. Graham said people at the embassy coped by working together as a team. "I've never seen people pitch in so willingly. That really helps the mental health and the morale of the group," she said.

But when electricity was cut off, the 120 degree weather made spirits sag. People tried to keep cool by taking frequent dips in the embassy pool. In the evenings, when temperatures cooled and meat was still available, families barbecued together by the pool. When the Grahams left the compound, Americans there were eating tuna and rice.

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The Grahams slept in wet T-shirts to try to stay cool. "If there's one thing we're looking forward to it's ice," said Mrs. Graham during a press conference after arriving at Nashville International Airport Sept. 14, where a crowd of family and friends greeted her.

Throughout the ordeal, Mrs. Graham said her sons were not sheltered from what was happening. Before going to Kuwait, the Grahams had been Southern Baptist missionaries in Liberia for three years. They left Liberia for furlough before the country's civil war broke out, but the Graham boys followed the news about the war. Two days before Iraq invaded Kuwait, they read soldiers had massacred 600 people taking refuge in a church in Liberia.

The couple's openness with their sons helped them prepare for separation from their father, Mrs. Graham said. It has also helped the boys to know Graham's daily schedule at the embassy. "That's so much better than those who know nothing about their relatives," she said.

Throughout the ordeal, the family has found comfort from faith and family. Every night before bed, they talked about their questions and prayed together. "We found a great deal of strength in just being together as a family," she said.

Mrs. Graham said the experience has made her family stronger, even though they are concerned for Maurice's safety. "I've learned that it just doesn't do any good to sit around and worry about when is this going to get over with," said Mrs. Graham. "I've learned to put my whole trust in God. That's what's going to see you through."

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

CORRECTION: In the BP story released 9/13/90 titled "Laurie Graham, sons leave Kuwait; Maurice still in embattled embassy," the date in the fourth paragraph should be corrected, so the paragraph reads as follows:

Mrs. Graham, with sons Peter, 13, and Aaron, 10, arrived in London late on the night of Sept. 12, 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.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

CLC board elects
Whitehead, Strode

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
9/17/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission trustees unanimously elected Michael K. Whitehead, a Kansas City, Mo., lawyer and deacon at First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo., as general counsel and director of Christian citizenship and religious liberty concerns and Thomas H. Strode Jr., staff journalist at Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn., as director of news information/Washington. Both will be based in the Christian Life Commission's expanded office in Washington.

The action came during the commissioners semi-annual meeting Sept. 10-13 in Nashville.

Whitehead will join the staff Oct. 1. He succeeds 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. Strode will join the staff Nov. 1. He will fill a newly created position in the Washington office.

Whitehead told trustees Christians must become active against those who would banish God from public schools. He said he supports the concept of equal access but not a constitutional amendment calling for prayer in public schools.

"Students don't give up the right to free speech when they cross the door into a public building," he said.

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Strode said, "I believe I can be just and fair in my reporting but not compromise my convictions. My desire is to report truthfully and accurately to Southern Baptists what is happening in Washington, D.C."

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 center 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 which 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 expressed faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized at age 10 in First Baptist Church of Independence, Mo. At First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo., Whitehead has served in a number of lay positions including chairman of that church's deacons.

His other affiliations include the Kansas City chapter of Lawyers for Life, the Washington-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, Jonathan, 12; Holly, 7; and Hannah, 2.

Strode, 38, received a bachelor of journalism degree in 1974 from the University of Missouri in Columbia. In college he wrote for the student newspaper and was a member of Kappa Tau Alpha, the national journalism honor society. He received his master of divinity degree in 1985 from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis.

Strode says he expressed faith in Jesus Christ at age 23. He was licensed to preach by First Baptist Church of Little Rock, Ark., and was ordained by Bellevue Baptist Church.

Between the time he graduated from college and entered Mid-America, he worked as a sports writer and copy editor for the *Arkansas Gazette*, a daily newspaper in Little Rock. During seminary, Strode worked part-time at Bellevue Church. He was named full-time staff journalist there in 1985. His duties at the church included producing the church's weekly newsletter and other publications.

He was also in charge of the church's neighborhood fellowships and was the staff liaison on moral issues.

He and his wife, Linda, have two children, Aaron, 10, and Catherine, 7.

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CLC board OKs
budget for D.C. office

By Louis Moore

*N-CQ
(CLC)*

Baptist Press
9/17/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission approved a new budget for 1991 allocating almost 35 percent of the agency's \$1.4 million annual resources for its greatly expanded Washington office, and the remaining 65 percent for its work in Nashville.

The allocation of \$489,284 for the CLC's Washington office includes the \$365,328 increase given the agency in June by the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans. The \$489,284 figure includes what the agency has spent in the past for its Washington office as well as a transfer of some funds from its Nashville operation to its Washington office.

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The commission opened its Washington offices on a part-time basis in 1987. It added its first full-time staff member to its Washington office in September 1989.

At their semi-annual meeting in Nashville Sept. 10-13, commissioners also elected two new program staff members for the Washington office and authorized the hiring of a receptionist/secretary there. Commissioners unanimously elected Michael Whitehead, a lawyer and deacon from First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo., as general counsel and director of Christian citizenship and religious liberty, and Tom Strode, a journalist on the staff of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, as its director of news and information/Washington.

The Southern Baptist Convention in June expanded the Christian Life Commission's program statement and budget to include religious liberty issues.

Commission Executive Director Richard D. Land said commissioners interpreted the votes in June as a strong desire on the part of the convention for the commission to upgrade its Washington office.

Land said the new budget is divided into Washington and Nashville sections in order to help Southern Baptists keep track of where the agency's funds are being spent.

Commissioners approved a 10 percent cost-of-living salary adjustment for the agency's Washington program staff. Trustees also gave Nashville staff members salary increases averaging 2.45 percent.

The commission's literature sales are "on the rebound significantly" following a steep decline during the 1987-89 period when the agency was undergoing transition following the election of a more conservative board of trustees and ensuing personnel changes, Louis Moore, associate director told trustees.

After hitting their lowest level in a decade in 1989, literature sales in 1990 will rebound to either the second or third highest year ever, depending on final tallies, Moore said. He said total literature sales for 1990 should exceed \$120,000, up from \$67,000 in 1989. He urged the trustees "to join the staff in doing everything possible to see that the rebound and increase continue."

In other action, the commissioners:

-- Approved 10 speakers for the agency's 1991 annual seminar March 25-27 in Fort Worth, Texas, on "Christians and the Environment: Finding a Biblical Balance Between Idolatry and Responsibility." Those speakers include Bill Tillman, professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth; Bill Pinson, executive secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; Millard Erickson, dean of Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.; and Gary Leazer, director of the interfaith witness department at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta.

-- OK'd holding the agency's 1992 annual seminar in Washington. That session will focus on Christian citizenship and religious liberty.

-- Endorsed a statement referred by the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans to all agencies stating that no commission personnel were involved in convention politics. That statement says involvement in convention controversy while on the payroll of the convention "would be grounds for disciplinary action."

-- Affirmed the agency's support for higher federal excise taxes on beer and wine and its call for pro-health messages on all broadcast and print advertisements for alcoholic beverages.

"The beer industry is more protected by the White House and Congress than the endangered spotted owl," said Robert Parham, the commission's associate director with responsibilities for drug and alcohol abuse.

CLC board gives
award to Colson

NASHVILLE (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission voted 29-1 to present the agency's 1991 Distinguished Service Award to Charles "Chuck" Colson of Prison Fellowship Ministries. F-10 (C)

Colson, 59, a former White House aide to ex-President Richard Nixon, was convicted and served seven months of a one-to-three year federal prison sentence after pleading guilty to a Watergate-related charge in 1974. Before going to prison, he expressed faith in Jesus Christ. After he was released from prison, Colson began a prison ministry that eventually took the title Prison Fellowship Ministries.

He became a Southern Baptist in 1977 when he joined Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Va., where he is still a member.

A popular speaker in churches and other Christian gatherings, Colson is the author of eight books including such Christian best-sellers as Born Again, Life Sentence and The God of Stones and Spiders.

Colson writes a monthly column for Christianity Today magazine and contributes regularly to numerous newspapers and magazines.

Prison Fellowship has a staff of 170 and a network of about 30,000 volunteers, who work in more than 500 prisons. Colson says more than 250,000 inmates have benefitted from the ministry of Prison Fellowship.

In nominating Colson for the Distinguished Service Award, Christian Life Commission Executive Director Richard D. Land said, "Chuck Colson has distinguished himself through his ministry as well as his writings. Many believe he is rapidly taking up the mantle of the late evangelical theologian-author Francis Schaeffer."

Colson will receive the award during the Christian Life Commission's 1991 annual seminar March 25-27 in Fort Worth, Texas.

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RTVC approves
\$8.9 million budget

Baptist Press
9/17/90

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission trustees, holding their fall meeting in Fort Worth, approved an \$8.9 million operating budget for the 1990-91 fiscal year -- an \$800,000 increase over the 1989-90 budget. N-CG (RTVC)

RTVC President Jack B. Johnson and trustees expressed concern about stability of Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program, the denomination's unified budget that finances the convention's missionary and education endeavors.

Trustees adopted a resolution encouraging each state convention to continue to utilize the Cooperative Program as the primary means of support for missions at home and around the world and encouraging local churches to give regularly a portion of their undesignated income to missions through the Cooperative Program.

The concern over the Cooperative Program's stability stems from the fact that the moderate-conservative controversy that has led some moderates, including about 3,000 who met last month in Atlanta, to consider new funding mechanisms that would bypass the Cooperative Program to support Baptist agencies and institutions.

Sixty percent of the RTVC's funding comes through the Cooperative Program, with the second largest amount -- 22 percent -- coming from advertising on the RTVC-owned American Christian Television System (ACTS) network, executive vice president Richard T. McCartney, who made the budget presentation, told trustees.

The remainder comes from gifts from individuals, foundations and corporations. The RTVC makes no appeals for funds on any of its radio or television programs.

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Trustees approved a year-long capital fund-raising campaign for the Fort Worth area, with a goal of \$1 million to \$1.5 million. Cargill and Associates of Fort Worth was employed as consultant. Trustees at their April meeting had employed Cargill and Associates to test the feasibility of such a campaign in Fort Worth. Funds raised in the campaign will be used to purchase field and studio production equipment, update the commission's computer systems, fund endowment and refurbish the building.

Trustees approved a resolution stating that an investigation indicated the commission has not been used to support either side of the current controversy in the SBC and resolving to inform all employees that such action by any employee is forbidden.

Interviewed by a local reporter following the trustees' meeting, President Jack Johnson said that if someone were to try to force him to take sides, "I would consider that not proper."

Johnson, who resigned as executive director of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention to become head of the RTVC, said his job is to shun politics and concentrate on expanding the Baptist satellite network, which he said is in its best financial condition in many years.

Nearly \$600,000 of the \$800,000 increase is expected to result in expansion of the commission's television delivery system and the ACTS network and to enhance the outreach of ACTS with new programming, according to Johnson.

The RTVC debt retirement is ahead of schedule and will require less than 20 percent of the new budget, Johnson reported to the trustees. He also announced no allocation to the agency's contingency reserve fund is included in the budget since the reserve has reached the \$500,000 goal previously set by trustees.

Trustees set Jan. 14 -- during their next meeting -- as the date for Johnson's formal installation as commission president.

The board also adopted a uniform salary plan that groups staff salaries into categories according to the nature of the assignment. "A thorough analysis of each staff position was done by a consulting firm, and existing inequities were eliminated," Johnson said. He announced plans to initiate an annual review process to enable supervisors to evaluate performance of each employee and provide a basis for orderly adjustments of salary and position.

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Kuwait refugees find
shelter at Baptist school

By Erich Bridges

N. S. M. B.

Baptist Press
9/17/90

AMMAN, Jordan (BP)--Three-year-old Michael Palomo is one of the youngest refugees fleeing the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Michael, a miniature ball of energy with a winning smile, could still be in the no man's land that is now Kuwait. Or he could be dead, like some children who have died of thirst as their families struggled across the hellish desert that stretches toward the Iraq-Jordan border. One family reportedly lost two children and had to bury them in Iraq.

Instead, Michael is alive and safe, along with his parents and about 200 other Philippine refugees from Kuwait who have found shelter at the Baptist school in Amman, Jordan. He hops from mattress to mattress scattered about the floor of the barracks-like school gymnasium, where the Filipinos are staying until their government sends a plane for them.

The Baptist school offers a safe haven. Southern Baptist workers in Amman, Jordanian Baptists and others provide food, medicine, blankets and other help.

Thousands of Filipinos, Thais, Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis and other Asian contract workers have joined the vast human wave washing across Kuwait and Iraq to escape possible death -- from war, thirst or starvation.

Michael may not remember these fearful days, but he will never be quite the same little boy.

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"I think he got a mental block, because before the invasion he memorized most of the nursery rhymes by heart," explained his mother, Margarita Polomo, who ran a supermarket in Kuwait with her husband, Joseph. "After the invasion all he knows is about the Iraqis and guns and helicopters."

Like many Philippine workers, the Palomos tried to stay in Kuwait after the invasion, because their savings were tied up in the bank there (closed after the invasion) and because they feared an overland journey out. Then the Philippine embassy in Kuwait City closed Aug. 25. And an Iraqi soldier warned them to get out. They knew the time had come.

They abandoned their savings from six years of work and drove three days without sleep to reach the Jordan-Iraq border, joined by eight other Filipinos in a van loaded with water jugs.

"There were so many stories (about Iraqi brutality) that you were afraid to sleep until you reach Jordan," Mrs. Palomo said. "You just pray."

They made it safely, and were treated well by Iraqis, perhaps because of Michael, she said. "Thank God we are safe, but I feel sorry for those who could not come into Jordan. There are so many out there in the boundary area, and there is no food, no nothing, because it is the desert. I pity them."

Another Philippine refugee couple now at the school, Nelson and Delores Flores, tried hiding out in their apartment building in Kuwait. When they looked out the window and saw Iraqi soldiers looting, they were shot at. When soldiers banged on their door, they crouched in silence until the soldiers went away. They had heard rumors the Iraqis were raping civilian women.

They went to the Philippine embassy in Kuwait City Aug. 23 when they heard it would close, and found thousands of Filipinos sweltering on the grounds under the scorching sun. Afraid to leave but terrified of staying, they sold their possessions and joined 20 others in two cars and a van.

One woman in the group died before they reached Baghdad, and Mrs. Flores became very ill. But the Philippine embassy in the Iraqi capital gave them food. They found the border with Jordan closed, but hid in the desert until nightfall and then slipped through.

In Amman, they slept in front of their embassy for two days until "I felt if we could not stay in a good place I will die here," said Mrs. Flores. They found that place in the Baptist school's gymnasium.

Mattresses line the walls and clean laundry hangs from lines strung across the windows or from basketball goal supports. As the sun sets and cool air settles on the evening, the smells of Philippine foods waft out the open door. One refugee shoots baskets to pass the time; another plays guitar.

The Southern Baptist workers still in Jordan provided the mattresses, blankets and medicine -- in part with money from their own pockets. Southern Baptist relief funds also will help. Jordanian Baptists, other Christians, students at the school, and the Philippine embassy are providing food.

Jordanian Baptists also prepare thousands of sandwiches almost daily and deliver them to other refugees in the city.

Southern Baptist workers Gerry and Arylis Milligan, both nurses, distribute medicine, give injections and help school physician Magdy Hanna care for ill Philippine refugees. One Filipino fled Kuwait so quickly that she left her shoes. Mrs. Milligan gave her a pair.

Volunteers with the Filipino Christian Fellowship in Jordan come each night to hold worship services with music, preaching or Christian films. Between 30 and 40 refugees have become Christians through the ministry, according to volunteer Manolo Quiambao. Four were baptized Sept. 2 in the Dead Sea.

"This is the Marriott of refugee camps," said Southern Baptist worker Graydon Hardister with a grin.

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Unfortunately, Baptists can accommodate no more than 200 refugees. But more than 100,000 had swarmed into Jordan by Sept. 5. Up to 20,000 are crossing the Iraqi border each day, and food riots are breaking out at the huge camp near the Al Ruweished border crossing, as refugees grow hungrier, angrier and more desperate in the oven heat.

At the largest camp in Amman, nearly 10,000 refugees huddle back-to-back in a warehouse-like exhibition building with a floor bigger than a football field. Even more camp outside, where they sweat during the day and shiver at night in tents or lean-tos made of sticks covered with sheets and blankets.

Bangladeshis at the camp surround visiting journalists, angrily decrying the lack of aid from their own country and appealing for international help.

"Please help me get out of this hell," one begs.

As the world focuses on potential tragedy at the Saudi-Kuwait border where hostile armies face each other, an actual tragedy is developing in Jordan.

A poor nation that can barely feed its own people, Jordan cannot meet the needs of refugees now in the country, much less the thousands of daily arrivals. Despite intensive efforts by the government, private citizens, charities, mosques and churches, the situation is rapidly approaching chaos.

Without major and immediate international assistance, Jordanian Crown Prince Hussein warns, refugees will begin dying from hunger and exposure.

At the Baptist school, workers are doing what they can. But water alone for refugees there costs \$50 a day; medicine, \$100. Food rationing already has begun for Jordanians, so food is becoming harder to find.

What will happen if the crisis becomes a long-term one?

"I pray it won't," said Milligan.

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

Iraqi church growing,
Jordanian pastor says

By Erich Bridges

F-EMB

Baptist Press
9/17/90

AMMAN, Jordan (BP)--Evangelical Christians in Iraq are experiencing spiritual revival and growth, according to a Jordanian Christian leader who preached in Baghdad earlier this year.

The evangelical Protestant church in Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, has grown to about 600 members, Fawaz Ameish said in an interview in Amman, Jordan. Ameish, pastor of Amman Baptist Church, spent two weeks preaching in Iraq before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Iraqi evangelicals attend four churches in Baghdad and three other cities and have "many home meetings," Ameish said. Recent spiritual renewal at the Baghdad church began after a Lebanese Baptist preacher from the United States conducted services there and "the Lord moved mightily," Ameish reported.

"Many were converted and joined the church," the Jordanian pastor said. "All the week it is like a beehive, even now. I went there and many came and gave their lives to the Lord. There is true revival going on in that church."

Ameish said he became so excited during his visit that he considered beginning Baptist work in Iraq, but he was told new denominations could not be started there now. Instead, he strongly encouraged evangelicals there to seek permission to start more churches.

About 25 new Christians from Iraq attended a summer training conference in Amman just before the invasion and were stranded there for a time, Ameish said. Seventeen were baptized in Jordan before returning to Iraq in late August.

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Christians in Iraq, a tiny minority in a nation that is 96 percent Muslim, were once persecuted by radical members of the ruling military council, Ameish said. Some believers were detained or imprisoned.

"But when Saddam Hussein got rid of those extreme people from his council and had power in his hand, he released (the Christians)," Ameish said. "He became very kind and nice to all the Christian groups. He even visited the homes of some Christians. Imagine! After this persecution some revival took place in the church."

Other minority groups have not been as free to operate. Saddam's police state suppresses any internal groups it opposes, including some Muslims, according to human rights groups.

Christianity came to what is now Iraq in the first century. Tradition holds that the Apostle Thomas evangelized Jewish communities there. The Ancient Church of the East, or Assyrian Church, is the oldest church body in the nation, but Catholics of various stripes are far more numerous.

Protestant missionaries entered the nation in the 19th century. All American missionaries were expelled in 1969, and their schools were closed or taken over by the government. But most of their churches stayed open under Iraqi leadership.

Islam is the state religion, according to the 1970 constitution, but that document states that freedom of religion and worship are guaranteed. No proselyting or Christian broadcasting is allowed, and private publishing is carefully controlled by the government.

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