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Soviets adopt historic
religious freedom law

By Martha Skelton

N-fmb

MOSCOW (BP)--After seven decades of religious repression in the Soviet Union, a historic law enacted Oct. 1 forbids the government from interfering with religious activities.

The law, passed by the Soviet parliament, improves the legal status of religious organizations and gives Soviet citizens the right to study religion in homes and in private schools, in the country or abroad.

"We strongly believe it will have a positive influence on our churches," said Gregory Komendant, president of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. "We have had past problems with the government, but this new law will protect us from all punishment."

For thousands of Baptists and other religious believers in the Soviet Union, the new law also clears the way for the Sunday schools, youth activities and charitable ministries they already are operating.

"We rejoice that it gives a legal basis for what is already being done. This is something to thank God for," said Keith Parker, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area director for Europe.

The Soviet constitution long has guaranteed "freedom of religion," but in practice all but basic worship services were stifled. Christian believers were denied job advancement, higher education and housing because of their faith, and some were imprisoned. Places of worship were confiscated and put to non-religious uses. The state also financed campaigns to promote atheism in schools, through the media and in so-called Museums of Religion and Atheism -- some located in former cathedrals.

Passage of the new law, observers agree, is a de facto acknowledgment that 70 years of atheistic teaching, propaganda and discrimination against believers has failed to diminish, much less eradicate, religious practice in the Soviet Union.

Komendant attended the parliament debate on the new law, accompanied by Alexei Bichkov, UECB vice president. Peter Shatrov, vice president of the Russian regional Baptist union, attended similar sessions of the Russian republic's representatives.

"All people are pleased and glad that such a law was developed and adopted," said Komendant. He addressed the deputies about a point in the third article of the draft law, and it was adopted with the revision he requested. A reference had been made about the form of worship services being "not bad for human health." Concerned that this phrase might be used against churches in certain situations, Komendant asked that it be dropped. Instead, the law affirms all human rights in relation to worship.

An equality provision in the law will affect both young and old church members. No longer will young people be excluded from educational opportunities because of their church involvement. And retiring pastors, like all workers, will be eligible for state pensions. "We are equal with all, equal in pay and pensions," Komendant said.

The educational rights have been extended to all churches equally, so students from the evangelical tradition will have the same prospects as Orthodox or Catholic students.

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The government will continue to have a religion department, but its function will change. It will be an information center, not a body monitoring the churches, said Komendant. Local authorities will be the governmental bodies with which churches will deal, he said.

The diminished government relationship to atheism is a key provision of the law. While atheism remains an integral part of communist dogma, the new law prohibits the government from funding either religious or atheistic activities and propaganda. For years religious leaders, including Baptists, called for the government to put atheism and religion on equal legal footing. They presented these and other ideas in discussions with government representatives about what provisions the new law should contain.

"Atheism ought to be the same voluntary organization like religion -- self-supported, self-governed," Bichkov said after a 1988 meeting with government officials. He was general secretary of the UECB for many years.

Some members of the Soviet parliament are Christian, but none are evangelical, Komendant said. But many "are sympathetic to us," he added.

Observers of religion in the Soviet Union see ambiguities and unanswered questions in the new law and its implementation. But they expressed a guarded optimism that fundamental change has come to relieve decades of inequality for the nation's churches and believers.

Peter Reddaway, an expert on Soviet religion at George Washington University in Washington, told the Associated Press: "The authorities have been loosening restrictions for a couple of years, and now they're putting it in writing." He estimates 50 million Muslims, 30 million Russian Orthodox followers, 6 million Catholics, 2 million Jews and 1 million Baptists live in the Soviet Union.

Certain elements of the law will be worked out later. It calls for establishing a panel of religious leaders to advise the government on human rights issues. Religious practice in the Soviet military is another incomplete area. The law says soldiers may participate in religious services during free time. One lawmaker asked about the military organizing services for soldiers, but was told this question would have to be worked out later.

Another open question remains: will the Russian Orthodox Church attempt to regain a pre-eminent position among legally recognized religions? It was the state church in Russia for centuries.

Bichkov has participated in preliminary meetings to establish a new Bible society in the Soviet Union. In the course of these discussions, he has become concerned that some Russian Orthodox leaders want to get as close as possible to their former state church supremacy.

Evangelicals and those of other faiths, who remember the oppression they suffered during those years, are not encouraged. "When atheism oppressed us, we were together. When oppression disappeared, (Orthodox leaders) repudiated 70 years of experience," Bichkov said. "We are afraid they will become the national, institutional church."

Bichkov said he has seen indications that the Russian Orthodox Church may insist that any Bible society operate under its jurisdiction rather than serve all faiths from an independent stance. The first Russian Bible Society, organized in 1813, was closed later by the czar under pressure from the Orthodox church.

"Orthodox leaders (expect) the time is coming for the restoration of their power in some way," Bichkov stated. "But our Baptists are militant also. If the Orthodox say one word, Baptists say two words back."

Indian Ocean Games
open up to Baptists

By Ron Ragan

N-FMB

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar (BP)--When the Olympic torch flared to life opening the 1990 Indian Ocean Island Games, it signaled the beginning of an athletic event unparalleled in the history of sports-loving Madagascar.

It also sparked an aggressive Baptist evangelism effort that may change the course of Christian history in the island nation off the coast of Africa.

Southern Baptist missionaries Fred and Sami Sorrells, of Brady and Houston, Texas, first heard the games were coming to their island home many months earlier. And come they did, with more than 1,500 athletes arriving on Madagascar for the Aug. 24-Sept. 4 event, sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee.

The Sorrellses felt the evangelism opportunity was too good to pass up. Many people would come from predominately Muslim nations where the Christian message rarely is heard. So the missionaries, together with Malagasy Baptists, decided to use the games and the islanders' love of athletics for evangelism. The results far exceeded their most optimistic expectations.

Madagascar, the world's fourth-largest island, is just off the coast of Mozambique in eastern Africa. Otherwise famous for its orchids, spices and butterflies, the island was transformed by the Malagasy people for one week into the sports hub of the Indian Ocean. Madagascar and the other participating islands -- Mauritius, the Comoros, Seychelles, Maldives and Reunion -- make up a part of the world where athletics is a passion.

For Baptists, the games and associated evangelism presented an enormous challenge to limited resources. Their most visible project was a huge yellow-and-white-striped tent, provided by Southern Baptists and located strategically across the street from Madagascar's main sports stadium in the capital of Antananarivo.

Covered stalls -- housing a video room, bookstore, infirmary and coffee house -- surrounded the tent. Baptists also rented a large natural outdoor amphitheater near the stadium for musical specials.

The tent served as an auditorium for special events such as the 150-voice "Grand Chorale" and a daily children's show. More than 2,000 children, many of them homeless street urchins, participated in puppet shows and sing-along specials. Each day hundreds of people packed the tent and other rooms, heard preaching and singing and watched videos and films on the Christian faith. Sorrells estimated more than 10,000 people visited the Baptist compound during the week. Another 2,000 heard programs in the amphitheater.

The tent also was the scene of moving stories of spiritual conversion, perhaps none more inspiring than that of an old grandmother. Sorrells narrated what happened:

"A young boy came to our children's show and was so impressed that he returned home and told his grandmother he had found a place where God lived. The old woman couldn't sleep all night. At 5 a.m. she prayed that God would help her find this tent her grandson spoke about and finally let her discover the God she had been seeking for years.

"The same morning this old woman literally ran into the tent and cornered Lalao, one of our most faithful church members. She said, 'Can you tell me where I can find the Kingdom of God?' Lalao took her into the coffeehouse and told her the story of Christ. The old woman broke into tears and thanked Lalao for an answered prayer. She invited Jesus to be her Lord and Savior."

The story doesn't end there, Sorrells added. "The next morning at 7 o'clock she appeared in our first new Christians' Bible discipleship class. She apparently felt she had a lot of catching up to do."

Southern Baptist missionary Bubba Sawyer, who helped in the games ministry, thinks sports is one of the most effective ways to reach Third World young people with the gospel. A Fairhope, Ala., native and missionary in nearby Mauritius, Sawyer knows about sports and young people. He played football at the University of Alabama as a wide receiver.

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Sawyer, his wife, Debbie, and Norman and Jeannie Wood, also Southern Baptist missionaries on Mauritius, flew to Madagascar for the games. Sawyer acted as a trainer, taping ankles and knees, giving advice and using his inside position with athletes to share the gospel. Wood preached, participated in street evangelism and helped organize special events.

Sawyer said the potential talent pool in the United States for athletic evangelism is staggering. "I know there are many coaches and former athletes in America who would come as volunteers and trainers if missions issued a request," he said.

Southern Baptist volunteers from the United States also played a big role in the activities -- a first for Baptists in Madagascar.

Ross Geyer from Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, spent a month in Madagascar using his sports training talents to reach athletes with the gospel. He concentrated on volleyball players. "Even though I don't speak their language, they know I care. I'm planting seeds with these athletes," he said.

Geyer discovered an acute shortage of needed medical materials. "Athletic tape is a novelty over here," he said. "Elastic bandages and analgesic balm, common in every high school field house in America, are unheard of here."

Geyer agrees with Sorrells and Sawyer about the potential for using athletics to reach people for Christ in the Third World. "Being involved in athletics over here may be more than just the competition. ... It may be survival for many," he said. "Let's say we concentrate on athletics as a mission strategy, win a prominent athlete to the Lord and he takes a public stance. The potential is unlimited. There's not a church on this island that can draw the kind of crowd a volleyball or football game will."

Patrick Rakoto, Madagascar's badminton champion, uses his celebrity status to present a Christian witness wherever he goes. Sorrells says it is amazing to watch athletes come to Rakoto and ask about his faith. Rakoto is humble about leading others to God: "I don't really do anything. It's the Lord working through me," he said. The idea of God is already there in most athletes, he adds. "It just takes someone to tell them."

Dave Morse, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, spent three months in Antananarivo helping local Baptists prepare for the games. He helped build a sound recording studio, instructed Baptists in recording techniques and taught discipleship classes.

Laura Chitwood, an International Service Corps volunteer from Smithville, Okla., has been living in Madagascar teaching and working with the Sorrellses. She plans to stay through December. During the games she used her training in sports medicine and coaching to tape ankles for the Madagascar women's volleyball team. She also used the opportunity for personal evangelism with the athletes.

Personal evangelism played a key part in the Baptist strategy. Each day teams of three people, speaking French, Malagasy or English, fanned out to distribute tracts, witness and answer questions. Baptists passed out more than 100,000 pieces of literature. Volunteers reported seeing people all over the city standing on street corners and in businesses reading tracts.

Often Baptists brought people back to the coffeehouse for one-on-one discussions. Sorrells said about 650 people made personal decisions to accept Christ as Savior. "There are only 1,300 Baptists on the whole island," he said. "These 650 new Christians will present a major discipleship challenge in the coming weeks and months."

Volunteers reported an almost unbelievable response from people on the streets. Crowds gathered requesting tracts and asking questions. Many expressed confusion and doubt about the nature of God and sin in the world.

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Volunteer Ted Winston, a Dallas Theological Seminary student, said a policeman stopped him on the street and started to ask questions. "We witnessed to this man and he kept coming back each day, two or three times," Winston said. "Finally he came with a written list of questions concerning the Christian position on such topics as sin, ancestor worship and sacrifice. We showed him biblical verses dealing with these things and he fully accepted the Scriptures as authoritative. In the end he made a profession of faith and accepted the Lord as his personal Savior."

On the final day of the games Sorrells and other Baptists distributed packets of Christian literature, Bibles and cassette tapes to athletes. Badminton silver medal winner Rakoto's athletic village friends helped pass out the material. "In many instances Muslim athletes received a Christian Bible and heard a Christian witness for the first time," Sorrells said.

The evangelistic team also received an unexpected morale boost on the last day. "We had produced a 43-minute voice cassette featuring testimonies of prominent international athletes and local sports heroes, information about the islands and some music," said Sorrells.

"We had planned the cassette mainly for distribution to athletes, but then the Madagascar radio station heard it, liked it, and wanted to play it on the air. So, in prime time, just before the nationally broadcast closing ceremonies, 1 million Malagasy citizens heard our cassette."

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Ron Ragan, Southern Baptist missionary from Kenya, covered the Indian Ocean Island Games for Baptist Press.

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

Madagascar: a new spirit
in the Indian Ocean Islands

By Ron Ragan

N-FMB

Baptist Press
10/1/90

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar (BP)--A celebration was in full swing, with plenty of food and song.

Slowly, one by one, dancing relatives brought shrouded skeletons of long-deceased ancestors forth from a tomb and paraded them high on their raised hands for all to see. August is the annual time of exhumation in Madagascar -- rites that require removing and rewrapping the bodies of sacred ancestors.

Southern Baptist missionary Fred Sorrells describes a common practice for many Malagasy people: "A person will dream, and in the dream one of the ancestors, a grandparent, will say, 'My bones are cold.' That means they must go into the tomb, take out what remains of the body, clean it and wash the bones, then wrap it again in silk cloth."

Ancestor veneration is just one of many forms of worship in Madagascar, where a people from many races have just as many gods. Madagascar is a mission field as ripe as any on earth.

Baptist work in Madagascar has roots dating back to 1932, when a London Missionary Society worker named Brinkley Evans arrived. He worked with the people, left for a time and returned as an evangelical missionary. He worked until he fell sick and returned home in 1945.

From 1945 until 1966, no Baptist missionaries lived on the island. In 1966 Malagasy Baptists invited missionaries from the Conservative Baptist Convention into Madagascar. The first Southern Baptist missionaries, Fred and Sami Sorrells, arrived in 1987.

According to Sorrells, many pockets of unreached people groups live on the island. "There are officially 18 tribes in Madagascar," he said. "Out of those there are only two tribes, accounting for about 2 million people, that you could say are really evangelized. The rest of the population of 12 million is very much unreached."

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Many Malagasy Baptists readily admit that evangelical outreach historically has taken a back seat to other church affairs. In 50 years, Baptists in Madagascar have grown only to 1,300 believers. They represent 30 churches, 15 of which they started in the past five years.

But Sorrells insists things are different now; a new evangelical spirit is sweeping the churches. "My goal is to motivate Malagasy Baptists to reach out to this island," he said.

Landi Rabenirainy, a choir director and church leader, believes Baptists are starting to recognize the need for reaching outside the church body. "You could say we are mature because of our years of Christian work, but not in how we share it," he said. "We thank the Lord for this opportunity to share Christ during the Indian Ocean Island Games. It's just the beginning of something bigger for Malagasy Christians."

Sorrells agrees. "The Indian Ocean Island Games have really unified our Malagasy Baptists," he said. During the games, held Aug. 24-Sept. 4, Baptists took a high-profile position by erecting a large tent just across from Antananarivo's main sports stadium complex. Large green banners all over the capital city invited one and all to visit the Baptist Visitors Center. They also rented the city's natural amphitheater for musical productions and preaching.

Volunteers, many of them from the United States and Europe, worked side by side with local Baptists in street evangelism, children's programs, films and videos, plus music performances. It was almost as if Malagasy Baptists came out of a 50-year hibernation.

On the streets of Antananarivo, a casual observer would never have thought Malagasy Baptists were timid. Each day 100 or more Baptists left the tent like a swarm of ants, converging on the city with an evangelistic enthusiasm and passion usually reserved only for football.

Have Malagasy Baptists caught a vision? Maybe. Said Sorrells: "Lay involvement is the key to sustaining this momentum, and it was unprecedented here during the games." Hundreds of Baptists worked in the tent area cooking meals each day, manning a bookstore, video room and coffeehouse. Even a full-time doctor provided medical assistance as needed.

The work won't end there. "With about 650 professions of faith during the games, and that many new believers to disciple, everyone will have to get committed to the task," said Sorrells.

Many observers are convinced that Madagascar is ready for revival. During the Indian Ocean Island Games response from the Malagasy people was often overwhelming. Excited people surrounded Baptist volunteers on Antananarivo streets, requesting information and advice on what the Christian message could mean in their lives.

In a country where more than 50 percent of the population is under age 18, evangelizing young people ranks high in priority. And sports is the key to reaching them. "With athletics there's instant rapport," Sorrells said.

In opening dedication ceremonies for the Baptist Visitors Center, Antananarivo's mayor said, "The Christian has a great responsibility to fill. Every day we face things that make us ask, 'Where are the Christians?'"

In the past some people might have asked, "Where are the Baptists?" That was before the Indian Ocean Island Games.

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Ferguson urges convocation crowd
to deal with conflict constructively

N-CP
(MO.)

Baptist Press
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Southern Baptists must seek God's grace for the maturity, strength and ability to deal with denominational conflict constructively, according to Milton Ferguson, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Addressing a packed auditorium, Ferguson received a standing ovation as he spoke of the Southern Baptist Convention controversy during the Kansas City, Mo., seminary's fall convocation.

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"We must acknowledge that there is pain and sickness in our Southern Baptist family," he said. "We have gone through 12 years of public conflict, playing out in a world stage our own internal difficulties."

In order to deal with the conflict constructively, Ferguson suggested Southern Baptists must first acknowledge the reality of the controversy.

"We are a family in trouble. We are a family in distress," he said. "We must, therefore, acknowledge the conflict. We cannot run from it, no matter how painful it is. The worst thing we can do is to deny or seek to evade the reality of the situation."

Ferguson said there are certain attitudes Southern Baptists should avoid while seeking to deal with denominational conflict in a constructive manner.

"First of all, let's avoid an 'all or nothing at all' pattern of thinking and acting," he advised. "It is almost inevitable in a conflictual situation that we come to a point where there is no middle ground. When we think that way, we begin making decisions as if the only options we have are all good or all bad, all right or all wrong. We see people as friends when they agree with us and as enemies when they oppose us."

Ferguson also suggested Southern Baptists avoid the compulsion to control.

"There is a kind of attitude or desire, especially with those of us in places of responsibility, to want to control what happens in order to guarantee a good result," he shared. "When we give our energy and time to trying to control circumstances, we can become caught up and preoccupied in the problem. We can be overwhelmed and see only the dark side of the issue."

"Jesus sought to teach us that he who seeks to save his life -- his church, his denomination, his seminary -- shall lose it. But he who is able to lose his life -- his cause, his institution, his ministry -- for Christ's sake, shall find it," Ferguson said.

The president urged his audience to face their fears concerning denominational conflict.

"I think the fundamental fear that many of us fear is the fear of abandonment, abandonment by the people who gave us birth, by Southern Baptists who educated us and brought us life, by the denomination of which we were so proud."

"Our family is hurting, it's fragmenting, it's in pain," he continued. "Children always feel abandoned in times like these."

Ferguson said such fears can be conquered by the acknowledgement that "God is not dependant on Southern Baptists. The presence of God in human life and in human history, and the purpose of God in your life and mine is so much larger and grander even than our heritage and our hope which so long has been rooted in the family which is called Southern Baptist."

"To say this in no way means I am abandoning my family in a time of crisis," he continued. "It means that I am looking beyond the family for the help and the hope that comes from a higher power and from a greater resource than those of us who are in pain can provide for each other."

Ferguson concluded, "We must deal with conflict responsibly. We must look beyond our own resources for the strength that comes from trusting God moment by moment, one day at a time."

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Chaplain offers urban resort
ministry at Six Flags park

By Ken Camp

N-
Texas

Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)--To many high school students, a summer job at Six Flags Over Texas might seem like getting paid to play. But when the disillusioning reality of day-to-day work sets in, chaplain Rick Sellers is there to offer sympathetic counsel and a Christian witness.

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Sellers, a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has served as resort chaplain at the Arlington, Texas, amusement park since late July.

"Many of the employees are young people -- high school kids on their first job. They feel a lot of stress. It a big responsibility for those kids who work out there," said Sellers, who is concentrating his seminary studies in the area of youth ministry.

"I'm there to work with them one-on-one, so they will have someone to talk to if they have problems at work, relationship problems, drug problems or whatever."

Sellers also is available to counsel the adult employees, to respond to religious questions initiated by guests at the park, and to assist in coordinating special events with a spiritual emphasis such as concerts featuring contemporary Christian musicians.

During Six Flags' peak season in August, Sellers worked at the amusement park about 20 hours each week and was on-call 24 hours a day. Since Labor Day, when the park cut back on the number of days it is open, Sellers has worked each weekend.

The resort ministry project was initiated by Bob Raus, professor of church recreation and associate dean of the school of religious education at Southwestern Seminary. The experimental project is scheduled to receive funding through the end of October.

The resort chaplaincy project is sponsored by Tarrant Association and the church ministries department of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. It is made possible by Texas Baptist gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions and through the Cooperative Program unified budget.

Raus developed the proposal for the amusement park chaplaincy program following a sabbatical several years ago during which he traveled 27,000 miles studying resort ministries across the country. At that time, he discovered students from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary involved in a chaplaincy program at the Worlds of Fun amusement park in Kansas City, Mo.

Returning to Tarrant County, he found that Six Flags Over Texas had a chaplain at one time, but the chaplain left the park to accept a Fort Worth pastorate. Raus said the park management was receptive to the idea of reopening the chaplaincy program, realizing the "payback" it receives.

"There's a high turnover rate among employees. Many are young high school students who think it sounds so neat, having fun all day long at Six Flags, but it ends up being hard work," said Raus.

"Having a chaplain available would help stabilize employment. The young people would have somebody to talk to about their problems, and it would improve morale."

Sellers said his greatest challenge has been explaining who he is and what he is doing, and in spreading the word that he is ready to minister when called upon.

"I've been contacting local youth ministers, seeing if they have kids in their youth groups who are employees out there. I would like for them to help get my name out circulating among the other employees to let them know we're providing a chaplain for them," Sellers said.

Raus said he hoped that the presence of a chaplain at the park would encourage young Christian employees to be bolder witnesses, and as youth are reached for Christ, he hoped the chaplain could help direct them into local churches.

Though there is no promise of funding and no obvious groundswell of support among local churches, Raus said his dream is that the chaplaincy program might become a year-around urban resort ministry involving the MayFest crafts fair, the Fort Worth Livestock Show and other events.

"I believe ultimately we would see the churches reap the harvest in a concrete way," he said.

Praxis teams brave hardships
to share Christ across U.S.

By Breena Kent Paine

F-CO
(WOBTS)

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Praxis teams from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary braved crime, scorpions, floods, language barriers, physical handicaps, rejection, and frustration to share Christ across the nation this summer; and the results were victories for Christ.

Praxis is a 10-week project in communities perceived as targets for planting churches. A cooperative effort of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, the seminaries, the state conventions, and the local associations and churches, Praxis provides students an opportunity to put into practice what they are learning in seminary.

To share the gospel in the predominantly black neighborhood of Carver Ranches, Fla., Joel Greene, of Lafayette, La., and his partner, Samuel Wlue, a native of Liberia and a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., strove to show the people they were "on the same level." They dressed like them, and even braved the crime rate to move into an apartment in the area. But when they found the place infested with scorpions, they had to leave.

Moving into a safer, largely Canadian subdivision had its problems, too, however. As two unknown, poorly dressed, black men moving items in and out of an apartment in a white, middle class neighborhood, they were suspected immediately as thieves. Neighbors called the police.

"We were cleaning out the apartment, when I noticed my partner was missing," Greene said. "I found him outside, on the ground, surrounded by police. ... Fortunately the pastor of the sponsor church showed up, explained what we were there for, and the police gave us an apology. They were just doing their job."

The Praxis team's perseverance paid off, however, and by the end of the summer, they saw ten professions of faith.

When a 26-foot-high wall of water plowed through the little valley of Wegee Creek, Ohio, causing 22 deaths, Jerry and B.J. Grubb's plans to start a church in Shady Side were halted.

Grubb, of Metairie, La., began interviewing victims and assessing their needs. Through the help of Baptists, he was able to provide families with food, shelter, and needed household items; as well as answer their spiritual questions, preaching during services for the victims and sharing with them one-on-one.

One drunk man looking for his wife and child "was crying, and you could smell him down the hall," Grubb recalled.

"I've tried everything," said the man.

"Have you tried God?" Grubb asked, and he took him into a corner to pray with him.

"I asked God to relieve him of his burden and comfort him. ... The next morning, I found out his wife and child had been found and had been moved to shelter."

Although Jeff Turner is a victim of cerebral palsy, he used his physical condition to an advantage when he and his wife, Zodie, shared Christ with curious Hispanic south Miami apartment residents.

When Turner walked up to some kids from the neighborhood, and said, "Let's play basketball," they thought he was crazy.

"They had seen me stand and walk, and they thought I was a freak show," he said, "until they saw me play."

"I shared with them from Psalm 139 about how we are 'wonderfully made,'" continued Turner, who coached junior high basketball in Orlando, Fla., before coming to seminary. "I told them the Lord doesn't care what you look like on the outside; he loves you just the way you are."

Because of the racial differences and high crime rate in the area, the Turners built relationships to build trust. That meant helping a family move, taking someone to lunch, bringing a needy family groceries, or "translating" -- breaking difficult words into simpler English -- for a Hispanic in a court case.

"The people would come to Bible study to check us out, at first. They were apprehensive because we weren't Latins," said Turner, whose part-Cherokee-Indian features were often mistaken for Hispanic. "At the end of the summer, they were just starting to open their homes to us. If we had stayed several more weeks, I think we could have seen a lot more people saved."

For John and Ernestine Herrington, grandparents nearing their 60s with leg and other health problems, planting a church in Garden Grove, Fla., "was a very stretching experience."

At first, they had worried about their physical condition; but even with all the walking and stress they faced during the summer, they had no serious problems, said Mrs. Herrington, of Tylertown, Miss. "God answered our prayer."

One day, the Herringtons' car stalled. A passerby offered to help them jumpstart it, and as he helped he talked.

"I've had the worst week of my life," he said, and he continued to pour out his frustrations.

The Herringtons invited him to Bible study, and he showed up; but they failed to get his address. He never came to Bible study again.

For weeks, they prayed for the man and for another opportunity to share Christ with him. Finally, they thought they recognized the man's van in front of a home one day.

"John asked someone out front if Ed lived there," Mrs. Herrington said. The answer was positive, "and he went inside and led Ed to the Lord."

"We did not do what we did this summer; God did it," Mrs. Herrington said. "We were like empty vessels. God filled us up and poured (himself) out of us."