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October 9, 1990

90-138

Rebel fighting in Rwanda
halts most mission work

N.F.M.R.

KIGALI, Rwanda (BP)--Tensions in parts of Rwanda eased Oct. 8 after more than a week of fighting between government and rebel forces -- fighting that shut down most mission work, a Southern Baptist missionary said.

"It's much better today," said missionary Sandi Sivage of Luling, Texas. "People are starting to move about on the streets, more shops are open and I've seen people driving private cars for the first time in several days." Sivage lives in Kigali, the capital of the east African country. Rwanda, about the size of Vermont, has a population of nearly 7 million people.

Although life in the capital has begun to return to normal, fighting continues in northern Rwanda. Mission officials have asked missionaries outside the capital to come into Kigali for a mission meeting, if safe travel is possible. The missionaries will consider evacuation options and safety factors in staying. In times of unrest, each missionary has the final say on whether to stay on the field or leave.

Fighting broke out Sept. 30 when Rwandan rebels from neighboring Uganda attacked Rwandan government troops near the Akagera game park in northern Rwanda. The rebels advanced to within a few miles of the capital before Rwandan troops, with the aid of Zairian, French and Belgian soldiers, halted the military push.

Missionary Katrina Knox from Columbia, Tenn., and her visiting parents were detained in the game park hotel for about 24 hours by government troops Oct. 1. The family was visiting the park when they accidentally drove into an area of fighting. They were taken to the hotel for safety and escorted to Kigali the next day.

Seventeen Southern Baptist mission workers live in Rwanda, including one volunteer couple, seven missionary couples and one single missionary.

Mission volunteers Rick and Gail Stewart from Sykesville, Md., planned to leave Rwanda Oct. 12 for the United States. With a military escort, the Stewarts drove from Kigali to their home in Mukoma Oct. 9 to collect their things before leaving. The fighting has forced the Stewarts to cut short their volunteer term by about two months.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew has been in effect since fighting moved toward the capital Oct. 4. Missionaries in Kigali and in cities south of the capital have stayed at home, venturing out only for food and supplies, said mission administrator Vernon Sivage of Midland, Texas.

"We are keeping our heads low and listening to the radio (for news)," Sivage said. By Oct. 9 all mission workers had reported they were safe.

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CORRECTION: In Baptist Press story titled "State convention presidents seek 'peace,' 'common ground'" mailed 10/8/90, please note the following correction.

Eddie Hamilton was incorrectly identified as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. He is, in fact, president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Second century fund grant
applications due Nov. 1

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union is accepting applications for Second Century Fund grants through Nov. 1.

N-20 (Wmu)

The Second Century Fund is an endowment fund established by WMU during its centennial year as a gift to future generations of women in missions. All contributions are invested permanently with only the interest earned on the principal given as grants.

Grants are given in three categories: to develop missions organizations abroad; to enhance WMU leadership development in the United States; and to foster education about missions and WMU among Southern Baptist seminary students and faculty.

Grant recipients will be announced during the Jan. 5-11 WMU executive board meeting.

Grant applications can be requested from: Second Century Fund, Woman's Missionary Union, P.O. Box 830010, Birmingham, Ala. 35283-0010, Attn: Mary Helen Dixon.

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Retiring missionaries reflect
on service, urge others to go

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
10/9/90

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Bob and Margie Wakefield's 31-year missionary career ended with a question they could not answer.

One last time before returning to the United States, they visited the Khonds, a tribal group in the eastern highlands of India. The Wakefields, from Hartville and Tribune, Mo., had worked with the Khonds as itinerant missionaries for several years.

The couple spoke to the Khonds during their final church service in India. When the worship leader asked if anyone in the congregation wanted to say something to them, a small man stood in back of the church and asked a question.

It was a "question we did not know how to answer," said Wakefield during a recognition service for retiring Southern Baptist missionaries Oct. 8 at Bon Air Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

"We want to give the question to you tonight because I have a feeling that some of you have the answer. The question was simply this: 'Is anybody else coming?' ... It's your question."

The Wakefields were among 71 retiring missionaries honored by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. The missionaries served a combined total of 2,164 years in 43 countries.

Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks called the missionaries "heroes and heroines in the faith." Parks said he found four common themes as he read testimonies the retirees had prepared for the evening service's printed program.

First, the testimonies reflected God's call to serve on a foreign field. "The Lord's calling is woven throughout the tapestry of their testimonies," said Parks.

For some of those missionaries, God's call also moved them to a different location in the middle of their mission careers. That was the case for Bert and Ruth Dyson, Southern Baptist missionaries to Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The Dysons, of Nashville, and Mobeetie, Texas, had worked for 28 years in Nigeria when they sensed God's call to begin mission work in Sierra Leone.

"My first thought was, 'We're too old to start over again,'" admitted Mrs. Dyson. But during a church service in Nigeria, a sermon on Abraham helped the couple make the decision to pull up roots again.

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"We didn't go with the great spirit of Abraham," she said. "We went more like Jonah, kicking and squawking. ... But God was so good to us. God spoke to Abraham and to us in that same way: 'Go from your country.' But the bottom line for Abraham and the bottom line for us was, 'I will go with you and I will bless you.'"

The missionaries' testimonies also reflected a "sharp awareness of the Lord's presence in all kinds of circumstances," Parks noted.

David King said his Bible now almost automatically falls open to Psalm 91 because he read it so much while working in bloody Lebanon. The psalm speaks of God's protection.

"God has been faithful," King, of Livingston, N.J., said of his service there. "God has blessed, God has kept us in his care and God is still active there."

Although missionaries no longer can live in Lebanon, the Foreign Mission's No. 1 personnel request is for someone to coordinate church development in the Arab world. He urged Southern Baptists to pray that this request will be filled.

The missionaries' testimonies also revealed their awareness of the Lord's provision for them, Parks said.

Missionary June Pike of Fort Smith, Ark., will never forget May 2, 1975. She and her family were living in the midst of the civil war in Angola.

During those days, she relied on Psalm 62, which declares, "I stand silently before the Lord, I wait for him to rescue me. Why then should I be tense with fear when trouble comes?"

On May 2, soldiers came into her neighborhood searching for weapons. Since Mrs. Pike's husband, Harrison (of Texarkana, Texas), is a hunter, they had guns in the house.

When someone came to the door, Mrs. Pike recited Psalm 62 and prayed for help as she opened the door. There stood the night watchman employed by the Pikes. He simply wanted his wages. As she paid the man, she saw the soldiers drive away.

"How were we able to cope?" asked Mrs. Pike. "We depended upon the intercessory prayer of Southern Baptists and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit."

Finally, the testimonies reflected the "Lord's victory," Parks said. Texan Sarah Beth Short told of struggles she and her husband, James, experienced when their daughter, Martha, was born mentally and physically handicapped in Mexico. The Shorts are from Fort Worth and Dallas.

"There were times when I wondered if God really was even enjoying my pain," she admitted. "I knew better than that. But I wondered because it hurt so bad."

She responded by developing a ministry to handicapped people. The program now reaches both the handicapped and their families in several areas of Mexico.

James Teel of Electra, Texas, who worked in Latin America and Canada, related the story of the late Enrique Marconi, an Argentine Baptist pastor. As a 7-year-old, Marconi was shining shoes early one Sunday morning in Argentina. The late Southern Baptist missionary Martin Blair stopped for a shine. Blair invited Marconi to Sunday morning services at the church where he was pastor.

By the time Marconi arrived, the service was already over. When Blair saw him, he invited him to sit on the front pew. He and his wife, Cora, repeated the entire service just for Marconi. When Blair told him some Bible stories, Marconi accepted Christ as Savior. Later his mother and aunt did the same.

When Teel was leaving Argentina in 1976, Marconi said to him, "When you go home, I want you to say thank you to Southern Baptists. Thank them for sending that missionary. Tell them not to stop. ... There are a lot of little 7-year-old boys out there."

Blair's son, Judson, also was among the 71 emeritus missionaries recognized. He and his wife, Dorothy, worked for 41 years in Argentina and at the Baptist Spanish Publishing House in El Paso, Texas.

Amelio Giannetta, a retiring missionary to Italy and Brazil, grew up at a Baptist orphanage in Rome. "Because of God's grace to Southern Baptists, I came to know Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior," he said.

Giannetta challenged Southern Baptists to love and accept one another as Southern Baptists have "received and accepted and loved us."

"Don't spend your time talking about your brother," he said. "Talk about Jesus. There's a world ... that's in desperate need of hearing the gospel of God's redemption, love and grace. Let's reach it."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Biographical information and photos of each missionary honored during the retirement service will be sent to their home state papers.

Gregory advises students:
'measure your ministry'

F-CO
(MWBTs) Baptist Press
10/9/90

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Seminarists preparing for lives of vocational Christian service should "measure" their ministries, Joel C. Gregory advised students at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"It's better for you to measure your ministry before others do," said Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

Gregory was guest speaker during the "Week of Preaching" lecture series, held recently at the Kansas City, Mo., seminary. The series is sponsored annually to provide an opportunity for spiritual renewal and inspiration for seminarists and area guests.

The Texas pastor told students they could measure their ministry by considering the maturity of their faith and examining their motivation. He also spoke to seminarists about facing times of testing and depression in the ministry.

Pointing to Abraham as a biblical example of a life of great faith, Gregory said, "It's one thing to talk about faith in the abstract and another thing to say, 'How does faith behave in the concrete?'"

Concrete faith enables the Christian minister to go with God without knowing where he is leading, to wait on God without knowing when he will act, and to believe God without knowing how he will accomplish his promises, Gregory noted.

"The essence of faith is its willingness to live out the last word that God gave, until he gives the next word," the pastor said.

Gregory examined the Apostle Paul's message to the Thessalonians as he discussed the proper motivation for ministry. He noted Paul disdained four motives for ministry: error, greed, manipulation and reputation.

The apostle's motivation for ministry was that "a sacred trust -- the gospel message -- had been deposited with him, and he was motivated not to betray that trust," Gregory said. "His mission was to spend his life for the sake of the gospel."

In II Corinthians, Paul describes the gospel message as treasure which is deposited in "jars of clay," Gregory pointed out. "The weakness of humanity contains the treasure of the gospel. ... God uses us in such a way that the treasure of the gospel is displayed against the relatively less valued backdrop of our own humanity, so that the all surpassing power of God might be seen in our ministry."

Seminarists may measure their ministry by the way they cope with life's testing times and depression, Gregory said.

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"We can face life's testing times with a sense of inward spiritual joy with we perceive God's purpose in the test," he said. Christians must recognize that trials must be experienced in order for the reality of faith to be demonstrated.

"When you understand God's purpose in the test, you can face life's testing times with an inward sense of well-being that nothing can shake," Gregory affirmed.

In addition to experiencing various trials, vocational Christian ministers may suffer from periods of depression, the Texas pastor said.

"There is a remedy for depression in the lives of God's servants that is found when we keep on talking to God and recover his praise," he noted. "You must realize that even when it seems God is silent, he is still working in your life. ... Tell God how you feel and engage in the overt praise of God. Then you will find relief from depression."