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NOTE TO EDITORS: The following stories on mission work in Colombia are based on firsthand coverage in November-December 1990.

Missionaries cope amidst  
Colombia's lingering drug war

By Mary E. Speidel

N FMB

BOGOTA, Colombia (BP)--When Avianca Flight 203 exploded in midair, John Magyar quickly called his daughter.

"I knew the first thing that would go through their minds was, 'Maybe Dad was on that flight,'" said Magyar of his six grown children. Magyar, from St. Louis, is a Southern Baptist missionary in Colombia.

Magyar had been a frequent flier on that morning route from Bogota to Cali, Colombia. He wasn't aboard when a bomb killed all 107 passengers Nov. 27, 1989. But he knows he easily could have been.

"The danger that we feel is being in the wrong place at the wrong time," missionary Ellis Leagans said of Colombia's lingering drug war. Leagans is administrator of the Southern Baptist mission organization in Colombia.

That danger escalated in August 1989 when leaders of Colombia's Medellin-based drug cartel declared "total and absolute war" on the government. They also renewed threats to harm Americans in Colombia.

The cartel was reacting to then-President Vigilio Barco Vargas' announced plans to reinstate an extradition treaty allowing Colombian drug criminals to be tried in the United States. His announcement came after cartel hit men assassinated Colombian presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan Aug. 18, 1989. In the weeks that followed, a rash of violence rocked Colombia -- bombings and murders of politicians, judges and journalists.

After an election campaign that left three presidential candidates dead, newly elected President Cesar Gaviria Trujillo took office last August. Trying to get drug traffickers to surrender, he changed Colombia's drug policy by offering to waive extradition and cut jail terms for cartel leaders.

Just before Christmas, Gaviria's strategy paid off. On Dec. 18 Colombian drug baron Fabio Ochoa, one of the top three leaders in the cartel, surrendered to justice officials. If Ochoa is well-treated, some analysts believe other traffickers may do the same. But U.S. drug experts doubt Colombia will win the drug war this way.

Whatever the war's outcome, violence remains part of life in Colombia, especially in Bogota, Cali and Medellin. In some shopping centers, customers wait in lines while police check their cars for bombs. At major airports, passengers may go through as many as four separate security checks.

"After a while, it just becomes part of what you do to live here," said Magyar, sipping Colombian coffee at his desk in one of the country's troubled cities.

And for some missionaries, "part of what you do" is cope with close calls.

In December 1989, a bomb containing half a ton of dynamite exploded outside the headquarters of DAS, Colombia's national secret police. The bomb, attributed to drug traffickers, killed some 60 people. The day before, a missionary couple had been standing in line in the area.

Last April two children of missionaries were waiting for a school bus when officials deactivated a truck bomb a few blocks away. The bomb contained 1,600 pounds of dynamite.

Later that month a gunman killed presidential candidate Carlos Pizaro aboard a commercial airliner en route from Bogota to Barranquilla. A Southern Baptist missionary was to have been aboard that flight, but her plans changed. Another missionary had flown on the same aircraft the night before.

In the face of such dangers, each missionary copes differently. One said he and his wife openly talk about the possibility of being killed or kidnapped. "I guess you get a little matter-of-fact about it," he admitted.

Missionary Bob Caperton said he relies on the truth found in Proverbs 26:13 as paraphrased in The Living Bible.

"It says something like, 'I can't go outside today because a lion may be in the street,'" said Caperton while driving down the street in a Colombian city where he works. "That's like saying, 'I can't go do my missionary work today because I might get killed.' That's always a possibility. But I might get killed in Houston, Texas, too." Caperton is from Alvin, Texas.

Missionary families with young children probably feel the most stress, according to Leagans.

"We've gone through different degrees of being afraid," admitted Cindy Faris of McAlister, N.M., a church and home worker in Colombia. She and her husband, Bart, have a 3-year-old son, Daniel, and an infant daughter, Christina.

At the preschool Daniel attends, armed guards keep watch at the barbed wire fence around the building. "It's a different kind of thing that you have to think about .... If something happened to (the children), what would you do?" said Mrs. Faris while Christina napped and Daniel played.

She finally quit reading the newspaper in order to handle the stress.

Missionaries in Colombia also face pressures from relatives at home. "Probably the greatest part of the stress factor comes from knowing that relatives back in the United States are hearing things on the news that don't give the full picture," said Leagans, from Davie County, N.C.

Some reports isolate a single incident and give the impression that violence is everywhere, he said. While watching Cable News Network broadcasts, "Occasionally I wondered if I was living in the same city they were talking about," he commented.

Leagans encourages his colleagues to call U.S. family members to report on their safety. "It's true in so many cases, being in a situation may not be nearly as bad as being on the outside, hearing about it and wondering what's happening," he said.

When Colombian violence makes international news, Magyar said he immediately phones one of his children to assure them of his safety. But at the same time, he and his wife, Joyce, don't give their children a false sense of security. "We have frequently said to them, 'If there's a problem, we'll shoot straight with you,'" he explained.

When missionaries learn of potential problems, "Staying home is the biggest precautionary measure we take," noted Leagans. In some cases, travel in certain areas also has been restricted. But the overall impact of Colombia's violence on actual mission work "has not been anything out of the ordinary," he said.

Yet the total Southern Baptist missionary force there has dropped from 71 to 50 in the past two years. A few missionary resignations were attributed to security concerns, Leagans said, "but I think any resignation is a combination of a lot of factors." Also, some who have left Colombia have retired or transferred to other countries.

Missionaries who remain in Colombia credit much of their coping to intercessory prayer. The prayers of Southern Baptists "kept us on our feet and safe through all those terrible days of stress and fear that we were experiencing" in the fall of 1989, one missionary said.

But the underlying tension of living in Colombia never goes away, another missionary said. "I think if there weren't a call (to Colombia) we wouldn't still be here," she said. "If people weren't praying for us, we would have left a long time ago."

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

Colombians open to gospel  
as drug battle takes toll

By Mary E. Speidel

*N FMB*

Baptist Press  
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CALI, Colombia (BP)--As prospects for peace emerge in Colombia's drug war, people are becoming more open to the gospel of peace, according to some Baptist leaders there.

Since cocaine lords declared war on the Colombian government in August 1989, hundreds of civilians have died. Drug barons have targeted judges, politicians and journalists who have denounced their illegal trade. In 1990, some 420 Colombian policeman were killed and more than 530 wounded, mostly in the drug war.

The bloody battle has taken its toll on Colombia.

"Our country is tired," said Luis Alberto Ramos, a Baptist pastor in one of Colombia's major cities.

Colombians saw violence subside last July after traffickers declared a truce in the fighting. And when the country's new president, Cesar Gaviria, took office the next month, he offered to waive extradition to the United States and cut jail terms for drug barons. On Dec. 18 one of the top three leaders in the Medellin-based drug cartel surrendered to the government. Some officials believe other drug bosses will follow his lead and the war may wind down into peace talks.

In spite of such prospects, the year of drug-related violence "has made people restless. They want answers," said Harold Segura, pastor of one of Colombia's fastest-growing Baptist churches.

"It's been very tense. There's been a lot of fear," added Jorge Giraldo, a Colombian Baptist chaplain and pastor.

Against that backdrop, "I think we very definitely are seeing an openness to the gospel," said missionary Ellis Leagans, administrator of the Southern Baptist mission organization in Colombia. Leagans is from Davie County, N.C.

"People are willing to listen because ... when there is a storm around, they'll look for answers," he said.

Although Colombians have seen a lull in the drug war, they still face the threat of violence from rebel guerrilla groups. Guerrilla bombings, kidnappings and murders continue as they carry out leftist causes.

But as international communism has declined during the past year, Colombia's six mostly leftist guerrilla groups have dwindled to two. One of the six, the April 19 Movement or M-19, is now a political party.

In the face of such turmoil and change, one pastor believes Christians need to do a better job of addressing Colombia's problems.

"We pray and we sing, but people haven't said much about the situation," said Giraldo. "They say, 'It's a sin. It's a sin.' But there's not a lot of effort to interpret what is happening from God's point of view ... . The church needs to address people who are asking, 'Where is God in this?'"

In two Colombian cities hit hard by the drug war, a Baptist ministry called Teleamigo has attempted to do just that. Teleamigo, which derives its name from the Spanish words for "telephone friend," offers 60-second taped inspirational messages to callers. People also receive free personal counseling by phone or in person, at their request.

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The ministry operates in Medellin and Cali, where it receives about 2 million calls a year. It later will be offered in Barranquilla and Bogota.

"Many people call in just because they feel anxiety," said Southern Baptist missionary John Magyar of St. Louis, general director of Baptist Communications in Colombia which sponsors the ministry.

The upbeat phone messages of Teleamigo "help those who are suffering from the consequences of living in a culture which is violent," added Ramos, who became a Christian through Teleamigo.

Although callers discuss problems ranging from marital conflict to alcoholism, some calls directly relate to Colombia's violence. One Teleamigo worker reported a caller asking prayer for a relative who had been kidnapped by drug traffickers.

Besides offering counseling through ministries like Teleamigo, some Baptist leaders try to address Colombia's tensions through preaching. Ramos believes every Colombian pastor should "be totally committed to a peaceful and better Colombia. The pastor should be prepared not only with the Bible but also with the ability to share a message of peace."

At one of Colombia's metropolitan Baptist churches, members recently completed a study of the Old Testament's 12 minor prophets. They heard sermons on social injustice, violence and suffering. "Our preaching touches the needs of the people very closely and tries to give a Christian answer to what's happening," said pastor Segura.

But sometimes that answer may best be expressed in practical ministry.

When a car bomb exploded near the home of Southern Baptist missionary Arnold Pessoa, a non-Christian neighbor contacted him on his ham radio. The neighbor, who was away on a business trip, had been unable to reach his wife and family because electricity and phone services were out. He asked Pessoa to check on their safety.

Pessoa learned the bomb had caused heavy damage to the family's house. No one was hurt, but the man's wife was "in shock," he said. Pessoa provided pastoral counseling and relayed messages back to his neighbor via ham radio.

As the family recovers from the trauma, Pessoa hopes to lead them to Christ. "There's an open door there," he said.

While sharing their faith with Colombians amid the drug war, missionaries and Colombian Baptists also have supported each other.

"We have been in this with Colombians, because they have faced the same violence, and for some of them, faced it more so than we have as foreigners," said Leagans. "We have shared ... realizing that Christ is the answer to the problems of Colombia."

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

Five years after Armero,  
survivors find new life

By Mary E. Speidel

N-fmB

Baptist Press  
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LERIDA, Colombia (BP)--"It seemed like the end of the world."

That's how survivor Eli Oviedo described the massive mud slide that buried Armero, Colombia.

For many people in that small farming town, Nov. 13 of 1985 spelled the end of the world as they knew it. That night the volcano Nevado del Ruiz erupted in the Andes Mountains above Armero.

As chunks of melting ice and lava flowed down the 17,716-foot-high mountain, it smashed against a dam of boulders in the nearby Lagunilla River. Waves of rocks, ash and mud tumbled toward the valley below. Some 24,000 people died in the mud slide, one of the worst human disasters in South American history.

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As the avalanche rushed forward, it picked up almost everything in its path. "It looked like the whole street was coming toward us," Oviedo said.

He, his wife and eight children fled to higher ground. There, "We embraced each other and prayed. There was nothing else to do," he said.

Oviedo felt his children trembling as the avalanche roared closer. But about 15 feet away, the mud slide stopped abruptly. "It looked as if the mud had been held by a wall. But there was nothing there," he said.

Incredibly, they were safe. "For me it was a miracle of God," said Oviedo, who now attends a Baptist mission in the nearby city of Lerida.

But most people experienced no miracles that night. Some lost everything, including entire families. Others lost limbs. Some who lived said later they wished they had died in the mudslide. Said one father who lost both his children, "The real tragedy of Armero was having lived through it."

Even five years after Armero, survivors are still trying to build new lives. "They are still suffering a great deal. They need a lot of support," said Oswaldo Arenas, a Colombian Baptist home missionary who works with survivors in Ibague, a city about 70 miles south of Armero.

Some have found support at two Baptist centers operating in Lerida and Ibague, where many refugees fled after the mud slide. Called the "Center of Hope," each center provides job training, counseling and Christian teaching for Armero survivors. A Baptist mission also meets in each center. Arenas and his wife, Graciela, direct the Ibague center.

At both centers, some survivors have found a new life in Christ.

One is Luis Enciso, whose back was broken by a falling beam. While in rehabilitation, he attempted suicide.

"I was so humiliated to be in a wheelchair. I felt myself less than nothing," said Enciso, who now lives in Ibague.

But he found new hope when Rafael Blanco, then a Colombian Baptist home missionary, and Southern Baptist missionary Mary Nell Giles visited him in an Ibague hospital.

Giles, from Gruver, Texas, gave him a Bible. As she continued to visit him, "I began to think of her as a special agent from God," he said.

Giles and her husband, James, were among a group of Southern Baptist missionaries, Colombian Baptists and Foreign Mission Board staff members who aided relief workers immediately after the tragedy. James Giles was then Baptist disaster relief coordinator in Colombia. He is from Bailey County, Texas, and also has lived in Floydada, Texas, and Clovis, N.M.

Initially, Southern Baptists provided \$10,000 in disaster relief. Since the tragedy, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has sent some \$200,000 in disaster and hunger relief. Colombian Baptists and the Baptist World Alliance also have contributed funds.

During early relief efforts, Baptist workers were impressed by a comment from a Red Cross employee. "By next week, many Colombians will have forgotten about Armero," the worker told Baptists. "Please don't abandon us."

But Baptists didn't forget Armero. Two months later they had rented a vacant house near the hospital where many people were still recovering. There they started a goodwill center to help survivors with rehabilitation. Home missionary Blanco and his wife, Mary, and Colombian Baptist social worker Lidia Kelly worked alongside Southern Baptist missionaries Bob and Joan Caperton, who moved to Ibague for six months to help with the project. The Capertons are from Alvin and Sherman, Texas, respectively.

Today, each Center of Hope offers courses to help survivors learn job skills. Such classes include broom-making, sewing, typing, embroidery, cooking, upholstery, cake-decorating and crafts.

Through the Ibague center Enciso has learned to make sweaters on a knitting machine provided by Baptists. He and two other men have formed a small business making and selling mops and brooms. He and his wife get up at 3 a.m. daily to make arepas, a Latin American bread, which he sells in the streets. His wife also works as a maid.

Survivor Miriam Ospitia has learned to sew in classes held at the center. She helps to support her family by making clothes on a sewing machine donated by Baptists in Spain.

Ospitia and her mother were the first survivors to become Christians through the ministry of Baptists. When they attended their first Baptist worship service, "We immediately felt a relief from our suffering," she said. "We realized this (the gospel) was a message that was very important for us."

Survivor Jose Arevalo now serves the Baptist mission in Ibague as treasurer. At age 16, he lost every member of his immediate family in Armero. He also lost his right leg to gangrene. Doctors almost had to amputate his other leg.

While Arevalo was recuperating in an Ibague hospital, Giles told him about Christ. He later became a Christian while attending activities at the center.

Arevalo, now an accountant, recently committed his life to full-time Christian ministry. Next year he hopes to attend the Baptist seminary in Cali. "If I endured a tragedy like Armero and endured so much suffering and became well again, I know God has something for me to do," he said.

Survivors like Arevalo also have found psychological and emotional support through the center. Besides introducing people to Christ, "I think the greatest ministry at the center is helping these people to recover a positive self-image," said home missionary Arenas, who also is pastor of the Baptist mission, where about 60 people attend weekly worship services.

Many living in Armero were farmers, who lost their means of income. As a result, "One of the people's greatest needs is sources of work," said another Colombian Baptist home missionary, Sergio Henao, who directs the Lerida center with his wife, Janet.

By providing job training the Lerida center has helped to give Baptists a good image in the community, Henao said. After beginning in a rented house, the center is now located on the main street of the section of Lerida known as the "New Armero." A government agency, Resugir, donated the property.

Armero survivors helped to build the two-story building which houses classrooms, sanctuary and living quarters for the Henaos. The building, which also includes street-front spaces for small businesses, was dedicated in August 1989. Today, about 35 people attend services at the Baptist mission, where Henao is pastor.

Just seven miles from the Center of Hope in Lerida, new plant life grows on the gray terrain that once was Armero. It seems a symbol of hope among the white crosses that honor thousands who died.

And new Christians like Luis Enciso seem to be symbols of hope for other Armero survivors. Others often ask Enciso how he has rebuilt his life. "I explain it's because of the power of God and the work of Baptists," he said.

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Armero mud slide survivor  
'gives it all she's got'

By Mary E. Speidel

N-FMB

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BOGOTA, Colombia (BP)--She clenched her teeth with all the force she had.

"Give it all you've got," said Maria Teresa Malaver, trapped under a fallen wall.

"I can't! I can't!" cried the boy.

"I can stand the pain," Malaver insisted.

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The boy pounded a sledgehammer against the wall that pinned her legs to the ground. With the second blow, the wall shattered.

As he lifted the pieces, Malaver felt her right leg. Bones protruded in all directions. Her foot hung by a tendon.

"I asked God to help me forget the pain," said Malaver, a survivor of the killer mud slide that wiped out Armero, Colombia.

On the night of Nov. 13, 1985, the volcano Nevado del Ruiz erupted in the Andes Mountains above Armero. The flow of lava and glacial ice smashed against a dam of boulders in the Lagunilla River near the volcano. The dam forced the flow into the valley below. Hot ash and mud rushed down the mountain, gathering almost everything in its way. The mud slide buried Armero alive. Some 24,000 people died.

The afternoon of Nov. 13, ash began falling in the farming town of Armero. Around 11 p.m., the electricity went off. Unsure of what was happening, Malaver and her husband decided to evacuate. She woke her daughters, Karla, 16, and Paola Andrea, 8, and told them to get dressed. Then she fed the infant twins she was keeping.

Standing at the front door, they heard an incredible noise. "I could see the whole back of the house coming at us .... The only thing I could think about was the end of the world," she said.

As she reached for the children, something struck her back. She began to roll. When she stopped, "I felt like the earth was surrounding us," she said. She screamed for her children. They never answered. And they were never found.

Trapped beneath debris in the same area, her husband said he thought they would die. "God will get us out if he wants us to live," Malaver responded.

But by the next morning, Malaver felt so much pain that she prayed she would die. "I told God I couldn't handle it anymore ... but God gave me the strength I needed in that moment."

While waiting for rescuers after being freed from beneath the wall, Malaver tried to keep her mind off her pain. Injured people all around her cried, begging for death.

"I tried to encourage them," recalled Malaver. "I told them that God had given us a tremendous test. Somehow he was going to get us out of there."

Malaver saw looters pilfering through the rubble nearby. They looked at her leg, then walked right over her, carrying clothing and household goods.

She asked for a piece of clothing to cover her mangled leg. Someone gave her a few linens and a shirt. She made a tourniquet with strips of a sheet to stop the bleeding. Fearing dehydration, she moved part of a broken tooth around in her mouth to make herself salivate.

In the morning light, she could see what once was Armero. Corpses, dismembered body parts, downed utility poles and pieces of crumbled buildings were scattered all over. The air smelled of sulfur.

The Malavers waited two days before they were rescued. She was taken to the nearby city of Guayaquil. When she arrived, doctors didn't have enough supplies left to treat her.

She was flown to a Medellin clinic, where surgeons had to amputate her right leg below the knee. She was hospitalized there for three months.

Her husband was taken to a hospital in another city several hours away. Eventually, he was transferred to Medellin after he learned his wife was there.

After recuperating, they settled in Bogota to be near family. But a year after Armero, Malaver still needed a prosthesis for her amputated leg.

Then she heard about the Center of Hope in Ibague, a city about 70 miles south of Armero. Malaver's sister, who lived in Ibague, said Baptists who operated the center were providing prostheses to Armero survivors.

"It's always been very difficult for me to have to ask for anything. But I saw that it was the only way," said Malaver.

She went with her sister to the Center of Hope. Colombian Baptist home missionary Rafael Blanco invited her to travel the next week to Cali with other survivors. There they were fitted with prostheses provided by Baptists.

"I couldn't talk about the tragedy then. I was crying all the time," said Malaver, who had separated from her husband because of marital problems.

She stayed three months in Cali for rehabilitation. Costs were covered by Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board disaster relief funds.

During that time she met Southern Baptist missionaries James and Mary Nell Giles, who had been working with Armero survivors since the early relief efforts. Giles was then Baptist disaster relief coordinator in Colombia.

Mrs. Giles gave her a Bible. "I took quite a bit of refuge in it," said Malaver. Later she accepted Christ as Savior.

"I realized that the only thing that I had was the Lord," she said as a tear rolled down her cheek. "He had saved me because he had something important and great for me. Since then, I ask him every day to show me the way that he has for me."

After she returned to Bogota, Malaver began attending Northside Baptist Church there. Today, she is employed by the Bogota Red Cross and works with volunteers. She also is involved in organizing an association of amputees from Armero. So far, she has found 60 amputees living throughout Colombia.

"I have a dream of being able to get them together in one place to hear the message of Christ," she said. "I think it's something very important for us."

She asked Southern Baptists to pray for her and other Armero survivors. "Even now five years after Armero, we have a very difficult road ahead of us."

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

'Operation Cookie' sends treats  
to soldiers in Middle East

By Rod Payne

F-C (Texas)

Baptist Press  
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WICHITA FALLS, Texas (BP)--Baptist women in Wichita Falls, Texas, have banded together to send both physical and spiritual food to armed service personnel stationed in the Middle East.

Members of First Baptist Church already have sent one shipment of homemade cookies as part of their "Operation Cookie" effort. Included with the shipment were copies of a tract compiled by the church's pastor, Morris H. Chapman. The tract, "God's Promises for Tough Times," features scriptures of encouragement. Chapman is also president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

For one of the women involved the program has a special meaning. Lynn Baxter's son, Richard Earl Baxter, is a lieutenant serving in the Desert Shield deployment with the 1st Cavalry Task Force. His company was placed on alert for deployment to the Middle East in August, immediately following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

From the beginning Baxter asked for prayer for the many soldiers who were not Christians. With Bible studies and personal sharing Baxter encourages not only other soldiers but people in his home church in Wichita Falls as well.

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Baxter's zeal for sharing Christ in such a dangerous situation comes as both a comfort and an explanation, said his mother. "Maybe that's why the Lord puts Christians in these positions," she said, "because their faith shows through."

The women of the church agreed to begin praying for every person in Baxter's platoon by name. They also wrote letters of encouragement.

The scope of the project soon was expanded as more troops, including forces from Sheppard Air Force located in Wichita Falls, were deployed.

Baxter wrote the people of First Baptist Church after the arrival of the "Operation Cookie" packages expressing the appreciation of those receiving the parcels.

"Thank you for including the verses showing God's promises during hard times. From what I understand, approximately 20 people in the battalion of 600 people have received Christ," he said.

"I can understand the importance of 'going into the wilderness' as Jesus did to fast and pray. Coming to Saudi Arabia and living in a desolate place has actually been a blessing in many people's lives. Now, all of the distractions of home have been stripped away, and people have time to examine their hearts and think about spiritual matters. Thank you again for being the wonderful church family that you are."

Encouraged by the response to the first large shipment, the women of "Operation Cookie" already are planning another. They have heard from families as far away as Georgia whose loved ones received something special from "Operation Cookie."

Their prayer continues for the safety of all those in this troubled area.

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(Rod Payne is minister of media at First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls.)

Baptists minister to victims  
of Mississippi tornadoes

By Tim Nicholas

F-CP  
(MUS.)

Baptist Press  
1/16/91

VAIDEN, Miss. (BP)--The courthouse clock in Vaiden, Miss., stopped at 5:04 on Friday, Dec. 21, when a tornado destroyed large sections of the community. But when the clock stopped, Baptists went to work ministering to victims.

Vaiden Baptist Church Pastor R. Leon Holly huddled with his family in the pastorium by the church as the tornado blew through the north Mississippi town.

Just after the tornado ripped through the town, a church member phoned Holly telling him a fellow church member had lost his home. "We went across town and found them (the family) wandering in the rain," said Holly.

Though the rain still was coming in torrents, "I began to walk," said Holly, who said he scrambled down the litter-choked roads, checking on other church families in the path of the twister.

He went to the mobile home of his church's Sunday school director Larry Ingram, whose home had been blown about 100 feet from its foundation and had wrapped itself around a pine tree.

Fellow church member Mark Havens had arrived a short while ahead of Holly. "We had walked around the scene for several minutes before we heard a little girl cry," said Havens.

When the storm came, Ingram had taken his 4-year-old daughter, Rachel, into the bathroom, covered her with his own body and held onto the toilet. Both were injured but survived.

Another church family suffered the death of their 12-year-old daughter as a result of the tornado. Their other two daughters were injured.

Holly and his wife, Geneva, stayed at the Lexington Hospital with the Pace family until 4:00 the next morning.

Meanwhile, Jim Didlake of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's Brotherhood staff had been monitoring the weather's activities. Didlake, on-site coordinator for Mississippi Baptist disaster relief, left at 4:30 that morning for Vaiden with Ed Bailey, a disaster crew volunteer from Brandon. Together with the chief of police, they made a windshield survey of the damage.

Then Didlake and Holly met with the county clerk, the board of supervisors, and Red Cross staff. As a result of that meeting, the Baptists were asked to handle food services while the Salvation Army handled clothing distribution.

The kitchen at the church was too small, but since school was not in session, Vaiden High School's kitchen was available.

The five-day feeding effort provided about 1,600-1,800 hot meals. The disaster relief unit arrived Jan. 2 to feed Parchman prisoners who had been brought in to handle cleanup. The unit fed about 250 people a day.

Meanwhile, the Vaiden church organized itself for response. Five families lost everything in the tornado, so Holly called together five couples whose property had been spared to act as a disaster committee. Their immediate work was to purchase Christmas gifts for the five families, particularly the children. Paul Harrell, state Brotherhood director, told Holly the immediately available \$1,000 of disaster relief money could be spent on such gifts.

By the next evening, however, churches and individuals had begun sending money for relief to the Vaiden church.

By one week after Christmas, more than \$28,000 was in hand at the church, so the committee was faced with the job of "making judgments on how to disburse the money," said Holly, who noted that the disbursement would go beyond church membership into the community based on need.

"Local Baptist response has been tremendous," said Holly. Grenada County Baptists sent two pickup truck loads of food, with a promise of more to come, said associational Brotherhood director James E. Ray. The Vaiden church distributed more than 500 boxes of food to victims.

Holly and Didlake said finding food line help during the holidays was easy. Volunteers were always available. Holly said local pastors and their families participated. Frank Bishop of North Winona Baptist Church and his wife worked the line Christmas day; Johnny Walker of First Baptist Church of Winona, and his family, Christmas Eve night.

The Vaiden church has met with representatives of Vaiden Missionary Baptist Church, which was totally destroyed, organizing a joint response committee to work out ways to help.

Vaiden did not stand alone in disaster over the holidays. The second tornado death came in Belzoni. Columbus had flooding; Tupelo suffered from a gas outage. First Baptist Church, Saltillo, opened their building for shelter and food service on Christmas eve, but only 10 people arrived there and in a Tupelo shelter. People instead moved in with friends and neighbors.

Linda Hambrick, a clerk at a Vaiden gas station and a member of Vaiden Baptist Church, lost her home in the tornado but remained optimistic.

Ordinarily "all you hear about is the bad" in people, she said. However, "I found so much more good here -- people caring about God and coming through -- the different denominations working together." She said she hadn't heard about the Baptist disaster work before, adding, "There's still a lot of good going on."