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March 28, 1991

91-47

Kenya missionary beaten,
killed by highway robbers

By Craig Bird

N-FMB

KIJABE, Kenya (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Lynda Bethea, 42, was killed and her husband, Ralph, 43, was injured March 27 when they were attacked by robbers on a Kenya highway.

Kenyan police reportedly have four suspects in custody.

In a cruel parody of the Good Samaritan story, the missionary couple stopped their car to assist a man sprawled across a rural road near Kijabe, Kenya, around 11 p.m. But as Bethea leaned over the man to see what was wrong, he looked into the barrel of a pistol. At least three other men emerged from the brush and punctured the left rear tire of the car before taking all of Bethea's money and disappearing into the darkness.

Before Bethea could get the tire changed, the masked men returned and demanded more money. When they attacked her husband, Mrs. Bethea came to his aid and was beaten repeatedly and savagely with iron bars. She died at the scene from severe head injuries.

"I tried to fight them off but they just kept coming, they just kept coming," Bethea later told Kenyan police in a barely audible whisper. "I gave them all the money I had but then they started beating my wife. ... We asked them for the love of Jesus to go away and Lynda begged them to stop hitting us. ... She kept telling them, 'We have children.'... But they just kept beating her."

Bethea suffered several cracked ribs, injuries to his left shoulder and cuts and bruises over his face and head. His face and hands were badly swollen.

When the men finally fled, two cars passed the bloodied couple without stopping. But the second driver went to the police station in Kijabe and returned with officers.

The attack took place less than a mile from the Betheas' intended destination, Rift Valley Academy, about 45 miles northwest of Nairobi. They had planned to spend the night before taking their two older sons, Ralph III, 17, a junior at the missionary boarding school, and Joshua, 13, an eighth-grader, to their home in Mombasa for a month-long Easter break.

Two other children, Luke, age 12, and Lizette, 9, had remained in Mombasa with friends.

School officials contacted missionaries and before daylight 10 missionaries and Kenyan Baptists had gathered at the school to be with Bethea as others came throughout the day from across Kenya.

Kijabe police notified Nairobi police headquarters and officers worked through the pre-dawn hours securing the murder scene and using dogs to track the gang. About 100 yards away they found a smoldering campfire and a pair of partially burned shoes. They described it as an apparent attempt to throw police dogs off the scent. But by midmorning March 28 the suspects were in custody.

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A U.S. Embassy representative arrived at Rift Valley Academy about an hour after being notified of the incident and promised to do everything in the embassy's power to help.

Mrs. Bethea, of Jackson, Miss., befriended hundreds of Southern Baptist volunteers who made her home headquarters for numerous evangelistic crusades in Mombasa. The Betheas helped lead in the evangelization of the Mombasa area, where the gospel has found remarkable acceptance recently among once-hostile Muslims.

"One of the missionaries (saw) Ralph and Lynda yesterday and said he had never seen her more relaxed and happy," said Jimmy Draper March 28.

Draper, who spoke to Bethea and other missionaries by phone after the attack, is pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas, and a former Southern Baptist Convention president. He is a close friend of the Betheas and worked with them in several Kenya evangelism projects.

"She was just a wonderful missionary wife," Draper said. "She adapted well to not complaining and just putting up with whatever Ralph was doing and she was enthusiastic about it. We've been with them in a lot of different situations. It was typical of Ralph to stop (the car). He could have driven around that man in the road. That would be the normal procedure, but knowing his heart he stopped to help, and knowing Lynda it was like her to get out and try to help. That was the way they lived."

Asked why the Betheas have met with such evangelistic success, Draper credited their "incredible optimism. They just believed people could be saved. If a place was hard they just believed there were more prospects... And then there was a quality that very few people have, just a willingness to be reckless and trust God."

A memorial service was scheduled for March 29 at Brackenhurst Baptist International Conference Center, located between Nairobi and Kijabe. Bethea requested an African choir to sing some of his wife's favorite songs.

Bethea and the four children were scheduled to leave Nairobi late March 29 and fly to Tulsa, Okla. His parents, Ralph and Lizette Bethea, former Southern Baptist missionaries to Kenya, Tanzania, Indonesia and India, live in Claremore, Okla. Bethea's brother, James Bethea, is a missionary to Indonesia.

Mrs. Bethea was the 13th member of a Southern Baptist missionary family to die as a victim of murder or other hostile action since the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board started sending missionaries overseas in 1845.

Funeral plans in the United States were incomplete. Draper, who is working with the Bethea family on arrangements, said a memorial service will be held at First Baptist in Euless, followed by funeral services at First Baptist Church in Jackson (Mrs. Bethea's home church) and burial there. Dates depend on when Mrs. Bethea's body was to be transported from Kenya.

Born in Jackson, Mrs. Bethea, the former Lynda Sharp, received the bachelor of science degree from the University of Mississippi School of Nursing in Jackson. She also attended the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

She married Bethea in 1970. They worked as short-term missionaries in Kenya with the Africa Inland Mission from 1973-74. She also worked as a nurse in Louisville, Ky., Seymour, Ind., and at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson while her husband was attending seminary and serving various churches. He was assistant pastor of First Baptist Church in Tulsa from 1979-82, pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church from 1982-83 and executive director of Love America in Edwards, Miss., from 1983 until their missionary appointment in 1984.

Mrs. Bethea's parents are deceased. Besides her husband, she is survived by a brother and her children.

Muslim converts to Christianity
kept in jail by Egyptian court

By Art Toalston *N.F.M.B.*

CAIRO, Egypt (BP)--Three Muslim converts to Christianity arrested nearly six months ago will be imprisoned for at least 45 more days after a March 27 hearing in an Egyptian court operating under martial law.

According to Menes Abdul Noor, pastor of the 1,000-member Kasr el Doubara Evangelical Church in Cairo, the converts are charged with contempt for Islam and threatening the unity of Egypt. The men have been part of Noor's congregation since converting to Christianity about five years ago.

"It's a human rights issue," Noor said in a telephone interview March 28. "These gentlemen did nothing against the constitution. They were not arrested because of violence or a crime, but solely because of reports from the secret police office."

People should be free to choose their faith, Noor continued. "A Christian can become a Muslim in Egypt (or) anywhere in the world. So why can't it be the other way around?"

The three men are being held in solitary confinement in the Abu Zaabal Industrial Prison on the outskirts of Cairo. "They are in good health and good morale," Noor said.

For about four months, however, they were "subjected to extreme forms of torture" to renounce their Christian faith, according to reports circulated by the Cairo congregation. They were beaten, drugged, tortured with electrical rods, burned with cigarettes, hung by their wrists with handcuffs and cursed.

The men's names are Mustafa Muhammad Sa'id Al Sharkawi, 30; Muhammad Hussein Sallam, 25; and Hassan Muhammad Isma'eel Muhammad, 21. Their names often are spelled in different ways in various English-language reports.

Noor said the men are not being prosecuted through Egypt's judicial system but through the Interior Ministry which has enforced state of emergency provisions since the 1981 assassination of former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat by Islamic extremists.

At the Egyptian Embassy in Washington, D.C., however, press officials said they were unaware of charges against three Egyptian converts to Christianity.

"I assure you that if somebody is in prison it has nothing to do with religion at all," one official said.

However, reports about the three converts' imprisonment also have been circulated by Amnesty International and numerous Christian organizations.

In a report last December, Amnesty International called for "the immediate and unconditional release of these three men" who it believes "to be prisoners of conscience."

Converts to Christianity also were persecuted in Egypt in 1989. According to Amnesty International's report for that year, "A number of people who had converted to Christianity from Islam were detained without charge or trial under emergency legislation."

At least one international Christian organization, Atlanta-based Operation Mobilization, has organized a letter-writing campaign for the men's release. It urges letters be sent to the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, El Sayed Abdel Raouf El Reedy, and to U.S. senators and congressmen.

Operation Mobilization has urged letter writers to note Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak recently received a major award in France for advancing "the rights of man, democracy and peace."

Information about the letter-writing effort may be obtained by contacting Operation Mobilization at 404-631-0432 or P.O. Box 2277, Peachtree City, GA 30269-0277.

Charges of converting to Christianity and seeking to convert others initially were filed against the men last fall. Two of the believers were arrested Sept. 28 and the other was arrested on Oct. 9. The charges were dismissed in "security" court hearings Nov. 23 and Dec. 8, Noor said, but officials of the Interior Ministry ordered them kept in jail. New charges of contempt for Islam and threatening Egypt's security were subsequently filed.

Laws in Muslim countries do not typically forbid conversion to Christianity, said David Bentley, religious rights researcher for the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies in Altadena, Calif. As United Nations members, Bentley noted, Muslim countries have subscribed to U.N. declarations affirming the right of people to choose their religious faith.

Instead, pressure against conversion comes through the Muslim community and the family, Bentley said. Statistics detailing such pressures are impossible to compile, he said. "A family could poison a daughter thinking about becoming a Christian or marrying a Christian, and nobody outside the community would ever know about it."

One reason the Egyptian government targeted the three converts -- and other Muslim governments periodically target Christians -- is to lessen criticism from Muslim fundamentalists, Bentley noted. Many Muslim leaders are moderates seeking to keep fundamentalists in check, he said. "Most religious prisoners in that area of the world are Islamic fundamentalists," he added, "and they're clamoring for justice as much as Christians are."

In Egypt, for example, some 8,000 supporters of the Islamic opposition were arrested in 1989, according to Amnesty International. Islamic fundamentalists also were targeted, for example, by the governments of Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria, Amnesty International reported.

To lessen Muslim fundamentalist ire, governments in the region sometimes target Christians -- or "look the other way" when fundamentalists bring various sorts of pressure against Christians, Bentley said.

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Medical volunteers in Philippines
meet physical, spiritual needs

By Lonnie Wilkey

F-CC
(2N)

Baptist Press
3/28/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--A team of Southern Baptist health care volunteers has returned to the United States after two weeks in the Philippines dispensing medicine for both body and soul.

The team was comprised of Baptists from Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arizona, and Korea. They were in the Philippines under the umbrella of the Tennessee Baptist/Philippines partnership which began in 1989.

"Think of all the good things God has done for you since you were a baby," physician Bill Skinner of Nashville, told a young Filipino mother who was having trouble sleeping.

"I guarantee you will find peaceful rest," assured Skinner, a member of Two Rivers Church in Nashville, and a retired missionary who spent 38 years in Paraguay.

Skinner's subtle Christian witness was magnified many times over by the 34 volunteers who traveled to the Philippines March 1-15.

A nurse's smile or doctor's gentle touch broke down language barriers as the health care group showed God's love to the Filipinos.

While attempting to meet minor physical needs, the team's other objective was to plant "Gospel seeds" that would result in permanent spiritual harvest.

Working alongside Filipino Baptist pastors and lay leaders and Southern Baptist missionaries, the efforts of all involved paid off.

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During the two-week period health care workers treated 8,396 medical and dental patients. About 1,948 people made decisions, the majority first-time professions of faith, as Filipino leaders did one-on-one and group counseling before, during, and after the clinics.

In addition, both Southern Baptist and Filipino Baptist leaders agree "doors have been opened" for follow-up by the Filipinos and future presentation of the gospel message.

"Church planting can be done through medical outreach," said Nashville physician Dewey Dunn, member of Woodmont Baptist Church and coordinator of the medical efforts.

Health care workers open doors for evangelism, Dunn observed. "Medical teams give validity and credibility to evangelism efforts," he said.

Southern Baptist missionary nurse Linda Dillsworth agreed with Dunn's assessment. "The hands-on clinics are great because they show the people God loves them and Southern Baptists love them," said Dillsworth, who coordinated arrangements for the volunteers in Mindanao.

"Good seeds have been planted. We are seeing hearts being softened," said Nelson Espana, pastor of Lupon Baptist Church and moderator of the Davao Oriental Association of Baptist Churches.

Missionary Dee Oliver who lives in Mati concurred. "The biggest results will be the contacts that lead to one-on-one witnessing," she said.

The 34 volunteers were divided into six teams. One team, comprised primarily of Southern Baptist missionaries from Korea, Jim and Barbara Miller and Jim Hampton, and Bobby Dunn of Nashville and Philippines missionary Judy Yost worked in Luzon near San Jose City.

On the island of Mindanao, four teams were assembled and sent to different locations. A fifth team, headed by Dewey Dunn, remained in Davao City and worked with doctors and lectured at the regional medical center.

Team members shared common concerns about the tremendous medical needs, but also expressed appreciation for the Filipino people.

"I went to the lab at the Mindanao Baptist Hospital. Instead of a 'gone to lunch' sign, there was a 'gone to prayer room' sign," said Kaye Rock of Tri-Cities Baptist Church in Kingsport, Tenn.

"It would be neat to work in an atmosphere like that where people stop to pray," she said.

Judy French of First Baptist Church in Nashville, said at first she was in "culture shock". She soon realized, however, the Filipinos were giving all they had.

"They moved out of their homes so we could have a place to sleep. They truly sacrificed to see to our comfort and well-being with the best they had."

"It was a humbling experience -- to realize my own selfishness, greediness, and shallow commitment," she said.

Team members also agreed there was no doubt God's presence was with them throughout the time.

"God's faithfulness, and care of us on this mission project has been so evident. He has given me more than I could ever tell or express just by going and seeing," said Jeanette Acres of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Oneida, Tenn.

Ann Patterson of Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, noted there can be "no better way of seeing how God is at work throughout the world" than by participating on volunteer mission trips.

"Going as a volunteer will challenge you physically, emotionally, and spiritually to give the best and be the best you can be. I guarantee that your view of missions will never be the same," she said.

One of the highlights of the trip was the opportunity for volunteers to worship and pray together and alongside the Filipinos. The teams sang many praise songs during the two weeks.

And, though, they never voted on a "theme song," most of the volunteers would find no fault with the selection of "To God Be the Glory."

As the song states, "Great things he hath done."

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'Turning Our Hearts' theme
for church music conference

F-20

Baptist Press
3/28/91

ATLANTA (BP)--"Turning Our Hearts" will be the theme for the 1991 Southern Baptist Church Music Conference annual meeting June 2-3 in Atlanta, according to Mark Edwards, conference president.

A unique organization of local church ministers of music, college and seminary music faculty and denominational church music workers, the conference's annual meeting is primarily a time of fellowship, musical inspiration and an interchange of ideas, said Edwards, minister of music at First Baptist Church, Nashville.

The conference is one of about a dozen meetings scheduled in advance of the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Atlanta June 4-7.

The two-day meeting is split between Wieuca Road Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta and the Ritz-Carlton (Buckhead) Hotel. A banquet Monday evening with an awards presentation concludes the conference.

Conference participants will join the Wieuca congregation Sunday night in worship with Allen Walworth, pastor of First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., as speaker and Edwards leading the music.

Concerts will be provided by South Carolina Honor Children's Choir; First Light of First Baptist Church, Nashville; choir and orchestra of First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga.; Georgia Sons of Jubal and Jubalheirs; youth choir of Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, Ala.; Brewton-Parker College Choir, Mount Vernon, Ga.; and Image of Palm Beach Atlanta College, West Palm Beach, Fla.

Other highlights will be choral workshops led by Robert Burton, retired professor of conducting, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and a HymnSing led by Bill Green, minister of music, First Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas.

In addition to Edwards, 1991 conference officers include: Bob Hatfield, Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., president-elect; Dot Pray, keyboard consultant for the Mississippi Baptist Convention, vice president of the denominational division; Lynn Madden, minister of music, Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, Ark., vice president of local church division; and Betty Bedsole, professor of music, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., vice president of music educators division.

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Southern Baptist Church Music Conference

June 2-3, 1991

Church: Wieuca Road Baptist Church
3626 Peachtree Road, NEHotel: Ritz-Carlton (Buckhead)
3434 Peachtree Road, NESunday afternoon

- 1:00 Registration
1:45 Call to Order
2:05 Concert -- South Carolina Honor Children's Choir
2:40 Concert -- First Light, First Baptist Church, Nashville
3:15 Exhibit Break
4:00 HymnSing -- Bill Green, minister of music, First Baptist Church, Richardson, Texas, and associate professor of music, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas
4:45 Dismiss

Sunday evening

- 6:50 Pre-service music -- Sanctuary Choir and Orchestra, First Baptist Church, Augusta, Ga.
7:10 Worship with Wieuca -- Music Director: Mark Edwards, president, Church Music Conference, and minister of music, First Baptist Church, Nashville; Preacher: Allen Walworth, pastor, First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala.; Organist: Ron Boud, associate professor, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.
8:20 Reception hosted by Georgia Baptist Church Music Department

Monday morning

- 9:00 Concert -- Georgia Sons of Jubal and Jubalheirs
9:30 Formal Paper -- Milburn Price, dean, School of Music, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.
10:15 Exhibit Break
11:00 Concert -- Youth Choir, Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, Ala.
11:30 Annual Business Session
12:00 Lunch at Wieuca

Monday afternoon

- 1:00 Divisional Meetings
2:30 Choral Workshops -- Robert Burton, retired professor of conducting, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas
3:15 Concert -- Brewton-Parker College Choir, Mount Vernon, Ga.
3:45 Dismiss

Monday evening

- 7:00 Banquet
Music -- Image, Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach, Fla.
Awards, Honorary Memberships
Benediction -- Allen Walworth

Church could help America's
5.5 million hungry children

By Mark Wingfield

N-Nmp

ATLANTA (BP)--One of every eight American children under age 12 -- 5.5 million -- is hungry, according to a new comprehensive study of childhood hunger in the United States.

Millions more children are at risk of hunger, meaning one-fourth of America's children face food shortage, said the study conducted by the Washington-based Food Research and Action Center.

America's churches could help solve this problem if they would recognize the need and take action locally, said Nathan Porter, domestic hunger specialist with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"The extent of this problem is shocking," he said. "But it didn't become a fact today just because this study came out. What made it a reality is not the story. The reality has been there all along."

If the study errs at all, Porter said, it estimates the number of hungry children too conservatively.

"The church should be reminded of the instance where the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus," he suggested. "Even though this may not be our intent, if churches do not target these families who are poor and children who are hungry we are doing the same thing as the disciples, keeping them away from Jesus and any hope for their survival.

"If we are not making an effort to discover where these children and their families are, if we are not equipping our church workers and laity to minister to their needs and give them a witness to the gospel, then we're totally ignoring what the church is all about."

The study was a three-year, \$1 million project involving door-to-door surveys in seven areas of the United States. Those surveyed were families with annual incomes representing 185 percent of the poverty level or less. This level is the point at which families qualify for free school lunches and food stamps.

In 1990, poverty level for a family of four was \$12,700. That means a family of four earning 185 percent of poverty level would make \$23,495.

Families with hungry children have average incomes 25 percent below the poverty line and spend nearly one-third of their incomes for food. These families spend an average of 68 cents per person per meal.

The largest expense such families face is housing, the study showed. While a typical American household spends 22 percent of its income for shelter, families with hungry children spend more than 60 percent of their income for shelter.

Porter said results of this study support the findings of other research on poverty and hunger in America: 23 percent of children under age 6 live in poverty, 78 percent of America's poverty-stricken are women and children and one American child dies every 53 minutes from the effects of poverty.

Contrary to popular belief, America's poor and hungry are not found primarily in cities, he added. In rural areas, an average of 18.5 percent of the population is poor, compared to a national average of 12 percent.

This is significant for Southern Baptists because the convention has more churches in rural areas than in metropolitan areas. Additionally, churches in comfortable suburban areas should be challenged to become allies with struggling inner city churches surrounded by poverty, he said.

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Porter believes the church will begin to make a difference when Christians see the reality of hunger face to face. "It's hard for me to come in and say, 'Here are the statistics, now you write your congressman.' Statistics are not going to change people. Prejudice and attitudes are so ingrained as part of our culture.

"What it takes is a conversion experience for our church people. We as Baptists know that conversion only comes through experience. We must experience involvement through mission action, through ministry, to really learn the conditions first-hand."

Resources for addressing domestic hunger issues are available from state church and community ministries directors or from the HMB. Hunger funds designated to the SBC Executive Committee are divided 80 percent to the Foreign Mission Board and 20 percent to the HMB.