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91-103

Lewis, Parks outline dreams
for the year 2000 and beyond

By Linda Lawson

N-CO

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Outlining dreams for the year 2000 and beyond, the presidents of the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign mission boards registered concern that economic recession, denominational controversy and cultural pressures against long-term commitments could limit efforts at world evangelization.

HMB President Larry Lewis and FMB President R. Keith Parks fielded questions during a July 7 town meeting attended by more than 200 participants in Jericho: A Southern Baptist Missions Festival at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

Financially, Lewis said the HMB stands to receive \$600-700,000 more in Cooperative Program funds for 1991-92. However, medical insurance costs for home missionaries and HMB staff will increase by about \$800,000.

Amid those pressures, Lewis cited the need to increase the home missions force by 100 people per year.

"We need to really pray that these lifeline supports (Cooperative Program, Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions) will continue" and increase, said Lewis.

Foreign missionaries and FMB staff are "having to learn to do more with less," Parks said.

On the positive side, he cited Baptist conventions in some countries which are becoming increasingly self-supporting and others beginning to send missionaries. Cooperative efforts among evangelical groups are maximizing the impact of personnel, programs and resources.

However, Parks said both people and money are needed to take advantage of opportunities in eastern Europe.

"There is no question but that we need many more dollars than are coming in," said Parks.

The two agreed the 12-year denominational controversy has taken a toll on missions.

However, Lewis said, "I feel rather positive at this point." He cited what he termed a "spirit of reconciliation and healing" at the 1991 Southern Baptist Convention meeting June 4-6 in Atlanta and SBC President Morris Chapman's call for starting 1,000 new churches on Easter Sunday 1992.

Resolution of the controversy depends "on whether we can create an atmosphere where all Southern Baptists can feel they are full participants in decision making," Parks said.

"The roller coaster charts all the offerings are going through show a lack of definiteness on the part of those doing the giving," he continued.

At the end of May, Cooperative Program unified gifts received by the SBC Executive Committee were 6 percent ahead of the previous year. But June receipts dropped 17.42 percent behind June 1990, leaving year-to-date receipts 0.59 percent below last year.

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"If somehow we can re-establish that home and foreign missions are our priorities, then I think we have a chance to regain the cohesiveness we had in the past," said Parks. "I hope we can."

Increasing numbers of volunteers participating in home and foreign missions represents one of the brightest spots of progress, Parks and Lewis agreed.

A total of 62,000 Southern Baptists worked in a variety of home missions volunteer roles in 1990, and 11,500 Southern Baptists worked in foreign missions.

"Volunteers are important not only for what they do overseas but also for what happens to them" in their support of missions causes, said Parks.

Lewis noted the contributions of volunteers in newer convention areas of the United States. For example, in the Greater Boston Metropolitan Association, 20 of 23 full-time staff members are volunteers.

Both Parks and Lewis expressed concern the percentage of two-year missionaries is increasing slightly while the percentage of career missionaries appears to be decreasing slightly. A long-term trend in that direction would be detrimental.

"An unwillingness to make long-term commitments is part of our culture," said Parks. "We're swimming against the current to expect people to make lifetime career commitments."

On the home missions front, Lewis said the HMB remains committed to goals to have 50,000 Southern Baptist churches and church-type missions by the year 2000. Achieving the goal will require starting 1,500 new missions each year through the year 2000.

Lewis cited the Key Church Strategy where selected churches are being asked to commit to starting at least five new missions per year and to have five missions at all times.

As president of the HMB, Lewis said he sees his primary role as that of "cheerleader, trying to cheer the troops on."

Parks said speaking about missions and spending time with the missionaries are his favorite activities.

"I really don't have any hobbies," he laughed, "because I enjoy what I'm doing so much."

More than 110 home and foreign missionaries served on the faculty for the third annual missions festival sponsored by the Home and Foreign mission boards, Sunday School Board, Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union.

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Southern Baptists mark
100 years in Mexico

By Mary E. Speidel

F-FMB

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MEXICO CITY (BP)--Within two weeks, their five children died of scarlet fever.

But G.H. and Minnie Lacy of Arkansas never turned their back on God's call to Mexico. They were pioneer Southern Baptist representatives there from 1903 to 1935. Despite their loss, the Lacys persevered. He started a Mexican Baptist seminary in Oaxaca.

Southern Baptist representatives in Mexico and Mexican Baptists recalled the contributions of Lacy during a recent centennial celebration of the Southern Baptist organization in Mexico. He was memorialized during a service at First Baptist Church in Mexico City.

Joining 100 Southern Baptist representatives for the event were about 50 former and retired representatives and current Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board staff members.

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"I think all of us felt a real sense of responsibility, seeing those who had worked faithfully for so many years," said participant Judy Garrett, a Southern Baptist representative from Brownwood, Texas. "We realized that 100 years has passed and much has been done, but there's much more left to do."

Guest speaker Rolando Gutierrez-Cortes, president of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico, thanked Southern Baptists for their investment of lives and resources in Mexico.

"This is a shared history of joys and sorrows, mutual suspicions, open collaboration, pain and sacrifice, persecution and liberty, limitations and accomplishments," said Gutierrez.

Baptist work in Mexico has moved from a state of "paternalism" to "integration," Gutierrez noted. Historically, funds for Mexican Baptist institutions and ministries were channeled through the Southern Baptist organization. But since the 1970s, the Mexican Baptist convention has gradually become self-supporting, assuming responsibility for property, institutions and ministries.

The transition has been "a time of cultivation of mutual respect and teamwork in which resources are not only shared but multiplied and redeemed," he said. "The generation which has participated in this process has invested long hours without curtailing efforts and we are very grateful to them."

Although the Southern Baptist organization formally was begun in 1891, Baptist work in Mexico was started in 1862 by James Hickey, an Irish itinerant preacher. In 1870 American Baptists sent representatives to Mexico. And in 1880, Mexico became the first Latin American country where Southern Baptist representatives served. The National Baptist Convention of Mexico was formed in 1903.

Today the convention counts 888 churches and 2,056 mission congregations and "preaching points." Mexican Baptists hope to have 2,000 self-supporting churches by the year 2000.

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Missionaries busy amid
chaos of 'new' Ethiopia

By Craig Bird

F-CMB

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ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)--A new Ethiopia is not rising phoenix-like from the ashes of disgraced President Mengistu Haile Mariam's overthrown regime.

The birth is more like a breech delivery.

But slowly, often grudgingly, the residents of the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa are coming to respect the authority and intentions of the victorious forces of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front, according to Southern Baptist missionary Jerry Bedsole.

Addis Ababa's populace is predominately Amhara (the country's ruling caste for centuries) while the EPDF rebels are overwhelmingly Tigrean. When the rebel forces finally crashed into the capital in late May and defeated the departed Mengistu's remaining troops, the city braced for an ethnic bloodbath.

But after 30 years of war, most Ethiopians were just too tired to fight anymore. Despite isolated incidents, the transition has seen little violence.

"It was amazing that with a full-scale takeover of the city by an invading army, everyone had electricity and water the entire time," explained Bedsole, of Foley, Ala., who has worked in Ethiopia for two decades. "Of course the EPDF had controlled the hydroelectric generators for some time before the final battle, and even called their foes in Addis Ababa and promised not to cut the power if the government would send maintenance crews and parts to the stations."

The EPDF rigidly enforces a "shoot on sight" order against looters and thieves, and "there is a growing feeling that they will be just as tough against corruption in government," reported Bedsole. "And in the past few years graft was rampant."

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The new rulers, who convened peace talks July 1 with opposition groups to seek a new form of government for long-suffering Ethiopia, have concentrated on rounding up top military officers and former ruling party officials. Lower-and middle-echelon civil servants and soldiers have not been targeted.

The missionary also is enthusiastic about the future of evangelical Christianity in Ethiopia.

"One of the first things the EPDF did was call all the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) who were doing relief work under Mengistu and ask us to continue what we had been doing and expand it," Bedsole said. "I think we have even more opportunity than before because they are desperate for all kinds of help and their attitude is 180 degrees different from the Derg (the former government).

"These people are not looking for enemies, whereas the Derg was so oppressive they looked for an enemy under every rock. The EPDF's attitude seems to be that as long as you help meet the physical needs of the country, you can witness all you want. In fact, the past few weeks we (missionaries and Ethiopian Christians) have been openly preaching and handing out tracts in Addis Ababa with complete freedom -- and it's been great."

But woes still besiege the country even if war clouds have finally cleared.

Perhaps the biggest problem is the shattered vestiges of Mengistu's army. An estimated 50,000 former soldiers are jammed into Addis Ababa. They make up the majority of the people in the city who are dependent on outside aid groups to stay alive.

Southern Baptist missionaries are buying bread and feeding 3,000 former soldiers a day, Bedsole said. Most government troops ended the war in rags and penniless. They either threw their guns away in the final battle or traded them for food. But the soldiers in Addis Ababa are the lucky ones. Many others fled the capital and discarded their wounded along the way.

Missionaries recently sent men by truck to buy lumber in the region to which the soldiers had fled. "When they got back they were almost in shock," Bedsole said.

The road was lined with wounded and starving soldiers begging for food and assistance -- needs the men could not meet with a truckload of lumber. "They said lions and hyenas were attacking the soldiers as they weakened," Bedsole added.

Humanitarian help is hampered by the same factor slowing food distribution -- lack of gasoline. Bedsole estimated no more than a tenth of the country's vehicles are on the road and individual gas purchases are severely limited.

"We have 1,000 tons of grain designated for Baptists to distribute and we have trucks," the missionary said. "But getting the gasoline is another matter." The country also is out of butane gas, the primary fuel source for cooking in most urban areas and many rural homes.

Bedsole believes "the country will right itself" if gasoline supplies are provided. "There are pockets of famine but most of the hunger is war-related," he explained. "If the trucks can start rolling and the feeding stations reopen, most folks will just need help until the first harvest next January."

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'Wire of death' was
bogus but did the job

F- FMB

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ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)--Despite the grim situation in Ethiopia, some light moments provide emotional relief.

Several months ago Southern Baptist missionaries began construction on a medical clinic in the Menjer District southwest of Addis Ababa. The building was still in the rough stages when Ethiopian People's Democratic Front troops captured the capital city.

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Looters quickly moved to fill the void left by the collapsed central government. In Menjer their two prime targets were the unfinished clinic and the home of missionaries David and Debbie Brownfield.

Not much building material had been stockpiled at the clinic, but thieves hauled away some steel and other small items. When word got back to the Southern Baptist mission office, missionary Sam Cannata contacted village officials and said construction work would not proceed until everything stolen was returned. It was, and crews resumed work almost immediately.

Later missionaries learned what transpired at the Brownfields' house. The couple was on emergency leave in the United States when the government fell, and the Ethiopians guarding their house fled except one. But that lone guard grabbed some wire and strung it atop the wall that surrounds the house.

When a large mob appeared, he confronted them, pointed to the wire and told them it was electric. "Anyone who touches it will die," he warned. The crowd melted away without a single attempt to loot the property.

The nearest electricity is miles and miles away.

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NOTICE: Aug. 31, 1991 will be the last day for use of the Jacquard computer in the Baptist Press office. After that date, Baptist Press will be available electronically only on the CompuServe system. We will, of course, continue to mail Baptist Press to all our subscribers. Contact David Haywood at the Baptist Sunday School Board for more information.

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