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FMB -A

**Baptists praying during massive
Madagascar demonstrations**

By Craig Bird

ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar (BP)--Madagascar may have two presidents and two prime ministers -- but it doesn't have a functioning government.

Daily crowds of up to 400,000 people clog the streets of the island nation's capital, Antananarivo, demanding political change while taxes go uncollected, banks refuse to open and postal services are paralyzed.

Southern Baptist missionary Fred Sorrells of Brady, Texas, has continued to work in the chaotic situation. It has erupted into real violence only once, when demonstrators were shot to death on the streets in front of the Sorrells residence. The Sorrells, who live across from the presidential palace, were not at home.

The shootings occurred Aug. 10 when President Didier Ratsiraka's North Korean-trained presidential guard fired on the demonstrators. The Madagascar Red Cross said 31 people died that day in the capital, while another 20 deaths were reported in related violence in the north.

About 1,000 Baptists in the city "aren't very visible on either side politically," according to Sorrells. "They feel their main role is praying for the situation."

Sorrells left Madagascar Aug. 21 enroute to the United States to join his family for a furlough in Austin, Texas. His wife, Sami, a Houston native, and their three children left Aug. 1.

More than two months of massive street demonstrations and a nationwide general strike spawned the dual chief executives Aug. 19. Opposition leaders declared President Ratsiraka stripped of all powers and themselves the legitimate government.

They also "voided" the 1975 constitution and "dissolved" Madagascar's National Assembly and High Court. Ratsiraka dissolved his own government three weeks ago and named a new prime minister, but has not moved beyond that point.

Since the shootings Ratsiraka has remained holed up in the presidential palace issuing decrees banning public assemblies and imposing curfews, which are flaunted publicly and massively. Even his order giving the military extensive powers of search and arrest has been largely ineffectual as the army has tried to distance itself from the Aug. 10 violence, according to Associated Press reports.

Sorrells credits the relative calm that still prevails to the basic nature of the peaceful Malagasy people. "Violence is the last resort in their culture, so the manifestation of these demonstrations shows how serious the situation is," he said.

Sorrells, who also is trying to establish an evangelistic outreach in the Comoro Islands, remained in the country after his family left to lead evangelistic efforts at a multinational cultural and athletic festival set for Aug. 6-13. The festival was canceled Aug. 4 and his plans to visit the Comoros went awry when all flights leaving the country were overbooked.

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"I spent a couple of days standing in line at the airport trying to get a ticket on any plane to anywhere," he explained. "I even considered flying out on Aeroflot (the Soviet airline).

"If I had done that I would have landed in Moscow just in time for those mass demonstrations!"

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102-year-old Chinese woman
still on the move for God

By Lounette Templeton

FMB-F

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HONG KONG (BP)--Ng Leung Shiu Ha is under 5 feet tall and weighs less than an average 12-year-old, but she stands out in any crowd.

The tiny woman with the stately presence is 102 years old.

On most Sundays she walks to Wanchai Baptist Church in Hong Kong. If it rains she takes a taxi.

Sunday school and Sunday worship services are top priorities for Ng. Not far behind are women's fellowships and deacon's meetings. Occasionally she chides her fellow deacons for not having mission education for the children. Still in good voice, Ng sang an old Chinese version of Psalm 23 at the Christmas banquet last year.

Ng climbs two flights of stairs to reach her home. She shares quarters with another woman, but she takes care of herself. "I even do the washing and cleaning," she said. A food service delivers meals to her during the week, but on weekends she eats at a nearby restaurant where she is instantly recognized.

Ng became a Christian in China at age 24. At the time, since her husband and brother worked in another village, she lived with her sister-in-law.

"I was very ill," she recalled, "and although I worshiped the idols and had incantations around the house, my illness persisted." She finally visited a Christian doctor who knelt and prayed for her. "I was healed instantly," she said.

She accepted Christ as Savior and "threw away all the idols." Her belief in Christ, however, caused her sister-in-law to send her away.

In a neighboring village, Ng found a missionary living in a church building. The woman took her in and "treated her as a godchild," she said. She learned to read by studying the Bible with the missionary.

Ng joined her husband two years later and he, too, became a Christian. At 28, she was ordained a deacon in a Baptist church.

Life was hard and sometimes dangerous for Ng Leung Shiu Ha. Once she and her two small children were kidnapped by bandits. The bandit leader wanted her for his concubine, but when his wife would not allow it, he turned Ng and her children over to an elderly man who wanted her.

Fortunately, the old man treated her "like a daughter," she said. Eventually her husband found her and rescued his family. "In those times of danger," she said, "God protected my family and me."

Her husband died when he was about 50, and she was on her own. Over the years she worked as a shopkeeper and midwife.

"The Lord is good to me," she said. "My grandchildren in Hong Kong earn a good living for themselves and they treat me well. My health is good. I have no worries."

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The church ministers to Ng in many ways. "When I have gone through hard times, they have always helped," she said. She believes the church can provide both spiritual and physical help for the elderly -- particularly "those who have no family or friends."

And she lives what she preaches. Her pastor reports she has opened her home over the years for young and old alike who "needed a place to stay." One "practically homeless" young man who stayed with her for a time is now an architect, the pastor said. She still shelters elderly people in need.

What advice does she give young people today? "Study the Bible diligently, be obedient, and always strive to do your best."

As for older folks, she reminds them serving God is a lifetime matter. "You're never too old to serve God," she said. "I pray. I read the Bible every day."

Although she's unable to "go visiting" as she did a few years ago, Ng still finds elderly people to invite to church. "I don't want them to be afraid of growing old," she said. "If you're a Christian, growing old means you're getting closer to Heaven."

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

Christian love called
only cure for racism

By Chip Alford

SSB-F

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--There is only one cure for racism on America's college campuses -- love -- a conference leader at the 1991 Student Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center said Aug. 12.

"How can you treat someone badly when you are loving them as Christ has told us to love one another?" asked Thelma Douglass, assistant dean of students at the University of Houston. "The closer you grow to Christ, the more you see man as a person and not as a race," she said.

Baptist college students packed a conference room for Douglass' seminar, "Racism on Campus: Developing a Cross Cultural Sensitivity."

Explaining the cause of racism, Douglass used the acrostic S-I-N, which she said stands for self, ignorance and natural man.

"One of the main causes of racism is focusing on self," Douglass explained. "When we turn everything inward toward ourselves and our race we are not reaching out like God wants us to do."

Ignorance, she said, perpetuates racism. "In the Bible God says my people die because of a lack of knowledge. We need to take time to investigate, research and learn about other races and cultures. We can't let our emotions take control; we have to take control of our emotions."

Explaining the inclusion of "natural man" in the acrostic, Douglass said those without Christ "do not know the ways of God. So, they often act in the opposite way that God intends."

Douglass, an East Texas native, said God has blessed her with an openness to all races and cultures.

"My mother was a missionary and she instilled in me the importance of loving all people. I try to look for the best in every person," she said.

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Illustrating her point, Douglass, an African-American, said she recently walked into a seminar and was greeted with the comments, "We're glad you're here. Now we have a mixed group. You can be our token (minority) person."

"I could have been offended by that," Douglass said, "but I chose to get to know the person. After sitting in the conference I realized she was a godly woman and that she had not meant to offend me by her remarks."

Racial slurs and derogatory comments can be devastating, but Douglass said she tells people who have been hurt by them to ask themselves, "Compared to all eternity, with a comment like that, what does it matter? We have to be careful not to let things get blown out of proportion. Wrong information can be communicated without malice."

Douglass said more educational efforts on the high school and college level are needed to inform students about the differences and uniqueness of races and cultures.

"I really feel that there is a reaching out for this kind of information," she said. "We need a knowledge of other cultures to understand other points of view. But it is going to take a concerted effort on the part of both administration and student leaders to plan the courses and encourage students to take them."

Douglass urged students to take the risk of reaching out to their peers from different racial and cultural backgrounds. "You don't have to be inhibited," she said. "They are your brothers and sisters in Christ and are to be respected as individuals just like yourself."

Sharing information from a Michigan State University publication, Douglass suggested several ways students can experience diversity, such as:

- trying food from a different culture,
- sitting down at a cafeteria or in a classroom with people of a different race or nationality and introducing themselves,
- listening to music which represents a different culture,
- talking with a friend about racism and closely examining their own feelings, and
- writing down 10 stereotypes they have about cultures and ways they can rid themselves of them.

While an increasing number of fraternities and Christian organizations on college campuses are becoming integrated, Douglass acknowledged many campus groups are still formed along racial and cultural lines. That isolation can be helped, she said, by students intentionally coming together for cross-cultural events.

"I can be part of an individual group, yet still merge and mix with other groups. We need to remember that we can come together without losing our uniqueness," she said.

"Having God's word come alive in our lives can make a world of difference," Douglass said. "I tell students they can be a better person tomorrow for reading God's word today."

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

Students challenged to let
God's word come alive

By Chip Alford

SSB-F

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--A spiritual revival will not come to the world until it first comes to the college campus, Calvin Miller told more than 2,400 Southern Baptist college students and leaders attending the 1991 Student Conference at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center.

Miller, pastor of Westside Church in Omaha, Neb., told students revival will come to their schools only when they give themselves "to constant prayer and the infilling of the Holy Spirit." He encouraged students to become disciplined in Bible reading and prayer.

"God will never make you exercise those disciplines which move you into a deeper and deeper relationship with him," he added.

Miller and Esther Burroughs, national evangelism consultant for women for the Home Mission Board, were worship leaders for the Aug. 10-16 conference. Their messages to students were built around the theme, "God's Word -- Alive."

Describing God's Word as a "love letter from God," Burroughs challenged students to let scripture come alive in their everyday lives.

"I believe this world is crying out for us to act as if the word had been made flesh in our very lives and we can stand on it and act on it," she said.

Morning Bible studies during the week were led by Jerry Hayner, pastor of Forest Hills Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. Hayner taught his book, "Dealing With Life's Questions," the new collegiate edition of Outreach Bible Study. Following each morning session, students broke into "share groups" to learn how to lead evangelistic Bible studies.

The collegiate years are "probably the most burdened time of care you will have in your life when you consider the kind of decisions you have to make," Hayner told students. Career, dating, marriage and religious convictions are just a few areas in which students have to make sometimes difficult choices, he said.

Hayner encouraged students looking for success to turn to the only one who can provide it, "and his name is Jesus."

In addition to attending seminars, Bible studies and worship services, about 300 students participated in a "Read-Through-The-Bible Marathon." Reading scripture aloud in pairs in 30-minute intervals, the students took 73 and one-half hours to read from Genesis to Revelation.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Couple hopes performances
bring God's word alive

By Chip Alford

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--"God's Word Brought to Life."

For Paul and Nicole Johnson, those words are more than just a phrase printed on the front of their business card. It is their goal every time they walk on stage.

"We want to make the word of God real to people and communicate the unconditional love of Christ," said 25-year-old Paul, half of an energetic Christian drama team formed with his wife in 1988.

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If the response at the 1991 Student Conference at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center is any indication, the couple is reaching that goal. The Johnsons performed the theme interpretation and several sketches during the Aug. 10-16 student conference bringing laughter, tears and at least one standing ovation from students.

Residents of Murfreesboro, Tenn., the couple travels three weeks out of every month, performing at church worship services; college chapels; youth, college and single adult retreats and conferences; marriage festivals; and other events.

"It can get tiring, but we both love what we do," said Nicole, 24. "God has really just built the ministry for us and we're thankful for all the opportunities."

The Johnsons, who married in 1987 after graduating from Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., became interested in drama at an early age.

Paul got his start as a four-year-old on the children's television show, "Romper Room."

"I think the thing I remember most was being scared of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum," Paul remembered, laughing. "But the potato chips were great."

Nicole became interested a little later in life, performing in "speech squads" and junior and senior high school plays.

Both accepted Christ as teenagers and felt called into some type of Christian ministry. At Samford, they earned theater degrees and performed with ACT 8, a campus ministry drama team which Paul also directed.

After graduation they waited tables to pay the bills and planned a trip to San Diego, Calif., to audition for the Christian drama troupe, "The Lamb's Players." But they never made the trip.

"We were sitting around talking one day, and we just threw out the idea of starting our own ministry," Nicole recalled. "We had a good laugh about it, but the idea stuck with us. We had no idea how it would work, but we wanted to try."

The couple put together a mimeographed flyer and sent it to 700 Baptist churches in Alabama. Within a few weeks they were performing in churches, and they've been busy ever since.

"It was a little scary at first when we quit our jobs, but I think we were too dumb to realize just how scary it really was," Paul recalled. "We never really thought about being able to pay the bills. We just knew God would take care of us and he has."

Today the couple is booked a year-and-a-half in advance. And when they aren't performing, they are often writing new material.

"Drama really has a wide appeal," Nicole said, adding she and her husband perform before all age groups.

While they make ample use of humor in their sketches, most have a serious message as well. For example, "When I Was Little" starts out with a young girl describing her relationship with her imaginary friend but ends with the loving arms of Christ being wrapped around her demonstrating his unconditional love. "The Blame Game" uses a game-show format to make the point that blaming others for our mistakes isn't necessary because God is a forgiving God.

In addition to communicating scriptural truth through their performances, the couple said they also work at keeping their material relevant and entertaining.

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"We always try to speak from where we are in our journey," Paul said. "We want to remind people that the Christian life is a pilgrimage and that God is always there to help us along the way."

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Portland church finds new
way to learn about missions By Susan Todd Doyle

F.W.M.U.

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--"But we've always done it this way" is a statement you will never hear at Greater Gresham Baptist Church in Portland, Ore. In fact, church leaders are going out of their way to do things differently.

When the church organized almost two years ago, one thing Pastor Jeff Iorg wanted to avoid was leader burnout.

"Since we're a new church, we've tried to be careful with our resources of leaders -- doing a few things well rather than doing a lot of things haphazardly," Iorg said.

The church's charter members wanted to offer quality programs and experiences to new members. They also wanted missions education and involvement to be an integral part of their church.

Their dilemma was how to offer these things when they didn't have enough leaders to go around. The brand-new church just barely had the people it needed to staff the Sunday school classes and accept necessary duties. There weren't enough leaders left for age-level missions organizations.

But the members of Greater Gresham Baptist Church found they could do both with a little creativity.

Quilla Whiten, a charter member of Greater Gresham and president of Woman's Missionary Union for the Northwest Baptist Convention, was willing when Iorg asked her to become missions education director for the church.

"The great thing about Quilla is that she really wants to be creative," Iorg said. "She wants missions education to take place more than she wants organizations."

Working together as a planning team, Iorg and Whiten have found with a little imagination and creativity, a congregation can be easily educated about missions.

Whiten has seen to it each church family receives a prayer guide to use during the Week of Prayer for Home Missions and the Week of Prayer for Foreign Missions. Iorg has used the prayer guides in Sunday morning services as a way to encourage members to continue using them during the week.

During the break time between the 9 a.m. Sunday morning worship service and the 10:30 a.m. Sunday school hour, members of Greater Gresham can enjoy coffee and missions videos in the hallway of their school-turned-church.

But members don't have to wait until they've been at church for an hour before learning something about missions. Whiten uses the school entryway to give members a taste of missions materials. Her weekly displays feature a variety of missions topics and needs.

The women of the congregation have enjoyed "Saturdays and Salads" once a month. During these sessions, they have studied missions books such as "Empowered!" written by Esther Burroughs and published by Southern Baptist WMU.

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Sunday school teachers have found Whiten to be an added source of information for their lessons, too. Each Sunday she gives them a fact sheet listing relevant missions information.

WMU magazines are being shared with members of the church. Also, the church has provided for each family a subscription to the foreign missions magazine, The Commission, and the home missions magazine, MissionsUSA.

"So many people get caught up in organizations being the goal -- and not missions education, missions giving and missions going," Iorg said.

The goal of the missions education team of Whiten and Iorg at Greater Gresham has been to get materials and information into the hands of all church members. They have found activities add to the experience.

Missionary speakers and the Greater Gresham version of a missions fair have been popular on occasional Sunday evenings. The church meets once a month on Sunday evening for fellowship. Missions has been a natural focal point of some of these gatherings, Whiten said.

"Greater Gresham Baptist Church is proof that WMU is more than age-level organizations. It is missions education for the whole church in many different ways," said Bobbie Sorrill, associate executive director of Southern Baptist WMU.

"Jeff Iorg and Quilla Whiten have looked at their church and its needs, and they have customized a missions education program for that church. That's what we here at the national WMU office want every church to do. For some, it will mean providing age-level missions organizations, but for others, it will mean taking a churchwide approach."

The key to a successful churchwide approach to missions is a pastor who is interested in missions and a layperson who will be responsible for gathering the resources, Sorrill said.

The approach the leaders of Greater Gresham have taken with their congregation is paying off. In a recent churchwide survey, members indicated one of the three things they wanted more of was missions education.

"It just tells me that missions education can be done successfully a little at a time," Whiten said.

Any church can include missions education in its program even if they aren't able to staff a full slate of age-level organizations, Iorg said. All it takes is a little creativity and planning.

"I would encourage any church to not be afraid to think creatively," he said. "The approach doesn't have to be 'How can we get this organization started?' but, 'Let's dream about how we can accomplish the goal of missions education!'"

Sorrill echoed Iorg's challenge: "Our bottom-line goal at WMU is to involve persons and churches in missions, not to just form age-level organizations. Age-level organizations are important, but they may not be for every church."

Whiten said she has learned one main thing from her experience with educating her church about missions. "It tells me that missions can be done a little at a time."