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Drought, war in Africa's Somalia
claim thousands of lives daily

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
9/4/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Each day in Somalia 1,000 to 5,000 people die of starvation -- and the human tragedy in the drought- and war-devastated African country is unfolding faster than world hunger agencies can respond.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has channeled more than \$115,000 in hunger and relief funds to workers in Kenya and Yemen aiding Somali refugees since March 1991. Board officials now expect to send far greater amounts of aid in the coming months.

"Somalia is the most desperate, intense place of human suffering in the world today," said Graeme Irvine, president of World Vision International, which is scheduled to launch its first two feeding stations in Somalia Sept. 4.

A 10-member World Vision team, including several Americans, will staff the centers in Baidoa, a city of some 100,000 people in central Somalia where an estimated 300 to 700 people die daily of starvation.

"They're going in at extreme risk, knowing the dangers involved," said Jim Newton, spokesman at World Vision's U.S. headquarters in Monrovia, Calif., who recently visited the country currently ablaze in a multi-sided, terror-filled civil war. Men and youth with automatic rifles -- some 20,000 to 30,000 in Somalia's largest city, Mogadishu, alone -- rob relief caravans at will in the now-lawless country the size of California.

World Vision intends to open additional feeding centers in Somalia, Newton said, qualifying, "We're going to take it a step at a time and meet the needs as funds become available."

The Christian relief agency has budgeted \$10.8 million for food distribution and agricultural development for Somalia during the coming year -- four times its 1992 outlay for ministry there.

"As many people die every day in Somalia as in a month in Yugoslavia, despite the constant media attention to the Yugoslav conflict," Irvine stated.

Two years of warfare in this 99-percent-plus Muslim country has placed an estimated 1.5 million of its 8.3 million people, mostly unarmed women and children, "in direct threat of starvation," according to Bread for the World, an anti-hunger lobby based in Washington. Several million more Somalis are hungry and malnourished.

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The lobby's Africa policy analyst, Sharon Pauling, is asking "why greater thresholds of suffering and horror must be reached in Africa before camera crews arrive and decisive action is taken by the international community."

"We have two years supply of weapons," one Somali fighter has been quoted as saying, "but only one year supply of people."

Beyond the drought now gripping Somalia and fellow Horn of Africa countries Ethiopia and Djibouti as well as other parts of eastern and southern Africa, Somalia's civil war has sidelined its farmers. Only 5 percent of their usual crops were planted last year, according to Bread for the World.

"In the major cities fruits and vegetables are more expensive than grenades," one Christian worker noted.

War has terminated government services, according to reports, and closed all schools, except those operated by mosques for study of the Koran.

Additionally, the strife made refugees of an estimated 1 million Somalis. Up to 500,000 Somalis have crossed into Ethiopia and 300,000 into Kenya while some 65,000 have sailed in rickety boats across the Red Sea to Yemen, according to estimates.

Just to meet minimum needs for the refugees, some \$94 million in relief funds is needed this year, according to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In August, the United States began an airlift of 145,000 tons of food to Somalia where, according to one relief organization, some 40,000 tons of food is needed monthly, apart from food needs in other countries where Somalis have taken refuge.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is at the forefront of still-developing food distribution efforts in Somalia. In addition to World Vision, other relief groups in the country include World Concern of Seattle; Doctors Without Borders from France; Save the Children from England; and Concern from Ireland.

Bread for the World is urging the United Nations to deploy additional security forces to protect food and relief workers inside Somalia. At present, some 500 Pakistani soldiers are there in behalf of the United Nations.

And Bread for the World is urging the United Nations to lead out in calling the world community "to flood Somalia with food and other urgently needed supplies ... and to establish a conflict resolution process that includes all parties" currently warring in Somalia.

For individuals, Bread for the World urges:

- involvement in raising funds for Somali relief in their communities.
- writing letters to newspapers and TV networks encouraging them to continue covering Somalia's plight.
- writing letters to the White House and to senators and congressmen "to congratulate them on what they have done so far and to continue to do everything possible to get relief to Somalia."

Southern Baptist missionaries in Kenya have tried to ease the suffering of some of the thousands of Somalis who have fled south to Kenya searching for food and safety. For several months medical missionary David Sorley has worked a few days each week in three refugee camps north of his home in Nairobi. The camps, set up by the United Nations, shelter more than 120,000 Somali refugees.

Sorley, from St. Paul, Minn., has assisted Canadian Baptists in treating the camps' sick as well as working with Somali children left severely malnourished by the drought and civil war.

"We're giving them a mix of wheat, sugar, oil and some pea flour. We premix the food to keep others from selling it in the market," Sorley said. "That's the tragedy even in the refugee camps. The best-nourished know how to use the system -- and the weak ones fall through the cracks. Some of the weak can't even get into the lines and so you have to go tent to tent searching for them and that's a very labor-intensive process."

Sorley has not worked in the camps in recent weeks. However, the Southern Baptist mission organization in Kenya has agreed to free Sorley of some of his regular responsibilities, allowing him to return to relief work with the Somali refugees.

Southern Baptist workers in Yemen also are trying to aid Somalis who have fled there across the Red Sea. (See accompanying story.)

Beyond its current famine, Somalia "must be considered the most ignored country ... in the history of Christian missions," added David Barrett, missions researcher at the Foreign Mission Board and editor of the "World Christian Encyclopedia."

Somalia is 99.9 percent Muslim, with fewer Christians per capita than any other African country, according to researchers. Less than three dozen North American missionaries were assigned to the country and there are just 1,000 Somali Protestants and 2,000 Roman Catholics among the country's 8 million people.

For additional information about the crisis in Somalia, contact the Foreign Mission Board, Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230, (804) 353-0151; World Vision, 919 W. Huntington Drive, Monrovia, CA 91016, (818) 301-7782; or Bread for the World, 802 Rhode Island Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20018, (202) 269-0200.

World Vision's Irvine said he tells donors "to recognize the difficulties" facing relief agencies working in the midst of Somalia's civil war. "Some food is stolen at gunpoint and there are no watertight guarantees it will reach those facing starvation. But most of it does, and without this food the people will surely starve."

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Donald D. Martin contributed to this report. (BP) photo available from Jim Newton at World Vision, (818) 301-7782 or fax (818) 301-7779.

Somali refugee relief efforts
in Yemen hampered by low funds

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
9/4/92

ADEN, Yemen (BP)--Crippled by losses in their hospital and a shortage of relief money from the United States, Southern Baptist workers in Yemen are seeking ways to help refugees who have fled death in Somalia.

During recent months an estimated 25,000 refugees from the strife-torn, famine-ridden east African nation have sought safety across the Red Sea on the shores of southern Yemen.

They have made temporary homes in three refugee settlements. In one camp, about 100 dome-shaped stick huts rise out of a rocky dirt plain. Living there are several hundred Ethiopians who first fled their homes in the 1970s to resettle in Somalia. Native Somalians have moved into tents in two much larger camps.

The most recent refugees ran their ship aground in late June and set up camp right on the shore after Yemen refused to let them land, said Southern Baptist volunteer worker Rodney Armstrong. Rumors people were dying of cholera on board the ship proved false, he added.

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Southern Baptists sent two workers from Cyprus to help the United Nations register the refugee group to receive rations.

Southern Baptist representatives working in Yemen also have sent medical workers to treat the most seriously ill refugees and distribute medicine. And they have agreed to take in patients at their hospital -- one at a time -- if the United Nations will pay. One patient was treated at the hospital for infection from a gunshot wound in his leg.

Still, Southern Baptists have been unable to free the personnel needed to make a significant impact in the refugee crisis, said representative Al Lindholm. They've not even had enough money to pay travel expenses, he said.

Historically, Southern Baptist work in Muslim-dominated Yemen has been limited to the 22-acre Jibla Baptist Hospital and clinic compound. This year the hospital is fighting to stay open. Spiraling inflation, a weak exchange rate for the U.S. dollar and an overload of patients who simply can't pay promise to drive hospital losses to between \$150,000 and \$200,000 by the end of the year, Lindholm said. The Yemeni government has stalled in approving an increase in patient fees.

Baptists have given freely to relieve world hunger during the past year. But the denomination spends hunger funds only on projects that provide food and water. The best way to aid the refugees in Yemen, on the other hand, is by supplying workers who can design and supervise programs to convert raw foodstuffs already on hand into meals and offer medical care and other services, Lindholm said.

Southern Baptists' general relief fund pays for such projects. But general relief giving has been slow, said Sam James, the Foreign Mission Board's vice president for the region. James urged Southern Baptists to designate their contributions "Yemen relief" if they want to help.

"The refugees are being given flour (by the United Nations), but I'm told they don't know how to cook it," Armstrong said. Refugees are using the bags of flour to sit on or trading them in towns for cigarettes and other commodities, he said.

Armstrong, assigned since last November as pastor to the group of 60 internationals who practice at the hospital, has been working with the United Nations' refugee office.

Armstrong and Lindholm are seeking Southern Baptist volunteers who can help build a bakery to feed 25,000 to 50,000 people and supervise bread and milk distribution programs. They also need volunteer doctors and nurses with experience in public health.

To cover their expenses so far, Southern Baptists in Yemen have been working from a \$2,000 donation designated for Yemen relief by a church in Illinois. In July another \$25,000 in relief funds purchased clay pots to hold water for the refugees.

"We have been able to do some things, but there are many more opportunities than we've been able to take advantage of," said Dale Thorne, director of Southern Baptist work in the Middle East and North Africa.

"The need is so great it almost paralyzes you. You wonder how you can even make a dent into it," Armstrong said. "But then you realize that by showing compassion and doing what you can, that doesn't go unnoticed by the people."

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Texas leaders issue call
for Somalian relief effort

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
9/4/92

DALLAS (BP)--Three Baptist General Convention of Texas leaders have issued a call for all-out relief efforts to victims of war, famine and AIDS in war-torn Somalia.

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In a statement, BGCT President Dick Maples of Bryan, Executive Director William M. Pinson Jr. and Levi Price Jr. of El Paso, chairman of the 193-member BGCT executive board, praised the "concern and humanitarian efforts of the United Nations to bring food to the embattled, hungry people in Bosnia," in the former Yugoslavia.

"Now we must deal immediately with the even more overwhelming tragedy in Somalia where an estimated 1.5 million people are in immediate danger of starving to death and 4.5 million ultimately face starvation," the Baptist leaders said.

"We urge our government and the United Nations -- as was done in Bosnia -- to take whatever humanitarian and Christian actions are necessary to relieve the needless suffering of millions of people in Somalia."

Also, the Baptists leaders called on "every concerned Christian to pray and use all available influence to see that food, medicines and materials for shelter will get to those who have the most urgent need."

Somalia is in the most serious condition of any nation in the world, according to the Red Cross. Beyond drought, the east African nation has been racked by civil war since 1988 and caught in a state of anarchy since dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was deposed in 1991.

Relief workers say one-fourth of Somalia's children are already dead.

About 1 million Somalis are refugees. Southern Baptists are ministering to refugees who manage to flee to Kenya and Yemen.

BWAid, the relief arm of Baptist World Alliance, said in addition to supporting aid agencies working in Somalia, it is working through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and Canadian Baptists, contributing toward massive feeding and medical programs for Somali refugees in Kenya.

The United States has sent 145,000 tons of food and transportation worth \$200 million to aid refugees in Kenya but most of it may not arrive before October, relief workers said.

Joe Haag of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, who coordinates world hunger education for Texas Baptists, said, "Baptists should be encouraged by the relief work being done by their missionaries to aid Somali refugees along the Kenya border.

"They need more financial aid to help relieve suffering there and, very soon we hope and pray, in Somalia itself."

Gifts can be designated to Somalia relief by sending checks directly to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Haag added.

"As always, 100 percent of hunger funds are used in direct ministry," Haag said.

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Prayer also needed
for suffering Somalis

By Art Toalston

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Somalis need food -- and also prayer.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has issued several calls to prayer for Somalia in recent months. "We want to create a worldwide prayer response to the tragic situation in Somalia," said Minette Drumwright, director of the board's international prayer strategy office.

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Recently the prayer office asked several hundred Southern Baptist churches to include the Somali people in their prayer ministries that focus on unreached people groups.

"The first matter of prayer is that food and medicine will actually reach those in need," she said. "We need to pray that somehow the warring factions will stop the killing so that basic help can get to the people who really need it."

Another prayer request centered on Somali children.

"The fate of these children is a matter we've asked people to be concerned about. More than 1 million children are in dire circumstances. They are in urgent need of food and medical attention. They need our prayers," Drumwright said.

In the most recent alert the prayer office also asked Southern Baptists to pray that the few Somali Christians "will have the strength and courage to be true to their faith and witness." Virtually all the Somalis are Muslims and the country has historically been hostile toward Christianity.

"We can pray that the Lord will use this tragedy to create opportunities for evangelization that were not there before," Drumwright said. "Pray that God, in his sovereignty, will choose to work in this situation the way he did among the Kurds. God shook open some closed doors (after the Persian Gulf war) and Christians have been able to enter (Kurdish communities) with the gospel. God can do the same thing in Somalia."

Graeme Irvine, president of World Vision International, has listed three key needs for prayer:

-- "Pray constantly for peace. Peace will not come easily. The warlords of Somalia will resist it. International apathy and indifference hinders it. Yet for those who care, it is the critical path to follow."

-- "There is no organized church in Somalia but there are Somali Christians. Pray for them that, in this hour of darkness, God's light might shine through them."

-- "Pray for those working in Somalia. The voluntary relief agencies have carried the burden of compassionate help to the people. Relief staff work under incredibly difficult and dangerous conditions. Their lives are in constant danger."

Agencies at work in the heavily Muslim country include the International Committee of the Red Cross; World Vision International; World Concern (U.S.A.); Doctors Without Borders (France); Save the Children (United Kingdom); and Concern (Ireland).

A Christian advocate for the Somali people, who cannot be identified because of sensitivities involved in his work, said Christians must believe "the ultimate strategy is prayer ... that no country or people group is closed to God. Their lostness must always remain our burden and challenge.

"We must pray and work," he said, "to develop strategies for entering the Somali community" by Scripture production; by "incarnating Christ" within the refugee camps and aiding the international community in food distribution and medical care; and by creative water, agriculture, animal science, literacy development projects -- "the list is endless ... to find avenues of ministry among this ignored people group."

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Donald D. Martin contributed to this story.

Nicaraguan Baptists aid
tidal wave survivors

By Mary E. Speidel

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--Nicaraguan Baptists already have begun providing emergency food and clothing to survivors of the tidal wave that slammed Nicaragua's Pacific coast Sept. 1, killing at least 100 people.

The Baptist Convention of Nicaragua will work through local Baptist churches and also will contribute money, food and clothing to relief efforts begun by the Nicaraguan Red Cross and CEPAD, a Nicaraguan evangelical relief organization. Missionary Sam Drummond is representing Southern Baptists on a Nicaraguan Baptist committee planning relief efforts.

The Baptist convention decided Sept. 3 to request \$25,000 in relief funds from several Baptist groups based in the United States. About \$10,000 of these funds would be earmarked for emergency food and clothing. Another \$15,000 would be used to rebuild houses destroyed by the flooding.

Meanwhile, Texas Baptist Men are planning to send Sept. 7 a plane load of relief supplies to Nicaragua, said Jim Palmer, missionary to Nicaragua who is on furlough in Fort Worth, Texas. The supplies will probably be channeled through Nicaragua's International Baptist Convention, one of two Baptist conventions to which Southern Baptist missionaries relate. Palmer said the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board may provide relief funds to assist with ground transportation and distribution of these supplies.

The supplies will be used near Masachapa, one of the hardest hit of nearly 40 communities affected along about 120 miles of coastline, Palmer said. A member of a Baptist church there died in the flooding. The victim's name was unavailable. Flood waters also destroyed the home of the church's pastor; his children nearly drowned, Palmer said.

No other deaths or injuries among Baptists and no damage to other Baptist churches in the area have been reported so far, said Tomas Tellez, executive secretary of the convention.

A seaquake, measuring 7 on the Richter scale, triggered the tidal wave that reportedly left about 100 people missing, 155 injured and 3,700 homeless.

The four Southern Baptist workers living in Nicaragua reported they felt no aftershocks in Managua, the capital, about 75 miles from the quake's epicenter. Missionary Margaret Drummond, from Louisville, Ky., said her family did not learn of the disaster until friends from the United States called the next day to check on them.

Other workers in Nicaragua -- all based in Managua -- include Mrs. Drummond's husband, Sam, from Camden, Tenn., and journeymen Ken and Teresa Nicely, from Troutville, Va. Palmer and his wife, Viola, are from Marshall and Fort Worth, Texas, respectively.

Before the tidal wave struck, Nicaraguans already were experiencing about 70 percent unemployment, said Tellez. "The economic situation is horrible," he said. "The seaquake worsens the situation." He added "prayers and help from our Baptist brothers and sisters around the world are badly needed at this moment in Nicaragua."

Tellez led a delegation of four officials from the Baptist convention that visited the disaster zone Sept. 2 to assess damages and see how Baptists could help. When they arrived on the scene, members of several churches in the area already were ministering to survivors.

"The flooding was very sudden," said Tellez in a Sept. 3 phone interview. "The lights went off. There was complete darkness The parents didn't have any opportunity to assist their children." About 75 percent of the victims were children under age 5, he said.

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Up to about 100 meters (more than 300 feet) beyond the seashore, no houses were left standing, he said. In resort towns along the beach, "beautiful places of recreation for the people ... were practically erased from the map."

Along the shore, "Very humble houses, especially those of fishermen or very poor people, were completely destroyed," he said. Most of these people made their living along the seashore, fishing or selling food to tourists. "Now these people are practically without any source of income, thus aggravating the hard situation of misery, poverty and unemployment."

In the disaster zone, San Rafael Baptist Church, about 10 kilometers from Masachapa, housed several families Sept. 1 after flood waters forced them from their homes. Members of that church and nearby El Salto Baptist Church and Baptists in the major seaport of Corinto were collecting food and clothing for survivors as of Sept. 2, Tellez said.

Members of First Baptist Church of Rivas were planning to form a brigade of volunteers to distribute food and clothing and help rebuild some of the houses destroyed in nearby San Juan del Sur, considered one of the most devastated areas, Tellez said.

A food and clothing collection effort is under way at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Nicaragua, where Drummond teaches. In addition, all Baptist churches throughout Nicaragua are being encouraged to donate clothing and food for survivors.

In Managua, a new Baptist radio station is expected to air announcements about how volunteers can help with relief efforts, Tellez said. The FM station began broadcasting in late August, but an electrical storm several days before the tidal wave caused some technical problems. The station has been off the air since.

"This has been a terrible obstacle," said Tellez, who added he expects the station will be able to resume broadcasts soon. Meanwhile, some 150 listeners have called asking why the station was off the air and how they could help with relief efforts. Despite the problems with the station, this response from listeners is "very encouraging," he said.

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Houston SBC housing requests
should be postmarked Oct. 1

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Hotel reservations for the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting should be mailed Oct. 1, according to convention manager Richard P. Rosenbaum Jr.

The meeting will be June 15-17 in Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center.

"New this year will be an attempt to assist groups of 50 or more who wish to stay in the same hotel," Rosenbaum said.

Requests for group housing forms should be directed to the Housing Information Office, SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce Street, Suite 750, Nashville, TN 37203, telephone (615) 244-2355.

Individual housing request forms are available from the offices of state Baptist convention executive directors and in the September issue of The Baptist Program magazine, Rosenbaum said. Rosenbaum is SBC Executive Committee vice president for business and finance.

The forms provide complete instructions for filing. They also list hotels in the 8,000-room Southern Baptist block, their rates and distances from the convention center.

Requests postmarked Oct. 1 will receive priority. The SBC housing office will begin filling the requests Oct. 15. The housing office will assist in finding rooms for others after requests postmarked Oct. 1 have been filled.

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Registrants may not submit more than one request per person. The housing office's computer will cancel all copies of multiple requests by the same individual. In a further attempt to discourage duplicate reservations at multiple hotels, hotels will be requiring advance deposits when confirmations are mailed. Rosenbaum said registrants should not send deposits, however, until notified by their hotels.

The convention's block of 8,000 rooms is spread among 39 Houston hotels. The Hyatt Regency will serve as SBC headquarters, with the Westin Galleria Hotel as WMU headquarters.

Disabled persons and others with special needs should contact the SBC Housing Information Office.

Due to limited downtown parking, a ground transportation system will be developed. Information about advance bus shuttle tickets will be provided at a later date.

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Leaders need vision, vitality,
declining church pastors told By Ken Camp & Orville Scott

Baptist Press
9/4/92

DALLAS (BP)--For declining churches to begin growing, their leaders must have spiritual passion restored, according to Michael Dean, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

"Unless you possess spiritual vitality as leaders, anything you do is like rearranging deck chairs on a sinking ship," he said.

At the Nationwide Church Growth Conference in Fort Worth, Aug. 31-Sept. 3, Dean addressed a specialized track for leaders of churches that have experienced a 10 percent decline in Sunday school attendance the last five years.

He offered church leaders a "checklist for change" detailing specific actions they could take in the areas of visionary leadership, physical considerations, worship services, Sunday school and innovative outreach.

Relevancy is a key factor in making churches appealing to newcomers, particularly to "baby boomers," Dean said.

"The issue is not contemporary versus traditional worship service styles. The issue is relevant versus irrelevant," he said, warning pastors a successful approach in urban southern California could be disastrous at a rural church in east Texas.

"Understand what is relevant in your culture, in your setting, and implement that," he said.

Tradition, fear, stereotypes, complacency, fatigue and short-term thinking are "vision killers" that can rob churches of potential growth, according to Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Fla.

If leaders of declining churches want a vision from God for their congregations, they must come to know themselves, their circumstances and their Lord, Traylor said.

Underscoring the importance of articulating visions in achieving goals, he pointed to the historical example of President John F. Kennedy's declared goal of putting men on the moon within a decade. Although the goal was not achieved until the Nixon administration, it was set in motion by that initial declaration of vision, he said.

"If men can do that, if a bunch of Democrats and Republicans can work together to do that, what could the Holy Spirit do with us if we get the vision to reach our communities, our states, our nation and our world with the gospel?" he said.

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If their churches are to grow and reach the lost, Baptists must avoid the "Doppelganger effect" -- the belief that churches must resemble each other in posture and appearance, according to Landrum Leavell III, pastor of Royal Palms Church in Phoenix, Ariz.

Churches will become obsolete when they grow unwilling to integrate new practices to meet changing needs of communities, Leavell warned.

"We're the only ones afraid of change," he said. "Every element of society has changed but we're sitting here with horses and buggies."

Christians cannot afford to be "weak-kneed nerds," he said. Instead, they must be bold in outreach because "Nobody wanders in (to churches). If people aren't sought and brought, they aren't going to come. We like to hang out with one another but we're not reaching out to anybody."

The words "fun" and "worship" should not be seen as incompatible, according to conference leader Bill Tisdale, pastor of 3,200-member First Baptist Church in Henderson, Texas.

"I tell young people they ought to be able to enjoy themselves when they come to church," Tisdale said, whose congregation averages about 150 baptisms per year.

"We have no problem with a structured order of service, but within that is celebration and praise."

Tisdale emphasized the importance of various gifts in a congregation but cautioned, "Our power is not in our gifts and our abilities. My strength is in the Lord."

Churches that grow involve the laity in meaningful service that utilizes their giftedness, according to Billy Ray Parmer, pastor of First Baptist Church in Valley Mills, Texas.

"The real meaning of fellowship is joint participation, not ice cream suppers," said Parmer, who led a conference for declining, mid-sized, small-city churches.

Parmer, who has served the same central Texas congregation for a quarter-century, encouraged the pastors to make a commitment to ministry for the "long haul," taking time to learn their people.

"Study your people to know their gifts," he said. "And be involved in the lives of the people."

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DeVoss to 'get ball rolling'
as global sports consultant

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
9/4/92

NORMAN, Okla. (BP)--Steve DeVoss gets the ball rolling.

That quality should serve him well as the first sports consultant for Cooperative Services International, the Southern Baptist aid organization.

DeVoss has a vision for linking sports resources -- including professional, collegiate and amateur athletes and coaches -- with existing needs across the globe.

"Sports is a common denominator throughout the world. It builds bridges," said DeVoss, currently a youth worker in Norman, Okla., who will begin his new work in October.

He's seen those bridges built at home and abroad and hopes to develop an international network of them.

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From a base in east Asia, DeVoss, from Henderson, Ky., and his wife, Pam, from Middleburg Heights, Ohio, will operate an organization offering sports consultation and sports partnerships in other countries.

They will ask volunteer sports groups such as Athletes in Action and Professional Athletes Outreach to help supply them with athletes and coaches for the program. They also hope to involve Christian sports volunteers from all over the world.

"Wherever I've been I've used sports," said DeVoss, who played college baseball at Murray (Ky.) State University in the 1970s.

For nearly 10 years, he has led sports clinics and demonstrations across the United States, from Honolulu to Chicago. The clinics, staffed by volunteers, have covered all kinds of sports -- baseball, tennis, gymnastics and volleyball, to name a few.

DeVoss' dream of being a global sports consultant took shape in 1988 in Seoul, South Korea, at the World Congress on Sports, a coalition of Christian groups working in sports projects. Nearly 600 delegates from 106 countries attended. DeVoss taught seminars on how to conduct sports clinics and worked as a consultant to delegates from Ghana and Nigeria. He also helped lead a basketball clinic in Taejon.

Last year his dream grew stronger when he worked as a sports clinic leader in South America and in the former Soviet Union.

In Venezuela, where baseball is the No. 1 sport, DeVoss helped lead a baseball clinic teaching skills of the game to young people. The clinic featured Major League pitcher John Wetteland of the Montreal Expos and Carlos Rios, a scout for the Atlanta Braves and former coach and infielder in the Atlanta farm system.

In Kazakhstan, DeVoss participated in a cultural exchange organized by that country and the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey. More than 300 Americans visited Kazakhstan, one of the 15 former Soviet republics.

DeVoss and a team of American volunteers led a baseball clinic and an American football demonstration for the Kazakhs. They also competed in a soccer match, although only one person on the U.S. team had ever played the sport. They tied 1-1.

"It was very fitting," DeVoss said.

The teams exchanged medals, trophies and jerseys as symbols of their cross-cultural friendship. The Kazakhs presented the American team a sash bearing the word "champion" in Russian. The Americans gave their football to their Kazakh host, Vitaly Sifoudanov, an international rugby player for the former Soviet Union, for his 35th birthday.

Last May Sifoudanov joined a delegation of 300 Kazakhs who visited the United States as guests of Southern Baptists. During their stay, DeVoss flew to Norfolk, Va., to spend a day with the Kazakh sportsman. The two men have developed a strong friendship.

"When you get involved in sports with someone, you're sharing your life. ... There's an automatic bonding," observed Pam DeVoss.

The DeVosses hope to do a lot more of that as they develop a network of athletes.

All the workers in their sports projects don't have to be athletes, DeVoss said. His wife is a good example. Mrs. DeVoss, a former high school biology teacher, said she's no athletic star. But she's found ways to use her talents in many of the sports clinics her husband has coordinated.

When they get settled in their new assignment, she will be office manager for the sports organization. She also will care for the couple's two young daughters and play hostess to sports volunteers who come to their area.

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The DeVosses have a favorite photograph that shows how sports communicates across cultures. The photo -- taken during DeVoss' 1991 trip to Kazakhstan -- shows a Kazakh holding a baseball and staring at it, completely amazed.

"You can tell he's never seen a baseball before," Mrs. DeVoss said.

Moments like that have convinced DeVoss that sports is a powerful way to build bridges.

"After all," he mused, "didn't God create the world in the shape of a ball?"

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information on volunteer sports projects through Cooperative Services International, contact Steve DeVoss, c/o Cooperative Services International, P.O. Box 6841, Richmond, Va. 23230-0767. (BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

17 BSSB employees named
to management positions

By Linda Lawson

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Seventeen employees of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board have been named to management positions in the office of church growth and programs, according to Gene Mims, vice president.

Church growth and programs, the largest of four areas of the board created in a recent restructuring, houses units which produce literature and other products and services for Southern Baptist churches.

Mims is responsible for the work of four divisions -- church growth and Sunday school directed by Harry Piland, discipleship and family development directed by Roy Edgemon, church program support directed by Roland Maddox and worship and music, which presently has no director.

In the worship and music division, which includes the Genevox Music Group and the church music ministries department, Mims said a nationwide search is under way for a division director. He said persons currently employed by the board also will be considered.

"We are looking for an outstanding individual who has church and denominational knowledge, a ministry and business background and one who will inspire our present music staff to do its greatest work," Mims said. "This person must be recognized by Southern Baptists as a music leader and must be accepted by employees within the Sunday School Board as the kind of leader who can take worship and music into the next level for the 21st century."

Within the worship and music division, Mims named Mark Blankenship to become full-time director of the Genevox Music Group, the board's trade publishing unit. Blankenship, 49, has been interim director since September 1991 while continuing to hold a management position in the church music department.

Wesley Forbis, director of the church music department, will continue in that role, though the name will change to church music ministries department.

In the church growth and Sunday school division, which includes the former Sunday school division and church administration department, Mims announced four management appointments:

-- Billie Pate, associate division director, will continue in that role.

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-- Joe Stacker, director of the church administration department, will direct the church growth leadership department.

-- Louis Hanks, manager of the youth curriculum section, will become director of the youth-adult department, replacing Max Caldwell, who is retiring.

-- Cos Davis, manager of the preschool program section, will direct the preschool-children department, replacing Muriel Blackwell, who is retiring.

Mims named an associate director, two department directors and three section managers for the discipleship and family development division, which includes the former discipleship training, family ministry and student ministry departments and the section responsible for Centrifuge and Crosspoint camps in the church recreation department.

-- John Kramp, supervisor of the adult editorial unit in the discipleship training department, will become associate director of the division, a new position.

-- Henry Webb, program design and planning coordinator in the discipleship training department, will manage the new discipleship and family growth and administration section.

-- Avery Willis, manager of the adult section in the discipleship training department, will direct the new discipleship and family adult department.

-- Gary Hauk, manager of the family enrichment section in the family ministry department, will manage the discipleship and family magazines section, which will include periodicals such as Home Life, Mature Living and Christian Single.

-- Art Criscoe, director of the management support section in the discipleship training department, will direct the new discipleship and family youth/children/preschool department.

-- Charles Johnson, director of the student ministry department, will continue in that post, though the name will be changed to section.

In the church program support division, Mancil Ezell, director of the church media library department, will direct the newly created church program services department to include the former church media library and church architecture departments and the former church recreation department except for the section that oversees Centrifuge and Crosspoint camps. Allen Adcox, senior manager of the inventory management/distribution system section, will direct the new business support services department. A director for the marketing services department will be named at a later time.

The current managers of the black church development, language church development/new work and Hispanic development sections -- Elgia Wells, Peter Kung and Tito Fafasuli -- will continue in their posts and report to Mims.

Mims said he expects to announce the structure below departments and personnel for most of the remaining management positions by the end of September.

"We're working as fast as we can to fill these positions with the best qualified people so that we can move forward in serving the churches," Mims said.