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92-155

WASHINGTON -- FMB to aid Somali group with peace initiative, with photo.  
WASHINGTON -- Somalia remains in dire need, Mozambique also facing crisis.  
MISSOURI -- Why does God allow disasters to happen?  
DALLAS -- Affiliates' future uncertain as VISN-ACTS channel launched.  
TEXAS -- RTVC counselors say new channel calls for 'Help!', with photo.  
TEXAS -- 'Not the kind of person who calls a helpline.'  
WASHINGTON -- RFRA supporters seek last-minute passage.  
TEXAS -- Denial of students' rights results in 3 conversions.  
ATLANTA -- 11 trends in church life listed by HMB president.  
GEORGIA -- Haitian youth find haven of stability, with photo.  
NASHVILLE -- Correction.

FMB to aid Somali group  
with peace initiative

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board will assist a group of Somali expatriates in its attempt to secure peace between warring factions in Somalia.

The board has agreed to transport five members of the Somali Coalition for Action to Somalia as soon as the group secures written invitations from faction leaders assuring safe passage in and out of the country.

Board administrators hope the trip will take place by mid-October or early November. They also plan to send relief supplies with the coalition delegation, said Jim Houser, FMB associate area director for eastern and southern Africa.

"The idea is to help bring about a cease-fire in the short term and, in the long term, peace so relief goods can be distributed safely to the people," Houser said. "We're involved because we were approached by the group and felt this was at least worth a try."

Since March 1991 the Foreign Mission Board has channeled more than \$115,000 in relief and world hunger funds to workers in Kenya and Yemen aiding Somali refugees. Board officials expect to send more aid in the coming months. The board also has issued special calls to prayer for Somalia and asked several hundred Southern Baptist churches to include the Somali people in their prayer ministries that focus on unreached people groups.

The board also is involved in efforts to help with relief work in Somalia itself, explained Bill Bullington, vice president for mission work in Africa. Soon mission workers in the region will submit new requests for funding relief work, he said.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission also hopes to raise Southern Baptists' awareness of relief needs in Somalia during the denomination's World Hunger Day observance Oct. 11.

But the fighting in Somalia must stop before relief groups can effectively distribute food. And the Somali Coalition for Action believes it can play a part in ending the violence.

The year-old group has appealed for peace in Somalia so international relief supplies can reach the thousands of Somalis who are dying from lack of food, medicine and water, explained Ali Mohamed Aden, the coalition's chairman and main spokesman.

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Between 2,000 and 5,000 people die each day in Somalia because of drought and civil war, relief groups report. They estimate 25 percent of children under 5 years old have died in Somalia in the past 12 months.

Somalia's plunge into anarchy began in January 1991 when a loosely unified opposition force ousted President Mohamed Siad Barre, ending 21 years of brutal dictatorial rule. Siad Barre, a Cold War ally first of the Soviet Union and then of the United States, governed the nation of predominantly nomadic herders by playing one clan against another.

When Siad Barre's government fell, the dictator left behind one of the poorest nations in the world. He also left a heavily armed opposition force, which soon turned on itself as different factions scrambled for power.

"This (civil war) is Siad Barre's legacy," said Mohamed Ali Hassan, president of the Somali Coalition for Action. "What we are going through at present is a time of temporary insanity. What we need is temporary help to get back on our feet and be a nation again."

"We are not against any group in Somalia," added Aden. "We do not wish anyone harm or ask for anyone's dismissal (in Somalia), but we are working to bring together our people for humanitarian reconciliation. We believe there is a way to solve this without going back to a dictatorship."

Coalition members believe many of the faction leaders will trust them and listen to their appeals for peace. The coalition is made up of Somalis from various clans who claim they have no political agenda other than finding an end to the killing.

"We are Somalis, and this is a Somali tragedy, and I believe Somalis can solve this," Aden said. Many of the people who are involved in current peace negotiations in Somalia represent foreign powers, Aden contended. The coalition believes faction leaders will not trust these negotiators enough to secure peace, he said.

The coalition already has received an invitation to meet with Gen. Mohamed Farrah Aidid, one of the main faction leaders. The group also expects to receive an invitation from interim president Ali Mahdi Mohamed, another major leader in the conflict, Aden said.

The coalition has pledged it will not take sides. "We are a humanitarian organization and it has to stay that way," Aden said.

The mission board insisted on this neutral stance before it agreed to assist the coalition, Houser said.

"Our desire is to help the people rather than assist those who would set up any type of government, he said. "That's something Somali people will have to do themselves."

It was this apolitical position that drew the Somali coalition to the mission board, Aden explained.

"They have sponsored our trip to Somalia," Aden said in a Sept. 18 press conference in Washington, D.C. "They have done so without taking political sides or demanding any obligation other than the humanitarian outcome for peace and harmony to our people."

Foreign Mission Board administrators believe the coalition is honest in its intentions. But it remains to be seen what progress the group can achieve.

The coalition is a young organization with 15 members and no funds of its own. The group has been busy contacting Somalis in the United States, Canada and Europe, but it still is a fairly unknown group. The U.S. State Department, when contacted, had not heard of the coalition. The hastily called press conference during which the group announced its humanitarian intentions and plans to travel to Somalia drew no one from the Washington-area media.

However, mission board administrators believe their support will not be wasted.

"Something like this has not been tried before," Houser said. "As a Christian organization we have a responsibility to do what we can to ease Somalia's suffering in any way possible. God has said we are to be peacemakers. This may not work but we can at least try to help and then leave it in God's hands."

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

Somalia remains in dire need,  
Mozambique also facing crisis

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--"The massive death and devastation we have seen in Somalia is beginning to emerge in other parts of Africa as well," said David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World. "Not only is the continent experiencing the worst drought of the century, civil wars in Somalia and Mozambique are compounding the situation. The lives of nearly 60 million Africans are in danger."

Beckmann and several other nonprofit relief officials recently returned from a survey of conditions in Somalia and other drought-stricken parts of southern Africa.

Assessments indicate Mozambique will likely deteriorate into a crisis similar to Somalia if greater attention is not directed toward the country. In both Somalia and Mozambique, civil war, political disarray and drought are fueling the famine. In Mozambique, relief officials estimate 3.1 million people are at immediate risk of starvation and an additional 6 million people are dependent on food aid.

Despite stepped-up relief efforts in Somalia, an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 people continue to die daily. "The current situation in Somalia is horrifying," said Philip Johnston, president of CARE. "I saw children whose thighs and legs were no bigger in circumference than my wrist. Their bodies had no muscle mass, only bone and skin covering it. It is tremendously difficult to get food through to Somalia's desperately hungry people."

"I've been a witness to many scenes of indescribable human suffering," said Jeffery Clark, Africa consultant with the U.S. Committee for Refugees. "Nothing, however, was adequate preparation for my travels in Somalia -- a journey to hell if there ever was one. I have returned shaken and shocked, but I have also come back angry at the stewards of the international humanitarian assistance system that have allowed this horrible situation to deteriorate into monumental catastrophe."

Sagging donations for Africa are also a serious concern. "Only 3 percent of the public contributions donated for relief efforts in Africa during (the Ethiopian crisis of) 1984-85 have been raised for this humanitarian crisis," said Tom Getman, chair of the InterAction Disaster Response Committee and director of government relations with World Vision. "Private voluntary organizations face serious financial shortfalls unless the media can help move the American public to past levels of generosity."

Relief experts have called for three specific responses to meet the dire needs in Africa:

- 1) Increased public donations to private relief organizations providing assistance in Africa. Among those organizations is the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, based in Richmond, Va., with work among Somali refugees in Kenya and Yemen. Civil war in Somalia has made refugees of an estimated 1 million Somalis. Other evangelical organizations at the forefront of Somali aid include World Vision of Pasadena, Calif., and World Concern of Seattle, Wash.

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2) Increased media coverage of the drought, not only in Somalia, but in other parts of Africa as well. Bread for the World notes: "The drought in Somalia was reported only after it was too late to prevent much of the suffering. Editors and journalists must not wait until bodies are emaciated and lying on the streets before giving attention to the drought and famine affecting the rest of Africa.

3) Increased response by the government, specifically:

-- The U.S. should continue to flood Somalia with food and step up efforts to provide non-food development assistance to southern Africa.

-- The State Department must play a more active role in seeking peace in both Somalia and Mozambique.

-- President Bush should encourage immediate deployment of 3,500 U.N. security forces in Somalia.

-- The Senate should approve \$80 million in disaster aid for Africa to meet emergency needs for seeds, water and transportation.

"Abhorrent conditions which we tolerate for Africans are conditions we clearly are not willing to tolerate for ourselves or for Europeans," said Sharon Pauling, Africa policy analyst for Bread for the World. "We've become comfortable with the notion that Africans can adjust to dehumanizing conditions. This hypocrisy is inadmissible as the world has the capacity to prevent famine."

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Why does God allow  
disasters to happen?

By Brenda J. Sanders

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--In the span of three weeks, two of the most powerful hurricanes in U.S. history dramatically altered the lives of tens of thousands of Americans, stripping away the necessities of life -- food, water and shelter.

After the damage caused by Hurricane Andrew in Florida and Louisiana and Hurricane Iniki in Hawaii, many people may wonder: "Why does God allow disasters to happen?"

The question was posed to professors of theology at Southern Baptists' six seminaries. All agreed there is no easy answer to why a loving God allows evil to exist in the world.

"It would be superficial and trite to trot out some easy little theological formula to explain our God in light of the problem of natural or moral evil," said Danny Akin, dean of students and professor of history and theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. "That question can never be answered with complete accuracy and to everyone's satisfaction because the ways of our God are mysterious."

Akin continued, "We must remember we are in the hands of a providential God and he is in control. Every breath we take is because of his grace."

Citing Romans 8:22 -- "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" -- Akins said evil exists in the world because of the sinful fall of mankind. "God set man as the head of his creation and gave man the freedom to choose good or evil," he said. "Because man fell, creation suffers. Ultimately, we are accountable for evil in the world."

The results of a hurricane or other natural disaster are heart-wrenching to people caught up in their destructive power, noted J. Terry Young, professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisiana. "But in the bigger picture, of which we are only a tiny part, there may be a long-term gain or benefit which we can't see for lack of perspective."

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God manages the world he created through natural law, Young pointed out. "Sometimes we wonder why God doesn't intervene and suspend natural law for just a little while," he continued. "But God knows that natural law, which he designed, will bring the greatest good for all. The alternative would be random chance or chaos."

Instead of asking why God allows a hurricane, Young said, victims of the disaster should ask, "How can God help me through the suffering this hurricane has caused?" And, those who were not victims should ask, "How can I, as a servant of God, help those who are hurting in this disaster?"

Bill Hendricks, professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., noted, "There is always an element of mystery and an unresolved question about natural evil. Evil is absurd and has no right to exist, but it does. Christians should be slow to blame God and eager to ask: 'Since this has occurred, what now is my relationship to thee, O God?'"

Hendricks said it is best to "leave it to those who are victimized in a disaster to make their own interpretations" about how the experience affects their lives. However, he added, the tendency to "hold a grudge against God" is self-destructive and "ultimately hurts us, rather than helps us."

"From evil can come good -- which does not explain evil, but provides a better resolution to the problem," Hendricks said.

Keith Putt, assistant professor of philosophy of religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, agreed that "sometimes during tragedies, the best in people is brought out. There is a sense of community, of support and encouragement."

On the other hand, Christians experiencing the devastation of a natural disaster may wonder whether God is oblivious to their situation, Putt noted. While calamity may overwhelm their senses, he said, "God identifies with those who are homeless, those suffering from grief. He is with them and feels that loss and pain.

"God doesn't require us to go through experiences that he's not willing to go through with us," Putt emphasized.

Because of Hurricanes Andrew and Iniki, some people will come to a saving knowledge of God, affirmed Bill Stancil, associate professor of Christian theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. "Some will develop qualities they did not have before, such as patience, love and ability to depend on others. Those may be some of the good by-products of the disaster."

However, he noted, "God did not send the disaster to make us better people. Of course, there will be some who become bitter, angry and despairing because of such a disaster."

Christians must be willing to allow people to protest against God when something inexplicable occurs, Stancil said. "Sometimes we aren't willing to give people the freedom to express feelings of anger and bitterness. We are quick to try to defend God and explain why we think the disaster happened. It's as if we think we must get God off the hook.

"However, God set into effect the laws of nature," Stancil continued. "If he were to intervene miraculously in every disastrous situation, we would never have to exercise faith and we would never have an opportunity to grow through suffering."

Regardless of why such things as hurricanes occur, "God is present and working in the midst of natural disasters," according to Barry Stricker, assistant professor of theology and Christian philosophy and associate dean of academic affairs at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

"It is surely better to emphasize God's power to heal and save than it is to speculate on the reasons behind a certain natural phenomenon," Stricker pointed out. "Even our best answers will not bring comfort and healing to those experiencing the pain of loss in the face of natural disaster. Healing of the emotional hurt can only happen through the power of God."

This healing can be facilitated by "the presence and ministry of God's people in situations of great heartache and pain," Stricker added. "God will not always remove people from tragedy -- but he has promised he will be present with people in the midst of tragedy. Even in a time of great loss," Stricker said, "that is good news!"

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Affiliates' future uncertain  
as VISN-ACTS channel launched

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

DALLAS (BP)--On Oct. 1, programs from Southern Baptists' American Christian Television System will be seen for the first time in New York, Chicago, Las Vegas and other "pioneer missions" areas.

But that same day, ACTS may no longer be carried in some Bible Belt communities by affiliates who feel they built the network, only to have it move in a direction they could not follow.

Affiliates in Wichita Falls, Texas, Springdale, Ark., and several other communities apparently no longer will be identified with ACTS after Sept. 30, and many other affiliates are taking a cautious "wait-and-see" attitude.

Beginning in October, the ACTS network will share a common channel with the Vision Interfaith Satellite Network capable of reaching 21 million households. According to the agreement reached in July between ACTS and VISN Group, Inc., the two networks will maintain their own identities and separate program times on the shared channel. In alternating time slots, ACTS will broadcast eight hours daily; VISN, 16 hours.

Officials with the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission praised the channel-sharing deal as both an economic boon and an evangelistic opportunity.

The agreement with VGI allows ACTS during the coming year to avoid a \$3.7 million expenditure that would have come had the network moved to a new satellite from the soon-to-be-outdated one they have been using. Beginning in October, ACTS will transmit via a satellite currently used by VISN and pay no user fee.

Furthermore, the shared channel immediately will make VISN-ACTS the country's second largest religious network, and industry insiders expect VISN-ACTS to seize the No. 1 spot quickly.

However, some local ACTS affiliates claim it sends viewers a "mixed signal" to have Southern Baptist programs on the same channel as non-evangelical Christian programs, including those produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), which many Southern Baptists consider a cult.

"We'll be the largest faith and family network on the air, they tell us. Yes, and we'll have the largest confused constituency of anyone on the air, too," said Rod Payne of the Wichita Falls ACTS affiliate.

Payne, whose station was honored by ACTS last year as Affiliate of the Year, said there is "absolutely no way" he would consider carrying VISN programming on his channel.

VISN was begun in 1988 by the National Interfaith Cable Coalition, Inc., a 28-member consortium representing 54 faiths including Roman Catholic, Jewish and Eastern Orthodox groups as well as mainline Protestants.

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Some affiliates hope to switch allegiances to FamilyNet, a network acquired last year by the RTVC from televangelist Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour, Inc., and Liberty Broadcasting Network. The RTVC, however, is contractually bound to market FamilyNet as broadcast-only, not as a cable competitor to VISN-ACTS.

Other local church-based affiliates plan to place their programs on non-Southern Baptist networks. Bob Jett, vice chairman of the Temple, Texas, ACTS board, said his board met with the local cable operator and decided to switch to the Trinity Broadcasting Network.

Unlike VISN-ACTS, which will charge cable companies a small fee per subscriber to carry the network, Trinity offered to pay the local cable company 25 cents per subscriber for four years in return for allowing Trinity into the central Texas market.

The local cable operator in Springfield, Mo., also chose to switch to Trinity. In Springfield, locally produced programs previously appearing on ACTS will be carried on a local access channel.

"We're weighing the possibilities of moving to another network," said Mike Whipple, minister of media at First Baptist Church in Cullman, Ala. "To people in Cullman, First Baptist Church is ACTS. And we cannot be party to spreading a false gospel."

RTVC officials insist that having Southern Baptist programs appear on the same channel as programs produced by other faith groups does not constitute an endorsement of those non-evangelical programs.

"We don't defend the gospel. Our program statement is to proclaim the gospel," said Jack Johnson, RTVC president. "I believe if truth and error stand side by side, truth will prevail."

The commission is sensitive to the "emotional parameters" of the VISN-ACTS deal, including the feelings of loyal affiliates who feel they have been placed in difficult circumstances, Johnson said.

But words of comfort have not been solace enough for some. It was church-based affiliates that negotiated with cable companies, built a viewership base and invested heavily in equipment to produce local programming, said Mark Brooks, chairman of the local ACTS board in Springdale, Ark.

"Someone else gave the farm away and I'm left out here doing the best I can," said Brooks, pastor of Elmdale Baptist Church in Springdale. "Our choices are either find a way of providing an alternative source of programming apart from ACTS and VISN or pull out of television altogether."

Johnson said he is grieved by the possibility of losing even one affiliate but he emphasizes both the new markets that will be reached through the shared channel and the way the potential audience will be expanded in existing markets.

In addition to adding a potential 4.6 million viewers in New York, 1.3 million in Pennsylvania and 1.4 million in New Jersey, the new arrangement will add an additional 1.2 million in Florida, 1.3 million in Texas and 805,000 in Oklahoma, he noted.

ACTS, which went on the air in 1984, currently broadcasts 24 hours a day to about 8.2 million households primarily in the South and Southwest. VISN currently reaches an estimated 12.8 million households through 712 cable systems, mostly in the North and West.

"I believe this arrangement has the potential for broadening the audience considerably for Southern Baptist programming," said Gary Fenton, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. Birmingham is a market previously serviced by VISN that ACTS had, up to now, been unable to penetrate.

"Unfortunately, many of those who have been watching ACTS have been Southern Baptist," Fenton said. "Now the network has a better chance to reach people who are not just our kind of church folks. I'm excited about it."

RTVC trustee Gary Underwood likewise is excited about the missionary possibilities of the shared channel, but he also understands the concerns of local affiliates. Underwood is executive vice president of Beech Street Communications in Texarkana, Ark., an ACTS affiliate.

"We may lose some communities. I wish it didn't have to come to this," he said. "But when you look at those we may lose, they are communities where there's already a strong Southern Baptist presence. At the same time, we're picking up places where we don't have very many home missionaries or Southern Baptist churches.

"We have to look at it as a missions opportunity, reaching the outsiders. I just wish we didn't have to sacrifice some of the insiders to do it."

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RTVC phone counselors say  
new channel calls for 'Help!'

By Doug Dillard

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--It would be hard to convince Pat Wooley 8 is less than 24.

Pat Wooley, soft-spoken director of counseling services for the Radio and Television Commission, is shouting for help these days, scrambling to stretch resources to meet the expected increase in counseling calls when the ACTS network begins broadcasting eight hours daily instead of 24.

Wooley has sent out an urgent request for volunteers to meet the increase in counseling calls expected as a result of ACTS' move to share a satellite with VISN.

Some see the move as a compromise to share a channel with what has been one of ACTS' chief competitors in the cable marketplace. Some have seen the move as a step back because of the fewer hours.

Wooley sees it in terms of a thousand new cable systems and a jump from 8.2 million subscribers to 21 million and a total potential audience of 56.7 million people. And to counseling staff, according to the 18-year veteran employee, it means an incredible crunch on overloaded and understaffed phones in RTVC's counseling center.

A telephone company survey recently reported only about 13 percent of callers are able to get through to counselors now, Wooley said. "What will it be when we add over a thousand new cable systems Oct. 1?"

A systems consultant has designed a computerized call-forwarding system that will enable callers to break out beyond the six-phone limits of the present system and forward calls to volunteers who will agree to stand by their home phones to help.

The Radio and Television Commission has offered counseling on radio and TV programs since 1970. But the creation of ACTS in 1984 gave an opportunity to offer a toll-free spiritual help line on "Invitation to Life," an evangelistic service featuring John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston. That program now features Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church.

Volunteers trained and directed by RTVC professional counseling staff answer the phones, pray with those who share needs, explain how to become a Christian or just listen in prayerful concern.

About a year ago, Wooley enlisted more volunteers and began posting the 800 number to "The Baptist Hour" and the number of calls more than doubled. Again this spring, she said, Richard Jackson's program was aired on Tuesday mornings and the numbers spiraled upward again.

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The 3,242 calls this year have included 108 who prayed to receive Christ, 153 who rededicated their lives, 157 who prayed to seek assurance of their salvation. The remaining 2,824 were "just hurting and needed to know someone cared," Wooley said.

About 20 percent of all callers become involved in longer-term, in-depth correspondence counseling by professional staff, she added. "We don't operate our phones in a 'boiler-room' atmosphere and we don't let computers decide what to say in our correspondence," Wooley said.

Individual file folders on some callers and correspondents are several inches thick and contacts may stretch over several years, she said. "There's so much pain here. But there are some incredible victories." She named some as she fingered some files:

-- "There is Douglas, who tested HIV-positive about a year ago. His girlfriend left him and he feels like everything is falling apart. He wants to be a Christian but is afraid God won't accept him, and he can't bear another rejection. He calls frequently to share his fear of being alone, just to talk with someone who won't judge him."

-- "Jane and her husband are just beginning a Christian walk. They are confused by the different sects who have tried to influence them. She said, 'I wasn't even watching your show, but somehow we flipped to that channel.' When she saw our 800 number on the screen, Jane cried, 'Maybe that's somewhere we can get some help!' and dashed to a pay phone to call. We've shared Christian materials and helped them get involved in a good church."

-- "Rose had been attending a local church but after hearing the program she realized she needed to make a personal commitment to Christ. She said, 'I just repented of my sins and asked the Lord to take me back. I just felt like I needed to confess it to someone and I saw the number on the screen. Can you tell me how to get closer to Christ?' Through correspondence we have disciplined Rose and encouraged her commitment."

"I could go on and on," said Wooley, director of counseling since 1979, who remembers so many, suffers with so many and rejoices with so many.

Wooley acknowledged the ministry's dependence on computers. Carefully conceived and constructed stored materials on hundreds of topics are at the fingertips of the professional staff, accessed through a sophisticated database. "But it is not for speed in automation but for preciseness in applying answers to specific problems," Wooley explained. "We would no more 'wing it' on a quick, ad-libbed answer or automate it than we would think of doing our counseling without prayer."

The eight-person counseling services staff is indeed a praying group, according to Wooley, and each program's list of callers and prayer requests is distributed to the entire RTVC staff at daily 9:45 a.m. prayer meetings.

"Prayer is a greater need than volunteers or technology," she said. "Maybe those who hear about the opportunity side of our problem can at least pray for us, and for those who respond."

For those who want to pray -- or volunteer -- the 800 line will be ringing on Tuesdays at 11 a.m. and Fridays at 9 p.m. Central Standard Time during "Invitation to Life" and on Thursdays for "The Baptist Hour" at 11 a.m. Central starting Oct. 1. Those who want more information about how to help may call Wooley during RTVC business hours at (817) 737-4011.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the RTVC.

'Not the kind of person  
who calls a helpline'

By Pat Wooley

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)-- Tim's first words were, "I don't know why I've called you, I don't even know what it means when you say you offer 'spiritual help.' I was just flipping through the channels and saw this 800 number. But I've just been through two weeks of hell -- I've been through tough times before, but never anything like this."

I expressed empathy and concern and Tim (not his real name) shared his story. His wife had given birth several weeks ago to a child which was still in intensive care with what has been diagnosed as a brain virus. The doctors hold little hope the child will survive. Tim asked me to hold the line for a minute while he carried the phone into the laundry room, as his wife was resting and he didn't want her to know he had called.

"I'm not the kind of person who calls a helpline -- not that there's anything wrong with it -- and I'm leery of anything on religious TV. But when I saw your number, I found myself dialing. I've tried to be strong for everyone else but I'm just at the end of my rope." Tim's voice frequently faltered with emotion and tears.

Tim is the 32-year-old son of a Baptist minister, but "I haven't been living the kind of life I was raised to live." He said he and his wife "have everything," the typical yuppie couple. He said he knew in the scheme of things God has a reason for all this, but they had waited so long for a child and now to lose it was almost more than they could bear. I discussed with him the fact God does not send tragedy to zap us or force us to do his will, but even the worst experience can be redemptive if we respond to it in faith and trust.

The family has received support from the church, pastor and other Christian friends, and Tim said, "I know we're going to be OK, whatever happens." After I led in a prayer, he stated with tear-choked voice, "Ma'am, I don't know you and we'll probably never meet, and I know you hear a lot of sob stories, but I tell you, this has changed me; my life will never be the same. It's meant a lot to be able to share this with someone, I can't tell you what it's meant to me to have someone I can be honest with, someone who understands and cares. You've given me a lot of insight and I'll never forget you and what this program has done for me."

Tim promised to call us back and let us know the outcome, but we have not heard from him again.

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Wooley is director of counseling services for the Radio and Television Commission.

RFRA supporters seek  
last-minute passage

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--Supporters of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act pushed for its last-minute passage in this session of Congress while abortion captured the focus of attention during a Sept. 18 hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

At the time of the hearing, only two weeks remained for both the Senate and House of Representatives to vote on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The target date for Congress to adjourn for the year is Oct. 3.

"It's a very small window of opportunity but we have not given up hope we will be able to pass the bill," Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel Oliver Thomas said after the hearing. "It's still a long shot but it's more important now than ever that all Baptists and all Americans" support the bill.

He is "very optimistic," said Forest Montgomery, counsel of the National Association of Evangelicals.

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"The conventional wisdom is there isn't enough time, but this is a question of will," Montgomery said after the hearing. "Will the leadership in the Senate and the House see that this is brought to the floor? ... That's what it comes down to, but there's enough time."

RFRA supporters are seeking a House Judiciary Committee vote Sept. 24. They hope the Senate Judiciary Committee will pass the bill to the floor shortly thereafter.

RFRA, which is S. 2969 in the Senate and H.R. 2797 in the House, is designed to return the First Amendment's free exercise of religion right to its status before the Supreme Court's much-criticized 1990 Employment Division v. Smith opinion. In Smith, the Court ruled government no longer was required to show it had a "compelling interest" before restricting religious liberty.

Although other concerns have been expressed, fear of RFRA's impact on abortion rights has been the main reason for opposition to the bill. Disagreement about the bill's effect has divided the pro-life movement, an effect manifested at the Senate hearing as it was in a May hearing before a House subcommittee.

Representatives from the National Right to Life Committee and the United States Catholic Conference voiced opposition to RFRA because of their belief it will give new legal standing for women to claim abortion as a free exercise of religion.

Such claims will be filed whether or not RFRA becomes law, pro-lifers supporting the bill said at the hearing.

"After careful study by the attorneys for (some) pro-life organizations, it is our collective judgment that there is no realistic chance that a pro-choice argument could be successfully made if Roe v. Wade is ever reversed," Michael Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association, told the committee.

"We would note that cases have been filed under the Free Exercise Clause claiming a free exercise right to access to abortion, but none of these claims has been ultimately successful. I don't think this bill will change that one whit."

Among pro-life organizations denying the bill will result in a new right to abortion are the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Christian Action Council, Christian Legal Society, Coalitions for America, Concerned Women for America, Traditional Values Coalition and NAE. Such groups have said they intend to fight any claims abortion is a religious right while endorsing the principle of religious liberty by endorsing RFRA.

Support of RFRA by such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way also has caused some pro-life groups to question the impact of the legislation.

"The legal battle on the right-to-life issue will ultimately be won or lost on privacy grounds," Farris said. "It is unimaginable to me that the Supreme Court of the United States would take an issue as important as abortion and make a watershed decision based on an invisible loophole in a bill dealing with religious freedom."

RFRA could produce the following scenario, attorney Bruce Fein said in testifying against the bill: Operation Rescue participants claim freedom of religion to block access to an abortion clinic; women seeking to enter the clinic being blockaded claim the same free exercise right, and the result is "the law of the jungle."

Passage of RFRA is critical for medical personnel who oppose performing abortions on religious grounds and Christian and Jewish groups who stand against homosexual rights ordinances, University of Texas law professor Douglas Laycock testified.

Homosexual rights suits are being brought against conservative religious bodies, "and churches are often losing those cases," Laycock said.

"In a society where regulation is driven by interest group politics, Smith means that churches will be embroiled in endless political battles with secular interest groups," he said. Churches will "be in here on every bill trying to get an exemption to protect religious practice bill by bill, because otherwise they will be subject to everything ... and they will often fail... ."

In his testimony, the BJC's Thomas called Smith "the Dred Scott of First Amendment law."

"We have been knocking on the door for two long years," Thomas said. "We hope and pray and beg for you to please bring this bill to the floor in this Congress and restore the nation's first liberty to its rightful preeminence."

Other groups who had representatives testifying in behalf of the bill were the ACLU, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and NAE.

The Senate's chief RFRA sponsors, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D.-Mass., and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah, were present as members of the committee. Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D.-Ohio, was the only other committee member to appear at the hearing.

RFRA has 192 co-sponsors in the House and 26 in the Senate.

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Denial of students' rights  
results in 3 conversions

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (BP)--Three young people accepted Christ as Savior as a result of students in three Corpus Christi schools being told they couldn't assemble to pray on the school grounds during "See You at the Pole" Sept. 16.

"What Satan meant for evil, God used for good," said Sam Douglass, pastor of Yorktown Baptist Church in Corpus Christi.

When students arrived at 7 a.m. at King and Moody high schools and the Tom Browne Middle School, they were told they could not assemble and pray on the schools' grounds.

Students at two of the schools left the school grounds to pray but some of the students at King High School went ahead and prayed around the flag pole, although they were told they would be subject to disciplinary action.

King High School principal Sherry Blackett, a member of First Baptist Church in Corpus Christi, told the students, "I have the same convictions as you but I'm compelled to carry out the policy."

She said, "The students were not belligerent. They held hands and prayed around the flagpole."

Media were on hand to record the incident, and as soon as the word spread, Blackett was besieged by irate callers, many making unkind comments, she said.

She had already been the victim of violent threats as a result of her efforts to deal with gang activities.

Most other principals in Corpus Christi were at a breakfast that morning and apparently were not aware of the prayer event, Blackett said. But she learned about it the day before from posters placed in the school hallway by students.

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Blackett said when she asked the superintendent of schools for direction, she was told she must enforce the policy and tell the students that if they refused to leave, they would be penalized.

She felt it didn't help her status when another principal was quoted by the Corpus Christi Caller-Times as saying, "If I had known about the prayer meeting, I would not have enforced the rule."

Douglass said, "Mrs. Blackett did everything with integrity."

When Blackett explained her predicament at the regularly scheduled open house at King High School the night following "See You at the Pole," most parents gave her a standing ovation.

Douglass said denial of the students' right to assemble was based on a closed-forum policy established by the Corpus Christi School Board.

He said parents and other community and church leaders have protested and asked for a written policy that is legally viable.

"We hope the issue will be addressed at a meeting of the Corpus Christi School Board in about two weeks," Douglass said.

Jim Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said pastors in Greenwood, S.C., had called about a similar problem in advance of "See You at the Pole," but the issue was resolved and the students were permitted to participate. He said students praying around the flagpoles are within their rights of free speech and assembly affirmed by the Supreme Court in *Tinker vs. Des Moines* at the height of the Vietnam protests.

The school board's closed forum policy prohibiting non-curriculum activities does not apply, because "See You at the Pole" is not a school activity, he said, but rather students exercising their rights of free speech and assembly.

He speculated some problems may have been generated by the Supreme Court's recent 5-4 decision in *Lee vs. Weisman* that graduation prayers violate the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Douglass said an immediate positive aftermath of the incident resulted when the students who stayed to pray were questioned by others as to why they were being disciplined.

They shared their faith and led three students to accept Christ as Savior.

Preliminary reports indicate that 100,000 students in Texas prayed around their schools' flagpoles during "See You at the Pole," the largest simultaneous youth prayer meeting in history, said Chuck Flowers, associate in the Texas Baptist evangelism division.

The youth prayer effort, begun by Texas Baptists three years ago, may have involved as many as 2 million students nationwide, double last year's participants, leaders said.

Also, students in eight other countries participated. Representatives in Moscow reported more than 50 students gathered to pray in Red Square at the same time students were praying in the United States. Since its first year, when "See You at the Pole" drew about 41,000 students, many student prayer groups have been started and the lives of many students and teachers have been changed, Flowers said.

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Students were urged to pray that they can make a difference on their campuses and that God will intervene in satanic influences that destroy the lives of their fellow students through suicide, alcohol and drug abuse and rebellion.

"One of the most exciting discoveries for students is to find Christians on campus they didn't even know about coming forth to take a stand for Christ," Flowers said.

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11 trends in church life  
listed by HMB president

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

ATLANTA (BP)--More innovative churches, less conformity in funding and more ethnic diversity are in store for Southern Baptist churches as they approach the 21st century, the president of the Home Mission Board told state convention leaders.

"It is important for any agency or state convention to be aware of these trends and think positively about how we can adjust to changing times," Larry Lewis said after addressing executive directors of state Baptist conventions.

Lewis said he is often asked if the denomination is better off today than a decade ago. "I think the answer is both yes and no."

"We lament the stress and the controversy that has polarized us, but at the same time we have seen real progress" in the convention, said Lewis. While most mainline denominations have been losing members and congregations, Southern Baptists have been gaining both, he noted.

Since Bold Mission Thrust started 14 years ago, the denomination has increased from 35,255 churches to 38,2210 churches (plus 5,000 mission congregations); from 345,690 annual baptisms to 396,668 baptisms; and from 13 million members to 15 million members, he said.

Also during that time, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions have more than doubled, he added.

Lewis noted while he doesn't agree with all the changes he discussed with state executives, leaders must honestly acknowledge what is happening in order to address and deal with the trends.

Those trends, Lewis said, are:

-- more emphasis on innovative churches instead of traditional churches. Lewis noted the innovative Saddleback Valley Community Church in Mission Viejo, Calif., is among the fastest-growing Southern Baptist churches in the country. About 14,000 attended its Easter services this year, Lewis said, and the 12-year-old congregation has started 20 mission congregations.

However, he also noted that traditional churches such as North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn., and Second Baptist Church in Houston are growing as well.

-- more alternative funding and less conformity to one plan. While claiming that he was "Cooperative Program born and bred and will be when I'm dead," Lewis said, "I think we have to acknowledge that many churches are moving to alternative funding approaches. Funding missions through the (moderate Cooperative Baptist) Fellowship is only one of many."

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-- more emphasis on the Great Commission and less emphasis on the "great controversy." "More and more people are saying, 'Let's quit our fighting and get back to the main thing,'" Lewis said.

-- more ethnic diversity and less Anglo homogeneity. Of the 1,200 new churches started last year, more than 600 were Anglo churches, more than 400 were ethnic churches and nearly 100 were predominately black churches, Lewis said.

-- more associations structured by ethnicity than by geography. The increase in ethnic congregations has resulted in more groups such as Korean and Hispanic fellowships, Lewis said.

-- more interdenominational and para-denominational relationships. "Even though the leadership of the convention is more conservative theologically, they are probably more open to networking with other denominations," Lewis said. "Especially with evangelical denominations."

-- more agency cooperation and less "turfism." Lewis pointed to the new Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth, which is jointly supported by the Home Mission Board and Baptist Sunday School Board, as an example of SBC agencies working together.

-- more satellite churches and less traditional church planting. Traditionally, churches were not planted unless they could soon become self-supporting, Lewis said. If Southern Baptists are serious about reaching the urban areas -- and especially black and ethnic areas -- Lewis said they must start thousands of churches that may never be constituted, self-supporting or own their buildings.

-- more emphasis on tasks instead of programs. Some of the more innovative churches are developing without traditional structures but are using other ways to meet the ministry needs of the congregation, Lewis noted.

-- more emphasis on volunteers and bivocational workers and less reliance on salaried staff and missionaries. At the Baptist association in Boston, 20 of the association's 24 staff positions were filled by volunteers, Lewis said.

-- more church-based ministries and less denominational-based ministries. While the resources of the convention are limited for starting ministry centers, Lewis said, "There's hardly any limit to what Southern Baptists could do through 43,000 congregations if every congregation would see itself as a ministry center."

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Haitian youth find  
haven of stability

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
9/21/92

PALMETTO, Ga. (BP)--Fleeing potential violence and certain poverty, 18 Haitian youth are in a haven of stability with Georgia Baptists.

On July 6, the boys were flown to Atlanta with only hand-held American flags and chest X-rays from their medical screenings.

They are now in a routine that includes doing household chores, learning survival English, playing soccer and attending church at a Haitian mission in Atlanta. Three of the youths have made professions of faith since being in Georgia.

The boys were among hundreds of Haitians living in temporary shelters at the naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, when they came to the attention of Bill Graham, Home Mission Board director of missionary personnel.

"We began to have a number of unaccompanied minors show up in the camps," said Graham who was in Cuba as an Army Reserve command chaplain. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service interviewed all the youth, Graham said. Some of them were sent back to Haiti, but some were allowed to come to the United States.

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As officials began looking for agencies to host those minors cleared to come to the United States, Graham thought of the children's homes operated by several state Southern Baptist conventions.

The result is a 90-day contract for the Georgia Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministries to care for 24 boys between the ages of 9 and 17 at the expense of the U.S. Department of Justice.

This is the first time unaccompanied minors have been placed with a non-Catholic agency, said Bill Fulkerson, Home Mission Board director of refugee services. Catholic agencies have been used, Fulkerson said, because of their extensive child-care ministries.

The goal of the Justice Department is to place the boys with relatives or in foster care. Five of the youth originally assigned to Palmetto have been placed with relatives and another boy was transferred to another program.

The contract with the Georgia Baptist Children's Homes expires at the end of September, but the Justice Department has asked that it be extended, said James Harper, north area administrator for the Georgia Baptist Children's Homes and Family Ministries.

Harper said he sees the contract as an "opportunity to do foreign mission work at home."

After moving into two cottages at the Palmetto campus southwest of Atlanta, the boys' first task was to unload new mattresses for their twin beds. Their next journey was to a department store to buy clothes for the next day.

Their favorite outing, however, is to the local A&P grocery store to "see all that food in one place" said Carol McCarty, north director of area ministries for Georgia Children's Home and Family Ministries.

Though they were contacted in April about the possibility of housing the boys, the children's home staff did not know until nine days before the boys arrived they would definitely be coming. In that time, the staff interviewed and hired houseparents, social workers and teachers for the Haitian youth.

The lack of lead time also meant long days of refurbishing the 25-year-old cottages which were not being used. McCarty recalls working on the Fourth of July to get one of the buildings ready.

She quipped to a fellow worker, "This is some way to spend your Fourth of July."

He thought about it for a moment and replied, "Yes, it sure is."

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

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CORRECTION: In the correction dated 9/17/92, please take note of the following correction: the retiring executive director-treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention is James Griffith, not Griffin.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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