

(BP)

-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strade, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

October 27, 1992

92-179

NEW JERSEY -- 'Malcolm X' film spurs pastor to ask Baptist's help with Islam.
NEW JERSEY -- Samuel Shahid: dedicated to teaching Christians about Islam; with photo.
NEW JERSEY -- Quality of Christians' lifestyle can stir Muslims in U.S. to faith.
IVORY COAST -- Five missionaries in Liberia evacuate as fighting continues.
ALBANIA -- Proposed religious law stalls in Albania assembly.
KENTUCKY -- Veteran returns to Vietnam 'to do something out of love.'
FLORIDA -- Pastor takes steps to help fellow refugees from Cuba; with photo.
TENNESSEE -- Brotherhood trustees review special projects, approve Challengers.
WASHINGTON -- Churches share responsibility for drug war, official says.
NASHVILLE -- (BP) Brites.
NEW ORLEANS -- Seminarians give helping hand to hurricane's tornado victims; with photos.

'Malcolm X' film spurs pastor
to ask Baptist's help with Islam

Baptist Press
10/27/92

By Karen Willoughby Santiago

SOMERSET, N.J. (BP)--The movie "Malcolm X" is slated for nationwide release Nov. 20, but pastor Buster Soaries isn't waiting.

Soaries recently called on Southern Baptist Islamic scholar Samuel Shahid to help educate his predominately African-American congregation on Islam -- and the appeal and danger of the quasi-religious faction called Nation of Islam that preaches Caucasians are devils.

About one-third of Muslims in the United States are African-American converts, Shahid said. Some consider Islam to be the religion of their African ancestors. Others, particularly those who have joined the Nation of Islam, say that in Islam they have an African-American alternative to the whites' Christianity.

Malcolm X was national spokesman for the Nation of Islam a generation ago. Before Malcolm X was assassinated -- some say martyred -- in an internal power struggle, his eloquent speeches fanned flames of militant black nationalism.

"The Lord knows the black community in America needs to be a lot more aware of Islam," said Soaries, pastor of a National Baptist congregation in the New York City area, as he introduced Shahid. "We can't afford to be ignorant. Many of us are losing family members to Islam and pseudo-Islamic cults we don't understand."

Soaries became aware of the Nation of Islam when he was a teen, he said in an interview.

"I know the appeal. I know the danger," Soaries said. "The nation of Islam is one of the fastest-growing movements among black Americans. It is important for our church to be prepared to converse with Islamics and to deflect the Islamic mystique that will be heightened by the release of this movie."

About 100 people attended the three-night seminar at First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, N.J., out of a congregation that numbers perhaps 1,500 in two Sunday morning services.

--more--

At Soaries' request, Shahid and two associates led discussions on mainstream Islam, Islam in Africa and the Nation of Islam.

Shahid, a deacon at Monmouth Baptist Church (SBC) in Tinton Falls, N.J., ministers through Good News for the Crescent World, an organization he started in 1988 that has 10 members on its board of directors and no salaried personnel. His income comes from donations that also help pay for the expenses of two volunteer associates: Joseph Okpanachi who was a Muslim when he lived in Africa, and Alexis K. Johnson, who was a member of the Nation of Islam and later a mainstream Islamic imam (leader) when he lived in New York City.

One of the appeals of the Nation of Islam is the discipline that envelopes the lifestyle of previously undisciplined black youth, Johnson said.

"Most males like direction," Johnson said. "This discipline is positive direction. It builds self-esteem and virtually eliminates drug problems. The Nation of Islam says you're creating your own problems, and through martial arts training, education and vocational experience, helps you solve your problem.

"And for me, the Nation of Islam also appealed to the anger I had in me, imbedded deep anger over the racism I had experienced," Johnson said. "The Nation of Islam gave me the opportunity to vent the anger in what I saw was a positive way, by doing for myself and the whole idea of uplifting the black race."

The Nation of Islam's acclaimed FOI (Fruit of Islam) group has a national reputation for going into areas besieged with drug-related problems and cleaning them up, Johnson said. The success rate is related to the fact that those who go into the drug areas came out of similar areas when they embraced the teachings of the Nation of Islam.

"The danger in the Nation of Islam is the hidden teachings that are not taught in public," Johnson said. "It's in these hidden teachings that you learn the original man was black and that whites are devils. But we live in a world where we all have to live together. When you look at the whole picture, the Nation of Islam is not the answer."

The Nation of Islam is a political and social movement rather than a religious entity, Shahid said.

"They borrowed the name 'Islam' for their own purposes," he said. "The movement has some merits as it tries to create a moral identification to the black people as a race, but it teaches racism."

Johnson led the discussion at the Somerset church on the Nation of Islam.

A man who used several names, one of which was Fard Muhammad, started the Nation of Islam in Detroit in 1934, Johnson said. His father was black and his mother was white, and they were from the Middle East.

Fard Muhammad's convert Elijah (Pool) Muhammad moved to Chicago, started a Nation of Islam temple and taught that the blacks' original religion was Islam, that the people abducted as African slaves were robbed of not only their homes and families, but also of their religion, language and culture. His vision was to bring blacks back to Islam, Johnson said.

His spokesman in the 1950s and early 1960s was Malcolm X, a fiery orator who rallied against the injustices blacks faced. At the same time Martin Luther King was preaching peace and non-violence, Malcolm X screamed freedom, justice and equality by any means necessary, Johnson said.

"Then he made a pilgrimage to Mecca and found white Muslims," Johnson said. "Because of this, he began to question his beliefs and found in some areas he was misguided and was not embracing true Islam."

Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. Nation of Islam members were convicted of the crime.

Louis Farrakan became the national spokesman for the Nation of Islam in the late 1960s. Elijah Muhammad died in 1975. His son, Wallace Muhammad, became the leader of the group that by then numbered in the hundreds of thousands and began to swing the direction of the Nation of Islam closer to mainstream Islam. This group today is known as the Muslim American Movement.

Farrakan objected to the change of direction and left, only to reorganize the remnant Nation of Islam in 1985. Today, the Nation of Islam numbers about 20,000 members and adheres to Elijah Muhammad's racial supremacy philosophy, Johnson said.

"Malcolm X" writer/producer Spike Lee has used the media to ask children and teens to stay home from school and watch the movie on Nov. 20.

Soaries said concern that the Malcolm X movie would result in a community-wide breakdown in race relations led him to ask Shahid to lead a seminar on Islam and the Nation of Islam.

"We have a responsibility to our community," Soaries said. "Malcolm X might have been a great speaker, but he didn't have the right answer. Jesus is the answer."

--30--

Samuel Shahid: dedicated to
teaching Christians about Islam

Baptist Press
10/27/92

By Karen Willoughby Santiago

SOMERSET, N.J. (BP)--A recent three-day seminar on Islam at a predominantly African-American church in Somerset, N.J., was sandwiched in between week-long seminars in Peoria, Ill., and Boston, with a fund-raising banquet thrown in for good measure.

It was business as usual for Samuel Shahid, a Southern Baptist Middle-East scholar who has made ministry concerning Muslims his life work.

"Since I came to the United States, I began to realize the influence of the Islamic movement here," Shahid said. "When I talked with people about it, very few agreed with me. I began to realize that the Lord was talking to me to do something about helping churches to create an awareness of Islam in order to reach out to Muslims."

Out of the world's 5 billion people, 1.5 billion call themselves Christian, but Islam -- the religion of the Muslims -- with 1 billion adherents is not far behind, and it's growing fast, Shahid said. He particularly is concerned with the 15 percent of the immigrants to the United States each year who are Muslims.

"According to some estimates, there are 6 to 8 million Muslims and Arabs from more than 55 countries in the United States now," Shahid said. "Churches and other Christian organizations are not yet equipped to deal with this. They need to learn how to respond to the challenges of ministering to the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of Muslims as well as Christians from Muslim backgrounds."

Through seminars, lectures and short-term courses taught at seminaries, Shahid spreads his native understanding of Muslim people and the religion called Islam. A faith missionary, he operates under Good News for the Crescent World, an organization he founded in 1988 that has 10 members on its board of directors and no salaried personnel.

Born in Jordan to Christian parents with Egyptian citizenship, Shahid's curiosity about his playmates led to a 1982 Ph.D. in Middle-Eastern studies from the University of Chicago.

--more--

He is the author of hundreds of articles and 21 books. His latest work, still in progress, is a comparative study of Islam and Christianity slated for publication both in Arabic and in English. One recent five-year project was the literal translation of the Old Testament into modern Arabic.

"Muslims believe they have a command from God to make the entire world Islamic, the same as Christians believe God has commanded them to spread the gospel around the world," Shahid said. "They are commanded to spread Islam to obtain God's favor, a better chance to get his mercy."

Most Muslim countries are closed to evangelism. Even native Christians are not allowed to preach or witness beyond the wall of their churches, Shahid said.

"We have a unique opportunity to reach out to those who come here, to people who want to know about Christianity but would never have the opportunity at home," Shahid said. "Many will return to their native land carrying the good tidings with them, and even those who settle in the United States will be able to witness to their countrymen."

Muslims say Christians and Jews have perverted the Word of God and that the Koran was written to make things right, Shahid said.

Muslims say the Koran was revealed to Muhammad, who was born in Arabia in 570 A.D. It was a time of idolatry -- local Arabs had 360 idols -- and immorality.

What was needed was for people to surrender to the will of God, Muhammad decided after a time of contemplation in a mountain cave near Mecca.

His wife was the first convert to the religion Muhammad called Islam, which means "surrender." Others -- especially among the poor of Mecca -- quickly followed, attracted by Muhammad's personal charisma and the lure of a religion that was meaningful to them after the lackluster Christianity, Judaism or idol-worship they previously had experienced.

There are five main articles of faith, Muslims say:

- belief in Allah as the one true God.
- belief in angels as the instruments of God's will.
- belief in the four inspired books: Torah, Zabur, Injil and Koran, of which the Koran is the final and most complete.
- belief in the 28 prophets of Allah, of whom Muhammad is the last.
- belief in a final day of judgement.

Islam is more of a way of life than just a set of beliefs, Shahid said. A person must accept the doctrines of the faith, perform the required duties and live a moral life. This way of life is wrapped around what are known as the Five Pillars of Islam:

- Repeating "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah" constantly throughout the day.
- After ceremonial washing each time, repeating specified prayers upon rising, at noon, in mid-afternoon, after sunset and before retiring.
- Fasting from sunup to sundown during the month of Ramadan.
- Giving one-40th of one's income for the care of the poor.
- Making at least one pilgrimage to Mecca, or sending someone there.

--more--

Muslims do not have an assurance of eternal salvation, Shahid said. Their only hope is that by living a moral life, they might earn Allah's mercy.

They are a traditional people with strong family ties," Shahid said. "Here in the United States, people talk about freedom and neglect their responsibilities. There, moral values and family ties come first, even before freedom."

Muslims are particularly opposed to Western culture's emphasis on sex, Shahid said. They reject the divinity of Jesus Christ, although they agree to his miraculous birth and sinless life. Because they believe humans are born innocent, Muslims believe there is no need for the redemptive act of Christ on the cross.

Islam spread along trade routes, Shahid said. The Crusades of the Middle Ages were a reaction to the spread of Islam northwest toward Europe, and Africa now has almost as many Muslims as it has Christians, Shahid said.

The Black Muslim sect, also known as the Nation of Islam, grew out of an American belief in the 1930s that Islam was the native African's original religion, Shahid said. The Nation of Islam is a political rather than a religious organization and does not permit Caucasians to be members, Shahid said.

The purpose of Good News for the Crescent World's ministry is to help Christians know Islam's teachings so they can better reach out to and minister to Muslims, Shahid said.

"They are human beings," Shahid said. "They are one-fifth of the world's population, these Muslims. If we are not concerned about this one fifth, who's going to be concerned about them?"

Shahid anticipates a move to the Dallas area in the near future in order to be more accessible for speaking engagements across the nation.

--30--

(BP) photo available upon request from the central office of Baptist Press in Nashville.

Quality of Christians' lifestyle
can stir Muslims in U.S. to faith

By Karen Willoughby Santiago

Baptist Press
10/27/92

REDBANK, N.J. (BP)--A Turkish woman who objected to an Islamic view of womanhood, an Egyptian man who followed his wife to Jesus and a Jordanian woman who was loved into Christianity all recently shared their personal testimonies at a banquet in Redbank, N.J.

The banquet was in support of a faith ministry led by Samuel Shahid, Good News for the Crescent World, dedicated to teaching Christians about Islam. Shahid is a Middle East scholar and Southern Baptist deacon at Monmouth Baptist Church in Fair Haven, N.J.

"Jesus also died for Muslims and because of that we have to reach out to them," Shahid said. "In the history of the world we have never had so many Muslims come to know Christ."

The Turkish woman now is a theology student at Eastern Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, because Christians gave her copies of the Bible and the Koran. She asked that her name not be used for security reasons.

"I had come to a point where I denied God because I didn't think God could be so wrathful toward women," she said of her former Muslim faith.

"I met Jesus Christ by reading the Bible," she said. "There was persecution and discrimination. My friends disowned me."

--more--

There is no established Christian church in Istanbul and perhaps no more than 1,500 Christians who meet in small groups, the Turkish woman said.

"We need more people to take the gospel to Muslims," she said.

A. Awad is an immigrant from Egypt who now lives in the New York City area. He was first introduced to Christianity because his father permitted him to attend a Christian school in Cairo that had an outstanding reputation for academics, but he became a Christian because he was impressed with the change in his wife after she became one.

"It became apparent to me that something had happened to her internal being," Awad said. "I was sincere in my desire to know more (about) her God and I believe God took me in a gradual and growing way to meet him.

"To walk with the Lord is an attitude," Awad said. Awad said he disguised his name for security reasons.

A Jordanian woman who also did not want her name used for security reasons was the third speaker.

"I was (a) practicing Muslim but it did not satisfy my soul," the Jordanian woman said.

"Friends told me about Christ. I argued with them but I liked their life and I was seeking what was in them. I loved the Jesus in them.

"I kept telling them, 'I am Muslim. Jesus Christ is not for me,' and they would tell me, 'Did you practice your religion?' I would say that I am praying and fasting and they said, 'OK, if you feel peace and joy, that is good.'

"I felt rebuked because I did not feel peace and joy," she said. "From them I learned two things: the love of Jesus and prayer. Prayer is like food to me."

Her family rejected her when she became a Christian, the Jordanian woman said. Her father did not speak to her for 10 years, "and I was his favorite," and her brothers still don't speak to her.

"Still, I will never regret becoming a Christian," she said. "The more I am persecuted, the more I am rejected, the more power the Lord gives me and I just feel love for them."

Because of the alienation from family and friends, the support of a Christian group is as important after a Muslim's conversion as it is before, Shahid said.

"Once a Muslim becomes a Christian, he loses his family, his friends, his property and even his children, if he is living in an Islamic country, and his wife must divorce him if she remains Muslim," Shahid said. "If the people in the church do not stand by him, he will have nothing."

Muslims, like Christians, vary in the depth of their faith, Shahid said. Most of those who come to the United States are curious about Christianity, something they heard very little about in their Middle Eastern country that does not permit Christian missionaries. They are drawn into Christianity by the love of Jesus that shines through the lives of genuine believers.

"Appearances are very important to a Muslim," Shahid said. "They're watching the way you live, and some of them live morally better than a nominal Christian does."

Muslims are particularly offended by the sexual immorality that is such a part of Western culture, and they see it as leading to the decline of Western civilization, Shahid said.

"The best witness to anybody is your life, not anything else," Shahid said. "With your love you will change their minds."

Bible knowledge is another essential, Shahid said.

"If you don't know your Bible very well, how will you know what to answer? You have to make them think," he said.

There are more than 1,500 mosques in the U.S. today, Shahid said.

Most Islamic countries refuse to grant visas to Christian missionaries, Shahid said. "If we don't reach out to them here, how can we reach out to them elsewhere?"

--30--

Five missionaries in Liberia
evacuate as fighting continues

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
10/27/92

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast (BP)--Five Southern Baptist missionaries evacuated Liberia in late October as fighting continued in Monrovia, the capital of the west African country.

The five, now in temporary lodging in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, hope to return to Liberia as soon as the fighting ends, said Foreign Mission Board administrators.

No other missionaries in Liberia planned to leave as of Oct. 27, according to a message from missionary Bradley Brown of Marietta, Ga.

"There are no immediate plans for anyone else to leave," Brown said in a fax message via a United Nations' satellite phone. "Our situation continues to be satisfactory. There is much relief work to be done. Please assure our children that it is our choice to be here. It is not a matter of not being able to leave."

The evacuated missionaries left Liberia over a span of several days. Debbie Moore of Hope, Ark., flew from Monrovia to Abidjan Oct. 23. Joyce Nicholson of Seaside, Calif., left the next day. Felix and Dene Greer of Jackson, Miss., departed Monrovia Oct. 25. Jane Williams of Knoxville, Tenn., left the town of Yekepa, drove across a northern border Oct. 25 and arrived in Abidjan Oct. 26.

Seven other Southern Baptist missionaries and two shorter-term workers remain in Liberia. Six are in Monrovia and three in Yekepa.

Monrovia continues to experience heavy fighting in the latest chapter of the civil war that started in December 1989. Troops with the west African peacekeeping force and rebels of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia have exchanged artillery and small-arms fire in several parts of the capital city, according to reports.

Liberia's interim president, Amos Sawyer, urged Oct. 27 that all sides in the fighting leave Monrovia and allow the capital to remain a "safe haven" for refugees. Sawyer's plea followed a rocket attack in the city that killed four or five civilians, including a baby.

More than 60,000 people have died in Liberia's civil war. Fighting has forced about half of Liberia's 2.8 million citizens to leave the country as refugees. In recent weeks, more than 100,000 new refugees have sought refuge in Monrovia.

"There are many thousands of displaced people now who need all the help they can get," Brown said.

Missionaries working through local churches have supplemented international relief agencies' food distribution with food, clothing and bedding. Other missionaries have staffed temporary medical clinics.

--30--

Proposed religious law
stalls in Albania assembly

By Marty Croll

TIRANA, Albania (BP)--The new government's first try at molding religious freedom for Albanians stalled in late October when lawmakers held off proposed regulations that favored only three "traditional" faiths.

The proposed law would require any religious group besides Muslims and members of the Orthodox and Catholic churches to ask a powerful committee for the right to exist. All groups would operate under the authority of lawmakers, the president, the cabinet and a specially appointed committee for religion.

The lawmakers' decision to delay action came after human rights experts and Christian believers -- some from outside the country -- alerted them that other countries would hardly view the law as "free."

Evangelical Christians view the law as a stumbling block to starting churches in the once-communist nation. They want to expose it to the free world in light of the United Nations' 1981 resolution against religious intolerance.

Evangelicals hope diplomats outside Albania will urge the nation to replace the draft law with something more akin to religious freedom guarantees in other modern nations. Such control is unacceptable under world standards, they claim.

Among those alarmed by the law is James Wood, president of the International Academy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, which was organized about a decade ago in Europe.

"The law is so threatening," said Wood, also director of the Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. "The drafts were being treated very secretly -- not to be made public. The government (is) showing anything but an attitude of equality ... : It's hard to see with the law any possibility of new groups coming in."

Some "fine people in the government" simply need to be "sensitized" to the injustice of the law so they can consider replacing it, Wood said. It was designed in "good faith" to prevent Albania from being divided by a hodgepodge of religious interests, he added.

The law would require at least 100 Albanian believers with an Albanian leader to petition a government-appointed committee and win its approval before acting as a religious organization.

The proposal stunned some evangelicals and human rights advocates. Evangelicals have worked tirelessly for openness in faith in Albania since communism fell and democracy was declared. The European Baptist Federation had been told it could start a church with as few as 10 Baptist believers, said Karl-Heinz Walter, EBF executive secretary and regional secretary for the Baptist World Alliance.

Southern Baptists recently have begun work in Albania through several avenues. The European Baptist Federation also sponsors a missionary couple there and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship plans to send missionaries soon.

Albania, like other Eastern European nations, started shaking off its communist chains and began writing new laws after the Democratic Party gained control of the People's Assembly through popular elections last March.

But with its emphasis on a powerful, watchdog "religious cooperation" committee, the proposed religious law bears the mark of a leftover communist elite, according to some evangelicals. Others see the influence of Turkey, a strongly Muslim nation which claims it, too, provides religious freedom.

--more--

The law finds powerful support within Albania's bureaucratic structure, sources said. Known for brutally enforcing the atheism it officially declared in 1967, Albania reportedly is about 70 percent Muslim, 20 percent Orthodox and 10 percent Catholic. Evangelicals are sparse.

In their heyday, communist leaders used a religious affairs office to curtail Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim activity. Now, however, officials in that office are advocates of those groups instead of obstacles. They are the ones bringing the law to the assembly.

Sources in Albania say many of the opening clauses of the law were written in modern "human rights" phrases in hopes it would go through the assembly easily and without real consideration.

--30--

Veteran returns to Vietnam
'to do something out of love'

By Melanie Childers

Baptist Press
10/27/92

MURRAY, Ky. (BP)--Three tours of duty weren't enough for Vietnam veteran Chuck Ward.

He spent nearly three years as an operation intelligence yeoman in a Navy aviation unit. He was trained to hate and kill and dehumanize the enemy. He swore he never would go back.

Yet this summer, 20 years later, the Baptist layman joined 11 other Vietnam veterans in his fourth "tour of duty" to the Asian country.

This time, his assignment was different.

"I needed to do something out of love ... to go back and eyeball my former enemy and take his hand and tell him about Jesus," Ward said. "Only the Lord can change your heart like that."

Ward's trip was made possible by a group called Vets with a Mission, a charitable, nonprofit organization founded by Vietnam veterans dedicated to bringing healing and reconciliation to the Vietnamese people.

The organization sponsors two trips to Vietnam each year. Groups work first to address humanitarian needs and develop trust; then they seek to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Veterans on the most recent trip were placed on teams ranging from evangelism to construction work.

Ward said he spent two days at the polio orphanage sponsored by Vets with a Mission. Then he helped negotiate with area officials to make plans for building a health facility.

Enough time remained for him to visit several villages he knew of from two decades ago.

For Ward, who now is executive director for development and alumni affairs at Kentucky's Murray State University, the long journey to Vietnam this summer marked the end of an even longer journey: that of a war veteran struggling through his past to find peace and wholeness.

Ward admitted, like many veterans of the bitter and controversial war, he was plagued for years by what is known as PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Although he was raised in a Roman Catholic environment, Ward said he fell away from the church during and after his military service.

--more--

He credited his wife, Joette, as being the most significant influence in leading him to a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ in 1982.

Even then, he said, he wasn't serious about his commitment. It wasn't until personal difficulties arose in 1987 that he began to look at his life from a new perspective.

"I was broke, busted and disgusted," he said. "I came as close as you can come to a breakdown."

But Ward is quick to see the Lord's hand in life events: "It's amazing to see how the Lord works if we just give him a chance. He's totally in control," he said.

Ward's life was turned around when he moved to Murray, Ky., in 1987.

"We moved in right across the street from the pastor of Memorial Baptist Church," he said.

Through the encouragement of pastor James Simmons, the Wards joined Memorial Baptist Church and found opportunities to become involved in ministry.

First, he taught Sunday school to university students. Then, along with some other members from Memorial, Ward began a weekly Bible study at a nearby prison.

But Ward said he was most grateful for the church's support of his involvement with two veterans'-related, Christian ministries.

"I had this brochure about a Vietnam vets conference ... and my pastor really encouraged me to go," he said.

That conference was Ward's first association with Point Man International Ministries, which he described as "a Christian outreach for veterans by veterans."

Just as the point man in the military is well trained and entrusted with the lead position on dangerous missions, Point Man International Ministries "is taking the lead in showing vets the way to Jesus Christ," Ward said.

Point Man Ministries operates through small local support groups, or "outposts," of Christian veterans meeting and praying for one another, as well as seeking to lead other veterans to Jesus Christ.

Ward said he finally was able to deal with guilt and other feelings from the war through involvement in a Point Man support group.

Today, Ward is one of nine outpost leaders and also serves as state coordinator for the Kentucky chapter.

Ties with Point Man Ministries led to Ward's introduction to Vets with a Mission and the opportunity to return to Vietnam this summer. He said he hopes to be able to go again for three weeks in 1994, to conduct vacation Bible schools at one of the polio orphanages and a health care clinic.

"I feel a burden to share with these people," he said. "I've been blessed more than any of the people I've touched" through these ministries.

Referring to Romans 8:28, Ward said God has taken something bad in his life -- even something as traumatic as the Vietnam War -- and turned it around for good.

Pastor takes action to help
fellow refugees from Cuba

By Barbara Denman

KEY WEST, Fla. (BP)--After drifting for three days in an 18-foot boat in the shark-infested Straits of Florida, 16 desperate Cuban refugees were spotted and plucked out of the sea by the U.S. Coast Guard.

Docking in Key West, the group, like hundreds in the past two months, was delivered into the open arms of pastor Reinaldo Medina, himself an exile from Castro's Cuba, and members of White Street Baptist Church.

In the days after Hurricane Andrew, the church has become Key West's Ellis Island. Medina and his band of volunteers have been called on to fill a role once handled by the federal government, resettling the largest influx of Cuban refugees to enter the United States since the 1980 Mariel boatlift.

Nearly 1,000 refugees risked their lives by sailing and paddling their way across the 90-mile-stretch from Cuba to Key West -- 485 in August and 486 in September.

In their quest for liberty, some ride homemade rafts of inner tubes and plywood tied with twine while others pay exorbitant fees for passages on tugboats and trawlers. The Coast Guard estimates 40 percent of the "rafters" drown before their trip to freedom is complete.

Rosa Ribera and her two sons, ages 12 and 9 were among the 16 who drifted for three days. To embark on their October freedom journey, the Cubans carried the boat in the middle of the night three miles across rough terrain to a spot where they could launch it. After being in the water only a short time, the motor failed, forcing the passengers to start paddling even while Cuba could be seen on the horizon.

Throughout their whole adventure, the group cautiously hid from Cuban police and coast guard's detection. Discovery of their activities would mean certain prison, she said.

On the third day, the exhausted refugees were without food or water when they were spotted by a boat from Grand Cayman which notified the Coast Guard to rescue them.

Ribera said she would risk their lives again to "seek liberty and freedom, especially for the children," she said. "There is no future in Cuba."

The U.S. government treats Cubans arriving in the United States as political refugees seeking asylum. They are processed and given legal residence more quickly than other groups.

News of the Cuban refugee's swiftness and ease in attaining legal residence has drifted back to Cuba, prompting even more refugees to risk their lives to escape the increasingly deteriorating economic conditions of the country. One refugee reported that "Castro took away eggs and will take away milk tomorrow."

"People are hungry," said refugee Arturo Valdes, who said he would do anything to "escape the unbearable misery -- in the economic sense, the psychological sense and the social sense. You cannot even choose your own food."

Prior to August, Immigration and Naturalization Service officials would take the refugees to the Krome Avenue Detention Center in Homestead, where they would be processed and sometimes detained. But Hurricane Andrew cut off all communications with the mainland and closed the Krome Avenue center indefinitely.

When the first boatload of 62 refugees arrived after the storm, no one was prepared to handle their resettlement. Steve Kabrick, a commander of the Coast Guard's security forces and member of the White Street congregation, contacted Medina.

--more--

"After Andrew blew through, we had 15 Cubans in the barracks with 22 new arrivals and more on the horizon. We didn't have the finances to help them and had to do something," Kabrick said.

"I said, 'Pastor, I need help.' He came over, we prayed together and decided to take them to the church."

At one time more than 63 Cubans lived at the church before they were resettled in Miami. Medina and the volunteers have welcomed more than 500 at the church, providing clothes, food, a warm shower, a bed and a bus ticket to Miami.

They also are presenting them with the gospel and have seen more than 300 professions of faiths. "They have never heard the gospel before in their lives," Medina said. "It (their response) is beautiful."

Although the ministry is not without critics Kabrick called the relief effort "a humanitarian and godly thing to do. As a Christian and a child of God, I take off my hat and say I'm glad the altars are full, people are weeping in repentance and God is blessing our work."

In October, after the White Street neighbors complained about the constant coming and going of refugees, the church opened a refugee center on Stock Island.

The Oct. 10 opening of the refugee center focused national media attention on the ministry. Coverage also included Radio Marti, which broadcast the activities to Cuba, and two Hispanic TV stations.

Although much of the media attention has subsided, the volunteers, who have grown in number, continue to struggle to keep up with the influx of refugees. Every day, after receiving a call from the Coast Guard, they drive the church van to pick up refugees from the Coast Guard base at the Key West Naval Station and transport them to the Stock Island center.

After being picked up at sea, the refugees arrive looking slightly confused in a new land and not sure what to expect. They are processed in an open picnic pavilion and turned over to the church members who greet the refugees as heroes with kisses and hugs.

The refugees arrive in Key West, sunburned and hungry from their trip, with few possessions. Often their clothes are tattered and torn by the trip. Often they lose their shoes. Each refugee receives clothes, shoes and food donated by Key West stores and restaurants. The volunteers transport some refugees to the hospital for medical attention.

The flow of refugees is unpredictable, if not constant. One day 40 may come in, the next day 15. As soon as the volunteers take one group to the bus station, another group comes in and the process repeats itself.

As the refugees depart for Miami, "you feel a little part of yourself go," observed church member Carlos Solis as he took Ribera's group to the bus. "You feel tired. But when the new people come, God charges your batteries."

Medina often meets the Coast Guard's cutters' daily delivery of refugees, providing a calm fatherly presence as he puts his hand on their shoulders and speaks in their native tongue.

Medina said he spearheaded the effort because he knows what it means to escape Castro's oppression and find liberty and freedom in a new land.

--more--

A pastor in Cuba for many years, Medina, along with six Southern Baptist missionaries, eight Cuban layman and 38 Baptist pastors, were accused of trying to overthrow the communist government in 1965 and were thrown in Castro's prisons. He served 14 years of a 20-year sentence. He was allowed to come to the United States in 1979. He was pastor of the Estrella de Belen Church in Hialeah 12 years before going to the White Street congregation in 1992. Medina's Cuban experiences are recorded in a book, "Behind Cuban Bars."

Shortly after coming to the Key West church, Medina was dealt a crushing blow. His wife, Iraida, died after a brief illness. Her loss gave him great anguish and doubt.

"I wondered why the Lord called me here," he said. "Everyone thought I should go back to Miami but for some reason I felt I should stay. Now I know the Lord established me to be here at this time.

"If I was not here, this would not be done. I had the heart, the facilities. I was in the position at this time to do what I'm doing."

Financial and volunteer support of the White Street refugee ministry have come from a variety of sources, including the Cuban-American community in Key West and Miami, Fifth Street Baptist Church in Key West and the Florida Baptist Convention.

The White Street church was built by the SBC Home Mission Board in 1953 to house a struggling Hispanic mission and the services of a goodwill ministry begun in 1940. In recent years, the ethnic congregation's membership declined so much that it did not have the necessary funds to maintain the building.

In 1991, the property was deeded over to the Florida Baptist Convention and renovated using state mission offering funds and labor provided by more than 350 volunteers. After its renovation was complete, the church housed two new congregations under the leadership of Hugh Hurt, retired state language missions director.

In October Hurt traveled to Key West to assist the congregation in their efforts. Hurt credits Medina's "deep compassion for his people and his leadership showed in an emergency situation as he responded to the needs of the Cuban boat people," Hurt said. "When no one group responded locally, he went into action, stepping into the gap when no one else would."

--30--

(BP) photo available upon request from the Florida Baptist Convention's communications department.

Brotherhood trustees review
year full of special ministry

By Steve Barber

Baptist Press
10/27/92

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Trustees of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission got a multimedia review of this year's crowded schedule of the agency's special ministry projects at their Oct. 23-24 meeting.

James D. Williams, Brotherhood Commission president, said the projects ranging from Central Asia to south Florida show a "radical, caring, Christian love" that must be offered before the gospel message can be accepted.

"There are a lot of people out there who aren't going to take our word for the gospel," Williams said. "But out of the curiosity that this kind of love always arouses we have the chance to clarify, with the words of the gospel, why we've acted as we have, and then the Holy Spirit brings conviction and repentance."

--more--

The food-distribution phase of Project Brotherhood in the Moscow area served as an ideal witnessing opportunity for volunteers and a starting point for Russian Baptist churches to magnify their outreach, according to Williams, who said lists of food recipients have become prospect lists for churches.

"I thank God for the seeds that have been planted and the harvest that has already been reaped," he said. "Think of the good that's going to come as these churches evangelize their own people. Let's pray that many will come to know our wonderful Lord Jesus."

Dennis and Jennefer Quinn of St. Peters, Mo., who served as the first on-site Project Brotherhood coordinators in Moscow, gave their testimonies and were recognized along with Mississippians Sammy Platt and Larry Taylor, who followed the Quinns in Moscow, and Chuck Singletary and Bob Sloan, who operated the Project Brotherhood Information Center in Memphis.

Trustees also saw a videotape overview of the agency's coordination of Southern Baptist disaster relief efforts in the wake of Hurricane Andrew and had their first look at the latest promotional video for World Changers, which involved more than 2,500 youth in missions projects during 1992.

The work of the 18-member Ladakh Medical Project team, which saw 3,000 patients during July in India's Himalayan Mountains, was recapped by Brotherhood Commission staffer and team leader Eddie Pettit. Up to three teams could be sent to the same area next year, Pettit said.

The review and recognitions came against the backdrop of the agency's official launch of its \$10 million Opportunity Now capital campaign. Proceeds will establish a "Program Reserve Fund" to support similar emergency needs at home and abroad.

The campaign started Oct. 15 and has full participation by agency employees. Williams told trustees the goal will be 100 percent participation from employees and trustees before the campaign begins making appeals to large foundations and later to individuals taking part in Brotherhood programs and projects.

The trustees also approved a recommendation that Challengers, a new missions education program for young men in grades 7 through 12, begin in October 1994.

"This will be a combination of the best elements of Pioneer Royal Ambassadors and High School Baptist Young Men, which Challengers will replace," said Russell Griffin, director of the Brotherhood Commission's children and youth division. "We will make it self-directional, flexible and simple in structure and materials. And we want it to strengthen missions commitment and leadership development among young men."

In other action, trustees:

-- approved a request of \$1,090,189 from the basic Southern Baptist Cooperative Program budget for the budget year 1993-94, representing a 10 percent increase over the 1992-93 allocation.

-- changed the agency's bylaws to revise its method of selecting members of the nominating committee. With the change, the full board will elect the six-member committee by ballot. They were previously appointed by the trustee chairman.

-- elected members of the agency's first investment committee, charged with managing the agency's reserve funds. They are Willard Finch, retired educator, Winterville, N.C.; Joe Herndon, retired engineer, Duncan, Okla.; and Kenneth King, associational director of missions, New Braunfels, Texas.

-- adopted a 1992-95 "Corporate Priority Plan" that includes a set of broadly stated priorities to guide all other agency planning for the next three years.

--more--

-- Elected new officers: Bob Hill, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Cleveland, Miss., chairman; Willard Finch, vice-chairman; and Donley Brown, retired military management analyst, Jefferson City, Mo., recording secretary.

The next meeting of the Brotherhood Commission trustees is scheduled April 23-24, 1993, in Memphis.

--30--

Churches share responsibility
for drug war, official says

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
10/27/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--Churches should play key roles in education and rehabilitation in the war on drugs, a leader in the nation's drug control strategy told ethnic evangelical leaders.

"I'm convinced that the real answer to the drug crisis and any other crisis in this country is sitting out there," said Kay James, associate director for the Office of National Drug Control Policy, addressing more than 200 ethnic evangelical pastors and denominational leaders during a public policy briefing.

"I have a responsibility and you have a responsibility," said James, whose tenure may end in January if President Bush is not re-elected. "Whether I'm here or not, your responsibility remains the same."

While the government works in long-term strategies to reduce supply and curb demand, James said churches can be active in individual lives if they will accept that responsibility. "Do you have any drug programs in your churches?" she asked.

"You have the best chance of success for keeping somebody off drugs," she said, referring to the "redeeming work of Jesus Christ in an individual's heart."

Some headway has been made in fighting drugs, she added. Casual drug use has decreased 13 percent in the past four years, and government spending on the drug war has increased from \$4.6 billion in 1980 to almost \$13 billion in 1993, she said.

At the same time, however, urban and minority drug use has increased, she said.

Churches should empower families to educate children about drugs and other moral issues, she said.

"Train the parents to talk to their kids about drugs. Train the parents to talk to their kids about sexual matters," she said. "Give them the godly perspective. Give them the perspective they need."

The comments were made during a two-hour briefing meeting with James and two other government officials discussing public policies and issues.

Another speaker upset some in the audience by discussing political issues instead of matters of importance to ethnic churches.

The session was billed as a non-political sharing of information and ideas between government agencies and church leaders. But Charles Kolb, deputy assistant to the president for domestic policy, spent much of his time comparing George Bush's domestic agenda to that of Democratic challenger Bill Clinton.

"We received explicit information, both written and oral, that this would not be a political gathering," said Timothy McElwee, director of the Washington office of the Church of the Brethren.

--more--

"That's not to say there wasn't some useful sharing of information," he said. But "if the intent and purpose was a non-political gathering, it failed."

"I don't think they (the speakers) did their homework," added Brent Foster, an evangelism and church development consultant for the Mennonite Board of Missions.

While some speakers did address political issues, the meeting was successful in assembling leaders from more than 25 denominations and 40 ethnic groups to begin discussing issues of mutual importance, said Oscar Romo, director of the Home Mission Board's language church extension division.

"There are areas in which we can work together," he said. "It proved that people of diverse denominations can come together in their efforts to discover how to minister to the needs of the people."

The meeting also opened the way for further meetings with government agencies to improve awareness of ethnic evangelicals, said Romo, who helped organize the meeting.

--30--

(BP) Brites
Compiled by Art Toalston

Baptist Press
10/27/92

They're strange-looking BSU missionaries

BELOIT, Kan. (BP)--Baptist Student Union summer missionaries in Kansas, Carl and Jody Thomason, from Williams Baptist College in Arkansas, helped in evangelistic community surveys, Vacation Bible Schools and church construction teams. But they didn't look like typical BSU summer missionaries -- they're grandparents. Carl, an oil field chemical salesman for 18 years and convenience store owner, sensed a call to preach three years ago and enrolled at Williams for ministry studies, while Jody earned an associate degree in secretarial science. She heard of BSU missions in one of her classes. "We thought we were probably too old," she recounts. Not!

He became wary of Arab stereotypes

PETAH TIQVA, Israel (BP)--Robby Wilson's family voiced concern over his safety as he headed to Israel as a Baptist Student Union summer missionary at Baptist Village camp/conference center. Just before his departure, they read news reports of an Arab man killing a young girl with a sword. After arriving in Israel, the University of Tennessee student learned that another Arab man lost his life trying to save the little girl. "But that information wasn't included in the U.S. news stories," Williams said. "There are always two sides to a coin."

Kudos to praying mother, grandmother

OMAHA, Neb. (BP)--Desry Smart, pastor of Omaha's Prince of Peace Baptist Church, admits he strayed from his Christian upbringing in a pastor's home. He tried professional boxing, a career as a singer and black activism. "God has such a way of working with people," Smart now says. "He has done such a total job on me. I always thank God for my grandmother and my mother. I always felt if it hadn't been for their prayers, I wouldn't be here today."

Single dad finds faith midst crisis

GARY, Ind. (BP)--In the middle of a financial crisis after a freak accident in his aircraft sales and maintenance business in 1978, Jesse Toledo's wife left him and their 5-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. "When it seemed like nothing else could possibly go wrong," the single father recounts, "I got down on my knees beside my bed and prayed ... really prayed and cried ... and poured everything out." Faith in Christ then blossomed, says Toledo. "If I had any doubts about God, they were gone then."

--more--

Just be there to help grief-stricken

DALLAS (BP)--Joe Gross, director of pastoral care and counseling at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, offers this advice for friends of people who face the sudden loss of a spouse or child: "During the early hours and days of grief, your presence is more important than anything you might say. Some of the best initial help for grieving persons comes from those who are willing to be physically present and emotionally available. Presence may mean sitting quietly for periods of time or simply listening. For some, it is touching and hugging; frequently it means tolerating and even sharing tears."

You gotta believe -- in students

SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--"When working with students, you have to be willing to step out on a limb by saying you believe in them," says Lisa Dunaway, assistant vice president of residential life and dean of women at Oklahoma Baptist University. "A lot of our students have never heard, 'I believe in you and I think you can do it.'"

--30--

Seminarians give helping hand to hurricane's tornado victims

Baptist Press
10/27/92

By Kevin Devine & Debbie Moore

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--As the early morning sunlight began to filter through the clouds above the eastern horizon, 32 New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary students, faculty and staff members held hands in prayer for the day ahead.

They were on their way to LaPlace, an hour's drive west from the seminary campus, to help and comfort the victims of tornadoes spawned by one of this century's greatest natural disasters, Hurricane Andrew.

They prayed for safety, strength and the opportunity to minister to people in need. They also thanked the Lord for his merciful protection, for although forecasters had predicted that the hurricane would head for New Orleans after leaving south Florida, the city was spared. Electrical power was knocked out for a day or so in some places, but otherwise the New Orleans campus suffered only minor damage.

As the NOBTS team moved through the Homewood subdivision to their clean-up site, their response was one of stunned silence. What had once been a modest, neat neighborhood was now reduced to several hundred acres of shattered glass, twisted metal and splintered wood.

Organized by Jim Danielson, manager of the Baptist Bookstore on the seminary campus, and Walter Brown, associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, the NOBTS team faced the scope of the task and set to work.

"I can't believe you're doing this," Cathy Calcagno said quietly as she stood on the remains of her wooden deck. As she spoke, the work of dismantling a mangled above-ground pool was almost completed. "You'll never know how much this means to us," she said.

On the evening of Aug. 23, Calcagno was preparing her son and daughter for bed. Just hours before, the most destructive winds of Andrew had passed far enough to the west that the Homewood subdivision had suffered little more than a prolonged summer thunderstorm.

Unfortunately, a half dozen vicious tornados were spawned from the edges of the hurricane.

--more--

"We all heard the noise, but we didn't realize what it was," Calcagno said. "We had just come through a hurricane; the last thing we expected was a tornado. As the roar grew louder, it finally dawned on us what was happening." Finding cover in their bathroom, the Calcagnos survived a few brief moments of terror without injury. The same could not be said of their home.

In addition to their destroyed pool, several gashes were torn in the roof. Roof trusses collapsed and crashed through the ceiling of her daughter's bedroom, splintering her bed and dressing table. "If this had happened five minutes later, my children would have been in bed," Calcagno said as she slowly shook her head. "We are just so grateful that we are all safe. ... When we walked outside after the tornado we found our neighbors standing in the rubble of their home."

The modest two-bedroom home that once stood at 39 Homewood Drive had been reduced to a few fragmented interior walls and several tons of rubble in a matter of seconds. The job at hand was to move the debris scattered across the lot to a pile near the street where it could be loaded onto trucks for disposal.

"I love these Baptists!" Bob Richard said to no one in particular. A member of the Knights of Columbus and director of the relief effort, Richard had spent the previous 10 days organizing volunteer efforts to clean-up the hardest hit areas of LaPlace.

"You have no idea how great this is that you're here to help," Richard said of the NOBTS effort. "The parish authorities have just been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the damage; so if anything is going to get done here, it is going to come from people like you."

"Every summer your young men from the seminary serve as counselors at our boys' summer camps," Richard said, "and now this. Baptists -- I just love 'em."

--30--

(BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Seminary.