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13 Southern Baptist chaplains  
among military in Somalia

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
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ATLANTA (BP)--At least 13 Southern Baptist military chaplains are among those assigned to relief efforts in Somalia, said Lew Burnett, director of military chaplaincy for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

While the chaplains' primary ministry is to soldiers, the focus on humanitarian aid rather than warfare will change the nature of the chaplains' task, Burnett said.

Instead of the fear of being killed, many military personnel assigned to Somalia are excited about their mission, said Lew Dawson, HMB associate director of military chaplaincy.

Yet seeing people die from starvation may be more traumatic for some soldiers than seeing people die in warfare, Dawson said.

In addition to working with troops on the field, chaplains will minister to soldiers returning to the United States with haunting memories of the situation in Somalia, Dawson said. Some soldiers will also need help readjusting to the United States where food is plentiful.

Southern Baptist chaplains are endorsed by the Southern Baptist chaplaincy commission but are enlisted and assigned like other military personnel.

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FMB's Eugene Hill dies after wreck;  
was active in Chinese work at 83

By Bob Stanley

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Eugene L. Hill, 83, who helped start Chinese Baptist churches in Virginia and Maryland after retiring from a 40-year career with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, died Dec. 11 of injuries from a car-truck crash in the Richmond area. The Hills' car skidded into the rear of a dump truck Dec. 10 during a rainstorm. Mrs. Hill, a passenger in the car, received less serious injuries and was released from the hospital after an overnight stay.

On the day of the accident he was preparing materials to use Dec. 13 in the ordination of deacons at First Chinese Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, where he had been preaching monthly in the absence of a pastor.

"He may have had an Anglo body, but he had a Chinese spirit," said Charles B. Nunn, executive director of the Richmond Baptist Association. "He thought, he felt and he could speak with the Chinese. He loved them and they knew it."

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Nunn said the Hills usually worked as a team, with Hill preaching in Cantonese and his wife playing the piano for many Chinese services. Cantonese is the language used in southern China where the Hills once worked as missionaries.

Hill retired from the Foreign Mission Board staff in 1975 as head of the department of missionary education. He worked 20 years on the staff after serving 20 years as a missionary. He and his wife were missionaries to China 16 years and then worked four years in what was then known as the Singapore-Malaya mission.

Born in Knox City, Texas, in 1909, Hill moved to Oklahoma with his family as an infant. His parents lived in a rural area where his mother taught him to read and write from the Bible and John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." His mother died when he was 10, and his father died just after his 13th birthday, leaving him to help care for five younger brothers.

After graduation from high school, Hill worked in the oil fields, where he led his first congregation, a crew of roustabouts who listened as he read and explained Scripture during the Sunday lunch hour. Converts among his fellow employees later became the nucleus of a northern Texas church.

At 17 he returned to school to prepare for the ministry. He earned a B.A. degree in 1932 from Oklahoma Baptist University at Shawnee and master of theology and doctor of philosophy degrees from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1935 and 1943.

He met his wife, the former Louise Heirich of McAlester, Okla., during his senior year in college. They were married after she graduated two years later. Soon after moving to his first pastorate in Horse Cave, Ky., Hill received a phone call from C.E. Maddry, then the chief administrator of the Foreign Mission Board, asking if they would become missionaries to China.

During the Hills' first term of service after appointment in 1935, the Japanese-China war began. He taught at Graves Theological Seminary in Canton, which remained open until the city fell to the Japanese. During the siege Mrs. Hill went to a neutral part of Canton and he remained in Tung Shan, another part of the city.

Each thought the other might have been killed. When Hill was able to get back to his wife, he found her in a hospital, where their son had been born early. They were later separated by the war for almost a year.

Hill taught 16 years at the Chinese Baptist seminary, serving as dean of studies for 14 years and president for two years.

In 1951, after living under the Chinese communist regime for a year, the Hills transferred from China to Singapore-Malaya to do evangelistic work.

The Hills lost two daughters and a son in infancy. Their second son, Eugene Benton Hill, the one born during the siege of Canton, died as a toddler when he fell from a hotel window in Memphis, Tenn., while they were in the United States. Their fifth child, John L. Hill, is a professor at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

Hill joined the Foreign Mission Board staff in 1956 as the head of missionary education and promotion, supervising The Commission, the board's magazine, and other print and audiovisual products. He was the author of three books in Chinese, one of which, "The Life of Christ According to the Gospels," was published in a second edition in 1991.

After retirement in 1975, the Hills taught a year at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1977-78 term. But they devoted most of their time to work with the Chinese in Virginia and Maryland.

In 1988, the Chinese Baptist Church of Richmond honored Hill on his 79th birthday, considered the 80th by Chinese since they count the actual day of birth as a person's first birthday. They presented the Hills a plaque which read: "For their lifetime love and dedicated service to the Chinese people."

A memorial service was held Dec. 14 in Richmond, with burial planned in McAlester, Okla., where their son, Eugene Benton, is buried. Besides his wife and son, Hill is survived by four brothers, three grandsons and four great-grandsons.

**Jail time makes impression  
on 22 boys from local church**

**By Melanie Childers**

EUBANK, Ky. (BP)--After a sobering night behind prison bars, Royal Ambassadors from Bethel Baptist Church in Eubank, Ky., decided the new prison in Manchester, Ky., is a nice place to visit but they wouldn't want to live there.

Voluntarily trading in a free Friday evening for handcuffs, shackles and 8-by-15-foot cells, 22 RAs and 11 adults got a taste of prison life during an overnight visit to the newly-completed Federal Corrections Institute Nov. 13-14. Rocky Farmer, one of the RA leaders at Bethel Baptist and an employee at the prison, suggested the trip as a positive learning experience for his group. Pastor Jim McKinney quickly added his affirmation.

"Federal prisons don't open that often, and this was an opportunity for a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience," McKinney said.

The prison held open house Nov. 13 for interested citizens in the community to tour the facility. But, McKinney said, Bethel's RAs were the only group to request permission to stay overnight in the prison cells.

The group arrived at 6:30 p.m., signed in and took a brief tour of the central control area of the prison.

After an introduction to the facility, the boys spent several hours playing in the gym, "to give them a chance to work off some of their energy," McKinney said.

Around 11 p.m., the group was led to the segregation area, where they all were given identification numbers and taken five at a time to be handcuffed and shackled.

Spreading sleeping bags over prison bunks, the group settled in two-by-two for what many said they hoped would be their only evening ever behind prison bars.

Although the cell doors were not locked during the night, McKinney said they were locked for about an hour the next morning. A breakfast from McDonald's was served through the food slots before the doors were opened again.

"It's an eerie sound to hear a steel door slam shut," McKinney said. "It really made them think about how isolated they were."

Ricky Farmer, a 14-year-old who "has been in RAs ever since I can remember," said having the doors locked wasn't "too scary" for him. But he did admit he was relieved when they were opened again.

After a walking tour of the facilities Saturday morning, the group concluded its visit with a devotional thought about choices.

"We talked about the cost of wrong choices and focused on facing choices as responsible people," McKinney said.

That was the point of spending the night at the prison, the pastor added. "That prison over there is for a purpose. People are placed there and not let out after an hour and a McDonald's breakfast.

"Everybody can face temptation; everybody has to make tough choices."

At least some of the boys said they got the message.

"The basketball courts might have been nice but I certainly wouldn't want to end up there," said Justin Hart, 13. "I'm going to try my best to stay away."

Ricky Farmer said other friends' inquiries about his experience provided opportunities to share what he learned from the trip.

"Hopefully, I can be a Christian witness and help influence others not to end up there," he said.

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**Hemphill cautions against  
unstable growth methods**

**By Frank Wm. White**

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Church growth is the local church carrying out the Great Commission, and some of the finest practitioners in church growth are Southern Baptists, Ken Hemphill told state Sunday school leaders.

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Speaking to state leaders of Southern Baptist Sunday school work during Dec. 9-11 annual planning meetings at the Sunday School Board, Hemphill said the Southern Baptist niche in church growth is largely being ignored even though some of the best examples are in the convention.

Hemphill is director of the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth, a cooperative effort of the Sunday School Board and the Home Mission Board.

Because of the trend toward innovative approaches to church growth with an avalanche of consultants and books on the subject, Hemphill cautioned state leaders to evaluate church growth ideas with three essential points.

Any church growth plan should be biblical, Baptist and adaptable to different church situations, he said.

While recent church growth writers have indicated 10 percent of a congregation may have the gift of evangelism, Hemphill pointed out that all Christians have the biblical directive for evangelism.

"If we develop our strategy on the basis of an observation that only 10 percent are doing evangelism rather than the revelation that every Christian should be doing evangelism, we will be in trouble," he said.

Baptists have a heritage of growth, and Baptist theology is suited to growth, Hemphill said. "Our theology is best suited for church growth but we desperately need a theological renewal.

"People are looking for a microwavable method of growth. They want to take it home and plug it in and let it work for their church without much effort," he said.

However, growth methods that work in one location may be wrong for another location if the principles can't be adapted to the situation, he cautioned.

Hemphill said the struggle for church growth is developing a gap between the "innovative" or "contemporary" church and the "traditional" church. The terms indicate the traditional church is neither innovative nor contemporary.

"It is likely that the best mix for the great majority of Southern Baptist churches is innovation on a strong biblical and Baptist traditional model," he said. "We must help the traditionalists who are frozen in the past learn from the celebrative and contemporary. We must help the contemporary church to not accept uncritically everything that comes down the pike in the name of innovation."

He cited 10 concerns and weaknesses of current approaches to church growth.

1) Many plans are "heavy on methods and marketing and light on missions and message," he said.

While marketing the church is important, churches should not neglect the ability of God to change people, Hemphill said.

2) The idea that confrontational evangelism is not working is based on a misunderstanding of personal soul-winning and poor statistical research, he said.

Hemphill pointed out that 14 of the 17 largest churches in the Southern Baptist Convention have weekly visitation and evangelism programs.

3) Marketing information suggesting a low level of commitment from church members may be a self-fulfilling prophecy, he said. "We tell people often enough that we expect a low level of commitment and we get what we expect."

A marketing strategy that downplays commitment and giving creates a feeling of a "bait-and-switch" strategy when tithing and involvement are mentioned, he said.

4) Target evangelism that focuses on a single age group can only work in large metropolitan areas and does not supply the diversity which creates unity for the church, Hemphill said.

"If you target one age group, you have to keep your aim moving as the age group grows older," he said.

"Most churches must pick multiple targets," he said. "Age-graded Sunday school offers the multiple-target approach that is needed."

5) Church growth strategies that are weak on discipleship "do not bode well for the future of the church," he said. "If we are going to grow, we must grow future generations of the church."

6) Church planting is not a part of most church growth strategies. "We will not win the world by growing megachurches," he said. "It will take planting many churches in many communities."

7) The suggestion that cells are more effective than traditional Sunday school is not based on research facts, Hemphill said.

Sunday school is reaching 80 percent of the people who attend worship services, Hemphill said. "If traditional Sunday school is working for 80 percent of the congregation, why not maintain and strengthen the Sunday school while you develop a network of cells for special needs and interests for those who are not attending Sunday school?"

8) Hemphill said there is no statistical evidence to support claims that denominational labels are a deterrent to church growth. "Church growth is not a competitive sport but a cooperative ministry," he said. "If this trend is not challenged, it will cause an erosion in our cooperative ministry at every level."

Removing the label is the least significant thing a church could do to grow. "If the product inside the wrapper is tasteless, changing the wrapper makes no substantial difference," he said.

Of the top 150 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, only two have omitted Baptist from their name, Hemphill said.

9) An emphasis on "front door" or "side door" evangelism could cause a lack of emphasis on "their door" evangelism, he said.

"In every generation, a method emerges which seems to promise that we can shirk our responsibility to go to the lost," he said. "We cannot exchange a 'come-and-see' approach for a 'go-and-tell' approach."

10) Efforts to make worship services seeker-targeted tend to dilute authentic worship, he said. "We need to be seeker-sensitive rather than seeker-targeted."

"Look at what you are doing to make the experience comfortable for the seeker but don't compromise the integrity of worship," he cautioned.

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Texas criminal justice ministries  
brighten Christmas for families

By Ken Camp

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DALLAS (BP)--Two Texas Baptist ministries are brightening Christmas a little this year for some families and individuals touched by the criminal justice system.

Exodus Ministry in Dallas is helping concerned Christians "adopt" families of recently released ex-convicts to make their Christmas wishes come true. And the Hospitality House in Huntsville, Texas, is giving toys to the children of prisoners.

The ministries of both institutions are supported by Texas Baptists through their gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions. Exodus and the Hospitality House are part of the Texas Baptist Men Criminal Justice Ministry program.

Exodus operates a 20-unit, multi-family housing complex in Dallas where up to 17 ex-offenders and their families are provided a temporary home within the context of a Christian community for up to six months.

The ministry was begun in 1988 under the sponsorship of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas as a pilot project of Dallas Baptist Association, the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the Home Mission Board. Of the 107 families who have been through the Exodus program of spiritual and social development, only four have had family members return to prison, according to Mike Rouse, executive director of Exodus Ministry.

As part of its Christmas ministry, Exodus collects wish lists from families of ex-offenders. Then families, individuals or Sunday school classes are asked to accept the responsibility for buying presents on the list.

"Mothers wrap the presents for their own children. It gives them more of a sense that the gifts really come from the parents," Rouse said.

Exodus gives a partially decorated tree to each resident family. The adopted and adoptee families then get together to finish decorating the trees at an open house Christmas party and worship service Dec. 17.

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Exodus also provides turkey dinners with all the trimmings to needy families of ex-convicts both at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"Our goal is to promote family togetherness -- to help put the broken unit back together," Rouse said.

For the sixth consecutive year, the Hospitality House in Huntsville is collecting and distributing toys to the children of prisoners in Texas Department of Corrections facilities.

Directed by Bob and Nelda Norris, the Hospitality House provides a temporary refuge for visiting families of inmates in Huntsville-area prisons.

Since opening its doors in the summer of 1986, the Hospitality House has provided overnight lodging to about 20,000 people, served 16,000 meals and been instrumental in leading more than 300 people to make professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

Last year, the Norrises and the volunteers who work with them gave more than 250 bags of toys to children ages three weeks to 16 years old. The ministry has distributed about 1,100 Christmas gift bags in the last four years.

Only new toys in good condition are given as Christmas presents. Any damaged, second-hand toys given to the Hospitality House are donated to another local ministry.

Toys not given to children at Christmas by the Hospitality House are distributed throughout the year to children making first-time visits or celebrating birthdays.

The gift-giving season at Hospitality House begins about three weeks before Christmas and extends at least until the New Year holiday.

"The folks don't all show up on Christmas Eve. They kind of come in cycles over a period of several weeks around Christmas," Norris said.

Obviously, wide-eyed, smiling children who receive the gifts with whoops of joy never fail to touch the hearts of the Norrises. But they also are moved by the wonder of many adults who find it so hard to believe anyone cares for them.

"Just last Saturday, we had a lady in here who has been visiting her husband in prison for about five years. She saw our tree -- a big, beautiful, eight-and-a-half-foot evergreen -- and must have spent an hour just staring at it, reaching up to touch its needles and to gently handle its ornaments," Norris said.

Finally, she sat beneath the tree and began looking at the homemade dolls there, created by the wives of the Texas Baptist Men Retiree Builders.

When Norris told her to pick one out for herself, with childlike glee she carefully examined each one before selecting just the right doll. He also gave her a gift bag of personal hygiene items, which she received gratefully.

"She must be 40 or 45 years old, but it was like it was the first time she had ever seen a Christmas tree," Norris said. "She lives in abject poverty in a little one-room trailer house.

"So many of the people who come here have so little. This seems like so much to them. They are just filled with awe to think it is here for them."