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92-31

Home missions volunteers up
in 1991, but shortage predicted By David Winfrey

ATLANTA (BP)--The number of volunteers for home mission projects increased in 1991, but coordinators say a bad economy may keep many volunteers at home this year.

"We've got missionaries who are about at the point of panic," said Valerie Hardy, a Home Mission Board volunteer coordinator.

Fewer youth groups are volunteering for Home Mission Board projects this year, meaning more missionaries will not get enough staff for such summer projects as Vacation Bible Schools and backyard Bible clubs, she said.

The Home Mission Board counted more than 69,600 volunteers in 1991, up 9.4 percent from the 63,600 in 1990, according to a report from the board's volunteer division.

Volunteer projects range widely in age groups and duration of service, from adults working for a year establishing a church to mission youth groups working a summer in resort ministry.

Youth groups showed the largest increase in 1991, jumping from 22,000 in 1990 to 30,500 in 1991, the report states.

While the Home Mission Board recruited more youth groups in 1991, some of the increase also came from better accounting for groups that set up their own projects without help from the HMB, said Mike Robertson, director of short-term volunteers.

But the number of volunteer youth groups likely will decrease this year, Robertson said. On average, 70 percent of missionaries' requests for volunteer groups are filled annually, he said, but that figure could be as low as 60 percent this year.

"If we don't get more help here at the last minute then we will be well down," he said.

In Daytona Beach, Fla., the Halifax Baptist Association has just half the groups it needs for sand and surf clubs in area hotels, said Bernie Davis, pastor of Spruce Creek Baptist Church.

Volunteer youth groups from around the country come for a week each in June and July to help staff the games and Bible studies offered at hotels at Daytona Beach.

Some hotels that otherwise would have no mission project have called the Halifax association to see if the clubs will be offered this year, Davis said.

"Their clientele look forward to it and plan their vacations so their children can participate in it," Davis said.

The association will try to place a group in each hotel for at least one week but fewer groups will mean fewer witnessing opportunities, Davis said.

Robertson said the poor economy may be restricting some churches from assembling volunteer groups this year.

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"There are still some critical needs that need to be filled," he said. "It's not too late if a group will tell us they'll do it."

People interested in volunteer missions with the Home Mission Board can call toll-free at 1-800-HMB-VOLS.

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Volunteers' time contributions
total more than \$67 million

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
2/20/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist volunteer mission workers donated more than \$67 million worth of time in 1991, according to reports by the Brotherhood Commission and Home Mission Board.

Volunteer coordinators from those two groups and the Foreign Mission Board released reports Feb. 18 on volunteer activity last year.

The Home Mission Board reported 9.4 percent more volunteers in 1991 than 1990. Some of the increase was due to better accounting of groups that organize projects without help from the HMB, HMB director of short-term volunteers Mike Robertson said.

The HMB identified 56,948 volunteers last year who worked for a year or less on projects ranging from church construction to backyard Bible clubs.

Using \$88 per day volunteered, the value of HMB short-term volunteers totalled about \$51 million, according to the HMB report.

HMB volunteers also reported more than 7,000 conversions, 4,000 rededications and 300 decisions to enter church-related service, the report states.

Robertson noted, however, 30 percent of the requests from field missionaries remain unfilled, and economic conditions could push that number as high as 40 percent this year.

The Brotherhood Commission counted more than 62,281 volunteers who worked a minimum of three days, totalling at least \$16.4 million, said Bob Salley, director of the National Fellowship of Baptists in Missions, the volunteer coordinating department of the Brotherhood Commission.

The Foreign Mission Board reported 10,229 volunteers in 1991, a slight decrease compared with 1990, Tom Prevost, director of the board's international service department, said.

Prevost said the decrease wasn't disappointing considering the economic conditions in 1991 and the likely fear of traveling abroad during the Persian Gulf conflict.

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Missionary's visit to Haiti
paves way for volunteers' return

By Mary E. Speidel

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--When life gets discouraging, Haitians have a saying meant to lift each other's spirits: "Bon courage."

Southern Baptist missionary Mark Rutledge used that phrase often during a February trip to Haiti. "Keep your courage" or "good courage" is how it translates from the French Creole, the heart language of Haitians.

"It's a common thing to say when things are discouraging. People here in many ways are used to suffering ... because that's life here," Rutledge said in a telephone interview from Port-au-Prince, the capital city. "I think it's important they keep their courage and keep focused on God. He's the solution and the strength to deal with the situation here."

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Rutledge was back in Haiti for the first time since Nov. 2, when he and his wife, Peggy, and Southern Baptist volunteer Bobby Edwards left the country. The Rutledges, from Murfreesboro, Tenn., and Glendale, Calif., respectively, operate an agricultural project in Haiti. Edwards, a mechanic from Greenville, S.C., works with a Baptist well-drilling project in Port-au-Prince.

When they left the island nation last year, international sanctions were just starting to cause fuel shortages and price increases. The Organization of American States imposed the sanctions to protest a Sept. 30 military coup ousting Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first elected president. Since then the military junta has resisted diplomatic efforts to return Aristide to power. Aristide remains in exile in Venezuela.

After leaving Haiti in November, the Rutledges, the only Southern Baptist career missionaries assigned to Haiti, began furlough in Visalia, Calif. Edwards went to the Dominican Republic to do mechanical work for Southern Baptist missionaries there.

Rutledge's trip back to Haiti paved the way for Edwards and two other Southern Baptist volunteers to begin working in Haiti in late February. Edwards, who has been a volunteer there for more than two years, was joined by volunteers Ed and Mary Brentham, from Belton, Texas, Feb. 19 in Port-au-Prince. They will work together on a water well-drilling project.

Most recently, the Brenthams have been Home Mission Board church planters in Belton. Earlier, they spent eight years as Southern Baptist volunteers in Haiti, where they lived in a remote area. Brentham also was a volunteer last summer with a Southern Baptist well-drilling project to help Kurdish refugees in Iraq.

Even though current conditions are difficult in Haiti, Rutledge said he felt comfortable recommending that the volunteers come into the country now. "Because of who they are and their experiences, it will not be as tough for them as it would be for the average American," Rutledge said.

"We were there before (in Haiti) through six changes in government and it didn't bother us," said Brentham before leaving for Haiti. "There's so much work that needs to be done. I feel like we'll be all right."

Since Southern Baptist workers left Haiti last year, a record number of Haitians have fled the country by boat, seeking political asylum in the United States. Their plight has been the center of growing controversy since the Supreme Court gave U.S. officials permission to forcibly repatriate many of these boat people. Many refugees had been taken temporarily to camps set up at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, only to be sent back to Haiti.

Meanwhile, economic conditions in Haiti have gone from bad to worse, according to press reports. Even before the sanctions, Haiti was considered the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

But Rutledge said Haitians he talked with during his trip didn't complain. "There's a certain pride about being Haitian. ... You don't complain a whole lot because things are rough here, anyway," he said. "You just keep your head up and keep plugging along even when you're hurting."

Although Haitians didn't say much about their hardships, "I think the general feeling is that things are pretty bad for everybody right now because of the economic situation, the increased cost of everything," Rutledge said.

Food was readily available but "expensive," he said. For people who live on subsistence incomes, even small price increases have a "dramatic impact" on their lives, he said. Many Haitians are unable to afford tuition to send their children to school. For some, paying the tuition may mean their children go to school hungry, he said.

In Port-au-Prince, Rutledge saw diesel fuel prices increase nearly \$7 a gallon in one day, causing long lines at the gas pumps.

Rutledge said he didn't know if an actual fuel shortage existed if a shortage was caused by people who were panicking and buying as much gas as possible. Despite the embargo, some fuel is coming into Haiti from some other Caribbean islands, according to news reports.

The cost of fuel and other expenses have kept Haitians from traveling much, Rutledge noted. But a group of Haitian Baptists was able to gather Feb. 15 in Cap-Haitien for a cleanup day at the headquarters of the Baptist Convention of Haiti, he said. The building was burned by a mob Sept. 30 in an incident apparently unrelated to the coup the same day. The burning was reportedly linked to a disagreement between some Haitians over control of a Baptist secondary school in the northern city.

Haitian Baptist churches that could not afford transportation for workers sent money to help with the effort, Rutledge said. Plans to rebuild the headquarters are pending a report by an engineer who examined the structure.

Rutledge had not heard reports about further violence against Baptists in the area. However, in southern Haiti, the looting of a Baptist pastor's home had been reported. No information was available about who was responsible. The pastor and his family were away at the time the house was ransacked.

In addition, the Baptist mission house where Edwards had been living had been robbed since Southern Baptist workers left the country. It appeared that nothing valuable had been stolen, Rutledge said.

Before returning to California Feb. 18, Rutledge asked Southern Baptists to pray for encouragement for Haitian Baptists. "Generally, things here are always out of control, so you're constantly having to rely on God to help you deal with that. ... Pray that they would use this time as God would have them to use it -- to witness and to reach people. Pray that they wouldn't lose this opportunity."

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Haitian refugees look
to churches for help

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
2/20/92

MIAMI (BP)--While the federal government is shipping back thousands of Haitian immigrants to their homeland, many who have been fed and given shelter by Baptists in South Florida have been granted permission to enter the United States.

"The church in this community is here to help serve others," said pastor Wilner Maxy, pastor of the Emmanuel Haitian Church in Miami. "We help everyone in need. We feel the church is the right place to get physical food and spiritual food."

Scores of the newest Haitian refugees are joining fellow countrymen in Miami's Little Haiti where they are receiving food supplemented by Florida Baptists' hunger funds and are sleeping in apartments owned by church members. Others are finding refuge in Homestead, Fort Pierce, Orlando and Sarasota.

Miami's pastoral leadership is aware the newest refugees will face many problems, including high unemployment, language barriers and crowded living conditions, Maxy noted. His church continues to help families who have been in Miami for at least five years.

"But if they come here they are better off than in Haiti," Maxy said. "They can find a church. They can find a friend."

Florida Baptists historically have responded when emigrants flooded their shores. In the past, Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans received help after immigrating to Florida. Currently, state convention officials are monitoring the Haitian influx to determine other ways the churches can supplement what is being done by government and other religious groups.

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Estimate indicate as many as 3,000 Haitians will be able to qualify as political refugees, according to Mike Pszyk of Church World Services. About 1,000 already have entered the States on a 90-day parole basis. To remain, the refugees must request political asylum within 90 days, a time-consuming and expensive process. Failure to do so means immediate deportation.

The most recent influx of Haitian refugees are men between the ages of 20 and 40 who came to the States alone. Nearly 75 percent of those are resettling in Florida, mostly South Florida, where they have relatives.

"Everybody from the Caribbean wants to come here," said Mike Dailey, church and community ministries director with the Miami Baptist Association. "They know they have a community to come to. They can survive quite fine here in Miami." Dailey is working closely with Haitian pastors to determine other ways Florida Baptists can assist in the resettlement.

Enouk Milgrise, 24, was among 11 men and one woman who sought refuge at the Emmanuel church. Milgrise left Haiti on a small boat with nearly 100 aboard. The boatload was rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard and sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Ten days ago he was permitted to relocate in Miami.

Milgrise said he felt compelled to leave Haiti because of the fear, turmoil and violence there. Speaking through an interpreter, he recalled a homeland where each night random shootings killed adults and children. Knowing that he left behind a mother and sister, the young man said he was cautious about revealing too much.

Milgrise is one of the fortunate ones. The U.S. Coast Guard has plucked 15,716 Haitians from the sea since the Sept. 30 overthrow of Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The current U.S. government policy is to return the vast majority of emigrants to their homeland, contending the refugees' decision to leave Haiti was based on economics, not political conditions in the country.

Some wonder how the Haitian military leaders who overthrew Aristide will greet their fellow countrymen who supported the president and then fled the island after his overthrow. A number of legal aid groups have protested the deportations, citing persecution and threats against the returned citizens.

Devil Legrand, pastor of Miami's New Bethany Haitian Church, can sympathize with the 15 refugees taken in by his church members. Five years ago he was pastor of a 1,000-member church in Haiti when he was persecuted for testifying against government employees who had stolen and cashed checks sent to him. He, too, remembers random gunfire and death in the streets.

With the government in turmoil, Legrand said he could find no protection from this type of harassment in Haiti. So he and his family, who held passports, escaped to Miami from the island carrying nothing with them. For months, he and several family members stayed in his daughter's apartment, sleeping side by side on the floor.

"After five years there is still no stability in Haiti," he said.

But the Miami pastor has cause for rejoicing. One of the most recent refugees helped by the church made a profession of faith Feb. 9.

Legrand said the food is not used to force Christian commitments. "But when they pick up the food, we invite them to church. There they hear the gospel."

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Renovations begin
on seminary village

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
2/20/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--An estimated \$7.7 million renovation project is under way on a 251-unit apartment complex that has served Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's married students since its acquisition 39 years ago.

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Seminary Village will "look like a new complex" when work is completed on the 55-year-old buildings, said T.J. McGlothlin, vice president for business services at the Louisville, Ky., school.

In addition to cosmetic improvements, the village will receive electrical and plumbing upgrades, central heating and air conditioning, mechanical ventilation systems, new roofs and gutters, new bathroom fixtures and new appliances. The village grounds will also benefit from landscaping renovations, new sidewalks and curbs, drainage improvements and better lighting. Renovations are expected to be completed within 18 months.

The project will be financed with First National Bank of Louisville at no cost to the seminary. Affiliates of the bank and the seminary have formed a partnership which is now the owner of the village. The partnership will qualify for affordable housing and historic preservation federal tax credits.

The seminary will manage the village for the partnership. It also has an option to repurchase the village from the partnership.

Although the bank's affiliate will receive tax benefits for its role in the project, the village will receive no direct government assistance, emphasized seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt.

"We have been careful not to blur the line of church-state separation with this financing arrangement," he said. "The fact that First National Bank's affiliate is receiving tax credits for its participation in the project is no different in that regard than from church members who deduct contributions to their congregations from their federal income tax."

To qualify for the partnership's tax arrangements, the village must be opened to other tenants, not just seminary students and their families. Elisabeth Lambert, the seminary's vice president for student services, said the school will screen applicants within the parameters of open housing laws. All prospective tenants, both students and non-students, will be required to provide references. "We realize this is a family environment," she said, "and we are seeking tenants who will enjoy living near families and who will be contributing members of the community."

Tenants must also fall within certain income levels. Lambert noted that more than 75 percent of the current student tenants meet the qualifications. Some apartments in the village have been set aside for families whose income exceeds the limit.

"One of the most gratifying dimensions of this project is that it addresses the seminary's two-pronged commitment to our students and their families and to the larger Louisville community," Honeycutt said. "When renovations are complete, our student families will enjoy excellent facilities. At the same time, we will be adding additional affordable housing in an attractive family atmosphere for qualified Louisville residents."

Seminary Village, acquired by Southern in 1953, was constructed in 1937 as Green Tree Manor Apartments, the first and only large-scale apartment complex in Louisville insured by the Federal Housing Administration. That distinction helped qualify it for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.