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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 Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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AIDS challenging Christians
to demonstrate compassion

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
6/22/93

HOUSTON (BP)--AIDS is going to be difficult to solve scientifically, but much can be done immediately by Christians who show compassion for its victims, according to Southern Baptist participants in the 9th International Conference on AIDS in Berlin, Germany, June 6-11.

Four members of Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston, who were sent to the conference by their church, said the conference confirmed there has been little medical progress as AIDS has become a global epidemic involving more women and more heterosexuals.

The World Health Organization, which sponsored the AIDS conference in conjunction with the International AIDS Society, estimates there are 14 million victims of the disease worldwide, and the numbers will grow to 40 million by the year 2000. Harvard researchers, however, estimate that AIDS may afflict up to 100 million people by the end of the decade.

Willie Sylvester, director of Brentwood's Project W.A.I.T. (We Are All in This Together), said Christians need to cast aside fear and demonstrate more understanding and compassion for AIDS sufferers.

"There are no signs that AIDS is transmitted through casual, social contact," Sylvester noted. "It is acquired through sexual contact and contaminated blood products and needles used by drug abusers."

Brentwood, Southern Baptists' largest Black church, has up to 100 volunteers serving in its AIDS ministry in southwest Houston. In an average month, they provide transportation to medical centers for about 75 AIDS sufferers and provide food for about 60 victims of the disease.

"Our goal as we meet people's physical needs is to also reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ," Sylvester said.

Another Brentwood member attending the AIDS conference said there was a lot of emphasis on "protected sex" through use of condoms.

"But I feel we need to spend more time teaching abstinence," said Glenda Gardner, who is chief of the Houston Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention.

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"We need to spread our arms even wider to enclose people with AIDs," Gardner said.

"The important thing is not how they got it but how we can minister. It helps their recovery if they know people are not being judgmental, but are there to heal them."

Gardner also said that because of the close alliance of AIDS and tuberculosis, more testing is needed for both diseases.

Another conference participant, Shepherd Smith, president of Americans for Sound AIDS/HIV Policy in Washington, D.C., said the conference confirmed that AIDS, which once involved primarily homosexual white men, is moving rapidly to include women and people of color.

He said a growing promiscuity worldwide contributes to the new wave.

Smith said the conference, which drew about 15,000 participants from at least 100 nations, was "pretty downbeat," partially because many of the radical homosexual AIDS activists of the 1980s have died.

He said the conference also revealed the frustration of homosexual rights activists with President Bill Clinton.

"The Clinton administration has done virtually nothing for the AIDS community. However, the gay rights activists are reluctant to protest him as they did Bush and Reagan for fear they will jeopardize the agenda they hope to achieve through him."

Smith said that clearly the epidemic worldwide is moving very rapidly into the heterosexual community.

"There was very little at the conference to announce in treatment or vaccines. AZT, which AIDS sufferers have depended on, was shown to be less effective than previously thought," Smith said.

Smith said there was more acknowledgment that infected mothers who breast-feed are more likely to pass the AIDS virus on to their babies.

"There was no evidence that all of the education and condom distribution is slowing the spread of the disease," Smith added.

"The way we've responded to this disease makes very little sense. We must respond to it as a major medical problem with traditional medical intervention, more testing and reporting and partner identification," Smith stated.

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Home missionary to help
churches with AIDS ministry

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
6/22/93

NEW YORK CITY (BP)--The bottom line on whether people become involved in AIDS ministry is how they interpret Scripture, says a home missionary in New York City.

"It boils down to whether you believe the Great Commission includes people with AIDS. Do you agree with Paul that we are to bear one another's burdens? Are you willing to be your brother's keeper?" asks Michael T. Williams.

In April, Metropolitan New York Baptist Association called Williams to serve as HIV/AIDS urban consultant. The new position will be reviewed after one year, but Williams is confident the need for AIDS ministry in New York City is great enough to warrant an ongoing consultant position.

Other home missionaries, including Oklahoma physician Fred Loper, facilitate medical missions, but Williams is the only home missionary with AIDS ministry as his primary assignment.

Williams became involved in AIDS ministry as director of Harlem Baptist Center. Three years ago the grandson of a woman in the center's senior adult program died from AIDS and her pastor would not do the funeral service. Of 17 pastors Williams questioned, 11 said they would not do the service because they believed AIDS results from sin.

Many people are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, from sexual contact or intravenous drug use. But Loper notes that other illnesses, such as lung cancer and cirrhosis of the liver, are also caused by sinful behavior.

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"God intends for his people to deal with the sins that cause disease, (but) too often they are selective judges rather than compassionate Christians," Loper wrote in a Home Mission Board brochure titled "Beginning a Ministry with People with AIDS." The free brochure is available by calling HMB customer services at 1-800-634-2462 and requesting item 632-76F.

Williams says he was outraged with the pastors who would not perform funerals for AIDS patients. His anger turned to action when he discovered an entire hospital floor of people infected with HIV.

As he visited hospitalized AIDS patients, he realized he was the only visitor for many of them. Those who recovered enough to go home usually had no one to help them cope with their impending death, he says.

In the last two months of 1991, Williams performed 44 funerals for people who died with AIDS, he says. Yet the focus of his ministry, and the goal he wants churches to adopt, is to help people live.

As a grief therapist whose first child died in infancy, Williams says AIDS presents a "very different grief than losing a baby."

People can live for years after they learn they are HIV-positive, so the resolution of grief is put off for a long period, Williams says. Patients also have a constant awareness of the problem, he adds.

When people learn they are HIV-positive, Williams' advice to their friends is "don't run off. Look at them as people who are sick. Tell them you'll be there for them if they need to talk. Ask 'What can I do for you?'"

Churches do not need new programs or more money for an AIDS ministry, he says. "Just include them in what you're already doing."

Isolation, one of the biggest problems facing AIDS patients, can be combatted by churches that overcome judgmental attitudes toward people with AIDS, Williams says.

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(BP) horizontal photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline is on SBCNet Newsroom.

FMB to weigh go-ahead
of organizational study

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press
6/22/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A Massachusetts firm is the front-runner for what could become a half-million-dollar contract to study the organization and operations of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, according to FMB official Bob Shoemake.

Some trustees, meanwhile, have questioned whether to proceed with plans for the study in light of recent layoffs, elimination of several volunteer programs and the election of Jerry Rankin as new FMB president.

Rankin was in meetings at the board's Richmond headquarters June 22 and could not be reached for comment by Baptist Press' mid-afternoon deadline.

According to Shoemake, FMB executive assistant to the president, FMB trustees' policy subcommittee of the administrative committee decided May 14 to invite ODI, a firm based in the Boston suburb of Burlington, to make a presentation June 29 during the regular FMB meeting in Richmond, Va. Shoemake said the subcommittee then will decide whether to recommend ODI to the administrative committee and the full board, which must approve the choice of a consultant.

Shoemake said ODI was one of four firms to submit proposals for the FMB study. The others were The Bellamy Group of Coral Gables, Fla.; Delta Consulting Group of New York City; and Al Coke and Associates of Denham Springs, La.

The policy subcommittee met during the April 19-21 FMB meeting in Columbus, Ohio, to hear presentations from the four firms. Shoemake said the presentations were "a little overwhelming" and the subcommittee ran out of time, so members decided to meet again May 14-15 in Richmond. There they decided by consensus to invite ODI to make a second presentation.

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Trustees voted in December 1992 to hire a consultant to study the FMB related to its purpose. Shoemake said the project was advertised to firms he was aware of, and trustees were invited to suggest companies that might be interested.

Shoemake said the study would look at organizational structure; the role of trustees; centralized versus decentralized operation; financial support; electronic systems; working with a new president; communication; and one-, five- and 10-year plans.

Shoemake said three of the four interested firms submitted cost estimates for the study, which ranged from \$160,000 to \$500,000 based on hourly charges of \$2,500 to \$6,000. ODI did not attach a total dollar figure to its proposal, he added, but its plan would have the potential of reaching the half-million-dollar mark.

"At this stage it's a little immaterial," Shoemake said. "We're not sure how in-depth we'll go." The firms also varied in their estimates of duration of the study -- from eight months to six years.

Shoemake confirmed that at the May 14 meeting, some subcommittee members questioned going ahead with the study after the announcement May 5 that 27 FMB employees would be laid off.

The nomination of Jerry Rankin as FMB president had not yet been announced, and trustees discussed how a new president might fit in with the study. The subcommittee eventually voted unanimously: "That a consulting firm be chosen and recommended to the board, and that the consultant process be initiated on the election of the new president."

Betty Swadley of Springfield, Mo., who left the trustee board after completing two four-year terms and was a policy subcommittee member, wrote to Rankin June 2 to request that in his first act as president Rankin ask the trustees and the policy subcommittee to stop the study.

"I feel very uncomfortable about that decision -- especially in the face of the downsizing (layoffs), program cutbacks (Tentmakers, Baptists Living Abroad and others)," Swadley wrote.

The FMB announced the elimination of Tentmakers, Baptists Living Abroad and Creative Evangelistic Opportunity programs in late May.

Mike Goodwin, also a Missouri FMB trustee and a member of the policy subcommittee, favors going ahead with the project.

"I don't think that there's any question as to the value of a study," said Goodwin, a pastor in Festus, Mo. He said his heart went out to those who had lost their jobs but the board cannot "let that kind of sensitivity desensitize us to our greater mission."

Goodwin called the study a matter of good stewardship, as did trustee Hoyt Savage, a pastor from Las Vegas, Nev.

"What's best for the long term may not always coincide with what's going on right now," Savage said.

Prior to his election as FMB president June 14, Rankin told Word & Way, Missouri Baptists' newsjournal, that several senior FMB staff had recommended that the study be put on hold until a new president was elected. He also expressed a desire to have input on the direction of the study.

Savage said the fact that ODI is an international company worked in its favor. ODI Vice President David Dennen said the company has about 300 employees worldwide.

Besides Boston, it has offices in New York, Washington, Atlanta, Houston, St. Louis and other U.S. cities, plus branches in London, Madrid, Amsterdam, Singapore, Hong Kong and other foreign cities.

Dennen described ODI as "sort of a hybrid of training and consulting." The company deals in management and leadership development. It often is called on to implement "total quality management," which emphasized improvement in areas such as processes and customer focus.

He said the firm will propose a one-year study of the Foreign Mission Board. The first six months and the second six months will each have a specific set of tasks and specific anticipated results. The study will include suggestions to be considered beyond the one year.

Among the companies ODI has done work for in the private sector, Dennen said, are AT&T, Proctor & Gamble, Grumman, Eli Lilly, Pfizer, Federal Express, Jet Propulsion Labs, Texaco, British Airways and Volkswagen.

He said the company also has been contracted by federal government agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Coast Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration. And it has done work for the Red Cross and for utilities and universities.

Dennen said ODI had never been contracted by a national religious organization.

"That was one of the reasons we were interested in this," he said. "We think we'll learn some things out of it."

Dennen added that the company had been impressed with Foreign Mission Board personnel and their degree of commitment to a "very worthwhile work."

ODI does not approach a study with an attitude of "who to fire," Dennen said. Personnel cuts are not pre-ordained, he explained, and the firm typically identifies efficiencies in systems rather than suggesting layoffs or restructuring. He called the latter "a court of last resort."

Shoemake said the policy subcommittee will have some new faces when it meets June 29. New trustees were elected at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 14-16. Swadley, who has completed two four-year terms as a trustee, is among those leaving the board.

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MasterLife undergirding
California prison ministry

By Walt B. Collins

Baptist Press
6/22/93

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (BP)--The "end of the line" for the 103,000 inmates in California's correctional system is the State Prison at Sacramento, formerly known as "Folsom." The gray, concrete walls enveloped by razor wire stand in stark contrast to the lush, rolling hills surrounding the prison, home for 3,400 inmates with long sentences or who are deemed "management problems" by prison officials.

In the midst of the inmates, Southern Baptist chaplain Edward Meads and a team of Southern Baptist volunteers are helping change hearts and transform lives. Chaplain Meads and Mission Service Corps volunteer C.M. Howell use MasterLife, an in-depth discipleship program, to train Christian leaders to build the "church" in the Sacramento prison.

"We have a strong church in the prison," Meads said. "There is a real spiritual openness in here."

In addition to the changed lives resulting from MasterLife, Meads said this type of spiritual discipline will help make the men productive citizens when paroled or released.

"In here, the men are exposed to a lot of spiritual teaching, some good, some not so good," Meads said. "MasterLife gives them a spiritual anchor to refer back to when they are confronted with different teachings."

At the Sacramento prison, there are two MasterLife groups meeting with a combined total of about 30 men.

Bobby Rubish, serving time for murder, described his transformation: "My prayer life has really grown. I used to only pray once a day but now I pray nine to 15 times a day. I am learning how to take all my thoughts captive through God's Word."

Rubish now contemplates God's forgiveness of his crime.

"I've broken the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.' It took a long time for me to really accept that God could forgive me. But I know he has, and it is really freeing. But I also know that there is a family back there that does not have a father because of what I've done. I want so much to let them know how sorry I am for what happened. I hope someday I can."

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Joseph Alcala, another inmate, also shared how coming to Christ helped him gain something he never had -- compassion.

"Before, I did all these bad things and I never felt guilty," Alcala said. "Now I have a conscience. One of the greatest blessings of knowing Christ is the new feelings I have. I now have compassion."

Tim Hamlin, who described his former life as "anti-church," now praises God for a new relationship with his heavenly Father. "I used to persecute Christians. If I saw you walking down the street with a Bible, I would go and across the street just to fight you. I used to spray paint church doors. But since I came to Christ, God has made all the difference in my life. Through prayer, my wife has come back to me."

The groups, led by Howell and Stan Foster, pastor of Dos Rios Baptist Church in Sacramento, are the beginning of what Howell envisions as a statewide program.

"I have a dream that every prison in this state will have a MasterLife program in place," Howell said. "We have inmates willing to commit to the training. All we need is leaders to come and help teach them. We have seen God do just tremendous things here through this program. I know that it can work anywhere."

Foster sees more than spiritual results.

"Of course we are primarily excited at the spiritual growth in these guys," he said. "But a real benefit is that one day these guys will be released into society as new creatures in Christ. Our hope is that their growth in Christ will help them come back to their neighborhoods as spiritual men of God and not menaces to society. We are seeing that kind of change."

Volunteers are needed to assist in the growing Southern Baptist ministries in the prisons, according to Greg Sumii, director of missions ministries for the California Southern Baptist Convention.

"There really is a revival taking place in the state prisons across California," Sumii said. Southern Baptist chaplains are ministering in six state prisons and three federal prisons in California. "All of them are pleading -- begging really -- for Southern Baptist volunteers in MasterLife, discipleship or visitation ministries," Sumii said.

Other opportunities for involvement, Sumii said, include participating in weekly worship services by preaching, singing or sharing a testimony, pen pals or establishing friendships through monthly visitation.

"There are numerous ways to get involved, for those who are the most talented to those who think they are least talented," Sumii said. "Training can be provided for anyone who wants to get involved."

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Court: State may not discriminate
against religious school student By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
6/22/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--Government may not discriminate against a handicapped student because he or she chooses to use government aid at a religious school, the Supreme Court ruled June 18, but the justices refused to alter their test for determining violations of church-state separation.

The court ruled in a 5-4 vote an Arizona school district could not refuse to provide a sign language interpreter for James Zobrest, a hearing-impaired student at a Roman Catholic high school, if government-funded interpreters were provided for children in public and nonreligious private schools.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) "creates a neutral government program dispensing aid not to schools but to individual handicapped children," Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote in the majority opinion. "If a handicapped child chooses to enroll in a sectarian school, we hold that the Establishment Clause does not prevent the school district from furnishing him with a sign-language interpreter there in order to facilitate his education."

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The court's decision in *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District* demonstrates "educational choice is constitutional, where the aid goes to the student, not to the school," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "This case also teaches that religious discrimination is unconstitutional, even when it is done in the name of strict separation of church and state.

"The aid serves education and freedom of choice, not religion. Just like G.I. Bill money to a college student who chooses Baylor University, this aid to a high school student who chooses a religious high school does not violate church-state separation," Whitehead said.

"A refusal to permit private choice of a religious school does amount to government coercion of religious conscience as a condition of receiving a public benefit available to nonreligious people."

The court overruled a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision which said use of an interpreter at a religious school would be a government establishment of religion. The activity would advance religion and entangle government and religion, the court of appeals ruled.

The Supreme Court did not revise the *Lemon* test, however, as the Christian Life Commission and other organizations had asked. The *Lemon* test, based on the 1971 *Lemon v. Kurtzman* decision, is the court's standard on establishment clause cases. It says a government practice must have a secular purpose, neither advance nor inhibit religion and avoid excessive entanglement with religion.

The CLC and eight other groups signed onto a brief by the Christian Legal Society siding with *Zobrest* and also asking the court to revise *Lemon*. The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, joining a brief by the American Jewish Congress, also agreed with *Zobrest* but did not ask for a revision of *Lemon*.

"We, of course, were pleased that the court did not disturb the neutrality principle that is reflected in *Lemon*," said BJC Associate General Counsel Brent Walker, but "instead relied on cases decided under *Lemon* to reach its decision."

The June 18 opinion followed the court's reasoning since the late 1940s of benefitting students rather than schools, Walker said. He said it also did not signal an inclination "to tolerate voucher payments to parochial institutions."

The court's opinion also said, "By according parents freedom to select a school of their choice, the statute ensures that a government-paid interpreter will be present in a sectarian school only as a result of the private decision of individual parents. In other words, because the IDEA creates no financial incentive for parents to choose a sectarian school, an interpreter's presence there cannot be attributed to state decision-making."

An interpreter's job is different from that of a teacher, the court said.

"Nothing in this record suggests that a sign-language interpreter would do more than accurately interpret whatever material is presented to the class as a whole," the opinion said.

Justices Byron White, Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy and Clarence Thomas joined in Rehnquist's opinion.

In a dissenting opinion, justice Harry Blackmun said the court had strayed from a "course set by nearly five decades of Establishment Clause jurisprudence."

The court's cases "consistently have rejected the provision by government of any resource capable of advancing a school's religious mission," Blackmun said.

"And our cases make clear that government crosses the boundary when it furnishes the medium for communication of a religious message. ... it is beyond question that a state-employed sign-language interpreter would serve as the conduit for [*Zobrest's*] religious education, thereby assisting (the school) in its mission of religious indoctrination," he said.

David Souter joined Blackmun in his dissent.

Sandra Day O'Connor, joined by John Paul Stevens, agreed with the first part of Blackmun's dissent calling on the court to return the case to the lower court for consideration of some statutory and regulatory problems. She refused to address the establishment clause issue.

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Cuban Baptists receive BWA help
in medicines, church renovation

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
6/22/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--"The door has been opened for Baptists in Cuba to receive urgently needed medical supplies from Baptist World Aid," according to Paul Montacute, director of the relief and development division of the Baptist World Alliance.

That assurance, Montacute said, came from Silvario Platero, minister for religious affairs in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, with whom the BWA official met during a fact-finding visit to the country.

"I made a clear request, in the light of the current situation, that we be allowed to send medical supplies direct to our member bodies," Montacute recounted.

"Platero said there would be no problem with this, particularly as Baptists had good doctors to direct the program," Montacute said, "but he did ask that the Baptist conventions consult with (Cuba's) Ministry of Health about the distribution of the medical supplies once they were on the way."

The promise that Cuban Baptists could receive medical supplies directly was good news for the country's Baptist leaders who want to be seen as "agents of help in this time of need," said Montacute.

It also was good news because, like other Cubans, Baptists are feeling the severe effects of Cuba's devastated economy since the collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and a continuing U.S. blockade.

Cuban Baptists also are deeply concerned about the poor state of their church buildings, Montacute said. "In fact, this is their No. 1 priority," he said.

Baptist leaders in Cuba say their government currently is being very helpful in allowing them to repair their buildings and also build new ones, Montacute said.

As part of his visit, Montacute saw several Baptist churches, some in "terrible condition" and some that had some repairs done. BWAid is working in a special program to seek funds to help Cuban Baptist churches in such building/renovation programs.

At one church, Montacute said, "one section of the sanctuary is propped up with wood, the floors are uneven and you have the impression the whole building is unsafe."

While Cuban Baptists are receiving "a good supply of Bibles, there is still a great need," Montacute added.

There also is "a desperate need for the Spanish edition of the Baptist hymnal," he said.

The three Baptist conventions that belong to the BWA are the Eastern Baptist Convention of Cuba, with ties to the American Baptist Churches USA; the Western Baptist Convention, with ties to the Southern Baptist Convention; and the Free Baptist Convention of Cuba.

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Missionary couple survives
attack by drug-crazed robbers

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press
6/22/93

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--Four armed men -- one wanted for killing a policeman -- beat and robbed Southern Baptist missionaries Ed and Linda Ables at their home in Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 15.

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The couple suffered lacerations and bruises and lost at least \$500 in the robbery. But they easily could have been killed, Mrs. Ables told Baptist Press. "In the middle of everything, we really saw how the Lord was protecting us," said the missionary, who is from Birmingham, Ala.

The attack occurred about 10 p.m. as Ables, from Fort Payne, Ala., was returning home from leading a conference on cults at a local Baptist church. Two thugs rushed inside the garage as he was parking the family car. The men pointed automatic pistols at Ables and demanded money. Meanwhile, two other armed robbers appeared and began beating Ables on the head with the butts of their pistols and a sawed-off shotgun.

One man thrust his hand into Ables' pocket and took about \$200 in Argentine pesos. The robbers said they wanted more money and continued to strike the missionary. Ables tried to give them his car keys, thinking that might entice them to leave. But the men forced him inside the house.

Ables called out to warn to his wife, who was in a back room. She didn't understand what he was saying and came to investigate. Mrs. Ables found the thugs pointing guns at her husband.

"They were completely wild. You could tell they were high on drugs," she said. The Ableses assume the thugs wanted money to buy more drugs.

The men forced the couple into their bedroom and continued hitting Ables. The youngest attacker, who looked about 18, then struck Mrs. Ables on the head and face. He said he wanted jewelry and money.

"My face looks like a freight train hit it," said Mrs. Ables.

Ables recalled he had some American dollars in a locked briefcase in the house. He tried to tell the robbers about it, but one had stuffed a sock into his mouth. At the same time, another was beating him repeatedly on the head while demanding to know where more money was kept. The thieves ransacked the room, dumping contents of the drawers on the floor. When the men finally removed the sock, Ables told them of the cash and got it from the case.

Meanwhile, the couple's 17-year-old son, Ralph, and a friend had heard the noise. They were in Ralph's bedroom in a separate building behind the house. Not realizing an attack was under way, they came to the back door but found it locked. Ralph broke a window to try to get inside. When he saw the thieves, he and his friend jumped the fence and ran to a neighbor's house to call police.

When the robbers heard glass breaking they fled, apparently thinking someone had come to help the missionaries, Mrs. Ables said.

If Ralph hadn't come to the door when he did, "I have no doubt they would have kept on until they had killed us," she said.

The robbers were at the missionaries' house only about 10 or 15 minutes, Mrs. Ables said, "but it seemed like an eternity."

Ables was hit in the head at least a dozen times. Surprisingly, "There was a time or two when they were hitting me that I was thinking, 'I thought this would hurt worse.' I didn't feel that much pain. I felt a peace," Ables said.

The two were taken by ambulance to a public health clinic where they were treated and released. The next day they were examined again at a British hospital in the city. They sustained no broken bones or internal injuries in the attack.

The couple identified the thugs from police sketches and photos. One is wanted for killing a policeman. A police guard was stationed outside the missionaries' home for several nights after the robbery.

Despite the trauma and injuries, Mrs. Ables said she already has seen something positive come from the experience. Several non-Christian neighbors told the couple "they could see that God was watching after us in a special way," she related.

"It's really amazing how the Lord can use something this traumatic. In so many ways you can see how he works," she said.

2 Oklahoma City churches
boosted by trading places

By Dave Parker

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Build a new facility, add on to an existing one or go to multiple worship services. Those are the most common solutions to churches when they outgrow their facilities.

For one Oklahoma City church, though, a fourth option is being used: Trade buildings with another congregation.

Shortly after Danny Frazee became pastor of Wilmont Place Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, the church began looking at several options to handle the growing number of members. Plans were developed to build a new worship center, at a projected cost of more than \$1 million.

Then began a series of events that Frazee calls "the providence of God." A seminary friend, Hance Dilbeck, invited Frazee to lead a revival at First Baptist Church of Snyder, Okla. During the revival, Frazee met a man from south Oklahoma City, where Wilmont Place is located, and they began talking about the neighborhood.

"We were comparing notes, and I shared with him that we were in need of space and considering adding on," Frazee said. "He shared with me that Dayspring Church (Assemblies of God) had been having financial difficulties for some time" and was considering closing the church's doors.

When Frazee returned to Wilmont Place, he shared that information with his minister of music, Russell Freeman. "We went over to Dayspring, feeling a little awkward," Frazee said. "I had never done anything like this before.

"The pastor said three weeks earlier he would have had nothing to talk about," Frazee recalled. "But he had struggled for four years with holding on and getting the bills paid" and was open to any possible solution.

Frazee went to see the facilities on a Monday night with one of his deacons. He took the staff through the next day, then presented it to Wilmont Place's future plans committee. He shared the information with the church that Wednesday night, and the church voted unanimously to look into it.

So, Wilmont Place agreed to buy the Dayspring property, and Dayspring is working out a lease-purchase agreement for the Wilmont Place facilities.

In the current facility, Wilmont Place has averaged 437 in attendance, with 611 there one Sunday.

"It was shoulder to shoulder," Frazee said. "The overflow met in a Sunday school department and watched the service over closed-circuit TV."

The new facility has an auditorium that seats 1,200. It has 50,000 feet of education space and is located on 15 acres of land between two major thoroughfares, within blocks of an interstate highway.

Wilmont Place was formed in 1923 as Richolson Heights Mission.

Members of Dayspring Church have experienced some grief over losing their building, but Frazee said they are excited that their ministry will live on, including Daystar Academy, a Christian school that will be housed in the church building.

Frazee said he is excited about the move. "This is the opportunity of a lifetime that a lot of pastors and a lot of churches never have opened to them," he said. "We looked at taking two to three years to build the space we need. Instead, we're getting it in 30 days."

NOTE TO EDITORS: Several editors have requested a breakdown of the Foreign Mission Board trustee vote to elect Jerry Rankin as board president June 14. The roll call of trustees present and voting in Houston -- arranged alphabetically by state -- has been posted on SBCNet Newsroom.

HOUSE MAIL



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