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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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ILLINOIS -- Illinois Baptists keep cooking while Mississippi River rises.
CALIFORNIA -- Baptist leader says it's time for revival in Middle East.
CALIFORNIA -- Participants find help, hope at Middle Eastern conference.
NASHVILLE -- AP article highlights BSSB fitness program.
CALIFORNIA -- Saddleback graduates first class at Hispanic Pastors' Training Center.
NASHVILLE -- Catholic leaders express interest in BSSB's 'True Love Waits' campaign.

EDITORS' NOTE: This story was inadvertently left out of (BP) on Tuesday, July 13.
We apologize for the error. It will be included in the mailing for Wednesday.

Illinois Baptists keep cooking
while Mississippi River rises

By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press
7/14/93

PLEASANT HILL, Ill. (BP)--A giant, gleaming ribbon of plastic stretches from north to south to mark the top of a recently heightened levee. Men and women, like ants on an ant hill, scurry here and there on one side of the earthen works. On the other, the brown waters of the Mississippi River speed southward.

Down river several miles, about 50 people in the town of Mozier are cut off by the rising river waters. They have no levee to protect their homes.

The workers along the levee, stranded residents in Mozier and hundreds of others in western Illinois have been eating meals cooked with Southern Baptist hands for more than a week.

Illinois Baptists' Brotherhood has set up its mobile disaster unit in Pleasant Hill, which is on rising ground at the edge of "the bottoms" several miles east of the river.

The Baptist involvement is part of the larger Red Cross disaster relief effort. Illinois Baptists cook hot meals that are loaded into Red Cross vehicles and taken to various sites along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

There, volunteers in boats, trucks and all-terrain vehicles carry the food to hungry people.

Preparation of the meals is Baptists' most-visible response as a group but there are individual Baptists up and down the river who also have pitched in to help the volunteer efforts.

The Illinois disaster unit arrived in Pleasant Hill on Saturday, July 3.

Through July 13 the Baptists had prepared about 40,000 hot meals, with the daily average then at about 4,000, according to Joe Shelton of Meadowbrook Baptist Church in Moro.

Seventeen Baptists were working at the unit July 13, and Shelton said most were spending four to five days at the site.

At most disaster sites, the Baptist crews serve meals at the unit and also ship out food on Red Cross trucks called ERVs (emergency response vehicles). In Pleasant Hill, however, there is no serving line at the unit.

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Virtually all of the food is being taken, via ERVs, to the people in need.

To get the food into Mozier, Red Cross volunteers put servings into covered containers, then local residents load the food -- along with fruit, drinks and the daily mail -- into an aluminum boat. The local people then take the food to each home where residents remain along flooded Highway 96.

Flooding is not unusual in the area, but Vicki Angel said this is "the first time Mozier has gotten any help."

There is only one church in town, the Church of Christ. A Christian church closed down some time ago.

At the levee, the hard work of sand-bagging produces hardy appetites and big thirsts. The men and women there have dark brown, red-tinted skin as a brand from the hot sun. Shirts are wet with perspiration. And arrival of a basket of tomatoes produces excitement.

"We've got the best levees along the Mississippi," said Pleasant Hill resident Jerry Rodhouse. "The livelihood of all of western Illinois depends on this" effort to save the levees.

The bottom land that stretches out between Pleasant Hill and the river is filled with acres of corn, beans and wheat. Those crops are on land that would be under water if not for the levees.

"A lot of this crop hasn't been paid for yet," Rodhouse said. "This crop has to come in or (the farmers) are done."

The "goodness of the volunteers" is appreciated, added Rodhouse, who is a Methodist, "especially those who are sending prayers."

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Baptist leader says it's time
for revival in Middle East

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
7/14/93

SANTA CLARITA, Calif. (BP)--"Everywhere in the world, every continent has experienced revival ... but never in the Arab world for 13 centuries," observed Ghassan Khalaf, a Baptist pastor from Beirut, Lebanon.

"We feel it is our turn," he declared.

Khalaf is president of the Lebanese Baptist Convention and newly elected president of that convention's theological seminary. He was a principle speaker at the annual Middle Eastern Conference sponsored by California Southern Baptist Convention July 2-5 in Santa Clarita.

Nearly 300 attended the conference, said to be the largest of its kind sponsored by Southern Baptists.

Khalaf spoke several times during the four-day gathering held over Independence Day weekend.

Other speakers included Nassat Ghally, professor from University of Cairo, Egypt; Nageeb Labeeb, internationally known music leader from Egypt; Lon Chavez, director of the CSBC missions growth division; Khalil "Charlie" Hanna, CSBC missionary to Middle Easterners in California; and Rodney Webb of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board language missions department.

Speaking to Middle Eastern pastors and others attending the conference, Khalaf stressed the need to be faithful in attending church services and in tithing.

"Everyone who commits himself to church services worships God," he said. He also encouraged participants to "be faithful in giving the tithe -- regularly, faithfully, with joy -- to the church, not to some other cause.

"Give gifts to others, but the tithe is the Lord's to spread the gospel," Khalaf said.

In an interview with The California Southern Baptist newsjournal, Khalaf said there is "greater openness to the gospel" than he has ever seen. "I feel now is our time in the Middle East," he said.

During the past year Hadath Baptist Church, where Khalaf is pastor, has started seeing new converts from Muslim backgrounds. "This means a lot when you know for 15 years we have (had) fighting between Christians and Muslims," Khalaf said.

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Political and social changes in the world and powerful Christian radio broadcasts "like a bombardment covering North Africa and the Middle East" are "compelling people to be open to new religions, ideas" and schools of thought, Khalaf said.

"You can be sure of thousands and thousands of secret believers in Christ in the Arab world," he asserted. "As it happened in Berlin and the U.S.S.R., the Lord can do it in the Middle East, too.

"We are waiting for revival in the Middle East," he said.

When revival finally comes to the perennially troubled region, Khalaf said Middle Eastern Christians hope to be an effective witness not only to the Arab world but to Israel as well.

"If we live there, we live on this hope," Khalaf said. "We will be more effective than Americans coming to the Jews. We have great expectations."

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Participants find help, hope
at Middle Eastern conference

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
7/14/93

SANTA CLARITA, Calif. (BP)--Becoming a Christian in the predominantly Muslim culture of the Arab world poses more than a few problems for Middle Eastern converts, even in ethnically diverse California.

Estimates place the number of Middle Easterners in the Golden State, many of them followers of Islam, as high as a half million. And Muslims, considered one of the fastest-growing religious groups in the world, are having an increasing presence in California as witnessed by mosques springing up around the state.

Leaving Islam is considered blasphemy in some parts of the world. Arab converts to Christianity often are shunned by their Muslim families. Some are tortured in an attempt to force them to renounce Christianity. To refuse is to risk death.

Of course, the prospect of death is less severe among California's Middle Eastern Christians. But the prospect of finding help for reaching other Middle Easterners with the gospel is what drew many of the nearly 300 participants attending the California Southern Baptist Convention's annual Middle Eastern Conference in Santa Clarita July 2-5.

And while many found help in what speakers said during general sessions and in special interest seminars, some also found new hope.

"I get encouragement from the other pastors and all their testimonies about what God is doing through the people," said Basim Karoumi, pastor of Arabic Church of San Jose, a mission sponsored by First Baptist Church of Campbell.

Born in the biblical city of Ninevah and raised in Baghdad, Iraq, Karoumi has lived in America nearly eight years. His background is in accounting but he also is a graduate of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., with a masters degree in religious education.

Karoumi noted that because many Arabic people in America are unfamiliar with Christian Scripture, the conference helps him help them.

"Many Middle Easterners don't know how to open the Bible," he explained. "Here they learn how many books there are, how spiritual it is. This is a good environment," Karoumi said.

Karoumi met his fiancee, May Shammass of San Diego, at a previous Middle Eastern Conference. Shammass said she attended again this year "to be charged more ... to have more Holy Spirit."

Like many Arab Christians, Shammass said she often finds it hard witnessing to, or even being accepted by relatives.

"It is very difficult," Shammass said, recalling efforts to explain her faith to her mother and sister. "In the beginning they were more than upset.

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"But praise the Lord!" Shammass continued. "The Lord just touched my sister." And although her sister still has not become a Christian, Shammass said that during a recent visit "she was more open than before."

In the meantime, Shammass said her own faith and witnessing have been strengthened by attending the Middle Eastern Conference. "I always tell people definitely how I came to the Lord," she explained.

Jesse Yousef operates a service station in Ontario. Born into a Coptic Christian family in Cairo, Egypt, Yousef came to California from Argentina two years ago. After meeting Khalil Hanna at a Bible study, Yousef attended his first Middle Eastern Conference this year and found it helpful.

"It is very nice for the future, for helping with the problems of life and teaching children how to go to church and be nice," Yousef said.

Asked if he thought the training would help him have a bolder Christian witness, Yousef replied without hesitation. "Sure, of course," he said. "I am strong with Jesus Christ!"

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AP article highlights
BSSB fitness program

Baptist Press
7/14/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--A Christian-based weight loss program distributed by the Baptist Sunday School Board is receiving national attention, thanks to an article carried by the Associated Press news service.

"First Place: A Christ-Centered Health Program" was referenced in a recent article by AP religion writer David Briggs that discussed the link between faith in Christ and good health.

"The long-held mutual suspicion between the professions of health and religion has slowly broken down in recent years as several studies have shown the value of faith in aiding recovery from spiritual and mental illness," the article states. "Institutional churches are encouraging members to be careful how they treat their bodies as acts of faith."

"First Place" -- begun more than a decade ago at First Baptist Church of Houston and now offered in some 1,450 churches -- was cited as an example of how religious denominations are beginning to pay more attention to health and fitness. The program combines the disciplines of prayer and Bible study with practical information about nutrition, fitness, self-control and healthy eating habits.

"Since the article starting appearing in newspapers, I've gotten calls from all over the country," said Linda Coombs, assistant editor in the BSSB's discipleship and family adult department, who was quoted in the AP article. "People are wanting to know more about the program, how it works, how to order it." Coombs leads a "First Place" group at the board and has been a participant at her local church.

"We put Christ in first place in our lives and then he gives us help and the strength to deal with our weaknesses," Coombs was quoted as saying.

As another example of increased church-related attention to health and fitness, the AP article also mentioned a policy statement approved by the 205th assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The statement urges church members to pay attention to diet, exercise, stress control and rest and encourages churches to provide a smoke-free environment in their buildings.

More information about "First Place" is available by calling Kay Moore, discipleship and family adult department, (615)-251-5612.

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Saddleback graduates first class at Hispanic Pastors' Training Center

By Mark A. Wyatt

SANTA ANA, Calif. (BP)--Graduates are often reminded that a commencement ceremony means more than students completing a course of study; it also signals a beginning.

But for 14 men and five women who made up the first graduating class from Hispanic Bible Training Center in Santa Ana, a commencement service June 30 signalled 10 beginnings.

That's how many new churches are being planted throughout the Orange County Baptist Association by the center's first graduates following months of academic study and hands-on ministry.

Located in Santa Ana, the center is sponsored by Saddleback Valley Community Church in Mission Viejo.

"This training concept takes us back to our roots as Southern Baptists," said Glen Kreun, executive pastor of the Southern Baptist congregation. Kreun said new churches are needed to serve the growing Hispanic population in California.

"The training center will provide a practical type of education and experiential training" for men and women who do not qualify for seminary training, Kreun said.

The initial class featured students with a variety of educational backgrounds, including high school graduates, some with college training and one with a medical degree from Mexico.

For nine months students spent five hours a day in classroom instruction and another six hours daily in the ministry areas where the new churches are being started. During that period the students visited 13,798 Hispanic homes, conducted 592 Bible studies and helped lead 2,442 people to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

Yamile Fernandez, pastor of Centro Familiar Cristiano Buenas Neuvas (Good News Family Christian Center) in Santa Ana, envisioned the training center three years ago. It became reality when 19 students began their studies in October 1992.

Fernandez serves as one of eight instructors at the center.

Rick Warren, senior pastor of Saddleback church, addressed the graduates in Spanish. Warren joked that he had set a goal to learn Spanish "so I will be able to speak with everyone in heaven!"

In his charge to the graduates, Warren noted "there are literally millions of Hispanic people in Southern California who need to know Christ. Each one is a person God loves and Jesus died for.

"We must build hundreds of new churches to reach Orange County for Christ," Warren said.

Noting he had seen Saddleback grow from just one family to an attendance of more than 8,000, Warren offered encouragement to the graduates.

"Wherever God leads you, he will also provide for you," Warren said. "God's work, done in God's way will not lack God's support."

God's timing is always perfect, Warren said. "Sometimes you will be tempted to become impatient. But God knows what he is doing. At the right time, you will receive the answers to your prayers."

Warren concluded by urging the graduates: "Never give up! Great people are just ordinary people who keep on doing what is right, even when they don't feel like it."

Doyle Braden, Orange County Baptist Association director of missions, received special recognition for his help with the center and support in starting the new churches. Two of the new Hispanic churches are being started in Orange, two in Anaheim and one each in La Habra, San Juan Capistrano, Lake Forest, Santa Ana and Placentia. A bilingual church is being established in Tustin.

The occasion also was marked by congratulatory messages from state and national Southern Baptist leaders. Larry Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, sent a letter saying he was "impressed and humbled at the commitment and dedication of these students"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please substitute the following story as an update of the (BP) story with the same headline dated 7/9/93.

Catholic leaders express interest
in BSSB's 'True Love Waits' campaign

Baptist Press
7/14/93

By Chip Alford

NASHVILLE (BP)--Leaders at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington have expressed interest in possible involvement in the Baptist Sunday School Board-sponsored "True Love Waits" campaign.

Richard Ross, youth ministry consultant at the BSSB and one of the coordinators of the sexual abstinence campaign aimed at teen-agers, met July 13 with leaders from the bishops' Secretariat for Family Laity, Women and Youth.

"They have expressed interest in the campaign, and we have made plans for further dialogue," Ross said.

While in Washington, Ross also made preliminary inquiries into obtaining a permit for the display of between 500,000 and 1 million sexual abstinence covenants signed by youth from across the country. Plans call for the "True Love Waits" covenants to be displayed on the Mall in Washington on July 29, 1994, during "DC '94," a multi-denominational youth rally. About 15,000 teens are expected to attend the event, which is being sponsored by Youth for Christ, a nondenominational youth ministry organization based in Denver.

"DC '94" participants will be invited to join together for prayer around the covenants and then hear a concert featuring contemporary Christian artists like Steven Curtis Chapman, Petra and Degarmo and Key.

"True Love Waits," first introduced in April at a nationwide youth conference in Nashville, already has been endorsed by several other denominations and para-church groups, including: Youth for Christ; Youth With a Mission, Port Orchard, Wash.; National Network of Youth Ministries, San Diego; Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn.; Reachout Ministries, Norcross, Ga.; Student Discipleship Ministries, Fort Worth, Texas; and Son Life Ministries, Wheaton, Ill. Christian authors and speakers James Dobson and Josh McDowell also have expressed support for the campaign.

News about the campaign also has been reported by media from across the country, including the New York Times, Time magazine, The Washington Times, CNN Radio, The Houston Post and the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN).

"In the beginning, 'True Love Waits' was envisioned as a campaign for just Southern Baptists. None of us anticipated the interest other denominations and religious organizations have shown," Ross said.

"We are thrilled with the response and the potential impact a broad, multi-denominational campaign could have on the national conscience."

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