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Baptist volunteers rallying
to aid Flood of '93 victims

By Tim Palmer

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ST. LOUIS (BP)--The year 1993 will forever be remembered in the Midwest as the year two sleeping giants -- the Mississippi and Missouri rivers -- awoke.

Jim Furgerson believes the Flood of '93 could help wake up another sleeping giant: Baptist men. Furgerson is national disaster relief coordinator for the Southern Baptist Convention Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn.

"We have a tremendous opportunity to minister," he said July 25 while riding in a van to a Baptist disaster relief center in Quincy, Ill.

Furgerson -- along with Brotherhood Commission President James Williams, Missouri Baptist Convention Executive Director Don Wideman and Missouri disaster relief director Jim Albers -- visited Baptist flood relief sites at Cape Girardeau and St. Louis, Mo., and Quincy.

Some of the numbers Furgerson can cite indicate Baptist men have been stirring already. They found time to build 408 churches from the ground up in 1992 -- the same year Hurricane Andrew struck south Florida. There, Baptist relief workers prepared and served an estimated 4 million meals to victims and workers -- enough to fill a line of tractor-trailer rigs stretching 72 miles.

Put a man on an ERV (emergency response vehicle) run, Furgerson said, and let him experience a bunch of dirty children hugging him around the legs because they are hungry and he's brought them food. Do that and you've got a committed volunteer. "When missions grabs his heart, it grabs his pocketbook," Furgerson added.

Two other elements of disaster relief contribute to its appeal. The chance to tell war stories is one; the chance to use nifty equipment is the other.

"We've got some who pray for disasters," said Williams, laughing. Longtime volunteers sport Red Cross pins from various relief jobs on their yellow caps. Some wear "Andrew Busters" buttons.

Talk during breaks turns to Andrew, or Hugo, or Bob. Lack of a name notwithstanding, the Flood of '93 will generate its own stories.

"It's really rough up here because it's so spread out," said Tennessee volunteer Ed Simpson. He explained the Andrew volunteers had the satisfaction of seeing the people they were helping.

Not only can most of the flood workers not see the people they're helping, they cannot see an end to the flooding. Albers described the woeful expressions on the volunteers' faces at Edmundson Road Baptist Church in St. Louis during a downpour July 23.

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Every time the Missouri or Mississippi reaches a new crest, he pointed out, the clock that will tick until cleanup can start goes back to zero.

When the "mud-out" does begin, the Kentucky disaster relief team will be ready with its new sump pumps, which are placed neatly beneath the trailer that serves as the team's command post at First Southern Baptist Church in Quincy.

In Cape Girardeau, Tennessee disaster relief director Cameron Byler proudly showed the visitors a new truck and a new trailer. An anonymous layman gave him \$50,000 and told him to go buy a new disaster unit, Byler said above the din of generators and exhaust fans on the First Baptist Church parking lot where the team set up shop.

He pointed out "anchor points" on the corners of the vehicles. "You can drop a helicopter and up and go."

The approximately 60 volunteers from Tennessee brought cots and sleeping bags and are staying in the church activities building. "It's kind of like the Holiday Inn for us, from what we're used to staying in," Byler said.

Wideman described the July 25 trip as overwhelming on two counts -- the extent of flooding as seen from the air and the extent of goodness and generosity as seen in the volunteers who had traveled long distances to help.

He said he was impressed by the relief teams' ability to feed large numbers of people and by the number of workers taking part in the effort. More trained volunteers are needed in Missouri, he acknowledged.

Volunteers from other states are eager to pitch in on the Flood of 1993. Albers said South Carolina and Oklahoma Baptists were "chomping at the bit" to send in their disaster relief teams.

Williams said the volunteers at the three sites "represent the bedrock of Baptist people."

Many of those volunteers are women, and women put together the majority of the 1,300-plus "care kits" that were assembled at the Quincy site July 25. The kits for flood victims include toothbrushes, combs, washcloths and other grooming items, and toys for children.

One person who appreciates such efforts is Sharon Oryall, assistant director for Missouri-Illinois flood relief for the American Red Cross. The group visited the Red Cross operations center in St. Louis the afternoon of July 25.

Oryall worked with Baptists after Hurricane Andrew and now she's doing it again. "I don't know -- in several different areas -- how we could do without them," she said.

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Disasters also bring strains
to emotions, relationships

By Shari Schubert

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ST. LOUIS (BP)--When disaster strikes, there is a tendency to think first of physical needs -- protecting property and lives, finding shelter and food, salvaging possessions. But neglecting emotional needs at such a time is a dangerous mistake, mental health professionals warn.

In a handbook for flood victims titled "Repairing Your Flooded Home," the American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency emphasize that Step No. 1 is: "Take care of yourself first."

"With all the cleanup and repair jobs awaiting you, it may seem odd to spend the first chapter of a flood recovery book talking about emotional issues," the publication states. "But a disaster can do damage beyond the obvious destruction and debris you see everywhere. You should recognize that the flood can take its toll on you as well as your property."

The stakes can be high. While residents in the Missouri River town of Hermann are struggling to cope with this year's flood, many -- including First Baptist Church pastor Dennis Cebulak -- can still remember one of the tragic results of the flood of 1986: An elderly woman walked out into the water and drowned.

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Hoping to alleviate the stress and depression that might precipitate a repeat of that tragedy, community leaders in Hermann are trying to keep things as normal as possible in the wake of this summer's flooding, Cebulak added. With the encouragement of the city's police chief, the church went ahead with its Vacation Bible School parade last weekend, altering the route to circumvent flooded streets.

Working to re-establish routines and normal activities is one of many healthy ways of coping with the flood of emotions that inevitably follows a disaster.

People who are victims of a disaster experience grief, just as one would experience with death or any other significant loss, explained Emily Adams, a Red Cross mental health officer currently working in Missouri.

The first response to disaster often is shock. The body responds to perceived danger by increasing the flow of adrenalin, explained Paul Hamilton, a hospital chaplain and coordinator of emotional needs ministry for South Carolina Brotherhood disaster relief. That "fight or flight" response often is followed by physical exhaustion.

Other initial responses may include fear or disbelief. People may have difficulty making decisions, even about things not flood-related -- such as what to cook for a meal, said Adams, a licensed clinical social worker from Irvine, Calif.

Initial responses are not all negative. Victims may seek help and information for themselves and their families. They may seek to help other disaster victims. They may begin planning what they will do about cleanup when the waters go down.

Once the initial crisis is over, victims may have other emotional responses. Behaviors indicating people are having difficulty handling their situation include inability to talk about it without getting upset; withdrawal from family, friends or social activities; outbursts of anger; increased substance abuse; and domestic violence.

People sometimes express anger about the disaster indirectly, Adams noted. They may blow up over some seemingly small matter, such as having to wait in line.

At this stage, people also may experience physical symptoms such as changes in appetite or digestive problems; difficulty in sleeping; headaches; and increased effects of allergies, colds or flu.

They may experience feelings of guilt over not being able to prevent the disaster, or anxiety about the future.

Children's responses may include thumb-sucking or bed-wetting, clinging to parents, reluctance to go to bed, nightmares, fantasies that the disaster never happened, crying and screaming, withdrawal and immobility, inability to concentrate and refusal to attend school or problems when they do attend.

"We're not talking about people going crazy," Adams emphasized. "We're talking about people who are having a hard time getting through a hard situation."

Victims can help themselves by eating properly -- not meal-skipping or living on junk food; getting enough rest; and avoiding excessive use of alcohol, Adams suggested.

One of the most difficult aspects of current flood situation in the Midwest is the long-term nature of the crisis, counselors agreed. For more than three weeks now, the rivers have crested, fallen and crested again. It may be weeks yet before home and business owners can return to flooded areas to begin damage assessment and cleanup. Meanwhile, many are living in cramped -- and sometimes costly -- temporary quarters, and all they can do is wait.

Loss of privacy and loss of familiar routines create stress. Parent-child and spouse relationships may be strained. Thom Meigs, professor of pastoral care and psychology of religion at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., noted intimacy between couples may get "waylaid" as they deal with other demands.

Couples need to take time out from coping with the crisis to spend some private time together, counselors said. Parents need to take time to do things with their children. Individuals and families need to take time to do some things that are not flood-related, such as going to church, going to a movie, spending time with friends.

Also, "We encourage people to give themselves time to feel bad," Adams said.

While Adams believes the waiting is the hardest part for flood victims, Meigs thinks the greatest difficulty may come when they have to go back to their homes, farms and businesses and face the mess -- mud, snakes and debris; buildings damaged or destroyed; molded carpets and furniture; crops rotting in the fields; and a smell that will linger for who knows how long.

For many, that's when the bitter reality will sink in that the energy they expended in sandbagging, pumping and moving possessions to higher ground was for naught, Meigs pointed out. "It's as if those efforts didn't count."

The loss involved is not just the loss of material possessions, Meigs added. There is a sense of "losing place," the loss of "a lot of stuff that symbolizes home" -- photos, keepsakes, farms or homes that have been in families for generations.

Despite the magnitude of the loss, about 70 percent of people affected by a disaster will be able to work through the emotional issues on their own, Hamilton said. "The other 30 percent really need some help."

Hamilton is a volunteer with the National Organization of Victim Assistance (NOVA), a Washington-based nonprofit organization, which sends teams to work with people in communities affected by disasters ranging from natural catastrophes to plant explosions and crimes. One thing teams try to accomplish in "debriefing" sessions with victims is to help them know what to expect, he said.

"Sorting things out early" often helps people avoid post-traumatic stress disorder, he explained. When they realize sleeplessness or crying, for instance, are normal reactions, they are better equipped to cope.

Red Cross provides counseling along with other disaster-related services, not only for victims, but for relief workers to help them manage the stress so they can provide better service, Adams said. Knowing there will be long-term needs after Red Cross emergency personnel have left an area, the organization also works with local mental health agencies to equip them to deal with counseling needs.

When possible, Red Cross counselors refer clients to local resources, including churches, Adams noted. "We ask them, 'What is your normal support system? Who do you talk to when you're troubled?'" If they have ties with a church, encourage them to use those ties, Adams said.

What can church members do to help when disaster strikes? "The normal kind of neighborly things you would do anyway," Adams said. That might mean inviting them over for a meal or offering to baby-sit or helping with cleanup.

After a disaster, "your life's never the same again," Hamilton acknowledged. A damaged home can never be put back quite like it was before. People don't feel quite as safe anymore. But along with that vulnerability, he emphasized, people learn "ultimately, all we can do is trust God."

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Speaker: faith stronger
than fear of witnessing

By David Winfrey

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Christians afraid of witnessing should trust the same faith they used to receive salvation, a speaker said during Home Missions Week.

"It takes the same faith to witness that it does to receive Jesus as Savior," said Stan Clark, a Mission Service Corps volunteer with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's personal evangelism department.

Fear is natural but God intends for Christians to overcome it and share their faith with others, Clark said.

"Fear is Satan's secret agent, the anchor that holds us back from sharing our faith. If we don't overcome the fear, Satan will silence us."

Fear can actually be beneficial, Clark said, because it humbles the witness to rely on God and points the person being witnessed to towards the power of God, not the power of the witness.

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"Fear keeps us from appearing cold or too professional," he said. "Fear (also) elicits the sympathetic listening of the lost person."

Christians should not assume that fear is God's way of telling them that witnessing is not their gift. "Witnessing is something God wants all of us to do, and he has equipped all of us to do."

Clark recalled one person who was saved after listening to an elderly lady present the gospel by nervously reading a tract. The listener wasn't originally interested, he said, but was impressed that she would take the trouble to witness despite being obviously uncomfortable.

Clark defined five ways to help overcome the fear of witnessing:

-- Have a plan. "It helps to overcome fear to know you have a planned approach."

-- Know the purpose. Realize that witnessing is the fulfillment of God's plan for Christians, he said.

-- Pray. Be in communion with God to seek his direction and intervention in the life of the person being witnessed to, he said.

-- Presume all people are lost and receptive. "Most people really want to know how they can be properly related with the Lord."

-- Practice. Begin to feel more comfortable hearing yourself present the gospel, he said.

"One thing you can be sure of is you have everything you need to be the witness God wants you to be," Clark said. "If you want to defeat Satan, then be obedient when you have the opportunity to witness."

Clark said Christians should be more concerned about being faithful to opportunities than the response of the person being witnessed to.

"Not everybody will respond, but everybody ought to have the opportunity to respond," he said. "The only way that's going to happen is for every Christian to be obedient."

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Jesus: the first
resort missionary?

By David Winfrey

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Jesus, who called his disciples from the lake side and witnessed while traveling through Samaria, was the first resort and leisure missionary, a special ministries consultant said during Home Missions Week.

"Jesus reached out to people in all sorts of settings to get them into the kingdom," said John Farris who is based in Missouri. "He wasn't in the synagogue too much was he?"

Churches sometimes question the validity of ministries in resort and leisure settings, said Farris, who has been in such mission activities 26 years. "People are geared to in-house ministry, and they think if it doesn't happen in the four walls it doesn't count."

But some people's only opportunity to hear the gospel is when a Christian is meeting needs in a unique setting, he said. "We don't have to strive to bring acceptability to these ministries because Jesus did that."

Reaching people for Christ through resort ministries requires three things, Farris said:

-- Proper theology. Jesus didn't compromise the gospel when talking to a great prospect like the rich young ruler, Farris said.

-- Proper methodology. Jesus tailor-made his gospel message for each audience, Farris noted.

-- Proper base. Ministries should be congregational-based in order to draw volunteers and support from that church, he said.

Resort ministries also are dependent on good relations with the directors of the park, resort or event, he added.

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Farris described trying to establish a ministry for a boat race at the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri. After being rejected twice, the organizer smiled the third time he saw Farris coming through the door.

"He said, 'If you can get 36 people to park cars, you can do whatever you want to do,'" he recalled. "Everybody who came got parked by a Baptist. Everybody who got out of the car got a tract on how to get saved."

The key element of resort missions is service. Ministries range from day camps at state parks to offering cold refreshments at the beach, he said. "If we don't have a servant's heart, we can forget these types of ministries."

Resort ministries also can lead to church starts, as eight churches have resulted from resort ministries around Lake of the Ozarks, he said. "Our strategy is to reach the people as they're out in the resort setting and then get them into the local church."

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WMU members take time from
conferences to minister

By Susan Doyle

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--They thought they were going to learn how to be involved in missions. Not only did they learn how, they got a little practice.

More than 150 women, men, youth and children attending Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center July 17-23 spent an afternoon putting together ministry kits.

"The theme of our meeting was 'Serve in Christ's Name,'" said Bobbie Patterson, WMU associate executive director and coordinator of the meeting. "The whole meeting was ministry-oriented. We were pleased at the response of the people attending the conference. They were able to see missions as 'doing' as well as 'learning.'"

Soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, razors, washcloths and other items were donated by the people attending the annual WMU training conference. More than 250 hygiene kits were assembled using these items.

More than 60 pounds of food and enough school supplies for 100 children were also given by the conference participants.

As they helped assemble the kits, one adult was overheard explaining the project to a young child. "Meeting the needs of others is one way to say to Jesus, 'I love you.'"

The hygiene kits, food and school supplies will be distributed through the Neighborhood Baptist Center in Albuquerque, N.M., and the noonday program of Albuquerque's First Baptist Church.

The kits will allow Baptists in the Albuquerque area to minister in ways they couldn't have otherwise, according to Aquilla Smith, mission education/promotion director for the Baptist Convention of New Mexico.

Mission Service Corps volunteers working through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in the Las Cruces, N.M., area also will receive some of the items to use in their work.

Conference participants attending WMU week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center Aug. 21-27 also will assemble the same type of kits and are asked to bring the following items to donate: soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, razors, washcloths, notebook paper, pencils, pens, crayons and erasers.

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