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FIRST-PERSON

Pay raises given regularly
in Baptist flood relief work

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
8/31/93

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo. (BP)--Two or three times a day, you might get your pay doubled at this fast-food operation.

Someone might notice how hard you're working and exclaim to everyone, "We're gonna double his pay!"

The catch is, two times zero is zero.

But you don't work here for the money.

You work here because you were fortunate while others weren't, and, like my wife, Karen, your heart yearns to help. In this case, our house wasn't flooded by the Mississippi River and theirs was.

And they need something to eat, as do numerous other disaster relief workers and volunteer sandbaggers struggling to save levees along the Mississippi.

So, you make a few phone calls and find out about volunteering for the Tennessee Baptist disaster relief unit crew in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

And, soon after arriving there, you start getting your pay doubled.

We arrived at the unit around 7:30 a.m. on a Wednesday in mid-August. On-site coordinator Don Byrd of Knoxville immediately put me to work -- luckily -- slicing potatoes; Karen, chopping onions. She said it wasn't bad after the first four or five, and she and several others diced up dozens of pounds during the ensuing three hours.

The head cook this day is Ed Simpson, a retiree from Trezevant, Tenn., introduced by one co-worker as a former cook at the Waldorf Astoria and by another as a former cook on the Queen Mary.

Probably not, you conclude about Ed, especially after L.O. Miller, a retiree from Erwin, Tenn., tells you, "If a guy don't like to be kidded, stay home. We're gonna kid ya."

During your first hours on the job, co-workers ask where you live and what you do, and you ask the same and whether they've been on other disaster relief operations. Several tell of working in devastated south Florida after Hurricane Andrew; others, seemingly veterans at disaster relief judging by their steady teamwork, surprise you saying it's their first time out.

Simpson, meanwhile, adds streaks of salt, pepper and sugar to a mixture of green beans, potatoes and onions, explaining in low-key fashion he wants flood survivors and whoever else might eat his cooking to enjoy something "just like mama makes."

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The menu for each meal prepared by the Baptist team, Simpson explained, often is determined "by what we've got around" in food either donated to or purchased by the Red Cross.

No jobs are assigned in this operation at First Baptist Church in Cape Girardeau which prepared some 2,200 to 3,000 meals daily from mid-July through the end of August in mid-90-degree heat. "If you see something that needs doing, do it," they say. "Take a break whenever you need to."

Nevertheless, Bill Currington of Mascot, Tenn., noted he works harder as a relief volunteer than ever is required in his full-time job as an electrician.

Like ants busily working without any apparent pattern, volunteers in a short time might move from one cooking tent to the other, slicing potatoes or onions, frying chicken in one of eight deep pots, stirring vegetables on a cafeteria-type cooker, opening institutional-size cans of fruit or mixing an iced tea concentrate with a bag of ice and water from a hose, all the while wearing plastic gloves as required by the local health department.

The food, heated to 160 degrees, again to satisfy the health department, and drink are stored in "Cambros," sturdy plastic containers the size of an ice chest.

The Cambros then are loaded into Red Cross "Emergency Relief Vehicles" that arrive mid-morning and again mid-afternoon to begin their respective treks to flood-tormented communities.

And, of course, there's cleanup when the ERVs return the Cambros, beginning with a steam sprayer like ones used to clean greasy car engines.

Each time the ERVs come in, Baptists and Red Cross workers exchange greetings and talk about the heat, the river level, how the flood survivors seem to be faring and, sometimes, whether the Baptists' meal count in the Cambros has been on target.

"You look bad and you smell bad" at the end of the day, said volunteer Arthur Clifton of Knoxville, "but you sure feel good." He said his wife, Regina, also felt good about it, enough so to let him spend his 16th wedding anniversary with the team. Another volunteer, Gayla Shinlever, spent her 21st birthday in disaster relief, enduring constant kidding led in part by her brother, Ken, for how she looked 14, 16 or maybe 18 -- anything but 21.

"We're taking more back to the bunk than we started with that morning," said Tommy Smith, pastor of Natchez Trace Baptist Church in Camden, Tenn.

Miller confessed he chose golf instead of joining a volunteer team headed to Florida after Andrew.

"Golf used to be first with me," he said. "I got convicted about it. I've always been a taker. Now I'm going to be a giver. Lord willing, I'll be back if there's another one."

Don Colyer of Kingston, Tenn., moved on crutches and his lone leg after an amputation as he worked, explaining, "God gives you strength you never thought you had." His efforts are worth it "if I can just carry a glass of water," he said, "or pray for you."

"We become family," said Cameron Byler, Tennessee Brotherhood leader who thinks the Flood of '93 is the 50th disaster he's worked. "We get to know people from one end of the state to the other."

"You meet people you'll love forever," Miller added.

"It's cooperation and it's not caring who gets the credit," said Keith Lyle, a retired high school teacher and coach from Johnson City, Tenn. "It's 'us' instead of 'me.'"

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(BP) photo available upon request from the central office of Baptist Press.

Interfaith meeting with Clinton
excludes Southern Baptist leaders By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Bill Clinton called the White House's recent interfaith breakfast a "new beginning ... with a group of religious leaders from all faiths and parts of our country," but the invitation list excluded any official representation from the country's two largest denominations.

Neither the Southern Baptist Convention nor the United States Catholic Conference were represented officially among the 86 participants who heard Clinton, a Southern Baptist, ask for respectful discussion of issues by people who disagree in a 12-minute address after the breakfast. The National Association of Evangelicals also was not officially represented.

Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said he was "surprised that a meeting that was touted as ecumenical would be so non-ecumenical in its invitations. A meeting of religious groups that has no official representation from the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Association of Evangelicals or the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops may be many things, but ecumenical it is not."

Southern Baptists attending the breakfast were Cecil Sherman, coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization started by moderates within the SBC; James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; Oliver Thomas, the BJC's general counsel; and Rex Horne, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark. Clinton is a member of Immanuel.

Participants also included pastors and leaders from other Baptist bodies, mainline Protestant denominations, Jewish and Catholic groups. A few readily identifiable evangelicals, such as Ron Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action and David Neff of Christianity Today, also attended.

The breakfast was "only the beginning of the process" of outreach to the religious community, said Maria Tio of the White House media affairs office. Clinton will meet with smaller groups in the future, she said, and they are "hoping that it will include everyone."

Robert Dugan, director of NAE's office of public affairs in Washington, said the president feels more comfortable with leaders from the National Council of Churches, with whom he met in March, and "certainly knows that evangelicals were not a very supportive constituency (in the 1992 election), to put it mildly."

That lack of support was "because of some positions we have espoused on some very basic issues," Dugan said.

The CLC and NAE publicly have opposed Clinton's support of abortion and homosexual rights, while the Catholic Conference maintains a strong pro-life position.

The BJC's Dunn, who sat at the president's table and was among those consulted about the invitation list, told The Washington Times there was no attempt to apply a litmus test. There were pro-lifers among the participants and "a big selection of people from the left, middle and right," Dunn told the Times.

Dunn refused to talk with Baptist Press, alleging unfair treatment by the new service's Washington bureau in the past. Neither Sherman nor Horne were available for comment when called by BP.

Leaders from the SBC and NAE often were included in White House meetings during the administrations of George Bush and Ronald Reagan.

Neff, managing editor of Christianity Today, said he was not surprised by the exclusion of some conservative religious leaders.

"I think that those who have put themselves in opposition to the administration, not just criticizing policy but having generally criticized the administration in a negative fashion, are generally going to have a hard time getting access," he said.

Land said, "Such a distinction would not apply to the Christian Life Commission, because we have made it very clear in every instance we have been critical of the administration that we are doing so on policy grounds and we have specified the particular policies that were objectionable to the majority of Southern Baptists.

"We have been very careful to make it clear that Southern Baptists should pray for the president, as we are commanded to do by the Bible, and that our disagreements are with policy, not personalities. We will continue to evaluate the Clinton administration as we have previous administrations by their policy pronouncements and their policy actions. If the price to be paid for that is not being invited to the White House, so be it," Land said.

"We found that telling the truth as we saw it caused us to be less than welcome at times in the Bush White House, and it did not deter us from speaking the truth as we saw it. The same will be the case with the Clinton administration."

Neff said he thought Clinton probably took personally the motion to unseat Immanuel's messengers to the 1993 SBC meeting. In June, a motion to unseat Immanuel's messengers because the church had not disciplined Clinton for his support of homosexual rights was overruled.

In other action at the June convention, Southern Baptists voted to separate themselves from Clinton's pro-choice and pro-homosexual rights policies.

While the NAE did not have an official representative at the breakfast, its general counsel, Forest Montgomery, attended as an individual invited by the BJC's Dunn, Dugan said.

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**He hopes his mission trip
stirs other blind Baptists**

By Lonnie Wilkey

**Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--Just mention "Chile" to Charles Couey and then be ready for a long conversation.

The Nashvillian took part in a summer evangelistic crusade in Chile, serving as a preacher for one of the volunteer teams.

While hundreds have served in similar roles in Chile and other countries, Couey's trip was a bit unique: According to Jarvis Hearn, director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention's partnership missions department, Couey is the first blind Tennessee Baptist to participate in volunteer missions overseas. Couey, a computer programmer for the state of Tennessee, is president of the Southern Baptist Conference of the Blind.

Despite not being able to see, Couey had no reservations about leaving the country. "I strongly believe if God calls us to do something he is going to preserve us in it," he said.

Couey recalled a conversation he had in February with Hearn.

"I asked him if there was anything I could do in partnership missions. Without hesitating he answered, 'Yes, go preach in Santiago,'" Couey said. "I knew by his answer that it was what God had for me at this point in my spiritual life."

Couey said he was well-received by the Chilean people.

"Being myself and showing compassion for the people's needs is what God used as much as my preaching," he said.

The primary beneficiaries of Couey's love were children. Couey, who teaches 5-year-olds at Nashville's Park Avenue Baptist Church, said he held children all week, even while he preached.

One woman had said she could not attend the revival services at La Estrella (The Star) Church because there was no one to watch her baby. Couey held the baby while he preached so the lady would attend. She accepted Christ as her Savior during that week, he reported.

Richard Poe, a coordinator of the Tennessee/Chile partnership, reported Couey was effective because his love for the children impressed upon the parents that someone cared.

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During the eight services Couey conducted that week, there were 15 professions of faith and five rededications, one of which was his own.

"I got under conviction about the fact I could go to Chile to tell people about Jesus because they did not know my weaknesses.

"They saw me at a spiritual plateau. I asked the people of La Estrella Church to promise to pray with me about my rededication decision," he said.

The church members went a step farther. Their pastor asked the church to covenant to gather to pray for Couey.

Couey said missionary Jim Dobbins explained to him that in Chilean custom there is a difference between a promise and a covenant.

Chileans might break a promise but they will not break a covenant, Couey said. "I know they are praying for me."

A highlight for Couey came at the end of the crusade when he was asked by the Chile missionaries to preach the "victory night" message.

There were two university professors in the group and a number of pastors, Couey said. "I was honored to be asked to preach the victory night message."

Couey said he is "amazed" God would use him. "I spent 27 years running from God but he still uses me," Couey said.

Couey said he hopes his trip will be an inspiration to blind Baptists. "I want the blind to identify their spiritual gifts and use them in serving Christ wherever he might put them," he said.

He observed "none of what happened in Chile had anything to do with my blindness. It was with my availability to serve him."

"Next to my conversion and the family God has given me, the Chile trip was the greatest spiritual event of my life," Couey said.

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Garner-Webb launches
new M.Div. degree

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8/31/93

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. (BP)--Garner-Webb University's school of divinity launched its master of divinity program Aug. 23, adding to the master of arts in Christian ministry program it began during the spring semester.

A total of 44 students are enrolled in the school's new divinity school, including 10 women and three African Americans. Garner-Webb is affiliated with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

The school has scheduled a "Founders' Day Celebration" Sept. 13 at Boiling Springs (N.C.) Baptist Church which will include the installation of Bob Lamb as dean.

Lamb, 63, has been professor of religious education and religion at the university since 1979 and from 1962-76. From 1976-79, he was associate director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Seminary Extension Department. Lamb has earned the master of arts in religious education and doctor of education degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Sunday school quarterly gave
his witness what was needed

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
8/31/93

CARROLLTON, Ala. (BP)--God, providence, a director of missions and a couple in a stranded vehicle merged one steamy Sunday afternoon in Alabama recently resulting in changed lives and a better appreciation of Sunday school literature.

Ernie Carroll, Pickens (Ala.) Baptist Association director of missions, described in a letter to Southern Baptist Sunday School Board officials how the culmination of a long day on the preaching circuit "turned out to be an experience I will never forget."

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Carroll preached on a July Sunday morning at Mineral Springs Baptist Church in Millport, Ala., returning home that afternoon to prepare for a discipleship training class at nearby Carrollton Baptist, his home church.

His wife had become ill and Carroll was to lead her class at Carrollton where members were studying "Experiencing God".

"During that class, a man asked me how weekly visitation programs fit the idea that we must look for the activity of God, yet go out and visit even if we do not necessarily see God at work.

"I answered that God is going to save at any given time anyone he wishes and that I must trust God has been working in that person's life and preparing his heart."

Following the class, Carroll drove back to Mineral Springs to preach the evening service.

"As I made my way up to the church, I saw a stranded vehicle near the church. I thought for a moment, 'Wouldn't it be a shame for a person to break down in sight of a church and no one come to offer help?'

"So I pulled up and offered to help."

The couple said their car was running hot and they needed water but the man had nothing in which to carry it, Carroll said.

"I emptied a liter soft drink I had in my car and told him I would go to the church for water. As I left, I thought, 'He's asked me for water; now I'm going to offer him living water,'" Carroll said in his letter.

Carroll said circumstances did not seem to be in his favor. It was hot and worship was to start in 30 minutes so he knew he had to be precise and to the point.

"I realized I did not have a tract to use in witnessing to this couple. As I was wondering what to use that would be concise and make sure I would leave nothing out, I suddenly remembered that the Sunday school quarterlies have the plan of salvation outlined."

So Carroll said he grabbed a senior adult quarterly, returned to the waiting couple and witnessed to them after they had filled the radiator with water.

Carroll discovered the woman was a Christian but the man was not.

"I asked them if they died in a car accident on the way home, did they know if they would go to heaven? The woman answered 'yes,' but the man could not say if he would go to heaven."

So Carroll was given permission by the man to share the plan of salvation.

"When we got to the sinner's prayer, I read through it and asked if that prayer expressed a need in his heart at that moment. He said it did. I then asked him if there was any reason why he could not pray to receive Christ as Lord and Savior of his life. He said there was not.

"At that moment I led him through the prayer basically as it is printed in the quarterly. I felt the sincerity in his heart as he began to cry as he prayed.

"I want to thank the Sunday School Board for printing the plan of salvation in their literature," Carroll wrote. "Without it, I don't believe my witness would have been as effective. The timing was of the utmost concern. The preciseness of the plan left no room for doubt."

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