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Compassionate volunteers:
heroes to flood survivors

By Laurie A. Lattimore

Baptist Press
10/29/93

ANNADA, Mo. (BP)--Three months after the first onslaught of the Flood of '93, Nellie and Lyle Freeland stared at what was left of their mobile home in Annada and wondered if it would ever be repaired by the time cold weather set in.

All of their salvaged belongings sat in a neat pile 15 feet across and 4 feet tall in the middle of the floor -- one of the only sections that had not collapsed. New insulation had been installed at one end, but dirty paneling, rotted cabinets and rusty nails held the rest of the trailer together. The cinder blocks raising the trailer two feet already were sinking in the mud.

The couple, both in their 70s, slowly picked away at the walls, doing whatever they could to pass the time until a hired laborer showed up in the afternoon, if he came at all. Five feet of standing water had caused more than \$9,000 damage to their home, not including the loss of \$4,000 in tools and supplies in the shed, Lyle said.

"I wish those people had to go through what we're going through so they'd get out here and do something to help us," Nellie said, voicing her frustration with government assistance.

Her outlook brightened a few hours later, thanks to two college students from Monte Vista Baptist Church in Maryville, Tenn., who were with a volunteer crew helping rebuild in the area.

Russ McBrayer and Jeff Talley, students from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, tore out all the rotted walls and stripped old insulation. They completely gutted out the kitchen area, throwing most of the cabinets and appliances in the scrap pile, and made it possible to put in new insulation and walls.

"I am just so thankful for them, they have done a good work," Nellie said, unable to wipe the once-absent smile off of her face. "I just think they're great. They've done more good in the last hour than has been done here all last month."

The Freelands were just one of the families McBrayer and Talley had helped over a week's time. The young men are among the thousands of Southern Baptist volunteers from 27 states and Washington who have joined in the rebuilding effort. So far, 45 Missouri teams have worked on cleanup, along with a combined total of 135 out-of-state volunteer teams.

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"We saw the flood on television and watched the water carrying houses away, and we thought there must be a lot of people needing some help," McBrayer explained. "So we came up to help."

Keith McBrayer, Russ' father and also a volunteer, said the six-person Tennessee crew had spent the week doing "whatever we were told would help people." That included cleaning out sewage water, tearing out floors, disinfecting walls, putting up new insulation, painting and whatever else came up.

"We're not carpenters, but we knew people needed help," the elder McBrayer said. "Someday we might have a disaster and may need help. That's not why we're here, though. We just wanted to be here to do whatever we could."

The volunteer group spent the week working in the Missouri towns of Annada, Clarksville and Foley. They stayed at First Baptist Church of Elsberry, the command center for flood cleanup in that area.

Buddy Owens, pastor of the Elsberry church and command center coordinator, said water had not completely gone down there until a week earlier because of flash flooding in late September. Many residents in the Annada-Foley-Clarksville area have moved out and only half are likely to return.

Crop loss is extensive, Owens noted. A member in his church had more than 10,000 acres under cultivation before the flood. The farmer has eight acres now.

Annada, which is four miles inland from the Mississippi River, became engulfed by the mighty river that stretched a mile past the town of fewer than 100 people. Elsie Magers, 83, an Annada resident who has lived 30 years in the house that belonged to her mother, is getting ready to move back in after weeks of watching Southern Baptist volunteer groups put it back together.

The workers went beyond rebuilding, Magers said. "I just got a box in the mail from a team that sent me a new winter coat and a white sweater because they knew I had lost mine in the flood."

Don Anders, flood cleanup coordinator for the Missouri Baptist Convention, had high praise for the volunteers.

"The ones out here now are the really committed and compassionate people ... they are able to respond and really show a servant spirit."

Anders admitted he has been surprised by the high response of volunteer help through September and October, plus those already lined up for November projects. He has been working on scheduling teams to continue the rebuilding into the new year.

Part of the rebuilding effort's success has been due to the command center coordinators, Anders said. Command centers were established in churches along the 1,000 miles of flooded rivers. Coordinators work with local Red Cross representatives and city governments to find out where volunteers are needed. Then coordinators assign teams to specific jobs. Anders said the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission in Memphis, Tenn., will use Missouri's system as a model for other disaster relief.

"The Lord has really been in this plan because our idea actually worked," Anders said.

The greatest benefit of the rebuilding efforts, Anders emphasized, is their positive psychological and spiritual impact. The fact that something is being done to help victims is a vital ministry, he said.

"Rebuilding helps people cope and gives them hope," he said. "Their identity of security is their home and when they have lost that, a lot has been taken away."

"Our teams have given a tremendous amount of witness and support. FEMA comes in with all of the dollars and cents of the flood, and we can offer a Christian witness and compassion."

The spiritual witness is ever-important in the rebuilding phase of the flood.

"The magnitude of financial loss is astronomical," Anders said. "And when people have lost everything and see no hope, suicides happen. We're hoping to provide support to people who see no hope."

Gary Leazer, Larry Holly
comment on Masonic flap

By Martin King

ATLANTA (BP)--After an initial refusal to comment, the Home Mission Board official who was asked to resign over his continued involvement in the issue of Freemasonry has told Baptist Press he does not remember being instructed to refrain from such involvement.

Meanwhile, in a letter to Lewis, Larry Holly called for the Home Mission Board to "stand up and say 'We blew it!'" and conduct another study of Freemasonry. Holly, a physician from Beaumont, Texas, submitted a motion to the 1992 Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis resulting in the HMB's investigation of the organization.

Gary Leazer, former director of the Southern Baptist agency's interfaith witness department, submitted his resignation Oct. 22 after it was requested by HMB President Larry Lewis, based on publication of a speech Leazer made in August to a Masonic convention.

Lewis charged the speech violated explicit instructions to Leazer last spring not to be involved in the controversy.

Leazer, in a telephone conversation Oct. 28, said, "Dr. Lewis and I remember things differently. I do not recall being instructed that I was to have no further involvement with Freemasonry. I was only told that I was to have no further involvement in writing of the 'Report on Freemasonry.'"

"I have looked through my files, notes and personal journals and can find no notes that would indicate those instructions," Leazer said. "That is not how I recall the conversation."

Informed of Leazer's response, Lewis said he has a vivid memory of the conversation. "In fact, Dr. Leazer asked if he could fulfill speaking engagements on the issue and we told him 'no.'"

Darrell Robinson, HMB vice president of evangelism and Leazer's former supervisor, also stated the prohibition was clearly communicated. "Dr. Leazer was removed from the entire Masonry assignment and was instructed not to address the issue further," Robinson said.

In a letter to Lewis dated Oct. 27, Holly, as a "principle representative" of those challenging Freemasonry in Southern Baptist life, withdrew "any support and/or any endorsement of (the report and study on Freemasonry) which may have been implied" because of the board's "indefensible compromise" on the issue. Holly has criticized the study, but prior to the Southern Baptist Convention he encouraged support of the directors' report and its recommendation.

Holly called for HMB directors to "provide the SBC with an honest and objective study of one of the scourges on the Kingdom of God."

Lewis has repeatedly expressed confidence in the study as a scholarly investigation that is fair and objective. "To date no one has come forward to identify any significant error in this document," Lewis told Baptist Press, "and it is my opinion that we have done our task adequately."

Holly leveled several charges at Lewis personally as well as directors of the mission agency, including: the report was developed "under the direct supervision" of Masons, of Freemasonry sympathizers such as Leazer or of "those who were fearful" of Masons. He urged Lewis and the board to make a "public admission that fear caused us to compromise, but that we will tell the truth now."

In a letter to Holly, Lewis said he "absolutely rejects and resents these charges" and repeated his conviction the vast majority of Southern Baptists are satisfied with the Home Mission Board actions and desire no further resources be expended on the matter.

**SBC seminary enrollment
up for fall semester**

By Scott Collins

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The number of students enrolled in courses for credit at the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries is up 8 percent this fall, according to officials from the schools.

Five of the seminaries reported increases ranging from 28 percent to 3 percent. Only one school saw its enrollment drop.

"This report is encouraging for the seminaries and for Southern Baptists," said Russell H. Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and current chairman of the Seminary Presidents Council.

The largest increase came at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, which saw a 28 percent jump this fall. That increase reflects an 88 percent increase in the seminary's baccalaureate and pre-baccalaureate programs, which grew from 269 students last fall to 506 in 1993.

Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., each grew by 15 percent. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., reported a 10 percent increase followed by Southwestern at 3 percent.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was the only seminary of the six which reported a decline. Officials at the Louisville, Ky., school reported a 4 percent drop for the fall semester.

Overall, the six seminaries reported a total of 9,136 students enrolled in courses for academic credit, an increase of 650 students from 1992. That figure is the total non-duplicating student headcount.

Individual seminary fall enrollments are: Southwestern -- 3,458; Southern -- 1,807; New Orleans -- 1,682; Golden Gate -- 966; Southeastern -- 688; and Midwestern -- 535.

In addition to students enrolled in credit courses, the seminaries reported 30,942 people took classes for no credit. That number represents people enrolled in continuing education programs, lay study seminars and other programs sponsored by the six seminaries. Southwestern reported the largest headcount in those categories, with 23,743 participants.

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**Baptists, fair workers
rekindle friendships**

By Melanie Kieve

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10/29/93**

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP)--In the western North Carolina mountains, fall means many things -- cooler weather, brilliantly colored leaves, tourists by the droves. But for a particular set of autumn sojourners to the Asheville area, fall means a renewing of friendship with Buncombe Baptists.

The sojourners -- workers at this fall's Western North Carolina Fair -- renewed relationships with Buncombe Baptist Association volunteers who have ministered to them at the annual fair since 1990.

"Over the last four years we have built friendships with the fair workers and this year the harvest was ripe," recounted Carolyn Johnson Charles, director of church and community ministries for the association.

"Many of the workers were hurting, not only physically but spiritually, and they approached volunteers who have worked each year with the fair ministry," Charles continued. "They came with their hurts and burdens seeking relief, and they found comfort in human touch, in our listening and in the Scriptures."

Two professions of faith were made and several recommitted their lives to more faithful service, Charles noted.

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Volunteers from 11 churches in the association worked in four-hour shifts in four areas of ministry: the medical/dental van, disaster van, break tent and missions booth. At the medical/dental van, 31 volunteer medical and dental personnel treated 117 fair workers. Approximately \$200 in prescriptions, many drug samples and 200 hygiene kits were given out, according to Charles.

The disaster van was open each day for a "show-and-tell" in which fair-goers and fair workers were given ice water and information about the disaster van ministry, Charles said.

The break tent provided fair workers food and drink as well as blankets, clothes, shoes and towels. The break tent met an important need, Charles said, because many fair workers have few belongings and sleep in tents and trailers or on the ground.

The missions booth made fair-goers aware about the varying ministries of Buncombe association Baptists, Charles noted.

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Kieve is assistant editor of the Biblical Recorder, North Carolina Baptists' newsjournal.

FMB President Rankin issues
missions challenge to students By Brian Smith

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--God is calling Christians to lift up Jesus Christ and make him known to a lost world, the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board said during a chapel service Oct. 28 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Jerry Rankin told students the call to know Jesus Christ is a call to tell others about him.

"The purpose of God sending Jesus to die on the cross was nothing short of bringing redemption to all humanity, to all nations, that they might become his disciples," Rankin said. "God has never diverted from that purpose of bringing a lost world to redemption."

God's call to reach the lost world is personal and purposeful, Rankin said.

"Will we be obedient and be a part of God fulfilling his purpose?" he asked. "Will we recognize that he has given us the privilege of experiencing redemption through Jesus Christ, not for our own blessing and benefit, but so that we can become available to fulfill the Great Commission that all the world may know him?"

Rankin said God is intervening in human history beyond anything Christians could have imagined or anticipated. He cited countries such as Angola, Romania, Russia, Siberia, Mongolia, Morocco and Yemen which have become open to missionaries.

"God has seen the needs, hurts and longings of the people and is intervening to fulfill his purpose," Rankin said.

However, in acknowledging that only three people responded recently to 53 missionary requests in the Middle East, Rankin added, "I am convinced that God is calling out the laborers, but the laborers are not hearing and the laborers are not responding."

Saying he believes most people are not looking for a call "but a shove," Rankin said, "I don't believe God has given anyone the liberty to place a geographic restriction on the call on their lives. How can we expect God to give us both a specialized call and the liberty of doing anything and everything else we want when his purpose is so very clear? He's called us to give our lives in conformity to that purpose."

That call is from God himself, Rankin said, adding God doesn't call anyone without also providing the resources needed.

"When God calls, it's no longer optional," he said.

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Rankin is the third consecutive FMB president who earned his seminary degree from Southwestern. Along with students, faculty and staff from the seminary, more than 70 furloughing, retired and former missionaries living the Fort Worth/Dallas area attended the chapel service.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

BSSB to conduct
legal issues seminar

Baptist Press
10/29/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Can churches be sued for the sexual misconduct of their ministers?

Are churches liable for injuries sustained by members and visitors on church property?

How does the Americans with Disabilities Act affect churches' hiring and firing practices?

These are only a few of the questions to be addressed at the "Legal Issues in Th Church" seminar April 25-28, 1994, at the Baptist Sunday School Board headquarters in Nashville.

"Churches are being sued and pastors and church leaders need to be aware of that," said Jim Ryan, church business administration consultant at the Baptist Sunday School Board and coordinator of the seminar.

"This conference will offer the latest information on important legal issues, some practical ideas for avoiding lawsuits and an opportunity for church leaders to get their legal questions answered,"

A variety of topics will be addressed at the seminar, Ryan said, such as child abuse, sexual misconduct/harassment, employment law, hiring and firing practices, taxes, child care law, copyright law and many other legal issues.

One of the key seminar leaders will be Richard Hammer, editor of "Church Law and Tax Report," a bimonthly publication which provides legal and tax information for thousands of denominational and church leaders across the United States. Hammer, whom Ryan described as "one of the leading authorities on church law in the country," has written several books, including: "Pastor, Church & Law," "The Church and Clergy Tax Guide" and "The Church Guide to Copyright Law."

Other seminar leaders will include Julie Bloss, an attorney for the Southern Baptist Annuity Board; Jim Guenther, general counsel for the SBC Executive Committee; and Jim O'Dillon, minister of education and administration at Ooltewah Baptist Church in Ooltewah, Tenn.

BSSB personnel providing leadership at the meeting will include: Ryan; Norm Finney, manager of legal services; Larry Cannon, legal consultant; Joe Stacker, director of the church leadership department; Bruce Grubbs, manager in the church leadership department; Steve Lawrence, director of human resources; and Joe Richardson, personnel counselor.

The cost of the seminar is \$67 and the meeting is "open to anyone in the church who has administrative and personnel responsibilities," Ryan said.

For registration information, call the BSSB church program training center at (615) 251-2294.

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Steve Roberson named
president of TimeRite

By C.C. Risenhoover

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10/29/93

DALLAS (BP)--Steve Roberson has been named the first president of TimeRite, a solely owned subsidiary of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

For the past year Roberson has been executive vice president of TimeRite, which sells program and commercial time for ACTS, the RTVC's faith and family values cable TV service, and FamilyNet, the commission's broadcast television program service. Prior to that he was a sales representative for TimeRite.

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Prior to Roberson's promotion, Doug Dillard had served in a dual capacity as vice president of external relations and president of TimeRite.

In the early days of ACTS, TimeRite first operated as a syndication service to Christian and secular TV stations. In that form it became dormant in the late '80s but was revived in the early '90s to serve as a sales arm for ACTS and FamilyNet.

"I think the future for the RTVC is bright and exciting," said Roberson. "During the past several months I've had opportunity to meet representatives of several ministries interested in working with the RTVC through ACTS and FamilyNet. The Lord is opening doors everywhere. We're going to be working with the Sunday School Board, the Foreign Mission Board, the Home Mission Board, the WMU and other agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. But other evangelical groups are also interested in working with us. All I can see is growth and opportunity in carrying out the Great Commission."

RTVC President Jack Johnson said, "Steve Roberson is the kind of young man whose Christian commitment coupled with his business acumen is making a real difference in the way we carry out our mission. He has been an asset to the RTVC since first coming here as a seminary student."

Roberson, a native of Magnolia, Ark., graduated from Northeast Louisiana University in Monroe with a degree in pharmacy. He then worked in retail pharmacy in Shreveport, La., for five years where he was a member of and worked on the television crew of Broadmoor Baptist Church.

"That's where the seed was planted," he said.

In 1979 Roberson took a position as a staff pharmacist for the Veterans Administration in Shreveport. Four years later he was promoted to director of pharmacy for the VA in Chillicothe, Ohio. Two years later he enrolled in an executive MBA program at Ohio University while continuing to work for the VA.

"I had designs on getting into the pharmaceutical marketing area," he said. "That was my goal but it wasn't God's plan for my life."

Roberson earned his masters degree and in 1988 said he started feeling the call to go into Christian media.

"That seed that was planted at Broadmoor Baptist Church was beginning to grow," he said. "It was at a youth retreat where I started feeling the calling really strong. My wife, Faye, felt the same. We discussed my calling with a staff member at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chillicothe and he encouraged me to start looking at seminaries."

Roberson said he thinks the Lord led him to attend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, because it offers a communications program. When Roberson started to seminary, his wife, who worked for an insurance agency in Chillicothe, got a job in the RTVC's business services area.

He graduated from the seminary with a masters degree in communication in July 1991 and started working part-time in the commission's television production area. By that December he was a sales representative for TimeRite.

"In the small town where I was raised, I was a member of a small Missionary Baptist Church," said Roberson. "And when I was living in Chillicothe the American Baptist Church where I was a member was too small to have a television ministry. So God leading me to Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport was his way of giving me direction for my life."

Roberson said in looking for advertisers for ACTS and FamilyNet, TimeRite works with Christian publishers and music producers who have not done much television advertising.

"And in the secular area we look for family oriented companies and products that are not offensive to the Christian community," he said. "We make it very clear to advertisers whom we are serving."

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