

# (BP)

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EDITORS' NOTE: Tim Palmer traveled to Romania in December to complete the adoption of 6-year-old Andrei from an orphanage. Baptist Press asked Palmer, managing editor of Missouri Baptists' Word & Way newsjournal, to share his experience. A photo of Palmer and Andrei is being mailed to state Baptist newspapers from the Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

### FIRST-PERSON

His 'good bed' in Romania  
replaced by one in America

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

It's a metal crib, one of 15 plain metal cribs in the room where the little boys at the Special Garden orphanage sleep every night. I photographed the roomful of cribs when I went to Baia Mare, Romania, to get my son Andrei.

Now I look at the photo when I want to remember the life we took him from, in the hope and faith that we can give him a better life. Andrei looks at the photo differently. "It's a good bed," he says, pointing to the crib that was his.

Andrei is 6 years old and until mid-December he had never known life outside an orphanage. In his new life, he sleeps in the bottom bunk in a bedroom he shares with his brother, 8-year-old Geoffrey.

Sometimes Andrei misses the friends he left behind at Special Garden. My wife, Catherine, and I try to honor his grief, even as our hearts ache to see him feeling sad.

But children, thank God, are resilient. Soon the twinkle returns to Andrei's grey-blue eyes and he's back having fun.

He has a firm hold on our hearts. From the moment we met each other in a hallway at the orphanage, when a nurse told him I was his "tata" (father) and he would go with me to America, Andrei has been my son.

We weren't sure Andrei would know how to have fun. We weren't too sure of anything when we set out on the road to adoption, except that we wanted God's will to be done.

Andrei entered our consciousness one day last year when Cathy got a phone call from her friend and fellow missionary kid Janice Duffy in Tennessee. Janice and her husband, Roger, had adopted a baby girl out of Romania in 1991.

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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Now they were going to try to adopt her older sister, Janice reported -- and guess what? There was an older brother, too.

Cathy recently had finished writing her 10th novel, titled "For the Love of a Child," which has an MK heroine who adopts a 2-year-old. Life was imitating art -- we already had started the process to adopt a newborn in Missouri.

After agreeing among the three of us that adopting an older child would have many advantages -- he could play baseball with us, for one -- we turned our attention to Andrei. We and the Duffys worked through Nashville-based Small World Ministries, one of six U.S. adoption agencies authorized to do adoptions out of Romania.

If we quickly could move along on getting certified to adopt in Missouri, if we quickly could get started on U.S. government authorization to adopt overseas, if we quickly could fill out, fingerprint, sign, notarize, mail, overnight this form and that document and the other file ... maybe we could have Andrei home for Christmas.

And that's exactly what happened. Roger Duffy and I spent nine days in Romania -- two more days than planned -- and we arrived back in America Dec. 21 with Andrei and his sister Andrea.

Before our trip, the best advice I got concerning international adoption came from Sandy McLaughlin of Holt International Children's Services in Bucharest. I had asked her whether it was feasible to complete an adoption during a one-week stay in Romania.

"It is important to be flexible and patient," she advised. "Tight schedules tend to cause a lot of undue stress in the adoption process."

Our stay was not stress-free. One day we were waiting for a ride outside the Bucharest clinic where the children had medical tests required for a U.S. visa. Andrei had ventured off the walkway and was examining something he'd picked up off the ground. Suddenly I heard Roger exclaim, "It's vile."

What he had really said was, "It's a vial!" Andrei's object was a discarded, blood-stained glass vial. Fortunately I was carrying some sanitary wipes; his hands got a thorough scrubbing.

Andrei and I landed in St. Louis on Dec. 21. Our welcoming party was small -- Cathy, Geoffrey and Cathy's parents, Harold and Betty Cummins. But dozens of others shared the moment with us in spirit -- people who had prayed for us, helped us, encouraged us.

I came to realize that what we were doing struck a responsive chord in the hearts of people who love children.

And people in Romania love children, I discovered. Reports on American television of deplorable conditions at some orphanages have given the country a bad name, but as Sandy McLaughlin said, "They're doing the best they can with what they have -- and things have improved."

Small World representative Tudose "Doru" Diaconu talked about his country as we watched the Transylvanian countryside roll by on our 12-hour train ride from Bucharest to Baia Mare. Former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu had decided Romania should arrive at a population of 30 million by the year 2000. To that end, he outlawed abortion and made birth control unavailable.

"The official policy was to have a lot of children in the family, and if not in the family, in the orphanages." Ceausescu's reasoning, Doru explained, was that more young people in the work force would mean a better life for retired people.

Today Ceausescu is four years in the grave and Romania has 249 orphanages. At Special Garden, Adriana Herman is the doctor for 120 youngsters ages 3 to 8.

The first words she spoke to Roger and me went a long way toward easing my fears that the children had been in the care of uncaring people.

"It is hard for us to give you these children," she said.

We assured her they would be loved and cherished, and they are. And we promised to try to get her an otoscope -- an instrument to check for ear infections that no American children's physician would be without.

What about the children who are still there? They seemed happy enough, and the fact that Andrei sometimes misses the orphanage reminds us that to him it was home. He looks at his friends' pictures and says their names, laughing at certain ones.

I'm afraid they'll pass from his memory, and I suppose they must, to make room for new friends, for a whole world of knowledge opening up to him as an American kindergartener.

And of course we've entered a new world ourselves, as adoptive parents. Some people feel compelled to express their reservations or even give dire warnings about the "issues" we will have to deal with in the future.

Yes, we know the first years of a child's life are supposed to be the most important. But if everyone were afraid to adopt a child older than age 2, all those children would be consigned to a life without a family. They would miss out on knowing a parent's love, the first model for God's love.

I don't think that's what our heavenly Father had in mind. We're trusting in the sufficiency of his grace.

A few nights ago Cathy was tucking Andrei in and she asked him, "What about this bed? Is this a good bed?"

He looked at her and he looked around him and he replied, "It's a good bed."

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Korean adoptee focuses  
on Romanian orphans

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

BUCHAREST, Romania (BP)--For all the gifts Sandy McLaughlin brought to share, the world didn't exactly fling open its arms to welcome her on the cold dawn of Jan. 31, 1961.

In fact, she was one child too many for her Korean mother, who left her four days later near a police station in Seoul, South Korea.

Part of her umbilical cord was still attached when authorities found her and processed her at City Hall as an abandoned child.

But she believes God had a plan for her. Thirty years later, on a trip back to Seoul from her adoptive home near Erie, Pa., she began to understand it.

Now the 33-year-old social worker with smiling eyes is a Southern Baptist tentmaker in Romania, the last one approved before the Foreign Mission Board discontinued the program relating to Baptist professionals employed overseas.

She draws her paycheck from Holt International Children's Services -- the very agency that delivered her out of the bowels of a South Korean orphanage and into the waiting arms of a Baptist family when she was six months old.

Holt is one of six adoption agencies approved by the Romanian government to place abandoned children into families in the United States.

Foreign adoption is one way Romanians are reducing the number of children living in orphanages that sprouted like weeds during the reign of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Ceausescu aimed to strengthen the economy by pumping new blood into the labor force. He wanted enough babies to produce 30 million Romanians by the year 2000. Whether they were reared by families or state orphanages made no difference to him.

That's why in 1989, when Ceausescu was executed and Romanian-style communism toppled, hordes of children languished in orphanages. The crisis came under world scrutiny when American network TV documented it about a year later.

If McLaughlin's project with Holt is successful, it will increase the ability of Romanians to care for their children. She labors to help Romania rear its children in real families -- either the ones they were born into or with new Romanian parents. Foreign adoption then could be a choice in cases where children cannot be placed inside Romania.

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"The general population of Romanians love their children and will sacrifice their lives for them," McLaughlin said. But economics have forced them to let the state care for children they can't afford to feed and clothe.

McLaughlin's own beginnings drive her to lead the effort to keep kids out of institutions -- backed by a 30-member staff and funded through a three-year, \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. government.

"When I pick up one of these babies, I always see myself, I always feel myself," she said.

"Romanians have had the belief they are protecting their children by putting them in an institution. But children don't deserve to be in an institution. A child deserves to have a family.

"It bothers me when children are wet or want to be held, or are hungry and want to be fed, and nobody is coming to give them attention. I stress to people in our training: 'If you don't love them, who will?'"

McLaughlin came to Romania after sensing a distinct call to foreign missions in 1991 during one of her Holt-related business trips to Il San, the Korean orphanage of her beginnings. Her first visit there was a "Motherland Tour" with Holt when she was a college sophomore.

Romanians sometimes ask, "Why are you here? How long are you going to stay?" McLaughlin said. "I'm staying until the Lord calls me and tells me to go somewhere else or go on home."

Holt is an international Christian adoption agency started in 1956 by Harry and Bertha Holt. The Holts were moved by seeing the thousands of homeless children in South Korea after the Korean War and adopted eight of their own. McLaughlin has been working with Holt full time since 1986, and off and on since 1981. In the United States her job centered on helping Oregonians with adoptions.

Starting in 1990 she sensed a life shift coming. "I kept saying, 'Oh, everything is fine, Lord. I don't want a change in my life,'" she recalled. But after her soul-searching experience at the Il San orphanage, "I said, 'OK, I'll go. I'll go anywhere in the world that you want me to go.'"

That place was Romania.

Holt, which works in more than a dozen countries, became interested in Romanian children after TV coverage exposed the situation there. The agency sent a worker in early 1991 and won a grant that summer. McLaughlin arrived in October.

McLaughlin said she sees God having prepared her many years for the opportunity. That knowledge, however, has bloomed gradually, like a spring blossom reluctantly opening itself a petal at a time to the vestiges of winter.

"I see now how God has used all of the experiences I've had in my whole life right here in Romania through my work, through church, with people and with daily surviving," she said.

It wasn't always that clear, though. "I remember flying into Bucharest, seeing the lookout tower at the airport with guards and thinking, 'Oh my goodness, what have I gotten myself into?'"

Still, she has adjusted to Romania well, weathering long lines and a shortage of everything from potatoes to bread -- and bone-chilling, 40-degree temperatures in her apartment, where she often has no running hot water.

McLaughlin's project, "Future of Romanian Children," uses Romanian social assistants operating out of two centers. One is in Bucharest, the capital, and the other is in Constanta on the Black Sea. Workers identify children "at risk" of abandonment or already without known parents in orphanages, maternity hospitals and pediatric wards.

They help parents make a decision either to rear their children at home or give them to other Romanian families offering a home through adoption or short-term foster care. Healthy Romanian babies aren't as easy to adopt as it might seem; parents have legal rights to the children as long as they stay in contact with them.

Up to 30 percent of children in Romanian orphanages still have birth families who visit them regularly, McLaughlin estimated. Her project aims to aid the others. Of them, 30 percent have no family. The rest are "at risk."

McLaughlin knows how adoption by loving parents enhanced her chances of success. "My parents are my real parents," she said. "I wouldn't trade them for anything in the world. Next to God, they are the most important aspect of my life.

"When I walk into a room full of little kids with their arms reaching up to me, my only thought is, 'They need a family.' They need to have what I have," she said. "You want to grab them all up and take them under your arm or stick them in your pocket and say, 'Everything is going to be OK,' and take them home. But I can't."

Other people can. It's her job to help find them.

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(BP) photos (two horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet Newsroom.

EDITORS' NOTE: Families interested in adopting a child from Romania -- or other countries where Holt works -- may contact: Holt International Children's Services, P.O. Box 2880, Eugene, OR 97402, ATTN: Romania desk or Adoption Inquiries. Telephone: (503) 687-2202.

Mother Teresa decries abortion  
as Clinton listens at prayer event By Tom Strobe

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--With the pro-choice president of the United States sitting nearby, Mother Teresa decried the practice of abortion, calling it the "denial of receiving Jesus," at the annual National Prayer Breakfast Feb. 3.

The slight, elderly Roman Catholic nun's denunciation of abortion in the presence of Bill Clinton was "as bold a prophetic confrontation as I've ever witnessed," said Robert Dugan, director of the National Association of Evangelicals' office of public affairs. "It was electric in that ballroom, because most people there knew (Clinton) was hearing something that he would rather hear in private."

Mother Teresa, who won a Nobel Peace Prize for her ministry to the sick and needy in Calcutta, India, said in her keynote speech the "greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because Jesus said, 'If you receive a little child, you receive me.' So every abortion is the denial of receiving Jesus, the neglect of receiving Jesus.

"And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?"

Abortion "just leads to more abortion," she said. "Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love one another but to use any violence to get what they want."

It appeared the president "was a little embarrassed," said Dugan. About 4,000 people attended, according to an event leader.

Although "the place just came alive with vigorous applause," Clinton did not applaud when she denounced abortion, Dugan said. A review of a video of C-SPAN's live coverage showed Hillary Clinton, as well as Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, also not applauding at the head table.

Rep. Earl Hutto, D.-Fla., chairman of the House of Representatives prayer group, said he was surprised at Mother Teresa's comments and doubted the president knew what she was going to say. In recent years, however, she has gained recognition internationally as a pro-life advocate.

"She was very persistent in making her points," said Hutto, who sat between Al Gore and Mother Teresa as she spoke. "Being pro-life, I appreciated what she said."

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Like Clinton and Gore, Hutto is a Southern Baptist. Like Clinton, Gore is pro-choice.

Speaking after Mother Teresa, the president praised her for her "moving words" and "lifetime of commitment" but told the audience, "We will always have our differences; we will never know the whole truth ... ."

The White House had no further comment on Mother Teresa's speech, an administration spokesman said Feb. 4.

The Senate and House groups alternate in selecting a speaker for the breakfast. This year, Senate group chairman Howell Heflin, D.-Ala., was responsible for choosing a speaker, Hutto said.

"Mother Teresa has given preachers and ministers everywhere a pristine example of what it means to be truly prophetic in the presence of Caesar," said Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission Executive Director Richard Land, who saw the telecast of the breakfast. "I pray that all those who are in Caesar's presence in the future will be inspired by her example."

Since taking office last year, Clinton has reversed several pro-life policies. He also has supported unsuccessful congressional efforts to renew Medicaid funding of abortion and to pass the Freedom of Choice Act, which would eliminate most state restrictions on the practice.

In her speech, Mother Teresa called on couples to reject the use of contraceptives and to practice natural family planning. "Once that living love is destroyed by contraception, abortion follows very easily," she said.

She challenged listeners to follow the sacrificial example of Jesus in loving others, beginning with family members.

In his six-minute speech, Clinton called on the participants to reaffirm freedom of religion, not "freedom from religion;" to be humble, honest and fair; to discard bitterness, to forgive and to focus on others.

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Harding-Kerrigan controversy  
has lessons for Christians

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Tonya Harding. Nancy Kerrigan. Two names suddenly turned into household words. Five books on these Olympic skaters will begin somersaulting into print before the first gold medal is awarded this month.

Regardless of Harding's innocence or guilt in the Jan. 6 attack on her Olympic skating teammate, Christians in the sports world say much can be learned from the internationally infamous incident.

"It's a matter of where you put your priorities," said Lori Endicott, top setter on the U.S. women's volleyball team, which captured the bronze medal at the 1992 Summer Olympics. "How big a thing is money to you?"

"You see things like this happen and you realize how people are so caught up in that," reflected Jay Barker of the University of Alabama who quarterbacked the Crimson Tide to the 1992 national championship. "Their only fulfillment and enjoyment in life is by winning, and at all costs.

"You also realize that's the world," said Barker, a member of First Baptist Church of Trussville in Birmingham, Ala. "The world is teaching people, 'Look out for No. 1' and 'Be the best at all costs.' That's not the message the Lord teaches us through the Word, which is to love one another, look out for others and serve them."

However, a former defensive lineman for the Cleveland Browns cautioned the emotionally charged issue should not be blamed solely on competition or a victory-mad society.

"All that the overemphasis on winning does is bring out what we already are," said Bill Glass, now head of Bill Glass Ministries in Dallas and a member of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Duncanville.

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"If I'm morally corrupt, I'm morally corrupt whether I'm under pressure or not. My sin nature is there and it will come out if I'm not right with the Lord and haven't experienced his rebirth."

Gauging the world by Glass' words, the corruption extends beyond the worldwide publicity that transformed the Kerrigan-Harding case into a daily soap opera; there was last year's stabbing of tennis star Monica Seles and the attack on two American bobsledders by German skinheads.

And this kind of atmosphere leads some to fear for the future of sporting events everywhere.

"It opens up a lot of scary doors. It could affect everything from high school to college, pro and amateur athletics," said Chip Tarkenton, sports anchor at WRIC-TV in Richmond, Va., who has been a Southern Baptist more than 13 years.

"I hope it doesn't get to where nobody can be in the arena so the athletes can participate," said the nephew of former pro football quarterback Fran Tarkenton. "You just don't have any idea what people will do today. Some folks just may do it for the notoriety."

"There's always a chance of that happening because of terrorism or angry fans," Endicott agreed. "It is scary when it happens on your own team."

That's why faith is so important to the volleyball star. Though she trains in San Diego she retains her membership at Tatum Baptist Chapel near Springfield, Mo.

"I think being a Christian you have a better attitude," Endicott said, "with everything you do in life: your attitude on the court, the way you conduct yourself and the way you treat other players. I think Christians can still get angry but it's a matter of how you show that emotion."

"As Christian athletes we're able to distinguish between athletics and our walk with the Lord," Barker added. "I think he gives us purpose in life and the only true fulfillment we can have. We realize sports can't do that."

The Alabama junior said an Athletes in Action sports camp taught him how athletic ability can lead to the field of play becoming a "worship ground."

Thus, amidst the heated competition on the gridiron, Barker said he finds solace in thanking God for all that he provides. He said he realizes on-field sacrifices will never match Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

"That has really helped my game and given me more purpose," he said. "With all the criticism that comes from the fans and people's expectations -- knowing that you can never fully please them -- you realize you're there for a different reason, to serve and worship him."

Christians have an opportunity to demonstrate their beliefs through their post-game attitude as well, said Tarkenton, who attended Western Carolina on a football-track scholarship.

"I don't know if my conversion changed my attitude about playing to win," he said. "You want to win. But it is just a game and nobody should die over a game. You may not like your opponents during the battle but, afterwards, a friendship may strike up out of it. That happened to me numerous times."

Glass said he sees a need to maintain perspective. He said the Olympic Committee should consider Kerrigan was not knocked out of the Winter Olympics, and the public should remember there are far more serious issues in the world.

Even for those who don't participate in athletics, the current publicity-charged climate presents an opportunity to display grace and forgiveness. Not only toward Tonya Harding, but others perceived as guilty of poor conduct.

Too many Christians resemble Peter, Glass said. He mused that while the apostle whacked off a slave's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was probably aiming for the man's head.

"That's the anger I see in some so-called Christians," he commented. "We get a vigilante attitude -- we're going to strike back in anger at all these wicked sinners. That wasn't the Lord's attitude. Such people have a heart problem that goes much deeper and they can only be helped by rebirth."

Paralleling that is the opportunity for Christians to follow Jesus' "Judge not ... " advice in Matthew and avoid the rush to judgment, the athletes said. That will counter rash opinions, like the recent poll in which 58 percent of the public considered Harding guilty.

"If we're too harsh and judgmental, we become Old Testament Pharisees," said Glass, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

The former NFL star goes into prisons two dozen weekends of the year. There he preaches forgiveness to all kinds of people: homosexuals, multiple murderers, child molesters and others.

"We need to hold out grace and forgiveness. Yet if we are so grace-oriented we don't take a moral stand we're wishy washy. We have to keep a balance."

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Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky.

Calif. WMU assessing  
quake homeless' needs

By Terry Barone

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

LOS ANGELES (BP)--California Woman's Missionary Union volunteers visited Red Cross shelters Feb. 5 to begin assessing the needs of victims made homeless by the Jan. 17 Northridge earthquake.

Edna Ellison, director of California WMU, said women were organized into ministry teams to go to as many of the 36 shelters as possible to find out "the most critical needs."

"Those of us who have never lost our belongings or homes find it difficult to empathize with the thousands who are displaced as a result of this disaster," she said.

The goal of the teams was to visit the shelters in groups of two and talk with victims to find out their specific needs, according to Greg Sumii, director of the California Southern Baptist Convention missions ministries department and off-site coordinator for disaster relief.

Sumii enlisted the help of WMU in assessing the needs because "of the ministering spirit of WMU which I feel is a natural conduit for such ministry."

"We don't know what we will find in interviewing the 6,000 or so living in the shelters," Ellison said. "I suspect we will find both physical and spiritual needs which require immediate attention."

Ellison and Sumii both said while women are assessing needs, spontaneous ministry will be taking place.

"There are a lot of people out there who have not opened up and been able to talk about what has happened to them," Sumii explained. "And sometimes it is easier to open up to a stranger than it is to someone you know who is experiencing the same thing you are."

Ellison said information obtained Feb. 5 would be instrumental in deciding the approach for a "shelter blitz Feb. 21 to distribute items and provide one-on-one counseling."

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Counseling offered to ministers  
stressed in quake's aftermath

By Terry Barone

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Pastors and church staff members emotionally stressed out because of the Jan. 17 Los Angeles earthquake will be receiving special counseling services and a retreat sponsored by California Southern Baptist Convention.

After weeks of constantly dealing with urgent needs in the aftermath of the earthquake many ministers, church staff and their families find themselves "emotionally fragile," according to Greg Sumii, director of the CSBC missions ministries department.

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"Pastors and church staff members are overwhelmed by the constant tug for their availability and resources. There are just too many people with overwhelming needs," said Sumii, a certified counselor.

He added many times pastors and church staff members suffer from guilt because they feel they aren't doing enough since people are still suffering and remain in an unresolved crisis situation.

"But in reality, he (pastor or church staff member) is doing everything possible," Sumii said.

On Feb. 8, Paul Stanley, a retired Southern Baptist counselor who lives in Gold Coast Baptist Association, and other counselors and Christian therapists working with the CSBC missions ministries department, began counseling services at First Baptist Church in Arleta.

A Psychological and Emotional Debriefing Retreat also is planned to help pastors and church staff members and their spouses understand their emotional and physical states and how to manage them in a healthy way.

Both counseling and the retreat are primarily for people in San Fernando Valley and Gold Coast Baptist associations, hardest hit by the 6.6 magnitude Richter Scale temblor. But both are available for any pastor or church staff member in the Los Angeles area who need them.

The retreat is scheduled Feb. 25-26. However, a location had not yet been determined at press time.

Sumii said the retreat would offer professional help on how to remain physically, emotionally and spiritually stable while ministering under constant emotional stress in an ongoing crisis such as the earthquake and its aftermath.

During a recent trip to Los Angeles, Sumii said he interviewed a pastor who said, "After two weeks of dealing with urgent needs both day and night, my wife and I are totally exhausted. I find myself crying uncontrollably."

The pastor also said he knew of others in the same situation and that if "we do not get emotionally stabilized, we won't be any good for our families, the families of our churches who are very traumatized or the community at large."

"Many pastors and church staff members are feeling guilt, weariness, mental and physical stress and an overall sense of helplessness. Through counseling, we hope to bring these things under control before they burn out emotionally," Sumii said.

Counseling and crisis intervention also are important to the overall impact of churches in the area, Sumii said. He cited a study after Hurricane Hugo which revealed that a significant percentage of pastors in the affected area had either divorced, left the ministry or taken ministry positions outside the area.

"These statistics speak very loudly and we do not want a similar situation happening in California because of the earthquake. This is only another weapon Satan uses to attack our mission. Our goal is to fight the battle with Christ and win," Sumii said.

He said people who go through such a traumatic experience will suffer symptoms in varying degrees.

Each person's situation helps determine how many of these symptoms they will experience, Sumii continued. "All will be in different stages. Some may never reach a critical stage, while others will. It all depends on where they are located, how badly their church families were affected and their own stress level prior to the earthquake."

Sumii said getting a handle on emotional stress early will go a long way in a healthy and fast recovery for not only pastors, church staff members and their families, but for church families and the community.

**Baptists continue post-quake meals, damage survey, cleanup**      **By Terry Barone**

LOS ANGELES (BP)--With heavy aftershocks as strong as 4.0 still shaking the Los Angeles area more than two weeks after a Jan. 17 earthquake, California Southern Baptists were in high gear providing meals, cleanup teams and assessing damage to churches.

In cooperation with Southern Baptists from five other states, more than 705,000 meals had been prepared through Feb. 4 for victims of the worst earthquake to strike Southern California in 20 years. California Southern Baptist's two disaster relief units prepared about 295,000 of them.

Don Hargis, director of the California Southern Baptist Convention men's ministries department, said the meal count continues to increase daily though the number of people in shelters is decreasing.

Even though victims are leaving the shelters, Hargis speculated victims may not be able to cook where they are staying, may have had dishes broken during the quake or may need to take care of other matters, yet know the Red Cross feeding schedule and continue to return for meals. "We don't mind that a bit," he said. "As long as they have that need, that is what we are here for."

It is anticipated the meal count will continue to rise before it tapers off, according to Hargis, who said meal preparation could continue until the end of February.

"Things are going very smoothly, and we anticipate the possibility of sending units back to their home states in about a week (Feb. 10). The only thing that will stop us is heavy tremors," he added.

California Disaster Relief Unit #2, a commercial catering van, had to be moved from Shepherd of the Hills Church Feb. 2 because fierce winds were hampering meal preparation. The Porter Ranch church continues to serve as a Red Cross shelter and as Baptist disaster headquarters for volunteer coordination of cleanup.

The California Unit #2 was moved to First Baptist Church in Fillmore, where a Missouri unit is stationed. It was anticipated the Missouri unit would move to the Van Nuys Airport to join the Texas, Oklahoma and Mississippi units. The Louisiana unit and volunteers remain in Santa Clarita.

California's 18-wheeler, which had been at the San Fernando Valley Red Cross Center in Van Nuys, also was to be moved to give the Red Cross office more working space. Hargis said he hoped to move it to a Southern Baptist church in the area, but at press time a decision had not been made for relocation.

There is still a great need for California Baptist volunteers, according to Hargis.

"We have had great participation and cooperation from other state Baptist convention volunteers. South Carolina and Georgia crews already are set up to come in and work 10-day shifts. I am grateful that other state conventions have people on alert status ready to come out and help."

Volunteers who have worked with the California units include crews from Tennessee, Oregon, Arkansas and Illinois. Nevada also has sent volunteers. Prospective volunteers outside California should contact their respective state convention's Brotherhood office.

Edd Brown, retired director of CSBC men's ministries, and Harold King, a retired builder and developer, assessed damage to churches during the first week of February.

"The Lord didn't forget us. Southern Baptists (church buildings) were extremely fortunate," Brown said Feb. 3 after spending most of the day at seven churches which had asked that their property be inspected.

Brown reported only two of the seven churches inspected had possible structural damage, but all were usable. Though most are repairable, Brown said volunteers with specialized building skills will be needed to make many of the repairs. He added churches are "going to need dollars to recover from even minimal damage."

The two churches Brown alluded to were Shepherd of the Hills Church and Mandarin Baptist Church of San Fernando Valley in Northridge. The Mandarin church has a crack running through the building with a half-inch to an inch separation, according to Brown. The parking lot has a two-inch split which runs about three feet deep, he said. He also reported the steeple out of square, door jams shifted as much as an inch, split carpet, shifted walls, 10-12 broken windows and loose roof tiles.

Shepherd of the Hills has possible major structural damage, but inspectors can't tell without more investigation. Brown said it appears the roof moved six to eight inches causing problems with many of the building's systems. He said the sprinkler system and the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system all will have to be rehung as will much of the ceiling in the office and educational building.

Many of the churches surveyed need repairs such as walls resurfaced and painted, beams replaced and block fences repaired.

Unsure about when reconstruction might begin, Brown said volunteers who have specialized skills in texturing, concrete, block work and plaster repair are needed. Structural engineers also are needed.

On Jan. 29, 20 cleanup teams worked in homes in the Canoga Park and Porter Ranch areas. Plans for Feb. 5 were for teams to move southward into the Northridge area nearer the quake's epicenter.

Ed Adams, a CSBC new church extension strategist and coordinator of the cleanup response, said since the cleanup headquarters is not at a Red Cross center it has "been more difficult to get (cleanup) jobs. So we have sent people out into the community with flyers."

He anticipates a couple more Saturday cleanup days before reconstruction teams can begin work on churches and homes.

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NRB opts against invitation  
to Clinton for annual meeting

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Bill Clinton was "deliberately snubbed" by the National Religious Broadcasters in not being invited to the association's annual meeting, according to a Feb. 4 Religious News Service article.

A formal statement released by NRB's executive committee said it "cannot give a platform to a leader who so aggressively supports and puts forth policies and positions which are blatantly contrary to scriptural views."

The two-paragraph statement on NRB's refusal to invite Clinton to the Jan. 29-Feb. 1 meeting in Washington did not specify any Clinton stances. However, many evangelical groups, including the Southern Baptist Convention, have been critical of various Clinton positions supporting abortion and homosexual rights.

NRB members include 800 religious radio stations and 250 TV stations.

Receiving invitations to address the NRB meeting were two oft-mentioned candidates for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination, former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp and Education Secretary William Bennett, and Oliver North, the central figure in the Iran-Contra scandal and now a Republican candidate for the Senate from Virginia.

The refusal to invite Clinton marked the first time in more than a dozen years a sitting president has not been invited to address the NRB, the Religious News Service said.

The news service quoted one prominent evangelical, Randall Terry of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue, as labeling Clinton "an enemy of righteousness" against whom evangelicals should "go on the attack."

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RNS quoted several evangelicals as questioning the decision, including Charles Colson, Prison Fellowship founder and a Southern Baptist church member in northern Virginia, and Eugene Habecker, American Bible Society president. "We have a responsibility to keep open communications with people on both sides of the aisle," Habecker said, adding, "I frankly think Reagan and Bush took evangelicals on a ride and laughed all the way to the political bank."

After Clinton's election in 1992, NRB invited him to its 1993 meeting in Los Angeles, according to NRB officials, who noted Clinton failed to respond.

Following is the full NRB statement:

"In recent years it has been the decision of the NRB leadership to invite the President of the United States to address the annual convention. This has always been a nonpartisan choice, with both Republican and Democratic Presidents participating. However, for the '94 convention, it is the decision of the Executive Committee that no invitation will be extended.

"As believers, we are admonished to pray for those in authority, and commit ourselves fervently to that task. However, we cannot give a platform to a leader who so aggressively supports and puts forth policies and positions which are blatantly contrary to scriptural views."

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Compiled by Art Toalston

The wall is 'too high, too deep,  
too wide' -- except for Jesus      By Shari Schubert

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The wall of sin that separates mankind from God. Rick Ousley painted a vivid picture of it -- and of Christian salvation -- during the Missouri Baptist Evangelism Conference Jan. 17-18 at First Baptist Church of Raytown, Mo.

Ousley, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, was the featured speaker in the Tuesday evening service which targeted youth needs and interests.

Preaching from the story of Nicodemus in John 3, Ousley motioned toward an imaginary line down the center of the sanctuary and asked conference participants to picture a massive, solid wall, built of heavy rock boulders -- too high to climb over, too deep to tunnel under, too wide to go around.

The space on one side of the wall, he said, represents that which is born of flesh. It is earthly, temporal and carnal. On the other side of the wall is that which is born of the Spirit. It is eternal and pure. It is the kingdom of God.

"It is sin that has made this barrier, and death is the consequence," Ousley said.

He told how, as a 9-year-old boy, seeing a Billy Graham film at his church prompted him to recognize he was separated from God. "How do you get to where God is?" he asked.

It occurred to him "every person I know who claimed to be saved was a church member." Maybe that was what he needed to do, he recounted.

So he walked down the aisle, and when the pastor asked him questions, of course he answered "yes." He was given a card to fill out: Application for Church Membership. "Wa-hoo! That's the magic card!" He was a church member, a genuine "Southern-fried Baptist."

Dramatizing his sermon in pantomime, Ousley crouched down on the platform and prepared to make a run for the imaginary wall. "Here I come, Lord! ... Pow!" he exclaimed, slamming into the invisible wall.

Turning back to the congregation, he reinforced his point: "You don't pass through sin and death by joining a church ... You might as well affiliate with a Kiwanis Club and say, 'I'm going to heaven.'"

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Ousley then recalled the day his pastor came to talk to him about being baptized. "I know he probably said the right thing, but all I heard was baptism." He told the youth "baptism comes from the Greek baptizo, which means 'get wet, bubba.'"

So now he was baptized. Ousley crouched down again. "Here I come, Lord! ... Pow!

"That ain't holy water," he quipped, gesturing toward the host church's baptistry.

"You get baptized because you've been saved, not in order to get saved," he emphasized.

He continued to trace his story, describing his attempt to cross the barrier by doing good works. But the best of human goodness "looks like a roach compared to Jesus," he pointed out.

Then he talked about his friends, "the PTL cheerleaders" whose religious experience was rooted in emotions. That, too, proved powerless to bring about redemption. "You don't pass through this barrier on a feeling," Ousley said. "The cross of Christ is not so cheap."

The wall of sin was not breached, Ousley pointed out, until God decided to cross the wall himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into the fleshly world and ministered. He bore the consequences of sin. He was kicked, beaten, spat upon, crowned with thorns and crucified. "They did everything to him that made that barrier," Ousley said. And then they buried him.

Ousley paused in the story to remark that he used to think it was cruel that Jesus had to be placed in a borrowed grave. But then he figured it out: "You borrow something when you plan to give it back!"

When Jesus arose from the dead on Resurrection Sunday, he broke the barrier, Ousley said. "You have good news to bring."

Continuing his own story, Ousley recalled how he was saved at age 18 through the witness of a Nazarene preacher. "He knew I was a Baptist. He knew I'd never set foot in his church," Ousley related. "But he loved me ... and I got saved."

Ousley stressed salvation is available to anyone who will accept it. "You can flunk calculus, but there's no excuse for flunking life. You can pass."

"The good news for man," Ousley said after the sermon, "is that God loved us so much he came to our side of the barrier, and the greatest story we could possibly hear is the barrier has been broken, and any person can receive Jesus Christ, who paid for the sin and death of that barrier."

Ousley said he counsels individuals to pray, "I'm placing my trust in someone who loved me enough to die for me. There is no institution or any other individual that paid the price for my sin, except Jesus. To receive him is to trust him as the only way to God to break the barrier."

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Laotian wants to thank God  
by preparing for missions

By Angie Boliver

Baptist Press  
2/8/94

ABILENE, Texas (BP)--What seems like the stuff of a good action movie to most people was real life for Hardin-Simmons University freshman Keo Rasavong. When Keo was 2 years old, her father, Paul Rasavong, a Laotian soldier in the Vietnam War, was captured and sent to a POW camp, where he was forced to do hard labor and his captors tried to brainwash him. Unable to bear the cruel treatment any longer, he and some friends decided to attempt an escape.

The only route of escape was to cross the Mekhong River that separates Laos and Thailand. Except for one of the friends who died in trying to swim across, they made it to the other side and Rasavong eventually was sponsored to come to America.

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Meanwhile, Keo, her mother, Seng, and her younger sister had never known what had happened to their father. They assumed he had died in the war. Six years after his capture, however, Keo's mother heard of his escape.

Seng was told he had made it to America and had remarried. But, she believed in his faithfulness to her and was determined to get her family to him.

She had some money and managed to send a message to the other side of the Mekhong to say she wanted to cross over. She was told to wait with her daughters and a boat would come for them at night. That night, they hid in the bottom as it crossed, in danger of being found by soldiers and killed. Keo worried she and her family were going to die. But they made it safely. At the time, with her Buddhist background, she attributed their safety to good luck, but now as a Christian she thanks God for protecting them.

A wagon was waiting on the other side to take them to the refugee camp. There her mother bated to gain money to come to America. Keo, then 8, and her sister became friends with a man in the camp. Before long, they realized the man was one of her father's best friends from the war. He managed to connect them with her father and they found out he was not remarried but instead was still searching and waiting for them.

Money was provided and, in 1981, Keo and her family arrived in America to be reunited with her father.

The family moved to Amarillo, Texas, and were welcomed and assisted by First Baptist Church there. The whole family later made professions of faith as Christians and are very active in the church.

Keo has had struggles since that fateful day in 1981 such as learning English, adjusting to schools and living with a father she had not seen since she was 2.

However, she thanks God for getting them through all the hardships -- a thankfulness she plans to put into action, explaining, "The Lord has done so much for me that I want to give my life to missions so I can help other people."

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Boliver is a student writer in HSU's media relations office. (BP) photo available upon request from Hardin-Simmons University media relations office.

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