

# (BP)

## - - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #:  
Nashville, Tennessee 37:  
(615) 244-2:  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8:  
CompuServe ID# 7042C

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115  
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

June 23, 1994

94-106

TANZANIA--Baptists, United Nations sign contract for Rwanda refugee work.  
TANZANIA--Missionary with 'no more tears' cries again for Rwandan child.  
ALABAMA--Clinton to get postcards of encouragement from Baptist girls.  
ALABAMA--Stuffed bears given to children in crisis.  
FLORIDA--Missionary affirms 'He Is Able' after his experiences in Africa.  
FLORIDA--Homemaker describes God's power to fill void from child's death.  
FLORIDA--She arrived in Miami in despair, but found faith, restored marriage.  
FLORIDA -- God gave healing via reunion with son she gave to adoption.  
FLORIDA--Even in tragedy of suicide, family found God sufficient.  
FLORIDA--He found God and a ministry at refugee center in Key West.  
FLORIDA--His cancer diagnosis prompted him to prayer like never before.  
FLORIDA--His former million-dollar life now spent in witness for Christ.  
FLORIDA--Final Cross Over figures: 776 professions of faith.  
FLORIDA--Evangelists see change, challenges as 20th Century draws to a close.  
FLORIDA--Pastors list pros, cons of full-time evangelists.  
FLORIDA--Couple named missionaries along with 'baby sitter.'

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

Baptists, United Nations sign  
contract for Rwanda refugee work By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

KARAGWE, Tanzania (BP)--A one-month contract signed in mid-June by Baptists and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is setting the stage for possible long-term Baptist involvement with displaced Rwandans.

The Baptists' first assignment will be to survey "at risk" groups in refugee camps in Tanzania.

"After this initial project is completed the U.N. can decide if they want to work with us and we can decide if we want to work with them," explained Southern Baptist missionary Larry Randolph. "Either way we are committed to ministry with the refugees, either inside the camps or outside."

Randolph joins 10 other Southern Baptist missionaries forced out of Rwanda by the blood bath set off there by ethnic hatred and civil war. After evacuating Rwanda they voted as a group to move to Tanzania to aid some of the thousands of Rwandan refugees who have fled there.

Baptist Relief Services, the organization contracted by the United Nations to survey the camps, consists of the Rwanda missionaries, their Baptist and missionary colleagues in Tanzania and Florida Baptists, who are engaged in a missions partnership with Tanzanian Baptists.

The agreement with the U.N. refugee commission asks Baptists to survey several camps along the Rwandan border to determine the scope of needs.

"There is a real problem with orphans, for instance," Randolph said. "Refugees pick up children as they flee Rwanda and usually register them with their family when they arrive at the camp. Once settled, they locate other relatives or friends of the children and move the children in with them" -- but often retain the camp-issued cards needed to get food for the children.

--more--

The contract resulted from weeks of frustrating negotiations between representatives of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and U.N. officials after Baptists offered to help in the camps.

"Part of the problem was that they didn't really know who Southern Baptists are," said John Faulkner, Foreign Mission Board administrator for eastern and southern Africa. "And part was that U.N. people in Tanzania didn't want to work with 'small' aid agencies."

When no job assignments were forthcoming over a period of weeks, Faulkner contacted U.S. Embassy personnel in Kenya, who set up meetings with top U.N. refugee officials in Nairobi.

"When they saw how much money Southern Baptists have put into relief and development projects in east Africa, they got very interested," he reported. "In addition to major projects in Somalia, Uganda and Kenya, we have spent more than \$1 million in Tanzania and have planted more than 12 million trees in Ethiopia."

The U.N. regional office called its Tanzania office and "encouraged" them to strike a deal with the Baptists.

Back in Tanzania, the Baptists hadn't even set up tents at their base camp when the refugee camp director, a Catholic nun, asked them to help with the needs of some newly arrived refugees.

In the hectic 16-hour days that followed, the Rwanda missionaries began distributing food -- and using their language fluency to help other relief workers and Rwandan refugee leaders communicate, settle logistical problems and do cultural trouble-shooting.

"Many of the Rwandan leaders said that was the first time they had ever understood what was happening in the camps and how things operated," missionary Stan Lee said. "Communication is a real problem since most of the relief workers speak only English or Swahili and the refugees speak Rwandan or some French."

A prime example: Refugees told missionary Martha Colwell they were being beaten by local residents when they went to draw water from a nearby lake. The Tanzanians were protecting their own water supply.

"The camp director didn't have any idea there was even a problem, because the refugees did not have anyone to talk to that they trusted," Colwell said. "As soon as we told her, she contacted Oxfam (the relief group in charge of water for refugees) and moved to solve the problem. Interestingly, the refugees trust us more than the local Tanzanians who speak Rwandan. They know we can go to the powers-that-be in the relief agencies and represent them."

Ability to speak Rwandan created instant acceptance, according to missionary Diane Randolph.

"When we spoke their language and acted within their culture the refugees would laugh and clap," she related. "Adults followed us around like children always follow strangers in African villages, and when we told them where we'd lived in Rwanda and how we had had to leave, they told us, 'You're Rwandan, you're Rwandan.'"

The U.N.-Baptist contract specifically bars the missionaries from "engaging in religious activities" with the refugees. But Randolph felt the mission should enter into the agreement anyway, for two reasons:

First, the prohibition is being interpreted only as forbidding the establishment of a Baptist congregation or public meetings and preaching in the camps.

"We told them sharing our faith was what we are about, but they just don't want different denominations getting into competition," Randolph explained. "Individually and privately we can respond to people in spiritual need."

Second, the contract lasts for only one month. By the end of July the missionaries hope a long-term relationship will be taking shape. A dual approach might emerge, with Baptist Relief Services working inside the camps -- and within U.N. guidelines -- while Tanzanian Baptists offer an evangelical witness through churches outside the camps. That could include worship services, literacy classes, vocational training and recreational programs.

Florida Baptist volunteers are due to arrive in late June to assist wherever needed in and around the camps.

--30--

Missionary with 'no more tears'  
cries again for Rwandan child

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

KARAGWE, Tanzania (BP)--If you love Rwanda, you cry even when you think no more tears are left.

Southern Baptist missionary David Hooten drove his family through armed mobs to flee the small African nation as it descended into mass killing in April. Since then he has stood on bridges and watched the bloated bodies of murdered Rwandan women and children float past. He has gotten messages about friends killed in the ethnic slaughter.

He has seen a lot and cried a lot.

But when he and fellow missionaries began working in Rwandan refugee camps in western Tanzania he saw more. And cried again.

"I was standing outside a tent where refugees were getting their food distribution when a relief worker walked up with a 10-year-old boy," said Hooten, of Tifton, Ga. "He was staring, vacant-eyed. You could tell his mind was gone. He had just entered the camp, had not eaten for days and had watched all of his family killed.

"Because I could speak Rwandan I tried to talk to him, but he never acknowledged my existence. When I put my arm around him, he was so starved, my fingers closed around his upper arm -- and I have small hands. He had to go back to be registered and he was lifted into a vehicle, still not responding to words or touch.

"Another refugee woman came by, saw him and handed him three small bananas she was carrying. He just stared at them, not knowing what to do. Repeatedly I told him, 'Eat, eat,' but for a long time he just sat there. Finally he feebly reached up and slowly peeled the end of one banana. Then, as the truck drove away, he became animated and literally tore the bananas open and crammed them into his mouth."

Hooten didn't see the boy again. But he won't forget him. And he'll see many more, just as tragic, as long as the fighting rages in Rwanda.

--30--

Clinton to get postcards of  
encouragement from Baptist girls

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--President Bill Clinton will be getting a "picture postcard" view of the country as soon as the U.S. Postal Service delivers the more than 13,500 postcards Southern Baptist teen-age girls are sending to him.

Clinton, also a Southern Baptist, will find the messages of encouragement and promises of prayer support to be somewhat different from criticism he has received recently from the Southern Baptist Convention.

The girls are attending the June 21-24 National Acteens Convention in Birmingham, Ala. The meeting, sponsored by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, is held once every five years for girls in grades seven through 12.

The girls were asked to purchase the cards in their home states before coming to the convention.

Girls lined the sidewalk to a temporary post office in the convention center set up by the staff of the city's downtown branch. Within six hours, the girls bought more than 13,000 stamps -- most of them for the cards they were sending to the president.

--more--

Postal worker Mark Gilreath sold the stamps and manually stamped the cards with a special cancellation stamp designed by the postal service for the event.

"President Clinton's gonna get them all at one time," Gilreath said. "I'm going to see to it."

--30--

**Stuffed bears given  
to children in crisis**

**Baptist Press  
6/23/94**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Children in Alabama who are suffering from AIDS and children in poverty across the country received a gift June 23 of stuffed bears and tennis shoes from more than 13,500 Southern Baptist teen-age girls.

The girls, from all 50 states, are attending the June 21-24 National Acteens Convntion in Birmingham, Ala. The meeting, sponsored by Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union, is held once every five years for girls in grades seven through 12.

More than 5,000 stuffed bears and 7,000 pairs of shoes had been collect d by the third day of the meeting.

A Baby's Place of Alabama, Inc., is just one of the benevolent organizations based in Birmingham to receive the bears. The home is a statewide AIDS service organization which provides care for children who are HIV positive and for children who have someone in the immediate family dealing with the disease.

"The bears will be given as gifts when the children need a special lift or for birthdays," said Glenda Hollis, founder and executive director of the organization. "These kids don't tend to have a lot of birthdays."

Bears and shoes are being sent across the country to social service centers in New Mexico, Texas, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Georgia.

Other local organizations to receive bears and/or shoes include the Children's Hospital of Alabama, Sav-A-Life, Safe House and the Birmingham Baptist Association.

--30--

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Several testimonies were shared during the June 14-16 Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Fla. Baptist Press writer Brenda Sanders p nned a story on each.

**Missionary affirms 'He Is Able'  
after his experiences in Africa** By Brenda Sanders

**Baptist Press  
6/23/94**

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--"God is able to take care of his people," missionary Thomas Smith affirmed to the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Reflecting on the convention's theme, "For I Know -- He Is Able," Smith shared about the harrowing experiences he faced when the country where he serves, Sierra Leone, went through a military coup to overthrow the government.

For months, he recalled, there had been fighting to the south of the town wh r he lived with his wife, Shirley, and their two children. Gradually, the fighting grew closer and the missionaries began to hear gunfire in the distance.

One day, two local pastors came to the Smith home and warned them danger was near. They urged the family to flee the country.

The next day, Smith's wife and children, along with another missionary family who lived nearby, left the city. Smith remained behind to care for the members of the church where he was pastor.

"We all thought they'd be back in a couple of weeks, after everything had calmed down," Smith recalled.

--more--

However, the following morning, Smith heard gunfire very close to his house. Soldiers now were fighting within the city.

"Within a half hour of the beginning of that fight for the city, almost all of my neighbors had packed up what few belongings they could carry on their heads and began to flee the city," Smith said.

"As they began to leave, I realized my reason for staying was fleeing with them," he continued, "so I packed a few clothes, put them on the back of my motorcycle and began a journey I'll never forget."

When Smith reached the main road out of town, he saw utter chaos. Thousands of people were streaming down the road, and across the road soldiers were firing into the bush. The few cars he saw were careening around the crowds of people, trying to get away.

"There were roadblocks set up by soldiers who were stopping people in vehicles and robbing them of their cars," he said. "I was afraid that if I slowed down at all, I'd be overwhelmed by people who wanted my transportation."

But Smith said through it all "it seemed like no one ever saw me." He safely motored down the road and out of the city.

"I know God is able to take care of his people, because that day he preserved this missionary," Smith said. "I know he is able to take care of his people, because he sent two pastors to warn my family so my children didn't have to experience the chaos of that day."

He noted, in addition, every local pastor in their area was safely able to leave the country with his family.

"I know God is able to provide encouragement because in the midst of that experience God renewed my call to Sierra Leone," Smith affirmed.

"I know God is able to give joy and peace and contentment because we've not been able to go back to that place, and all of the things we left behind -- our children's toys and things of sentimental value -- are all gone now. But I've learned that we didn't really need those things," Smith said.

"I know God is able to preserve his church because all of the churches in that area are still there and still functioning with the few believers who have been able to return.

"I know God is able to spread his kingdom," Smith continued, "because some of the pastors who fled began churches in other areas and strengthened old churches that were dying."

Smith paused, gripped the podium and searched the audience. Then, his voice filled with emotion, he said, "I know God is able to do whatever he wants through people who are yielded to him. I know God is able to do whatever he wants to do in your life, if you will allow it."

--30--

Homemaker describes God's power  
to fill void from child's death By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Homemaker Pam Veteto said she could praise God for his power to fill a painful spiritual void left by the death of her daughter, in a testimony to messengers at the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention.

Veteto, of Batesville, Ark., and her husband, Danny, a Baptist director of missions, suffered the loss of their 8-year-old daughter, Shauna, in 1985 when the child died following surgery for a brain aneurism.

Shauna had made a profession of faith in Christ at age 6, and at age 7 she told her parents she thought God was calling her to be a missionary.

"As a proud mother, I was so excited. I could just envision God raising up another Lottie Moon in her," Veteto recounted.

A year later, when Shauna began experiencing severe headaches, the Vetetos took their daughter to a neurologist and prayed God would "help our little girl get better."

--more--

To their horror, the couple discovered a CAT scan showed a mass the size of a billiard ball at the base of Shauna's brain. Surgery to remove the aneurism was scheduled and Veteto said, "Our world was crashing in around us. We could not understand why God was allowing this to happen."

Grasping for answers and seeking to find God's purpose "in this horrible disaster," Veteto said she thought "maybe God would use this terrible ordeal to give Shauna a great testimony when she became older."

"We had faith each day the physicians would tell us they did not know how but somehow Shauna had been cured; the aneurism was gone. This, however, never happened," Veteto said.

Shauna's surgery did not go well and took much longer than expected. Shauna was extremely weak and in much pain the next few days.

"As the mother of an 8-year-old, I had been able to kiss away her hurts, drive away her monsters and dry her tears," Veteto said. "Now I was completely helpless to come to her aid. All I could do was sit beside her bed and watch my child grow weaker and weaker."

Praying for God to grant them mercy, Veteto said, "I begged God to let my little girl live. However, this was not God's will."

Shauna died and although she believed her daughter was "now in the presence of the glorious God she loved so much," Veteto said she felt "alone, cheated and completely deserted."

"I prayed constantly for comfort and peace, for relief from the pain, but I could not get any relief from God," she shared. "I told God if I could just feel him, if I thought he was even listening, if I thought he even cared, maybe I could get through this nightmare. It seemed as if God was silent, as if he had completely turned his back on me."

Veteto said she kept going to church but found it difficult to sit in a pew without her daughter beside her. One day, she said, "I told God I was giving up. He knew how much I loved my daughter, he knew I could not make it without her and he had taken her anyway. So he should understand that I was giving up. I would not ask anything of him any more and I expected him not to ask anything of me."

In her hour of deepest despair, Veteto said, "I started feeling God's Spirit for the first time since Shauna's death. I really knew he loved me and would not leave me alone. He still had plans for my life."

"After some time, I told God I wanted to live abundantly again, but I had a huge void in my life and I asked him to please help me fill that void."

God answered that request "with one of the most joyful and fulfilling experiences I could ever imagine," she said. "He led us into the foster care ministry."

In the last eight years, more than 80 needy children have stayed in the Veteto's home. "With each child," she said, "has come the opportunity to share God's love and concern."

"It is very exciting watching each child grow in body and spirit," Veteto noted. "We have had the opportunity to see several of these children come to a saving knowledge of Christ while in our care."

"I still believe in a God of miracles," she told messengers. "He has worked a miracle in me. Each time a child leaves my home, he takes a little part of me with him, but he also leaves a part of himself with me. God has taken a huge void and filled it with so many smiles, kisses and 'I love you's,' sometimes I think the void is about full and even overflowing."

--30--

She arrived in Miami in despair,  
but found faith, restored marriage By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Rachelle Hood-Phillips' divorce had just been finalized when she moved from Chicago to Miami with her 2-year-old daughter to accept a position at Burger King's world headquarters.

--more--

"I had never been to Miami before. I had no family there. I had no friends," she told messengers during the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention. "I was drowning in debt and despair. I was physically, emotionally and spiritually destitute after five years of a very, very bad marriage."

Hood-Phillips remembered dropping her daughter off with her baby sitter one day and driving away, feeling she was losing her grip on life. "I drove a couple of blocks, then pulled over to the side of the road and cried out: 'Jesus, if you're real, please help me now because I can't hold on much longer.'"

God's response was immediate, she said. "Since that prayer, my life has never been the same."

She soon found a church home at Wayside Baptist Church in Miami. The congregation, she said, "loved me unconditionally. They disciplined me and helped me grow in my faith. They poured their lives into mine."

There, Hood-Phillips said, "I learned how to devour the Bible."

She also rose through the ranks at Burger King to become a corporate vice president and now is in private business as a human resource development specialist.

During a quiet time of Bible study one day, however, Hood-Phillips became convicted divorce was a sin in the eyes of God.

"I closed my Bible, got down on my knees and asked God to forgive me of the sin of divorce," she recalled. "I prayed, 'If it's your will my husband and I should be reconciled, Lord, your will be done.'"

Shortly after that prayer, she and her ex-husband began to talk again and Hood-Phillips said all the obstacles to their reconciliation began to fall away. Eventually, they remarried.

"God taught me many things during that time," she said. "Two things stand out in my mind that helped restore our relationship to where it is today.

"The first is that I became a warrior of prayer. I knew the power of prayer and I had people on seven continents praying for my husband's salvation," she said.

God also taught her the power of love, and Hood-Phillips noted: "I learned that aggression begets aggression; hostility begets hostility; love begets love."

She said when her husband lashed out at her in anger, she responded with love.

"One day, the lashes stopped and love beget love," she said. "It got better and better, richer and sweeter."

Remarried now for eight years, Hood-Phillips said her husband recently asked her to pray for the salvation of 20 of his friends.

"I tell you, God is able," she affirmed. "He is able to do exceedingly more than we could ever ask or imagine. I know, because he did it for me."

--30--

God gave healing via reunion  
with son she gave to adoption      By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Thirty years ago, as a young single woman, Karen Thomas, began a career as a New York stage performer and thought her life held promise in the entertainment industry. However, when she unexpectedly became pregnant, her dreams were dashed and she felt her life had lost its meaning.

Thomas, now a crisis pregnancy counselor in Paducah, Ky., shared her testimony during the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention.

Seeking a solution to her situation at an abortion clinic, she said she "heard an inner voice" tell her to leave and give her child up for adoption. She did so, but through the following years, she could not stop grieving over giving up her firstborn child, a son.

--more--

Thomas said she later married and had two daughters but "still felt empty inside." She was actively involved in church but finally realized "a public display of religion was not enough. It finally occurred to me that I only had a knowledge of God and no relationship with his Son. I began to search for a whole and complete life."

Finally, at the age of 38, she said, "Jesus changed me and put me on his path."

In 1992, while worshipping with her family, she felt impressed to search for her son. With the help of a woman who works to reunite adopted children with their birth mothers, her son was located within a year.

"The situation was so overwhelming that I had to lay it at the feet of God and ask him to help me approach my son," she said. Doubts began to fill her mind and she wondered, "Would he hate me for giving him up? Would he question the circumstances of his conception? Would he choose to ignore me?"

She and her two daughters wrote letters to her son and waited to see what his response might be.

Four days later, her son, Mark, called. He thanked her for not aborting him and told her his adoptive family had given him a good life.

When she became a Christian, she had begun to pray for the salvation of her son, and she now found out this prayer had been answered. He was a Christian.

"What followed was a wonderful reunion," she shared, "one in which all my wounds were healed, all the guilt washed away and all the hopes and dreams of a young unwed mother were realized."

Now, Thomas' family and Mark's see each other often and even vacation together.

"Each encounter is to me a living testimony to God's abundant love, God's constant care in our lives and God's perfect timing," Thomas said.

"Miracles do happen when faith is practiced," she continued. "When I gave total submission to God's plan for my life, my heavenly Father restored to me my precious son. That God shines his light on ordinary people remains, to me, the ultimate mystery of our faith."

--30--

Even in tragedy of suicide,  
family found God sufficient

By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--After the suicide of his son, Cecil Sims said he found God's grace to be "not only sufficient, but overwhelmingly adequate."

Sharing a testimony during the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention, Sims, the executive director-treasurer of the Northwest Baptist Convention, said he did not truly understand the power and depth of God's sufficiency until he experienced personal tragedy.

Thirteen years ago, Sims said, his 27-year-old son, David, took his own life with a handgun.

Throughout his teen and young adult years, David had experienced "spells of deep depression and moments of rage," Sims recounted. "We had sought for him spiritual, emotional and physical help for many years, but to no avail."

Because of his son's obsessive and compulsive nature, Sims related, "He could not receive love or develop normal relationships."

After 13 years of "mental and emotional misery," Sims said, "our David sought peace in death."

Afterward, he and his wife and three other children "went through all the pain of self-examination and faced the normal questions: What did we do wrong? What else could we have done? Why did God not answer our prayers? Was this judgment upon our sin?"

These were questions to which there were no satisfying answers, Sims said. However, he and his family managed to keep the experience from destroying them. "Satan was not going to have that victory," he emphasized.

--more--

"David had no relief. Why? We will not know this side of glory," Sims continued. "But God was still God and we knew he would not put more on us than we could bear."

Sims said he also realized "God loved David more than we did and David was more God's than ours."

He suggested perhaps "God gave David to us so he could have the best possible chance to become normal. We offered love, security, openness, patience, moral training and loyalty. We chose to believe we were faithful stewards of our parenting opportunity.

"And in the midst of the years of heartache and ultimate heartbreak, God was teaching us to trust and not to question, to persevere and not to give up, to realize he was carrying us and not forsaking us," Sims said.

"Since David's death, we have chosen to thank God for David, not to resent God for not healing him. We know David's no longer suffering. It's better to look forward to a whole David than to weep over the loss of a tormented son," Sims said.

He told his audience to remember through the most excruciating tragedy "God is ever-present. He will not forget you or put more on you than you can bear. His grace is sufficient."

--30--

He found God and a ministry  
at refugee center in Key West By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Arturo Cobo found faith in God and an opportunity for ministry to his countrymen through the efforts of a Florida Baptist church involved in outreach to Cuban refugees.

Cobo, currently general coordinator for the Transit Home for Cuban Refugees in Key West, Fla., and a veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion who spent two years in Fidel Castro's prisons, shared his testimony at the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention.

He recounted the years of frustration he suffered as he tried to find happiness through a native Cuban religion that included making animal sacrifices to appease many gods and "saints."

Out of curiosity, Cobo began attending White Street Baptist Church in Key West, Fla., when he discovered that in 1992 the congregation and pastor Reinaldo Medina had opened its doors to Cuban refugees to provide food, shelter and spiritual guidance.

Refugees, sailing on fragile rafts from Cuba across the treacherous Straits of Florida to Key West, found "a warm welcome to the land of freedom" at the church, Cobo said.

"I could say that the first few times I went to the church, just as an observer, I noticed a deep tranquility every time I sat down to listen to the people singing gospel songs and pastor Medina preaching the Word of God," Cobo said.

This experience was significant, Cobo related, because his traditional religion had never brought him happiness or peace.

"I felt great frustration, an enormous weight on my shoulders and in my soul which I carried year after year," he said. "I felt betrayed by the devil because the devil takes away your peace, happiness and even your sleep."

Finally, Cobo asked Medina to help him "get Satan and his demons out of my house and out of my life." They destroyed the stone figures of his traditional religion, idols representing gods of the sea, good health and death.

"I managed to overcome this," Cobo said, "because I received the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and was baptized. At the moment of my conversion, my sins were forgiven and that was my leap of faith to God. I could now sleep at night. It was now faith and not frustration that guided me."

--more--

After his conversion experience, Cobo became involved with the refugee ministry of White Street church, which resulted in the establishment of Transit Home. Cobo said the refugee center has helped more than 6,000 Cuban refugees, out of which more than 2,000 have made a profession of faith in Christ as their Savior.

"At the Transit Home, the Word of God is preached and the Bible is given to every rafter that arrives from Cuba," Cobo noted.

"I am still concerned with the problems of my country," he added. "When I feel sad because my country has been enslaved, when I see my brothers and sisters dying in the Straits of Florida in search of freedom, when I feel that the sun no longer shines for that island of mine, I pray to God and I ask him every night to grant freedom to the Cuban nation. God bless America, and may he bless Cuba with freedom."

--30--

His cancer diagnosis prompted  
him to prayer like never before By Brenda Sanders

Baptist Press  
6/23/94

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--While battling cancer, Jack R. Smith found a sense of peace unlike anything he'd ever known before -- when he turned the outcome of his illness over to God.

Smith, associate director of the personal evangelism department of the Home Mission Board in Atlanta, shared his testimony with messengers during the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention.

Just after Christmas 1991 a physical exam showed indications he had prostate cancer, Smith said. Seven follow-up biopsies confirmed the malignancy was in his body.

"Folks, I went before the Lord then and I had a prayer experience that was unlike any I had ever had," Smith recounted. During the prayer, he began to try to bargain with God and said, "I pray. I talk to you every day."

Smith sensed an answer from God: "Do you feel like your prayer life is so exemplary that you ought to be spared from cancer?"

"No, I sure don't pray like I ought to," Smith responded, "but I do love the Bible. I love your Word and I like to study it and preach it."

Again, he sensed God's response: "Do you feel that your Bible study habits are so disciplined that I ought to make an exception for you?"

"No, I don't study my Bible like I used to," Smith responded.

"When he got through with me, I didn't have one reason in the world why I ought to be allowed to live," Smith shared. "But I asked if I could be healed.

"Then I remembered when Jesus came to that place in his life when he said, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet, not my will, but thine be done.'"

Smith admitted, "Folks, I really had to struggle to say that, but as soon as I did, there flowed over me a peace that I cannot explain. The Lord's presence was just so real to me."

He said his surgery was on Good Friday morning and he admitted, "The surgery was no fun, but there was a victory, there was a peace and there was a joy every day.

"If you ever have to totally depend on the Lord when everything is completely out of control, you'll find him there because he is able," Smith said.

Seven weeks of radiation followed the surgery, and Smith said, "I'm not a hero, but my Lord was there every day, never fail.

"The greatest thing," he said, "was not that he got me through that cancer -- and I have a good prognosis now. The greatest thing is that anytime you remember an empty tomb, remember he is able."

--30--

**His former million-dollar life  
now spent in witness for Christ By Brenda Sanders**

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--Bo Mitchell was a radio broadcaster who once made a million dollars through investments in radio stations and oil wells.

Mitchell, now a Mission Service Corps volunteer assigned to the evangelism department of the Home Mission Board, travels the nation teaching Continuing Witness Training -- the HMB's lay witnessing program -- to pastors and lay people.

His life had been an exciting one, he told messengers at the mid-June Southern Baptist Convention. During World War II, he served as a U.S. Navy pilot. Later, he was a play-by-play announcer for the Florida State University football network. Ultimately, he fulfilled a personal goal of becoming a millionaire.

However, he said he "was lost and on his way to hell" when he married his wife, Mickie, a Christian woman who attended a Baptist church.

After much encouragement, Mitchell finally attended church with his wife and was impressed by the pastor's sermon. "That changed my life," he said, and later he made a profession of faith in God.

In time, he lost his fortune but gained a desire to share his faith in God. He discovered, he said, as a Christian "the most important thing I could do was tell somebody about Jesus."

He received training at a Lay Evangelism School and went on a mission trip with a group of Florida laymen to Colombia, South America. Revival broke out, he said, and 243 people professed faith in Christ. "That changed the direction of my life forever," Mitchell said.

He became convinced God wanted him to be involved in personal evangelism and became a MSC volunteer.

Since then, he has participated in numerous mission trips, both in the United States and in other countries, and has taught others to share their faith in Christ.

He also stressed the importance of witnessing to one's neighbors, and told messengers of his experience in leading a man down the street from him to faith in Christ.

"My dear friends," he said, "I believe that the direction of the United States is one of lostness. I believe that it may become a footnote in history unless those of us who call ourselves Christians begin to witness now, today, wherever we go, about the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

"Only 5 percent of our people in a year's time ever attempt to lead anyone to Jesus Christ," he continued. "What a tragedy!"

--30--

**Final Cross Over figures:  
776 professions of faith**

**By David Winfrey**

**Baptist Press  
6/23/94**

ATLANTA (BP)--Cross Over Orlando resulted in 776 professions of faith, according to final figures compiled by the Home Mission Board's evangelism section.

The annual witnessing effort before the Southern Baptist Convention is designed to saturate the convention city with the gospel and aid local churches in reaching people for Christ, said Darrell Robinson, HMB vice president for evangelism.

The 776 professions of faith broke down as follows:

- 136 from street or performance evangelism,
- 296 from block parties,
- 223 from door-to-door witnessing,
- 34 from evangelistic rallies and
- 87 from "harvest Sunday" services in 40 churches that hosted a special speaker or activity.

--more--

In addition to the local impact, Cross Over also introduces visiting pastors and church leaders to innovative forms of witnessing, such as block parties and street evangelism.

Other statistics from Cross Over:

- 6,682 people were fed during 18 block parties,
- 11,921 homes were visited during door-to-door witnessing; people were home 7,407 times,
- the plan of salvation was presented at least 5,380 times,
- 4,866 Bibles were distributed and
- at least 1,201 people were trained to witness.

Next year's Cross Over will be in Atlanta, Saturday, June 17.

--30--

**Evangelists see change, challenges  
as 20th century draws to a close** By Keith Hinson

**Baptist Press  
6/23/94**

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--The life and job of the full-time evangelist is changing, according to several itinerant preachers and musicians attending the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Orlando, Fla.

One significant change has been the length of most series of revival meetings -- still the bread and butter of itinerant evangelists.

"When I first became a full-time evangelist more than seven years ago, almost all (revival) meetings ran from Sunday through Friday," said Fred McCoy, an evangelist based in Warner-Robbins, Ga. "But now, many revivals only run through Wednesday night. In fact, I'm doing more one-day (revival) meetings now."

McCoy attributed the reduction in the number of revival meetings to "our fast-paced, hurry-up society" and to an increasing number of alternative options for what to do on Friday nights.

Benny Jackson, an evangelist based in Germantown, Tenn., said many mega-churches have reduced the number of revival meetings because they have so many activities and events throughout a given week or year.

"In a mega-church, a revival is one of many major events," said Jackson, who is in his 21st year of full-time evangelism. "Some medium-size churches copy the mega-churches, because they want to be like them. But what the medium-size churches don't realize is that they don't have as many major events."

Jackson said medium-size churches would benefit from a longer series of revival services, because "a larger proportion of their people participate in the meetings than in mega-churches."

Dean Forrest, an evangelist based in Greenville, S.C., would like to see a return to two-week revivals, which were popular in the earlier part of the 20th century.

"It takes the first two or three meetings for the people to really get close to you," said Forrest, who sings with his wife and preaches. "As it is, by the time they start opening up to you, it's over. We need more time to motivate people to bring lost people with them to the meetings."

Leon Westerhouse, an evangelist based in Birmingham, Ala., cited poor spirituality as a factor in the smaller number of revival meetings.

"People are doing so many other things that they're putting ahead of the Lord," said Westerhouse, who recently completed 30 years in full-time evangelistic music and preaching. "Most people are just Sunday-morning Christians. They used to be more enthusiastic about revivals, but now I emphasize that we have to personally go out and bring them in."

Fred Collins, an evangelist based in Plains, Ga., cited the complacency of Christians as a factor in the failure of many revival services to reach people who are not Christians.

--m re--

"We've got the cart before the horse," said Collins, who has been in full-time evangelism 12 years. "We're trying to have evangelistic sermons, but we need to awaken the church before we win the lost in great numbers."

Collins takes issue with the way the word "revival" is used. "When you use the term in any other country," he said, "the Christians there know what you're talking about. In America, it is seen simply as an evangelistic campaign. That's frustrating because of the burden I have for the church to be revived."

The increasing number of one-day revivals can have a beneficial effect, Westerhouse said. "A church has to prepare in advance for a one-day meeting," he said. "They must have a push on home visitation prior to the revival and an emphasis on prayer."

Jackson said one-day revivals can be a time when numerous conversions take place. "If a church has done a lot of preparation and has a lot of prospects present, then the service can be a good harvest time," he said.

Boyd and Floyd Amason, identical twin evangelists based in Chesterfield, Va., say they are invited to an increasing number of Sunday morning concerts and one-night concerts.

"There are often more conversions on Sunday morning, because many of the people who attend are not the most committed," said Floyd, who with his brother has been for 20 years in what they call "a music ministry with humor."

Westerhouse believes economics and time-related factors are catalysts in shortening the number of revival services. With more working mothers and with many church members working two or three jobs, "They don't feel they have as much time with their children and may not be as willing to attend a longer series of meetings," he said.

With all the pluses and minuses of shortened series of revival services, there is another upside, according to some evangelists.

"An advantage is that an evangelist can have more time with his family," said Westerhouse, "though it's a disadvantage for reaching people for Christ."

McCoy echoed his sentiments: "In the past, I would get home on late Friday night, unpack and then repack for the following week. Now, with revivals often ending on Wednesday, I have more time with my family."

Though the number of revival services has shrunk, compensation for evangelists has not, according to some itinerant preachers.

"Financially, you're totally living by faith," said Forrest. "Some people consider it an obstacle, but you learn a lot about how good God is. He comes through in a difficult situation."

"If we wanted to make money, we would go into a different field," said Floyd Amason with a chuckle. "We say we're not a nonprofit ministry, but we are nonprofit."

The Amasons have seen a change of venue for their ministry. "In the early days, there could be no guitars played in the sanctuary," said Boyd Amason, who plays guitar and has written or arranged most of the 300-plus songs in their repertoire. "It used to be we would perform in the activities building or fellowship hall."

Floyd Amason plays several instruments, including stringed bass, electric fiddle, keyboards and harmonica. "We were considered very contemporary when we first started," he said. "Now we're middle of the road. The people in the congregation have always been open and receptive."

**Couple named missionaries  
along with 'baby sitter'**

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--When Darwin and Jan Bacon became Southern Baptist foreign missionaries June 12, their baby sitter became one, too.

While Bacon was pastor of Farmingdale Baptist Church on Long Island, N.Y., Sandy Lyle, then a teen-ager, baby-sat with the Bacons' two sons.

"I used to go to their house all the time," she recalls. "I even stayed with their children when their third son was born."

During its missionary appointment service at the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in Orlando, the Foreign Mission Board appointed the Bacons, whose sons are now grown. They'll work in Germany, where he will be pastor of an English-language church. He is from Garland, Texas, and his wife, Jane, is from Eatonton, N.J.

Sandy Lyle Hammack, now a registered nurse, and her husband, Duane, a psychological counselor, both from Jackson, Miss., were appointed to do social and outreach ministries in Hong Kong. She is the daughter of Ken and Judy Lyle, now of Shrewsbury, Mass. Her father is executive director of the Baptist Convention of New England.

"I hadn't seen the Bacons or heard from them since I left to go to college," said Hammack, who now has three daughters of her own, ages 12, 8 and 6.

When she saw her former pastor and his wife receive their appointment certificates, she cried.

"It was like my whole life flashed before my eyes, and I realized that God was sovereign even back in the 1970s and knew that we were going to be together again at this appointment service," she said.

HOUSE MAIL

**(BP)**

**BAPTIST PRESS**  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, TN 37203

Southern Baptist Library and  
Archives