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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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**HMB recruits volunteers
for Georgia flood relief**

By Sarah Zimmerman

**Baptist Press
7/13/94**

ATLANTA (BP)--Before rivers in south Georgia had receded enough to assess the flood damage, the Home Mission Board was recruiting volunteers for the inevitable cleanup and repair.

"We're looking at six months to a year for cleanup and rebuilding," said Charles Holland, director of missions for Bowen Baptist Association. "The cleanup is going to be a long haul. I hope we Baptists are in it for the long haul."

Twenty-eight deaths are attributed to the floods caused by heavy rains from tropical storm Alberto. Americus, Ga., one of the hardest-hit communities, had 21 inches of rain in 24 hours. Disaster relief feeding units from the Brotherhood Commission were on site immediately. Future volunteer needs will include jobs such as removing mud from basements and replacing sheetrock.

The ongoing volunteer efforts will be coordinated through the Home Mission Board and Georgia Baptist Convention. To volunteer, call the HMB at (404) 898-7486 or (800) HMB-VOLS.

Financial donations for relief work can be sent to the Home Mission Board, 1350 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601. Checks should be made payable to the Home Mission Board and earmarked for disaster relief.

In Oglethorpe, Ga., water was eight feet deep inside the second floor sanctuary of Whitewater Baptist Church and four feet deep at the church's pastorium, said Diane Simmons, church treasurer.

Church members realized the flood might affect their church, so they moved items from the lower level to the sanctuary, Simmons said. When the lower level flooded and it became clear the sanctuary was in the flood's path, church members removed the pews, organ and piano. They also moved furniture from the pastor's home.

Time did not allow them to move all the church furniture to higher ground, Simmons said. "No matter where you are, you feel like you need to be in five other places."

While other churches had flooded basements, First Baptist Church of Zebulon, Ga., met in its basement. A tornado spawned during the flood damaged the church roof, but the basement was dry.

Churches not damaged in the flood are being used as shelters for evacuated residents and as storage for items people moved from their homes, Holland said.

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Joe Beauchamp, director of missions in Tucker Baptist Association, said First Baptist Church of Camilla, Ga., housed people in its education space -- one family per Sunday school room.

The worst flooding in the association was in Newton, Ga., Beauchamp said. Water reached the second story of the courthouse, even though "the town moved up away from the river a long time ago," he said.

Needs vary from place to place, but Holland said his area currently has plenty of drinking water. Future needs will include cleaning supplies such as rubber boots, shovels, water hoses and bleach. Paper plates, paper cups and disposable diapers also are needed, he said. Collection and distribution of such items is being coordinated by local Baptist associations.

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6-day Habitat effort yields

6 homes for '93 flood victims By Laurie A. Lattimore

Baptist Press

7/13/94

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Hundreds of volunteer workers sporting dirty boots and heavy tool belts paid little attention to blistering sunshine and frequent rain in Jefferson City, Mo., to complete their goal -- building six houses in six days for the "Joining Hands Over Troubled Waters" project.

Mother Nature's flood assault on Jefferson City last summer challenged River City Habitat for Humanity to plan for a "blitz build" just six months after completing the chapter's first house. The River City chapter is the only Habitat affiliate in the nation to develop a specific response for victims of the Flood of '93. Baptists were among several denominations putting on the blitz in early July.

Habitat for Humanity International is a nonprofit Christian organization committed to making the dream of owning a home come true for low-income families. Families selected through an application process make a down payment and then pay approximately \$200 a month for 20 years to cover costs of building materials. Each homeowner must put 350 hours of "sweat equity" into the construction of their house and other Habitat homes.

When Habitat International President Millard Fuller visited flood-ravaged central Missouri last summer, River City Habitat board members told him of their plan to build their second and third houses for victims of the flood.

"He told us, 'You're not thinking big enough,'" said Bob Matroni, then-vice president of the local chapter and current president. "Now we're thinking big enough."

All construction of the homes is done through volunteer labor, saving \$10,000 to \$20,000. Labor and building materials are donated by churches, businesses and other organizations. All payments on the Habitat houses are put into a revolving fund that provides for building the next Habitat home.

"The only sad thing is we don't do enough of it," said Jim Matthews, a minister at Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Calico Rock, Ark. "If possible, I would build a house for everyone who applied."

But 10 houses is a good start. Just ask any Habitat member who knows what the chapter was doing a year ago -- waiting for rain to cease so volunteers could finish the first River City Habitat house, the future home of Marcell and Casandra Pickens. Because of persistent rain, the house wasn't complete until late November.

Richard McClure, blitz build coordinator and member of First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, said the flood project was conceived in November and approved by the board in December.

"To do this six months later is phenomenal," McClure said. Most Habitat chapters build 10 houses in 12-18 months. "A whole set of things happened just when they needed to, which shows the Lord really had a hand in this."

The future homeowners are more than grateful. Fred and Jodie Cundiff and their 9-month-old daughter Hollie will be in a home for the first time since their trailer was six feet under water last summer. They have lived in public housing since they had to move out.

"I don't think 'excited' describes how I feel," Cundiff said. "It's an experience, a dream I never thought would happen."

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Cundiff said the hundreds of people who volunteer their time to help build his house and others give him an overwhelming feeling.

"If I could line every one of them up, I think I'd hug them all," he said. "I love them."

"The day my daughter was born, I promised her she would live in a house someday. Now I can fulfill that promise," said Joe Zarecki of the home for his wife JaNiece and daughter Jessica.

Of the group from Urbana, Ill., that helped build his Habitat house, he said, "I hope one day they come to me and ask for help."

More than 200 out-of-town and 250 local volunteers were scheduled to work during two blitz build weeks, June 5-11 and 19-25. The out-of-state volunteers represent nine churches from eight states.

Twenty-five Jefferson City-area "covenant churches" joined with RCHH to provide food, funding and/or volunteer labor during the blitzes. Mary Houston, a member of First Baptist Church who coordinated its volunteer help on the build, said she was glad to see Baptists involved in an interfaith community project.

"Heavens, yes, we should do more of this," she said. "I don't think Baptists have a monopoly on heaven!"

Dan Whitehurst, a member of First Baptist Church and treasurer of the Missouri Baptist Foundation, became interested in Habitat for Humanity after following a PBS television series on the organization. Whitehurst jumped at the opportunity to get involved when the local blitz build began, taking a day off to help build the Zarecki house.

The Foundation board of trustees approved within the legal provisions of an estate a \$1,000 donation to River City Habitat for the blitz build. Whitehurst commended the trustees' decision for such a gift, but admonished Baptists not to stop their missions contributions at financial support.

"Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was to love thy neighbor as thyself, and he showed us how to use the opportunity of meeting people's physical needs to address their spiritual needs," Whitehurst said. "Habitat is a good program, a legitimate one and I'm excited about what can happen with it in the years ahead."

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**African American Baptists
reading beyond stereotypes**

By Dennis L. Sanders

**Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Swaying choirs. Engaging and ecstatic preachers. The animated congregation.

These are images that make up one view of African American faith, but the perception does not take into account how African Americans view their faith, what is the essence of their faith and current topics of interest in their churches.

Five African American Southern Baptist leaders were asked to reflect on their faith in light of books they have been reading recently.

Emmanuel McCall, a retired black church relations leader with the Home Missions Board and now pastor of Christian Fellowship Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, is exploring the Bible from a black outlook via two books: "Stony the Road We Trod" by Howard Divinity School theologian Cain Hope Felder and "Exploring the New Testament" by Tom Hoyt.

Most of the Bible is deciphered through the lenses of whites, McCall said, noting that writers like Felder and Hoyt are exposing the black presence in the Bible as well as biblical issues affecting blacks.

Citing the story in the Book of Acts of the Apostle Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, McCall said he wonders why this man is called a eunuch, which he believes carries a negative connotation, instead of the positive term of government official. McCall said he believes this man had an important role in the founding of Ethiopian Christianity, "and yet this man is demeaned."

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African Americans bring to the table different viewpoints that would be helpful to whites, McCall said. "I think there are some perspectives that would do the whole church well (to hear)," he said.

For Olivia Cloud, coordinator for the Baptist Sunday School Board's black church development section in Nashville, Tenn., African American authors also remind her of the validity of Christian experience outside the European train of thought.

"Their (whites') experience is an experience, not the experience," said Cloud, advising Christians of European descent to listen to speeches and understand African American culture, toward realizing the religious experiences of African Americans and other ethnic groups such as Native Americans have validity.

Cloud has been reading "God of the Oppressed" by James Cone, a theologian at Union Theological Seminary in New York who helped coin the term, "black theology," and "Just a Sister Away" by womanist theologian Renita Weems of Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

Working with low-income women in Nashville has been Cloud's way of applying what she has read. She works with the women on such things as economic empowerment and self-esteem, battling not only poverty but something she sees as endemic in the African American community as well as among the disenfranchised in society -- the belief in the "sweet by and by," the focus on the afterlife while ignoring the personal and societal pain in the here and now.

Cloud said she believes this kind of theology came from slavery. In interviews of former slaves during the Depression, they said they believed things would not change in this life, and this tenet "just got passed down from generation to generation," Cloud said. When someone is locked out of the system, they need something to look forward to, said Cloud, who counters this thinking in her work and says, "If you take care of this life, heaven will take care of itself."

Don Sharp and the church where he is pastor, Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chicago, are among those working to take care of this life. His congregation takes part in a prison ministry, an AIDS support group, a feeding ministry and providing affordable housing.

"We live in a country that is rife with institutional racism," said Sharp, adding he often deals with the rotten fruits of racism, such as drugs, gangs and the attack on the family.

Many of the books Sharp is reading revolve around the issue of race, such as "Faces at the Bottom of the Well" by former Harvard professor Derrick Bell; "Race Matters" by theologian Cornel West; "There Are No Children Here" by Alex Kotolwitz; and "For My People" by James Cone.

Sharp is critical of what he sees as the denomination's inattention to issues concerning social justice. "I have not seen it as part of the agenda of the denomination," he said. Sharp added if resolutions passed during annual Southern Baptist Convention meetings are an indicator, then it shows the SBC's priorities are elsewhere. He added, as another example, that Southern Baptists are not investing enough in the prisons. While they have chaplains, there are no programs to help former convicts not return to incarceration.

Sharp cited James Cone's contention that people of God must address the issues of justice and become a "change agent" to free up those imprisoned by the "demons" of institutional racism.

His church always is asking if it is making an impact in the community, Sharp said, citing his belief that Faith Tabernacle has a mandate to make an investment in the lives of people. "Otherwise," he said, "What our purpose for existing?"

Is the black church making an impact? Penny Hildreth-Ellis, a former minister at New Faith Baptist Church in suburban Chicago who now lives in Montgomery, Ala., said she thinks it still is. "It is still the mainstay of the black community," she said, noting -- in terms of where African Americans gather -- it is the church.

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Hildreth-Ellis said the books she has read lately, such as "Beloved" by Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison and "Wouldn't Take Nothing From My Journey Now" by Wake Forest professor Maya Angelou, have confirmed her belief that the church is a dominant institution in the African American community.

While she sees the church as an anchor in the African American community, Hildreth-Ellis acknowledged some see the church as not being progressive or as irrelevant. The black church was slow to respond to such crises affecting the African American community as AIDS and gangs. This may be changing, Hildreth-Ellis said, noting that younger pastors often are more progressive and trained, in contrast to the older and more entrenched pastors.

The comment that churches have been slow to deal with crises affecting the lives of African Americans is affirmed by Joe Ratliffe, pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston. Among the books he has read are "Upon This Rock" by Samuel Freedman, which deals with how one pastor, Johnny Ray Youngblood, deals with issues affecting his community in New York.

Ratliffe also is reading "U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches" by Tex Sample, which talks about what the church of the future will be like. Ratliffe noted the author says denominations will not have such an important role, while the local church will reemerge in importance.

Ratliffe said the church is not addressing the needs that are what he calls "the heartbeat" of secular society. "It's (the church) a sanctuary from reality in many cases," he said, and often is very provincial. Ratliffe gave examples of how his church, by comparison, is seeking to respond to the outside world by ministries to such groups as the homeless, people with AIDS and single parents.

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Sanders is a free-lance writer in Washington.

Miss. camp area may receive permanent gambling protection By William H. Perkins Jr.

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7/13/94

BILOXI, Miss. (BP)--The Mississippi Gaming Commission on June 30 declared the neighborhood around Gulfshore Baptist Assembly a legal but inappropriate site for casino gambling and is considering a permanent ban on any gambling development in the area.

Paul Harvey, executive director of the commission, told the state's three gaming commissioners during their regular meeting in Biloxi the situation in the Henderson Point neighborhood where Gulfshore is located "transcends" the legality of casino development there.

Harvey identified a number of concerns he had with developing the site for a casino operation:

- tight, compacted nature of the residential area.
- "unprecedented" amount of correspondence opposing the site.
- Harrison County Board of Supervisors' unanimous opposition.
- proximity to religious activity.
- petition from local residents with 1,500 validated names, all opposing the site.
- public safety concerns due to lack of infrastructure in the area to handle huge increases in traffic and sewer problems.

"I don't consider it to be a suitable site," he said, adding he would have a "tremendous problem" recommending the site for a casino operation.

The ballroom atop the Treasure Bay Hotel, where the hearing took place, erupted with applause from the hundreds of local residents and Baptists who had packed the room to register their opposition.

The three gaming commissioners echoed Harvey's statement.

Commissioner Robert Ingram of Gulfport said Baptists had done a "glorious job" of convincing him they didn't want a casino anywhere near Gulfshore.

He was referring to the tidal wave of letters and telephone calls the commission received concerning a proposal -- withdrawn just a few days before the hearing -- by Spectrum, Inc., to build a 24-hour-a-day casino within sight of the state Baptist campground.

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Harvey reported earlier he was forced to hire temporary staffers to deal with the deluge of mail opposing the casino.

Commissioner W.W. Gresham of Indian Ia concurred with Harvey and Engram, and commission chairman Stuart Irby of Jackson observed the executive director and all three commissioners held the same position on the matter.

Paul Jones, executive director of the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, asked the gaming commission to impose a 1,000-yard buffer zone prohibiting gambling development around religious retreats and conference centers recognized as nonprofit by the Internal Revenue Service.

"We want you to be proactive," Jones said.

The gaming commissioners approved Harvey's request that legal staff be allowed to study the buffer zone proposal and bring recommendations before the commission.

"It's not who's right but what's right. I think we know what's right," Harvey said.

Jones promised to monitor the commission's progress toward an officially recognized buffer zone.

"Baptists proved that their voice can be heard loud and clear in Mississippi. Thanks to everyone who wrote and called the commission, the mission of Gulfshore will soon be fully and permanently protected," he said.

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Ridgecrest reorganization,
downsizing are announced

Baptist Press
7/13/94

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Reorganization to reduce operating costs and enhance marketing and conference services at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center have been announced, to be effective Aug. 1.

Changes will result in the deletion of 14 positions, four management and 10 support staff. Three of the 14 positions currently are vacant. Of the 11 affected employees one will take early retirement and 10 will receive severance benefits and outplacement assistance.

"These changes have been made necessary by the financial realities of a 10-year decline in summer attendance," said G.W. Lankford, director of Ridgecrest. "While our non-summer attendance has remained stable, the decline in summer guests represents a major loss in income.

"These actions will reduce expenses now and poise us for future growth both in guests and in revenues," he said.

Staff reductions will take place in the guest housing, maintenance, food service, conference service and business sections.

Marketing and conference services functions will be combined into an enlarged section, with the addition of one position and upgrading of three to strengthen efforts at recruiting groups to meet at Ridgecrest and then meeting their needs while on campus.

Mike Arrington, executive director for corporate affairs, said Ridgecrest and Glorieta (N.M.) conference centers are "vital ministries of the Baptist Sunday School Board that are mandated to break even financially."

"This restructuring at Ridgecrest and changes announced earlier at Glorieta will enable the conference centers to keep our expenses more in line with our revenue projections, maintain guest costs at a reasonable rate and position ourselves for growth and improved guest services in the future."

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Southwestern trustee recounts
process that led to Hemphill

By Tim Palmer

Baptist Press
7/13/94

ST. LOUIS (BP)--A month and five days after Russell Dilday was fired as president of Southwestern Seminary, Fort Worth, a trustee search committee met to begin the process of choosing his successor.

A half-dozen meetings and less than three months later, the committee was ready to recommend Kenneth S. Hemphill for the job.

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Search committee member Pat Campbell, pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church in St. Charles, Mo., provided a chronology of the nine-member committee's work. Except for one meeting in Orlando, Fla., all the meetings took place in the Fort Worth area.

When members gathered for their first meeting April 14, the committee already had 23 names of prospective candidates and 12 resumes. Committee members agreed to classify the candidates into a first tier, a second tier and a third tier. The first tier of "best possibilities" was to be limited to four candidates.

The list of 23 included Hemphill, who had been proposed by trustee Darrell Robinson of the Home Mission Board in Atlanta. "I was excited to see his name on there," said Campbell, who knew Hemphill from a church growth conference Hemphill conducted at his church.

Individuals whose names had been proposed but who had not submitted resumes were contacted and asked whether they wanted to do so, Campbell said. Some declined to apply.

The search committee assigned Campbell to chair a subcommittee to compose a purpose statement to give to presidential candidates. Also, members of the full committee were told to pick a certain time to fast and pray for God's guidance in their task -- one meal per week.

"There was a lot of prayer at every meeting," Campbell said.

At the second meeting, May 2, the committee reviewed, edited and adopted the purpose statement, which Campbell had written with input from subcommittee members. The statement called for "a man of vision and faith who can dream big dreams and bring them into fruition"

Also May 2, the committee identified a first tier of four men and a second tier of four men, based on members' classification of candidates.

The search committee met again May 17 and approved a motion to begin the interview process June 7. Six men were invited for interviews: Hemphill, director of the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth in Atlanta; Timothy George, dean of the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.; Richard Melick, president of Criswell College in Dallas; Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission in Nashville; Ralph Smith, pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas; and Mark Coppenger, vice president for convention relations at the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville.

Melick, Smith, Land and Coppenger were interviewed June 7. George and Hemphill, who both had schedule conflicts that day, were interviewed June 15 during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Orlando.

The committee decided to invite Hemphill, George, Melick and Smith for second interviews, with their wives. However, George was out of the country and thus unavailable for a second interview, Campbell noted. The second interviews took place at a hotel near the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Hemphill was interviewed June 30; Melick and Smith on July 1.

Again Hemphill made a favorable impression on Campbell. "We really felt good on his first interview, and the second interview solidified it, made it come together so strong."

At about 3:30 p.m. July 1, the search committee voted unanimously to recommend Hemphill to become president of Southwestern. Campbell seconded the motion of search committee vice chairman Ollin Collins, pastor of Harvest Baptist Church in Watauga, Texas, to recommend Hemphill.

Campbell said he was glad to have had a part in the selection process. He acknowledged the search committee had been mindful of the need for peace at Southwestern after the uproar caused by Dilday's firing, but he insisted the committee's overriding objective was to do God's will and to name God's man for the job. "Whoever that was, we were going to go with that."

**Congressional hearing held
on lesbian retreat in Miss. By William H. Perkins Jr.**

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--People in Mississippi's Jones County simply do not want a large lesbian retreat in the Ovett area, several local residents told Congressman Barney Frank (D-Mass.) during a July 6 hearing in Jackson.

Frank, an admitted homosexual and chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, called for the hearing after complaints from Brenda and Wanda Henson, the lesbian couple running Camp Sister Spirit, that they were being threatened and harassed by people opposed to the 120-acre encampment in rural southeast Mississippi.

The Hensons have accused opponents of draping a dead dog over their mailbox, spreading nails in their driveway, shooting at the camp from nearby woods and other acts of intimidation.

James Hendry, leader of Mississippi for Family Values, told Frank and Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) that he is opposed to the "commercial enterprise" on the Hensons' property and offended by efforts to "mischaracterize our community and our state."

He also said opposition leaders have counseled against acts of harassment and violence directed toward the retreat.

Hendry testified that the names, addresses and telephone numbers of opposition leaders were apparently supplied to national homosexual and lesbian publications, which resulted in obscene calls and letters directed at him and other leaders.

Frank clashed several times during the hearing with John Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church in Richton, who told Frank he is against Frank's idea of expanding civil rights protection to homosexuals and lesbians during the 1995 congressional session.

Allen produced a sheet of letterhead stationery titled, "Camp Sister Spirit Feminist Education Retreat," in which New Augusta attorney Paul Walley, Allen and Hendry were listed as leaders of the "opposition hate group."

"We do not hate the Hensons or anyone else. My greatest desire for them ... is that they might experience the life-changing redemption found in a genuine faith surrender to Jesus Christ," Allen told Frank.

Mississippi Congressman Mike Parker (D-Miss.), whose district includes the Ovett area, has repeatedly criticized Frank's interference. Parker also has spoken at anti-Camp Sister Spirit rallies.

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**Missionary returns to Peru
after being shot in robbery**

By Mary E. Speidel

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7/13/94

LIMA, Peru (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Gary Crowell, who nearly died after being shot and robbed in Lima in March, returned to Peru June 30 after a three-month medical leave in Houston.

During the leave, Crowell and his family prayed he would be well enough to go back to Peru by the end of June.

He has undergone physical therapy after surgery to repair damage to his left elbow caused by a bullet that passed through his left arm. After the shooting in Lima, he underwent emergency surgery there for a bullet-severed major artery.

Two armed men robbed and shot Crowell as he was returning from the bank to his office in Lima, where he is treasurer for Southern Baptist missionaries in Peru.

Colleagues who heard the shots saved his life by rushing him to the nearest hospital.

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