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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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**Southern Baptists find Gaza
happier place to live, work**

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
8/17/94

GAZA (BP)--Once again, it's OK to laugh and play in Gaza.

"It's a much, much happier place to live in. People feel free to get out at night. They have wedding celebrations like they did before," said Dona Fitzgerald, chairman of the organization of Southern Baptist representatives working in Gaza.

The hope that flooded in after Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasser Arafat recently took the reins of power in Gaza has spilled over into the lives of Palestinians with whom the Baptists work.

Fitzgerald and her physician husband, Dean, of Bartlesville and Tulsa, Okla., respectively, came to the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip in 1978. That was nine years before Palestinians launched an uprising against Israeli rule called the Intifada -- and before Gaza City grew so bleak and barren because of it.

Now the Intifada -- directed at the Israeli military occupation -- is no longer necessary. Under agreements hammered out between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Israelis have pulled out. The PLO has begun exercising its newly won rights to self-rule.

During the Intifada, the Israeli military forbade movement of people outside their homes after 8 p.m. The Intifada stopped celebrations and public music. Baptist workers likened life in the violent, fenced-in strip of land bordering Egypt, Israel and the Mediterranean Sea to living in a cage with 750,000 angry people.

But now conditions are even better than before the Intifada began, Fitzgerald said.

Personal freedom and a new burst of energy translates into opportunity for the Gaza Baptist Church, a vibrant group of believers whose numbers have grown from recent weekend revival services. The church is looking for an Arab pastor.

Its membership numbers about 30, but the church's reach extends far beyond that. "We have contact with a lot of people who aren't members," Fitzgerald said.

Seventy-five people attend Sunday school, and about 40 come to youth meetings. The church's Bible school this year attracted more than 100 children.

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To strengthen the Baptist witness, Southern Baptist representatives are requesting new full-time co-workers -- preachers and an English teacher -- from churches in the United States. They're also asking for a teacher to make a career out of training teachers at a school for the hearing-impaired.

No one has yet been appointed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to fill those assignments. But a deaf educator and her husband (who will do youth work in the church) are expected to arrive soon for a short-term assignment under Southern Baptists' International Service Corps program.

Southern Baptist representative Paul Lawrence, who is designing continuing education classes in hospitals and clinics, also is asking for nurses to come for several weeks to teach subjects such as neonatal, oncological and cardiac-care nursing.

Lawrence, of Leeds, Ala., taught at Baptists' nursing school until it was leased rent-free to the United Nations last year. Baptists were unable to keep it adequately staffed because of rising violence from the Intifada. Lawrence is working through former students at the school to offer specialized courses for nurses in Gaza.

Southern Baptist worker Glenn Glover of Bessemer, Ala., has found a new way to meet people and make friends. He has dribbled a basketball around with other teams in a Palestinian league. During the day he teaches English -- a much-sought-after commodity -- with colleague Nancie Wingo of Fort Worth, Texas, at the Center of Culture and Light.

The Baptists believe the worst is over in Gaza -- at least for a time.

"People seem to feel much, much better about their situation now," said Fitzgerald.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following three stories on Baptist work in inner-city Memphis focus on part of the new multi-state Southern Baptist Mississippi River Ministry.

'But if we don't tell them
about Jesus, who will?'

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
8/17/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The sights of inner-city Memphis are not pretty. Consider these:

-- Dilapidated houses with peeling paint and loose boards are the rule rather than the exception on most inner-city streets. At least they do offer some protection from the elements.

-- Faces lined with fear stare at cars carrying white males, wondering if you're a drug dealer, seller or narcotics agent. After all, who else would dare enter the neighborhood?

-- A 1-year-old baby playing in an old playpen, unaware he has been abandoned by his parents, with his hope for the future in the hands of an elderly couple on welfare seeking to adopt him and his preschool-age sister.

-- Graffiti-laden walls where rival street gangs try to outdo each other dot the area.

And the list could go on.

But, says Tim Cox, Memphis inner-city pastor and Mississippi River Ministry coordinator for Shelby County Baptist Association, "If we don't tell them about Jesus, who will?"

Whereas many Southern Baptist churches within shouting distance of inner-city Memphis have moved away, Brinkley Heights Baptist Church, where Cox is pastor, is among the few that have stayed to try to minister where most fear to tread.

With meager resources and relatively few members, it could be a hopeless task. But through ministry options like Mississippi River Ministry and Urban Allies, a plan which teams Baptist churches for work in specific distressed areas of a city, inroads are being made. As the association's church and community ministries director, Cox coordinates both those efforts for the association.

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Brinkley Heights is the hub for most of the MRM work around Memphis this summer. During the week the church functions similarly to a Baptist center, providing food and clothing to those in need, as well as spiritual counseling to those who utilize the services offered by the church.

Before the summer is over, more than 50 teams, including several from Tennessee Baptist churches, will have done various ministries in the area, according to Ray Gilder, program associate in the Tennessee Baptist Convention's missions department. Gilder coordinates Mississippi River Ministry in Tennessee.

Among the most prevalent are Backyard Bible Clubs, held at Brinkley Heights and other locations, Vacation Bible Schools and work project ministries.

"We do anything we can to show the love of Jesus," Cox stressed.

Church teams have come in and, working with summer missionaries assigned to Cox, have provided much-needed ministry to inner-city children. For some of those kids, a hug from a volunteer youth or adult is the only indication they will have that someone does care about them.

Cox, who is a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board Mission Service Corps volunteer, has worked in inner city Memphis the past five years. He was bivocational until three years ago when he felt the call to devote himself full time to the ministry needs of the area. He understands the challenges of ministering in a predominantly black urban area.

"The Lord has shown me people in the inner city are not looking for a place to go to church. They are looking for the church," he said.

Cox observed before "you can share the gospel you have to demonstrate that you care."

The work projects have helped show that caring attitude, Cox noted. "The purpose of the teams is not to do a tremendous amount of work but instead we're trying to build relationships (with people in the community) to show them we care and are here for the long run."

Cox is well aware Memphis is not unlike many other urban cities although a recent report lists Memphis with the second-highest rate of poverty than any other metropolitan area of more than 500,000 people in the nation.

"Poverty is poverty and it knows no race," Cox said.

He observed the people in inner-city Memphis "live on the edge of disaster every day" just one step from homelessness. Last year, he said, there were 9,000 homeless people in Memphis and 3,000 of them were children.

Mississippi River Ministry is one way of offering hope and God's love to those "living on the edge of disaster," he said.

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**Churches' unified efforts
breaking racial barriers**

By Lonnie Wilkey

**Baptist Press
8/17/94**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--If Westhaven Baptist Church was going to reach its community for Christ, church leaders knew they would need help.

Through Southern Baptists' Mississippi River Ministry, that help has come -- from other Baptist churches, business owners and managers, and even government leaders.

With assistance, Westhaven, an African American church in Shelby County Baptist Association, operates three "hope centers" in apartment complexes near the church and has held a summer-long Vacation Bible School at the church.

Pastor Chris McNairy said the concept was developed and then shared with managers of apartment complexes at a luncheon sponsored by the church.

"We developed common goals, but we told them the only thing we had to offer was Jesus," McNairy recalled, adding one of the leasing agents was later saved.

Three apartment complexes -- Spring Creek, Courtyard and Kingsgate -- each provided at least one room for the ministry. Some provided more and most were given to the church for use at little or no cost.

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Bible studies are held on site along with arts and crafts classes and when school starts, tutoring for the kids, according to Walter Hammond, associate pastor at Westhaven. Hammond also serves as the chaplain for the Spring Creek Hope Center.

Volunteers for the ministry come from Westhaven and other Memphis-area churches through Urban Allies, a ministry in the association that teams churches to work in specific target areas.

Churches currently paired with Westhaven at the three hope centers are Collierville, Leawood and Trinity.

"We have a great relationship with the churches we're working with," Hammond said.

McNairy noted the ministry is breaking down racial barriers and is having a positive effect on his congregation of relatively new Christians. They are learning by working with mature Christians from the other churches involved, McNairy said.

Hammond said they hope to eventually have 12 hope centers to accommodate the 10,000-plus people who live within walking distance of Westhaven Baptist.

Besides the churches, local government and business leaders have pitched in to help with the summer-long VBS program.

Shelby County Sheriff A.C. Gillis, a member of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, provided \$5,000 in confiscated drug money to help fund the program. The funds were used to give stipends to "interns" from the apartments to help during the schools and to buy recreation equipment. Daily lunches were provided by the Parks Commission.

Also, several volunteers from businesses and churches helped work on Westhaven's softball field.

"We are seeing the community rally behind us," McNairy said.

Also, he added, "we're seeing a breakdown of the stronghold of racism -- a racism built on myths and events such as the killing of Martin Luther King Jr.

McNairy said there are some who say Christians can't work together because of race. "We know we can," he affirmed.

The Memphis pastor knows the issue of race needs to be put in the background for good.

"Kids do not look at color. They look at someone who loves and cares for them."

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Former school teacher returns
to minister in neighborhood

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
8/17/94

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Dwight Clayton is no stranger to inner-city Memphis.

Now a Missions Service Corps volunteer with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Clayton is assigned as an urban missionary to the same neighborhood where he taught in the local high school for 20 years.

"God just would never let me leave this neighborhood," Clayton said, noting when he began looking for a place of ministry about five years ago, this is where he came.

Clayton also is pastor of New Song Baptist Church, a mission of Brinkley Heights Baptist Church, a small congregation in inner-city Memphis that is trying to make a difference in the lives of people.

Clayton is a natural to serve as pastor of a mission in an area that has a bad reputation. "Everybody here knows Dwight because he taught here," said Tim Cox, pastor of Brinkley Heights and church and community ministries director for Shelby County Baptist Association.

The target area for New Song is several apartment buildings near the mission. According to Cox there are 10,000 to 12,000 people within a mile and a half of New Song, the only Southern Baptist witness in the immediate area. Clayton and Cox are especially interested in involving children and youth in the mission.

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Clayton began "Straight Up" youth groups. He takes the youth to a borrowed church gym or somewhere inexpensive away from the neighborhood. They have a 20-minute Bible study and then just have fun for awhile, he said.

"We have seen kids saved in the church. God has blessed that," Clayton said.

Cox acknowledged the area is tough. "There's a lot of fear in the area. People are afraid. But, if we don't tell them about Jesus, who will?"

Ray Gilder, program associate in the Tennessee Baptist Convention's missions department and coordinator of the state's Mississippi River Ministry, observed on-site ministry is essential.

"An on-site ministry presence is what these kids need. They need to stay with them until they're mature and can withstand the pressures of the community," he said.

Gilder is quick to praise the efforts of Cox and Clayton.

"Tim and Dwight are living in the trenches. They have a vision and a heart," Gilder observed.

In order to be known in the community, the mission recently acquired property on the corner of Georgia and Clinton streets, south of the Memphis business district. The mission currently is meeting in a local community center.

Clayton said he had been praying for some time to find an appropriate building for the ministry. "I saw this house and knew this was it," he said, adding he would come and sit on the front steps and pray "for God to give us this house."

The prayers paid off. Using funds provided from the Golden State Mission Offering and the Shelby County association, the property, which includes the house and an old store building, was purchased earlier this year.

The property is essential to the future of the ministry, leaders agreed.

"For Southern Baptists this is a foreign missions field. The best way to approach it is to have people living here," Cox said.

They envision eventually having missionary residents in the house, with the store building being used primarily as the church sanctuary.

But before anything can be done, a tremendous amount of work is ahead. The inside already has been "guttled" by volunteers. Future volunteer teams are needed to continue work before the church actually meets in the facility.

Churches interested in assisting with renovation work are welcome to call Cox at (901) 458-0617.

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**Church members demonstrate
compassion for community**

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
8/17/94

GAINESVILLE, Ga. (BP)--Every Thursday people needing clothes, money or food line up outside Judy Furlow's office. It's her favorite day of the week.

Juanita Adams uses the Bible to teach Vietnamese immigrants English. She's taught internationals since 1976, and she calls it the most rewarding thing she's ever done.

June Dillon, a retired teacher, runs a church clothing closet like a well-organized department store. "If I stayed at home, I'd get depressed," she said.

Their attitude of joyful service permeates First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga., where members also sponsor a Vietnamese mission, provide a meeting place for Alcoholics Anonymous, contribute to an associational food pantry, host a Christmas party at the county jail and make stuffed animals for hospitalized children.

"Years ago these people took the Bible seriously when Jesus said, 'In as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it unto me,'" said pastor John Lee Taylor.

Taylor also attributes the members' responsiveness to the church's emphasis on spiritual gifts and the priesthood of the believer. Associate pastor Bruce Fields said church members give themselves and their money out of a sense of blessing.

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The bottom line, Taylor said, is that rather than asking why they should participate in a mission project, "most of the members are 'why not?' people."

Three years ago the church began participating in a community program to provide shelter for homeless people, rotating with other churches on a weekly basis from October through April.

When the responsibility falls to First Baptist, a church van picks up the homeless participants at 6 p.m. at the city square. People are taken to the church's family life center where they eat a hot meal, have a chance to wash their clothes and take showers. They spend the night at the center, and the next morning they are given a hot breakfast and a sack lunch.

Volunteers interview each homeless person to determine his or her needs and ways to help. They found the majority of the men were working but not earning enough money for housing. A man in his 80s was blind and had been neglected by his family. He is now in a government long-term adult care program. Some homeless participants have joined First Baptist.

The coordinators' challenge is finding enough ways for people to volunteer. "We had so many people volunteer we didn't have a place for everyone," said Patti Patterson. "I never heard anyone say, 'I don't want to,'" said Alice Adams, a church member and professional social worker.

Perhaps the church's mission spirit can be attributed to starting young. Each summer junior high youth take a combined choir and mission trip in the state of Georgia. The senior high youth mission/choir trip is outside the state, and once every four years it's outside the United States.

"Young people are one of God's greatest resources to do his work," said Jimmy Cutrell, minister of music. "They have energy, time, willingness, and they're teachable."

The mission trips have taught them "what full-time missionaries do" and "how other people live," the young people say.

Scott McReynolds, youth minister, said he hopes the mission trips teach youth the importance of commitment to Christ and being equipped as disciples.

"I don't feel like we do enough" in mission endeavors, McReynolds said.

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(BP) photos (horizontal and vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines in SBCNet News Room.

Volunteer enlistment critical
to meet church ministry needs

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
8/17/94

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Every church member is needed in some position of service if all the ministry needs of the congregation are to be satisfied, according to a national consultant in church administrative services

Jim Ryan, of the pastor-staff leadership department in the Baptist Sunday School Board, told participants in Bible Preaching Leadership Conference Aug. 13-19 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center he believes a lack of leadership in Southern Baptist churches is not God's failure, but that of church leaders and members.

Leaders "have failed to enlist and train God's people in service," he observed, "and some of God's people are living in blatant disobedience to God's will. Christian service is not optional."

Volunteers are prevalent in the Bible, Ryan said, in descriptions of disciples, saints, brothers and sisters, gifted persons, laborers together, priests and living stones.

Today's church leaders have a variety of means to organize for enlistment of volunteers, beginning with a nominating committee, authorized by the church to work with church program leaders in selecting, enlisting and nominating leaders to the church for election.

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Many people do respond positively when volunteer opportunities are presented, he said. While the reasons people give for saying "yes" are not always the ones leaders would prefer, Ryan said many of the reasons are sound.

Among those he has compiled are:

- It sounds like fun.
- I want to be where the action is.
- They really need and want me.
- It is a chance to learn new skills.
- It could help me with my personal life.
- I have gotten a lot of help; now it is my turn to repay.
- It is a critical need; I have got to do my part.
- I will have a chance to really influence what happens.
- Service is a tradition in our family. It's expected.
- My best friend is asking me.
- I will make new friends.

Ryan suggested diagnosing leadership needs of the current church organization, preparing a leadership roster of needed workers, dealing in positions rather than people in current roles and listing only those positions to be filled.

Needs for additional classes and departments to be created should be cited to forecast additional volunteer leadership needs and to provide for growth potential. Then, he said, priorities should be ranked, enlisting the strongest leader for each position. A job description should be prepared for each position.

Ryan said he advocates evaluating every church member for service, asking introspectively if the person could serve if willing and whether the person's current gifts and training would be acceptable to the church.

Among ways to search for volunteers among members, he suggested a Christian service survey, a gift search, a series of sermons on spiritual gifts, personal consultation with adult teachers for suggestions, a survey of new members, checking varieties of leadership lists and training records within the church, hosting an enlistment banquet and conducting a leadership commitment service.

Developing a climate for service is important, he said, through spiritual preparation in sermons and challenges, keeping leadership needs before the church and testimonies from those who serve.

Among the cautions Ryan offers those planning to enlist volunteers is to avoid hallway discussions or telephone requests, to never apologize for asking someone to serve God and to remember you have God's help and power.

In addition to fully describing the specific volunteer need and providing sample copies of materials to be used, he advocates adequate training to provide understanding of responsibilities, to improve the quality of work and to acquaint workers with the church's objectives, goals, purposes, plans, policies, procedures and doctrines.

As workers assume their roles, he suggested leading them to set measurable, dated goals with checkpoints and celebrations of attained goals.

Finally, he said, recognition benefits workers and the whole church. Among the possibilities for acknowledgment are a commissioning service, an appreciation banquet, personal recognition and letters of appreciation.

Ryan said he is convinced religious educators must possess an inner assurance of God's call and of the authority of the Word of God, accept responsibility for equipping leaders for growth and possess a confident assurance that the power of God will enable them to do all that he leads them to do.

Bible Preaching Leadership Conference was sponsored by the pastor-staff leadership department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

**Southern Seminary names
full-time archivist**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Gregory A. Wills has been named archives and special collections librarian at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Wills recently completed requirements for a doctorate in historical studies from Emory University in Atlanta. He also holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Duke University in Durham, N.C., and a master's degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass.

Wills, the seminary's first full-time archivist, will oversee the repository of seminary records which date back to the school's founding in 1859 in Greenville, S.C. He also will administer collections that include documents and photographs from the early ministry of Billy Graham and thousands of records from all levels of Baptist life.

Wills has contributed articles on early Baptist leaders Basil Manly Jr. and Jesse Mercer to "American National Biography," a forthcoming work from Oxford University Press. He also wrote an article titled "Jesse Mercer and Church Discipline" for "Viewpoints: Georgia Baptist History."

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**Wheelchair no handicap
for Brotherhood leader**

By Wm. Fletcher Allen

Baptist Press
8/17/94

FAYETTEVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Hearing about the never-give-up attitude of Steve Orr is one thing, but seeing him in action is the real thing.

He's an unusual but successful Brotherhood director.

Although he is confined to a wheelchair by cerebral palsy and unable to speak clearly, the young man's indomitable spirit often places him in positions of leadership.

He finds ways to communicate. And when men of Parks City Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Tenn., are absent from a meeting, they have to deal with Orr. He gets someone, usually his mother, Geneva Myrick, to call them for an accounting.

Baptist Men of the church have rallied around Orr, making him a member of their group and gladly accepting his role as "chairman of enthusiasm."

As he was being interviewed before a Wednesday evening prayer service, Orr wasn't willing to accept praise for the work the men's groups have done.

"The men who can really do the work -- they are the story," he said.

His mother said the Baptist men's fellowship has been a boost to her 39-year-old son, who lives at home. "Because of his dad's death," she said, "they are the men whom he needs so much in his life."

Orr said he was willing to work with the men because they "drafted" him and pledged they would work together in projects that needed to be done. One of the first things he undertook was responsibility for calling some of the older members of the church, "just to check up on them." His mother does the communicating -- but Orr insists the members call him if they have a need.

He also is responsible for getting the men together when a meeting is needed. And, volunteered one of the men, Orr likes fish so much he gladly acts as the "official taster" at the churchwide fish fries.

It seems the men of the church have a list of needs that seldom shortens. They cook for revival meetings (one of their easy jobs) and move their community to help others. For example, they helped neighboring First Baptist Church in McBurg with some construction in April.

When the March ice storm marched through the area, the men, including their leader, did a lot of work for fellow church members trimming trees, clearing yards and removing 75 trailer loads of debris from homes and the church yard. With Orr giving advice, they have almost taken over maintenance of the church buildings and grounds.

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The church is blessed with retired men who "don't know how to retire," said Joe Mayberry, William Carey Baptist Association director of missions. He added when anyone in the church has a need for prayer, "they know what to do, they call Steve Orr." And when he calls to ask someone to do something, he seldom is refused.

Charles Pyles, one of the co-leaders for the Brotherhood, said Orr always has a good outlook on life. "He is a good man with a very sharp mind," Pyles said.

Pyles said Orr is expert at games of the mind. "If he starts losing, he just falls back on a humorous term. He reminds us that we shouldn't be unkind to 'a poor little crippled boy.' That's when everyone knows to stay alert," said Pyles.

A work list of work done and jobs to be done looks like a work order for a large maintenance company.

Ed Lee, interim pastor of Parks City, cites Orr as a shining light and a tower of courage among his fellow members. "They just depend on his smiling face and positive attitude," he said.

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