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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 70420,135
 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

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SOUTH CAROLINA--Churches offer comfort, counsel in Union, S.C.
 SOUTH CAROLINA--Hospitality became a ministry for Christians in Union, S.C.
 VIRGINIA--Foreign Mission Board to accept matching funds for Romania work.
 SOUTH CAROLINA--Romania's needs etched on businessman's heart.
 WASHINGTON--Justice Department reverses stance in pornography case.
 FLORIDA--Volunteer recounts trauma Rwanda refugees suffered.
 ATLANTA--Marriages thrive by intent, not accident, speaker reminds.
 FLORIDA--Their venture of faith offers help to burned-out church staff.
 TEXAS--Dialogue with Hemphill touches on music, tuition.
 NEW ORLEANS--So. Calif. churches honored for anti-violence effort.
 TENNESSEE--Correction.

Churches offer comfort
 counsel in Union, S.C.

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
 11/11/94

UNION, S.C. (BP)--Before now, Allen Raines said the worst disaster residents of textile-dependent Union, S.C., experienced was Depression-style unemployment during an industry downturn in the 1970s.

Then came October's drowning deaths of Susan Smith's children and national news coverage that transformed some residents into household names. But in the midst of the tragedy, the body of Christ has shone brightly, bringing hope and reconciliation to many grieving citizens, according to local pastors.

"We've tried to let people know that now is the time we need to practice our faith," said Raines, pastor of First Baptist Church and a "Nightline" guest after Mrs. Smith's Nov. 3 confession. "I'm in the process of responding to letters and phone calls, letting people know if they're having problems with their children, to tell us."

"The most important thing is that God is with us through all of this," said Dale Lynch, pastor of Mon Aetna Baptist, the city's largest congregation where Sheriff Howard Wells is a member. "He's walking with us and giving us strength through the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

"God is faithful and he will help us through this," Lynch added. "I think this has brought families closer together. This is a close community anyway, but I think it made parents look closely at how much they love their children and how important they are to them."

At St. Paul's Baptist Church, pastor A.L. Brackett's message of healing, forgiveness and love spread across the nation through a broadcast over Cable News Network (CNN). Several days later he received a call from a woman in Alabama who said she had been unable to forgive Mrs. Smith until she listened to his sermon.

"We have talked with those who are having nightmares about it," Brackett said. "Since people got over the shock, their main question is, 'Why?' They've been trying to get into her mind, asking why she didn't leave them on someone's doorstep. They've been coming up with all kinds of solutions that could have prevented tragedy."

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The pastors admit they don't always have answers for coping with the shock of a mother charged with killing her own children. But they provide a listening ear in one-on-one sessions and offer comforting words found in the Bible. Raines said believers especially tried to encourage law enforcement officers by bringing them food and telling them they were praying for them.

Tommy McManus, director of missions for the Union County Baptist Association, counseled with David Smith, father of the two victims, and is a friend of Mrs. Smith's stepfather. He said in delicate situations it is important to let hurting people know you are there as a friend, not for personal gain.

Various Scriptures do address the situation, the pastors say. Brackett referred to Psalms 40, which begins, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry" (NIV), and Isaiah 40:31, "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength . . ." His sermon on CNN drew from 2 Chronicles 7:12-16. Particularly verse 14, which talks about the need for God's people to humble themselves and turn from their wickedness so he will heal their land.

Lynch also used several Psalms for counseling, such as Psalms 46. It contains passages like "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (verse 1) and "Be still, and know that I am God" (verse 10). Lynch uses them to reassure others, "God is faithful and will help us make it through this."

"What came to mind was the letter to the Thessalonians (paraphrasing 1 Thessalonians 4:13), 'Grieve not as those who have no hope,'" said Raines. "The idea is there is hope and we do have a choice to put our lives back together. We choose how we're going to react to this -- whether we're going to let mistrust, betrayal, anger and maybe hatred do something to us."

Among the sources of anger and mistrust was Mrs. Smith's initial false account of an African American carjacker kidnapping her children. Her brother issued a public apology to the black community Nov. 9. But the incident raised enough concern that civil rights leader Jesse Jackson met Nov. 10 with ministers and community leaders and spoke to high school students.

The church played a key role in diffusing tension surrounding that incident. Brackett, one of the few African American pastors who lives in the city, said there was a great sense of relief after the press conference announcing Mrs. Smith's arrest.

"There are those who would like to explore that issue," he said of race. "But I've been saying all along that I don't think it is a racial situation." He finds agreement from Raines, who pointed out the man questioned by police since he matched Mrs. Smith's description didn't feel her actions were racially motivated.

And churches crossed racial and denominational lines to sponsor a week-long prayer vigil and community-wide services. Twenty-seven churches participated in a 24-hour-a-day prayer vigil. The prayer effort and services that followed were organized by Mayor Burt Williamson and McManus, both members of Tabernacle Baptist Church. The next community-wide church meeting will be hosted by an African American church.

McManus said the church's response in the midst of trouble has allowed the community to see that the best ways of dealing with the grief can be found in God's guidelines.

"God didn't cause the tragedy but he took our faith and shook it," McManus said. "1 Corinthians 12:31 says, 'I will show you the most excellent way.' That more excellent way is the way of love. We tried to let the community know there is a more powerful way of dealing with grief and sorrow than the world's way."

Prayer, the support of Christian people and love are the best coping methods available, he explained. While it was good that the talk show hosts who visited allowed people to discuss their feelings, he said, healing truly comes in relying on what the Bible says.

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Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Hospitality became a ministry
for Christians in Union, S.C.

By Keni Walker

UNION, S.C. (BP)--Matthew 10:42 says that whoever offers a cup of cold water to a disciple also will receive a reward. During the search for Susan Smith's children, various church members offered some southern-style forms of the biblical principle -- sausage, biscuits, coffee, snacks and a fried chicken dinner, complete with dessert and iced tea.

One evening in the midst of the 10-day investigation, Mon Aetna Baptist Church served 175 dinners to law enforcement officers, FBI agents and members of the news media. That topped off breakfasts of coffee and biscuits with sausage, cooked up by First Baptist Church. A member who owns a meat market donated the sausage and fellow members baked the biscuits, demonstrating Union's motto, "City of Hospitality."

At the peak of news coverage, more than 20 media satellite dishes decorated this bedroom community for the Spartanburg-Greenville metropolitan area. Reporters from magazines, talk shows, network television and wire services converged here and were impressed with their reception.

One reporter was so overwhelmed he insisted on donating \$20 to First Baptist's Brotherhood group, according to pastor Allen Raines. Another reporter, from the Atlanta Journal & Constitution, told him she had never been in a place that treated the media so well.

"I think it made a tremendous impression," said pastor Dale Lynch of Mon Aetna Baptist. "The sheriff (Howard Wells) is a member of our church and it made an impression on him. And the press isn't used to that kind of treatment anywhere."

"Our community responded extremely well," said Raines. "People aren't used to having cameras on them and microphones stuck in their face and being asked for their opinion."

Lay members did more than serve food, though. Few Christians have been in the public eye more than Wells, a 20-year member of Mon Aetna. Although a faithful member, he doesn't hold any church offices, said Lynch, because his being on call 24 hours a day makes it extremely difficult. Lynch discovered that while working as a juvenile probation officer during his studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas.

"Howard's a man of deep faith and is very compassionate," the pastor commented. "My favorite quote is that he said he had the sharpest minds in law enforcement working on this case, but he needed divine guidance in finding these children. Looking back, he said he could see how God had led the case to its conclusion."

Another church member works for the county's office of substance abuse prevention and is part of the state's volunteer crisis response team. The group has organized meetings recently to help residents deal with emotional trauma. It also huddled with ministers, which Lynch said is needed to help clerics deal with their own problems stemming from the crisis.

In addition, Lynch said before the disappearance was solved, his congregation helped distribute flyers about the children and faxed copies to other parts of South Carolina and the nation. They also created the laminated cards with yellow ribbons worn by the Smith family during the 10-day period.

And, while Mrs. Smith's hoax fanned cries of racial discrimination from various parts of the nation, pastor A.L. Brackett told of his African American church aiding the search when police thought they had a black suspect.

Mayor Burt Williamson also played a key role in the local Christian witness. A member of Tabernacle Baptist Church, he helped organize the week-long prayer vigil and community church services that brought many denominations together.

The first was an impromptu prayer meeting featuring black and white speakers from several denominations. Held in front of city hall the day after Mrs. Smith's arrest, Williamson said that and other services will make a major contribution to healing the close-knit community.

"We've all been hurt by this tragedy," Williamson said. "I walked around with my chin hung down for several days. You can see when people are hurting."

He stopped and his voice trembled as he fought back tears.

"The Christian people responded well," he said.

Foreign Mission Board to accept
matching funds for Romania work By Marty Croll

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has agreed to accept matching funds from a private foundation to fuel post-communist evangelism in Romania.

Among other things, the funds could enable Romanian Baptists -- one of the largest and most influential evangelical groups in Eastern Europe -- to build up to 100 churches.

Under the program, Baptists in the Eastern Europe nation will provide land and build a foundation for each church. The Foreign Mission Board, aided by the matching funds, will pay \$15,000 each for prefab construction of church buildings big enough to seat 100 people. Romanians tend to peg groups that worship without church buildings as cults.

"Southern Baptists could influence the whole course of Romanian history with this many new churches," said Don Kammerdiener, the board's executive vice president.

The matching funds, not to exceed \$1 million, will come from the Maclellan Foundation. The foundation was formed in 1945 to meet physical and spiritual needs worldwide, said Thomas McCallie, its executive director. It awards about 150 grants a year, totaling about \$12 million. About \$6 million -- all of it spent for evangelical causes -- goes overseas. Another \$6 million supports Christian and philanthropic causes in the United States.

The foundation is the fruit of a fortune amassed through the Chattanooga, Tenn.,-based Provident Life and Accident Insurance Co. of America. In 1890 a Scottish Presbyterian named Thomas Maclellan, who suffered financially when his bank in Nova Scotia failed, came to the United States. He bought Provident, then a 2-year-old company, to provide income so he could pay off creditors.

The foundation supports overseas Christian witness by funding programs to start churches and train leadership, McCallie said. Foundation officials were particularly impressed with Romanian Baptists and the work they saw God doing in Romania. "The people we saw had a vision for their country. They had a real plan," McCallie said.

They also were impressed with the work of the Foreign Mission Board.

"We have appreciated what we have seen going on in overseas churches Southern Baptist missionaries work with," McCallie said. "The Foreign Mission Board has done some fantastic work, and we appreciate its leadership around the world."

The foundation, which first approached the board several months ago, will give 50 cents for every dollar Southern Baptists donate to Romania through the Foreign Mission Board. Board officials believe the projects being funded are in line with their overall strategy for Romania and Eastern Europe.

"This is an opportunity for people who want to make a difference in Romania to do so, and get their money matched with more," Kammerdiener said. "We hope some of the Southern Baptist money that has been pouring into Romania will now pass through this funnel."

In addition to churches, funds also will support a Romanian Baptist publishing effort and two educational institutions. One institution is the Bucharest Christian University, which the Romanian Baptist Union is developing in cooperation with the University of Bucharest. The other is Emmanuel Bible Institute, owned by the Second Baptist Church of Oradea.

The board has never before received matching funds from a foundation. But mission leaders say they see things changing in the future. Increasing numbers of people want to give to charitable causes differently than they have in the past.

Board officials hope to capitalize on a new financial trend taking shape. During the next decade, the post-World War II generation of Americans will pass on to the next generation what some analysts estimate could amount to \$10 trillion.

At the same time, FMB President Jerry Rankin is looking for ways to attract more missions support from Southern Baptists in all corners of the denomination.

"This board wants to be the channel through which all Southern Baptists can express their missions concern," said Kammerdiener, in announcing the board's agreement with the foundation.

Despite the activity of Foreign Mission Board missionaries in Romania after the fall of communism, Southern Baptist churches and individuals have been giving freely on their own to various projects of Romanian Baptists.

Board trustees have been vocal about their desire to inject a dose of financial adrenalin into Eastern Europe. But they've been hamstrung by leveling receipts supporting the overall missions program. In August they voted to accept funds from interested foundations designated for work in the region.

They also voted to earmark up to \$5 million for Eastern Europe if the mission board receives more than its projected allocation from Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program unified giving plan in 1995. And they decided that any receipts given above the goal of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions in 1995 also would be designated for Eastern Europe.

"Some of this was almost revolutionary -- the way we planned the use of money for Eastern Europe," said Bill Blanchard, chairman of the trustee committee that oversees work in Europe. "But for the last 40 years or so (because of communism) we haven't been able to give them anything substantial."

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Romania's needs etched
on businessman's heart

By Norman Miller

Baptist Press
11/11/94

SIMPSONVILLE, S.C. (BP)--His is not a household name, but he is probably responsible for feeding more Southern Baptists than the Wednesday night supper committee.

Southern Baptist businessman Greg Horton was one of the original partners in Quincy's Family Steak House and Ryan's Family Steak House, and now he and his wife, Bobbie, are investing their lives and resources in rebuilding the hopes of downtrodden Baptist brothers and sisters in and around Bucharest, Romania.

Back in the early 1970s, Horton started Quincy's with two other men who wanted to establish a family oriented restaurant that offered good food without serving alcohol. Most of the initial investors were Christians, so essentially, Quincy's became a Christian-run business.

Eventually, Horton sold his shares in that restaurant and, with another group of partners, started Ryan's Family Steak House, of which he presently owns and operates four franchise units.

For several years now, the Hortons have been sowing seeds, financially and evangelistically, in Romania. "I got a sort-of vision as the (Romanian) farmers got back some of their land after the 1989 revolution," Horton said. "The government kept the farm equipment and was charging exorbitant rates to plow, cultivate, plant and harvest crops. The farmers were even forced to bribe government drivers if they wanted their fields plowed.

"We chose the village of Hapria, met with the Baptists there and discussed purchasing a tractor and all related equipment for them," Horton continued. "The church would own the equipment and hire a man to drive and maintain it. Now, the Baptists' fields are plowed first, on a cost-recovery basis. Then other farmers' fields are plowed at a price between what Baptists pay and what the government charges. The church has used the farm equipment evangelistically. The money comes back into the church to buy more equipment or to help another needy church or mission."

Horton said the project inspired Ian Walker, pastor of Bent Creek Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C., to buy farm equipment for another village. "I even got a call from a Mennonite man in Abbeyville, S.C., who was so impressed that he bought a second tractor for the Romanians."

Greg and Bobbie, who are members of Temple Baptist Church, Simpsonville, S.C., also preach and sing in as many churches as possible when they visit Romania.

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"W visit prisons, orphanages and schools, too," said Bobbie, reflecting on the rigors and rewards of six trips to Romania. She told of 25 Baptists "huddled in the home of their deacon; however, meeting in the home caused Eastern Orthodox priests to accuse the tiny flock of being a cult because they had no formal building. They moved to a schoolhouse, but the priests had them kicked out. The members attempted to buy land but were unable to get building permits, again due to pressure from the priests. So, the lone deacon said, 'My backyard's big enough, let's build there.'"

The Hortons met with this fledgling flock under an oak tree in August 1993. Leaving enough money to start the building, Greg and Bobbie continue to support the construction despite skyrocketing building costs. Even though construction techniques are sound, cost and availability of building materials necessitates the use of rough-hewn trees for beams and pillars.

Recounting a meeting in the mountain village of Monar, where Baptists recently have erected a building, Greg said, "It is simply four walls and a roof -- no windows, no heat -- and a dirt floor. The pastor said our midweek meeting would draw 10 to 15 people, but more than 120 people packed into that little building. At the invitation, 25 people raised their hands expressing a desire to accept Christ."

"We stayed in the homes of the members on our last trip, and the furnishings were meager," Bobbie recounted. "We had no hot water until Saturday night when the wood-burning hot water heater was stoked so everyone could have a bath for Sunday."

Bobbie finds it difficult to come home, noting "how little our churches do with so many resources. I compare that to how much the Romanians have done with so little. The Lord has blessed them."

Romanian Baptists have a "very close and warm family life," Bobbie said. "The children are the most well-disciplined kids I've ever seen. They are very polite, well-mannered and well-trained; and they sit quiet as church mice, hardly moving a muscle during three-hour services."

Greg, who was president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention in 1991, is a trustee at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary as well as a member of the SBC Executive Committee's program and structure study committee. Romanian Baptists' biggest need, he said, is "to receive evangelistic training. The second greatest need is funding to start new churches. Once the buildings are built, the people will come."

He recommends bringing church groups to the mission field because "it is hard to take a vision home with you. You have to come and get the vision. This can change a person; it can change a church, especially if the pastor is part of it. Our pastor has been to Romania twice; now he's on fire for missions. This also helps our Southern Baptist mission efforts. When you can say to others in your church, 'I've been there,' then the personalized impact is much more profound."

Bobbie added, "A deacon came with us on our trip last August, and when he got home, he gave his life to Christ; he realized he was not saved. He said, 'I had to come all the way to Romania to see what real Christianity was all about.'"

After recounting a witnessing opportunity which resulted from a flight delay at the Cluj-Napoca airport, where the air traffic controller was won to Christ in spite of an apparent attempt by the secret police to interrupt the gospel, Greg said, "That's the beauty of Romania right now, you can go anywhere and share Christ, in a school, on the street, in a factory or prison, even in the control tower of an airport."

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**Justice Department reverses
stance in pornography case**

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/11/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Department of Justice has reversed itself again in an important child pornography case, but this time its switch has elicited approval from opponents of pornography.

Attorney General Janet Reno announced Nov. 10 the Department of Justice is opposed to a convicted child pornographer's appeal for the United States Supreme Court to accept his case.

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A year before, the Department of Justice had reversed a previous interpretation and argued against the conviction of Stephen Knox. As a result, the Supreme Court returned the case, Knox v. United States, to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals. The appeals court disagreed with the arguments of Solicitor General Drew Days for the Department of Justice and again upheld the conviction.

In announcing her department was asking the Supreme Court not to hear Knox's appeal, Reno said she agreed with the appeals court's ruling and not with the interpretation of her solicitor general. The brief filed with the Supreme Court bore her signature rather than that of Days, she said.

"I believe that the government must argue for that legitimate interpretation of the statute which prohibits the receipt and possession of child pornography to the maximum extent allowed under the Constitution," Reno said in a prepared statement. "The Third Circuit's interpretation is sound and persuasive."

The general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission lauded Justice's action after sharply criticizing its previous position.

"There seems to be a great awakening at the Justice Department," Michael Whitehead said. "Its old position indicated greater concern for pornographers than for child-victims. Its new position puts children first.

"General Reno should be praised for awakening to this moral insight. Unfortunately, the solicitor general has not yet seen the light."

In addition to Reno's action, 238 members of Congress also submitted a brief asking the court to refuse to review the case.

It is uncertain when the Supreme Court will announce whether it will accept the case.

Days had contended child pornography must "show minors engaged in the conduct of lasciviously exhibiting their (or someone else's) genitals or pubic areas" and must include visible depiction of the genitals. The interpretation argued by the Department of Justice under President Bush and upheld by the court of appeals focused on the intention of the adults producing the photos or videos.

Three days after the Supreme Court remanded the Knox case to the Third Circuit last November, the Senate showed its displeasure by passing by a 100-0 vote a non-binding resolution saying the Justice Department's brief "did not accurately reflect the intent of Congress" in enacting child pornography legislation.

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Volunteer recounts trauma
Rwandan refugees suffered

By Barbara Denman

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11/11/94

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--After three months of ministering among Rwandan refugees, Jim Brown still is overwhelmed by their losses -- family members, homeland, clothes, livelihoods and food.

Standing in line for their meager ration of beans, corn, oil, salt and cookware is nothing when compared to the toll on human life that the conflict took on the refugees.

"There was not one family in the refugee camp that was not touched directly by death in their immediate family," Brown said. "Mothers, fathers and children. All through the camp you see 15-year-olds caring for younger brothers and sisters. You see mothers and children with no fathers."

One Rwandan refugee working in the compound with Brown lost five children and had not seen his wife and remaining daughters in months. At least 900 in the camps are orphans. "All this because the killing and carnage inside Rwanda," Brown said.

Brown, director of the Florida Baptist Convention language missions ministries department, served on a three-month special assignment to coordinate Florida Baptist volunteers working in the Rwandan camps. Since July a dozen Florida Baptist volunteers have traveled to Tanzania to assist Rwanda and Tanzania missionaries and Tanzania pastors in ministering to the refugees who fled to that country. They served in camps in Kageni and Rubwera, located about five miles apart, where more than 40,000 refugees from the Hutu tribe have relocated.

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These volunteers, who participated under the mission partnership between Tanzania and Florida Baptists, coordinated food supplies, assisted in refugee registration, assessed needs and built a Christian hospitality house.

The refugees entering Tanzania needed all the help they could get. "Many, if not all, came with very little possessions on their heads and gunny sacks," Brown said. "Most were wearing rags -- children and adults -- that were literally hanging off their bodies." Because they had no change of clothes, many of the children wore blood-stained garments, a constant reminder of the struggles they had endured.

The children bore other evidences of the cruelty. They wore machete scars on their heads and across their faces. The children with white hair carried the tell-tale sign of malnutrition.

"You see a lot of babies that look like recent pictures from Somalia," Brown said. "I saw one little girl in particular who I thought had been beaten because her eyes were so swollen. But the swelling was due to malnutrition."

These youngsters were being treated in a malnutrition clinic operated by Doctors Without Borders. Brown visited them every day, offering his own rendition of "Jesus Loves Me" in their native tongue, smiles, hugs and balloons.

"Balloons are not a big deal here (in the United States)," Brown said. "But when you don't have any balloons and you have never seen a balloon, it is a big deal." It wasn't long after Brown began sharing that the doctors placed beach balls in the children's clinic beds.

Brown also began daily afternoon games of dodge ball to entertain the children. As he got to know more of the children personally, he began identifying those who most desperately needed new clothes and sneaking them new garments.

In his free time Brown went "zone walking" through the camps, trying to speak their language and offering a smiling face. His communication was made easier through his ability to speak French, which is known by some Rwandans.

"As I would go zone walking, God always provided me an individual for myself that spoke French. We could sit down, visit and before long five or six other Rwandan men would join us. They didn't know a lick of French, but the communication loop was made complete because God provided just one man who spoke French."

During these occasions Brown shared his faith with the refugees, told them that Jesus loved them and gave out tracts when he could.

Brown also spearheaded the building of a Christian hospitality center between the two camps. This center will be staffed by Tanzanian Baptists as a place where all denominations can worship and encourage each other. The building will also become the site of potential Baptist ministries to the refugees.

The center was built on a hillside given to the Baptists by a Muslim officer from a nearby Tanzanian village. The site previously had been used as a latrine and gave off a horrible stench. Volunteers cleaned up the land and built the center from poles and mud.

"God transformed that dunghill into a lighthouse on the hillside, a lighthouse of hope," Brown said.

The Sunday before Brown departed from Tanzania, more than 2,000 people from nine denominations stood on that hillside to dedicate the center in worship. Thanksgiving to God was offered in at least three languages.

"As you look from the hospitality center you see parts of the Rubwera refugee camp, the river valley and the mountains of Rwanda," Brown recalled.

Trying to identify with the refugees' feeling, he added, "I don't know if I could have taken it, sitting up on that hillside knowing that I could never go back to my country which I could see less than five miles away.

"The refugees are not going back any time soon. If they do, they face certain death."

Brown said the volunteers also had opportunity to be a Christian witness to the other relief agencies who had never worked with Southern Baptists before. "I'd like to think that our acts of kindness helped these groups have a little more compassion for the refugees."

According to Hugh Cater, coordinator of Florida's foreign mission partnerships, Baptists will continue to minister in the refugee camps until the summer of 1995.

Ministry plans include the purchasing of clothes in Africa and distributing them to infants and children; assisting Doctors without Borders in staffing an infant center; training for Rwandan Baptist pastors in basic pastoral ministry; providing education and recreation for the children who have hours of free time; and offering parenting classes for expectant and young mothers. Cater reported that many of these ministries will be provided through the Christian center.

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Marriages thrive by intent,
not accident, speaker reminds

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
11/11/94

ATLANTA (BP)--Husbands and wives become the best of friends by intent, not by accident, said Steve Pettit, keynote speaker at the Fall Festival of Marriage in Atlanta Nov. 4-6.

"You could drift along and become the best of friends," Pettit said. "That doesn't require you to do anything, but it's dangerous. Just like someone drifting in the ocean, the riptides will put you where you don't want to be unless there is a strategy in place to stop the drift."

That strategy is not a "how-to" formula; rather it means marriage partners placing their union in the most advantageous position possible before engaging the enemy, Pettit told the 79 couples gathered for the weekend, adding, "If you don't believe there's an enemy out to destroy your marriage, then you're already defeated."

Marriage partners must have an intent to endure, despite overwhelming obstacles and imperfections in each other. "A number of us have created an idol, a dream of what a spouse should be, and we love that dream more than we love our spouse," Pettit said. "Then we get angry when our spouse falls short of the image we've created.

"When we say, 'I do,' a door closes behind us, and we are locked in an impossible situation," Pettit said, which is part of God's intent, so he can use marriage to make the partners more like Christ.

"Marriage simply was not designed to work for two self-centered people," said Pettit, director of Commission Ministries, a counseling center in Melrose, Fla. "God uses it as a laboratory, challenging people to change."

When conflict arises in marriage, rather than letting it build a wall between spouses, Pettit suggested they see it as God calling them to respond in a Christlike manner.

"If God is in it, wishing to reveal himself, the conflict is not what builds a wall -- the conflict will lead to intimacy between you and your spouse," Pettit said, echoing the theme of this year's Fall Festivals of Marriage: "Husbands and wives, the best of friends."

"When our intent is to serve, to love, to wash feet like the very Son of God did, then we're no longer living by our skills; rather, the life of God's Son is flowing through us and impossible things begin to happen," Pettit said.

Pettit counseled: Make it your intent to love within your marriage, embracing any conflict as would Christ who died for you. If you think the battle is against your spouse, he added, then you will develop flesh and blood techniques to manage conflict within your marriage. The foundation of a godly marriage is the willingness to manage conflict from the spiritual realm, he said.

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Their venture of faith offers
help to burned-out church staff

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
11/11/94

MELROSE, Fla. (BP)--When Steve and Ella Pettit pulled a U-Haul truck into the driveway of what was to be their new home, their 5-year-old son began to cry. He thought the detached garage was where the entire family of seven was going to have to fit.

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As it was, the north-central Florida lake home was about the only guarantee the Pettits had as they made a journey of faith from a secure pastorate in Kentucky to a fledgling ministry in Florida. Despite having five children under age 6, the Pettits had accepted a position, with no promise of salary, with Commission Ministries, a counseling and retreat ministry encompassing help for church staff members on the verge of burnout.

"The only promises were we'd have a place to live, electricity and health insurance," Steve said. The health insurance was important because, adding to the Pettits' step of faith, was their youngest son, Gabe, who suffers from cerebral palsy with severe developmental delay. If they dropped Gabe's health insurance, the Pettits knew they would never get him back on another plan.

In fact, Gabe's condition had been a sticking point with the Commission Ministries board of directors, who thought he would get in the way of the Pettits ministering to others.

Ironically, 40 percent of the ministry's counseling appointments have in some way come through Gabe, such as when the Pettits take him to a physical therapist. "It got to be a joke," said Ella. "I would say, 'Don't talk to me. I don't want to get to know you because I don't want to lose another therapist.' Once they came to Commission Ministries with their problems, Gabe had to stop seeing them."

Steve added: "So the obstacle to ministry became one of the primary opportunities for ministry. It's a classic case of God taking all things and working them together for his good, not to mention that Gabe provides credibility. People who come here can see we experience pain, fatigue and stress of our own.

"Even though we have not had the normal securities for the past six years, we have seen God provide," Steve said of their reliance on love offerings rather than charging for any services. "Your personal ministry is God working through you, pulling back the layers, asking, 'What would stop you from doing this in faith?'"

"I like not having any other answers for our provisions than that God did it," Ella reflected. "It's a God-thing. We don't look at this as a special way to live; this is the way Christians live their lives."

The Pettits' desire is to make their home a safe place where people can come to bare their pain. "If you want to come here and fuss and cuss for a while, you can fuss and cuss," Steve said. "There aren't a lot of places where those in ministry can reveal their painful problems. They need someone who will listen to them and not say, 'You should be able to handle that at this point in your Christian walk.'"

Whether they're doing retreats, marriage and family counseling, seminars or Bible studies, the Pettits say their goal is to make the church aware of Christ's indwelling presence, the hope of glory.

"It may not change your circumstances, but you can come to a different interpretation when you know you are not doing it alone. It is God working through you," Steve said, adding many today place so much emphasis on gaining insight into a situation that "understanding" has become one of our culture's gods.

"We hear people say, 'If I could just understand why God doesn't fix this,'" Steve said. "We're trying to say, 'No, you may never understand this one. If you know God, and you trust him in this, then you will come out of this, whether you understand it or not.'"

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Dialogue with Hemphill
touches on music, tuition

By Bob Murdaugh

Baptist Press
11/11/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Students at an informal dialogue Nov. 10 with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's president, Ken Hemphill, were told seminary officials are studying the possible inclusion of more contemporary forms of worship in the school of church music's curriculum.

"The music faculty has been very responsive, and I think many of you already have sensed in chapel a greater openness to different worship styles," Hemphill said. "We're planning a chapel week in which we will focus on contemporary worship, blended worship and traditional worship to give that picture to folks."

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In any school of music, "part of the foundational elements always must be some classical training because that's the foundational skills level," Hemphill noted. "The goal in a music school where we're sending out ministers and missionaries globally is to create the ability of flexibility."

Hemphill assured the estimated 100 students that Southwestern's tuition policy has not changed, contrary to inaccurate reports in various media outside the seminary. The only students who pay doubled tuition are those from non-Southern Baptist churches. "The question of whether to charge doubled tuition obviously arises when you've got a church that splits funding to a Southern Baptist program and a non-Southern Baptist program. The trustees here cannot make that determination. Only the Southern Baptist Convention can."

After expressing interest in broadening his communications with students and faculty, Hemphill said he hopes to continue visits with students in the dormitories and Naylor Student Center and conversations with faculty in their lounges and over lunch.

"It is important that everyone has access to communication and information. A lot of students have felt left out of the loop, but they have a right to know clearly what the facts are and where we (the seminary's trustees and administration) are," said Hemphill, in his fourth month as Southwestern's president.

Nobody will be punished for expressing his or her opinions constructively, Hemphill assured the students. "There is no real value in majoring on negatives," he said, admonishing against fostering a "rumor mill" atmosphere on campus.

Some of Hemphill's chief goals for the seminary include providing the best benefits and resources for faculty, making spiritual development of students a higher priority, upgrading housing and strengthening ties with alumni. He acknowledged the need for the seminary's students and staff to do more outreach in the local community. He said he currently is considering project ideas with the theology and evangelism faculties and is open to student input.

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So. Calif. churches honored
for anti-violence effort

Baptist Press
11/11/94

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Romie Lilly, associate minister of Central Baptist Church, Inglewood, Calif., received the "Ecumenical and Interreligious Network" award from the National Council of Churches Nov. 11 on behalf of the Southern Area Clergy Council.

Lilly was among the key organizers of the council, a group of 70 churches working to deter violence in the Los Angeles area marked by riots after the Rodney King beating. The council's project, "Keeping It Good in the Hood," was featured in the July/August 1994 issue of "MissionsUSA" magazine.

The Southern Area Clergy Council was one of five organizations to receive the award for their efforts to "mend torn places in the community," said a spokeswoman for the National Council of Churches.

The award was presented during the annual meeting of the National Council of Churches general board, which is the group's governing body.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "N.M. convention runs overtime over '96 dates, resolutions," dated 11/8/94, please correct the fifth paragraph's identification of Calvary Baptist Church's location to Roswell, not Prescott.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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