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January 5, 1995

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Home missions season spotlights  
evangelism, Annie offering

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

ATLANTA (BP)--With the theme "Win All," this year's Season of Home Missions highlights a variety of Southern Baptist evangelism efforts.

The season, from mid-February to mid-March, includes the Week of Prayer for Home Missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, the home missions study and Sunday school emphasis day.

From block parties to truck stop chaplaincy, Southern Baptists are using creativity and common sense to take the gospel to people who might never enter a church, said Joe Westbury, author of the home mission study, titled "All Things to All People."

"Our missionaries have learned that you don't do evangelism the same way in Boston that you do in Mississippi," he said. "As they have adapted to the locations where they are assigned, they have also adapted the gospel presentation to the people there."

In addition to profiling the work of home missionaries, this year's study offers tips from the missionaries that individual Southern Baptists or their churches can use to be a better witness.

Woman's Missionary Union has adopted an unprecedented \$50 million goal for the 1995 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions. WMU Executive Director/Treasurer Dellanna O'Brien said the goal is ambitious but reachable. "It's far beyond anything we've ever done before, but it's definitely not beyond the realm of possibility," she said.

The previous highest offering received was \$37.6 million in 1992. WMU adopted the \$50 million Annie Armstrong goal and December's foreign missions offering goal of \$100 million in recognition of the denomination's 150th anniversary, O'Brien said.

Reaching the goal will require that offering supporters both give and be advocates for the offering in their churches, she said.

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"It's going to take all of us making a decided effort. It's not going to happen without additional and sacrificial efforts," she said.

O'Brien also stressed the importance of prayer for missions work.

"While we put emphasis on the dollars that go into an offering, what we feel is more significant is the prayer that accompanies the giving," she said.

"Dollars without prayer support can never be as effective as those that are spent in the power of Christ."

This year's Week of Prayer for Home Missions will be March 5-12. Home missionaries whose work is highlighted this year are:

-- Charles and Laura Lea Chamblee, of Franklin, Mass. Charles is a church planter and Laura Lea is a missions growth team associate.

-- Richard Harris, a director of missions in Wheeling, W.Va.

-- Lee and Bonnie McClanahan, Mission Service Corps volunteers who coordinate construction crews to help build churches in Arizona.

-- Dub Bryant, a regional evangelism missionary for Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota.

-- Ramon Alemon, a catalytic missionary who helps start Hispanic churches in northwest Oklahoma.

-- Ken Weathersby, a new work strategist who helps start African American churches in Memphis, Tenn.

-- Charles and Daisy Joyner, who start congregations through apartment ministries in metro Seattle.

-- Bill Sims, an area evangelism director who helped pioneer evangelistic block parties in the San Francisco Bay area.

March 12 will be Home Missions Day in Southern Baptist Sunday schools. Members will be challenged to consider their responsibility to witness and minister -- including prayer, mission trips, class goal setting and giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, said Dan Euliss, chairman of the offering's promotion team.

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(EDITORS' NOTE: (BP) photo (vertical) and clip art for the Season of Home Missions mailed to state Baptist newspapers Jan. 4 from the Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering press kit, with stories about the WIN ALL theme, clip art, stories about Southern Baptist and Home Mission Board heritage, photos and profiles of all Week of Prayer missionaries will be mailed later this month.)

SBC Cooperative Program receipts  
drop 2 percent in December 1994

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program receipts for December dropped 2.21 percent below that month a year ago, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee.

Receipts for the year-to-date were almost identical to a year ago: \$34,494,918 compared to \$34,367,885, or a .37 percent increase (\$127,032).

For December, CP receipts totaled \$12,218,783 compared to December 1993 of \$12,495,334, or a decrease of \$276,550.

Designated receipts for the month were up 4.63 percent: \$3,309,045 compared to \$3,162,701 while the year-to-date designated receipts total was 9.43 percent ahead of the same period last year: \$7,067,706 compared to \$6,458,758. The SBC fiscal year is Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

The December receipts were above the required SBC program allocation budget monthly total of \$11,378,310 or 7.39 percent (\$840,473). The year-to-date receipts are 1.05 percent above the Y-T-D budget requirement: \$34,494,918 compared to \$34,134,932.

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The SBC Cooperative Program total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 1994-95 program allocation budget as well as restricted funds received from state conventions which identify them as Cooperative Program.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international SBC ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

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Southwestern may learn  
of accrediting findings

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Association of Theological Schools may make known to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary officials actions the accrediting agency is imposing, if any, in a Jan. 6 meeting in Pittsburgh.

Unless seminary officials opt to announce the ATS findings after the meeting, actions by ATS' accrediting commission Jan. 6 might not be reported until after a one-month period during which Southwestern can appeal any sanctions.

ATS teams visited the Fort Worth, Texas, campus May 23-25, after Russell H. Dilday Jr.'s firing in March, for what was called a "focused visit without prejudice" for "fact-finding" and made a follow-up visit Nov. 14-15. The first visit also involved representatives of another seminary accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. To date, there has been no word of any SACS decisions involving Southwestern's accreditation with that agency.

A Southwestern delegation scheduled to attend the ATS accrediting commission meeting in Pittsburgh will be led by new President Ken Hemphill, elected by trustees last July to succeed Dilday. Also attending will be Ralph Pulley, trustee chairman and a Dallas attorney; Scotty Gray, Southwestern's executive vice president; William Tolar, vice president for academic affairs; and James T. Draper Jr., president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and former trustee chairman as a pastor in Texas.

If ATS actions are imposed, they could involve probation or less-severe "notations" for Southwestern, which enrolled 3,254 students during the fall semester.

According to Nancy Merrill, ATS public relations director, probation would address a "major inadequacy in a school" to be remedied within a specific period of time. A "notation," meanwhile, would reflect principles in the accrediting standards not being adequately translated into practice at a school, in the ATS commission's judgment, Merrill said.

ATS issued a written rebuke to Southwestern's trustees after Dilday's firing, viewing "with utmost seriousness ... such precipitous action (by the trustees) ... a clear violation of accepted governance practices and places in jeopardy the vitality and basic integrity of the institution." At that time, James L. Waits, executive director of ATS, who penned the criticism, asked trustees to rescind Dilday's firing.

The Jan. 6 meeting of ATS' accrediting commission is one of two regularly scheduled meetings of the group each year, the other being in June, Merrill said.

ATS policies give schools the right of first disclosure to their constituencies of any ATS sanctions, she said. After the one-month period, ATS would answer media inquiries about its actions, she said.

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The second visit by ATS was undertaken despite a request last summer by Tolar, then acting seminary president, that it be delayed until the spring of this year. With the seminary trustees voting on Hemphill July 28 and the regular board of trustees meeting in October, the spring 1995 period would give trustees and a new president time to get ready for the visit, Tolar said at the time.

The five-member team conducting the May fact-finding visit spent a full day interviewing current and past trustee officers, Dilday, faculty, administrative staff and elected student leaders.

The seminary's other accrediting association, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, took part in the May visit and those findings were to be presented to a commission subcommittee at the end of June in Atlanta. Pulley and Gray attended the subcommittee meeting June 23 by invitation, but no further information was reported by seminary officials.

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Brotherhood project to provide  
missionaries with clean water

By Bob Carey

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--After hosting missionaries Dale and Gaye Coleman, the Baptist Men of Oak Grove Baptist Church near Covington, Tenn., knew exactly what the Southern Baptist missionaries to Togo needed.

"We wanted to give them a Pure Water-Pure Love water purification unit," said Jeff Koonce, an Oak Grove member and Big Hatchie Baptist Associational Brotherhood director.

Pure Water-Pure Love is a new program of the Brotherhood Commission's men's ministries department. It will place water purification units in career missionary homes throughout the world. The program will allow a missionary family to have pure water and will help the family minister more effectively in countries where water can be a major health problem.

"We're excited about the fact that churches can help provide our missionaries the basic physical need of life, water, and that the missionaries can then tell the people about Christ, the living water," said James D. Williams, Brotherhood Commission president.

"We are trying to purchase 2,500 units at a cost of \$250 for each unit. For churches, it can be a great way to have a personal touch of missions," Williams added.

The Pure Water-Pure Love program officially begins on Baptist Men's Day Jan. 22. Baptist Men's units across the country will be challenged to make this a project for their men's group.

The Pure Water-Pure Love program brings missions closer to home, Williams said. As donors purchase each unit, a label will be attached with the donor's name. Missionaries receiving the unit will provide some basic information to the church about their family and country. This information will allow a church to know how to pray specifically for the missionaries and their country. Each time the missionaries take a drink of pure water, they will be reminded of people in the United States are praying for them, Williams said.

"We believe that missions education can be enhanced when it becomes a personal part of your life. Ideally, when the missionaries return home on furlough, they would share with the sponsoring church about the effects the water has had in their lives," he noted.

For the Colemans, the new unit means other ways of sharing the gospel in Togo, a small country in west Africa.

"I may not be a medical missionary, but I give water on my porch to people every day," Gaye Coleman said. "We give water to everyone who comes to our house. It's a cultural part of welcoming visitors."

For Dale Coleman, an agricultural specialist, it will mean another step toward changing the way the Togo villagers look at health, sanitation and water.

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"In this part of the world, just the availability of water has been a big boost in public health," Coleman said. "We have a six- to seven-month dry period. The quality of water drops so greatly. The people have come to realize the necessity of having pure water free of contamination. This is a new idea to them. It has shown them the way to a better life.

"As rural workers we will be trying to introduce the pure water concept to the villagers," Coleman continued. "Many cities have good water and it draws the rural people. With the movement of people to the cities, it causes deterioration of the water. By showing the villagers the idea of pure water, they can stay in rural areas and have a quality life. It's important to upgrade the quality of life in villages. The villagers provide the food for the country. When villagers leave for the city, the manpower to raise the agriculture diminishes and the entire country suffers."

Coleman said he previously has benefitted from Brotherhood programs.

"I was involved in Royal Ambassadors before going on the mission field. It was a major part of the reason I went to the field," Coleman said of the Brotherhood Commission's program for boys in grades one through six. "RAs helped me get a real taste of missions. I became the RA director at church and later worked in the association.

"Teaching the kids about missions and the requirements to be a missionary helped me realize God was calling me. It took me six years to meet the requirements, but RAs kept me going."

Gaye Coleman cited several benefits to Pure Water-Pure Love. She said she believes the project will take a major burden off the local mission office, worrying about the health of missionaries. More importantly, she said, "It will make a direct connection for the missionaries on the field to churches back home in the U.S. We know they care."

The tabletop units will provide 4,000 gallons of clean water or enough to supply a missionary family approximately four years of clean water before a new filter is needed. Placed on the countertop next to the sink, it is an easy addition to most faucets, requiring little skill to install and no electricity to operate.

Further information about the Pure Water-Pure Love project is available from the Brotherhood Commission at (901) 272-2461.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Brotherhood Commission.

**Boothe urges compassionate  
response to abortion issue**

**By Sarah Zimmerman**

**Baptist Press  
1/5/95**

ATLANTA (BP)--As Southern Baptists observe Sanctity of Human Life Day Jan. 15, the Home Mission Board's director of alternatives to abortion ministries stresses the need for a compassionate response.

Sylvia Boothe and national missionary Barbara Noakes travel across the country to help churches develop a crisis pregnancy ministry. They have helped train volunteers for 36 crisis pregnancy centers.

For churches or associations starting a crisis pregnancy center, Boothe and Noakes offer 18 hours of training for volunteers. In communities without a center, the women lead a 12-hour conference to teach people how to minister to everyone involved in the pregnancy and how to pool resources in the community.

In all the training, Boothe stresses "we're not to judge. We have to tender our message with love and compassion and forgiveness and restoration. Always represent Christ in a loving way."

Crisis pregnancy centers are locally funded and locally staffed. Consequently, their procedures vary but typically a woman comes to a crisis pregnancy center for the free pregnancy test.

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"Usually she's scared to death and it takes the last ounce of her energy to open the door and come in," says Boothe, who directed a crisis pregnancy center in Oklahoma City before joining the HMB staff.

Women are counseled on alternatives to abortion and ways the crisis pregnancy center can help.

The next step depends on the person's response to the pregnancy test result. Again, Boothe stresses the need for sensitivity: "We push on the spiritual door, but we don't force it open."

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in 1984 passed a resolution calling for the Home Mission Board to address the issue of abortion. In 1987, the board established the alternatives to abortion office, with Boothe as its director a year later.

Despite the mandate from messengers, "people used to go out of their way to avoid our booth at the convention," Boothe says. "Now they flock there."

Some people were leery at first because they thought the alternative to abortion office would be a political organization, Boothe says. "This is a ministry, not the political end of it."

Some ways to become involved in alternatives to abortion are:

- Pray.
- Ask your pastor to preach on the sanctity of life.
- Become educated about the issues and educate others.
- Ask your doctor's opinion on abortion and tell your doctor of your convictions.
- Learn how your state and national government representatives vote on abortion and family issues. Write them, asking them to initiate or support legislation on life issues.
- Write a courteous, factual letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Provide public, school and church libraries with the best books available on related subjects.
- If Planned Parenthood representatives speak to local school students, ask school principals for equal time to present your point of view.
- Run for a position on the school board.
- Encourage young people to remain abstinent before marriage.

For more information, call the HMB alternatives to abortion ministries office, (404) 898-7402.

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(BP) photo (vertical) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline on SBCNet News Room.

Jim Henry selects  
6 parliamentarians

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--A team of six parliamentarians has been selected by Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry to assist in business sessions of the SBC in Atlanta June 20-22.

"I believe it is an excellent group and they will serve well in helping us conduct our business in an orderly and helpful manner," said Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., who was elected to a first term as SBC president last June in Orlando.

Henry did not designate any of his six selections as chief parliamentarian.

As he had announced to the SBC Executive Committee last September, Henry's team did not include C. Barry McCarty, lead SBC parliamentarian since the 1986 SBC annual meeting in Atlanta.

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Henry told the Executive Committee he had called and written to McCarty, an ordained Church of Christ minister from Cincinnati, to thank him "for the excellent work that he did at a critical time in our denomination. God used him. But now we need to move on ... and this is one way that we're saying we're moving on to the future ..."

The six parliamentarians selected by Henry are:

-- John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention and an SBC parliamentarian who worked with McCarty for several years. Sullivan is chairman of SBC Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee, which will be celebrated during the June SBC. He also was a member of the SBC Peace Committee and is a former SBC first vice president.

-- Lester L. Cooper Jr., pastor of Valley Hill Baptist Church, Riverdale, Ga. He has served on the Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee in various capacities and has been a parliamentarian for the state convention. A certified parliamentarian by the American Institute of Parliamentarians, Cooper has been president of the Georgia Association of Parliamentarians/Atlanta Unit, director of the Georgia Association of Parliamentarians' Educational Institute and chairman of the association's education committee. He is coauthor of "Parliamentary Procedure for the People."

-- Sanford W. Peterson, president of Sanford W. Peterson, Ph.D., Enterprises, Inc., corporate communications consultants. He is one of the editors of Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, 3rd edition, and author of articles in Parliamentary Journal and for the American Society of Legislative Clerks and Secretaries. Peterson has presided over convention debate as a parliamentarian for such groups as National League of Cities and the American School Food Service Association.

-- Jimmy E. Jackson, pastor of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala. He has assisted in SBC parliamentary duties and has been a member of the SBC Executive Committee and the Committee on Committees and president of the Alabama Pastors Conference.

-- David N. Matlock, Caddo Parish juvenile judge and member of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La. He served as parliamentarian for the Louisiana Baptist Convention in 1991 and 1994 and is a former member American Institute of Parliamentarians and National Association of Parliamentarians.

-- Joe H. Reynolds, a lawyer with an emphasis on commercial litigation and member of Second Baptist Church, Houston. He has served on the SBC Executive Committee and Committee on Nominations and has assisted in SBC parliamentary duties. He was listed by his peers in "The Best Lawyers in America."

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Lawsuit seeks end of devotionals  
by students over intercom system

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

By William H. Perkins Jr.

ECRU, Miss. (BP)--A Baptist layman serving as Pontotoc County school superintendent is facing a federal lawsuit filed by a mother who doesn't like his stand in favor of school prayer.

Jerry Horton, a member of Ecrú (Miss.) Baptist Church and former state legislator in his first elective term as superintendent of the 2,700-student school district in northeast Mississippi, said disagreement has been building for months with Lisa Herdahl of Ecrú about how to handle prayer at 1,300-student North Pontotoc Attendance Center, where the five oldest of her six children attend school.

"I had telephone conversations and personal contact with Mrs. Herdahl, but we were not able to reach common ground. There has been prayer in Pontotoc County schools for at least eight years with no complaints," he said.

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Herdahl has said publicly her children are stigmatized and harassed because they do not participate in a daily, student-initiated devotional piped through the school's classroom loudspeaker system after announcements from the principal's office.

Her lawsuit states prayer is permitted in classrooms and at school events, and a high school-level course on Middle East studies uses the Bible as the only textbook.

The conflict may shape up as a national battle of titans, with the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way coming down on Herdahl's side.

On the other side, the Tupelo-based American Family Association has offered to help the school district, as has the Christian Action Commission of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

Paul Jones, CAC executive director, said he has talked with Horton about the lawsuit.

"We have offered the support of the Mississippi Baptist Convention and the resources of CAC to be used in any appropriate way by officials and concerned citizens of Pontotoc County," he said.

The Mississippi ACLU chapter announced in October 1994 they would monitor school districts for students "impermissively subjected" to school prayer, based on the Sept. 2, 1994, decision by U.S. District Judge Henry Wingate in Jackson that struck down the school prayer law passed by the 1994 session of the Mississippi Legislature.

Mississippi ACLU executive director David Ingebretsen of Jackson wrote a letter Oct. 28, 1994, to the state's school superintendents, claiming Wingate had specifically prohibited devotionals and prayers over school public address systems; teacher-led/initiated classroom prayers; prayers by visiting clergy; recital of the Lord's Prayer in classes; and prayers at sporting events.

When Jones learned of the ACLU letter to school superintendents, he said, "We intend to counter the impression that superintendents and schools boards must surrender their right to make policy whenever a complaint is raised about religion."

No hearing date has been scheduled for the lawsuit, but Horton said he intends to strongly defend the district's school prayer policy as constitutional and good for the students.

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Evangelist Amato carries  
message of hope to Cuba

By Joe Scott

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

HAVANA, Cuba (BP)--The first time Rick Amato led a group into Cuba, last May, he took 10,000 Bibles with him. He was disappointed when he could distribute just 2,000 of them. "You can't distribute them en masse in Cuba," he said.

Amato, a Southern Baptist evangelist from Detroit, sent the remaining 8,000 Bibles to the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Soon afterward, 22 churches started among the tents of the Cuban refugees being held there.

"No Americans started them," Amato said. "They just began."

When a Cuban pastor learned of the churches, he sent a young woman on a raft to Guantanamo Bay with a letter authorizing her to make the new churches into Baptist churches.

Amato took nine Christians, including six Southern Baptists, to Cuba over the Thanksgiving holidays, Nov. 22-27. They took tens of thousands of dollars in medicine and medical supplies with them.

Amato preached in the Kremlin in 1991. He has met with Russian leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba has been in the midst of an economic crisis.

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Allen Speer, pastor of Memorial Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Mo., saw ample evidence of hardship in accompanying Amato to Cuba. "Everywhere you look there are empty shells of houses. The people's faces look very downtrodden," Speer said. "There is a spiritual climate that is depressed, and yet there is something about to happen."

During an outing at the marketplace, Speer stopped and talked with a young boy in a wheelchair. The American shared one of the Spanish-language tracts from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board that he obtained from the Missouri Baptist Convention.

"He could speak quite a bit of English, so we were able to share a tract with him," Speer recalled. "He cherished that tract."

John McKnight, pastor of Hepsibah Baptist Church, Seneca, S.C., remarked, "The first thing I thought about when I saw Havana is that this is a place that has rejected God and now they are reaping the consequences -- though in the midst of this is a remnant which God has raised up."

In the churches Amato, Speer and McKnight preached in, people crowded into pews, sat in the aisles, stood in the doorways, listened from hallways and even looked in windows. In one church, Speer counted 200 people crammed into a 12- by 30-foot room.

"I suppose that of the church services we attended, the Sunday morning experience must have been the mountaintop for all of us," Speer said of his experience at La Lisa Baptist Church in Havana. "It was just like a wave, a continuous wave of praise."

Four people were saved in that service. During the week before, 30 people had accepted Christ at La Lisa church.

"This is the best time for the church because so many people are looking for God," said Gipsia Pandiello, a La Lisa member. "It is not only because of the economic crisis, but the government has accepted religion, too."

Speer said he was surprised by the Cuban churches. "They're strong. There is so much spiritual maturity because their faith has been tried and proven and tried and proven."

He noted that of all his experiences on the trip, encounters with two pastors, Vidal Hernandez and Ramon Sanchez, affected him the most. Hernandez is pastor of Jaruco Baptist Church and Sanchez is president of the Freewill Baptist Convention in Cuba, one of four Baptist groups in Cuba.

"There was such a language barrier there," Speer said, "and yet there was such communication. We couldn't speak to each other much, but just in going down and getting some Cokes and sharing my Pringles with them, a lot of communication was passed."

"They really wanted us there," Speer said. "They really needed the fellowship."

Amato referred to the United States' 30-year embargo of Cuba in the churches where he preached. "For many years there have been barriers between the nations," he told them. "I bring you good news today. Those barriers are being broken down. Jesus Christ is moving freely among the nations. Jesus Christ knows no barriers."

He said he would like to see an end to the embargo. "The difficult thing about the embargo for me personally is that I do know for a fact that there are people dying -- children, specifically -- of diseases because of a lack of medicines that are available in the United States. They can't get them."

Amato pointed out Mexico, Brazil and Canada do not have embargoes against Cuba.

"Castro has used the embargo as a scapegoat for the country's problems," Amato said. "He has signs up all over blaming the West for his problems. The Cuban economy is in catastrophic condition. It is devastated."

"In another time, in another place, I know that there was a good reason for the embargo. But I think it is time for us to consider new alternatives to converting Cuba, to bringing them around."

Amato acknowledged the United States is in a no-win situation. "If we do nothing, then children die. If we do lift it, an inefficient system triumphs."

Cuban pastor Hernandez said the two nations are united in another sense. "In Jesus Christ, we are one, and the love of Jesus binds us together. Whatever barriers there might be between countries, there are no such barriers between the people of God. God's kingdom has no frontiers."

To strengthen those bonds, Amato and Hernandez asked Americans pray for Cuba. "Pray for Fidel Castro," Amato said. "Pray for the nation of Cuba and all the post-socialist nations."

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**Lack of medicine, supplies  
hamper medical care in Cuba**

By Joe Scott

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

HAVANA, Cuba (BP)--The island of Cuba lies just 90 miles south of Florida. But for many, especially sick or injured people in Cuba, the United States of America is much farther than that.

"We have many difficulties because many times we need different medicines or different drugs for our patients and we don't have those drugs," said Victor Gonzalez, an oncologist in Havana. "One patient, she has breast cancer and she needs testosterone. She needs it because she has metastasis. We don't have it in Cuba at this moment."

Gonzalez is vice president of the youth department of the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba, to which Southern Baptists relate. "One of the immoral, sad things is that many times the patients who need the medicine are children," he said.

Joe Grant, an orthopedic surgeon and a member of the U.S. Christian Medical Association, was with a group of Southern Baptists who visited Cuba in late November. "A lot of the children's cancers are 80 to 90 percent treatable and curable here in the United States," Grant said. "In Cuba, those children are dying, and to lose a child because you don't have the medicine is a catastrophe."

Rick Amato, a Southern Baptist evangelist from Detroit, took tens of thousands of dollars in medicine and medical supplies in spite of the United States' 30-year-old embargo against Cuba.

The island nation has had a limited budget to purchase medicine and supplies, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"Since we cannot buy the medicine in the United States, we must buy the medicine in Europe," Gonzalez explained. "But it's more expensive with the transportation of the medicine."

While in Cuba, Grant and Amato met with Cuba's vice minister of health, Enrique Commandero. They discussed taking in more medical supplies and having Christian doctors go to Cuba to present seminars and demonstrate different operations.

"We're interested in sharing ideas in medicine and technology, but also in sharing the message of salvation and freedom in Jesus Christ," Grant told Commandero. He asked if there would be any problem in having Christian doctors share their faith with other doctors during the seminars and operations.

"Obviously, you can talk about anything you want afterwards," said Commandero, who noted there probably would not be time for witnessing during an operation.

"Oh, you can talk about Jesus Christ in the operating room," Grant assured him.

Grant also told Commandero that some of the medical supply companies he was working with were insisting that only Christian doctors receive the supplies "so that God would receive the glory."

Commandero agreed to let Amato and Grant give the medical supplies to Christian doctors, who would be allowed to distribute medicine and equipment.

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Amato and Grant will work through the Christian Medical Association in Cuba, but at least one obstacle must be overcome first. The Cuban government has not recognized any religious organization that is not affiliated with one denomination. Because the Christian Medical Association in Cuba has not been recognized officially, it cannot legally attend international meetings or receive literature or medications.

The prospect of receiving medicine and supplies from the United States may help the organization become officially recognized. Such recognition also would aid the medical association in evangelization and in expanding its membership.

"We as a Christian Medical Association in Cuba are part of a general vision to win Cuba for Christ," said Jose Rubio, a general practitioner and vice president of the medical association. "The main objective of our organization is to win doctors, to win patients and their families to the Lord."

The group traveling with Amato delivered the medicine and supplies they carried to Calixto Garcia Hospital in Havana. They also toured the hospital, where the group met Gonzalez.

"I was impressed with the knowledge, the skills, the compassion and the dedication of the Cuban doctors," Grant said. "They are quite capable. They just don't have the medicines or the supplies they need."

The Christian doctors spend much of their spare time working in prisons, sanitariums, nursing homes and other hospitals or with homeless people. Rubio's church has a ministry working in each of those areas.

Gonzalez said the most important thing churches in the United States can do for them is pray. "Pray for us that we may share with our patients or our friends the Word of God.

"In the second place, we think churches may help us by sending us different medicines, different material supplies for our work in our hospitals, for our work in the churches," Gonzalez said.

"We want the best for our people in Cuba," he concluded. "I only teach Christ. He's the answer to the problem in Cuba."

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EDITORS' NOTE: Europe and Middle East correspondent Mike Creswell and photographer Don Rutledge visited Israel to do this special coverage on the rise of Christianity there.

**Jews in Israel increasingly  
accepting Christ as Savior**

**By Mike Creswell**

**Baptist Press  
1/5/95**

JERUSALEM (BP)--So many Israeli Jews are becoming Christians that Southern Baptist workers in Israel say the growth, if it continues, could be the top story not only of this decade -- but of the age as well.

Estimates on the number of Messianic Jews -- as Jewish believers call themselves -- now range from 3,000 to 6,000. They belong to more than three dozen congregations scattered across Israel. One new congregation is started each year, on average.

While the numbers remain relatively small for a country of about 5.5 million people, this is not just any country. It is Israel, the small nation whose roots are inextricably linked with the Bible.

For centuries Jews have been unresponsive to the gospel; even one person's decision to follow Christ has been a major event and cause for rejoicing among Christians. These days there's much more rejoicing, because decisions are happening more often. Southern Baptist workers in Israel have issued a plea for increased prayer support during 1995, specifically for Jewish evangelism.

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Messianic Jews say they numbered perhaps 200 in Israel 25 years ago -- and they kept a low profile. Now they routinely hold evangelistic crusades in which they distribute tracts and share their faith with passers-by, resulting in consistent growth.

One Southern Baptist worker compared Messianic Jewish growth to lighting a skyrocket in the rain. The fuse has taken decades to ignite, but now things are beginning to happen.

The phenomenon is not just a Baptist one. Several church and evangelistic groups in Israel report slow but steady growth. Most Messianic Jewish congregations avoid denominational labels to make the gospel message more appealing to other Jews. Also, many of the congregations are charismatic, although there are signs some may be moving away from that.

One modern phenomenon making more Jews receptive to the gospel: a new custom of Jewish citizens traveling overseas when they complete their terms of military service. As they travel in Christian lands, many hear the gospel for the first time, and in a more relaxed atmosphere than possible in Israel.

Some of the hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews who have arrived in Israel in recent years also believe in Christ. They can be found in congregations throughout Israel. Increasing numbers of them have sought baptism.

The same has been true of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. Several hundred Ethiopians, officially identified as Jewish, took part in a Christian retreat last year. Some found Christ before leaving Ethiopia; others made Christian commitments after arriving.

During the Jerusalem March, a major parade held in the heavily Jewish western part of the city last September, some 200 Messianic Jews marched amidst 20,000 Jews from around the world. The annual observance, held in conjunction with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, has more to do with civic pride than religion, since many marchers are sponsored by local corporations.

But the Messianic Jewish group was extremely conspicuous as they marched along Jaffa Road with banners, T-shirts emblazoned with their name and gospel messages. Led by women wearing brightly spangled costumes, they carried loudspeakers broadcasting Christian music.

Most of the parade watchers paid them no more attention than other marching groups. But in several locations Orthodox Jews, clearly upset that the Messianic Jews were there, shouted angrily. Some approached the marchers with hands raised as if to strike out, but were calmed by policemen.

Oddly, the scene mirrors Israel today. An estimated 80 percent of the population shuns Jewish Orthodoxy; only a relatively small percentage of the people are devoutly and actively religious.

But just as militant Muslims persecute Christian believers among the Arabs, Orthodox Jews can be a fearsome force, dedicated to rooting out Jewish Christianity, which they abhor as a heretical deviation.

When Narkis Street Baptist Congregation in Jerusalem held an open house during the Feast of Tabernacles late in 1994, about 30 Orthodox Jews came to debate church leaders and tried to urge visiting Jews to leave. Many congregation members responded by presenting their Christian testimonies.

"I was surprised at how much they listened," said Southern Baptist representative Pat Hoaldrige of the Orthodox.

The Orthodox Jewish men were wearing their standard attire: black robes and hats and white shirts. They all wore the "peyoth," the side curls prescribed in Old Testament passages. The police arrived, alert for possible violence, but the evening passed peaceably though with high tension.

Hesitant to discuss the limited response among such "hard-core" Jews, Hoaldrige admits finding ways to share the gospel with people violently opposed to it is a challenge.

"I try to create a situation wher Israelis will come and want to know who we are," he explained. "If we can do that in a non-threatening way, then the door is open. If you go to them, you cause problems."

Narkis Street Baptist Congregation has about 250 members in their English-language, international congregation, plus another 80 people who worship in a Hebrew-language congregation. A group of Russian immigrants also meets during the week with church leaders.

Aggressive evangelism efforts directed at the Russian immigrants likely would draw the ire of both Orthodox Jews and the Israeli government.

"Narkis Street isn't reaching out to the Russians, yet some have come," Hoaldridge said. "We include them and encourage them to learn Hebrew and get involved with the people who have formed the roots of the society here. If they don't learn Hebrew, they don't get jobs and don't get integrated."

Both Messianic Jews and those who work with them remain cautious because of the obvious dangers. They have endured an assortment of attacks and threats through the years, especially between 1972 and 1982.

In 1992 a youth group from the Narkis Street congregation was attacked by a gang in downtown Jerusalem. But the most destructive attack occurred when unknown arsonists burned down the church in October 1982. Rebuilding has been costly and time-consuming.

Such attacks are nothing new to readers of the New Testament; the Apostle Paul was the most diligent Christian persecutor before his conversion.

Even today most Israelis know the name of Jesus only as "Yeshu," rather than his correct Hebrew name, "Yeshua." Few are aware that "Yeshu" comes from an ancient rabbinical acronym of three Hebrew letters which form the phrase, "May his name be cursed."

One Southern Baptist worker says Jewish rabbis have a distorted view of Christianity -- and many think it's wrong even to say the name of Jesus.

Messianic Jews refer to Jesus by his correct name. And they're convinced many more Israelis will meet their beloved Yeshua in the days ahead.

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(BP) photos (two vertical and one horizontal), for use with this story and the two to follow, mailed 1/3/95 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutlines available on SBCNet News Room.

'Harvest ready -- send workers,'  
says Messianic Jewish leader

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

TEL AVIV, Israel (BP)--"The harvest is ready in Israel. We just need to pray for more workers," said the Messianic Jewish woman named Chaya.

She and her husband belong to a congregation that meets in the greater Tel Aviv area. To describe her as a bold witness would be an understatement.

Chaya and other women led 200 Messianic Jews through Jerusalem streets last September as part of the annual Jerusalem March. They wore modest but brightly spangled costumes, beat tambourines and kept time with lively Christian songs they broadcast on portable loudspeakers. The march, featuring 20,000 Jews from around the world, coincides with the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles.

A believer who became a Christian at First Baptist Church in Gainesville, Fla., Chaya later married Avi, an Israeli and Messianic Jew, and moved back to Israel with him 10 years ago. Now the two help organize evangelistic campaigns throughout Israel.

Evangelism in Israel is a bit different, she pointed out. Training courses for campaign workers include sessions on how to deal with violence and the police. The Christians work the streets in small groups, handing out thousands of tracts but sharing the gospel meaningfully with just a few people.

A turning point came in 1986 when a handful of Messianic Jews dared to begin witnessing on the streets. They prepared for the worst kind of reprisals, but the expected violence didn't materialize -- so they continued. Growth followed. Often they plan major evangelistic campaigns during Jewish holy times, such as Passover.

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In one recent three-day campaign in Tel Aviv, they mobilized 74 believers who passed out thousands of tracts, gave out 103 copies of the New Testament to people who had never seen one, and managed to present the entire plan of salvation to 260 people. Eleven people were willing to give their addresses for follow-up visitation. Five accepted Christ as personal Savior.

"It was a small campaign, one weekend, and this is the result," said Chaya.

An ongoing witness occurs at a coffeehouse in Tel Aviv. Southern Baptist workers Chandler and Sallie Lanier established the facility 30 years ago, first as an art gallery, as they sought to share the gospel. But the work really took off when a handful of believers began using the center as a base for evangelistic efforts.

Another Tel Aviv believer named Eitan doesn't think increased evangelism efforts account for the increased response.

"I think God has chosen to bring more believers to himself at this time," he said simply. Eitan and his wife, Orit, became Christians after Orit discovered her father had become a believer in Christ shortly before he died of a heart attack. He had not told his family of his decision.

"An Israeli can't just call up his relatives and say, 'I'm now a believer,'" she said. After they learned of his decision, they visited a Christian organization in North Carolina and spent months exploring the faith he had found.

At first they tried to ask trick questions and catch the teachers in mistakes about the Bible's contents. The Christians replied that if they could find one error in the Bible, they would leave their ministry and go into business or something else.

"After almost a year, we understood some things," Orit said. "First, there is a God, which we had not known. Second, we knew the Bible was the Word of God, that it was impossible for somebody to have just written it. And we learned that the New Testament is part of the Old Testament. The result is that Jesus is the Messiah."

These days Eitan works with a Christian publishing house, producing Christian materials in Hebrew that are in short supply in Israel. And they have come to understand why Orit's father kept news of his conversion to himself.

They found their new faith didn't bother most of their atheistic friends as long as they kept their beliefs to themselves. Close friends tended to keep the couple's faith a secret, if only to avoid causing problems for them.

"They're also trying to protect themselves," said Eitan, "like if you have somebody in your family who's a criminal. You don't talk about it; it's a shame for the family, not socially acceptable."

One Jewish group sent a rabbi to them to win them back into Judaism. But after half a dozen meetings, he declined to return. "He said later he had no answers for the questions we were asking," Orit said.

Added Eitan: "They know when we check the Bible, they're going to lose the argument. I took a Bible to the discussions; the rabbi brought a commentary, not the Old Testament itself."

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Jewish evangelism:  
questions remain

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press  
1/5/95

TEL AVIV, Israel (BP)--Even the term "Jewish evangelism" is a problem for some people, acknowledges Southern Baptist representative Jim Sibley in Israel.

Sibley wants to see evangelism among Jews have a higher profile in Southern Baptist life. He especially wants Southern Baptists to pray intensively for Jewish evangelism in the years ahead. But he also wants Southern Baptists to lay aside some faulty ideas on the topic.

"Jews aren't a hidden people -- they're a people in hiding," he said. "They have avoided having contact with the gospel."

Sibley, from Dallas, first encountered Jews in south Florida, where he was a pastor for eight years, but had limited contacts with them. Yet from the age of 14 he had felt a spiritual call to share the gospel with them.

"It became a real passion and a real burden," he recalled.

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Scripture gave him a love for Israel and a burden for the Jewish people. He and his wife, Kathy, have represented Southern Baptists in Israel the past 12 years. In recent years Sibley has worked with a Messianic Jewish congregation in the Tel Aviv area.

Jewish believers (Christians) in Israel refer to themselves as "Messianic Jews," to indicate people who have a Jewish background but have trusted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior -- generally without following the traditions of rabbinical Judaism.

Some Messianic Jews in Israel, however, wear the "kippah," the small hat worn by Jews to show they are under the authority of the rabbis, or a prayer shawl with tassels. Most don't observe the food laws of the rabbis, but some do. Sometimes Messianic Jews follow such practices to strengthen their witness to other Jews, Sibley said.

Linking the terms "Jewish" and "believer" bothers some people, but not Sibley.

"When a Mexican believes in Jesus, he's a Mexican believer. When a man from China believes in Jesus, he's a Chinese believer. So, when a Jew believes in Jesus, why shouldn't he be a Jewish believer?"

Southern Baptists have had workers in Israel since before the modern state was founded in 1948. But Sibley sees reluctance among some Southern Baptists and other Christians to give Jewish evangelism a high profile.

Sibley counters those who say Jews don't need Jesus because of God's covenant with Abraham. He contends that Acts 4:12 and John 8:56, among many other New Testament verses, make it abundantly clear that salvation for the Jewish people depends on a faith relationship with Christ, too.

Some Christians say the church has replaced the nation of Israel in the purposes of God, so there's no need to evangelize Jews. But Sibley points to Romans 11:1-5.

"Paul's response to this kind of thinking is to insist that although the majority of Israel has rejected the Lord, there's always a faithful remnant of believers among the Jewish people. As gentiles, when we put our trust in the Messiah of Israel, we are grafted into the olive tree of Israel, along with that faithful remnant of Messianic Jews," he said.

Some Christians say there's no need to evangelize the Jews now because they won't be saved until the "last days" foretold by the Bible. Such a view is based on a misinterpretation of Scripture, Sibley said. Along this same line of thinking, some Christians cite Mark 13:10, which states: "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations."

Sibley counters: "This is saying that the gospel is to be preached to all nations prior to the cataclysmic events of the prophetic future. OK, but Israel is also one of the nations."

Finally, some Christians avoid Jewish missions as they avoid all missions, saying God will save Jews however and whenever he chooses, and that he doesn't need our efforts. The same argument was used -- unsuccessfully -- to stop William Carey from launching the modern missionary movement in the 1700s, Sibley said. Most evangelicals understand the Bible's strong teaching on global missions in such passages as the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28.

Sibley urged Southern Baptists to read the many biblical passages that speak directly to the burdens Christians should have for the salvation of the Jews, such as Romans 1:16, 9:1-5 and 10:1-3. Although Paul was the apostle to the gentiles, when he visited a city he inevitably went to the Jews first.

Large populations of Jews are scattered around the world, Sibley said, and developing a strategy to reach them for Christ is a biblical, workable goal that could change the course of missions.

"Without specific strategies, they'll never be reached," he said. "That's something that has to be recognized. Most Jewish people don't consider Jesus an option."

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