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CBF missionary shot while evacuating Albania

By Martha Skelton

TIRANA, Albania (ABP) -- A Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary was shot March 13 while trying to leave strife-torn Albania.

Debbie Ayres, a CBF missionary since 1993, was hit by a stray bullet in an arm or leg -- reports differed -- in the Albanian port city of Durres on March 13 as her family and other Christian workers tried to leave the country.

Ayres is the first CBF missionary injured by violence.

The report of her injury indicated it was not life-threatening. She and her husband, Bert, are assigned to Lezhe, Albania.

Ayres was reportedly out of the hospital and evacuated from the country March 14. She and her family were among those scheduled to depart from the American Embassy in Tirana via helicopter. They were to be flown to a ship and evacuated to Italy.

All CBF personnel had left the country by March 14, according to a report relayed through the U.S. State Department.

Personnel from several missions agencies decided to leave Albania in recent days as the country's civil unrest spread and intensified rather than abating as they had hoped.

Some missionaries left the country a week earlier, but many had stayed, gathering in the capital city of Tirana to wait out the difficulties.

All Southern Baptist missionaries in Albania were out of the country by March 12, according to their European regional office in Wiesbaden, Germany. They are staying in neighboring countries until they can return to Albania.

The British Missionary Society still had several couples in the country through Thursday, March 13. They were called to the British Embassy in Tirana Thursday afternoon and told they would be evacuated by Royal Air Force planes. However, the road to the airport was closed Thursday afternoon and rebels overran the airport, so the

RAF planes did not land. Instead, the BMS missionaries and others were ferried across the Adriatic Sea on Friday by an Italian Navy ship. They expect to fly back to Great Britain as soon as passage can be arranged, according to a BMS spokesman.

One Baptist missionary who was able to leave keeps in touch with Albanian friends by telephone. "They are in shock. There is terrible chaos," she reported. Albanian Christians encouraged foreign colleagues to leave when they were ready; there was no spirit of blame or disappointment, according to this missionary. "They told us last week, 'Do what you have to do.'"

While reports are still sketchy, missionaries cited indications of God's protection and the value of undergirding of prayer for the missionaries and Albanian Christians.

One couple from the Canadian Baptist Mission working in Albania had left earlier for Greece for the impending birth of a baby. "They decided to go to Greece a little earlier than planned. If they had waited longer, the border would have been closed," said Bob Berry of CBM.

Mary Ida Buzhardt, a CBF missionary youth worker, flew out of Tirana Wednesday night to stay temporarily with friends in Great Britain. She was able to change a plane ticket for another flight because there was an available seat at the last minute. "God was with me through all the decision-making," she said.

In addition to the safety of her colleagues, her concern is for her Albanian Christian friends and co-workers, she said: "They are just trying to secure themselves and what little they have. There are many good people [in Albania]."

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BWA seeking food for Bulgaria after government lifts restrictions

McLEAN, Va. ABP) -- Baptist World Aid, the relief arm of the Baptist World Alliance, has launched a special appeal to provide food for Bulgaria, where severe economic conditions have led to hunger and suffering, particularly among the elderly and poor.

The Bulgarian government recently relaxed regulations that allowed only the government and its agencies to receive food supplies. In a letter to evangelical church leaders in Bulgaria, the government department of religious affairs said it would assure "that such humanitarian help will be free of customs duties and will be sent to the evangelical churches to which it is addressed."

Theo Angelov, president of the Bulgarian Baptist Union, asked BWAid "to send to the Baptist Union of Bulgaria any food you can find. Big shipments as well as small quantities will be received with thanks."

"It is a sad sight to see old people digging in the trash for food and homeless children on the street," Angelov said. The Bulgarian union has already distributed 8,000 food parcels to orphanages, kindergartens and Baptist churches. The organization also has given people money for heat.

Already the European Baptist Federation and Baptist organizations in Canada and Hungary are responding to BWA's call for help. BWA, based in McLean, Va., is accepting donations.

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-- By Paul Montacute

Southwestern Seminary plans record fund-raising campaign

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has announced a \$100 million fund-raising campaign -- its largest ever -- to increase endowment, provide scholarships, add major new buildings and undertake massive renovations at the nation's largest seminary.

"This will launch us into the 21st century," said seminary President Ken Hemphill. "It is born out of the desperate needs of our world."

Trustees who gathered for their spring meeting March 10-12 also elected one person to the faculty but convinced administrators to withdraw a proposal to elect a second. They also promoted four faculty members and approved a cut in tuition.

The fund-raising effort, called "Touch the World: Impact Eternity," will finance a \$20 million conference center and a \$15 million performing-arts hall at the 3,000-student seminary.

Hemphill, who became president two years ago, said the campaign will help the seminary fulfill its mission to prepare Southern Baptist pastors, educators and other ministers. "If anyone is going to carry out the Great Commission, it is going to be us," Hemphill said, referring to Jesus' command to preach the gospel throughout the world.

Fund-raising analysts estimate that in the next 10 to 15 years, one-third of the nation's wealth would be transferred to heirs, said Jack Terry, vice president for institutional advancement, who presented the plan to the trustees.

The Southwestern campaign includes \$37.7 million for endowment, Terry said. Current endowment is \$75 million. More than \$44 million is proposed for new buildings and renovations, including the conference center and the arts hall.

The \$20 million conference center would be built in four phases and designed for continuing education of ministers and lay persons. The first phase would provide 30 guest rooms and 5,000 square feet of conference space, said Terry.

A fine-arts center, estimated to cost \$15 million, would provide a performing arts hall for the music school and a facility for drama.

"This would not compete with the performing-arts hall downtown," Terry said. "It would provide our music students with an auditorium with fine acoustics."

Also \$3.5 million is proposed for a new building for the seminary's off-campus training center in San Antonio.

No time period was set for the fund-raising campaign, Terry said, adding, "We are looking at a five-year window initially." He told trustees that supernatural effort will be required for the campaign's success. "Only God can do it," he said.

The campaign includes \$10 million to finance academic chairs created in honor of several individuals; \$4 million to provide scholarships for children of pastors and missionaries; and \$4 million for the Tolar Faculty Fund, which aids faculty members in crisis.

Proposed improvements at the seminary include: \$2.8 million for dorm and apartment renovation; \$635,000 for student center additions; \$1.1 million for swimming pool replacement; \$300,000 for building and furnishing presidential guest houses for visiting faculty members and others; \$1 million for miscellaneous campus improvements.

Tuition will be cut 12.5 percent -- from \$80 per hour to \$70 per hour -- making Southwestern, already one of the lowest-cost seminaries in America, even more affordable.

The tuition cut contrasts with national trends of escalating student costs. Also included was removal of a cap on tuition charges after 10 hours. As a result, students carrying more than 12 hours will actually have an increase.

The tuition cut was possible largely because seminary funding from the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program will increase next year. But Hemphill added: "We have no promise our portion will remain at that level. But we wanted to put the money where it would do the most good."

In faculty-related matters, Scott Langston was elected assistant professor of Old Testament, but Steve Harmon was denied election to teach theology.

The administration's recommendation to elect Harmon was withdrawn after protests from some trustees, who Harmon said were upset over his views on women in ministry and his public opposition to the trustees' 1994 firing of seminary president Russell Dilday. (See ABP story of March 12, 1997.)

Faculty promotions were approved for associate professor of preaching Grant Lovejoy, distinguished professor of youth education Phil Briggs, professor of administration Gary Waller, professor of music theory and composition William Mac Davis Jr., and professor of piano Robert Carl Smith.

Angela Cofer, associate professor of voice, was approved for tenure. However, a recommendation for tenure for Keith Putt, associate professor of philosophy of religion, was withdrawn by administrators before the meeting.

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-- Compiled from reports by Jim Jones of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Craig Bird of Southwestern Seminary and the ABP staff.

Illinois church leads effort to minister to flood victims

By Tim Ellsworth

GOLCONDA, Ill. (ABP) -- The 960-resident town of Golconda, Ill., is unusually quiet for a Thursday morning. Traffic is virtually non-existent, and many stores are empty.

But First Baptist Church here is buzzing with activity -- food is cooking, forms are being completed and phone calls are being made -- all to help victims of the devastating Ohio River flooding.

"Anybody I see I'm going to feed," one worker says on her way out of the building.

The church is serving as a Red Cross shelter for flood victims. And flood victims there are.

The Ohio River has risen about 20 feet above flood stage, dumping water out of its banks and displacing many from their homes -- like Rick and Regina Eddington, members of First Baptist Church.

The Eddingtons, who live in Halltown, a small community on the outskirts of Golconda, started packing up on Thursday, March 6. Workers started sandbagging on Friday, and the water came in on Monday -- more than a foot deep.

This is the second time the Eddingtons have had to move from their home of 15 years because of flooding. "We're used to the flooding, but this is the first time it's ever gotten into the homes," Regina said.

They got everything out, but "right now we're just trying to find temporary homes to live in," she said.

"It's hard on everybody," she continued. "We feel like we're putting a lot of people out."

They won't be going back, they said. "It's too much of a heartache to have to deal with it all," Regina said. "We always said if it got in the house we would never go back."

The Eddingtons were grateful for the help provided by First Baptist Church, where Terry Rainwater is pastor. They said they also knew people around the state were praying for them.

"That's all a person can do right now," Rick said.

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Nearly 100 churches affiliate with new Virginia convention

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- About 10 percent of Virginia Baptists have aligned with that state's new conservative convention.

Nearly 100 churches have affiliated with the new Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, formed last year by conservatives dissatisfied with what they call a liberal trend in the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

Sixty-six of those churches are "uniquely aligned" with the new group, according to its newsletter. Another 32 churches are "dually aligned," maintaining ties with both groups.

The combined membership of the 98 uniquely and dually aligned churches was about 58,800 in 1995, the last full year such figures are available. No statistics were reported for seven of the churches.

Membership in the Baptist General Association of Virginia's 1,564 churches in 1995 was 594,904.

Thirty-three additional churches are described as "contributors only." It is not clear if the contributions are from individuals channeled through the church or if they are the result of church action.

Conservatives organized the SBCV last September, charging the 174-year-old Baptist General Association of Virginia is theologically liberal and is distancing itself from the more conservative Southern Baptist Convention.

The Norfolk Baptist Association, which includes the cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk and Virginia Beach, has the most churches with ties to the SBCV, with 10 of its 75 congregations either uniquely or dually aligned.

The 66 uniquely aligned churches contributed \$407,393 in 1996 to support the Virginia Cooperative Program budget, which includes contributions sent to the Southern Baptist Convention. The 32 dually aligned churches sent \$594,116 to the budget.

Total Cooperative Program receipts to the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1996 were \$15 million.

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Smithwick picked to head Kentucky children's homes

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children has chosen William Smithwick as new president of the state's largest private provider of residential services for abused and neglected children.

Smithwick will assume the post in late April. He currently is assistant executive director for programs and administration at Virginia Baptist Children's Homes and Family Services, where he has worked 10 years.

Smithwick succeeds Curtis Mooney, who resigned in July to become chief executive officer of DePelchin Children's Center in Houston.

Smithwick is a native of Bowling Green, Fla. He holds both a bachelor's and master's degree from Averett College in Danville, Va.; a master-of-divinity degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.; and a doctor-of-ministry degree from St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore.

With a \$13.8 million annual budget, Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children assists more than 3,200 children and adults each year through children's homes, pregnancy counseling and adoption services, and a Christian counseling ministry.

Founded in 1869, Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children is the oldest Southern Baptist child-care ministry.

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