

# Associated Baptist Press

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EDITOR'S NOTE: More coverage of the Heath High School shootings is expected Friday. Photos are available by request.

## **Students draw on faith in aftermath of shooting**

By David Winfrey

WEST PADUCAH, Ky. (ABP) -- Brittney Thomas stood only a few feet from Nicole Hadley when a teenage gunman opened fire on the Agape Christian Club of Heath High School in West Paducah, Ky.

Prayer had just ended and Hadley was laughing at a joke when she was struck by a bullet. She was still laughing just before she lost consciousness and subsequently died, said Thomas, who was shoved by a friend behind glass doors in the school hallway, helpless to do anything but watch.

"We just had to watch him shoot people from inside the glass doors," she said. "We just watched people fall and scream and run."

As she talked with friends two days after the shooting, Thomas, alternating between tears and laughter, already was making some sense of the Dec. 1 tragedy.

"The whole school is now turning to God. It's not just a little circle anymore," she said.

Thomas was one of the scores, if not hundreds, of Christians from Heath and beyond seeking to redeem the Dec. 1 tragedy by drawing from and strengthening their faith.

Amid pain, sorrow, anger and questions surrounding the shootings, many youth are working to model the Christian values they talk about in the now-famous prayer group as the whole world looks on.

"I don't want them to say, 'Yeah, I remember Heath. They're the one [school] where all those kids died,'" Thomas said. "I want them to say, 'Yeah, I remember Heath. They're the one with the prayer group of 400 and didn't let one incident ruin their life.'"

Among events in the aftermath of the shootings, in which a 14-year-old student allegedly killed three girls and injured five other Heath students:

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-- Hundreds of students attended the early-morning prayer meeting when they returned to school Tuesday, the day after the shooting. Attendance remained strong throughout the week, students said.

-- Shooting victims and their parents told others of their forgiveness toward the accused assailant, freshman Michael Carneal.

-- Some students have become Christians or rededicated their lives to God.

-- Parents of the three slain girls agreed to televise the joint funeral, hoping it would lead some viewers to become Christians.

At a Wednesday night discussion at Harmony Baptist Church in Paducah, 14-year-old Katie Sullivan, another member of the Monday morning prayer group, termed it "neat" that people would see God at work through the event.

"I'll just never forget the sound of the first bullet," she said.

Nevertheless, she and a friend hung banners the next day reading, "We forgive you, Michael, because God forgave us."

Feelings of forgiveness do not mean students condone the shooting or don't want the suspect to be punished, she added.

"Of course we all have anger in us," she said. "We have so many questions that we'll never have the answer to. I think we all have the sinful nature in us, but Michael followed through with something that others of us wouldn't."

Tony Steele, a hospice chaplain and leader of the discussion at Harmony Baptist Church, said he's been impressed by the spiritual maturity of the students, especially their willingness to forgive Carneal. "I expected it, but I didn't expect it this quickly," he said.

Roger Palmer, youth minister at First Baptist Church of Paducah, said the only possible explanation for the teens' willingness to forgive is that Jesus is working through them. "He's fulfilling in us just what he spoke on the cross: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

Tommy Tucker, pastor of Olivet Baptist Church, said students' attitudes following the tragedy taught adults a lesson about Christianity.

"They seem to have a spiritual foundation that has enabled them to cope with it far better than I would have expected," he said.

Tucker said one network reporter asked him why this tragedy would happen to a prayer group. "And my response was, 'What group would be better prepared to handle it than a prayer group?'"

Palmer agreed, pointing to banners of Scripture passages hanging on school walls and the growth of the prayer group.

"These kids are saying, 'We know where our strength is found. It's found in the Lord Jesus Christ and not anywhere else.'"

"What they're hoping for first of all, of course, is that several of their lost friends will come to know the Lord as their Lord and Savior," he said. "Secondly, several of the Christians who are on the campuses have said, 'I'm not going to worry any more whether I'm cool. ... I'm going to take a stand for Christ.'"

Tom Hughes, pastor of Kevil Baptist Church in Paducah, said the shooting has driven home to students that death can come unexpectedly. One of the slain girls, Jessica James, attended Kevil Baptist.

"I think the main message is you need to be prepared spiritually for whatever is encountered in life," Hughes said. "It's a bad situation, but we're all trusting that God will hold true to his promise to work through the situation and bring forth some good."

The shooting affected several Kentucky Baptist churches. Two of the girls who were slain, Kayce Steger and Jessica James, were members of churches affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

Steger, 15, attended 12th Street Baptist Church in Paducah, and James, 17, attended Kevil Baptist Church in Paducah. The third slain girl, Nicole Hadley, 14, attended Bible Baptist Heartland Church, an independent Baptist church.

At least two of the wounded students also attended Kentucky Baptist churches. Holland Holm, 14, attends Immanuel Baptist Church in Paducah. His head was grazed by a bullet. He was treated and released.

Craig Keene, 15, attends Olivet Baptist Church. Keene, who was shot in the neck, was treated at a hospital and released.

In addition, Heath High School's Principal Bill Bond is a member of First Baptist Church of Paducah. Other churches had students who attended the prayer meeting.

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## **Billy Graham hospitalized in Florida for lung condition**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Evangelist Billy Graham was hospitalized Dec. 3 in Jacksonville, Fla., for a respiratory infection and dehydration.

Graham, 79, was admitted to St. Luke's Hospital in Jacksonville, Fla., about 5 p.m. Dec. 3. A hospital spokesperson said Dec. 4 that Graham was in fair condition and improving.

Graham was diagnosed with pneumotitis, an inflammation in his right lung. Treatments with antibiotics and intravenous fluids brought the infection under control within 24 hours, according to a statement by the hospital.

Officials said Graham would likely be hospitalized three days.

Graham was vacationing in the Caribbean when he came down with fever, chills and discolored sputum. When symptoms worsened, doctors decided to hospitalize him. Graham, a Mayo Clinic patient, was taken to the Florida hospital because it is the nearest Mayo-affiliated facility.

Despite suffering from Parkinson's Disease, Graham continues to lead the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association but has delegated many of the day-to-day responsibilities to his son, Franklin. The internationally known evangelist said in May he may have to retire soon, but he is scheduled to speak in several revivals next year.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Former Baptist women's leader launching ministry to Native Americans**

By Bob Allen

RESTON, Va. (ABP) -- Willene Pierce, who resigned as executive director of the Baptist World Alliance women's department in July in a dispute with the group's officers, has announced she will begin a "faith ministry" to American Indian women in Oklahoma.

Pierce, who lives in Reston, Va., said she will move to Muskogee, Okla., in early January to launch Native American LINK (Living in Neighborly Kindness).

"Relating to American Indians has been an ongoing joy in my life," Pierce said in a letter to friends and supporters. "For many years I have considered the possibility of a ministry that would assist Indian women. I believe that now is the time for me to launch out on faith."

The ministry will use a "woman-to-woman" approach to help Native American women develop personal skills, strengthen families and grow spiritually. Specific emphases will include job training, nutrition, health care,

parenting, support for ministers' wives, witness training, Bible distribution, retreats and conferences, ministry projects and consultations for women's ministries and Woman's Missionary Union groups, Pierce said.

Funding will come primarily from individuals and churches, Pierce said. LINK will produce a newsletter at least twice a year to provide information, reports, volunteer opportunities and prayer requests.

Pierce said she will be assisted in the new ministry by Laura Mackey, a Choctaw Indian and longtime friend in Oklahoma.

Pierce resigned from the BWA women's department over differences in ministry philosophy and leadership style with the organization's executive committee, according to a joint statement issued July 14.

Earlier reports had indicated that Pierce was fired during a closed-door meeting of the department's executive committee. The joint statement termed those reports "premature."

Both sides agreed not to discuss specifics of the dispute, saying it would "disserve the women's department ministry, the individuals involved and the cause of Christ."

Before assuming the post in February 1995, Pierce worked 13 years as executive director of Woman's Missionary Union in the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

Pierce said the new ministry fulfills a long-time dream. When she was 17, Pierce traveled to teach in a vacation Bible school in the Choctaw-Chickasaw Baptist Association in Oklahoma. She has returned often to lead other Bible schools, speak to women's groups, teach in youth camps and visit with friends. She served a one-year term as a Mission Service Corps volunteer in Oklahoma for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

In 1995 and 1996, Pierce conducted a research project to determine effective leadership training methods and moral and social issues affecting Native American women.

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## **Missionary journalists resign to join new mission organization**

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Don and Robin Martin, missionaries with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board for 10 years, resigned Dec. 2 to join All Peoples, an organization formed last month to help local congregations send missionaries abroad.

The Martins -- who have spent most of their IMB career as news writers -- will bring All Peoples "a tremendous amount of skill and expertise in the area of communication," said Mike Stroope, the IMB missionary who resigned last month to start the new organization.

Since 1994, the Martins have written about the work of missionaries in World A, that part of the globe where people have little or no access to the Christian gospel. The region -- which Stroope said will be the primary geographical focus of All Peoples -- includes nations in North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The Martins have been based in Singapore.

"God has taken hold of us and set us on a path to help propel the local church straight into World A," Don Martin, 39, said Dec. 4. "There is no one way to do this with such a great challenge in front of us. But there's a world of creativity within our churches. We can't even imagine the results if this creativity has unlimited channels in its task of reaching World A."

When Stroope announced the formation of All Peoples last month, he said the organization's aim is to "mobilize the whole church" for mission.

"The money is there, the personnel is there, but this commission [to share the gospel] is no longer owned by the church," he said. "It's been given to a centralized board. The church must take back its commission."

In addition to Stroope and his wife, Kay, four other IMB missionaries resigned last month to work with All Peoples: David and Mary Carpenter and Mark and Cindy Morris. All eight All Peoples' staffers -- including the Martins -- will raise their own financial support from local churches.

The Martins have asked to remain in their IMB positions until April 1, when their current missionary term ends. Robin Martin is expecting the couple's third child at the end of January.

Both Texas natives, the Martins each hold degrees in journalism from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. In April they will return to Texas, where they will be based initially.

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## **Hunger relief opening doors for diplomacy, Baptist leader says**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Since the Korean War ended without a winner in 1953, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has continued to regard the United States an enemy.

But widespread food shortages in North Korea are opening doors that military action and four decades of attempted diplomacy could not, said a Texas Baptist official who was there from late August to mid-November.

John LaNoue of Texas Baptist Men visited 10 of the nation's 12 provinces as a member of a five-person team representing non-governmental organizations in the U.S. During the 85-day mission, the Americans monitored distribution of food provided by U.S. humanitarian organizations, including 130 tons supplied by Texas Baptists.

It was upon LaNoue's return to the U.S., however, at a debriefing before a Congressional committee, that he learned that the relief work of non-governmental humanitarian organizations was instrumental in bringing North Korea to a Dec. 9 peace summit in Geneva.

"We knew our gifts had the potential to save lives by preventing starvation," LaNoue said. "We had no idea they had the potential of helping bring people to the peace tables."

LaNoue went to North Korea under the auspices of Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board and Amigos Internacionales, a Waco, Texas-based non-profit relief and development organization approved to work with the U.S. Agency for International Development. Other monitors represented CARE, World Vision, Mercy Corps and Catholic Relief Services.

Team members found that grain shipments were reaching hungry people and saving lives. Still, many more will die unless food contributions from outside the country continue and food production within the country is accelerated, they reported.

Some experts say several million North Koreans could starve in the next several months. A year-long famine has already killed as much as 15 percent of the population in numerous towns and villages, according to a September report by World Vision.

LaNoue estimated that industrial areas in the country's mountainous provinces probably will run out of food by the end of January. Most agricultural areas will deplete food supplies by sometime in March.

As LaNoue and the other monitors traveled throughout North Korea, from the Chinese border to the demilitarized zone, they witnessed delivery of more than a million 110-pound bags of corn. They visited public distribution centers where grain was rationed on the basis of calories needed to perform specific jobs. They talked to people in schools, clinics and private homes.

Statistics normally are treated as state secrets in North Korea and Americans are considered "hundred year enemies." The North Korean people are reluctant to reveal any personal weakness to a stranger. Still, LaNoue asked page after page of penetrating questions. In every instance, he found that the donated food was making the difference between life and death.

LaNoue talked with families who supplemented their small allotment of grain with mountain vegetation -- grass, leaves, roots and stems of any non-poisonous plant. He discovered they were making flour from the cellulose husks of corn.

He also found that shortages extended beyond food to include the most basic medical supplies. Doctors perform surgery barehanded because there are no rubber gloves. Patients agree to operations only under the most extreme circumstances, since there is no anesthesia.

LaNoue recalled visiting a classroom of 7-year-olds. One boy was small for his age, but otherwise showed no obvious signs of malnutrition. Immediately behind him was another boy gazing ahead with a vacant stare, bowed legs and withered arms.

"You wonder why two children in the same class look so different, then you realize there is no medicine," LaNoue said. "One has had an untreated case of dysentery, and the other hasn't. I asked a doctor if he could put some of the children on IVs. He said he could put them on saline solution, but he couldn't put them on glucose because there was no sugar to make it from. These children are literally one case of dysentery away from death."

Three months of daily exposure to horrendous suffering, long separation from family and a grueling travel schedule took its toll on LaNoue, who lost 40 pounds during the trip. But he said the prayers of friends at home and the personal daily spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading and journaling sustained him.

"Prayer has become my breath in this place," he wrote on one of the more than 150 pages of a journal he kept during his stay. LaNoue said he often prayed for two-to-three hours a day, sometimes even rising at midnight and praying until daylight.

Near the end of his trip, LaNoue made contact with three other Texas Baptists.

Yoo J. Yoon, past president of the Korean Baptist Fellowship of Texas; Bong Hee Han, TBM vice president for Korean Baptist Men; and Benjamin Kim, Asian church consultant with Dallas Baptist Association, spent six days in North Korea.

Korean Texas Baptist churches gave about \$20,000 for famine relief, and the leaders were exploring avenues for future involvement.

Yoon, pastor of Glory Korean Baptist Church in Dallas, said North Korea has changed a lot since his last visit two years ago.

"The country is much, much poorer than it was," Yoon said, "but there is a little bit more freedom. You can see it widening a little bit at a time."

Yoon said he saw people openly selling cigarettes, cooked sweet potatoes and small rice cakes on city streets -- commercial practices previously unthinkable in a totalitarian society founded on Socialist principles.

He also saw something that was even more unthinkable a few years ago.

"In Pyongyang, I saw two women going up to a trash pile just across the river. When they got there, they opened their backpacks and starting collecting vegetables, picking off the parts that were too brown to eat," he said.

Yoon, who also serves on the Coordinating Council of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, was instrumental in getting that group to establish a famine-relief fund for North Korea at its general assembly in June. The fund had received more than \$15,000 through October.

The three Korean-American ministers distributed about 50 evangelistic tracts to North Koreans and shared their faith personally with a number of people.

Not long before the Korean Texas Baptists arrived, LaNoue learned about an urgent need for salt to replace reserves destroyed by a typhoon in August.

Unless the North Koreans received salt in massive quantities, they would have no way to preserve cabbage for "kimchi," standard Korean fare that is often the only vegetable available during the harsh winter months.

Through a series of phone calls to his Texas office, LaNoue quickly secured a \$60,000 pledge from the International Mission Board and Texas Baptist Men to buy salt. The Korean Texas Baptists, in turn, negotiated a

price reduction from vendors in China, making possible the purchase of an additional 100 tons of salt, bringing the total to 2,400 metric tons.

"Your God moves fast," a North Korean official told LaNoue. "He must be a mighty God."

Another urgent need, LaNoue discovered, is winter coats for school-age children. Just before his return to the U.S., LaNoue received a request from the liaison in the North Korean government's American Affairs office for 180,000 heavy coats.

"Many of the farm children have to walk anywhere from two to five kilometers [one and a quarter to three miles] through the snow to get to school," LaNoue said.

"Once they get to school, they spend the day in unheated classrooms. A heavy winter coat for a child could make the difference between life and death," he added, noting that many children might not survive illnesses because local clinics lack medicine.

Texas Baptist Men and the state's Woman's Missionary Union responded by coordinating a "Coats for Christmas" drive among the state's Baptist churches, working in partnership outside the state with the Southern Baptist Convention's WMU, International Mission Board and North American Mission Board.

Through contacts made by leaders of the Korean Baptist Fellowship of Texas, coats will be purchased for \$7 in China and delivered to North Korea at a much lower cost than shipping from the United States. New and clean used coats are also being collected by the Baptist General Convention of Texas in Dallas.

North Korea asked that the first 102,000 be delivered on Christmas. The remaining 78,000 would be due in mid-January.

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