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January 5, 1996

96-4

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WEST VIRGINIA--Auto worker obeys God, retires, starts church in native W.Va.

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CALENDAR

ALABAMA--Woman's Missionary Union executive board meeting, Birmingham, Jan. 12-17.

Auto worker obeys God, retires,
starts church in native W.Va.

By Ellen Walker

Baptist Press
1/5/96

ROCK CAVE, W.Va. (BP)--Deep in the often-overlooked interior of West Virginia, where the coal mines have almost all shut down, the logging business is slow and the majority of people have minimal education, God has planted a church that is ministering to people's needs and bringing them to Christ.

New Covenant Baptist Church, Rock Cave, W.Va., had tried unsuccessfully for eight years to start something in the remote Twin Lakes area. In early 1993 a discouraged missions committee reported its lack of success in a business meeting, and it was there that new member Marvin Riffle was touched that this was where God wanted him to work.

The then-59-year-old retired auto worker had grown up in nearby French Creek, W.Va., and moved away, like many of its young people, in search of employment in 1957. In Ohio at the age of 38, while watching a local church television broadcast, Riffle became a Christian.

"He (the Lord) opened my eyes and gave me hope where I had none," Riffle said. A year later his wife became a Christian and eventually the couple joined Camden Baptist Church, Oberlin, Ohio.

During the years after his conversion, Riffle fought the prospect of doing any kind of ministry. But on a trip home to West Virginia for Labor Day 1988, "the Lord spoke out of the clear blue," Riffle said. "You need to go to the front office and put in for retirement." He had worked for the Ford Motor Company more than 30 years. When he told his wife, Reba, she questioned how they would live for the next seven years, since he was not quite 55 at the time.

Determined to stop fighting God and be obedient to whatever God directed, Riffle retired on Jan. 6, 1989, and moved back to West Virginia.

"You don't know what the Lord wants you to do until you start being obedient," Riffle said. "He knew where I was ... and he left me in the Ford plant until I made the decision to do it (to be obedient)." If he had realized the joy of obedience, Riffle added, he would have done it sooner.

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Obedience is tied closely to faith, Riffle said in his down-home style of explaining profound theological thought. "People say they don't have enough faith. The problem is, they don't exercise the faith they have. It's like a glass of water. If I set it next to you and you don't drink, I'm not going to get you another glass of water until you've finished the first."

Even after moving to West Virginia, it took four years before God opened the door of ministry in Twin Lakes. Herry Kinchen, missions division director for West Virginia Southern Baptists, was in revival when Riffle invited him to come look at an old house as a possible church site -- a most unlikely location, Kinchen recalled thinking. "If he can see a church here, it's more than I can see." Nonetheless, Kinchen approved \$50 for rent and gave Riffle a green light "to go for it."

There were voices of doom and discouragement along the way. One person took Riffle aside warning, "Are you in your right mind? You're locating in the heart of Satan worship." Undaunted, the words of his father, a logging contractor, echoed in Riffle's mind. "If you find a big patch of timber, move the sawmill to the timber."

Work began on the small, four-room dilapidated house in April 1993. Uninhabited for more than 20 years, it was filled with farm machinery, lawn equipment and junk piled two-thirds of the way to the ceiling. It had no bathroom. Riffle placed flyers in the community announcing a church would be started in the near future, raising curiosity among residents.

On June 6, 1993, the Riffle's 40th wedding anniversary, Twin Lakes Southern Baptist Church opened with 17 in attendance. By late fall of 1995, the congregation had 87 Sunday school members, 38 church members and an average attendance of 24 on Sundays and 20 on Wednesday nights. With a population of 2,700 in the entire zip code which spans several counties, the church has baptized 15 people, five the first year and 10 its second year. Riffle's dream is to double the baptisms each year.

The church is not content to just meet, worship and study. Although its members are not rich by any definition, every month they impact their community by serving boxes of food to 140 families.

Sometimes the boxes contain government commodities, but all of the food they currently are distributing they have purchased themselves. They also provide clothing for those in need.

"We don't neglect anybody," Riffle said. Youth of the church minister with adults in a nursing home in nearby Buckhannon through music, puppets and clowning.

Riffle is the first to acknowledge "the Lord works in most mysterious ways." The Lord's provision has included money for pews, an anonymous interest-free loan of \$30,000 to buy the property and several mission construction teams. In 1994 First Baptist Church, Strong, Ark., added a 30- by 32-foot structure for an auditorium and in 1995 Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, Vale, N.C., built an additional 32- by 32-foot building for classrooms. County Line Baptist Church, Ruther Glen, Va., put siding on the building.

On Nov. 13, 1994, just before his 61st birthday, Riffle was ordained to the gospel ministry. He participated in the service in a wheelchair. Two days prior to the event, he had fallen off a roof while helping to put trusses on a house.

Although he had been licensed previously, he "originally did not want to be ordained," he said. However, when two couples had come to him seeking to be married, he realized he was "half a preacher." To better equip himself for the task, Riffle, like other West Virginia pastors, is taking seminary extension courses once a week, coordinated by the director of missions of the Monogahela Baptist Association.

Content to follow God's lead, Riffle admitted "once you start planting churches, you don't want to stop." Although he would someday like to start another church, Riffle said he plans to stay at Twin Lakes "until the Lord says to move on." Initially thinking he would stay only six months, he admitted the Lord "has stopped me right here."

Believing with God "there's no limit," Riffle has dreams that someday Twin Lakes will be a big church and someone will follow behind him with that dream. "It will only happen through obedience," he added.

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Walker is a free-lance writer in Barboursville, W.Va.

'MasterControl,' 'On Track'
keep RTVC host on the go

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
1/5/96

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--For the past 10 years Chuck Ries' life has been a roller-coaster ride of unusual proportions, all connected with the many interesting people he has met.

Ries' life began changing dramatically in 1985 when he became producer of "MasterControl," a weekly 30-minute interview-driven radio program produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission. The program, an RTVC mainstay since 1959, is currently on 536 stations.

Since 1991 Ries also has been producer of "On Track," a weekly program featuring interviews and contemporary Christian music. "On Track," which began in 1981, is currently carried by 432 stations.

"It's hard to know where to begin," the producer said, laughing. "I once stuck my hand in a whale's mouth while doing an interview with a whale handler. And I guess things just kind of got out of hand from there."

Ries, obviously, has no future as a comedian.

With a guide and driver, however, he once did a whirlwind tour of Israel in five days, saw the entire country and did 30 recorded interviews in the process for the RTVC programs.

Then, on a motion picture location in downtown Los Angeles one night, Ries thought he was witnessing the shooting of a movie. He actually found himself in the middle of a police chase and arrest.

His pursuit of a story for "MasterControl" put him in a jet boat and took him up Idaho's Snake River into Hell's Canyon, 35 miles past the last paved road and past the last navigation point.

Pursuit of stories also has taken him on a horseback ride into the Rocky Mountains and put him on virtually every Hollywood movie lot numerous times. He was one of many VIP media guests for the opening of the MGM Disney Studio in Orlando, Fla.

A sampling of celebrities he has interviewed for "MasterControl" and "On Track" include former baseball stars such as the late Mickey Mantle, Dave Dravecky, who lost an arm to cancer, Tommy John and Jim Palmer; Tom Landry, former coach of the Dallas Cowboys; and Bill McCartney, former coach of the University of Colorado football team and the founders of the Promise Keepers mens movement.

Jimmy Stewart, Bob Hope, Ernest Borgnine and James Earl Jones are among the movie stars he has interviewed, along with Bob Newhart and the casts of numerous television shows that include "Growing Pains," "ER" and "Family Matters."

"To give you an idea of my ability to judge what television shows will make it in the market, I told someone 'ER' wouldn't last six months," Ries said.

TV personalities interviewed by Ries include John Tesh, Mary Hart, Ed McMahon, Dick Clark and Jay Leno.

"The interview with Jay Leno was unusual in that it wasn't planned and I really didn't know who he was," Ries said. "This happened well before he became a household name. I was in Los Angeles and a publicist asked me to do her a favor and interview a stand-up comic named Jay Leno. Things like this just happen when you're producing a program like 'MasterControl.'"

Country artists who have been interviewed by Ries include Vince Gill, Randy Travis, Ricky Van Shelton and Kathy Mattea. Christian artists include Gary Chapman, Michael W. Smith and Kathy Tricoli.

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"MasterControl" also has featured interviews with well-known TV ministers and authors such as Ed Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston; Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark.; Henry Blackaby, director of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board; Robert Schuller and Josh McDowell.

Ries said two of the most interesting people he has met were Mel Blanc and Dawes Butler, the animation voices of some of Hollywood's most popular cartoon characters. Each died about six months after being interviewed.

"When I was leaving Mel Blanc's house, I ran into Walter Matthau walking his dog," Ries said. "We sat down and talked a while."

Ries thinks his career as a broadcaster has simply been a matter of being willing to become involved in what God is doing in the world. He graduated from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, with a bachelor of music degree, majoring in church music ministry. When he enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, majoring in music ministry, he needed a part-time job and applied at the RTVC. He was employed as a tape duplicator, working 20 hours or less a week.

"At the time we were duplicating 6,000 tapes a week," he said. "After a month I went to Ed Malone (vice president of radio services) and asked to do something else. Nine months later a part-time job opened up as a production engineer. I did that for a year and a half.

"In May of 1982 I graduated from seminary with a master's degree in music and was offered a full-time job at the RTVC as an associate radio producer. I felt the Lord was telling me to 'Do this for a while,' because my primary focus during this early period with the RTVC was on how this type of experience could help me in a church situation. I always thought my ministry would be in a local church. Early on, Christian broadcasting was a dream, but I never thought I could make a living doing it."

Malone said, "Chuck has grown tremendously as a producer and has developed exceptional interview and public relations skills. He is known in every arena of entertainment as a dedicated Christian. He is committed to making a spiritual impact, to providing programming that reaches out with the message of Jesus Christ."

Ries said everything he has learned at the RTVC over the years would be useful to a church. And he has not given up his music ministry. At First Baptist Church of Weatherford, Texas, he is part-time assistant minister of music, directs two choral ensembles and takes care of the church's sound system.

He also directs the church's dinner theater each year and helps the minister of music with the annual Easter pageant.

Ries said, "I grew up listening to 'Powerline.' When I was a teen-ager, it was on a Top 40 station in Houston on Saturday night."

"Powerline," a weekly program produced by the RTVC, has been aired by stations nationwide since 1969 and currently is carried by 627 stations.

"I was especially interested in the Christian commentary on the program," Ries said. "And, though I'm a cradle-to-the-grave Southern Baptist, it was nice to hear someone say it was all right to be a Christian and a teen-ager.

"I was impressed with the foresight of Southern Baptists' radio ministry, how the RTVC was getting the Christian message on secular radio. That's why I'm so sold on 'MasterControl.' It's on secular radio, features interviews and information, but the message of Jesus permeates the entire program.

"Of course, I'm sold on all the programs we do because they are all Christ-centered."

In addition to the three weekly programs mentioned, the RTVC also produces "The Baptist Hour" and "Country Crossroads." "The Baptist Hour," now aired by 393 stations, began in 1941. "Country Crossroads," which began in 1969, is currently carried by 884 stations.

**Wilson resigns as BSSB v.p.
of trade publishing group**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Charles A. Wilson, vice president of the Baptist Sunday School Board's trade publishing group, has resigned, effective Jan. 31, according to President James T. Draper Jr.

Wilson, who plans to pursue other business-ministry activities, has led the board's Broadman & Holman Publishers since 1992. He joined the board in 1991 as assistant vice president for business. He was elected vice president for trade and retail markets in 1992 and became vice president for trade publishing in 1994.

"I have accepted Chuck's resignation with reluctance," Draper said. "He is a valued friend who has been a dynamic and visionary leader. He has been instrumental in the strong progress at the board in the past four years."

As vice president for trade and retail markets, Draper said Wilson set successful strategic directions both for Baptist Book Stores and Broadman & Holman.

"Since 1994, he has focused his energies on charting dramatic improvements with Broadman & Holman," he added. "Through his efforts B&H is on a strong course of strategic initiatives. Some outstanding products are being released, as evidenced by numerous awards and the fact that several books and videos have made best-seller lists. We are committed to building on this foundation toward continuing progress in making B&H a leader in the religious publishing field."

Wilson said he is "thankful for the way the Lord has blessed my work at the Sunday School Board. I will be praying for its continuing success."

With Wilson's resignation, Draper said B&H managers will report to Ted Warren, executive vice president and chief operating officer.

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**Churches are 'weapon-free zones'
under Texas concealed-gun law**

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
1/5/96

DALLAS (BP)--Pistol-packing Texans can't take their guns to church, according to the new state law that allows qualifying adults to carry concealed weapons.

About 1,200 Texans who had passed state-sanctioned firearms training and received licenses were able to carry concealed weapons legally effective Jan. 1. Some state officials have predicted the number will rise to 78,000 by next year.

However, the same law that legalized the carrying of concealed weapons made it illegal to carry handguns, concealed or not, "on the premises of a church, synagogue or other established place of religious worship."

"Churches don't have to do anything to declare themselves weapon-free zones. The law already does that," said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The law is written broadly enough to include not only church sanctuaries, but also any part of the church property including offices, educational buildings or fellowship halls."

Some denominations have instructed their churches to mark facilities with signs prohibiting the possession of weapons, and some Baptist churches may choose to follow suit. However, the law does not require them to do it, Strickland said.

The concealed firearms law also prohibits handguns in hospitals, nursing homes, amusement parks, schools, sports venues, correctional facilities and bars.

Unlike churches, the law requires Baptist hospitals and homes for the aging to display a notice in both English and Spanish that it is illegal to carry a handgun on their premises. They must display signs with one-inch-tall block letters conspicuously at each entrance of their facilities.

Many other Texas workplaces began the New Year posting signs declaring themselves weapon-free zones. Among them was the Baptist General Convention of Texas office building in Dallas.

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Signs at the front door and at the parking garage elevators of the Baptist Building state, "Entry with firearms or other weapons is prohibited." The signs warn violators they may be prosecuted.

"In light of the concealed handgun legislation, we wanted to take reasonable precautions to provide a safe working environment for our employees and to provide for the safety of our guests," said Roger Hall, the BGCT's treasurer and chief financial officer.

"The signs may not be required technically, but we considered them a positive gesture."

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Laymen 'turn the tables,' pray for their pastors," dated 1/4/96, please change the date of Baptist Men's Day from Jan. 8 to Jan. 28.

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Baptist Press

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