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Faith in God Sustained Him,
Ex-POW Tells Congregation

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (BP)--A Navy prisoner of war elected by his fellow prisoners as their chaplain returned to First Southern Baptist Church of Clairemont here after being released to thank those who prayed for his freedom.

"I was able to sustain life and hope through the faith I have in God," Captain Howard Rutledge told the packed congregation of more than 700 persons.

"I am here today also because of the prayers of Christian people while I was in prison," he added.

He urged everyone to place their trust in God because, he said, there is no other place to put it.

For almost five minutes, the congregation applauded the former POW's remarks as he stood beside Pastor Charles W. Foley, who had asked Rutledge to speak to the church.

At the close of the service, Capt. Rutledge came forward to move his membership to the church. Foley reported that five other persons in the congregation, moved by the captain's testimony, made professions of faith in Christ.

While imprisoned, Capt. Rutledge said he made a promise to God that on the first Sunday that he was in San Diego, he would join First Southern Baptist Church of Clairemont. He said he was converted as a boy of 14 in Oklahoma, but had never moved his membership to the church his family attends in California.

The last time he attended services at the church was just prior to going overseas when his son, John, was baptized. He said he lamented the fact that he did not move his membership at that time.

Capt. Rutledge, 44, had been imprisoned for almost 7 1/2 years. Although he did not refer specifically to his experiences in prison in his brief testimony to the Clairemont church, a Navy spokesman said that his fellow POW's had selected Capt. Rutledge as their prison chaplain.

At the church service, Capt. Rutledge wore his khaki uniform, and sat with his mother, his wife, his two teenage daughters, his married daughter and his grandson. His family belongs to the church, according to Foley.

After the service, Rutledge gathered with members of his family at the home here which his wife, Phyllis, had purchased while he was in prison.

Almost all the returning American POW's are testifying, like Capt. Rutledge, to the power of prayer and faith in the prison camps, according to an American Baptist Navy chaplain stationed in the Philippines where most of the POW's first land.

"The key to their survival and to their mental and emotional health was a deep, abiding and growing relationship with God," said Chaplain Alex B. Aronis, an American Baptist involved in a ministry to returning POW's at Subic Bay Naval Air Station, the Philippines.

"The story of the religious experiences of these men is inspiring beyond words," Chaplain Aronis wrote in a letter to the director of American Baptist Chaplaincy Services in Valley Forge, Pa.

"Without God, I would not have been able to survive," one returning POW told Chaplain Aronis. Asked if he meant that God really helped him, the ex-POW replied: "No, not merely helped. I mean it when I say I could not have made it without God pulling me through."

Another news report, carried by Christianity Today magazine, indicated there was apparently a spiritual movement that swept through the ranks of the POW's at the so-called "Hanoi Hilton" prison camp.

"Everything else was stripped from us, and we were left with only our faith in God," one POW was quoted as saying. "I couldn't have made it if it were not for Jesus Christ and being able to look up and see him in some of the trying times," another said.

Many of the POW's told of holding worship services, organizing choirs, and studying the scriptures, mostly from memory, in the POW camps. The men reconstructed whole sections of scriptures out of their memory, due to unavailability of Bibles.

The most meaningful passages to the POWs, Chaplain Aronis wrote, included the 23rd Psalm, the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, Romans 12, and I Corinthians 13.

Their favorite hymns had been, "In the Garden," "What A Friend We Have in Jesus," and "Holy, Holy, Holy," he noted in a report carried by American Baptist News Service.

Their by-word, Chaplain Aronis said, was "God Bless You," a greeting used even to those who professed to be agnostics or atheists.

"The religious experience was so significant and so beneficial for some," Chaplain Aronis wrote, "that two that I know of said they were glad they had the prison experience because of what they learned in terms of life, values and priorities."

One POW told the chaplain he uniquely felt God's presence. "The moment my feet touched down on North Vietnamese soil, God was standing next to me," the POW told him. "He was three buildings tall, and the tip of his shoes came to my forehead, and he said to me, 'I'm going to be with you and I'm going to take care of you.'"

Chaplain Aronis added that in his conversations with the returning POW's, "the stories just kept coming, not because I was pumping but because they just had to be told. It was the spontaneous sharing of Good News that is apparent in the New Testament."

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SBC Mission Gifts
Continue Increase

3/7/73

NASHVILLE (BP)--Contributions to world missions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget continued to climb, with a 16.75 per cent increase during the month of February.

During the first five months of the fiscal year, October through February, gifts through the Cooperative Program had reached \$14,153,106, an increase for the year of almost \$1.2 million, or 9.24 per cent.

A six per cent increase is necessary to meet the convention's budget for the year, SBC officials said.

In addition to the \$14.1 million in Cooperative Program gifts, a correspondingly big increase in designated giving to specific mission causes was noted in the report, prepared by the SBC Executive Committee here.

A total of \$15,135,157 has been given to designated mission causes, primarily home and foreign missions, so far during the fiscal year. It is an increase of \$1.7 million or 12.83 per cent, for the year.

Grand total mission gifts (Cooperative Program and designations combined) climbed to \$29,288,263, an increase of \$2.9 million or 11.07 per cent.

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Big increases have been reported for the last three months. December and January were record months of Cooperative Program giving, with an all-time high of more than \$3 million contributed through the Cooperative Program in January.

In February, Cooperative Program gifts were just short of the \$3 million mark, with \$2.9 million given through the denomination's unified budget that is similar to the United Givers Fund approach.

Designations were also up in February, when \$9 million was reported for specific mission causes, most of it through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions. February, always a heavy month for designated gifts, noted a \$1.4 million or 19.07 per cent increase.

For the month of February, a grand total of almost \$12 million (\$11,998,691) was given through the Cooperative Program and special designated offerings, an increase of \$1.8 million or 18.5 per cent over February gifts of 1972.

The financial report reflects only contributions to world and nation-wide SBC mission causes, and does not include amounts given to support local and state missions.

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Baptist Layman Arrested
For Trailer Park Visiting

3/7/73

CROWLEY, Tex. (BP)--A 37-year-old volunteer youth director for an independent Baptist church was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct here after police ordered him and other church members to leave a trailer park where they were attempting to conduct a visitation program.

The pastor of the Rendon Baptist Church near Fort Worth, Lonnie Echols, said the congregation plans to continue the visitation program despite the arrest, and to fight for their freedom of religion in court.

It all started when the youth director and volunteer choir director for the church, Willie G. Rutledge, took a church bus with several members to the Chalet City Mobile Home Park at Crowley to visit for the church and share their faith.

Echols said that the wife of the manager of the trailer park yelled at the group, telling them they could not solicit door-to-door at the park, and ordering them to leave.

Rutledge responded, "We're not soliticing, we're witnessing." Echols added the 37-year-old layman who volunteers his time as youth and choir director told the woman they would pray for her.

The woman and her husband called the police.

When the police arrived, Rutledge and the other agreed to leave, with plans to go to the city hall and get a soliciter's permit. City hall, however, was closed.

According to Echols, Rutledge told the officer he was willing to leave, but that he could not stop him from witnessing for Jesus Christ.

"The only way you can stop me from witnessing is to lock me up," Rutledge reportedly told the officer.

"Okay, we'll just take care of that," the officer replied, according to Echols. "They put handcuffs on him and hauled him off like a criminal," Echols added.

Objecting to the way Rutledge was treated, the pastor said he was all for law and order, and he knew the police have a job to do, "but so do we." He said that freedom to share their faith was the principle at stake, and argued that church groups should not be classified as soliciters.

Echols said that when the case comes to trial (March 13), the church would file a motion that would exempt church groups from the solicitor's permit requirement.

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A report on the incident in a Fort Worth newspaper indicated that the group came to the trailer court at about 8:30 p.m. on a Tuesday evening, and started visiting without permission from the management.

Echols said there was one family living in the trailer court who had indicated an interest in joining their church and had asked for a visit.

Managers of the park were quoted as saying they had nothing against the church members, but there is a strict rule against door-to-door solicitations in the mobile home park.

Crowley Police Chief Cecil Sorrells said the 37-year-old layman, a student at Bible Baptist Seminary in nearby Arlington, Tex., pleaded not guilty to the disorderly conduct charge, and was released on his own recognizance.

Sorrells said that church groups are required to have a soliciter's permit before going door-to-door in Crowley. "It doesn't cost anything for a church group," he said. "If these people had bothered to go by and pick one up, this wouldn't have happened."

Echols said the church, an independent Baptist congregation, is located in the rural community of Rendon a few miles outside Crowley in Tarrant County about 20 miles south of Fort Worth. Crowley has a population of less than 1,000.

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Radio-TV Fund Campaign
Exceeds \$150,000 Goal

3/7/73

ROANOKE, Va. (BP)--A "Second Step" fund drive to benefit the Southern Baptist Radio-Television Commission here has exceeded its campaign goal of \$150,000, and campaign leaders said they hope to raise as much as \$200,000 to \$250,000 here.

Roanoke is one of 34 cities in the country where the SBC Radio-TV Commission will conduct "Second Step" fund campaigns this year. It is the first to reach its goal.

Already, pledges have reached \$150,200 in Roanoke, and that amount was pledged by less than 20 per cent of the prospective givers in the campaign, according to Reginald M. Wood, Roanokes' campaign chairman. The leaders decided to continue the campaign to challenge others to participate.

Other similar campaigns are currently being conducted in Fort Worth, Shreveport, La.; and Knoxville, Tenn.; and are being organized in Jackson, Miss., and Montgomery, Ala.

Purpose of the campaign is to raise \$2 million to build a major television production studio and broadcast training center for the commission based in Fort Worth. The campaign is for capital funds only.

In Fort Worth, the campaign has passed the \$661,000 mark, with plans to raise another \$1 million. Amount pledged in the Shreveport campaign has reached \$84,500 toward that city's \$150,000 goal.

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