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**'Didn't Want White Man's
Religion,' Now Minister**

By Mike Bailey

FORT WORTH (BP)--"We wanted no part of the white man's religion so we chased the missionaries off."

This was the initial reaction of Russell Begaye and his family to the white Christian missionaries who came to their home on the Navaho Reservation in New Mexico.

Begaye is now a master of divinity student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary preparing himself for the job of going back to his tribe and teaching them about Jesus Christ.

He grew up in a traditional Navaho home in Shiprock, N.M., and was taught the Navaho religion by his parents. The family had tried some of the "white man's religion" but did not care for it.

But then Begaye's father became paralyzed and the healing power of the Navaho faith never came, so the family turned to the Christian religion in hopes of a cure.

"The Holy Spirit really got hold of us," Begaye said smiling. "Soon after we started going to that Baptist church, my father was saved, then my mother and then me." The mission church is one of several missions sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board and is funded through the Cooperative Program (basic unified budget of Southern Baptists).

Within a year, the prayers were answered Begaye said, and his father was able to walk once again.

Four years later, Russell Begaye felt that God was calling him to preach. He had an edge over the missionaries, because Begaye could speak to the other Navahoes in their own language. He preached revivals in many of the churches on the reservation. "I really felt God working through me," he said. "One night, twenty-seven people came down and accepted Jesus in one of the meetings."

After high school, Begaye went to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) to major in pre-law and there realized the extent of the harassment of the American Indian. He recalled, "I saw a lot of hatred and prejudice. Several of my friends were even shot so I got bitter and turned away from my Christian faith."

Begaye found an outlet for his hatred in the American Indian Movement (AIM) and participated in demonstrations, protests and every chance he got, he spoke out vehemently against the white man. "But after every speech I made, God would get hold of me and shake me up. It got to where I couldn't go to sleep because running through my mind was, 'Love your neighbor. Love your neighbor'."

During his junior year at UCLA, Begaye was invited to a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting and was impressed by the spirit of love he found there. "God finally drove me to my knees," he said, "and I put Jesus back in the center of my life. And He replaced all my hate with His love."

January, 1974 was an important month for Russell Begaye because he found himself with two opportunities. One was that he believed God was leading him to attend the seminary. The other was a \$24,000 a year job with a consulting agency designed to aid the American Indians. "But the Lord wanted me here," he said, grinning.

Begaye wants the seminary training because he says it will better equip him to go back to the reservation and train laymen in the churches there so they can aid in spreading the gospel.

"Most Navahoes," he explained, "think that salvation means accepting the white man's culture. But when they hear another Navaho tell about it they can understand better because we both come from the same culture."

Begaye is now preaching on Sundays at the Fort Worth Indian Mission and is also a member of the Parent-Indian Advisory Council of the Fort Worth school system.

But one day he is planning to go back to New Mexico because, "I want my people to know about Jesus."

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Mike Bailey is a news writer for the public relations office of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

Elaine Dickson Moves To Sunday School Board

NASHVILLE (BP)--Elaine Dickson, Dean of Student Affairs at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., will become supervisor of the young adult section in the Sunday School department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board on Jan. 1, 1975.

Miss Dickson, a native of Illinois, has been at Southern Seminary for the past 5 years. She was an instructor in the School of Religious Education before assuming her position of Dean of Student Affairs in 1972.

Prior to her work at Southern Seminary she served at the Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham, Ala., for 11 years, first as Woman's Missionary Society promotion associate, and then as assistant to the director of the Promotion Division.

She has worked also as Young Woman's Auxiliary Director, Texas Woman's Missionary Union; Interim Youth Secretary, Oklahoma Woman's Missionary Union; Youth Director, First Christian Church, Fort Worth; and teacher, Moore High School, Farmer City, Ill.

Miss Dickson holds the bachelor of science degree from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; the master of religious education degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth; and the doctor of education degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Professional societies in which Miss Dickson holds membership include the Southern Baptist Religious Education Association, the Association of Religion and Applied Behavioral Sciences, the American Guidance and Personnel Association and the National Association of Women's Deans and Counselors.

Miss Dickson has co-authored two books. The first was "The Woman's Missionary Union Program of a Church," with Mrs. R. L. Mathis, President of the WMU; and the second, "The 70's--Opportunities for Your Church," with James Daniel, a group leader in the church services and materials division at the Sunday School Board. She has written numerous articles in denominational publications and some Southern Baptist Convention programming documents.

She has been listed in Outstanding Young Women of America, Outstanding Educators of America and Who's Who in Religion.

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Baptist, Catholic Colleges Open Ecumenical Institute

BELMONT, N. C. (BP)--An Ecumenical Institute, jointly sponsored by Belmont Abbey College, a Roman Catholic school, and Wake Forest University, a Baptist school, was officially launched with an interdenominational worship service in Belmont Abbey Cathedral here.

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The institute is an expansion of one started by Wake Forest University in 1968, under the leadership of Brooks Hays former congressman from Arkansas and a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Director of the Belmont Abbey-based institute is Claude U. Broach, who retired after 30 years in the ministry of St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, N. C., to accept the new position.

The worship celebration commemorated the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the decree on ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council.

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\$600,000 in Gifts Go To Mercer University

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Mercer University, a Baptist school here, has been given two separate gifts totaling \$600,000, President Rufus C. Harris announced.

A \$500,000 gift from an anonymous donor was to be used toward construction of a building for the university's Walter F. George School of Law. The other gift of \$100,000 came from Lamar R. Plunkett, Georgia clothing manufacturer and chairman of the State Board of Regents, and his wife.

The \$600,000 brings the total of gifts received since Mercer's April meeting of trustees to more than \$2 million, Harris said.

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From 'Soles to Souls'

By Fletcher Allen

Betty Craft kicked a shoe stool somewhat affectionately and said, "That's the end of the shoe business!"

She looked at her husband Ira and added, "From soles to souls!"

Ira and Betty Craft of Columbia, S. C., are an example of a family involved in world missions.

Seven years ago, Ira resigned from a prosperous position as vice president for a major shoe company to devote his full energies to Baptist missions efforts in pioneer areas and around the world.

For 30 years, Ira worked for the Butler Shoe Co., advancing from a shoe salesman to vice president of the company. About 10 years ago, the company sent him to the Boston, Mass., area to direct the company's expansion program on the East Coast.

But the Crafts got involved in something else--the Calvary Baptist Church in Framingham, Mass., a suburb of Boston. Ira became so involved he even served as treasurer of the New England Baptist Association during the two and a half years there.

"Pioneer missions came alive to us," Ira recalled. "I had lived all my life in the Bible belt of the South, and I just didn't realize the mission needs in the Northeast. To see what God was doing there with so little resources was an inspiration."

Ira and Betty became concerned, not only about the mission needs in the Northeast, but also about the missions of Southern Baptists back home in the South who seemed to be unaware of those needs.

It was then that they realized, "God was speaking to us, asking us to go back home to South Carolina," and share with the people what God is doing in pioneer missions, and connect up the resources with the needs.

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Ira walked into the president's office and turned in his resignation, deciding at age 50 to live off his investments and savings so he could devote full time to working for Jesus Christ.

What happened then continues to amaze the Crafts.

Friends and acquaintances began to crop up from the past.

It was in Framingham that the lives of Ira Craft and Bill Gurley crossed for a second time. Craft had been doing much thinking about early retirement--when Gurley, a wealthy Christian businessman from Memphis, Tenn., "just happened" to talk to him about an idea he had.

Gurley, who operates the Gurley Oil Co., in Memphis, wanted to organize a laywitnessing foundation, but didn't know exactly what to do with it. "Why don't you come and be the executive director, and let's get something going for the Lord," he told Ira.

Ira accepted the position as executive director of Baptist Missions, Inc., and they did "get something going for the Lord."

Gurley helped start at least nine Baptist missions in Memphis, and is the one who makes it possible financially, Ira said.

Ira, however, is the sparkplug that keeps the foundation running.

Ira is careful to work through official channels at the SBC Home Mission Board, and with the state conventions, associations and local Southern Baptist churches in the pioneer areas where he tries to help.

"It's not a big organization," Ira pointed out. "We never plan any plush offices. . . . We operate from a small bedroom--converted-to-office at our home in Columbia, and Betty and I are the only staff the foundation has."

Baptist Missions, Inc., generates about \$70,000 annually for Baptist work in pioneer areas--above expenses. And the only expenses are travel costs. Craft lives off savings and investments. He emphasizes that "every cent given by a church or an individual to a pioneer mission or like project, goes directly for that cause."

He won't even accept pay or expense money for speaking to a church or related group. "I tell them to send the money to a pioneer mission cause and let them know why they sent it," he said.

"We only want to help the Home Mission Board," he added. "Can more people get to know the Lord if we help? And does the lay leadership know how to do the job? We think Baptist Missions can help both ways--by generating funds and by telling lay leaders how to work for Christ."

Baptist Missions, Inc., is fulltime--Ira speaks somewhere weekly--but the Crafts are actively involved with Park Street Church in Columbia. He is a deacon and they are co-ordinators for a college and career group in Church Training.

Ira is a member of the Foreign Mission Board and is on the board for the Vineyard Conference Center. He is a trustee for Luther Rice Seminary and is on the executive committee for the South Carolina Baptist Brotherhood. He is on the Men's Committee of the Baptist World Alliance and is co-ordinator for the Pan-American Union of Baptist Men for North America.

A strong supporter of the Brotherhood organization in Southern Baptist churches, Ira is active in leading lay renewal weekends across the SBC, and lay evangelism schools around the world.

You might see the Crafts anywhere in the world--Hong Kong, Singapore, Spokane, Dallas, Zurich, Cali--or any town in South Carolina. That's the way they do things. Wherever the need for witnessing or helping or ministering--they will go.

Some examples of Ira Craft's labors include:

- a push cart Bible school in Columbia
- Lay Evangelism schools in Hong Kong, Macao and Malaysia where 112 first time decisions for Jesus Christ were made
- Lay Evangelism schools in Singapore where 70 came to Christ. The list goes on and on.

Ira's main task, however, is not so much leading evangelism and renewal programs himself, as it is inspiring and motivating other laymen to get personally involved in mission.

For example, not long ago, Ira was gone from his office home for a few hours, and when he returned Betty gave him two telephone messages.

The first was from a church in Rochester, N. Y., that needed \$10,000 for a down payment on a Methodist church building that was for sale. Until then, the Baptist congregation had been meeting in rented quarters.

The second phone call was from Bill Duncan of First Baptist Church, Picayune, Miss., who wanted to know when Ira could come down and challenge his people.

Ira followed up on both phone calls. First he went to Rochester and investigated the needs.

Then he went to speak at the Picayune church, and later to the Associational Brotherhood annual meeting in Picayune. That night, the laymen attending the Brotherhood meeting raised \$10,000 to answer the challenge from Rochester.

Later, Ira asked Betty when those two phone calls came. "The call from Rochester came 15 minutes before the call from Picayune," she replied.

"Isn't it exciting what the Lord is doing?" Ira concluded.

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Fletcher Allen is associate editor of The Baptist Courier, the Baptist state paper in South Carolina.

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