

(BP)

News Office of the Southern Baptist Convention

-- FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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July 31, 1975

75-117

Appoint More Blacks, Says
Career Black Missionary

By James Lee Young

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' only black career foreign missionary wants a joint effort between National (black) and Southern Baptists to send more black Southern Baptist-sponsored missionaries abroad.

"Specific opportunities in Nigeria, for example, won't last forever," says Sue Thompson, only black career foreign missionary of the predominately white 12.5 million-member Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

Appointed in 1967, she was the first black to be named a career missionary by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in over 80 years. Marva David Butler was chosen for the board's two-year missionary journeyman program in 1965 and served as a secretary in Santiago, Chile.

Three other blacks working under Foreign Mission Board sponsorship at present in the missionary journeyman program are a nurse in Barranquilla, Colombia; Mikel F. Robinson, a Bible teacher at Kumasi (Ghana) Academy and Mary Ballance, teacher in commercial subjects in Nairobi, Kenya.

"National Baptists have the personnel and Southern Baptists have the money and programs for a joint effort," Miss Thompson told Baptist Press.

"I would like to see the Foreign Mission Board and the Southern Baptist Convention take the initiative in this--without paternalism. Any joint effort should be a two-way street," the attractive young woman stressed; "Southern Baptists could afford to make the financial sacrifice, with no strings attached." She has communicated her feelings to the Foreign Mission Board, she noted.

"I don't really know how blacks will receive it," she continues, "but I'm concerned primarily with a need for proclaiming the gospel in Africa."

Miss Thompson, a student worker stationed in Minna, Nigeria, serves seven or eight schools, "comparable to high schools" and does some Baptist Student Union work on the university level. She works with the Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Baptist Mission of Nigeria. (The latter is the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries)

The Foreign Mission Board notes it has never had stipulations against appointing blacks as missionaries. In fact, black missionaries were under the auspices of the SBC soon after its inception.

Blacks were serving as missionaries to Liberia in 1845 when the SBC was organized in Augusta, Ga., The missionaries, originally serving under the sponsorship of the Triennial Convention, the first nationwide body of Baptists, were all under SBC control by 1856.

Forty-five blacks were appointed to the Liberia Mission before the U.S. Civil War forced retrenchment of foreign missions, with the Liberian and other mission work later formally suspended. Blacks began organizing their own work, and the rise of black churches and conventions made the traditional cooperative efforts between whites and blacks less practical.

The SBC Constitution stipulates that all missionaries must be members of Baptist churches cooperating with the convention. Out of 12.5 million Southern Baptists, the board has a small group of blacks, statistically speaking, from which to draw potential candidates.

According to estimates about 70,000 blacks are members of SBC-affiliated churches; some are black churches dually aligned with the SBC and a national black convention.

While this is a sizable number of black Baptists, a board spokesman noted that applicants among blacks for Southern Baptist foreign mission appointment has been anything but high. No statistics of foreign mission applicants by race were available.

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During her tenure as the denomination's only black career foreign missionary, Miss Thompson has encountered "little racism" among the missionaries. "It hasn't been a severe enough problem for me to have to confront anyone personally," she notes.

Nor has Miss Thompson encountered much of a problem as a woman on the missionary field. She has served on several mission organization committees and has "not felt discussion was even against me as a black or as a woman."

If her acceptance by the white missionaries has been good, Miss Thompson feels "at one" with the Nigerians. "Nigerians, other Africans and people around the world have asked me 'Why don't Southern Baptists have more black missionaries?'"

Christianity has come to be identified as a white, western cultural religion, particularly in Africa although the growth of Christianity in the Third World nations may eventually offset that, Miss Thompson noted.

In Nigeria, she said, there is some mistrust and suspicion of whites among the educated and/or government officials, "more so than among the masses." But there's not pronounced racism in Nigeria, she added. Miss Thompson noted she has received negative reaction from some black Baptists in the United States because of her Southern Baptist affiliation.

"But the Nigerians want more black missionaries. The names they have given me are 'Omodele', meaning 'child returns home,' and 'Ajoke,' meaning 'We love you.'"

Miss Thompson's first contacts with Southern Baptists were the racist ones.

"I almost left the organized church as a teenager because of racism... With whites, it was their hating of blacks and their lack of love. With blacks, I saw a lack of seriousness in carrying on the work of Christ, and I didn't see any educational programs for the young people.

"Blacks reached out to whites for many years and were rejected. But now whites, Southern Baptists especially, are reaching out and blacks appear to be rejecting them. I think I can understand blacks' separatist attitudes at present," she noted.

However, Miss Thompson said, there is no place for separation or isolation in Christianity and both races have been guilty of these.

"Some Southern Baptists say that when we get more blacks in SBC churches, then there will be more black missionaries... but you can't expect blacks to join Southern Baptist churches en masse nor expect them all to become Southern Baptists." An answer instead, she said, is greater cooperation between the conventions in missionary endeavors, such as the joint effort she proposed.

Attending Baptist Student Union (BSU), Southern Baptists' organization for college and university students, changed her outlook on Christianity and Southern Baptists, Miss Thompson said. Her "call to missions" was the result of a summer's mission work in New Orleans as a college student.

"I was the only black in the BSU at Central Missouri State University" in Warrensburg, "but I decided to give it a chance."

A former school teacher, Miss Thompson said her first "genuine relations with Southern Baptists" came as a student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, from which she was graduated in 1967.

She joined Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, where John Claypool, now pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, had led the people to meet the issue of race and integration.

"God answered my prayer. I was well received by the students and faculty at Southern and at Crescent Hill Church. The church had already gone through racial tensions, so there were really no problems for me racially. I taught a Sunday School class and had an afterschool club in the church's weekday program, leading in Bible study, recreation and crafts, she said.

When she first entered the "white situation," Miss Thompson recalled, "there were some psychological adjustments that amounted to a struggle about being used by Southern Baptists as a token.

"It's not a problem with me now. I feel I'm doing what God wants me to do. I have a worthwhile ministry to whites and blacks in the U.S. and overseas. In some small way I feel I'm contributing to reconciliation."

Puppets Make Missions
More Real to Children

By Nancy Carter

RICHMOND (BP)--Margaret and Kenneth may be puppets, but they're not dummies.

The two new additions to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, part of a special program for children coming to the board for tours during the summer months, tell about missions and the work of missionaries. More than 1,000 children visited the board in June.

Margaret and Kenneth, whose first initials (MK) stand for "missionary kids," portray the children of missionaries appointed by the Foreign Mission Board.

Under the supervision of Richard M. Styles, the board's public relations consultant, the show is performed by Pam Strang, who wrote the script and does actions and voices for the puppets. Miss Strang, a junior education major at Stephens College, Columbia, Mo., is a summer employee at the board for the second year.

"The puppets make it possible for children to get in on missions too," she said. "Children can't comprehend all the board meetings, the newsletters and the annual reports, but they can surely relate to something as real as two kids."

Many children express interest in becoming missionaries themselves after hearing all the career possibilities open to missionaries--such as preaching, medical work, teaching, social work and agriculture, Miss Strang noted.

"I was stumped when one little five-year-old girl told me she wanted to be a missionary and I asked her, 'What do you want to be?' and she said, 'a beautician.' I didn't know what to say to her, other than the Lord can use each of us."

She remembers another young girl, about 14, who was blind. "She asked me if there was any place in the world of missions for blind people. I feel like, yes, there is. There's always a place for anyone who has the will and the desire and feels called by God."

The idea for the puppets began last summer when Miss Strang took a course in puppetry at her church. She talked with Styles about using puppets at the board for children's groups instead of the film usually shown to all tour groups, and Styles agreed to consider it.

He learned that another board employee, Terry Snyder, had experience in making puppets. After discussion, research and preparation, the decision was made on the characters the puppets should have and their physical appearance. Snyder made both puppets in four days.

Margaret, it was decided, would be the "bossy" member. She has black hair, wears pink aviator glasses, and has bug-eyes. She wears a prim smock dress and a shoulder bag with her initial, "M," on it.

Kenneth is the "intuitive" one, Miss Strang said. He has "shocking" red hair, wears a green baseball cap and jersey and portrays the typical young boy who thinks of baseball first, last and in between.

The show begins with the two here in the United States. Their parents have just been appointed to go overseas.

At first, Kenneth is more concerned about baseball than about his parents being missionaries.

"He really doesn't know what a missionary is, and this relates to the children, because most of them don't know much more about missionaries or missions than the words," Miss Strang said.

"Margaret says, 'Let me tell you all about missionaries,' and this is when it all starts to come together," Miss Strang added.

Once Kenneth is overseas and begins to write his friends, he changes his mind about missions. "He comes to the conclusion at the end that missions really is important after all--missions is helping other people, and a missionary goes out as an ambassador for Christ."

Th children seem to take the message of the puppets seriously, Miss Strang said, even though they laugh at Margaret's "big mouth" and Kenneth's exasperation with his sister.

Although the script is always the same, the reactions of different age groups are quite different, Miss Strang believes.

"Five-year-olds will respond a little shyly, eight-year-olds will respond great, thirteen-year-olds feel stupid, fifteen-year-olds think it's really good, and seventy-two-year-olds are just laughing.

"Some of the loudest laughs have come from the older people."

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to state Baptist papers

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story mailed 7/30/75, entitled "Today Show to Interview Pastor on Nagasaki Bombing," the first graph should read: SAN ANTONIO (BP)--Buckner Fanning, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church here, is scheduled to be interviewed on NBC-TV's "Today" show, Aug. 11, about an evangelistic crusade he recently conducted in Nagasaki, Japan, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on that city. (The words--about an evangelistic crusade--were accidentally omitted from the July 30 story.)