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**Once Prestigious Church
Ministers with 'Just Enough'**

By Tim Nicholas

BALTIMORE, Md. (BP)--More than 100 years ago, famed Woman's Missionary Union leader and Southern Baptist home missions advocate Annie Armstrong was converted and baptized into the fellowship of then prestigious Seventh Baptist Church here.

Today, that same church is struggling to survive, and to minister in a dilapidated section of the city.

Robert Dorr, the pastor, has his own version of a "theology of enough." He is convinced "God has given us just enough to get by."

That "just enough," however, is a lot. The otherwise age-encrusted church is sponsoring more than a dozen creative ministries in the inner city.

The church, with about 125 regularly in worship services, supports its ministries financially with "just enough to get by."

But the rolls of the church have dwindled from the mid-50's high of 1,458 to the present 350.

About three-fourths of the Sunday School is black, whereas worship services attract mostly white people. In terms of evangelistic outreach, the church baptizes 10-15 people a year, Dorr said.

Looking at the dilapidated houses and poverty-stricken people in the area, he noted, "It's not enough to save people for eternity, we need to help them while they're here."

Seven years ago Dorr realized the church membership would not renew itself and that members wanted to minister.

"I thought God wouldn't open any more doors than we could go through," he said, "but when we asked, they started opening left and right."

One of the first doors to open was in child care. Two women, one a church member, approached Dorr about opening a children's center.

Neighborhood children had no place to play, nothing to play with, "or any of the experiences we take for granted where kids learn about themselves and their world, to paint, color, be in an atmosphere of love."

The women checked with the local health department and found the church could use all its for play space.

The nursery school began with just enough. They made their first years budget of \$8,000 just barely.

The church then utilized the professional expertise of its membership. A certified public accountant agreed to handle the finances and serve on the corporate board set up by the church for the nursery school, a lawyer agreed to do the incorporation papers, and a pediatrician agreed to provide consultation in beginning the school, the minister noted.

Later a self-supporting day care center joined the nursery school in the church. Dorr then decided the church ought to do something for its elderly members who were scattered about the city.

"We had one woman who fell at home and lay on her floor for 24 hours before she was found," the minister said. Another church member died and wasn't found for a couple of days.

"We need something in the area for our elderly people in between total independence and a nursing home," Dorr explained.

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So the church's members checked the possibility of leasing several row houses -- with common side walls--across the street from the church. They already owned two adjoining houses, still used as a halfway house for former mental hospital patients.

The bank that owned seven houses only had about 50 percent occupancy and wanted to sell, not lease the buildings.

"We had about given up on the idea when we decided to try to raise money within the church," said Dorr.

Then three men in the church threw up a trial balloon. They contacted others to get pledges of \$1,000 each to be given over a five year period. "Nobody turned them down," exclaimed Dorr.

"In only a few days we had \$25,000 pledged. One man had said that if we could get \$10,000, he'd match it. Soon we had \$50,000 in sight and the sale price for the seven houses was \$32,000.

"I figured it would take about \$15,000 to bring them up to standard. That's our theology of enough--we just barely had it.

"Another miracle was Miss Boughan," said Dorr. Mildred Boughan manages the St. Paul Project, a senior citizens' housing complex on St. Paul Street.

She retired from the telephone company in 1973 and told the pastor that she was moving back to Virginia if he didn't keep her busy.

The church closed the purchase just after her retirement date and she immediately began as manager. Miss Boughan coordinated efforts to ensure the buildings met code violations and to move in the elderly. The project's rules stipulate that residents must be over 40, but they are seldom that young and usually live alone. Twenty-eight of the 30 available apartments were rented at last count. Rent is much less than comparable facilities, Dorr said.

Miss Boughan takes care of rent collecting, publishes a weekly "block bulletin" and runs a coffee shop where residents can gather for coffee, tea and doughnuts daily at 10 p.m.

Besides the five houses the St. Paul Project occupies, another house on the row is a retreat center used by various groups for overnight conferences and by summer missionaries.

Still another house is occupied by the Nahum Community, a self-supporting Christian commune, named after the Old Testament prophet, whose name means "comfort and consideration."

Residents are committed to participating in an urban church's life.

"A commune was the logical thing we thought for the senior citizens," said Dorr. "But they all wanted separate apartments and except for caring for one another in illness, they are simply neighbors."

The interdenominational Midtown Churches Community Association (MCCA) runs a daily hot lunch program for senior citizens at St. Mark's Lutheran Church where most of the residents eat lunch, next door to the Baptist church.

Seventh belongs to the MCCA and participates in its many local projects--which the Baptist group could not handle alone.

"I can't imagine going back to a traditional pastorate," the minister noted. "Here Mrs. Fah y, at her 94th birthday party, was supposed to make a wish and blow out the candles. Instead, she bowed her head and said, 'Heavenly Father, thank you for all these God-fearing people who've given me this place to live and who care for me.'"

Dorr continued, "This afternoon I'm doing decoupage with the kids in the community program and I'll be with the barbershop quartet this evening when they sing at a museum.

"But I'm still not sure we've gotten the church into ministry," he added. "...We're in a precarious sort of position in that we're not attracting new families to carry on the church.

"I honestly don't know what's going to happen when these older members retire or move away or die. At the moment finances are stable, but..."

"I'd like to be younger or independently wealthy," mused Dorr, 51. "I'd like to stay on indefinitely and see what happens."

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**Plans Made for Evangelism,
Ministry Among Vietnamese**

ATLANTA (BP)--Spurred by the belief that their people need to be reached with the Christian gospel before they are assimilated into the U. S. culture, Vietnamese Baptist leaders met here to plan for evangelism and ministries among their 130,000 refugee countrymen.

Thirteen Vietnamese leaders from nine states met at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board with home and foreign missionaries, Home Mission Board staff members and several state language mission directors.

"We had two purposes for the meeting," said Lewis Myers, former missionary to Vietnam, now on assignment from the Foreign Mission Board to assist the Home Mission Board in developing ministries among the Vietnamese refugees.

"First, we wanted to give them orientation into the work of language missions and let them see how what they are doing locally plugs into the national picture.

"Second, and the major reason for the meeting, we wanted to get their insights into how we can best accomplish what we're trying to do. We wanted to see what their feelings are--their frustrations and their hopes for work among the Vietnamese."

One of the immediate results of the conference, Myers said, probably will be circulation of some kind of "news sheet" among the Vietnamese Baptists.

"They need to feel a sense of community," Myers said, "and some kind of news sheet could help by keeping them informed of other groups and their progress."

A publication of some kind also could help in distributing Bible study materials and devotional aids, he said.

Myers, who spent 15 years in Vietnam, said a sense of urgency permeated all the sessions here. "The general feeling of the men, as well as surveys that have been taken among refugees," Myers said, "is that the people will be most receptive to the gospel in the first few months they are in the country."

Myers said the leaders want to respond to that sense of urgency and already have formed small congregations in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., Orlando, Fla., Dallas and Birmingham, two in El Cajon, Calif., and three in Los Angeles. Bible study groups have begun in San Antonio, Houston, and Bryan, Tex., and Ft. Worth, Tex.

Myers said that there probably were only about 200 Baptists in the more than 130,000 refugees who came to the United States but he and the others estimate that already the number has more than doubled.

"I see the possibility for other congregations in Arlington, Va.; Washington, D. C.; Carbondale, Ill.; San Jose, Calif.; the Tampa Bay area, Dothan, Ala.; New Orleans, the Mississippi Gulf Coast and in Fayetteville, N. C.," Myers said. "We also believe there can be a Vietnamese ministry in New York City and Chicago.

"I have a dream of seeing young men in training now moving into each of our seminaries and ministering in those areas," he added.

One of the refugees, Nguyen Xuan Son, already is a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C., and Ho Hoang Mat expects to enroll soon at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

"If the people are reached," Myers said, "the basic thrust will have to be lay led." The laymen, he said, will be trained by Vietnamese pastors.

To aid the new congregations, scriptures in the Vietnamese language are being obtained from the American Bible Society and a hymn book in Vietnamese and a Vietnamese-language version of "These Things We Believe" by Clyde Turner will be produced by the language missions department of the Home Mission Board.

"But their greatest need," Myers said, "is to feel loved, to feel that there are people who care for them just out of Christian love. They also need a sense of a clear direction for a new life, and that will involve spiritual insight. We're working to help them find it."

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(BP) Photos will be mailed to Baptist state papers.

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Southern Baptists Sponsor
1,872 Vietnamese Refugees

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ATLANTA (BP)--Through September, Southern Baptists had sponsored 1,872 Vietnamese refugees in 531 family units, according to Church World Service, which works with 19 denominations, including Southern Baptists, in the refugee resettlement effort.

Also through September, United Methodists had sponsored more refugees than any other group--834 families with 3,289 persons. Southern Baptists were second in the number of persons sponsored.

Irvin Dawson, director of immigration and refugee service for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said the totals to date through mid-October indicate the number of sponsorships by Southern Baptists is now around 600 families and more than 2,000 persons, however.

And those figures do not include the number of refugees sponsored by Southern Baptists who have gone through other agencies, he said.

Dawson said the total number of refugees still in need of sponsoring totals about 30,000. The greatest need is for sponsors of single men and large families.

Churches interested in sponsoring refugees may contact Dawson's office at the Home Mission Board, 1350 Spring St., N. W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, or make direct contact with the Southern Baptist director for refugee resettlement at Fort Chaffee, Ark. (WATS line, toll free, 800/643-9750), or with the Church World Service office at Indiantown Gap, Pa., (phone 717/872-4946).

The refugee resettlement camp at Eglin Air Force Base Fla., has been closed. The refugee operation at Camp Pendleton, Calif., reportedly was to be phased out by Oct. 31, and the remaining refugees transferred to Fort Chaffee.

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