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Minister Fought Crime, Rode  
Rails, Now a Missionary

By Walker Knight

MOOREFIELD, W. Va. (BP)--Homer Albright is a small, ruddy-faced man who is quick to talk about the weather, crops, football and especially God. He never lets a conversation end without bringing up "Jesus as Saviour."

His pleasantness and concern conceal a tough resoluteness that has carried him through life as a Depression-era freight train rider, plant worker, machinist, Baptist pastor and crimefighter.

If there's one thing Albright loves to do, it's build churches and missions. That's fortunate because as a Southern Baptist home missionary in northeastern West Virginia, he plans to begin two or three church-type missions this year.

Albright left what he described as a "comfortable" pastorate in Georgia after wrestling with the impression that he ought to be in "pioneer missions."

Six inches of snow covered the West Virginia hills when the minister and his wife, Pearl, moved to Rainelle to be pastor of two small mission congregations. Seven years there tested their patience, vision and even their sense of call.

Albright, however, is a man of few fears and has proven his ability to meet challenges that others might consider too big.

About 10 years ago, when he was pastor of Madison Street Baptist Church in Commerce, Ga., he began a lonely, one-man war against crime.

Commerce and surrounding Jackson County was headquarters for an international car-theft ring with connections among some law enforcement agencies. Gambling and bootleg whisky flourished openly, with slot machines in many business establishments. Everyone seemed to know what was going on, but no one was doing anything about it. That is, no one but Albright.

Beginning with a weekly broadcast on the local radio station, Albright launched a campaign under the theme "Citizens, This Is Your County." As he had guessed, people were only waiting for someone to take the lead. Soon other pastors and community leaders joined the struggle and before too long the movement had elected several candidates on reform tickets.

Tragically, the gangs struck back, killing a newly elected district attorney by bombing his car. Albright was called to Atlanta as a character witness against the local sheriff, who was convicted of car theft. The FBI and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation began to arrest dozens of persons, most still in prison today, including the head of the bootleg ring.

Throughout the fight Albright was harassed with phone calls and his life threatened. But he always asked the callers for time to say a few words and then presented the plan of salvation.

"I knew they were bluffing," he says about their threats. "They would have had the entire county down on them if they had killed me and they knew it."

True, perhaps, but Homer Albright has always been a man with few fears. As a youth from Hoxie, Arkansas, he joined thousands in the Depression who roamed the country by hopping moving freight trains. He went from one coast to the other, even visiting the 1932 World's Fair in Chicago. After a friend lost his legs and eventually his life on the rails, Albright called it quits.

In 1949, Albright summoned all his courage to become a minister. At that time he was 38-years-old, had a young family and no college credits; the decision was a big step into the unknown. But while working as a machinist in South Bend, Ind., he and Pearl had helped start a Baptist mission. The memory strengthened the ministerial "calling."

Albright entered Furman University, a Baptist institution in Greenville, S.C., as one of its oldest students. He and Pearl worked in a downtown mission most of the time they were in Furman. After graduation, he went to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, serving as pastor of nearby congregations until he received his degree.

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A year and a half after the Albrights moved to Rainelle, the mission in Meadow Bright had grown large enough to call a full-time pastor. Albright now had time to focus all his attention on Grace Baptist Church in Rainelle. Under his leadership the church grew rapidly.

Albright speaks of the "miraculous" in overcoming problems at Grace Baptist. A lot to build on was bought when a Louisiana lady, hearing of the congregation's need, gave the exact price of the land. Later, Albright found a lumber yard that sold them building materials on credit; something everyone said was impossible. When a baptistry was needed, a Georgia pastor donated the money his church had given him for a trip to the Holy Land.

After seven years at Grace Baptist, Albright felt they "needed new blood. It seemed like God was saying to move to some new work. I knew it would be pioneer."

But the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists wasn't about to let a man like Albright leave the state. Convention workers persuaded him to accept a position as a zone missionary for the eight-county, northeast section of West Virginia; an area known as the Potomac Highlands.

"We knew the eight-county work was the biggest challenge we had ever faced," he says. Besides, the prospect of being more closely involved with the West Virginia convention's priority of starting churches and missions fitted Albright to a tee.

He and Pearl moved to Moorefield --where a nucleus of a mission was already forming--so they would be nearer the center of their area. Three years later, the Moorefield congregation meets in a 12-by-60 foot mobile home. The chapel contains an attractive nursery, restrooms, and an auditorium for about 60 persons.

During services at the chapel on a recent evening, Albright made some important announcements. The congregation needed to be thinking about an additional room for adults, so children's classes could be divided to take over the folding partition-rooms of the auditorium. He also reminded the congregation that the mobile chapel was only on loan to them from the state convention and would have to be returned within the year. They must hurry and find land to buy and build on.

And there was bad news and good news. Don Wall, an area missionary, would soon visit to talk about phasing out a portion of the financial aid received from the state convention and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Usually such aid is dropped 10 to 15 percent a year, according to the congregation's ability to finance its expenses.

The good news was that the First Baptist Church of Marion, Ky., was prepared to assist the chapel. In 1975 the youth choir, sponsors and pastor from the Kentucky church spent a week at Moorefield, holding Vacation Bible School and revival. The Kentucky young people had now decided to buy all the literature the chapel needs for the next 12 months, freeing funds for site and building needs.

Albright, one of seven missionaries featured in a new HMB photo-textbook, "Seven Beginnings," says he enjoys his eight-county responsibility, but the area's vastness and difficulty of travel in the hills keep him under pressure.

On a typical Monday he travels two hours to Hedgesville, in the eastern panhandle, within a section of West Virginia surrounded by Maryland and Virginia. A Bible study fellowship has formed in the home of a young couple and Albright tries to get there each Monday evening, returning home near midnight.

The pattern of Homer Albright's work has been to discover areas growing in population that have few churches. Then he leads in survey work, followed by special events such as revivals or performances by singing groups. From these events he attempts to form a Bible study.

He is most concerned about the three counties without any Southern Baptist witness--not even a Bible study group. He hopes to begin some sort of witness in each of these counties within the next five years.

Albright expects someone else to become pastor of the Moorefield chapel when it becomes a church. He will be starting work in other areas and he expects to continue after he turns 65.

"I've got many good years of work left in me, and I want to spend them here starting mission and churches."

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**Work Uninterrupted  
 In Midst of Unrest**

GATOOMA, Rhodesia (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries working here are in no danger and work proceeds as normal, despite reports of political unrest in this country, according to James Westmoreland, the Rhodesian mission organization chairman.

While there has been reported unrest and activity confined to the border areas, "No one is in any danger here and there's no indication there will be any immediate trouble," said Westmoreland.

Most of the 78 Baptist missionaries and their families in this country continue to receive letters expressing concern over reports of trouble in Rhodesia, he said.

An example of the normalcy of Baptist work here is that 424 girls and women have already pre-registered for the annual (Rhodesian) Girls Auxiliary (mission organization) convention to be held soon, the missionary cited.

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'Don't Compete with Men,'  
 WMU Leader Challenges

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By Nancy Carter

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Competition with men is not the answer for young women who enter previously male-dominated religious careers, Carolyn Weatherford, Woman's Missionary Union executive secretary, said here.

"In any area where a woman goes that was formerly a male 'dominion,' the tendency is for the woman to be a 'man-woman'--to do it the way a man would do it, and try to do it better," Miss Weatherford said in a "Women in Ministry" forum at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"My contention is that men and women are different for a purpose--we have basic, general characteristics that are different--and that's why we need both. The mistake a woman may make would be to try to be the kind of minister the man would have been. This is what women have to guard against."

Responding to a question concerning jobs in traditionally male fields, Miss Weatherford said, "There are really not many new fields that are opening up to women, although the number is increasing, I must say that."

For this reason, she added, women are sometimes misled when they are challenged to commit their lives to full-time Christian service.

"They are misled when they are told, 'Give your heart to the Lord and give your life to him in a church-related vocation and there are many opportunities for you,'" she said.

When some do respond to calls, such as to the pastorate or to the mission field, they are then told, "'We have a lot of fine pastors looking for wives,' this type of thing."

Because of such discouragement, Miss Weatherford added, "At some times women have not been free to do what they felt the Lord wanted them to do."

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Europeans Meet in Moscow;  
To Move Offices to Hamburg

MOSCOW (BP)--The European Baptist Federation (EBF) executive committee meeting here for the first time in any East European socialist country, cited "the new climate of peace and friendship on our European continent," and approved a relocation of EBF offices to Hamburg, Germany.

Deliberative sessions were led by Alexei M. Bichkov, EBF Council president and also general secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR (AUCECB), who were hosts for the meeting.

A communique concerning the EBF meeting was hand delivered by Bichkov to Baptist World Alliance (BWA) officials in Washington: "They expressed gratitude to God and support for events leading to the consolidation of peaceful coexistence and constructive cooperation between countries with different social and political systems of the European continent. Foremost among these, they noted, was the signing of the final act of the Helsinki Agreement on Security and Cooperation in Europe," the communique stated.

"The message of the last Congress of the EBF in July, 1973, contained the following words, 'We thank God for the breaking down of barriers in many spheres of society and for the new climate of peace and friendship on our European continent. We support in our prayers every attempt to create a new atmosphere of good relations between countries and to avoid anything which might bring conflict today or in the future,'" the communique related.

The committee responded with interest to a proposal initiated by various religious organizations in the Soviet Union for an "Inter-Religion Conference for stable peace, disarmament, and just relations among the nations." Bichkov was asked to continue cooperation in preparation for the conference, sometime in 1977, and to convey its tentative program, when available, to EBF-member unions for their study and consideration.

As a result of the election, last September, of Gerhard Claas of the Baptist Union of the German Federal Republic to EBF secretary-treasurer, the executive committee decided to move its headquarters office to Hamburg about Oct. 1, 1976. The moving will coincide with Claas' succeeding the present secretary-treasurer, C. Ronald Goulding of England, whose offices have been in London the past 10 years.

Claas and Goulding are fellow associate secretaries of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Goulding will move to BWA headquarters in Washington, D. C., to direct the BWA's new division of evangelism and education. The Hamburg office will also serve the European office of BWA.

In other action the EBF executive committee voted to recommend additional aid as European projects for a new building for the Gubenerstrasse Baptist congregation in the eastern sector of Berlin (German Democratic Republic), and acquisition of a structure by the Christian Community of Lille, a new congregation of the French Baptist Federation.

Plans for the next EBF Council meeting, scheduled September 16-20 in Budapest, were presented by representatives from the Baptist Union of Hungary and of the Hungarian Free-Church Council, who will be hosts. In addition, venues of future conferences were taken up, including the next EBF Congress, set for June, 1979, in Brighton, England.

In other action, the executive committee reviewed implementation of the new EBF Constitution, completed committee membership lists, and heard initial drafts of future projects from the Federation's Committee on Evangelism and Education.

Workers responsible for geographical regions in the AUCECB organizational structure held a planning conference simultaneously with the executive committee sessions. The two groups enjoyed joint meetings for periods of worship, inspiration and fellowship.

Executive committee members and others attending their sessions were invited to preach in various Baptist churches in the Moscow area and in more distant cities following the meetings.

The EBF has a membership of about 1.2 million members Christians-Baptists in 26 countries of Europe. The total Baptist community, including unbaptized adherents and children of Baptist families, is estimated at 1,965,806, the BWA cites.