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460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

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Baptist Layman Is A
'Goodwill' Ambassador

By Chris Evans

AMARILLO, Tex. (BP)--Getting to know Baptist layman Willis L. Williams, the man behind Amarillo's Goodwill Industries, is not something one accomplishes in one sitting--or even two.

There is an introductory stage when discomfort sets in. Williams fights to enunciate his words correctly. He struggles to walk across the room to a filing cabinet. He wobbles when he takes each step, but he is a very mobile man for a person with cerebral palsy.

Somehow, Williams has the uncanny ability to allow one to see beyond his physical person--a knack to put one at ease, to convey a feeling of "I'm comfortable if you are." When the discomfort leaves, the real probing can begin.

After the initial moments, the first quality which becomes evident is almost expected. It is a humanistic concern, a selflessness which might characterize anyone who heads up a helping organization. And while he rarely talks about his work in relation to his Christian beliefs, one has only to follow him through the Goodwill Industries general offices and industrial complex at the Amarillo Air Terminal Complex to feel the religious fervor with which he does his job.

"Hello, Mr. Williams," says one handicapped worker after another as he canvasses the old building which was built for normal military personnel. He stops to lament the fact that a regular-size wheelchair cannot get through the doors of the bathrooms--that the disabled have to be carried from the doors to the toilets.

Born with cerebral palsy as result of a spinal injury received during birth, Williams' parents refused to allow him wheelchair privileges for fear any chances he had of walking would be smothered. He learned to talk by sitting in front of a mirror and trying to emulate the lips of an instructor.

He was graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in business management, and then from Goodwill Industries of America's executive director training program. He was voted outstanding speaker by the Toastmaster's Club of San Antonio, in which city he served as public relations director of Goodwill for 17 years. In 1973, Williams was cited for meritorious service by the President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped. A deacon, he is a member of First Baptist Church, Amarillo, where his wife, Ann, works with the deaf ministry. The couple has two adopted daughters, 11 and 9.

As a child he was crushed by insensitive adults and was stopped by a state trooper once after someone reported him to be a drunk driver. "I never took a drink in my life," he grins now.

A man who could easily be bound to a bed or a wheelchair, Williams gets to work an hour early each weekday and leaves work late--"after I can't go any longer," he says. He took the post as executive director of Goodwill in Amarillo in June, 1975, and his presence is being felt. When he took the job, 38 percent of the employes at the general offices and industrial plant and the two Amarillo stores were not handicapped, which means they were not classified as such by doctors. As Williams saw it, that percentage meant fewer disabled persons were being given the opportunity of finding means of supporting themselves.

"When I got here, I refused to let them hire any more non-handicapped people, but they insisted we had to have some," he remembers. "Quite honestly, we have to have a few, but not many--and certainly not as many as we had."

At last count, only 14 percent--four of six supervisors at the general offices and industrial plant--were not handicapped. Other than the professional people such as psychologists, social and placement personnel, almost all persons working for Goodwill in the area are disabled, he said.

Goodwill, Williams contends, is unlike other businesses in several ways, the most obvious being that Goodwill is non-profit. "We cannot in any way be compared to other businesses, because most other businesses try to keep their most productive employes... We try to get rid of ours. If we can place a handicapped person in a job position he can handle like a non-handicapped person, we get some affirmation that we are succeeding," he reasons.

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NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

BUREAUS**ATLANTA** Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041**DALLAS** Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996**MEMPHIS** Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461**NASHVILLE** (Baptist Sunday School Board) Gomer Lesch, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 254-5461**RICHMOND** Richard M. Styles, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151**WASHINGTON** W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Blessitt, Harvey, Dark Help
Baptists Observe Bicentennial

DALLAS (BP)--Evangelist Arthur Blessitt, who has carried a wooden cross halfway around the world, said here that he is a happy loser in the U.S. presidential race because spiritual and moral reform in politics has become the major campaign issue he hoped it would.

The 35-year-old Baptist street minister, who spoke to 12,000 Texas Baptist youth at a statewide bicentennial rally in Dallas, said he feels God called him back to America from Southern Africa "to declare that we need a born again, soul-winning witness in the White House."

While the Texas Baptist youth observed the Bicentennial, samplings of other Baptist rallies around the country showed 20,000 persons at an Arkansas Baptist sponsored rally in Little Rock, featuring Paul Harvey, and nearly 4,000 Baptists closing a 24-hour Bicentennial extravaganza sponsored by Illinois Baptists.

"The most important thing is for the candidates to provide moral and spiritual leadership in the nation and not just political rhetoric," Blessitt told the Texas Baptist youth.

Beginning at Sunset Strip in Hollywood, Calif., in 1969, Blessitt said he has carried a 90-pound wooden cross for 12,500 miles through 25 countries on three continents. He will resume carrying the cross in August through Hawaii, American Samoa, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea, he noted. Blessitt told the youths he has been jailed, shot at, beaten with rocks and sticks because of his stand for Christ, but "I haven't met anyone who's having the fun I'm having."

The evangelist said he believes, "Politically and spiritually we had the best platform. We also had the best plan of tax reform ever, but the national news media refused to give us a hearing."

Blessitt recalled that in losing on the Democratic ticket he outpolled two major candidates in the New Hampshire primary and five in another state.

After the teenagers at the youth evangelism conference here had knelt in prayer in an outdoor park for moral and spiritual revival in America, Blessitt said that unless the nation experiences a reformation, "I think we will have anarchy."

"I'm not sure that revival can take place in the midst of such prosperity in the U.S.," he said, "but I hope God will spare us the catastrophic events that have historically preceded spiritual reformations."

Blessitt said that when the president is inaugurated next January, "I hope he'll call for all-night prayer meetings and call the nation to repentance."

Meanwhile in Arkansas, Harvey, nationally-known news commentator, said at the state-wide Bicentennial Life and Liberty Rally that America's youth have tasted "the bitter fruit" of permissiveness and are "going to be the strictest generation since Queen Victoria. It seems certain they will declare the law of our Lord."

As Harvey continued, comparing the inflation rate in America with that of other countries, the stadium rang with a thunder of applause. He said that America had an inflation rate of 4.3 percent while Australia's is 12.7 percent and Argentina's is 682 percent.

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Harvey said that other countries know that our living conditions are the best on earth. He told of a bumper sticker on a Philippino's car which said: "Yankee go home." After a dramatic pause, Harvey continued: "And take me with you."

He said that people emphasize the negative rather than the positive. The newspapers talk about 7.5 percent unemployment when we could say 92.5 percent of the people are employed. "More Americans are moonlighting than have no job at all. If everything is coming up roses why did the stock market slide?" It reflects only the jitters of the Manhattanites "who are here because they are not all there," he declared.

In conclusion, Harvey said that democracy without a declaration of dependence upon the Divine is "Like an unguided missile--it will self destruct." Those who deify materialism, he declared, have advocated guaranteed incomes and seen crimes rise, and their philosophy has produced experimentation with drugs and sexual license.

"Even if the Bible were not inspired," he said, "it would be the best blueprint for getting us through here," he said.

The meeting also featured singer Anita Bryant; Manuel Scott, black Baptist pastor from Los Angeles; Evangelist Angel Martinez; and Arkansas Baptist leaders.

In Illinois, Andrae Crouch and the Disciples singing group closed the 24-hour Bicentennial extravaganza before nearly 4,000 people at the state fairgrounds in Springfield. Activities began on the afternoon of July 4th with a Baptist arts and crafts exhibit in a local motel ballroom, plus an outdoor service that night, led by Al Dark, former big league baseball player and manager. Estimated attendance at that service, which also featured black soloist Myrtle Hall of New York City and concert pianist Betty Chapman of Shelbyville, Ky., was 2,000.

After the Sunday night service and until noon of Monday there were continuous mini-concerts at the motel ballroom, plus two presentations of the Bicentennial musical, "Fabric of Freedom," by 10 high school and college youths who are giving 60 performances in Illinois this summer.

Ron S. Lewis, director of church development for Illinois Baptists, said Baptists decided on their own Bicentennial rallies, rather than share an ecumenical service on the steps of the state capitol, after it was learned the theme "Freedom in Christ" would not be acceptable. "They wanted to stop with the words freedom rally, while we wanted the emphasis on freedom in Christ," Lewis said.

-30-

Book Stores to Handle
WMU Retail Sales

Baptist Press
7/9/76

BIRMINGHAM (BP)--Retail sales of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) literature and supplies other than periodicals will be handled exclusively by Baptist Book Stores --for at least three years--beginning October 1.

Agreements between WMU and Baptist Book Stores call for the sales arrangement to be tried and studied for three years. "If consumers are not pleased WMU will resume retail sales," said Carolyn Weatherford, WMU executive director.

Previously customers could order WMU publications either from the national WMU office in Birmingham or from Baptist Book Stores. Over the counter sales and mail order retailing will now be handled only by Baptist Book Stores, under an agreement just reached by officials of WMU, auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, and of the book store division of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

All business related to the purchasing of WMU magazines subscriptions will continue to be handled only by WMU, according to Miss Weatherford.

Certain other short term publications for special projects may also be advertised or purchased from WMU although none are presently available, she added.

"Baptist Book Stores have already been handling 85 percent of our gross sales in literature and supplies," Miss Weatherford said. "We believe that other customers will come to find buying through the Baptist Book Stores satisfactory." Buyers can charge purchases through Book Stores, while WMU does not extend credit.

William S. Graham, director of the book store division, said, "As our six new regional mail-order centers move into operation, we should be able to fill orders within 24 hours after we receive them. WMU buyers will benefit from this service."

Miss Weatherford said that WMU staff will begin training book store employees to assist persons in selecting WMU publications. WMU and Baptist Book Store personnel will improve efforts to maintain an adequate stock of more than 225 WMU literature items in book stores, she said.