



January 28, 1977

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'What's a White Man Doing
Out Here Digging Roots?'

By Jim Newton

WARM SPRINGS, Ore. (BP)--It had been a long morning, and Allen Elston's back was already tired. He wasn't used to digging roots like the Warm Springs Reservation Indians.

But he felt it was an honor to watch the annual spring thanksgiving ceremony and to go with the tribe as members dug for edible roots.

"I just dug and dug and dug," he recalled. And all the time, the Indians were watching him. When he came in for lunch, they laughed. "You know what the meadowlarks are saying?" one of them asked Elston. "They're sitting up in the tree and singing, 'What's a white man doing out here digging roots?'"

After 17 years of service as a Southern Baptist missionary to the three confederated tribes on the Warm Springs Reservation in central Oregon, Elston sometimes still ponders the answer. For him, the answer is a demonstration of his love and God's love through Christ, for the Warm Springs Indians.

In terms of church attendance and involvement, the results have been discouraging, but he has earned acceptance and respect from the Indians.

Several years ago at the close of a three-day funeral, an older woman paid a tribute to the Baptist missionary. As the people left the longhouse, the old woman turned to Elston and said to him and all within hearing distance, "I do not want a white man's funeral. I sure do not want a white man's casket. I just want a pine box made by Elston."

Perhaps no other incident can better illustrate the degree that the lanky, easy-going Southern Baptist missionary from Texas has been accepted into the lives and social structures of the Warm Springs Indians.

When Elston came to the reservation 17 years ago, he was determined to become integrated into the blood-flow of the people.

The breakthrough in his relationship with the people came when a freak flash flood rampaged down the small river that divides the town of Warm Springs. The Indians saw their houses swept off foundations and washed away.

Hundreds of residents were stranded on one side of the river without water, food or medical care. Elston organized the city's disaster relief effort and took charge when no one else would accept the responsibility. "It was a case of too many Indians and not enough chiefs," he quipped.

After that, he became an adopted unofficial member of the tribe. At Warm Springs, Elston "belongs." And to the Indian, "belonging to the group is the most important thing in the world," Elston added.

Ironically, "belonging" is the key factor to discouraging results encountered by Elston in church attendance and involvement. The men feel that church is for women and children. If a man went to church regularly, he would be rejected by the group, by the other men, Elston explained.

Group pressure is also part of an alcoholism problem with the reservation. Elston didn't know how many of the men are alcoholics, but noted that the percentage is high.

As many as 45 persons attend the reservation church's worship services where Elston is pastor, but seldom is there a man present. And after 17 years, Elston still does not have a layman in the church who will lead in public prayer. This year, however, Elston has developed an extremely close relationship with Lee Roy Scott, who was saved while watching a Billy Graham evangelistic crusade service on television.

Scott didn't understand what had happened to him, so he went to Elston to talk about it. Elston and Scott have talked together and prayed together daily since then.

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Recently when they shared a meal together, Scott looked at his friend and said, "Partner, would you pray for the food?" Elston knew that in the Indians' terminology, the word "partner" is almost like the word "family." Scott is one of the few men who attend the worship services and attends about once a month, Elston said.

Although the disappointment has centered around involving men in the church, Elston noted he is encouraged by the women's response.

Recently, a woman made a motion to increase the church's part on paying the pastor's salary by \$50 a month. "I feel it's time for us to accept more responsibility on the pastor's salary," she told the congregation.

The women are also planning to reorganize the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and start holding regular meetings again. In the past, Elston has had to do almost everything in the church because of lack of trained leadership.

In the early days, he believed his ministry would be a church-oriented one.

He realized, however, he couldn't build a strong Indian church because they felt it was the white man's church, not their own church. It was furnished by white man's money, led by a white pastor, and it taught a white man's gospel.

After much trauma and several frustrating years, Elston and his small band of faithful members dropped the programs, and began developing programs the Indians wanted and were willing to support and lead.

"It had a cleansing effect on us spiritually, and emotionally, and was like saying, 'All right, we'll admit failure and start over,'" he said.

The most successful approach turned out to be informal Bible study sessions at Elston's home on the reservation. The men would come to a Bible study session in Elston's home but wouldn't go to the chapel.

Warm Springs Reservation shatters stereotype images most white people have of an Indian reservation. One of the wealthiest reservations in the nation, in addition to thousands of acres of rich timber the Warm Springs tribes have several other advantages.

When the U.S. Government settled with the tribes for \$4 million after the Indians' traditional fishing grounds were destroyed by construction of a dam on the Columbia River, the tribal council moved decisively.

They invested the money in a plush resort center on the reservation and on an Indian-owned and operated saw mill to market the lumber from their timberlands.

The investments resulted in a guaranteed annual income amounting to \$3,000 per person per year among the 2,100 members of the tribes. Since the average family includes five members, the average family income on the reservation exceeds \$15,000.

Elston, on his missionary salary, ranks in the lower one-third in per capita income for the people of the reservation. He jokingly remarks that by their standards, he qualifies for welfare.

The missionary has had to warn WMU groups across the nation not to send old clothes for the "less fortunate" Indians on the reservation, for the Warm Springs Indians probably are "more fortunate" than most Southern Baptists.

Changes that have come from the new affluence have been so radical and so sudden, Elston noted, that the Warm Springs Indians have gone through some identity struggles. Ralph Mennick, a young tribal administrative official told Elston, "We're in a period of transition. We don't know who we are or where we are going."

When Elston faces discouragement from the slow progress of his work, he remembers another comment by Mennick. "Don't give up on us," Mennick said. "If you left us, we'd feel you were deserting us."



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89 New Congregations Are Started In Coastal Kenya

MALINDI, Kenya (BP)--Going from village to village, six teams of Kenyan Baptist nationals have started 89 congregations and baptized 1,328 persons in the last 14 weeks. Their work is part of the "Giryama Project," designed to reach members of the Giryama tribe of coastal Kenya.

The year-long project began last summer with the digging of 10 new wells in Giryama villages so that the people could have clean drinking water during the dry season.

Since this initial contact was made, team members have been working in four phases under direction of Southern Baptist Missionary G. Claylan Coursey. The first phase is one week of evangelistic services and teaching led by national pastors and recently graduated national seminary students.

A four-day preliminary leadership training course is the next stage of the project, followed by introduction of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in a once-a-week home study. The fourth phase is a one-week Bible school which rotates in location so each leader can come one week a month.

The project was designed to reach the Giryama Tribe with the gospel of Jesus Christ and train leaders from among the tribe members to continue the work. Giryama Tribe members, once thought to be Muslim, were either without religious beliefs or were animists (spirit worshippers) when the project began.

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Warren Named Associate
On World Mission Journal

Baptist Press
1/28/77

MEMPHIS (BP)--Charles E. Warren Jr., 29, has been elected as associate editor of World Mission Journal, monthly mission's publication for Baptist Men of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission here, effective March 1.

Warren, senior editor in the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's press office for nearly four years, succeeds Larry R. Jerden, who was elected editor of the Rocky Mountain Baptist, state Baptist newspaper for Colorado.

He also served in the Richmond Bureau of the Baptist Press (BP), located at the Foreign Mission Board headquarters. (BP)'s Memphis Bureau is located at the Brotherhood Commission.

Before joining the Foreign Mission Board staff in 1973, Warren, a native of Roanoke, Va., was a staff writer for the Texas Baptist public relations department, Dallas, while completing a master's degree in religious education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. Warren has also served as minister of youth of churches in Texas and Virginia while a student.

Warren also spent two years in the Foreign Mission Board's missionary journeyman program, serving as publications coordinator for the Baptist Publishing House, Lusaka, Zambia. His wife, the former Sandra Karen Hilton of Beaumont, Tex., was also a missionary journeyman.

Jim Newton, editor of World Mission Journal, which covers the full spectrum of Southern Baptist missions, cited Warren's Foreign Mission Board experience and first hand knowledge of missions as areas of special strength he will bring to the monthly tabloid's operation.

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Besides seminary training, Warren is a graduate of Bluefield (Va.) Junior College and holds a bachelor of arts in journalism from Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee.

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist papers.

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story, mailed 1/27/77, entitled "Census Bureau Rules Out Religion Question in 1980, please insert the following graph after graph 8, which begins-- "Business interests, religious statisticians . . ." etc.

A distinction should be made between a religious question in the census, which individuals are required to answer about their religion, and a survey of religious bodies asking for statistical information. In 1947, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) passed a resolution in favor of gathering information from religious bodies. Although the SBC in annual session has never resolved one way or the other on the religious question in the decennial census, many Southern Baptists and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington have voiced objection to it on religious liberty grounds.

In graph 12 of story mailed 1/27/77, entitled "President Hits Pride at National Prayer Breakfast," delete the words "objected because they"--making that portion of the sentence read: ". . . the people might think he was being proud . . ." etc. In last graph, change the name Burt O. Lance to Thomas B. (Bert) Lance.

Thanks,

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