



April 14, 1977

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Leaving Vietnam Was
'Grief Experience'

By Leland Webb

RICHMOND (BP)--Make no mistake. Leaving Vietnam or neighboring Laos was a grief experience for the Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to those two countries until 1975.

It meant leaving friends and years of work. For some of the missionary children, it meant leaving the land they knew best as home.

The suddenness of South Vietnam's collapse took them all by surprise, they reflect now.

"I was sitting on a committee for long-range planning for the Vietnam Baptist Mission, and within two weeks I was out of the country," missionary Peyton M. Moore, now assigned to Hong Kong, recalled.

"I live with remorse," says H. Earl Bengs Jr., reassigned to Sarawak, Malaysia: "Did I do all I could have done? Did I stay as long as I should have?"

Finally assured that he stayed as long as was reasonable, Bengs still maintains he should have done more, regardless of danger.

"I remember the looks on their faces the last time I went back," he says of the Vietnamese Christians at the Baptist Mission office in Saigon: "They looked at me like I was an angel."

The shock of not returning to Laos hit J. Murphy Terry after a few days in Bangkok, Thailand. He had returned from furlough in the U.S., hoping to go back to Laos.

"I could sit on the bank of the Mekong River and look toward Laos--so close, yet so far away. We don't spring back as easily as we might think," he notes. "Until the crisis becomes yours it's not very real to you."

Herman P. Hayes, now assigned to Indonesia, recalls: "I'm sure our grief experiences from Vietnam were of a far greater nature than more normal grief experiences," with several types all piled into one. "We still have waves of emotional reactions that can't be explained," he says.

Audrey (Mrs. William) Roberson, now in the Philippines, believes the missionaries didn't honestly face that they wouldn't go back. During the 1960s, missionaries had been evacuated because of coups and returned. I felt strongly that I was leaving for a short period.

"You have to live with the memory of little things," she adds, "such as not following the impulse to give a bag of sugar to a Vietnamese friend or of not giving away our towels--always thinking we would need them when we went back."

It's still doubtful that an opportunity will come anytime soon for Baptist missionaries to re-enter Vietnam, according to William R. Wakefield, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area secretary for Southeast Asia.

"There doesn't appear to be an opportunity under the present (Vietnamese) government for the return of missionaries," Wakefield recently told Baptist Press.

Several missionaries believe their emotions would have healed more quickly had they all been able to gather in the same place after it became clear they would not return to Vietnam.

But on leaving Saigon, each couple decided their destination--Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong--on individual bases. Later, when it became clear they would not return to Vietnam, it was too late, they say, to assemble in one spot. And the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has no provision for such a travel request.

"When we first came out, our emotions were raw," Moore recalls, "and we were in something of a shock. We weren't berserk, by any means, but I think we were undergoing a much deeper trauma than most of us realized. Then we were concerned with a lot of immediate crises."

The decision to leave Vietnam finally rested with the missionaries. The Foreign Mission Board's policy of supporting a missionary's individual decision about when to leave a field is viewed as "supportive, though it puts a pressure of decision on the missionary," says James L. Kellum Jr., now assigned to the Philippines. The policy "gave us a great deal of assurance," he recalls.

Financially speaking, there was little we could consider a loss, because the board and Southern Baptists were extremely generous in helping us recoup material losses," Moore says.

At the close of the June, 1976, Baptist Mission meeting in the Philippines, Roberson, who had served in Vietnam since 1959, stood before the group.

"I want to do something I haven't done in a long time," he said; "I want to sing in Vietnamese.

Unsure that he could sing without wavering, he asked the other former missionaries to Vietnam who were assigned to the Philippines mission to join him. And together they sang a simple gospel melody.

The scene may have been a turning point. Roberson and others were at least able to look back. Yet their song may also have been a kind of farewell to a stage of ministry unlikely to be resumed.

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Adapted from The Commission, monthly magazine of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Leland Webb is managing editor of The Commission.

(BP) Photos dated 4/11/77 mailed to Baptist state papers

Two SBC Agencies Announce
Cooperative Outreach Effort

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Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--The need for additional Sunday Schools and churches to compensate for rapidly rising population is the basis for a newly announced cooperative effort of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Sunday School and Home Mission Boards.

Grady C. Cothen and William G. Tanner, executive heads of the Sunday School and Home Mission Boards respectively, said the two agencies want to work with state Baptist convention and association leadership in a thrust to begin thousands of new Sunday Schools and church-type missions.

The sponsoring church, association, state convention and the Sunday School Board will work together in campaigns to start and organize new Sunday Schools.

ACTION, The Sunday School enrollment plan to enroll anyone, anywhere, anytime, as long as they agree to being enrolled, will be one of the major tools used by the Sunday School Board in establishing new Sunday Schools, according to Cothen.

"The Sunday School Board has placed a high priority on starting new Sunday Schools," Cothen said, "and working with the Home Mission Board will add a new dimension to this area of our work."

The Home Mission Board will work with the sponsoring church, association, and state convention to develop the new Sunday Schools into church-type missions.

Tanner said that rising population in the United States has made the need evident for the Home Mission Board to accelerate programs to keep up with growth.

"We hope that in the near future Southern Baptist churches will be present in nearly every community in our nation," Tanner said.

"This cooperative effort seems to be a natural move to utilize the resources of both agencies to realize that goal," Tanner added.

According to Tanner and Cothen, every effort will be made to coordinate the programs of the Home Mission Board and Sunday School Board to make it easier for state leaders of these programs to work together in this effort.

State Baptist convention personnel will be asked to coordinate the involvements of associations and the two SBC agencies.

"Bold Mission: Let the Church Reach Out," the 1977-79 Southern Baptist Convention emphasis, was a primary reason for beginning the cooperative effort.

Tanner and Cothen said that the program will be implemented "as quickly as possible so new Sunday Schools and churches can be established to help Southern Baptists in their goal of bringing men to God through Jesus Christ."

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**Sullivan Declines Second
Term as SBC President**

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President James L. Sullivan announced here he will not serve a second term as president of the 12.9-million-member denomination.

Calling the reasons "personal and the decision final," Sullivan, 67, will request that his name not be placed in nomination at the SBC annual meeting in June in Kansas City, Mo.

Sullivan, retired head of the SBC Sunday School Board, was elected to a first term in office last year at the SBC annual meeting in Norfolk. Traditionally, SBC presidents are elected for a second term--the constitutional limit for the office.

"The ceaseless air travel, constant physical and emotional strains, and extended absences from home cause me to conclude that one term is sufficient and best for me and the convention," he told Baptist Press.

He expressed gratitude "for the opportunity which has been mine of serving the Lord and Southern Baptists in this manner" and said his "experiences as president have deepened my conviction that the Southern Baptist Convention is the greatest denomination on earth and that God has mighty things in His plans for the future."

Sullivan said he wished to make this announcement to allow "ample time for the messengers to give due consideration to names of other persons they might wish to nominate for the office in Kansas City on June 14."

The annual meeting of the nation's largest Protestant denomination is scheduled June 14-16, with auxiliary meetings set to begin as early as June 12.

Only two other SBC presidents have served one term--K. Owen White, then of Houston, Tex., who declined a second term after serving in 1964, and F. F. Brown of Knoxville, Tenn., the 1933 SBC president, who also declined.

P. H. Mell of Georgia served longer than any other SBC president, 15 terms, 1863-1871 and 1880-1887. Jonathan Harralson of Alabama served the longest consecutive period as an SBC president, 10 terms between 1888 and 1898.

SBC Rooms Still
Going at Rapid Rate

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Baptist Press
4/14/77

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The picture has brightened somewhat on availability of rooms for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting here in June, but they are still going fast, reports Billy D. Malesovas, convention manager.

Malesovas, director of financial planning and assistant to the treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, said 5,794 out of 6,603 available rooms had been assigned to 12,478 people as of April 14.

He urged persons expecting to attend the SBC, June 14-16, and its auxiliary meetings, beginning June 12, in Kansas City, to make reservations as soon as possible.

The 6,603 rooms represent a 400 increase over the previous figure of 6,200 from the SBC Housing Bureau, which has been trying its best to accommodate messengers to the SBC, Malesovas said. He noted also that some block rooms have been released, making more rooms close to the convention center complex available as of April 14.

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Malesovas said the SBC Housing Bureau, at 1221 Baltimore St., Kansas City 64105, will only accept reservations in writing, not by telephone, until one week before the convention, when telephone calls will be accepted if rooms are still available. He urged persons expecting to attend to secure housing forms from state Baptist convention offices.

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Mrs. Cannata has 'Unlimited'
Freedom to Visit Husband

Baptist Press
4/14/77

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)--Mrs. Samuel R. J. Cannata Jr. said here April 14 that she has "unlimited access" to her husband, a Southern Baptist medical missionary, while he is being detained by Ethiopian officials.

In a phone conversation with Davis L. Saunders, area secretary for Eastern and Southern Africa of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Mrs. Cannata said she "spent four hours today" talking and praying with her husband. She is allowed to take his meals to him.

Mrs. Cannata asked for prayers that she and other missionaries in Ethiopia would have the patience needed to await official action in her husband's case.

Dr. Cannata has been in official custody since April 3, when he and his family were taken from their home in Alem Ketema to the capital city of Addis Ababa. The action followed a search of the Cannata home earlier that day.

After preliminary questioning, Mrs. Cannata and their three children were released, but Dr. Cannata was detained for further questioning. Later in the week, Southern Baptist missionaries were told that the provincial officials had completed their report and forwarded it to higher authorities.

House-to-house searches have been under way in Ethiopia in recent weeks, with newsmen being told that the searches were directed at the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and three Ethiopian groups which the government blames for a wave of assassinations and turmoil in the country.

In February, 1976, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board officially reaffirmed its long-standing position of non-involvement of its missionary representatives in political affairs.

"Missionaries are to maintain carefully their role of spiritual ministry, refraining from any relationship with intelligence operations of any nation (including the United States) or with political movements in the nations where they serve. They are to avoid anything that might make unclear their purpose of Christian witness and service and thus jeopardize their witness for Christ," the statement said.

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CORRECTION

In BP story mailed April 12, entitled "Southern Baptist Relief Efforts Grow Rapidly," please insert this graph after the sixth graph, beginning, "Grubbs pointed out . . .,"

"Total receipts for world relief in 1976 were \$1,646,131, of which \$1,571,395 was appropriated by the Foreign Mission Board during the year."

Pick up graph 7, beginning, "As giving and appropriations increased, so . . ."

Thanks, Baptist Press