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'Mission Service Corps'
To Enlist 5,000 Missionaries

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Mission Service Corps, designed to gear up the ambitious Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) goal of enlisting 5,000 short-term volunteer missionaries by 1982, was born here amidst an unusually intense air of urgency and excitement.

A special Mission Volunteer Committee of leaders of SBC agencies and state conventions, meeting within about two weeks after the SBC voted in Kansas City to add the beefed-up short-term emphasis to the denomination's Bold Mission effort, "met with the idea of unstopping the channels for money and personnel to flow to areas of need," said W. Ches Smith, committee chairman.

Impetus for the eventual formation of the Mission Service Corps grew out of meeting, June 7 in the White House, between President Jimmy Carter and various SBC agency leaders. Carter urged his denomination to strengthen the short-term volunteer missionary phase of its Bold Mission plan, voted into existence the previous year in Norfolk, to proclaim the message of Christ to the entire world by the close of the century.

While expressing the need to overcome barriers which would prevent the effort from undergirding the Bold Mission effort, committee members emphasized the effort must be organized properly to keep it from floundering and collapsing under its own weight.

"The idea is already catching fire around the Southern Baptist Convention, and we need to get organized without losing the momentum and urgency," Smith said. "Placement, training and utilization are important. We don't want wholesale sending without proper support. Great zeal without support will cause the effort to flounder. We want to do this in a way which will enhance, not harm, the SBC's Cooperative Program giving," said Smith, also chairman of the SBC Executive Committee.

The special committee laid out 10 principles; established three work groups (for enlistment and screening, identification of places of service and assignments, and financing and administration) and set the next committee for Sept. 1 in Nashville. It hopes to report to the SBC Executive Committee at its meeting in Nashville, Sept. 19-21.

Among the 10 principles, the committee expressed the hope that the churches will follow through on the SBC's action requesting a percentage increase each year in Cooperative Program giving and that they will seek to double gifts to the Cooperative Program by 1982.

"Much of the money going from Baptist pockets to para-church groups will go to this effort, if Southern Baptists can catch the spirit of it," Smith said.

The principles include the objective of enlisting the 5,000 persons for one or two years service in the U. S. or abroad and finding churches or groups of churches to fund the volunteers.

Other principles include statements:

--That the two mission boards and the state conventions will jointly work out fiscal administration procedures having to do with enlistment and utilization of volunteers.

--That all funds "flow through normal channels and that those not designated for specific activities or persons be divided by formulae to be agreed upon by the SBC and state conventions, recognizing the importance of the identification of church or individual support with the Mission Service Corps personnel."

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--That the two missions boards and state conventions administer all personnel assigned to them.

--That the state conventions be encouraged to take the leadership in planning with churches and associations in cooperation with the SBC agencies involved in development of the Mission Service Corps.

--That the two mission boards, the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), the Brotherhood Commission and the Sunday School Board work with state conventions in the promotion of the Mission Service Corps and enlistment of volunteers.

--That the SBC Executive Committee relate to the Mission Service Corps, in keeping with SBC actions, to work with various agencies to secure full implementation of SBC actions, evaluate the project, report periodically and make any needed recommendations beyond 1982.

--That the two mission boards, the WMU, Brotherhood Commission and Sunday School Board review Mission Service Corps principles and develop more specific models for implementing the corps and that these be reviewed by the committee's workgroup, a representative group of pastors and others at the Sept. 1 meeting.

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Boyce Bible School:
Only 3, But Growing Fast

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By Michael Duduit

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Only three candles will decorate the cake when Boyce Bible School here celebrates its third birthday in August, but each of those candles will burn bright with meaning for a school that some said would "never make it" when the doors opened in 1974.

That first semester there were only 48 students at the fledgling institution, begun by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to provide quality theological education for ministers who lacked a college degree.

This year, says executive director James Ryan, the cumulative enrollment topped 300 students and projections are for "a ten percent growth each year from now on."

"Our goal is that by the time the school is 10 years old we will have 800 students. That is 10 percent of the ministers in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) who do not have college degrees," Ryan asserts.

(The other five Southern Baptist theological seminaries and the Seminary Extension Department of the six seminaries also offer diploma programs for persons without college degrees.)

Ryan believes that these ministers--ones without college degrees--pose a great challenge to the denomination.

"The Home Mission Board says 52 percent of our pastors have not been to seminary . . . there are 8,000 without college degrees in the SBC today. One of these days our whole denomination is going to focus on just this type of education--you just can't continue to neglect such a sizeable proportion of our people."

At the Boyce School, everything is geared to meeting the needs of this special category of student, usually older than the average seminarian, sometimes already in the ministry for several years, and without a college degree.

The faculty is composed primarily of part-time instructors who continue to serve in local churches and denominational positions. The three full-time professors include Ryan, a retired college professor and a retired pastor. The faculty has grown from 11 in 1974 to 31 today.

Ryan indicates that the choice of faculty is aimed at providing "practitioners with high academic qualifications."

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The curriculum is specifically designed for the needs of the Boyce School's students. For instance, explains Ryan, "one of our goals is to teach the principles and competencies needed so that wherever you go you can organize a Baptist church."

This is especially important since half of the students coming to the school are from outside the traditional SBC areas--they come to Louisville from the Northeast, Midwest, and Western states, the "pioneer territories" for Southern Baptists.

The executive director also emphasizes that the curriculum is denominationally and church oriented.

"We have a curriculum that talks about our Lord, the local church, and our denomination," Ryan stresses.

Course work is scheduled so that pastors may commute to the Louisville campus for several days or evenings each week, but according to Ryan, "more and more students are coming to live with us on the campus."

Yet many students are able to attend Boyce Bible School without ever coming to Louisville through two off-campus Boyce Centers that have been opened, with the sponsorship and support of state Baptist conventions, in Little Rock, Ark., and Columbus, Ohio.

Both centers enroll an average of 40 students per term, and each was represented with one student in the recent graduating class of 27 students. Faculty members at the off-campus centers are drawn from among state denominational leadership, local pastors and others. Some Louisville faculty have also commuted to the centers.

Ryan says that he has had "a lot of inquiries" about opening centers in new areas, and expresses a willingness to investigate new locations.

"Where the state convention initiates a request and is willing to make the center their school, Southern Seminary, through the Boyce Bible School, is willing to help," Ryan explains.

Ryan notes feeling of excitement on campus as the Boyce Bible School begins its fourth year of existence. You can feel it among the faculty, who are pouring their own lives and ministries into these students. You can feel it among the students, many of whom say that the Boyce School is "just what I've been looking for."

Ryan shares that excitement--even more so on this third birthday than when the doors opened in 1974. He says confidently: "The sky's the limit on what we can do here at the Boyce School--God only knows what will happen."

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.

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