



Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

--FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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January 16, 1978

78-5

Her Final Sacrifice
Will Inspire Hundreds

By Judy Touchton

ATLANTA (BP)--She is a tiny slip of a woman--less than five feet tall and never weighing more than 102 pounds in her 91 years.

Lying in the stark white hospital bed she hardly ruffles the covers. Her greyed hair, still showing tinges of strawberry blonde, gently frames her pale face against the pillow. Her body shakes, struggling against the overpowering cancer as she grasps for breath.

She struggles to open her eyes, her colorless lips move to speak, then close without a sound. She is dying. But she is ready.

In November, in what may have been Myla Koetter Guard's last gesture to support Christian missions, she mailed to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board the diamond engagement ring she had worn more than 70 years.

It arrived in the morning mail packaged in a box that had held steel wool pads, stuffed with tissues and wrapped for mailing in a brown paper sack. A ragged-edged blue ring box held the tiny gold band with a solitaire diamond.

Its arrival had been prepared a day earlier by a note: "I would like it sold and the amount given to some young woman preparing to do mission work or to be used to the best advantage."

The simplicity of her words, the selflessness of her gift, the significance of her gesture, touched many hearts at the board.

In his Home Missions magazine column, Executive Director William G. Tanner wrote, "Mrs. Guard thought her ring might be worth \$250. But who could give dollar value to the sentiment symbolized by such a treasure?"

"Mother never talked a lot about her Christianity...she lived it more," relates her only child, Myla Bennett. "She didn't have to talk. She was always at the church--with the Woman's Missionary Union, leading Sunbeams, holding circle meetings."

Mrs. Bennett said her mother told her she didn't sell the ring and send the money because, "Back during the depression, in the 1920s and '30s, people didn't have any money. So they would put jewelry in church collection plates."

Mrs. Guard, who until a stroke after Christmas was alert and full of life, wore her engagement ring next to her gold wedding band until the day she mailed it, even though her husband died in the 1950s.

She has always been staunchly independent--living alone in Fayetteville, Ark., spending her winters in Phoenix, Ariz. Three years ago, she moved to Athens, Ga., to be closer to her daughter, but she lived in her own apartment, walking daily the eight blocks to town. Only last year she moved into her daughter's home.

Mrs. Guard knew even before the stroke, which left her partially crippled and unable to care for herself, that she would die soon.

She found out she had cancer at age 81 and has since had several operations. At 89, she had a breast removed. Now lung cancer is slowly ending her life.

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She lies in the hospital bed...waiting.

Touched by her gift, Tanner said he would use her ring "to the best advantage"--as a symbol of sacrifice, a rallying point, a challenge to personal support for the new Mission Service Corps, the convention's attempt to place 5,000 volunteers alongside 5,000 career missionaries.

"Mrs. Guard," Tanner added, "I want to show that ring to Southern Baptists across the nation urging them to match your sacrifice..."

Mrs. Guard would be pleased with that decision, says her daughter, "but sending the ring was no sacrifice for her. It was something she planned and did...just as she has always planned her life and her death. She has made her funeral plans...selected the clothes, shoes, hat she will wear, picked out her casket and made arrangements with the funeral home here for her funeral in Fayetteville."

Yet with plans made for death, Mrs. Guard has not given up life.

On the outside of the envelope she received from the Home Mission Board thanking her for her gift and sending her a copy of Tanner's column, she noted the date.

"Rec'd. Dec. 2, 1977," her note read...just as if she planned to live forever.

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist papers by Atlanta Bureau of Baptist Press.

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ACE Says Seminary Extension
Courses Rate 3 Hours Credit

Baptist Press
1/16/78

NASHVILLE (BP)--Fourteen courses offered by the Southern Baptist Seminary Extension Department's Home Study Institute have been evaluated to be worth at least three semester hours of college credit each when applied on a college degree program.

The evaluation was conducted by the American Council on Education's Office on Educational Credit under a program instituted late in 1977. Results of the evaluation will be published in the next issue of the "OEC Newsletter" distributed to 23,000 educators and policy makers in postsecondary education.

"The effect of the evaluation will be to assist Seminary Extension students who wish to transfer their course work toward a degree at a college or university," said Raymond M. Rigdon, director of the Seminary Extension Department. "While the American Council on Education (ACE) study is presented only as a recommendation, it should provide assistance to registrars and others seeking to evaluate a student's work completed with the Home Study Institute," Rigdon said.

In the past, most students seeking to transfer Seminary Extension courses to degree programs have received only one hour of credit per course completed. As a result of the ACE recommendation, students in the future may receive three hours of credit per course.

Courses submitted for evaluation by the ACE were among the most popular offered in Seminary Extension's College-level curriculum series. Thirty-nine college-level courses are listed in the current Seminary Extension catalog, along with 14 basic (easy-to-read) series courses. Seminary Extension is a department of the six theological seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Although the ACE project applies to home study (correspondence) courses only, the Seminary Extension courses involved are used both in home study and in study in Seminary Extension centers. Teachers in centers must hold a master's degree or its equivalent and must be certified by the Seminary Extension Department.

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The American Council on Education is nationally recognized as a major coordinating body for postsecondary education. Composed of national and regional educational associations and institutions of higher education, the ACE, since its founding in 1918, has worked to establish and improve educational standards, policies and procedures.

The evaluation project is being carried out by the ACE Office on Educational Credit in cooperation with the National Home Study Council (NHSC). The Seminary Extension Department is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the NHSC and is an official member of the National University Extension Association.

"The (ACE) review team observed that the programs Seminary Extension presented for review were generally of very high quality, and students completing them could compare favorably with students who have studied in conventional settings," said Madeleine Green, assistant director of the ACE's Office on Educational Credit.

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Foreign Mission Board Responds to World Need

RICHMOND (BP)--The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has approved the release of \$59,000 from general relief funds and \$14,000 from hunger relief funds for work in four countries.

At its January meeting the board appropriated the \$14,000 for work in Nicaragua, where drought and poor crops have accentuated a continuing hunger crisis. Food will be purchased to feed 281 families for about four months with half of the appropriation. The other \$7,000 will be used for the purchase of seed and agriculture-related materials for the planting of a new crop.

W. Eugene Grubbs, the board's hunger relief and disaster response consultant, said, "Although not the largest in dollars, this appropriation has been important in terms of the number of people helped."

In Guatemala, 60 percent of the houses destroyed by the earthquake two years ago have not been rebuilt. As a part of Southern Baptists' continuing rebuilding efforts, \$50,000 was appropriated for rebuilding at least 50 homes. Many of the victims are still living in tar paper shacks and makeshift huts. Baptists will be working in coordination and overall planning with other relief agencies.

Also appropriated from general relief funds were \$5,000 to replenish a standing benevolent ministries fund in Korea and \$4,000 to help train young women in the Bahamas so they can get better jobs.

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'Other Little Ships' Project Aids Ministry Among Iowans

DES MOINES, Iowa (BP)--When US-2 worker Robin Bridges, assigned by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to two years of volunteer service in the U. S., found himself in Des Moines, he had plenty to do, but nowhere to do it.

Thousands lived in three low income government housing projects but the only facilities available to begin ministries in those areas were beyond the finances of Bridges and his supporters.

Then Bridges and his supervisor Greg Whitetree, director of Christian Social Ministries for the Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship, hit on the idea of a mobile classroom.

"I found an advertisement where there was a 1955 Chevrolet bus for sale," Bridges said. "The bus had been converted to a camper. When I saw it, I knew that it was exactly what we needed. It has a stove, a table and some other things, plus a big area in the back that can be used for classes."

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Bridges didn't have the \$700 needed to buy the bus so he and Mike Roberts, the language missions director for Iowa, took out a personal loan for the amount.

Bridges, Whitetree, and Roberts have named their project "Other Little Ships," taken from Mark 4:35-36. They figure it will cost approximately \$3,000 by the time they have the bus licensed and equipped just the way they want it, adding a folding basketball goal on the back, and adding tarpaulins in the summer that can be unrolled from the top and sides to make several classrooms around the bus.

Bridges also hopes that the bus can be used as a craft center for senior adults in one of the housing projects. "These senior citizens are excited about the possibility," Bridges said. "They want to participate in activities, but can't because they are so far away. When I talked to the tenants association, the senior citizens representatives were excited about the possibility of pulling our bus up to their apartment complex and having a craft and activities center right there."

Bridges envisions other avenues of ministry with the bus including Sunday Schools, day care, Boy Scouts, Vacation Bible School, reading classes, friendship clubs and others.

"It's just great," the young missionary says. "We won't have any rent. All we have to do is pull into one of these areas, and I have already talked to the residents and they are really excited."

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His Life Began At Rope's End

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (BP)--Life began at the end of the rope for Max Cleland, Jimmy Carter's first presidential appointee.

The triple amputee told "messengers" to the Baptist General Association of Virginia here that he is what he is "by the grace of God," borrowing from the biblical book of Corinthians.

Cleland, administrator of veteran's affairs, said he used to wage a fierce battle for independence from God, seeking to be self sufficient. He has since learned "you either have to become God or accept God."

Cleland lost both legs and his right arm in a grenade explosion in Vietnam. When he began rehabilitation in his Georgia home, he still saw his task as "me on my own against the system, against fear, against the unknown."

He did well, winning election to the Georgia Senate. Then he ran for lieutenant governor and lost. "That defeat put me out of business," he said.

"Somewhere, something was wrong in my life. I was unemployed and in debt to banks, in debt to myself and in debt to my fellowman," he confessed.

"It took more than a wheelchair to get my attention. I learned that having a personal will is fine, but it should be exercised in the will of God," Cleland said. Then, "sick and tired of being sick and tired," he accepted a job in Washington.

"Where I was at the end of my rope was the beginning of Christian living," he told the messengers. "It was one step in faith through darkness. On the way to Washington at night I prayed, 'Lord be merciful to me a sinner. Help me find a group of people who understand that kind of life.'"

That prayer was answered when Cleland found a group of believers at First Baptist Church of Clarendon and he now says "through Christ God has made me stronger in the broken places."

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