



February 13, 1978

78-19

Prisoner, Volunteer
Meet Through Letters

By Dan Martin

ATLANTA (BP)--This is the story of two men.

One is a convict, a man who has spent the majority of his life behind the bars of jails and prisons from Iowa to Alabama and Louisiana to Pennsylvania.

The other is a lay preacher, a man who quit a good job, sold his home and moved his family to the frontiers of Southern Baptist work in Vermont.

The two men have never met; maybe they never will. But their lives have touched because of an article in Home Missions magazine and a series of letters.

Oliver "Dean" Lusk was featured in the January issue of Home Missions. Last year he quit a good job in Tahlequah, Okla., and moved to Rutland, Vt., as an unpaid volunteer with the Home Mission Board's Christian Service Corps. His assignment was to start Bible studies to reach the people of the area.

CSC volunteers generally support their efforts with secular work, but so far Lusk has been unable to find steady employment despite a master's degree in education and extensive job experience. His family will remain in Vermont, doing missions work, as long as their money lasts.

Sterling Belle-Isle, 38, read the article in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, where he is serving a 15-year sentence for robbing a bank in Hueytown, Ala., in 1972. The stocky, tattooed man has spent 16 of the last 21 years in prison, having been convicted on a car theft charge when he was only 17.

"Oh man, what a beautiful story," he said. "Just imagine, Brother Lusk selling his house, giving up his job ... Why, that's what most of us want to achieve in life, that's what we want. But he was willing to give all that up because he found there was something more important. I thought, 'Hey, I want to be part of this.' The Lord really moved on my heart."

Belle-Isle wrote a brief letter to Lusk, addressing it simply to Mr. Oliver Lusk, Rutland, Vt. 05701.

"Brother," the letter said, "I would like to share in your ministry by giving some little money each month to help support your work. I work in the prison cotton mill and receive \$30 for my labor. The Lord has spoken to my heart in a real way and I want to send you \$10 a month to help you reach the lost for Christ."

Despite the inadequate address, the letter was forwarded to the Lusks at their rented home about 20 miles from Rutland.

"I got almost to the middle of the letter before I realized what it was," says Dona Lusk. "I started to cry. I had to put the letter away before I could finish it. It was kind of overwhelming."

Lusk added, "Dona gave the letter to me that night. To be honest, when I read it, it made me feel very inadequate. Compared to what he is giving--on a percentage basis--we are giving very little."

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The letter came at a critical time for the Lusks. Not only are they seeking out a living on whatever part-time work Lusk is able to get, they are faced with huge and mounting medical bills because of an accident suffered by their son Brent, 15.

In late summer, Brent was injured when he struck a wire cable stretched across a motor-bike trail in a remote area. Since then, he has had surgery three times and faces a fourth operation.

"We think God has blessed us and miraculously saved Brent's life," Dona said. "Most people who suffer this type injury do not live."

Despite the miracle, the family faces medical bills of close to \$14,000. With the mounting problems, the Lusks plan to stay on in Vermont, nurturing the two Bible studies they have begun, and supplying in pastorless churches across the state, as long as they can.

"His (Belle-Isle's) letter overwhelmed us," Dona said. "He is not in the easiest place to be and live a Christian life. That he would want to share with us in that way is almost more than we can believe."

Belle-Isle, who became a Christian in November 1975, admits that sharing is a relatively new desire for him. "I've been pretty selfish all my life, living for myself," he says. "I've not been concerned with anybody else."

He was serving time in Marion--which was built to replace Alcatraz, and is the "real hard rock joint" of federal prisons--and was listening to the radio one night:

"A guy was laughing down the cell block," Belle-Isle recalls. "He hollered for me to turn the radio to a certain station. I needed a laugh, so I turned over. It was Jerry Clower on one of the Baptist programs, Country Crossroads.

"He was real funny and then he started talking about how he credited all his success to the Lord. The Holy Spirit moved on my heart and I knew I couldn't be any greater failure than I was. I knew I didn't want to go on hurting like I was hurting.

"I knelt down and asked Jesus Christ to come into my heart, to forgive my sins. Before I got up, I knew he had... I knew I was saved. I haven't been the Christian I'd like to be, but man, I sure thank God I'm not what I was."

Belle-Isle wrote to the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, which produces Country Crossroads, and told them of his salvation experience. Executives there sent him a correspondence Bible course and a New Testament, the first Bible he ever owned.

"I'm glad somebody cared enough that they sent me the Word, and a correspondence Bible course and letters of encouragement. I'm thankful they followed up," he added. "They nurtured me when I was young in the faith."

As the prisoner talked of Lusk, he said: "When I read that article, I knew Brother Lusk is a guy who represents everything I haven't been. But I know he represents everything that by the grace of God I can be... I regard him as a role model for my own life."

Sterling Belle-Isle and Oliver "Dean" Lusk are separated by thousands of miles, background and strong steel bars. But because God moved on the lives of each, both have been touched.



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HEW Secretary Defends
Carter on Parochial Aid

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--Joseph A. Califano Jr. defended President Jimmy Carter against charges that he lied to the Catholics during the 1976 campaign when he said that he, if elected, would work for federal funds for parochial schools.

The secretary of U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, who is a Roman Catholic, said that candidate Carter carefully chose his words relating to education aids to parochial schools. He said that Carter's pledge was limited by the restrictions placed on him by the U. S. Constitution.

The Carter campaign pledge relating to constitutional aid to parochial schools has been widely cited by Catholics as an endorsement of tax credits for those paying tuition in such schools. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D.-N. Y., himself a Roman Catholic, went so far as to say that the president lied to the American people when he came out against tax credit proposals.

The Califano defense of the president came during hearings on the administration's alternative proposal for aid to middle class Americans with children in college. Specifically attacking tax credit aid to education, the Carter plan proposes a \$1.4 billion package of grants, work study and loans in fiscal 1979 to increase existing student aid programs. The Moynihan-Packwood proposal for tax credits is estimated to cost the government a minimum of \$4.7 billion.

The views of the Carter administration on aid to parochial schools were explained at a joint hearing before the Senate Committee on Human Resources, chaired by Sen. Harrison A. Williams, D.-N. J., and the House Committee on Education and Labor, chaired by Rep. Carl D. Perkins, D.-Ky.

The hearing contrasted with one held by Moynihan and Sen. Bob Packwood, R.-Ore., in January. The earlier hearing was virtually boycotted by other members of the Senate and treated mildly in the media.

On the other hand, the administration's proposal and attack on the Moynihan-Packwood plan was launched by a press conference in the White House with the president himself present. This was followed by the joint hearing by committees from both houses of Congress, with bi-partisan support the next day. It was heavily covered by the media. The joint committee hearing was a love feast compared to the acrimonious spirit of the Moynihan-Packwood hearing.

Hearings on the administration's proposal will be continued both in the Senate and House in a whirlwind effort to enact it into law before overwhelming support can be mustered for the Moynihan-Packwood tax credit proposal. The administration, however, has heavy odds to overcome because six times before the Senate has passed some form of tax credit legislation, and strong support exists in the House for a Moynihan-Packwood type of bill.

The administration's proposal is designed to aid higher education only, while the Moynihan-Packwood Bill also includes elementary and secondary schools in an attempt at a breakthrough to aid parochial schools.

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Califano explained that his children attend private Catholic schools, but that he did not feel that the government should pay him for their education. He said there are serious questions about the constitutionality of the proposed tax credit plans to aid parochial schools.

The HEW secretary further explained that he had asked the attorney general for an opinion on the constitutionality of tax credits and that he had instructed lawyers in HEW to work on constitutional ways of aiding parochial schools. He said that at the present time the way to aid parochial schools is to expand the services authorized by laws already enacted by Congress. One of these ways is to use more effectively the "by-pass" amendments, which authorize the federal government to provide services directly to schools which state constitutions prohibit from receiving state aid, he said.

Although not calling the Moynihan-Packwood plan by name, Califano severely attacked it by saying, "tuition tax credits, to put it bluntly, make neither educational nor fiscal sense."

He then hit tuition tax credits with five charges: They "indiscriminately" aid the very rich who do not need relief from educational costs; can be "inordinately expensive;" "will unnecessarily fragment education policy among different congressional committees;" do not meet the needs of some families who prefer loans to grants and who need help over a longer time rather than short-term aid; "are a blunt instrument" that make it difficult to maintain a flexible educational policy adaptable to changing circumstances.

The HEW secretary made it plain that "if Congress decides to add a tuition tax credit to the administration's proposed tax package, then the president will oppose substantial increases in appropriations for federal student assistance programs."

Many private school groups and the Roman Catholic education interests support the Moynihan-Packwood type of tuition tax credit aid to both elementary-secondary and higher education. The nation's public school educational organizations and religious liberty organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and Americans United, oppose the proposal.

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'Sex Life of Jesus'
Film Not Produced

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press
2/13/78

WASHINGTON (BP)--An aide to U. S. Sen. Mark O. Hatfield said the Danish filmmaker who has sought unsuccessfully to produce a movie on the alleged sex life of Jesus in several foreign countries has also failed to find a producer in the United States.

Tom Getman, legislative aide to the Oregon Republican, told Baptist Press that the filmmaker, Jens Thorsen, has turned his objective to finding a book publisher who would agree to publish a script of the film in book form.

Thorsen has failed to have the obscene film, "The Many Faces of Jesus," produced in such nations as Britain, Israel, and Denmark. If made, the film reportedly would depict Jesus as having been sexually active in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

Hoping to find refuge in the United States Constitution's guarantees of free speech and free press, Thorsen came to this country some time ago, but has had no success.

Getman said that Thorsen recently asked Grove Press of New York City to produce the book, but noted that the publisher has apparently made no decision. He said Hatfield's response to a surge of complaints about the project has been to urge concerned Christians to write Grove Press, 196 West Houston St., New York, N.Y. 10014, asking the company to refuse to publish Thorsen's work.

Hatfield, a Baptist, has been telling angry Christians that neither Congress nor President Carter can do anything about the movie or the book simply because it is not a legislative issue.

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Inquiries by concerned Baptists have accelerated in recent days, partly occasioned by a statement reportedly made by a prominent Southern Baptist pastor at the recent state evangelism conference in Ohio.

Bailey Smith, pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., and president of the Southern Baptist Pastor's Conference, reportedly said in a major address to the Ohio conference that the pornographic film "is being filmed on U. S. soil."

Asked at the close of his address to give the source of his information about the filming in America, Smith told the Ohio Baptist Messenger that he could not recall it.

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Laborers Sought To Rebuild
Washington, Ga., Churches

Baptist Press
2/13/78

WASHINGTON, Ga. (BP)--Georgia Baptist Brotherhood leaders are seeking about 100 laborers to go to Washington, Ga., for a three-day period March 16-18 to help rebuild the sanctuary of a black Baptist congregation destroyed by a fire recently.

Money and preliminary labor have already been contributed by Georgia Baptists to help Mulberry Baptist Church and Mt. Zion Baptist Church rebuild their sanctuary.

Mulberry and Mt. Zion churches were among four Baptist and Methodist churches burned by vandals recently. Several suspects were apprehended and charged with arson.

Concrete workers and brick masons are scheduled to pour foundations March 11. Carpenters, brick masons, plumbers, electricians and others will then be needed for a "blitz" three-day construction project March 16-18.

"There will be no pay," said R. Eugene Dailey, state brotherhood secretary. "This will be a volunteer project."

He said a few brick masons will be needed March 11, but the biggest need is all sorts of labor volunteers for March 16-18.

A special meeting will be held at the First Baptist Church in Washington March 15 at 8 p.m. to organize work crews and hold a special prayer meeting for the project.

Volunteers are urged to contact R. Eugene Dailey, 2930 Flowers Road, S., Atlanta, Ga. 30341, or phone 404-455-0404.

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Milfred L. Lewis Donates
\$1 Million to Baylor

Baptist Press
2/13/78

WACO, Texas (BP)--Houston area businessman Milfred L. Lewis has donated stocks valued at \$1 million to Baylor University, according to Tom Z. Parrish, Baylor vice president for development.

Lewis donated 35,693 shares of stock in the Equipment Renewal Co., Houston, valued at \$1 million. Lewis is manager and former owner of the equipment company.

He and Mrs. Lewis both received bachelor of business administration degrees from Baylor in 1955. Their son is a Baylor freshman majoring in pre-law.

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