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'Last of Breed' Church Starter
Has 120 and Still Counting

By Everett Hullum

CASPER, Wyo. (BP)--Bennie Delmar is the last of a breed of Southern Baptist missionary.

Counting grandchildren and great grandchildren of the mother church, First Southern Baptist of Casper, Wyo., he has helped start 120 churches in the Northern Plains.

It took 25 years, one-and-a-half million driving miles and more than he made in gas, oil and car repairs, but 58-year-old Oliver Raymond Delmar's burning desire for missions--an obsession he's had throughout his life--meant he didn't believe defeat possible.

Young Delmar often lived in oil camps where there were no nearby churches. His mother would round up neighbors to begin a church--in a school, bunkhouse, any place available. It was his mother, he says, who gave him a compulsion to begin missions.

Delmar was a pastor in eastern Arizona where he had started four missions when he went to Casper only to hold a revival. At the end of his second week there, a group of 18 constituted First Southern Baptist Church and called Delmar to be pastor.

As the only SBC church in the four-state region, Casper became the funnel for all requests from Southern Baptists in the Northern Plains. Delmar answered every one--no matter how distant.

Near the end of 1951, with First Southern averaging more than 100 in attendance, Delmar was appointed director of missions for the region. With territory larger than the state of Texas, he moved to Billings, Mont., to be centrally located--and began to live behind the wheel of his car. As churches and associations multiplied through the years, Delmar's land was cut. He now works only northern Wyoming.

But the Delmar stories--at least one for every person who's ever known him--chronicle the years, the man, his "car-pocket" approach to missions, and his tremendous persistence.

In the 20 years he's driven the Northern Plains, Delmar has started churches in bars, halls, lodges, clubs, schools, homes, banks, hotels/motels, cathedrals, storefronts, mobile homes, courthouses, and one warehouse.

In New Castle, Wyo., Delmar held first services in a mortuary--on New Year's Eve; in Dickinson, N.D., in a city hall; in Butte, Mont., in a school gymnasium. Once he even started a church in a car, meeting in a park.

Delmar's loose strategy was effective: to hit the key cities and to respond to leads from "interested families."

He rarely asked townsfolk if starting a Southern Baptist work was a good thing. He tried that approach--with dismal results.

Once, in Mills, Wyo., his newspaper announcement of plans to begin work was quickly upstaged by a more established denomination's announcement two weeks later it was beginning services.

At Shelby, Mont., his newspaper ad came "too soon." By meeting time, opposition had formed. He found the building "was not available after all; they had rescinded their action because someone had objected."

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His tested approach was to quietly, but openly enter a town like "menacing-looking" Butte, Mont., the state's fourth largest city. There, despite feeling "all the time I should be looking back over my shoulder for fear somebody was going to hit me over the head... and once stumbling into a cafe backroom poker game," Delmar says he finally located some "Baptist people."

He brought in two summer missionaries who spent two weeks surveying, announcing services and leaving circulars. There were no problems and the first service drew 35 people.

"We'd put out 36 or 37 chairs, so we hit it about right," he says, "but I've always wondered, if we'd put out more chairs, would more have come?"

Delmar's enthusiasm and undaunted spirit of "can-do" is reminiscent of the Southern Baptist spirit of the 1950's when the convention got expansion fever and began to start churches for the Southern Baptists tossed nationwide by the dust bowl and World War II.

During one stretch in the '50s Delmar weekly drove a 2,000 mile circuit, hitting a number of newly started preaching points. For a while he made more than 400 miles a Sunday, preaching three times.

He would ride buses or trains all night, sleeping on the way to be able to preach in the morning. Once when a bus ran late, he chartered a plane to make a meeting.

"I made a practice of never missing an appointment, no matter what and never letting anything die once we started it," Delmar says. "We didn't want Southern Baptists to have a reputation of giving up."

Churches and pastors responded to his dedication. Delmar is credited with bringing dozens of unusually qualified pastors to "the far end of nowhere", matter-of-factly demanding of them the same sacrifices he freely made. Most were bi-vocational, working secular jobs as well as serving a church.

"Bennie wanted top-notch people from the beginning," says early pastor Richard Peacock. "The only difference between us and foreign missionaries was foreign missionaries got paid. We went for nothing."

Pastors knew, however, that when they phoned Delmar, he'd be there to help. He'd take care of them. Said one: "He wasn't a desk-and-paper man; we had missionaries like that later and we never saw them. Bennie was a field man."

Yet his failure to make reports, to keep fellow workers involved, his disregard for time and distance...caused a string of superiors to tear their hair. Only in the last year has he gotten an office. Before that he'd carry in his head the needs he saw. "Some people think he's slow," says a pastor. "But I've seen him get more done than a lot who're constantly juggling everything."

And in 25 years of working and talking...and driving and giving...Delmar created a legendary record of church starting equaled by few men.

"Occasionally you hear someone say that all this new work might die out and come to nought," says one of the current crop of young pastors Delmar has recruited. "Well it might. But Bennie Delmar would have to die first."

And with him, say some in the SBC, would be the death of a breed.

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Carter Warns Soviets
At Wake Forest University

WINSTON-SALEM, N. C. (BP)--President Jimmy Carter issued a clear warning to the Soviet Union when he told a Wake Forest University audience that "we will not allow any other nation to gain military superiority over us."

Carter, the fifth president to speak at the Southern Baptist university, said America must balance the olive branch and the sword to preserve its security. But he said, "Even as we search for agreement on arms control, we will modernize our strategic system and revitalize our conventional forces."

Carter's speech was momentarily interrupted at its beginning when an audience member stood to present a petition asking for the freedom of the Wilmington 10. An aid quickly accepted the petition and Carter continued.

The president said America's defense policies will be carried out by maintaining strategic nuclear balance, strengthening European defenses and developing forces to counter threats to America's allies and vital interests throughout the world.

Carter, the second Southern Baptist president to visit Wake Forest, was accompanied by his wife Rosalynn, son Chip and Chip's wife Caron.

A crowd of 20,000 watched Baptist President Woodrow Wilson lift the first spade of dirt for the new campus in 1951 when it moved to Winston-Salem from Wake Forest. A receptive crowd of 2,200 heard Carter's speech in Wait Auditorium.

Carter called Wake Forest University "a great college." He did not elaborate on that but linked his heritage to North Carolina when he said his first ancestor to live in Georgia, James Carter, moved there from North Carolina.

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Wood: Three Actions
Against IRS ImpositionBaptist Press
3/20/78

DALLAS (BP)-- James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, advised Southern Baptist institutions to consider judicial, administrative and legislative remedies to government regulations which impose financial accountability to the Internal Revenue Service on all church agencies and institutions not ruled as "integrated auxiliaries of churches."

"The seriousness and gravity of the situation have increased," Wood told the 16th Southern Baptist Business Officers Conference. "We're now in a position which I think can accurately be called a crisis. Indeed, it's a mounting crisis involving our churches and church agencies and the IRS."

Southern Baptist churches and church agencies and institutions have opposed any attempt by the IRS to define "integrated auxiliary of a church" since this means, in effect, that the government would be defining the mission of the church by determining what is and is not a "religious activity."

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Those agencies or institutions which don't qualify as an "integrated auxiliary" are now required to file Form 990 annually. The form calls for detailed financial information.

Wood said church-related institutions can use "petitioning" to call on the president and the Treasury Department to "revise, re-examine or even rescind" the IRS definition of 1977.

He said correspondence and contacts with the White House--an example of what he means by "administrative remedies"--have drawn no response to the issue of the financial accountability of churches, church agencies and institutions.

In "judicial remedy," a Southern Baptist organization might refuse to comply with the regulation with the full intention of entering into litigation and court action against the ruling.

"The hope would be that the federal court would find the entire regulation unconstitutional," Wood explained. "We believe that it is in violation of the First Amendment."

Institutions could also seek a legislative remedy for the regulation by securing the introduction of a bill in Congress which would modify or even rescind it, Wood said. He stressed that any Southern Baptist organization should seek legal guidance before attempting any of the three remedies.

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Georgia Baptists
Affirm Trustees

Baptist Press
3/20/78

ATLANTA (BP)--The Georgia Baptist Convention Executive Committee meeting in quarterly session, adopted a strong statement reaffirming trustee government of Georgia Baptist schools and refused to require professors to sign articles of faith similar to those Southern Baptist Convention seminary professors must sign.

The executive committee reaffirmed its long standing policy that "convention-elected trustees are the responsible group to make policy for employment of personnel and policy for magnification of state convention adopted objectives of the colleges."

It added: "Baptist principles and polity, it appears, would not support the requirement of the signing of creeds by any person, or statement of Baptist beliefs by non-Baptists." The executive committee was concerned also that to require signing of a statement of beliefs by the professors would "seriously threaten the accreditation of our colleges."

The issue was raised in November 1977 when the Mallary Association presented the Georgia Baptist Convention with a resolution that would require professors in Georgia's Baptist schools to sign statements of belief. The resolution was referred to committee until the March meeting when it was rejected.

The committee adopted a long set of goals for Georgia churches in Bold Mission Thrust, Southern Baptists' effort to present the gospel to every person in the world by the year 2000. They include a 10 percent increase in baptisms, Sunday School enrollment and annual special mission offerings by 1982.

Also approved were goals of 282 new church-type missions by 1982, 300 career missionaries, 300 Mission Service Corps volunteers, 10,000 short-term mission volunteers and an annual 20 percent increase in Cooperative Program (national SBC unified budget) giving.

Georgia Baptist Convention leaders gave "enthusiastic" support for Mission Service Corps promotion in Georgia "through normal channels." Mission Service Corps is the SBC program to put 5,000 short term volunteers on the field as missionaries at home and abroad by 1982.

The statement said that the Georgia Baptist Convention will receive and disburse Mission Service Corps funds as designated but will not fund a Mission Service Corps volunteer, solicit funds for a Mission Service Corps volunteer or project nor promote a special offering for Mission Service Corps volunteers and/or service projects.

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