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He's Been 'Baba' To Decades  
Of Africans in Kansas City

By Mary Jane Peironnet

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--When Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary held spring graduation exercises, four of the capped and gowned students receiving degrees were Nigerians, men who came a long way from home and will return there to preach and teach.

The four, plus two of their countrymen continuing at the Kansas City seminary next term, are the latest in a long "procession" of Nigerians who've selected the school for their theological studies. Most of them have travelled halfway around the world because of one man--Midwestern's dean of students and registrar, V. Lavell Seats, a missionary in Nigeria for 17 years.

One of the '78 graduates, 53-year-old John Yakubu, was baptized by Seats in 1942. The two men walked eight miles through a road-less area because John wanted the baptism in the tiny village where he grew up.

Last August, more than a third of a century later, John enrolled at Midwestern for a year of classes and renewal of his friendship with the former missionary.

In the interim, the Nigerian had attended a seminary in his homeland, served as pastor of a church, married and raised a family. It took 25 years for him to reach the point, financially and otherwise, where he could come to this country for studies which would give him the "diploma in theology", a degree designed for those who do not have bachelor's degrees.

While the other five Nigerians currently at Midwestern are not as closely tied to Seats through his missionary service, four of them came to Kansas City--directly or indirectly--due to the faculty member's having been in their country. The same holds true of a majority of their predecessors.

During his 17 years in Africa, Seats was a professor, and later president, of a Baptist seminary in Ogbomoso, Nigeria, and served as administrator, editor and general missionary adviser for the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

He's been back from the foreign field over two decades, all at Midwestern. He was the first faculty member hired by Millard Berquist, the founding president, when preparations were underway to open the Southern Baptist school in 1957.

But the former missionary's imprint on the Baptist community in Nigeria continues to be felt--through those he knew while serving there, their children and other family members, his friendship with present missionaries in the country, and--most of all--through the Nigerians who have come to Kansas City to study and counsel with him and then returned to their homeland as pastors or teachers.

Figures are not readily available in the seminary office as to the number of Nigerian alumni, but it's estimated that 25 or 30 of them have come for stays of from one to three years.

While they've been here in Kansas City, many thousands of miles from home and in a vastly different environment from their own, they've had a special friend and mentor in the person of Lavell Seats.

As with the present six from the African nation, the students have ignored the educator's three titles--professor of missions, registrar and dean of students--and his three academic

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degrees. When chatting with him in his office or elsewhere on campus they call him by the respectful yet informal term of "baba."

The word is commonly used by Africans when speaking to an older person, Seats explains. It is respectful and courteous, but it also denotes friendship and closeness. He's pleased that the men have chosen to address him thusly.

If the Nigerians didn't already feel "at home" with Seats, they soon would after entering his office. Shelves, tables and walls in the room are filled with artifacts from Africa and from Dr. and Mrs. Seats' travels to other parts of the world.

Besides much Nigerian native art, the room contains handsome wooden carvings and metallic heads and masks from many countries, graceful dancers from Bali, a fat Buddha from Taiwan, an intricate "king's" boat and oarsmen carved from a water buffalo horn in Thailand, a costumed bridal couple from Korea, water buffalo from the Philippines, a horse from Russia, a copper lion on a framed lion skin from Rhodesia, a buffalo-hide shield from Kenya, spears from Tanzania, and carvings of elongated Masal warriors, also from East Africa.

While the Nigerians feel close to their American "baba," another "baba" on the seminary campus--John Yakuba, who's old enough to be their father--has also been a close and helpful friend.

On July 1, John will return to serve his countrymen, as have almost all of the Africans attending the seminary.

After graduation John will return to the city of Lokoja, where his wife and children are, and where he's pastor of a church now being ministered to by its deacons.

Many of the American graduates of Midwestern have also gone to Nigeria, which is the most densely populated country on the African continent. Numerous others have served or are serving missions in other countries. It's a matter of considerable pride with the seminary's administrators that their school has a consistently high percentage of its graduates in foreign service.

Seats points out that of his own special group of alumni--those from Nigeria--one is now serving in the high position of personal chaplain to the president of that nation.

The chaplain and other Midwestern graduates will no doubt continue "spreading the word" about the Kansas City seminary and the "baba" faculty member who once taught and preached in their homeland.

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Hopkins Assumes Editor  
Role in Kansas-Nebraska

Baptist Press  
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TOPEKA, Kans. (BP)--John Hopkins, Christian social ministries consultant for the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, will assume the editorship of the convention's "Baptist Digest," July 15, while maintaining his present responsibilities.

Hopkins, 50, will fill the role on an interim basis, succeeding Lynn P. Clayton, who will become editor of the "Baptist Message," newspaper of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Clayton had also served as evangelism director.

A native of Houston, Texas, Hopkins serves under joint appointment of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Kansas-Nebraska Convention. Previously, he spent more than 20 years in federal service.

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He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska and studied at the University of Maryland and the University of Vienna. He earned master of religious education and doctor of ministries degrees from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

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Cancellations Plague  
Glorieta Attendance

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press  
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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Last minute cancellations, especially for Sunday School weeks, continue to hold down attendance at summer conferences at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Because persons with confirmed reservations can receive full refunds up to 30 days prior to a conference, the rush of cancellations by phone and mail began about May 1 and has not let up, said Bill Hendricks, supervisor of the business section which handles reservations.

One of the two reservations clerks is occupied nearly full time receiving and processing cancellations, while the other calls persons on waiting lists to let them know space is available.

For example, 5,000 requests for reservations for the third Sunday School week, June 24-30, were received January 3, the first day reservations opened.

With the waiting list so long and Glorieta having a capacity of 2,500, Hendricks returned checks to 70 groups at the bottom of the list.

On April 30, Glorieta had confirmed reservations for 2,610 and by May 31, that figure was down to 2,080. A total of 530 cancellations were received during May.

As soon as reservations for any week drop below capacity, reservations clerks begin calling the waiting lists. However, many have already made other plans by that time.

Returning checks and calling the waiting lists have caused telephone and postage costs to skyrocket, Hendricks said. "Each check we write costs 13 cents, plus 15 cents postage, plus labor, and often a long distance telephone call," he said.

While the three summer weeks already completed had at one time capacity reservations with waiting lists, actual attendance for each dropped several hundred below the maximum.

Church training youth week (June 2-9) had 2,668 confirmed reservations as of March 31, but wound up with 2,124 in attendance. Attendance for the first Sunday School week (June 10-16) was 1,814, but 2,486 had confirmed reservations on April 30. The second Sunday School week (June 17-23), which had 2,718 confirmed reservations on April 30, wound up with an attendance of 1,960.

When persons or groups fail to cancel within the 30 day deadline and become ineligible for refunds most don't bother to cancel at all. "Sometimes we learn about these, when a church with 40 reservations only sends in 20 names for room assignments," Hendricks said.

Because of similar cancellation problems at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center, trustees of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, which operates both centers, have approved changes in registration procedures for 1979.

Reservations will open February 1 instead of January 1 to finalize summer decisions. Also, refunds will be granted on a graduated scale depending on the cancellation time.

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### 668 Young Persons Make Decisions During Conferences

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--More than 10 percent of the 6,000 young people involved in church training-sponsored weeks at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Centers made decisions for Jesus Christ.

Larry Yarborough, program director for the back-to-back June weeks in New Mexico and North Carolina, said he expected the results of the week to have a heavy impact on Southern Baptist churches across the convention.

"We presented programs that emphasized the importance of a young person's encounter with Jesus Christ--using examples from the Old and New Testaments in more than nine hours of daily activity scheduled during the six day sessions," Yarborough said after returning to his office at the Sunday School Board.

Yarborough said 96 youngsters made professions of faith, 45 committed their lives to a denominational vocation and 527 rededicated their lives after the evening worship services.

"Our hope is that the youngsters will return to their churches and duplicate the spirit and contagious 'koinonia' that was present at both of the weeks," he said. "We stressed the need for the development of young disciples in Southern Baptist churches through the use of the church training youth curriculum."

Having directed the youth weeks for seven consecutive years, Yarborough said he found that many of this year's youngsters are more interested than their predecessors in making a contribution to their churches immediately.

"They didn't want to be trained for the future; rather their desire was to learn what they can do right now."

He said this year's participants were also "more hungry for spiritual direction" in their lives. "They were also more open and receptive to persons of authority."

Yarborough said the June sessions provided an excellent opportunity for the youngsters to share their experiences and difficulties with young persons from many other parts of the country.

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