



January 17, 1979

79-08

Former Dancer  
Shares Christ

By Linda Lawson

SAN JOSE, Puerto Rico (BP)--A former New York night club dancer is now walking the streets of a small town in her native Puerto Rico, sharing her faith in Christ and giving life to a church that was virtually dead.

Nellie Rodriguez came home to Ponce, Puerto Rico, three years ago to care for her father, ill with cancer.

While home, she became a Christian. Soon a missionary told her the Lord had something for her to do and a visiting evangelist said she had the gift of sharing Christ with others. But Nellie was not so sure.

However, when a woman from nearby Piedra Agusada visited Nellie's church to ask for help in reaching her community, Nellie responded.

A small church building was already there, although the attendance in recent years had never exceeded three adults and a half dozen children.

At first Nellie continued her work in a clothing store and went to Piedra Agusada each Saturday to visit and prepare the church for Sunday. Then when a place became available for her to live in Piedra Agusada, she left her job and began spending each day visiting and witnessing in homes and on the streets.

So far, 19 people have become Christians through the ministry of Nellie Rodriguez.

"I know the gift the Lord has given me is to be a missionary," she said one afternoon recently as she sat in the living room of a woman who had become a Christian through Nellie's efforts.

"I really care for the people. I laugh with them and cry with them. I know God wants me here," she said.

In addition to her ministry in homes, Nellie has organized almost nightly activities at the church. Besides Sunday services where as many as 80 people have crowded into the small building and yard, a prayer group meets on Monday nights.

On Tuesdays, a pastor from Ponce comes to lead Bible study. A preaching service is held each Thursday night and on Saturdays Nellie teaches a class on how to lead a Christian life.

For the future Nellie hopes the church will have a fulltime pastor. For now, living and working among the people of Piedra Agusada is enough. She expresses no regrets for the loss of attention and money that went with her dancing career. "The things I had never gave me what I have now," she said.

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(BP) photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers by the Sunday School Board Bureau of Baptist Press.

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Sense of Sacrifice  
Lost in Society

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"One of the most critical needs of pastors and church staff members is a clear understanding of the ministry," Baptist Sunday School Board President Grady C. Cothen told state church administration consultants in their annual meeting.

"Ministers need to help the people of God know they are the body of Christ in the world," he continued. "This is a shaking, sobering, difficult and humbling concept."

"American society today has been fragmented by a loss of responsibility where people will not sacrifice for family, church or country. These trends speak in loud and strident tones to pastors, church staff members, and denominational workers who are trying to lead churches. We too are pressured by the society in which we live, where there is no interest in the cults, gurus and mysticism."

Cothen said recent statistics he had received indicated 27 percent of the American population believe yoga can make life better, compared to only 16 percent who claim the same for revivalism. An identical 16 percent believed vegetarianism makes life better.

"There is an enormous response to religion today," he said, "but without a commitment to the morals and ethics of Jesus Christ and the scriptures. Also, too frequently there is interest in religion without ethics."

Quoting a recent poll, Cothen said only 21 percent of the American people feel we need to return to the old morality, while 54 percent see nothing wrong with unmarried couples living together. However, 77 percent feel people should be responsible for other people's property.

"With that kind of society, we are not going to be able to do things in the same old way," Cothen said.

"God's ministers need to understand they are people of God, the body of Christ in the world," he continued. "We need to have sensitive hearts to loving people, who have indescribable hurts and fragmented ambitions."

"We must have a new vision of our purpose, our reason for existing--not just to get ahead or be somebody, but to be God's person on the scene," Cothen said. "The future of it all may very well rest with us, so we cannot be satisfied with anything but our all and God's best."

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Mark's Gospel  
Gets Replaced?Baptist Press  
1/17/79

MISSOURI CITY, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptists' annual January Bible Study accumulated some strange theological dimensions on the church page of "The Mirror," local newspaper in Stafford, Texas.

It just shows what a difference a single letter can make. The study, as mentioned in "The Mirror," was Mary: "The Saviour for Sinners."

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Indonesian Official Denies  
Threat to Religious Freedom

WASHINGTON (BP)--The cultural attache of the Indonesian embassy in Washington says that new laws concerning mission work in his southeast Asian nation "are not aimed at limiting religious freedom."

T. M. Soelaiman of the Indonesian embassy told Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Robert S. Denny that "people are free to change their religion. The decisions are to protect the interest of believers in Indonesia and to preserve harmony among them."

Mission boards in the U.S. and Australia are concerned over new laws SK. 70, that says missionary work should not be directed toward those who already possess a religious belief, and SK. 77, which regulates material and financial aid to religious bodies, including aid in the form of personnel.

But Soelaiman assured Denny and associate Charles F. Wills that, "If voluntarily a person wants to change his religion, he is free to do so because he has got the right to do so."

About SK. 77, Soelaiman said, "Foreigners assigned to help religious bodies here should abide by immigration regulations. The government wants to know their country of origin and the duration of their stay here."

He said also that SK. 77 requires information on the nature and form of aid sent from abroad to religious bodies in Indonesia, the country from which the aid comes, and the utilization of that aid. "All this is to ensure that the aid goes to the right addressee," he said.

In Australia, J. D. Williams, general secretary of the Australian Baptist Missionary Society, had expressed concern that the laws, when fully implemented, "could virtually end missionary work in Indonesia and churches elsewhere."

Southern Baptists have 107 missionaries in Indonesia, and also operate Bible schools and hospitals there.

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Priest Explains Baptists  
To Fellow Catholic Clergy

Baptist Press  
1/17/79

FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS, Ill. (BP)--Joseph O'Donnell, a priest from Newnan, Ga., and a regional worker for the Glenmary Home Missioners, described Southern Baptists from a Catholic perspective to 130 priests and 40 nuns at the clergy conference of the Belleville Diocese:

- (1) "They know how to use the public media, with Billy Graham's television ministry one of the best examples.
- (2) "Southern Baptists are more open to dialogue with us than any of the other Baptist bodies in America.
- (3) "They are not 'holy-rollers.' Often, their worship is more formal than some of our services. And their music--oh, it's beautiful, beautiful. You should see what they do with their choirs and congregational singing, and the money they spend on it.
- (4) "Southern Baptists are the largest, wealthiest, best organized, and most mission-minded of any of the Baptist bodies. One Sunday last year, they raised \$35 million for foreign missions. The best we did on any one Sunday was \$5 million.
- (5) "They baptize by immersion, and their baptism would be acceptable by us.

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(6) "They have fantastic skills as "missioners" and "evangelizers." Once they find Christ, Southern Baptists feel compelled to tell others. This can irritate some Catholics, especially in smaller towns. But I say to them, 'Keep it up; stir us up!'

(7) "The psychology and personality of President Carter cannot be understood outside the psychology of Southern Baptists. His personal witnessing is an example.

(8) "In their opposition to government aid to parochial schools, Baptists are not bigoted or prejudiced. They do this out of deep conviction about the separation of church and state.

(9) "Baptist ministers do not have as much freedom as our priests. Baptists say they are the 'free church,' but we as Catholics have the freedom. This is due to the autonomy of each local Baptist church. Each church employs and dismisses its pastor, and thus has tighter controls on him. As Catholics, our priests have greater freedom since they are responsible to the bishop, not the congregation."

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### New Church Building Tells Story of Changing Freedom

MADRID, Spain (BP)--Two men stood in the midst of an unfinished dream. More than 30 years ago their church building was an object of prayer, a virtual impossibility.

J. D. Hughey was a Southern Baptist missionary and seminary professor in Spain in 1947 when he contracted to purchase land for the First Baptist Church, Madrid. Juan Luis Rodrigo was one of his students.

Today Hughey is the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Europe and Rodrigo is the church's pastor.

The neighborhood people looked forward with "great expectation" to the building's dedication, Rodrigo said. Both the congregation and the country underwent many changes in the past 31 years. When Hughey was working toward purchase of the property he received a telegram warning him he should be very careful everything was "official" because there were people watching these "Protestants," hoping for trouble.

This careful watching marked almost 28 of those years and was not the only limitation on Protestant worship. Baptist churches could not hang signs on their buildings for identification. Public meetings could not be held anywhere but the church building. Baptists could not advertise their presence in any way.

The changes in religious freedom began during the last years of the dictatorship of Generalissimo Franco and have quickened in pace since the beginning of the reign of King Juan Carlos.

Not only is the church building finally going up, but university students are being allowed to study different religions and philosophies, including the Baptist faith. The government of Spain has separated itself from the official responsibility of selecting Spanish leaders in the Roman Catholic Church.

But in the more than 30 years of waiting, economic conditions have also changed. Soaring building costs forced the First Baptist Church into a joint building arrangement for the new seven-story structure. A building company will give them the use of two whole floors, plus part of another for a pastor's apartment, in exchange for the right to build on the two lots owned by the church.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

### CORRECTION

In BP story mailed Jan. 16, entitled "WMU Gets Mission Picture, Lays Plans for Future Work," please change "flexicon" in line 2, paragraph 13 to "flexitime."

Thanks, Baptist Press