



October 1, 1979

79-163

After 18 Years,
Viliamu Comes Home

By Everett Hullum

PAGO PAGO, American Samoa (BP)--After 18 years, Lefanoga Viliamu came home.

Home to the white beaches, verdant forest, sapphire waters. Home to the mountains and moods of the barefoot culture whose patterns and pace are as gentle as waves in the sun-dappled harbor.

His home, American Samoa--born of prehistoric volcanic explosions in the ocean, nurtured and molded by the pounding waves--is foreign to most in the United States. Yet American Samoa has been a U.S. territory since 1900. The four islands of 76 square miles and 33,000 people--mere pinpoints in the vast Pacific--are 4,500 miles and many mental light years southwest of San Francisco.

Almost two decades ago, Viliamu left the islands for the mainland. He became a Christian and a pastor with a burning desire to return to Samoa where Christianity had been introduced in 1831. But it's influence is eroding. Nothing, however, opened up for nine years.

An opening came when he preached to his stepfather, Mageo. A matai (chief, head of a clan), Mageo was a former Congregationalist pastor and had served the Samoan government and schools before migrating to Hawaii.

In Hawaii, Mageo was jailed briefly on a minor mail-fraud charge. Viliamu visited his stepfather. For the first time, he came to know--and love--the man who had married his mother a few years before.

In 1976, Viliamu returned to Samoa as a Southern Baptist missionary. There he found his people threatened by the winds of mechanization and U.S. money.

Romo says a "spiritual vacuum" existed. Dozens of fale sa, literally holy houses, existed on the islands, from the old Congregationalist to new Mormon and Baha'i.

Baptist was new. Viliamu explains: "They asked, 'What is that?' when we started. They did not understand how to cross from being deeply religious to having a living relationship with Jesus Christ."

Mageo invited Viliamu to come to American Samoa to begin a Christian school. Viliamu, however, felt a church should be started first. "A church should be the mother of whatever we do," he explains.

Happy Valley Baptist Church was started and 18 persons attended the first Sunday. The church now includes some Anglos, local teachers, and some Korean fishermen. Most are Samoan.

Viliamu blends ideas from the mainland with Samoan concepts to create a fellowship that emphasizes the importance of each individual. At times, when he's exasperated at the snail's

pace or an old, unwieldy practice, he refers to his people as "they." At such times, he says, "I feel like an outsider, coming back. I was away so long. . . ."

Despite Viliamu's background, the first years of his ministry on American Samoa have not been easy. The family has faced a mysterious, deadly fever which struck their daughter. She recovered but only after a doctor in Hawaii diagnosed the illness. They have also had to face life which is vastly different than the supermarket and drugstore-filled one they had known on the mainland.

Adjustment was difficult for Lena, Viliamu's wife, whom he married in Texas. Lack of privacy, unfamiliar language and customs and general differences caused pain and loneliness. But Lena says Southern Baptists "couldn't have found a better person than Ray (what Viliamu called himself in the states because some friends couldn't pronounce his name) to serve here."

Viliamu's witness and ministry have brought new stirrings in the Christian body on American Samoa. Says his 63-year-old stepfather, "Ray was sent by God to help his people. I see a big change because of how Ray teaches."

The ministry is foreign to the islands--marriage classes for young adults, Bible studies, sports and activities. Every night is busy and Viliamu spends days translating hymns, visiting and preparing sermons.

Oscar Romo, head of the language missions division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, assesses the ministry by explaining: "Even after we perceived the need in Samoa, we could not have moved without Ray. Only a person from Samoan culture could understand it enough to be accepted, and to be as effective as Ray has been. Only a Samoan could have done what Ray's done."

-30-

(BP) photos mailed to Baptist state newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press.

TV Station Replaces
Worship With Football

By Charlie Warren

Baptist Press
10/1/79

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--An unofficial community pressure group has been formed to protest the temporary cancellation of the live telecast of worship services at First Baptist Church, Memphis, by station WREG-TV.

In its place during the 11 a.m. time slot on Sunday, the station, Channel 3, is airing "The Johnny Majors Show," a taped partial playback of the University of Tennessee's football game.

Spearheaded by Kenneth Dean, pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church, the interdenominational group of pastors and religious leaders has registered its protest with Channel 3, the University of Tennessee (which has expressed concern over the problem) and commercial sponsors of "The Johnny Majors Show." They also have filed an official complaint with the Federal Communications Commission, according to Dean.

Charles Brakefield, general manager of Channel 3, told the Baptist and Reflector that his station's position is that the time period is occupied by "The Johnny Majors Show" by prior agreement with First Baptist Church during football season, after which time First Baptist Church will resume its telecast.

-more-

"They (First Baptist Church) agreed to that when they bought the time, and Kenneth Dean knows that," Brakefield told the Tennessee Baptist newspaper.

Earl Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church, Memphis, confirmed Brakefield's comment: "Officially, we have no gripe," Davis said. "They told us when we went on that there was a possibility that we would be preempted for the UT football games."

He said he has neither encouraged nor discouraged Dean and others involved in the protest. He did say the church hopes it won't happen again next fall.

Dean, referring to First Baptist Church's silence on the matter, explained, "First Baptist does not quite know why they were taken off, but they have a \$600,000 investment, and they don't want the television station to say, 'We've decided to leave you off altogether, because you have opposed what we want to do.' So they are scared for their investment."

Davis confirmed that the church has spent more than \$250,000 on cameras and equipment and another \$250,000 plus on renovation of the building in preparation for the telecasts which have been on the air since December 1978. He also confirmed that the church has paid \$1,000 each week for the air time.

"When we found we were going to be off we felt we had to do something to let the people know and try to retain our audience," Davis said. "So we made a 30-second spot to run each Sunday at 11 a.m. which simply explains that we'll be back on in December. We were being charged \$100 a week for that, but Mr. Brakefield called me Sept. 21 and said he had been rethinking that and really didn't think he ought to charge us."

Channel 3's Brakefield said he has received only minimal pressure so far. He mentioned receiving "three or four" letters from pastors who "have heard from Reverend Dean."

Asked if he believes "The Johnny Majors Show" has greater public interest than the televised worship service, Brakefield responded, "That's not a fair question. What I'm trying to do is serve all aspects and facets of our audience here and to do the best I know how to do in serving the interest. "The Johnny Majors Show" had been on the air for many years and the university is a state university and has a big following down here."

Asked if it might be possible to reschedule the show at another time, Brakefield said, "If it was (possible), it would be aired at another time."

Dean said he feels Channel 3 is "pushing this church around." He sees it as a \$600,000 stewardship effort lying idle.

"The reason I'm involved," Dean said, "is that it's an issue for every pastor because we all work with people who are hospitalized, who are in prisons, who are aged, who are confined to their homes and they rely on television for some of their religious needs. They are deprived of the opportunity to participate in a worship service. So it's a community issue; not just a First Baptist Church issue."

2nd Highest Month Puts Basic Cooperative Program Over Top

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists recorded the second highest month in the history of the denomination's Cooperative Program unified budget and exceeded the 1978-79 national basic operating and capital needs budgets.

But the denomination made only a relatively small dent in the challenge portion of the budget for Bold Mission Thrust, the SBC effort to proclaim the message of Christ to the entire world by the year 2000.

The national Cooperative Program figure for September, the final month in the fiscal year, totaled \$5,845,075, to push the final figure for undesignated giving to national causes to a record \$64,165,480. That exceeds the \$62 million basic operating budget for SBC missions efforts and the \$2 million capital needs budget, and represents an 11.75 percent increase over \$57,418,384 contributed last year.

But it made only a dent of \$165,480 in the \$11 million Bold Mission Thrust challenge portion of the budget for contributions above the \$64 million earmarked for basic operating and capital needs. The overage, according to SBC vote, will be divided as follows: 54 percent to the Foreign Mission Board, 30 percent to the Home Mission Board, nine percent to the Radio and Television Commission, six percent apportioned among the six theological seminaries, and one percent to the Brotherhood Commission.

Total giving in 1978-79 amounted to a record \$119,076,383, a 13.05 percent hike over the previous year. The total giving includes the Cooperative Program figure of \$64,165,479 and another \$54,910,904 in designated gifts. The latter figure is 14.61 percent ahead of the previous year.

"We rejoice in God's blessings upon the work of Southern Baptists and that we have exceeded the basic operating and capital needs portions of the 1978-79 budget," said Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, which disburses the funds.

"But," he added, "I am anxious that Southern Baptists will take the next step in mission giving in 1979-80 to achieve the total budget goal, including the Bold Mission Thrust challenge portion."

With the 1978-79 fiscal year complete, Southern Baptists will seek to reach \$83 million in Cooperative Program funds in 1979-80. That includes \$68,500,000 in basic operating needs, \$2,500,000 in capital needs and \$12,000,000 in Bold Mission Thrust challenge funds.

As a general rule the Cooperative Program portion of the total giving represents about one-third of the amount local Southern Baptist churches contribute through state Baptist conventions. Some 35,400 churches send eight to ten percent of their contributions to state convention offices.

-more-

Bennett expressed "appreciation to churches and state conventions for their commitment to world missions, especially to those which have been able to increase their contributions in this time of Bold Mission Thrust needs."

The \$5,845,075 given in September amounts to a 16.57 percent increase over the amount given in the same month in 1978. It is second only to the all-time record month of \$6,002,367 given in January 1979. Total giving in September amounted to \$6,846,464, an 18.27 percent jump over September 1978. That amount includes \$1,001,389 in designated contributions, a 29.22 percent increase over last September.