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-- FEATURES

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Deevers Makes Difference In Foreign Dental Ministry

By Jim Newton

BOUAKE, Ivory Coast (BP)--Charles Deevers used to make more money in one day as a dentist in Jackson, Miss., than he makes now in an entire month as a missionary dentist in Africa. But he and his wife Dianne feel strongly they've never been as happy.

"You talk about money, we used to really have it," exclaimed Dianne Deevers in her deep-South accent as she drove down the dusty roads of Bouake, a city of 365,000 in the heart of Ivory Coast, West Africa. "But we weren't nearly as happy then as we are now, because now we're right in the center of God's will."

Mrs. Deevers had felt God was calling her to missions when she was only nine years old, but her husband had never felt that sense of calling. About eight years ago, she prayed that if God still wanted her to be a missionary that Charles would also experience a call to missions.

A few days later, he came in from his dental practice and said he had called the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to ask if they needed dentists on the mission field. "I hadn't shared it with you yet, but I feel that the Lord is calling me into missions," he told Dianne.

"The question that arose in my mind," recalled Deevers, "was, 'What difference would one less dentist make in Jackson, Miss.?' versus the second part of the question, 'What difference could one more dentist make in the Ivory Coast, a country with more than seven million people and only seven or eight dentists all the time?'"

In Bouake, the Deevers seem to be making a lot of difference, not only in the physical treatment of dental patients, but in their spiritual care as well.

Although he is reluctant to claim credit for it, Deevers estimates that at least half of 60 to 80 Africans who attend worship services at the mission church in Bouake have come as a direct result of the ministry of the dental clinic he directs.

On a typical day, the dental clinic will provide treatment for at least 60 patients. By comparison, one dentist in the United States with a staff of several dental assistants and one hygienist would probably consider 20 patients in one day a heavy case load, Deevers says.

The key to his ability to treat large patient loads is the special design of the clinic he built in 1978, and the work of seven African dental assistants he has trained.

The dental assistants, all of them Christians, are trained to give injections, take X-rays, do extractions, make simple diagnoses, and make impressions for partial dentures. Deevers does the more advanced dental work, such as root canals, dental surgery and fillings.

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To qualify for the position, each of the dental assistants must be an evangelical Christian who knows how to share his faith.

Deevers feels strongly that the Lord has sent each one of the dental assistants to him, pointing out that the seven assistants can speak most of the major tribal languages of the area.

The dental treatment, Deevers stressed, is not an end in itself, but a means to proclaim the gospel. "Our first goal is to reach people for Christ, to witness to people, and then to use dentistry as a means of communicating with the people," he said.

When the patients arrive at the clinic, they hear a message by missionary Dan Routledge, the field evangelist who lives in Bouake. Routledge preaches in French, explaining who Jesus is and why the Baptist mission is providing dental care for the people.

The message is also translated into at least two tribal languages.

The dental staff begins seeing patients only after they have had their own private devotion period, sometimes coupled with a dental training session taught by Deevers.

Mrs. Deevers is into a hospital ministry where she offers Bibles, tracts, books, and cassette tapes to those who respond in the wards.

Numerous patients have become Christians as a result.

One woman told her, "Before you came in here, I didn't know who God was, and my heart was dark and black inside; but now that I have prayed to receive Jesus, it feels like a light has been turned on inside me."

The experiences they have had have brought so much joy and happiness that the Deevers hope and pray that more Christian dentists will give up their practice in the United States and volunteer for missionary service.

"There is a tremendous need," said Deevers. "In the Ivory Coast alone, we could easily use 50 more dentists. Every country in West Africa needs more dentists."

Deevers is convinced that dentists can really make a difference. And his unique dental ministry proves that point.

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

Adapted from the September issue of World Mission Journal.

Old Telephone Number
Creates New Headache

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--An old telephone number for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, which appeared in a new catalog, has created a large headache for a Nashville construction company telephone operator.

Caroline Melbo, operator for the Hardaway Construction Company, has been receiving up to 500 calls each week since the 1980-81 Church Materials Catalog was mailed in June to 82,000 churches and individuals.

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The catalog lists church literature and Convention Press items and the old board main number appears in the book on a letterhead of a personal letter from a board executive. The board has not used the old number since April 1976.

"Every long distance operator in the United States knows I've been giving out your number to callers," Melbo said good-naturedly. "People become irate when I can't fill their orders, and they won't listen to me when I tell them we're a construction firm."

The company began receiving calls for the board about one and one-half years ago, even though the number had not been used for any other telephone company customer for more than two years.

With the distribution of the catalog to customers in the United States and overseas, Melbo began to get calls from "all over the world."

The Sunday School Board—and Caroline Melbo—want everyone to know the board's main number is (615) 251-2000. Literature orders should be called to (615) 251-2633. Baptist Book Store items should be ordered from regional mail order centers.

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Extension Centers Show
Continued Growth Trend

Baptist Press
8/22/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--To mountain pastors in North Carolina, sailors on a ship in Guantanamo Bay, French Haitians in New York and Hispanics in California, the records established this year for seminary extension centers have a personal significance.

Those are just a few of the 390 centers in 42 states and two foreign countries that served an estimated 9,000 students during the year ending July 31. The number of centers has increased annually for the past seven years. Almost 2,000 other persons are enrolled with the Seminary Extension Home Study Institute.

Leaders of the Southern Baptist Seminary Extension Department feel they know why an increasing number of associations are establishing such ministry training centers.

"These centers are helping Southern Baptists at the associational level to move toward their Bold Mission goals," says SED Director Raymond M. Rigdon. "More pastors and lay ministers trained in biblical and other ministry-related subjects means more effective churches."

Rio Grande Valley Association, in Weslaco, Texas, where Robert E. Smith is director of missions, has been using seminary extension as a part of its basic strategy. Smith invests one day per week in teaching Seminary Extension's college-level courses to Anglo, black and Hispanic mission leaders. He has had as many as 70 persons enrolled at a time.

First Baptist Church, Moab, Utah, is a member of an association that consists of only four churches. They began a Seminary Extension center last year with three young men committed to ministry, studying "Principles of Preaching."

James L. Ryan, SED's associate director for extension center education, sees some additional factors involved in the growth.

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"A Seminary Extension center is a grassroots program from beginning to end, yet with a quality of study materials that could not be produced locally," Ryan says. "People from within the association decide which of our 60 courses to offer and enlist someone from the area to teach. They can be totally responsive to the needs for training in their area."

"Many of the students in our centers already are involved in ministry when they enroll with us," Ryan notes. "Study through an extension center allows them to continue that ministry while they learn—and apply what they learn the very next Sunday."

The Seminary Extension Department is housed in the Southern Baptist Convention building in Nashville but is jointly sponsored by all six Southern Baptist seminaries. Seminary professors write all of the courses, and the six presidents make up the administrative committee which oversees the work of the department.

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House Panel Continues
School Prayer Hearings

By Larry Chesser

Baptist Press
8/22/80

WASHINGTON (BP)--Most witnesses at a second House subcommittee hearing on the controversial Helms proposal to deny federal courts jurisdiction in school prayer cases opposed the amendment.

The number of supporting witnesses declined when Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., author of the Senate-passed amendment, cancelled his appearance due to a "conflict." The hearings' last witness told the panel she had changed her mind about supporting the legislation after sitting through earlier hearings.

Rita Warren, president of Christian Civil Liberties Union Inc., told the Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice that the Helms amendment was not needed and the Constitution should be left as it is.

Warren pointed out that had the Helms amendment been in effect, it would not have allowed a federal court to rule a Massachusetts law permitting a minute of silence for meditation and prayer constitutional.

Grace Balsinger, immediate past president of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA), told the panel that the Helms amendment is "misleading" because "it attempts to make one think the Supreme Court is against prayer." She pointed to a PTA resolution calling for teaching "about" religion in public schools.

Rabbi Daniel F. Polish, associate executive vice president of the Synagogue Council of America, said prayers in school would be either sectarian or non-denominational in nature. He argued that sectarian prayers would doubtless be "in direct conflict" with the religious traditions of some, and that non-denominational prayers "trivialize the nature of prayer."

A three-member Protestant panel challenged the Helms amendment, arguing that voluntary prayer was not banned by the 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions on school prayer. "There is no reason for Congress to enact a law that would 'permit' prayer in schools, for it is presently possible for voluntary prayer to occur," said Jack Corbett, director of church/government relations for the United Methodist Church.

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John R. Houck, general secretary of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., agreed, adding that the "nurture of religious faith belongs in the home and in the church, not in the public schools."

Edward A. Dowey Jr., of Princeton Theological Seminary and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., challenged proponents' arguments that prayer in schools positively affects morality. He pointed to the Republic of South Africa "where both prayer and religious instruction in school are the bulwark in fact for a religious defense of apartheid—separation of the races—a cruel doctrine demanding the perpetual subservience of the black and colored people to minority whites."

A Jewish secular panel representing the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and B'nai B'rith women concluded the first day's session arguing against the amendment.

Lawrence Sager of New York University Law School, testifying on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, called the Helm proposal "unconstitutional" and "ill-advised."

"Where Congress sets out to do that which the Constitution forbids, the clothing of its action in the guise of jurisdictional limitation cannot serve as a means of avoiding the pertinent constitutional restrictions," Sager said.

Daniel J. O'Connor, chairman of the American Legion's Americanism Commission, argued for the Helms proposal on the basis of states' rights.

"On this issue it is the states and not the federal government that should exercise proper jurisdictional authority," O'Connor said.

The value of prayer in school, O'Connor said, is not that it alone will "reverse objectionable trends in our society," but that it will "encourage greater receptiveness to our collective spiritual and moral heritage."

William O'Reilly, executive director of the Maryland Federation of Catholic Laity, told the committee that "the best way to protect the rights of everyone on this sensitive issue is to let the matter be decided at the local level."

Another Helms amendment proponent, Martha Rountree, president of Leadership Foundation, protested the lateness in the legislative session for holding the school prayer hearings. She feared there would not be enough time after the committee deliberations to get the bill to the floor for a vote before adjournment.

A subcommittee spokesman said, however, "a subcommittee can act very quickly on legislation if it chooses."

For the Helms amendment to reach the floor, other than by discharge petition, the subcommittee and the full judiciary committee would have to act fast and favorably.

"I don't think the witnesses in support of the Helms amendment have persuaded many members of the subcommittee," the subcommittee source said.

Subcommittee Chairman Robert W. Kastenmeier, D-Wis., plans to hold a fifth day of hearings in early September involving members of Congress. Among possible witnesses are Rep. Stephen L. Neal, D-N.C., sponsor of a resolution expressing the sense of Congress that the Constitution does not preclude periods of silence in school and Rep. Robert F. Drinan, D-Mass., a Catholic priest who will retire at the end of the 96th Congress following a request by the pope that priests not seek public office.