



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

-- FEATURES

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Former Radio Announcer
Trains Christian Witnesses

By Erich Bridges

SPANISH FORT, Ala. (BP)—"During my first 19 years as a Christian, I never saw one person come to Christ through a word I had shared."

Those sad words come from Bo Mitchell, an Alabama native and Southern Baptist layman. Like many, Mitchell found it very hard to share his faith verbally with friends and acquaintances who were not Christians.

During the last few years, however, a remarkable series of events has revolutionized the lives of Mitchell and his wife Mickie.

In early 1976 Mitchell, 56, a longtime radio announcer (for many years the "voice" of the Florida State University Seminole football team), attended a lay evangelism school at West Bradenton Baptist Church in Bradenton, Fla.

After studying witnessing skills, school participants fanned out over Bradenton to share their testimonies. To his utter amazement, Mitchell led a fellow church member to Christ during the first visitation evening.

"I couldn't believe it," Mitchell remembers. "This person had been in my Sunday School class for two years."

Sometime later Mitchell accompanied a group of Florida Baptist men to Colombia, South America, where they taught witness training sessions in Baptist churches.

In 1977 he led several lay evangelism schools in Florida churches. During that time the Mitchells steadily increased their own personal witnessing.

By early 1978 the Mitchells were so excited about their newfound "hobby" that they had lost all interest in radio broadcasting. They sold their share in several radio stations and contacted Florida Baptist Convention Director of Evangelism Jim Ponder about full-time service opportunities.

Ponder invited Mitchell to join him as a special lay staff member in the area of witness training. Mitchell accepted and was assigned to Ponder's office through Mission Service Corps, the Southern Baptist program designed to place 5,000 full-time volunteers on home and foreign fields for one or two years.

That was October of 1978. In the two years since, the Mitchells have led numerous lay evangelism schools and seminars all over Florida, as well as in South Korea during preparation for the major city crusades held there last summer by Florida Baptists and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

This fall the couple moved to Alabama and expanded their training ministry to a national scale. Still Mission Service Corps volunteers, the Mitchells now teach lay evangelism schools and TELL Witness Training seminars all over the country under the auspices of the SBC Home Mission Board in Atlanta.

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Mitchell defines witnessing as "sharing Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God." Further, "it is not an option or a gift"; it is a commission from Christ to all Christians.

Most Christians don't witness, Mitchell contends, because they don't know how, or aren't empowered by the Holy Spirit, or both.

"People who say 'I can't witness' are telling the truth," he says. "The Lord must do it through us. If we only know the mechanics of witnessing, we won't have the power. On the other hand, if we don't know how to tell a person in simple language what Jesus has done for us, we won't witness at all."

Working closely with local pastors, the Mitchells lead lay evangelism school participants in learning basic witnessing skills and then applying them in the community. The average school consists of three evening sessions in church followed by an evening of visitation and witnessing.

"The greatest thrill in life is looking into somebody's eyes at the moment he or she understands who Jesus is," says Mitchell. "And if Christ is to prevail, if we are to make a mark on this generation, then we lay people have got to step out and witness, boldly. Pastors and church workers can't possibly do it alone."

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Home Missions Magazine
Adopt's MissionsUSA Name

Baptist Press
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ATLANTA (BP)--The chronicle of Southern Baptist missions in America is changing names. Beginning with its January/February 1981 issue, MissionsUSA will be the new name for Home Missions, magazine of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The change comes on the heels of one of the magazine's highest honors. The Ragan Report, a weekly survey of ideas and methods for communication executives, cited the magazine as one of "Arnold's Admirables," named for columnist Edmund Arnold.

"Yours is one of the 10 publications (in the United States) selected for their excellence in typography, . . . design, content and writing," publisher Lawrence Ragan told MissionsUSA Editor Walker Knight.

The publication's name change has been needed for several years, Knight said, "First, we want to avoid confusion with Home Life, a magazine published by the Baptist Sunday School Board. Second, we want to convey more accurately the intent of the Home Mission Board's periodical, to cover the full range of missions and ministry in the United States and her territories."

"We promise to continue in MissionsUSA the tradition of Home Missions: to present the undiluted, honest world of home missions, from denominational staffers to missionaries in the most remote and difficult assignments," Knight said.

The magazine will continue to assist Home Mission Board programs and to present topics which "will blend in a mixture we'll try to keep varied and lively, entertaining and provocative." Length of some articles will be shortened, but the magazine will maintain its emphasis on photography.

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Luther Rice Regents
 End Merger Discussion

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)—Merger talks between Luther Rice Seminary and Criswell Center for Biblical Studies officially were ended by regents of the Jacksonville-based Luther Rice at their Dec. 4 meeting.

Nine of the 11 regents approved a report of a special three-man committee that merger discussions with the Dallas-based Bible school be terminated, but that "good will and respect" continue between the two schools.

Paige Patterson, who is both a regent of the Jacksonville school and president of the Dallas college, was not present for the meeting, nor did he cast a vote, according to Luther Rice president Robert Witty.

"He did telephone, and while he was physically absent, he did know of our action," Witty said.

The possibility of merger was initiated by Witty in May of 1980, and under the proposal Patterson would have become president of the merged schools.

When asked why merger discussions were terminated, Witty said: "The regents considered the reasons for the terminations of the talks to be totally internal to Luther Rice Seminary."

He added the school, which has 250 resident students and "about 4,000" external, or correspondence students, currently is seeking graduate and undergraduate accreditation "of both the external and internal systems."

Witty said: "The regents believe stabilization of all procedures under the present leadership is vital to attainment of our academic objective: accreditation."

The school, which has been criticized publicly as a "degree mill," is seeking accreditation through the American Association of Bible Colleges, and is planning to apply to the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and in Canada in 1982, Witty said.

Witty added the merger discussions were "blown out of proportion. It has been a friendly discussion. We have never done anything more than just talk."

In their official statement, released through Edgar Cooper, editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, journal of the Florida Baptist Convention, the regents also "expressed concern and disapproval for the totally unauthorized and inaccurate statement reportedly made...by Dr. Michael Warr."

Warr, a teacher at the school and editor of The Pioneer, its quarterly publication, reportedly told a Jacksonville newspaper, "Patterson was too much of a controversial figure for us," Witty said.

Witty, who said regents took no other action against Warr, a former Georgia pastor, added Luther Rice "has a written public statement which we have published repeatedly that no Luther Rice employee ever makes any negative statements concerning any Southern Baptist agency, institution or personality."

Patterson has been involved in political activities within the 13.6 million-member denomination, reportedly to control denominational institutions to enforce a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

Witty, 74, said: "We here at Luther Rice are not politically minded so we have never entered into any problems about the SBC. Our only desire is to serve Southern Baptist education."

He also responded to questions from Baptist Press, about published remarks by Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main Baptist Church of Houston, who is a leader in a group countering Patterson's political efforts.

Chafin said attacks on the integrity and doctrine of Southern Baptist institutions—particularly the six seminaries—are motivated by an effort to help three non-Southern Baptist-affiliated schools: Criswell center, Luther Rice and Mid-America Seminary in Memphis, Tenn.

"I would say this is contrary to the fact," Witty said. "I do not know where he got his information, but as far as Luther Rice Seminary is concerned, it is inaccurate."

He added: "Frankly, I believe all of us lose if any one's integrity is destroyed. We as Southern Baptists are viewed as a denominational unity and loss of respect for one is loss of respect for all. We do not feel we would gain by discrediting any Southern Baptist organization."

He would not comment on whether he believes Southern Baptist seminaries are "riddled with liberalism," as Patterson and Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge, have charged.

"We have made no investigation of any kind concerning the doctrinal stance of any other institution. All we are trying to do is keep Luther Rice in line...what anybody else does is between them and God."

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Board To Produce Laotian,
Vietnamese Class Materials

Baptist Press
12/5/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)-- The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board will release in late 1981 the first Sunday School materials in the Vietnamese and Laotian languages.

Six Laotian and Vietnamese Southern Baptists and officials from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Sunday School Board held a three-day meeting in Nashville to review proposals and finalize plans for 14 sessions of Sunday School materials in each language.

The materials will be published for the approximately 120,000 Laotians and 250,000 Vietnamese living in the United States.

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"This is a historic occasion in Southern Baptist life because we are acknowledging that America is not a melting pot but a nation of people who speak 86 languages," said Oscar Romo, director of the Home Mission Board language missions division.

Romo said studies of Baptist work among language groups have shown that three factors generally influence success or failure: availability of leaders from the language group; ability of Southern Baptists to penetrate the group with a gospel having a sound theological base; and the availability of Christian material in that language.

"I frankly am astonished that we have done as well as we have with no materials to work with," said Romo. Southern Baptist congregations worship in 77 languages.

Bob Fulbright, director of the Sunday School Board Bible teaching division, said the selection of Laotian and Vietnamese was made following surveys of Home Mission Board and state Baptist convention language missions workers.

Fulbright said Korean will be the next language in which materials will be developed but no target date has been set for their release. The Sunday School Board has been producing materials in Spanish for about three years.

The three persons who will be writing Vietnamese materials are Ha Xuan Nguyen, Dallas, Texas; Phan Than Binh, El Cajon, Calif., and Hanh Thi Nguyen, Seattle, Wash.

Those writing the Laotian materials will be Joshua Vang, Decatur, Ga., Inta Inthavong, Whittier, Calif., and Mike Phrasavaph, Whittier, Calif.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story mailed 12/3/80 entitled "Banner Year Projected For Southern Baptists," substitute for last paragraph:

Roy Edgemon, secretary of the board's church training department, said, "I am thankful to God that church training is experiencing significant growth. Equipping Centers, Ephesians 4 Conferences and the dedication of state church training leaders and pastors all contributed to the increase."

Thanks,

Baptist Press