



BAPTIST PRESS

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April 3, 1981

81-57

Women Ministers
Find Happiness

By Tom Miller

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Two Richmond women—Anne P. Rosser and Janet Garrison—are finding happiness and fulfillment in the pastorate.

While ordination of women is not approved by the majority of Southern Baptists, the storm of protest which at first accompanied ordination has quickly given way to respect for local church autonomy.

Two Richmond congregations have exercised that autonomy. Rosser, along with her husband, Aubrey J. "Buddy" Rosser, is copastor of Bainbridge-Southampton Baptist Church, and Garrison is associate pastor-interim pastor of Chamberlayne Baptist Church.

Rosser's call to full-time Christian service was acknowledged when she was a child. After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Westhampton College, she married Buddy and interpreted her call as being the wife of a pastor.

She helped put her husband through seminary and for 22 years was a wife and mother. Then, in 1973, with the support of her husband, then pastor of Monument Heights Baptist Church in Richmond, she applied for admission to Union Seminary in Richmond.

Four years later she completed the prescribed course and received the doctor of ministry degree.

She was ordained—not without opposition—at Monument Heights Baptist Church June 4, 1978. For more than a year the Rossers prayed and worked and waited before accepting a call to Bainbridge-Southampton church, a marriage of Bainbridge Street in a deteriorating neighborhood and Southampton, a suburban church staggered by white flight.

The church had demonstrated a willingness to try new things and had a minimum of prejudice against women preachers: in 1972, Marjorie Bailey, chaplain at the Virginia prison, was ordained by Bainbridge Street.

By calling copastors, the church in two locations is able to schedule both morning worship services at the traditional 11 a.m. hour. The Rossers usually preach on the same theme and scripture but have learned each had to do his and her own preparation. Neither is "senior" pastor and Rosser praises her husband. "He is very, very special. He is his person and I am mine. It took a big person to do what he did. We don't always agree, but we always work through disagreements until we are both satisfied."

Rosser, who evidences a strong biblical orientation, said: "So much of what we've been taught about the church and about women is unscriptural. We've adopted cultural mores and baptized them with scripture. Many who call themselves inerrantists, aren't. In sermons

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they interpret scripture through culture rather than letting scripture evaluate their culture."

Garrison, a 27-year-old graduate of Meredith College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was already on the staff of Chamberlayne Baptist Church as a pastoral intern when William R. Smith resigned last June. The church, which had ordained her March 30, 1980, asked her to assume full pastoral responsibilities.

Although she felt called of God, as a seminarian Garrison did not have the pastoral ministry as her goal. "Frankly," she says, "I had...a problem with women being pastors."

A turning point was a seminary course on women in Christian history. "It opened my mind to greater possibilities," she said.

Her job seeking failed so Garrison "went home" for counsel. Home is Chamberlayne church where she grew up and experienced God's call.

"I didn't come to Chamberlayne looking for a job," she said. "But as I talked with Bill Smith it was he who suggested a possible staff position."

She was quickly integrated into pastoral roles through the initiative of the senior minister. Smith's move to Florida in mid-summer thrust her suddenly into all the preaching, administrative and ministry responsibilities.

"Fulfillment in a pastoral role became a growing thing," she said. "Women have not been given the opportunity. It simply was not an available option."

"The people have seen me and related to me as pastor. They placed me in that role and it helped me to grow," she says.

Church attendance is up, and since assuming her duties, Garrison has preached twice each Sunday, conducted Wednesday prayer services, performed marriages, conducted funerals and baptized 20 persons, nine of them in one service.

"The congregation has taken the attitude of 'Let's not wait on a new pastor to do what needs to be done,'" she says. "And as long as I am here, I'm going to assume the role as pastor and move forward."

She pointedly says, "I don't try to be anyone else. I can't imitate Bill Smith. The power of God's spirit allows us to be total people. We are called to celebrate what we are, not try to be what we aren't. I am a woman and it doesn't get in my way. I am not called to lose my femininity."

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(Miller is associate editor of The Religious Herald, journal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.)

(BP) photos mailed to Baptist state newspapers by The Religious Herald.

March Cooperative Program
Receipts Reflect Increase

Baptist Press
4/3/81

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--March contributions through the national Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program reflected a 14.02 percent increase over March 1980.

The increase follows a decline of 4.4 percent in February contributions through the method Southern Baptists use to finance the work of missions, education and evangelism.

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During March, contributions amounted to \$16,885,176, of which \$6,534,207 was undesignated and \$10,350,968 was designated, primarily to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.

For the year, contributions are up 13.02 percent. Total contributions are \$86,588,593, of which \$40,989,875 are undesignated and \$45,598,718 are designated, primarily to the two special offerings.

For the month, total offerings are up 14.02 percent; undesignated are up 11.28 percent and designated gained 15.82 percent. For the year, total offerings are up 13.02 percent; undesignated 13.64 percent and designated 12.47 percent.

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Fire Destroys Office
Of Fresno Association

Baptist Press
4/3/81

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--The offices of Mid-Valley Southern Baptist Association were destroyed March 29 in a fire set by arsonists.

Two buildings in the three-structure complex were gutted but the third received only smoke damage.

Fire officials said a flammable fuel was spread in all three buildings, but apparently the arsonists did not have time to torch the third building.

Jack Duke, association missionary, said all office equipment was destroyed, but most of the files, including financial records, are readable, even though water soaked.

Ron Climer, youth and family intern and chaplain of Fresno County's Juvenile Hall, whose office also was located in the building, lost school reference books accumulated during the past 10 semesters, but was able to salvage most of the research he has done during the past five years on his masters' thesis.

Duke also lost his personal library which included books inherited from his father.

Neither Climer's nor Duke's personal books were insured.

Both Duke and Climer will work out of their homes until temporary offices can be obtained.

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Changing Area Pastor
'Like a Sub Captain'

Baptist Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Being the pastor of a church in a racially changing and economically depressed area is like being the captain of a disabled submarine, the pastor of an inner city church says.

Joe Priest Williams, pastor of Baptist Tabernacle in Louisville, Ky., made the analogy as he spoke to a conference for churches in racially changing communities, sponsored by the department of black church relationships of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"Being the pastor of such a church is much like being the captain of a disabled submarine that cruises just below the surface, unable to make it to the top," Williams said.

To counter that, Williams called for an organization of "ghetto prophets" and "ghetto

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theologians" which could help pastors of churches in the transitional areas learn from each other and share common problems and solutions.

Such help is needed, he said, and asked, "Who has the energy for (prophetic) preaching after six days in the midst of broken people every week?"

"The ghetto theologian can have the best of opportunities in the worst of situations," he said.

Another speaker, Baxter Phillips, pastor of 79th Street Baptist Church in Miami, told the black and white participants they need to face the psychology and economics of change, adding attitudes and money matters are both obstacles that must be overcome if churches in changing communities are to succeed.

Relating the psychological experience of his congregation, he reported the 79th Street church's attitude "changed from isolation to acceptance" and the "transition of our community impressed on each of us (white members of the congregation) that Negroes were human, too... and that they had spiritual needs," he said.

Some members of the church threatened to leave if blacks were allowed to join, and others threatened to leave if they were not, but the church finally "applied the teachings of Jesus" which developed a "sweet, sweet spirit" among the members, he said.

"Blacks brought the ability to struggle to the membership," he said, explaining the congregation learned to better utilize all its resources. As a result of this shared coping and commitment not to let money become the "focal point" of the church's ministry, the church has been able to focus on spiritual matters, he said.

Emmanuel McCall, director of the HMB black church relations department, reminded participants that no matter how difficult their tasks, "God's grace is sufficient" for their needs.

Despite the notion that the "Christian experience is one of flowery ease," a presence of evil in the world is "attempting to undo what God has done for his people," warned McCall, whose department sponsored the conference.

"The way of the cross is the way of difficulty," he said, asking, "But who told us it was going to be different than that?"

McCall told participants God has promised to give them enough grace to deal with their needs.

"He does not give us more than we can handle at one time, just enough for the situation at hand," McCall said. "And just when that's about to run out, he sends some more."

Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union, also addressed the group, urging black and white Baptists to join together to achieve the goals of Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust effort to proclaim the gospel to every person in the world by the year 2000.

"We need to be reminded that Bold Mission Thrust is impossible without the cooperative efforts of all Baptists of all colors in all communities," Weatherford said.

She said Baptists can either face openly or ignore their differences, hostilities and fears of change, but added: "Let us not tolerate the spirit that if we ignore it (the problem), it will go away."

She urged Baptists to face the challenge of the future and call on "Christ's mighty energy at work in us, for it is that energy that will bring to conclusion the bold goals of Bold Mission Thrust."

Integration Not Possible,
Baptist Conference Told

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--There is no such thing as an "integrated community," a Methodist expert on racial change told a Baptist leadership meeting.

James H. Davis, assistant general secretary for congregational development of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, said there are no integrated communities, only communities in racial transition.

Davis addressed the national leadership conference for churches in racially changing communities, sponsored by the black church relations department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

The statement, he said, applies not only to communities, but to churches, adding there are very few integrated churches in America, only transitional churches.

"Time after time, a pastor has told us his community and his church were exceptions, but when we would go back several years later, we found the pastor was gone and the community had changed," Davis said.

Speaking to more than 200 white and black Southern Baptist leaders of churches in transitional communities on "The Dilemmas of Racial Transition," Davis pointed out whites and blacks look at racial transition from opposite perspectives. "The transitional community is a problem for whites, but an opportunity for blacks," he said.

The dilemma is compounded, however, because "nowhere in America is prejudice, bigotry and racism more evident than in communities in racial transition," he said.

Davis charged America has its own form of "apartheid" similar to the policy of racial separation in South Africa, except "here we do it by social convention and informal customs, rather than by law and force of arms, . . . and have places which are defined as 'white areas' or 'black areas.'"

The history of race relations in America is not a slow, steady process, he charged, but is "a series of freedoms given and then taken back," he said.

Battles won in the "war on poverty" were wiped out during the Nixon years and are being completely obliterated by the Reagan administration budget cuts, he said.

"Give a freedom; take it back. That's the pattern of so-called racial progress in this country," Davis charged. "Maybe white people grant two freedoms and take only one back, so on balance there may be progress in the long run."

Davis told pastors of churches in racially changing neighborhoods not to worry about their churches dying. "Out of the death of a white church can come either a transitional church or a new black church," Davis said. "Either of these is a new church to be celebrated, and that doesn't mean that a church died."

"To a Christian, that's not death, that's resurrection and new life for the future," he proclaimed. "One of the tasks for the church in the transitional community is to prepare for the new church."