



BAPTIST PRESS

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May 21, 1981

81-82

Plaque Marks Foundation
At WMU 93rd Anniversary

By Catherine Allen

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention of 1888 had taxed the First Baptist Church of Richmond. The messengers, all male, nervously debated whether women should be allowed to organize a missionary support group.

Meanwhile, more than 100 women convened one block up the hill at Broad Street Methodist Church. There, in the Methodist social hall on May 14, Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention was formed.

Exactly 93 years later, WMU leaders from 11 states returned to the historic site to thank the Methodists for their hospitality.

May 14, 1981, WMU officials joined with two Methodist bishops to dedicate a plaque marking the site of Broad Street Methodist Church. The church now is located in suburban Richmond under the name of River Road United Methodist Church.

Fred Forberg, a trustee of the church, led in the placement of the marker. He assured Baptists that the Methodists would not let the site of WMU's birth be forgotten, though Broad Street Methodist Church was demolished in 1963 to build a parking lot. He returned to WMU a plaque which the women had placed in the old church in 1938, during 50th anniversary celebrations.

Joining with Forberg were Robert M. Blackburn, bishop of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church; Carl J. Sanders, former pastor of the Broad Street church and former bishop of the Alabama conference; and William E. Knight, present pastor of River Road Baptist Church.

Baptists speaking during the public ceremonies were Mrs. A. Harrison Gregory, president of WMU-SBC; Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of WMU; Mrs. George B. Clarke, president of Virginia WMU; and R. Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC.

The WMU audience adjourned to the First Baptist Church which this time welcomed the women with red carpet treatment. With birthday cake, candles and tributes, 225 guests celebrated 93 years of WMU's history.

Wendell Belew, director of the missions ministry division of the Home Mission Board, said, "Often WMU's voice is the only voice that cries out in the church that the good news is for all the world. You have helped keep the churches on target."

Belew praised the innovations of Annie Armstrong, the founding secretary of WMU. "She was a practitioner of missions," he said. "She invented kinds of ministries we thought we just invented recently."

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Harold Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, recalled his experiences with WMU as a pastor, husband, denominational worker, and as a child—when he was a member of WMU's former Sunbeam Band. "We have been laborers together with God," he said, quoting WMU's watchword.

Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board, thanked WMU for more than \$500 million which the women have raised through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions. But he said that missions education done by WMU is of greater value than money. "Prayer is even greater. But greatest of all is the love that you have given to Jesus Christ and to the lost people of this world," he said.

Carolyn Weatherford gave a 1981 update of a paper presented to the women of 1888, "The Special Obligation of Women to Spread the Gospel." "The 10 reasons for which we organized still exist," she said. She cited the biblical examples of women who worked with Jesus and with the early church in proclamation of the gospel and the needs of missions and the capabilities of women.

"These same factors make us eager to organize WMU in the 11,000 churches which do not have a missions organization," she said.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Woman's Missionary Union.

Southern Students
Organize for 'Power'

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Press
5/21/81

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary are organizing a power block which they hope will wield major influence on the upcoming proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention in Los Angeles.

The power, however, concerns prayer, not politics.

At a recent chapel service, a student organization issued a challenge to the student body to join in a "Seminarians United in Prayer" movement. Students were asked to participate in a "bold and fervent vigil of prayer" by committing themselves to pray at specific times during meetings of the Pastors' Conference (June 7-8) and the Southern Baptist Convention (June 9-11).

Within a few hours of the announcement, 48 one-hour time slots representing the five-day sessions had been filled with students' signatures.

"We are aware of how volatile the situation in our denomination is, and we feel it is a matter of urgency and responsibility that we place the convention sessions before the reconciling power of God," explained Charles Johnson of Mississippi, chairman of the M.Div. Student Council which issued the prayer appeal.

"We believe our prayer concern is the most creative contribution we can make to these important meetings," added Dale Peterson of Virginia, another member of the council. Peterson said the other five SBC seminaries have been invited to conduct similar prayer vigils on their respective campuses.

The council statement expressed concern for "the potential for polarization as Southern Baptists attack each other in the printed page and in the pulpit" and called on students to pray for "the election of positive leadership within the convention."

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Students were challenged "to pray that all factions within the convention will seek the reconciling love of Jesus Christ as the basis of our unity in spite of genuine differences among us that we may courageously proclaim him in word and deed through Bold Mission Thrust."

The M.Div. Student Council represents students in the seminary's school of theology who are preparing for the pastorate and other areas of ministry in Southern Baptist life.

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Lebanon Missionaries Find
War Part of Everyday Life

By Susan Cahen

Baptist Press
5/21/81

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--Jet planes whistling overhead and the booming answer of anti-aircraft guns in the neighborhood interrupt children's games on the playground of Beirut Baptist School.

The children, happy at play one minute, run crying the next to their teacher, who also trembles.

No one is hurt and the gunfire offers no immediate threat. But continuing violence is part of the daily scenario of fighting between Christian and Muslim factions in Lebanon and part of the everyday life of Southern Baptist missionaries who are stationed there.

Missionary David King, in describing the situation, says lifestyles in this atmosphere must be flexible. Schools close for several days, then reopen when there is a lull in fighting. Missionaries take their children to school by circuitous routes to avoid danger areas.

They sometimes cancel nighttime evangelistic meetings, knowing believers might attend but those they are trying to reach will not.

Although all Southern Baptist missionaries in Lebanon work in the capital city of Beirut, they live in both the western Muslim sector and the Christian sector, east of the Green Line, the recognized line of demarcation between the two factions.

King says: "The Green Line shows up black at night--a very dark swath right across Beirut from north to south--because the electricity is all shot out in that area."

"It is deserted except for the fighters and a few hardy souls who have good stocks of food and good strong basement shelters," he says.

Missionaries assigned to the Beirut Baptist School live in the Muslim sector, where the school is. But missionaries assigned to the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, or to publication and broadcast ministries, live near the seminary in the Christian community, which reaches into the hills and surrounding villages.

Missionaries living near the hillside areas say they get a "bit of excitement" at times, especially at night. King said one evening "a salvo of seven or eight shells whistled over our heads and exploded in the hillside. It didn't do any damage, but it sent us scurrying to the seminary basement for fear more might be following. Max (Mrs. King) had cooked a turkey for dinner, so we brought it to the basement and enjoyed it off the workbench. Such is life in Lebanon these days!"

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Though living with the sounds of war can create tension, new cease-fires sometimes make it just as difficult to sleep in the sudden, eerie quiet.

The children go back to school, the missionary parents remain in the downtown area to shop. But this type of quiet day is just as likely to provoke a case of "war nerves," King says, as a day of aerial activity and antiaircraft fire.

Missionaries have drawn up evacuation plans, but so far they are not planning to implement them even though the U.S. State Department has asked Americans in nonessential roles to pull out.

Lanell Barnes, wife of mission chairman Emmett Barnes, reports that the missionaries are remaining in Lebanon for now, "waiting and wondering just like everyone else." With Syrian and Israeli forces being drawn increasingly into the fray and with the threat of an all-out mideast war if the mission of U.S. Envoy Philip C. Habib fails, the missionary stance remains flexible.

The decision to evacuate is left largely to individual missionaries as is the rule in any of the world's "hot spots." Missionaries and Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board officials say that opportunities must be weighed against risks.

In making the decision to remain thus far, King says, "We feel comfortable being here and so far we are not a burden to anyone nor causing problems for anyone—on the contrary, we feel that we can be of positive help to the people of Lebanon during this time of trial."

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Sex Discrimination Suit
Filed Against Belmont

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Anne Russell, an English teacher at Belmont College, has filed an \$850,000 lawsuit against the school claiming sex discrimination and harassment.

Russell was hired for the 1979-80 school year, but her contract was not renewed, she charges, because the college "wished to fill the position with a man."

Named in the suit are J.M. Galloway, chairman of the education department; Glenn Kelley, former dean of the college; Anderson Clark, former English department chairman; and Herbert Gabhart, college president.

In addition to the complaint of employment discrimination because of her sex, Russell also charges she was subjected to sexual harassment by Clark and that the administration failed to respond to her complaints. Clark left Belmont last year and is teaching in Korea on a Fulbright fellowship.

After meeting with the college's attorney, James Guenther, Gabhart issued the following statement: "Belmont College is a Christian college and operates on every occasion to the best of its ability in conformity with the highest moral and ethical principles of our faith. It does not practice nor condone sexual discrimination or harassment. The college will do its best to present the full truth in all matters in the courts."

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Baker, Others Oppose Bills
Denying Federal Court Role

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Southern Baptist constitutional specialist joined other religious and civic leaders in denouncing as "dangerous" and "unconstitutional" proposals before Congress to remove federal court jurisdiction in cases involving abortion, school prayer and busing.

John W. Baker, general counsel and director of research services for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, told a press briefing that he was concerned about the constitutionality of the proposals which he described as a "quickie" way of changing the Constitution without going through the constitutional amendment process.

Citing Baptist commitment to church-state separation, Baker noted opposition by the Baptist Joint Committee and its member bodies, including the Southern Baptist Convention, to efforts in the last Congress to remove federal court jurisdiction in school prayer cases.

Baker said the emotional volatility of such issues has "clouded" constitutional questions involved.

The press briefing, which included representatives of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Civil Libertarian and public interest groups, followed the first round of hearings by the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution on the broad issue of congressional power to limit federal court jurisdiction. The House Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice begins similar hearings June 3-4.

Though more than 20 proposals to limit or remove federal court jurisdiction on controversial issues are pending, the method of attempting to overturn Supreme Court decisions is not new. Sixty such bills were introduced between 1953 and 1968.

The Southern Baptist Convention has a long-standing opposition to state-mandated prayer in public schools, a position reaffirmed at its 1980 annual meeting in St. Louis.

In a related development, two Southern Baptists joined a coalition of more than 55 organizations pushing what it describes as "voluntary" prayer in public schools, but what critics insist is state-mandated prayer. Members of the group, called Project Prayer, include Claud Logan Asbury, pastor of Parkville Baptist Church, Baltimore, Md., and William Powell, editor of Southern Baptist Journal, a monthly newspaper not related to the Southern Baptist Convention.