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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**NATIONAL OFFICE**SBC Executive Committee  
460 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219  
(615) 244-2355  
Wilmer C. Fields, Director  
Dan Martin, News Editor  
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor**BUREAUS****ATLANTA** Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041  
**DALLAS** Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996  
**MEMPHIS** Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461  
**NASHVILLE** (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
**RICHMOND** Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
**WASHINGTON** Stan L. Hasteley, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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81-119

**Pastors, Wives Evaluate  
National WMU Programs**

By Beth Sayers Wildes

**BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)**—"Keep it warm, keep it simple, keep it biblical," was the advice offered the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union by key pastors and their wives after a two-day evaluation session.

The 26 pastors and 17 wives were invited by WMU leaders to take part in a two-day evaluation of the 93-year-old organization's purposes, goals and programs.

The 1.1 million-member auxiliary to the SBC is responsible for missions education, promotion and support in Southern Baptist churches.

The evaluation panel represented 16 state Baptist conventions and a cross section of small, medium and large churches. They were invited on the basis of their experience and influence within the denomination.

At the conclusion, the group affirmed WMU's purposes, commended the staff for its openness during the dialogue and issued challenges to the organization.

Daniel Vestal, pastor of First Baptist Church, Midland, Texas, challenged WMU to become "radically committed" to promoting lay involvement in missions.

"The world won't be won to Jesus Christ by professional church leaders," Vestal said. "Six thousand missionaries won't make an impact in a world of four billion people. But what if we had a million Southern Baptists going out each year?"

Douglas Watterson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn., said: "You cannot allow yourselves to be sidetracked from missions. WMU must maintain this singleness of purpose. It must continue to be the catalyst for the passion of winning the world to Christ."

A black Southern Baptist pastor, Milton Boyd of Westside Baptist Church, Montgomery, Ala., said WMU materials need to reflect the Southern Baptist Convention's multiracial makeup more forcefully and to let ethnics and blacks know WMU organizations are for them, too.

Participants also dealt with the impact of WMU's image.

"I believe WMU has a problem that's not related to its purpose or its assignment, but to the way WMU is perceived," said John Hessel, pastor of First Baptist Church, West Frankfort, Ill.

Milton Cunningham, pastor of Westbury Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, said he sometimes saw WMU as being "tied more to the past than the future."

Cunningham referred to the close association WMU has to two 19th century missions leaders for whom national annual mission offerings are named. The connection between WMU and the two women "does not communicate what WMU is seeking to do today," he said.

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Participants also discussed the impact the offerings have on the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified giving plan.

The WMU executive board sets the national offering goals each year. Local WMU organizations promote them in churches. These offerings provide the largest source for the budgets of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and Foreign Mission Board. The Cooperative Program provides the second largest source.

The pastors dealt with a variety of concerns relating to these and other special interest offerings. They said special appeals hit churches almost monthly in some states. The pastors predicted a need to reduce the special appeals in order to protect mission support, and said they favor more emphasis and personalization of the Cooperative Program.

They urged WMU to help make the needs of Southern Baptist missions more tangible to the 13.6 million people affiliated with the SBC.

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

Deacon Leads Americans  
To Appreciate Disabled

By Marv Knox

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7/31/81

WASHINGTON (BP) — It's a case of the blind leading the sighted—as Harold O'Flaherty helps Americans see the needs of disabled people.

O'Flaherty directs the U.S. government committee which promotes the International Year of Disabled Persons, a United Nations emphasis for 1981, designed to highlight concerns of the physically and mentally handicapped.

He takes his job seriously; he's been blind since birth.

"The International Year of Disabled Persons is the first time in recorded history that the world has recognized both the contributions and the needs of its disabled citizens. No longer must disabled persons be relegated to second-class citizenship," says O'Flaherty.

He claims the emphasis provides people everywhere with "the opportunity to replace rhetoric with action," noting his committee is working with 30 federal agencies and is considering 200 projects.

O'Flaherty, a deacon at Redland Baptist Church in Gaithersburg, Md., believes Christians have a biblical command to help disabled persons.

"Jesus said, 'If you've done it to the least of these, you've done it unto me. And if you have not done it unto the least of these, you have not done it unto me,'" he notes.

"From that mandate, one realizes Jesus had a very caring ministry. . . . I believe that the church in the aggregate sense has been less than responsive to America's 36 million disabled persons."

As proof, O'Flaherty points out that many churches are not architecturally designed to accommodate crippled people and even fewer publish lists of Sunday hymns so that blind persons can learn the words ahead of time.

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"Disabled people need to be involved in the mainstream activities of the church," he insists. "I'm blind, but my church has allowed me to teach Bible studies and Sunday School for years. They've even elected me a deacon. I would like to be a microcosm of national experience."

Churches need to be creative, discovering disabled people in their communities and making church activities available to them, he says. Christians should give people "the cold, hard facts of the gospel and get them participating."

O'Flaherty himself is an example of what hard work, positive thinking and faith can do. When he was a youngster, rehabilitation workers suggested he become a baker. Instead, he opted for a more active lifestyle. He played high school football, won the Atlantic Coast Conference wrestling championship and became the first blind graduate of the University of Maryland.

As an adult, he has spent more than 16 years as an administrator for the U.S. Public Health Service, where he'll probably return when his duties with the International Year of Disabled Persons are complete next spring.

"Jesus gave 7,000 promises recorded in scripture, and they have characterized my life and my faith," he says. "All of us--disabled or not--can claim those promises and find that source of strength."

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Former Angola Missionary  
Gets Permission To Visit

By Mary Jane Welch

Baptist Press  
7/31/81

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — Betty Dixon, Southern Baptist missionary who evacuated Angola in 1975, has been granted a visitor's visa to attend dedication of a new church building in Huambo, Angola.

The granting of the visa was "totally un hoped for," said Davis L. Saunders, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director for eastern and southern Africa. Mrs. Dixon and her husband, Curtis, had spent five years trying to obtain a new work visa for the country before transferring to Portugal in late 1980. The Baptist Convention of Angola obtained Mrs. Dixon's 15-day visa.

While she is in Angola Aug. 8-23, Mrs. Dixon will be investigating the possibility of Southern Baptist missionaries returning, said Saunders. On the strong recommendation of the U.S. consul general, the Dixons and other Southern Baptist missionaries in Angola evacuated in August 1975, a few months before the country was granted independence by Portugal. Although Dixon was able to make five brief trips into the country in the following months, no missionaries have been able to return as residents.

Mrs. Dixon also will explore the possibility of transferring Southern Baptist mission property and funds still in the country to the Angola convention. Missionaries were unable to make these transfers when they evacuated and could not take the funds, which Saunders calls "substantial," out of the country.

She also will look into the possibility of Angola Baptist leaders being granted permission to receive training at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zambia in Lusaka. Saunders has been trying to arrange such training for more than a year, but has run into several problems.

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The seminary already has agreed to the program, but has no Portuguese-language teachers. If Angolan leaders can get permission to go to Zambia, the Foreign Mission Board will probably have to fly a missionary and national Baptist from Portugal to teach the intensive seminars.

While living in Portugal and seeking to return to Angola, the Dixons have been sending Sunday School and Woman's Missionary Union literature and theological education by extension materials to Angolan Baptists. The convention's 1979 report indicated that 72 churches, almost double the 37 reported previously, were active in the country.

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Study of Pension Plan  
OKd By Annuity Board

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7/31/81

DALLAS (BP) — A 20-member committee to "study and recommend a new, improved church pension plan" has been approved by trustees of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board.

"The makings of a new, improved church pension plan are under way," Darold Morgan, president of the board, said after trustees unanimously approved a resolution authorizing the chairman, Charles L. Holland of Longview, Texas, to appoint a committee of five trustees, five staff members, five persons at large and five state executive secretaries.

"We all recognize the impact inflation has on retired employes and we want our ministers and layworkers to be well prepared so as to alleviate these economic tensions," Morgan added.

Annuity Board officials indicated the study will be aimed at updating and upgrading church pension plans.

The trustees action came after two meetings of state executive directors, hosted by the Annuity Board. The meetings involved presentation and discussion of the background, financial condition, actuarial evaluation and a 51-page summary of present retirement plans.

After considering retirement plans for the future, the executive directors agreed to support the Annuity Board staff in recommending that a study committee be appointed to design a new church pension plan.

Holland will announce his committee appointments within the new few weeks, Morgan said.

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Article Finds Home  
For Disabled Baby

Baptist Press  
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CARMI, Ill. (BP) — July 1, the Illinois Baptist told about a 6-month-old baby girl available for adoption at the Baptist Children's Home in Carmi.

Carla Monroe, social worker at the home, said the baby was blind in one eye, and may go totally blind. "Doctors also have advised she has some brain damage, although it is impossible to tell the extent of the damage until she is three to five years old," Monroe said.

Three weeks later, on July 21, Carla wrote the Illinois Baptist that an adoptive family had been found for the baby, as a direct result of the July 1 news item. "We got several responses from the article," she said, "and were able to select from them an excellent home. The adopting couple has special qualifications to deal with handicapped children, plus their desire to provide a loving Christian home. They are certainly proud of their new daughter, and she seems equally delighted with them."

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Lightning Bolt Brings  
Legacy For Missions

By Craig Bird

GOODNIGHT, Texas (BP) — After Aug. 1, Goodnight Baptist Church will be only a memory, but it will leave behind a legacy for missions and Christian education.

The tiny Southern Baptist congregation in the Texas Panhandle, about 50 miles from Amarillo, will close its books, but its influence will be felt indefinitely in spots as diverse as Brazil and Abilene, Texas.

Last April, a freak storm, which splattered only a handful of raindrops, rolled across the Panhandle. A bolt of lightning struck the steeple of the church. Nobody noticed any damage, but about two hours later, fire broke through the roof of the 29-year-old building. Before any of the surrounding fire departments could reach the rural church, the structure was destroyed.

The seven regular members of the church, all women except for pastor O. C. Edwards, faced a dismal situation. Insurance coverage was only \$20,000 while rebuilding costs were estimated at \$150,000. Edwards is 74, and the women range in age from 65 to 80 (except for one youngster in her mid-50s).

"We decided to put what money we had into missions instead of trying to rebuild because we knew our community could be served (by other churches)," Edwards explained.

So, in a remarkable business meeting, the church parceled out \$5,500 to the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; \$5,000 to Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene; \$5,000 to Wayland Baptist University in Plainview; \$2,000 to the Top of Texas missions area (basically the Texas Panhandle region); \$1,000 to the Baptist General Convention of Texas; \$1,000 to the Home Mission Board of the SBC, and \$1,500 to Panfork Baptist Assembly.

The gifts to the FMB and the BGCT are designated for mission work in Brazil. The Top of Texas area will also receive title to the two lots the church stood on.

The congregation didn't forget Edwards either, who has been pastor of the church for more than 20 years (including the last seven as "interim" after his retirement in 1974).

The parsonage was put in top shape at a cost of \$3,600 and deeded to Edwards and his wife as a retirement home.

The two universities included in the distribution have endowed scholarships with the gifts so that each year (beginning in 1982) the interest from the original gift will aid a worthy student.

It is not surprising that Goodnight Baptist Church decided to invest everything it had left in missions and in Baptist education. It was that kind of church from the time it was organized in 1903.

"We've been giving 20 to 25 percent of our budget to missions for years," Edwards pointed out. And in 1965 the church sent him to Brazil where he teamed with another preacher and a musician for three weeks of mission work in Poltarondo, Brasilia and on the Amazon River.

July 26, 1981, was the last service of Goodnight Baptist Church. On Aug. 1 the books were to be closed and all the church records sent for microfilming to Southwestern Baptist Seminary. The 78-year-old church will just be a memory. A memory and a legacy of missions and education that will live for years to come.

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CORRECTION: In BP mailing 7/29/81, in "Lay Participation Up in Los Angeles SBC," please change sixth paragraph on page two to read: "Of female participants, 31.4 percent.... (rather than 3.14 as sent).

Thanks,  
Baptist Press