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--FEATURES

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Keith Parks: Complex  
Man in a Complex Role

By Robert O'Brien

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--As a frail, sickly child, Keith Parks surprised doctors when he lived beyond the age of 13.

Years later, when his kids were teen-agers, a robust Keith Parks surprised their friends, who couldn't envision losing to an "old man," when he challenged and beat them in impromptu foot races.

Members of the Foreign Mission Board surprised 25-year veteran missionary and board administrator Keith Parks--and many outside observers--when they picked him to succeed Baker James Cauthen as chief administrator of the world's largest evangelical missionary-sending agency.

It still surprises 54-year-old Foreign Mission Board President Keith Parks when people talk about him in the role of president. "I'm always a little surprised or detached when they talk about it. Sometimes I feel like they must be talking about someone else. I never thought I'd be that in my wildest imagination."

Parks, in turn, has surprised a lot of people since he assumed his duties Jan. 1, 1980, with the sweeping innovations his administrative style has brought. The openness which characterizes his presidency--such as his willingness to speak forthrightly on even the most complex problems of running a \$100-million-a-year agency--kicks their surprise into overdrive.

Parks believes integrity demands that Southern Baptists know the problems as well as the victories as the board spends their contributions to reach the world for Christ.

His sense of integrity was forged in small towns in Texas and Arkansas in the family of a cattle trader who--in his eldest son's memory--exemplified spiritual depth, tough-minded discipline and honesty.

"I would hear daddy say, when talking about guys who would try to trade him a sick animal, 'It does me a lot of good to be an honest man and beat them at their own game,'" recalls Parks.

But those days, in the heart of the depression, weren't easy for Parks, who developed a severe rheumatic condition at age six and spent a painful summer in the hospital. "When I got out of the hospital, I was skinny and weak. I didn't know until years later that doctors told my parents that I wouldn't live past 13."

He also didn't know until years later that his mother and father knelt by his bed and prayed that if God would heal and strengthen him they would do all they could to encourage him toward Christian service.

Parks also learned years later that his mother had felt called to missions when she was a teen-ager but couldn't go because of difficult circumstances during World War I. After he had decided to become a missionary, he learned she had prayed for years that God would call one of her children for overseas service.

Keith, oldest of four, answered the call to Indonesia. If current plans hold, all four of his children will end up on the mission field. Randall, now 28, earned a Ph.D. at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where his father also earned a doctorate, and has been appointed for Egypt. Kent, 24, a student at Southwestern, says he will seek

appointment, as will Stanley, 18, and Eloise, 20, both students at Hardin-Simmons University.

"Mom and dad never pushed us toward missions," Stanley says of the independent-minded Parks children. "They gave us the spiritual guidance and helped us develop the tools to find out for ourselves what God's call was."

Parks' wife, Helen Jean, his children and co-workers paint a picture of a complex man:

Conscientious family man, sporadic jogger, warm preacher, avid reader, early rising tennis player, serious Bible student, sure-handed egg-throwing champ of annual board picnics, good listener, "Godly man" with "feet of clay," good handyman, consensus-seeking administrator but firm--some say stubborn--romantic and thoughtful husband, encourager of creative ideas, hard worker, strict but loving father who can get angry but forgives and forgets, down-to-earth humorist, optimistic realist, selective TV viewer, more prone to view the "big picture" than to keep up with details, practical admirer of beauty, rabid Dallas Cowboy fan, and faithful church member--even when the Cowboys play a late Sunday afternoon football game on TV.

A well-developed sense of humor, a key ingredient of that complex mix, helps Parks lighten relationships and break tension and fatigue at home and work. Other escapes at home include quietly sipping coffee and watching a lighted aquarium in a darkened room, a habit he picked up as a missionary in Indonesia, and reading Louis L'Amour's western novels.

His family and co-workers especially enjoy his sense of humor, which allows him to both kid others and take jokes about himself--including his baldness.

But, says Eloise, he usually can get in the last quip. "Daddy says that the heads God covered up, he was ashamed of."

Parks could take comfort in social science research which indicates that balding persons will more likely administer large budgets and staffs, but he has learned that the responsibility for the board's \$104 million budget, 3,100 missionaries and 350 home office staff has headaches as well as victories. With that turf goes responsibility to make decisions--popular and unpopular. Parks has made some of both.

A close co-worker says Parks often hurts inside when he has to make a tough decision regarding staff or when he receives a lot of criticism for an unpopular decision. "He likes to be liked, but he has the capacity to make difficult decisions regardless of what people think of him," he says.

Commenting on that type of decision, Parks says: "I must make those decisions based on strong rationale and objective data so that the decision has validity apart from feelings and emotion. There's no way to please all people in this role. If there's a basic conviction on something I know I've got to stand by--whatever the reaction--I have to plant my weight in terms of my own convictions."

Eloise, who admits she and her dad have "hit heads" over the years on matters of discipline and conviction, knows what he means by that. But she says, "I couldn't have had a better father. I know he loves me and he cares about me."

Some close observers of Keith Parks say that typifies him. He cares about people and about foreign missions.

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O'Brien is overseas news coordinator at the Foreign Mission Board.

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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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SBC Ethicist Commends  
Peace Education Week

By Tim Fields

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A nationwide emphasis week on education about nuclear war is being commended by a staff member of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

According to Ron Sisk, director of program development for the moral concerns agency, participation in Ground Zero Week, set for April 18-25, is one way in which Southern Baptists can work for peace with justice.

The emphasis week designed to help people know more about the effect nuclear war will have on their lives is being sponsored by Ground Zero, a bipartisan organization concerned with the lack of a national consensus and direction on nuclear policy.

"Involvement in this emphasis week is one way in which Southern Baptists can support peace initiatives in their community," Sisk explained.

"The great majority of Southern Baptists are not pacifists. We are, however, members of peaceable churches and we believe in working for peace with justice," he said.

"As a community-based educational effort, Ground Zero Week is designed to help explore some concrete answers to the question of how a nuclear war would affect our lives."

Sisk said Ground Zero seeks to inform and spark discussion in local church, school and community gatherings.

"As concerned Christians and citizens, Southern Baptists ought to take advantage of this and every other effort to become knowledgeable about the dangers of nuclear war," Sisk said.

"Many believe nuclear war is the single greatest threat to the future of our children and grandchildren," he said.

One of Ground Zero's major efforts is the production of a 200-page nuclear war primer and other materials designed to help in conducting emphasis week activities.

Individuals and churches can secure more information by writing to Ground Zero, 806 15th Street, N.W., Suite 421, Washington, D.C. 20005.

IWO, Nigeria (BP)--She doesn't look like an African chief, but 56-year-old Texan Alma Rohm received that title in mid-January. RB

Hundreds from the Nigerian city of Iwo, the Baptist College where she teaches and the Baptist mission and convention of Nigeria turned out to see the Southern Baptist missionary named "Iya Nisin Ilu of Iwo" or "Mother in Service of Iwo."

The 1951 class of Baptist College, the first to graduate after her arrival at the male teachers' school, asked the traditional council of chiefs of Iwo to confer the title on Miss Rohm in recognition of 31 years of service to the church, school and city of 214,000 people.

Students from the college danced from the college to the palace for the installation and back again. Miss Rohm approached Oba (King) S. O. Abimbola II's throne accompanied by Deborah I. Dahunsi, Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) president, WMU members and friends and fellow missionaries.

Kn eling at the palace entrance, Miss Rohm received the traditional akoko leaves which were torn and placed on her forehead under her headtie, traditional headdress for Yoruba women.

At the palace, she changed into another traditional Yoruba dress of hand-woven cloth and put on coral jewelry. The king blessed her as she knelt before his throne.

At a service following at the Baptist College, G. A. Otunla, principal of the college and also a chief, said the honor to Miss Rohm was also an honor to Baptist College, the Iwo community, the Baptist mission of Nigeria and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Nigerians grant such an honor only to someone who has "a really unusual relationship" with them says John Mills, the Foreign Mission Board's director for west Africa.

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Blankenships Leave Libya,  
Arrive Safely in Morocco

Baptist Press  
2/17/82

TANGIER, Morocco (BP)--The Harold Blankenships, Southern Baptists' only missionary family stationed in Libya, left the country Feb. 7 and arrived safely in Morocco Feb. 13. RB

Their decision to leave Libya was made in December at the urging of the American government. Although their departure was delayed by the process of securing exit visas, they had no trouble actually leaving the country, Blankenship said by telephone from Tangier, Feb. 15.

He, his wife, Dorothy, and their 14-year-old son, Franklin, flew from Libya to London, then on to Tangier.

"We thank the Lord we were able to get in the country (in 1965) and thankful we were able to leave," Blankenship said. "We have appreciated the prayers of Southern Baptists."

Blankenship has been pastor of the English-language Baptist Church in Tripoli, Libya, since missionary appointment 16 years ago. The couple has been transferred temporarily to Morocco where they will serve until their next furlough begins in about a year and a half.

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