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Supportive Church Helps
Minister Rebuild Life

By Gail Rothwell

COVINGTON, La. (BP)—When Reid Doster's wife left him in April 1981, he felt his world had fallen apart and his career as a minister might be ended.

But with the help and encouragement of friends and church members, Doster was able to piece together his broken dreams and step back into the pulpit of First Baptist Church.

When Doster moved to Louisiana from Houston, his wife of seven years had stayed behind to finish her final semester of graduate school. He had been at the Covington church four months when she called to say she wanted a divorce.

"Thirteen days later I stood in the pulpit and explained I had a crisis in my personal life that was beyond my control and I needed their prayers," Doster recalled.

The next week he told the deacons and then the congregation the entire story. "I fully expected the deacons to ask for my resignation. I felt like an embarrassment to the church," he admitted. Instead, he said, "They were genuinely concerned about ministering to me. Each deacon tried to reaffirm me and at the end of the meeting they laid hands on me and prayed for me."

In an effort to fully understand the situation, the chairman of the deacons, James O. Banks, and another church member went to Houston to talk with Doster's wife. They returned believing there was no hope for reconciliation. A no-fault divorce became final in June 1981.

During this time Doster said he was torn by conflict because, "I felt as the pastor I had to come out of the situation lily-white. At first I was afraid to tell my congregation who I was."

But Doster said he soon realized the congregation was willing to accept his humanity. "I was hurting and struggling and at times it was all I could do to hold myself together. There was a period when I felt abandoned by every kind of love. It took me some time, but I began to realize God's presence in my life. He was always there to provide the strength and encouragement I needed," said Doster.

Doster believes it was his "firm commitment to the ministry and the knowledge I was where God wanted me to be" that gave him the courage to face his congregation another hour, another day.

"Despite all the pain and terror I felt, I also felt God's presence in my life during this time," he shared. Also, "the congregation believed in me and gave me space and time to heal."

Chairman of deacons Banks expressed the church's support of Doster saying, "We felt the Lord could handle any situation, if we could learn to wait on him."

Banks indicated the church felt Doster was the right man for their church. He explained, "If you feel the Lord has called him there, then the Lord will move him or keep him. We felt Reid was the pastor for our church."

Doster said God's presence in the life of the church during his crisis is evidenced by the fact that the church baptized more people that year than in any of the previous 21 years.

"Looking at the records I just couldn't believe it," exclaimed Doster. "It was then I began to realize how God was working, using my life."

Not only was the church experiencing numerical growth, but the Together We Build campaign went over its half million dollar goal, with \$506,000 in pledges. "The campaign began the same time my crisis did," said Doster. "But what greater symbol of support could the congregation show than to vote to move ahead with a major church project."

In the last eighteen months several church ministries have been added. The first singles Sunday School class was begun and within three months had enrolled more than 30 people. A second class for single parents was recently started.

The church, under Doster's guidance, is now conducting a divorce recovery seminar. Approximately 50 people from the church and community are attending the six-week program.

"People are hurting so badly and I believe the church can help them," Doster explained. "They are struggling and need some Biblical perspective of divorce and God's healing grace."

In the future Doster would like to use his experience to help other ministers who may be facing the same kind of problem.

Doster recently completed a training seminar conducted by the Baptist Sunday School Board family ministry department training seminar and was certified as a special single adult consultant.

Consultants are available to help churches, associations and state conventions develop, expand and evaluate ministries to single adults.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Sunday School Board.

International Communicators
Meet In Switzerland

By Ruby Burke and Reinhold Kerstan

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RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)—More than ninety Baptist editors and mass media communicators, meeting at the International Baptist Theological Seminary June 29-July 2, looked for ways to better "Communicate the Peace of God Today and Tomorrow."

Participants from 17 European countries and the United States heard Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Gerhard Claas warn of the tremendous power of the press, citing dangers and problems which result from poor or misguided handling of news, even by the Christian press. Emphasizing the important role of the Christian communicator Claas said, "Journalists should be the ones who speak the language of today. If they are unable to communicate 'the Good News of peace with God,' how can we expect a pastor to be able to pass on the gospel?"

During the three day meeting, participants heard reports on the status of communications in 16 nations and celebrated the 25th anniversary of C.R. Daley as editor of the Western Recorder, journal of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

The outgoing president of the International Baptist Seminary in Ruschlikon, C. Ronald Goulding, received the first European Baptist Press Service Award of Appreciation. A second award was given posthumously to Jan Van Dam, recognizing his service as editor of De Christen, the weekly publication of the Baptist Union of the Netherlands.

This first international seminar was organized by the communications departments of both the Baptist World Alliance and the Southern Baptist Convention, in cooperation with the European Baptist Federation and the staff of the European Baptist Press Service.

An eastern European editor commented: "Hopefully this seminar is only the beginning. Whether in the east or the west, we communicators need a continued sharing of ideas and concerns."

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(Ruby Burke and Reinhold Kerstan are Baptist World Alliance communications department staffers in Washington, D.C.)

(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Foreign Mission Board bureau of Baptist Press

New Orleans SBC
Viewed By Editors

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Editors of 20 state Baptist newspapers used terms such as uneasy, hostile, volatile, polarized, uncertain and tug-of-war to describe the 1982 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The editorials, while commenting on a variety of things, generally spoke of the atmosphere of the convention, the emergence of political parties, the performance of the outgoing president, and speculations about the new president.

David Simpson of the Indiana Baptist, one of the newest editors, wrote: "Baptists from around the world had an opportunity to say something positive about Christ, the church and brotherly love. The statement, to say the least, was garbled."

Edgar Cooper of the Florida Baptist Witness, described the 125th annual meeting: "From the welcoming address ... to the final amen, there was a feeling of tension and a noticeable division of the messengers. The so-called conservatives and moderates were at it again."

J.B. Fowler of the Baptist New Mexican said the "lack of trust that has developed across the denomination the last three or four years made this the most divisive convention I have attended since 1950 when I went to my first one in Houston."

Presnall W. Wood, of the Baptist Standard in Texas, wrote that Southern Baptists "left Los Angeles in 1981 thinking they had turned the corner on a wearisome controversy, but they left New Orleans still standing on the corner."

C. R. Daley of the Western Recorder in Kentucky, said the meeting "is history and we are still together with no formal split in sight.... There were no clear winners but there were clearly some losers. They were Bold Mission Thrust, mutual trust among Southern Baptists and the 'sweet, sweet spirit in this place' which we often sing about."

Jack U. Harwell of the Georgia Christian Index, was encouraged, writing that the "mixed signals" say "Southern Baptists are going to stay somewhere near the middle of the road on most issues, but always on the 'right' side of that middle line, never on the left."

Many of the editors wrote of the division of the denomination, with John Roberts of the Baptist Courier in South Carolina, writing that the convention is "divided, with strong feeling on each side of the division. This division is deeper than it was last year, or the year before, or five or 10 years ago. It goes much deeper than rallying around an individual and opposing another. At the core of each side is commitment to an ideology and determination to see that ideology prevail."

Al Shackelford, editor of the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector, said: "It is now evident that our convention has evolved into two political parties.... It was distressing ... to see that on almost every issue faced the votes -- and the debaters -- were predictable, right down the party line."

He added that if the two parties remain equal, "our future conventions will be dominated by bitter debates," and that if one gains sufficient strength to dominate the convention "our beloved SBC would face the likely possibility of a split."

Larry High of the Maryland Baptist, wrote that if political activities are escalated, "our convention will make the Republican and Democratic conventions look like amateur night."

Lynn Clayton of the Louisiana Baptist Message wrote that the convention "is held together by the glue of trust -- trust in God and trust in fellow Baptists," adding that "present internal conditions of charges, countercharges and partisan politics are weakening our glue."

Wood of Texas wrote that the "division was there and it was not over the Bible. Nor is the issue over being liberal or conservative. Southern Baptists are conservatives and finding a label to describe differing Baptists is difficult. But whatever the label, the conservative messengers were divided and it was over control of the institutions."

"The struggle ... is control," Shackleford wrote, adding that the political plums in the SBC are the control of the trustees of the SBC agencies and institutions. The key to that system is to control the presidency and its power to name the Committee on Committees which nominates the Committee on Boards which nominates the trustees."

The presidency of the 13.8 million member denomination drew much attention, a situation which Marse Grant, of the Biblical Recorder in North Carolina criticized, writing that the "politicking -- before the convention and during it -- has overshadowed everything else. Time was when Foreign Missions night or a great message dominated the memories of those attending. Not so any longer. Now it's the presidency."

The new president, Jimmy Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, did not draw unanimous approval.

Dick McCartney of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger said questions about Draper are hard to answer "without qualifications. It depends on a number of things. Who will be his advisers and confidants? How does he perceive the office? What personal agenda does he have? Few people beyond the president can answer them."

He added that "time will tell" but commented he is "optimistic.... What Southern Baptists desperately need right now is a new commitment to openness. I believe we may have the beginning of that in Jimmy Draper."

New Mexico's Fowler noted he "has no quarrel" with Draper, but advised him to remember "that the Southern Baptist Convention belongs to all of us -- conservatives, ultraconservatives and the not-so-conservatives. It is ours and we love it. We will rebuke it when it is wrong and fight for it when it is right and do battle with anyone who tries to steal it."

Julian Pentecost of the Religious Herald in Virginia, said Draper "is on record to the effect he wants his presidency to be one of healing and bringing us together.... This desperately needs to be done and we hope and pray he will be equal to the challenge. If he is to achieve his objective, it is imperative he accept the reality of our diversity."

Outgoing president Bailey E. Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., got praise and criticism. Several editors lauded him for presiding with "sincerity, fairness and wit." He was criticized for his appointments.

Georgia's Harwell said Smith's presidential message was "one of the most strident rightist messages we have heard in years." Kentucky's Daley said the message was "appropriate in theme ... but its tone was inflammatory and accusatory."

Daley said Smith's appointments to the key committees "constituted an abuse of office and betrayed any claim he ever made for a healing role as president."

A number of editors criticized the resolutions committee, with Fowler saying it was "heavily orchestrated ... by members of America's religious right movement." He said the resolutions on prayer and scientific creationism were "tragically unfortunate."

Oklahoma's McCartney said the SBC "deserves more than it got" from the resolutions committee, adding that if the conventions "must have a committee on resolutions, we should make them broadly representative of Southern Baptists or we should limit the scope of their work to the routine resolutions of appreciation and acknowledgment."

Missouri's Terry spelled out that the committee chairman, Norris Sydnor Jr., was advised by Ed McAteer, founder of The Religious Roundtable, a right-wing political organization, and said: "In retrospect, one cannot help but wonder why Smith appointed a person chairman of the resolutions committee who had never before attended a session of the Southern Baptist Convention.... One also wonders who directed the committee, Sydnor or McAteer?"

Ragland Leaves West Beirut;
Makes Plans For Coming Home

By Bill Webb

MANSOURIYE, Lebanon (BP)—Southern Baptist missionary Jim Ragland left west Beirut, Lebanon, July 7 with plans to return to the United States July 11. He was staying with nine fellow missionaries in Mansouriye, outside Beirut.

Ragland, who has provided shelter to refugees and operated a clinic for the ill and wounded in Beirut Baptist School almost since Israeli warplanes first attacked the city June 4, plans to attend his son John's wedding June 24. He was the last Southern Baptist missionary to leave the embattled city.

He will be reunited with his wife, Leola, who flew back to the United States two weeks after the conflict began.

The night before Ragland left west Beirut was a bad night for shelling, he said in a telephone interview. None hit the school, which now houses about 40 refugee families, but some fell within a few blocks.

Student groups and others continue to provide food packets for refugees staying in school and other public buildings. Though few fresh fruits and vegetables are available on the streets, "there does seem to be ample stocks of canned goods (in west Beirut)," he said.

Ragland left west Beirut July 3 to attend the monthly meeting of the Lebanon Mission in Mansouriye. He stayed temporarily on the east side when Israeli soldiers closed off border crossings to the west sector.

He was allowed back in July 5 only because he convinced the border guard he was a clergyman. Re-entry was virtually a miracle, he said.

"I felt lonesome, like a fish out of water," Ragland said, explaining why he returned to west Beirut temporarily. "I wanted to see the people one last time before I left and to see what was happening there."

Back inside, Ragland said he discovered both determination to defend the city and optimism that an agreement might still be reached.

Men in the church near the school will look after the school while he is gone, Ragland said. Many of the church families have already left for east Beirut; only about five Lebanese men remain and they meet together to pray each evening.

Some of the other Southern Baptist missionaries still in Lebanon are also making plans to leave the country.

Missionary Wayne Fuller, whose wife, Frances, left during the first week of the conflict, will come to the United States July 17. He will accompany Nancie Wingo; a single missionary, and Ashleigh Dunn, the daughter of missionaries Pete and Pat Dunn. David and Maxine King are planning to return to the United States later in July.