



-- FEATURES

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Texas Family Builds
Bridges To Missions

By Craig Bird

ABILENE, Texas (BP)—After 28 years and hundreds of changed lives, the vow is still strong, the results still impressive.

When Cotton and Barbara Bridges married in 1954 they promised the Lord and each other missions would always be a central part of their home and a mission program would always be a part of any church they attended even if they had to lead it.

Since then they have raised three children—and seen all three work in Baptist mission projects. They have headed one of the most successful Royal Ambassador programs in the country. They have been to Brazil on a short term missions project. Career decisions have been made on how the new job would advance missions.

"The first 15 years we were married he spent our anniversary on RA campouts," Barbara admitted. And none of the children can remember when they became aware of a Christian's obligation to missions because they were around it all their lives. Dwight even maintains he was "born in an RA jacket."

This living out, family style, of the Great Commission has provided some possible entries if Ripley's ever publishes a Missions Believe It or Not. Barbara and Cotton could be listed under "husband and wife teams who have been sponsors on both a national Royal Ambassador Congress and a national Acteen conference." Cotton and David qualify under "father-son teams who have been on the state Texas Baptist Men's board simultaneously." And David's wife, Nancy, has an entry, "most recently pregnant woman to spend a summer in Alaska doing mission work for Baptist Men."

Cotton is in his 21st year as a Royal Ambassador counselor and has not missed a state RA congress in 17 years or an associational RA camp in 15 years. He estimates he has worked with "three or four hundred" boys in that time but Barbara insists he has done more than just "work" with the program. "He won't say anything about it but we are always getting letters from former RA's thanking him for the example and inspiration he gave them and giving him some of the credit for the good things they are doing in their own lives now," Barbara pointed out.

But despite their tenacity in sticking to their early-marriage commitment to missions, the Bridges have had rough spots.

Barbara had made an individual commitment to missions several years before she met Cotton but her vision was based on foreign missions. "It took me awhile to grow to the point where I realized missions is 'where you are' and you don't have to even go across the street, much less across the ocean to find a mission field. When I realized that then my commitment fit in exactly with what Cotton was doing." Her vacations are scheduled around RA needs.

And then there were all those anniversaries where campouts had priority.

"Keeping house was often my part but you better believe I resented it at times," she admitted. "You can't have a commitment and not have times of question. If you don't question then you don't know where to turn when you face different options of service."

Even Cotton attributes the depths of his conviction to some rough times. "In 1968 David was a 14-year-old and he and I weren't getting along very well at all," he explained. "I went to a Texas Baptist Men's meeting in San Antonio and I stayed up all night praying asking God to either help me get totally committed or make me unconcerned."

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From that prayer session came a vastly improved relationship with his son and a solidified determination to plug missions even deeper into his life at all levels. Thirteen years later those priorities led him to a career change. In 1981 he resigned his position with an Abilene bank and accepted a spot on the staff of First Baptist Church, Abilene, as assistant director of the church's new Family Life Center--and to strengthen the RA program.

The \$2.5 million complex is opened to the public--including the hundreds of neighborhood children from homes ethnically and financially far removed from the typical member of the 4,000-member congregation. "One of the things that excited me about this job was the chance to use facilities like these to show kids what God's love is all about," Cotton said. "When they are playing pool, raquetball, basketball or bowling there is a chance to develop relationships, a chance to witness."

His beloved RA program is kept on display to all the boys that show up at the Family Life Center but you don't play on an RA basketball team or run cars in the pinewood derby or go to the state track meet unless you are an active member of one of the Royal Ambassador chapters. "Our athletic programs exist as auxiliaries to our boys mission program--not the other way around," he said. Athletics is a way to share Christ with the boys and their families.

Now the Bridges are looking ahead at what changes may come in their life since their youngest child is finishing high school this year. "We're prejudiced but we think God has given us three of the finest children anybody ever had--and the finest daughter-in-law," Cotton said. "But as they become independent it may open up even more ways for the Lord to use us in missions," he said. They have a strong pull toward Brazil due to their 1981 trip to the state of Salvador as part of Texas Baptist's relationship with Brazil.

David and his wife Nancy work with RA's and GA's at First Baptist Church and have focused their marriage on missions just like his parents. They even got to know each other on a mission trip to Indiana while students at Hardin-Simmons University and helped revive the youth mission programs at their church in Wichita Falls, Texas, before David was transferred back to Abilene.

David, a former member of the national Pioneer RA Advisory Board and Texas RA president, is vocal about the role missions should play in the church. "Sunday School is not designed to be the soul-winning arm of the church," he said. "Sunday School tends to attract people who are already Christians and it is a great place to learn to be disciples--but the cutting edge of a church's outreach should be Baptist Men, Woman's Missionary Union, RA's, Acteens and GA's because that is where you can come in contact with lost people!"

Darla is a senior at Angelo State University and spent this past summer in Wisconsin as a Baptist Student Union summer missionary. Last summer she was a Home Mission Board Invincible, working across Texas.

Dwight, a high school senior, has already logged two summers as a regional RA staffer and, along with his dad and brother, is a member of the Baptist Men Disaster Relief Team for the Abilene area. He was part of the 1978 RA Chapter of the Year (Cotton was counselor) at Calvary Baptist Church in Abilene.

And odds are the missions lifestyle won't be a two-generation phenomenon. Granddaughter Sarah has been on a mission trip that took place before she was born. David and Nancy worked in RA camps in the Alaskan wilderness during the summer of 1979 and it was more than air-sickness that made Nancy queasy--she was pregnant.

But for the Bridges family there could have been no better way to get a child started off right than putting feet to their faith and works to their beliefs.

Congress Passes Tax Bill,
Church Pension Plans Aided

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)—Congress has completed action which will increase the ability of churches and denominations to provide more adequate retirement plans for their ministers and lay employees.

The noncontroversial changes in laws governing church pension plans were included in a controversial tax bill which will raise taxes by \$98.3 billion over the next three fiscal years. The measure, pushed by President Reagan as a means of reducing anticipated federal deficits, passed the House of Representatives 226-207 and the Senate 52-47 on Aug. 19.

Under the changes approved by Congress participants in church pension plans will be able to increase tax-sheltered retirement contributions in several ways.

Ministers and other church employees who made inadequate or no contributions to pension programs during their early working years will be given the same option for overriding the normal annual contribution limit that current law offers teachers, hospital workers and employees of home health services.

The new act will treat all Baptist (or other denominational) employment as years of service with one employer. This change will benefit church employees because the annual limit on pension plan contributions is affected by the number of years in the present job.

Also for most ministers and church employees whose adjusted gross income is \$17,000 or less the new act will provide a minimum allowable contribution each year of \$3,000. The tax-deferred contribution cannot exceed the employee's compensation.

The act also provides an additional election for church employees which allows an increase in the contribution limit by up to \$10,000 for any year but subject to a \$40,000 lifetime cap.

It also specifies that church pension boards are authorized to issue tax-deferred annuities, a clarification church pension boards sought after a 1982 Internal Revenue Service ruling that only life insurance companies could do so.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Annuity Board joined 26 other denominational pension boards to seek the changes in pension laws. The changes were initially introduced in the Senate by senators Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas and Robert J. Dole, R-Kan., and in the House by representatives James C. Wright, D-Texas and Barber B. Conable, R-N.Y. Later they were packaged in the Senate Finance Committee's tax bill which cleared the Senate in July.

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Baptists Urged To Reject
'Diseased Value System'

By Patti Stephenson

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)—Charging Americans suffer "collective mental illness" as a result of a "diseased value system," sociologist Mary Tillman called for Christians to "reflect Christ rather than a society which teaches 'to be somebody, there must always be somebody beneath me.'"

Speaking in a week-long conference on "Witnessing Out of Personal Wholeness and Social Integrity" during the Home Missions Conference, the director of Tillman Associates in Atlanta blamed secular society's "exclusivity syndrome" for perpetuating racism, classism and sexism. Instead of being reconcilers, she said, "Christians help maintain the walls between rich and poor, black and white, men and women."

Both blacks and whites are guilty of "worshipping the idols of money, middle-class status and achievement at others' expense," she said. "While Christ calls us to stay in the cities and love our brothers and sisters, society says we must leave if we want to succeed." Noting "cultural brainwashing" begins at birth "and pervades our churches," she called for Christians "to transcend the world's value system and remember we're already somebody in God's eyes."

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The annual conference in the North Carolina mountains drew more than 2,000 participants from the eastern United States. Daily Bible study on "Great Awakenings" was led by Lloyd Elder, executive vice president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Warren C. Hultgren, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla., preached in evening sessions.

The conference theme, "All These People," was interpreted through multi-media presentations and a performance by PowerSource, the music/drama troupe which performs at the Baptist Pavilion at the World's Fair. The sessions were also highlighted by drama and mime presentations by Freddie Neel, a professional evangelist and entertainer.

William G. Tanner, Home Mission Board president, honored the 85th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., as PACT Church of the Year for the eastern U.S. and named Eddie Freeman, director of the special missions department of the Alabama Baptist Convention, as PACT Consultant of the Year for the East. PACT, sponsored by the HMB's Metropolitan Missions Department, is the Project to Assist Churches in Transitional Communities.

Tanner also presented awards to William Barkley of Waldorf, Md., as outstanding rural-urban director of associational missions for the eastern U.S. and to Larry Martin of Detroit, Mich., as outstanding metropolitan director of associational missions for the East.

Barkley serves as director of missions for the Potomac Baptist Association in southern Maryland. Since 1967 the association has doubled its number of works under Barkley's leadership according to Quentin Lockwood, director of the HMB's rural-urban missions department.

Don Hammer, director of metropolitan missions at the Home Mission Board, credited Martin as director of missions for Detroit Baptist Association with increasing the number of churches 40 percent since 1976.

In the Wednesday evening session Renaud Balzora, pastor of the Haitian Evangelical Baptist Church in Miami, Fla., was named Outstanding Language Pastor of the Year for the eastern U.S. Balzora, who also teaches seminary extension courses to Haitians and heads the Baptist Refugee Resettlement Center in Miami, received the award from Fermin Whittaker, thnic church growth director for the HMB.

Conference participants were saddened by the death of Ridgecrest postmaster Leonard Ward, 72, who died of an apparent heart attack. He worked at the Baptist assembly for four years along with his wife, Evelyn, who has served as museum hostess. Services and internment were to be held in Thomasville, N.C.

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Church-related Colleges
Offset Federal Aid Cuts

By Lonnie Wilkey

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Despite reduction of federal student assistance programs such as the Pell Grant (formerly the Basic Education Opportunity Grant), church-related colleges are finding ways to assist students wishing to attend Christian institutions.

A recent survey, "Recent Trends in Financial Aid to Students Attending Independent Colleges and Universities," by the National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities (NIICU) shows a decline of almost 18 percent in Pell Grant fundings to students attending independent colleges.

The report also indicated an almost 10 percent decrease in the number of Pell Grant recipients at these institutions.

Arthur L. Walker Jr., executive director/treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention Education Commission and a member of the secretariat of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), notes the report does provide a ray of hope for the student desiring a Christian education at a Baptist school. "The NIICU's survey has shown a major increase in institutional need-based aid," Walker said.

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The percentage of recipients of institutional aid rose from 45 percent in 1979-80 to 55 percent in 1981-82 and the average institutional award increased by 19 percent, from \$1,196 to \$1,424 in the same period.

"It is encouraging to know that our Baptist institutions, as a part of the independent sector, are finding ways to aid deserving students at a time when government assistance has dropped drastically and from all indications may drop even more," Walker said.

-30-

Former College Classmates
Schedule Unusual Reunion

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CLINTON, Miss. (BP)--There is nothing unusual about folks meeting at their alma mater. But for two former Mississippi College students a reunion this month will be most uncommon.

Bill Moseley and Mrs. Diane Deavers both attended Mississippi College in Clinton. They don't remember each other since Deavers graduated the month Moseley transferred from Baylor University. In 1964 the Deavers were living in Memphis, Tenn., where their daughter, Liz, was born and Moseley, who had married, was living 40 miles south of Memphis where Melissa was born.

Eventually the Deavers were appointed Southern Baptist missionaries to the Ivory Coast in Africa wher Deavers is a dentist. The Moseleys were assigned to do field evangelism work in Brazil.

Now 20 years later Moseley and Deavers, both on furlough, will meet in Clinton when their daughters enroll in Mississippi College. Melissa and Liz have never met but will be roommates.

In 1962 Moseley struggled through biology under Melissa's grandfather and admits he never dreamed he would some day bring his daughter to Mississippi College to room with the granddaughter of his biology professor.

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