



September 28, 1982

82-137

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the third of three articles about Southern Baptist chaplains at the U.S. military academies.)

Air Force Restrictions  
Don't Curtail Outreach

AB

By Michael Tutterow

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (BP)--Don and Lynne Gurney are restricted.

Despite 14 years as co-directors of Baptist ministries to students and military personnel at the United States Air Force Academy, military regulations deny the Gurneys access to most areas of the 17,900-acre facility. Their civilian status limits on-campus activity to only a few buildings and even meetings with cadets require an appointment and are limited to Arnold Hall.

Yet academy regulations have not limited the Gurneys in sharing their faith. Baptist ministries annually involve more than 100 cadets and officers at the academy. In addition, graduates assigned to military bases throughout the United States and in dozens of areas around the world give the Gurneys' ministry a global scope.

It began with "availability" and a willingness "to be involved in people's lives," Lynne said. Their highly personalized ministry now assures cadets "they don't come to a place, they come to people."

"The goal," Don said, "is to locate Baptists and other Christians and help them grow in their faith. That implies more than list making; it's making contact with them and letting them know we're there."

Long before the cadets arrive at the academy, the Gurneys contact state Baptist conventions requesting names of new Baptist students who will attend the academy. Letters to newcomers are written, and when freshmen--"Doolies"--finally arrive, they receive a warm airport reception from the Gurneys.

For the next two months the academy immerses students in intense summer training. When they finish in August the Gurneys again are waiting to give them their first off-campus break since their June arrival.

"Doolie Church Sunday" involves more than 100 freshman cadets with the Gurneys serving as hosts for an all-day excursion orienting newcomers to downtown Baptist churches. The trip concludes at the Gurneys' three-story house, which also has served as home to the Gurneys' six children and "home away from home" for hundreds of cadets.

With that introduction to BSU, the Gurneys begin weaving into cadets' already jammed academic schedules a mixture of Bible study, music, mission projects and socials. The needs of the students change each year, Lynne said, so programs vary from year to year.

Academy rules, academic competition and the highly disciplined atmosphere place tremendous emotional, physical and mental pressures on the cadets, says Don. The programs, he explained, "help cadets keep their heads together."

Monthly events, ranging from fall and spring leadership retreats to a winter ski trip and a spring break mission trip to New Mexico, offer BSUers a refreshing break from stringent academy life. "BSU offers the chance to get away and be a real person again."

But planning does not guarantee success. Since BSU is not an official academy organization, "the academy can change everything with one rule or regulation," said Lynne. They've been left high and dry before, she recalled, so "you learn to be flexible."

The Gurneys have earned both the academy's recognition and respect during their tenure. Col. Tom Eller, the first academy BSU president and recently retired head of the academy's astro-computer science department, applauds their efforts which gave "constancy" in such a mobile environment and provided students with a "home away from home." The academy also presented the Gurneys with a commendation recognizing their contributions to "the quality of cadet life."

Oklahoma natives, the Gurneys ventured to the Northwest in the early 1950's. Following study at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, they returned to the Northwest where Don pastored churches in Washington and Idaho and where both received their introduction to Baptist student ministries.

Later the Air Force Academy began looking for someone familiar with military life and experienced in student and pastoral ministry to coordinate Baptist ministry at the academy. Don's stint as a paratrooper, coupled with their combined ministry experience in the Northwest, qualified them for the position. The HMB affirmed their credentials by appointing them co-directors of Baptist ministries to students and military personnel at the academy.

Through counseling, opening their home to students, staging airport receptions and delivering messages and surprise birthday cakes to unsuspecting cadets, the Gurneys prove "they aren't out to do anything but be concerned with you," recalled a former cadet.

"We want every squadron to know they are loved and cared for, but they don't all know what's available to them," Don explained. "If they have a choice, I can live with that. But if they don't, then I hurt for them."

-30-

(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Home Mission Board

SBC Growth Unique Compared  
To Other Major Denominations

BSSB

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press  
9/28/82

NEW YORK (BP)— Southern Baptists, with increases in membership and territory in the last decade, are unique among mainline U. S. denominations, according to a new church membership study.

Churches and Church Membership in the United States 1980, a cooperative, interdenominational research effort, reveals growth in adherents (full members, their children and other regular participants) in Judeo-Christian religious groups in the U.S. is lagging slightly behind population growth for the first time in 30 years. All mainline denominations except the SBC have experienced significant decreases. Earlier studies were done in 1952 and 1971.

The study, based on data from 111 church bodies (denominations) with 231,708 congregations reporting a membership of 112.5 million, shows Southern Baptists have congregations in 76 percent of the counties in the U.S.

Baptists (Southern Baptists and nine other church bodies) are numerically predominant in more U.S. counties than any other religious group. Baptists have more than 25 percent of the adherents in 1,164 counties, followed by Catholics (963), Methodists (374) and Lutherans (277).

Researchers calculate the 112.5 million adherents counted in the study represent 49.7 percent of the total U.S. population and 91 percent of the adherents of some religious group. The conclusion that approximately half of all Americans do not adhere to a religious group conforms to numerous other similar surveys.

Two research analysts from the University of Connecticut, William M. Newman and Peter L. Halvorson, said the data indicates an increasing pluralism in U.S. religion because of the mixture of denominational groups representing diverse cultural and ethnic groups.

-more-

According to the researchers, the 35 groups which submitted data for the study represent the "overwhelming majority" of all adherents. "The study is the best estimate of church adherence we have," the researchers said, comparing its quality to that of the U.S. census.

The churches were outrunning the population in the years between 1952 and 1971, the researchers said. However, in the years between 1971 and 1980 the population increased at a rate of 4.6 percent while religious adherence increased by only 4.1 percent.

The analysts saw a trend reflecting U.S. population shifts which positively affected the growth of denominations that are already strong where the migrants are headed, such as the Sunbelt area.

The two said many people join a local church when they move in order to "plug-in" to the local culture, instead of carrying their denominational identity with them.

A trend toward smaller congregations was also evident. Some denominations, while declining in total adherents, list more congregations and more counties of representation.

Southern Baptists stand in contrast to this trend, also, because the number of churches with fewer than 300 members has dropped steadily over the period of the three membership studies.

Concerning the failure of religious adherents to keep pace with population growth, the analysts said there may be a message that fewer people are enamored with major religions in this culture and the present generation of middle adults may view religion as something less than useful to them than have earlier generations.

Martin Bradley, manager of the research services department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and a member of the executive committee of the study, said the new study shows Southern Baptists to be a significant factor in the U.S. religious scene.

Bradley said the 320-page report, which provides information on the number of churches and members on national, regional, state and county bases, is the most thorough geographical examination of religious bodies available. He said the study should be valuable to Southern Baptists to examine the religious makeup of individual counties and areas to determine the need for new worship groups.

For purposes of the study, adherents were defined as all members, including full members, their children and the estimated number of other regular participants who are not considered as communicant, confirmed or full members. For Southern Baptists and 54 other church bodies which have a category only for full members, adherents were estimated according to a formula. Southern Baptist membership is reported as 13,369,848 in the study, while the estimate of adherents is 16,281,692.

In the new study, 17 church bodies have one million or more adherents, accounting for 91.9 percent of the total number of adherents. Twenty-five bodies in the 100,000-999,999 range represent 6.9 percent while the remaining 69 bodies comprise 1.2 percent of the total.

The 76 percent of the representation of congregations in U.S. counties for Southern Baptists ranked fourth in the study. The 2,383 total for Southern Baptists leaves more than 700 counties without a Southern Baptist congregation. Bradley said some of these counties are sparsely populated, however, and different Baptist groups have churches in many of the others.

United Methodists have congregations in 2,986 counties or county equivalents, followed by Catholics, 2,881, Assemblies of God, 2,452, and Southern Baptists.

Baptist groups included in the study are American Baptist Association, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., Baptist General Conference, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Bethel Ministerial Association, Inc., Conservative Baptist Association of America, North American Baptist Conference, Separate Baptists in Christ, Seventh Day Baptist General Conference and Southern Baptist Convention. Missing are Free Will Baptists and the three major Black Baptist denominations, which were unable to furnish records on a county basis. It has been estimated that the omitted church bodies have approximately 6-8 million members.

Copies of the study book, with a color map, are available for \$24 from the Glermary Research Center, 750 Piedmont Ave., N.E., Atlanta, Ga. 30308. Extra copies of the map are available at the same address for \$5 each.

-30-

(BP) map mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Baptist Sunday School Board Bureau of Baptist Press

HSU's Theology School  
Gets \$5 Million Gift

Co

Baptist Press  
9/28/82

ABILENE, Tex. (BP)—Hardin-Simmons University has received a gift which could ultimately amount to \$5 million, to establish the Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Logsdon School of Theology.

The largest single gift in the university's 91-year history was announced by Jesse C. Fletcher, HSU president. Mrs. Logsdon has set aside in deferred forms or transferred ranch land as well as mineral rights to the university property and land that could ultimately mean over \$5 million to the university endowment fund.

Charles W. Logsdon, Jr., a prominent West Texas rancher and businessman, died last October. His wife is the former Koreen Willcox.

"The gift makes possible the dramatic escalation of a program that is at the very heart of Hardin-Simmons University," Fletcher said. "The School of Theology will be able to train Christian vocational workers on a plane unparalleled in the university's history. In addition, it will make possible the training of lay workers through special scholarship programs."

Logsdon graduated from HSU in 1928, was a former Cowboy Band member and had been an HSU trustee and a member of the Board of Development. Mrs. Logsdon attended HSU in 1932.

Logsdon was a lifelong resident of the Abilene area and was a rancher all his life. For more than 55 years he was an active member of First Baptist Church where Mrs. Logsdon is still an active member.

-30-

Vandalism Damage To Georgia  
Church Estimated At \$25,000

AB

Baptist Press  
9/28/82

ATLANTA (BP) — Vandals struck the sanctuary of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church early Sunday morning (Sept. 26), causing damage estimated at \$25,000.

Sixty-two pews were pulled up from the floor and overturned in the main sanctuary, Jim Neyland, minister of education/administration, said. Seven glass door panes also were broken in the educational section of the church.

"When you see damage in the main sanctuary, which is closer to the heart, it hurts," Neyland said.

A total of 1,400 worshippers attended the 8:30 and 11 a.m. worship services, held in the fellowship hall Sunday morning. Speakers set up in the chapel permitted participation in the service by the overflow crowds.

Atlanta police are investigating. There are no reported suspects. Neyland added: "We have no suspects, whatsoever. We have no disgruntled employes, so we have no idea who it could have been."

--30--

Alabama Woman's Will  
Leaves NOBTS \$500,000

CO

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary will receive approximately \$500,000 from a bequest by an Alabama women.

Elizabeth S. Deer, of Monroeville, Ala., died in Sept., 1980 and left NOBTS 25 percent of the residue from the probated estate and 25 percent interest in the sale of large land holdings in Nebraska. She requested the money be used "as an investment in the future of the the institution and its part in the cause of Christ" and to assist in the education of persons for Christian ministry."

This is the second largest gift from an individual the seminary has received, according to Cliff Amos, director of development at NOBTS. The seminary has already received most of the proceeds from the will.

-30-

CORRECTION: In BP mailed 9/21/82, "Draper Names Key Committee Leaders," in paragraph 10, please change the name of the Pine Bluff church where Tal Bonham was pastor to Southside Baptist Church, not First Baptist Church, as sent.

Thanks,

Baptist Press