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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  
Craig Bird, 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  
**NASHVILLE** (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave. N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
**RICHMOND** (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
**WASHINGTON** Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Oklahoma City First  
Names Women Deacons

By Dan Martin

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Three women have been elected deacons by members of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City, setting up what is sure to be a confrontation between the 3,000 member congregation and the Capital Baptist Association.

The election results were announced this week in the church's edition of the Baptist Messenger, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. Members of the church balloted Aug. 21, choosing 18 deacons from among 48 persons--including seven women--nominated.

Pastor Gene Garrison, immediate past second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said normally the church elects 15 deacons each year, but this year three vacancies had to be filled, necessitating the election of 18 deacons.

Of those elected, the three women and three men will be ordained by the church Sept. 25. Twelve of those elected previously have been ordained.

The women elected are Edna Dunn, Kathleen Nash and Sherry Lawson. A fourth woman--unnamed in the news article--also was elected but declined to serve, saying her husband and two sons already are ordained deacons at the church, and adding she believed her election would be "a little too much."

The article explained the three week delay in announcing the results of the election by noting Garrison "personally interviewed those who had never been ordained, informing them of their election and asking them to consider serving as an active deacon."

Garrison told Baptist Press he asked each of the women to prayerfully consider serving, saying he did not tell them whether they were the only woman elected to the board until after each had consented to serve. "Each of the women prayerfully considered it for several days before agreeing to serve," he said.

Dunn and Lawson will serve on the deacon body with their husbands, each of whom has been a chairman of the deacons at the church. Nash is a widow; her late husband also was chairman of the deacon body.

In his column in the newsletter, Garrison noted: "I am well aware of the fact that not everyone will agree with this action. It thus becomes very important to understand the basis of this disagreement. No church should ever attempt to compel uniformity of faith at every single point. But the church must seek a unity within diversity, harmonizing technical differences of interpretation within a spirit of mutual love and respect..."

"We do not all agree at every single point of biblical understanding, yet we have found a remarkable fellowship that allows and encourages individual freedom and responsibility to think, to study, to decide and to act within a larger spirit of oneness."

He wrote that some in the church are concerned "with the attitudes and opinions of those outside our church, particularly other Southern Baptists. Well, I share the same concern. I am committed to the New Testament principle of trying 'not to offend' my brethren. I prefer not to provoke criticism, and especially to avoid argument whenever possible."

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"But what I have said about our local church must, I feel, also be true about Southern Baptists as a whole. We must focus on points of agreement and not on items of disagreement."

Garrison told Baptist Press that in taking the action he does not "feel we have denied the faith...or denied the Bible. I feel we have tried to be open and loving to all people. I am both pleased and proud of the way our church has participated in this entire process."

The process leading to the election of the women as deacons began in March of 1981, when a nine person committee was named to study the role of women in the church. After its two year study, the committee reported it found nothing in the New Testament to prevent women from becoming deacons. It recommended bylaws be changed to allow women to serve as deacons. The action was taken following a two-hour discussion Jan. 16 by a 232-167 affirmative vote.

The action set off an immediate reaction by some pastors and churches in the Capital Baptist Association. The executive board in February voted 36-8 to adopt a resolution opposing ordination of women and calling for a study by the association constitutional committee.

The constitutional committee reported back April 18--two months ahead of schedule--that the association has no authority over any church and that a church which ordains women is not in violation of the body's constitution.

However, the committee concluded the present constitution gives the association authority to determine its relationship with any church believed to be in error in faith or practice, and noted: "The association reserves the right to determine its own membership, to refuse to seat messengers from churches that may become corrupt in faith or practices."

The executive board, minutes after adopting the committee report, approved a resolution opposing the ordination of women as deacons or ministers. The resolution, proposed by Hugo Lindquist, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, said members believe the Bible "does not authorize the ordination of women" and adds that "any church who is a member of our association that ordains women be informed that such action is not true to the scriptures and does not agree with our doctrinal position."

The action of First Baptist Church in authorizing, electing and ordaining women as deacons and the reaction of the Capital Association in passing two resolutions and adopting one committee report opposing the ordination of women, probably will set up a confrontation when the association conducts its annual meeting Oct. 17-18 in Nichols Hills Baptist Church.

Ernie Perkins, director of missions, told Baptist Press he hopes "we don't make this a test of fellowship. I hope it won't even be brought up, but I am sure it will."

Perkins, who has headed the 137,000 member association for two years, said First Baptist Church did not send messengers to the 1982 annual meeting, and may not do so again in 1983. If the church sends no messengers, Perkins said, "the matter may be handled very quietly. If a motion is made not to seat their messengers and they don't have any messengers, then it will have to be ruled out of order."

However, he pointed out he believes the matter is up to Garrison and the church. "I honestly do not know if Gene (Garrison) wants it handled quietly. He may want to vindicate himself or declare they have a scriptural basis for what they have done. It may be that he wants to speak to the annual meeting."

Perkins said if Garrison wants to defend his position "there will be others who would take the scriptures and do exegesis in another way. It would open up a long, hard discussion and votes would be made and cast. I really don't know what would happen...."

The picture is clouded by the association constitution, which specifies it is an "association of messengers from churches..." Since First Baptist Church did not send messengers to the 1982 meeting, questions have been raised about its membership.

While Perkins admitted it would take a "Philadelphia lawyer" to untangle the snarls, he did say the church is considered a member of the association since it contributes to the work of the body, and since it submits an annual church letter.

Missionaries Will Return To China  
'Sooner Or Later,' Cauthen Says

By Norman Jameson

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Missionaries "sooner or later" will be allowed back into China, says Baker James Cauthen, who helped shape one of the largest mission enterprises in history.

For 26 years Cauthen headed the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Before that, he was a missionary to China and area secretary for China and Southeast Asia for eight years.

In his third year of retirement, Cauthen, who will be 74 in December, is teaching Asian missions to students and potential missionaries at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Baptists long have dedicated massive resources to China. Of the 539 missionaries the Foreign Mission Board supported in 15 nations or areas in 1924, 287 were in China. By contrast, Brazil, with 310, is the country with the largest single number of Southern Baptist missionaries today--but the total force is 3,343 in 101 countries.

Baptist mission work in China stopped in November 1951 when missionaries were evicted. Yet so strong a magnet is that vast nation that in 1964 Foreign Mission Board reports still listed China as one of the nations in which it had active work.

Cauthen, probably the second best known Baptist to have been a missionary to China (after Lottie Moon for whom Southern Baptists' annual foreign missions offering is named) said China still holds a strange and strong allure to Baptists because Baptists have a better sense of China's "dominant and meaningful" history.

Historically among the world's most advanced civilizations, China's Manchu Dynasty was in decay about the time Westerners came to know China.

"In Westerners' first contact with China they saw the decaying society that had gotten too conservative and failed to make scientific and cultural advances," Cauthen said. "God has done a great work in China, and the gospel has had a great hearing among the people. Missionaries know the people. It's no wonder they want to go back.

"What adjustments may be necessary to go back into China? We'll wait and see what they are and make them. We'll go as friends, as colleagues, probably not as employers very much."

Cauthen said Southern Baptists' commitment to missions continues strong. "There is a profound commitment in the convention to Bold Mission Thrust," he said. "It has been taken very deeply into the heart of the convention. It is one of the elements that said to us 'don't major on the minors, major on the majors' and the major is taking the gospel to the world."

Cauthen is concerned that Baptists not devote an inordinate amount of attention to convention politics because "if you put your attention in certain places and focus too sharply on one item, it can dull the importance of that which should be uppermost."

Even though Baptists support a far flung missions enterprise, 46 senior colleges, hospitals, 20 national boards, agencies and auxiliaries, Cauthen said "the Baptist home" is the best place an observer's finger can feel the pulse of Southern Baptists.

"Look at a Baptist family," he said. "See a man getting ready with his wife and children to go to church, not because somebody said they have to but because they want to because they see the church as a vital part of family life. The second place to look is the local church. In the local church there is a real concern for witness and a great love for the scriptures. Baptists love to pray and they love their churches.

"Southern Baptists represent more potential for the kingdom of the Lord than most people realize," Cauthen said. "We're a free people in a free church with no ecclesiastical hierarchy telling us what to do. When you get free people in a free church moving on the conviction of the truth of God, that becomes a mighty power.

"The only grip on a Baptist is the grip of God's hand on his heart."

Seattle Apartment Ministry  
Points To Inner City Need

By Carol Rathbun

SEATTLE (BP)--Few people would term recent government cutbacks in social services a "blessing." But for Lake Washington Baptist Church in Seattle they have opened the door to an unusual community ministry.

Vince DePalma, a man who says he was "simply at the right place at the right time," was passing through Seattle around Thanksgiving of last year on his way to seminary when he stopped to visit a few days with the Lake Washington church.

He discovered the Seattle Housing Authority had lost its funding for youth and social activity programs and full-time "community workers" who had run community centers at several of the public housing complexes had been released.

DePalma made contact with the manager of one of the housing complexes in the Lake Washington area. He offered to bring a number of social programs such as tutoring, youth recreation and youth outings into the public housing projects for free.

The manager and her supervisor were both very receptive and gave him keys to three housing complexes within a few miles of the church. Other members of the church began to get involved and in early February another full-time worker, Larry Trowbridge, was recruited.

Each housing complex consists of a small high-rise building for the elderly and townhouse apartments for low-income families. A community center equipped with an office, kitchen, ping-pong table and other recreational resources is also located in each complex.

By opening the community center after school and staying to talk and play with the youth, they began to gain the confidence and trust of those they were trying to minister to.

DePalma and Trowbridge have taken groups on outings to the mountains, signed youth up to participate in the United Way Campership Program, involved some in the church's softball team and brought movies into the community center.

Plans are being made to form a basketball league and to start a tutoring program in the fall, using families in the Lake Washington church.

The community centers open and close each time with prayer and a time for prayer requests. Three of the youth went with Trowbridge and DePalma to the Billy Graham Crusade in Tacoma last May and others are going to the Lake Washington church on Sundays.

This summer, Backyard Bible Clubs and a missions Sunday school were organized at two of the three apartment complexes with an average of 40 children in attendance between them. Two summer missionaries assigned to the Puget Sound Association helped in these activities.

The real need continues to be more workers. DePalma left in June to attend Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and the summer missionaries left in August. Trowbridge, unable to supervise all the community centers alone, has sought and expects to receive help this coming year from the University of Washington BSU and from other churches in the area.

"Besides people," Trowbridge said, "we could use money to buy more recreational equipment or repair broken equipment we already have. We could also use donations such as active-participation games or used bicycles, that kind of thing."

He related a story in which the youth at one of the apartment complexes had wanted a pool table for their community center. He started to pray for one and not long after, he discovered his boss had an old one in his garage.

Trowbridge asked if he could have it to take to the complex and his boss said he could. "That was a real breaking point in the ministry," he said. "The kids saw there is power in prayer and in God."

The door to ministering to the youth's parents is also beginning to crack open. "There are a lot of working single parents in the complexes," DePalma explained, "and a lot of them have problem kids they don't know what to do with."

Recognizing the need to encourage apartment ministries such as the one DePalma and Trowbridge have been involved in, the Home Mission Board, along with the Puget Sound Association, is studying the possibility of planting an inner city worker through the HMB Christian social ministries department in the Lake Washington church.

The person in the full-time position would spend half his time in Christian social ministries and half as apartment ministry director.

"More and more people are moving from homes to apartments and we've got to move along with them," DePalma said.

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Nigeria Missionary Dies  
Following Emergency Trip

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NEW YORK (BP)--Betty Chance Egedy, Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria, died Sept. 7 at Cornell University Medical Center, New York, after an emergency trip to the United States for treatment of an undiagnosed illness. She was 58.

She was flown to the United States Sept. 4 after doctors at Baptist Medical Centre, Ogbomosho, were unable to determine why she had suffered weakness, appetite and weight loss and a drop in her blood protein level in recent weeks. An autopsy is being performed.

She was to travel to New Orleans, in her home state of Louisiana, but when the plane landed in New York she was rushed to Cornell University Medical Center, where she underwent an emergency leg amputation in an effort to save her life.

Her husband, Charles, and Don and Patsy Meier, missionary physician and nurse from Ogbomosho, accompanied her.

The Egedys were employed in 1981 as missionary associates to Nigeria, where they taught at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho. Before going to Nigeria, Mrs. Egedy was a high school teacher in Slidell, La., where she was chosen "1981 Teacher of the Year" by the St. Tammany Parish School System. She also participated with her husband in a number of Biblical archaeological expeditions to the Middle East.

She was a native of Baton Rouge, and a graduate of Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, and Woman's Missionary Union Training School (now part of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), Louisville, Ky. She also studied at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

She was a summer missionary in Houston for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and an editorial secretary and writer for the American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia. She was also a teacher in Somerdale, N.J., Cheshire, Conn., Chalmette, La., and Westlake, La.

Besides her husband, also a resident of Louisiana, she is survived by a son and daughter, both of Baton Rouge.

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(BP) photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.