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January 3, 1984

84-1

Academy President
Smothers Dies In Fire

SEYMOUR, Tenn. (BP)--Hubert B. Smothers, president of Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy in Seymour, Tenn., died early Jan. 1 in a fire which destroyed the president's home on the academy campus.

Smothers, 59, apparently was overcome by smoke when he returned to the two-story home thinking one of his grandchildren was still inside the burning house.

According to reports, five of the six Smothers children and their families were spending New Year's weekend at the Smothers' home. About 1:30 a.m., a son-in-law, Bob Hammonds, discovered the kitchen/family room engulfed in flames.

Hammonds alerted other family members and all 13 were able to escape. However, in the confusion, Smothers thought one of the grandchildren was still inside and went back.

When members of the Seymour Volunteer Fire Department were able to enter the home--about an hour later--they found Smothers. He was rushed to the East Tennessee Baptist Hospital in nearby Knoxville, but all efforts to revive him were unsuccessful.

Fire officials said the fire apparently started from a fireplace in the family room. An investigation, required by Tennessee law in all fires which involve a fatality, will be conducted this week.

Smothers had been president of the high-school level boarding school since September 1970. The school is part of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

He was a graduate of HCBA, Cumberland College in Lebanon, Tenn., and George Peabody College for Teachers (now a part of Vanderbilt University) in Nashville. After serving as coach and teacher at Greenbrier High School in Greenbrier, Tenn., he became director of public relations for Belmont College in Nashville.

In 1958, he became personnel supervisor at the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, and was director of the service division of the BSSB when he became HCBA president.

The family has requested memorials be made to HCBA. The Hubert B. Smothers Memorial Fund has been created at First Baptist Church of Seymour, where Smothers was a deacon.

Following Smothers' death, the executive committee of the HCBA board of trustees held a called meeting to make arrangements for the continuing operation of the school. Mrs. Jane Ellison of Knoxville, trustee chairman, with advice of the executive committee, will serve as the academy administrator until an interim president is named.

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Relocation Enriches Missions;
Not Church's Building Fund

By Larry Brumley

Baptist Press
1/3/84

CARROLLTON, Texas (BP)--When First Baptist Church, Carrollton, moved from downtown facilities to its satellite center in North Carrollton Dec. 11, it turned the buildings over to its two ethnic missions.

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"They could have sold the facility and used the money for the new place they moved to, but they didn't choose to. They didn't have to consider us. They could have left us where we were meeting and we would have gone down," said Jimmy Cox, pastor of First Church's Cambodian Missions.

In addition to the Cambodian mission, the church sponsors a Hispanic mission and is planning to begin a Korean mission in 1984.

Before First Baptist Church moved, Pastor Wayne Allen preached at the downtown church and the satellite (about five miles away) each Sunday morning.

The Cambodian mission holds its worship service at 9:30 a.m. and the Hispanic congregation uses the same auditorium at 11 a.m.

The move will allow each of the missions to expand to about 400 members, Allen said.

"The move will give us an opportunity for growth," Cox said. "We were about at a standstill at our other facilities."

The Cambodian mission was started about three years ago with one family and has grown to 80 families. It was meeting in four locations prior to the move.

The possibilities are tremendous, said Cox, who estimates Carrollton's Cambodian population at 1,500 members.

Santos Ramos, pastor of the Hispanic mission, said his congregation is about 12 years old and has a Sunday school enrollment of about 170.

"We had no room for growth where we were (across the street.) It was an old building and we feel that was one of our main obstacles to growth," Ramos said. "I like the spirit which the church had in the transition (from the downtown site to the new location), wanting to continue to minister in the community."

The move will also allow First Church to expand its child care program at the downtown location to care for up to 350 children in the day care child development center, Allen said.

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Biblical Names
Are Relative To Him

By Joe Westbury

Baptist Press
1/3/84

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--Geriel deOliveira, director of missions for the San Francisco-Peninsula Association, doesn't have much trouble remembering names of books in the Bible or their major characters--he simply looks to his relatives for inspiration.

His Brazilian grandfather had been married only two months when he was saved through the efforts of Southern Baptist missionary Loren Reno. He was so excited with his newfound faith that he decided to attach Biblical names to his offspring as soon as they came along.

Thus began the legacy of uncles Psalm, Proverb, Deuteronomy and Peter. And aunts Martha, Ruth, Zipporah and Psalma, the feminine variation of Psalm. deOliveira's father married the daughter Mary.

Though his father was not a Christian at the time--a bone of contention in the family--he decided to continue the tradition to stay on the good side of his father-in-law. Thus the origin of deOliveira's brothers Genesis and Eliel (meaning God is God), and sisters Bernice and Holda (an Old Testament prophetess).

"My parents must have loved the book of Chronicles because three of our names came from there. My name, which means 'May God See', is found in 1 Chronicles 7:2. He was the son of Tola, a great-grandson of Aaron," he explains.

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On Dec. 28, 1969, deOliveira had the privilege of leading his father to faith in Christ. Three months later his father died in an automobile accident.

deOliveira proudly states he was born by the Holy Spirit twice--in 1942 in the Brazilian state of Espirito Santo (Holy Spirit), and in 1961 when he became a Christian.

After his marriage, he decided to break the family legacy and give his children names that were easy to translate into both languages. However, he did name his son "after the greatest Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil--the 'Apostle of the Amazon', Eric Nelson."

In addition to his dual heritage as a Brazilian and a naturalized American citizen, even his marriage has an international flare. He met his wife, the former Sylvia Martin of Greenville, S.C., and the daughter of a Southern Baptist deacon--at a Korean Southern Baptist church in Los Angeles.

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(Joe Westbury is associate editor of World Mission Journal.)

Transformer Explosion Empties
New York Convention Offices

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1/3/84

SYRACUSE, N.Y. (BP)--An underground transformer exploded and sprayed PCB over a 12-story building which houses the Baptist Convention of New York Dec. 21.

Oil containing the deadly chemical was blown through an open grate in the sidewalk outside the building. Officials sealed the building and began cleanup work immediately--including hauling off deep accumulations of snow from the December storms.

Baptist convention employees were not allowed back into their offices which occupy part of the one floor structure, for any reason until Dec. 29.

That meant several who had not picked up their paychecks did not get to do so until after Christmas. Fortunately church pastoral assistance checks from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for December had been mailed early because of the holidays.

On Jan. 3 the basement of the building was still sealed while additional tests for contamination were being conducted. Contamination would have been much more severe if the explosion had resulted in a fire. When burned, PCB produces two even more deadly chemicals--dioxin and furans.

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Longtime SBC Bookkeeper
Ruth Nelson Dies

Baptist Press
1/3/84

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Ruth Nelson, 83, who worked for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee from its establishment in 1927 until her retirement in 1965, died at her home in Nashville, Dec. 26.

As a bookkeeper for the agency she attended every annual session of the SBC from 1933 to 1965 and countersigned distribution checks to SBC agencies for more than \$413.8 million.

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Widow Of Liberian Leader
Prays For Peace, Understanding

By David R. Wilkinson

Baptist Press
1/3/84

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--More than three-and-a-half years after her husband was assassinated in a military coup, the widow of Liberian president and internationally-known Baptist leader William R. Tolbert Jr., still prays daily "for love to forgive my enemies."

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Tolbert, president of the Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention for 22 years, and president of the Baptist World Alliance, 1965-1970, was killed in an April 1980 coup led by the head of the country's national guard.

He was shot to death in the official residence on the eve of a three-week centennial celebration of Baptist work in the country. His wife, Victoria, who heard the shots from downstairs, was arrested and imprisoned, along with other members of the family.

For more than two years, Mrs. Tolbert said, she was emotionally unable to speak of her husband's death. But in an interview in her son's apartment in Louisville, Ky., she recalled the horrible sequence of events.

The president emeritus of the Liberian Convention's Baptist Woman's Union interspersed the account with frequent references to the "love and support" of Baptists and other Christians around the world.

Her only surviving son, William R. Tolbert III, is a first-year theology student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Tolbert, who was imprisoned for two years following the coup, hopes someday to return to Liberia to follow in his father's footsteps as a minister. In addition to his other responsibilities, the senior Tolbert served for 25 years as pastor of Zion Praise Baptist Church in Bensonville, his hometown.

Mrs. Tolbert was extremely careful not to criticize the current administration in Liberia, since some family members still live in the country and Southern Baptist missionaries continue to minister there.

"I've kept a low profile (since coming to the U.S.)," she explained. "I don't read the papers or anything else about what's going on (in Liberia). I just ask the Lord to bring peace to my country, to touch people's hearts."

On the day her husband was killed, Mrs. Tolbert was thrust into a single jail cell shared by 26 other persons--men and women. "For days I didn't know where I was," she recalled. "I had no idea what would happen to me."

Even so, she "found a sense of inner peace. We sang and prayed together. I knew the Lord would take care of me."

She received no word from the outside and wondered if her children had received the same fate as her husband. She was unaware of the many petitions for her release, including a resolution from the Woman's Department of the Baptist World Alliance.

The jail had no windows, and it was two months before she was allowed to venture outside for brief, close-guarded walks, Mrs. Tolbert said. After three months in prison, soldiers came to get her.

Rather than facing an execution as she anticipated, she was placed under house arrest and moved to a small house under 24-hour guard.

On the last day of 1980, Mrs. Tolbert was allowed to come to the United States for medical treatment. Four months later, however, she returned to Liberia to seek the safety of her children and other family members.

"I had promised to come back, she explained. "I wasn't going to stay here when all my children were still in Liberia."

Each of the seven children, except for elder son A.B., was eventually released. A.B., representative in the legislature, was executed in October 1981, despite numerous requests for his release, including a petition from the Queen of England.

Today, most of the family lives in the U.S. One of five daughters, a physician, chose to remain in Liberia with her family.

After Mrs. Tolbert became seriously ill again, doctors convinced government authorities another trip to the U.S. was necessary for adequate medical care. After visiting a U.S. doctor, however, the pain and tension caused by the trauma ceased. Mrs. Tolbert wasn't surprised. She has no doubts that "the Lord made me sick so I could come to the U.S."

Though she left Liberia "with nothing," Mrs. Tolbert is grateful "just to be alive.

"I haven't been in want since I left Monrovia," she said. "Baptists and other Christians have been very kind to me. People have generously supplied my needs and those of my family. And I know they have prayed for me."

Mrs. Tolbert said she has no long-range plans, except for spending time with her children and grandchildren. "The Lord has been good to me," she said. "I'm willing to do whatever he wants me to do."

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Alabama Volunteers Postpone
Nigeria Trip Following Coup

Baptist Press
1/3/84

IBADAN, Nigeria (BP)--Alabama Baptist volunteers were forced to postpone travel to Nigeria following a Dec. 30 coup in the country.

Maj. Gen. Mohammad Buhari led the coup which toppled President Shehu Shagari and the civilian government. Buhari imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew, closed all borders and suspended all international flights and international communications.

Three Alabama volunteers were scheduled to leave for Nigeria Jan. 1 and another 31 on Jan. 4 as part of a partnership mission effort between Alabama Baptists and the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

They still plan to go to Nigeria when and if their service is possible under the new government, said Earl Potts, coordinator of the project for the Alabama Baptist State Convention.

There are about 100 Southern Baptist missionaries and auxiliary personnel in the Nigeria.

Fred Levrets, executive director of the Baptist Mission in Nigeria, reported by phone Jan. 3, a curfew was still in effect and airports and borders were still closed following the coup.

Reports within the country made him feel all missionaries were safe although internal communications were still cut and he had been unable to directly contact some mission stations. He said missionaries in Ibadan were able to move freely during the daytime.

Potts said 28 students and counselors from Samford University were among the volunteers scheduled to leave Jan. 4. Most were to work on university campuses throughout Nigeria. Nine other teams of Alabama Baptists are scheduled to help in evangelistic crusades during January, February and March.

Levrets asked Southern Baptists to continue to pray that missionaries will be a witness during this time in Nigeria.

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