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July 17, 1984

O'Brien Resigns To Accept Amarillo Church's Call

By J.B. Fowler

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New Mexico
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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)—Chester O'Brien, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico, has resigned effective Dec. 31, to become an associate to Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas.

In reading his resignation to the convention's executive board July 16, O'Brien said: "Three times since 1958 our family has been associated with First Baptist Church, Amarillo. Carl Bates and the missions committee called us from First Baptist Church, Tucumcari, N.M., to begin the Paramount Baptist Church. Later, as director of missions for the Amarillo region, we were members at First Baptist Church. Winfred Moore was our pastor.

"We had been invited, once again, to join the staff of that great church. It is my hope that the personnel committee of this convention will be able to name a replacement by the time of the state convention meeting (Oct. 30, 1984), so that the new executive director and I may work together for two weeks in early December.

O'Brien, 59, said his duties at the Amarillo church will include leadership in church evangelism and ministries to the church's large senior citizen membership. Also, O'Brien will assist Moore in other areas of pastoral ministry.

When O'Brien leaves New Mexico on Dec. 31, he will conclude 10 years as the state's executive director. He began his ministry on Jan. 1, 1975, upon the retirement of R.Y. Bradford.

During those 10 years, the state's Cooperative Program budget has increased from \$702,329 in 1974 to \$2,290,351 in 1984; church membership has increased from 98,000 to 110,000, and Sunday school enrollment has increased 48,000 to 55,000. Currently, there are 341 churches and missions in the state, compared to approximately 250 in 1974.

The Amarillo church, where Moore has been pastor for the past 25 years, has a membership of 10,000 people. In 1984, the church has averaged 2,605 in Sunday school and has a \$4.25 million operating budget.

The third largest Baptist church in the state of Texas, the church gave \$1.27 million to missions in 1983. Ranking second in Cooperative Program giving in Texas, the church will give \$605,000 to missions through the Cooperative Program in 1984. According to Moore, the church's Lottie Moon Offering for foreign missions in 1983 was \$106,372.

Following O'Brien's resignation, the executive board met to name a search committee to seek a successor. Eugene Elder, pastor of First Baptist Church of Aztec, is chairman of the board. Calvin Partain, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gallup is president of the BCNM.

Under the BCNM constitution, the convention in annual session must elect the executive director. Spokespersons said they hope the search committee will be able to nominate a successor to O'Brien when the BCNM meets in Glorieta in late October.

Biographer Says Armstrong
Could Be Caustic, Hostile

By Charles Willis

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Southern Baptists who believe Annie Armstrong, one of their missions-minded heroines, was a "sweet little old lady" may be in for a surprise.

According to Bobbie Sorrill, author of "Annie Armstrong: Dreamer in Action" recently released by Broadman Press, Armstrong was "six feet tall, ramrod straight and didn't take anything off of anybody."

Sorrill, associate executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, SBC, told participants in the church media library conference she discovered during her research for the book that Annie Armstrong was a woman who seldom hesitated to express her opinions.

As the first WMU executive from 1888 to 1906, Armstrong was "very much a Southern Victorian woman in some ways," Sorrill said. But when it suited her purposes, she could be a strong-willed personality.

A staunch defender of Southern Baptist agencies, Armstrong wrote several times weekly to express her views to the heads of the Foreign Mission Board, the Home Mission Board and the Sunday School Board.

"Her letters were very lengthy," Sorrill said, and when she became angry, the messages were "caustic and hostile." After such outbursts, her biographer said, "she would always be sorry. I think she would have given her life for the Foreign Mission Board, the Home Mission Board or the Sunday School Board."

While Armstrong had differences that led to difficulty with some of the national WMU presidents, she appeared to be loved by Southern Baptist women across the country, Sorrill said.

"She had a regular correspondence with all of the denomination's missionaries, including Lottie Moon," she continued. In fact Armstrong was responsible for the annual foreign missions offering being named for Moon.

Years after Armstrong had resigned her post over personal opposition to a WMU training school, national women's leaders asked her permission to name the annual home missions offering in her honor. Armstrong balked. She wanted no part of fame. She finally yielded when others assured her that naming the offering for her would help the cause of missions.

Armstrong was active in Utah Place Baptist Church, Baltimore, where WMU was then headquartered. For 60 years she taught children in Sunday school.

Sorrill said her two-and-one-half years of research on Armstrong led her to H.O. Walters of Florida who was a member of Armstrong's class when he was seven years old and she was in her seventies.

Walters told Sorrill Armstrong expected perfection of her pupils and each child was required to repeat the memory verse each Sunday before entering the classroom.

Walters also recalled an occasion when Armstrong invited the class to her home for tea and cookies but left all the preparation and serving of refreshments to her sister Alice. Armstrong wasn't a poor hostess however, for Walters told Sorrill that while Alice scurried about, their teacher "was down on the floor playing jacks with us!"

In 1938, gravely ill and sometimes in a coma, Armstrong, then 88, called for "my boys." Walters, then in his 20s, was summoned to visit her with the church pastor. "She was out of her coma," Sorrill quoted Walters as saying, "and she drilled me on every memory verse I had ever had!"

Sorrill admitted some of the volatile correspondence and apparent bull-headedness of Armstrong shattered some of her preconceived ideas about the missions heroine. However, she said, a meek woman would never have been able to make the impact Armstrong made in those times.

"She had key roles in planning literature for missions and in organizing women for missions support," Sorrill said.

Armstrong's family had enough money that she could have chosen to be a socialite, Sorrill said. "But she chose the broader concern of the whole world. She left us a missions denomination as her legacy."

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Churches Should Establish
Enrollment Goals: Piland

By Linda Lawson

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"Doing business like we've always done it will sustain what we've always been," insists Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. "We need to expand our ways of thinking to enter a new day where more unreached persons are found and brought into the church."

He feels churches should set Sunday school enrollment goals--not to have a number to post on a bulletin board or print in the church newsletter--but because they want to involve more persons in Bible study and ultimately lead them to become Christians.

"If an enrollment goal doesn't reflect people, we don't have our hearts right," Piland pointed out. "Every person is infinitely important and worth saving."

As the denomination moves into the final year of 8.5 by '85 (SBC goal to reach a Sunday school enrollment of 8.5 million by Sept. 30, 1985), the 36,531 churches are being asked to set enrollment goals and develop specific strategies to reach them.

As of Sept. 30, 1983, the SBC Sunday school enrollment had reached an all-time high of 7.8 million. Increases for four consecutive years have registered a net gain of 497,483.

The goal for 1984-85 is a net increase of 500,000. The theme for the year is "Reach 5 in 85." It is hoped church goals will be set with supporting goals by classes and departments.

Piland said he believes emphasizing enrolling people in Bible study is in keeping with the challenge of Christ to take the gospel to all people. "The only thing wrong with 8.5 by '85 is that it's too small," he said.

For example, the ratio of Sunday school enrollment to U.S. population has declined from 1:25 in 1963 to 1:29 in 1983. To achieve a 1:25 ratio with 1983 population would require a Sunday school enrollment of nine million. To achieve the 1953 ratio of 1:26 with the 1983 population would require a Sunday school enrollment of 8.7 million.

Piland noted approximately 130 million persons of the United States population of 226 million are unchurched and only 31 million are enrolled in any Bible study.

"We must focus upon the lost people of our communities," he said. "But too often we spend most of our time with those who are in the fold."

In 1983, a total of 564,000 persons 10 years of age and older were enrolled in Southern Baptist Sunday schools who were not members of Southern Baptist churches. While some of these are children of church members who have not yet made professions of faith and others are members of other denominations, Piland said he hopes many thousands are persons who can be reached for Christ through their involvement in weekly Bible study.

"There is a fundamental necessity to teach the Bible evangelistically as well as to nurture Christians," Piland said. "Evangelistic teaching has been all but lost in most churches."

Evidence of that contention is the number of baptisms per 100 persons enrolled in Southern Baptist Sunday schools has declined from 6.2 in 1953 to 5 in 1983.

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To give greater emphasis to the unreached, Piland urged churches to target their efforts with persons who have no religious preference. Also, he said, "Every church should regularly participate in some kind of people-finding mission--survey, census, People Search."

Church events such as retreats, fellowships and social events need to be planned to include unreached persons, instead of being only for church members, said Piland.

"We want to develop a psychology that says, 'Why not let the unchurched see Christian people in other settings besides the Sunday school class?'" Piland emphasized.

To set a church enrollment goal, Piland said, leaders must first know how many persons they lost the previous year through death, transfers, etc.

For example, in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1983, a total of 956,000 persons were enrolled in Sunday school, but the net gain was only 136,000. So approximately seven persons had to be enrolled to net one.

Second, Piland said the number of available prospects must be considered in setting an enrollment goal. Leaders should also evaluate space and the number of available trained workers before setting a goal.

"When you follow this process you are saying, 'We know we've set a mark we aren't going to achieve ourselves. We know God expects us to work,'" Piland said.

After the goal is set, Piland said strategies must be developed, budget planned and events put on the calendar which support the goal. "All events must be planned with the objective in mind," he emphasized.

"Enrollment goals provide direction, a focus and a target," said Piland. "The goal is measurable, simple, clear and definite."

Also, he noted, a goal provides motivation and incentive for workers. "When people understand they're on a task rooted in God's Word, it mobilizes their energy."

Emphasizing enrollment increases the likelihood that those enrolled will be contacted and ministered to, whether or not they attend Sunday school," said Piland. "They're on somebody's roll and can be objects of concern. We ought to emphasize enrollment because we honestly care about lost people."

Reviewing selected SBC statistics since 1953, Piland said the greatest need is for more new churches and Sunday schools. The ratio of churches to U.S. population has declined from one church for every 5,130 persons in 1953 to one for 6,200 in 1983. To attain the 1953 ratio with the 1983 population would require a total of 44,153 churches, an increase of 7,622 over the present 36,531 Southern Baptist churches.

"Statistics are fascinating, not because they allow us to play with numbers, but they enable us to evaluate how well we are reaching people and touching lives," Piland said. "It is difficult to measure spiritual growth taking place in people's lives, but you can know if your church is penetrating society."

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(BP) photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press

Billy Barber Resigns
As RTVC Vice-President

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Billy T. Barber has resigned as vice-president of development services for the Radio and Television Commission to become a private motivational consultant in Tampa, Fla.

Barber, who came to the commission in April 1983, resigned effective July 15. He will continue to serve as a consultant in the commission's development department, said Jimmy R. Allen, RTVC president.

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Allen said the commission has contracted with Cargill Associates of Fort Worth to supervise the development program until Barber's replacement is named.

Before coming to the RTVC, Barber was director of community relations at the University of Tampa for two years. He previously was pastor of First Baptist Church of Tampa for 14 years.

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Sullivan Calls For Revival,
Commitment In SBC Churches

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GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)—"The crisis in the Southern Baptist Convention is not a theological crisis; it is a crisis of commitment," John Sullivan said during Bible-Preaching and Church Media Library conferences.

"It has been my feeling for several years that the great difficulty with which the convention would have to struggle would be a philosophical difficulty, centered in the Cooperative Program," said Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church, Shreveport, La.

"I'm praying for revival, spiritually, as well as a renewed commitment to the Cooperative Program. I think it is critical."

Defining fellowship as "hearts beating as one for missions and evangelism," Sullivan observed that "some churches are tied together at the mouth, not at the heart."

"Without commitment of Southern Baptists to the Cooperative Program, one of two things will happen, as I see it. We will go back to a society-like system, for lack of support, or we will continue to trim our expectations to get our commitment," he said.

"Denomination means a common denominator," he continued. "I see the common denominator of the Southern Baptists as the Cooperative Program for a method and biblical theology for the foundation of that method."

Sullivan said that Southern Baptists' commitment in light of Bold Mission Thrust is not as bold as it ought to be. "Commitment to the Cooperative Program is easy for me. It always has been," he said. "I'm a product of it, and when you are a product of something, you ought to have a measurable degree of gratitude." However, he added, commitment to something should not be accompanied by blindness to its faults.

Sullivan said he doesn't think that churches are failing to increase gifts to the Cooperative Program because of differences within the SBC. Instead, he said, "we've lived so long on inflated dollars, we've had a hard time with budget planning. I do think Southern Baptist churches need to give a higher percentage of their income to the Cooperative Program."

Suggested actions leading to increased commitment, Sullivan told conference participants "we must have a renewal of worship in the services of our churches, encountering Christ in his living presence and not just the ideal of worship. We must have a recovery of the concept of biblical ministry, and we must have a depth of understanding for and appreciation of the church."

"I don't believe the differences in the SBC have destroyed our heartbeat for missions," he concluded. "It has reallocated some energies, but I don't believe it has destroyed our zeal for missions and evangelism."

In the New Testament, even Saul of Tarsus with his vindictive spirit could not split the church," he observed. "Fellowship was not something they talked about; it was something they had."

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