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August 21, 1985

85-101

First Missionary To Chile
Stays Involved By Prayer

By Art Toalston

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Two rubber bands hold together aging, tattered sheets of paper that help William Davidson, age 93, traverse the world in prayer nearly every day.

In old-time handwriting, Davidson has written the names of 450 current and former missionaries and their children for whom he prays.

"This man is incredible!" said one of numerous grateful missionaries who greeted Davidson during Foreign Missions Week at the Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

The former missionary--the first to represent Southern Baptists in Chile in 1917--has supported other missionary families through prayer for 25 years.

Davidson, of Shonto, Ariz., carried his prayer list just like a wallet at Glorieta--in his back pocket. He doesn't boast about his prayer practice. He keeps no tally of answers to his prayers.

"I think it's his (God's) missionary assignment to me," he simply says. "So it's my priority activity."

Davidson tangibly demonstrates his ministry of intercession on each person's birthday. He sends a handwritten letter, along with a Scripture verse etched onto a note card, a verse he hopes will be "fresh" for each person.

Siegfried Enge, artistic and photographic resource specialist at the Baptist Spanish Publishing House in El Paso, Texas, says he's amazed at Davidson's recall of each family member. "He keeps up with us. I don't know how he does it."

Enge adds, "In today's computerized world, for him to write a handwritten letter--not typewritten--is something else. It's a lost art."

Davidson is an antidote to any retiree who thinks, "What can I do now? I'm finished."

"If I could drive around freely, I could be helpful to a good many people," Davidson says. "But since I can't (drive), I have to do what I can at home."

Davidson probably could drive if he had a mind to, but he decided to quit several years ago, knowing that other drivers might not think he should be behind the wheel.

"I feel that he (God) gives me this good health in order to do this praying for (the missionaries) daily and this writing." Neither his eyes nor his writing hand tire. He still can read small print without his glasses. To stay in shape, he ventures out a mile "first thing in the morning," then undertakes 30 minutes of "fitness exercises."

His outlook toward prayer is to-the-point. "The Bible commands us to pray. Men like Paul (the apostle) asked for prayer. It's just a natural thing for a Christian to do."

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Davidson and his wife, Mary, who died in 1966, were appointed as Southern Baptist missionaries to Chile on July 3, 1917, just a month after they were married. Within another month, they set sail for South America. By the time of their furlough in 1922, Davidson had begun the First Baptist Church of Santiago and two other congregations, all of which remain active.

During furlough he was diagnosed as having tuberculosis. His doctor privately expected him to die. Davidson surprised the physician, recovering while in a sanitarium for six months and returning to Chile in 1924. Still, he felt weak and decided to resign from missionary service. Several years later he had recovered from the disease and "I haven't had a trace of it since." He was a Bible teacher at Hannibal-La Grange College, Hannibal, Mo., for 15 years and a draftsman for 28 years.

He now lives with his widowed daughter, Virginia Fisher, school nurse at a Navaho elementary boarding school in Shonto. He's a member of First Southern Baptist Church, Tuba City, an English-language Navaho church.

After leaving Chile, Davidson continued to pray for the missionaries there. Later, he added those in Ethiopia and various others. He remembers reading a missionary's letter in The Commission years ago recounting a rough day when she felt no one had prayed for her. "So I wrote to her and said, 'You can't say that again, because I'll be praying for you every day.'"

Around 1960, he began writing to all missionaries in language school in San Jose, Costa Rica, keeping in touch with everyone who wrote back. In about 10 years, his list got so big "I couldn't add any more."

Davidson doesn't advocate everyone having such a large prayer list of missionaries, yet he believes that, "Everybody ought to have a number he's praying for daily."

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

The Unappointed:
Bitterness Or New Dreams?

By Leland Webb

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8/21/85

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Hundreds have discovered through the years that the door to foreign missionary service does not open to everyone who knocks. For those who find the door shut, recovery from the disappointment can be slow.

It was "one of the most traumatic experiences I ever went through," one candidate said.

Yet they find themselves in good company. The rolls of the unappointed contain familiar names: the executive director of the Woman's Missionary Union, the president of Hardin-Simmons University, a long-time seminary missions professor. Others include Southern Baptist missionaries who earlier had encountered that shut door.

Though time often blurs memory, many nonappointees vividly recall the experience years later. It is a time when an individual's sense of God's will and necessary appraisal by a larger Christian body may collide. Reactions vary, but feelings often are intense.

Some, startled at being redirected from foreign missions, feel shock sometimes mixed with anger. One wife for a time wondered, "Has God put us on a shelf?"

It "came as a great shock and disappointment," to Eldred Taylor, executive director for Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, Inc. "No one had given any indication of doubt."

"In a matter of minutes the dreams and plans for my life (seemed) shattered," remembers Doris DeVault, who has spent a lifetime in Woman's Missionary Union work in the United States.

Candidates sometimes add to the trauma by building unrealistic expectations, perhaps because they have not heard--or have not accepted--all that is involved in the process.

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The Foreign Mission Board's duty is to send out the best-prepared with the strongest prospects for long-term service. The board must consider carefully factors individuals normally do not. For example, a medical condition manageable in America could become a severe liability overseas under pressure of climate, stress and shortage of medical facilities.

Candidate consultants and other staff members in the board's personnel selection department assemble information from candidates (including a detailed life history), from medical and psychological specialists and from references. As a group they decide whether to present candidates to a subcommittee made up of board trustees on the human resources committee. Candidates may override the staff's negative decision and ask trustees to review their cases.

Trustees make the final decision, and do not always follow the staff's recommendation. Of candidates actually considered by board trustees, 85 to 90 percent are appointed, according to Louis Cobbs, director of the board's personnel selection department. Some candidates remove themselves from the process before reaching the committee.

Some unappointed enter a time of personal confusion as they deal with whether they have misread God's will. For most, reconciliation to reality follows as they seek a new direction.

"We felt rejected; we felt embarrassed; we felt at sea in a sail boat without a sail," relates Charles Hampton of the experience he and his wife, Evelyn, faced more than 30 years ago. It was hard to cope "with the well-meaning people who continually told us that if God had called, no one or nothing could have prevented our going," he says. Today the Hamptons are missionary associates in South Africa.

Stunned by not being appointed, Warren Rush resigned his pastorate and returned to his home church to seek God's leading. His later pastorates included 22 years at one church before he and his wife, Joanah, became missionary associates in Senegal. DeVault went back to what she had been doing--working as a missionary in a rugged section of Tennessee.

The appointment process has changed over the years to lessen the trauma. It has been years since examination and appointment were set the same week, a schedule that sometimes led to last-minute rejections. Staff members try to minister sensitively to those not appointed. But they are aware the experience carries such deep emotional and spiritual currents, many will find it hard to accept under any circumstances.

Yet Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, in retrospect says she believes the board "played exactly the role it should have" in turning her from missionary service. She viewed the experience at the time, she adds, as "God's closing one door and opening another."

A church calling a pastor offers some apt comparisons--and contrasts--to the appointment process. First, a pulpit committee, even while seeking God's will, remains aware of the congregation's needs.

Cobbs compares this to the "matching" part of the appointment procedure in which each qualified missionary candidate must fit a specific personnel request from overseas. This process of matching persons, qualified by gifts and preparation, to specific needs "becomes the crux of the matter," says Cobbs.

Second, a pulpit search committee involves group process--within the committee and then by the congregation. This is the "corporate Christian decision," says Cobbs, in which a larger Christian body must examine and confirm an individual's calling.

"The Foreign Mission Board by definition could only send a limited group of people," points out Jesse Fletcher, who preceded Cobbs as director for personnel selection. "They have to send the people that fit the profile best for the kind of service to be rendered." Fletcher, now president of Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, and his wife sought missionary appointment but were turned aside on medical considerations.

Third, while most pastors will be called to more than one church in their ministry, the quest for missionary appointment usually is a once-in-a-lifetime event.

Why are some not appointed?

--Some don't meet all the qualifications. These have been established over a long period and often reflect experience as well as cultural realities. Prominent among barriers is a medical or emotional problem.

--For some, no job request exists for their particular combination of gifts, training and family situation.

--Sometimes mistakes occur. The Bible teaches mankind is sinful, human judgment is warped, points out Cobbs, so "no one person is right 100 percent of the time." That's why no one person at the board decides who is and who isn't appointed.

Still, some not appointed are sure mistakes have been made. Hampton remains convinced more than three decades later a faulty medical report kept him and his wife from appointment. The Rushes still feel their deferment was in error. "We do not believe that everything that happens is the will of God, due to choices made by man," he says.

What becomes of the unappointed?

--Some seek an alternative route overseas, perhaps through another missions agency or as volunteers.

--Some keep the missions hope alive and reapply later, perhaps after a medical crisis has passed. Hampton acknowledges his 24 years of service in United States helped make his work in South Africa more effective.

--Most redirect their ministry. Helen Falls recalls that the same mail bringing the negative news from the mission board brought an invitation to be WMU Young People's secretary in Maryland. She later spent 37 years as missions professor at New Orleans (La.) Baptist Theological Seminary.

And Weatherford notes that during 26 years in WMU work "the Lord has let me be a part of the decision-making of dozens of women and men who in some way or another said, 'I'll go in your place.'"

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(Adapted from the August issue of The Commission, Foreign Mission Board magazine.)

Church Votes To Move
Rather Than Sue Member

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
8/21/85

LOTTIE, La. (BP)--Cane Brake Baptist Church in Lottie, La., has voted to move rather than take a church member to court.

Ownership of one-half acre of a one-acre plot upon which the church is located is at the center of a dispute between the church and its next-door neighbor, a longtime member of the congregation.

But rather than settle the issue in court--a battle church leaders maintain they could win--Cane Brake members voted two weeks ago to relocate.

The church recently had the property surveyed and had an abstract prepared which traces ownership of the land all the way back to the 1830s, reported Pastor Perry Hancock. The church has owned the land since 1901, with no stipulations in its deed, he said.

The problem apparently began when the previous owner of the property adjacent to the church sold his land, which he claimed included one-half of the acre on which the church building sits, Hancock explained.

However, the church also studied the Bible as it considered its options in relation to the situation. Based on the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the Apostle Paul, church members decided they would not be acting in a Christ-like manner if they sued their fellow member for clear rights to the property.

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The decision not to sue took place in "one of the most unusually Christian business meetings I have ever attended," said Arthur Achord, director of missions for Atchafalaya Baptist Association, which includes the church.

"They (the church members) feel they could have won in court, but they never could win in the community," Achord said. "They were afraid they would hurt the cause of Christ."

However, they are not afraid to sacrifice themselves, he added, noting the church's financial situation "already is in push-to-shove shape, with limited resources."

The church is looking for two acres of property on which to relocate, noted Hancock. Members have voted to start a building fund, and they anticipate they will need \$100,000 to make the move.

Achord, whom Hancock credits with being "a great help" to the congregation, said he plans to seek aid for the church from the Louisiana Baptist Convention's mission loan fund and from the Georgia Barnette Offering for state missions. He noted, however, that exceptions must be made to grant both requests, since the church no longer is a mission.

Hancock declined to identify the church member in the dispute in order to preserve her confidentiality.

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Claypool Leaves Baptist
For Episcopal Church

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--John R. Claypool, copastor of Second Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas, and former pastor of Crescent Hill Baptist Church, Louisville, has resigned his position to seek ordination in the Episcopal Church.

Claypool was accepted for a year of special studies at Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas. He will also be theologian-in-residence at Christ Episcopal Church, San Antonio, Texas.

Claypool hold the BD and ThD degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

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