

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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85-16

Two African Nations Get Rain;
 Keep Praying, Parks Urges

By Bob Stanley

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Reports of rain in two African countries offer evidence God is beginning to answer the prayers of Southern Baptists and other Christians, R. Keith Parks told the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board Feb. 13.

Missionaries in Zimbabwe, one of some 30 African countries hard hit by drought, say they've had the best rain in 13 years, the board's president reported. Rain also has increased in South Africa.

"We take that as the beginning of an answer to the prayers being offered," Parks said. He urged board members and all Southern Baptists to continue to pray "that God will pour out his rain on that drought-stricken continent."

State convention executive directors and editors of state Baptist newspapers are leading in the response to Parks' appeal for nationwide prayer both for sufficient rain and harvest in Africa. The theme "Water Is Life-Pray for Rain in Africa" has been shared with denominational leaders and church members in recent weeks.

Last year the board sent more than \$4 million in hunger relief aid to African countries and is gearing up this year for a \$1 million relief program in Ethiopia, in addition to aid to other nations. But board officials say even the combined efforts of all relief programs can't do as much to wipe out starvation as normal rains would in countries hit by three to five years of drought.

In other major actions, Parks set forth seven strategic priorities for the board in the next three years and board members pledged their personal support for the denomination's Planned Growth in Giving stewardship emphasis.

The board president laid special stress on the No. 1 objective to "implement cooperative approaches to world evangelization with interested Baptist bodies."

Parks and other members of an international Baptist steering committee have invited "sister Baptist bodies" in about 30 countries to send representatives to a June 26-28 meeting in connection with the Foreign Missions Conference at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center. International representation will predominate at this meeting, with simultaneous translation planned in four to six languages.

Representatives of Baptist conventions with which Southern Baptists work overseas will pay their own way to attend, Parks emphasized. Many of these come from conventions already sending missionaries to other lands or hoping to start such foreign outreach soon.

By committing itself to a true partnership with overseas Baptist leaders, the board has to be open to "some pretty drastic kinds of things," Parks noted.

"Some of their recommendations will startle, frighten, stimulate and worry us to death," he said. "But I keep saying we must enter this with a measure of integrity that we will give serious consideration regardless of whether we've ever done it (missions) that way or not."

As other priorities, Parks listed:

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--Look at the role of the mission organization and study deployment or redeployment of missionaries for most effective use.

--Consider more effective ways to be involved in lands where normal mission activity is prohibited or restricted.

--Develop a data base from which better management decisions can be made.

--Establish percentage ranges for the board's four major budget divisions: missionary support, overseas operating, overseas capital and home office.

--Integrate the increased involvement of state convention partnerships overseas and other Southern Baptist volunteers to enhance a unified and indigenous mission effort.

--Work with the Home Mission Board and other agencies in identifying matters of mutual concern, such as international student or seamen's ministries, and develop a plan to work together more effectively in such areas.

As part of its plan to involve Baptists in areas where normal missions activity is impossible, the board appointed an eight-member subcommittee to work with staff members in exploring ways this might be accomplished.

In studying the best deployment of its missionary force, Parks emphasized the board must not be "bound by the past." "We will not drift casually into certain kinds of locations or configurations that maybe once were best, but maybe no longer are."

Parks said the way Southern Baptist members and their churches respond to the new Planned Growth in Giving emphasis will determine how far the denomination can go toward reaching its Bold Mission Thrust goal of sharing the gospel with all people by the year 2000.

Forty-seven board members, about 80 percent of those attending the meeting, turned in cards pledging to increase their giving by a certain percentage in each of the next 15 years. Board Chairman Harrell Cushing of Alabama and four other board members gave testimonies of spiritual blessings that had come from giving above the tithe, or 10 percent of their income.

During the meeting the board named 41 new missionaries, reappointed six and heard reports on the commissioning of 43 journeymen Feb. 8.

Two medical consultants also were added to its staff. Van W. Williams III, a Mississippi missionary pediatrician and administrator at Bangalore (India) Baptist Hospital, was named health care consultant responsible for advising staffers and missionaries on health care programs and strategy around the world. Joyce A. De Ridder of Michigan will be consultant for health care recruitment. At Houston (Texas) Baptist University she designed and directed a missionary internship program and helped design the Center for Exploring Ministry Careers.

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Missionary Says Board Unfair;
FMB Says Claim Not Justified

Baptist Press
2/15/85

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--A missionary on leave of absence from Zimbabwe claims the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has not treated her fairly or compensated her adequately for what she describes as a disabling throat illness. She says she contracted the ailment on the African mission field.

But a Foreign Mission Board committee decided Feb. 11 the diagnosis of an independent throat specialist did not substantiate claims made by the missionary, Ann Sliger.

Board President R. Keith Parks said the board does not release details of such missionary medical examinations. He added, however, the diagnosis showed no evidence of a serious or disabling throat illness.

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The Eastern and Southern Africa Committee, which made the decision in consultation with board staff members, said Miss Sliger's leave of absence would end Feb. 13 and she would be given opportunity to resign from missionary service, effective that date.

Miss Sliger, 34, was appointed a missionary in April 1977 and arrived on the field in January 1978. She worked as a radio-television programmer in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, before her return to the United States on regular furlough in November 1981. Soon after return she underwent the normal furlough physical examination by a private physician. The report on this examination did not mention a throat condition.

In an interview with a Richmond newspaper reporter, Miss Sliger said her throat problem began in Zimbabwe, where she said she "became very sick with a virus" which affected her throat. In April 1982, while on furlough, she said she went to a Greenville, S.C., doctor complaining of a sore throat.

She said the illness has prevented her resuming her stateside radio-television production career or practicing her hobby, ventriloquism. She asked that the board cover her medical expenses "until I know my throat is going to be all right." She also said the board should provide her some type of disability compensation.

The missionary, now living in Greenville, S.C., told the Richmond reporter she retained an attorney because "I just felt like I was getting the runaround." She said the board had failed to pay her more recent medical bills.

Her father, pastor of an independent Baptist church in Cantonment, Fla., near Pensacola, wrote about his daughter's case in a letter circulated to certain publications, including *The Richmond News Leader*, the city's afternoon paper.

Parks said Feb. 12 the board had paid all medical bills Miss Sliger had submitted with the exception of one request made just recently for dental bridgework. Altogether, he said, the board has paid about \$3,600 in medical bills for Miss Sliger since she returned from the field.

He also noted that on Sept. 13, 1982, the board provided an extension of her furlough, with full pay, through the end of November that year. She was placed on leave of absence beginning Dec. 1, 1982. Medical coverage, but no salary, continued during this leave.

Seeking to resolve differences in the case, board representatives, including Parks, met with Miss Sliger and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ken Sliger, in Atlanta in December 1983.

At a meeting later that month, the Foreign Mission Board outlined a procedure by which an independent medical specialist, agreed upon by both the board's doctor and Miss Sliger's physician, would examine Miss Sliger. A letter communicating this information was sent immediately to the missionary.

The board said late in 1984 it had wanted to resolve the case but had waited a year to receive the diagnosis. This diagnosis, with about \$1,600 in medical bills, reached Parks Dec. 14, 1984. Parks said the bills were paid immediately.

The report of the examining specialist was studied by the board's medical consultant upon receipt and shared with members of the board's Eastern and Southern Africa Committee Feb. 11,

Before missionary appointment, Miss Sliger was cinema/television production director for the Fine Arts Center in Greenville, S.C. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Tennessee Temple College, Chattanooga, Tenn., and a master of arts degree in cinematography from Bob Jones University, Greenville. She also attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., in preparation for missionary service.

'Biblical Faith'
Said Alternative

By Marty Blankenship

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)—A Southern Baptist seminary president says "biblical faith" is the alternative to the current theological controversy among Southern Baptists.

During a chapel service at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, President Milton Ferguson told students, faculty and staff that many Southern Baptists believe they must choose between two theological extremes—radical liberalism and dogmatic fundamentalism. Ferguson suggested an alternative position he called "biblical faith."

"The alternative is letting God be God and make himself known. It is becoming more concerned with what God did do than with the question of what God could do and should do. It means being humble enough to be on the receiving end of God's revelation in Jesus Christ," he explained.

Ferguson said biblical faith requires an openness to new insight and revelation from the Word of God. "It does not mean being shallow or permissive, believing any old thing. Quit the contrary," stressed Ferguson, "it means betting your life on the fact that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

Radical theological liberalism, an emphasis arising in the 19th century, ruled out the supernatural and the miraculous. It denied the need or the possibility of revelation from beyond human history, according to Ferguson. "Liberalism says we can only believe what our human reason can discover in nature and in history," he explained.

"I say to you today, we here at Midwestern have not been, are not now, and will not be committed to that theological perspective."

In addition, Ferguson said, "We reject the rationalistic claims of dogmatic fundamentalism," which is one 20th century reaction to liberalism. This kind of fundamentalism, in emphasizing the supernatural "unconsciously makes God subject to human reason by prescribing in advance what God must be and how he must act in his self-revelation and redemptive activity," Ferguson explained.

Both theological viewpoints fail to affirm an adequate biblical faith, he pointed out. Both "depend primarily on human reason for their final authority and security.

"All of us are confronted with insecurity in this life. We don't have all the answers; we are finite and limited; we are partial in our knowledge and understanding," he said. "All of us find it difficult to cope with this fact. Each of us wants to be right, to be secure; all of us are afraid to be wrong.

"Biblical faith affirms the Bible as the inspired Word of God, remaining open to the revelation of God's presence and purpose through that Word," said Ferguson. Biblical faith can live with our limited knowledge and our human imperfections, "because it is able to receive the gift of God's ultimate answer through Jesus Christ, our living Lord," Ferguson said.

When the president urged seminarians to develop and maintain "a living biblical faith" instead of retreating into "an easy doctrinaire liberalism or fundamentalism," the audience responded with sustained applause.

Ferguson pointed out we are living in a time when people are quick to stereotype others. "People want labels," he said. "Especially as conflict grows, it is more difficult to see each other as brother, sister or even as a fellow believer. Instead, we seem eager to label anyone who differs from us as the enemy."

The president said he rejects any attempts among Southern Baptists to stereotype others. "To classify and label in advance not only is destructive, it is unChristian," he stressed. However, he added, "If you must use a label for me, call me a biblical conservative. I believe in affirming, living and conserving biblical faith. That's who I am."

Ferguson addressed the matter of the seminary articles of faith, "The Baptist Faith and Message" and their vital role in Southern Baptist life today.

He said he is charged by the trustees with the responsibility of leading the faculty to teach in accordance with and not contrary to the articles of faith. "I do this gladly," he said. "We affirm the articles of faith freely and enthusiastically and the context of commitment within which we live and work as Southern Baptists."

The president insisted, however, he will "resist all pressure to treat the articles as a restrictive creed" in the educational process at Midwestern. He warned of a growing tendency to expect conformity with positions which are not affirmed by "The Baptist Faith and Message." "We cannot remain neutral or passive in the face of such pressures," declared Ferguson.

He added, "We at Midwestern will resist all forms of rationalism and continue to emphasize a living biblical faith."

Ferguson urged his audience to become part of the solution rather than the problem in the Southern Baptist Convention. "It is time for us to affirm and practice our unity in Jesus Christ as we renew our focus on missions, evangelism and education," he said.

Ferguson encouraged all Southern Baptists to get involved at the church, associational, state and national levels. "We must seek out the facts," he said. "We must study the issues, consider the consequences, and vote with freedom of conscience and conviction to return Southern Baptists to the joyful fellowship of working together in witness and ministry in a world which desperately needs help and hope."

"We must elect leadership at each level who in belief and practice have demonstrated they affirm our unity in Christ, they affirm our fellowship of trust, and they affirm our commitment to work together in Jesus' name."

Ferguson, who observed his 12th anniversary as president of Midwestern Feb. 1, concluded his address by calling the seminary community to a renewed commitment to witness and ministry through personal evangelism.

He cited the 1986 emphasis on "Good News America" among Southern Baptists, and said, "It is my prayer every person associated with Midwestern seminary, beginning with the president and extending through the faculty, students, alumni and trustees, will become a more effective personal soul winner, as we share the love of God in Jesus Christ wherever he leads us in his service."

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Volunteers Head To Ethiopia
As Missionaries Gear Up Relief

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
2/15/85

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)—Southern Baptist volunteers have begun arriving in Ethiopia and others are on the way as missionaries in the drought-choked country gear up a relief and development ministry in the Menz-Gishe area.

The project includes short-term feeding, health care and dry ration distribution and such long-term development as agriculture, water catchment, irrigation, sheep breeding, veterinary medicine and community health.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Ethiopia have been working through the frustrating, time-consuming tasks of securing storage and feeding facilities, permits, visas, transportation, equipment, supplies and Ethiopian workers to get the program underway and volunteers into the country.

Missionary Jerry Bedsole said the first two loads of food went into Menz-Gishe in early February and that another 200 metric tons, secured through cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation, would be ready about two weeks later.

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While food distribution gets underway, missionaries are exploring plans to double the 15,000 people who will be fed initially and then expand even further. They've also investigated possible use of helicopters, which would improve access to remote areas, speed up emergency food transportation from eight hours of travel on body-pounding bad road to minutes by air, and allow transportation to continue if rains shut down the road.

Missionaries have already spent \$200,000 in Southern Baptist hunger and relief funds to gear up the effort. They're expected to ask for another \$220,000 for additional needs in the next phase of their extended commitment to short-term hunger relief and long-range development.

John Cheyne, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's human needs consultant, predicts the effort may require more than \$1 million in hunger and relief funds in 1985.

Meanwhile the Foreign Mission Board has been processing applications to fill an urgent need for two volunteer nurses willing to work one or two years, beginning in August, to conduct feeding and health care in Menz-Gishe.

Two other volunteer nurses, Mary Saunders of Richmond, Va., and Sally Jones of Atlanta, Ga., will work there for several months until the long-term nurses arrive. Saunders, a former missionary to Africa, is the wife of Davis Saunders, Foreign Mission Board director for eastern and southern Africa. Jones grew up in Kenya, where her parents, Tom and Nancy Jones, are missionaries.

Ed and Vi Mason, Floridians who spent two previous one-year volunteer terms in Ethiopia, have arrived to work as volunteer field directors of the relief effort from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city.

A volunteer couple from Texas, Bob and Yvonne Walls, will fill a similar role in Menz-Gishe. They'll take over logistics there from John Lawrence, a volunteer veterinarian from Louisiana who has worked in the country since September 1983.

Lawrence extended his departure date from January 1984 to April of this year and moved from Addis Ababa to begin field coordination efforts in Menz-Gishe. Those efforts have included building storage facilities and a feeding station and renting property to aid the relief work of missionaries Jerry and Rosie Bedsole, Lynn and Suzanne Groce and Troy and Jewell Waldron.

Volunteers Everett and Kay Martin from Texas also have arrived in Ethiopia to assume Lawrence's veterinary teaching duties at a government agricultural and veterinary school near Addis Ababa. They'll also assist in relief and development efforts.

The Foreign Mission Board is processing the application of another volunteer couple to fill the Bedsoles' veterinary responsibilities when they come home on furlough in June.

Missionaries have received word that a Mennonite couple also may become available to help coordinate work in Menz-Gishe.

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

Foreign Board Names
Health Care Consultants

Baptist Press
2/15/85

RICHMOND, Va. (EP)—A missionary physician and a university professor have been named to help guide and staff the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's worldwide health care program.

Van W. Williams III, pediatrician and hospital administrator in India, will become health care consultant in the Human Needs Ministries office May 1. Joyce A. De Ridder, former professor at Houston (Texas) Baptist University, will join the staff in March as consultant for health care recruitment in the Medical Services Department.

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Williams has been a pediatrician at Bangalore Baptist Hospital since 1974 and hospital administrator since 1980. He will advise staff members and missionaries on health care programs and strategy around the world.

More than ever before, the board's health care consultant will be able to concentrate on medical mission strategy, said John Cheyne, senior consultant for human needs ministries. Responsibilities for missionary health and other concerns handled by Williams' retired predecessor, Franklin Fowler, have been shifted to the Medical Services Department, created in 1983 and directed by former missionary physician William C. Gaventa.

Williams said he's excited to be coming to the position in an era of changes for the medical mission program. Health care institutions such as hospitals and clinics have developed credibility and trust with people through the years, he said, but it's time to build on that by considering other options, like community health care.

A health care consultation last fall involving medical missionaries, board staffers and outside specialists affirmed the need for a broad health care program which deals with the whole person. Participants said not only hospitals and clinics but also community-based health care programs, evangelism, agriculture, literacy, economics and sanitation all relate to health care.

De Ridder will recruit health care personnel such as physicians, hospital administrators and nurses for both missionary and volunteer positions. As a sociology professor at Houston Baptist University, she designed a university-wide cross-cultural study program, designed and directed a missionary internship program and co-designed the Center for Exploring Ministry Careers.

Besides recruiting medical personnel, De Ridder will administer the medical volunteer program and the medical receptor and residency program, which places medical students and residents overseas for eight to twelve weeks.

Williams, a Mississippi native, is a graduate of Mississippi College, Clinton, and the University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson, and holds the master of public health degree from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. He is married to the former Sarah McGlamery of Houston. They have three children.

De Ridder, of Michigan, holds bachelor and master degrees from Texas Woman's University and a doctorate from North Texas State University, both in Denton. She was chairman of the behavioral sciences department at Houston Baptist University for five years.

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



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