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April 15, 1985

85-44

Mission In Ethiopia Desperate For Nurses

RABEL, Ethiopia (BP)—Volunteer nurses Mary Saunders and Sally Jones work from morning until dark at the Southern Baptist feeding-health care center in the Ethiopian highlands with no relief in sight.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has searched in vain for longer-term volunteer nurses to take their place in remote Rabel, Ethiopia, when their service ends in August.

Saunders, a veteran of 26 years of African missionary nursing, and Jones, daughter of missionaries to Kenya, arrived in mid-March, when the center opened, to cover the emergency until special assignment nurses could be found.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Ethiopia, struggling to meet the overwhelming needs of famine-stricken highlanders, need one nurse by at least June 1 to overlap with Saunders and Jones and a second by Aug. 1.

As they develop other feeding centers, the missionaries will request additional nurses and likely a physician.

Special assignment nurses for Rabel must be Southern Baptists with RN status and will be requested to serve at least a year. However, six-month assignments will be considered because of the emergency situation. They will receive transportation, room and board and a stipend.

Potential candidates are urged to write Joyce De Ridder in health care recruitment at the Foreign Mission Board, Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230, or call her at (804) 353-0151.

Requirements also specify the nurses must have the "ability to function under difficult circumstances and be flexible."

That's a key qualification for Rabel, where workers face sparse, remote living conditions without electricity, refrigeration, running water or indoor bathing facilities.

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**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee**

Feeding Center Brings Hope
To Starving Ethiopians

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
4/15/85

RABEL, Ethiopia (BP)—Gaunt Ethiopians struggle in growing numbers out of the canyons and across barren plateaus of the Ethiopian highlands to find relief at the Southern Baptist feeding center in Rabel.

About 7,000 people of the tens of thousands cut off from the outside world by the terrain found their way to Rabel in the first three weeks of the center's operation as word spread of the food and medical care there.

The sight of the starving, sick, ragged remnants of families overwhelms even veteran missionaries to Africa.

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Frail old people and desperate mothers with vacant-eyed, starving children fall down and try to kiss the missionaries' feet in gratitude for a system which puts food in their mouths and blankets around their cold shoulders and provides medicine for their ills.

"We cry a lot and we pray a lot," said Mary Saunders of Richmond, Va., who spent 26 years as a Southern Baptist missionary nurse in Africa and returned in mid-March as a short-term volunteer to help open Rabel center.

Ethiopians stand outside the compound, peering through its gate like lost souls longing for a glimpse of paradise, while they await feeding, health care and shelter for those too ill to leave. Local officials screen the masses to allow the most needy to go first.

The center is one of at least three which Southern Baptist missionaries hope to open this year in the populous Menz-Gishe (pronounced Munz-Gishay) district in the 10,000-foot highlands.

That's part of the stop-gap assistance the missionaries plan to help the people survive until enough rain comes for them to plant and harvest crops. Then plans can get under way for such long-term assistance as water and agricultural development, community health, veterinary medicine and animal breeding.

But first the missionaries must solve difficult logistical problems to make the Rabel center, the most remote feeding center in the country, fully functional and effective.

The Lutheran World Federation transports U.S. AID grain from the port at Asab to Mehal Meda, where Southern Baptist missionaries have built a warehouse to store it before transporting it to Rabel for distribution.

The treacherous, precipitous road from Mehal Meda to Rabel, a 60-mile-long donkey path 12,000 Ethiopians used hand tools to open, takes six to eight hours in the two seven-and-a-half-ton trucks the mission uses to transport the grain. It takes 12 minutes by helicopter.

The grueling trips pound the equipment and Ethiopian drivers mercilessly as they try to provide more than 300 tons of grain the center needs each month and get enough backlog in storage there before rain washes out the road.

Ironically, the road lies along an escarpment in an area rain can affect despite the drought. It's likely rain will wash out the road but geographical factors will prevent it from getting over the escarpment to the drought-stricken land.

The missionaries have ordered four more large trucks and are working against time to set up a three-pronged transportation system which will get food to the people despite the road.

The system would involve the trucks, helicopter service missionaries hope to work out, and an airplane they hope to use after they build a landing strip at Rabel.

Establishment of the transportation system will insure the Rabel center has enough supplies and allow the mission to expand feeding and health care to other areas of Menz-Gishe where thousands already have died.

Southern Baptists have contributed \$1.29 million in hunger funds in the past six months for Ethiopia—only the beginning of what will be needed for continued short-term relief and long-range development. The Foreign Mission Board has allocated \$842,500 of that amount for use by Ethiopian missionaries and awaits further requests from the field as the missionaries face the ever-changing crisis.

Availability of food and medical supplies from other sources has allowed missionaries to use Southern Baptist hunger funds in the design of a life-saving delivery system where no infrastructure exists and little or no hunger relief took place before the system went into operation.

People would die without the system, much as the body would die without a heart and circulatory system to deliver lifeblood.

"If we had to spend the funds available on both food and transportation, we couldn't touch five to 10 percent of the people we're reaching because of the enormous cost of transporting food in here," explained Southern Baptist missionary veterinarian Jerry Bedsole.

The missionaries have cooperated with Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites and others to procure high-protein porridge mixtures and biscuits, cooking oil, beans, powdered milk, medical supplies, seeds for eventual distribution, blankets and other supplies to make the center operational. Southern Baptists have bought the vehicles, hired Ethiopian drivers, funded transportation costs and built facilities for storage and feeding and health care vital to saving people's lives.

John Lawrence, a volunteer veterinarian from Minden, La., extended his term of service a second time to ramrod a crew which built facilities from the ground up at Mehal Meda and Rabel. "We couldn't have started as quickly without John," one observer commented. "He's one of the unsung heroes of this operation."

Lawrence slept in a sleeping bag in an area with no running water, electricity, refrigeration or immediate access to the outside world to complete the job before he returned to Louisiana in early April.

Volunteer nurses Saunders and Sally Jones of Atlanta, who grew up in Kenya as the daughter of missionaries, still work under those sparse conditions, although Lawrence built beds for them.

Six volunteers have arrived to help the three career couples work against overwhelming odds. At least six others are in process, but the Foreign Mission Board still needs Southern Baptist registered nurses to volunteer for at least a year to fill the short-term positions Saunders and Jones will vacate in August.

As the number of centers increases, ground and air transportation expands and long-range development gets under way, the missionaries will face an increasing demand for funds and volunteers.

Missionaries throughout Africa will face similar problems in some 20 drought-stricken countries. The Foreign Mission Board has appropriated nearly \$1.6 million for hunger and relief for Africa thus far in 1985 and expects many more requests. Africa missionaries used more than \$4 million for hunger and relief in 1984.

Proud of their heritage of hard work and self-help, Ethiopian highlanders who have the strength continue to till the worthless soil, tend their dying livestock and hope for rain and a harvest.

Until it comes, they have an ally in their fight against death.

"Now that you're here our people have hope," an Ethiopian man told agricultural missionary Lynn Groce.

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

BJCPA Asks Supreme Court
Delay In Parochial Aid Rulings

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press
4/15/85

WASHINGTON (BP)—In an unusual tactical move, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to delay decisions in two pending parochial aid cases until it considers a third dispute involving a Southern Baptist seminary professor.

The Washington-based Baptist agency asked the high court not to decide a New York City case testing the constitutionality of sending public school teachers at federal taxpayer expense into private, sectarian schools to deliver remedial instruction and other services.

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That case, *Aguilar v. Felton*, tests whether Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 violates the First Amendment's ban on an establishment of religion by excessively entangling public school officials with religious schools.

In addition, the Baptist Joint Committee motion asked the court likewise to defer its decision in *School District of Grand Rapids v. Ball*, a dispute involving the Michigan city's practice of sending public schoolteachers into parochial schools at state expense to provide remedial and extracurricular assistance.

Earl W. Trent Jr., an American Baptist member of the Baptist Joint Committee and house counsel of his denomination's Board of National Ministries, urged the high court to delay action in the two cases pending review of *Bennett v. Wamble*, a dispute pitting new Secretary of Education William J. Bennett against Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary church history professor G. Hugh Wamble.

Wamble, a tenacious advocate of separation of church and state, has been fighting Title I aid for parochial schools since 1977, when he challenged the funding in Missouri in federal district court. Wamble also challenged the "bypass" device adopted by Congress in 1974 and used by the Department of Education to deliver Title I services, a mechanism used in Missouri to skirt the state constitution's strict prohibition on public aid to parochial schools.

Last December, U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Stevens Jr. of Kansas City ruled for Wamble, but the decision came more than seven years after the Midwestern seminary professor's suit was filed. After Stevens' ruling, Wamble told *Word and Way*—newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention—that "the time factor is certainly a problem," adding: "The effect of the delay was to let the New York case start from scratch and eventually go to the Supreme Court."

Because the New York City and Grand Rapids cases had been argued Dec. 5—only days before Stevens' ruling—the Kansas City judge stayed his injunction against continuation of the aid in Missouri nonpublic schools until the Supreme Court makes its rulings.

Trent's brief for the Baptist Joint Committee requested the high court delay its decisions in the separate New York City and Grand Rapids proceedings because the two "have inadequate factual records when compared to the extensive factual record in the case at bar."

Trent referred to massive evidence obtained by Wamble, who argued his own case in the five-month 1982 trial in Judge Stevens' courtroom. Wamble was joined in his successful challenge by 39 taxpayers and parents of public schoolchildren as intervening plaintiffs.

Wamble had filed his suit April 4, 1977, the first day federal funds were funneled into Missouri parochial schools using the bypass device. He sued both the then-U.S. commissioner of education (whose office was part of the now-defunct Department of Health, Education and Welfare), and Blue Hills Home Corp., a third party contractor used to distribute Title I funds to parochial schools. By the time the case came to trial, 13 parents of parochial schoolchildren had signed on as intervening defendants.

Although the trial finally was held beginning in August 1982, and despite Judge Stevens' initial indication he would rule by the following spring, more than two years passed before the decision came down. By then the Supreme Court had heard arguments in the New York City and Grand Rapids cases.

If the high court were to grant the Baptist Joint Committee motion to delay deciding those two disputes, it would be adopting a rare approach. As the matter stands, the justices are expected to issue formal rulings in the cases before adjourning its current term in early July.

Foreign Missions Leader
Cauthen Dies At Home

By Art Toalston

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Baker James Cauthen, 75, who led Southern Baptists in building the largest missionary force among Protestant denominations, died April 15 at home.

Cauthen was executive secretary, and later executive director, of the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board from 1954 until his retirement at the end of 1979, a longer tenure than any of his seven predecessors.

The number of Southern Baptist missionaries increased from 908 to nearly 3,000 during Cauthen's administration and the number of countries where they worked from 32 to 95. Missions funding moved from \$6.7 million in 1954 to \$76.7 million in 1979.

Cauthen and his wife, Eloise, went to China as missionaries in 1939, taking their two young children to a country partly in control of Japanese invaders. Both during World War II, and later during the communist takeover, the Cauthens were forced to evacuate. Twice they lost all their household possessions. Yet in China Cauthen came face-to-face with the world's "appalling spiritual need." He wrote, for example, "One man asked us if Jesus is an American."

R. Keith Parks, Cauthen's successor in 1980, noting that "God blesses us primarily through people," said, "Through Baker James Cauthen, he has blessed literally the people of our world." Cauthen, in his missions commitment, "symbolized to Southern Baptists the cohesive force that has moved us together through our history," Parks said.

Evangelist Billy Graham called Cauthen "one of the greatest missionary statesmen in all American church life. He was one of the most powerful speakers on missions I ever heard....a father figure to Southern Baptist missionaries....who gave inspiration and prophetic vision."

W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, and a longtime friend of Cauthen, said, "He was a marvelous exponent of the message of Christ in the Orient. He was an incomparable leader in the support of foreign missions among Southern Baptists."

Cauthen, continued his advocacy after retirement by teaching at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary near San Francisco during the 1980-81 and 1982-83 academic years and at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, 1983-84. He suffered a heart attack in 1977 and had a stroke in October 1984.

It was as a missions teacher at Southwestern from 1935 to 1939 that Cauthen decided on a missionary career. "The question that took me to China," he said, "was, 'Why shouldn't you go?'" Cauthen also was pastor of Fort Worth's Polytechnic Baptist Church from 1933 to 1939. His wife, whom he married in 1934, had been born in China, the daughter of longtime missionaries Wiley B. and Eunice Taylor Glass, and had been open to returning as a missionary.

In October 1946 the board elected him secretary for the Orient in October 1946, succeeding M. Theron Rankin, who had become the board's executive secretary. When Rankin died in January 1954, Cauthen was elected head of all Southern Baptist foreign mission work.

During his 26 years at the Foreign Mission Board's helm, Cauthen's sermons exhorted Southern Baptists to new heights in missionary activity. As early as 1964, Cauthen envisioned 5,000 Southern Baptist missionaries at work around the world. "God has not given us our current resources that we may use them upon ourselves," he said then. "As a body of Christian people we are fully capable of producing a new thrust in world missions and on a scale never before known." Southern Baptists are still working to reach that goal.

In his last sermon to the Southern Baptist Convention, he said in 1979, "Let us pray, give, go, send, preach, teach, bear witness to the lost, the hungry, the poor, the broken, the distressed, and, if need be, suffer and die that the name of Jesus Christ be made known to every human being on the face of the earth."

Missionaries by the hundreds would recall making their commitment to overseas ministry after hearing Cauthen address a convention or Baptist assembly session or in a worship service. One missionary quipped that Cauthen, "like Elijah, kept appearing on the scene."

Cauthen's experiences in China prepared him well for a pastoral role to the denomination's missionaries. As World War II intensified, the family coped with spiraling inflation and food shortages in China, and they often fled to crowded mountain caves during Japanese air strikes. His son, Ralph, was stricken with polio in 1942. Cauthen regularly exercised his son's legs to facilitate full recovery. His daughter, Carolyn, became critically ill with fever, as did his wife just before one of their evacuations. Mrs. Cauthen was flown to India on a stretcher.

When peace came, Cauthen initiated the most extensive relief effort that Southern Baptists had ever undertaken. Chinese Christians, a minority often bypassed by government relief programs, received food and medical care. Later, as executive director, Cauthen opened the door for ongoing Foreign Mission Board relief ministries.

Cauthen also called for 100 missionaries to go to Japan, where Southern Baptists had only a token presence prior to the war. The goal was reached in 1953.

As communists wrested control of the Chinese mainland during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Cauthen coordinated the evacuation of more than 200 missionaries. His policy allowed each to decide whether he or she had "Christ's clear command to stay on." Only one missionary, surgeon Bill Wallace of Tennessee, lost his life.

Cauthen took Southern Baptists' witness to Korea, India, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand and other Asian countries by reassigning many of the missionaries to minister among Chinese-speaking groups.

Cauthen also guided the Foreign Mission Board's development of a network of overseas English-language churches for U.S. servicemen; a program providing two-year mission assignments for recent college graduates; expanded volunteer opportunities abroad for Baptist lay people; and an up-to-date home office building in Richmond.

In the late 1950s, he courageously began to call Southern Baptists to put on "some sackcloth and ashes" regarding civil rights. Missionary work is tarnished, he said, "when any story goes out of people of any race being refused admittance into a house of worship."

Born Dec. 20, 1909, in Huntsville, Texas, Cauthen grew up in Lufkin, was baptized at age 6 and, two years later, was intent on entering the ministry. He was licensed to preach by his home church at age 16, after a small, rural church asked him to be their pastor.

He graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University (then College) in Nacogdoches, Texas, and Baylor University in Waco, Texas and earned master's and doctoral degrees in theology, in 1933 and 1936 respectively, from Southwestern.

Cauthen wrote several books, all dealing with missions. "Beyond Call" in 1973, based on his words of counsel and inspiration to new missionaries, followed "Now Is the Day," "By All Means" and a work he coauthored, "Advance: A History of Southern Baptist Foreign Missions."

A biography, "Baker James Cauthen: A Man for All Nations," was written by Jess C. Fletcher, president of Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, and a former administrator at the Foreign Mission Board.

Honorary degrees were conferred on Cauthen by Baylor University; Stetson University, Deland, Fla.; the University of Richmond, Va.; Hardin-Simmons; Seinan Gakuin University in Japan, East Texas Baptist College, Marshall; California Baptist College, Riverside; and William Carey College, Hattiesburg, Miss. He also was named a distinguished alumnus by Southwestern.

The Foreign Mission Board's new Missionary Learning Center near Richmond was named in honor of Cauthen and his wife. The chapel in the Richmond headquarters and an academic chair of missions at Golden Gate also bear Cauthen's name.

He is survived by his wife, Eloise Glass; two children, Carolyn Mathews of Santa Fe, N.M., and Ralph B. of Greensboro, N.C.; and two grandsons. Services will be April 18 at First Baptist Church in Richmond.

'Baptist True Union'
New Newspaper Name

LUTHERVILLE, Md. (BP)—For 68 years the newsjournal for Southern Baptists in Maryland and Delaware was called The Maryland Baptist, one of seven different names the newspaper has had.

With the first issues in April, The Maryland Baptist was no more. A name change was made necessary since the convention's legal name was changed last November to include Delaware.

So the staff and state paper committee decided to go back to the original, and call the paper the Baptist True Union. The first modern day Baptist True Union was issued April 4.

Editor Fletcher Allen said the name is really new—since the word "Baptist" was added to the Dec. 8, 1849, name. He said there are several reasons for the choice of names. "We are entering our 150th year of Southern Baptist work in Maryland and Delaware," he said, "so history is a good precedent here.

"The first paper was published in 1849 when the Maryland Baptist Union Association was only 13 years old. We are adapting the first name—and placing emphasis on the unity it brings—unity that is desperately needed all across our Baptist world."

Allen explained the first editor stated his rationale for the name clearly in the first issue—Dec. 8, 1849. The editor said that when the world is evangelized and "Jesus shall reign as king of nations," this will be the "true union to which we aspire."

The subscription rates will remain the same and the paper still will be mailed 48 weeks each year.

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Historical Commission
Hires Shellyn Poole

Baptist Press
4/15/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Shellyn Gresham Poole, 27, has been named communications specialist by the Historical Commission, SBC. She will assume her new duties on May 1.

A native of Jackson, Miss., Poole is a graduate of Mississippi University for Women, B.S., 1977, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, M.R.E., 1979. She was on the staff of Southwestern as graduating students/alumni placement coordinator, 1980-82, and as associate director of church/minister relations, 1982-84.

In her new position, Poole will assist the Historical Commission in developing news and information services, coordinating public relations materials and activities, designing and marketing products, and interpreting and promoting the mission, programs, emphases, and services of the agency.

Poole and her family live in Nolensville, Tenn. Her husband, Philip, former director of communications for Southwestern seminary, has been a public relations specialist for the Baptist Sunday School Board since November 1984. Members of First Baptist Church, Nashville, they have one child, Melissa Shellyne, born Sept. 20, 1984.

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New Orleans Trustees
Adopt Record Budget

Baptist Press
4/15/85

NEW ORLEANS (BP)—During their annual meeting, trustees of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary adopted a record operating budget which included a four percent across the board salary increase.

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In addition, they elected a professor of missions and recognized a decade of growth under the leadership of Landrum P. Leavell II as president of the 68-year-old institution.

A budget of \$6,017,500 was adopted to maintain academic and support programs on the seminary's main campus and in its five extension centers during the 1985-86 academic year. This is an increase of 3.18 percent over the 1984-85 budget of \$5,832,000.

Included in the budget was a four percent across-the-board salary increase for faculty, staff and administration. No salary increases were granted in the previous year due to the short-fall in Cooperative Program giving.

Andrew J. Glaze Jr. was elected as Chester L. Quarles Professor of Missions effective Aug. 1. Currently head of the department of religion and philosophy at Mississippi College in Clinton, Miss., Glaze served with the Foreign Mission Board in Argentina from 1953 until 1980.

He holds a bachelor of arts degree from Mississippi College and bachelor of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

Leroy D. Yarbrough was promoted to associate professor of choral conducting and music theory. He has been assistant professor since joining the faculty in 1976.

The trustees also recognized "10 years of outstanding service" provided by Landrum Leavell as the seminary's seventh president. While presenting a resolution from the trustees, William M. Hamm Jr., board president, praised Leavell for his "invaluable leadership during its (th seminary's) greatest decade of growth and expansion."

Officers of the board were reelected for next year. Hamm, president of Berg Mechanical, Inc., Shreveport, La., will begin his fourth term as president of the trustees. Carl A. Hudson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Natchitoches, La., begins his second year as vice-president. Starting their third terms as treasurer and secretary respectively are Mrs. Walter (Joyce) Fox, a pastor's wife from Lafayette, La., and Fred J. Vogel, professor emeritus of the University of New Orleans.

In other actions, the trustee:

--Elected John Knight of Lafayette, La., Jim Threldkeld of Tupelo, Miss., and Jack Cunningham of Shreveport, La., to the New Orleans Seminary Foundation Board.

--Granted approval for the administration to employ an architect for renovation of the student center building.

--Approved preparation of feasibility studies by Cargill Associates of Fort Worth, Texas, to explore the potential for new development efforts.

--Reviewed progress of the self-study being conducted in preparation for the accreditation review in early 1986.

In his report to the trustees, Leavell reviewed the seminary's operations during the last year when it faced conflicting challenges of a record enrollment and a nearly \$200,00 short-fall in Cooperative Program support. Despite these situations, the seminary maintained its fiscal integrity and operated "in the black," he said.

The president reported the Cooperative Program budget to be proposed during the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas includes only a \$78 increase for New Orleans over the budget adopted in 1984.

He added enrollment in the current year is expected to reflect a new record, but th administration is committed to maintaining the seminary's programs while assuring complete fiscal integrity.

Noting 67 percent of the seminary's operating budget is derived from Cooperative Program support, he said, "Anything that jeopardizes the Cooperative Program, jeopardizes us."

Three Million More Testaments Ordered

NASHVILLE (BP)—Southern Baptist churches and other groups have ordered more than 1.1 million Good News America New Testaments in the three months since they were made available at cost by the Sunday School Board through Holman Bible Publishers.

Because of the early orders, Johnnie Godwin, director of Holman, has ordered an additional three million copies to be printed by Kingsport Press of Knoxville, Tenn. This will bring the total number of New Testaments in print to eight million.

The Good News America New Testaments are published for use in preparation for the 1986 nationwide simultaneous revivals. With the new order, there will be four million King James, three million New American Standard and one million Spanish New Testaments in print.

Godwin said the new printing order includes two million King James and one million New American Standard New Testaments. Orders placed through April 1 for King James New Testaments totaled more than 750,000 out of an original printing of two million. More than 360,000 New American Standard New Testaments were ordered in that period from the two million available copies.

At that rate, Godwin estimated the King James copies would have been gone by the first of the summer, almost a year before the scheduled revivals.

The price for the New Testaments in King James, New American Standard or Spanish version will remain at 32 cents per copy, in multiples of 50, Godwin said, until the eight million copies already printed or ordered are sold out. Any additional printing likely will require a price increase of one or two cents per copy to cover higher costs. The price does not include shipping and handling.

Churches are encouraged to order the Good News America New Testaments as early as possible to ensure receiving them when they are needed for the outreach project, Godwin said. Presently, approximately four weeks are required to process the order and ship to the church. When the present supply of testaments is exhausted, the order filling time could be no longer. Godwin estimated it would take three months to buy paper, print and deliver one million more of any of the versions.

Godwin said churches should remember to order Good News America New Testaments through the materials services department of the Sunday School Board, where church literature is ordered. Orders placed through Holman Bible Publishers cannot be filled as quickly.

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Sullivan Expresses Optimism For SBC

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
4/15/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Changes in the Southern Baptist Convention in the 10 years since his retirement have not dampened the optimism of retired Sunday School Board President James L. Sullivan for the future of the denomination.

Sullivan has served Southern Baptists for 59 continuous years, beginning at age 16 when he was elected youth director of the Baptist Young People's Union in Waltham (Mississippi) Baptist Association.

After leaving the Sunday School Board in 1975, Sullivan was elected president at the 1976 Southern Baptist Convention, where he served for one term. In his opinion, the denomination's highest office should be for only one year to give more laymen the opportunity of involvement and to avoid allowing elected officers to manipulate the machinery to achieve personal goals.

After his term as president of the SBC, Sullivan went through a time of health problems. He went to the doctor for a regular checkup and wound up in the hospital for approximately three weeks for treatment of a heart condition.

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The problem is presently under control with medication and a pacemaker, but Sullivan can seldom accept week-long engagements because of the stress from such a demanding schedule. He still receives calls almost daily requesting a visit somewhere in the country.

Sullivan said he believes there have been significant changes in the convention, over the past five years especially. He said he believes a lot of people have misused Southern Baptist polity and manipulated proceedings by political maneuvers.

"Many decisions made by the convention, I'm convinced, are not where the mainline Baptists have been and are presently in their personal objectives and dreams for the denomination," he explained.

"The Lord has a way of taking situations and bringing out of them His purpose," Sullivan said. "If we will be patient and prayerful, we will come out stronger and more unified.

"The Kansas City Convention last year obviously was a display of extremism," Sullivan said. "It still was not the worst convention I ever attended. The worst was in 1949 in Oklahoma City, and good came out of it, with the right decisions.

"Even with evidence of extremism, a process unfolds," Sullivan continued. "We may lose some churches at each end of the spectrum, but our convention will not split."

Sullivan said revisions are needed to make sure small groups do not manipulate between annual sessions of the convention.

"This has happened before, toward the more progressive side," he said. "However, this is the first time such a well-funded coalition of groups with personal interests has wanted their ideas to prevail."

Sullivan said the doctrines of the opposing groups in the denomination may be the same, but the attitudes are different. "A positive attitude can magnify the importance and purpose of the church, which is to win, mature and teach people, regardless of size or location," he said. "We need to help people understand the nature and purpose of the Bible as the textbook of the church.

"We can't let up on the importance of the Bible because it is our basis for information in our faith and practice," he continued. "Unfortunately, we as a denomination have been put in the position of not believing the Bible when we object to the ways some people are using it.

"Personally, I believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture as much as anyone, but I believe also in the priesthood of the believer and the right and responsibility to interpret it under the leadership of the Holy Spirit," Sullivan explained. "I object strenuously to any person using the Bible in a coercive way to try to force his personal beliefs on someone else.

"If you don't tell Baptists every day you believe the Bible, they think you don't believe it," claimed Sullivan, who was president of the Sunday School Board for 22 years. "We need to constantly tell of our belief in the Bible.

"I'm optimistic about Southern Baptists," Sullivan said. "I think we have a great future in spite of weaknesses. There is no such thing as a perfect system, but don't major on weaknesses instead of strengths.

"I hope Baptists will maintain a positive attitude and intensify witnessing, outreach and study so people can better understand the meaning and methods of Scripture," he said.

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