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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4228

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69 Foreign Missionaries
Named At Denver Service

DENVER, Colo. (BP)--Sixty-nine new foreign missionaries were appointed in Denver, Colo., April 12, to serve in 25 countries.

Denver is the farthest west the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has conducted an April board meeting and appointment service, which are held in different states each year. About 4,000 people gathered for the service that lasted nearly two hours.

The service included the appointment of the board's first regional correspondent, Craig Bird, and his wife, Melissa Jackson Bird. Both Texans, they will serve in eastern Africa, where Bird will cover stories in 19 countries.

Bird compared his life with "a small Arkansas creek emptying into the Mississippi River." He told the crowd he felt "awed by the width and powerful current of this thing Southern Baptists call foreign missions, but confident we have been flowing toward this night for many, many years."

"We tried to talk God into calling us to seminary and launching us on a career 'really' in his will," Bird said. "But just over a year ago, during a mission tour of Hawaii, we slipped into the Mississippi.

"A growing conviction that God wanted us in foreign missions matched a newly approved program at the Foreign Mission Board to use professional journalists (overseas) to help better tell the story of Southern Baptist missions," Bird said.

Larry Dramann, from Colorado, told the crowd a turning point in his life came a few years ago when his car rolled down a 400-foot embankment and he was not seriously injured. "I got on my knees and prayed that night," he recalled. "God spared my life for a reason."

He married Jonda Pettigrew and got involved in church. During a 1981 mission trip to South Korea, "God absolutely broke our hearts and we knew we would be called to the mission field," he said. The Dramanns will work in Zambia, where he will be business manager for the mission.

Six people walked forward during an open invitation at the end of the service and committed themselves to foreign missions. One is a pastor in Colorado and another is a 34-year-old woman who was a Moslem in Lebanon until six years ago. She is a Christian now attending Colorado Baptist University.

Hundreds went down after the service and took "praying hands" prayer pins available on the stage edge. R. Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board, told the crowd, "Take a prayer pin and pray for missionaries as you have never done before."

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Canadians To Send Missionaries
With Southern Baptists' Help

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
4/14/86

DENVER, Colo. (BP)--Canada's Southern Baptists soon will begin sending their own foreign missionaries abroad with financial assistance and other aid from Southern Baptists in the United States.

The Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists, consisting of 80 churches located primarily in western Canada, plans to appoint foreign missionaries and pay their salaries and pensions. The Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board, in action approved during its April 11 meeting in Denver, has agreed to provide housing on overseas fields for the Canadian missionaries, insurance and medical coverage, transportation expenses and other aid.

The Canadian convention hopes to be able to send one or two missionaries per year, said Don Kammerdiener, Foreign Mission Board director for Middle America and the Caribbean. The cooperative agreement is designed to help the Canadians move toward full support of their missionaries as their convention grows in size and strength.

"We are assisting them in having their own mission program, not absorbing them into ours," Kammerdiener stressed about the joint effort.

Preliminary projections indicate the expenses covered by the Foreign Mission Board would average about \$13,000 per year for a single missionary and \$19,000 per year for a missionary family. In some countries the expenses could run higher or lower, depending upon national economic conditions and dollar exchange rates.

The Southern Baptist contribution would total about half the overall support package for Canadian missionaries. The Canadians plan to provide salaries for their missionaries which equal those provided for Southern Baptist missionaries.

The agreement climaxes negotiations begun in 1984, when the Foreign Mission Board urged Canadian Southern Baptists to start their own foreign mission effort. The board also offered to screen, train and find overseas assignments for Canadian missionaries.

The Canadians named a special committee to explore the issue. The April 11 action, Kammerdiener said, is the result of discussions between that committee and the Foreign Mission Board.

Foreign Mission Board personnel consultants will interview and screen Canadian missionary candidates, making recommendations concerning missionary appointment to the Canadian convention's executive board.

After appointment by their convention, new Canadian missionaries will train at the Foreign Mission Board's Missionary Learning Center near Richmond, Va.

Initially, Canadian missionaries probably will join organizations of Southern Baptist missionaries on overseas fields and fill assignments identified by those organizations. "I would guess they would like to get started under the umbrella of an existing mission to see how it works," Kammerdiener said. "But they may branch out later."

Canadians also will be eligible for participation in the Foreign Mission Board's two-year journeyman assignments and lay volunteer programs. In these limited-term programs, Canadians will be commissioned directly by the mission board rather than by their convention. Canadian journeymen also will receive full financial support from the board.

The plan will be reviewed in several years. The Canadians anticipate eventually taking over full funding of their missionaries.

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Most Americans Do Not See
AIDS As God's Punishment

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
4/14/86

WASHINGTON (BP)—Most Americans do not believe the deadly disease AIDS amounts to God's punishment upon sexuality, pollster George Gallup has reported.

Results of his survey, conducted last December but just released, show 55 percent of the public holding that view, with 21 percent believing the disease—formally known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—is God's judgment. Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) say they are undecided.

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Other key findings in the survey revealed:

--Forty-one percent believes the response of churches to the victims of AIDS has been adequate or better. But another 35 percent describes the response as "poor."

--Nearly three in five (57 percent) express the view that homosexuals are capable of adopting a heterosexual lifestyle if they choose.

--Half those surveyed describe homosexuality as a sin, with 32 percent disagreeing and 18 percent having no opinion.

--Fully two-thirds think homosexual bath houses should be closed.

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(Editor's Note: Following is the second of a four-part series exploring the implications of the ongoing school prayer debate.)

U.S. Senate Divided On
Silent Prayer Amendment

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
4/14/86

WASHINGTON (BP)--With the vote on a proposed school prayer amendment pending in the U.S. Senate, members of that body are lining up on opposite sides of the issue.

As expected, Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, one of the co-sponsors of S.J. Res. 2--the silent prayer amendment now awaiting Senate floor action--has been vocal in supporting passage of such a measure.

Arguing the Supreme Court has altered the intent of the framers of the Constitution in regard to the permissibility of prayer in public schools, Hatch said, "Given the integral role of compulsory public education in the development of the values of the citizenry, I am convinced--and I believe that the great majority of Americans would share this view--that the Supreme Court's erroneous interpretations have created a regime in which the state has become antagonistic, even hostile, toward religious views."

While Hatch called S.J. Res. 2 a "remedy for the missteps" of the nation's high court and said it would provide a well-defined restoration of the proper meaning of the First Amendment's establishment clause, Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., said, "Whenever the federal government begins to make religious decisions for the people, our First Amendment right to worship according to our personal beliefs is threatened."

Simon said voluntary silent prayer has never been banned from the nation's public schools, adding, "I doubt there is a child on earth who has not offered up a few words for hope and guidance at some point in his or her school day."

The measure's other co-sponsor, Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz., voiced disagreement with that contention. He said a constitutional amendment, such as S.J. Res. 2, is needed to "restore religion to the honored place it has traditionally held in our country and in our nation's public schools."

DeConcini said silent prayer--as provided for in his proposed constitutional amendment--would provide a means for religious expression without subjecting participants or nonparticipants to undue embarrassment. He added such an exercise would allow participants the freedom to pray to "whatever deity or values he or she finds holy."

Sen. Lowell Weicker, R-Conn., argued, however, school prayer--in whatever form--is government prayer since a public school is as much a part of government as the Internal Revenue Service, Central Intelligence Agency or U.S. Senate.

"Then there is the deceptive magic word 'voluntary' as in the phrase 'voluntary school prayer,'" Weicker said. "The phrase itself is, however, a contradiction. Since public education in these United States is mandatory, how can the prayer conceived within it be voluntary?"

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"Thanks to the Constitution as written, no one, no individual in these United States, can be prevented from praying or reflecting as he deems fit anywhere, anytime. Why would anyone trade off such a total freedom for the organized freedom of prayer in a classroom at 8 a.m.?"

Although agreeing that, in principle, students are free to pray silently whenever they want, Sen. Joseph R. Biden, D-Del., said he supports S.J. Res. 2 because it would dispel a general notion that students may not pray during school-sponsored moments of silence. He said that notion developed after a recent Supreme Court decision striking down an Alabama silent prayer statute.

"This amendment is not intended to tell children that they should pray during the moment of silence," Biden said. "It is intended simply to dispel the notion that they may not pray."

Another supporter of S.J. Res. 2, Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., refutes Weicker's argument. Helms, an outspoken proponent of prayer in public schools, said, "Our Constitution never intended to remove religion from our daily lives, but the Supreme Court has unfortunately moved in that direction by forbidding our students from practicing their religious beliefs on a strictly voluntary basis."

Sen. Howard M. Metzenbaum, D-Ohio, charged proponents of the amendment with not being content with "prayer resulting from the private and individual actions of schoolchildren," but rather insisting on "organized, group devotional exercises led by school officials."

Citing the sponsors' argument that the amendment would prohibit government from coercing any child to pray, Metzenbaum said, "But how is an eight year old to respond when the teacher conducts an 'organized religious activity' each morning in which other children are involved? What if the great majority of the class uses written prayer cards prepared by a particular denomination? What if the teacher discusses the types of prayer students may wish to give without 'encouraging' a particular form of prayer? What if the school officials provide that students who do not wish to be a part of the morning devotional event must leave the room?"

Metzenbaum added, "All these types of conduct are apparently allowed by this amendment, but it is ludicrous to argue that these situations are 'neutral' in regard to religion."

Sen. Charles McC. Mathias, R-Md., said he bases his opposition to the amendment on the fact that public classrooms should be dedicated to learning rather than given over to devotional exercises.

"Today, questions of religious observance do not figure in the processes by which Americans select members of local school boards," Mathias said. "Under S.J. Res. 2, the issue of whether or not to choose 'to structure a devotional exercise' could be injected into the political arena."

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Guest Professor Teaches
About Traditions He Forsook

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press
4/14/86

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—As a boy, Osadolor Imasogie sprayed insecticide on the floor to keep termites off the wooden statues representing his ancestors.

As a young man he had to choose between his Christian convictions and a funeral ceremony to add his father's spirit to the host of spirits to be worshiped.

The choice was simple but not easy. It pitted him against his family, but his life was committed to Jesus Christ, not the African traditional religion of his native Nigeria.

Imasogie disinherited himself from his father's estate, but African Christianity inherited an influential theologian and statesman.

Ironically, Imasogie, 57, now spends much of his time enlightening Western Christians about the very African traditions he rejected. This semester he is a visiting professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Since he was the youngest son, it was Imasogie's boyhood task to accompany his father, a high chief of the Endo tribe, when sacrifices were offered to ancestors.

"I had to treat the floor to keep termites from attacking the wood," he says. "I remember asking my father one day if he would just tell his father to kill the termites himself," he remembers. "He said the piece of wood wasn't his father--it was a symbol of his father."

Such an insight clashes with Western Christians' belief that Africans worship idols and are incapable of sophisticated religious thought, he maintains.

Even though there were two other schools in his native Benin City, his father, "for some reason" sent him to a school run by Southern Baptist missionaries. He encountered little family resistance when at 16 he became a Christian because his father had died and his mother had no objections.

But when the the religious funeral ceremonies were delayed for financial reasons, the stage was set for conflict. By the time the the eldest son scheduled the ceremonies 10 years later, Imasogie was a 26-year-old Baptist pastor.

"I told them it was a pity but I couldn't participate--it would conflict with what I believed," Imasogie explains. "Two days later I was summoned by the oba (the tribe's king)."

"The Bible says honor your father and your mother," the oba challenged. But Imasogie explained this was not a matter of honor but of being true to Jesus Christ.

"My half-brothers didn't like my stance, but I think they respected me for it," he notes. Proof came later when one of the half-brothers, the one who raised Imasogie after their father died, became a Christian, along with his mother.

Cut off from his inheritance, Imasogie continued a career which led through the Baptist College in Iwo, Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Oklahoma Baptist University, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has been principal of the Nigerian seminary since 1979 and has just completed six years as president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

But the watershed of his life's work promises to be as a theologian.

"Projections are for Africa to be the most 'Christian' continent in the world by the year 2000," he says. "But the challenge is what kind of Christianity will it be. The answer will be determined by how Africans perceive Christianity--whether as a foreign religion advantageous to be associated with, or as a Christ-based religion which understands African problems."

He carries on regular correspondence with African theologians and is convinced the product not only will anchor African Christianity but also will have an impact on Western theological thought.

Western missionaries will still be needed, he says. "We need them to criticize our theology as it develops. Theology is a public thing, and they can help us avoid the extremes of stating what we feel."



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