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April 21, 1986

86-57

Fish Caught In Tournament  
Helps Reassure Missionary

By Eric Miller

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Jimmy Smith has a fish story that supports his family's decision to be missionaries to Guatemala.

Some people have pointed out similarities in his story and the story of Jesus Christ telling Peter to take a coin from the mouth of a fish, he says.

In Matthew 17, Peter asked Jesus about paying taxes. Jesus advised Peter not to offend those who collect taxes and told him to cast a hook into the sea. The first fish he would catch would have a coin in its mouth. "Take it," Jesus said, "and pay them for me and for yourself."

While taking a course in missions at Houston Baptist University in 1983, Smith, then pastor of First Baptist Church of Lolita, Texas, developed an interest in foreign missions. At a conference the next year in Austin, Texas, two missionaries to Guatemala sat with him during a meal.

The missionaries sensed from his questions that he had more than a casual interest in missions and invited him to spend part of the summer with them in Guatemala. The visit would help him determine if he could make the cross-cultural adjustment and he would see the mission field first hand. He liked the idea and his wife, Rosanne, wanted to go, too.

"I got home, we looked at the checkbook and it said we weren't leaving the county, much less the country," Smith recalls. The church and relatives probably could have helped finance the trip, but the Smiths said no to those possibilities.

They decided if God really wanted them to go, he would help them get the money.

A few weeks later, Smith went fishing with Gene Alexander, a deacon in his church. Alexander mentioned a bass tournament in which he would be competing in two days.

He explained that a fish bearing a metal tag on a fin would be released into Lake Texana, a large lake southwest of Houston. A prize of \$20,000 would be awarded to any tournament participant catching the fish on Saturday. Other prizes would be awarded to those who caught the most in weight.

Three businessmen organizing the tournament paid \$1,000 for an insurance policy to cover the \$20,000 in case someone did catch the tagged fish on Saturday.

Agents with the New York firm handling the policy used the size of the lake and potential number of tournament participants to project the chance of a participant catching the tagged fish on that one day--6.8 billion to one.

Smith joked, "Gene, if you caught the fish, I could go to Guatemala."

Alexander got serious and said, "If I caught that fish, I'd give you \$5,000 and you could go to Guatemala."

Getting equipment out of the boat at the house, Smith casually mentioned Alexander's proposal to Rosanne. She wrote it in her prayer list notebook. "I wasn't going to be outdone," Smith says, "and I went over to the church and wrote it in my prayer list notebook."

"We both prayed for the fish to be caught so we could go to Guatemala," he reports.

SOULS OF THE BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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The first fish Alexander caught that Saturday was the \$20,000 fish. However, he didn't realize it until hours later because he had caught it at dawn and did not see the metal tag inscribed with a serial number.

Not wanting to believe the fish had been caught, the New York insurance firm sent a man to Texas to administer a polygraph test to the man who tagged the fish and released it, the newspaper representative who witnessed the release, the sheriff's department official who was there and Alexander. All four passed the tests, and the firm gave Alexander a check for \$20,000.

The tournament money was a "large part" in providing a way to visit the mission field, Smith says. "But it's only a small part in the overall picture of how the Lord has dealt with us."

The trip to Guatemala, he explains, was necessary because "I was afraid I might just be having a little dream—just looking for adventure."

He would tell himself the call to missions was "totally illogical. Quit thinking about this. This is not the Lord's will. You're pastoring and this is what you've prepared for."

Yet, in Guatemala, "we drove through villages and towns that had no one to tell them of Jesus' love. There were just too many different areas and Indian dialects and not enough missionaries.

"As we were going through customs (in Guatemala) looking back at the missionaries who were there to see us off, my eyes began to fill with tears," Smith says. "I felt as though I was leaving a place where I should stay. At that moment I was sure."

About \$1,600 was used for the trip and the rest was used to pay off debts to department stores, hospitals and doctors as the family moved and Smith entered seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He lacked 62 hours of seminary courses for a master of divinity degree.

The money from the tournament also paid for moving expenses, rent and utility deposits and a month of rent in advance. As the money ran out, his wife got a teaching job, and churches and friends helped them financially. Eventually, Smith became associate pastor at Venus Baptist Church in Venus, Texas.

The Smiths were appointed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board at an April 11 service in Denver. Smith, a native of Houston, will be a general evangelist and his wife, the former Rosanne Stohler, a native of Fort Worth, will work in the home and church.

The Smith family will go to Costa Rica this summer to study Spanish for a year before going to Guatemala. The Smiths' have a son, Lantz Douglas, 11, and a daughter, Marci Suzanne, 8.

The fish, still bearing the metal tag, is mounted on a wall in Alexander's home.

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(Eric Miller is a staff writer at the Foreign Mission Board.)

Ill Missionary Child  
Being Moved To Dallas

Baptist Press  
4/21/86

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Philip Newberry, the Southern Baptist missionary child who contracted meningitis in late March, was scheduled to be transferred to the Children's Medical Center of Dallas April 22.

His condition remains serious, but improvements have been noted, said William Gaventa, a physician and director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's medical services department. The Newberry child appears to be responding to visual stimuli and perhaps to sound, although as of April 18 he had not spoken. He no longer is on a respirator and is taking small amounts of nourishment by mouth.

The illness has caused circulation in his hands and feet to be restricted, and amputation of parts of his extremities is probable, Gaventa said.

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The child is the 22-month-old son of missionaries Randy and Jan Newberry of Gordon, Texas. They were attending a furloughing missionary conference at the board's Missionary Learning Center outside of Richmond, Va., when he became ill.

The transfer from Medical College of Virginia Hospital in Richmond will put him closer to his parents' hometown, where they had been on furlough since December.

The Newberrys were appointed missionaries to Brazil in 1982. They have two other children, Amy, 15, and Joel, 12.

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Kadel Succeeds Householder;  
Whitehouse Elected By RPRC

Baptist Press  
4/21/86

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (BP)—The Religious Public Relations Council elected Lutheran, United Methodist and Southern Baptist communicators to top offices during the 57th annual meeting of the international organization, held at the Marriott Hotel in South Bend.

Paula R. Kadel, coordinator for promotion and interpretation for Lutheran Church Women in Philadelphia, was elected president. She succeeded Lloyd T. Householder, director of the office of communications at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., who had been president for two years.

Donald S. Whitehouse, who had been the council's chairman of membership and chapter development, was elected secretary. Whitehouse is communications planning analyst at the Sunday School Board.

Other officers elected were vice president, Thomas S. McAnally of Nashville, director of United Methodist News Service, and treasurer, Robert Lear, director of the Washington office of United Methodist News Service.

In other action at the three-day meeting, the council presented 21 of its Wilbur Awards to professionals in secular electronic and print media for excellence in communicating religious values.

Participants also approved an eight-year career development plan to upgrade religious communicators. The plan was recommended by a committee chaired by Wesley M. (Pat) Pattillo, vice president for development at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.,

The council agreed to publish a fourth edition of its "Handbook for Local Congregations," a publication designed to help churches upgrade communications. The organization also voted to participate in and help coordinate RCC (Religious Communications Congress) 90, the once-in-a-decade gathering in April 1990 in Nashville of religious communications groups from around the world. RCC 90 follows similar gatherings in 1970 and 1980.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: May will be observed on the Southern Baptist Convention calendar as "Chaplaincy Ministries Month." Southern Baptists, through the SBC Home Mission Board chaplaincy division, have 2,013 chaplains serving in military, industrial, institutional and commercial roles.

Denny Burris Fights  
Fires As Chaplain

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
4/21/86

DALLAS (BP)—Denny Burris estimates the size of his "congregation" at 14,400, but he is not a pastor.

Burris, like more than 2,000 other Southern Baptists, is a chaplain. Unlike others, however, he is a full-time fire department chaplain—the only one endorsed by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board chaplaincy division.

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As chaplain for the Dallas Fire Department, Burris works with 1,800 personnel at 512 fire stations. "If each of them is married and has two kids that makes 7,200—and husband and wife each have parents so that makes 14,400 easy," he estimates. "Obviously, all of them don't call on me at the same time, but I get calls to deal with firefighters' extended families all the time. I'm the only minister many know."

Being a firefighter is in his blood. Burris' grandfather was a Dallas fireman, and his father was a Dallas policeman.

Burris says he had experienced "an obvious call to the ministry." Like most people, he thought that meant he should become a pastor. So while working as a firefighter, he started studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

"These guys (seminary students) talked about needing to preach just like needing to breathe," he says. "But I didn't have the drive to get up into the pulpit to preach."

Nevertheless, in 1977 he resigned his firefighting job and became associate pastor of Pleasant Run Baptist Church in suburban Lancaster. He enjoyed it and learned a great deal, but when the church had financial difficulties two years later, he offered to resign to ease the crunch.

In 1980, Wilts Bailey, "a good ol' Southern Baptist boy" who works in the training division of the Dallas Fire Department, told Burris the volunteer chaplain for his department had retired. Burris admitted an interest and in April 1981, he was appointed to the volunteer position. The following July he went on the payroll of the Dallas Fire Department in a "dual role" as firefighter and chaplain.

In January 1982, the position became full-time, and Burris hasn't looked back.

"Just about everything I do is crisis-related," he says. "Because of the nature of the job, I get to do more ministry in a day than most pastors do in a year. I have a chance to deal with people when they are hurting—a wife whose husband is badly injured, a fireman tugging on a body bag or a paramedic holding a battered child." The question they ask most, says Burris, is, "Why did this happen?"

"I see them sweat and bleed and cry, and sometimes I hear them cuss. But they need somebody to listen, somebody to demonstrate the love of Christ."

He answers all multi-alarm fires, performs weddings and funerals, counsels and is on call 24 hours a day.

Not only do firefighters statistically have the most dangerous job in the country, but paramedics have the most stressfull, Burris says.

"The divorce rate among policemen and firemen is 74 percent, and I've done surveys which indicate it is much higher than this among paramedics," he says. As preventive medicine, he holds classes for wives of trainees, trying to prepare them for the difficult role they will be asked to fill.

"The hours and the dangers of the job require flexibility," he says. "When you consider the death and carnage paramedics see all the time, you can understand how they will be affected as husbands and fathers when they get home."

Like most pastors, Burris has success stories from couples he has counseled. But when the phone rings it is just as apt to be a plea for help with an alcohol or drug problem as with marital difficulties.

Burris' background helps his credibility. Photographs of his grandfather and uncle in their Dallas firefighters uniforms hang in his office. His father was a policeman for 22 years. Prior to his conversion he twice narrowly escaped death, once in a burning building and once in a traffic accident that set the fuel truck he was driving aflame.

Even now he is a certified master firefighter and paramedic. He often rides ambulances and occasionally picks up a hose and fights fire.

Burris organized the Fellowship of Christian Firefighters and coordinates a major project, the distribution of "special firefighter's" editions of the New International Version of the Bible to each graduate of the training school. He also distributes the Bibles to others, including juveniles who have been arrested for arson and are required to attend a counseling session.

Among his prized memories are of boys who later have thanked the department for the Bibles, including one who carries it to school with him each day and another who sleeps with it under his pillow.

Recalling people he has helped get through the bad days, Burris says, "It helps to know God has been at work the past four years. When I'm getting down, sometimes I just pull the files and look through them."

Working out in the firefighters' small gym helps ward off stress, as does the support and understanding "of a wonderful wife." But mostly, "I can't explain how I deal with so much stress in other lives without going under myself except to admit that God gives me the peace and comfort I need.

"I'm doing the two things I love best," he points out. "Being a fireman and being a minister. How much better can God be to me?"

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

Joint Committee To Sponsor  
Hymn-Writing Competition

Baptist Press  
4/21/86

WASHINGTON (BP)—In conjunction with its 20th Religious Liberty Conference, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs is sponsoring a national hymn-writing contest.

Hymns entered in the contest should focus on a theme of religious liberty, soul liberty or freedom of religion. The winning hymn will be introduced during the conference, which will have the theme of "Intersecting Values: Christian Citizenship and Church-State Separation."

Contestants may either compose an original hymn tune and lyrics or write new lyrics to an existing hymn tune.

Judges for the contest will be William J. Reynolds, associate professor of church music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; Milton Ryder, pastor of First Baptist Church, Boston; and Chief Richard Donn, director of the U.S. Navy Band's chorus.

The contest winner will be provided with registration, lodging and meals while attending the Religious Liberty Conference, to be held Oct. 6-8 in Washington.

Entries must be mailed by July 1 and should be sent to Jeanette Holt, Baptist Joint Committee, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20002.

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