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86-85

Former SBC President  
Louie D. Newton Dies

ATLANTA (BP)--Louie D. Newton, president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1946 to 1948, died June 3 of pneumonia at Georgia Baptist Medical Center in Atlanta. He was 94.

Newton, who was pastor of Druid Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta for 40 years, was the oldest-living former SBC president when he died.

Born in Screven County, Ga., in 1892, he was a graduate of Mercer University in Macon and Columbia University in New York.

As a young reporter for the New York World, he refined his writing skills through interviews with John D. Rockefeller, Thomas A. Edison, Charles Evans Hughes and Rudyard Kipling. Those skills later aided him as publicity director for the SBC's "75 Million" campaign to pay debts owed by hospitals, schools and agencies. The same year, 1919, Georgia Baptists purchased the Christian Index from private interests and named him editor.

Following the death of his pastor at Druid Hills, Newton, who was chairman of the deacons, was offered the ministerial post. He became pastor on April 1, 1929.

His reputation spread as he hammered on the familiar Baptist themes of the day--anti-liquor, anti-pornography, anti-slot machines--and by protesting to every president from Franklin Roosevelt to Richard Nixon for sending envoys to the Vatican. He was a founder of the Georgia Temperance League.

Newton became a frequent visitor to the corridors of power and counseled with presidents. This year, following a unanimous vote of the Georgia General Assembly, his portrait was hung in the state capitol. He was only the third minister so honored.

Newton was chairman of the SBC's finance committee for 25 years and vice president of the Baptist World Alliance. He also was a co-founder of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

He once led a nationwide campaign to collect kits of clothing for orphans in war-torn Russia and a Bible and a pipe for Joseph Stalin. The campaign immediately drew fire from the Baptist right led by Fort Worth, Texas, pastor J. Frank Norris, who branded Newton a communist sympathizer. Norris harassed Newton with telegrams each Sunday for months. When eventually presented with the Bible, Stalin bowed and said in Russian, "Thank you."

Newton's weekly radio program, on which he and his wife interviewed notables, ran every Sunday for 57 years until his death.

The Louie D. Newton Center for Extended Care, adjoining Georgia Baptist Medical Center where he died, is named for him, as is a cottage at the Georgia Baptist Children's Home in Palmetto. The Baptist church on the Mercer campus was renamed Newton Hall in his honor.

His wife, the former Julia Carstarphen of Macon whom he married in 1915, died in 1969. Survivors include two daughters, Eden Elizabeth Gurein and Sarah Catherine Robertson, both of Atlanta; four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Texas Churches, Baylor Help Start  
Baptist Mission In Thailand

By Karen Benson

WACO, Texas (BP)--If it had not been for a Southern Baptist pastor in Tyler, Texas, Nirund "Nick" Jivasantikarn might not have become a Christian.

If it had not been for Baylor University in Waco, Texas, Jivasantikarn might not have been nurtured in his new-found Christian faith.

And if it hadn't been for a Southern Baptist foreign missionary, Jivasantikarn might not have been able to establish a Baptist mission when he returned from his U.S. studies to his homeland in Lampang, Thailand.

Jivasantikarn found salvation through the witnessing efforts of W.M. Shamburger, who recently retired as pastor of First Baptist Church of Tyler.

In the mid-1970s, Jivasantikarn followed his older brother, who had left Lampang to attend Tyler Junior College in Tyler. It was Shamburger and other individuals in First Baptist Church who took an interest in both men and introduced them to Christ.

When Jivasantikarn came to Baylor in 1978 to pursue master's and doctor's degrees in education, he found a nurturing environment for his faith and the individuals to encourage him along the path of Christian maturity, he says.

At Baylor, he also discovered a place where individuals are cared for not only academically, but spiritually, physically and mentally. The concept of "well-roundedness" is one he wants to incorporate into the program of the Lampang College of Commerce and Technology, where he now is president.

"I am a product of Baylor University," Jivasantikarn says. "When I returned home to the (Lampang) college, I saw the limited resources of our college, and I saw the emphasis on academics while the students' lives have been downplayed. They are not well-rounded, especially their religious commitment. They are not serious with their religion."

The need to minister to the "whole" person in his students concerns him. "To be constructive and productive citizens and to help in the development of our nation, I would like to provide them the opportunity of studying Christianity at the college," Jivasantikarn says.

He maintains a hope the exchange program that was started in 1980 between Baylor and Lampang College will provide individuals who not only can teach English language classes but who can help him with Christian activities and in witnessing efforts.

"I am not trained for it. I am not a minister," Jivasantikarn explains. But still he has tried. Last year, his initial efforts to begin a Christian ministry in Lampang finally paid off.

"To my luck and astonishment, I found Dr. Ronald C. Hill, head of the Thailand Baptist Mission in Bangkok. To my delight, he was a Baylor graduate and has spent 34 years in Thailand. We communicated, and I expressed my frustrations to him and my hope and wish to bring Christianity to our school."

Hill came to Lampang, some 400 miles north of Bangkok, where he visited the Lampang school and the Lampang Province, a province of 700,000 people spread across 6,000 square miles with no Southern Baptist mission or church.

"After he made a study of our school and of our province, he decided to leave the position in Bangkok to become the first Baptist missionary in Lampang and in northern Thailand," Jivasantikarn said.

When Hill and his wife, Evelyn, arrived in April 1985, the couple joined with the Jivasantikarn family of four to form the Lampang Baptist Fellowship. Initially, the fellowship included only those six individuals. The small group became the first Baptist work to be established in northern Thailand, and particularly in Lampang Province.

"We had been attending other (non-Baptist) churches, but we were now able to have our own Sunday worship," Jivasantikarn recalls.

The going hasn't been easy. The small fellowship slowly has added a few members until about 25 now worship together. But the group has no facility of its own in which to meet. They use a classroom at the Lampang College for Sunday school, worship and all other Christian activities. Thus, they have to work around the college schedule and only use the classroom when the college doesn't need it.

But the cramped quarters, inconvenience of scheduling and lack of time haven't dimmed the enthusiasm of the fellowship. The small group maintains the hope that one day soon it will have its own facility.

"I was influenced very much when I was a student at Baylor by the Baptist Student Union program and activities," Jivasantikarn says. "We want to build a BSU building which will serve as a place for activities for a BSU and as a worship center for the Baptist fellowship.

"That way, we can have a place of our own--have enough space for hundreds of students who are interested and who are inclined to believe to come and let us share with them."

To raise the funds for such a center, Jivasantikarn enlisted the help of individuals and churches in the United States and in Thailand. In 1983, the American-Thai Christian Foundation was formed solely to encourage and promote Christian activities at Lampang College and in Lampang Province.

The foundation is raising funds now to purchase land and to build the BSU/church building, with plans also to provide a housing facility for journeymen, foreign missionaries and staff.

And who is the president of the American-Thai Christian Foundation? None other than W.M. Shamburger of Tyler, Texas. Other participants include Ron Durham, pastor of Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco, and members of their two churches, along with members of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, to name but a few.

Once land is purchased and the building is in place, Jivasantikarn and others in the Lampang Baptist Fellowship have other wishes to fulfill. "We have not reached out very far yet. We have to plant our church first. But from this effort, we will go out with mission churches all across northern Thailand," Jivasantikarn predicts.

His position in Lampang Province will do nothing but help in the effort. Jivasantikarn is president of the Lampang City Council and plays leading roles in the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club and in educational organizations.

"I feel somehow that God is working through me, and something exciting is unfolding," he says. As a child, he had wanted to become a doctor and was a good enough student to be one. Instead, he became a teacher, college president and a leading policy maker in his province.

"Instead of healing and dealing with a patient one at a time, I am now dealing with hundreds of college students and hundreds of people in the province at a given time. The Lord has provided a way for me to affect the lives of thousands of people," he notes.

"It's amazing, really amazing."

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Missouri Congregation Dedicates  
\$1.2 Million Facility Debt-Free

By Trennis Henderson

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BRANSON, Mo. (BP)--Tucked away in the 13th chapter of Romans, verse 8 instructs Christians to "owe no man anything, but to love one another...."

Owe no man anything? Not even money? That's the way the pastor and members of First Baptist Church of Branson, Mo., have chosen to interpret the Apostle Paul's admonition. And not only interpret it; they've actually put their interpretation into action--to the tune of \$1.2 million.

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That's how much the Southwest Missouri congregation has raised during the past seven years in order to dedicate its new 44,000-square-foot sanctuary, office and educational facilities completely debt-free.

"Theologically, some may disagree" with the church's interpretation of the Romans passage, Pastor Jay Scribner acknowledges. "But that's the premise upon which we have functioned. We had begun to preach biblical principles of stewardship to get our families out of debt," he explains. "We decided there's no reason for God's family to be in debt either."

With that, church members banded together to pay off a consolidated loan of \$207,000. Included in that total was a \$150,000 loan taken out in 1979 to purchase a choice eight-acre tract of land located at the junction of Branson's two primary business routes.

"Seven years ago we were growing rapidly enough that we were in a bind from a facilities standpoint," Scribner notes. "After exhausting the options of staying where we were, we discovered this piece of land and realized it was the best location in town."

Determined that "we needed to get out of debt and stay out of debt," the congregation succeeded in repaying the loan in only 22 months. That was five years ago and it hasn't taken out a loan since—not even in the midst of its ambitious relocation project.

One key to the debt-free construction, says building and construction committee chairman Dave Crismon, was the decision to build the new facilities in phases as money became available. That called for patience, since the congregation already had outgrown its existing facilities.

Crismon says several adult Sunday school classes "met in the back of stores, in office buildings, in motel rooms" and in other "temporary, often inadequate facilities" for several years while waiting for construction to be completed.

When other options for temporary facilities eventually fell through, Crismon relates, "we began meeting in the unfinished rooms" at the new church facility about a mile from where the rest of the congregation was meeting. "We didn't have heat or air conditioning" during those two to three years, he adds. During the winter months, "we brought in kerosene heaters and everybody dressed warm."

But the inconvenience seemed only to heighten everyone's enthusiasm about the ongoing construction project. "We couldn't grow where we were at," Crismon explains. "We were highly motivated to get into a nice facility where we could grow."

Scribner notes the church's building contractor "is a Christian man willing to work with us. He'd stop when we say stop and start when we say start." Those stops included two periods when construction was halted for as long as nine months while additional funds were received.

"Sometimes that got somewhat frustrating to our people," the pastor says. "They were confronted by their friends. We learned to say, 'We're building it debt-free and we'll move into it debt-free. We're trusting God to provide for us.'"

That attitude became a witness to the community, Scribner relates. "It's really strengthened and challenged our faith," he says. "We're not a wealthy congregation by any means, but there's been a lot of faithful people."

Crismon says despite the frustration, the in-between stages really didn't have a negative impact on the congregation. "It might have been even positive," he suggests, "because people were so anxious to get back to building."

That anticipation resulted in what Scribner describes as "a continual financial emphasis for the past six years." Beginning in 1979 with a "Building Together with God" program that raised \$450,000, the Branson church members have since gone through financial programs called "Faith Living Through Thanks Giving," "Measure of Faith Day" and "Possess the Land."

Roy Gillispie, coordinator of the initial "Building Together with God" program, says "We got to where we could guesstimate what the people would give when we started a new campaign—we had so many of them. But it was a great experience."

Noting there have been "times of discouragement and unrest," Scribner emphasizes, "Overall, there's been a prevailing spirit of faith and faithfulness.

"When you're doing things according to God's principles, he will accomplish what he said he would," he continues. Stressing that the church's various financial goals have been motivational, he adds sacrificial stewardship "has become a lifestyle of giving for many of our people. It has become the mentality of the church."

Gillispie and Crismon readily offer personal testimonies to that effect.

"I have grown more in the past seven years than the whole 60 before," Gillispie says. "It's made me grow and live by faith more than I ever have before—I've been blessed in so many ways."

As construction committee chairman, Crismon says one of his responsibilities is making sure the bills are paid. "There were times I did not think we would have the funds," he admits. "I didn't think we could do it."

During such times he would go to the church and pray for money to cover the immediate bills. Seeing those prayers answered repeatedly, he remarks, "has helped my faith tremendously. I just can't doubt anymore."

When the congregation moved into its new home earlier this year, the 600-seat sanctuary, the office suites and three-fourths of the classrooms were ready for occupation. But the church also faced a move-in deficit of \$25,000 that needed to be paid within 10 days.

"Some said, 'We've made it this far. Looks like we'll have to go to the bank,'" Scribner recalls. "But there was a Joshua and a Caleb among us who said, 'God's promised us this, so let's trust him for it.'" The results of that trust were gifts of \$25,600 during the first two Sundays in the new building.

Once the church construction is completely done—which will include finishing another eight to 10 classrooms, the fellowship hall, a prayer room and paving the parking lot—the total cost will be about \$1.5 million.

"We're still committed to finishing it the way we began," Scribner insists. "The skeptics have become less vocal.

"We anticipate totally finishing it this fall—seven years from the time we did our initial financial campaign," he adds. "The actual construction phase will have spanned four years. The weariness has been sort of a blessed tiredness—like the final night of a revival."

And what will the Branson congregation do once the construction is totally finished? "We plan to do another major financial campaign in 1987 for missions causes," Scribner reports. "Our people have simply developed a lifestyle for giving. When individuals understand and embrace the biblical principles of financial freedom, it permeates the church as a whole."

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Gift Sets Up Myers  
Fund For Seminararians

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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)—A family gift has been received by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., to establish the Edna T. and Donald G. Myers Student Aid Fund. Proceeds from the fund will be used annually to provide assistance to students preparing for either pastoral or church music ministries.

The fund is named for a North Carolina couple, Edna Teague Myers and the late Donald G. Myers.

Myers served several North Carolina churches as pastor and was active in the state convention as a trustee of both Meredith College and Wake Forest University. He also was elected vice president of the general board of the convention as well as vice president of the convention.

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