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87-5

Weatherford Urges Women
To Use Spiritual Gifts

By Carol Garrett

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)—Christian women should use their gifts to become servant leaders despite negative attitudes toward women in ministry that could discourage service, Carolyn Weatherford told a group of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union leaders.

"I'm not talking about preaching. I'm talking about ministering and serving through mission action," said Weatherford, national WMU executive director. She suggested women be more aggressive in exercising their spiritual gifts.

Women do not just "become" servants, Weatherford said: "We who are leaders in the service of others are children of God. Nobody thrusts us in the servant role, but we choose to take it on."

Weatherford said she sees all Christian women as potential servant leaders if they choose to use their gifts. They must do this by first being obedient to God, and not "cowering in a corner, frightened to serve," she noted.

She described her role of leading more than 1 million WMU members as the same as any other Christian woman who uses her gifts: "I'm not any different. I continue to see my role not as one of privilege and honor, but of service."

Weatherford said she believes God has a way of helping people do what he wants them to do. "I never intended to be a WMU worker, but I cannot imagine doing anything else from the perspective I have now," she related.

"Discover your gifts and then select positions in churches and take directions in your families based on these gifts," she urged.

The motivation for doing God's will and using spiritual gifts comes when Christians have given their hearts to Jesus, she said, admonishing, "Don't neglect the gift that is in you."

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Southern Baptists Need
Breakthrough For Growth

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Prayer, commitment and optimism are among the essential factors needed for Southern Baptists to make a breakthrough toward Bold Mission Thrust and Challenge 10/90 goals, Harry Piland told state Sunday school leaders.

Piland, director of the Sunday school department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, outlined eight factors he believes are needed for a breakthrough in Southern Baptist growth.

Speaking during annual planning sessions, Piland said Southern Baptists must believe growth can happen, renew commitment to enrollment and evangelism and disciple people who are enrolled.

Preliminary Uniform Church Letter statistics indicated a possible decline in 1985-86 Sunday school enrollment of almost 8,000 from the record total of 7,953,834 reached in 1984-85. If the final figures released in February 1987 show a decline, it will be the first decline in Sunday school enrollment in seven years.

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"The trend is an upward trend for the past 10 years. Bold Mission Thrust can work. It has gained momentum," Piland said.

Bold Mission Thrust is the Southern Baptist goal of sharing the gospel with every person in the world by the year 2000. Challenge 10/90 is a Sunday school support goal of 10 million people enrolled in Sunday school by 1990.

Piland urged Southern Baptists to return to evangelism in the grass roots of America: "We can no longer say we are a denomination of the grass roots. We must return to the blue-collar person and turn to persons living in mobile home parks, housing projects and those society has overlooked to make Christ known to our nation."

He said Southern Baptists must rely on basic principles but be willing to accept new methods, multiply leadership through training, unify to meet the task and support the work with prayer.

A 6 percent increase in Sunday school enrollment for each church for each year until 1990 would exceed the goal of 10 million enrollment, Piland noted, adding, evangelism through the Sunday school and discipleship are essential partners in the push for Sunday school growth.

"There is no conflict between telling the lost about Jesus and then teaching the saved Christian principles. They are both important," he explained.

He cited ASSISTeams — associational Sunday school improvement support teams — and special worker training as ways for leaders to multiply their efforts by having more trained workers to work with churches in Sunday school development.

Teamwork between the Sunday School Board, state leaders, associations and churches will be necessary to meet the goals, he said. "We must become an unselfish people linking hands. We must pull together to get the job done."

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Prisoners Participate
In Cellblock Evangelism

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
1/13/87

DALLAS (BP)—Sharing the gospel in the cellblocks of America's toughest prison won't be much of a culture shock for a group of evangelistic witnesses trained by Shady Oaks Baptist Church in Hurst, Texas. They all are prisoners themselves.

The 35 inmates in the Texas Department of Corrections Eastham unit, recently rated "America's toughest prison" by Newsweek magazine, all became Christians while behind bars. Many were converted directly as a result of the ministry of Don Dickerman, associate pastor at Shady Oaks Church.

In the near future, Dickerman and a group of volunteers from Shady Oaks will go to the Eastham unit to train the inmates in the Evangelism Explosion witnessing program. The prisoners will then go into cellblocks on a daily basis with the warden's permission to witness to fellow inmates.

"When those of us from the free world witness to prisoners, it's easy for them to say, 'Sure you love us, and you care, but you've never been here. You don't know what it's like,'" says Dickerman. "When other inmates witness to them, they have to know that it's real — that it works."

Dickerman has been involved in prison ministry for 11 years, first as a pastor and evangelist and later as bivocational associate pastor at Shady Oaks Church. His primary responsibility as associate pastor is leading the church's volunteer prison ministry.

Last year, Dickerman spent about three weekends each month behind bars with volunteer groups, preaching 112 times in prisons. He saw 1,500 prisoners make professions of faith in Christ in evangelistic services and many others converted through personal contact and correspondence.

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"One very effective evangelistic tool we use is our newsletter, 'The Solid Rock,' which is read by about 50,000 inmates each week," he says. "Sometimes when I go into lock-up areas to see prisoners who aren't allowed out of their cells for more than an hour or so a day, I see stacks of them that prisoners have saved and that are read and reread."

Each issue contains an evangelistic message as well as letters from inmates and other items of interest to prisoners. Most of the budget of Don Dickerman Ministries — a non-profit organization based at Shady Oaks Church — is spent on publishing the newsletter.

Dickerman works as a commercial representative for Texas Electric and serves without salary as associate pastor in charge of prison ministries. Although he finds his schedule demanding, his excitement for prison ministry has not diminished after 11 years.

"I've known a spiritual renewal in prison that I've never seen in the free world," notes Dickerman. "When prisoners experience the grace of God, they fall in love with Jesus. It's an abiding love because they realize more than most of us how far down God reached to touch them."

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Saxophonist Alumnus
Gives Talent To God

By Elizabeth Watson

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Gospel saxophonist Vernard Johnson holds notes so long some people think he has a third lung.

But the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary alumnus says his second wind comes from God.

That he can even play the saxophone is a miracle, Johnson notes. As a child and teen-ager, he suffered chronic asthma. "I used to gasp for breath every night, sometimes wondering if that breath might be my last," he recalls.

Johnson wanted to shed his sickly image, so he decided to play the saxophone in the school band when he was 12 years old: "I knew it would be a monumental task for me to blow a horn, but I desperately wanted to make my parents proud." So I struggled, blowing one note and gasping for air as I learned to play."

Johnson soon began playing his saxophone in his Kansas City, Kan., church. By age 17 he was playing with the Modern Jazz Prophets band, still suffering with asthma. He was "empty and lonely, in search of 'soul satisfaction.'"

"Thank God one day someone walked up to me and said, 'Vernard, I know someone who sits high but looks low, who will hold your hand through the storm and rain. His name is Jesus, and you need to try him,'" he reports.

Two weeks later, Johnson did. Walking along a downtown Kansas City street, he looked up and told God, "I've heard you are a doctor in the sick room. If you are truly real, heal my lungs and I will play for you the rest of my life."

"While walking down that street, God began to convict me," Johnson says. "He told me if I would give him my life he would do more than touch my lungs — he would touch my whole life. Tears began to roll down my face and right there on the street I accepted Christ as my savior."

"A few days later, I decided to put my horn down and please Jesus. But God spoke to my heart saying, 'Vernard, don't put your horn down. Just change your song.'"

So Johnson traded tunes such as "My Amazing Love" for "Amazing Grace." Before Johnson's 18th birthday, his asthma attacks completely stopped.

Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in music education from Kansas State Teacher's College. A professor there encouraged him to study at Southwestern Seminary.

Frank Stovall, former professor of voice, ran into Johnson the day he visited Southwestern for the first time. Johnson says that encounter changed his life:

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"Can I help you?" Stovall asked Johnson.

"Yes, sir," Johnson said. "I hope to go to school here."

"Oh, wonderful!" Stovall said. "What will your major be?"

"Gospel saxophone," Johnson said.

"What?" Stovall asked. "I've never heard of that major before. Can you sing? Play the piano?"

"No, I just play the saxophone," Johnson said.

"Well, you come back in the fall and we'll set you up. Don't you worry," Stovall told Johnson.

Johnson took the professor at his word and came back to Southwestern — twice. The first time he earned the master of music in church music degree in 1973. The second time he earned the doctor of musical arts in church music in 1979, becoming the first black person to receive that degree at Southwestern.

Today Johnson shares the gospel in more than 200 "soul-winning concerts" each year. Last year more than 17,000 decisions for Christ were made as a result of his ministry. He has played his saxophone for presidents of the United States, Billy Graham and other dignitaries around the world.

"God told me if I would stop playing for the world and play for him, he would allow me to play before kings and queens," Johnson says. "I still haven't had the privilege to play before kings and queens. But I know I will someday because God hasn't let me down on any of his promises yet."

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Crusaders Make Points
With Kids Through Basketball

By Scott Collins

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Winning people to Jesus is more important than winning games for the Texas Crusaders basketball team.

However, the Crusaders have been successful at both.

The team of mostly Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary students plays in the Fort Worth (Texas) Commercial League. Texas Baptist Men sponsor the team, which has won the league championship or placed second several times.

Student Kevin Lee, a 6-foot-3-inch guard, uses the Crusaders to help his youth ministry at Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church. Lee played college basketball at Langston University.

He takes a van-load of teen-agers to Crusader games and then out for pizza on Friday nights. "The kids see us as a Christian example," Lee says.

But the team's witness extends beyond the youths. After losing the championship game of the state tournament two years ago, Crusaders witnessed to the winning team. The most valuable player from the other team accepted Christ.

"As a result of the city league, we develop friendships with guys on other teams and can take a stand for Christ and witness," says team member Scott Corwin.

"Most people think we (Christians) are wimps," Lee adds. But it's strange that "we have a team everyone wants to be on."

Crusaders extend their witness through sports clinics. They instruct Baptist boys' Royal Ambassador teams and play exhibition games against church teams.

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The Crusaders also travel abroad to play, most recently in Mexico in 1984. On the road, team members speak in churches and tell individuals about Christ.

"We took advantage of a fanatical interest in sports," says Steve Caver, a Southwestern graduate. The Mexico trip "was a tremendous opportunity because the people were so interested in basketball. Most of what we did was in personal evangelism."

Caver is now minister of missions and recreation at Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving, Texas. He is organizing similar teams on a high school level there and hopes to take a team overseas in 1987.

Another former Crusader who is continuing his basketball ministry is 6-foot-11-inch Paul Renfro. He now plays on the Athletes In Action team against major college teams and even the Russian National Team.

Renfro doubles as a seminary student, attending Southwestern during spring semesters.

The Crusaders believe the adage, "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game."

"I have realized that God doesn't mind me playing," Lee says. "He just wants me to play for him."

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Students Get Hooked On Witnessing
In Seminary Evangelism Classes

By Scott Collins

Baptist Press
1/13/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Amber Chapman couldn't understand how sin separated her from heaven, and her father, a Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary student, had tried every approach to explain it.

Then one day during Larry Chapman's personal evangelism class, Roy Fish, professor of evangelism, presented a plan for leading children to Christ.

The next day Chapman presented the plan to Amber, and the grade-school child accepted Christ.

"A lot of things in the class have been helpful, but this has been the best because it hit me where I was," Chapman says.

Chapman is not the only Southwestern Seminary student who has taken the responsibility to witness seriously -- both in and out of the home.

"Our first calling is to minister to others at the point of their personal needs," explains Fish. "And the nature of our calling is to share the good news with other people."

Since its early days with B.H. Carroll and L.R. Scarborough, Southwestern has stressed the importance of personal evangelism. "God has joined evangelism and education in holy marriage," Scarborough is quoted as saying.

James Eaves, professor of evangelism, says he requires students in his personal evangelism classes to submit three witnessing reports each semester. But students don't receive a grade for the reports, because "you shouldn't witness for a grade," he says.

However, witnessing helps students see the joys of winning people to Christ, Eaves says, noting, "I see students catch the vision and joy, and years later they write and thank me."

Jerry Froidi says his personal evangelism class challenged him to witness in the things he does each day, like long-distance running. Froidi designed a gospel tract using Scripture verses about running. Now when he runs in races on weekends, Froidi hands out copies of the tract and witnesses to other runners.

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Eaves says students also are involved in street ministries throughout Fort Worth, Texas, which provide opportunities for witnessing.

The seminary also offers special opportunities for witnessing. Last Thanksgiving weekend students visited the prison in Huntsville, Texas. Eaves reports "hundreds of conversions" were recorded. Students are involved in partnership evangelism mission trips overseas during the summer. And the annual Operation Penetration effort in newer Southern Baptist state convention areas involves personal witnessing.

However, Eaves says most of the witnessing students do is related to the local church. That is of "utmost importance because that is where they are involved."

"I usually say, 'Remember that in this class your final grade is not what you receive from the registrar,'" Eaves says. "'Your final grade is one you receive from the Lord for how well you do it in practice.'"

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CORRECTION: Please add the following sentence to the end of the sixth graf of the story entitled "Chaplaincy Provides Opportunity To Minister" dated 1/12/87: Her husband is Ray Furr, communications manager for the Southern Baptist Annuity Board in Dallas.

Thanks,
Baptist Press
