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March 19, 1987

87-41

Senter Picks Up Pieces
Of His Life, Ministry

By Mike Creswell

YEKEPA, Liberia (BP)—A few months after the brutal murder of his wife and daughter, Southern Baptist missionary George Senter is struggling to pick up the pieces of his life and go on.

Senter and his 15-year-old son, Philip, were hit hard by the Nov. 26 tragedy, but they have no plans to leave Liberia. Back from a short visit home to the United States, the missionary has plunged into a busy schedule of preaching, teaching and training Liberian Baptists to start churches throughout Nimba County.

Liberian Baptist seminary graduate Benjamin M. Morris, 32, was convicted March 6 of the murders of Libby Senter and her daughter, Rachel. But people still are talking about Senter's public expression of forgiveness toward Morris when the two met face to face at a police station following Morris' arrest.

"The thing you have done is very bad, but God loves you and wants to forgive you if you'll let him," Senter told Morris, who broke down and wept. Moments passed. Senter put his arm on the man's shoulder and said, "With God's help, I forgive you, too."

The missionary's determination to stay in Liberia and his gentle treatment of a disturbed man who had wronged him have become a powerful Christian witness across Liberia.

One Nimba County church had split over internal dissension. But in a recent meeting the two sides reunited after a woman said of Senter, "This man has forgiven a man who wiped out his family. Surely we can forgive each other and patch up our differences."

In the village of Ypain, a young Baptist man Senter had been working with was at the point of quitting the ministry because of the difficulties he encountered there. But when he saw Senter staying in Liberia after the tragedy, he resolved to stay with his ministry.

For his part, Senter admits he still fights bad feelings about Morris, whom he and his wife had tried to help by giving him a place to stay. But he realizes it will do him no good to harbor bitterness toward the man: "I had to talk to God, and I have to talk with him every now and then about it. You have to deal with it.

"I happen to be a missionary, and my wife was a missionary, but it could have happened as easily if we weren't. When you become involved with people, you become vulnerable."

Following Morris' arrest, hundreds of angry people gathered around the police station. Many knew the Senters personally. Others were embarrassed that such an event could happen in their country.

"I was hurting, but I soon began to realize I had to forget my feelings and minister to these people who were hurting," Senter says. "I had a deeper Christian perspective from which to view the thing. They (Libby and Rachel) were in heaven, and their pain and suffering were over. This was not in the minds of these people. Their friend, the person they'd leaned on, was taken away from them. There were so many people really hurting, both here and in the United States. She was a good woman."

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**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee**

Mrs. Senter had been doing very well in learning the Mano language and working in area villages. She also had been teaching at Mt. Nimba Baptist Church and a nearby school. In the weeks before her death, she spent much of her time ministering to a blind man and a woman who suffered from cancer of the jaw.

The impact of her ministry was illustrated recently when Mike Gono, a Liberian Baptist, returned to Liberia after studying in Guinea. He had not heard about the killings until his return. Meeting Senter on a street near Mt. Nimba Baptist Church, Gono wept openly, his head on the missionary's shoulder.

"Yes, they're with Jesus now," Senter whispered, infinite sadness in his voice and face. Mrs. Senter had taught Gono to read the Mano language and had encouraged him while he was in her class at church. She was his friend.

Senter is enduring a sense of loss as anyone would: He misses tucking his daughter into bed at night, their prayer together, the good-night hug and kiss. But he takes supreme comfort in knowing she is with God. Rachel had made her profession of faith in Christ during the family's last furlough in the United States.

"Both were in a good spiritual condition and were ready to meet God," Senter says. "That night (Libby) had been studying MasterLife (Christian discipleship materials). The notebooks were on the desk. Rachel had a notebook for Bible class at school. The teacher gave me her notebook, and the notes indicate she was making an effort to work on some areas of her life in light of what the Bible taught."

Prayer helped him face his family's killer, and he believes prayer support has been a tremendous help to him and Philip since the incident. "I've been able to go on," he says.

Philip could have remained in the United States with family members. But he was eager to return to Liberia, which is more like home to him, Senter said. Philip is attending the American school in Monrovia, several hours drive from Yekepa, staying in a youth hostel directed by missionaries.

Now in his second four-year missionary term, Senter works in an area in Nimba County about the same size as the region he once served as a home missionary in Indiana. A trip from his home to the most distant churches means a bone-grinding journey of about 350 miles, most of it churned out at 25 miles per hour in a four-wheel drive vehicle.

It's a rugged land of jungle and dirt roads that turn to sticky mush in the wet season. One of Senter's joys has been increasing work with Upper Nimba Baptist Association, which has 15 churches and preaching points. Another 24 churches are in lower Nimba County.

The tragedy which struck the Senters has come at a time when Baptist work is moving well in the county and throughout Liberia. "I'm excited, because we're moving ahead more than any time since I came in 1981," he says.

Senter pauses, the pain of remembrance and loss plain on his face. "As far as I know, I'm holding up fine."

Southern Baptists are advised to pray for him and Philip just a little longer.

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

Wideman Unanimously Elected
Missouri Executive Director

By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press
3/19/87

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)—Donald V. Wideman was unanimously elected executive director of the Missouri Baptist Convention March 17 during a special called meeting of the convention's executive board.

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Wideman, 59, currently is pastor of First Baptist Church of North Kansas City, Mo. Scheduled to assume office May 11, he will succeed interim executive director Tom Nelson, who has served since Nov. 7, 1986. Nelson was elected following the Nov. 6 death of Rheubin L. South, the convention's executive director from 1975 to 1986.

Convention President John Hughes, pastor of First Baptist Church of Independence, presided over the called meeting, which lasted less than one hour. Search committee Chairman Wally Jones presented a report from the 11-member search committee that reached its recommendation after 10 meetings and 534 hours of work during the past five months.

Jones, pastor of Fee Fee Baptist Church in St. Louis, said the committee received 32 nominations for the position. Noting the committee's "essential focus was on the discovering of God's leadership," Jones said, "I do convey the unanimous recommendation of your search committee and would feel that we have hit hallelujah ground if your response should be a unanimous call of Dr. Donald V. Wideman to be our executive director.

"The more the committee talked with Dr. Wideman, the more impressed we were," Jones continued. "The final meeting with Dr. Wideman explored in depth his personal convictions about the issues confronting Baptists today -- theologically, socially and denominationally. ... We believe Dr. Wideman will start well as executive director and, even more important, he will wear well."

Questions raised during the executive board discussion included concern over Wideman's comments as 1984-85 Southern Baptist Convention second vice president. He stated publicly at that time he was denied opportunity for input prior to appointments made by Charles Stanley, who then was SBC president.

"Don's position in all of this was never a controversy with Dr. Stanley nor with the conservative theological position," Jones responded. "The concern was strictly one of procedure -- that by bylaw requirement, the officers of the convention were to participate in certain processes. ... As we looked at the record, we never found at any point where Dr. Wideman either by language or by inference indicated anything but the most proper posture in regard to Dr. Stanley and the whole matter."

Jones added the situation "was a very, very powerful illustration of Wideman's ability to deal with the principles rather than the personalities."

Sharing a time of personal testimony, Wideman told the board members: "I consider it a great honor to have been considered at all. I honor the office of pastor and consider that a high calling, and I certainly consider it a high calling to be considered for the office of the executive director."

Noting the title of executive director "smacks of authority," Wideman added: "I consider it to be the office of a servant. That is the way that I operate as a pastor, and that is certainly the way I will operate as executive director."

Wideman said he came "to this decision with a sense of honor, a sense of direction and a sense that the Lord has called me to this place. ... I think I can honestly say I have not sought any offices, including this one. The Lord and God's people have given me these places of leadership and service."

The native Missourian pledged to "do my best to serve the Lord and all of Missouri Baptists. I believe we have a great state convention. I'm aware that no one can please everyone, but I do believe that I can minister to the great bulk of Missouri Baptists."

Describing his challenge as executive director, Wideman said, "My task would be to lead, encourage and help equip Missouri Baptists to do the work that God has placed us here for, and that is to reach people for Jesus Christ, to make an impact on this state and to attempt everything that is right and proper to reach people and change this world."

He concluded by telling the board members, "I believe it's our turn and I want to be faithful."

Prior to Wideman's current pastorate in North Kansas City, which he has held since 1973, he has been pastor of Liberty Manor Baptist Church, Liberty; First Baptist Church, Oakville; and Oakland Baptist Church, DeSoto, all in Missouri.

A native of St. Louis, he graduated from Southern Illinois University and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Among his Missouri Baptist offices are president and recording secretary of the Missouri Baptist Convention; president of the state Pastors' Conference; chairman of the convention's recent Strategic Planning Committee; a member of the state executive board, serving as chairman of the church program committee; and trustee of both William Jewell College and Baptist Health Systems.

In addition to serving Southern Baptists as SBC second vice president, Wideman has been a member of the the SBC Committee on Committees, Committee on Boards and chairman of the local arrangements committee for the 1984 annual meeting. He also has been a trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Forw Worth, Texas, and a member of the executive council for Hispanic Baptist Theological Seminary.

He also has been moderator of four Missouri Baptist associations: Jefferson County, Clay-Platte, Kansas City and Blue River-Kansas City.

Wideman is married to the former Marian E. Kiepe. They have four grown children and five grandchildren.

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Educator Warns Government
Threatens Institutional Autonomy

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
3/19/87

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Increasing government demand for accountability to the state is endangering the autonomy of religiously affiliated institutions, warned a key figure in a landmark Supreme Court decision.

Charles S. Mackenzie, president of Grove City (Pa.) College addressed educators and legal representatives at the National Conference on Autonomy and Accountability in Nashville, Tenn.

The meeting was sponsored by the Center for Constitutional Studies, an ecumenical organization headquartered at Mercer University, a Georgia Baptist Convention-related institution in Macon, Ga., in cooperation with the National Association of College and University Attorneys.

Grove City College, a Presbyterian school, was involved in a legal fight, Grove City v. Bell, over whether financial aid to students constituted federal aid to the college. The court ruled government interference on college campuses was limited to the specific programs receiving federal funds.

That ruling is now in jeopardy, Mackenzie said, because some members of Congress are attempting to overturn the Grove City decision through the proposed Civil Rights' Restoration Act.

"It (the Civil Rights' Restoration Act) represents an incredible expansion of government power over every entity in American society which even remotely or indirectly benefits from government," Mackenzie charged.

He noted the government is using the issue of financial aid to gain accountability from educational institutions. "Student financial aid has become leverage used by government to coerce all colleges into conformity with official public policy -- whatever that is," he said.

The Grove City president observed that whereas universities once "transcended, evaluated and judged public policy," they are today "subservient and complaint."

Society will suffer if all colleges and universities become instruments of state policy, Mackenzie said. Institutions will lose what little objectivity they have, and they will find that the creativity and vision necessary to inspire and invigorate society is stifled, he noted.

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Mackenzie admitted, however, not all accountability is bad. "Higher education, when it was truly autonomous, was accountable -- to God, to the truth, to trustees, to its various constituencies and, of course, to the laws of the land.

"That kind of personal accountability existed in creative tension with autonomy. Each fed on the other," he said.

Mackenzie pointed out the irony in what he sees occurring. "The state now is demanding accountability from all other institutions but paradoxically is becoming less and less accountable to anyone," he claimed.

He called for society to "discover the real nature of the university with its autonomy rooted in discovering and transmitting what is true and right and necessary to know for living."

Mackenzie also challenged universities to defend their autonomy: "If we are to keep alive a free society, we must keep alive the free pursuit of knowledge. If we are to preserve the free pursuit of knowledge, we must protect academic autonomy. For without free universities and free churches, there will be no freedom at all."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: This update story replaces "Brotherhood And FMB Head Relief Effort In Ecuador," mailed 3/16/87.

Cargo Plane Departs
For Ecuador Wednesday

By Jim Burton

Baptist Press
3/19/87

MIAMI (BP)—More than 65,000 pounds of food and clothing donated by Southern Baptists departed March 18 for earthquake-stricken Ecuador in South America.

About 40,000 pounds of cargo from Winterhaven, Fla., arrived March 17, reported Cameron Byler, national disaster relief coordinator for the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission. More than 25,000 pounds had already been unloaded at Ecuadoriana Airlines cargo center in Miami.

A Boeing 707 has been donated to transport the cargo for the four-hour flight to Quito, the capital of Ecuador. Officials with the airline have requested anonymity for their company. Cost of transporting the cargo has been estimated between \$15,000 and \$17,000.

Food was bought in large quantities below wholesale prices with money provided by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the Florida Baptist Convention and Florida Baptist churches. In addition, four state Brotherhood departments have donated funds: Texas, \$7,500; Oklahoma, \$1,000; Louisiana, \$1,000; and South Carolina, \$4,000. The total contribution of Southern Baptists is expected to exceed \$25,000.

Byler said the response of volunteers in Miami Baptist Association has been outstanding. Joseph Sustarsic, disaster relief coordinator for south Florida, said more than 25 Baptist men have helped unload the truckloads of cargo at the Ecuadoriana Airlines cargo center. A number of Hispanic men from First Baptist Church of Cutler Ridge, Fla., arrived March 16 to help unload the truckload of cargo due from Winterhaven.

This joint disaster-relief effort of the commission and board is the first in South America, said Bryan Brasington, the board's area director for Spanish-speaking South America.

The response to Ecuador resulted when earthquakes struck on March 5 and 6, causing floods and mudslides. The government estimated 1,000 people are dead or missing and thousands are left homeless.

The Ecuadorian government is paying for the cargo plane's fuel, while their national airline, Ecuadoriana, is providing labor to load the Boeing 707 in Miami and unload it in Quito.

Byler will accompany the cargo plane and lead a three-man damage assessment team. Joining him are Ron Patterson, a regional disaster relief coordinator in Florida, and Cal Jones, Louisiana Baptist disaster relief coordinator. Ecuadorian Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries will be responsible for distribution from Quito and Lago Agrio.

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Oklahoma Convention
Adjusts CP Allocations

By Norman Jameson

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--Oklahoma Baptists' board of directors voted unanimously March 17 to temporarily adjust the division of Cooperative Program gifts between state and national ministries.

The change, recommended after months of study by a special committee, increases the amount utilized for Oklahoma missions to 56 percent and reduces the amount forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention to 44 percent. It is effective as of Jan. 1, 1987.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' voluntary, unified method of financing evangelistic, missions and educational endeavors worldwide. Funds are channeled from churches to state conventions to SBC agencies.

For two years, Oklahoma has been one of only two state conventions to divide Cooperative Program gifts evenly, 50-50, between state and national conventions. Florida is the other state convention.

The new plan implements an immediate procedure to return Oklahoma to the 50-50 division as quickly as possible.

"We must strengthen for now our own Judean ministry that we ultimately can do more in the uttermost parts of the world," said Bob Hammons, pastor of First Baptist Church of Seminole, who headed the special study committee that was requested by messengers to the state convention last November. "Not to make the adjustment means we would ultimately do less in the uttermost," he said.

Bill Tanner, Baptist Convention of Oklahoma executive director-treasurer who boarded ship as Oklahoma's economy scraped bottom, said: "I detest the fact we have to back down. But we also have to be practical in what we have to do.

"We are in a serious, critical situation," Tanner said before the vote.

He said the state had "picked the pockets" of all its reserves.

While Oklahoma was increasing the percentage of Cooperative Program gifts it forwards to the SBC from 43.5 percent in 1980 to 50 percent in 1985, Oklahoma churches actually were decreasing the percentage of their gifts they forwarded to the Cooperative Program from 10 percent to 8.9 percent.

On top of that, Oklahoma's economy, based on agriculture and oil, was flying high in the late 1970s when the state's Baptists began their trek to a 50-50 division. The past five years of agricultural depression and crashing oil prices clobbered the state's economic base at the same time Baptists kept reaching for the 50-50 goal.

The 44 percent Oklahoma Baptists will forward to the national Cooperative Program still stands as the third-largest percentage shared by any state convention.

Under the new plan, favorable circumstances will allow a return to 50-50 by 1994. Increases of 1 percentage point to the SBC will be made for each increase of 10 percent in dollars received from Oklahoma churches, not to exceed 1 percentage point per year.

A minimum of one-fourth percentage point increase will be made each year.

Percentage changes in Oklahoma's race to 50-50 were significant. For instance, while the state realized only a \$34,026 increase in gifts from churches in 1985 over 1984, it sent on to national ministries \$331,265 more because of the 2 percent change in allocation to the SBC.

While the double shock of oil and agriculture belts America's midsection, the coastal areas enjoy an economic resurgence.

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Because of the shared load with all state Baptist conventions, Tanner, for 10 years president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, feels the national agencies will not be hurt by Oklahoma's temporary reduction in its gift percentage.

In making his presentation to the board, Hammons used the analogy of surgery he recently endured. He delayed the surgery, fearing its cost in discomfort, expense and time. He finally submitted to it, knowing that in the long term, he could accomplish more with the surgery than without.

The same surgery is necessary on Oklahoma's shared percentage, he said, so the home base can be strengthened and ultimately more can be accomplished in the world.

Because of Oklahoma's economic decline during a period it was sending more money to national ministries, the state convention has operated for five years on virtually the same budget. During this time it had to absorb a \$500,000 increase in fixed costs, such as utilities and insurance.

While it was operating on the same budget in 1986 as 1982, it sent \$1.5 million more to SBC in 1986 than in 1982.

"All the Cooperative Program is missions, so we didn't cut the CP," said board member Joe Hubb Collier, pastor of Southern Baptist Church in Texoma. "We readjusted the allocation of our mission affairs."

"We've got the best department leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention," he said. "But they can't do anything if they are sitting around their desks worrying if they can pay their utility bills or not."

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(NOTE TO EDITORS: The name of the church in the next-to-last graf is "Southern Baptist Church.")

Glenn Brown New Editor
Of Oklahoma Baptist Messenger

By Robert Mathews

Baptist Press
3/19/87

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)—Glenn A. Brown, associate director of planning and promotion for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma since 1973, was elected editor of the Baptist Messenger by state convention directors March 17.

Brown, 54, will assume duties as the seventh editor of the 75-year-old Oklahoma Baptist newsjournal April 1.

Brown succeeds Richard McCartney who resigned in January to become executive vice president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission in Fort Worth, Texas.

An Oklahoma convention employee since August 1971, Brown was religious education department associate secretary and church training director until moving to the executive office in 1973. For the past 14 years he has been state stewardship director and church administration consultant.

Oklahoma Executive Director-Treasurer Bill Tanner, who recommended Brown to the convention's administrative committee, which recommended him to the full board, said Brown is a man "who knows and understands Oklahoma Baptists."

He said Brown is someone "with whom I can relate and a man who has served long enough to have worked with the churches and knows the pastors. He has paid his dues."

Brown was born in Porum, Okla., and grew up in Shawnee. He attended Oklahoma Baptist University from 1950 to 1952 and graduated from Tulsa University in 1962. He earned a master of arts degree in educational psychology from the University of Oklahoma in 1968.

He has been minister of education and music at Springdale Baptist Church in Tulsa, First Baptist Church of Sallisaw and Britton Baptist Church in Oklahoma City.

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Brown has written and led conferences on the subjects of stewardship and church administration.

At the request of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, he has taken part in missions projects in Rhodesia, Hong Kong, South Africa and Spain.

The Baptist Messenger is the third-largest circulated news publication in Oklahoma and fifth-largest state Baptist newspaper, with a circulation of more than 117,000 copies.

In response to the lone question during his appointment, Brown said he has no political agenda.

"I'm neutral," he said. "I want to share Southern Baptist news as fairly as we can so you can depend on it. I see no benefit in printing derogatory statements or an endless harangue or constant finger-pointing. I will find the middle road of accurately reporting news and preserving the integrity of the individuals involved.

"The Messenger should speak a positive word and be of service to the churches by telling what's going on in the churches, the state and the Southern Baptist Convention. It should be a stabilizing voice for our convention and serve as a platform for wise leaders, both men and women, to express their opinions. It ought to be a blessing and encouragement to the laymen."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Baptist Messenger

Inner-City New Orleans
Presents Ministry Task

By Oscar Hoffmeyer

Baptist Press
3/19/87

NEW ORLEANS (BP)—Dealing drugs on the front steps of Grace Baptist Church has declined since David and Leslie Anderson started working there.

The action has mostly moved across the street in the New Orleans inner-city neighborhood "because they feel uncomfortable with drugs on the church steps since we work with some of them," he says.

"Nothing in their environment points to Christianity," she explains. The ministry is slow, rewarding and frustrating, the couple says.

The Andersons are the first to participate in a pilot ministry program co-sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission Boards. Other sponsors are Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans, the Louisiana Baptist Convention evangelism office and First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas.

"The Foreign Mission Board has accepted inner-city work in lieu of pastoral experience. Looking for non-traditional, flexible ways to minister is important to foreign missions," Anderson explains.

The couple has made application for appointment to Thailand. Their goal is to be church planters. Working in New Orleans' inner-city helps them understand what it's like to be an "alien."

Even as the couple and their two boys lived in a neighborhood Baptist church when they began the ministry, they knew they could not be like the people around them.

"However, our first experiences were similar to theirs," she says. Living accommodations had been arranged in Victory Baptist Church, about a mile from Grace Baptist Church where they work.

There was no plumbing for two weeks, no kitchen. "I took the boys to New Orleans (Baptist Theological) Seminary for showers," he recalls. But the Andersons had a car and could escape the environment.

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She told about getting a polio shot for one of their sons. When they got to within one number of being accepted at the public health center, the line was closed.

"They told me to try again on Monday, but I had tried so much I wanted to cry. I took Sam to his pediatrician and paid \$38. But we had the option. Our friends in the neighborhood couldn't hop in a car and drive where they wanted to go and pay whatever it cost."

Living in the church building created a barrier for their ministry because the people were not church oriented. It also provided new experiences such as when a bullet broke the transom glass over their bedroom door following an all-night New Year's Eve celebration. And while sponsoring a party for students in the language class two days before Christmas, someone sprayed paint on their car parked by the church.

The Andersons recently moved into a house, so that barrier has been removed.

The inner-city program is multi-faceted to accomplish evangelism. Among programs in their schedule are:

-- English-language classes for people who speak other languages. Although many do not attend classes at the church to learn about Christianity, this becomes part of the teaching process.

-- Adult literacy classes to help the people prepare for better vocations.

-- GED classes to help people who need a high school diploma.

-- Human Resource Development Institute helps displaced workers with job training. The leader was impressed that the church would open its facilities so the neighborhood residents did not have to travel across town.

-- Child-Adolescence Resources Etc. classes assist pregnant teenagers and fathers of the children with responsible parenting.

"The church set up a ministry to provide maternity clothes, food, furniture and other needs. Also, we provide moral teaching in the classes that high school counselors cannot talk about," Mrs. Anderson says.

The Andersons met as students at Calhoun Community College in Decatur, Ala. They later owned a house in the historic section of Decatur and planned to stay there the rest of their lives until the mission call changed their plans.

But the call did not emerge full-blown overnight. She experienced it when she was 16, about 14 years ago. Her mother laughed when she told her.

But during a week of prayer for foreign missions, she felt the call again and knew the covenant with God still was there. He later experienced the same call, and they applied as volunteers to the Philippines. The effort was aborted for lack of living accommodations.

Later they sold their home. He entered New Orleans Seminary in 1983 and received the master of divinity degree last May.

Their ministry, with its frustrations and joys, has produced progress. More than 40 professions of faith in Christ have been recorded. Numerous witnessing opportunities have developed.

The Andersons also anticipate each new day as "aliens" in their own country, albeit a different culture, and look for the day when they will be witnesses in a foreign culture as the Holy Spirit leads.

"We are setting up a program and will leave it for someone else to develop, she says of the ministry in New Orleans. "It is just fun to walk down the street and share the message (of God's love) with the people we meet each day."

Calk's Mission Field Close
To Home, But Wide-Ranging

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)—He's lived most of his life within about 75 miles of his birthplace, but Jack Calk's field of ministry involves state, home and foreign missions.

For 12 years, Calk has been director of missions for the Del Rio-Uvalde Baptist Association in Texas, a job that includes coordinating Rio Grande River Ministry projects — helping upstate churches find places to serve in response to local requests. He also works with Baptists in Mexico as volunteer director of missions in Coahuila Baptist Association across the Texas-Mexico border.

"It's versatile work. There's something new all the time," says Calk, noting his area of responsibility includes portions of eight West Texas counties and a 300-mile-wide strip along the Rio Grande that extends 10 miles into Mexico.

Calk was born in Del Rio, Texas, and brought up on a ranch outside Comstock, Texas. As a young man he worked as a cowboy, and at 48, he still looks the part of a tall, lanky ranch hand. His early experiences have benefited him greatly as director of missions in the rural area along the Rio Grande.

"It has given me an entrance with the people," he says. "I'm familiar with what the people do, how they make their livelihood and what their skills are."

Growing up in Del Rio-Uvalde Association also gave Calk the advantage of a bilingual and bicultural education. He believes his background has helped him understand both the Hispanic language and culture and the unique culture of Anglos in a portion of the area that Mexicans call "La Frontera."

"A border ministry demands a bicultural approach -- Anglo and Hispanic," he notes. "The people in the area are special. They're a very independent and a very conservative people. They're trustworthy, but they believe trust needs to be earned. And they're a dependable people. Once they make a commitment, they keep it."

"Everybody immediately thinks of Hispanic work when they think of river ministry. A lot of people don't realize that quite a bit of our river ministry effort goes to Anglos along the border, also," he adds.

The Rio Grande River Ministry is funded by Texas Baptists gifts through the Cooperative Program unified budget and the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Calk's responsibilities include leadership training, church support, pastoral counseling and coordinating special projects such as planting new churches and erecting church buildings. In the past year, 16 new works were started in Del Rio-Uvalde Association.

"All of the existing Hispanic churches in the association have started new work," he says.

Counseling with pastors is an important task to Calk. Having served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Eagle Pass, Texas, for eight years prior to becoming director of missions, he understands the special problems that rural West Texas pastors face.

"There are several communities where the Baptist pastor is the only pastor of any denomination. The whole community comes to him with their problems, but he doesn't have anyone he can go to in town," he says.

Calk finds his working relationship with Baptists in Mexico particularly satisfying.

"I've been granted freedom to work in Mexico almost at will," he reports. "We have the complete support of the people there. We're able to accept the border area on both sides as our ministry."

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