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September 30, 1987

87-146

Robertson Asks Church
To Rescind Ordination

By Stan Hasteley

WASHINGTON (BP)--On the eve of his expected formal announcement as a presidential candidate, Marion G. (Pat) Robertson has asked the Virginia Baptist congregation that ordained him to the ministry in 1961 to rescind that action.

In a Sept. 29 letter, hand-delivered to the office of Freemason Street Baptist Church in Norfolk by aide Herbert Ellingwood, Robertson said, "I hereby resign the ordination to the Christian ministry which was so graciously and warmly bestowed upon me by the people of the Freemason Street Baptist Church."

The congregation ordained Robertson after his graduation from General Theological Seminary, an interdenominational school in New York City. According to former Freemason Street Pastor William L. Lumpkin, the church called Robertson as minister of Christian education, a position he held for about two years. Robertson left the post to launch his television ministry in Virginia Beach, Va.

In his letter, Robertson stated further: "I am keenly aware of the deeply held belief in this nation ... that there should not be an established religion ... nor should the government prohibit the free exercise of religion by any of the people.

"For this reason I recognize that although the overwhelming majority of the American people desire leaders with strong religious faith, to many of our citizens the election of an ordained clergyman of any faith -- Protestant, Catholic or Jewish -- to as high a public office as the presidency of the United States would in their opinion be tantamount to a preference of one religious denomination over all others."

Current Freemason Street Pastor Donald J. Dunlap told Baptist Press he informed Ellingwood the church should take action rescinding the ordination in the interest of the integrity of the ordination process. He said the matter will be presented first to the deacons, then to the congregation in business session. The earliest date possible for the congregational action, he added, is Oct. 11.

In Baptist tradition and polity, the local congregation ordains ministers, often after inviting a council representing churches in the local Baptist association to examine the ministerial candidate. When the ordination council attests to the candidate's fitness for the ministry, the church proceeds with a public service of ordination.

Although Baptist churches generally have been reticent to revoke ordination on grounds of misconduct or heresy, the practice is not unknown. In cases involving requests such as Robertson's, however, churches almost always grant the request for rescission.

According to the Associated Press, the 57-year-old Robertson also announced he has resigned as chairman and chief executive officer of the Christian Broadcasting Network and CBN Continental Broadcasting Inc. Robertson's CBN is the nation's fifth-largest cable network, reaching 37 million homes.

Robertson was expected to announce his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, N.Y., Oct. 1.

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(Contributing to this article was Jeanette Holt of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs)

Death Takes 'Prayer Warrior'
For Foreign Missionaries

By Michael D. Chute

SHONTO, Ariz. (BP)--William E. Davidson, longtime "prayer warrior" for Southern Baptist missionaries, has died.

Davidson, who for more than 60 years prayed for missionaries on their birthdays, died Sept. 23, two weeks after his own 96th birthday.

Davidson's intercessory prayer ministry was legendary. Most missionaries did not know W.E. Davidson (as he signed his name) until they received a letter from him. Then a long and rich relationship with the champion of the missionary usually developed.

While he was an unseen force to most missionaries, those he prayed for were not just names. Davidson often took extraordinary measures to know the missionaries in a personal way. He collected their pictures and lined the walls of his bedroom with them. Every year he went to Foreign Missions Week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center to meet with missionaries. He called the trip the "highlight of my year."

Davidson's prayer list also became legendary. To be one of the names on those aging, tattered sheets of paper held together by rubber bands was an honor. He always kept the list close at hand. When he wasn't exercising or working in his yard, he usually was praying. He also wrote to about 700 missionaries regularly. He prayed for them and hundreds more daily.

Davidson always viewed his prayer for missions as God's assignment to him. "We are to give ourselves wholeheartedly to supporting missions, giving to missions, praying for missions," he once said. "The Lord did his part and ascended to heaven and he left us the Great Commission. It's from him, and it's very important that all of us put that first in our lives." So, praying naturally became his priority activity.

Except for the 100-mile round trip from his home in Shonto, Ariz., to First Southern Baptist Church of Tuba City, Davidson rarely left home in his later years. Yet he remained an active Christian.

Davidson learned the value of intercessory prayer early in life. As the first Southern Baptist missionaries appointed to Chile in 1917, he and his wife, Mary, saw firsthand how prayer gets results on the mission field. They began First Baptist Church of Santiago and two other Chilean congregations.

Prayer helped sustain him during his first furlough back in the United States, when doctors diagnosed him as having tuberculosis. They gave him no hope to live. T.B. Ray of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board wrote to a mutual friend that "these two dear, godly people need to be borne to the throne of grace in a peculiar way. ... They need our help now particularly in prayer."

Two years later, following a six-month stint in a sanitarium, the Davidsons were back in Chile. But the stay did not last. Not only did Davidson's health fail again, but also that of his wife and two young daughters, Virginia and Dorothy. "With great sorrow (and) driven to do so," as he wrote at the time, the Davidsons resigned from missionary service.

They eventually regained their health and went on to lead productive lives. He taught Bible for 15 years at Hannibal-LaGrange College in Hannibal, Mo., and also worked as a draftsman for 28 years. Mrs. Davidson died in 1966 at the age of 73.

Davidson's love for missionary work overseas did not end at the shores of Chile. He continued to pray for missionary colleagues, Chilean pastors and the work there. Soon he added missionaries in Ethiopia and other countries to his list. Later he began writing to all missionaries in language school in Costa Rica -- those training for service in Spanish-speaking South America. All who responded were added to his prayer list.

Davidson's list became so large that he physically could not take praying for any more people. Eventually a missionary could only get on the list if another one on the list died or left the mission field.

"In nothing be anxious and in everything by prayer and supplication make your requests known to God," Davidson said in a television interview last year.

A native of Freeman County, Mo., Davidson was a graduate of William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He was buried Sept. 29 in Hannibal. He is survived by his two daughters.

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

Home Missionary
To Cuba Dies

Baptist Press
9/30/87

ATLANTA (BP)--Herbert Caudill, a Southern Baptist home missionary to Cuba for 40 years, died Sept. 29 in Atlanta.

Caudill, 84, was a native of Clinchport, Va. Caudill was appointed to Cuba in 1929, where he was pastor of Havana's First Baptist Church and two Spanish-language churches.

He later taught at the Baptist seminary in Havana and in 1947 became superintendent of Southern Baptist Home Mission Board work in Cuba.

In 1965, after Fidel Castro became premier of Cuba, Caudill and his missionary son-in-law, David Fite, were imprisoned and accused of illegal currency exchange. Caudill was given a 10-year sentence but was released 20 months later due to failing eyesight.

He received treatment and remained in Cuba with his wife and daughter until Fite was released in 1969. The Caudills then retired in Atlanta.

He is survived by his wife, Marjorie, and his children, Jane Pringle, a home missionary with her husband in New Orleans; Herbert Caudill, a foreign missionary in Ecuador with his wife; and Margaret Fite, who lives in Fort Worth, Texas, where her husband teaches at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Trustees Approve
Property Purchase

Baptist Press
9/30/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--The trustee executive committee of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board approved Sept. 24 the purchase of 2.6 acres adjoining the board's downtown property as the first step toward implementing a master properties plan.

They also authorized expansion of the parking lot on the roof of the operations building to add 115 parking spaces for employees and visitors, with completion expected by December.

A warehouse formerly used as a railroad freight building is located on the CSX Transportation, Inc., property which adjoins the north end of the board's operations building. Purchase of the property Sept. 28 at a cost of \$2.069 million is being paid for out of fixed asset reserve funds.

The Nashville Master Properties Plan approved by the trustees in August includes plans to expand the operations building for improved warehousing and distribution of materials and move the docking area to the north end of the warehouse from its present location on 10th Avenue North, a congested traffic area.

The plan, based on projected space needs of serving a denomination of 17.5 million members by the year 2000, also includes plans to purchase land underneath a portion of the operations building for which the board owns air rights and a purchase option and construct a multi-story office-conference building above the center of the operations building.

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Church Medical Rates
Increase In 1988

DALLAS (BP)--Higher doctors' fees, hospital charges and an increase in patient services will cause Southern Baptist Annuity Board church medical rates to increase 20 percent next year, said John Dudley, the board's senior vice president for insurance services.

Effective Jan. 1, 1988, monthly medical premiums for 21,000 church employees will increase an average 20 percent, said Dudley. Cost increases will range from \$2.50 for the individual Medicare supplement to \$55.00 per month for some family plans, depending on the coverage participants have and the geographical regions in which they live.

"This is the first time in three years we have increased the church medical rates, but rising health-care costs and claims have made it necessary," said Dudley. He noted claims for medical expenses were up nearly 40 percent over last year.

The board will not be alone in raising premiums, Dudley added. He predicted 35 to 50 percent rate increases will be typical in many medical plans in 1988. He cited the proposal before Congress for a 38.5 percent increase in Medicare rates as an example.

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Missouri's Greene County Association
Dismisses Church From Membership By Trennis Henderson

Baptist Press
9/30/87

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (BP)--Missouri's Greene County Baptist Association dismissed Rolling Hills Baptist Church from its membership Sept. 22.

The Springfield congregation was charged with deviating from the association's "historic interpretation of Scripture" in reference to glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues."

An estimated 90 percent of participating messengers at the association's annual meeting voted to dismiss Rolling Hills from associational membership.

The action culminated two years of study, discussion and action on the situation, said Jim Joslin, Greene County Association director of missions. A news release distributed by association officials following the meeting said, "The association has been faced with the choices of appearing to treat a church uncharitably or of seeming to accept the excesses and errors of the modern 'charismatic movement.'"

Noting "a delicate balance between freedom of conscience and doctrinal integrity," the release said, "The association must stand on the side of sound doctrine and say lovingly but firmly that modern 'charismatic' doctrines do not fit with basic New Testament theology."

Speaking in tongues by Rolling Hills members and their belief that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is separate from salvation have been points of concern within the association since 1985, Joslin told Word and Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

This February, the association's executive board requested the association's church relations committee to investigate rumors concerning the congregation's beliefs and practices. That request led to four major meetings dealing with the Rolling Hills issue.

The association's administrative committee ultimately drafted the recommendation to remove the congregation. In addition to concern over Rolling Hills' deviation from the association's interpretation of Scripture, the action to oust the church also claimed Rolling Hills' "differences are creating discord among our churches." The motion also noted other churches in the association "wish them well in the direction they have chosen to go."

Howard Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church of Republic, was the first messenger to speak against the motion. "This is our sister church," he insisted. "Do you separate yourself from your sister because you disagree with her? We are family.

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"I pastor a church that desires to continue to fellowship with Rolling Hills Baptist Church and with you. I believe we can live with our differences, and I believe we must live with our differences."

Chester Cossins, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Brighton, voiced an opposing view: "I don't like to see these kinds of things, but we'll stand before God Almighty one of these days on our interpretation of Scripture. ... We have to stand up tonight in Greene County Baptist Association and say what we believe. If we don't do that, there's more troubled waters ahead."

Prior to debate, participants learned messengers from South Haven Baptist Church in Springfield had decided to not vote on issues relating to Rolling Hills. South Haven, Rolling Hills' sponsoring congregation when it was organized as a mission in 1977, has since turned over ownership of the Rolling Hills property to that congregation, which was constituted as a church in 1979.

The deed given to Rolling Hills by South Haven contains a reversionary clause that states the property will revert back to South Haven should Rolling Hills ever cease to be a member of Greene County Association.

Stanley Hayes, chairman of deacons at South Haven, said his congregation's deacons met Sept. 27 to discuss plans related to the reversionary clause and property:

"On a technical basis, we feel the property has reverted to South Haven." We reaffirmed our commitment to establishing a Southern Baptist congregation at the Rolling Hills property."

He said the church's deacon steering committee and trustees will be working with associational leaders "to pursue all alternatives available" for starting a new Southern Baptist work there. He added that discussion with Rolling Hills members concerning property reversion is expected to begin soon.

Despite the reversionary clause, Rolling Hills Pastor Michael Morris said he believes there "needs to be some reimbursement in regard to our interests" in the property.

Morris, a graduate of Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Fla., said: "We are different than the traditional Southern Baptist church. We don't feel like the majority of pastors (in the association) were open to interpretations different than their own. The allowance of speaking in tongues is the major issue. We see that as acceptable."

After searching for "a missing dimension in the Christian experience" for several months, Morris said he and his wife attended a James Robison conference about four years ago. "In a general sense," Morris said, "the James Robison conference was kind of a culmination of when I came to this decision to come with a more open mind to Scripture."

Morris' experience parallels that of Chris Clements, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Portageville. Clements led his church to withdraw from New Madrid Baptist Association earlier this year after attending a Robison conference and determining, "The Lord was leading us in a direction that does not comply with the traditional Southern Baptist teachings of the Holy Spirit."

"Anything I understand today about the gifts of the Spirit had nothing to do with the (James Robison) conference," Morris said. He used almost identical language to Clements to describe his beliefs. "We feel like tradition and Scripture are in opposition to one another. We sincerely feel like we have been treated unfairly."

"The association had come to a point where we said we have broad perimeters, but this is beyond it," Joslin said. "I think the (Sept. 22) meeting showed evidence of a great deal of prayer resulting in restraint on the part of everybody involved. There was a sense of relief it wasn't a bloodbath but simple statements and a decisive vote."

"It's not a matter of one side winning and one side losing in this. We all lost," Joslin reflected. "I feel good that our association spoke strongly, but I feel very bad that the end result was that we lost a church."

Good Marriages, Families
Contribute To World Peace

By Terri Lackey

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N.C. (BP)--The concept, David and Vera Mace agree, may seem a bit idealistic, but the theory is sound: good marriages contribute to world peace.

"I came to the conclusion that good marriages are the key to good families, good families the key to good communities, good communities the key to good nations and good nations the key to a good world," said Mace, 80, author of nearly 40 books on marriage, many of which he wrote with his wife of 54 years.

"I don't know of any better way to work for world peace than to work for happy families," he said.

In recognition of their contributions to marriage enrichment, including several books and articles for publications of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, the board's family ministry department recently presented the "Family Ministry Award of Excellence" to the Maces.

The Scotland-born Mace and his English wife have spent their lives traveling to 61 countries working with governments to establish counseling organizations that deal with marriage and family life.

"Marriage is intended to pass on the values of the culture to the next generation," Mace said. "We are undermining and destroying the whole nature of our society by the way we are treating marriage. If you don't bring up in your homes children who become responsible adults, then what sort of country are you going to have?"

"The whole concept of marriage is different today than it was 50 years ago, and the requirements are quite different. Marriages have changed almost as much as anything has in this country, including medicine."

But as the concept of marriage has changed, so have the expectations, he said: "Successful marriages today are rare. The first year of marriage is a tremendous enterprise. There are so many things that have to be done, so many adjustments that have to be made and so many new things that have to be learned."

In the first year of marriage, couples "establish their patterns," Mace said. "A person must change more in the first year of marriage than in any other time in life. And if they are not prepared to do that changing and adapting, a breakup usually results."

While most divorces used to occur in the first seven years of marriage, the largest number now occur during the first three years, he reported. Divorces that occur after 15 or 20 years of marriage are often the result of failures to build a solid, healthy foundation for the marriage.

The Maces offer three suggestions for making a successful marriage.

First, "you must have commitment. If you are not committed to each other and the marriage, then you won't work through the difficulties which will arise," he said.

Second, couples must have an effective communications system: "In many marriages little or no communication goes on. You've got to know where the other person is and the other person has to know where you are. Vera and I start each day with a sharing period."

Finally, Mace said, couples must work continuously to keep the relationship close. "Watch for every sign of anger, work on it and clear it up," he said.

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