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October 22, 1987

87-158

Muskogee Association
Ousts Divorced Pastor

N-CO
(Okla.)
By Norman Jameson

CHECOTAH, Okla. (BP)--Muskogee Baptist Association in Oklahoma faced the issue of divorced and remarried pastors, and when its debate ended, Brushy Mountain Baptist Church was disfellowshipped.

Messengers to the association's annual meeting voted 196-48 to amend its bylaws to exclude any church that calls or ordains as pastor or deacon a man or woman who has been divorced and remarried "until such time the doctrinal error is corrected by either resignation or dismissal."

The action of the 51-church association, which required two-thirds majority, was aimed at Dale Lewis, bivocational pastor of Brushy Mountain Baptist Church near Muskogee since August 1986. Last January, the small rural church was recognized as an evangelism pacesetter by the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

In the year Lewis has been pastor, the church, which averages 58 participants in Sunday school, has baptized 62 people. Sunday school enrollment has nearly doubled.

The stackpole around which Muskogee Association circled was the interpretation of I Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6, where the Apostle Paul establishes the guideline that pastors and deacons should be "husband of one wife."

While opponents of the amendment differed, the prevailing view was that those verses, properly interpreted, indicate only men who never have been divorced and remarried are qualified to hold the office of pastor or deacon.

"He can preach, yes, be a great Christian evangel, yes, but he cannot be a pastor," said Jim Miller, retired evangelist and pastor and now a member of Shiloh Baptist Church, during the one-hour debate.

Amendment proponents tried to simplify the issue to one of upholding the Bible or denying its plain commands. Opponents said the amendment enters the broader issue of local-church autonomy. They said such a fine line could not be drawn because interpretation of those passages is not certain and forgiveness and acceptance should prevail.

In the annual sermon the night before, Kevin Clarkson, pastor of Grandview Baptist Church in Muskogee, indicated that if the biblical standard of "husband of one wife" was allowed to be polluted, members could expect to see their churches and children slide into promiscuity, child abuse and drug use. As difficult as confrontation is, it is the more loving course than to hold aloft a standard that is ignored, he said.

Bob Woods, pastor of First Baptist Church of Muskogee, who was instrumental in Lewis coming to Christ, said, "The only commentary Baptists have ever published, the Broadman Bible Commentary, lists five possible interpretations of 'husband of one wife.'"

Woods said the larger issue is church autonomy: "A church calls whomever it feels led of the Lord to call. Only Christ must approve. No one interferes.

"What if the Lord really did call Dale Lewis into the ministry? And what if Brushy Mountain Church really did feel led of the Lord to call him?"

But Miller said a divorce and remarriage disqualifies a man from the office of pastor, "and God's not going to call somebody who's disqualified."

Lewis, who sat silently among two rows of his church members during the entire debate, said later, "I have been called."

Lewis does not feel disqualified from office, because "I have only one wife," he said. "The Greek literally means 'he is to be a one-woman man.' This was a time when bigamy was common."

Both Lewis and his wife, Alice, were divorced before they married each other 10 years ago. Lewis, who still runs an insurance firm in Muskogee, was not a Christian until after he married his current wife.

"I think this association has just leaned into legalism," Lewis said. "They've created a situation that's going to require a full-time police force to enforce."

Lewis believes a divorced man who remarries commits adultery. He believes adultery is sin. "But the sin of a failed marriage is as forgivable as alcoholism," he said.

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Southern Baptist Schools Named
Among America's Best Colleges

N-10
(Ed. Comm.)

Baptist Press
10/22/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--Five Southern Baptist-affiliated colleges and universities were included in U.S. News and World Report's special report on "America's Best Colleges."

The report, which appeared in the Oct. 26 issue, was based on a survey sent to 1,329 college presidents. Nearly 60 percent of the presidents responded to the news magazine's request.

The survey, restricted to four-year institutions awarding at least a bachelor's degree and offering liberal arts programs as part of their undergraduate education, ranked 120 institutions as the best of their kind in nine categories.

Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., was ranked as the top school in the Southern and Border-State Comprehensive Institutions category.

Also ranked in this category were Furman University in Greenville, S.C., third; University of Richmond (Va.), tied for fourth; and Stetson University in DeLand, Fla., seventh. Mercer University in Macon, Ga., was ranked as "noteworthy" among these type institutions.

William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., tied for fifth in the Smaller Comprehensive College category. The Missouri Baptist school also was rated as one of the "best buys" among institutions of its type.

All six schools have relations with the state Baptist conventions in which they are located.

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Wife, 95, Praises Husband
For 100 Years of Service

F-FMB

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press
10/22/87

WACO, Texas (BP)--Probably no one is prouder of B.W. Orrick for turning 100 than his own wife. But then Vera Orrick is proud of her husband for just about everything.

"I brag about my husband," says Mrs. Orrick. "It's a great marriage. You don't very often find two people in their 90s both living alone in their own home. The Lord is so good to us to spare our lives this long together."

They live in an old frame house at the edge of the Baylor University campus. He will be 100 on Oct. 24. She will be 96 in January.

To visit the Orricks is to travel through time: not only into the past, through Orrick's boyhood in Madison County, Texas, through the couple's 37 years as Southern Baptist missionaries in Uruguay, through 30 years of life in Waco; but into the present and future. They find daily strength in believing they are eternal children of a living God, who they believe gives them both a reason to live.

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"My job is to wait on her," says Orrick. His deep voice still enunciates clearly with polished, well-placed emphasis. It is the same voice that once rang out with the gospel on the streets of Uruguay, where the couple pioneered mission work starting in 1921.

Because of pain and weakness, walking is a problem now for Mrs. Orrick. But talking isn't: "That's the only way I can do for the Lord now. He sends Baylor students here that are not Christians and gives me the opportunity to talk to them about Jesus. I give them New Testaments. One girl has been converted; she told me about it. We are praying for several, and believe they will give their hearts to the Lord."

The Orricks have had 68 years of marriage to brush up on their teamwork, and now it's being tested to the fullest. Three years ago Mrs. Orrick survived an operation for a burst artery that doctors told her would have killed most people 20 years younger. Now she spends most of her time in bed, so he walks where she asks him to. He no longer can hear well, or see to study and write. So she reads to him and tends to their financial matters. She also is his cheerleader.

"You will just be surprised at the way Mr. Orrick remembers, and the way he talks," she says. "It's remarkable what he does. He told me, 'I'm pretty old to learn how to do things in the house.' But he has. He's learned wonderfully well. He will have me come and sit in a chair in the kitchen and tell him what to do. He says, 'If you tell me what to do, I can do it.' He takes care of me."

As she explains how her husband trained new Christians in Uruguay during their first 10 years in the country when they were lone Southern Baptist missionaries, she says, "He was marvelous."

And when Orrick says he preached the gospel with fervor and faith in the midst of Catholic oppression in Uruguay, she interjects, "And you did it wonderfully." She also loves to remind people that her husband, at 78, was the oldest person ever to earn a graduate degree at Baylor.

In Uruguay people who knew the Orricks rarely saw one without the other. Co-workers often questioned whether "Don Guillermo," as Orrick was called, would be able even to find his way downtown without "Doq a Vera" by his side. Orrick would reply, only half jokingly, "When I don't follow her instructions, we usually get lost."

Those days hold fond memories for the Orricks, who receive letters regularly from Uruguayans, thanking them for the life they gave. Before they bought their first car, the couple would rise early in the morning, walk up to 60 blocks a day visiting people, and tumble into bed exhausted at midnight. Many congregations resulted. One was Radio Norte Baptist Church in Montevideo, which invited the Orricks back to help celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1973.

Orrick first became interested in foreign missions while he was at Baylor studying for the ministry. Because he was a Bible student at the school before Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary separated from Baylor, he's considered one of Southwestern's first students. And he studied under B.H. Carroll, who founded Southwestern in Waco, Texas, and became the school's first president.

No one had talked about foreign missions in Orrick's hometown. But after stumbling across mission books and attending a presentation by the first Southern Baptist missionary to South America, W.B. "Buck" Bagby, he became intrigued by the idea of preaching the gospel where it had never been heard.

When he and his wife arrived in South America, fellow missionaries presented two possible assignments to him. One was in Rosario, Argentina, which had come to be known as the most responsive area to the gospel in the region. The other was in Montevideo, virtually an untouched field. Because Uruguayans respond to people in the same lighthearted, easygoing way as Texans, Orrick says, the couple has never regretted the decision they made.

Much of the Orricks' work took them to the less developed areas of Uruguay. They brought a gospel tent back from their first furlough and drove it throughout Uruguay in a Model A Ford they used for 25 years. Orrick staked it up himself.

"When we started putting up the tent, the boys would come around and say, 'How much are you going to charge?'" Orrick remembers, chuckling. "I would say we don't charge anything. Up and down the street they went, yelling, 'A circus, a circus, and they don't charge anything!'" Attendance was usually good.

One time a Methodist man who heard Orrick's sermons under the tent instructed Orrick to lecture his congregation in a more scholarly manner. "I said, 'I am not going to have that man tell me what to do. I am going to preach the gospel.' Well that's what I did. I preached the gospel," he says. At his revivals he often used a Methodist woman who preached with great fervor and attracted crowds. "You can preach the gospel anywhere, and if you put your heart in it and preach it, people will listen," he notes.

Orrick also would preach impromptu messages in public places. Once he was at a country store and men were playing a game similar to bowling. Orrick stopped his car and spoke through a loudspeaker he had mounted on it. "The men quit their game and stood and listened. The man in the store closed his door and came out. That was how easy it was to get an interest. Everywhere, we were preaching, preaching, preaching," he recalls.

When Orrick came to a town, the first stop he made was at the police station. After police said it was all right to use his speaker, he would go all over town preaching. "You being the only missionaries and so many people wanting to talk to you, you were busy from early morning to midnight many days. Just on the go, on the go," Mrs. Orrick remembers.

When the Orricks came home, they threw that same energy into retirement. A man who loves to study, Orrick enrolled as a Baylor religion student at age 75. At first he planned to attend just to learn, but Mrs. Orrick insisted that he take college credit for his work. He received his master's degree in 1965. Also, the couple became active members of Seventh and James Baptist Church, which they no longer are able to attend.

One recent Sunday the Orricks answered the door to find a big group of children from Sunday school. The children sang for Mrs. Orrick and left her a poster with construction-paper hands pasted to it. "They wanted me to have their hands where I could look at them and know it was their hands," she says. "I have had that up there ever since."

The poster hangs on the wall she faces, opposite her bed in the one room to which their lives have become limited. Mrs. Orrick calls the room her workshop. Here they read, study and pray together, share their faith with visitors and write a handful of letters a day that circle the globe.

No longer are the Orricks able to work on the foreign mission field. But they still are missionaries.

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

William Hall Preston,
Student Leader, Dies

N-5 SB

Baptist Press
10/22/87

NASHVILLE (BP)--William Hall Preston, a pioneer in Southern Baptist student ministry who was instrumental in developing the Baptist Student Union student summer missions program, died Oct. 20 in Houston of cancer. He was 91.

Preston retired in 1964 after 37 years as an associate secretary of the student department (now the national student ministry department) of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Along with Frank Leavell, the first secretary of the student department, Preston developed the BSU student summer missions program, and he managed the student summer missions program for several years.

He wrote three Broadman Press books, "God Has Something Great for You," "Church Loyalty" and "Fathers are Special, Too."

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Before beginning his career in student ministry, Preston was president of Hall-Moody Junior College in Martin, Tenn., which later became the University of Tennessee-Martin, and was training union secretary for the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

He is survived by a daughter and two sons. One son, John Preston, is pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Farmington, N.M. He was married to the former Nancy Elizabeth Roebuck of Green County, Ala., who died in 1983.

The family requests memorial contributions be made to state convention student departments for student summer missions.

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Seminary Professor Says Youth Programs
Should Offer Intellectual Challenges By Mark Wingfield

N-CO
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
10/22/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Churches must challenge youth to think about their faith and give them more than "religious Rambo" leadership, said a professor of youth education in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's formal opening address.

Philip Briggs was chosen by the faculty to present the academic address. His topic was "The Church of Tomorrow," based on Luke 2:41-52.

Briggs said the topic came from the influence of his father. In the Oklahoma church where Briggs grew up, his father filled the pulpit whenever the pastor was out of town.

"Although he possessed the excellent mind of a power plant engineer, he had only one theme for his devotionals. The words of my deacon dad have stayed with me. He often said, 'We must provide for our young people, for they are the church of tomorrow.'"

A proper provision for this church of tomorrow must be based on the Bible, Briggs said, noting, "To lose this mooring of the Scriptures is to lose the understanding of our task and open ourselves up to misunderstandings."

And churches must not expect the church of tomorrow to understand today everything the Bible teaches, he said: "Few adults grow impatient with the unfolding physical growth of a teen-ager, but they will exhibit unusual concern if spiritual growth doesn't happen overnight.

"You cannot separate the spiritual growth of a youth from his maturation process. Effective youth ministers and leaders are those who comprehend the developmental stages of youth."

Churches must make a serious commitment to youth ministry, Briggs added.

Too often churches have the idea "that the youth minister is to be a glorified 23-year-old spiritual astronaut with the skills of a religious Rambo, all wrapped up in a cheerleader's outfit and topped off with a Brian Bosworth haircut," he said.

Also, some churches fill youth minister positions with "bootleggers." Briggs described these as people who have no specialized training and are "waiting for another position to come along."

But the primary challenge a youth minister faces is in properly educating teen-agers, Briggs said.

"Avoiding mental struggles" will not develop a youth's faith, he said: "Sheltering produces kids who are 'odd for God' and who never move out of an adolescent faith. They avoid the difficult questions.

"Teaching youth about faith should involve sound, informed biblical scholarship. Youth need to realize that God is at work in the world where they live. Sometimes youth have braces on their brains as well as their teeth.

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"If we attempt to indoctrinate rather than teach them to think out their faith, are we not telling them that brains are not needed in religion?"

Briggs said listening to youth from Southern Baptist churches makes him question if they have been educated properly. "Could our current educational endeavors have spawned the biblical ignorance and crass theology prevalent today, not to mention ethical and social issues that are contrary to our Lord's teachings?" he asked.

A youth's mind is like a fortified castle, Briggs said: "When those who work with youth attack the castle, seldom is there any penetration. Much of our preaching and not a little of our teaching is castle attacking."

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Southwestern Trustees Unanimously
Elect Conservative Chairman

By Mark Wingfield

N-10
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
10/22/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary unanimously elected a self-described conservative layman as chairman of the school's board Oct. 20.

An overflow crowd of students and faculty attended the opening session of the board's semi-annual meeting in anticipation of controversial proceedings. Onlookers feared Southwestern's meeting would follow the pattern of conflict set by boards of other Southern Baptist Convention agencies in recent weeks.

Instead, the 35 trustees meeting on the seminary's Fort Worth, Texas, campus harmoniously approved a response to the SBC Peace Committee, affirmed the seminary faculty and revised retirement policies. Every vote taken in the plenary sessions passed unanimously.

Trustees elected Ken Lilly, a physician from Fort Smith, Ark., as board chairman, replacing Drew Gunnells, pastor of Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala. Gunnells had served two terms as chairman and was ineligible for re-election.

Lilly is the first layman to chair Southwestern's board in the past 10 years.

Although he is "not a theologian," Lilly said he accepts the report of the Peace Committee as a standard for future faculty hirings. Prospective faculty members should accept the four examples of what "the majority of Southern Baptists believe" given in the report, Lilly said.

Those examples state that Adam and Eve were real people, that the miracles of the Bible are historical events, that biblical books were written by the attributed authors and that historical narratives in the Bible are accurate.

Whatever the Peace Committee has said, "we'd have to go by that," Lilly told reporters after his election. But such adherence would make "no difference" in what has been taught at Southwestern and what will be taught, he added.

"This seminary represents the constituency it serves," Lilly said. "This seminary is well on the conservative side."

Trustees as a whole agreed with that assessment of Southwestern in their formal response to the Peace Committee. Outgoing Chairman Gunnells wrote the response that trustees adopted unanimously.

The statement reads: "The board of trustees expresses appreciation to the Peace Committee for the careful way the committee reviewed its concerns with Southwestern Seminary and the committee's positive affirmation of the seminary's work. We pledge our prayer and cooperation with the committee as it continues its efforts to bring reconciliation to our convention."

Trustees also accepted a motion by James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas, that the past chairman and new chairman of the board jointly appoint a trustee committee to determine how to implement the Peace Committee report.

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Members of the committee are Jim Bolton, Dallas; Draper; Lewis McDonald, Churchville, Md.; James Coggin, Fort Worth; Wallace Palmer, Leesville, La.; and John McNaughton, Fort Worth. Lilly and Gunnells will be ex officio members. Draper was named chairman.

Bill Grubbs, trustee from Dallas, asked to add to the formal statement "The Peace Committee came to this campus and found no problems here." At Gunnells' request, Grubbs and Art Sherwood, trustee from Houston, jointly presented a separate statement affirming the faculty, which the board also unanimously accepted.

Grubbs said he wanted to assure faculty members the board would not try to achieve balance through firings. "Our faculty doesn't need to worry about us taking actions that are going to imperil them," he said. "Their jobs are safe and secure."

Later in the meeting, John Newport, vice president for academic affairs and provost, thanked the board for its affirmative statement.

Newport explained the Southwestern faculty is a "covenant community" that does not feel the need to build legal safeguards of their jobs. This understanding has kept Southwestern's faculty from forming a chapter of the American Association of University Professors, he said.

Southwestern's faculty members were "dealing with biblical inerrancy in our classes 25 years ago," Newport said. "Our professors are in the mainstream of this tradition."

Newport assured trustees faculty members are in a "learning mode" rather than an "antagonistic mode." He said, "We're trying to be sensitive to our constituencies."

Trustees also voted to approve the administration's recommendation of eliminating the seminary's policy of mandatory retirement at age 70. Under the new plan, faculty and administrators who are elected by the trustees will face a review process each year after age 65.

The annual review for these individuals will include a physical health examination, evaluation by peers, evaluation by people under direct supervision of the employee, review by the president and review by a committee of the board of trustees. The president then will recommend to trustees either to retire or continue employing the person.

In other business the board:

-- Re-elected Palmer vice chairman and McNaughton secretary.

-- Elected James Stanley Moore and Frank D. Stovall III to faculty positions in the School of Church Music.

-- Granted tenure to professors Thomas Brisco, Dan Kent, Bob Brackney and B.A. "Pat" Clendinning.

-- Accepted the school's audited financial statements.

-- Approved the James B. and Sarah Glover Professorship of Preaching/Evangelism.

-- Named the renovated preaching center in Scarborough Hall for Tom and Evelyn Linebery of Midland, Texas.

-- Named as recipients of the 1988 B.H. Carroll Founders Awards Charles and Polly Brinkley of Fort Worth; William and Lucile Porter of Terrell, Texas; and Patsy and Herman Smith of Fort Worth.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

Peaceful Meeting At Southwestern
Leaves Some Wondering What Happened By Mark Wingfield

N-10
(SWBTS)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The peaceful meeting of trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Oct. 19-21 left most observers and even some trustees wondering what happened to the anticipated controversy.

Trustees of other Southern Baptist institutions and agencies have faced off in confrontations this fall. Moderates and conservatives have clashed on boards of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee.

And Southwestern's past trustee meetings have not been noted for harmony. Rumors had circulated for weeks before Southwestern's fall meeting that the new conservative majority on the seminary board would try to bring wholesale changes.

But that did not happen.

Newly elected board Chairman Ken Lilly, a layman from Fort Smith, Ark., explained to reporters: "We prayed a lot about this. Many people who have had differences of opinion no longer have those differences. It sort of all just came together in this meeting."

Outgoing board Chairman Drew Gunnells of Mobile, Ala., and seminary President Russell Dilday agreed prayer made a difference.

"Prayer definitely was a part of it," Gunnells said. "What has happened elsewhere in the convention heightened our concern for prayer."

Dilday said the meeting's harmony was "a providential answer to prayer."

In addition, Gunnells said trustees worked hard to have a good meeting: "All our trustees wanted to have a harmonious meeting. They were willing to work out their differences of opinion in a spirit of cooperation."

Another factor, Dilday said, is that Southwestern does not face the problems other Southern Baptist Convention institutions are dealing with. "Some of our trustees have said that the problems they are concerned about are not found here at Southwestern," he added.

The board and administration have decided to "focus on this institution and its future rather than on the overall problems of the SBC," he added.

Yet whether this one peaceful meeting has brought healing to Southwestern's board of trustees or is merely a bandage is unclear.

Lilly told reporters he thinks the board will operate harmoniously. "This seminary is in good shape," he said.

At the end of the meeting, Lilly asked trustees to join hands around the tables for prayer. "Lord, help us all to love, honor and respect each other," he prayed.

"I hope this spirit of fairness and cooperation will characterize the future," Gunnells said.

The key is compromise, he added. In committee work at this meeting, both sides conceded some points. "As long as that is possible, you're going to have harmony," he noted.

"But you can't compromise on everything," Gunnells said. For that reason he does not expect everything to be unanimous in the future.

Dilday agrees: "While we rejoice in the positive, harmonious nature of this board meeting, it does not imply that differences on our board no longer exist. But we hope in the future these differences can be dealt with in the same harmonious and constructive spirit of this board meeting."

Only time will tell what the future holds, Gunnells said. The responsibility rests with those now in leadership.

If the leaders say, "Now we have power, and we'll do whatever we want to do," there will be trouble, Gunnells said. But if they are "fair and try to motivate this kind of harmony" there will be peace.

"Those who have power must use that to bring about peace," he said.

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2 Profs Elected To Music
Faculty At Southwestern

N-10
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press
10/22/87

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary elected James Stanley Moore and Frank D. Stovall III to faculty positions in the School of Church Music Oct. 21.

Stovall's election marks a homecoming. He previously taught at Southwestern from 1956 to 1984. He currently heads the department of music at Mississippi College.

Stovall, 57, is known among Southern Baptists as a tenor soloist, choral conductor and conference leader. He currently is interim minister of music at First Baptist Church in Canton, Miss.

Stovall and his wife, Sara, will return to Fort Worth, Texas, in January. He holds degrees from Mississippi College, the University of Alabama and the University of Texas.

Moore, 35, also has a previous relation to Southwestern. He earned two degrees from the seminary and is a candidate for the doctor of musical arts degree. He also is a graduate of the University of New Mexico.

Currently Moore is under appointment of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board as director of the school of sacred music at the South Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary in Rio de Janeiro.

Moore and his wife, Mary, and two children will move to Fort Worth in December.

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Workers With Disabled
Walk A Mile In A Chair

By Sherri Brown

F-HMB

Baptist Press
10/22/87

ATLANTA (BP)--Eight resource workers with disabled people met to discover better ways to minister while experiencing life in wheelchairs themselves.

The eight workers, including workshop leader Cecil Etheredge, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board national consultant for ministry with disabled persons, spent the two-day conference, including evenings, in wheelchairs.

Even though all participants work with disabled people -- including some who teach wheelchair safety -- none had ever experienced extended time in a wheelchair.

They quickly learned several hazards for the wheelchair-bound.

"Be careful when you lean over to pick up something from the floor," warned Lynn Talley of Fairmont, W. Va., after she fell onto the floor trying to pick up her purse.

"The doors are too heavy and hard to manage. When you push on the door, your chair rolls backward," complained Gayla Sherman-Koch, a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary social work student.

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The evening lesson included a three-block uphill trek to a nearby Atlanta restaurant. Managing curb cuts and driveway entrances while avoiding heavy evening traffic pointed out new hazards to the group.

Moments after rolling into the street in front of oncoming traffic, Etheridge pointed out, "These curb-cuts are too steep."

After being ignored throughout most of the day, it was a surprise when passersby stopped to help the struggling group.

"After a whole group of well-dressed business men and women walked in front of me, keeping me from crossing the street, a 'punker' with spiked hair and leather clothes asked if I needed help," recalled Sherman-Koch. The unlikely rescuer pushed Sherman-Koch up the hill to the entrance of the restaurant.

The handicapped-accessible hotel rooms brought a flurry of resentment from the group.

"The bathroom door was unbelievably difficult to handle," complained Jane Gibbons, a training coordinator for the Huntington, W. Va., Center for Independent Living. In order to get to the sink, the wheelchair had to be maneuvered into the far corner so the door could be opened. The move had to be repeated to get out of the room.

"And the mirror was too far away," said Mike Haywood, director of youth and family services for Peninsula Baptist Association in Newport News, Va. "I couldn't get close enough to see to shave."

Recognizing the difficulty in a room designed for disabled people, several voiced concern over many churches with no accessibility beyond handicapped parking and a ramp.

"Put your pastor in a wheelchair and see if he can get in and out of the pulpit," suggested Joe Thomas, associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Milledgeville, Ga.

After struggling through the ordeal, the group convened to discuss their observations.

"Even though we've been able to recognize some of the difficulties brought on by being in a wheelchair, we must remember we will never know what it's really like to be disabled, because we can get up and walk," pointed out Sherman-Koch.

"If I ever repeat this experience, I want a disabled person to teach me a few maneuvers in this chair. I'd certainly feel more confident with a veteran along," she added.

The group also helped develop a resource manual for ministry with the disabled. It will be available next year.

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