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NATIONAL OFFICE:
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor**BUREAUS****ATLANTA** Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041**DALLAS** Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550**NASHVILLE** (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300**RICHMOND** (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151**WASHINGTON** Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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88-6

WMU Head Calls Leaders
To Speak And Pray Boldly

By Susan Todd

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Don't expect Woman's Missionary Union leaders to remain silent in the convention controversy if state leaders follow the example and admonition of their national executive.

In an address to the national WMU executive board, Carolyn Weatherford called WMU leaders to "speak boldly" and "pray boldly." But she also cautioned them to pray for discernment in knowing when to speak.

"I ask you to join me in two things. Speak boldly when the need arises. And prepare your women to speak boldly and to understand something of the need," Weatherford said.

Also, "pray boldly," she urged. "Pray daily for the Lord to lead us out of the swamp of the convention controversy, for his glory."

There comes a time, she said, "when we have to say, 'That's enough.'"

Knowing when that time has come makes all the difference in the world, she said. "I pray for discernment in knowing when to speak and when to keep my mouth shut. I want you to know, I do not speak thoughtlessly," she said.

She told them to not be "rabble-rousers" but to be willing to speak, especially "when something is an untruth or when we are the brunt of a joke."

Weatherford said she has not been able to define the controversy in the convention, but said, "A lot of it is theological. A lot of it is political. A lot of it is disastrous. And a lot of it is the tool of the devil."

While the controversy defies definition, it nonetheless is "dangerous" to the cause of WMU and missions, she said. She called the leaders to stay aware of this and other dangers threatening WMU, but encouraged them to draw strength from milestones in WMU's past and present as they look to the future.

For example, the new headquarters building and the recent reorganization of the national staff were both designed to carry WMU "usefully and practically into the future," she said.

Also, the formation of Signal Services Inc. as a wholly owned subsidiary corporation of WMU is an innovative way of investing for the future, she said. Signal Services is a telecommunications company which offers the service of a mobile satellite uplink transmitter.

While strengths and milestones are important, she told the board milestones alone will not carry WMU into the future. Rather, she said, it is "what God decides about us" that is important, and emphasized the importance of striving for a life of excellence as WMU looks to the future. She said God "asks us to have a continued dissatisfaction with anything that is less than our best."

"We do not achieve a life of excellence by self-promotion, self-gratification or self-improvement. The only way is by exercising a radical faith in God," she said. "God doesn't send us into the dangerous and exciting life of faith because we are qualified, but he chooses us to qualify us for what he wants our life to be and do."

As long as WMU follows Christ's mandate to share the gospel, she said, "We're going to last a long time."

Annie Armstrong Offering
Passes \$30 Million Mark

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists gave a record \$30,246,290 through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for Home Missions during 1987.

The \$30.2 million total was an increase of \$2,435,913, or 8.76 percent, over gifts through the Annie Armstrong Offering in 1986.

Larry L. Lewis, president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, announced the final figures to the staff of the Home Mission Board, and to the executive board of Woman's Missionary Union which co-sponsors the offering with the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

Lewis said the rate of increase was double the rate of inflation, but acknowledged the offering fell short of the \$37.5 million goal by about 20 percent.

Lewis challenged the Home Mission Board staff, and the 3,600 home missionaries serving across the nation, to join Woman's Missionary Union and the Brotherhood Commission as partners in reaching the goal of \$37.5 million set for 1988.

Lewis pointed out that the 1988 goal is the same as the 1987 goal. "This is not an unrealistic goal. We can do it," he insisted.

"There are some tremendous needs out there in the mission fields of America that will go unmet because we didn't reach the goal," Lewis said.

Lewis said he did not want to lament failures of the past, or to get bogged down in an analysis of the reasons the goal was not reached. "Instead, I challenge each of us to make a commitment to do everything we can to make sure that we reach the goal this year, and every year in the future," he said.

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Lewis Pledges Cooperation
With States, Associations

Baptist Press
1/14/88

NEW YORK (BP)--Southern Baptist Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis, following on-site visits with missionaries and Baptist leaders in three of the nation's largest cities, pledged cooperation with Baptist state conventions and associations in planning future strategies for home missions.

Lewis, in an interview following visits in New York, Boston and Los Angeles, said he was impressed by the caliber of leaders and missionaries in the major cities of the United States, and by the strategies already being developed by Baptists to reach millions of people in America's cities.

As a part of his visits with local and associational leaders and missionaries in those three cities, Lewis also met with the staffs of Baptist state conventions in California, New England and New York.

During a meeting with the staff of the New York convention in Syracuse, Lewis received a briefing on Direction 2000, a strategy plan developed by the Baptist Convention of New York in cooperation with ten Baptist associations in the state.

Lewis pointed out that recently he had appointed a 28-member task force to advise the Home Mission Board on developing mission strategies for the future. He assured state convention and association leaders that future strategies of the Home Mission Board will be developed in cooperation with state conventions and associations.

On the last of his three trips, Lewis spoke at missions rallies and luncheons for Baptist missionaries, pastors, and associational leaders in Madison, New York City, Syracuse, Buffalo and Rochester. He visited the offices of the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association in Manhattan.

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Lewis emphasized his concern for Baptist missions in the Northeast, where he started eight churches in nine years as a mission pastor in Columbus, Ohio, and Willingboro, N.J., near Philadelphia. He was mission pastor for 10 years before helping to organize the Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptist Convention. He was one of the first staff members of that convention, serving from 1971-74. In 1974 he became pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church in St. Louis.

"A lot has changed since I left the Northeast in 1974," Lewis observed. "I'm impressed with the magnitude of Southern Baptist mission work with ethnics and blacks. In 1974, our work with blacks and ethnics was token, but now it is vital. For example, there are more ethnic, language and black churches in the New York convention than there are English-speaking Anglo congregations. Since 1974, Baptists have become the most ethnically-diverse denomination in America."

Lewis said he was disappointed Southern Baptists had not developed strong churches with several thousand members in some areas, especially the large cities. "I think every church should want to grow, expect to grow, plan to grow," he said. "But we never want to try to grow large super churches at expense of starting new churches."

Lewis emphasized the need for strengthening parallel programs at the Home Mission Board in church growth and church starting. "We need to strengthen existing churches, while at the same time starting new congregations."

He added that to grow strong Southern Baptist churches in the great cities of America, it will take committed pastors who are willing to plant their lives in one place and make long-term commitments to reaching the cities. "We have too many pastors who never mentally unpack their bags when they move to a new church."

Lewis said the visits to the three state conventions in California, New England and New York had been part of his plan to be a "field-oriented" president of the Home Mission Board, and to learn more about the needs and challenges of missions in America.

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(Editor's Note: This is the second of two articles on released time for religious instruction for public school students.)

Groups Demonstrate Viability
Of Released Time Programs

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
1/14/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--Mention "released time" to Natalie Foster or Sharon Jones and their enthusiasm for this approach to religious instruction for public school students pours out.

Released time programs allow students with parental permission to be released from class on a regular basis to receive religious instruction away from the school campus.

Foster and Jones both have hands-on experience with operating such programs. Foster supervises the 45-year-old released time program of the Evansville, Ind., Area Council of Churches, while Jones is director of a much newer released time program sponsored by Cincinnati's Southern Baptist Church, a National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., congregation.

In the Evansville program, Foster said, children learn how to use the Bible and explore themes ranging from being children of God to the life of Jesus to suffering personal loss to caring for God's world. The curriculum deals with basic Bible themes, rather than specific church doctrines, she added.

"We try to take a different approach than in Sunday school," Foster said. "We have a great many children who have never been in church, so we try to find ways to encourage them from where they are to use the Bible.

"We use lots of stories and lots of songs. Storytelling is something children aren't exposed to a lot these days."

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Children in the Evansville classes, which are held for third and fourth graders at 20 elementary schools, also spend time discussing their own feelings and how others might feel in various situations. Foster said such discussions help children develop compassion and understanding for others.

Foster, who has taught in the Evansville program for 32 years, said she rejects the criticism that the program's religious instruction is "watered down." "We basically hit thoughts that are acceptable to everyone," she said. Children who belong to a church are encouraged to feel great pride in that church and those who do not have a church affiliation are encouraged to get to know more about church, she added.

The children in the Evansville program are divided almost equally between those who attend church and those who do not. Of those who do attend, the largest number are affiliated with Baptist congregations.

Foster and the eight other teachers in the program have college training and Christian education experience. They are paid for their teaching responsibilities, as are the program's two teacher's aides and one substitute teacher.

Described by Foster as "devoted Christian people," the teachers represent a variety of denominations. Many of them were public schoolteachers who no longer want to teach full time. Foster told of one teacher with experience in both public and private schools who called her work in the Evansville weekday program her "most rewarding teaching experience."

Foster said the local school board is very cooperative, as are most of the area principals. "They feel the weekday program helps them in the long run," she said.

Funding for the Evansville program comes from individuals, churches and church school classes. Although parents are asked for donations, there is no charge for participation.

When asked why she would recommend a released time program, Foster told three brief stories:

-- A number of years ago after being in an automobile accident, Foster was hospitalized. In the middle of the night, she awoke and saw someone standing over her. It was one of her former weekday students. The young woman told Foster that she now had a daughter of her own and that she was trying to teach the child the things she had learned in the weekday program.

-- Four years ago, Foster was in a hotel lobby when a young man came up and threw his arms around her. He was a former weekday student whom she had not seen since 1965. He had come from a poor, broken family, but seeing potential in him she had sent him to a week-long church camp. He went on to earn a college scholarship and graduate with honors. The young man told Foster he still had all of his weekday program materials and that whenever he looked at them, he thought about everything she had taught him.

-- During the current school year, one of her classes was talking about feelings. When asked how he felt, a boy, whom Foster described as not having much in the way of family, money or opportunity, simply said, "I feel wanted when I come here."

"I have seen the results," Foster concluded.

Results also have been seen in the Cincinnati congregation's ministry, Jones said. By offering released time programs to the two elementary schools within its neighborhood, the church has been able to reach out to the families of its released time students.

"We are working with the children of our church's service area, so we have a vested interest," Jones said. "We have been able to share the problems of our children and their families and provide a support system for them. There have even been times when the schools have called to alert us to problems with which they thought we could help."

Jones, who led the church in developing its own curriculum and making sure the program did not violate the law, said the congregation began its released time program three years ago.

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She visited the principals of the two elementary schools to ask their permission in releasing the second, third and fourth graders who would be participating in the program. "The better the relationship between the principals and the released time personnel, the better the program is," she said.

Next, Jones and church volunteers handed out parental permission slips to the children as they left school property in the afternoon.

The program, which began with 50 students during its first year, now has reached its maximum of 115 students. Of those students, Jones said, only one-fourth have any church affiliation. "Even though the parents don't go to church," she said, "they recognize the need for their children to know about God."

At the same time, more than 20 families have joined the church as a result of their children's participation. Although the program avoids teaching Baptist doctrine -- it emphasizes an ecumenical stance, teaching general concepts about God and Jesus -- Jones said the church regularly sends letters to the children's families inviting them to various church activities.

If a congregation is considering beginning a released time program, Jones said it should be aware that such a program will cost money -- for transportation, supplies, curriculum and the like -- and that volunteer help may be difficult to find.

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

Autumn Effort Successful;
January Crusade Canceled

By Michael D. Chute

Baptist Press
1/14/88

MANILA, Philippines (BP)--A four-month church planting campaign on Mindanao island, jeopardized early by political unrest in the Philippines, took place without incident and recorded phenomenal results, according to Southern Baptist missionaries in charge of the project.

Foreign Mission Board officials reported Jan. 8 that 5,346 people made professions of faith in Jesus Christ and 529 of those were baptized during the church-planting crusades on Mindanao from August through November. Coming in five waves, most of the 104 American teams left a newly organized church after week-long evangelistic meetings and a week of follow-up.

Similar crusades are planned in early 1988 for the island of Luzon, where Manila is located. But a trip planned Jan. 26 has been rescheduled for early May because of the potential for unrest in conjunction with Jan. 18 regional government elections. Much of the violence in opposition to President Corazon Aquino's two-year-old government has centered around Manila.

"It was not wise to bring the team in at this time," said Sam Waldron, chairman of the Philippine Baptist Mission. Missionaries also have canceled a regularly scheduled mission meeting because of the election and possible unrest, he said.

Still, crusade coordinators say they anticipate trips to Luzon, planned for February and April, will proceed on schedule. The project will then conclude with the May trip.

The Mindanao portion of the project took place without incident, according to Southern Baptist missionaries and the participants themselves. However, extreme precautions were taken to insure the safety of the volunteers. Missionaries say it is safe to work in the Philippines, but they avoided placing American participants where there was possibility for violence.

For instance, American partnership teams usually are given orientation in Manila before going to the work site. But with these teams "we sent them on down (to Mindanao) because of the political unrest around Manila," said Waldron.

George Ellis, a member of the first team, which went in August, said: "It is true that there was danger around us, but at no time did I feel that I was in danger. People are watching over you at every moment. Local pastors (Filipinos) are listening to events which might affect your service." Ellis is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Healthy in Cincinnati, Ohio.

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The team was "in no danger at all during the Aug. 28 coup attempt," added Ondra Black, pastor of Hope Baptist Church in Flanders, N.J. "Our missionaries and local pastors know the situation and would not allow us to be close to danger. They checked daily with their contacts to make sure that things were all right. If there had been any danger to us, we would have been pulled out and moved to another location."

The church-planting strategy, formulated in 1984, calls for the American pastors to work in areas where there is no church. But a home Bible study must have been meeting for at least six months for the site to receive a team.

At the site, the Americans spend the first week in evangelistic preaching each evening and in visitation during the day. The second week is devoted to follow-up in church development and discipleship of those who make professions of faith.

"A church is organized on the last Sunday (of the week-long evangelistic crusade) if it is ready," said Southern Baptist missionary Jim Slack, church growth director for the Baptist conventions of Mindanao and Luzon.

About 75 percent of the Bible studies become churches using this method, according to Slack. Some wait to organize later. This ratio "is phenomenal by what we are seeing worldwide," he added. In the Philippines, about 30 percent of all preaching points become churches during a given year.

The five-year church development strategy for the Mindanao and Luzon Baptist conventions, begun in 1985, calls for the number of churches on those two islands to double by 1990. The goal for Mindanao is 1,000 new churches with 750 for Luzon. Such goals are realistic, says Slack, as Filipino history shows that "we have doubled every five years."

Over the past three years, missionaries and Filipinos worked with 257 Bible study groups on Mindanao, preparing them to organize into churches. American pastors were requested to lead church-planting crusades in these selected sites. The Mindanao Convention asked for an American preacher at each of those 257 sites but only 104 took part in the crusades.

Filipino and missionary leaders have isolated 150 Bible studies on Luzon which may be ready to organize into churches this year. Luzon leaders have requested that number of American preachers to lead crusades on the island during 1988. Foreign Mission Board officials are now trying to secure preachers to fill the Luzon request. Slack calls that the greatest need.

A member of the November crusade team agreed. Writing to the Foreign Mission Board after his return, Gary Longenecker called his involvement in the crusades "the greatest opportunity I have ever had." In the area where he preached, Longenecker, pastor of the First Baptist Church in House Springs, Mo., told of "crowds overflowing beyond the building to the outdoors. People at every window. So hungry for the gospel."

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China Artist Sings,
Paints Her Faith

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
1/14/88

NANJING, China (BP)--Standing in a tiny studio at a Chinese Christian seminary, He Huibing plays "Amazing Grace" on her bamboo flute.

She loves the wistful instrument, both for its sound and its symbolism. Bamboo signifies humility for the Chinese, she explains, "because it is empty inside."

Then she sings an unaccompanied interpretations of religious themes by Handel and Schubert. She shyly admits she has never heard another singer perform the Schubert piece.

"I want to hear how others sing this song," she confides. "I have not heard. So I just sing it according to my feeling."

She had no teacher, and very little training. Practice came during the long days she once spent toiling in a coal factory, singing to pass the time, her lungs competing with the deafening noise of machinery.

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Despite her vocal gift, Huibing considers music only a hobby. Her true love is art. Her paintings, most with Christian themes, cover the walls of the studio: the penitent woman washing Christ's feet, the woman at the well, the moon and stars of Psalm 8. Her lively colors glisten. Her delicate Chinese characters tell the stories of Scripture.

She is fulfilling a lifelong dream, but only after a very long wait. Deferred dreams are the tragic heritage of China's "lost generation," the millions of young people who lost their opportunity for education during the social turmoil of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution. In a Chinese description of misfortune, they have "eaten bitterness." They form what is probably the largest reservoir of unrealized potential anywhere in the world.

He Huibing, 31, is a member of that generation. And she has eaten her share of bitterness.

The bitterness came to Huibing early. Her family, from the southern city of Guangzhou (Canton), suffered during the political purges of the 1950s. As a child she was extremely close to her sister, who later died.

Huibing desperately wanted to study art. But during the Cultural Revolution and the years immediately following, social and educational chaos reigned. Acceptance at art college depended upon "your family's history, not your talent," she remembers. "So I worked in the coal factory ... very, very hard."

She studied art at night, just as hard. "I had a very strong dream. I longed for the day I could become an artist. I dreamed someday the conditions would change in China. I never lost my hope."

Hardship produced a deep sadness within Huibing, but did not break her stubborn determination to succeed on her own. The Word of God did. When the Christian church in Guangzhou reopened after the Cultural Revolution, she went there seeking truth. She was invited to sing in the choir.

"In the past I studied art to support my soul," she relates. "I thought that was enough. If I could not find success in real life, I could live in my dreams and my art. But I didn't find God.

"Before I read the Bible, I thought I was very strong. I could do anything. But when I read the Bible, it changed my life and opinions. It changed my view of the world. You know, the people my age grew up without God. So I tried to depend on God, to trust God. That was the beginning."

Huibing knew joy for the first time. She grew as a believer, and her dedication was recognized by her church. The congregation agreed to support her during seminary study. But church leaders warned her she would have to put away, once and for all, her dream of being an artist to devote herself to theological study.

"I could not accept this idea," she says. "But I tried, I tried. I gave up my hope in art."

God gave it back, she believes. Faculty members at the Jinling Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing quickly discovered Huibing's artistic talent. They encouraged her to continue art study along with her theological work.

Today she cherishes her old dream, but with an important revision. Now she dreams of spending her life as a Christian artist, speaking the truths of the gospel to her generation through her paintings.

"If someone can see a picture to make him think about what his faith is, he will search for the truth in the world," she believes. "The source of the truth is to find God and find Jesus for life."

Her dream has returned. Huibing wants to share it.

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

Seminary Students
Revive Church

By Breena Kent Paine

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Out of a dead church, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary students have built a thriving ministry. Their motto is "a small church with a big ministry."

Victory Baptist Church, led by seminary students in the Faubourg Marigny neighborhood on the edge of New Orleans' French Quarter, has seen more than 100 professions of faith in the past year. With special ministries for youth and children, classes in English as a second language and outreach Bible studies, the doors stay open seven days a week.

Victory Baptist has not always been so victorious, however. In past years, it ministered to a small Anglo congregation that dwindled and eventually dissolved as its members moved away and lapsed in their attendance.

Originally, the church was to sell its 100-year-old-plus building. But the Spanish congregation of Grace Baptist Church in New Orleans stepped in to take the property and fill the ministry void.

"When I found out they didn't have a pastor, I asked to move my congregation there," said Pastor Jorge Zayasbazan. "Also, I wanted to start an English congregation."

So the Miami, Fla., native and another seminary student, Lonnie Nelson, from Pensacola, Fla., opened the doors of Victory Baptist again in January of 1987; this time with services in Spanish and English and a dream to minister to the community as never before.

Three members of the original Victory congregation remained, and Zayasbazan brought eight members from Grace Church's Spanish congregation. A year later, there is a combined membership of 45 people, and about 75 attend services each Sunday. About 20 children attend services for them on Wednesday nights, and as many as 50 youth attend services for them on Tuesday nights, a branch of the church's ministry begun by seminary student Yvonne McFatter, from Lake Charles, La.

"The influence of the church goes beyond the doors of the church," said Zayasbazan. In a largely Catholic neighborhood, many still "recognize me as their pastor, even though they don't come to church. So, in a way, I've become a chaplain in the neighborhood. ... We're sowing seeds that in the long run will show growth."

As pastor of Victory Baptist, Zayasbazan ministers in unique ways, such as going to the post office to translate for a woman who cannot speak English, helping someone who cannot read fill out his application for food stamps or giving someone a ride to the bus station at midnight.

"People are hungry for the gospel," said the bilingual pastor. While visiting in the home of one Spanish-speaking couple, he presented the gospel to them: "When I asked if they wanted to receive the Lord, they both stood up and said, 'Yes.' At 11 p.m. the following night, there he was with a sister and a friend, wanting me to share the gospel with them."

Another girl from the neighborhood, named Tiffany, had leukemia. "When she came out of the hospital, the first place she went was to children's church," said Zayasbazan. "I think it was a touching experience for all involved."

Zayasbazan, who lives on the second floor of the church, said, "I have the opportunity to be there when they need me; when they need to talk or when they need food."

The neighborhood people are "respective as far as religion goes, and very protective of me and my family. We don't have to worry about our car being stolen," said Zayasbazan. "We have no fears. I don't think it's the ghetto" it has been called before.

A historical district with families and homes dating as far back as the 1800's, Fauborg Marigny also is a neighborhood of contrast. Some homes hide lavish gardens once enjoyed by the best of Creole society; other homes reveal the poverty of their occupants. "One of my neighbors doesn't have electricity; the other drives a Mercedes," said Zayasbazan.

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Throughout the past year, people from more than 20 nationalities have attended services at Victory church. Zayasbazan hopes eventually to hold services in several languages to minister to the variety of cultures in the neighborhood.

"I'd like to see a church that meets the community's needs, both socially and spiritually, and I'd like the church to show the make-up of the racial backgrounds of the neighborhood," he noted.

As a new plant may grow from the remnant of a dead tree, so a new ministry has sprouted in Faubourg Marigny. And, as Zayasbazan said, "The church's success is owed to seminary students who have offered their time voluntarily and sacrificially."

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(BP) photos available upon request from New Orleans Seminary

Sanders Resigns Word & Way,
Accepts Post At Midwestern

Baptist Press
1/14/88

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Brenda J. Sanders, a newswriter since August 1983 for Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, has resigned to become communications specialist for Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

In her new role, Sanders will write seminary-related press releases and feature stories for Baptist Press, state Baptist newspapers and Kansas City-area newspapers. She replaces Pam Parry, who resigned in mid-October to complete her seminary studies.

As a Word & Way newswriter, she has been involved in writing news and feature stories, proofreading, photography and design.

Prior to joining the Word & Way staff, Sanders' worked for the Independence (Mo.) Examiner, the Columbia Missourian, and The Thin Blue Line, newsletter for the Independence Police Department.

She is a 1981 graduate of the school of journalism at the University of Missouri in Columbia, with a news/editorial major. She is an active member of First Baptist Church, Jefferson City of Mo., and is a member of Baptist Public Relations Association, Southern Baptist Press Association and Associated Church Press.

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Seminary Couple Shares
Home, Work And Homework

By Elizabeth Watson

Baptist Press
1/14/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Jim and Becky Bricker believe a couple that studies together stays together.

The Brickers are theology students from Ohio who have taken every course together at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. They plan to graduate this May and say they took classes together to improve their grades.

But in the process they discovered the togetherness has improved more than grades. "Our relationship is stronger because of it," he says. "Taking the same classes gives us a lot in common which we can share."

She agrees: "We can go home and discuss all the things that happened that day. We share everything from the new friends we meet in class to the deep discussions about lectures and reading assignments."

"We grow together as we learn together," he adds.

And having identical class schedules offers other benefits, too.

It cuts book costs in half. "Since we usually only have one set of books, we carefully schedule alternate study times," she says.

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Also, having a live-in study partner is like having a safety net, he says, noting, "What I miss in class or fail to understand, Becky usually gets, and vice versa."

Who has the highest grade point average? They're reluctant to say.

"We promised ourselves when we first enrolled in seminary we wouldn't disclose to anyone, especially our parents, what our grades are so that things wouldn't be competitive," she explains.

She says they never get tired of each other -- which is a good thing, since they also work at the same place. Both are employed by John Peter Smith Hospital. He is a pharmacy technician, and she is assistant patient care coordinator on the psychiatric wing. They both work weekend shifts and see each other often at the hospital.

They also work together in Travis Avenue Baptist Church's house-church ministry. He is co-pastor of the Hemphill Mission House Church, and she leads evangelism training classes. After graduation this spring, the Brickers plan to become missionaries.

"Not only are we best friends, we are partners in ministry," he says.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

Hungarian Couple Makes
New Life In Florida

By Barbara Denman

Baptist Press
1/14/88

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--A new life in America, a new life of freedom and a new life in the birth of a son -- Julius and Anna Szabadkai have much to look forward to in 1988.

The Szabadkais fled their homeland of Hungary in November 1986, requesting political asylum in Austria. They remained there in a refugee camp until they were resettled by the Florida Baptist Convention missions division. They arrived in Jacksonville Aug. 6, 1987.

Five weeks after their arrival, Christopher David, their first child, was born.

Through an interpreter, Szabadkai expressed his delight that their son is an American citizen: "Our little son will have a better life. He can do anything he wants to do."

The Szabadkais said they left their native land, even though it meant leaving their family and friends to face a strange language and culture, because communism had become so oppressive.

The transition was made easier, the young couple said, through the support and help they received from Florida Baptists.

As they pointed to the sparse furniture in their apartment, much of which were received as gifts, the couple admitted that in Hungary they would have worked for years to get what they have now. "It is very hard for young couple to get ahead," he said. "We have a better life here. And here, there is freedom."

The Hungarians have found that freedom, something Americans often take for granted, is very real.

The couple attends Parkwood Baptist Church in Jacksonville. They observed Hungarians cannot express their religion in such a free and open manner.

Even the birth of their son at Jacksonville's Baptist Medical Center was a different experience for them. "We were surprised the hospital was so beautiful," she said. In Hungary, her husband would have been unable to see his new baby except through closed-circuit television.

After the birth of Christopher David, the Florida Baptist missions division staff gave the family a baby shower, an American custom not observed in Hungary. When an interpreter said they would be receiving gifts at the shower, Szabadkai replied: "You must be mistaken. I think they just want to see the new baby."

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"We have already received so many gifts," she added. "The baby has more things than we do."

The Szabadkai's thought once they arrived in America, they would be expected to reimburse their sponsors for everything. They feared the sponsors would "bring you here and forget about you." Instead, they have found a new family of sharing Christians.

The missions division staff, with some assistance from Parkwood and First Baptist Church, of Orange Park, provided for the family's immediate needs of food, clothing, housing, literacy training, counseling, job placement, medical needs and general orientation.

Within two months of their arrival, he began working in a car body shop and she was earning extra money by doing alterations and house cleaning.

This was the first time a state convention staff has "accepted the responsibility of resettling a refugee family without using convention funds," said Somchit Vang of the Southern Baptist Refugee Office in Atlanta.

Despite the state's large ethnic population, Florida Baptist churches do not have a good record in relocating refugees, said James Goodson, missions division director. Consequently, the missions division began the sponsorship process for the Szabadkais.

"We wanted to indicate just how easy it would be for a church to sponsor refugees," Goodson said. The experience, he added, has been "delightful, one churches would enjoy."

Gerald McKinley, a member of Orange Park Baptist, echoes Goodson's sentiments. When word came to the church that the young couple needed dining room furniture, he began gathering donations from other church members. He quickly secured table and chairs, end tables, a brass bed, flatware, cooking dishes and clothes.

"With every load we carried in, it was like we were Santa Claus," he said. "They were so elated and gracious -- showing it not just by words, but in their eyes and actions."

McKinley heartily recommends such a sponsorship for a church. "By sharing with the couple, we felt like we had received as much of a blessing as they had," he said.