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Missionaries Need Help
To Survive Resignation

By Leland Webb

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--"The other day was your birthday, and you were on the prayer list," said a man to his friend who had resigned as a foreign missionary. "I want you to know I just marked your name off the list."

Maybe it was a joke, but that attitude doesn't help people who have resigned from overseas missionary service. Fortunately, it is not typical, according to former missionaries who responded to questions from The Commission, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board magazine. Respondents had been missionaries from six months to 31 years; the average was 7.5 years.

But resigning is still painful for most. "The decision we finally made to resign was much more difficult than the one to go in the first place," said a missionary who spent 15 years overseas. A couple who served four years responded: "We were prepared to go, but we were not prepared to return. It was much harder to accept this as God's will."

Many returned missionaries reported positive, or at least supportive, acceptance by church members and others at home. One man, now a long-term U.S. pastor after 11 years overseas, said, "Never at any time have we experienced negative responses from church members, family members or colleagues."

Yet one reported, "There was real skepticism on the part of many churches, pastors and denominational leaders over our ability to resume a successful pastorate here in the U.S. after 15 years overseas, as if there was something wrong with missionaries who came home."

The percentage of loss by resignation among career missionaries is low, typically running around only 3 percent a year. Among non-Catholic missionary-sending agencies in the United States, this rate is "by far the lowest of any," said Louis R. Cobbs, director of the Foreign Mission Board's personnel selection department. He draws the comparison after direct contacts with numerous missions agencies.

The former missionaries responding offered suggestions about how they -- and others facing post-resignation trauma -- would like to be treated upon re-entering U.S. culture and church life: They want fellow Christians to recognize their freedom to follow God's will and change their place and type of ministry. Some would welcome help in getting re-established in the United States. The vast majority want to keep on being part of the missions team by sharing experiences.

A newly appointed missionary moves through a special program of orientation to get ready to leave the home culture and enter a foreign one. But there's little orientation for one coming back. Re-entry shock is now accepted as real for diplomats and businessmen returning to America after years abroad. But missionaries who resign also face drastic changes in their ministries and church relationships.

In suggestions for treatment at home, the returned missionaries hope for reinforcement through caring support and non-judgmental attitudes. One said he would like members "to understand that God's will is not necessarily tied to a geographical location -- that one can be free to change places of service as God leads and circumstances change."

Another recalled, "By some we were almost made to feel that we had failed God by resigning."

The Foreign Mission Board continues to emphasize career missionary calling, reflecting a commitment to identify with the new culture. At the same time, society has grown more mobile, and developing mission strategies may call for more field mobility for some missionaries.

One returnee expressed hope that members of the church where he belongs would "trust the resigning missionary to be able to discern the Lord's leadership and not to assume that he/she has left God's will, nor that God has withdrawn his call."

The pain of resigning from missionary service cuts deep for some. "The mission family and the board has been 'our family' all the years," wrote one woman who served overseas with her husband more than 30 years. "It is an awful feeling ... to be suddenly 'dropped.'"

In getting re-established in the United States, some resigning missionaries said help would be welcome both in finding a home base and a place of service.

"After being out of the United States for a number of years, a missionary's local state connections often grow weak," pointed out one former missionary. "He needs help in informing local people that he is available."

A resigned missionary starts over, facing practical needs -- "housing, a car, furniture, kitchen appliances, schooling for children," said one returnee. While overseas, missionaries use Foreign Mission Board-furnished vehicles and live in board-provided housing. Often the cost of shipping household goods to the United States, even in instances where the board provides assistance, prompts resigning missionaries to sell their furniture and appliances overseas.

Back in America, many no longer have a home base, and they need a car immediately. More than one expressed gratitude for such help as provision of a church's missionary house, a shower of kitchen needs or furniture loaned by church members.

Returning missionaries may "have to take a real step down in salary," noted Mel Torstrick, who works with furloughing missionaries and those who have left missionary service through retirement or resignation. Because of the wide range of duties a missionary may have handled overseas, pulpit committees in U.S. churches "cannot measure overseas service the same way they can with what a prospective pastor has been doing at another church," he said.

Placement assistance is part of Torstrick's assignment. He also offers hints on how to write a resume. Many missionaries have never written one, he pointed out, since they were appointed early in their careers.

The board for years has tried to provide a means by which returned missionaries might feel a part of the missions family. This is primarily done through Foreign Mission Fellowship, an informal organization of resigned missionaries, retired missionaries and returned journeymen. Its purpose, a brochure noted, is "to encourage and enable these persons to continue to play a vital role in mission support." Torstrick directs the fellowship; informal meetings are held in various parts of the United States.

To continue to be part of the missions team, many returnees said they still feel they can contribute to missions education. "Ask them to speak," one advised. "They still have a story to tell."

"People need to realize what a tremendous resource of experience a foreign missionary has to offer," declared another. "We feel that we came back from the mission field much better equipped than when we left. We also feel a definite stewardship to those experiences which we had and have enjoyed sharing them with our churches."

More than one returned missionary noted re-establishing identity sometimes is harder for missionary women than for their husbands. "Re-entering Southern Baptist life was much more difficult and traumatic" for his wife, wrote one man. "She felt that she had a professional role as a missionary, but back here she had no such role."

Reasons leading to missionary resignation identified by respondents reflect a wide range and closely mirror types identified by the board's staff during years of studies. These generally fall into three categories: Physical or emotional health problems of a missionary or family member; frustrations on the field, inability to adapt, disappointments, some lack of harmony; and a sense that God is redirecting their ministry.

"It was a leading of God's Spirit which we believe leads in different directions at different times, not just in one direction," declared a returnee who is a pastor in North Carolina. Another wrote, "We felt called to serve here just as we felt called to go" to the field.

Many respondents reported acceptance, if not full understanding, on the part of fellow missionaries. In some instances, colleagues helped in closing out work on the field. "Fellow missionaries could not understand our decision to resign," said one woman. "They loved us and tried to support our decision, but still questioned it."

All who responded feel they have found their way into productive roles in America. "My sense of fulfillment comes in seeing one of my former Acteens or one of the college students (with whom she works) make a commitment to missions and follow through," reflected one woman.

"My missionary experience has been of enormous benefit," wrote one. "It has gotten me involved in all kinds of ministries that I would otherwise have been afraid of -- such as hunger, race relations, social action, politics, poverty action. I now see the world through different eyes, and for that I am eternally grateful."

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Meeting Needs Emphasized
In Library Teleconference

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--A church media library's ability to meet the needs of people is more important than its size or the quality of its facilities, denominational leaders in media library work emphasized during a nationwide live teleconference Feb. 4.

The teleconference for church, associational and state media library workers was telecast on the Baptist Telecommunication Network and featured staff members of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church media library department and four state convention leaders.

In addition to an overview of church media library work, including the program's Bold Mission Thrust evangelism/ministry campaign emphasis, Impact 90, viewers called in questions to be answered on the air.

"A media library may operate from a box, from one shelf or the corner of a shared room," said Barbara Freese, consultant in the church media library department. She emphasized that small churches with limited space and resources can have a media library.

Keith Mee, manager of the program and field services section and teleconference co-host, said associations and churches are being urged to set goals in the areas of training, planning and new work.

"Every church and every association needs and can have a media library," said Mee.

As of Sept. 30, 1987, church media libraries registered with the department totaled 25,878.

Jean Adkinson, church media library consultant, praised media librarians for using the board's church study course system for training workers and the achievement guide recognition for improving the quality of their libraries.

In 1986-87, a total of 5,318 study course awards were given for media library courses and 368 media library diplomas were earned. Also, a total of 467 media libraries earned achievement guide recognitions.

Susan Warren, president of the Florida Baptist Media Library Association and media librarian at First Baptist Church of Brandon, urged librarians to promote use of the library among church members: "Media libraries do touch lives. Media libraries do improve learning."

That church media libraries include more than hardback books was evident in the questions called in by viewers. Topics included how to process videotapes, video cassettes and paperback books and the use of computers. Mary Draper of Atlanta, Ga., asked for help in planning space for a media library.

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Mee outlined a free service from the board's church architecture department whereby churches may send a drawing of proposed space and receive a drawing suggesting the best use of the space for a media library.

Twenty-one questions were called in by viewers during the 13-minute question-and-answer period. Mancil Ezell, director of the church media library department and co-host of the teleconference, said questions not answered on the air would be answered by mail.

State convention media library leaders participating in the teleconference included Eric Williams, Texas; Bill Carmichael, Florida; and Eleanor Yarborough, Tennessee.

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

Resort Ministries Conference
Explores 'Missions On The Edge'

By Mark Wingfield

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Imagine a darkened, blank wall lighted in only one area by the limited beam of a flashlight.

That small area of light represents the narrow section of the world penetrated by Christians, according to Sam Schlegel. The dark expanse of the wall is the fringe where unbelievers live.

Schlegel, experimental ministries and lifestyles missionary with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, spoke to about 50 participants in a regional conference on resort and leisure ministries at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He urged ministers to venture into "missions on the edge," taking the gospel to people with different lifestyles.

"If you can prove to me there is any group of people for whom Christ did not die, I want to know it," Schlegel challenged. The Bible says to take the gospel to all creatures, he said, noting, "But maybe there are some creatures we don't want inside our church."

Conference speakers explained the possibilities of resort and leisure ministries and the methods they are using to make such ministries successful. The conference, sponsored by the Home Mission Board and Baptist General Convention of Texas, coincided with spring missions week at Southwestern in Fort Worth, Texas.

Bill Lee, assistant director of the Home Mission Board special mission ministries department, said this was the first such conference to be held on a seminary campus. By allowing students to attend and including two conference speakers in seminary chapel programs, Lee hoped to interest students in resort and leisure ministries, he said.

One of those chapel speakers told students resort settings provide the perfect witnessing opportunity.

Greg Gearing, pastor of El Portale Baptist Church near Yosemite National Park in California, said he tried to determine from a pastor's perspective what would be the ideal setting to win a person to Christ. When he had completed his list, Gearing said, he realized he had described the ingredients of a resort or leisure ministry.

Leisure settings attract masses of people who are free from distractions, Gearing said. These people are enjoying settings that foster an awareness of God's presence and are willing to talk to strangers. Resort settings also provide a multitude of simple social needs Christians can meet to gain an introduction to the gospel, he explained.

Yosemite alone attracts 3 million visitors per year, Gearing said, asking, "Since they've already come at their own expense, wouldn't it be wise use of God's resources to win them to Christ while they're here?"

Tourists who might never be receptive to the gospel where they live often will listen when approached in leisure settings, he said, adding, "The barriers that keep them insulated from Christians are gone."

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Seminary students also heard from one of their own who recently has embarked on a resort ministry. Charlie Arnold, a 1986 Southwestern graduate, spoke in chapel about his work at South Padre Island, Texas.

Upon graduation from seminary, Arnold was called as pastor of Island Baptist Church on the five-mile-long Gulf of Mexico coast resort. South Padre Island is best known as temporary home to more than 15,000 college students during spring break each year.

This year, Arnold is coordinating a Christian concert on the beach with three major contemporary Christian musicians. This concert will be of the same professional quality as two other concerts that week sponsored by beer companies, Arnold said, but his will feature Christian testimonies and a call to commitment.

"We're praying that this year on this island we can glorify God instead of the devil," he said.

The situations described by Gearing and Arnold are not unique, said Bob Raus, professor of church recreation at Southwestern and conference coordinator. "There's probably not a church or association that doesn't have a resort ministry opportunity," he said.

Lee re-emphasized this need by insisting a biblical love for people should compel churches to find new ways to present the gospel. "We don't have to spend a lot of time figuring out God's will if there are lost people around that lake," he said.

The greatest need is to get pastors and churches interested in resort and leisure ministries, speakers said. Pastors often are reluctant to recommend members for resort ministry needs because they fear losing support out of their own church.

But the truth is that churches benefit by involving members in local missions, said John Farris, director of missions for Lamine (Mo.) Baptist Association. Farris has directed resort ministries around the Lake of the Ozarks since 1972. His association also sponsors a fun wagon for children and staffs a hospitality station at a highway rest area.

When church members get involved in missions, they "get excited about Jesus," Farris said. "They're not going to be the same dull people as before,"

Church missions groups often "grope for some meaningful project they can do," he said. So he goes to Baptist Woman's Missionary Union meetings and Baptist men's meetings across the association to promote resort ministries. After 16 years, he now has more volunteers than he has projects.

B.C. McCoy, director of missions for the Sabine-Neches (Texas) Baptist Area, agreed his success has come in finding volunteers "who would like to do something and have a sense of value afterward."

Rather than taking people out of the local church, resort missions often start new churches, creating a reproductive cycle, McCoy said: "Our goal is to plant churches. If these churches are begun with that resort ministry spirit, they tend to keep it up."

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Coalition For Biblical Inerrancy
Established By Missouri Pastor

By Trennis Henderson

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Baptist Press
2/10/88

BELTON, Mo. (BP)--Insisting that "the stakes are high in this battle," Missouri Baptist pastor David Baker has initiated the formation of the "Southern Baptist Coalition for Biblical Inerrancy."

Baker, pastor of First Baptist Church of Belton, Mo., wrote in the Jan. 20 issue of his church newsletter that he was seeking 50 men in his congregation to each contribute \$50 a year to the organization "until the battle is won." Baker added that "my prayer is that we will be able to enlist 1,000 people in the coalition by April, representing 250 conservative churches."

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Baker's actions follow his announcement last July that he was disbanding the "Missouri Inerrancy Fellowship," which he served as president at the time. Baker said in July that the Inerrancy Fellowship being disbanded was a direct response to the SBC Peace Committee's request that "all political factions ... discontinue the organized political activity in which they are now engaged."

At the time, Baker told Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, "We do not want to be part of the problem. ... Now we want to let the conservative shift take its course. We do not want to force the issue."

Describing the need for his current actions, however, Baker wrote in his Jan. 27 newsletter, "The moderate/liberal group has significantly intensified political efforts to 'take back' convention agencies and institutions. ... I had hoped to move away from 'political' meetings, but it seems that this battle must be fought consistently." Baker said the newsletter was mailed "to every church in the Missouri Baptist Convention, as well as to churches in Kansas and Nebraska."

The Missouri pastor cited "the need to inform Missouri Baptists" as one reason for his new political organization. While insisting that "it is not my intention to attack (Word & Way editor) Bob Terry," Baker charged that Terry's "editorial approach ... has often been inflammatory and at times misleading."

Baker announced plans for a "Rally for Biblical Inerrancy" March 24 at First Church of Belton. Among scheduled speakers are John Click, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church, Wichita, Kan.; Gerald Davidson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Arnold, Mo.; Tom Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla.; David Lucus, pastor of First Baptist Church of Oak Hill, Austin, Texas; and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College, Dallas.

The rally will focus on the theme, "A Baptist and His Bible!" It will be followed on March 25 by a breakfast meeting featuring a panel discussion by fundamental-conservative leaders.

Baker wrote that financial involvement in the coalition will finance "efforts to produce a monthly newsletter, schedule rallies and fellowship meetings and support related efforts to move our convention to a more conservative evangelistic position."

Jo Ellen Witt, president of the moderate-conservative group, Missouri Laymen United, responded to Baker's concern over increased moderate-conservative political activity. Noting that "we're not going to do anything in the way of rallies" in response to the Peace Committee request, she added that her group would continue to mail out its newsletter across the state, with the aim of "alerting laymen to the fact that they need to take part in the election process" of the Southern Baptist Convention.