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Parks assures missionaries
no doctrinal 'purge' ahead

By Art Toalston

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--No purge is under way of Southern Baptist missionaries, Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks has told the denomination's 3,800-plus overseas personnel.

Parks wrote to the missionaries after the board requested the resignation of missionary Michael E. Willett. The mission leader addressed questions and rumors beginning to arise as a result of the action in light of "suspicion and lack of trust" in the strife-weary Southern Baptist Convention.

Willett has been asked to resign by board administrators because they are not satisfied with the clarity of his views on the deity, miracles and resurrection of Christ.

Willett, from Liberty, Mo., has been in language study in Costa Rica and was scheduled to become a seminary teacher in Venezuela in August. Foreign Mission Board trustees will act on his status as a missionary during their July 18-21 meeting in Glorieta, N.M.

"This decision was made carefully and prayerfully in accordance with convictions of those of us who had to make it," Parks wrote to the missionaries. In Willett's case, he noted, board administrators' actions are "consistent with the guiding principles we have valued through the years."

One question being asked is whether the action is a result of pressure by conservative trustees, who now represent a majority of the Foreign Mission Board. Another question is whether Willett's expression of his views supporting women in ministry is the underlying issue. Willett wrote an article, "Opposition to women is unforgivable sin," in the April issue of SBC Today, an independent newspaper affiliated with Southern Baptist moderates.

"We must never get to the point where any group or individual is trying to pressure decisions for reasons other than the stated reasons," Parks said in an interview. "I would not be comfortable working that way, stating a secondary reason as the primary reason.

"We're working consistently with the way we've always worked. If that ever changes, I am publicly saying to the missionaries, 'I'll tell you.' If we ever get to the place where decisions are being made under pressure, I would tell the missionaries that."

He said his stance is "a matter of personal integrity."

Parks insisted Willett's theology is at issue. He said the missionary, in questioning some of the miracles of Christ recorded in the New Testament, falls short of a view of biblical authority necessary for teaching in a mission seminary.

Willett submitted a resignation letter June 18 but rescinded it July 7 after board officials reiterated that his theology was at issue. The missionary said he believes his theology is acceptable to Southern Baptists and that he is being martyred by conservatives for his views on women in ministry.

Willett was asked to resign after a review of concerns about his theology expressed by fellow missionaries in Costa Rica. The first missionary to voice concern, Michael McGinnis, from Birmingham, Ala., did so by writing to a minister in his home church. The letter received some circulation before another minister forwarded it to Parks.

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In writing to the missionaries, Parks noted, "The way concerns were expressed initially was improper and regrettable." McGinnis has "apologized for not going directly to the area director with his concerns," he added.

"The way we respond to questions regarding a missionary's doctrine, morality or integrity has not changed," Parks wrote. "When questions are raised, we go directly to the missionary involved. The decision we reach is based on discussions with the person involved and not on hearsay. The decision involves several staff. The staff then shapes a recommendation to the board if a change in status of the missionary seems necessary."

Controversy arising from a missionary's theology, Parks wrote, is rare. The Willett case "is not the beginning of a 'purge' of the missionary force," he said, but it "does indicate that decisions made in relationship to candidates and to missionaries are sometimes controversial."

"My hope," Parks said in the interview, "is that we can avoid as much as possible the distraction and debilitation that comes from rumors and suspicions about motives -- and that the missionaries can get on with their God-given task."

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Missionary to seek
Indonesian citizenship

By Marty Croll

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SEMARANG, Indonesia (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Clarence Griffin has begun to seek citizenship in Indonesia so he and his wife, Ruth, can continue their work in the absence of a permanent visa.

Griffin of Greenwood, S.C., said he will ask the Indonesian government's Religion Department to recommend to the Justice Department that he be allowed to become a full citizen of Indonesia. The process could take several years and eventually would cost him his U.S. citizenship.

At his retirement the 56-year-old Griffin runs a remote risk of not being able to regain his American citizenship. But he said he is willing to take that risk to gain the opportunity of the present. Working under the Evangelism Department of the Indonesian Baptist convention, the Griffins believe their primary concern now is helping Indonesians start new churches across the midsection of Java Island.

"We feel like the Lord wants us to stay here, and this seems to be the only way to stay," Griffin said.

Indonesia has informed missionaries who have been working there under Religion Department approval for 10 years or more that their visas will not be extended again. About 30 Southern Baptist missionary families, with some exceptions, could be affected during the next year.

The Griffins' visa extension runs out Aug. 12. Only if they are involved in applying for permanent citizenship might government authorities waive the restriction, Griffin said.

Last December the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board approved a policy allowing missionaries voluntarily to become citizens of certain countries where access is restricted. Indonesian immigration officials encouraged missionaries to make such a move. Missionaries to Indonesia first proposed the policy to the mission board last October.

The board's vice president for Asia and the Pacific, William R. Wakefield, said he expects some other Southern Baptist missionaries in Indonesia may make the same choice as the Griffins when faced with no other option to stay in the country.

The Indonesian Baptist convention set a goal in 1985 to start 500 new churches and develop 100 new pastors by the end of 1990. So far, 250 new churches have been started. In the responsive Semarang area where the Griffins live, they work with Baptists in about 100 churches, chapels and preaching points.

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For 26 years the Griffins have made Indonesia their home. They know the language, understand the culture, have a good working relationship with Baptist leaders and live in one of the areas of Indonesia most open to the gospel, Griffin said.

Mrs. Griffin of Cherryville, N.C., will remain an American citizen. This will allow Griffin to live in the United States with her when they are not in Indonesia.

Three of their four grown sons, who live in the United States, favor Griffin making such a move, he said, but the fourth had reservations. A brother of Griffin said he did not think the change is a good idea, but if God is leading Griffin that way, he could understand and would support him.

"The main thing is, it will allow me to stay in the country," Griffin stressed. "Then again, we don't have to make the final decision until later. The whole process could take several years. But this seems like the right thing to do now."

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Partridge heads south
on 'wings of prayer'

By Susan Todd

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RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Susan Partridge found more than just a few new friends at Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

She found a support system of 1,500 praying women who literally have prayed her to Brazil.

Each evening during the convocation, WMU national Executive Director Carolyn Weatherford led the group in a missions prayer. She shared Partridge's story with the group and asked them to join in prayer for answers.

Partridge, from Barron, Wis., was appointed as a Southern Baptist foreign missionary last summer at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center in New Mexico. Life has been one roadblock after another ever since.

After completing missionary orientation in November and December of last year, Partridge thought she would be on her way to begin working as a teacher at the WMU Training School in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. But she wasn't.

She began waiting and working through the onslaught of paperwork necessary to move into a foreign country. She applied for a visa, applied for acceptance into the country as a missionary and completed a myriad of other requirements.

Nothing happened.

Partridge had gone through orientation with three other missionary families headed for Brazil. Their paperwork was completed, and they left for Brazil in April.

"I was so disappointed, but I was reminded by something I had read to not point a finger at a person or persons saying, 'This is your fault,'" she said. "The book said to see how you can glorify God in things."

Partridge has done just that.

Her best opportunity came at Ridgecrest during WMU week. And 1,600 women got to watch as it happened.

The group prayed Monday evening, July 4, that Partridge's 11-week wait on her visa would end and that approval would be granted. Tuesday at 4 p.m., Partridge received word from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board that her visa had been granted.

Weatherford announced the good news during the Tuesday evening session. The message was met with a round of applause from the women whom Partridge has described as her support system.

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But the rejoicing was not over. One hurdle remained. Partridge needed to secure a seat on a plane to Brazil by July 20.

On Tuesday evening, Weatherford asked the group to pray that Partridge's plane ticket would be granted.

Partridge had contacted a travel agent on Tuesday with her request and was told nothing was available. The agent asked her to check back on Wednesday.

When she called Wednesday, Partridge reported, the travel agent said, "You must be living right."

The travel agent explained that a cancellation had just been received for a window seat in the non-smoking section of a plane headed for Brazil July 20.

Partridge told the travel agent, "No, it's not that I'm living right but the prayers of this group."

"You tell them their prayers worked," replied the travel agent.

Partridge gave all the glory to God for the turn of events: "I believe God allowed the delays for a purpose. I believe part of it is so that he would get the glory. And I think it has encouraged a lot of people to see their prayers at work."

And Partridge almost didn't even come to WMU week at Ridgecrest.

"I got to know Betty Lynn Cadle, the WMU executive director in Minnesota and Wisconsin," Partridge said. "She said, 'You've got to have an understanding of what's supporting you as you go to Brazil.'"

So Partridge came to Ridgecrest for her first time.

"It's been the most wonderful thing. I've never realized the support system that is behind missionaries," she said.

Both of her parents are dead, and she said she is especially thankful to have made special friends with the women of WMU. In a way, she said, these newfound friends take the place of family, knowing many Baptists at home support her.

"This week has been an unbelievable climax. I've been overwhelmed by it all," she said.

Of the women, she said: "They were so confident I'd hear something. I'm glad they have had a part in it.

"See, the neat thing about this whole thing is that God's getting the glory, and that's what I've wanted."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers from WMU

Unity strengthens BWA,
new leader Lotz claims

By Lynn P. Clayton

Baptist Press
7/14/88

MCLEAN, Va. (BP)--A world clock on Denton Lotz's office wall charts the sun's rising and setting around the world. A clock with less grandeur would not suffice to represent the parish of the general secretary-treasurer of the Baptist World Alliance.

Baptist World Alliance, the most widespread non-Catholic group in the world, relates to 137 Baptist conventions in 144 countries, and Lotz's background is suited to relate to such a cosmopolitan membership. He was elected to his post by the BWA General Council July 13.

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His experience also has taught him that Baptists around the world need each other, and each Baptist group has something important to share with the others, regardless of numerical strength and financial standing.

Lotz grew up in the Flushing area of New York City, the son of a lay Baptist preacher whose family were the first generation immigrants from Germany. His mother's family were first generation immigrants from Italy.

"Dad was a dedicated Baptist lay preacher -- a street preacher -- in the Bronx for 30 years who always wanted to be a missionary," Lotz recalls. "To be a Baptist in the setting of the Bronx meant something. It meant to know you were born again and different."

His academic training and early experiences reflect the international setting of his home and his father's love for books and study.

Lotz went to the University of North Carolina, where he was the president of the Baptist Student Union, expecting eventually to become a missionary to Japan. He applied to Harvard for post-graduate studies, received a scholarship and earned a Bachelor of Sacred Theology. From Harvard, he went to Germany, where he studied under Bishop Stephen Neal and Hermet Tilliche and received his doctorate in missiology in 1970 at Hamburg University.

He also managed to meet a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., Janice Robinson, who had served a term as one of the first Southern Baptist foreign missionary journeymen to Nigeria in 1965. Romance bloomed, and they were married. The union has produced three children: John Paul, 17, who was born in Geneva, Switzerland; Alena, 15, who was born in Vienna, Austria; and Carsten, 11, who was born in Kilchberg, Switzerland.

While studying in Europe, Lotz became involved in student evangelism.

He then became the fraternal representative to central and eastern Socialist countries in Europe for the American Baptist Churches, USA.

Later, he became professor of missions and homeletics at International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, a ministry of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, then headed by Penrose St. Amant.

While teaching in Switzerland, he met Gerhard Claas who later became general secretary-treasurer of the Baptist World Alliance. Claas brought Lotz onto the BWA staff as director of education and evangelism in 1980.

On March 21 of this year, Claas was killed in an automobile accident while on a fund raising effort in California. Lotz then was called upon to assume reins of the world-wide organization.

Lotz will serve in the BWA post until 1990, when he may be re-elected for another five-year term.

Lotz believes the BWA is important to all Baptist groups, including Southern Baptists who provide the largest share of its funding.

"Since 1905, the BWA has existed because as Baptists we know that we belong together as the body of Christ; there is something that unites us, and that is faith in Christ," he says. "We have made a conscious decision as adult believers to trust him.

"And our involvement with the BWA confronts us with Christ from a very different cultural background. It focuses us back to a biblical faith, saying to Baptists everywhere, 'I don't know you, but I love you in Jesus Christ.'

"It gives us a larger view beyond our local convention. It opens us up to receive brothers and sisters from other traditions."

The BWA, whose worldwide office is located in McLean, Va., "is not a missionary sending agency," Lotz stresses. "It is a fellowship of national Baptists. It enables national Baptists to work together as equals -- it is a forum for Baptist world leaders to think, speak, listen."

While BWA work is international in scope, it is comparatively small in budget. This year's receipts will be about \$1 million.

Still, Lotz stresses, it provides an avenue for smaller Baptist groups to make contributions to others: "The BWA provides an avenue through the Baptist Fund for World Evangelism for the Bangladesh Baptists' widow's mite to help Baptists in Liberia. It allows Brazilian Baptists to contribute to drilling a well to provide drinking water in India."

While the BWA is supported financially by gifts by national Baptist conventions, "We have many friends of the Baptist World Alliance who contribute directly to the ongoing work of the BWA," Lotz explains.

He expresses appreciation to Southern Baptists for their strong contributions in money and leadership and adds they still have much to gain from their relationship with the BWA.

"The BWA reminds Southern Baptists that 'when I am weak, then I am strong,'" he says. "Our strength does not consist in numbers or how much money we give. Our strength consists in how near to the cross of Christ we are.

"That might mean being in prison for my faith; being a pastor and receiving only \$30 a month; having no literature available; or having to borrow a book or a Bible that has been typed or copied by hand because there is no money to buy them. It might mean not being able to go to the university, or meeting in a building with no air conditioning or no building at all.

"The Apostle Paul is trying to tell us real strength comes from the weakness of the cross, which is the power of Christ which the world cannot understand.

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Nevada leader
Campbell dies

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RENO, Nev. (BP)--J. Walker Campbell, director of Bible teaching ministries for the Nevada Baptist Convention, died of a heart attack July 13. He was 58.

Campbell was an Alabama native and had been pastor of churches in Alabama, Louisiana, California and Nevada. He was pastor of West Oakey Baptist Church in Las Vegas immediately before he joined the Nevada convention in May 1986.

As a pastor, his churches were awarded five Eagle Awards from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in recognition of Sunday school growth.

He had been a member of numerous Baptist boards and committees, including the executive board of the Southern Baptist General Convention of California, which he chaired for one year, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He was a graduate of Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham, Ala., and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Campbell is survived by his wife, Mary; daughter, Pat Smith; son, Barry, a pastor in Reno; and three grandchildren, all of Reno.

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