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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Mary Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
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Desire to return to Lebanon
still strong for missionaries

F - CO
(MWBTS)
By Brenda J. Sanders

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Southern Baptist foreign missionaries Emmett and LaNell Barnes spent 20 years of their lives in Lebanon. Although they left the country more than a year ago, it's still on their minds, and they'd like to go back.

"We have some very close fiends there, and think of them often," Barnes said. "It would be good to return to Lebanon."

Along with other U.S. missionaries who served in Lebanon, the Barneses were instructed to leave the country in February 1987 by the United States government.

"Of course, there was a bit of danger there during the war," Barnes acknowledged. "But all of us (missionaries) who had to leave definitely felt a call to Lebanon, otherwise we wouldn't have been there."

For the past seven months, the Barneses have been on furlough in the United States, living in Memphis, Tenn., and traveling throughout various states, talking with churches about their work on the mission field.

In August, they will return to the Middle East, where they continued to minister after their exit from Lebanon.

On the mission field, Barnes is a seminary administrator; she is a church and home worker.

In 1966, they were appointed by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to Lebanon. After a year of Arabic language study in Texas, the Barneses ministered in the Middle Eastern country from 1967 to 1987.

Barnes, who considers Potosi, Mo., his hometown, was an Old Testament professor at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon, until 1977. He then became president of the seminary and continued to teach Old Testament classes.

Mrs. Barnes, a native of Monett, Ark., served the Beirut seminary as an English teacher. She also was involved in the ministries of their local church.

When Southern Baptist missionaries were forced to leave Lebanon, the Arab seminary was moved to Cyprus and Barnes continued to serve as its president. Mrs. Barnes worked at the seminary as a dietitian and made assignments for the kitchen and cleaning staff.

They will resume those roles upon their return to the Middle East.

Neither of the Barneses are fearful about returning. Both expressed a desire to return to Lebanon and said they hope the political situation clears up in the near future so that they will be allowed to do so.

Mrs. Barnes acknowledged times in Lebanon when "we had trouble very near us."

She recalled when a shell exploded behind their house. Windows in their home were broken, and shrapnel went through the laundry on the line.

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But most times, the fighting in Lebanon was not so near, she said. The missionaries were cautious in moving about Beirut and listened carefully to reports to know when danger might be close at hand.

"We knew the Lord was taking care of us," she explained. "We were there because we felt that was where God wanted us to be."

Barnes asked that Southern Baptists pray for the people of the Middle East: "Remember them as people who have been through a lot of difficulties. Especially pray for Baptist pastors and faithful Baptist church members there."

He also asked that Southern Baptists pray for the Arab seminary. "We have some people who will be retiring from the seminary in the next year or so, and we will have to replace them somehow," he noted.

Barnes attended Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., and graduated from Union University in Jackson, Tenn. He earned degrees at both Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. Mrs. Barnes also is a graduate of Union University.

Barnes said the training he received at those Southern Baptist institutions prepared him for missionary service.

In particular, he noted: "My experiences at Midwestern and Southern seminaries strengthened me intellectually and spiritually. My seminary studies really did prepare me for my life's work as a missionary. They prepared me for the new and different situations I have encountered on the mission field.

"I am very much indebted to my professors. I had wonderful teachers who were dedicated to knowing the truth and proclaiming it. Because of them, my confidence in God's truth in the Bible was developed, and I had a little steel put in my backbone. As a result, I am a more confident and bold person today."

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Preacher-mayor-judge
mixes faith, politics

By Lisa Manuel

F-10
(La)

Baptist Press
8/2/88

GILBERT, La. (BP)--Some folks say politics and preaching don't mix. Others say they are a lot alike.

When Woodson McGuffee discusses the two, he knows what he is talking about. He is mayor of Gilbert, La., judge, and pastor of First Baptist Church.

"I'm trying to walk a rope that hasn't been walked much by preachers," asserts McGuffee. To do that he says, "You've got to be out there where the action is to change things, but you've got to have the Lord there with you all the time."

He has been pastor at First Baptist Church of Gilbert for three years and was elected mayor a year and a half ago.

The 40-year-old minister says he decided to run for mayor after a man told him, "No preacher could ever win it."

"That kind of disturbed me," he says. "I believe a pastor not only preaches and is a minister to his church, but he is a minister to his community." So he ran for the office.

McGuffee's campaign cost was a whopping \$205. He bought newspaper ads and cards to leave on doors and paid a qualifying fee.

"Politicking. That's not really a big cup of tea, but I did it -- went door to door," he says.

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McGuffee recalls he knew he would win when he began campaigning. "I felt like I had something to offer the people, and when I started to run, I was encouraged by a number of people to run," he says.

His wife and two children and other kids in the community helped campaign.

But he faced opposition from preachers who disagreed with his decision. He reports: "I've been reprimanded for it. But you've got to realize I'm headstrong. I saw this as a mountain, and I thought I could climb it."

He won by a 66 percent vote.

Because legislation provides for the mayor to hold court in a town the size of Gilbert, which has a population of about 800, McGuffee acts as a judge once a month. Cases he hears most often are traffic violations, peeping Toms and fights.

About 10 percent of the 170 members of his church have come before him in court, and that presents problems, he notes: "Being a pastor and preaching in your church and getting along with your people is great. I've done it for 20 years. But to sit in the position of a judge, and your members come before you, then you look at them and hear that case, and you have to fine them or either place them in jail. That's not pleasant, but you have to do it."

Some members drop out of church as a result of his sentencing, but they eventually come back, he says.

McGuffee also is confronted by favor-seekers. "A lot of people ask their local officials sometimes to do things that are not even legal," he says.

Out of 390 tickets issued during his term, McGuffee says he has never fixed a ticket, but he has gone light on the sentencing, allowing violators to opt for community service or probation.

He also faces opposition from people who believe he fights for certain ordinances because he is a preacher. But he says he fights for ordinances such as open container laws because he is an American citizen, as well as a preacher.

"You can't drink a beer and drive around in this town. It's against the law. You don't do that around these juveniles. I don't like drunks around my kids," he explains. He does admit, however, his position facilitates adoption of certain laws.

Doing both jobs also makes ministry as he sees it easier.

The greatest benefit of being both pastor and mayor, McGuffee says, is that he can minister to everybody, regardless of race, creed or color. Although he has a policy of never discussing town business or politicking from the pulpit, he does minister to people who come to him at Town Hall with their troubles.

"There's more to ministry than in the church," he stresses. "We've got to get out of the confines of brick and mortar we're in and minister to the people."

"I find being mayor of this community, I minister to a lot of people."

McGuffee keeps a Bible on his desk and says he counsels with many people who have financial problems or problems with their children.

"There are several people in this town that were not members of any church that I was able to talk to, to minister to. I've been able to help them, pray with them, and that's been a ministry in itself," he notes.

He encourages them not so much to become Southern Baptists, but to become Christians.

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Another benefit McGuffee sees in doing both jobs is he can make a contribution to society. "I can't holler for change because I am the one that can make the changes now," he explains.

A change he would like to see in religious leaders is that they regularly attend town meetings, instead of "just showing up when there's a controversy."

He recently became honorary chaplain of the Louisiana House of Representatives. He also is a member of the Louisiana Commission for Employment of the Handicapped and a member of the Council on Aging for his parish.

McGuffee says state leaders need help, not criticism, stressing, "If we as Baptists in Louisiana would spend more time praying for these people than criticizing them, I think we'd have a lot better state."

McGuffee's term will be up in 1991, and he says he does not plan to run for mayor again. "It (the office of mayor) should be spread around," he relates.

Although he won't run for mayor, he may run for another office, but he's not indicating which one. "Ask me in two years," he says.

And where will he be five years from now?

"I will never give up my joy of the call of God to preach. Politics? Yeah, it'll be around, because I'm not going to sit on the sidelines and grumble. I'm going to do something about it."

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(Manuel is an intern with the Baptist Message, newsjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.)

Engineer hops off
'learning train'

By Lee Hollaway

F - CO
(SEED)

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Raymond Rigdon does not feel life is grinding to a halt. To him, it feels more like he is stepping off a moving train.

Rigdon, 68, recently completed a 19-year stint as executive director of the Southern Baptist Seminary External Education Division, an arm of the convention's six seminaries.

He has been chief engineer of the division's broadening efforts to provide ministry training opportunities to people unable to attend a regular seminary program.

Like any good engineer, Rigdon has a clear view of where he has been. "When I came to work for the seminaries in 1969, the Seminary Extension Department offered only one series of courses for everyone." Under his direction, the curriculum was expanded to three series, including pre-college and college-level courses, plus offerings for the continuing education of seminary graduates. Some of the courses now also are available in five languages other than English.

Within this decade, Rigdon has developed and introduced a series of master's level telecourses combining video presentations with a period of telephone interaction between the professor and students. He also has added new courses with a clinical component to the college-level series. The number of students enrolled in the division's programs has grown from about 4,000 in 1969-70 to 8,000 in recent years.

Even with his retirement date in sight, Rigdon kept "pouring on the coals." Within the past year he has led the Seminary Extension staff to begin work on eight new courses, one of which already has been released.

Rigdon also has studied the track ahead. If he had stayed on board for another five years, he says, he would have concentrated his attention in five areas: developing closer ties with individual seminaries, in addition to the cooperative enterprises; focusing on groups needing specialized training; encouraging all ministers to get involved in self-directed learning; looking at ways to apply high tech innovations to Seminary Extension and Seminary Studies; and pushing for development of an off-campus external degree plan.

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Retirement is not a word Rigdon applies to himself. "I'm looking at a career change," he says. After a couple of trips he and his wife, Doris, have planned, he expects to be engaged in research, writing and possibly some consultative work.

Several principles have kept Rigdon on track over the years.

"I feel the Southern Baptist Convention has a virtually inescapable responsibility to provide training for all of its ministers," he insists. "Those 50 percent of our pastors who don't make it to seminary ought to be able to expect just as much help from our denomination as those who do."

He also believes "learning should be a lifelong process," an idea he has lived as well as preached. "Diplomas and degrees may be milestones along the journey, but we must keep on learning every day, in every experience," he says.

Closely related to that is his conviction that learning never ends: "Even persons with the highest formal training need to continue their education on a systematic basis. The day we stop learning, we begin to lose some of our effectiveness in ministry."

Rigdon came to the staff of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in 1949 with an interest in leadership training, sparked in part by his studies under Gaines S. Dobbins at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. For the next 20 years, he was involved in lay leadership training through the board's church training department.

"When I moved over to the Seminary Extension Department, I began to gain a new appreciation of the importance of ministerial training," he says, "and I began to broaden my understanding of 'ministry.' It's more than just pastors -- it's also persons in education, music and other forms of ministry. It's more than just Anglo -- it's also Black, and Hispanic and Asian. It's more than just those who serve full-time -- it's also the thousands who serve bivocationally."

Rigdon sees denominational service as another form of ministry. "Each person who is working -- or has worked -- in the Seminary External Education Division is in ministry. Each one makes an important contribution to building up the kingdom."

People often ask him about his experience of working so long under the direction of six seminary presidents, who make up the division's governing board. Rigdon has worked with at least a dozen presidents over the 19 years, and he regards each as "a cherished, personal friend."

He had found them consistently kind and courteous, but he adds: "Of course, they did not always agree with each other or with me, so there were some frustrations. We were together, though, in wanting to equip students for effective ministry."

Rigdon is sensitive to the pressures the seminary presidents are experiencing in the current denominational climate. "I used to pray for them as a group," he observes, "but now, because of their unique situations, I pray for them individually."

After all the learning vehicles Rigdon has set in motion over the years, he denies having a favorite. He says, "I always got the most satisfaction out of the project I was working on at any particular time."

If Rigdon could give one last blast on his engineer's whistle, it would sound less like a moan than an escape valve, as he builds up steam for another run.

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CORRECTION: Please note the following correction in the 7/28/88 BP story titled "Deepen commitment to lost world, Southern Baptists challenged":

In the 16th paragraph (which begins: Challenged by the life of Sue Hays ...) the school where Hays is studying is Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, not Southern in Louisville, Ky.

Thanks,
Baptist Press