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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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July 30, 1990

90-97

John Newport leaving legacy  
of scholarship at Southwestern

By Chip Alford

*N-CC SWBSTS*

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--To many religion scholars, John Newport is known as a "Constructive Evangelical."

Those academicians view Newport as constructive because of his willingness to dialogue honestly with theologians of other beliefs, and evangelical because of his unwavering stand for Jesus Christ.

One of his former students, Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, describes Newport from a similar view. "He has helped his students put together the diverse strands of knowledge from various intellectual disciplines into a consistent worldview."

For more than 35 years, John Newport has expanded the religious worldview of students at Southwestern. He is retiring July 31 from the seminary.

And while Newport traveled across the United States and throughout the world, he found his home on the Southwestern campus.

"I've had a wonderful experience here at Southwestern," said Newport, who will leave a 35-year legacy of scholarship and leadership. "I found here a remarkable balance between scholarship and evangelism, between the theoretical and practical," he said. "Nobody could ask for a greater opportunity in terms of the fellowship on the faculty and working with the administration."

Newport first joined the Southwestern faculty in 1952, teaching philosophy of religion and Christian apologetics. He left in 1976 to become professor of religious studies at Rice University in Houston. He returned only three years later to work along side Dilday as vice president for academic affairs and provost.

Especially significant, Dilday said, is Newport's contribution to Southern Baptist apologetics, which "is already measurable in the lives of hundreds of students who are now serving around the world as ministers and missionaries. It can be observed also in the lives of young academicians who have been enlisted to join the faculty at Southwestern, and colleagues in theological education who have been inspired by his scholarship."

"I try to convey to my students a sense of the relevance, the excitement, and the urgency of the Christian gospel," Newport said. "This is where true freedom is, where true joy is, where true fulfillment is."

That excitement of the Christian faith has been part of Newport's life since his childhood days in Buffalo, Mo., where he lived only three blocks from the Baptist church and next door to the pastor. He was saved at a revival meeting at age 11 and baptized in a nearby river.

"God had been dealing with me and telling me that he wanted me for Christian service," Newport recalled. "So, finally, in a very traumatic experience in my home with my parents at the very last minute, I decided I would go to Southern (Baptist Theological) Seminary instead of law school."

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In addition to master's and doctorate degrees in theology from Southern, Newport has earned a master's degree from Texas Christian University, and a doctorate degree from the University of Edinburgh. He also has studied at eight other schools including Harvard University, Columbia University, and University of Zurich.

Newport also has written ten books.

In addition to his academic work, Newport has stayed in touch with the local church, serving as interim pastor for more than 50 congregations in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

After retirement, Newport will continue to live in Fort Worth with his wife, Eddie Belle. He will be a special consultant to the president for academic research, and also will continue to conduct doctoral seminars in philosophy of religion.

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

CORRECTION: In Baptist Press story "FMB chairman affirms Parks, announces Lottie Moon plan," dated 7/27/90, please make the following addition in the 6th paragraph:

During a trustee business session a few hours earlier, Hancock announced plans to invite more than 30 of the Southern Baptist Convention's pastors and others to the FMB trustees' October meeting ...

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

Baptist will be first woman  
to head College of Chaplains

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
7/30/90

ATLANTA (BP)--Elaine Hickman, a Southern Baptist chaplain, will be the first woman to serve as president of the College of Chaplains of the American Protestant Health Association.

Hickman was named president-elect by the body's 2,100 members this spring and will be installed to the office next March. After serving two years as president-elect, she will become president for two years.

The College of Chaplains is the certifying body for hospital chaplains of all faiths nationwide.

"I'm hoping this signifies a movement in the chaplaincy organizations of accepting people as people, not by any classification but for what they can do," Hickman said. "My sense is that we're ready to be more inclusive than exclusive."

About 25 percent of chaplains certified by the College are women. Membership includes 335 Southern Baptist chaplains of both sexes.

Hickman works at Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento, Calif., where she became the first Protestant chaplain to serve as a manager in a system of 12 Catholic hospitals. Mercy General is a 420-bed hospital with three full-time chaplains and five part-time chaplains.

Previously, Hickman served at Mercy Hospital in Bakersfield, Calif., and at AMI Brookwood Medical Center in Birmingham, Ala. She is a native of Heath Springs, S.C., and a graduate of Furman University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

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North Texas church  
reaches gang members

By Ken Camp

17-50  
(Texas)

DALLAS (BP)--Some suburban Dallas residents see Central American gangs in their community as a good reason to stay off the streets at night. But Valwood Park Baptist Church in Farmers Branch, Texas, sees the gang members as persons needing ministry.

Last November, under the leadership of missions coordinator Don Lund, Valwood Park Baptist Church started an apartment ministry at the nearby Valwood Village complex.

"The manager gave us an apartment rent-free on just one condition -- that we offer plenty of activities for the children to keep them out of trouble," said Lund.

To reach the large Central American population in the apartment complex, Valwood Park began its "Saturday Night At the Movies" program featuring Spanish-language Christian movies shown at no charge.

"One night, when we were showing 'The Cross and the Switchblade,' Gilbert -- a member of the Hispanic Connection gang -- was saved," said Charles Higgs, pastor of Valwood Park Baptist Church.

After making his profession of faith, Gilbert told Pedro Aviles, then pastor of Valwood Park's Latin American Mission, that he wanted to leave the gang, but he was afraid. He explained that gang "drop-outs" must run through a gauntlet in which other gang members beat them with heavy leather belts.

Aviles agreed to accompany Gilbert in talking to the gang.

In the process, Aviles led one of the gang leaders -- Pancho -- and another gang member to make a profession of faith in Christ.

Today, Gilbert, Pancho and the other former gang member are active participants in the Latin American Mission. The mission now averages more than 100 people in Sunday school under the leadership of pastor Al Levy.

Higgs noted many members of the mission have been reached initially through the Valwood Village apartment ministry. This summer, Hugo Morales, a graduating senior from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas, is leading a children's day camp and an English as a second language class at the apartment complex.

Texas Baptists have contributed to the outreach of Valwood Park's Latin American Mission through support of the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

Thanks to the various ministries of its apartment program, Latin American Mission and amnesty classes for undocumented aliens, Valwood Park Baptist Church is becoming known throughout Farmers Branch as a congregation that is interested in Central Americans and other Hispanics.

"We just realized that in order to reach these people, we would have to build bridges to them," Higgs said. "That's what's been happening."

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Death of rural Texas church  
births new Hispanic mission

By Ken Camp

N-CO  
Texas

Baptist Press  
7/30/90

DALLAS (BP)--The death of a rural northwest Texas community and the church that served it contributed to the birth of a new Hispanic mission in a neighboring town.

After several years of declining membership, Kirkland First Church, eight miles east of Childress, Texas, voted last year to disband and to give its fully furnished facility to Bi-Fork Baptist Area. About the same time, First Baptist Church of Quanah, Texas, was seeking a building to start a Hispanic mission.

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"We pursued several possibilities with Gerald Edwards, the church extension field consultant from the state convention, looked at some older buildings in Quanah, and did a thorough cost analysis," said Lee Roy Gibson, chairman of the missions committee at the Quanah church.

"The committee concluded that relocating the Kirkland Church would probably be the best way to go. We figured we'd get considerably more building for less money."

Last September, a brick facade was removed from the old church and it was jacked up, cut in half, mounted on trailers and moved 20 miles west to Quanah by way of winding back roads. The old building was relocated on a prime lot in east Quanah that was donated by a deacon at First Baptist Church.

As weather permitted, volunteers from First Baptist Church worked for several months alongside future members of the Hispanic mission in reroofing and rebricking the building.

After investing about \$70,000 and five months of labor in the building, First Baptist Church helped Agape Hispanic Baptist Mission dedicate its new facility in late February.

Agape now averages more than 35 people in Sunday school and had a high attendance of 62 children in Vacation Bible School.

The mission also has established two other preaching points in Hardeman County and one across the Red River in Eldorado, Okla., Gibson noted.

Texas Baptists share in the work of Agape Hispanic Mission through their support of the Cooperative Program and the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

In a special way, the former members of Kirkland First Church are able to rejoice in their unique contribution to the mission.

"Kirkland is a little rural community. Nearly everybody has moved out or died over the last 30 to 40 years. Very few live there now. But the few who were members of Kirkland Church are proud," said Herman Lancaster, director of missions for Bi-Fork Area. "They are proud their church building is able to be used as a church."

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Memphis churches merge,  
to begin new black mission

By Connie J. Umstead

F-00  
(Jmm)

Baptist Press  
7/30/90

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--After changes in the immediate community and a decline in membership prompted members of Lamar Heights Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., to vote to merge with another church, the congregation officially joined Cherry Road Baptist Church, also in Memphis, in early July.

Charles Dill, pastor of Lamar Heights, said the community surrounding the church began to change in the 1960s. Church members moved from the neighborhood, which in some estimates, is now 90 percent black.

Membership in the 75-year-old church has declined at a 13 percent rate each year since 1982. In 1988-1989, it declined more than 20 percent. Attendance went from 900 during the church's peak to only 85-90 on Sunday mornings. The average age was 70-75 years old and no youth or children attended.

The merger was "not only inevitable, it was God-oriented," Dill said. "I feel very comfortable about taking my people to Cherry Road."

The decision to merge was not made overnight.

In January 1989, Dill discussed the situation with the congregation. A survey was done later in the year to determine what members thought should be done -- whether the church should disband, merge with another, or give the property to Shelby Association. Dill said more than 70 percent wanted something to be done rather than go on as they were.

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In October, the membership voted to discontinue ministries at the Lamar Avenue location and seek to merge with another church, all to be accomplished within two years.

Dill mentioned the members' decision at a pastors' conference in Memphis, and also sent letters seeking invitations.

The church received eight invitations and considered six.

Cherry Road Pastor Reuben L. Trussell said he heard Dill mention the merger at the pastors' conference, but did not act on it.

Then Rob Finley, member of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis and son-in-law of a Cherry Road member, approached Trussell and encouraged him to respond to Dill's request.

Finley had been a supply preacher at Lamar Heights and felt the two churches were similar and would make a good match, Trussell said.

The next day, Trussell received a letter from Dill.

"I responded immediately and that's where it began," Dill said.

After studying the other churches, the Lamar Heights congregation voted in January to talk specifically with Cherry Road about a merger.

Committees were formed and a recommendation was made to phase in the merger which was completed July 1.

Wednesday evening activities were combined in May and Sunday evening services in June. Letters of Lamar Heights members were received into the Cherry Road church membership July 1, and ownership of the Lamar Heights property was deeded to Cherry Road.

Dill said Cherry Road was an ideal church for his congregation to join.

"Their people are much like our people, and are in the same socio-economic group. Many Cherry Road people are former Lamar Heights people."

Another reason the congregations are suited to each other is that both are interested in starting a mission at the Lamar Heights location.

Trussell said several in his congregation are concerned about churches relocating to the suburbs and abandoning mid-city churches because no ministries are replacing them. About half of the population of Memphis is black and there are only four or five black Southern Baptist congregations, Trussell explained. Through talking with people in Houston, Dallas and Atlanta where work with black missions is more in depth, he has learned that black people prefer to worship with black congregations.

"There is no Southern Baptist work in the vicinity of Lamar Heights with the black population," Trussell said. "We felt this would be a golden opportunity to help the community by establishing a mission. Our laypeople felt strongly about this."

A report of the joint committees of the two churches said Cherry Road, as the primary sponsor of the mission, will seek resources from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, the Tennessee Baptist Convention, Shelby Association and other churches.

There is one big drawback to the merger. It will leave Dill without a pastorate.

"People say, 'What's going to happen to you?' I don't know. I'm just going to stand in faith ... and wait until the Lord opens the door for me," Dill said.

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(Umstead is a news assistant for the Baptist and Reflector, newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.)