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June 7, 1993

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MARYLAND -- Maryland jail chaplain captive to a vision.
WASHINGTON -- Court right to refuse case on pledge, Baptist lawyer says.
ALABAMA -- WMU now accepting grant applications.
NASHVILLE -- Stewardship vice president joins children's home staff.
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Maryland jail chaplain
captive to a vision

By Bob Allen

Baptist Press
6/7/93

CUMBERLAND, Md. (BP)--Western Maryland jail chaplain Bill Hunt is a captive. Not, as his parishoners, literally behind bars, but to a vision for reaching souls and rebuilding lives on society's lowest rung.

Hunt first set foot inside a jail in his late 40s as a born-again Christian eager to share his new-found faith. Now an ordained minister, Hunt works full time as a Southern Baptist chaplain to prisoners in jails and work camps in western Maryland.

Hunt says the Lord made it very clear how and where he should serve. A few months after his own salvation experience in the fall of 1976, Hunt says he had a recurring dream about a young man in a T-shirt, white sneakers and tattered jeans sitting alone in a prison cell. Haunted by that image, Hunt began to check around for a jail ministry group. He managed to find one in time to become a last-minute addition to a team visiting the local jail to mingle and share their testimonies with prisoners.

"I had never been in one of those places in my life," Hunt says. He recalls feeling a shudder as the cell door slammed behind him. That sensation paled, however, to his astonishment at extending his hand to a 19-year-old black male prisoner wearing the T-shirt, white sneakers and jeans with worn-out knees he remembered from his dream. It was a powerful confirmation of God's calling that has held its grip on Hunt for more than 15 years.

"I know Southern Baptists aren't supposed to have visions," he says, "but I had one."

Now, Hunt says, he feels "at home" ministering behind bars. "It's where God wanted me and it's where I wanted to be. It's been 15 years and it's been a wonderful trip."

Hunt says God has equipped him for his ministry by giving him the ability to look beyond the acts committed by the prisoners to see them as objects of God's love in need of comfort, encouragement and salvation. "I have a compassion for them that never withers and never dries up," he says. "Whatever they do, I can still love them."

He admits he has had to pray at times about loving individuals accused of particularly heinous crimes. "I don't want nobody to go to prison," he says, "but I don't want them to hurt boys and girls, either."

Prisoners and jailers alike heap their praises on Hunt.

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"If it wasn't for Bill, I wouldn't make it in here," says, in a quivering voice, one prisoner serving 18 months for child abuse at Cumberland's Allegany County Detention Center.

Hunt sympathizes. "I tell a lot of them, 'If the shoe was on the other foot, I don't know if I could hang onto my faith,'" he says. "It's tough in there. A lot of guys are tough on" those who try to maintain an authentic Christian commitment behind bars.

Another prisoner, in his mid-30s, says he is awaiting trial on a string of charges based on an alleged assault of his girlfriend. The whole thing, he insists, is just a misunderstanding. "I've been running from the Lord for 25 years," he volunteers. "I've finally made up my mind I'm going to serve him."

Walking away, Hunt confides that the prisoner has been in and out of jail since age 19 and has spouted that story the whole time. However, Hunt is unbothered by the understanding that many of the people imposing on his good will are less than forthright. "You can't be sure when the Holy Spirit draws somebody," he says. "So you just spread the gospel. You let God do his part and you do your part. It works."

He refuses to speculate on how many individuals he has won to the Lord over the years. "I hate numbers," he says, admitting his record-keeping is the bare minimum to satisfy reporting requirements for small, monthly stipends he receives from the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware and Western Baptist Association. He describes himself as non-salaried and says funds from the denomination, as well as interdenominational supporters, go to ministry expenses.

Speaking generally, however, he says, "Over the years there have been a lot of them I thought were really saved. I sort of have an agreement with the Lord. I feel like they're going to be saved. I don't think the Lord would send you into a place like that and not honor it."

The Allegany County jail's administrator, John Bone, says Hunt is "one of the team here." The chaplain's visits, he says, ease tensions caused by overcrowding, discomfort and disputes between prisoners and officers. Hunt "has a great gift to talk to people," Bone says. "He has defused a lot of situations where we would have had to use physical force. ... I don't know where we'd be without him."

Bone says plans are being discussed for a new jail and he will insist Hunt's ministry be accommodated in the design. "The only thing he's asked for is a chapel," Bone says. "When we build, he's going to have one, even if it's in my office."

Hunt's ministry currently extends to three county jails and five youth detention centers. Glen Gamble, supervisor of one of the youth camps, agrees Hunt helps his staff do their job. "Without him, I don't think we'd be doing as well as we are doing," Gamble says.

Each Christmas, Hunt sponsors a visit to church for each youth camp. "They come back a whole different kid," Gamble says. "He makes them feel they're not away from home on the holidays," a time, Gamble says, when "it gets kind of jittery around here."

Gamble says Hunt's impression on the boys is significant. "The kids see us (staff), we're doing this because we are getting paid. He's doing it because he wants to."

Hunt values his access to the youth camps and focuses most of his energy there. "It's where I feel most of it should be," he says. "If you are going to change them, you need to do it before the clay is too hard."

"They're no angels," Hunt says. "They're tough kids but I always thought they were easy to get to, but you have to get their trust."

Hunt holds other activities, such as cookouts, but emphasizes Bible study in his work with the youth. "If they can get into the Bible, they can build their lives," Hunt says.

Oscar Ohler, Western Association director of missions, observes that some jail ministries fail because they never progress beyond playing softball or basketball. "Bill runs it so when a kid leaves (the institution) he can fit right into one of our Southern Baptist churches," Ohler says.

While Hunt has worked with Charles Colson's Prison Fellowship four years and has agreed to coordinate Prison Fellowship activities for a new federal prison scheduled to open nearby next year, he personally has little use for sophisticated programs in his own outreach to prisoners. "I don't use nothing but a Bible," he says. "That's what they need."

Though he is not a seminary-trained Bible teacher, Hunt says, "I don't believe you can be a Southern Baptist and not be a Bible student."

Hunt seldom attempts to keep track of a prisoner after he leaves a jail or camp. In fact, ironically, never hearing from a contact is a good sign.

"Usually, they go their own way," Hunt says. "That's a decision they have to make. If they want to stay in that (criminal) lifestyle, I'll see them again. If they get into a church, I don't."

Hunt emphasizes to prisoners the importance of finding a church, preferably Baptist, when they are outside. "They all ask me, 'Where is your church at?'" Hunt says. "They all want to come to my church. I'd like to have them, too." He tells them, "If you want to go to a church that teaches like I do," to attend a Baptist church.

However, it can be tough for former prisoners to find a church where they can thrive. "When they get outside, the most important thing they can do is get into a church family," Hunt says. But, he adds, "It's not familiar to them. They don't know how to act in it."

"When an ex-convict comes to the Lord, everyone puts their arms around them, but when he starts looking at one of their daughters ...," Hunt says, that changes. "It's hard for them to find a place."

At age 65, Hunt gives little thought to retirement. "In my heart, I'll know when it's time to quit," he says. "I knew when it was time to start and I'll know when it's time to quit."

He also has no time to worry about who, if anyone, will take his place. "The Lord will choose; you don't know that."

Hunt acknowledges that his ministry is unique but he doesn't regard it as special. "It's just natural with me. I've tried to do church things, like being a deacon. I can't make those things work.

Director of Sunday school? I think I'd go crazy." On the other hand, "They can't go to the jail," he says. "It's your calling."

Though he deals constantly with people in crisis and shares their pain, often with little visible result, Hunt says discouragement is not a problem. "I can't save anybody," he says. "I wouldn't want that responsibility. It makes my job so much easier to say, 'Lord, I want him saved; you want him saved; the Holy Spirit wants him saved -- I'll do my part and the rest is up to you.' It's a perfect plan.

"I don't get discouraged," Hunt says. "I just feel like the Lord will get it done one way or another."

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Court right to refuse case
on pledge, Baptist lawyer says

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
6/7/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court was correct in refusing recently to hear an attempt to overturn a law requiring public school recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance because of the inclusion of the phrase "one nation under God," a Southern Baptist church-state specialist said.

The court announced it would not accept the case after lower courts ruled such a law was neither an establishment of religion by the government nor a violation of the free exercise of religion.

"The lower courts reached the right result," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

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"Unfortunately, the lower courts had to rationalize the result in the language required by Lemon v. Kurtzman and similar Supreme Court precedents, cases which permit courts to uphold a government practice only if secular purposes and secular effects can be articulated," Whitehead said. "The lower court had to find secular, nonreligious reasons for permitting the word 'God' to appear in our pledge."

The Supreme Court's 1971 Lemon v. Kurtzman decision produced what came to be known as the Lemon test, which requires a government practice to survive a three-part standard to avoid being an establishment of religion:

- It must have a secular purpose.
- It can neither promote nor restrain religion.
- It must avoid excessive entanglement with religion.

The district court ruled the law requiring the Pledge of Allegiance passed the Lemon test because its purpose and effect were to teach secular values and principles, not religious ones.

The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals did not apply the Lemon test specifically in making its decision. It said the Supreme Court had recognized a difference between ceremonial use of the name of God and religious exercises.

Both courts ruled the free exercise rights of the student, Richard Sherman, were not violated because the law did not require every student to say the pledge.

"If the Supreme Court would jettison the Lemon test, lower courts might not have to go through such verbal gymnastics," Whitehead said. "A simpler test would state that government recognition and accommodation of religious values, including a common belief in God, does not amount to an establishment of religion.

"Neither is God's name cheapened nor made insignificant to millions of Americans simply because the pledge includes reference to God."

The phrase "one nation under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954.

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WMU now accepting
grant applications

Baptist Press
6/7/93

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union is now accepting applications for Second Century Fund grants. Applications will be accepted through Oct. 1.

The Second Century Fund is an endowment fund begun in 1988 as a gift to future generations of women in missions. All contributions are invested permanently with only the interest given annually as gifts.

Gifts are given in three categories: to develop missions organizations abroad; to enhance WMU leadership development in the United States; and to foster education about missions and WMU among Southern Baptist seminary students and faculty.

Grant recipients will be announced during the January 1994 WMU executive board meeting.

To date, 99 grants totaling more than \$291,000 have been awarded to individuals and organizations.

Grant applications are available from Second Century Fund, WMU, P.O. Box 830010, Birmingham, AL 35283-0010.

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Stewardship vice president
joins children's home staff

Baptist Press
6/7/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--John E. Rush, vice president of stewardship development for the Southern Baptist Convention's Stewardship Commission since 1976, has accepted a position with the Tennessee Baptist Convention Children's Homes effective July 1.

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Rush, *54, will be the associate vice president of development for the TBCH which operates three main campuses in Memphis, Franklin and Chattanooga and a Boy's Ranch in Millington, all in Tennessee. The state convention agency also operates three group homes in Burrville, Kingsport and Johnson City.

"I am excited about this career move to aid orphaned, neglected, dependent and abused children," Rush told Baptist Press. "I believe this ministry transition is God's will for my life and ministry. I hope my ministry can have a positive impact toward helping children and their families experience the love of Christ and become whole person in Christ."

According to Gerald L. Stow, TBCH president/treasurer, Rush's new position will be to assist in designing and implementing a comprehensive plan of public relations and helping raise financial support for ministry to more than 400 children who annually live in the homes.

Rush has written for SBC periodicals, led numerous conferences and was a marketing specialist for the Stewardship Commission. Prior to 20 years of denominational service in Nashville with the commission and the Baptist Sunday School Board, Rush was a pastor and on church staffs for 17 years. He is a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

He and his wife, Kay, have three grown sons. The couple are members of Clearview Baptist Church in Franklin.

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(BP) photo available upon request from (BP) central office in Nashville.

MEDIA ADVISORY concerning (BP) story 6/3/93 titled "Glorieta not affected by mystery illness": Regarding the mystery illness in New Mexico and concerns some persons may have relative to attending conferences at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, medical experts now feel the illness may be related to rodent droppings. No deaths have been reported since May 29 and, for now, news reports indicate the crisis may be over. Glorieta has experienced its largest attendance (2,200 persons) for opening week in 10 years.

Director Larry Haslam said the numbers of last-minute cancelations and persons who arrived without reservations appeared to be normal. The Sunday School Board's communications department will advise you if any new facts or circumstances warrant consideration by persons planning travel to Glorieta.

EDITORS' NOTE: In the (BP) story 6/4/93 titled "Study group affirms '63 BFM, targets theological revisionism," please add the following as the last paragraph:

In addition to George and Honeycutt, committee members are William Bell of Dallas; J. Walter Carpenter Jr., Houston; Mark Coppenger, Nashville; Stephen Corts, Charleston, S.C.; Carl F.H. Henry, Arlington, Va.; Herschel H. Hobbs, Oklahoma City; Richard Land, Nashville; R. Albert Mohler Jr., Louisville, Ky.; and William Tolar, Fort Worth, Texas.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "June 14 meeting scheduled by Lloyd Elder in Houston," dated 6/3/93, please correct the 11th paragraph's first sentence to read: "Elder said he has received a sizable favorable response to the proposal, with two or three negative responses, after mailing 6,300 copies of it to ..."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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