



Nashville, Tennessee
**Associated
Baptist Press**

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April 25, 2000

(00-35)

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**Philosophical concerns play minor role
in missionary attrition, IMB study finds**

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Political conflict and changes in philosophy at the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board have not significantly increased turnover of missionary personnel, IMB trustees were told during a recent board meeting in Fort Worth, Texas.

The percentage of the missionary force being lost to death, resignation or termination has been slightly elevated in recent years. And a wave of retirements has swept the missionary ranks. Record appointments of new missionaries, however, have offset losses to bring a net increase in the number of SBC international missionaries, officials report.

The number of career and short-term missionaries under appointment at the end of 1999 totaled 4,815.

IMB staff members highlighted results of an annual personnel-attrition study after several trustees asked specific questions about the data, said David Garrison, associate vice president for strategy coordination and mobilization.

Trustees wanted specifically to know if "New Directions" -- a recent reallocation of missionary resources away from traditional fields of work either to areas that remain largely unreached with a Christian witness or where people are most responsive to the gospel -- has increased the IMB's attrition rate.

The answer to that question is "no," Garrison told the trustees.

Of 272 missionaries who left IMB appointment in 1999 for reasons other than retirement, only 26 (9.56 percent of total attrition and one-half of 1 percent of the total missionary force) cited disagreement with IMB philosophy, policies, staff or structure as a contributing reason, Garrison said.

He admitted some who resigned could have failed to cite their true feelings about IMB philosophy changes but expressed confidence that was not likely to have been true in many cases.

Overall, the IMB's attrition rate in 1999 was 5.35 percent, the second highest in the past 10 years. The highest rate of attrition (5.55 percent) was recorded in 1992, the year former President Keith Parks resigned

and trustees created controversy by defunding a seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland. Fifteen missionaries resigned in protest of that action.

Otherwise, attrition rates for the decade averaged around 4 percent annually.

Information for the study came from a lengthy survey form completed by missionary supervisors each time a missionary resigns, dies or is terminated. Individual missionaries do not fill out a similar form.

The most common reason cited by missionaries leaving appointment last year was a change in their understanding of God's call. That explanation accounted for 25 percent of all departures.

"Fifty-eight individuals resigned because of a change of call; six resigned because they felt they were never really called; and four resigned because their families in the U.S. did not affirm their call," noted an executive summary of the study Garrison presented to trustees.

Other reasons most frequently cited for resigning were taking a stateside job (18 percent), issues related to missionary children (16.54 percent) and personality concerns such as problems with self-esteem (12 percent). Concern about IMB policies, philosophy and procedures ranked fifth in the list.

Other reasons given in more than 8 percent of all resignations were concerns about family back in the United States, difficulty adjusting to the mission field, work-related issues, health issues and interpersonal problems.

Seen on a worldwide scale, missionary attrition rates ranged from 2.39 percent in East Asia to 8.65 percent in the Caribbean Basin, the report said.

In addition to the Caribbean, the highest attrition rates were found in West Africa, Eastern South America, Western South America, Middle America and Western Europe.

These higher-turnover regions tend to be "older, more traditional fields," Garrison said. On the flip side, the regions recording lower attrition rates tend to be the newer, developing mission fields.

A notable exception is West Africa, which experienced an attrition rate of 8 percent last year but is a newer, growing field of service. "It is not a traditional field, but a tough, tough place," Garrison said.

Age plays a significant role in predicting which missionaries will resign, the study found. Half of all those missionaries lost to attrition last year fell within the 41-50 age range -- twice the percentage of attrition found in the next-highest age bracket, 30-40.

This is understandable, Garrison said, because the mid-life years of 41-50 are when adult children take on more responsibilities for aging parents, when children go off to college and when personal life crises often crop up.

More than half the missionaries lost to attrition last year had served eight years or more, but 31 percent had served five years or less.

That's a commendable track record, Garrison maintained, when compared with the average tenure of a pastor in a Southern Baptist church, which is about three years.

The study found that those with previous missionary experience are the most likely to be retained. Those who served short-term assignments as Journeymen or International Service Corps volunteers prior to career missionary appointment accounted for only 8 percent of last year's attrition, while those with no prior overseas experience accounted for 91 percent of the 1999 attrition.

In addition to resignations, a trend toward higher rates of missionary retirements continues.

The report did not indicate whether the increase in retirements was due simply to demographics or if other factors, like missionary dissatisfaction, also played a role.

The number of retiring missionaries peaked in 1991. A total of 105 missionaries retired that year, compared to 68 the year before. That was a year of highly strained relations between then-president Parks and trustees, which eventually led to his departure early in 1992.

The number of retirees fell back to 64 in 1992, then spiked again to 103 in 1993. From 1994 through 1999, retirements have ranged from 64 to 99.

Meanwhile, the number of new missionaries being appointed continues to climb every year, more than offsetting any losses to attrition and retirement.

For the near future, "we're looking at projections that we could have 8,000 missionaries, up from less than 5,000 now," Garrison said.

He credited a greater sense of connection between stateside churches and the missionaries they send out and the impact of volunteer missions projects as contributing factors.

"We're seeing a lot more young people coming out first for short-term service," Garrison explained. "Our big growth categories are Journeyman and International Service Corps."

The Journeyman program is for recent college graduates who commit two years to overseas assignments. International Service Corps is a more flexible program of volunteer service with varying terms of duration.

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Heifner to head development for Baptist Joint Committee

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A development officer at a Baptist university has been named director of development for the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington, D.C.-based religious-liberty organization.

Todd Heifner, director of endowment and capital funds at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., since 1995, will begin his new duties May 1, according to BJC Executive Director Brent Walker.

The BJC's Executive Committee unanimously approved Heifner's selection to fill the newly created position.

"He's a consummate development professional who is passionate about religious liberty," Walker said. "That's a win-win formula."

Walker said the agency moved to hire a development professional so it would be able to expand educational and other religious liberty programs.

Heifner called his move to the BJC "an opportunity to raise money for an organization that traditionally has not had a development shop."

Heifner said the Baptist Joint Committee "is really shaping the dialogue " on issues of church-state separation and religious liberty. "An opportunity to work with such a well-recognized Washington group is the chance of a lifetime in my mind."

Walker predicted Heifner "will be instrumental in taking our annual giving to a new level."

Heifner will also work with BJC Endowment President James Dunn to "build an endowment that will ensure the BJC's financial viability into the next century," Walker added.

Heifner, who will maintain an office in Birmingham, earned a bachelor's degree in public administration from Samford in 1991. In 1998, he earned a master of business administration degree from Samford and a master of education in higher education administration with a concentration in fund-raising management from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

Heifner expects to complete work on a doctorate in political science at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in August 2001.

Before joining Samford's development staff, Heifner served as an account executive for BellSouth Business Systems in Birmingham and as a specialist in corporate and external affairs for BellSouth in Montgomery, Ala.

Heifner, who served as a BJC intern in 1989, was named to the agency's board of directors last year.

In Alabama, he chairs the Governmental Action Committee and serves as a trustee of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce. He has also filled various rolls for the United Way of Central Alabama and is a member of the board of directors of the Downtown Jimmie Hale Mission, an inner-city homeless shelter.

He is a member and deacon at Riverchase Baptist Church in Birmingham. His wife, Catherine "Kit" Heifner, is a systems analyst with Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Alabama. They are the parents of a 2-year-old son, Graham.

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Mississippi governor challenges Baptist student summer missionaries

PASS CHRISTIAN, Miss. (ABP) -- Mississippi Gov. Ronnie Musgrove recently challenged Baptist student summer missionaries to dream the unlikely.

"When I was accepted to law school at Ole Miss, I thought maybe they had made a mistake," Musgrove told 120 summer missionaries at a training conference April 7-9 at Gulfshore Assembly in Pass Christian, Miss.

Musgrove, a member of First Baptist Church of Batesville, Miss., said he showed up for his first class 30 minutes early to get a feel for how he stacked up against the other first-year law students.

"There were four or five other guys already in the classroom, so I sat next to this guy and started talking to him," the newly elected governor related. "I quickly reached two conclusions," he continued. "First, I wasn't that impressed with the guy I talked to, and second, they accepted him into law school, so I felt better about my own chances."

The other student's name was John Grisham, the best-selling author.

"I've heard him tell a large crowd the same very thing about me," said Musgrove, who became Mississippi's 62nd governor Jan. 11. A Democrat from Batesville, Musgrove previously served as the state's lieutenant governor.

Speaking to college and university students preparing to spend their summer vacation as short-term missionaries in various spots across the United States and abroad, Musgrove described his own Christian conversion during a week-long revival when he was 13.

"The preacher preached a sermon that convinced me I was not saved," he recalled. "I was convicted that I had to establish a relationship with Jesus Christ, so he could forgive me of my sins and be savior of my life."

Still, Musgrove said he resisted God's call. "I'll never forget gripping that pew and looking up at the Lord and saying, 'I'm not ready to do this,'" he said.

After six nights, however, Musgrove said he ended up on the front row, where there was no pew in front of him to grab. "I could not resist any longer," he said. "I told the Lord I was a sinner and asked him into my life."

"Because of this, my entire life has changed," he said.

Musgrove offered the students other suggestions for living. He challenged them to live with conviction, to make meaningful commitments and to seek always to build consensus.

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-- By Carl White and Bob Allen

Speaker Ann Graham Lotz planning revival events

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Organizer Ann Graham Lotz says she will be sorely disappointed if "Just Give Me Jesus" gatherings in five cities this year result in anything less than revival.

"I don't want to be part of another event. I'm too tired and too busy for that," said the daughter of famed evangelist Billy Graham.

"If God doesn't send revival, if it isn't life-changing for those involved, I'll be doing something else this time next year," added Lotz, founder of AnGeL Ministries in Raleigh, N.C.

Lotz will join Kay Arthur of Precepts Ministries International as a featured speaker at a two-day "Just Give Me Jesus" gathering, scheduled May 5-6 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Janet Denison, whose husband, Jim, is pastor at Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, chairs the local steering team for the North Texas event. Similar revival services are scheduled in Knoxville, Atlanta, Kansas City and San Diego.

The interdenominational gatherings grew out of Lotz' desire to see Christian women focus on revival and a more intimate spiritual walk.

"I believe there is a desperate hunger for Jesus and for the truth given plain," said Lotz, a member of Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C.

"It is so easy for individual believers to become dulled by prosperity, anesthetized by the comforts and conveniences in our lives," she said. "It's dangerous when we think everything is fine and beautiful, but there is no power."

While Lotz said she feels honored to have been invited to speak at various denominational meetings and conferences, she has grown frustrated with seeing her message advocating revival sandwiched between announcements and business sessions.

"There were times when I thought revival could have broken out, but it wasn't on the program," she said.

About three years ago, she began developing the concept of a two-day revival meeting primarily -- but not exclusively -- for women. The events would be made available at no cost to participants, and she wanted to enlist the support of local churches in prayer and follow-up.

Following the five scheduled revivals, local churches in the respective cities will offer an eight-week Bible study. "The Vision of His Glory," produced by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, is a video-based study of the New Testament book of Revelation.

Lotz says her expectations are simple and straightforward. She plans to see revival.

"It will be characterized by repentance of sin growing out of a deep conviction of sin," she predicted. "It will be characterized by a recommitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord. It will be characterized by a recommitment to the Word of God -- to obeying God' Word."

She predicted the meetings would have a long-term effect. "When revival comes, it's not just for a weekend," she explained. "It's a lifetime commitment."

Revitalized Baptist church reaches out in neighborhood

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- The neighborhood around North Dallas Baptist Church has been through plenty of changes. Ellis Watkins has seen them all in his 70 years as a church member.

The 80-year-old deacon chairman remembers when the area north of downtown and southeast of Love Field was predominantly white. In recent years, influxes of Hispanic, African-American and Asian populations have contributed to a multi-cultural mix.

Many of the church's longtime members responded to the changing neighborhood by moving away. The average attendance, which stood at 580 in the early 1950s, plummeted to 30 by the mid-1990s.

"We lost a lot of the regular old-timers who resisted change," Watkins explained. "People don't like change."

Watkins was among those who moved from the neighborhood, but for more than 40 years, he has continued to commute across town to attend church.

"I elected to stay here," he said. "I guess I egotistically thought it was where I could make a contribution."

One such contribution was to serve on the board of Crossover Ministry, an effort to bridge cultures and reach the community around North Dallas Baptist Church.

Crossover Ministry is co-sponsored by Park Cities Baptist Church, Audelia Road Baptist Church, First Baptist Church of Carrollton and Wilshire Baptist Church, in cooperation with Dallas Baptist Association.

Texas Baptists have helped to support Crossover Ministry through their gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions.

"Crossover Ministry grew out of a desire to keep the facility open and to keep the ministry here going," said David Whitson, pastor of North Dallas Baptist Church.

Whitson came to the church "on a six-month commitment" in January, 1996, after 33 years on the mission field in Tanzania, he recalled. His predecessor had died, and Whitson agreed to help "bring closure" to the grieving congregation. But once he arrived, he became convinced that God wasn't finished with North Dallas Baptist Church.

Through Crossover Ministry, the church facility became a beehive of activity. A Vietnamese mission sponsored by First Baptist Church in Carrollton meets there. So does Iglesia Bautista Ebenezer, a Spanish-speaking congregation that has grown to twice the size of the North Dallas Baptist Church congregation.

At one time, an African-American mission also shared the facility. When that congregation relocated, a number of its former members chose to stay behind and join North Dallas Baptist Church.

The multi-cultural congregation is now about half Anglo, 30 percent African-American and 20 percent English-speaking Hispanic and Asian. Pastor Whitson is white, and the associate pastor, Michael Kimbrough, is black.

"We want to get people in the community on board," Whitson said. "Our primary objective is to develop local leadership, and it is beginning to emerge. There are no short cuts. It takes a lot of nurturing, love, patience and growing in the Lord."

In an effort to reach out to the community, Kimbrough organized a neighborhood block party at a nearby park on April 15. He enlisted the support of numerous congregations, Dallas Baptist Association and Criswell College.

More than 500 residents -- mostly children and youth -- attended the event, which included soccer and basketball games and entertainment by illusionists, mimes, clowns and musicians.

"It would take us months of going out, knocking on doors, to reach this many people," Watkins said.

Volunteers painted faces, twisted balloons into animal shapes, gave away refreshments, and shared their faith with anyone who would listen.

"Our main purpose here today was to see people snatched out of the devil's hand," Kimbrough said at a rally concluding the event. "We brought Jesus to the streets."

At least 15 people accepted Christ at the block party, and a resident at a nearby boarding house that is known as a center of drug dealing and prostitution offered to let Crossover Ministry start a Bible study in his apartment.

The morning after the Saturday block party, 11 first-time visitors attended North Dallas Baptist Church. Two made public professions of faith, and one joined the church by transfer of membership from another Baptist church.

Reflecting on the block party and the renewed vision for community outreach at North Dallas Baptist Church through Crossover Ministry, Watkins observed: "It does my heart good. This is what we're supposed to be about -- winning the lost to Jesus."

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