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### Helms, ultra-conservative icon, steeped in moderate Baptist life

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- Jesse Helms, the Baptist former senator who battled communist oppression but backed right-wing dictators and opposed abortion while appealing to racist sentiment, was a polarizing figure who was lionized by some conservatives and vilified by many liberals. The Republican, who died July 4 at age 86, may also be remembered as an example of the vast diversity still found in mainstream Baptist life.

Helms represented his native North Carolina for three decades in the Senate before retiring in 2003. His body lay in repose in the sanctuary at Hayes Barton Baptist Church in Raleigh July 7, and his funeral was held at the church July 8.

The ultra-conservative senator's long-time membership in the moderate congregation -- affiliated with both the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention -- may surprise some observers. Baptist historian Bill Leonard said July 8 that he knew Helms was a Hayes Barton member, but was "floored" to learn that the late senator had been a deacon at the church, which employs a female associate pastor.

"I think that's part of the irony and complexity of Baptist local autonomy," said Leonard, who is the dean of the Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C. Helms "was a man of consistent conviction to conservative ideals and courage to faithfully serve God and country based on principle, not popularity or politics," said Billy Graham, in a statement released shortly after Helms' death was announced. The long-time evangelist had been friends with his fellow North Carolinian for years.

Richard Land, head of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said it was appropriate that Helms died on Independence Day. "He was a patriot. ... He was a very strong pro-life, very strong pro-family and very strong anti-communist advocate," he noted, according to an article from Baptist Press, the SBC's news agency.

But moderates, liberals and some conservatives noted several of the dark spots on his record, most notably Helms' strenuous opposition to virtually all civil-rights legislation that came before Congress during his tenure.

He first rose to prominence in North Carolina as a television journalist in the 1960s. As an executive of the company that owned Raleigh's WRAL-TV, a CBS affiliate, he became famous for delivering five-minute nightly commentaries during the station's evening news broadcast. In them, he frequently railed against "the so-called civil-rights movement," big government, taxes and those he viewed as cultural elitists. He once infamously referred to the University of North Carolina in nearby Chapel Hill as "the university of negroes and communists."

After Helms was elected to the Senate in 1972, he opposed civil-rights legislation and backed the racist apartheid regime in South Africa. In 1983, he led an unsuccessful filibuster to prevent the creation of the federal Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, claiming that historians had not adequately explored King's and other civil-rights leaders' alleged ties to communists.

Helms never apologized for any of his views on civil rights and in later years defended himself, saying he opposed the movement not on racial grounds, but on states'-rights principles. He -- and his defenders, such as Land and former Kansas senator Bob Dole -- pointed to his personal friendships with African-Americans, including some who worked on his Senate staff. One of them was James Meredith, the black man who integrated the University of Mississippi.

But his fellow conservative David Broder, writing a column about Helms' retirement from the Senate in 2001, called him "the last prominent unabashed white racist politician in this country -- a title that one hopes will now be permanently retired."

He faced similar criticism for his foreign-policy views. After Helms was elected to the Senate in 1972, he used his perch as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to battle the threat of communism in the Third World,

and particularly Latin America. He gained a reputation as a supporter of many right-wing military dictatorships, most notoriously that of former Chilean president Augusto Pinochet.

Helms also had a close association with right-wing El Salvadorian leader Roberto d'Aubuisson. He was identified by the State Department as the man who ordered the murder of San Salvador Archbishop Oscar Romero -- done while the anti-poverty activist presided over the cathedral altar at a communion service.

Helms also came under heavy criticism for his staunch opposition to funding for AIDS research and relief, once saying that responsibility for every instance of the disease could be traced, ultimately, to "sodomy." Late in his career, Helms changed his mind on AIDS relief -- thanks to the efforts of rock musician and global activist Bono -- and supported \$500 million in funding to help fight the global scourge.

The SBC's Land acknowledged that Helms had "blind spots," noting the late senator's staunch support of the tobacco industry. "And, while there was ample evidence that he was not personally a racist, when he opposed the Martin Luther King Holiday as vigorously as he did, it was not one of his finer moments," he said in the BP article.

But Helms was reportedly well regarded at his Raleigh church, where he served as a deacon and in other roles. The congregation has long been active in moderate Baptist life, with many members serving in leadership roles with CBF and other organizations that resisted the SBC's rightward movement in the 1980s. Helms also donated his personal papers and endowment funds to Wingate University, one of two moderate Baptist schools (along with Wake Forest) he attended. They are now housed at the Jesse Helms Center on the university's campus in Wingate, N.C.

Wake Forest's Leonard said that Helms' long-time support of a church and a school that many of his political allies would regard as liberal or even heretical is illustrative of "the complexity of Southern religious life, particularly with regard to the Southern Baptist Convention." Mentioning Helms alongside fellow Baptist Jimmy Carter, Leonard said, both "have, apparently, maintained deep ties to what I would call a kind of traditional pre-controversy Southern Baptist identity."

One way to explain that, the Wake Forest University Divinity School dean said, is that, "Just as all politics is local, all ... Baptistness is local. And apparently Jesse Helms invested his life in a congregation and decided to stay in that congregation even though he had differences with ... the direction of that congregation in the [SBC] controversy."

### **Third-World Faith: Hub of world Christianity shifts to 'Global South'**

(ABP) -- Sounds of laughter, tambourines and native instruments reverberate through a tiny apartment as a small group of Christians gathers for fervent worship. Despite oppression under Islam and the Soviet system, these Central Asian Christians dance and sing with joy with the freedom they have found in Christ.

Their relationship with Christ is more important to them than their own lives. The gospel is not just a story to study, but is their daily connection to hope and the message to share with their community.

This is contemporary Christianity.

During the last few years, Christian scholars, such as Philip Jenkins, author and professor of religion at Pennsylvania State University, have noted the center of global Christianity has shifted to the Southern Hemisphere and other developing nations that missiologists often refer to as the "Global South." The center has left the United States and Europe and headed to Latin America, Africa and Asia, where churches have seen unprecedented growth despite persecution and opposition.

The number of Christians in North America is smaller than the number of believers in Africa, Latin America and Asia. By 2050, China, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Ethiopia and Uganda will dominate the list of the 10 nations with the largest Christian populations, according to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.

World events outside the United States and Western Europe have served as catalysts for the shift, said a mission worker in Central Asia, whose name cannot be published for security reasons. After years of oppression and poverty, people are finding freedom and hope through a relationship with Christ. "When you look over the past 100 years, one of the most deadly ideologies that killed more people during the 20th century was communism," the worker said. "Yet, today in places where communism existed, we have seen some of the greatest advance of the gospel over the past 15 years.

"Today, radical Islam is having a similar effect in certain locations in the Muslim world. People have grown weary of living under the oppression of Islamic fundamentalism and are starting to turn to Jesus in places that we can't even report right now."

Billy Kim, former pastor of the 20,000-member Suwon Central Baptist Church in Suwon, South Korea, said people feel like they have to rely on God in areas with widespread poverty and persecution. "As you go to affluent Europe, the United States and Australia, churches seem to decline," Kim, who served as president of the Baptist World Alliance, said. "But when there are problems of war, tragedy and poverty, like in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the church is

growing and people are looking for hope.”

Now that Christianity has penetrated these societies, Christians are taking the gospel into the community, meeting people where they live instead of expecting them to come to a church building to experience a programmatic approach to religion.

Stan Parks, strategic catalyzer for Southeast Asia with the Global Connection Partnership Network, said that South Korea is now the second-largest missionary-sending country in the world. India, Brazil, Nigeria, the Philippines and China launch the next-largest missionary efforts, even sending missionaries to the United States.

Christians who “come out of these areas have an enthusiasm, vitality, confidence and joy because they know why they are here, where they are headed and they know the message they have to share,” said David Coffey, the current BWA president.

With the influx of missionaries to the United States and Europe, church leaders are re-evaluating where the Western church stands. As stories of dramatic church growth in developing nations appear more frequently, the decline of Western Christianity becomes more evident.

Scholars cite many reasons why the West has shifted from the Christian center, and all agree new approaches must be taken for the West to turn around.

Rob Sellers, the Connally professor of missions at Hardin-Simmons University, a Texas Baptist school, attributed much of Christianity's decline in the West to growing secularism. However, he added, it is “more complicated than simply a matter of a 'secular-versus-sacred' bent in society.” He pointed to postmodernism -- with its rejection of absolute answers and its receptivity to spirituality -- as an overarching cultural phenomenon.

“Postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon in the West has influenced the way that people perceive and accept systems of thought -- be they religious, political or otherwise -- that claim to have the ‘definitive answer’ to the problem,” Sellers said. “A lot of people in the West are much more likely to validate different religious, political or social ideas than our parents -- and certainly our grandparents -- were apt to do. [They] are disenchanted with the established church. They perceive the church to be rigid, legalistic, formal, out of touch, superficial and old-fashioned.”

Sellers called for Christians to engage in holistic ministries that seek to enhance and sustain life. “If Christian people and churches were to set up their commitment to addressing human needs around the world, I believe more ‘secular’ people in the West would take notice and be more likely to participate,” he said.

Amidst the evident decline in church attendance in the West, pastors and church planters are hopeful, believing change can come through the Holy Spirit’s leading and through prayer. If change happens, it will have to come through non-Western ways, some insist. “We’ll keep doing what we are doing until we run out of money, but it will slow down,” said Bob Roberts, church planter and pastor of Northwood Church in Keller, Texas. “We will then get desperate enough to try something different and learn from those outside of the U.S.”

In the West, the church does not teach people to be self-feeding in their spiritual life, said Curtis Sergeant, a church-planting strategist with e3 Partners, a church-multiplication organization that equips, evangelizes and establishes connections with churches across the world. Christians need to be praying, reading Scripture and involving themselves in church life so that they can practice all of the Bible’s “one-another” commands and use their spiritual gifts, he said.

The Western church has created disciples who are dependent, not capable of reproducing disciples themselves, Sergeant added. “Church in essence is a movement of the Spirit,” said Bob Garrett, professor of missions at Dallas Baptist University. “It’s a conversion of a mindset, a complete change. [Church growth] has little to do with institutions and buildings and programs. It’s happening by people going out and helping their neighbors with life problems and sharing Christ. It is a contagious element that people catch.”

For growth to happen, Coffey said, Western churches must be more urgent and intentional in their approach to evangelism and be led by missionary-hearted leaders in order to recover their zeal. “While there are stirring examples around the world of those who are engaging creatively in mission and evangelism, I am discovering that many Baptists are unsure about how to preach the good news to the poor of our day,” Coffey said.

“The changing cultures alarm them, and many have lost their confidence to communicate the gospel. My conviction is that whenever there are changes in cultures, this constitutes a fresh call from the missionary God. We need to realize that a Christian mission has never evangelized a culture by avoiding it. Perhaps the starting point is a greater dependence on the strategic guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is able to lead us into places we may fear to go.”

The West has a giant task ahead, but Coffey added, “Don’t write the West off just yet.” “Christianity does not seem to plant churches that last forever,” he said, explaining that churches experience a cycle of death and birth. “While the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, the local and cultural expression of the community of Christ has no divine right to survival.”

### **Third World Faith: Church tells story of Jesus to Sudanese**

DALLAS (ABP) -- People remember the stories, because with each retelling, moments come alive once again. In largely illiterate cultures, such as many in southern Sudan, storytelling preserves hundreds of years of history for people groups dependent on oral records. It also gives missionaries a gateway to share the gospel.

"When I was young, everything was in stories," Sudanese pastor Edwin Makola recalled. "The [Southern Baptist] International Mission Board ... and the larger evangelical community ... discovered that orality was a good idea -- to go back to Jesus' day. He taught in parables. ... It's the right thing to do in southern Sudan." Makola arrived in the United States 13 years ago from Africa as a refugee from Sudan's civil war. He now serves in Dallas, as pastor to the Sudanese congregation of Forest Meadow Baptist Church. The church houses four ethnic congregations -- Anglo, Hispanic, Sudanese and Zambian.

Forest Meadow Pastor Tim Ahlen has taken groups to southern Sudan for four years to evangelize, but he uses a different kind of preaching than is usually heard in a typical stateside Baptist church. "Expository preaching is meaningless to [the Sudanese]. They walk away with the stories and the illustrations -- what they understand," Ahlen said.

As Texas Great Commission Initiative coordinator, Ahlen works to create awareness among missionaries about how worldview affects a person's reception of the gospel. The initiative -- a collaborative effort involving the local associations of Baptist churches in the state's four largest metropolitan areas -- exists to equip church leaders for effective mission work.

"Storying" -- Ahlen's chosen method for reaching narrative-oriented people groups -- incorporates as many as 50 Bible stories told in chronological order to create a holistic picture of God and his faithfulness.

Church member Lori Hoxie liked the storying method when she went to Sudan with fellow Forest Meadow members. "We picked the ones we thought were the most appropriate for the culture," she explained. "We did it at different times during the day, whenever they were available. You tell the stories, and then you ask questions about it to see if they got the facts straight -- to see if they know what's going on."

Foreign missionaries have been using storying for years, Ahlen clarified, but he wants to see it used in the Western world as well. He currently works with Makola to apply it in ministry with Forest Meadow's Sudanese congregation. Makola arrived from Africa trained in expository preaching. But to become a better minister to Sudanese in the Dallas area, he attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for a few weeks to learn storying.

The alternate method helps Makola communicate the gospel more effectively to people from his own culture, Ahlen said. "The culture is a storying culture. When Makola got brave enough to start telling stories, people would tell him they had never heard preaching with such power," Ahlen insisted. But why would Makola have to come to the United States before learning culturally appropriate teaching styles?

The reason stems, in part, from a long history of Western colonization in Africa, Ahlen said. Many Sudanese Christians think expository preaching is the only correct way to spread the gospel -- one effect of former colonial subjects' strong association of Christianity with Western cultural norms.

This bias creates negativity toward other, more local, methods of evangelism, such as storying. Many established Sudanese congregations in the United States have reacted negatively to storying. Sudanese missionaries often opt against using the method in their own country. "They don't want to go back to southern Sudan to tell stories; they want to go back to preach," Makola said.

It's also a struggle to convince Sudanese people, once in the United States, to return to ministry in Sudan because of tough conditions they would face, Makola said. Having just left "a mess ... of poverty and torture," most would rather stay in the United States, he speculated.

Navigating cultural mores in transition also complicates ministry to Sudanese in the United States. "The Sudanese people in particular -- they feel they have left that Third World background there. They are trying to cross over to the world they call civilized and leave behind the old systems, to shake them off," Makola said.

Acculturation presents problems, Ahlen said, when value systems clash, especially with first-generation Sudanese Americans. Children often upset their parents as they embrace American culture at the expense of home-country traditions, he said.

But despite frustration, Forest Meadow's Sudanese ministry -- focused on evangelism and church planting -- has been fruitful. Around 90 attend regular Sunday services. Special occasions, such as Christmas, attract as many as 800. Makola remains optimistic about evangelism in southern Sudan. "It's like water upon the sand. ... You don't see it at first, but slowly the sand becomes soaked. That's how the gospel works in people's lives. Time will come -- you will see a change."

### **'Dear Jane' letters a problem for military spouses at home**

(ABP) -- Divorce -- the word seemed to leap out of the e-mail from her soldier husband that Nancy (not her real name) had so eagerly opened. Discussions of divorce among military personnel generally conjure the idea of a weary soldier's receiving a "Dear John" letter while stationed on some far-away battlefield. While that is still most common, often the reverse happens -- the service member determines, sometimes while thousands of miles from home, that he or she no longer wants to be married.

A growing problem? Is the divorce rate among service men and women higher now than in the past? Has deployment to Iraq, Afghanistan and other combat zones increased the rate among military personnel?

No single answer to those questions has yet emerged. Noticing a doubling of the number of divorces among military personnel from 2001 to 2004 and concerned that long deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan have contributed to the increase, Pentagon officials commissioned a study by the Rand Corporation. The Pentagon sponsors Rand's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center.

Released in April 2007, the Rand study showed no spike in the rate that could be directly correlated to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Researchers Benjamin Kearney and John Crown analyzed military records from 1996-2005 for 6 million soldiers. They found that divorce in the military declined between 1996 and 2000, and then gradually began to rise. The military divorce, separation and annulment rate rose 3 percent in 2005, the same rate as 1996, when the deployment rate was not as high.

Rand researchers did not examine divorce rates among soldiers returning from war, nor have they studied which spouse -- the civilian or the military member -- most often files. "It's more traumatic at the return [from war] than the separation [from family] itself," noted Chaplain Col. Johnny Almond, a volunteer military-ministry coordinator for the Virginia Baptist Mission Board and pastor of Colonial Beach Baptist Church, Colonial Beach, Va. "If records were studied after deployment, [researchers] would probably discover the divorce rate is rising."

#### **The rate is rising among female military personnel, according to the Rand study.**

Women in military service are twice as likely to end their marriages as are their male counterparts. The study suggested two reasons for the disparity, which also is supported by a 1991 study of Gulf War veterans. First, existing support programs may not provide sufficient support for families of married military women.

Second, the study concluded that marriages of women service people "benefit significantly less from being deployed." "We're not arguing that deployment is good for marriage," Kearney, lead researcher for the Rand study, explained in a recent telephone interview. However, he added, deployment does provide some positive outcomes, particularly financial benefits due to increased combat pay. "Some benefits may outweigh some of the emotional costs," he said.

Rand studies indicate that the longer an individual is deployed, the less likely he or she is to divorce, Kearney added.

#### **Military programs**

All service branches offer resources to strengthen military families, including briefings for soldiers on how their absence and return could affect relationships and how to cope with change. Family support groups, marriage retreats, marriage-education programs and programs designed to educate single soldiers about choosing a mate also are offered.

Programs tend to be geared to active-duty personnel. Reservists and National Guard members often live far from the nearest military base's family-readiness center -- which provides support. Likewise, many Reserve and National Guard spouses may not meet or spend significant time with other military spouses, noted Eric Lewis, pastor for military ministries at Shadow Mountain Community Church in El Cajon, Calif., and military ministry leader for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board's Vision San Diego emphasis.

#### **Church ministry possibilities**

Lewis offers immediate crisis care for military spouses facing divorce through counseling services, much as he does with civilians. But the reservist and seminary student currently in chaplaincy training also helps spouses navigate the necessary channels to get access to services the Department of Defense offers to them.

Col. Bob Page, command chaplain for the Air Force's Air Combat Command, agrees that churches should respond with immediate care. "They need someone to be there. Most are away from their extended family...or friends to walk through the ordeal with her or him," he said.

Churches should offer continuing support as well. Page recommends DivorceCare or similar programs.

Remember single parents and divorcing members during special events and holidays. "Even Sundays are family-oriented and can be lonely for that person," he said. "Help the divorcing person know he or she is not alone. It would be easy for that person to feel isolated and alone."

### **To support military families through divorce, a few tips**

(ABP) -- Col. Bob Page, command chaplain for the Air Force's Air Combat Command, believes that, while the military branches have developed more programs and services for military families, support from churches and other non-governmental groups remains crucial.

That support is particularly important for reservists and National Guard members. Active-duty personnel living on base have the greatest access to military programs. Reservists and guardsmen may live up to 150 miles from the nearest military base and, consequently, have few connections to other military personnel.

Page suggests a three-pronged approach to ministry to service members.

#### 1. Prevention:

Provide regular opportunities to strengthen marriages and families and to help deal with the stress of military deployment. Churches could provide communication workshops, marriage seminars or retreats, financial-management tools, parenting classes, stress-management workshops and opportunities to renew marriage commitments

#### 2. Support:

"Church members should ask themselves: 'What can we do for spouses?'" Page said. Common sense generally can guide types of support ministries. "Start a telephone ministry. Just call [military families in the church] and ask how you can help," he said. Families of deployed service members welcome emergency home repairs, yard care, programs for children and youth and other practical services, Page added. Church members will discover particular needs as they telephone or visit spouses on a regular basis.

#### 3. Recovery:

Provide immediate care for spouses facing crises -- divorce, death of the military spouse or other family member, child-rearing issues and other life-changing experiences. Help them connect to military and civilian services for which they qualify. Provide continuing support through small groups.

Page emphasized that no local congregation has all the resources and skills to meet every need. He encourages churches to develop partnerships across denominational lines, with other groups and with the military. "Get with the chaplains at a base near you so you understand [issues and needs military members face] and find out ways to partner with them."

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