

Missions at South Apalachin Baptist Church by Nancy Crane

The Ladies Missionary group met monthly for many years well into the late 1990's - but as more and more women went to work, there were less ladies free during the day - and along with that, as our missionary doctor in Africa, (Gene and Sandy Thomas) retired we no longer had some of the hand's on projects that had long kept us busy - there were less physical things we could economically provide like rolling bandages and creating charts to teach reading skills. At this same time our church had established the Missions Policy and Missions Committee who looked after the financial needs of the missionaries and looked after keeping Missions at the forefront of the church - this group yearly found those who would be willing to work on a missions conference planning committee - then provide a special week of focus on Missions each fall. This policy provided the framework to guide the church to uphold the decision it made to maintain the missions giving of the church at around 35% of the overall budget. The Ladies Missionary was also well known for making quilts for newlyweds in our church.

The earliest Missions Conference of which I have details is 1986. Our conferences have traditionally been held in the fall, October time frame, though one year we did a split conference with a weekend in the spring and in the fall. It has been our privilege to see some of our own grow up in the church and hear God's call at our conferences and be sent out in God's service to the world. Some of these were Mark Misulich - missionary pilot in Africa back in the 1980's, Bruce Barnhart - pilot and church planter first in Ecuador then Khazakstan, Joy Sims (Barnhart) - church planting - discipleship in France, Robin Coules (Strope) - missionary in France, Deb Kensel (Bulkeley) - church planting Thailand, and our very own new pastor, Dan and Peggy Crane were missionaries in Paraguay. Also, according to Charlie Crane, Pastor Walter was a very large influence towards a strong mission's emphasis.

Some conference themes were *Lord of the Harvest, Planting the Seed, People Need the Lord, Go Ye Means Me, From Consecration to Coronation, The Local Church in the Field, If You Want to Walk on Water - Get Out of the Boat!, The Mission - Across the Street and Around the World, Simply Serving the Son, Beyond Borders, The King is Coming, Missions Alive for 95, Here I Am Lord - Send Me, Live the Word, and Going Hand in Hand*. With each we focused on special scriptures and on songs to call us to remember God's call.

Joy Sims remembers that as a child she loved and looked forward to the Friday night missionary gatherings.

Some highlights at the conferences over the years were - a World's Fair where each Sunday School class and small group put together a booth representing a country of the world and the church family could tour - tasting foods from various countries, seeing the cultural displays. One year the focus was on local ministries and the challenge was put out to get involved and we saw much effort go into some special efforts at the Ranch and other ministries. Also we had a Christian College preview as part of the conference effort to help our youth be exposed to Christian colleges they might choose for their studies. Another year we had a special effort to engage the children before the conference with projects, and another year we had a Saturday Children's conference where the children had different opportunities to consider missions for themselves. These special and different opportunities made us stop and think about what our answer would be to God's call to *Go Ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*. But the meat and potatoes of our conferences were regular Friday evening family dinners and meetings, Saturday men's and ladies meetings where at least the ladies shared more personal requests and challenges they faced, (I can't say as I ever attend-ed a men's meeting). These chances to get to know our mission-aries better helped us to pray more fervently when we read their letters - we could see their faces and know their heart for the world God has placed them among.

It truly has helped us to more faithfully do our part "holding the ropes" for those in far off lands carrying the message of the gospel. May God enable us to continue to do so until He returns!