

Minister remembers call to preach during 1939 congress in Atlanta

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Baptist General Association of Virginia

BIRMINGHAM, England—William Cumbie of Springfield, Va, sealed his call to preach in 1939 at a rally at the Seventh Baptist World Congress in Atlanta, Georgia.

It happened while the 16-year-old high school student sat on a pine bench astride second base of the old Atlanta Crackers baseball team and listened to George W. Truett preach. But his first overseas visit to a world congress, in 1960 in Rio de Janeiro, enlarged his world view beyond anything he could imagine.

Looking back on 12 congresses, the 82-year-old Baptist minister describes his “whole Baptist World Alliance participation as a series of mountain-top experiences of personal growth.” That’s why it dismays him that the Southern Baptist Convention has withdrawn from the BWA.

“Isolation from the Baptist world family can lead only to spiritual

impoverishment and loss of a world vision," he said. "The BWA can make up the financial shortfall. Those who withdraw are the losers."

In 1976, Cumbie, now retired from a career as a pastor and director of missions in Virginia, was president of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, admitted as a full BWA member at the 2005 congress in Birmingham, along with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

He shares the honor with his daughter, Beth Fogg, of Richmond, Va., who accompanied him to Birmingham, as the only father and daughter to serve as Virginia Baptist presidents. Fogg, a layperson, served in 2003.

Asked why they would travel to England in the wake of the recent terrorist bombings, Fogg declared, as her father nodded in agreement, "If you allow fear to rule your life, the terrorists have already won."

"I live 12 miles from the Pentagon, bombed by terrorists in 2001," Cumbie said. "I'm in as much danger riding the Metro line in Washington, D.C., as I am here."

Fogg likens the congress to a "Christmas Family Reunion"— a time when family reassemble after an absence from each other. "We came to reunite with our world family," she said.

"The BWA's greatest asset is its people," Cumbie added. "Unity and fellowship are a gift of God."

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