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Laying a Foundation of Leadership

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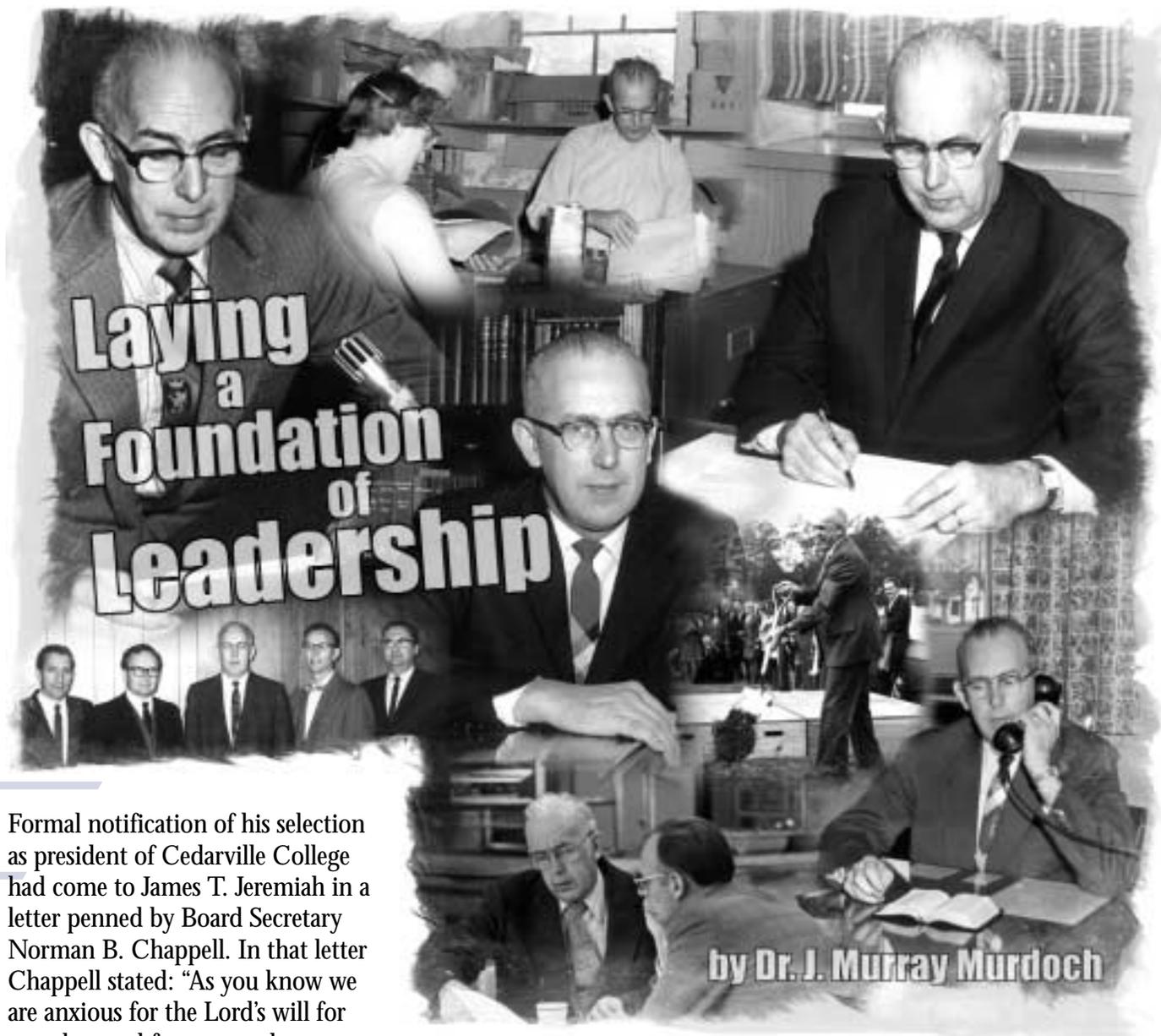
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Editors' note: Although Cedarville College was founded in 1887, a turning point in the institution's history came when the trustees of the Baptist Bible Institute of Cleveland assumed institutional control. It was in 1953 that James T. Jeremiah, a young pastor in Dayton, began his long association with the College. For 47 years, Jeremiah served as "Mr. Cedarville." He assumed the office of acting president somewhat reluctantly, but once the position was his, he committed himself totally to the task of providing Christian students, especially those from Baptist homes, a place to gain their education from those who shared their worldview.

The following is an extract from "Cedarville College: A Century of Commitment," a history of Cedarville College, published in 1987 by Dr. J. Murray Murdoch. We pick up Dr. Murdoch's narrative in 1953, just after the transition from Presbyterian to Baptist leadership was finalized. As the narrative shows, the challenges faced by James T. Jeremiah and his administrative supporters were formidable. The legacy of leadership Jeremiah provided during this early period of Baptist administration is one of ardor, dedication, and perseverance.



Formal notification of his selection as president of Cedarville College had come to James T. Jeremiah in a letter penned by Board Secretary Norman B. Chappell. In that letter Chappell stated: "As you know we are anxious for the Lord's will for ourselves and for you, and we believe that your acceptance of this position would do more to strengthen and ensure the future development of Cedarville than any one thing that this Board can do."¹

Future events proved the Board was absolutely correct in this assessment. Jeremiah began leading by example. His dedication and hard work became a model for those around him. He was "a very frugal person about spending for himself or the college."² With careful planning and hard work, the college

gradually stabilized financially, although tremendous needs remained. Jeremiah aggressively petitioned Ohio Regular Baptists for funds. He constantly urged the churches to get behind the college with their financial support. In taking inventory of the progress of the college for the readers of the *Ohio Independent Baptist*, Jeremiah reported in 1956 as follows:

"From January 1st, 1955 through December 23rd, 1955, \$43,087.52 has been given by churches and individuals for the support of the school. This does not



include money which has been given to the college for debt retirement, organ fund and so forth. As we compare the gifts for 1955 to those received during 1954, we are happy to report that over \$11,000 more was given in 1955 than in 1954.”³

While seeking financial help from Ohio churches, Jeremiah continually reminded the Regular Baptist constituency of the importance of “Baptist schools for Baptist youth.” In a lengthy article, he reminded his brethren that the best way to preserve the Baptist heritage was to have Baptist churches and Baptist missions staffed by graduates of Baptist schools. He urged Regular Baptists to support not only Cedarville College but other approved schools of the Association. He reminded them that Baptist schools needed their money and students in order to gain accreditation, recognition, and the prestige needed in the academic community.⁴ This theme, expressed graphically in March 1956, was one that Jeremiah was destined to repeat again and again from the pulpit

and with the pen in the years ahead.

Cedarville College continued to gain recognition among Regular Baptists in the months [and years] ahead. Two important events greatly aided in this process. The first occurred in June 1958, when the 27th annual conference of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches met in Columbus, just 45 miles from Cedarville. Eight hundred messengers came from all over the United States to attend the



conference. The evening meetings ranged in total attendance from 1,500 to 2,500.⁵

With so many Regular Baptists congregated that close to campus, it was inevitable that Jim Jeremiah would find some way of getting them to Cedarville! For months he had been traveling mile after mile to the churches with the Cedarville story. All those preachers and all those messengers in one place were too much to resist! He arranged for bus loads of Regular Baptists to come to Cedarville on the Wednesday afternoon of the conference. Ruby Jeremiah stayed home and she and Miriam Maddox prepared ham and potato salad, which was served in Alford Auditorium. A tremendous crowd gathered as bus after bus arrived from Columbus. The next month the *Baptist Bulletin* reported: “On Wednesday afternoon the Association made a trip to Cedarville College. A crowd of over six hundred and fifty were served a lovely lunch and enjoyed a sight-seeing tour of the buildings and grounds.”⁶ This happy occasion was used to introduce literally hundreds of people to Cedarville College.

In those early years of appealing to Regular Baptists for support, Jeremiah, the pastor who had become president, learned many important lessons. One of the most significant related to finances. In the local church, a desperate need could be met by appealing to people who understood the problem and were familiar with the circumstances. However, appealing to churches across the nation required a different approach. “I learned that you don’t send out letters of despair if you want a response. The answer to that kind of thing is, ‘If they are that bad off,



Left: As Dr. Jeremiah appealed to the Regular Baptist constituency, Cedarville enrollment blossomed. Below: Cedarville students take a break on the steps of Founders Hall.

why should I give to something that's going to die.' I learned that lesson early on."⁷

This knowledge became an important part of the second key event in introducing Regular Baptists to Cedarville College. In 1958 the *Baptist Bulletin*, the official organ of Regular Baptists, was a struggling journal. Jeremiah recognized the value of that publication in circulating word of Cedarville College. He entered into a verbal agreement with the editor to place a Cedarville advertisement on the back of the *Baptist Bulletin* each month. For years every issue carried such an advertisement. With the passing of years, the quality of those advertisements



bore testimony to the development of Cedarville College as an educational institution, and Regular Baptists watched the progress on the back of their national magazine.



Paul Gathany, current general manager for the CDR Radio Network, worked with Dr. Jeremiah's son, David, to begin WCDR in 1962. Both men were Cedarville students at that time.

As Cedarville grew, Jeremiah was aided by the faculty, staff, and students in carrying the message of the validity of liberal arts study to the Regular Baptist constituency. As the link between Regular Baptists and the college was nurtured, more and more students

learned the value of receiving their liberal arts education in a Christian atmosphere.

The institution continued to trumpet the message that "spiritual vitality and academic excellence are not opposite and unreconcilable extremes. They can and must be a part of any Christian college. The trustees, faculty, and administration of Cedarville are committed to the emphasis of both."⁸

Thus, under Jeremiah's leadership, Cedarville College carefully forged its link with Regular Baptists. This became a significant factor in the dynamic story of Cedarville's success.



As Cedarville grew, more and more students experienced the value of a Christian liberal arts education.

As enrollment increased countless changes marked the face of the campus. While the community observed with interest, Patterson Hall was erected largely by student labor, and Milner Hall was bricked, expanded, and remodeled. The dining hall, then located in what is [currently the CDR Radio Network], was enlarged to handle the expanding student body. All this occurred in the summer of 1959. The next year Williams Hall was added to the campus. This new two-story

(continued on page 16)

structure was capable of housing 104 students. The summer of 1962 saw the erection of a new gymnasium which, it was announced, would also house "a recreation hall, a snack bar,

celebrate its 75th birthday. The *Xenia Gazette* did a special 75th anniversary section in their edition of Wednesday, November 14, 1962. On the front of the insert was a picture of

*Left: The gymnasium, now called "College Center," was built in 1962 to serve as a cafeteria, gymnasium, and student center.
Below: Patterson Hall, which lost its second floor in the tornado of 1974, currently serves as Cedarville University's clinic.*



a bookstore, and a student lounge."⁹ That same year Alford Memorial was remodeled into an auditorium to seat 650 students. On December 1, 1962, students Paul Gathany and Dave Jeremiah began broadcasting on WCDR. The first program was a live play-by-play broadcast of a basketball game between Grace College and Cedarville in Winona Lake, Indiana.

The student population in September 1962 reached 455, and Cedarville College was ready to

Old Main. In addition ... was the Scripture reference "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." 



*Left: Originally used as the dining hall and later as the post office, this building is home to the CDR Radio Network today.
Below: Williams Hall was added in 1960 as a dormitory. Today the building houses faculty offices.*



Endnotes

- ¹Norman B. Chappell to James T. Jeremiah, September 13, 1954.
- ²Kenneth H. St. Clair, personal interview, August 5, 1986.
- ³*Ohio Independent Baptist*, January 1956, p. 10.
- ⁴*Ohio Independent Baptist*, March 1956, p. 14.
- ⁵*Ohio Independent Baptist*, June 1958, p. 13.
- ⁶*Baptist Bulletin*, July 1958, p. 11.
- ⁷James T. Jeremiah, personal interview, September 1985.
- ⁸*The President's Annual Report*, 1967, p. 1.
- ⁹*Xenia Gazette*, August 24, 1962.

Dr. J. Murray Murdoch is professor of history and chairman of the department of social sciences and history at Cedarville



University. A Cedarville faculty member since 1965, Murdoch also served as tennis coach from 1965-1994. Murdoch earned his B.Th. at Baptist Bible Seminary and his M.A. and Ph.D. at Northwestern University.

Murdoch authored Cedarville's centennial commemorative book, *Cedarville College: A Century of Commitment*, in 1987. He serves as senior pastor at Grace Baptist Church in Westerville, Ohio.

He and his wife, Ruth, reside in Springfield, Ohio, and have two sons: Jim is finishing his Ph.D. at Fordham University (N.Y.), and Mark is the youth pastor at Far Hills Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio.