Laying a Foundation of Leadership

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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 sightseeing 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,
learn 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.”

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 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 structure 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.

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

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 their liberal arts education in a Christian atmosphere.

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 (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, a bookstore, and a student lounge." 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 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 Old Main. In addition ... was the Scripture reference "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." 

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Endnotes
1 Norman B. Chappell to James T. Jeremiah, September 13, 1954.
3 Ohio Independent Baptist, January 1956, p. 10.
9 Xenia Gazette, August 24, 1962.

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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.

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.

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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.