THE CHRISTIAN chronicle

Singapore: veteran missionary analyzes growth factors

This month the Singapore Institute of Biblical Studies begins operating in one of Southeast Asia's most powerful city-states. The Institute is the dream of several missionaries and national preachers who believe educating the church is the key to keeping members growing and evangelistic.

The church of Christ was introduced to Singapore in 1955 when Ira Rice moved to the city to preach and teach. The earliest congregation grew and eventually acquired property on Moulmein Road. That location has been central to the spread of church and the training efforts for the Singapore Christians as well as other aspiring young preachers from Southeast Asia. The Four Seas Bible College, founded in 1965 by Rice and continued by Gordon Hogan until 1985, also used the facilities at Moulmein Road for its classes and programs.

Last fall Hogan served as Missionary in Residence at Oklahoma Christian, a role he has also filled at Freed-Hardeman and Harding. In December I had an opportunity to visit with Hogan about Singapore and the history of the church in that mini-size superstate. Evangelistic efforts have been extremely successful, and the church has a really bright future because the missionaries have cultivated leadership among the nationals so that there is a solid core of leadership for the future.

Hogan's Singapore work began in August 1968 after he and his family had spent eight years in Pakistan. At that time there were five congregations with a total membership of 150. The Hogans were the only missionary family. Today Singapore has 20 congregations and the Moulmein Road Church has more than 220 members. Mission families include Tony and Karen Gross, Ken and Estelle Sinclair, David and Debbie Hogan, Don and Ann Green, Ron Oltman, as well as Jane and Gordon Hogan. These mission families assist a dozen national preachers who have been converted and nurtured during the past twenty-five years.

When asked about the factors which have contributed to the success of the work in Singapore, Hogan focused on four important aspects of the church's development. First, he talked about the leadership of the church. Although he was too modest to acknowledge the key role that he and Jane have played, every one who has visited Singapore and all the preachers in Singapore are quick to report that Hogan has been a superstar quarterback for the Singapore work. The year his family arrived, the church was being torn apart by internal and external struggles. The Four Seas Bible College was about to close when he became the director in 1968; the Moulmein Roach Church was down to four members. Hogan's spirit of optimism and his systematic approach to work and evangelism helped the church survive the problems and get back on track. During our interview, Hogan stressed the important work of the Don Green family in promoting evangelism in the1970s.

Even though Hogan's perspective of leadership recognized the value of the missionaries, he stressed the importance of the national leaders who were converted as teenagers in the 1960s and the 1970s and who have grown and matured spiritually. He discussed 10 men who were the foundation for future church growth: most were converted when they were young, most had been

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Christians 11 to 20 years, and most had been trained at Four Seas Bible College.

The second factor Hogan discussed as vital to the church's growth in Singapore is the sufficiency mode of operating. Churches have been committed to assuming responsibility for their finances as well as their survival and growth. Only one national preacher has had financial support from the States, and he now is supported by the local church. All the church plantings have survived and are actively continuing to work. Ten to 15 men are capable of preaching, and in small churches the men take turns teaching and preaching.

The third element contributing to the growth of the churches in Singapore is the mental state of the city itself. Hogan describes the town "as wound up tight." A strong work ethic prevails, and the nation has a healthy view of education as the basis for personal and national growth. Because Singapore is a city state, people are the only resource. The government has promoted the idea that people must be responsible for improving the city by improving themselves. With human intelligence and individual effort as the only natural resources Singapore fosters a spirit of personal responsibility.

Training has been central to the work of the church. The Four Seas Bible College, initially begun to train preachers and church leaders, offered extension work throughout the city. The leaders produced by these efforts were intense and aggressive. Four Seas was closed in 1985 because of continuing external problems, but in 1986 a city-wide "Training for Service" program followed the model which had reached the greatest number of people. Now the Singapore Institute of Biblical Studies is launching afresh a plan to train the church in the Word and to equip Christians for ministry. Tony Gross is directing the school, David Hogan — the son of Gordon and Jane — serves as academic dean. The Institute continues a long tradition of commitment to training for service and leadership.

In his reflecting on the Singapore work, Hogan also mentioned the value of the Moulmein Road Church as a generative force. With a central locale on the fringe of the commercial area and with adequate space, this church has promoted growth. As the mother church for all the plantings, this congregation has helped set the tone and pace for evangelism, unity, and commitment to Biblical authority. The congregation has a core of leaders who have courageously promoted the gospel in a secular, materialistic city. Those leaders have grown and matured, and they have envisioned the growth which is taking place. Hogan also described a powerful thrust to evangelize throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. That evangelistic spirit in a church setting which has not viewed preachers or missionaries as having the responsibility for church growth has set the stage for sound, rapid growth.

Gordon and Jane Hogan have a fascinating history which includes military service, several years in management with Dunn and Bradstreet, church plantings in Florida, a commitment to go to India if their elders would be their sponsor, being diverted for an eight-year stint of service in Pakistan, and 22 years in Singapore. They are low-keyed people, but they are movers and shakers because they live by faith and they accept every situation as an opportunity to be living testimonies of Jesus' power. They do whatever needs to be done with no thought of personal recognition or personal gain. Their son David is following in their steps — he moved to Singapore when he was 14, graduated from Four Seas Bible College, earned degrees from Harding University and Harding Graduate School of Religion, and moved back to Singapore with his wife, Debbie. The Hogans have been instrumental in church growth and have prepared leaders to take their place when they can no longer serve.

The church in Singapore is growing because there is a total commitment to Biblical training and to helping each Christian understand personal responsibility to work and serve in the Kingdom of God. With 20 churches in a city of nearly three million people, the fields await the coming harvest. — BAILEY B. MCBRIDE

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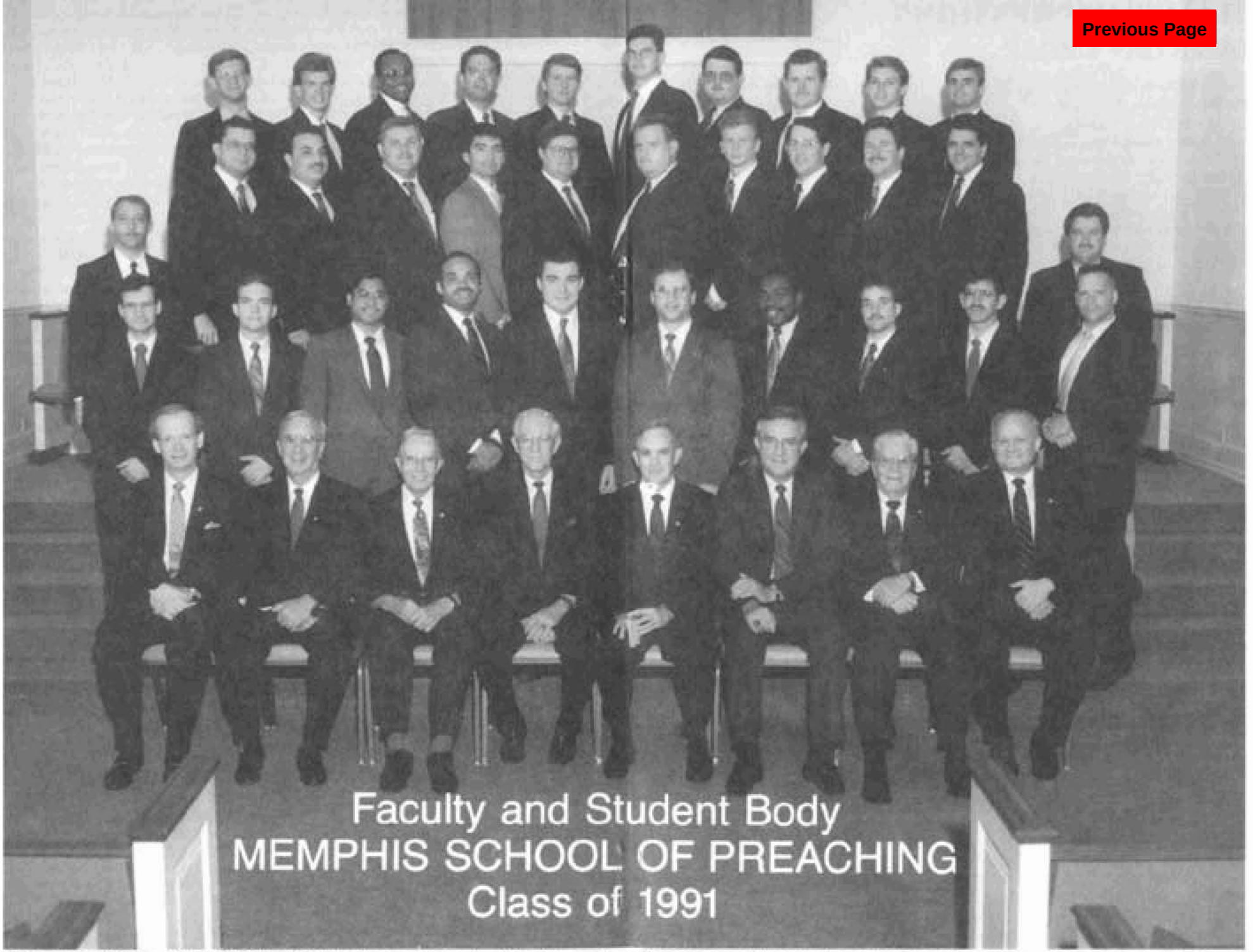

OF THE MEMPHIS SCHOOL OF PREACHING Class of 1991 (shown above), 13 graduated from the two-year basic course and 13 from the third-year course the Lord's Day night of June 16, 1991, at the Knight Arnold Church of Christ auditorium, of Memphis, Tennessee.

Seated on the front row together with Curtis A. Cates, Director, the faculty, left to right, includes Jim Dearman, Richard Curry, J. A. McNutt, Garland Elkins, Cates, Keith Mosher, E. L. Whitaker and Rod Rutherford.

Beginning with the second row, left to right, students include Kevin Rutherford, Jeff Bates, Gideon Rodriguez, Raymond Sweet, Barry Grider, Gregg Lahman, Jessie Powell, Mark Littleton, Larry Sutton and Ken Friel.

Indented, left end, Michael Millard; right end, Larry Siegle.

Third row, left to right, Josh Kraft, Jeff Penick, Rick Calvert, James Hill, Jr., Johnny Burkhart, Robert Tate, Brent Smith, Thomas Leslie, David Long and Kevin Beard.

Last row, left to right, Douglas Hoff, Doug McIntyre, Gary Atwater, Bob Hawkins, Robert Meredith, Stefan Dickerson, Brian Butler, David Jones, Kevin Ruiz and Steve Harris.