

# Detamore, Fordyce William (1908–1980)

## GREG HUDSON

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Fordyce William Detamore was a radio ministry pioneer and worldwide evangelist during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

## Early Life (1908–1921)

Fordyce William Detamore was born on March 10, 1908, to Henrietta Ivalou Flaiz (1881–1910) and Francis Arthur Detamore (1872–1938) in St. Paul, Minnesota, where Francis was serving as a pastor. Francis was soon called to Oregon to be the principal of Laurelwood Academy, with Henrietta serving as a teacher. In 1910 they moved to College Place, Washington, to be near Henrietta's parents.<sup>1</sup>

That same year, when Fordyce was two years old, his mother contracted typhoid fever and died at the age of 29.<sup>2</sup> His father worked in the Upper Columbia Conference until 1912, when he was called overseas to serve as president of the Malayan Union Mission, headquartered in Singapore. Before leaving, Francis asked Bessie Flaiz, Henrietta's sister, to be his wife, but she refused because she wanted to continue her education. She stayed in College Place and helped to raise Fordyce and his two siblings. After two years of this arrangement, Bessie finally agreed to marry Francis, and the entire family moved to Singapore in 1914.<sup>3</sup> At the age of seven Fordyce wrote a letter to his father proclaiming his desire to be a preacher.<sup>4</sup>

## Education and Marriage (1921–1929)

In 1921 Fordyce returned to the United States, entering the seventh grade in College Place, Washington. His father was soon called to serve in the Indiana Conference, and at age 15 Fordyce started academy in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where his sisters were attending Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC)<sup>5</sup> As part of an assignment for a speech class, Fordyce took part in his first evangelistic crusade in Eau Claire, Michigan.<sup>6</sup>

During his college years in Berrien Springs, Fordyce was involved in outreach through collegiate organizations such as the Missionary Volunteer Society<sup>7</sup> and jail bands.<sup>8</sup> He also worked as a colporteur.<sup>9</sup>

While studying at EMC, Fordyce met Althea Viola Stout (1908–1974). She had joined the Adventist Church as a teenager, against her parents' will.<sup>10</sup> Fordyce and Althea were married at Morley, Michigan, on May 21, 1928. Two days after the wedding Fordyce began working as the assistant field secretary for the Publishing Department in the Eastern Michigan Conference, spending the majority of his time working with colporteurs.<sup>11</sup> With no full-time ministerial positions available when the summer was over, Fordyce and Althea began teaching school in Bloomington, Indiana, with Fordyce also assisting the local pastor.<sup>12</sup>

In 1929 he began full-time ministry, accepting a call to Michigan. Detamore was first asked to help with evangelistic meetings in Detroit,<sup>13</sup> then assigned as the first pastor of the East Side church, which was organized at the conclusion of the campaign. This year also saw the birth of the Detamores' first child, Gwendolyn.<sup>14</sup>

## Mission and Ministry (1930–1941)

In 1930 the Detamores were called to a ministry that would take them across the globe. With six-month-old Gwendolyn,<sup>15</sup> they boarded the ship *Empress of Russia* on June 26 for a two-week journey to Singapore.<sup>16</sup> There



Fordyce W. Detamore  
Photo courtesy of the *Southwestern Union Record*, March 1, 1984.

Fordyce headed the Educational, Sabbath School, and Young People's Missionary Volunteer departments for the Malayan Union Mission.<sup>17</sup> This was the same union where his father had served, and where Fordyce had grown up.<sup>18</sup> His service involved travel throughout the mission region presenting training sessions, as well as evangelistic efforts.<sup>19</sup>

The family returned to the United States on furlough in 1935. For health reasons the temporary visit became permanent.<sup>20</sup> Fordyce was called to pastor in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was ordained to the gospel ministry.<sup>21</sup> In St. Louis Detamore implemented effective pastoral evangelism methods. By 1936 he was broadcasting on the radio with great success in finding interests that often resulted in individuals being baptized.<sup>22</sup> During 1938 Detamore conducted two evangelistic meetings in St. Louis that lasted 14 weeks<sup>23</sup> and 12 weeks, respectively.<sup>24</sup> Both of these series led to large numbers of people being baptized, and Detamore felt that the use of radio advertising helped to draw people to the meetings.

In 1939 Detamore moved to Kansas City, Missouri, to serve as pastor of the Kansas City Central Church, where he continued placing major emphasis on evangelism. He trained laypeople to be involved in outreach,<sup>25</sup> and in 1940 a major campaign led to more than 175 baptisms.<sup>26</sup> Soon the church had doubled in membership.<sup>27</sup>

While involved in this ministry, Detamore was also expanding his radio outreach in two ways. First, he began to offer the Shuler Bible study plan over the air as a Bible correspondence class. He first got this idea when he heard evangelist J. L. Shuler express hope that someone in radio ministry would experiment with this idea.<sup>28</sup> This course was very successful, and many people enrolled in Bible studies.<sup>29</sup> Second, Detamore formed a loose affiliation with two other Adventist radio broadcasts under the name "Bible Auditorium of the Air." Partnering with L. H. Lindreck in St. Louis, and B. T. Senecal in Wichita, Kansas, he believed, added prestige beneficial to each of the radio ministries among both the listeners and the radio stations.<sup>30</sup>

## Voice of Prophecy and Evangelism (1942–1953)

With such great success in evangelism and radio ministry, Detamore was invited to join with H.M.S. Richards as an associate for the coast-to-coast expansion of the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) on the Mutual Radio Network in 1942. His chief role would be in promotion and development of a Bible correspondence school.<sup>31</sup> He soon wrote the worldwide Bible course, followed by a junior Bible course, as well as a course using braille.<sup>32</sup>

After two years with VOP Detamore wanted to get back to more personal involvement in evangelism, and accepted a call in 1944 to serve as evangelist in the Texas Conference.<sup>33</sup> He began holding meetings throughout Texas and beyond. These meetings, lasting about four or five months each, were held in many places, including Dallas,<sup>34</sup> Amarillo,<sup>35</sup> Tulsa, Oklahoma,<sup>36</sup> and New Orleans.<sup>37</sup>

Detamore's success in evangelism soon had the family again moving to a mission field. Fordyce arrived in Shanghai by plane on January 1, 1948. His wife and their two younger daughters, Arlene (born in 1932) and Kathleen (born c. 1943), arrived by boat on January 6. Detamore had returned to the Far East to serve as an evangelist in the China Division.<sup>38</sup> His first series of meeting, conducted in English, began on April 4, and continued until July 25, 1948, resulting in at least 80 individuals joining the church.<sup>39</sup> He was able to hold one more series of meetings in Shanghai before the Communists prevailed in China's civil war, putting an end to that land's foreign missionary era.

In December 1948 American and British church workers in the Shanghai region were required to evacuate and relocate to safer areas, such as Formosa and Hong Kong. Althea and the children left for Hong Kong on December 7,<sup>40</sup> while Fordyce stayed until mid-January 1949, in order to complete his series of meetings before joining them.<sup>41</sup>

Upon arriving in Hong Kong, Detamore continued holding evangelistic meetings that were several months long, first in Hong Kong,<sup>42</sup> and then in Columbo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka),<sup>43</sup> and finally, two series in Singapore.<sup>44</sup> These would be the final "long" evangelistic series that Detamore would conduct. It was at this point that he pioneered short "lightning" series, generally lasting two or three weeks. These shorter meetings would, to some extent, shape the form of Adventist evangelism for years to come.

In 1952 Detamore was called to Indonesia for six months by Neal C. Wilson to conduct two-week "spearhead" meetings in 25 cities, teaming with singing evangelist Raymond Turner.<sup>45</sup> Along with nightly evangelistic meetings, Detamore held training sessions for local pastors and leaders during the mornings, with afternoons devoted to visitation. The endeavor ended on December 14, 1952, with the largest baptism held in the Indonesian Union up to that time.<sup>46</sup> In all, 737 people took a stand to be baptized during the six-month project.<sup>47</sup>

After five years in eastern Asia, the Detamore family accepted a call to return to the United States. One last Asian meeting was held in Manila, Philippines. The Detamore-Turner evangelism team concluded this series on June 6, 1953, with more than 400 having been baptized and several hundred more continuing to study. At the time the Manila campaign was described as "one of the greatest victories for evangelism ever seen in the Far East." The team took their time returning to the United States, visiting both Europe and the Middle East.<sup>48</sup>

## Stateside Lightning Evangelism (1953–1974)

Detamore, continuing to team with Turner, returned to service in Texas beginning November 1, 1953. During the next year the team brought the two-week lightning evangelistic campaigns to 14 different cities across Texas, resulting in more than seven hundred baptisms. After that first year they continued doing six to eight series a year, but expanded the series length to three weeks.<sup>49</sup>

While continuing to be officially employed by the Texas Conference, Detamore was often “on loan” to other conferences to conduct evangelistic meetings, preaching in more than 15 conferences across the United States.<sup>50</sup> In 1960 Detamore transitioned to the Florida Conference, holding eight to ten series per year.<sup>51</sup>

The short evangelistic series was an innovation primarily developed by Detamore, and he published articles and books to explore his experience<sup>52</sup> and the lessons he was learning. These books included instructional material and evangelistic sermons: *Evangelistic Methods, Step by Step, Pastor and District Suggestions*; and *Three-Week Series of Bible Lectures*.<sup>53</sup> He also produced a Bible study filmstrip series, *In His Steps*, to be utilized by lay members in gaining decisions.<sup>54</sup> Later, in 1965, Detamore published *Seeking His Lost Sheep*, sharing ideas and methods from his vast experience in working with inactive members.<sup>55</sup>

In 1969 Detamore returned to the Voice of Prophecy, joining the VOP Evangelism Association to hold seminars in cities that had sponsored VOP broadcasts for at least six months.<sup>56</sup> The plan was to focus on reaping the interests that have been formed through the radio ministry.<sup>57</sup>

## Preaching Through Retirement (1974–1984)

After 44 years of marriage, at the age of 66, Althea Detamore passed away on January 11, 1974, in Orlando, Florida. With her husband she had lived out of suitcases for thirty years and assisted in more than two hundred evangelistic series.<sup>58</sup>

Shortly after the death of his wife, Fordyce retired after 47 years of ministry, but continued a very active preaching and evangelistic schedule. He held meetings and spoke at camp meetings in the United States. He also planned one international meeting per year, returning to Manila, Hong Kong, and Singapore.<sup>59</sup> During his retirement he refused to receive any stipend from the VOP, encouraging them to use the money to hire another evangelist.<sup>60</sup>

To celebrate fifty years of preaching, Detamore held a series in Manado in the East Indonesia Union. On May 23, 1978, the anniversary date of the start of his preaching career, he made an altar call, and four hundred people made a commitment to Jesus.<sup>61</sup> He was named the Andrews University “Alumnus of Distinction” in the same year.<sup>62</sup>

At the age of 72, on May 15, 1980, the unstoppable evangelist passed away in Orlando, Florida. At the time of Detamore’s death, the VOP Bible Correspondence School that he founded had graduated more than 700,000 people.<sup>63</sup>

On January 1, 1984, the Detamore Evangelism Center was opened by the Southwestern Union. This center would initially be directed by Kenneth Cox in its work with Southwestern Adventist College (now Southwestern Adventist University) to train pastors, students, and laypeople in evangelism. It would also house memorabilia from the evangelistic career of Fordyce Detamore.<sup>64</sup>

## Contribution

Fordyce Detamore had a major impact on evangelism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While Detamore is directly responsible for leading thousands of people to be baptized, the impact of his ministry continues to be seen today. His development of the Bible correspondence school for the Voice of Prophecy helped establish the radio outreach as a way to interact with real people and help them to connect with Jesus through a local church. His development and innovation of the short evangelism series, along with his training manuals, influenced a generation of pastors and evangelists in methods still used to share the gospel.

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