

## **Annie Armstrong in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

It is inevitable that every year when a Southern Baptist church promotes the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering<sup>®</sup> for North American Missions, someone will ask, “Who is Annie Armstrong?” Some may even quip, “Isn’t Annie paid off yet?” There have been several people who have actually asked the North American Mission Board for Annie’s contact information so they could invite her to speak to their church.

Having Annie Armstrong speak to one’s church is no longer a possibility. Annie Armstrong was born in 1850 and died in 1938. For those Southern Baptists who are well versed in the elements of North American missions, Annie Armstrong is a woman whose boldness and commitment to missions during her lifetime serves as a model for today. Her legacy is timeless because it is one of fervent advocacy for taking the gospel to all people and supporting those who were doing just that.

A faithful children’s Sunday School teacher in her beloved Eutaw Place Baptist Church in Baltimore, Annie loved and took seriously her charge to share the story of Christ with all people, but her commitment to children was especially strong. She knew they would grow up to be the Christian leaders of the future and that their value as such could not be taken for granted. She worked with the Home of the Friendless, a shelter for destitute children, teaching Bible lessons on Sunday afternoons. Once, a young man who had grown up in the Home of the Friendless came to Annie and gave her money to use “in making persons happy [at] Christmas.” The young man claimed that “no one knew better how to do this than [Miss] Annie.”

Her strong commitment to taking the gospel to Native Americans and immigrants came as a result of listening to missionaries’ stories about the needs of these groups. She

personalized that commitment by serving her church and leading women to minister to immigrants arriving at the Baltimore pier. She also traveled to Indian Territory to minister personally to the Native Americans. While she could not be hands-on all the time, she encouraged women to make up boxes of supplies for missionaries in order that they could be better equipped to take the gospel to all people.

She also served as the first corresponding secretary of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) which began in 1888. She did her job wholeheartedly and without pay. Writing about her work, Annie said: "I am more and more persuaded that all that is required of those who have the work in charge is faithful seed sowing. The harvest is bound to follow. . . . No matter how heavy the burden, daily strength is given, so I expect we need not give ourselves any concern as to what the outcome will be, but think 'go forward.'"<sup>1</sup>

Annie indeed "went forward" with her support of missions. Her capacity to write letters has been well documented. She wrote literally thousands of letters every year, and in one year alone that number topped 18,000! She was perhaps one of the best friends a missionary could have, because when Annie was made aware of a missionary's need, she did all she could to see that need was met. She went on several mission trips, and spoke in churches to spark the interest of women to take seriously a commitment to missions and support Southern Baptist missionaries. It was fitting that the offering which benefited the missionaries she so dearly loved and supported was named in her honor in 1936.

Annie Armstrong died in 1938, and her tombstone reads, "She hath done what she could." The question for all Southern Baptists is, "Have we been faithful to do the same?"

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<sup>1</sup> Sorrill, Bobbie. *Annie Armstrong; Dreamer in Action*, ©1984. Broadman Press, Nashville, Tenn., p. 155.

