

Brigadier General Recruits Soldiers For Christ as Pentecostal Evangelist

The Army Medical Service Corps' first African American female general is a licensed minister with the Church of God in Christ

Soldiers in the U.S. Army swear to support and defend the Constitution against all enemies. Similarly, Christians pledge their lives and service to God.

For Brig. Gen. Sheila Baxter, the two covenants intertwine. In the general's view, God destined her military career and provided her with a broad audience to share His message.

"Your steps are ordered by the Lord," the Army Medical Service Corps' first African American female general said. "I believe He just pulled my star out of the sky and dropped it down because He felt that I was ready. Every day He reminds me, 'To whom much is given, much is required.' "

As the assistant surgeon general and deputy chief of staff for force sustainment, Baxter oversees medical logistics policy, contracting, information management and facilities for the Army's medical department. In her companion role as a licensed evangelist for the Church of God in Christ, she advises, teaches and prays for those needing God's direction.

"I have tough jobs with lots of responsibility," Baxter said. "You want to make certain you're giving right counsel. But I'm

confident because I have God in me and there's no doubt He helps me daily."

In her youth, the Franklin, Va., native never dreamed of a military career. She played basketball at Virginia State University (VSU) and planned to teach health and physical education after graduation. But a summer visit to her cousin, who was stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, introduced her to the U.S. Army.

"A light bulb came on," Baxter said. "I loved the camaraderie [of the military], I loved the atmosphere. When you get on that road God has for you, He will put people in your path to help you along the way."

Although Baxter had completed her junior year, the ROTC program at VSU accepted her into its two-year program. Commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1978, the first female VSU player to score more than 1,000 points and member of the school's athletic Hall of Fame climbed steadily through the ranks. In June 2003 she received her general's star.

Today the 49-year-old, who also earned a Bronze Star and Legion of Merit award, credits several superiors, including Brig. Gen. Richard Ursone and Col. Robert Bowles, for paving her way to the Army's top echelon. But a current Texas pastor directed the military commander toward her twin devotion to God and country.

Raised in a Baptist church, Baxter joined the Church of God in Christ while assigned to Augsburg, Germany, in 1986. Two years later, she heard God's call to evangelism and shared her vision with pastor J. Edward Fisher. Several years later, she

studied under his supervision at the Copperas Cove Church of God in Christ while assigned to Fort Hood, Texas.

“It’s not surprising General Baxter is a good leader in the church,” Fisher said. “I encouraged her to stay in the Army because she knows the importance of being bold and not fearful in sharing God’s Word. It’s unusual to have someone of her rank as an evangelist, and she provides a great example with her humble, quiet way of serving the Lord.”

Baxter says God has ordered her steps, sending evangelistic opportunities along the way. Several years ago, she hoped to attend the Industrial College of the Armed Forces but received an assignment to the Army War College in Pennsylvania instead.

While studying strategic leadership, national security and military strategy, she met Woodrow Woodall, a young man in her congregation who was going through a period of turbulence and questioning. His penchant for asking why directed him to several faiths and denominations, but Baxter’s counsel and guidance taught him to see God’s way of doing things.

“I have a very inquisitive nature and struggled with resolving tough questions, such as ‘Who are we?’ and ‘What is our purpose?’” said Woodall, a systems analyst for a Fortune 500 company. “General Baxter lifted the cloud of deception from me. I learned to stop shouting at God and started listening to God.”

Currently stationed at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, Baxter calls San Antonio’s Greater Evangelistic Temple Church of God in Christ her home church. Now serving her third tour of duty in the Alamo City, she and her pastor, Superintendent C.W.

Steward, feel very much at ease with their respective spiritual roles.

“She is a faithful member, a diligent missionary, and a good teacher and speaker,” Steward said. “Even though she holds a prestigious position in the military, she conducts her church duties with very little fanfare. General Baxter simply offers her services to the church wherever they’re needed.”

John Hillman