

October 7, 1964

Rome, Italy, Church
Boasts Fellowship

By John J. Hurt Jr.

ROME, Italy (BP)--The little English-speaking Rome Baptist Church, as much a delight to a visitor as an oasis in a desert, boasts the warmest fellowship that can be found on earth and a history which puts others to shame.

Georgians can add a boast it has the finest of pastors for it was Rome, Georgia which lost William C. Ruchti to Rome, Italy.

The visitor doesn't get two steps beyond the sidewalk before he learns this church sponsored by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board majors on hospitality. Ushers Oscar Jungbauer or Billy Evelyn almost dare you to get away without shaking hands with each of the 50 to 75 in attendance. It is that way before the service and after.

Ruchti's sermon for the visitor must compete with the history which abounds. It maybe is the better way for presentation of the church.

The building is in the heart of the city at Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina-- off one of the main thoroughfares. Less than a five-minute walk away are the world-famed Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain of "Three Coins in the Fountain" song fame.

The building was occupied by a Roman family about the time the Plymouth fathers were struggling to establish their homes. The walls contain rubble from the Coliseum. So much for the three-story building, worth maybe \$3 million in this inflation-ridden land, which also houses the Italian Baptist Union and is headquarters for Southern Baptist missionaries.

The church proper occupies comparatively modern facilities--a structure covering an 18th Century courtyard built by English Baptists when they supported missions here early in the century. The floor is of marble, as in most public buildings, with white plastered walls covering the stone.

Back to the fellowship, for that is what distinguishes the little church. Baptists attached to the embassy or with commercial assignments in Italy make this the center of their life. It is here, and only here, where they find a common purpose and it is the event of their week.

Two or three times a month they get together for social events and, during October, the calendar promises "dinner on the marble" which is the best they can do for "dinner on the grounds."

What does it mean to this little colony of Baptists? Mrs. William Ingle, mother of two, can best explain for no one means more to a church than she.

"I had been a Baptist all my life," said the transplanted North Carolinian from Durham. "I had begun to think we would have to make do with something else here when on the second Sunday in Rome we stumbled into this church. My children are getting their first Sunday school experience. The church is giving me 10-fold more than I am giving it."

She's church secretary, plays organ or piano as needed, or sings if somebody else prefers to play, teaches in one of the departments and does anything else but preach.

Mention of the Ingles requires notice the church boasts musical talent that puts others to shame. Bill Ingle is a Fulbright scholar studying in the Rome Opera House. Both are graduates of Westminster Choir College.

Then, there's Annette Meriwether, soprano from Michigan City, Ind., graduate of the Eastman School of Music and also studying opera on a Fulbright scholarship with another scholarship from the Baptist churches of Michigan City, Ind.

Bob Battle, from Virginia, was part of the original "Porgy and Bess" cast in Moscow and stopped off here to study opera. The musicians share frequently of their talents at the Baptist Orphanage, Woman's Missionary Union Training School and in Italian churches.

The membership numbers the consul general, and military men attached to the Embassy. There also is the J. H. Hutcheson family which, like the Ruchti, came here from Rome, Ga. He travels Europe, Africa and the Middle East for a machinery company.

Ruchti is required to give more time to study than most pulpits demand. His congregation is composed of college graduates and many here for graduate study. Twice each year he slips away to the Baptist seminary in Zurich, Switzerland for a week of special study and research.

He has learned to adjust to conditions. For example, church at 10 a.m. precedes Sunday school and he's convinced now it is better. "The people come to church to listen to God," he explains. "We build the communion of fellowship and the people then are much more ready to participate in Sunday school study and fellowship."

There can be no Sunday evening services. Parking is impossible because of nearby theaters. But, when he moves his family to a new part of the city about Nov. 1 he will be among his members and plans a midweek service in his home.

Mrs. Ruchti, a Georgia Woman's Missionary Union leader in their days there, shares in the musical program, teaches Sunday school, serves with the other missionaries and is as busy as her pastor-husband.

Few Baptists visit Rome without enjoying a meal in her home. All of the members have been entertained there countless times. Additionally, the Ruchti are the official representatives of the Foreign Mission Board for the reception of new missionaries, helping them to get settled.

Incidentally, they return to Georgia next August and will make their home in the Decatur area as he does graduate study.

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(Picture of Ruchti preaching accompanies feature)

Hays, Pope Confer
At Vatican Council

VATICAN CITY (BP)--Brooks Hays, consultant to President Johnson and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, visited Pope Paul VI here.

Although the visit was "wholly unofficial," Hays bore President Johnson's personal greetings and assurances of his appreciation of Pope Paul's contribution to the cause of world peace.

This was the second Hays visit with a Roman Catholic pope. In October, 1961 he and his wife were received by Pope John XXIII. "I feel that these two meetings constitute an impressive symbol of Christian love and goodwill between the Catholic Church and my own denomination," he said.

In a humorous but at the same time serious press conference with about 30 newsmen at the United States Information Agency at the American Embassy, Hays told about his visit to Rome. The pope invited Hays to attend sessions of the Vatican Council now in progress.

"I have been warned," the former Congressman quipped, "To remember that this is an Ecumenical Council and not Congress and I am not to rise and ask 'Will the gentleman yield.'"

Hays explained his interest in the council discussions on religious liberty and Christian attitude toward Jews. "I am sure my Catholic friends will understand my pride as an American in the eloquent statements of the cardinals and bishops from my country on these topics," he said.

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Speaking of the proposed council declaration on the Jews, Hays said it represents a growing feeling that all men are brothers. He said the declaration "will tend to put the influence of the Catholic Church behind efforts to deal with every aspect of antisemitism."

Hays stopped in Rome on his way to Berchtesgaden, Germany, to deliver three lectures at the retreat of the Protestant Air Force chaplains of Europe.

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Baptist Editors: Picture mailed to go with story.

Pennsylvanians Hold Their 1964 Fellowship

PITTSBURGH (BP)- Southern Baptists in Pennsylvania were advised here to depend on lay leadership in moving toward independent state convention status.

A. B. Cash of Atlanta, representing the denomination's Home Mission Board, told the 60 people present for the 1964 fellowship meeting, "If you want to get your convention off to a poor start, leave the lay leadership out of the beginnings; make it an ecclesiastical fellowship."

Apparently heeding the advice, the fellowship elected a steering committee headed by a layman from Absecon, N. J. --George Bagwell. Dolan Henry, pastor of the host North Park Baptist Church here, was elected committee vice-chairman.

The committee, the only organization of the fellowship, will plan for a 1965 meeting Oct. 1-2 at Harrisburg, Pa.

The 60 people attending the 1964 fellowship included over 20 laymen, some of whom had traveled several hundred miles to be on hand. The fellowship includes churches in central and southern New Jersey as well as the state of Pennsylvania.

No target date was set for an independent convention. Observers felt the group was engaged in no crash program to reach separate convention status by any particular time. Instead, they were concentrating on church extension so that when a convention is formed, it will have a strong base.

Churches in the Pittsburgh area are affiliated with the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio, those in the eastern part of the state and in lower New Jersey--from Trenton south--with the Baptist Convention of Maryland.

Churches in upper New Jersey, across the Hudson River from New York City, have entered a fellowship with New York state, looking to a new convention in 1967.

Seven of the 28 churches in the Pennsylvania fellowship are in the Delaware Valley district association. This is the Wrightstown, N. J., and Lakehurst, N. J., area. Four are in the Pittsburgh, Pa., district association, and four others are in the Keystone district association, including the Pennsylvania cities of Harrisburg and Carlisle.

Two other churches in northwest Pennsylvania are in the Frontier district association, most of whose churches are in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, N. Y. The Pennsylvania churches involved are at Bradford and Erie, Pa.

When most of the Frontier association churches enter the proposed New York state convention, the two at Erie and Bradford will apparently retain their Pennsylvania ties.

In addition, there are 11 other churches affiliated with the Maryland convention which are not a part of any of these district associations of churches.

The 28 churches sponsor 17 missions. The churches and missions have a total membership of 3467. Last year they had combined offerings of \$237,655 and forwarded \$22,862 to the Cooperative Program for work beyond the local community.

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Kansas Increases
World Mission Share

WICHITA (BP)--The executive board of Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists will propose an increase in the Cooperative Program amount going to the Southern Baptist Convention next year.

The 1965 Cooperative Program budget of \$220,000 will be divided 85 - 15 on a percentage basis. The larger amount will remain in Kansas, and the 15 per cent will go to national and worldwide work through the SBC.

In 1964, the SBC share has been 13.4 per cent on a \$232,000 goal.

The convention's total budget, including supplements from SBC agencies for jointly promoted activities, is \$386,080. It is subject to adoption by the convention itself.

The board also called Harold Inman, minister of education and music at Sharon Baptist Church here, to be the convention's new secretary of Sunday school work. He accepted effective Nov. 1.

Inman, who came to Kansas after college and seminary education in Oklahoma and Texas, succeeds Ray Conner. Conner accepted the call of First Baptist Church, Springfield, Mo.

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) -- The executive board of the Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists today proposed a 15 percent increase in the amount of the Cooperative Program budget to be sent to the national Southern Baptist Convention next year.

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